Networks, contexts, institutions: An enduring legacy in the historiography of science

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Introduction

This engaging *Festschrift* is dedicated to Mordechai "Moti" Feingold on his seventieth birthday. Feingold is renowned for his wide-ranging contributions as a historian of early modern science, hailed as "one of the premier historians of the Royal Society, of Newton and his long reception, of European universities, [and] of Jesuit science … and more".[1] Beyond celebrating a lifetime of achievement, the Festschrift also portrays Feingold as a hub of a scholarly community – active in the "Republic of Letters" by connecting like-minded scholars, sharing knowledge, and, in the words of colleagues, "making the work of others possible" through initiatives like editing volumes, journals, and book series. The title of this volume, accordingly, hints at how the honoree "collected wisdom, but also made that wisdom part of a collective".[2] Indeed, for many of the contributors, Mordechai Feingold has been a mentor and a trusted colleague with a "very personal impact".[3]

A unifying commitment of the volume lies in perceiving the making of science as a vector result of multiple agents: institutions, individuals, social networks. The essays consistently reject narrow, single-track historiography – instead embedding scientific developments in broader intellectual currents and societal frameworks. This is a ripple effect of Feingold's own scholarly ambit; Feingold himself "has studied individuals and insti-

1 Roos and Manning, *Collected Wisdom*, 2.
2 *Ibid.*, 5.
3 *Ibid.*, 1.

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tutions, cultural movements and social history", leaving a lasting imprint on each.[4] The essays mirror this breadth of inquiry.

In terms of broad themes, the four "Parts" of the volume – the history of universities, intellectual history, Newton, and the history of the Royal Society – address realms of inquiry dear to Feingold's scholarly heart, transforming them into structuring principles for the book. Each "Part", in its turn, is composed of three to five essays, where various scholars explore specific topics often directly linked with Feingold's own work. This convergence of content is intentional and explicit, and the strategy proves successful in creating a unified whole, testifying to a collective commitment to deepen and broaden Feingold's approaches.

Part I: Universities. Where the old science meets the new

Part I is dedicated to the history of universities. Feingold's work in this realm – his own output, as well as that of others which he fostered indirectly in collaborations – had been sustained and groundbreaking.[5] Feingold convinced a generation of scholars that "it [is] impossible to do early modern intellectual history of any sort without a profound understanding of the pedagogical worlds from which emerged the ideas that we study".[6] His own careful reconstruction of institutional and intellectual contexts uncovered how early modern universities were a mainstay of progress and innovation.[7] Feingold's work also converges with historiographical work being done in Germany and Europe; in the 1980s, Christoph Meinel established the importance of German universities as societal *loci* of science production in the late eighteenth century, as chemistry slowly solidified as a scientific discipline. Thus Meinel similarly situated the university as a functional interface between society and modern science.[8]

The present volume offers us five contributions in which new generations of scholars take on this popular topic with new energy. The first essay, by Richard Serjeantson, uncovers a previously unknown treatise on theology by the Oxford philosopher John Case (1540?-1600), entitled *Epistola quædam ad reverendum præsulem conscripta adver-*

4 *Ibid.*, 2.

5 See, for instance, Feingold and Navarro Brotons, eds., *Universities and Science in the Early Modern Period*.

6 Dmitri Levitin, quoted in Roos and Manning, *Collected Wisdom*, 5.

7 For instance, in Mordechai Feingold, *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship: Science, Universities and Society in England, 1560-1640*.

8 "Die Universität ist der soziale Ort neuzeitlicher Wissenschaft schlechthin. Sie ist Schnittstelle des Austauschs zwischen Gesellschaft und Wissenschaft": Christoph Meinel, "Zur Sozialgeschichte des chemischen Hochschulfaches im 18. Jahrhundert", 147-168. https://doi.org/10.1002/bewi.19870100305, 148.

