

**David Hume: The Making of a Philosophical Historian**

**A Reconsideration**

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## DECLARATION

The present PhD thesis has been composed by myself alone and represents my own work, which has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The thesis is concerned with the exploration of the interconnections between philosophy and history in David Hume's work and seeks to provide a reassessment of his remarkable transition from metaphysical philosopher and polite essayist to philosophical and narrative historian. The first part of the thesis puts forth a detailed reappraisal of Hume's intellectual preoccupations and literary pursuits in the crucial but neglected period 1748-1752, a period that witnessed Hume's tour of several European courts in 1748, his intensive reading of the classics and his engagement with Montesquieu's new system of socio-political analysis. These years saw a decisive shift in Hume's thinking about human nature that resulted in an increasing emphasis on its historicity. It is argued that this helps to explain his growing insistence on the necessity of accounting for the varied manifestations of human nature in different historical periods by a reconstruction of the social, political and economical conditions of past societies as well as their customs, manners and belief systems. It is furthermore argued that Hume's new holistic view of past civilisations found its expression in a number of diverse pieces which can be read as fragments of a cultural history of classical antiquity and contain an important agenda for a new kind of cultural history.

The second part of the thesis considers the significance of this thinking for Hume's plans for a large-scale work of modern British political history. The discussion is focussed on the *History of Great Britain under the House of Stuart* (1754-56) and pays particular attention to his intentions as a political historian. It is shown that the success of his work depended largely on his skill in raising his readers' 'interest' and his adeptness in conveying his own 'impartiality' as a historian. It is argued that Hume's achievement can best be understood through an in-depth analysis of his innovative appropriation of a narrative device that had already been used by many historians from Thucydides to Rapin-Thoyras, the set-piece political debate, which Hume employed as the main device for explaining the emergence of a mixed British constitution. The thesis thus offers a fresh interpretation of the relationship between Hume's concept of

philosophical history and his aims and techniques as a narrative historian and seeks to contribute to our understanding of the trajectory of his intellectual and literary career as well as the profound transformation of historical writing in the High Enlightenment.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CCH* *The Cambridge Companion to David Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993).
- EHU* David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: OUP, 1999).
- EPM* David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: OUP, 1998).
- Essays* David Hume, *Essays moral, political, and literary*, rev. edn. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987).
- HE* David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688*, ed. William B. Todd (6 vols.; Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1983).
- HGB* David Hume, *The History of Great Britain: The Reigns of James I. and Charles I.*, ed. and intro. Duncan Forbes (London: Penguin Books, 1970).
- HL* *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932).
- NHL* *New Letters of David Hume*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).

- OC* *Oeuvres Complètes de Montesquieu*, ed. André Masson (3 vols.; Paris: Nagel, 1950).
- Responses* *Early responses to Hume's History of England*, ed. and intro. James Fieser (2 vols.; Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2002).
- Treatise* David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, Oxford Philosophical Texts (Oxford: OUP, 2000).



## **Introduction: Hume's Transition from Philosopher to Historian**

The present study seeks to provide an in-depth account of Hume's intellectual and literary career in the crucial period extending from 1748 to 1756, a period of intense literary activity which saw the appearance of Hume's mature works of epistemology, moral philosophy and political economy as well as his first and most important foray into narrative history which resulted in the production of the two-volume *History of Great Britain* (1754-56). The study focuses on a number of Hume's intellectual preoccupations during this period and seeks to explore them in greater detail than has hitherto been attempted with the aim of providing a fuller picture of the development of Hume's thinking on history during this period as well as a reassessment of his remarkable transformation from moral philosopher to philosophical historian. In so doing the study will reconsider the scholarly accounts so far given of this transformation and seek to establish in how far these adequately capture the complexity of the period. Before we commence our investigation of the first half of the period in question, it will be useful to consider the major scholarly accounts given of Hume's overall career and enquire in how far they take notice of the period in question. A survey of these will be followed by a brief consideration of a number of common assumptions about Hume's career which, though problematic, are shared by most scholars. This will in turn allow us to propose an approach to this period which differs from those employed by previous investigators. Before we embark on this survey and critique of existing scholarly accounts of Hume's intellectual career, it will be requisite to give a necessarily very brief outline of Hume's complex career. We shall take as our starting point a short account of a debate Hume is said to have had with two of his friends, which provides us with a number of insights into Hume's career and thought.

One morning in early autumn 1761, David Hume received a visit from an old friend in his temporary London lodgings in Lisle Street, Leicester Fields. Robert Clerk was a London Scot with a promising army career whom Hume had known for well over ten

years and whom he regarded as a person of ‘great Cleverness & Ingenuity’.<sup>1</sup> Among his friends Clerk was famed for his quickness of intellect and feared for his ferocious manner of arguing. Acting like a good army-man, he was known to give no quarter and defend every inch of ground in discussions with the Edinburgh literati, one of whom went so far as to remark that ‘of all the Men who had so much understanding, [Clerk] was the Most Disagreeable person to Converse’ with.<sup>2</sup> Thus the stage was set for a heated debate. The conversation soon touched on a subject foremost in Hume’s mind at this time, namely the latest and last instalment of his *History of England*, concerned with the medieval period, which Hume was in then process of preparing for the press and which would be published in November of that year.<sup>3</sup> Complimenting Hume on his ‘Stile & Politeness in writing’, Clerk expressed his satisfaction that Hume ‘had taken to History in which he could not avoid being Instructive [a]nd Agreeable too’. Sensing a backhanded compliment, Hume replied:

I certainly shall not endeavour to avoid either of these Effects [,] But I hope you dont think I have endeavoured to avoid them in any of my other Writings.

C[lerk:] If you endeavoured you have not succeeded [for] you are very much in fashion & I do not mean for your Doctrines. For I think you rather try to pull down other peoples Doctrines than Establish any of your own.

H[ume:] Pardon me, did I not sett out with a complete Theory of Human Nature which was so ill received that I determind to refrain from System making.

C[lerk:] That was rash. The world’s a System & the best we Can do is to Assist one Another in perceiving And Communicating its parts & their connections.

H[ume:] I don’t know what a Man of Letters is to get by that. To be writing what every body knows or may hear from every Coffee House Acquaintance.

C[lerk:] That would be very idle: but I do not think M<sup>r</sup> Hume is in danger of that even if he should discard all paradox and take to the investigation of useful truths.

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume to Hugh Blair, 26 April 1764, *HL*, i, 435. Clerk (1724-1797) was soon to become Colonel (in 1762) and later General (1793).

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Carlyle, *Anecdotes and Characters of the Times*, ed. with an introduction by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973), p. 231. Carlyle memorably described Clerk as ‘truly the Greatest Siccatore in the world’.

<sup>3</sup> Hume’s *History of England, from the invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Accession of Henry VII* was published in London on 11 November 1761. Cf. Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (2nd edn., Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980), p. 402.

H[ume:] I own I am inclin'd to Scepticism & would avoid the Pedantry of Dogmatism [.] But have [I] not declared opinions on Commerce [.] Politics & Morals [?]

C[lerk:] I like some of your Thoughts on the Subject of Commer[ce] [.] But for Morals and Politics you seem [rather] to play with them than to be serious.

H[ume:] You surely think I am Serious in my Essay on Morality [?]<sup>4</sup>

This last question caused the conversation to turn to a consideration of Hume's moral philosophy in which Clerk directed his formidable though not always discerning energies against what he took to be a central principle of Hume's mature moral philosophy, the concept of utility. Driven by the force of Clerk's violent manner of arguing the conversation was about to reach a dead end when the servant entered to announce their mutual friend, Adam Smith, who 'entered the Room with a smile on his Countenance and Muttering Somewhat to himself' in his usual absent-minded manner.<sup>5</sup> We shall leave the scene at this point and, after briefly assessing in how far it can or cannot be considered authentic, enquire in which regards it might further our understanding of Hume's overall intellectual and literary career.

It must be admitted that we cannot ascertain with any certainty whether the scene just described actually took place and that there is room for doubt as to whether the conversation itself evolved along these precise lines. To be sure, Hume frequently discoursed with Robert Clerk during his time in London and we know that he had asked Adam Smith to call on him at his lodgings in Leicester Fields, which was a boarding-house frequented by Scots coming to London.<sup>6</sup> Though we have no direct statement as to the specific date at which this conversation is said to have taken place, internal as well as external evidence points to the autumn of 1761 when all three disputants were in London

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<sup>4</sup> 'Of the Principle of Moral Estimation: A Discourse between David Hume, Robert Clerk, and Adam Smith', in Vincenzo Merolle (ed.), *The manuscripts of Adam Ferguson* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), pp. 207-216, esp. p. 207f. The dialogue was first published by Ernest Campbell Mossner from the MS in Edinburgh University Library: "'Of the Principle of Moral Estimation: A Discourse between David Hume, Robert Clerk, and Adam Smith": An Unpublished MS by Adam Ferguson', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21 (1960), 222-32. The fullest discussion of Ferguson's dialogue occurs in Ian Simpson Ross, *The Life of Adam Smith* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), pp. 188ff.

<sup>5</sup> 'Of the Principle of Moral Estimation', in *The manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Merolle, p. 209. Smith was in turn subjected to a similar critical barrage from Clerk which was mainly directed against Smith's conception of sympathy as expounded in the *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

<sup>6</sup> See Hume to Adam Smith, 29 June 1761, *HL*, i, 346 and Hume to Robert Clerk, 12 December 1761, *NHL*, i, 64f.

and Hume was seeing the last instalment of his *History* through the press. While all the circumstantial information given above can thus be verified from contemporary documents, the actual conversation said to have taken place at Hume's lodgings presents us with a rather greater difficulty. The report – if such it is – of the debate between Hume, Clerk and Smith is contained in a manuscript essay by another Edinburgh man of letters, the clergyman and moral philosopher Adam Ferguson, entitled 'Of the Principle of Moral Estimation'. To be sure, Ferguson was sufficiently well acquainted with all three disputants and he might well have been present at this occasion or else could have depended on oral or written testimony from one or more of the disputants.<sup>7</sup>

By far the greatest problem is presented by the fact that the manuscript in Ferguson's handwriting dates from some time after 1800. In its present form – and we know of no other, though this does not exclude the possibility of an earlier draft – the report therefore dates from at least forty years after the event is said to have taken place.<sup>8</sup> This might thus well be a fictionalised dialogue in the Platonic tradition rather than an accurate report of an actual conversation.<sup>9</sup> It has moreover been suggested that Clerk, who occupies a central role in the piece and largely dominates the discussion, might be a mere mouthpiece for Ferguson, voicing the latter's own, largely critical views of the systems of moral philosophy devised by Hume and Smith. Yet it is just as likely that Clerk himself would have voiced these criticisms, since we know that Smith had in fact communicated some of the ideas discussed in the dialogue to Clerk whom he asked for his critical assessment.<sup>10</sup> Due to the absence of any additional testimony corroborating

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<sup>7</sup> The dialogue does not state whether Ferguson himself was present at this occasion and we do not possess any of his letters from that year which would allow us to ascertain whether or not he was in London at the time. Cf. *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle (2 vols.; London: Pickering, 1995), vol. i, p. cxli.

<sup>8</sup> The dialogue is written on paper watermarked 1801 and 1806, cf. *The manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Merolle, p. 214 note 1. This does not exclude the possibility of an earlier version of the dialogue, a possibility which has to my knowledge not been raised in the literature on the subject.

<sup>9</sup> There is a similar dialogue by Ferguson which also features Hume in conversation with a number of other literati, entitled 'An Excursion to the Highlands: Discourse on Various Subjects'. This manuscript is watermarked 1799 and was also preserved among Ferguson's papers, cf. *The manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Merolle, pp. 47-70.

<sup>10</sup> Smith to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 10 October 1759, in *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross (rev. edn., Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), pp. 48-57. Though this letter dates from two years before the most likely date of the conversation, it reveals that Smith was indeed eager to discuss the very same subject with Clerk, sure that he had removed potential objections to his

Ferguson's account, we cannot establish with any certainty whether his dialogue represents an actual conversation or indeed conversations or whether it is a synthetic account that presents us with the gist of several conversations Ferguson had heard about or participated in. This does put the scene described at the outset in perspective, but it should not discourage us from enquiring about what light it might shed on Hume's intellectual and literary career. Whether considered as an authentic report or as a largely fictional dialogue, this piece at the very least presents us with Ferguson's perceptive assessment of that career based on his knowledge of Hume's work and conversation.<sup>11</sup> Ferguson's dialogue provides us with a précis of Hume's intellectual and literary career, but the hints provided in that piece will need to be read alongside and checked against information gleaned from other, more reliable sources such as Hume's correspondence with his fellow literati.

Hume tells us in the dialogue that he 'sett out with a complete Theory of Human Nature which was so ill received that I determined to refrain from System making'. This refers to Hume's systematic exposition of his epistemology and moral philosophy in his first and now most famous work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, which he had composed when still in his mid-twenties and published anonymously in two instalments in 1739 and 1740. The remark that it was 'ill received' reflects Hume's perception of the failure of this, his first and now most famous work of philosophy, which did not attract either the audience or the critical attention Hume had envisaged for it and thus did not fulfil its author's high expectations. The first and only British review of the work was considered by the author 'somewhat abusive' and the work itself was not widely read, though it had a profound impact on the few thinkers who did read it and through them greatly

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moral philosophy by the inclusion of a passage about the impartial spectator in the second edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: 'I am now about to publish a new edition of my Book ....' In the dialogue Smith had mentioned the impartial spectator, which has led some commentators to conclude that he was most likely referring to the sixth edition of *Theory of Moral Sentiments* which was published in 1790. Yet there is no ground for such an inference as Smith's remarks in the dialogue are equally consistent with the draft amendments to *TMS* which Smith had asked Gilbert Elliot of Minto to convey to Clerk. On this see Ross, *Life of Smith*, p. 190.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hume to Adam Ferguson, 9 November 1763, *HL*, i, 410-1 and Ferguson to Hume, 26 November 1763, in *Correspondence of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Merolle, p. 55ff. Hume and Ferguson's mutual friend 'General Clerk' is mentioned in both letters.

contributed to the formation of the intellectual outlook of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>12</sup> Convinced that – as he later put it – the work’s lack of success ‘proceeded more from the manner than the matter’, Hume subsequently cast the three books of the *Treatise* anew in three separate publications, the *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1748; later retitled *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* and often referred to as the first *Enquiry*), the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751; also known as the second *Enquiry*) and the *Dissertation on the Passions* (1757). Hume was largely pleased with the products of this process of recasting, which were more elegantly written and far more widely read than the *Treatise*.<sup>13</sup>

Defending himself against Robert Clerk’s charges of not having advanced any positive philosophical tenets, abandoned systematic thought and contended himself with subverting the philosophical systems of others, Hume states that he had in fact ‘declared opinions on Commerce [,] Politics & Morals’. ‘Morals’ almost certainly refers to the second *Enquiry*, the subject of the subsequent heated debate between Clerk and Hume on the concept of utility central to that work.<sup>14</sup> Hume’s ‘opinions’ concerning politics and commerce were mainly contained in forty-two essays, most of which appeared in the twelve years following the publication of the *Treatise*. The *Essays, Moral and Political*, published in three instalments in 1741, 1742 and 1748, laid out Hume’s ‘science of politics’ and contained essays on the British constitution and party system as well a number of more philosophical essays. In some of these Hume engaged in the polite, conversational style championed by Addison, though he adapted the essay form to suit his own ends and, unlike Addison, studiously avoided ‘writing what every body knows or may hear from every Coffee House Acquaintance’ as he put it in his conversation with Clerk.<sup>15</sup> Hume’s *Political Discourses*, published in 1752, presented a system of political economy and an analysis of modern commercial society. Ferguson’s dialogue does not mention Hume’s *Natural History of Religion* or his essays on

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<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Phillipson, *Hume* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, [March or April 1751], *HL*, i, 158. The *Treatise* was not republished during Hume’s lifetime.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Of the Principle of Moral Estimation’, in *The manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Merolle, pp. 208-9.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Of the Principle of Moral Estimation’, p. 208.

aesthetics, which were published alongside the *Dissertation on the Passions* in his *Four Dissertations* of 1757. All these works, together with the two *Enquiries*, were subsequently republished in a collection of Hume's works entitled *Essays and Treatises*, published in a variety of formats from 1753 onwards, which consolidated Hume's reputation as a leading man of letters.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime Hume had started work on a narrative history of the Stuart Age which was to appear in two volumes in 1754 and 1756 under the title *The History of Great Britain*. Though discouraged by the initially slow sales of the first volumes as well as the mixed reviews and critical responses elicited by both volumes, Hume persisted in his undertaking and, following a brief period of indecision about whether to he should 'go backwards or forwards in my History', decided to write the history of the Tudor Era which was published in two volumes in 1759, this time under the title *The History of England*.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter, Hume again pondered whether to continue his history of Stuart Britain up to the Hanoverian Accession, but eventually settled on the early and medieval history of England. Having signed a lucrative contract with his bookseller, Hume then wrote the last two volumes of his *History* which present an account of the rise and slow decline of feudalism. These were published in 1761 and the following year the entire work was published in chronological order as a six-volume *History of England, from the invasion of Julius Cæsar to the revolution in 1688*. Hume's *History* was frequently reissued and soon established itself as the standard history of England. Hume spent the last fourteen years of his life revising the work in line with the latest historical discoveries as well as his changing political views. From the 1760s onwards Hume's reputation thus rested on two works, the *Essays and Treatises* and the *History of England*, and editions of both works that were published after 1768 featured a

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Sher has pointed out that *Essays and Treatises* was the main form in which eighteenth-century readers encountered Hume's philosophical and political works. Cf. Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 46ff.

<sup>17</sup> 'Shall I go backwards or forwards in my History? I think you us'd to tell me, that you approv'd more of my going backwards.' Hume to Adam Smith, [February or March 1757], *HL*, i, 246. Cf. Hume to William Mure of Caldwell, [Feb 1757], *HL*, i, 243.



frontispiece portrait of the author that includes two quills and two books.<sup>18</sup> These represent the dual calling of this man of letters, expressed in the words ‘History and Philosophy’ in the open pages of one of the books, a phrase that indicates that by the 1760s Hume’s fame as a historian had eclipsed his renown as a philosopher.

In Ferguson’s dialogue Hume refers to his own occupation as that of a ‘man of letters’, a term used in a way which suggests that his various literary endeavours can be subsumed under this heading. This is confirmed by a letter Hume wrote in the late 1740s in which he speaks about the benefit he expects to reap from a diplomatic tour of Europe, on which he was about to embark, ‘as a man of letters, which I confess has always been the sole object of my ambition’.<sup>19</sup> The man of letters had emerged in the early modern period as a literary career as well as a social identity distinct from that of the courtier, the party hack or the antiquarian scholar. Unlike these, the man of letters possessed a considerable degree of independence and addressed himself to a growing reading public.<sup>20</sup> Hume used his works and correspondence to communicate his identity as a man of letters and later described himself in one of his letters as ‘a philosopher, a man of letters, nowise a courtier, of the most independent spirit, who has given offence to every sect’.<sup>21</sup> Hume’s own career and literary output exemplifies some of the literary endeavours, which could encompass a diversity of genres from the philosophical treatise to large-scale narrative history. The breadth of interests and expertise underpinning these various pursuits is aptly summarised by John Valdimir Price: ‘The “man of letters” in the eighteenth century had to be philosopher, historian, and literary craftsman if he

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<sup>18</sup> Hume, *The History of England, From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688. A New Edition, Corrected* (8 vols., London: T. Cadell, 1770), i, facing title page.

<sup>19</sup> Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 29 January 1748, *HL*, i, 108-9.

<sup>20</sup> From the very beginning Hume specifically addressed himself to this public as is testified by his remark in the ‘Advertisement’ to the first two books of the *Treatise* (1739): ‘The approbation of the public I consider as the greatest reward of my labours; but am determin’d to regard its judgement, whatever it be, as my best instruction.’ *Treatise*, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 2 June 1765, *HL*, i, 504. For Hume’s identity as a man of letters see ‘Of Essay Writing’, *Essays*, pp. 533-537 as well as John Valdimir Price, *David Hume* (New York: Twayne, 1968), pp. 145-151; Jerome Christensen, *Practicing Enlightenment: Hume and the Formation of a Literary Career* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), esp. pp. 3ff; and Phillipson, *Hume*, pp. 17-34.



wanted to have any impact on his readers.’<sup>22</sup> Hume’s most extended statement on his identity as a man of letters occurs in his brief autobiography, *My Own Life*, written a few months before his death in 1776. This piece itself which testifies to the extent to which Hume’s social identity was intertwined with and dependent on his work since *My Own Life* is conceived as containing ‘little more than the History of my Writings; as, indeed, all my life has been spent in literary pursuits and occupations’.<sup>23</sup> The piece identifies Hume as a man of letters and tells the story of his struggle against adversity from the perceived failure of the *Treatise* to the eventual success of the *History of England*.<sup>24</sup>

Hume’s autobiographical piece was specifically designed to influence his own posthumous reputation, but it has had at least one unintended effect. In drawing his own character towards the end of the piece, Hume asserted that ‘the love of literary fame’ had been his ‘ruling passion’.<sup>25</sup> This remark, which was harmless enough in an eighteenth-century context, has been taken by twentieth-century philosophers as an indication that Hume’s desire for public acclaim or even notoriety led him to ‘abandon’ his true calling, the pursuit of ‘serious’ philosophy, after the *Treatise* had failed to attract the audience he had envisaged for it.<sup>26</sup> Having turned his back on philosophy, Hume then took up history sometime in the late 1740s or early 1750s. The assumption that Hume ‘abandoned’ or ‘deserted’ philosophy for history by 1752 is a problematic one for a number of reasons that we will have occasion to discuss later on.<sup>27</sup> The once widespread notion that Hume abandoned his philosophy in favour of history rests on the presupposition that to Hume’s

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Stephen Buckle, *Hume’s Enlightenment Tract: The Unity and Purpose of An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> ‘My Own Life’, reprinted in *Essays*, pp. xxxi-xli, esp. p. xxxi. For a recent interpretation and overview of the publication history of this piece see Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, pp. 53ff.

<sup>24</sup> The centrality of the notion of ‘success’ in ‘My Own Life’ has been explored by Robert Mankin in ‘Authority, Success, and the Philosopher: Hume vs. Rousseau’, in *Better in France? The Circulation of Ideas between Britain and the Continent in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. F. Ogé (Lewisburg, Bucknell Press, 2005)

<sup>25</sup> ‘My Own Life’, *Essays*, p. xl.

<sup>26</sup> For an extended critique of this view and a reinterpretation of Hume’s remark about his ‘love of literary fame’ see Buckle, *Hume’s Enlightenment Tract*, pp. 3-26.

<sup>27</sup> The notion that Hume ‘deserted’ or ‘abandoned’ philosophy for history can be found in Henry Grey Graham, *Scottish Men of Letters in the Eighteenth Century* (London: A. and C. Black, 1908), p. 43: ‘Hume ‘had almost abandoned philosophy, and now turned to history’; J. B. Black, *The Art of History: A Study of Four Great Historians of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1926), p. 78: Hume ‘deserted philosophy for history’; and R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1946), p. 73: Hume ‘deserted philosophical studies in favour of historical at about the age of thirty-five’.

mind the two were entirely distinct fields of endeavour. This assumption is in itself highly questionable, not only because Hume did at times subsume both philosophy and history under the heading 'literature', but because of the very first stated intention he presented to his readers, the 'Advertisement' to the first two books of the *Treatise*, published in 1739.

In the words of one of the earliest advocates of this view, there are a number of respects in which 'Hume's *Essays* and his *History of England* constitute *continuations* of his earliest work'.<sup>28</sup> This view underpins much of recent scholarly work on Hume's thought and intellectual career and has been fruitfully explored by philosophers, intellectual historians and literary scholars alike. This view receives some confirmation from an important statement Hume made when first addressing 'the public' in his earliest work. When publishing the first two books of the *Treatise* in 1739, Hume inserted a note to this effect:

My design in the present work is sufficiently explain'd in the *Introduction*. The reader must only observe, that all the subjects I have there plann'd out to myself, are not treated of in these two volumes. The subjects of the *Understanding* and *Passions* make a compleat chain of reasoning by themselves; and I was willing to take advantage of this natural division, in order to try the taste of the public. If I have the good fortune to meet with success, I shall proceed to the examination of *Morals*, *Politics*, and *Criticism*; which will compleat this *Treatise of Human Nature*.<sup>29</sup>

This statement indicates that by 1739 Hume was planning to extend his philosophical investigations from epistemology to fields as varied as moral philosophy, political science and 'criticism'.<sup>30</sup> This statement thus provides a link between the first two books

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<sup>28</sup> David Fate Norton, 'An Introduction to Hume's Thought', in *CCH*, pp. 1-32, esp. p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> *Treatise*, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> It is generally assumed that the term 'criticism' here refers to Hume's views on literary criticism or aesthetics touched upon in a number of his early essays and developed at length in two later essays, 'Of Tragedy' and 'Of the Standard of Taste', both published as part of the *Four Dissertations* of 1757. Cf. Peter Jones, 'Hume's literary and aesthetic theory', in *CCH*, pp. 255-280, esp. p. 255. Yet Hume may well have use this term in a wider sense. To be sure, the term 'criticism' is employed three times in 'Of the Standard of Taste', each time in the sense of aesthetic judgement or a system of rules for judging the merit of literary productions. Yet the terms 'criticism' and 'the critical art' are also used in Hume's 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' (1752) in a different sense, that of erudition or historical criticism. For Hume's notion of historical criticism see Wootton, 'David Hume, the historian', in *CCH*, pp. 281-312, esp. pp. 285-290. Any reevaluation of the possible meaning(s) of Hume's remark in the 'Advertisement' to the *Treatise* would have to take into account the complex semantic history of the term 'criticism', which is reflective of the development of aesthetics, philology and historical criticism in the early modern era. For

of the *Treatise* and Hume's subsequent works, in particular the earliest essays, some of which were composed during the period when Hume was in the process of preparing the *Treatise* for the press and published not long after that in 1741/42.<sup>31</sup> The statement is however open to a number of interpretations since it does by no means make clear how many of Hume's later forays into political science had at this stage been envisaged, planned or even written. Consequently there is still considerable disagreement among Hume scholars as to the precise nature of the connections between the Hume's *Treatise* and his subsequent forays into a number of fields, including British politics, political economy, and history. As recent studies differ widely in their assessment of the possible connections between his early philosophical and his subsequent political and historical work, it will be necessary to sketch out the most important interpretations that have been put forth in recent scholarly work on Hume's thought and intellectual career.

We have seen that Hume is said to have responded to Clerk's charge of scepticism – 'I think you rather try to pull down other peoples Doctrines than Establish any of your own' – by admitting that 'I am inclin'd to Scepticism & would avoid the Pedantry of Dogmatism'.<sup>32</sup> David Fate Norton, one of the first interpreters to insist on an underlying continuity of Hume's thought over the entirety of his intellectual career, identified Hume's scepticism as the single most important unifying element in his diverse works. Hume's sceptical outlook and methodology, initially developed to describe the limitations of human knowledge in the *Treatise*, had subsequently been applied to several fields of knowledge, most notably that of history. The *Treatise* indicates that Hume was from the very beginning concerned with the profound implications of his sceptical philosophy for widely discussed problems about the nature, study and writing of history.<sup>33</sup> In addressing these implications, he engaged with problems that had been at the core of a major seventeenth-century controversy about the possibility of historical

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this see Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1998), pp. 205-211.

