

Alan Ralph Millard FSA (1937–2024)

When Emeritus Professor Alan Millard died at home in Leamington Spa on 6 June 2024 aged 86, the Australian Institute of Archaeology lost a friend and a valuable scholarly advisor, and this journal lost a member of its Editorial Board. Several members of the Institute's Board knew Alan personally and mourn the loss of a friend. In preparing this tribute, I acknowledge the assistance of Dr Paul Lawrence, a former student of Alan's, Dr Bruce Routledge a University of Liverpool colleague, and Professor Jim Hoffmeier.

The picture above depicts Alan during his visit to Australia in 2004, when he studied the Institute's tablet collection. The tablet he is holding comes from Nimrud and has an interesting Aramaic label. During the visit he delivered the 2004 Petrie Oration entitled *Half a pot is better than no pot at all: The role of accident in archaeology* (2004), drawing attention to the fact that archaeologists are often reliant on ancient mistakes and mishaps.

Prior to retirement in 2003, Alan was the Rankin Professor of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic languages, and Honorary Senior Fellow (Ancient Near East) at the School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology (SACE) in the University of Liverpool. He had been at Liverpool since 1970, where he was a colleague of Egyptologist, Kenneth Kitchen. He continued writing and publishing in his retirement; the last off-prints we received arrived in April 2024.

Alan was born in Harrow, Middlesex on 1 December 1937. As a schoolboy, he displayed an interest in archaeology by digging at The Manor of the More in Rickmansworth, the 16th-century palace where Catherine of Aragon lived after the annulment of her marriage to Henry VIII. He participated in publishing the results as a member of the Merchant Taylors' School Archaeological Society. He went on to study Semitic Languages at Magdalen College, Oxford, under Sir Godfrey Driver, graduating in 1959.



At Tell Nebi Mend in 1975, inspecting Area A where tablets were later found. From the left: Peter Parr, Director; Majid Museli, Government Representative; Cecil Weston, Conservator, and Alan Millard. Photo: the Author

Between 1961 and 1963, Alan was an Assistant Keeper in the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities at the British Museum. While at the Museum, he published Aramaic inscriptions from the British School of Archaeology in Iraq's excavations at Nimrud, catalogued tablets from the old excavations at Kuyunjik (Nineveh, Iraq) and, most notably, rediscovered tablets forming part of the Babylonian Epic of Atrahasis, a creation and flood story, which had remained in a drawer unrecognised for several decades.

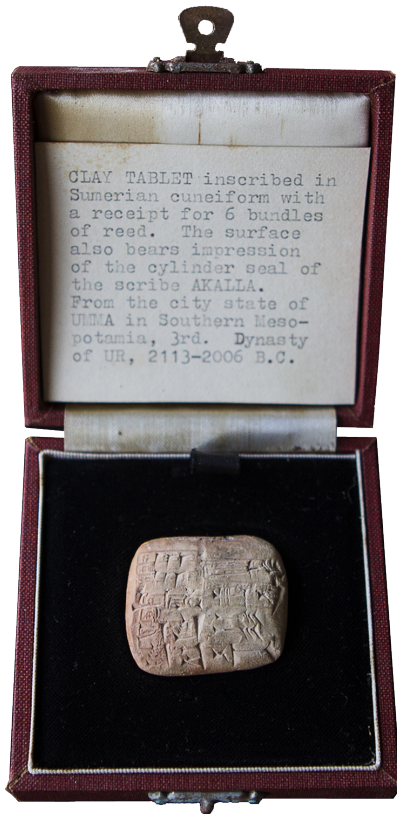


Alan making an initial examination of a recently found tablet, Tell Nebi Mend 1975. Photo: the Author.

From 1964 to 1970, Alan was the librarian at Tyndale House, Cambridge, a position which allowed him to complete an MPhil. at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, with Professor Donald J. Wiseman, another member of the Tyndale Fellowship. In 1970, he took up a post at the University of Liverpool.

He was elected as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1971, and became a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study, Hebrew University in 1984. Between 2001 and 2005, he served as Vice-Chair of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq (now the British Institute for the Study of Iraq). For many years he was on the editorial boards of *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* and *Buried History*, and was an active member of the Society for Old Testament Study.

Alan fostered his interest in archaeology by digging with Peter Parr at Petra, Jordan, in 1958. In 1975, he again dug with Peter Parr joining the first season of excavation at Tell Nebi Mend, Syria (ancient Qadesh-on-the-Orontes). He served as the project's epigraphist, and began his time at the site by checking the ancient stones used by the villagers in their houses to see if they bore inscriptions. Many of the houses on the tell were founded on Classical archaeological deposits. The residents were somewhat bemused when having their doorsteps, or whatever, overturned and inspected. He had little success, but eventually some tablets were discovered in the excavation. Alan's publication of them (2010) confirmed that the site was, indeed, ancient Qadesh.



A Third Dynasty of Ur tablet held by the local history museum on Horn Island that was seen by Alan when he visited the islands. Photo: courtesy of the Torres Strait Heritage Museum, Queensland.