sus Baroistas ('A particular letter to a reverend prelate, written against the Barrowists'), a text hitherto ignored by scholars including Charles Schmitt. Case was an independent lecturer at Tudor Oxford, but also "the most prominent philosopher in the Elizabethan university".[9] The letter illustrates a powerful negative sentiment against Protestant Reformation and against separatists, while placing it in an institutional context and within the broader intellectual landscape of the time. A following essay, by Leen Dorsman hailing from Utrecht, aims to track down the origins of student 'initiation' rituals (hazing, a social phenomenon which persists today) back to a structural change that happened at early modern universities in the Dutch republic: the transformation of student associations from medieval 'nationes' to modern student corpora. Shifting the reader's focus to Padua, Pietro Daniel Omodeo explores the correspondence between members of this Italian university and Daniel Sennert (1572-1637), the renowned physician and professor of medicine in Wittenberg. By tracing Sennert's concerns with intellectual, but also other more worldly matters, Omodeo's essay beautifully illustrates how the production of medical theory is embedded in the context of the life of the scholar which includes the lively intellectual exchange with contemporaries at other institutions. Omodeo thus sets out to answer Mordechai Feingold's call of 2016 for more exploration of the "confabulatory life" of the scholar.[10] William Poole takes on the seventeenth-century undergraduate Arts curriculum at Oxford, showcasing the genre of what he dubs the "curricular crib": short, often tabular "skeleton summaries of the traditional undergraduate subjects", usually left in manuscript as "*systema*, *compendium*, *epitome*, or *elementa*".[11] The genre had also caught Mordechai Feingold's attention. Poole masterfully shows that "while the 'crib' tradition in many ways sustained the traditional Aristotelian curriculum, it was at least in some hands also open to manipulation and modernisation" in accordance with more innovative trends in the field, such as Gassendian physics.[12] The last chapter in Part I, by Elizabethanne Boran, investigates the teaching of the science curriculum at Trinity College Dublin, focusing on the "dominance of Ramism" as well as on the influence of the Hartlib circle and their Baconian experimental program. Boran uses library loan records to reconstruct the availability of the "new science". Responding to, and continuing, Feingold's work on "students' notebooks and other records of unofficial teaching at early modern universities", Boran draws on previously unstudied student and staff notebooks to reconstruct the intellectual environment and the vision of those who built the TDC library.[13]

Perhaps the most overt tribute to Feingold's career, the Festschrift's university history section extends his methodology and interests into new terrain, while echoing his

[9] Serjeantson, 18.
[10] Omodeo, 62.
[11] Poole, 80.
[12] Poole, 80, 87.
[13] Boran, 105.

empirical rigour and emphasis on primary sources. It also validates Feingold's conviction that university history is integral to intellectual history, and points to fertile paths forward in the study of the history of higher education institutions.

Part II: Mind and matter. Galileo, Descartes, and the rainbow (Intellectual history)

In Part II, aspects of intellectual history are brought to the fore in four papers. Nicholas Popper examines the relationship between belief and evidence in the sixteenth century, and tests whether the standards for credibility might have been developed, as is (was) the consensus, in confrontation with stories that were exaggerated and (from a modern standpoint) quite obviously fake. He concludes that the role of empirical evidence in early modern historical writing was a matter of debate, and discusses how various actors handled uncertain evidence. Anita Guerrini in turn dwells on a section from Galileo's *Discourses concerning Two New Sciences* (1638), which had previously received little attention. The section debates the anatomical conditions of possibility for giant humans or animals, supporting with mathematical evidence the then relatively common claim that "giants are frail"[14] due to a mismatch between a certain body size and the necessary bone weight needed to support the body. Guerrini centers Galileo, another "giant" on par with Feingold's Newton, and his imbrications with the Accademia dei Lincei (via Galileo's correspondence with Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc) as another important knowledge network of the time. The paper by Noel M. Swerdlow investigates Galileo's arguments for planetary motion in the context of Copernican theory, and discusses the later evaluation and critique of these arguments by Newtonian science. As ever, he does not shy away from technical detail; readers somewhat familiar with mathematical physics will be delighted by Swerdlow's exposition and interpretation of Galileo's (erroneous) mathematical calculations to determine the distances between various celestial bodies. The presence of this essay is bittersweet: no sooner had this esteemed colleague sent in his contribution, than he passed away. The fourth paper is penned by Jed Buchwald, a longtime collaborator of Feingold. Buchwald reconstructs the intellectual journey that, many years ago, resulted in one of his own most prominent papers, "Descartes' Experimental Journey Past the Prism and Through the Invisible World to the Rainbow". The reflections that were to guide the genesis of this paper had begun in an interaction with Feingold. Buchwald reconstructed some of Descartes' experiments with prism and light, in order to better understand how these experiments shaped Descartes' optical theory and his hypotheses about the behaviour of light, refraction, and the formation of the rainbow. The essay is an ode to an indefatigable intellectual curiosity that does not stop at texts but en-