<sup>31</sup> On this see in particular John Immerwahr, 'The Anatomist and the Painter: The Continuity of Hume's *Treatise* and *Essays*', *Hume Studies*, 17 (1991), 1-14.

<sup>32</sup> 'Of the Principle of Moral Estimation', in *The manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Merolle, p. 208.

<sup>33</sup> See David Fate Norton, 'History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought', in *David Hume: Philosophical Historian*, ed. David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. xxxii-1.

knowledge. Hume's statements amount to a cautious and sceptical defence of historical knowledge against the challenge posed by Pyrrhonism, an extreme form of scepticism that threatened to undermine all belief in the credibility of historical sources.<sup>34</sup> Drawing on his philosophical account of causation to assess the credibility of historical testimonies, Hume worked out a methodology of historical criticism which he subsequently employed to great effect in his critique of belief in miracles.<sup>35</sup> This methodology also underpins Hume's historical work from the early 1750s onwards, from his critique of classical sources in his erudite dissertation on the populousness of antiquity to his investigation of the authenticity of historical documents in his *History of Great Britain*.<sup>36</sup> Hume's 'constructive scepticism', which expressed itself in his reply to the Pyrrhonian challenge, has therefore been identified as one of the main 'logical ties between the historical and philosophical elements of Hume's thought'.<sup>37</sup>

Building on this reassessment of this and further 'logical ties' between Hume's philosophical and historical thought, a number of commentators have advanced interpretations of Hume's intellectual career as a whole from his earliest concerns with epistemology and moral philosophy to his reformulation of his political and religious thought towards the end of his life. Writing in this vein, Donald Livingston presented a systematic reevaluation of a number of key themes in Hume's philosophy built on the assumption that 'historical thinking is ... an internal part of his philosophical thought'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> On Pyrrhonism and Hume's response to it see the following essays by Richard H. Popkin, 'The High Road to Pyrrhonism' and 'David Hume and the Pyrrhonian Controversy', in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp. 11-37 and 133-147; 'Skepticism and the Study of History' in *Hume: Philosophical Historian*, ed. Norton and Popkin, pp. ix-xxxi. The most extended account of Hume's place in the Pyrrhonian controversy and his account of the credibility of historical testimony is Dario Perinetti, 'Hume, history and the science of human nature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, McGill University, 2002), chapter 2.

<sup>35</sup> Hume's 'Of Miracles' was omitted from the *Treatise* but later published as a section X of the first *Enquiry*, cf. *EHU*, p. 169-186. For Hume's critique of the belief in miracles see M. A. Stewart, 'Hume's historical view of miracles', in *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, ed. M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1994), pp. 171-200.

<sup>36</sup> See David Wootton, 'David Hume, the historian', in *CCH*, pp. 288-290.

<sup>37</sup> David Fate Norton, 'History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought', in *Hume: Philosophical Historian*, ed. Norton and Popkin, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

<sup>38</sup> Livingston was building on David Norton's work on the interconnections between Hume's thinking on philosophy and history as well as the influential reassessment of Hume as primarily a moral philosopher in Norman Kemp Smith's *The philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines* (London: Macmillan, 1941).

In commencing with an analysis of the first book of the *Treatise* and then proceeding to give an account of Hume's political and historical works, Livingston sought to demonstrate the extent to which Hume's overall philosophy is framed as a narrative account of the temporal order in which the human mind forms its ideas of the world outside it. Such a narrative account presupposes an essentially historical outlook and it was consequently history rather than experimental natural science which provided the paradigms and methodologies for Hume's study of human nature as well as his 'science of man', the comprehensive study of man in his various moral, social and political contexts.<sup>39</sup> Hume had projected such a science at the outset of the *Treatise*, outlined its foundation in his account of human nature in the course of that work and continued to develop it in his subsequent political and historical works.<sup>40</sup> By drawing attention to the historical foundations of Hume's 'science of man' as well as his political science, Livingston was able to affect a profound shift in Hume studies which has resulted in a thorough reassessment of the historical dimension of Hume's thought.<sup>41</sup> Other commentators have conducted their investigations of Hume's philosophical and political thought along similar lines of enquiry and have thus contributed to the intensification of our understanding of the profoundly historical character of Hume's project of a 'science of man'.

The new account of Hume's philosophy presented by Norton, Livingston and a number of other scholars could not fail to have a profound and discernable impact on the study of other areas of Hume's thought. In the long run it has led to a reevaluation of the relationship between Hume's historicised philosophy on the one hand and the philosophical dimension of his historical writings on the other hand. This has involved extensive work on Hume's political thought, which has been made possible by three

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<sup>39</sup> The reference to 'the experimental method of reasoning' in the title of the *Treatise* as well as Hume's much quoted statement to the effect that this science was to be 'on experience and observation' had long been understood as a clear indication that Hume meant to Baconian or Newtonian experimental science. Livingston and others were able to show that there is an alternative interpretation, which recognises the fact that 'experience and observation' is either gleaned from history or developed in as narrative account.

<sup>40</sup> See Hume's 'Introduction' to the *Treatise*, pp. 3-6.

<sup>41</sup> This has established itself as a major trend in Hume scholarship as is evident from the fact that the most recent systematic study of Hume's philosophy is subtitled 'Reason in History', cf. Claudia M. Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in History* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 2003).

developments that have transformed recent study of eighteenth-century thought over the last forty years: a growing emphasis on the contextual analysis of masterpieces of political thought and historical writing, a reassessment of the political ideologies and religious controversies that shaped public life in the British Isles during the ‘long eighteenth century’ and an ever increasing interest in the intellectual culture of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>42</sup> Duncan Forbes’ groundbreaking study on *Hume’s Philosophical Politics* (1975) was the first and so far the most comprehensive attempt to reconstruct and reevaluate Hume’s political thought.<sup>43</sup> Focusing on Hume’s relation to the natural law tradition and on the immediate party political context in which the *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741/2) were written and revised, Forbes drew a detailed picture of Hume as a philosopher directly engaged in the debates of his time while at the same time seeking to transcend entrenched party political divides. This picture is painstakingly put together and on the whole convincing, though it will be argued in the second part of the present study that Forbes at times exaggerated the extent to which Hume’s lofty aim of ‘impartiality’ was actually realised in his historical narrative.

The interpretation of Hume as a political thinker preoccupied with the influence of factionalism received its clearest analysis and most incisive formulation in Nicholas Phillipson’s *Hume*. Phillipson provides an interpretation of Hume’s career that presents him as a modern man of letters in search of a medium to convey his lesson of moderation to a new reading public consisting largely of the middling ranks of society. To this end Hume successively experimented with a number of genres from the philosophical treatise to the Addisonian essay before appropriating the latter as an effective vehicle for serious philosophy rather than polite entertainment. Hume’s essays are concerned with the central political questions confronting Hume’s readers, questions about the nature of the British party system, the evaluation of political rulers and the analysis of the corrosive influence of religious divisions on civic stability. Moreover,

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<sup>42</sup> An overview of the most important developments in the scholarship on the Scottish Enlightenment is provided by John Robertson, ‘The Scottish Contribution to the Enlightenment’, in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation*, ed. Paul Wood (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2000), pp. 37-62, esp. pp. 37ff.

<sup>43</sup> Duncan Forbes, *Hume’s philosophical politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975).

they constitute 'a philosopher's agenda for a *History of England*' in which Hume works out the crucial issues faced by anyone aspiring to write the history of the British constitution.<sup>44</sup> The essays are thus a first step in a natural process that led from the analysis of the modern British constitution and party system in Walpolian Britain via a narrative of its emergence in the Stuart Era and the Elizabethan constitution back to the feudal order. In the process of writing these pre-histories of the modern British constitution Hume is shown to have developed a novel and revolutionary account of constitutional history. Phillipson contends that it was in the field of narrative history, which took the form of a history of civilization in Britain, written in several instalments and revised for the rest of Hume's life, that Hume found a medium that was both popular and ideally suited to the task of conveying his message of political prudence and moderation to a modern audience by presenting an effective philosophical antidote against the insidious effects of factionalism and religious strife. According to Phillipson the *History of England*, written at least in part in accordance with the agenda Hume had formulated in his early sets of essays and thus rooted in Hume's project of a science of man, can thus be regarded 'as the climax of an intellectual career rather than an afterthought'.<sup>45</sup>

Having surveyed a number of the leading interpretations in the field, it will be helpful to briefly assess a commonly held assumption about Hume's career, which underpin most of these interpretations though they are by no means held by all commentators. The first of these consists in the often unstated supposition that the *Treatise*, together with his early *Essays*, contain the nucleus of substantially all of Hume's subsequent work including the *History of England*. This view is rarely formulated in as bold and simplified a way as that, yet it is present in even the most sophisticated accounts. We have seen that Norton, Livingston and other commentators have based their

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Phillipson, *Hume*, chapter 4, esp. pp. 53, 75.

<sup>45</sup> Phillipson, *Hume*, p. 1. Phillipson's analysis is further developed in his 'Propriety, Property and Prudence: David Hume and the Defence of the Revolution', in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, eds. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), pp. 302-320. The impact of this interpretation can be seen in the description of Hume's early political essays as 'contemporary history' in J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume II: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 177-198.



interpretations on a close reading of the *Treatise*, while Forbes, Phillipson and, to some degree, J. G. A. Pocock's interpretations hinge on the *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741-8), a work of political analysis in which Hume is deemed to have developed the basic elements of the historical views he was to expound in the *History of England*. The present study contends that such an assessment is questionable as it does not sufficiently take into account Hume's later views on subjects as varied as commerce, manners, and the history of religion, some of which are not foreshadowed in the *Treatise* or indeed the *Essays, Moral and Political*. The present study will seek to demonstrate this by means of an in-depth examination of the works Hume composed after the publication of the last instalment of *Essays, Moral and Political* (1748), though it will be necessary to cast a brief glance at the treatment of history in the *Treatise* and early *Essays*.

From the very beginning of his literary career Hume pondered the theoretical and practical problems involved in the writing of history, as is evident from a number of discussions of related subjects in the *Treatise* and the early *Essays*. There are important remarks about history in all three books of the *Treatise*, yet these remarks by no means cover the entire range of aspects Hume was to explore in his subsequent work on history. In fact, discussions of history in the *Treatise* are focused on two main issues, the credibility of historical testimony and the nature of historical narration.<sup>46</sup> These are important philosophical discussions about the dual nature of history as repository of factual information about the past and as narrative of past events.<sup>47</sup> We should also take notice of an interesting remark about different kinds of historical subjects which occurs towards the end of Book Three of the *Treatise*:

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<sup>46</sup> The most extensive discussions of these subjects can be found in *Treatise*, pp. 58-59, 98-99 and 275-276. To be sure, Hume makes use of historical data in the course of his discussion of the foundations of political allegiance in Book III of the *Treatise*, where the evidence provided by history is invoked since 'the study of history confirms the reasonings of true philosophy'. Cf. *Treatise*, pp. 359-360.

<sup>47</sup> These aspects have recently received increasing attention. On Hume's discussion of the credibility of historical testimony see in particular Perinetti, 'Hume, history and the science of human nature', chapter 2. The most extensive treatment of Hume's thinking on the nature of historical narration is S. K. Wertz, 'The Nature of Historical Narration', in Wertz, *Between Hume's Philosophy and History: Historical Theory and Practice* (Lanham, New York and Oxford: UP of America, 2000), pp. 43-58.



The histories of kingdoms are more interesting than domestic stories: The histories of great empires more than those of small cities and principalities: And the histories of wars and revolutions more than those of peace and order.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps it was this remark which led Ernest C. Mossner to state that ‘Hume’s historical aspirations date at least from the *Treatise* in 1739’ and his ‘intention to compose a national history arose out of his pervasive study of the “science of man”’.<sup>49</sup> Yet it would clearly be a mistake to read this general remark about the most interesting subjects of history as an indication of a specific intention on Hume’s part to write the history of a kingdom in an era of revolutions. After all, Hume is here clearly writing from the perspective of someone who *reads* and analyses historical narratives and expresses no intention whatever to *write* a history. In fact, the first remarks to the effect that Hume had ‘long had an intention, in my riper years, of composing some History’ occur towards the end of the 1740s.<sup>50</sup> We can thus conclude that while the *Treatise* does indeed contain some of the philosophical foundations for Hume’s understanding of the nature of history and historical narrative, it cannot be said to contain anything like the range and richness of Hume’s mature philosophy of history as outlined in the second *Enquiry* nor any clear indication of an intention to ‘compose a national history’ along the lines of his later *History of Great Britain*.

Hume’s *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741-48) present us with a significantly different picture due to the fact that Hume drew far more heavily on historical evidence for his essays on contemporary British politics. History was constantly invoked in eighteenth-century political debates and it is no surprise to see that it is crucial to Hume’s arguments about the nature of the Hanoverian constitution and the emergence of the British party system. Yet while history thus features largely in Hume’s early *Essays*, one does get the sense that it is employed mainly as an auxiliary science that provides a resource of factual information to be utilized in his ‘science of politics’. A somewhat fuller picture of Hume’s views about the roles of history emerges from the short essay

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<sup>48</sup> *Treatise*, p. 391.

<sup>49</sup> Mossner’s footnote in *NHL*, p. 23 n.2 and Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. 233. In both cases Mossner fails to back up his claim. Mossner’s use of Hume’s alleged historical reading notes as a means to date his first attempt to write history will be discussed further below.

<sup>50</sup> Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 29 Jan 1748, *HL*, i, 108f. Cf. Hume to Henry Home, [early 1747], *NHL*, p. 23.

'Of the Study of History', a polite and somewhat whimsical piece that Hume later withdrew from editions of the *Essays and Treatises*. This essay focuses largely on benefits to be reaped from the study of history, which is presented as a source of entertainment, useful knowledge and even edification.<sup>51</sup> The essay is thus again written from the perspective of an avid reader of historical works and presents little more than conventional views. While Hume states that history can and should be read for its own sake, he also stresses that 'history is not only a valuable part of knowledge, but opens the door to many other parts, and affords materials to most of the sciences'.<sup>52</sup> As in the case of the *Treatise* there is an important sense in which Hume's later views on the philosophy of history and even his assessment of the different roles of history cannot be said to be fully contained or even anticipated in this or his other early essays.

While the views expressed in the *Treatise* and the *Essays, Moral and Political* reveal Hume's extensive reading of historical works, his intense interest in history and his heavy reliance on historical evidence for his political arguments, it would be misleading to maintain that Hume had laid all or even the most important theoretical foundations for his later study of history. This point cannot of course be made summarily, but only by means of a detailed comparison of earlier and later statement. Since a complete comparison of that kind would transcend the confines of the present study, we will have to confine ourselves to these brief remarks before embarking on an in-depth account and analysis of Hume's later views on history, which have on the whole been less studied than his earlier ones. Here we shall focus on two major areas, namely Hume's theory and practice of source criticism and his revisionist account of Stuart history. While Hume stressed in 'Of the Study of History' that an 'extensive knowledge' of historical facts 'belongs to the man of letters', we shall see that it was not until the late 1740s and early 1750s that he himself actually acquired this kind of knowledge. Moreover, Hume's account of Stuart history in the early political *Essays* is necessarily fragmentary and does not display anything like the depth and sophistication that was to characterise the interpretation he was to develop after 1752. His views on Stuart history therefore

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<sup>51</sup> 'The advantages found in history seem to be of three kinds, as it amuses the fancy, as it improves the understanding, and as it strengthens virtue.' 'Of the Study of History', *Essays*, pp. 563-568, esp. p. 565.

<sup>52</sup> 'Of the Study of History', *Essays*, p. 566.

changed drastically between 1741 and 1754 and we shall later have occasion to compare the diverging earlier and later interpretations and attempt to establish whether or not the views expressed in the *Essays* of 1741/42 anticipate some of the basic elements of his *History of Great Britain* (1754-56).

This directs our attention to the period of Hume's career following the publication of his *Essays, Moral and Political*, the last instalment of which appeared in 1748. In the immediately ensuing period we can perceive a profound shift in Hume's preoccupations as well as a marked increase in his literary activities. This is well illustrated by the number and range of works Hume composed in the late 1740s and early 1750s. In the relatively brief period extending from summer 1749 until summer 1751, Hume composed a number of works of varied length on subjects as diverse as moral philosophy, political economy, the philosophy and sociology of religion and suicide. The list of intellectual and literary projects Hume pursued in the late 1740s and early 1750s does not belie any straightforward sequential scheme and defies easy categorisation, but it directs our attention to this period, which is at the same time one of the most neglected and one of the most crucial periods of Hume's entire intellectual and literary career. In recent years increasing scholarly attention has begun to be devoted to the works Hume composed during this period such as the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), the *Political Discourses* (1752) and the *Natural History of Religion* (1757).<sup>53</sup> The *Political Discourses* present a sustained interpretation and defence of commercial society built around a number of concepts that form the conceptual core of Hume's mature political economy, in particular 'commerce', 'manners', and 'luxury'. These were concepts Hume had barely touched upon in his earlier writings, including his *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741-48).<sup>54</sup> The *Natural*

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<sup>53</sup> The date of Hume's composition of the *Natural History of Religion* cannot be established with any certainty, but most scholars concur that it was probably composed during the period 1749-51. For a further discussion of this see n. 218 and part II, n. 15.

<sup>54</sup> 'The problems of maintaining the rules of justice and morality in a commercial society were reserved for the *Political Discourses* of 1752.' Phillipson, 'Propriety, Property and Prudence', p. 318. On Hume's theory of commerce, see Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2005), pp. 21ff, 366ff; on the concept of manners see Yasuo Amoh, 'The ancient-modern controversy in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *The Rise of political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Tatsuya Sakamoto

*History of Religion*, most probably composed during this period but not published until 1757, reflects Hume's increasing preoccupations with the history and philosophy of religion during this period.<sup>55</sup> At the same time philosophers have revisited and reevaluated Hume's two *Enquiries* and have demonstrated that both works display a number of new and important intellectual preoccupations and can therefore no longer be regarded as mere 'milk-and-water versions' of the allegedly more serious philosophy contained in the *Treatise*.<sup>56</sup>

As a period of multiple occupations, extensive research and intense literary activities, the years 1748-1752 provides ample material for the intellectual biographer seeking to reconstruct and re-evaluate the middle stages of Hume's intellectual career. The dazzling richness and diversity of Hume's intellectual and literary occupations during these years give rise to the question of how we are to approach this period in a way that will enable us to trace the impulses Hume might have received for his thinking on history. It is worth stressing that just as it is important to distinguish this period from Hume's earlier and later thinking, it is necessary to establish an exact timeline for Hume's manifold interests and pursuits within this period so as to avoid the common mistake of reading later statements into earlier ones and confusing the different stages of what was evidently a highly complex process. This should furthermore enable us to establish with greater accuracy whether or not there has been a significant development in Hume's thinking on history. Thus, whereas the thematic or systematic approach followed in many studies of Hume's philosophy presupposes a basic unity and coherence in his

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and Hideo Tanaka (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 69-85; on luxury and on Hume's political economy as a whole see John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 360-371, esp. pp. 365ff.

<sup>55</sup> This work occupies a central place in the following two studies on Hume: Donald T. Siebert, *The Moral Animus of David Hume* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990) and Jennifer A. Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997). Studies of the *Natural History of Religion* include Mark Webb, 'The Argument of the *Natural History*', *Hume Studies*, 17 (1991), 141-159; and Michel Malherbe, 'Hume's *Natural History of Religion*', *Hume Studies*, 21 (1995), 255-274.

<sup>56</sup> 'Hume's first *Enquiry* is widely regarded as a milk-and-water version of the author's serious philosophy'. Cf. Buckle, *Hume's Enlightenment Tract*, p. 3. Attention has largely focused on the first *Enquiry*, cf. Buckle's study as well as Peter Millican (ed.), *Reading Hume on Human Understanding: Essays on the first Enquiry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002). Both works owe a debt to the first commentator to put the *Enquiries* centre stage, namely Antony Flew in his *Hume's Philosophy of Belief: A Study of his First Inquiry* (London: Routledge, 1961).

thought, the chronological approach opens up the possibility of tracing changes and thus leads to considerations about an overall development in Hume's thinking.<sup>57</sup>

A chronological approach such as the one I propose to adopt is by its very nature a biographical one, since the only way of placing Hume's texts in an exact chronological sequence consists in a detailed consideration and assessment of the textual and biographical data on which the reconstruction of such a sequence must be based. A chronological and biographical approach will yield far richer results if it is pursued in a manner which takes due notice of what one could call the 'connections' between life and thinking, in other words, if it seeks to trace the complex and inextricable interrelations between the life of a man or woman of letters and his or her writings. This is an approach most readily associated with the term 'intellectual biography' or even 'philosophical biography' and it is in the vicinity of this genre that I would situate my own approach in the first part of the present study.<sup>58</sup> It might be worth quoting a useful definition of the term 'intellectual biography', described by an eminent historian of ideas as a biography 'that throws light on [its] subject's intellectual pursuits, not merely by trying to establish a sequence or chronological order in those pursuits, but by trying to establish a rationale for them both in terms of the subject's motivations and in terms of a specific cultural and intellectual context within which those motivations are shaped and bear fruit'.<sup>59</sup> Understood in this way, intellectual biography traces the interconnections between a person's thought and work and the various biographical, social, cultural and intellectual contexts in which it can be situated. In the words of another commentator it 'presumes or demonstrates complex forms of interaction between the life and the thought'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> James Noxon, *Hume's Philosophical Development: A Study of his Methods* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973) is an early example of such an approach.

<sup>58</sup> Works with the subtitle 'An Intellectual Biography' have been appearing frequently since the early 1970s. For an attempt to define 'philosophical biographer' by one of the most eminent practitioners in the field see Ray Monk, 'Philosophical Biography: The Very Idea', in *Wittgenstein: Philosophy and Biography*, ed. James C. Klagge (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), pp. 3-15.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> 'The "biography of the philosopher" is a narrative which attempts some treatment of the full chronological sweep of the life, which offers reasonably detailed accounts of the philosopher's thought, and which presumes or demonstrates complex forms of interaction between the life and the thought.' Richard Freadman, 'Genius and the Dutiful Life: Ray Monk's *Wittgenstein* and the Biography of the

At this point it is worth recalling that we are here not concerned with what one might call the broad sweep of Hume's life or the widest possible contexts in which his life or work may be situated, but rather with the very specific question of the development of his thinking on one important subject, history, during a crucial period of his life. It will thus be necessary to modify the approach to suit the needs of a more narrowly focused enquiry, in which even closer attention needs to be paid to the intricacies of the 'interconnections between the life and the thought'. I would suggest that this can best be done by taking into account and seeking to establish the usefulness of a more particular concept, namely that of 'influence'. While the concept of a 'context' suggests a wider view that takes into account a whole area of the intellectual culture of the period in which a work was conceived or written and within which it may be meaningfully situated, 'influence' is a less expansive and more rigid concept that seeks to trace specific and demonstrable connections between particular features of one author's work and those of another. Due to the indiscriminate way in which the concept of influence has often been put to use in the writing of the history of ideas, it has however fallen into disrepute and has largely been replaced by more flexible concepts.<sup>61</sup> The most important of these alternative concepts is 'intertextuality', which has established itself as a very useful concept in the analysis of literary texts since it draws our attention to the web of direct and indirect references that characterise and – in the view of some commentators – constitute any given text. I would suggest, however, that the concept of 'influence' is more directly applicable in the case of Hume's works of the period 1748-56 due to the fact that the existing textual and circumstantial evidence will enable us to trace concrete and direct links between Hume and his intellectual environment. It will be argued in the following chapters that a number of these links can justifiably be labelled 'influences'.

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Philosopher as Sub-Genre', in *Biography*, 25 (2002), 301-338, esp. 337. I disagree with Freadman who marks out what he labels 'the biography of the philosopher' as a sub-genre distinct from other forms such as the 'intellectual biography'. This distinction appears to me largely artificial since the above definition can be applied to a great number of thinkers, writers and even artists whose lives have been or could be fruitfully written in the form of an intellectual biography.

<sup>61</sup> For a critique of the way the concept of influence has been (mis)used in the traditional history of ideas see Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', in Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge; Cambridge UP, 2002), pp. 57-89, esp. pp. 75-6.

To illustrate this general pointy we can briefly consider the relevant and much-discussed case of Hume's essay 'Of National Characters' which was first published as part of the last instalment of Hume's *Essays, Moral and Political* in 1748. This piece can be read in a way that suggests that Hume referred to a general debate about the primacy of physical or moral causation, a debate that pervades contemporary literature and would have allowed Hume to discuss this question without making direct references to any one text in particular. Alternatively, the piece can – and has long been – read as engaging specifically with a work which Hume does not mention, but which he and his contemporary readers are deemed to have had in mind and to which his essay is thought to be a reply. This work is Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois*, which had a tremendous impact upon its publication in 1748 and was immediately noted for its emphasis on the primacy of physical causes and its apparent endorsement of climatic determinism.<sup>62</sup> Both ways of reading Hume's essay appear at first glance equally legitimate and it is only an in-depth examination of the two works in question and the biographical context in which 'Of National Characters' was written and published that can supply us with sufficient evidence to decide which reading we ought to prefer. The question, in other words, is not so much about whether influence is a useful concept, but how and when it can legitimately be applied without misconstruing the meaning of a text. There are strict criteria for the application of this concept, which we shall observe when reconsidering the case of this essay in the first part of the present study.

These considerations about the proper use of the concept of influence presuppose an investigation of the extent to which Hume was actually familiar with the texts he is said to have been influenced by. This in turn poses the need for a detailed reconstruction of Hume's reading in the period in question. Part of the second chapter of this study will therefore be concerned with a re-evaluation of David Hume's reading at an important moment of his literary and intellectual career. In the early 1750s, which he spent at his family's country estate Ninewells in the Scottish borders, Hume engaged in an intensive reading of the classics, a reading that involved going back to works he had encountered

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<sup>62</sup> The most recent account of the so-called 'querelle de *L'Esprit de lois*' is Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2006), pp. 824-839.



earlier as well as reading ones he was yet not familiar with. This reading or re-reading was to result in his longest and most learned essay, entitled 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', and had a discernable impact on a number of major and minor writings written during this period. The initial aim of the section dealing with this reading of the classics lies in the reconstruction of the extent and depth of Hume's reading as well as the uses – scholarly, philosophical and polemical – to which he put the information gathered in the course of it. In addition, I intend to raise questions about the significance of such intensive private reading under studious conditions and highlight some of the implications this might have for our understanding of the various writings Hume composed in the above-mentioned period. It will be argued that this reading, commonly overlooked or neglected, had a much wider significance than has so far been realized and can in fact be shown to have been integral to Hume's intellectual preoccupations and literary pursuits during this crucial but neglected period of his intellectual career.