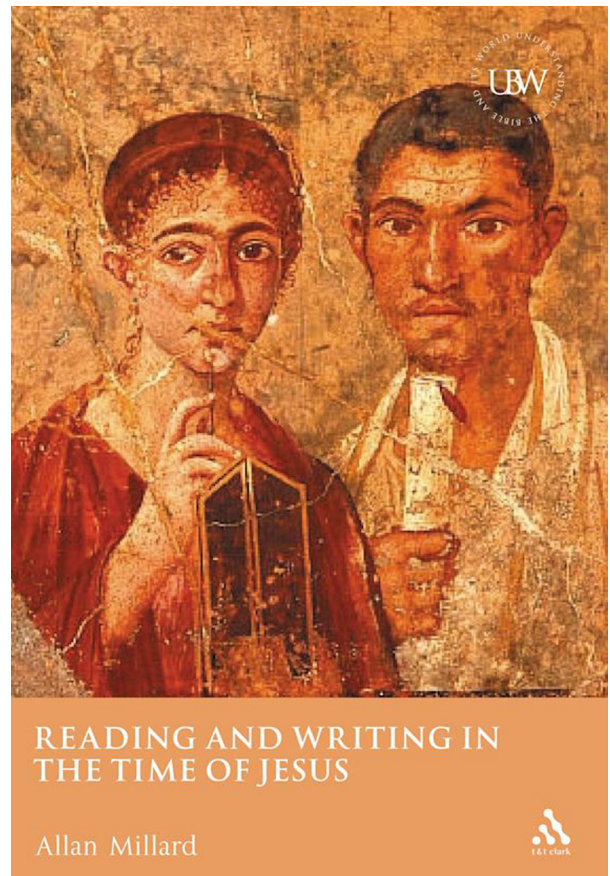
When I informed Alan about the project to publish all the known cuneiform material in Australia and New Zealand, he told me that when he and wife Margaret were visiting the Torres Strait Islands some years before, he had noticed a cuneiform tablet in the Torres Strait Heritage Museum on Horn Island. He thought that it should be included in the publication. As far as the museum knew, the tablet was donated to them by a local resident who had served in Mesopotamia during World War I, and it was not related to other Australian collections. Alan would not have minded having his holiday interrupted by such an artefact.

Semitic epigraphy, and editing the publication of Akkadian cuneiform tablets and Aramaic inscriptions, were Alan's main scholarly interests. In 1965, Professor Wilfred G. Lambert and Alan published the additional texts belonging to the Atrahasis epic that he had located in the British Museum. It included an Old Babylonian copy written in about 1650 BC, which is the most complete recension of the tale to have survived (1969). These new texts greatly increased the knowledge of the epic and were the basis for this first English translation of the nearly complete Atrahasis epic. Like the Book of Genesis, the Atrahasis fable contains both cosmological creation and flood stories. It was Alan's view that the Genesis and Atrahasis narratives derived independently from an earlier source. The later Gilgamesh epic features only a flood.

Additional publications of Aramaic and Hebrew inscriptions, and the Akkadian of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, helped Alan gain an international reputation. His monographs *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910-612 B.C.* (1994) and *La statue de Tell Fekherye et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (1982), with Ali Abou-Assaf and Pierre Bordreuil, continue to be widely cited. He had the rare distinction of receiving two festschriften.

Alan had an intense interest in the history of writing, scribal practices and questions of literacy in the biblical period, as did Professor Wiseman before him. He was acutely aware of the importance of the alphabet. These interests, and his personal commitment to the evangelical expression of Christianity, were represented in his popular books, such as *Discoveries from Bible Times* (1997) and *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (2000). Both reached wide audiences. He also served as one of the translators of the New International Version of the Bible, which was published in 1978.

He appeared on TV as an expert witness in the TV-film *Joanna Lumley: The Search for Noah's Ark*. He was treated with more respect than he received in 1977, when he tackled Magnus Magnusson's TV series and book, *BC, the Archaeology of the Bible Lands*.



The dust jacket of the Bloombury Publishing (T&T Clark imprint) 2000 edition of Alan's Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus.

His bibliography at https://theologicalstudies.org.uk/theo_millard.php reveals a steady flow of publications over a period of nearly sixty years; some years have over ten entries. Peter Williams, the Principal of Tyndale House, said of Alan, ‘Throughout his entire life not once did he adopt a remotely sensationalist interpretation, which is really quite remarkable for someone so involved in biblical archaeology and regularly explaining discoveries to lay audiences’ (<https://tyndalehouse.com/updates/news/professor-alan-r-millard-1937-2024/> accessed 3-7-2024). He was reserved, but not shy when it came to issues that needed addressing; however, he was loathe to talk about personal matters. This restraint flowed through to his popular books.

Some tributes to him have expressed the view that despite his many academic achievements, Alan’s real impact came as a teacher, mentor and colleague, both in his academic duties and as a member of faith communities on and off campus. His students are sure that it will be his teaching that will endure. They were taught to be cautious, detailed and evidence-based, and not to indulge in broad generalisations.

Alan’s contribution to the Editorial Board of this journal exemplified and promoted this approach. He often commented on its contents, but only once criticised a contribution, which he deemed to be superficial and general. That was in the early days of my editorship. Sadly, I will have to wait to find out his perspective on this tribute.

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Festschriften:

Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Essays in Honor of Alan Millard, Elizabeth A. Slater, Piotr Bienkowski, Christopher B. Mee, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005.

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Alan Millard’s references:

- 1969 *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (with W.G. Lambert), Oxford: Clarendon Press; reprinted Winona Lake, ID: Eisenbrauns, ISBN 1-57506-039-6 (1999)
- 1982 *La Statue de Tell Fekherye et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne* (with A. Abou-Assaf and P. Bordreuil), Paris: Association pour la diffusion de la pensée française.
- 1994 *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire, 910–612 B.C.*, State Archives of Assyria Studies vol. 2, Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, University of Helsinki.
- 1997 *Discoveries from Bible Times*, Oxford: Lion Publishing.
- 2000 *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- 2004 Half a pot is better than no pot at all: The role of accident in archaeology, *Buried History* 40, 7–14. <https://doi.org/10.62614/3c5zaj51>
- 2010 The Cuneiform Tablets from Tell Nebi Mend, *Levant* 42, 226–236, with a note on a Clay Sealing by Dominique Collon.