[14] Guerrini, 158.

gages in the materiality of experiment in order to "see" through the eyes of scientists of the past. It also attests to the fruitfulness of intellectual friendships and the emergent synergy of intellectual endeavour, as Feingold and Buchwald add their contribution to that of their colleagues Garber and Schuster in deciphering Descartes and his science.

Part III: Newton, Newtonianism, and beyond

Isaac Newton and his contribution to seventeenth-century science dominate Part III. Feingold's impact on Newtonian studies was transformative. In their introduction to the Festschrift, Roos and Manning observe that Feingold consistently "resist[s] the temptation to treat Newton as a superhuman icon of science" and instead reveals Newton as "a man of his time … [whose] interests in philosophy, mathematics, physics, alchemy, optics, and theology co-existed and supported one another".[15] The metaphorical sanctification of Newton is, argued Feingold, a result of the postmortem perception and reception of his works; as many people employed Newton's image or invoked him in order to suggest an intellectual connection, Newton himself, or rather his own legend, "metamorphosed into science personified".[16] By contrast, Feingold set out to unveil Newton not as the legend but as the historical person and scientist, by exploring Newton's multifaceted legacy – his physics or mathematics, yes, but also his theology, alchemy, and institutional roles. Contextualizing Newton sheds light not just on his own discoveries but also, crucially, on the seedbed that nurtured them. This was central to Feingold's scholarly creed and quest, who, in the *Preface* to an edited volume about Newton's mentor Isaac Barrow, had written that "all discoveries and breakthroughs in science, irrespective of the unique contribution of the individual who inaugurated them, cannot be considered in isolation, independent of a large community of teachers, fellow students, and scholars of the second order".[17] By reintegrating into the narrative the contributions of orbital figures like Isaac Barrow or Newton's successor William Whiston – figures peripheral from our perspective, but important or even central in their own times – Feingold's scholarship presented Newton and Newtonianism as a complex tapestry of interwoven roles, rather than a straight tale of scientific triumphalism.

The three essays in this section of the volume align closely with Feingold's Newtonian pursuits. The first essay, by Sarah Hutton, focuses on the Cambridge Platonist Henry More and his not-so-straightforward relationship with Cartesianism, as a piece of the context puzzle of Newton's formative years at Cambridge. Feingold had already suggested that Descartes' works, and Cartesian science, along with other newer currents such as the

[15] Roos and Manning, *Collected Wisdom*, 4.
[16] Feingold, *The Newtonian Moment*, xiv.
[17] Feingold, *Before Newton: The Life and Times of Isaac Barrow*, ix.

natural philosophy of Gassendi, exerted an influence on the Cambridge Platonists.[18] Hutton's study of More's reception of Cartesianism in the time of Newton's early education echoes Feingold's insistence on the presence of new philosophies in the university system, casting universities as incubators of new knowledge. This is a role that universities can fulfil even while nurtured by the turf of older ideas and natural-philosophical frameworks such as Aristotelianism; or by the oldschool type of polymaths who had emerged out of, and adhered to, the classical tradition, and who in principle looked on Descartes' new mechanical philosophy with suspicion. Hutton shows successfully that More's "concern was to make Cartesian physics work, to salvage the best system of which he was aware which 'saved the phenomena' of nature" – while making sure that certain ideological pitfalls such as atheism were avoided.[19]