To conclude, while Hume's life is often treated as a mere backdrop to his intellectual career, it has been argued that a biographical approach can shed considerable light on the development of his ideas. The interrelation between experience, reflection and the formulation of a theory of history will consequently be pursued in the first part of this study through an in-depth examination of the biographical episodes already mentioned, namely Hume's tour of Europe, his response to Montesquieu, and his reading of the Classics. These impulses, it will be argued, had a profound and discernable impact on his subsequent work, in particular the second *Enquiry* (1751) and the *Political Discourses* (1752). Particular attention will be paid to the main product of his reading of the Classics and his direct engagement with Montesquieu's theories, a long and densely argued piece entitled 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', published as part of the *Political Discourses*. It will furthermore be demonstrated that Hume's reading, originally undertaken in preparation for this erudite dissertation, resulted in the production of a number of smaller pieces, which taken together constitute a fragmentary history of classical antiquity. One of these pieces, entitled simply *A Dialogue* and attached to the second *Enquiry*, presents us with Hume's most important statement on



his philosophy of history and provides us with a reference point for our investigation of Hume's notion of 'philosophical history' before 1752. Given Hume's intense preoccupation with the history of classical antiquity in the period under consideration, we will then need to enquire why he eventually decided to write modern rather than ancient history. The transformation of Hume's intention will form part of the focus of the second part of this study, which engages with the composition and narrative structure of Hume's *History of Great Britain* (1754-56).

## **Part I**

*From Moral Philosophy to Cultural History, 1748-1752*

## 1. Confronting Cultural Diversity: Hume's Travels and his Response to Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois*

### 1. 1. The Travelling Philosopher on a Diplomatic Tour of Europe, 1748

During one of the periods Hume spent at his family estate Ninewells in the Scottish Borders and while in the process of composing and preparing for publication his *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1748, Hume received an invitation from his friend and kinsman, Lieutenant-General James St. Clair, to accompany him as an aide-de-camp on a diplomatic mission to the courts of Vienna and Turin.<sup>63</sup> These were the capitals of two of Britain's most important European allies during the ongoing War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48), which had by then entered into its last phase and was soon to be terminated by the peace treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle.<sup>64</sup> St. Clair's entourage was to proceed to the court of the King of Sardinia at Turin via the United Provinces, several German principalities, and the imperial court at Vienna. Hume's excitement at the prospect of this diplomatic tour was mingled with 'an inward reluctance to leave my books, and leisure and retreat', as he confessed to his friend and kinsman, Henry Home.<sup>65</sup> His intense feeling of anticipation and expectation at the prospect of what he repeatedly refers to as a 'jaunt' is, however, clearly conveyed by a farewell letter to an old friend:

I got an invitation from General St Clair, to attend him in his new employment at the Court of Turin, which I hope will prove an agreeable if not a profitable jaunt for me. I shall have an opportunity of seeing Courts & Camps; & if I can

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Hume's statement in his later autobiography: '[In] 1747, I received an invitation from the General to attend him in the same station in his military embassy to the courts of Vienna and Turin. I then wore the uniform of an officer, and was introduced at these courts as aid-de-camp to the general'. 'My Own Life', *Essays*, p. xxxv.

<sup>64</sup> The objective of St Clair's mission appears to have been to make sure that Britain's allies – in particular the Dutch Stadtholder, the Austrian Empress and the King of Sardinia – would fulfil the quota of troops in the field to which they were obliged by the substantial subsidies they received from Britain. Cf. Basil Williams, *The Whig Supremacy, 1714-1760* (2nd edn., Oxford: Oxford UP, 1960), chapter 9, esp. p. 264.

<sup>65</sup> Hume's anxiety is also expressed in his above-quoted letter to Oswald: 'But notwithstanding of these flattering ideas of futurity, as well as the present charms of variety, I must confess, that I left home with infinite regret, where I had treasured up stores of study & plans of thinking for many years. I am sure that I shall not be so happy as I should have been had I prosecuted these. But, in certain situations, a man dares not follow his own judgement or refuse such offers as these.'

afterwards, be so happy as to attain leisure and other opportunities, this knowledge may even turn to account to me, as a man of letters, which I confess has always been the sole object of my ambition. I have long had an intention, in my riper years, of composing some History; & I question not but some greater experience of the Operations of the Field, & the Intrigues of the Cabinet, will be requisite, in order to enable me to speak with judgement upon these subjects.<sup>66</sup>

This passage about the advantage Hume expects from visiting ‘Courts & Camps’ echoes a classical commonplace about the proper education and background of the historian. Eighteenth-century literary culture professed to adhere to the classical and humanist precept that history ought to be written by a person with extensive experience and true insight into the machinations of power politics – the *arcana imperii* – as well as the intricacies of military operations.<sup>67</sup> Hume’s highly-crafted statement thus testifies to the enduring appeal of the classical conception of history as a narrative of statecraft and war, usually composed by a retired political or military leader.<sup>68</sup> Hume’s more general statement that ‘this knowledge may even turn to account to me, as a man of letters’ should lead us to enquire whether Hume’s high expectations with regard to the insights to be gained from such a jaunt were actually fulfilled and to what extent this jaunt can be shown to have had an impact on the works of moral philosophy and political science that Hume composed after his eventual return to Ninewells in 1749.

Upon his arrival on the continent, Hume wrote to his brother, commencing what he called ‘a sort of Journal of our Travels’ in which he intended to give ‘an Account of the Appearances of things, more than of our own Adventures’.<sup>69</sup> This travelogue in the form of a very long letter charts the route taken by St Clair’s entourage in the spring of 1748, from the United Provinces through several principalities and free cities of the Holy Roman Empire, down the Danube into the heartland of the Habsburg dominions and finally over the Alps into the plains of northern Italy. It contains much more than the description of ‘Courts & Camps’, thus revealing that, beside the diplomatic purpose, this

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<sup>66</sup> Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 29 January 1748, *HL*, i, 108-9.

<sup>67</sup> For this view see Phillipson, *Hume*, pp. 76-7; and J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume II: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 7-25.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Philip Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture: From Clarendon to Hume* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), passim; and Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969).

<sup>69</sup> Hume to John Home of Ninewells, 3 March 1748, *HL*, i, 114.

jaunt also allowed Hume and his travelling companions to visit cities and battlefields, and to appreciate the beauties of an ever-changing scenery.<sup>70</sup> Hume's journal is of great interest to our present enquiry as it reflects his immediate impressions as well as the transformation of his views, especially with regard to the German territories in the Holy Roman Empire: 'There are great Advantages, in travelling, & nothing serves more to remove Prejudices: For I confess I had entertain'd no such advantageous Idea of Germany'.<sup>71</sup> The journal does indeed allow us to trace this transformation and witness the emergence of a new understanding of the political landscape of central Europe. Passing through the Holy Roman Empire, with its quick succession of small principalities and free cities, gave Hume the opportunity to comment on their different circumstances and respective degree of economic prosperity and to reflect on the possible causes of these marked differences within a relatively short geographic space. Thus, he had the occasion to visit three rather different cities in the space of as many days:

We were all very much taken with the Town of Nuremberg .... The People are handsome, well cloath'd & well fed: An Air of Industry & Contentment, without Splendour, prevails thro the whole. Tis a protestant Republic on the banks of a River (whose name I have forgot) that runs into the Maine, & is navigable for Boats. The Town is of a large Extent.

On leaving Nuremberg we enter'd into the Elector of Bavaria's Country, where the Contraste appeared very strong with the Inhabitants of the former Republic. There was a great Air of Poverty in every Face: The first Poverty indeed we have seen in Germany. [Even though] the Country be good & well cultivated & populous, the Inhabitants are not at their Ease. The late miserable Wars have no doubt hurt them much.

Ratisbon is a Catholic Republic situated on the Banks of the Danube. The Houses & Buildings & Aspect of the People are well enough, tho not comparable to those of Nuremberg. Tis pretended, that the Difference is

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<sup>70</sup> Hume's travelogue reads in part like a Grand Tour journal, ranging as it does from descriptions of people and places to observations on climate and customs. Hume did indeed see some of the places customarily touched upon by the Grand Tour, even though the intention of completing the Tour on the homeward journey was eventually abandoned. This impression is confirmed by Hume's remark from Turin, envisaging their homeward journey: 'I believe we shall make the Tour of Italy & France before we come home ... so that we shall have seen a great Variety of Dutch, German, Italian, Spanish, & French Courts in this Jaunt.' Cf. Hume to John Home of Ninewells, 16 June 1748, *HL*, i, 132. General St Clair did indeed intend write to London to ask permission to do some stations of the Grand Tour, but apparently without success. Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. 213.

<sup>71</sup> Hume to John Home of Ninewells, 7 April 1748, *HL*, i, 126.

always sensible betwixt a Protestant & Catholic Country, thro'out all Germany: And perhaps there may be something in this Observation, tho it is not every where sensible.<sup>72</sup>

In moving from one city to the next, Hume observed a great variety of factors such as the quality of the soil, the extent to which it was cultivated, and the population density in these territories. Proceeding from Nuremberg to the territory of the Elector of Bavaria and the free city of Regensburg, Hume noted the striking contrast between different political entities in such close proximity, which found its clearest expression in the appearance of the inhabitants. While as a traveller Hume gave his 'Account of the Appearances of things', as a political scientist he sought to discover the regularities underpinning the apparent diversity. In his journal we find him formulating general rules and then testing whether the complex reality he encounters conforms to these rules. At the end of his concise survey of three German territories, Hume thus hints at potential causal connections between the situation of the inhabitants on the one hand and the political regime and religious establishment on the other hand. He does however remain uncertain about whether such a rule can be universally valid, since ultimately there appears to be no single factor capable of determining the living conditions of the people. This becomes even clearer when, in the course of the journey, Hume's attention shifts from the situation of the inhabitants of a territory to their physical appearance. Departing from Maria Theresia's court at Vienna, St Clair's party made its way towards Italy via Styria and the Tyrol. This stretch of the journey afforded Hume plenty of occasions to describe the dramatic alpine landscape as well as comment on the people. When moving from Styria into the Tyrol he was struck by the difference in the appearance of the inhabitants:

But as much as the Country is agreeable in its Wildness; as much are the Inhabitants savage & deform'd & monstrous in their Appearance. Very many of them have ugly swell'd Throats: Idiots, & Deaf People swarm in every Village; & the general Aspect of the People is the most shocking I ever saw. ... Their Dress is scarce European as their Figure is scarce human. ...<sup>73</sup>

But the Aspect of the People is wonderfully chang'd on entring the Tirol. The Inhabitants are there as remarkably beautiful as the Stirians are ugly. An

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<sup>72</sup> Hume to John Home of Ninewells, 2 April 1748, *HL*, i, 124-5.

<sup>73</sup> Hume to John Home of Ninewells, 28 April 1748, *HL*, i, 130.

Air of Humanity, & Spirit & Health & Plenty is seen on every Face: Yet their Country is wilder than Stiria. The Hills higher, & the Vallies narrower & more barren. They are both Germans subject to the House of Austria; so that it wou'd puzzle a Naturalist or Politician to find the Reason of so great and remarkable a Difference.<sup>74</sup>

This striking and seemingly unaccountable difference between the inhabitants of two neighbouring regions called for an explanation. It poses a problem usually framed in terms of different 'national characters' and we will later have to consider Hume's contribution to this eighteenth-century discourse. At the end of this passage Hume alludes to two possible explanations. The first is the one advanced by the 'Naturalist', i. e. someone who holds that the physical appearance and constitution of a people is largely or even exclusively determined by such circumstances as the nature of the climate, the quality of the air or the fertility of the soil.<sup>75</sup> This explanation does not, however, sufficiently account for the remarkable difference between Styrians and Tyroleans, as is the one commonly put forward by the 'Politician', i. e. someone who believes that the differences in the living conditions of a people can be accounted for by reference to the form of government or religious establishment of their state or territory. Hume notes that such an application does not apply in this case as the Styria and Tyrol were both Catholic, German-speaking parts of the Habsburg realm. This difference therefore does by implication remain either unaccountable unless a different kind of explanation is found. Whereas the contrast between these two peoples is thus different in kind from the one Hume observed with regard to the citizens of Nuremberg and Ratisbon, in both cases the general rule usually employed to explain differences in the situation of the people does not hold true. While Hume's journal does not seek to provide any solution to this problem, one could infer that new rules might be formed on the basis of enlarged experience. What emerges most clearly from the pages of the journal, however, is Hume's reluctance to rely on conventional sets of arguments and his tendency to eschew monocausal explanations.

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<sup>74</sup> Hume to John Home of Ninewells, 8 May 1748, *HL*, i, 131.

<sup>75</sup> Hume specifically mentions the numerous iron mines in Styria (*HL*, i, 130) but does not make the connection – common at the time – between the allegedly poisonous fumes rising from such mines and the health and physical constitution of the inhabitants. For this notion see Robert Shackleton, *Montesquieu: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1961), p. 304-5.

Hume's journal ceased with his arrival in Turin, from where it was dispatched to Ninewells in June 1748. In any case, while Hume's hope to 'make the Tour of Italy & France before we come home' was not fulfilled, the journey back to London did lead via Lyon and Paris and included at least two noteworthy incidents. The first was a chance encounter with the Young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart, travelling incognito to his final exile in Rome, at a post-house inn at Fontainebleau, southeast of Paris.<sup>76</sup> A second and more directly relevant incident occurred in Paris and is recounted in one of Hume's later works, the *Natural History of Religion*, published in 1757. Even though Hume's account does not specify the date at which this incident is supposed to have occurred, we can conjecture that it must have taken place during the few days that St Clair's party spent in Paris, recovering from the journey and presumably moving in diplomatic circles.<sup>77</sup> This is Hume's account of it:

I lodged once at *Paris* in the same *hotel* with an ambassador from *Tunis*, who, having past some years at *London*, was returning home that way. One day, I observed his *Moorish* excellency diverting himself under the porch, with surveying the splendid equipages that drove along; when there chanced to pass that way some *Capucin* friars, who had never seen a *Turk*; as he, on his part, tho' accustomed to the *European* dresses, had never seen the grotesque figure of a *Capucin*: And there is no expressing the mutual admiration, with which they inspired each other. Had the chaplain of the embassy entered into a dispute with these *Franciscans*, their reciprocal surprize had been of the same nature. And thus all mankind stand staring at one another; and there is no beating it out of their heads, that the turban of the *African* is not just as good or as bad a fashion as the cowl of the *European*.<sup>78</sup>

This is yet another experience of bewilderment such as the one Hume had upon first seeing the Stryrians, on whom he commented that '[t]heir Dress is scarce European as their Figure is scarce human'. This time, however, Hume is the intrigued observer of a 'clash of civilizations', a mutual inability to understand the fashions and – by extension – the opinions of those with whom we are unacquainted. The unsettling of 'otherness' of the Tunisian ambassador as seen by a Capucin friar corresponds to a similar sensation evoked in the ambassador on seeing the 'grotesque figure' of a Capucin. Hume becomes

<sup>76</sup> Mossner, *Life of Hume*, pp. 218-9.

<sup>77</sup> Mossner, *Life of Hume*, p. 219. Mossner's conjecture is based on the assumption that Hume would have been unlikely to stay at a first-class hotel during his previous stay in Paris in 1734.

<sup>78</sup> *NHR*, pp. 75-6.



an observer of this scene of mutual bewilderment and the philosophical lesson he draws from it take the form of an impassioned plea for the recognition of the relativity of customs. Moreover, Hume's telling anecdote, a case study in cultural misunderstanding, is reminiscent of the uses of the Orientalist fiction popular with an eighteenth-century readership, which found its classic expression Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721). Hume was indeed reflecting on Montesquieu's work during this period, and it is to this aspect of his thinking that we must now turn. In order to understand its precise status as well as its complex relation with his travels, we need to reconsider Hume's relationship with Montesquieu's works, which, as we have already noted, display several parallels with Hume's thinking and writing in these years and is generally held to have been crucial for the development of his views.

### **1. 2. 'Of National Characters' (1748): A Critique of *L'Esprit des Lois*?**

The writings of Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) exerted a considerable influence on the social, political and historical outlook of the Scottish literati to the extent that the formation of the social and political thought of the Scottish Enlightenment may be described in terms of the refutation or appropriation of his theories of climate, causation and constitutions.<sup>79</sup> Hume is said to have initiated the reception of his work in Scotland by offering a powerful critique of *L'Esprit des Lois* (1748) in his essay 'Of National Characters', published the same year, which is deemed to have set the agenda for his fellow literati's response to the influential theories presented in that work. As Hume's direct response to Montesquieu is of immediate relevance to the development of his historical thought during the years we are at present

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<sup>79</sup> To the extent that the formation of the social and political thought of the Scottish Enlightenment may be described in terms of the refutation or appropriation of his theories of climate, causation and constitution. Cf. Richard B. Sher, 'From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment on Liberty, Virtue, and Commerce', in *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776*, ed. David Wootton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 368-402; and Fania Oz-Salzberger, 'The political theory of the Scottish Enlightenment', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 157-177, esp. pp. 170-2.

concerned with, we need to consider it in some detail and – I would suggest – greatly modify the common interpretation of Hume’s response to Montesquieu. The reception of *L’Esprit des Lois* by Hume and his fellow literati was preceded and prepared by his earlier writings, above all the *Lettres Persanes* (1721), a key work of the early Enlightenment as well as an eighteenth-century bestseller, with which Hume had been familiar since the early 1740s.<sup>80</sup> This familiarity, as well as the close business connections between Montesquieu and a number of Hume’s Edinburgh friends, would have helped to pave the way for the almost instantaneous reception of *L’Esprit des Lois* on its first appearance in 1748.<sup>81</sup>

The first direct evidence we have for Hume’s reading and response of *L’Esprit des Lois* is a long letter he wrote to Montesquieu in April 1749, containing a list of detailed reflections on and corrections of specific passages and arguments in that work.<sup>82</sup> This amiable and slightly pedantic letter which initiated the correspondence between the two thinkers is generally held to have been preceded by an earlier and much more critical response to *L’Esprit des Lois*. This, Hume’s initial and influential critique of Montesquieu, is generally thought to be contained in his essay ‘Of National Characters’, first published in late 1748 and thus immediately after the appearance of the work it is presumed to criticize.<sup>83</sup> While Hume’s essay does not contain any direct references to

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<sup>80</sup> Hume refers to Montesquieu in his essay ‘Of Polygamy and Divorces’, *Essays*, p. 628. In this instance the variorum section of this edition is incorrect and needs to be checked against the first edition: David Hume, *Essays, moral and political. The second edition, corrected* (Edinburgh, 1742), ii, 186. A 1730 edition of the *Lettres Persanes* can be found in a posthumous catalogue of David Hume’s library. Cf. David Fate and Mary J. Norton, *The David Hume Library* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 1996), p. 115.

<sup>81</sup> In addition to Montesquieu’s European-wide reputation as a man of letters, he was known to the Edinburgh literati, especially Lord Elibank and Lord Morton, through their connection with the Bordeaux wine trade. The success of *L’Esprit des Lois* may have contributed to the sale of his wine, as Montesquieu commented in 1752. Montesquieu to Guasco, 4 October 1752, *OC*, iii, 1439-40. See also Montesquieu to the Abbé de Guasco, 16 March 1752, *OC*, iii, 1426; James Douglas, 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Morton to Montesquieu, 29 October 1754, *OC*, iii, 1517-8.

<sup>82</sup> Hume to Montesquieu, 10 April 1749, *HL*, i, 133-138. Montesquieu found Hume’s remarks ‘pleine de lumière et de bon sens’. From this letter we can infer that Montesquieu had sent Hume a copy of the *De l’Esprit des Lois*, presumably identical with the two-volume 1749 edition of the work mentioned in the letter (‘l’édition in-quarto de Genève’) and found in the library catalogue. Cf. Norton and Norton, *David Hume Library*, p. 115.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Nicholas Phillipson, ‘Providence and progress: an introduction to the historical thought of William Robertson’, in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, ed. Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), pp. 55-73, esp. pp. 58-9.

Montesquieu's work, it does indeed present an extended critique of the kind of argument that is developed at length as well as accorded great prominence in *L'Esprit des Lois*. According to this argument, the manners of a people or what was then commonly referred to as their 'national character', were fundamentally determined by the influence of so-called 'physical' causes, defined by Hume as 'those qualities of the air and climate, which are supposed to work insensibly on the temper, by altering the tone and habit of the body'.<sup>84</sup> In several chapters of *L'Esprit des Lois*, Montesquieu had indeed accorded unprecedented importance to physical, particularly climatic, causes and this was one of the most controversial and debated aspects of the work on its appearance.<sup>85</sup> Appearing shortly after *L'Esprit des Lois* and vehemently denying the influence of physical causes on national characters, Hume's essay is thus often assumed to be a critique of Montesquieu's allegedly reductionistic theory of human nature and its particular manifestation in different national characters.

At first glance, 'Of National Characters' thus appears to be a direct response to *L'Esprit des Lois*, an interpretation that receives some support from Hume's claim to have read the latter work 'last autumn in Italy', that is at some point during his residence in Turin, which lasted from June to November 1748.<sup>86</sup> Upon closer consideration, however, a number of issues become evident and render this seemingly straightforward interpretation rather problematic. The first of these consists in the date of publication of the two works, which appeared a month apart.<sup>87</sup> This would be a rather short span of

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<sup>84</sup> 'Of National Characters', *Essays*, p. 203.

<sup>85</sup> This contrasts with his earlier *Lettres Persanes*, in which climate is barely mentioned. Even though the *Esprit des Lois* accords a much greater role to physical causation, Montesquieu never advocated climactic determinism insofar as he conceded that the pervasive influence of the climate on a people was generally modified by other factors and could be countered by sets of laws. Yet despite his modifications, the statements on the influence of climate were immediately remarked upon and remain among the most discussed aspects of this complex work. Cf. Shackleton, *Montesquieu*, chapter 14.

<sup>86</sup> Hume to Montesquieu, 10 April 1749, *HL*, i, 133.

<sup>87</sup> Paul E. Chamley, 'The Conflict between Montesquieu and Hume: A Study of the Origins of Adam Smith's Universalism', in *Essays on Adam Smith*, ed. Andrew S. Skinner and Thomas Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 274-305, esp. pp. 286-291, has unravelled the complex publication process of both works, which is complicated by the fact that Britain was then still adhering to the Julian Calendar. The first quarto edition of *L'Esprit des Lois* appeared in Geneva at the beginning of November 1748: Anon. [Montesquieu], *De L'Esprit des Loix* (Geneva: Barillot & Fils, 1748). Hume's *Three Essays, Moral and Political* (London: A. Millar; Edinburgh: A. Kincaid, 1748) appeared in London on 18 November (according to a notice in the *Daily Advertiser* of the same day), which corresponds to 29 November in the

time for Hume to have read through or at the very least skimmed the two tomes of Montesquieu's work, to have composed his own essay, and to have prepared it for publication. The matter is further complicated by the fact that Hume was on the continent, hundreds of miles away from his publisher in London with whom he could only have communicated via post, that is, with two to three weeks delay.<sup>88</sup> To this we can add a statement in Hume's later autobiography to the effect that the two years spent on the military and diplomatic missions with General St Clair 'were almost the only interruptions which my studies have received during the course of my life'.<sup>89</sup> In short, a closer examination of the biographical circumstances makes it appear rather unlikely that 'Of National Characters' is a direct outcome of Hume's reading of Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois*. Yet this conclusion leaves us with a problem, namely to account for the parallels between the two works.

At this point we need to briefly consider two ingenious solutions that have been offered to this problem. On the basis of meticulous research and painstaking reconstruction, Paul Chamley has traced the way in which rumours about the central argument of Montesquieu's *magnum opus* were leaked during the prolonged printing process and – due to a web of connections including secret agents – made their way

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Gregorian Calendar. The two works thus appeared almost a month apart. I do not agree with Chamley who considers Hume's claim to have read *L'Esprit des Lois* in Italy in autumn 1748 as 'extremely doubtful'. There is no reason to exclude the possibility that Hume had access to a copy of that work before leaving Turin on 29 November, even though there is no reason to assume – as Mossner does – that it was in Turin rather than at London that Hume prepared his detailed reflections contained in the 1749 letter to Montesquieu. As we have seen, these reflections specifically refer to the 1749 quarto edition also found in the Hume library and not – as Chamley incorrectly states – to the first (1748) edition of *L'Esprit des Lois*.

<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately this section of the correspondence between Hume and his publisher Andrew Millar does not appear to have survived. Hume's last letters before his departure from Ninewells do touch upon the publication of a new edition of the *Essays*, including three new essays which are specified, yet curiously the essay 'Of National Characters' is not among those mentioned. This as well as the considerable delay in publication has led commentators to infer that the essay probably did not exist before his departure and would thus have been written during his travels or his residence at Turin. It needs to be stressed, however, that the delay as well as the omission of this essay can at least in part be explained by the fact that Hume initially wished to publish another essay entitled 'Of the Protestant Succession', which he eventually withdrew due to its topical nature and presumably on the instigation of his friends. This delay has been taken to indicate that Hume took a long time to write a new essay, yet it could equally well mean that it took time for him to be persuaded to omit the old one, especially since communications between Britain and the continent were slow. In short, it is quite possible that Hume had his essay on 'National Characters' – or an early version thereof – in the drawer when he left for the continent and only decided to take it out and polish it once he had finally decided to omit 'Of the Protestant Succession'.

<sup>89</sup> 'My Own Life', *Essays*, p. xxxv.

from Geneva to Turin, where they would have caught Hume's attention and raised his interest.<sup>90</sup> Such information about the contents of Montesquieu's work could thus have provided an impulse as well as a target for his case against climatic determinism in the essay on national characters. An alternative, though not necessarily contradictory, interpretation has recently been advanced by Tatsuya Sakamoto, who on the basis of Hume's observations on the Styrians and Tyroleans – quoted and discussed above – argues that the essay on national characters was 'an inevitable byproduct' of his tour of European countries.<sup>91</sup> These two equally ingenious interpretations could indeed help to explain the origins of Hume's interest in climatic determinism, even though both are grounded in the somewhat problematic assumption that Hume would have conceived and composed the essay, as well as corresponded with his publishers and corrected the proof sheets, while on his travels or during his residence in Turin.<sup>92</sup> We need to enquire whether elaborate explanations such as the ones offered by Chamley and Sakamoto are actually required to explain the origins and purpose of Hume's essay. In other words, would it be possible to fully explain the argument of this essay without reference to either Montesquieu's work or the impressions travelling had left on Hume? To answer this question, we must turn to the essay itself.

Having defined 'moral' and 'physical' causes at the outset of his essay 'Of National Characters', Hume proceeds by denying that the latter have any real influence on the manners of a people:

As to *physical causes*, I am inclined to doubt altogether of their operation in this particular; nor do I think, that men owe any thing of their temper or genius to the air, food, or climate. ....

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<sup>90</sup> Chamley, 'The Conflict between Montesquieu and Hume', pp. 286-296.

<sup>91</sup> Tatsuya Sakamoto, 'Hume's political economy as a system of manners', in *The Rise of political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Tatsuya Sakamoto and Hideo Tanaka (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 86-102, esp. pp. 90ff.

<sup>92</sup> *Three Essays, Moral and Political*, including the essay 'Of National Characters', appears to have been published on the day Hume left Turin, 29 November 1748 (according to the Gregorian Calendar). *Three Essays, Moral and Political* (London: A. Millar; Edinburgh: A. Kincaid, 1748). The date of its publication is given in Chamley, 'The Conflict between Montesquieu and Hume', p. 291; the date of Hume's departure from Turin in Mossner, *Life of Hume*, p. 218. Mossner does however give an incorrect date for Hume's arrival in Turin, cf. p. 213.

I assert, then, that all national characters, where they depend not on fixed *moral* causes, proceed from [accidents], and that physical causes have no discernible effect on the human mind.<sup>93</sup>

If we run over the globe, or revolve the annals of history, we shall discover every where signs of a sympathy or contagion of manners, none of the influence of air or climate.<sup>94</sup>

This statement clearly sets Hume in opposition to Montesquieu's emphasis on physical causation, a fact of which the latter was well aware.<sup>95</sup> On the basis of these statements, as well as a number of examples Hume uses to corroborate them, it has been alleged that Hume's essay is self-evidently an implicit reply to the climatic arguments in the *L'Esprit des Lois*.<sup>96</sup> Yet upon closer examination this inference appears far from conclusive. Montesquieu's *magnum opus* was the result of much reflection, travel and reading and even though he gave uncommon prominence to the influence of climate, he was by no means the first to develop a theory around this idea. We shall have to briefly consider another possible source that could have provided Hume with a similar reference point for his case against the influence of physical causes on national characters.

By the mid-eighteenth century a body of literature had grown around the question of climatic determinism, among which John Arbuthnot's *An essay concerning the effects of air on human bodies*, first published in 1733, stands out as one of the most influential contributions. Like other authors writing on the influence of climate, Arbuthnot drew on Hippocratic theories to demonstrate the effect of air on the 'fibres' of the body, a physiological explanation Montesquieu would later develop in the *L'Esprit des Lois*.<sup>97</sup> It is to this particular line of argument that Hume refers when defining physical causes as 'those qualities of the air and climate, which are supposed to work insensibly on the temper, by altering the tone and habit of the body, and giving it a particular

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<sup>93</sup> At this point Hume later inserted the sentence: 'It is a maxim in all philosophy, that causes, which do not appear, are to be considered as not existing.' Cf. *Essays*, p. 203, 629.

<sup>94</sup> 'Of National Characters', *Essays*, pp. 200-204.

<sup>95</sup> In his reply to Hume's first letter, Montesquieu appears to be referring to the essay 'Of national characters' when writing about 'une belle dissertation, où vous donnez beaucoup plus grande influence aux causes morales qu'aux causes physiques'. Montesquieu to Hume, 19 May 1749, *OC*, iii, 1230.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Roger B. Oake, 'Montesquieu and Hume', in *Modern Language Quarterly*, 2 (1941), 25-41 and 225-248, esp. 234-237; and Chamley, 'The Conflict between Montesquieu and Hume', pp. 285-6.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. John Arbuthnot, *An Essay concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* (London: J. Tonson, 1733), pp. 150-154. Cf. Shackleton, *Montesquieu*, p. 308: 'That Arbuthnot greatly influenced Montesquieu in the development of his climatic theory cannot be doubted.'

complexion'. Yet he does so without specific reference to either Arbuthnot's or Montesquieu's theories of fibres.<sup>98</sup> In fact, Hume's essay is rather vague with regard to the kind of theory it seeks to refute and appears to refer to commonplace arguments about the influence of 'air, food, or climate' rather than to Montesquieu's specific insistence on climate as the major determining factor.<sup>99</sup> Thus, Hume's fairly general statements could equally well have been written before the publication of the *L'Esprit des Lois* as they do not necessarily constitute a specific reply to the theory of climatic determinism Montesquieu had outlined in that work.

This would mean that Hume's earliest extant written statement on Montesquieu does not consist in his 1748 essay 'Of National Characters', but rather in the letter he sent to Montesquieu in May 1749 after having perused *L'Esprit des Lois*, either shortly before his departure from Turin at the end of November 1748 or during his residing in London in the spring of 1749. This should lead us to reconsider Hume's actual engagement with *L'Esprit des Lois*, which took place in the context of a wider reception of that work in Scotland, a reception which Hume himself did much to encourage and promote. We shall first look at Hume's role in that wider reception as reflected in his correspondence with Montesquieu, before seeking to identify those features of *L'Esprit des Lois* that Hume picked up on, and finally considering the form that this critique took in a number of works he published from 1751 onwards.

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<sup>98</sup> I do not mean to argue that Hume drew on Arbuthnot's rather than Montesquieu's work. I have found no evidence for this, even though Hume's manner of ending his essay in a series of consecutively numbered examples is reminiscent of the structure of Arbuthnot's book. Instead, I simply wish to stress that there are other sources on which Hume could have drawn for his essay 'Of National Characters' and to argue that Hume's essay is more likely to have been a response to any or all of these sources rather than a specific attempt to refute the climatic determinism allegedly expounded in *L'Esprit des Lois*.

<sup>99</sup> Roger B. Oake has made the claim that Hume's choice of examples – an alleged propensity to 'drunkenness' in northern and to promiscuity in southern regions – was necessarily influenced by Montesquieu's examples; cf. Oake, 'Montesquieu and Hume', p. 236. This does not appear conclusive to me as there are no specific textual parallels between *L'Esprit des Lois* and 'Of National Characters'.



### 1. 3. Hume's Engagement with Montesquieu's New System, 1749-1755

Hume and his fellow literati were by no means the first to take notice of Montesquieu's *magnum opus* when *De l'Esprit des Lois* was published at Geneva in the autumn of 1748. In France, Montesquieu's fellow *philosophes* unanimously congratulated him on his achievement, while the public response took a more critical form as reviews and replies castigated the author for his alleged defence of heterodox opinions and immoral practices.<sup>100</sup> The work was quite differently received in England, unsurprisingly so given the praise Montesquieu had lavished on Britain as a model state that exemplified his vision of a free and commercial society. In 1749 Hume reported to Montesquieu that the latter's work was already being cited during a debate in the House of Lords, and the following year Horace Walpole called the work 'the best book that ever was written'.<sup>101</sup> Yet it was among Scottish men of letters that the work was to have its most profound and lasting impact.<sup>102</sup> The extent of their appropriation of the work is apparent from the series of lectures that Adam Smith delivered in Edinburgh during the years 1748-51, in particular the lectures on jurisprudence which clearly illustrate both the extent of his engagement with the substance of *L'Esprit des Lois* and the debt he owed to the wealth of information and observations contained in that work.<sup>103</sup> Over the following decades

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<sup>100</sup> Helvetius spoke for his fellow *philosophes* when calling it 'le plus grand, le plus bel ouvrage du monde'. Cf. Shackleton, *Montesquieu*, p. 356. This may have been an attempt to compensate for his initial criticism, since Helvetius later told Hume that he and the dramatist Bernard-Joseph Saurin initially sought to dissuade Montesquieu from publishing *L'Esprit des lois* and felt their advice was justified by its eventual decline in reputation. Cf. Hume to Hugh Blair, 1 April 1767, *HL*, ii, 133.

<sup>101</sup> Hume to Montesquieu, 10 April 1749, *HL*, i, 137-8. See also the Président Barbot to Montesquieu, 7 April 1749, *OC*, iii, 1216. Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann, 10 January 1750, quoted in Shackleton, *Montesquieu*, p. 357.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Peter Gay's statement that 'Scotland must rank first' among all the countries in which the ideas expounded in Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois* exerted an influence; quoted in Sher, 'From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment', p. 371.

<sup>103</sup> There are four direct references to Montesquieu and many more indirect ones in Adam Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence. The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, v, ed. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, P. G. Stein (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), esp. pp. 128, 154-5, 200, cf. pp. 443-4. In addition, one direct reference to the author of *L'Esprit des Lois* can be found in Smith's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, iv, ed. J. C. Bryce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 198. Hume may well have been present when these two series of lectures were first delivered in Edinburgh in 1748-51. Though both lecture series remained unpublished in Smith's lifetime, the lectures on jurisprudence exerted an enormous influence on



the Scottish literati developed an intense preoccupation with the theory outlined in this work, which took the form of both a sustained critique and a sophisticated appropriation of Montesquieu's groundbreaking theories. In the process of their engagement with *L'Esprit des Lois* the Scots thus laid the foundations of their own far-reaching enquiries into the fields of society, politics, and culture.<sup>104</sup>

This extraordinary reception of Montesquieu's ideas in Scotland can partly be accounted for by taking into consideration his previous reputation as the author of the popular *Lettres Persanes* as well as by his business ties with Scotland.<sup>105</sup> As a member of Bordeaux's aristocratic and commercial elite, Montesquieu owned extensive vineyards and was heavily involved in the wine trade. He traded with several members of the Scottish literary circle and their patrons, in particular Patrick Murray, Lord Elibank and James Douglas, Earl of Morton, and their business correspondence afforded ample opportunities for discussing literary matters.<sup>106</sup> It was by way of one such business contact – the wine merchant John Stewart of Allanbank – that Montesquieu first made contact with Hume by sending him a copy of *L'Esprit des Lois*.<sup>107</sup> This gift initiated a correspondence which reveals that Hume himself appears to have played an important part in Montesquieu's success story in Scotland. He facilitated the wider

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succeeding generations of Scottish thinkers from William Robertson to John Millar. For the background of the lectures see Ian Simpson Ross, *The Life of Adam Smith* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), pp. 81-96.

<sup>104</sup> This interpretation was first formulated by Dugald Stewart in his 'Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.' and 'Account of the Life and Writings of William Robertson, D.D.', read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1793 and 1796, respectively. Cf. 'Account of Smith', reprinted in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects. The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, iii (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 294, note 24. See Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, pp. ; Phillipson, 'Providence and progress: an introduction to the historical thought of William Robertson', pp. 58-9; Oz-Salzberger, 'The political theory of the Scottish Enlightenment', pp. 170-2.

<sup>105</sup> The first English translation of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721) was *Persian letters. Translated by Mr. Ozell* (London: J. Tonson, 1722). For early Scottish editions of Montesquieu's works see Alison K. Howard, 'Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau in eighteenth-century Scotland; a check list of editions and translations of their works published in Scotland before 1801', in *The Bibliothek*, 2 (1959), 40-63. This list does not include the first edition of Ozell's translation published in 1722.

<sup>106</sup> Scottish wine merchants had traded with Montesquieu for some time prior to 1748 and the success of *L'Esprit des Lois* might have been promoted by this trade, while Montesquieu clearly believed that the success of the book helped the sales of his claret: 'Le succès que mon livre a eu dans ce pays-là contribue, à ce qui'il paroît, au succès de mon vin.' Montesquieu to the Abbé de Guasco, 4 October 1752, *OC*, iii, 1440. For the winetrade see also Montesquieu to Guasco, 16 March 1752, *OC*, iii, 1426; and James Douglas, 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Morton to Montesquieu, 29 October 1754, *OC*, iii, 1517-8.

<sup>107</sup> The Stewarts of Allanbank were Hume's neighbours in Berwickshire (information provided by Professor David Raynor).

reception of Montesquieu's ideas in Scotland by helping to convince an Edinburgh publishing house, Hamilton & Balfour, to produce a revised edition of the *L'Esprit des Loix*, prepared from late 1749 onwards and published the following year.<sup>108</sup> Thus Edinburgh stood alongside Paris and London as one of only three places in which Montesquieu chose to bring out a new and corrected edition of his magnum opus.<sup>109</sup> In addition to this two volume edition of the complete French text, Hamilton & Balfour published an English translation of the two famous chapters on the British constitution in the form of a short pamphlet or booklet, evidently designed to meet the widespread public demand for Montesquieu's eulogy on the British constitution.<sup>110</sup>

What Hume thought about this eulogy becomes clear when we consider his first letter to Montesquieu, which gives us important clues as to how he read *L'Esprit des Loix*. Upon hearing that Montesquieu had just sent him a copy of that work, Hume replied with a letter in which he sets out to 'communicate to you some reflections I have made upon reading your work, most of which in the main serve to confirm the principles on which your system is founded'.<sup>111</sup> Hume's meticulous comments on ten passages of

<sup>108</sup> Anon. [Montesquieu], *De l'Esprit des Loix. ... Nouvelle Edition, avec les dernieres Corrections & Illustrations de l'Auteur* (2 vols, Edinbourg [sic]: G. Hamilton & J. Balfour, 1750). That this edition was at least in part financed by subscription is suggested by the following statement in the 'Avis au Lecteur' 'Nous rendons graces aux Messieurs qui nous ont encouragés par leurs souscriptions.' Cf. *L'Esprit des Loix* (Edinburgh, 1750), [no pagination]. An indication of Hume's involvement in the preparation of this edition is given in Montesquieu's reply to Hume's first letter to him. Montesquieu writes that a certain Pierre Le Monnier 'm'a parlé de l'honneur qu'on veut faire à mon livre en Écosse de l'y imprimer & m'a dit ce que vous m'avez déjà appris par votre lettre. Je suis très-obligé à vous, Monsieur, & à M. Alexandre, de la peine que vous avez prise.' Montesquieu to Hume, 3 September 1749, *OC*, iii, 1255.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Montesquieu to Hume, 3 September 1749, *OC*, iii, 1255.

<sup>110</sup> Anon. [Montesquieu], *Two Chapters of a Celebrated French Work, Intituled, De L'Esprit des Loix, Translated into English. One, Treating of the Constitution of England; Another, of the Character and Manners which Result from this Constitution* (Edinburgh: Hamilton and Balfour, 1750). The 'Advertisement' to the work states that it was designed for those who may 'have curiosity to see the opinion of so eminent a Frenchman concerning the British constitution'. Hume was well aware of the widespread acclaim of these chapters on the British constitution, cf. Hume to Montesquieu, 10 April 1749, *HL*, i, 138. He may well have had a hand in the preparation of this translation, but it is equally possible that this was due to the publishers' own initiative. It is generally supposed that this translation is the work alluded to in Montesquieu's letter (Mossner, *Life of Hume*, pp. 229, 232), but it appears clear to me that Montesquieu is referring to the complete French edition of *L'Esprit des Loix*. In addition, the translation itself, which differs from Thomas Nugent's famous translation appearing in London the same year, does not appear to be Hume's with regard to style, vocabulary, or even spelling.

<sup>111</sup> Hume's letter was written in French: 'Permettez-moi plutôt de vous communiquer quelques réflexions que j'ai faites en lisant votre ouvrage, dont la plupart servent à confirmer de plus en plus les principes sur lesquels votre système est fondé.' Hume to Montesquieu, 10 April 1749, *HL*, i, 133 (translation mine).

*L'Esprit des Loix* range from legal and historical to economic and political matters and suggest that Hume had attentively perused at least the first two-thirds of the work.<sup>112</sup> The most topical of Hume's observations was a remark on the abolition of hereditary jurisdiction in the Scottish Highlands, which had been effected by Parliament just two years previously, following the Jacobite Rising of 1745. Hume's remarks on paper money, the balance of trade, and public credit foreshadowed his line of argument in the economic essays which were to make up the bulk of the *Political Discourses*, published three years later in 1752.

From the point of view of the modern reader these detailed 'reflections' contained in Hume's first letter to Montesquieu are somewhat disappointing since they do not reveal his views on the conceptual framework and theoretical substance of *L'Esprit des Loix*. Even so, the very last point he makes in the letter does offer an interesting glimpse of a disagreement with Montesquieu's account of the mixed British constitution. Commenting on the popularity of Montesquieu's depiction of Britain as a model of a free government, Hume offers a more critical view that betrays a strong sense of scepticism about the durability of this type of government:

Our compatriots [the English] are highly vain about the approbation you give to their form of government, of which they are, and with some reason, very enamoured. Yet one cannot fail to observe that while simple forms of government are by their very nature liable to abuse since they do not have any inbuilt counterbalance, complex constitutions, in which one party suppresses the other, are like complicated machines, prone to be deranged by the contrast and opposition of parties.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> There are no references to books 22-31 of *L'Esprit des Loix* in Hume's letter, apart from the final point he makes concerning the Latin quotation in the very last sentence of the work. It is clear however, that Hume read and cited books 23 (on population) while working on his essay 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' and he would have also been interested Montesquieu's treatment of religion in books 24 and 25. There is no evidence to suggest that he read the last quarter of the work (books 27-31) which the title of the first edition described as 'recherches nouvelles sur les loix Romaines touchant les successions, sur les loix Francoises, & sur les loix feodales'. Indeed, there is nothing in his *Political Discourses* of 1752 to suggest that Hume had until that time developed anything more than a passing interest in feudal government.

<sup>113</sup> 'Nos compatriotes sont fort vains de l'approbation que vous donnez à leur forme de gouvernement, dont ils sont, & avec quelque raison, si amoureux. Mais ne peut-on pas remarquer que, si les formes simples de gouvernement sont par leur nature sujettes à l'abus, parce qu'il n'y a aucun contrepoids, d'un autre côté les formes compliquées où une partie réprime l'autre, sont, comme les machines compliquées, sujettes à se déranger par le contraste et l'opposition des parties.' Hume to Montesquieu, 10 April 1749,

It is worth considering this statement in some detail. Hume clearly disagrees with Montesquieu's eulogy on the British constitution. The reasons for his disagreement are merely hinted at, yet become apparent upon a close reading of the passage. First, Hume's vantage point as a Scottish man of letters enabled him to take a more detached view of the British constitution than that held by Montesquieu's English readership. Underlying this statement about 'their form of government' is the conviction that the modern British constitution was essentially an 'English' constitution adopted for the new British state that came into being with the Act of Union of 1707. Second, the perspective afforded by his treatment of different forms of government within the framework of his political science allowed for a more sceptical evaluation of the future prospects of the mixed British constitution. This in turn rests on a deep-seated conviction, which Hume shared with a number of ancient and modern critics of mixed constitutions, that this was an inherently unstable form of government in which the delicate balance between authority and liberty was constantly in danger of being upset by the ever-present spectre of factionalism capable of throwing the government into either of the two extreme forms of government, tyranny or anarchy.

Montesquieu was clearly grateful for Hume's detailed and thoughtful comments on numerous passages of *L'Esprit des Lois*, which he found 'pleine de lumière & de bon sens', and even used some of these for the preparation of the revised edition of the work published in 1750.<sup>114</sup> The correspondence was picked up by the older man of letters and continued until two years before Montesquieu's death in 1755. As a friend of both, the wine-merchant John Stewart continued to be a link between the two men of letters and through him Montesquieu took notice of Hume's more recent writings, including the essay 'Of National Characters'. Following his return to Ninewells in the summer of 1749 and during the ensuing period of intense literary activity, Hume formulated what

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*HL*, i, 138 (translation mine). 'Nos compatriotes' seems to me to denote the English as Hume specifically writes about 'their' not 'our' government.

<sup>114</sup> Montesquieu caused the following note to be written onto Hume's letter: 'Lettre de M. David Hume, qu'il faut copier dans le Spicilège [Montesquieu's notebook]. Elle est pleine de lumière et de bon sens. Il y a quelques remarques qui pourront être utiles pour ma dernière édition de *l'Esprit des lois*, et je puis dire que, d'une infinité de papiers qui ont été écrits là-dessus, c'est peut-être celui qui a autant de sens. Je pourrai ôter quelques endroits inutiles.' Cf. *OC*, iii, 1217 note (a).

can be taken to constitute a comprehensive critique of *L'Esprit des Lois*. As this critique lies buried in footnotes and passing references of his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) and his *Political Discourses* (1752), its recovery requires a more detailed and more thorough reconstruction than has hitherto been attempted. This, in turn, requires us to set Hume's remarks alongside those statements of *L'Esprit des Lois* which best illustrate the aspect of Montesquieu's complex theory picked up, developed or critiqued by Hume as well as other Scottish literati. The complex structure of Montesquieu's work demands that we begin this reconstruction by considering two crucial assertions made in the first book of *L'Esprit des Lois*, which contains the agenda for Montesquieu's entire enterprise.

The shortest and most concise summary of Montesquieu's central argument can be found in the full title of the first edition of *L'Esprit des Lois*, which reads *De l'Esprit des Loix ou du Rapport que les Loix Doivent Avoir avec la Constitution de Chaque Gouvernement, les Mœurs, le Climat, la Religion, le Commerce, &c.*<sup>115</sup> This title contains a list of some of the most central terms and concepts of this vast *opus* and thus a condensed version of the conceptual core of the work elaborated in book one and then developed in the ensuing books. The key concepts mentioned in the title – namely *loix*, *rappports*, *esprit*, *climat*, *mœurs*, and *commerce* – to which Hume made direct reference in his extended critique of Montesquieu's work, form the backdrop before which Hume developed his own conceptual apparatus for his revised political science as well as the ideas, including the idea of an 'esprit' or spirit of an age and the relationship between commerce and manners, which underpin both his *Political Discourses* of 1752 and his later grand narrative of English political history. In the following, we shall look at Montesquieu's definition of *lois* and *l'esprit des lois*, as well as his treatment of government, climate and commerce and contrast these with Hume's criticism or, where that is not available, Hume's own stance on these matters. We need to begin with the notion of *rappport* which is the central linking element in both the title and the overall argument of *L'Esprit des Lois*.

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<sup>115</sup> The title continues: 'à quoi l'Auteur a ajouté des Recherches nouvelles sur les Loix Romaines touchant les Successions, sur les Loix Françoises, & sur les Loix Feodales.' (2 vols.; Geneva, Barrillot & Fils, 1748).

In the first sentence of the programmatic first book of *L'Esprit des Loix*, Montesquieu defines laws as *rappports*, a term he had already employed in a similar context over twenty-five years earlier in his *Lettres Persanes* (1721). That work's main protagonist, the Persian traveller Usbek, had defined justice as 'a relation of suitability [*un rapport de convenance*], which actually exists between two things'.<sup>116</sup> This definition of justice echoed in Montesquieu's treatment of laws at the outset of *L'Esprit des Loix*:

Laws, taken in the broadest meaning, are the necessary relations [*les rappports nécessaires*] deriving from the nature of things; and in this sense, all beings have their laws: the divinity has its laws, the material world has its laws, the intelligences superior to man have their laws, the beasts have their laws, man has his laws. ... There is, then, a primitive reason; and laws are both the relations that exist between it and the different beings, and the relations of these various beings to each other.<sup>117</sup>

This definition of laws as actual and immutable *rappports* was immediately regarded as highly unusual and appears idiosyncratic when seen in the wider natural law context in which much of *L'Esprit des Loix* can be situated. Indeed, the opening chapter was to prove one of the most controversial parts of the work.<sup>118</sup>

Hume was one of the first to comment on Montesquieu's definition of the laws when he came to deal with several accounts of justice in the context of his own treatment of social virtues in the framework of his moral philosophy as presented in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* of 1751. Speaking of Montesquieu's work, Hume stresses that while much of the former's treatment of the laws in their social context was

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<sup>116</sup> 'Justice is a relation of suitability, which actually exists between two things. This relationship is always the same, by whatever being it is perceived, whether by God, or by an angel, or finally by a man.' Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, tr. C. J. Betts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 162. Cf. *Lettres Persanes*, ed. Jean Starobinski (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), p. 198: 'La justice est un rapport de convenance, qui se trouve réellement entre deux choses: ce rapport est toujours le même, quelque être qui le considère, soit que ce soit Dieu, soit que ce soit un ange, ou enfin que ce soit un homme.' There may be a hint of irony here, as much of the *Lettres Persanes* seeks to demonstrate the utter relativity of laws, manners, and mores.

<sup>117</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, tr. and ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), p. 3. Cf. *De L'Esprit des Loix* (reprint of 1758 edn.), *OC*, i, 1-2: 'Les Loix, dans la signification la plus étendue, sont les rappports nécessaires qui dérivent de la nature des choses; & dans ce sens, tous les êtres ont leurs loix, la divinité a ses loix, le monde matériel a ses loix, les intelligences supérieures à l'homme ont leurs loix, les bêtes ont leurs loix, l'homme a ses loix. ... Il y a donc une raison primitive; & les loix sont les rappports qui se trouvent entre elle & les différents êtres, & les rappports des ces divers êtres entre eux.'

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Shackleton, *Montesquieu*, pp. 244ff.



groundbreaking, it was preceded by a highly problematic assertion contained in Montesquieu's initial definition of laws at the outset of *L'Esprit des Lois*:

This illustrious Writer, however, sets out with a different Theory, and supposes all Right to be founded on certain *Rapports* or Relations; which is a System, that, in my Opinion, never will reconcile with true Philosophy. Father *Malebranche*, as far as I can learn, was the first, that started this abstract Theory of Morals, which was afterwards adopted by Dr. *Clarke* and others; and as it excludes all Sentiment, and pretends to found every Thing on Reason, it has not wanted Followers in this philosophic Age.<sup>119</sup>

From the point of view of Hume's own utilitarian account of justice and other social virtues in the second *Enquiry*, Montesquieu had gone wrong by resorting to an essential and metaphysical definition of justice and rights.<sup>120</sup> Hume contended that, far from consisting in necessary relations deriving from the nature of things, justice was in fact a social virtue, which meant that all its manifestations were necessarily dependent on the contingencies of the particular societies in which they occurred.

In his own treatment of justice in the second *Enquiry*, Hume thus put himself firmly in opposition to Montesquieu by making the extraordinary claim that 'public utility is the sole origin of justice'. Once this definition was accepted, it would follow that the laws possessed no intrinsic value other than that which they derived from their usefulness for the society for which they had been framed. This must consequently be their exclusive reference point and sole justification. Hume was well aware that this was a novel and contentious claim, far removed from the metaphysical definitions of justice given by Nicolas Malebranche, Samuel Clarke and Ralph Cudworth, which Montesquieu had echoed at the outset of *L'Esprit des Lois*.<sup>121</sup> Hume was not the only commentator to argue that Montesquieu had started his commendable enterprise on the wrong foot by giving a definition of the laws that was rather eccentric and sat uneasily

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<sup>119</sup> Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (London: A. Millar, 1751), p. 55 note. In later editions of his second *Enquiry*, Hume was to mention Ralph Cudworth as a further exponent of 'this abstract Theory of Morals', cf. ed. *EPM*, p. 93.

<sup>120</sup> It is not clear whether Hume here refers to the *Lettres Persanes* or to *L'Esprit des Lois*, or both. When he says that Montesquieu 'sets out with a different theory', he could either refer to Montesquieu's earlier definition of justice given in the *Lettres Persanes*, or to his initial definition of the laws given at the outset of *L'Esprit des Lois* as opposed to the different approach adopted later on in the first book of that work.

<sup>121</sup> Shackleton, *Montesquieu*, p. 244ff discusses these authors as possible influences on Montesquieu.

with the main argumentative thrust of the rest of the work.<sup>122</sup> Only once Montesquieu had moved away from this initial misguided definition of justice, Hume implied, was he beginning to lay the theoretical foundations for what Hume considered as an outstanding contribution to political science.