The second essay, by Dmitri Levitin and Scott Mandelbrote, unveils newly discovered letters Newton wrote to his friend and Trinity chamber-fellow John Wickins between 1677 and 1682. The letters, which shed light on Newton's theological interests, are here printed in full for the first time. Levitin and Mandelbrote carefully examine the available textual evidence to reconstruct certain puzzles related to Newton's correspondence more generally, and also to instruments that he constructed during that time period, such as the "two-foot reflecting telescope" in the construction of which Newton was aided by an artisan, a tool-maker referred to as Mr. Cooper.[20] In turn, two letters that address theology reveal that Newton, according to the authors, must have begun thinking about theological matters in 1675 or 1676; by 1677 he was "engrossed in patristic literature specifically", which shows that "he was approaching theology in the manner then recommended in Cambridge", going initially along the same path as his peers even as he later famously reached unorthodox conclusions.[21]

Finally, Marius Stan's essay investigates Émilie du Châtelet's interpretation of Newtonian mechanics, highlighting the distinctions between Newton's original ideas and du Châtelet's own work. In doing so, he tackles the very much Feingoldian historiographical issue of what "Newtonianism" truly means, how we should define it, and which philosophers can be said to conform to it. For one, not Madame du Châtelet – argues Stan. As he concludes, "'Newtonian' is not a useful category for her science", in spite of overall consensus to the contrary among historians of science.[22] Instead, "Du Châtelet really aimed to solve certain […] problems in the fundamental physics of her time, irrespective of its au-

[18] Feingold, *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship*, see esp. chapter "The nature and quality of scientific instruction: the teaching community", 45-85.
[19] Hutton, 244.
[20] Levitin and Mandelbrote, 258.
[21] *Ibid*., 264.
[22] Stan, 278.

thorship".[23] This revisionist argument echoes Feingold's inclination to question sweeping generalizations. Written from the perspective of a philosopher historian of science who is meticulous with definitions both from a logical and a historical point of view, Stan's essay provides a solid background for a rehabilitation of du Châtelet's physics in her own right.

To sum up, the seamless way these essays integrate Newton's scientific ideas with his religious and institutional life – a hallmark of Feingold's Newton studies – lives on in the work of scholars in this volume, many of whom owe their intellectual formation in part to Feingold's guidance.

Part IV: Academic societies and other hubs of learning

Part IV of the Festschrift, titled "Royal Society Luminaries", is dedicated to the history of the Royal Society, another topic where Feingold's contributions have marked the scholarly landscape. Exploring how institutional affiliations, religious constraints, and patronage networks affected the careers of scientists, Feingold supported the idea that in early modern Europe the university world and the world of academic societies were permeating and informing each other and that these types of institutions of learning co-evolved.[24] Essentially, Feingold's body of work supports the stance that scientific ideas are shaped and promoted through such institutional structures, which are inherently social.

The essays in this section highlight both prominent and lesser-known figures associated with the Royal Society. In his contribution on the early Royal Society's attitudes towards language and verbal communication, Rhodri Lewis sets out to reexamine the existing consensus regarding the Society's culture of polite discourse. For decades, historians have claimed that the Society's fellows were invariably civil and restrained in their communications, adhering to a Baconian ethic of genteel cooperation. While this was an outward, explicit normative strategy, it was not necessarily an accurate depiction of everyday reality. Lewis argues that "it is only by marginalizing the Society's engagements with the cultures of correspondence and scribal publication that one could come to the view that plainness, propriety, modesty, disinterest, and the rest were its Fellows' primary manner of discourse".[25] Consequently, an exploration into the correspondence of Sir William Petty – a founding fellow of the Society – allows Lewis to paint a more complex picture of the Society's daily interactions, where members did not eschew from vigorous and even rude discussions, such as calling rival ideas "nonsense". This reveals the importance of drawing

[23] *Ibid.*, 295.

[24] As argued in Giulia Giannini, "Preface", and Mordechai Feingold, "Between Teaching and Research: The Place of Science in Early Modern English Universities", both contributions in: Feingold, Mordechai, and Giulia Giannini, *The Institutionalization of Science in Early Modern Europe*. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004416871.