**Montesquieu did indeed quickly move away from this initial metaphysical definition of justice to arrive at the crucial statement of what he meant by the term *l'esprit des lois*, the central concept underpinning the entire work. This definition is given towards the end of the first book and is worth quoting in full:**

Laws must relate to the nature and the principle of the government that is established or that one wants to establish, whether those laws form it as do political laws, or maintain it, as do civil laws.

They should be related to the *physical aspects* of the country; to the climate, be it freezing, torrid, or temperate; to the properties of the terrain, its location and extent; to the way of life of the peoples, be they plowmen, hunters, or herdsmen; they should relate to the degree of liberty that the constitution can sustain, to the religion of the inhabitants, their inclinations, their wealth, their number, their commerce, their mores and their manners; finally, the laws are related to one another, to their origin, to the purpose of the legislator, and to the order of things on which they are established. They must be considered from all these points of view.

This is what I undertake to do in this work. I shall examine all these relations [*rappports*]; together they form what is called THE SPIRIT OF THE LAWS [*L'ESPRIT DES LOIX*].<sup>123</sup>

This passage highlights Montesquieu's major concerns and sets the agenda for the rest of the work. The first important thing to note here is this passage hints at a conceptual tension that permeates the whole book. Montesquieu speaks first of the relationship that laws ought to have with constitutions, climate, and a number of other factors, then of those that they actually have with these wider circumstances. His account is thus ostensibly descriptive, yet, in fact, at least in part prescriptive and he frequently switches from one mode of analysis to the other. Second, Montesquieu makes it clear that *l'esprit*

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<sup>122</sup> In his influential *Commentaire sur L'Esprit des lois de Montesquieu*, first published in 1806 and translated into English by Thomas Jefferson in 1811, Destutt de Tracy bluntly summed up this criticism: 'Une loi n'est pas un rapport et un rapport n'est pas une loi.' Quoted in Shackleton, *Montesquieu*, p. 245.

<sup>123</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, pp. 8-9 (the italics are Montesquieu's). The text continues: 'I have made no attempt to separate *political* from *civil* laws, for, as I do not treat laws but the spirit of the laws, and as this spirit consists in the various relations that laws may have with various things, I have had to follow the natural order of laws less than that of these relations and of these things.' Cf. *L'Esprit des Loix*, OC, i, 9:



*des lois* is not something distilled from the laws themselves, but is rather the sum of the *rappports* that they have with all aspects of society. It is thus the ‘esprit’ of the laws, as it highlights all the connections the laws have or ought to have with the general circumstances of the society to whose advantage they are geared. The laws are thus both interconnected with and referential to other aspects of culture and it is this web of interconnections that Montesquieu terms *l’esprit des lois*. The stress on the interrelations between the laws on the one hand and climatic conditions as well as social, cultural and economic factors on the other hand was probably Montesquieu’s most original idea and testifies to just how far his account of legal and political systems had moved beyond the earlier jurisprudential writers, such as Grotius and Pufendorf. What was new and exciting about his work was the notion that laws, while principally connected with the form of government, evolved by a gradual process by which laws and their interplay with sets of circumstances present in any given society. The laws ought therefore to be referential to all these various circumstances of society. This novel idea of legal evolution was to become the work’s first great contribution to eighteenth-century legal, social and political thought.<sup>124</sup>

We are now in a position to appreciate the extent of Montesquieu’s contribution to political science and can begin to see what Hume found so appealing about his work. Being himself engaged in a similar project, Hume was in a good position to appreciate the extent and originality of that contribution. In his above-mentioned discussion of justice in the second *Enquiry*, Hume draws his readers’ attention to Montesquieu’s remarkable achievement:

The Laws have, or ought to have, a constant Reference to the Constitution of Government, the Manners, the Climate, the Religion, the Commerce, the Situation of each Society. A late Author of great Genius, as well as extensive Learning, has prosecuted this Subject at large, and has establish’d, from these Principles, the best System of political Knowledge, that, perhaps, has ever yet been communicated to the World.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> An older view of Montesquieu’s achievement and influence is summed up in Meek, *Science*, who stresses the economic dimension and Stein, *Legal Evolution*, who traces Montesquieu’s influence on the legal thought of the Scottish literati.

<sup>125</sup> *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751 edn.), p. 54-5.

This is clearly glowing praise, which draws attention to the innovation and erudition underpinning Montesquieu's 'System of political Knowledge'. Hume was to temper his assessment later on as we shall see in due course. For now, it is worth noting that, while Hume echoed and endorsed Montesquieu's notion that the laws ought to be considered in their various contexts, this passage hints at the fact that the two disagreed about the relative importance that should be assigned to the study of each of these contexts. This is evident from the differences between their respective lists of factors. As we have seen, Montesquieu mentioned government in the first place, followed by physical causes such as climate. For Hume, government was followed by manners. In order to see whether this is really an accurate indication of the relative importance that each of these factors occupied in Montesquieu's and Hume's systems, we need to compare their respective stances on these matters. After having done so, we shall briefly consider the way in which Hume's overall assessment of Montesquieu's work – best expressed in the passage just quoted – changed from 1751 onwards.

Both the passage from *L'Esprit des Lois* and that from the second *Enquiry* suggest that among all the relations or *rappports* that constituted *l'esprit des lois*, forms of government ranked first. Montesquieu makes this very clear in the paragraph that follows the ones cited above:

I shall first examine the relations that laws have with the nature and the principle of each government, and, as this principle has a supreme influence on the laws, I shall apply myself to understanding it well; and if I can once establish it, the laws will be seen to flow from it as from their source. I shall then proceed to other relations that seem to be more particular.<sup>126</sup>

Montesquieu consequently explores this in the first quarter of *L'Esprit des Lois*. For Montesquieu, as for Hume, constitutions provide the prime object of study for the political scientist as well as the most important explanatory principle from which most political, social, economic and cultural phenomena can be deduced. The form of

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<sup>126</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 9. Cf. *L'Esprit des Lois*, OC, i, 9: 'J'examinerai d'abord les rapports que les loix ont avec la nature & avec le principe de chaque gouvernement: &, comme ce principe a sur les loix une suprême influence, je m'attacherai à le bien connoître; &, si je puis une fois l'établir, on en verra couler les loix comme de leur source. Je passerai ensuite aux autres rapports, qui semblent être plus particuliers.'

government was the most important factor, as both this statement and the structure of *L'Esprit des Lois* revealed.<sup>127</sup> Both thinkers disagreed with the often-quoted line from Pope's *Essay on Man* (1732-34): *For forms of government let fools contest, Whate'er is best administer'd is best.*<sup>128</sup> In contrast to this, Hume as well as Montesquieu sought to reaffirm the central importance of forms of government. They were however to disagree over the classification of constitutions, especially with regard to republics.<sup>129</sup> More importantly, their disagreement extended over the other factors that were held to exert a profound influence on the development of any given polity. In order to fully grasp the terms of that disagreement, we need to explore what can be regarded as the centrepiece of Montesquieu's political theory, the idea of *un esprit général*.

As the *L'Esprit des Lois* moves from the first and foremost of all circumstances, the legal and political, via climate to the cultural, it becomes clear that *l'esprit des lois* is itself only one, though an essential, constituent of a general and all-encompassing spirit of an age or nation, which Montesquieu terms *un esprit général*. We need to have a closer look at this idea, another central concept of the work distinct from, yet related to the idea of *l'esprit des lois*, which is Montesquieu's other great contribution to eighteenth-century historical discourse. Montesquieu had begun to develop this idea more than twenty years previously and had first used the term *un esprit général* in his *Considérations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains* of 1734, where it had been employed to denote the ultimate foundation of political power in any nation.<sup>130</sup> By the time Montesquieu composed *L'Esprit des Lois*, the idea had taken on a more concrete form, which found its ultimate expression in book 19 of that work. It is in the attempt to

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<sup>127</sup> Montesquieu's discussion of governments occupies books 2-8 and book 11 of *L'Esprit des Lois*.

<sup>128</sup> Quoted by Hume in 'That Politics may be reduced to a Science' (1741), *Essays*, p. 14 note 1.

<sup>129</sup> While their respective classifications of forms of government deviated from the threefold standard scheme derived from Aristotle and Polybius, both Montesquieu and Hume showed a particular interest in the role of aristocracies in modern polities. For Hume's insistence on the primacy of political institutions see Forbes, *Hume's philosophical politics* and David Miller, *Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), chapter 7.

<sup>130</sup> 'Il y a, dans chaque nation, un esprit général, sur lequel la puissance même est fondée; quand elle choque cet esprit, elle se choque elle-même, & elle s'arrête nécessairement.' *Considérations sur les causes de la Grandeur des Romains, et de leur decadence* (reprint of 1758 edn.), in *OC*, i, 519. For Montesquieu's thought on this subject as see Shackleton, *Montesquieu*, pp. 316-19. There is no evidence that Hume had read this work before 1753-4, when he inserted added a footnote reference to the *Considérations* to his earlier essay 'Of Parties in General', first published in 1741. Cf. *Essays*, p. 610.

define this *esprit général* in this book, that Montesquieu's most concise and lucid statement on moral and physical causation occurs. The very brief but crucial fourth chapter of that book reads:

Many things govern men: climate, religion, laws, the maxims of the government, examples of past things, mores, and manners; a general spirit [*un esprit général*] is formed as a result.

To the extent that, in each nation, one of these causes acts more forcefully, the others yield to it. Nature and climate almost alone dominate savages; manners govern the Chinese; laws tyrannize Japan; in former times mores set the tone in Lacedaemonia; in Rome it was set by the maxims of government and the ancient mores.<sup>131</sup>

This highly condensed section makes two related points of central importance to the understanding of Montesquieu's enterprise: First, *l'esprit général* is here used to denote the multitude of causes that shape human societies. Laws and their *esprit* are a part of this all-encompassing *esprit général*, though they are by no means the dominant among a multiplicity of factors. This stress on the multiplicity of factors, and some highly suggestive indications of the respective influence that each of these factors has on different types of societies. Thus, *un esprit général* is constituted by a multiplicity of factors, of which the laws and *l'esprit des lois* is but one and not necessarily the predominant one. As one modern commentator has noted, the 'assembly of causes is one of the most important ideas of *L'Esprit des Lois*'.<sup>132</sup>

Second, the passage quoted above is also one of Montesquieu's most concise and lucid statements on moral and physical causation and would as such have attracted Hume's attention. We have already had occasion to consider Hume's views on causation, which – as I have sought to argue – he had arrived at before reading Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois*. As we have seen, Hume had developed a different and contrary notion of the relationship between moral and physical causes, and had come to

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<sup>131</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 310. Cf. *L'Esprit des Lois*, OC, i, 412 ('Ce que c'est que l'esprit général.'): 'Plusieurs choses gouvernent les hommes, le climat, la religion, les loix, les maximes du gouvernement, les exemples des choses passées, les mœurs, les manières; d'où il se forme un esprit général qui en résulte. A mesure que, dans chaque nation, une de ces causes agit avec plus de force, les autres lui cèdent d'autant. La nature & le climat dominant presque seuls sur les sauvages; les manières gouvernent les Chinois; les lois tyrannisent le Japon; les mœurs donnoient autrefois le ton dans Lacédémone; les maximes du gouvernement & les mœurs anciennes le donnoient dans Rome.'

<sup>132</sup> Shackleton, *Montesquieu*, p. 316.

the conclusion that the latter's influence on the shaping of national characters was in fact negligible. Yet there is more in Montesquieu's statement than Hume deals with on this occasion. Drawing on the second part of the passage just quoted, we are now in a position to enquire whether Montesquieu was really as preoccupied with physical causation as his critics generally presupposed him to have been. This will in turn allow us to ascertain whether Hume's criticism did justice to Montesquieu's account of causation as presented in *L'Esprit des Lois*. Montesquieu's statements on classical and contemporary civilizations, namely Sparta, Rome, China and Japan, reveal that physical causes in general and the influence of climate in particular, while always exerting a considerable influence, do not exercise that influence on all societies in equal measure. Instead, the actions of lawgivers and the influence of manners and mores can gradually replace the impact of climate on the *esprit général* of human societies.

This brief statement is highly suggestive in another respect, as it clearly indicates that physical causation in general and climate in particular are by no means necessarily the decisive factors. To be sure, Montesquieu does state in the same book that '[t]he empire of climate is the first of all empires' and this has often been taken as an assertion of the universal and all-pervasive influence of climate on human affairs.<sup>133</sup> Yet climate is termed the 'first empire' for the reason that it completely dominates primitive societies before the onset of civilization and afterwards continues to be the most basic underlying condition of all societies. With the development of more sophisticated codes of manners and sets of laws, however, the ever-present influence of climate can be mediated and even to a large degree suspended, if never entirely overcome. This is an important qualification, which proves that Montesquieu's account of physical causation cannot strictly speaking be termed 'deterministic'. It is important to note in this context that Hume never directly accused Montesquieu of physical or even climatic determinism, the belief that climate or other physical factors such as the quality of the air or the ground should be considered the sole or main factor determining basic living conditions in any given society. Yet a comparison of their statements shows that Hume considered the role

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<sup>133</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 316, cf. *L'Esprit des Lois*, OC, iii, 421: '[l]'empire du climat est le premier de tous les empires'.

that Montesquieu had assigned to physical causes as excessive. Like his fellow Scottish literati Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, Hume consequently went to great lengths to downplay the role of climate and other physical causes in his own social theory in favour of ‘moral and political Causes’.<sup>134</sup>

The other major difference between Montesquieu’s and Hume’s list is that the latter mentions commerce, which is in Montesquieu’s list of factors relevant to *l’esprit des lois*, but is curiously absent from those constituting the *esprit général*. Nevertheless, Montesquieu devoted two books of *L’Esprit des Lois* to the nature of commerce and its history. The first chapter of book 20, entitled *Du commerce*, contains his most incisive statement on the subject:

Commerce cures destructive prejudices, and it is an almost general rule that everywhere there are gentle mores [*mœurs*], there is commerce and that everywhere there is commerce, there are gentle mores.

Therefore, one should not be surprised if our mores are less fierce than they were formerly. Commerce has spread knowledge of the mores of all nations everywhere; they have been compared to each other, and good things have resulted from this.<sup>135</sup>

This is Montesquieu’s most striking profession of faith in the civilizing force of commerce, underlining the fact that commerce is at the core of his account of the civilizing process. As one commentator put it, ‘Montesquieu considered the prioritisation of commerce the chief distinguishing feature of modernity’.<sup>136</sup> As we shall see, this is a notion that Hume himself fully endorsed. Yet Montesquieu goes further when stressing the connections between *commerce* and *mœurs*, even if it is not clear

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<sup>134</sup> The engagement of the Edinburgh literati with Montesquieu’s theories, and in particular the debate over the prevalence of moral or physical causation, is reflected in the minutes of the Select Society for the meeting held on 4 December 1754 and presided over by Hume: ‘The Question named by the President [Hume] and allowed by the Society for the subject of the ensuing Night’s Debate was; Whether the Difference of national Characters be chiefly owing to the Nature of different Climates, or to moral and political Causes.’ SCRAN image of the minutes of the Select Society, 4 December 1754, National Library of Scotland, Adv.MS.23.1.1, p. 33. Cf. [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk).

<sup>135</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 338. Cf. *L’Esprit des Lois*, OC, i, 445: ‘Le commerce guérit des préjugés destructeurs: & c’est presque une règle générale que, par-tout où il y a des mœurs douces, il y a du commerce; & que, par-tout où il y a du commerce, il y a des mœurs douces. Qu’on ne s’étonne donc point si nos mœurs sont moins féroces qu’elles ne l’étoient autrefois. Le commerce a fait que la connaissance des mœurs de toutes les nations a pénétré par-tout: on les a comparées entr’elles, & il en a résulté de grands biens.’

<sup>136</sup> David W. Carrithers, ‘Introduction: Montesquieu and the Spirit of Modernity’, in Carrithers and Patrick Coleman (eds.), *Montesquieu and the Spirit of Modernity* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002), p. 18.

from this statement whether only commerce is capable of creating gentle manners or whether the latter ought to be considered as a necessary precondition for the rise of the former. This is a problem that Hume would address at length in his *Political Discourses* and it is in response to this problem that he would formulate his most sophisticated account of the interrelation between commerce and industry on the one hand and manners and mores on the other hand. Hume's account stresses the point made by Montesquieu, namely that commerce facilitated the spread of knowledge and that the consequent comparison of different sets of manners led to a general increase in 'humanity'. Yet, as we shall see further below, the theory Hume was to develop in his *Political Discourses* and was later to apply in his *History of England* was a far more complex one, taking in additional elements not developed at any length by Montesquieu, such as a positive conception of luxury, an emphasis on industry, and a novel theory of money.

Montesquieu illustrated his point about *commerce* and *esprit* in the same book in a short chapter entitled *Esprit de l'Angleterre sur le commerce*, which resumes his discussion of Britain in two earlier chapters of the work and culminates in his assessment of English civilization:

This is the people in the world who have best known how to take advantage of each of these three great things at the same time: religion, commerce, and liberty.<sup>137</sup>

By the time Hume read these lines, he was about to embark on an extended exploration of these same three dimensions of English civilization. While he had dealt at length with the conditions and limitations of political liberty in his earlier political essays, his in-depth analysis of the culture of commerce and his sustained critique of the historical causes and consequences of religion were composed during the years following this initial reception of the *L'Esprit des Lois. La religion, le commerce & la liberté* or, in Hume's case liberty, commerce and religion can be seen as the three interpretative pillars on which both Hume's analysis of English civilization and his grand narrative of English constitutional history rest. These were of course common preoccupations in

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<sup>137</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 343. Cf. *L'Esprit des Lois*, OC, i, 452: 'C'est le peuple du monde qui a le mieux su se prévaloir à la fois de ces trois grandes choses, la religion, le commerce & la liberté.'



mid-eighteenth-century Europe, yet Montesquieu had put them on the agenda as constitutive elements of *un esprit général*, itself the conceptual centrepiece of an integrated analysis of civilizations. In so doing, he had laid the theoretical foundation for a new mode of historical enquiry, which was to find its expression in a number of ‘philosophical’ histories published in the mid- and late-eighteenth century. Like Voltaire and later Edward Gibbon, Hume was both an acute student and an exacting critic of Montesquieu. In fact, he may be credited with having been one of the first to perceive the full potential of Montesquieu’s groundbreaking venture. Hume dealt with the subjects of commerce and religion in the years following his initial encounter with *L’Esprit des Lois* and developed them in a fashion similar to that of Montesquieu, yet at greater length and in greater depth, in his *Political Discourses* (1752) and his *Natural History of Religion* (1757), both of which had been conceived and to a large extent composed during his time at Ninewells 1749-51, a time when Hume was corresponding with Montesquieu and digesting the multiple implications of latter’s groundbreaking work.

Lastly, it is now time to consider how Hume’s views changed subsequent to the years in which he corresponded with Montesquieu. Following Montesquieu’s death in 1755, Hume changed the reference to *L’Esprit des Lois* in the next edition of his *Essays and Treatises*, published in 1758. What Hume had formerly called ‘the best System of political Knowledge, that, perhaps, has ever yet been communicated to the World’ now became ‘a system of political knowledge, which abounds in ingenious and brilliant thoughts, and is not wanting in solidity’.<sup>138</sup> While this is still high praise, Hume’s final phrase betrays his perception that while not being altogether absent, ‘solidity’ is not necessarily the greatest strength of Montesquieu’s system.<sup>139</sup> Less than ten years later, in April 1767, Hume would write to his friend, the Edinburgh clergyman and man of letters Hugh Blair, giving an assessment of the current reputation of *L’Esprit des Lois* among

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<sup>138</sup> The first edition to include this change is a one-volume edition of Hume’s collected works entitled *Essays and treatises on several subjects. A new edition* (London and Edinburgh: A. Millar, A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1758), p. 415. This text remained unchanged from then on and still forms the basis for modern editions, cf. *EPM*, p. 93.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Chamley, ‘The Conflict between Montesquieu and Hume’, p. 298.



French men of letters. The following lines from his letter constitute Hume's final recorded statement on Montesquieu's work:

[Even though] the *Esprit des loix* be considerably sunk in Vogue, & will probably still sink farther, it maintains a high Reputation, and probably will never be totally neglected. It has considerable Merit, notwithstanding the Glare of its pointed Wit, and notwithstanding its false Refinements and its rash and crude Positions.<sup>140</sup>

This statement reveals the extent of what Hume had over the years come to consider as the shortcomings of Montesquieu's system, some of which can be detected even in his earlier statement despite the glowing praise he had lavished on *L'Esprit des Lois* back then. In fact, a careful reading reveals that this explicit statement in his letter to Hugh Blair does little more than restate and reinforce Hume's earlier and more circumspect criticism of the work as being more brilliant than solid. It should be noted, however, that despite the critical points raised in 1767, Hume appears to have maintained his earlier conviction that *L'Esprit des Lois* ought to be regarded as a groundbreaking work and that he proceeded to defend it at a time when it had to some extent fallen out of fashion with the *philosophes*.

In the course of the following chapters, we shall have occasion to trace the impact of Montesquieu's work on Hume's subsequent writings, and the gestation of his own mature thought on the nature of history. In the next section, we need to return to the late 1740s and Hume's literary sojourn at Ninewells and continue our analysis of Hume's intellectual preoccupations and literary pursuits during that period. In this context we will have to deal with a final important argument Hume picked up from *L'Esprit des Lois*, namely its author's forceful historical case for a decline in European population figures since antiquity. While population development was by no means the main theme of that work, it was this aspect that triggered Hume's most immediate and extended criticism of *L'Esprit des Lois*, which took the form of a critique of how Montesquieu had used his sources and thus a critique of his way of practising history.

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<sup>140</sup> Hume to Hugh Blair, 1 April 1767, *HL*, ii, 133.

## 2. Towards a Cultural History of Antiquity

### 2. 1. Hume's Reading of the Classics at Ninewells, 1749-51

Having assessed Hume's response to Montesquieu, we need to consider another crucial but neglected aspect of his intellectual preoccupations in the period 1749-51, his extensive reading of the Classics. In the early 1750s Hume engaged in an intensive reading of a substantial amount of classical literature, a reading that involved going back to works he had encountered earlier as well as reading ones with which he was yet not familiar. This reading was to result in his longest and most learned essay, entitled 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', published in 1752, as well as impact on a number of major and minor works written during this period. In the following we shall seek to reconstruct the extent and depth of Hume's reading of the Classics, as well as the uses – scholarly, philosophical and polemical – to which he put the information gathered in the course of this reading. This takes us back to the years 1749-51, the last of a number of extended periods that Hume spent in literary retreat at his family home, Ninewells in Berwickshire, and a time of intense studies and literary activity. The importance of these spells of literary activity in the retreat at his elder brother's estate is underlined by the fact that even while he was considering to accompany General St Clair on a military campaign in Flanders in the spring of 1747, Hume envisaged a return to 'Books, Leisure, & Solitude in the Country' to pursue 'my Studies at Ninewells', as he states in two letters to his friend and kinsman Henry Home.<sup>141</sup> These letters also provide us with an important clue as to the nature of his reading and the extent of the library available to him at Ninewells. Weighing the different options available to him, Hume shows himself inclined to resume his study of the Classics – he specifically mentions 'my Xenophon or Polybius' – but in reflecting back on previous times at Ninewells admits that 'I felt the Solitude in the Country rather too great, especially as I was so indifferently provided of a Library to employ me'.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Hume to Henry Home, [January 1747]; Hume to Henry Home, [June 1747], *NHL*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>142</sup> Hume to Henry Home, [January 1747]; Hume to Henry Home, [June 1747], *NHL*, pp. 24, 26.

In order to find out what exactly Hume was up to in his reading during this period, we need to have an even closer look at his correspondence with his friends. An important clue is provided by a letter he wrote to John Clephane in April 1750:

You would perhaps ask, how I employ my time in this leisure and solitude, and what are my occupations? Pray, do you expect I should convey to you an encyclopedia, in the compass of a letter? The last thing I took my hand from was a very learned, elaborate discourse, concerning the populousness of antiquity; not altogether in opposition to *Vossius* and *Montesquieu*, who exaggerate that affair infinitely; but, starting some doubts, and scruples, and difficulties, sufficient to make us suspend our judgement on that head.<sup>143</sup>

Again we find Hume referring to the 'leisure and solitude' of his life at Ninewells – perhaps an allusion to the Stoic ideal of literary pursuit in the leisurely retreat of the countryside, a notion which had received its classic expression in the letters of Hume's favourite among the ancient authors, Cicero.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, this letter hints at a range of diverse literary activities so wide as to justify the whimsical remark that they could only be subsumed in the form of an encyclopaedia. Hume specifically mentions 'a very learned, elaborate discourse, concerning the populousness of antiquity', a piece that was still on his mind in February 1751, as a letter to his friend and critic Gilbert Elliot of Minto reveals:

I have amus'd myself lately with an Essay or Dissertation on the Populousness of Antiquity, which led me into many Disquisitions concerning both the public & domestic Life of the Ancients. Having read over almost all the Classics both Greek and Latin, since I form'd that Plan, I have extracted what serv'd most to my Purpose....<sup>145</sup>

From this letter as well as the previous we can infer that Hume had been working on his essay on populousness for at least ten months, while at the same time being engaged in the composition of a number of other works mentioned in his correspondence. This provides us with an indication of the amount of preparatory work required by the specific task Hume had set himself. Hume claims to have 'read over almost all the Classics both Greek and Latin, since I form'd that Plan', an astonishing statement which

<sup>143</sup> Hume to John Clephane, 18 April 1750, *HL*, i, 140.

<sup>144</sup> This concept is epitomized in Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* of which Hume possessed an edition, cf. Norton and Norton, *David Hume Library*, p. 82. For Hume's reading and use of Cicero see Peter Jones, *Hume's sentiments: their Ciceronian and French context* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1982), pp. 29-41.

<sup>145</sup> Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 18 February 1751, *HL*, i, 152-3.

poses a number of questions concerning the extent and significance of his reading of the Classics.

The extent of the reading of the Classics Hume undertook at Ninewells in the late 1740s and early 1750s has repeatedly been questioned and its significance has been downplayed on the ground that it would have been to a large extent a re-reading of texts Hume had already encountered in the 1740s or at an even earlier date. This interpretation is largely founded on the evidence of surviving sets of manuscript reading notes in Hume's hand, commonly referred to as the 'early memoranda'. This set of manuscript notes bears no date and there is as yet no established consensus among Hume scholars as to the exact date of composition of the notes. In the present context it is intriguing to note that these reading notes contain a considerable amount of classical material, some of which bears directly on the question of populism.<sup>146</sup> On the basis of this material, Hume's biographer and the first editor of the 'early memoranda', Ernest C. Mossner, assumed that 'the reading of the classics in 1750 was, at the very least, a second reading.'<sup>147</sup> Mossner's argument has however been challenged on various grounds and will have to be reconsidered in the following. In addition to the somewhat uncertain dating, there are two main problems attending Mossner's argument concerning the relationship between the 'early memoranda' and the 1752 essay 'Of the Populism of Ancient Nations'.

First, it is important to note that Hume's ability to read Greek texts considerably improved during the 1740s, that is, between the most likely date of composition of the 'early memoranda' and the writing of the populism essay in the early 1750s. Hume tells us in his later autobiographical sketch that between 1742 and 1745, another period in which he was living with his family at Ninewells, he 'recovered the knowledge of the Greek language, which I had too much neglected in my early youth'.<sup>148</sup> Hume must here be alluding to his education at Edinburgh University, which Hume had entered at the

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<sup>146</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729-1740: The Complete Text', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 9 (1948), 492-518. See also E. C. Mossner, 'Hume and the ancient-modern controversy, 1725-1752: A Study in Creative Scepticism', in *The University of Texas Studies in English*, 28 (1949), 139-153, esp. 141 note 5.

<sup>147</sup> Mossner, *Life of Hume*, p. 266.

<sup>148</sup> 'My own life', in *Essays*, p. xxxiv.

tender age of ten and at which he had attended Greek classes during his second year (1722-23).<sup>149</sup> There is reason to doubt that he attained a good reading knowledge of the language either at university or at any other point before the mid-1740s.<sup>150</sup> This is significant, as it would mean that Hume attained a reading knowledge of Greek only *after* he had compiled his early reading notes. It is this capacity to read Greek which would have enabled him to peruse important sources for his populoussness essay such as Strabo's *Geographika* 'either in the original Language or even in a good Translation' as he writes in the above-quoted letter to Elliot.<sup>151</sup>

**A second and more important problem consists in the fact that Mossner appears to have overestimated the extent to which the list of works quoted in the 'early memoranda' and those cited in the *Political Discourses* (1752), including 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', overlap. In fact, the texts cited in the earlier document present only a fraction of the material Hume used in the later volume as will become evident once we have fully reconstructed the extent of Hume's reading in the early 1750s.<sup>152</sup> To this end I have drawn up a list of the classical citations in Hume's 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' (see Appendix). These amount to over a hundred classical works ranging over a variety of fields from philosophy to history, geography to religion and written in a number of different genres such as historical narrative, treatise, commentary, dialogue, play, public oration, epigram, and letters. This list thus comprises Greek as well as Latin authors, spanning all periods and most genres of ancient literature. The first thing that appears striking when we consider this list is that the majority of these works are only cited once and a few of these are merely alluded to without any reference to specific chapters**

<sup>149</sup> For the curriculum at Edinburgh University in the 1720s, see M. A. Stewart, 'Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711-1752', in *Impressions of Hume*, ed. Marina Frasca-Spada and Peter Kail (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 11-58, esp. pp. 16-25.

<sup>150</sup> M. A. Stewart, 'The Dating of Hume's Manuscripts', in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation*, ed. Paul Wood (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000), pp. 267-314, in particular pp. 280-85.

<sup>151</sup> Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 18 February 1751, *HL*, i, 153. We need to keep in mind that 'a good Translation' does not necessarily mean an English translation, since in eighteenth-century editions the original Greek text is often interfaced with a Latin, rather than a modern language translation.

<sup>152</sup> This has led Professor M. A. Stewart to conclude: 'What we have in the memoranda is less the actual research for any particular project than preparatory research'. Cf. Stewart, 'The Dating of Hume's Manuscripts', pp. 287-8.

or pages. This presents us with an interpretative problem, which stems from the fact that we cannot easily ascertain whether these are in fact citations from works that Hume actually read or whether they represent second-hand citations he may have culled from works of erudite scholarship. While earlier Hume scholars sometimes worked with the assumption that by and large ‘a citation by Hume carries its own guarantee that he was actually reading the work named’,<sup>153</sup> more recent scholarship has demonstrated that this view cannot be upheld. Recent research on the reading underpinning Hume’s early memoranda has revealed that what seems like excerpts from a number of works does not necessarily stem from his own reading of these works, but sometimes from summary accounts provided by works like Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*.<sup>154</sup> It is of course possible that Hume might have abandoned this practice of citing works at second-hand by the late 1740s, but the limits imposed on him by the lack of access to major libraries in the 1749-51 period makes it unlikely that he had consulted a copy of each and every one of the works he cites or alludes to in his *Populousness* dissertation. Since we cannot ascertain this with any certainty, it seems best to confine our observations to works that he cites more than once and pay particular attention to those of which he makes frequent use, since the likelihood of him having read these works appears greater.

The classical works Hume cited more than merely once or twice in his *Populousness* dissertation fall into three distinct groups. First and foremost, there are the great works of biography and history. Here we find the famous narratives of the classical historians, which were so widely read and admired in the eighteenth century. It is little surprising to find that Hume draws on Plutarch’s *Lives* as well as the four most famous Greek historians – Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Polybius – and their Roman counterparts Sallust, Caesar, Livy and Tacitus. Yet Hume makes equally good use of less-well known or less acclaimed historical works

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<sup>153</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner, ‘Hume’s Early Memoranda, 1729-1740: The Complete Text’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 9 (1948), 492-518, esp. 496.

<sup>154</sup> The results of recent enquiries into these matters are summed up and judiciously evaluated in M. A. Stewart, ‘The Dating of Hume’s Manuscripts’, in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation*, ed. Paul Wood (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000), pp. 267-314, esp. pp. 276-88.

such as Appian's *Roman History* and Dionyisus of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities*, Herodian's *History of the Empire* and the multi-authored *Historia Augusta*. Perhaps the most surprising find is that the most often cited work of all is Diodorus Siculus *Bibliotheca Historica*. Hume considered Diodorus Siculus 'a good writer' and his extensive and wide-ranging compilation of information concerning the geography and history of the classical world provided Hume with a wide variety of facts and observations, especially with regarded to the non-Greek and Roman world.<sup>155</sup> This underlines the fact that for the purpose of the populousness essay Hume did not rate the classical historians according to their literary merit, but instead considered them mainly as source texts, to be employed in accordance with their reliability and the extent to which they yielded the kind of information he required in order to build up his argument.

The range of sources Hume read for his populousness dissertation, as we have seen, extends far beyond works of history and biography and the list of citations reveals two other main categories of sources on which he drew for this dissertation. First, Hume makes extensive use of public orations, especially those of Demosthenes, Isocrates, and Cicero.<sup>156</sup> This reflects the high regard he expressed for Demosthenes' orations, which he considered to be among the 'most authentic pieces of all GREEK history'.<sup>157</sup> The reason for Hume's interest in this kind of source should become clear when we come to consider his practice of extracting information from classical texts. Second, he derives a number of facts and observations from works of ancient geography and treatises on agriculture. Here he makes extensive use of Strabo's *Geography*, a multi-volume compendium of geographic and ethnographic information about the ancient world. We shall later have occasion enquire how Hume obtained a copy of Strabo's work, when he read it and how he put this text to use in his writings of this period. For now it is sufficient to observe that the two most often cited works are those of Diodorus

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<sup>155</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *E*, p. 422 note.

<sup>156</sup> In compiling the list I have followed Hume's practice of citing each of the orations of Cicero and Demosthenes and Isocrates as individual works.

<sup>157</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *E*, p. 422 note.



Siculus and Strabo, followed by Thucydides' *History*.<sup>158</sup> On the whole, the list of classical citations in 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' underlines the extent and variety of the reading Hume undertook in preparation for this erudite dissertation, while centring on the 'historians, orators, and philosophers' on which Hume drew as 'authorities' in support of the argument he advanced in his demographic dissertation.<sup>159</sup> Insofar as they contain a large number of titles and comprise a representative cross-section of classical literature, Hume's citations thus partly bear out his claim to have 'read over almost all the Classics both Greek and Latin, since I form'd [the] Plan' of writing 'an Essay or Dissertation on the Populousness of Antiquity'.<sup>160</sup>

An important question remains to be explored: namely, how Hume could have read or at least consulted such a considerable number of classical texts at a time mostly spent in the rural surroundings of his family's country estate in Berwickshire. Unfortunately, we do not have a contemporary catalogue of the books available to him at his Ninewells home or at the local parish library of the nearby village of Chirnside.<sup>161</sup> In his 1747 letter to Henry Home, Hume showed himself inclined to 'return to my Studies at Ninewells' and at the same time complained about being 'so indifferently provided of a Library to employ me'.<sup>162</sup> This should prompt us to consider the available evidence pertaining to Hume's personal library. Hume had in fact been collecting books since the 1720s and his library was growing during the years between 1747 and 1753.<sup>163</sup> The best indication we have of the size of his personal library during the last period he spent at Ninewells is his statement in a 1751 letter that he possessed '£ 100 worth of Books', which has been

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<sup>158</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' features 33 citations of Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca Historia*, 19 of Strabo's *Geographika* and 13 of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. It is thus the Greek historians and geographers of whom Hume makes most extensive use, though these are closely followed by Roman writers on history, biography, natural history and agriculture.

<sup>159</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 414 note 100.

<sup>160</sup> Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 18 February 1751, *HL*, i, 152-3.

<sup>161</sup> See Norton and Norton, *David Hume Library*, 13ff. For the Chirnside parish library M. A. Stewart, 'Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711-1752', in *Impressions of Hume*, ed. Marina Frasca-Spada and Peter Kail (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 11-58, esp. p. 17.

<sup>162</sup> Hume to Henry Home, [June 1747], *NHL*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>163</sup> See in particular Hume's statement in a letter written in 1753 to the effect that he then possessed more books than he could use. Hume to John Clephane, 5 January 1753, *HL*, i, 170.



estimated to equal about four-hundred books.<sup>164</sup> While these certainly included some editions of the Classics alongside books of modern philosophy, literature and history, we cannot assume that it would have provided him with the more obscure texts or those that were only available in expensive scholarly editions.

This is well illustrated by the case of a particular classical text, which was crucial for Hume's argument, namely Strabo's *Geographika*, the most extensive surviving geographical and historical survey of the classical world. In this case we possess enough evidence to reconstruct in some detail how Hume procured and used this text. As he did not possess an edition of Strabo, Hume turned to his friend Gilbert Elliot of Minto for help, writing in February 1751 that

I have not a Strabo, & know not where to get one in this Neighbourhood. He is an Author I never read. I know your Library (I mean the Advocates') is scrupulous of lending Classics; but perhaps that Difficulty may be got over. I shou'd be much oblig'd to you, if you could procure me the Loan of a Copy, either in the original Language or even in a good Translation.<sup>165</sup>

This statement is significant for several reasons. First, Hume's remark that he could not get hold of an edition of Strabo 'in the Neighbourhood' might allude to the practice of borrowing books from friends and acquaintances which was common among Scottish border families.<sup>166</sup> Second, Edinburgh gentlemen, especially members of the Faculty of Advocates such as Elliot, could arrange to borrow books from the Advocates' Library, which had extensive holdings of 'Greek and Roman historians'.<sup>167</sup> Elliot did indeed manage to send Hume a copy of Strabo's *Geographika*.<sup>168</sup> The extensive use Hume made of that work is reflected in twenty-one references to it in 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', another one in a different essay of the *Political Discourses*, a further one in an earlier essay he revised and republished in his *Essays and Treatises on Several*

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<sup>164</sup> Norton and Norton, *David Hume Library*, pp. 13-4.

<sup>165</sup> Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 18 February 1751, *HL*, i, 153.

<sup>166</sup> With regard to this point I have profited from discussions with Professor M. A. Stewart and Mr Mark R. M. Towsey.

<sup>167</sup> The holdings of the Advocates' Library went far beyond the legal and jurisprudential texts to be expected in such a library. Cf. *A Catalogue of the Library of the Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1742-1807), i (1742).

<sup>168</sup> As there is a gap in the Advocates' borrowing records from 1724-54, we cannot establish with any certainty whether the copy of Strabo's *Geographika* sent to Hume by Elliot did in fact come from the Advocates' or possibly from Elliot's own extensive family library. Dr. Brian Hillyard and Helen Vincent of the National Library of Scotland have kindly made their expertise in these matters available to me.

*Subjects* of 1753-54, and finally two more in the *Natural History of Religion*, published in 1757.<sup>169</sup> Hume's use of Strabo, and of classical texts in general, can most clearly be seen in his essay 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', the piece for which he originally undertook his extensive reading of the Classics.

While reading the Classics with the populousness essay in mind, Hume had 'extracted what serv'd most to my Purpose' as he wrote in his 1751 letter to Elliot. This statement taken together with the systematic way in which he appears to have ploughed through multi-volume works like Strabo's *Geographika* or Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca Historia* suggests a specific manner of reading the Classics, which I believe can be reconstructed as follows.<sup>170</sup> While reading – or at the very least skimming through – a substantial number of classical texts, either in the original language or in a reliable translation, Hume would have scanned these texts for all kinds of facts and arguments that could conceivably be used to build up a coherent argument about aspects of the classical world relevant to the population question. In the process of doing so, he would have taken what must have been extensive reading notes in the form of extracts from the texts, possibly similar to those that make up the 'early memoranda', though probably considerably more extensive given the breadth and depth of his use of classical sources in the populousness essay.<sup>171</sup> Drawing on such notes Hume would have been able to 'collect all the lights afforded us by scattered passages in ancient authors',<sup>172</sup> which in turn would have provided him with a secure foundation on which to rest his densely argued case against the superior populousness of antiquity. This he did in 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', which is perhaps his most serious exercise in historical scholarship and which will be discussed in some detail in the following two sections.

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<sup>169</sup> See *Essays*, pp. 202, 350, 388-461, and *NHR*, pp. 22, 64. Hume even drew on his reading of Strabo for an elaborate joke in a letter to a friend, Hume to Jean Dysart of Eccles, 19 March 1751, *HL*, i, 159-60.

<sup>170</sup> Hume's reading of Strabo is well documented, cf. *HL*, i, 153, 157, 159. 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' contains more than thirty references to Diodorus Siculus, cf. *Essays*, pp. 403-464.

<sup>171</sup> Since no record or even the slightest trace of such material appears to have survived, the very existence of such extended reading notes is of course a hypothesis, albeit one that is suggested by the very nature of Hume's research for the populousness essay and supported by his remark to Elliot that he 'extracted what serv'd most to my Purpose'.

<sup>172</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 437.

In his letter to Elliot, Hume stated that the research for his populousness essay led him 'into many Disquisitions concerning both the public & domestic Life of the Antients'. Hume's populousness essay does indeed contain numerous digressions on the political conditions and cultural practices prevalent in classical Greece and Rome, most notably an in-depth discussion of ancient slavery. The broad range of subjects Hume dealt with in this essay testifies to his conviction that demographic development was not solely determined by social and political circumstances, but was moreover contingent on a wide variety of factors including political convictions, religious beliefs, moral codes, social customs and sexual mores. These were reflected in common practices and shared attitudes which characterized ancient societies yet were more often hinted at rather than directly expressed in the classical texts. Though difficult to detect, such allusions and casual asides could reveal a lot about the underlying cultural assumptions and moral values that ancient authors and orators shared with their contemporary audiences. This explains the emphasis Hume put on the value of public orations as the most useful sources and the fact that he considered the orations of Demosthenes to be among the 'most authentic pieces of all GREEK history'.<sup>173</sup> He paid particular attention to facts that were merely implied or even deliberately omitted in ancient texts and had thus eluded previous modern commentators who wrote about the populousness question. From Hume's painstakingly constructed argument we can thus infer that he read the Classics against the grain in order to extract from them meanings that their authors may not even have intended to convey. Hume's remarkable sensitivity as a reader in picking up on these undertones and uncovering their significance for our understanding of the classical world is clearly exhibited in the essay 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', to which we must now turn.

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<sup>173</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 422 note.

## 2. 2. Hume's Historical Dissertation on the Populousness of Antiquity

### 2. 2. 1. The 'Enquiry concerning Causes': Political Science and the Study of History

Hume's use of classical texts is most conspicuously displayed in the long essay for which he originally undertook this extensive reading, the essay entitled 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' and published in his *Political Discourses* of 1752. While this is by far the longest of all of Hume's essays, it has so far received only cursory treatment in Hume scholarship and its importance as a weighty piece of historical research has rarely been recognized.<sup>174</sup> The significance of this essay has partly been obscured by the fact that the demographical debate to which it is a contribution now seems obscure and of merely antiquarian interest. Yet Hume thought that the population question was 'the most curious and important of all questions of erudition' and he recognized its far-reaching implications the science of politics. At the beginning of the populousness essay he states:

In general, we may observe, that the question, with regard to the comparative populousness of ages or kingdoms, implies important consequences, and commonly determines concerning the preference of their whole police, their manners, and the constitution of their government.<sup>175</sup>

This question is thus potentially capable of tipping the scales in favour of either ancient or modern civilizations. The population essay can consequently be seen as Hume's most weighty intervention in the so-called 'battle of the books' or *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, the long-standing controversy about the comparative merits of ancient and modern civilizations and their respective ways of life.<sup>176</sup> The comparative assessment of ancient and modern achievements in a variety of fields gave rise to wider questions

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<sup>174</sup> But see the lucid remarks in David Wootton, 'David Hume, the historian', in *CCH*, p. 288.

<sup>175</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 381. The reason Hume gives for this is that since 'wise, just, and mild' governments are usually the most conducive for population growth, a high rate of population does in turn provide a clear indication of good government and wise institutions, cf. *Essays*, p. 382.

<sup>176</sup> This is the view of Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Forgotten Hume: Le bon David* (New York: Columbia UP, 1943), chapter 5; and Yasuo Amoh, 'The ancient-modern controversy in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *The Rise of political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Sakamoto and Tanaka, pp. 69-85. For the ancient-modern controversy see David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990), chapter 2.

concerning the possibility, or indeed inevitability, of historical progress.<sup>177</sup> We shall later have occasion to consider the ancient-modern controversy and establish Hume's place in it. For now it is sufficient to point out that Hume shared the general conviction of eighteenth-century men of letters that demographic data provided a yardstick with which the success of government and the general happiness of the people in any given polity could be measured.<sup>178</sup> The ancients were still largely deemed to have been more successful in terms of their political systems and this belief in the superiority of classical commonwealths appeared to be confirmed by the high population estimates given in supposedly authoritative ancient texts. The strength of Hume's case for the superiority of modern, commercial society, developed at length and with great sophistication in the *Political Discourses*, thus depended to a large degree on his ability to build up a convincing historical case that would effectively undermine prevailing notions about the greater population density of the classical world.

One of the most influential statements of this position had been made by Montesquieu in his *Lettres Persanes* (1721), in which a main character, Rhédi, asserts that 'there is scarcely a fiftieth of the number of men on earth that there was in ancient times'. Like previous authors, Montesquieu maintained that Europe, especially Greece and Italy, were much less populated now than in classical times.<sup>179</sup> As we have seen, in his 1750 letter Hume claimed that he had written his 'Essay or Dissertation' partly in order to refute the exaggerations of Vossius and Montesquieu. At the beginning of his Populousness essay he picks up on this passage in the *Lettres Persanes* as well as on

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<sup>177</sup> This theory of progress was developed in opposition to a widely held belief in a steady decline in human affairs, which could be traced back to antiquity itself, and was described by Hume, following Malebranche, as firmly rooted in human nature.

<sup>178</sup> 'But if every thing else be equal, it seems natural to expect, that, wherever there are most happiness and virtue, and the wisest institutions, there will also be most people.' 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, 382. On the significance of the eighteenth-century population controversy see Sylvana Tomaselli, 'Moral Philosophy and Population Questions in Eighteenth Century Europe', in *Population and Development Review*, 14, Supplement: Population and Resources in Western Intellectual Traditions (1988), 7-29.

<sup>179</sup> 'Après un calcul aussi exact qu'il peut l'être dans ces sortes de choses, j'ai trouvé qu'il y a, à peine, sur la terre la cinquantième partie des homes qui y étaient dans les anciens temps.' In the 1758 edition this passage was amended to read 'a fiftieth part' rather than 'a tenth part.' Cf. *Lettres Persanes*, ed. Jean Starobinski (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), pp. 248, 438.

Montesquieu's statements on this matter in *L'Esprit des Lois*.<sup>180</sup> Hume clearly regarded these and similar assertions as exaggerated, even extravagant, and he specifically rejects the *topos* of a general decline in human affairs, an argument that was commonplace in early modern literature and had figured prominently in Rhédi's account of European depopulation.<sup>181</sup> This means that, unlike in his earlier 'Of National Characters', Hume directly engaged with Montesquieu's theories in his learned dissertation of the populousness of the ancient world.

In the same letter Hume mentions the Dutch scholar, Isaac Vossius (1618-1689), whose erudite dissertation on the greatness of ancient Rome, published in 1685, was an influential and often-quoted contribution to the population controversy.<sup>182</sup> The notion that Europe, especially Greece and Italy, were much less populated now than in classical times was still the prevailing view in the mid-eighteenth century. If he wanted to overturn this, Hume had to beat his opponents at their own game. He had to make use of the critical methods of textual scholarship when conducting painstaking philological research and collecting scattered pieces of evidence to build up a convincing case for his side of the argument. The product of this kind of labour was a showpiece of erudite scholarship with a conspicuous number of footnotes (over 250) that reflected the breadth and depth of Hume's classical reading.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, it can be described as one of the

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<sup>180</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 380. Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, pp. 437-40.

<sup>181</sup> Hume rejects common assumptions of 'any decay in human nature' as an invalid arguments in the context of the population question, since these assumptions are not supported by any evidence: 'As far, therefore, as observation reaches, there is no universal difference discernible in the human species; ... we cannot thence presuppose any decay in human nature. To prove, therefore, or account for that superior populousness of antiquity, which is commonly supposed, by the imaginary youth or vigour of the world, will scarcely be admitted by any just reasoner. These *general physical* causes ought entirely to be excluded from this question.' 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, 378.

<sup>182</sup> In his *De antiquae Romae magnitudine* Isaac Vossius had estimated the population of ancient Rome at 14 million. This learned dissertation was the opening piece of Vossius' *Variarum observationum liber*, published in 1685 and immediately reviewed by Pierre Bayle. Bayle's review was later reprinted in *Oeuvres diverses de Mr. Pierre Bayle* (4 vols.; The Hague: P. Husson, 1727-1731). Cf. Joseph J. Spengler, *French Predecessors of Malthus. A Study in Eighteenth-Century Wage and Population Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1942), p. 37. Hume probably possessed and certainly quoted from this particular edition of Bayle's writings (see Norton and Norton, *David Hume Library*, p. 74) and may have learned about Vossius' claims concerning the population of ancient Rome through Bayle's review and critique of *De antiquae Romae magnitudine*.

<sup>183</sup> The preparation of the forthcoming two-volume edition of Hume's *Essays*, edited by T. L. Beauchamp and M. Box, which will form part of *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume*, has finally

first of Hume's pieces that is predominantly historical in character. For although Hume arguments in this essay resembled those of his other writings on political economy, the specific case he makes largely rests more on historical research than on philosophical conjecture. For the first time historical evidence provides the basis of one of Hume's essays rather than a mere reference point for Hume's own philosophical or political arguments. Since the populousness essay allows us to see Hume the historian in action, we need to consider in some detail the structure and argument of this important piece, which will in turn enable us to reconsider and reevaluate a number of commonly held views concerning Hume's historical method and practice.

At the outset of his essay on the populousness of antiquity, Hume defines his objective and sets out his own views on the relationship between historical fact and philosophical argument in a programmatic statement on the aim and methodology of this erudite dissertation:

How can we pretend to calculate [the numbers of inhabitants] of ancient cities and states, where historians have left us such imperfect traces? For my part, the matter appears to me so uncertain, that, as I intend to throw together some reflections on that head, I shall intermingle the enquiry concerning *causes* with that concerning *facts*; which ought never to be admitted, where the facts can be ascertained with any tolerable assurance. We shall, *first*, consider whether it be probable, from what we know of the situation of society in both periods, that antiquity must have been more populous; *secondly*, whether in reality it was so. If I can make it appear, that the conclusion is not so certain as is pretended, in favour of antiquity, it is all I aspire to.<sup>184</sup>

Here an important distinction is being drawn between two different types of historical analysis, which Hume labels 'enquiry concerning facts' and 'enquiry concerning causes'. The former is concerned with the collection of evidence and the establishment of historical data, while the latter only come into play in cases where the veracity of facts cannot be ascertained with any certainty, which is the case with the question of whether ancient or the modern Europe was more densely populated. 'Enquiries concerning causes' are therefore conducted in order to supply the lack of facts by means of inferences deduced from the general rules of the science of politics. This is done in

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forced Hume scholars to confront the accumulated scholarship contained in the footnotes to the populousness dissertation.

<sup>184</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 381 (Hume's italics).



the first half of the essay, which sets the scene for the second half of Hume's dissertation, 'the 'enquiry concerning facts', which consists of a more detailed examination and discussion of the surviving evidence pertaining to demographic matters. Taken together, these two halves of the essay thus presents a sustained argument in which the insights of Hume's political science are combined with those of his historical research in order to serve his self-declared aim of shaking the foundations on which the prevailing idea of the greater demographic density of the classical world rests.

In order to settle the populousness question, Hume deems it necessary 'to compare both the *domestic* and *political* situation' of ancient and modern Europe.<sup>185</sup> He proceeds to discuss two widespread 'domestic' customs of the ancient world, the prevalence of slavery and the practice of infanticide. Drawing on a wide range of sources from legal texts and orations to letters and histories, Hume seeks to reconstruct the extent to which slavery reflected as well as determined the moral outlook and the social stratification of classical societies. His self-declared aim is to consider these phenomena only insofar as they can be taken to have had a considerable impact on the demographic development of these societies. In the process of doing so, however, Hume clearly goes beyond this immediate objective of the populousness dissertation, seeking to expose the true nature of the moral and cultural standards prevailing in antiquity and question the suitability of these standards as exemplary codes of behaviour for the modern world. Comparing the ancient world with the modern does not simply serve as an aid to understanding the former, but furthermore as a way of discrediting it. Domestic slavery and widespread infanticide illustrate the fundamental inhumanity of moral practices common in classical antiquity, the former giving rise to and perpetuating 'the severe, I might say, barbarous manners of ancient times' by accustoming men to submission, flattery and cruelty.<sup>186</sup> Slavery is thus the paradigmatic example of the ancients' lack of regard for civil liberty. Due to its dissemination and severity, it far outweighs any superior liberties that ancient citizens might have had compared to modern ones and provides a clear indication that

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<sup>185</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 383.

<sup>186</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 384. For infanticide as 'the barbarous practice of the ancients', see *Essays*, p. 399.