[25] Lewis, 304.

upon primary sources beyond those published in print, and of examining informal communications between scientists, such as letters or notes – an approach which Feingold had long championed.

The next essay, by Anna Marie Roos, analyzes Nehemiah Grew's (1641-1712) doctoral dissertation *Disputatio medico-physica, inauguralis, de liquore nervosa* and its place in the development of iatrochemistry. The main focus is Grew's theory of nervous fluid in its seventeenth-century intellectual context. Influenced by Franciscus Sylvius (1614-1672) and Francis Glisson (1597-1677), Grew's medical theory was an eminent example of chemical medicine; and yet it was a version of chemical medicine which distanced itself from one of coeval iatrochemistry's most influential proponents, Jan Baptista van Helmont (1579-1644). While van Helmont underscored what we might call a more spiritual vision of disease etiology, Grew's approach was more naturalistic. Grew had "embarked on a series of distillations, including the blood and brain tissue", in order to understand the matter of nervous fluid and to possibly determine its chemical composition.[26] An adherent to Sylvius' iatrochemical school, Grew also engaged direct experimental evidence to draw conclusions about the acidity and alkalinity of bodily fluids, and posited a central role for "oil" as a component of blood. Remarkably, Roos argues, "Grew's insistence on inalterable principles in his dissertation may also have stemmed from his religious beliefs": the Calvinist position holding that God created immutable chymical principles whose mixtures we may experience and manipulate, but without altering the primary principles.[27]

The last chapter, by Stephen Snobelen, focuses on William Whiston, an astronomer and theologian excluded from Cambridge for anti-Trinitarianism and who was never admitted to the Royal Society because of his heterodox religious views. After losing his professorship, Whiston "remade himself in London as a natural philosophical entrepreneur", delivering lectures in coffeehouses and teaching philosophy as an independent tutor.[28] Snobelen pieces together various less conventional primary sources, such as newspaper advertisements, to "recreate [] Whiston's efforts to establish himself in the metropolis as he moved from a fixed university income to operate in the dynamic yet financially precarious world of public science".[29] In our own day and age, as financial instability in academia due to precarious employment affects a large, silent proportion of early and mid career scholars, this reader finds it refreshing to see Stephen Snobelen shining a light on such worldly topics, and drawing attention to how the parameters of income or wealth have always impacted the ways in which scientists and philosophers can (or cannot) practice their calling.

[26] Roos, 328.
[27] *Ibid*., 336.
[28] Snobelen, 349.
[29] *Ibid*., 349.

Methodological approach and implicit scholarly ethos

The scholarly values espoused in *Collected Wisdom* echo Feingold's own. Four years after his DPhil at Oxford with Charles Webster as a supervisor,[30] Feingold published his first book, *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship* (1984), which "took a stand against an older history of science and history of universities that placed all the credit for progress and innovation outside the institutions of higher learning".[31] Far from flaunting gratuitous revisionism for its own sake, Feingold's drive to challenge received narratives emerged from exacting archival research and textual evidence. By working with primary sources – university statutes, student notebooks, institutional records – Feingold demonstrated that Oxford and Cambridge played a significant role in the so-called Scientific Revolution, especially in fostering the "Copernican 'marriage' between mathematics and astronomy".[32] As Roos and Manning remark, he "made his case in exacting detail … and announced himself as a gifted and creative researcher willing to correct the record when the evidence required it".[33] His commitment to empirical rigor and to revisiting received narratives through fresh documentation became hallmarks of his scholarship.

The present volume reflects Feingold's methodological rigour, use of primary sources, and legacy as a mentor, as well as echoing his bold and refreshing "willingness to cast aside old truisms".[34] The Festschrift's contributors adopt similar textual-empirically grounded methods, with most essays analyzing primary sources (e.g. newly discovered manuscripts, correspondence, library catalogs) to reconstruct scholarly networks, pedagogical practices, or intellectual filiations. By upholding meticulous research standards, a broad intellectual compass, and a commitment to understanding institutions and ideas in context, the essays show implicitly that Feingold inspired researchers to argue constructively, grounding controversy in factual evidence rather than bias. This commitment to critical debate is one of Feingold's great strengths, and the Festschrift's willingness to include essays that stir the pot is a bow to that legacy of responsible revisionism. Thus, the community of scholars he fostered is carrying forward the torch of a pluralistic and deeply contextual history of science.[35]

The book also includes a helpful *list* of Feingold's over one hundred works – monographs as well as edited volumes, single-authored as well as in collaboration – testifying

[30] See Robert Fox, "The History of Science, Medicine and Technology at Oxford": 69-83, here on p. 73. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.2005.0129.