‘human nature, in general, really enjoys more liberty at present, in the most arbitrary government of EUROPE, than it ever did during the most flourishing period of ancient times’.<sup>187</sup>

Hume then goes on to paint a broad canvas of the political scene of the classical world, sketching the outlines of political life in antiquity with broad brushstrokes and highlighting its distinguishing features by contrasting them with the modern European state system. He does so by ‘talking *pro* and *con*’, taking corresponding features of the ancient and modern world and comparing them as a means of establishing and weighing up the relative advantages and disadvantages of the ancient world with regard to those features which might have been conducive to population growth. In the process of doing so Hume evokes an idyllic view of a classical world before the rise of the Roman Empire, a world composed of small agrarian republics in which power was shared among free and equal citizens.<sup>188</sup> With regard to civil liberty and equality of fortune as well as population growth such ideal republics would indeed seem more advantageous than the ‘great monarchies’ that made up much of modern Europe. There were, however, additional circumstances, which darkened this ideal picture and acted as a severe check on the population growth that could have otherwise been expected in such small agrarian republics. Due to the close proximity of these small republics, their mutual emulation and the martial spirit of the ancients, the republics of the classical world were in a state of almost perpetual war with one another. Small states and their populations were greatly affected by war, which in many cases must have been ‘destructive to human society’.

The internal politics of these republics was hardly more peaceful than the external ones, largely due to the seemingly advantageous degree of political liberty in the ancient

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<sup>187</sup> ‘Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations’, *Essays*, p. 383.

<sup>188</sup> Here Hume clearly speaks the language of classical republicanism: ‘Where each man has his little house and field to himself, and each county had its capital, free and independent; what a happy situation of mankind! How favourable to industry and agriculture; to marriage and propagation! The prolific virtue of men, were it to act in its full extent, without that restraint which poverty and necessity imposes on it, would double the number every generation: And nothing surely can give it more liberty, than such small commonwealths, and such an equality of fortune among the citizens.’ ‘Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations’, *Essays*, 401. This passage is discussed in Sher, ‘From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment’, pp. 385-6; and J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume III: The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), p. 383.

polities, which tended to give rise to unchecked and destructive factionalism. Hume comments sardonically that '[t]hese people were extremely fond of their liberty; but seem not to have understood it very well'.<sup>189</sup> The city republics of ancient Greece were destabilized by violent factionalism, their regimes overthrown in frequently revolutions, their citizens decimated in the proscriptions and massacres which invariable followed every change of regime.<sup>190</sup> As revolutions were 'frequent in such violent governments, the disorder, diffidence, jealousy, enmity, which must prevail, are not easy for us to imagine in this age of the world'.<sup>191</sup> In 'talking *pro* and *con*', Hume thus points out that the greater degree of political liberty enjoyed by citizens of the ancient republics was outweighed by their practice of slavery as well as by the factionalism and internal instability of their democratic city states.

The disadvantages of ancient as compared to modern polities thus sprung from the very fact that the former were small, free and agrarian. Hume specifically mentions two features that the ancient world lacked; namely an established aristocracy and a law of primogeniture. It is of course no coincidence that these were characteristic features of the societies Hume and his contemporaries inhabited and which Hume sought to defend against those who extolled ancient virtue as the only proper foundation of politics. He implies that an established aristocracy could have acted as a check on the seditions of the people, while the law of primogeniture would have helped to establish security of property, which was 'rendered very precarious by the maxims of ancient

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<sup>189</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 408.

<sup>190</sup> Hume paints a vivid and bleak picture of the inhumane practices resulting from the rage of faction in classical republics: 'In ancient history, we may always observe, where one party prevailed, whether the nobles or the people (for I can observe no difference in this respect) that they immediately butchered all of the opposite party who fell into their hands, and banished such as had been so fortunate as to escape their fury. No form of process, no trial, no pardon. A fourth, a third, perhaps near half of the city was slaughtered, or expelled, every revolution; and the exiles always joined foreign enemies, and did all the mischief possible to their fellow-citizens; till fortune put it into their power to take full revenge by a new revolution.' 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 407.

<sup>191</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 407. This did not change when the Roman republic entered, indeed the history of their civil wars written by the historian Appian contains 'the most frightful picture of massacres, proscriptions, and forfeitures, that was ever presented to the world. ... The maxims of ancient politics contain, in general, so little humanity and moderation, that it seems superfluous to give any particular reason for the acts of violence committed at any particular period.' 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 414.

government'.<sup>192</sup> This was a restatement of a point Hume had made earlier on in the *Political Discourses*, in a short essay entitled 'Of Remarkable Customs'. After elaborating on a legal problem of the Athenian constitution, he sums up his view with regard to the direct democracies of the classical world:

The ATHENIAN Democracy was such a tumultuous government as we can scarcely form a notion of in the present age of the world. The whole collective body of the people voted in every law, without any limitation of property, without any distinction of rank, without controul from any magistracy or senate; and consequently without regard to order, justice, or prudence.<sup>193</sup>

There was, however, a further advantage of the moderns over the ancients, one that is repeatedly highlighted in the economic and political essays that make up the *Political Discourses*. This was the fact that the ancients had only a rudimentary knowledge of navigation, manufacture, industry, trade and commerce. In all these fields great advances had been made by the moderns and according to Hume these 'improvements and refinements' must have contributed to the encouragement of population growth.<sup>194</sup> Hume concludes his comparison of the social, political and economic state of ancient and modern Europe by weighing up their respective advantages and disadvantages:

Thus, upon comparing the whole, it seems impossible to assign any just reason, why the world should have been more populous in ancient than in modern times. The equality of property among the ancients, liberty, and the small divisions of their states, were indeed circumstances favourable to the propagation of mankind: But their wars were more bloody and destructive, their governments more factious and unsettled, commerce and manufactures more feeble and languishing, and the general police more loose and irregular. These latter disadvantages seem to form a sufficient counterbalance to the former advantages; and rather favour the opposite opinion to that which commonly prevails with regard to this subject.<sup>195</sup>

Having thus cautiously stated his opposition to the prevailing view of a greater population density in ancient times as well as indicated his general preference for the modern world, Hume moved from the 'enquiry concerning causes' to that concerning

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<sup>192</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 411. 'One general cause of the disorders, so frequent in all ancient governments, seems to have consisted in the great difficulty of establishing any Aristocracy in those ages, and the perpetual discontents and seditions of the people, whenever even the meanest and most beggarly were excluded from legislature and from public offices.' *Essays*, p. 415.

<sup>193</sup> 'Of Some Remarkable Customs', *Essays*, pp. 368-9.

<sup>194</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, pp. 419-20. This ties in with the overall argument of Hume's political economy as outlined in the *Political Discourses*.

<sup>195</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, pp. 420-1.

'facts' in accordance with his initial distinction between these two kind of historical enquiry. In so doing, he ventured onto the main field of combat on which this particular battle between the partisans of the ancients and those of the moderns was to be decided. All his elaborate previous arguments were just 'small skirmishes and frivolous rencounters' that were ultimately incapable of deciding the outcome of the contest, since an 'enquiry concerning facts' could effectively disprove any 'conjectures' Hume had put forth in the first half of his populoussness dissertation. In stating that 'there is no reasoning ... against matter of fact',<sup>196</sup> Hume admitted that with regard to historical controversies erudite scholarship took precedence over political science. In principle historical enquiry thus had the potential to render philosophical reflections obsolete. In the case of the controversy over the relative population density of the ancient as compared to the modern world, however, philosophical reflections were by no means rendered obsolete. It had been necessary to resort to a discussion of a multitude of factors that could act as 'causes' of population development in antiquity due to the fact that it was impossible to gather precise demographic data from the surviving sources, as Hume made clear when turning to his 'enquiry concerning facts'.

### **2. 2. 2. The 'Enquiry concerning Facts': Erudition and the Art of Source Criticism**

Hume commences his 'enquiry concerning facts' by stating that '[t]he facts, delivered by ancient authors, are either so uncertain or so imperfect as to afford us nothing positive in this matter'. This difficulty stems from the fact that 'all kinds of numbers are uncertain in ancient manuscripts, and have been subject to much greater corruptions than any other part of the text'.<sup>197</sup> What is needed therefore, is an enquiry into the truthfulness and reliability of ancient authors as well as a careful and critical reading of their texts. Any serious historical enquiry must consequently begin with a thorough and rigorous critique of the sources. A modern historian needs to question the accounts of his ancient

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<sup>196</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 421.

<sup>197</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 421.

predecessors, accounts that have assumed an authority beyond their actual merit and are all too often taken to represent the literal truth. Hume questions the reliability of specific sources and their dubious statements on population figures and discusses at length an often-quoted passage in Plutarch's *On the Decline of the Oracles*.<sup>198</sup> It was this passage on which Montesquieu had partly based his assertion in his *L'Esprit des Lois* that population figures had been in decline since the establishment of the Roman Empire.<sup>199</sup> It is important to note that Hume chose the field of erudite scholarship rather than that of political science when seeking to refute Montesquieu's thesis that the establishment of extensive and absolute governments had a detrimental effect on population development.

Hume's comparative assessment of ancient and modern Europe as well as his critique of classical historians posed anew some of the most vital issues of the so-called ancient-modern controversy. The 'controversy about ancient and modern learning' could not fail to have profound implications for the writing of history, implications of which Hume was acutely aware. Questions about the knowledge and writing of history underpinned the debate about the advancement of learning and literary composition, yet this was by no means the most important ground of engagement of the French *Querelle*. The issue came to the foreground in late seventeenth-century Britain with the prolonged public dispute between the statesmen turned historian, Sir William Temple, and the young scholar, William Wotton, who took the sides of the ancients and moderns respectively. While insisting that the ancients held the historical pre-eminence in the field of narrative history, Temple had conceded that the moderns might have surpassed them in antiquarian learning, yet he considered the latter a dull and decidedly un-gentlemanly exercise in amassing facts that were ultimately not worth knowing. Antiquarian scholarship found its expression in erudite commentaries that did not substantially contribute to the understanding of ancient texts and were largely irrelevant for the modern politician or man of letters. Wotton's initial response to Temple's insistence on the superiority of the ancients is contained in his *Reflections upon ancient and modern learning* (1694), a work that has been called 'the most comprehensive and fair-minded

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<sup>198</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, pp. 460-63

<sup>199</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, pp. 439-40. Cf. 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, pp. 458-60.

contribution to the war [between ancients and moderns] that appeared in either France or England during the seventeenth century'.<sup>200</sup> It was also one of the last substantial contributions to a controversy, which had largely abated by the mid-eighteenth century, but of which Hume and his contemporaries were none the less acutely aware.<sup>201</sup> It is worth having a closer look at Wotton's sophisticated argument, since it reveals the full force of the 'modern' position that Hume was to adopt and integrate into the sceptical framework of his own historical outlook.

William Wotton's most astonishing and controversial claim was that the moderns had superseded the ancients in their knowledge of antiquity. In other words, modern scholars knew the classical world better than the ancient authors who had inhabited it. Yet Wotton's statement is more complex and more qualified than that, hinging as it did on the assumption that the decisive difference between the ancients and the moderns consisted in the invention of printing, which allowed a greater circulation of knowledge and did much to prevent the loss or corruption of important texts:

Wherefore if one reflects upon the Alteration which Printing has introduced into the State of Learning, ... it will not seem ridiculous to say, That *Joseph Scaliger, Isaac Causabon, Salmasius, Henricus Valesius, Selden, Usher, Bochart,* and other Philologers of their Stamp, may have had a very comprehensive View of Antiquity, such a one as Strangers to those Matters, can have no Idea of; nay a much greater than, taken altogether, any of the Ancients themselves ever had, or indeed, could have. *Demosthenes* and *Aristophanes* knew the State of their own Times better than *Causabon* or *Salmasius*: But it is a Question whether *Boëthius* or *Sidonius Apollinaris* knew the State of *Demosthenes*'s Time so well; yet these also are Ancients to us, and have left behind them Writings of very estimable Value. Literary Commerce was anciently not so frequent as now it is....<sup>202</sup>

**Against Temple, Wotton thus defended the useful contribution made by antiquarian scholars. In so doing he questioned the authority of those ancient writers who had written their accounts based on second-hand knowledge and who had been surpassed in their knowledge of their own time by the great erudite scholars of the seventeenth century. Hume, who had drawn on some of these**

<sup>200</sup> Spadafora, *Idea of Progress*, p. 25.

<sup>201</sup> Hume appears to have possessed the first edition of Wotton's *Reflections* (1694); cf. Norton and Norton, *David Hume Library*, p. 137.

<sup>202</sup> William Wotton, *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (London: P. Buck, 1694), p. 312.

**antiquarian scholars to build up his own case in the populousness essay, made a similar point, though in his argument the significance of the invention of printing lay not so much in the fact that it had prevented the loss or corruption of works, but rather in that it had obliged historians to be more truthful and accurate than they might otherwise have been:**

In general, there is more candour and sincerity in ancient historians, but less exactness and care, than in the moderns. Our speculative factions, especially those of religion, throw such an illusion over our minds, that men seem to regard impartiality to their adversaries and to heretics, as a vice or weakness: But the commonness of books, by means of printing, has obliged modern historians to be more careful in avoiding contradictions and incongruities. DIODORUS SICULUS is a good writer, but it is with pain I see his narration contradict, in so many particulars, the two most authentic pieces of all GREEK history, to wit, XENOPHON'S expedition, and DEMOSTHENES'S orations. PLUTARCH and APPIAN seem scarce ever to have read CICERO'S epistles.<sup>203</sup>

Hume, it is implied, read them all and was thus in a position to appreciate the contradictions inherent in the body of classical literature. This was the domain of the 'critic', whose task it was to evaluate the reliability of each source and draw fine distinctions between more or less reliable authors, sometimes even between more or less reliable parts of a given work.

At this point, we must return once more to Wotton's *Reflections*. Discussing 'the Historical Exactness of the Ancients, compared to that of the Moderns', Wotton pointed out that there were instances which tended

to justify those Modern Writers, who have, with great Freedom, accused some of the Greatest of the Ancients, of Carelessness in their Accounts of Civil Occurrences, as well as of Natural Rarities; and who have dared to believe in their own Reason, against the positive Evidence of an old Historian, in Matters wherein one would think that he had greater Opportunities of knowing the certain Truth, than any Man that has lived for several Ages.<sup>204</sup>

The modern historian was thus not only entitled, but even obliged, to question the authority of his ancient predecessors, even in matters in which the ancients could be assumed to have had inside information. Hume was one of those who 'dared to believe in their own Reason' even against the authority of the ancients and the exercise of his

<sup>203</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 422 note.

<sup>204</sup> Wotton, *Reflections*, p. 316.



critical faculty is brilliantly displayed in the populousness essay. This was the domain of what Hume called ‘the critical art’, which he defends in terms similar to those employed by Wotton:

The critical art may very justly be suspected of temerity, when it pretends to correct or dispute the plain testimony of ancient historians by any probable or analogical reasonings: Yet the licence of authors upon all subjects, particularly with regard to numbers, is so great, that we ought still to retain a kind of doubt or reserve, whenever the facts advanced depart in the least from the common bounds of nature and experience.<sup>205</sup>

Hume proceeded to ‘give an instance with regard to modern history’, incidentally drawn from Wotton’s adversary, Sir William Temple, whose own historical work is made to appear at least as unreliable as those of the ancients he had defended. Hume further illustrates his point by reference to Temple’s one time secretary and protégée, Jonathan Swift. According to Hume, relying on ancient satirists as historical sources was as misleading as taking *Gulliver’s Travels* as an accurate reflection of early Hanoverian Britain.

Discrediting certain ancient texts was something the Humanists had already done, yet ‘moderns’ such as Wotton and Hume took matters further in not even exempting the classical texts beloved by Humanist writers, such as Livy’s monumental *Ab urbe condita*, the master-narrative of the establishment of the Roman republic and its rise to predominance in the Mediterranean. Discussing the early history of Rome and dismissing ‘the fabulous history of [Rome’s] ITALIC wars’, Hume asks whether there is one grain of truth in all of Livy.<sup>206</sup> Since much of Livy’s account concerned the early ages of Rome for which his work was the only surviving source, the truthfulness of his narration could not be tested against other sources, such as public orations, memoirs or legal texts. In a long and somewhat discursive note to another of the *Political Discourses*, ‘Of the Balance of Power’ Hume sets out this problem and seeks to establish the criterion for ascertaining the veracity and accuracy of Livy’s narration. This note, which Hume later omitted from editions of his *Essays and Treatises*, seems to have been entirely overlooked by Hume scholars, yet it merits quotation in full, since it

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<sup>205</sup> ‘Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations’, Hume, *Essays*, p. 641. This passage is only to be found in editions of Hume’s *Essays* which were published prior to 1760.

<sup>206</sup> ‘Of the Balance of Power’, *Essays*, p. 336.



reflects the thought-process by which Hume arrived at his sceptical standards of source criticism:

There have strong suspicions, of late, arisen among critics, and, in my opinion, not without reason, concerning the first ages of the ROMAN history; as if they were almost entirely fabulous, 'till after the sacking of the city by the GAULS; and were even doubtful for some time afterwards, 'till the GREEKS began to give attention to ROMAN affairs, and commit them to writing. This scepticism, however, seems to me, scarcely defensible in its full extent, with regard to the domestic history of ROME, which has some air of truth and probability, and cou'd scarce be the invention of an historian, who had so little morals or judgment as to indulge himself in fiction and romance. The revolutions seem so well proportion'd to their causes: The progress of the factions is so conformable to political experience: The manners and maxims of the age are so uniform and natural, that scarce any real history affords more just reflection and improvement. Is not MACHIAVEL'S comment on LIVY (a work surely of great judgment and genius) founded entirely on this period, which is represented as fabulous. I wou'd willingly, therefore, in my private sentiments, divide the matter with these critics; and allow, that the battles and victories and triumphs of those ages had been extremely falsify'd by family memoirs, as CICERO says they were: But as in the accounts of domestic factions, there were two opposite relations transmitted to posterity, this both serv'd as a check upon fiction, and enabled latter historians to gather some truth from comparison and reasoning. Half of the slaughter which LIVY commits on the ÆQUI and the VOLSCI, would depopulate FRANCE and GERMANY; and that historian, tho' perhaps he may be justly charged as superficial, is at last shock'd himself with the incredibility of his narration. The same love of exaggeration seems to have magnify'd the numbers of the ROMANS in their armies, and *census*.<sup>207</sup>

This dense footnote illustrates Hume's approach to sources and exemplified his sustained source criticism as practised in the populousness essay and its companion pieces in the *Political Discourses*. The problem is clearly raised by the earlier parts of Livy's work, which were deemed 'entirely fabulous' by some critics. Could it be that all of Livy's narration and, by extension, all of ancient history, is just such an unverifiable story, a fable which we have come to accept, but for which we have no external evidence? If so, how can we believe in the veracity of history at all? Hume does not go so far; indeed in writing that this kind of 'scepticism ... seems to me, scarcely defensible in its full extent', he appears to be confronting the spectre of Pyrrhonism.

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<sup>207</sup> 'Of the Balance of Power', *Essays*, pp. 633-4. This note was later omitted from editions of Hume's *Essays and Treatises*.

This is a distinctly philosophical problem not framed in Wotton's polemic and one to which conventional arguments about the progress of learning offer no solution. Hume had to find a philosophical solution by stating the necessary preconditions for a belief in history. In doing so he can draw heavily on his own earlier accounts of belief, probability and sceptical suspense of judgement. This is evident from the assumption underlying his argument, namely that the criteria for evaluation Livy's narration lie in the probability of what he narrates. The science of man in general and that of politics in particular thus provide the conceptual apparatus for Hume's sophisticated exercise in source critique and reconstruction.

Hume almost goes so far as stating that Livy's account must be true simply because Machiavelli could write an intelligent account loosely conceived as a commentary on the early parts his History, the *Discourses on the first Decade of Titus Livius*. Yet the point is important, since it highlights the fact that Hume approaches Livy's political history from the point of view of a political philosopher, just as Machiavelli had done.<sup>208</sup> This perspective presupposes a sharp division between what we would now call foreign and domestic policy, a division first made by and echoed in Hume's earlier political essays. Like Machiavelli's great predecessor, the Greek politician turned historian Polybius, Hume maintained that the 'we can lay down no fixed rule about the former, but the latter is a regular process'.<sup>209</sup> According to this distinction, foreign policy could not be accounted for by general laws, as it depended on the caprice of a few statesmen. Hume's Science of Politics as laid out in these earlier essays was largely an attempt to account for the phenomena of the political world by reference to the most fundamental determining factor, the constitution of a polity. This is what made the 'science of politics' such an exact science, capable of being developed into a classificatory system with fixed 'rules' and 'axioms'. Having developed this system, Hume could now judge the probability of Livy's account of the internal revolutions, the 'progress of the factions' and the 'manners and maxims'. As far as the 'fabulous history' of Rome's

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<sup>208</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (first publ. 1981; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), pp. 56-7.

<sup>209</sup> This is Polybius formulation, cf. Polybius, *The Histories*, tr. W. R. Paton (6 vols.; London: Heinemann, 1922-27), iii (1923), p. 397.

wars was concerned, the improbability of Livy's account was too self-evident – even, it appears, to the ancient historian himself – to merit any further refutation. There was evidently a 'love of exaggeration' in the ancient historians, which allowed Hume to question the veracity and accuracy of the dubious demographic figures they provided and on which modern antiquaries had largely based their view of the superior populousness of ancient nations.

**Yet there is more to Hume's approach that is highlighted in this passage than a straightforward application of the conceptual apparatus of his political science. In addition to this, Hume discusses the kinds of sources that had been preserved and were available to historians of this period. While 'the battles and victories and triumphs of those ages had been extremely falsify'd by family memoirs' as Hume maintains following Cicero, in the case of 'the accounts of domestic factions, there were two opposite relations transmitted to posterity, this both serv'd as a check upon fiction, and enabled latter historians to gather some truth from comparison and reasoning'. Ancient party historians – like those of the modern era – had to be careful in order to avoid the contradictions arising from rival accounts of the same events. While single surviving accounts of one event forced the modern historian to accept or reject such accounts wholesale, the fact that more than one text had survived meant that the insights could be gained 'from comparison and reasoning'. This would be highly useful for Hume's narrative of Stuart history where he was confronted with both kinds of sources, namely the memoirs of protagonists and the party histories in which the events of the Civil Wars had been enshrined.**

For now it is worth noting that even the most unreliable sources, such as Xenophon's *Cyropedia*, which Hume regarded as 'altogether a romance' with regard to the facts related therein, could yield important and revealing information concerning 'the prevailing notion[s] of ancient times'.<sup>210</sup> This leads us to enquire just how Hume, 'the critic', read his sources and extracted from them the information he required to build up his case. By drawing on a wide range of sources and seeking to 'collect all the lights afforded us by scattered passages in ancient authors', Hume thus sought to avoid

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<sup>210</sup> 'Of the Balance of Power', *Essays*, p. 332.

overgeneralizations and arrived at a sceptical and balanced conclusion.<sup>211</sup> The broad range of subjects Hume dealt with in his populoussness dissertation testifies to his conviction that demographic development was not solely determined by social and political circumstances, but was moreover contingent on a wide variety of factors including political convictions, religious beliefs, moral codes, social customs and sexual mores. These were reflected in common practices and shared attitudes which characterized ancient societies yet were more often hinted at rather than directly expressed in the classical texts. While the population question provided the guiding principle and overriding criterion for Hume's reading and research, the very process of that research necessarily led him to collect data on a wide range of cultural information and thus in effect build up a database which he could utilize for other literary and philosophical projects in which he was engaged during this period. The breadth of Hume's reading meant that the classical sources gathered in the process of it could be used for any number of philosophical and polemical purposes, extending far beyond the populoussness discourse for which the reading was originally undertaken.

### **2. 3. Hume's Fragmentary History of Classical Civilizations**

This is probably best exemplified by the companion pieces to the populoussness essay in the *Political Discourses* of 1752 as well as by another work probably composed in the early 1750s, the *Natural History of Religion*, later published as part of Hume's *Four Dissertations* of 1757. In the following I shall briefly survey these and some further works for the light they collectively shed on Hume's use of his classical reading. This will in turn allow a broader assessment of the breadth, nature and significance of Hume's varied uses of the information gathered in the course of his classical reading that went beyond the immediate purpose of his reading, the population dissertation.

The breadth of Hume's reading and the various uses to which he put this reading are clearly reflected in the numerous and sometimes extensive citations made in the

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<sup>211</sup> 'Of the Populoussness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 437.

economical and political essays that taken together comprise the *Political Discourses* of 1752.<sup>212</sup> Of the twelve essays that comprise this collection, only the last two have no classical citations.<sup>213</sup> The remaining essays all feature numerous references to classical authorities. While such references to classical authorities are occasioned by the historical nature of the populism dissertation and two essays on Greek and Roman as well as British political usages, 'Of the Balance of Power' and 'Of Some Remarkable Customs', it is harder to account for the frequency with which they occur in the seven remaining essays, which are concerned with economical issues such as trade, money and taxes. Taken together, these latter essays present Hume's sophisticated and influential analysis of commercial society, which, according to Hume, was a modern phenomenon of which the ancients were largely unaware. Hume's depiction of classical antiquity is used as a kind of foil against which contemporary commercial society can be portrayed in a way that allows Hume to accentuate what he considered to be the essentially modern nature of commercial society. While the peculiar and advantageous nature of modern commercial society could have been equally well illustrated by contrast with the much better documented economic conditions of medieval Europe, these essays contain only the sketchiest of outlines of the feudal order and dwell instead at length on the political, social and economic conditions of the ancient world.

While the *Political Discourses* provide what is probably the most interesting use of classical sources, Hume's use of these sources goes far beyond this work. Even before the *Political Discourses* went into their third edition, Hume was concerned with republishing this set of essays together with his earlier *Essays* and *Enquiries* in a

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<sup>212</sup> It would be possible to write a history of Hume's works from the footnotes upwards, since the numerous references Hume included in or later added to his various works are highly revealing and tell an interesting tale about Hume's reading and the multiple uses he put his sources to. In the present context I am however only concerned with what these footnotes indicate about Hume's reading and use of the classics.

<sup>213</sup> The two last essays of the *Political Discourses* are 'Of the Protestant Succession' and 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth', *Essays*, pp. 502-511, 512-529. The absence of classical citations in these two essays is easily explained by the fact the former, which deals exclusively with the contested issue of the Hanoverian succession, was written before Hume's reading of the classics at Ninewells and had originally been intended for publication as part of the *Three Essays, Moral and Political* of 1748. The latter takes the form of a thought experiment outlining the constitutional framework of an ideal republic and displays Hume's in-depth engagement with and attempt to improve upon the constitution model proposed by James Harrington in his *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656).

collection of his post-*Treatise* writings entitled *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*. This was the kind of format in which most of Hume's essays would continue to appear and be read during his lifetime and, due to its success, numerous editions of this collection were produced. Hume used the opportunity afforded by successive reissues of his works to make sometimes substantial alterations to his earlier essays.<sup>214</sup> This is particularly apparent in the first, four-volume edition of the *Essays and Treatises* (1753-4) for which Hume added numerous classical references to his older essays, sometimes to great effect.<sup>215</sup> This is well illustrated by a note added at to the essay 'Of the Original Contract', initially published as part of the three essays issued in 1748 and written, as Hume stated in a letter to Lord Elibank, to counter the party ideologies. Hume's point in this essay is that the idea of an original contract, on which legitimate government was supposed to have been founded, ran contrary to both the nature of politics and all records of history. At the end of the essay we find a final note, which provides an unexpected and rather curious reference to a famous passage in Plato's dialogue, *Critias*, which deals with the final days and last reflections of Socrates:

The only passage I meet with in antiquity, where the obligation of obedience to government is ascribed to a promise, is in PLATO'S *Crito*: where SOCRATES refuses to escape from prison, because he had tacitly promised to obey the laws. Thus he builds a *tory* consequence of passive obedience, on a *whig* foundation of the original contract.<sup>216</sup>

Whig and Tory party ideologies is here presented through the spectrum of Plato's dialogues, which provide an unexpected twist at the end of this essay. Here, as elsewhere, classical literature is used as an alienation device, which allows an over-

<sup>214</sup> These as well as Hume's statements in his correspondence reveal the importance he attached to a continual revision of his works and the care he put into these revisions.