[31] Roos and Manning, *Collected Wisdom*, 2.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] On the importance of pluralism in science, especially in the history of chemistry, see among others: Morris and Seeman, "The importance of plurality and mutual respect in the practice of the history of chemistry"; Seeman, "Moving beyond Insularity in the History, Philosophy, and Sociology of Chemistry": 75-86. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10698-017-9290-7.

to his talent of cultivating the kind of synergistic intellectual curiosity that thrives in the commerce of the minds. Lastly, a convenient *Index* includes not only names of historical persons and toponims mentioned, but also some topics with broad echoes in the history of science: from plague to madness, wine, or vinegar.

Conclusion

Even beyond early modern topics, Feingold's insistence on grounding grand narratives in hard evidence is a transferable lesson, and one that is evergreen. In more recent times, the history of science, together with most humanities disciplines, has undergone a pivotal transformation. The advent of digital and computational methods has triggered a restructuring in the ways in which we come by our knowledge. There are some clear advantages. Fortunately, a careful implementation of digital and computational methods in the humanities is fully compatible with an approach that prioritizes empirical data and primary sources. After all, with the help of such new methods we can access, and process, an incomparably higher number of such primary sources, increasing the reliability of our interpretations beyond anecdotal evidence. We can comb through an unprecedented array of documents, making it more feasible than ever to, for instance, include sources or voices that have previously been neglected by scholars – whether intentionally or unintentionally; or simply as a consequence of there being only a certain number of work hours in a day, and only a relatively small number of articles and books to be written in a human lifetime. Some of these limitations can now, in part and with measure and due diligence, be transcended.

A side effect of this restructuring is that many of us now work in larger teams to pool our expertise not only in various historical eras as defined by traditional disciplinary boundaries, but also in various aspects of the data gathering and exploration. For certain phases in their work, the early modernist may be aided by the "data curator", the medievalist by the OCR transcription expert, the classicist by the Python programmer. The knowledge acquisition is now truly "collective", in a Feingoldian sense of synergy. Many of the contributors in this Festschrift - colleagues or former students of Feingold's – are now training students of their own, spreading his ethos of meticulous scholarship. This genealogical influence, combined with new approaches, means the 'Feingold School' of history of science – characterized by its empirical depth and breadth of vision – will likely thrive in coming decades. Feingold's work has also modeled an ethos of intellectual generosity and collaboration, vital back then but perhaps even more so today, in times when historical projects have gone large-scale and often require teamwork (e.g. large database projects or international research teams). In that sense, this Festschrift is not an endpoint but a launching point – uniting personal tribute with forward-looking scholarship.

One final reflection: The editors note Feingold's "contagious commitment to learning". While likely meant as a metaphor, and possibly inspired by the vocabulary of the recent pandemic (but turned, of course, into something positive and desirable), it highlights how this kind of intellectual commitment carries an emotional, one might say irrational undercurrent. It is almost as if one has to succumb to it, much in the manner of an infectious disease. In that (for us rather poetic) sense, the idea of the influence of a mentor echoes a very early modern concept, that of "celestial influence" which among its manifestations included the phenomenon of contagion. This volume is proof that indeed, the influence of a mentor has permeated scholarly minds up to our own generation – with all contributors being born, however, still in the twentieth century. But what about the next generations of students and scholars, who shall live in a world much different from the one we ourselves grew up in, in the past century? Can we still contaminate our children with the thirst for learning, in our own day and age? Can we contaminate our students with the thirst for evidence? Time will tell. This reader surely hopes so.

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