<sup>215</sup> Thus the insertion of an indirect quotation from Dionysius of Halicarnassus provides Hume with a new concluding statement for his the essay 'Of Polygamy and Divorces', first published in 1742. Cf. *Essays*, p. 190, cf. p. 629.

<sup>216</sup> 'Of the Original Contract', *Essays*, p. 487, cf. p. 644. The text of this footnote was transferred to the main text in the 1770 edition of the *Essays and Treatises*, in which Hume also inserted a further classical citation which sums up his entire argument in a nutshell and on which the essay in its revised form ends: 'The crime of rebellion among the ancients was commonly expressed by the terms νεωτερίζειν, *novas res molari*.' Cf. Hume, *Essays and treatises on several subjects* (4 vols.; London: T. Cadell; Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1770), ii, 296. Miller, drawing on the variorum apparatus of Greene and Grose, fails to notice that this sentence is not in any of the pre-1770 editions of Hume's essays.

familiar notion to be seen through the prism of classical literature. This note also reflects the fact that Hume thought he had sufficiently combed classical literature.<sup>217</sup>

Yet during these years, Hume prepared his two major works on religion, the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* and the *Natural History of Religion*. Despite the fact that the former was not published during Hume's lifetime, and the latter was only published in 1757 as part of the *Four Dissertations*, we have enough evidence to suggest that they were both works of the period Hume spent in literary retreat at Ninewells between 1749 and 1751.<sup>218</sup> Whereas the *Dialogues* are of course in a large measure modelled on a key classical text on the philosophy of religion, Cicero's *De natura deorum*. Nevertheless, they contain only a handful of specific references to classical authorities, a fact which is easily accounted for by the literary form and the philosophical nature of this work. The *Natural History of Religion*, on the other hand, contains what Hume described to his publisher as 'a good deal of Literature' in the form of numerous and sometimes discursive footnotes,<sup>219</sup> which testify to the essentially historical character of this piece (though what exactly Hume understood as 'natural history' will be discussed in a later section). In these footnotes we again encounter the texts Hume had perused at Ninewells and employed to such great effect in his populoussness dissertation, that is, authors such as Strabo, Xenophon, Livy, Tacitus and especially Diodorus Siculus.<sup>220</sup>

Yet, on closer examination, there appears to be a noticeable difference in the way Hume used these and other classical authorities. Whereas he still uses them as

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<sup>217</sup> Hume's remarks on Socrates, later to be incorporated into the main text, are probably best read as an in-joke. The notion that the inimitable Socrates might have been the only one to square the apparently irreconcilable doctrines of passive obedience and original contract must have been amusing to Hume's reader who were over-familiar with these ideological positions.

<sup>218</sup> It is evident from a long letter he wrote to Elliot in March 1751 that Hume wrote much of the *Dialogues* at Ninewells, even though he was dissuaded from publishing them in his lifetime and kept making revisions to this work until the very end of his life. The date of composition of the *Natural History of Religion* is unclear and there is no mention of it in Hume correspondence until June 1755, when he mentions it as one of 'four short Dissertations, which I have kept some Years by me, in order to polish them as much as possible.' (Hume to Andrew Millar, 12 June 1755, *HL*, i, 223). It is generally assumed that these four pieces including the *Natural History of Religion* 'had probably been composed during the three-year period 1749-51'. Cf. Mossner, 'Hume's *Four Dissertations*', 37 and *Life of Hume*, p. 321.

<sup>219</sup> Hume to Andrew Millar, 12 June 1755, *HL*, i, 223.

<sup>220</sup> Diodorus Siculus' *Library of History* is the most often quoted work in both the populoussness dissertation and the *Natural History of Religion*.



illustrations, he also invokes '[t]hese wise heathens' as an authoritative voice that lends support and credibility to his own, frequently heterodox arguments about religion.<sup>221</sup> Thus, he draws a striking parallel between two exponents of religious thinking in late antiquity:

The learned, philosophical *Varro*, discoursing of religion, pretends not to deliver any thing beyond probabilities and appearances. Such was his good sense and moderation! But the passionate, the zealous *Augustin*, insults the noble *Roman* on his scepticism and reserve, and professes the most thorough belief and assurance. A heathen poet, however, contemporary with the saint, absurdly esteems the religious system of the latter so false, that even the credulity of children, he says, could not engage them to believe it.<sup>222</sup>

The polemic nature of this passage is unmistakable. By contrasting the 'learned, philosophical Varro' with 'the passionate, the zealous *Augustin*', Hume clearly reveals where his own sympathies lie. In the light of his evident sympathy for what he considered as the less dogmatic spirit of Greek and Roman paganism, the last sentence about the 'heathen poet' Rutilius Claudius Namatianus, and his pagan critique of Christianity is blatantly ironic insofar as Hume's dismissal of the Roman poet's notions as absurd barely conceals his endorsement of the pagan poets' scathing verdict on the Augustinian brand of Christian theology.<sup>223</sup>

This brief survey of the varied uses to which Hume put his classical reading reveals that they served a multiplicity of purposes, ranging from providing illustrative examples to allowing Hume to express opinions and pass judgements through the medium of classical literature. As we have seen, however, at Ninewells Hume had read classical texts primarily for the relevant historical evidence they yielded. This use of the Classics as sources from which information concerning the political, legal, social, cultural and religious practices of the ancients could be extracted, is reflected both in the economic essays that make up most of the *Political Discourses* and in the *Natural History of Religion*, where the classical historians and orators feature next to the testimony of travellers into distant parts of the world. On the basis of these classical sources, Hume's

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<sup>221</sup> *NHR*, p. 77 note.

<sup>222</sup> *NHR*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>223</sup> Hume identified the 'heathen poet' in a footnote as 'Claudii Rutilii', that is Rutilius Claudius Namatianus, a Roman poet of the fifth century BC, whose poem *De Reditu Suo* contains a pagan critique of Christianity. Cf. *NHR*, p. 81



*Political Discourses* and *Natural History* thus develop a distinctly *historical* argument, often built around a comparative perspective that contrasts ancient with modern usages, moral codes and political institutions.<sup>224</sup> Written from such a comparative perspective, these give a full account of ancient manners, an account which highlights the essential otherness of classical civilizations and thereby emphasizes the cultural chasm which separates us from the past.<sup>225</sup> In these pieces the past is approached not solely from the point of view of the moral philosopher and through the principle of sympathy, but moreover from a distinctly historical viewpoint which stresses the need for a detailed recreation of past manners and beliefs as a necessary prerequisite to understanding of past ages.

Once these scattered pieces are viewed from the perspective of the classical reading that informs them, they appear as fragments of a whole, in terms of their sources as well as their subject matter. Taken together, they can thus be seen to form a fragmentary history of ancient civilizations, comprising most of the fields of social culture / cultural endeavour (ranging from society and politics to customs and manners, to moral and religious beliefs). Following his survey of the political, social and economic conditions of the ancient world in his *populousness* dissertation and its companion pieces in the *Political Discourses*, Hume extended his enquiry into the field of culture and the history of manners and mores, mainly conducted in a short but dense piece entitled ‘A

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<sup>224</sup> This is sometimes done for overtly polemical reasons, such as when Hume uses aspects of the classical past as an ideal to be set in contrast with conditions of the modern world he seeks to castigate. This is certainly the case in the essay ‘Of Suicide’, composed some time in the early 1750s, which might have been inspired by a suicide of one of Hume’s companions in 1746. Hume’s immediate response to this suicide precipitates his statements on the permissibility of suicide in the later essay, cf. Hume to John Home of Ninewells, 4 October 1746, *HL*, I, 97-8. Hume’s use of the ancients as a counterfoil to his own time is particularly apparent in the highly topical dedication affixed to some 1757 editions of the *Four Dissertations* (1757; reprint Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 1992), pp. i-vii. This took the form of an open letter to his friend John Home, elicited by the Edinburgh controversy over the latter’s play *Douglas*. For the background see Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 1985), pp. 65-92.

<sup>225</sup> For Hume’s philosophy of history see S. K. Wertz and Donald W. Livingston who have countered the all too common misrepresentation of Hume as a historical and cultural universalist, cf. Wertz, ‘Hume, History and Human Nature’, in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (1975), 481-496; Livingston, *Hume’s philosophy of common life* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 210-46. Mark Salber Phillips has identified this concept of ‘historical distance’ as a distinctive feature of eighteenth-century historical discourse and writing, exhibited with particular clarity in Hume’s historical works, cf. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), chapter 2, esp. pp. 61-2, 77-8.

Dialogue' and to be examined in greater detail below. Finally, in the *Natural History of Religion*, he surveyed the ancients' views of religion and toleration. These texts explore different aspects of that historical reality and contribute to the overall picture emerging from these pieces. These surveys include comments on the 'spirit' of antiquity, which is portrayed by Hume as having been more rustic, equal and martial than that of the moderns. These enquiries can also be shown to have been in a large measure based on the sources of the populousness dissertation, that is, the texts Hume perused in the period 1749-51. Hume's reading of the Classics at Ninewells is thus a unifying element crucial to the understanding of the genesis of his mature works composed and published in this period, as it provides us with the missing perspective from which his diverse works composed at Ninewells can appear as a unity.

Hume thus appears as a thorough student of antiquity, something that does not seem to have been lost on his contemporaries. As we have seen, he even referred to passages from his reading in his correspondence and the same appears to have been true of his conversation. This is confirmed by a remark made by James Boswell after his first meeting with Hume in the summer of 1758. Boswell (always one to pick up on the essence of a conversation) comments that 'Mr Hume ... has apply'd himself with great attention to the study of the ancients, and is likewise a great historian'.<sup>226</sup> Hume's renown as an erudite scholar is here mentioned alongside, and even prior to his reputation as a historian, which was by then already well established.<sup>227</sup> Hume's growing acclaim as an historian of England did therefore not fully eclipse his interest in the study of classical civilizations. This leads to the question, whether Hume did in fact try to bring these capacities together in an attempt to combine his knowledge of the classical sources with his skill as a narrative historian. This question does not seem to have been asked by recent Hume scholarship, but it is posed in an interesting way by Hume's nineteenth-century biographer, John Hill Burton. In the course of discussing Hume's 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', Burton goes on to remark that

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<sup>226</sup> Quoted in Mossner, *Forgotten Hume*, p. 171.

<sup>227</sup> By 1758 both volumes of Hume's *History of Great Britain* (1754 and 1756) had been published and the work had begun to be widely read and appreciated after an initially critical reception and slow sales of the first volume.

In the perusal of this essay one is inclined to regret that Hume afterwards made a portion of modern Europe the object of his historical labours, instead of taking up some department of the history of classical antiquity. The full blown lustre of Greek and Roman greatness had far more of his sympathy than the history of his own countrymen, and their slow progress from barbarism to civilization. The materials were nearly all confined to the great spirits of antiquity, with whom he delighted to hold converse, instead of involving that heap of documentary matter with which the historian of Britain must grapple; acts of parliament, journals, writs, legal documents, &c. – all things which his soul abhorred.<sup>228</sup>

This passage contains two interesting assertions. The notion that Hume would have been uniquely qualified to undertake a narrative history of classical antiquity is confirmed by our investigation into his knowledge and use of classical sources, even though Burton clearly overstates Hume's admiration for classical civilizations and his alleged disregard for the great trajectory of English history. Burton goes further when asserting that this task would have been made easier and more enjoyable by the very absence of the dry source material out of which English constitutional history would need to be reconstructed. Indeed, as we shall shortly see, Hume was decidedly sceptical about the prospect of writing 'some department of the history of classical antiquity'. The question remains whether Hume ever considered writing such a history. Hume did mention 'my historical Projects' and 'some history' in letters dating from the late 1740s, and these could well have included projects for a history of classical antiquity, a popular subject at the time, but we do not have any direct evidence from the late 1740s or early 1750s to corroborate such an assumption. There are, however, tantalizing statements he made in 1759, which reflect his thoughts about the problem of writing classical history. They occur in the context of recommendations he made to William Robertson, who was then in search of a subject for a historical work to follow his *History of Scotland*, published that year. Hume discussed possible subjects with several of their mutual friends and came up with the following suggestion: 'May I venture to suggest to you, the antient History, particularly that of Greece.'<sup>229</sup> In a second letter Hume discourages Robertson

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<sup>228</sup> John Hill Burton, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: William Tait, 1846), i, 363.

<sup>229</sup> Hume to William Robertson, 8 February 1759, *NHL*, p. 47.

from pursuing his envisaged project of a *History of the Reign of Charles V* and discusses the problems involved in writing the history of ancient Greece:<sup>230</sup>

The antient Greek History has several Recommendations, particularly the good Authors from which it must be drawn: But this same Circumstance becomes an Objection, when more narrowly considered: For what can you do in most places with these Authors, but transcribe & translate them? No Letters or State Papers from which you could [sic] correct their Errors, or authenticate their Narration, or supply their Defects. Besides, [Charles Rollin's *Histoire ancienne*] is so well wrote with respect to Style, that with superficial People it passes for sufficient.... I doubt not but such a work would be successful, notwithstanding all these discouraging Circumstances. The Subject is noble, & Rollin is by no means equal to it.<sup>231</sup>

Hume's advice to Robertson is highly revealing and contains the outlines of an answer to Burton's question. All this suggests that Hume had thought long and hard about the possibility of writing classical history. We do not, of course, know when Hume first formed these reflections about the possibility of writing narratives of Greek history. In their present form they can be assumed to reflect Hume's opinion as presented in and shaped by the discussions among his fellow literati in Edinburgh, sparked off by Robertson's search for a subject for his next historical work. There are, however, indications that Hume had begun thinking about these issues at a much earlier date. In his 1752 essay 'Of the Balance of Power', Hume observed that Greek history was far less familiar to his contemporaries than that of the Romans.<sup>232</sup> Indeed, the idea that classical and especially Greek history could be rewritten for a modern audience was a relatively new one.<sup>233</sup> Modern histories of Greece had just begun to appear and there was still a considerable gap in the market.<sup>234</sup> The most renowned as well as influential attempt to rewrite the history of classical civilizations, including that of Greece, was

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<sup>230</sup> Robertson persisted in this undertaking and eventually published his *History of the Reign of Charles V* in 1769.

<sup>231</sup> Hume to William Robertson, 7 April 1759, *NHR*, p. 48.

<sup>232</sup> 'The reason, why it is supposed, that the ancients were entirely ignorant of the *balance of power*, seems to be drawn from the ROMAN history more than the GRECIAN; and as the transactions of the former are generally more familiar to us, we have thence formed all our conclusions.' 'Of the Balance of Power', *Essays*, p. 335.

<sup>233</sup> So much so that several writers could claim to be the first to have undertaken a modern retelling of classical history, cf. Wootton, 'Hume, the historian', pp. 284.

<sup>234</sup> See Giovanna Ceserani, 'Narrative, Interpretation, and Plagiarism in Mr. Robertson's 1778 *History of Ancient Greece*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 66 (2005), 413-436.

Charles Rollin's *Histoire ancienne* (1730-38).<sup>235</sup> Hume appears to have possessed an edition of this work and there is a critical reference to Rollin's discussion of Greek history in his *Treatise*.<sup>236</sup> The two letters to William Robertson suggest that Hume's awareness of the limitations of Rollin's work, which he admired only for 'a certain Facility & Sweetness of Narration', seem only to have increased over the years.<sup>237</sup> In Hume's eyes, the Frenchman's popular success and widespread renown did not therefore present an insurmountable obstacle for any aspiring historian of Greek antiquity.

Instead, Hume suggested that the main problem lay with the classical text themselves. Hume's suggestion that the modern historian could do little more with these 'good Authors' than 'transcribe & translate' their narrations could be read as an endorsement of conventional wisdom, if the reasons which led him to this positions did not differ so widely from those of his predecessors. These had held that the narratives written by classical historians were authoritative and could not be surpassed, for the reason that they had themselves witnessed the events they described or had at least had access to now lost primary sources.<sup>238</sup> As we have seen, Hume had ceased to believe that the classical historians were the authoritative voice to which nothing new could be added. Following Wotton, Hume had made a case for the superior knowledge of the modern due to the critical tools available to them. Yet, this presupposed that a range of primary or non-narrative sources to be preserved, against which the narratives of classical historians could be checked. While this was evidently true for cultural history, which could be reconstructed from letters, orations, dialogues and a range of other sources, it was not true for political history and Hume regretted the absence of these types of sources. Thus, while Burton was correct in claiming that Hume 'delighted to hold

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<sup>235</sup> Charles Rollin, *Histoire Ancienne* (13 vols.; Paris: Estienne, 1730-38). This was followed by a *Histoire Romaine* (7 vols.; Paris: Estienne, 1738-48). For Rollin's influence on eighteenth-century historiography see Ceserani, 'Narrative, Interpretation, and Plagiarism', 416ff.

<sup>236</sup> While Rollin is mentioned in book II of the *Treatise* as '[a] late celebrated historian', his interpretation of a particular historical episode is cited but not accepted by Hume, cf. *Treatise*, p. 272-3. Hume appears to have owned five volumes of the first edition of Rollin's *Histoire Ancienne*, see Norton and Norton, *David Hume Library*, pp. 32, 125.

<sup>237</sup> 'I think Rollin's Success might encourage you, nor need you be in the least intimidated by his Merit. That Author has no other Merit, but a certain Facility & Sweetness of Narration; but has loaded his Work with fifty Puerilities.' Hume to William Robertson, 8 February 1759, *NHL*, p. 47.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Wotton, 'Hume, the historian', p. 284.

converse' with the classical authors, he was inaccurate in stating this would have suited him better as it would not have involved 'that heap of documentary matter with which the historian of Britain must grapple; acts of parliament, journals, writs, legal documents, &c. – all things which his soul abhorred'.<sup>239</sup> The reason why Hume was sceptical about the prospects of writing ancient history was not despite, but precisely because, of the absence of such 'documentary' evidence in the form of 'Letters or State Papers'. Matters were even worse when neither reliable narrations nor documentary evidence had been preserved for a given period, such as the early history of Rome.<sup>240</sup> Hume's reading of the Classics had made him aware of this profound problem, essentially a problem of sources and source criticism, involved in any attempt to write narrative history on a classical subject.

It is therefore quite possible that Hume at some point intended to write a history of a classical subject such as the history of Greece that he discussed with his fellow literati and proposed to Robertson. In the above-quoted 1747 letter to Henry Home, Hume speaks of his return to study at Ninewells with 'my Xenophon or Polybius in my Hand', and we also find him alluding to 'my historical Projects'. The following year he wrote to James Oswald of Dunnikier that 'I have long had an intention, in my riper years, of composing some History'.<sup>241</sup> These historical projects are not specified and we cannot therefore ascertain whether they might have included classical subjects or whether such an idea was formed during his study of the classics. Since Hume never followed through on any idea he may have had of writing a narrative of classical history, we need to turn once more to the kind of history he did write in this period. The latter did not take the form of a narrative and was thus not prone to the kind of problems Hume associated with the writing of classical history. Instead, this fragmentary cultural history took a form which Hume's French contemporaries would have called a *peinture* of classical

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<sup>239</sup> Burton, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, i, 363.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Hume's statement in 'Of the Balance of Power', first published in 1752: 'There have strong suspicions, of late, arisen among critics, and, in my opinion, not without reason, concerning the first ages of the ROMAN history; as if they were almost entirely fabulous, 'till after the sacking of the city by the GAULS; and were even doubtful for some time afterwards, 'till the GREEKS began to give attention to ROMAN affairs, and commit them to writing.' *Essays*, pp. 633-4.

<sup>241</sup> Hume to Henry Home, [January 1747], *NHL*, pp. 23-4, and Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 29 January 1748, *HL*, i, 109.

civilization in its manners, mores, etc., as opposed to a *récit* of its political and military transactions.<sup>242</sup> Hume himself did not use these terms, nor did he define the undertaking suggested by and based on his reading of the Classics. In order to understand the conceptual assumptions underpinning this project we need to turn to a last piece suggested by his enquiries into ‘the public & domestic Life of the Ancients’. This is a short piece simply entitled *A Dialogue*, which contains Hume’s most lucid statements on his philosophy of history.

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<sup>242</sup> See the French antiquarian Jean-Baptiste de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye’s use of these terms: ‘L’histoire d’un peuple consiste moins dans le récit de ce qu’il a fait que dans la peinture de ce qu’il a été’, quoted in J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. Volume I: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 155.



### 3. Hume's New Concept of Philosophical History

#### 3. 1. 'A Dialogue': From Moral Philosophy to Cultural History

Early in 1751 Hume wrote to his friend Gilbert Elliot of Minto asking him for critical advice on a short piece he had sent Elliot via a friend. This is the manuscript of *A Dialogue*, which Hume was to append to his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* published later in the same year. It is clear from this letter that, while the *Dialogue* was from the outset connected to the projected second *Enquiry*, Hume wished Elliot to consider and assess it as a free-standing piece.<sup>243</sup> There are clear indications that Hume considered this as among his best works both in terms of its literary quality and in terms of it being an effective literary vehicle for the presentation of a complex idea.<sup>244</sup> At the core of the work lies the cultural misunderstanding, which echoes the observation Hume made in Paris, where he had noted the mutual surprise of a Tunesian ambassador and a Capucin friar upon seeing one another. As we have seen, this had led Hume to reflect on the relativity of customs and fashions, and by extension on that of the ideas held by the Muslim and the Christian: 'Had the chaplain of the embassy entered into a dispute with these *Franciscans*, their reciprocal surprize had been of the same nature.'<sup>245</sup> The true significance of this episode does not appear to have been noted by commentators on Hume's life and work, but I would like to suggest that some of Hume's sentiments expressed of 'A Dialogue' might have been inspired or reinforced by such an encounter and that this highly crafted dialogue may be seen as representing something like the 'dispute' into which the ambassador and the monk might have entered. This gives rise to the interesting possibility Hume might have transferred his

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<sup>243</sup> Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 10 February 1751, *HL*, i, 145. Elliot replied only days later by enthusiastically praising the literary and philosophical qualities of the work and – with an eye on both the philosophical content and the literary composition of the *Dialogue* – asking 'Why can't you always write in this manner?' Elliot's letter is partly reprinted in Burton, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, i, 323-4. I am indebted to Dr Emilio Mazza for this alerting me to this letter.

<sup>244</sup> Hume writes to Minto that 'I have scarcely wrote any thing more whimsical or whose Merit I am more diffident of.' Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 10 February 1751, *HL*, i, 145.

<sup>245</sup> *NHR*, p. 75.

Parisian observation on the relativity of customs and the mutual misunderstanding to the sphere of history.

The first part of Hume's 'A Dialogue' comprises a description of the manners and morals of the people of a land called Fourli given by the first interlocutor, a traveller named Palamedes. Palamedes is introduced to the reader by the first-person narrator of the Dialogue:

My friend, Palamedes, who is as great a Rambler in his principles as in his person, who has run over, by study and travel, almost every region of the intellectual and material world, surprized me lately with an account of a nation, with whom, he told me, he had passed a considerable part of his life, and whom, he found, in the main, a people extremely civilized and intelligent.

There is a country, said he, in the world, called Fourli, no matter for its longitude or latitude, whose inhabitants have ways of thinking, in many things, particularly in morals, diametrically opposite to ours. When I came among them, I found that I must submit to double pains; first to learn the meaning of the terms in their language, and then to know the import of those terms, and the praise or blame attached to them.<sup>246</sup>

Palamedes, who claims to have spent part of his life among the inhabitants of Fourli, recounts the essence of his conversations with his host, Alcheic, who is highly respected by his compatriots and regarded as 'a perfect character' on account of his actions that seem immoral to Palamedes.<sup>247</sup> From these conversations there emerges a detailed picture of the manners and mores of this advanced civilization. The inhabitants of Fourli permit pederasty and incest, and they do not condemn parricide and infanticide. Palamedes notices with bewilderment that they applaud Alcheic's murder of his friend and benefactor, Usbek, and his eventual suicide. Shocked by this drastic account, Palamedes' interlocutor remarks that such 'barbarous and savage manners' were incompatible not only with a supposedly civilized nation, but furthermore with human nature itself. They are even more extreme than the most extravagant accounts sometimes given of the manners of primitive people.<sup>248</sup>

This last remark as well as the description of the strange customs of the inhabitants of 'Fourli' has clear undertones of the travelogue tradition, in particular the sceptical uses

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<sup>246</sup> 'A Dialogue' in *EPM*, p. 185.

<sup>247</sup> *EPM*, pp. 185ff.

<sup>248</sup> *EPM*, p. 188.

of travel accounts in the works of Hume's literary and philosophical predecessors, especially Montesquieu and that other great thinker from the Bordelais, Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). In his now classic study, *La Crise de la conscience européenne*, Paul Hazard has summed up the significance of factual and fictional travelogues for intellectual history of the Early Enlightenment. In Hazard's view travel meant 'comparing manners and customs, rules of life, philosophies, religions; arriving at some notion of the relative; discussing; doubting'.<sup>249</sup> Travel accounts were capable of constituting a 'School for Sceptics' since they confronted the reader with the bewildering variety of human beliefs and customs, which in turn gave rise to sceptical doubts concerning supposedly ubiquitous characteristics of human societies and universal standards of morality. This notion of travel and travel writing as a 'School for Sceptics' dates back to the sixteenth century, which witnessed both the beginning of the Age of Exploration and the revival of ancient scepticism by thinkers such as Montaigne, whose widely read *Essays*, first published in 1580, draw on accounts of the New World as well as on his classical reading for his comparative assessment of human customs, beliefs and morality.<sup>250</sup> We need to briefly consider these essays for the light they throw on Hume's similar use of travel accounts to convey the relativity of customs and manners within the framework of a sceptical philosophy.

In his essay on custom (*De la coutume*) Montaigne contrasts the customs of ancient Greece with those of newly discovered countries which hold widely differing attitudes to chastity as well as to such practices as incest, parricide and infanticide.<sup>251</sup> Europeans are apt to deride or condemn these practices, but they should realize the relativity of human manners and mores which are everywhere dependent on custom and fashion. Montaigne had put this case most forcefully in the most sceptical of all his essays, the apology for Raymond Sebond (*Apologie de Raimond Sebond*):

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<sup>249</sup> Paul Hazard *La Crise de la conscience européenne* (Paris: Boivin, 1935), translated by J. Lewis May as *The European Mind, 1680-1715* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 44.

<sup>250</sup> Among these were Francisco López de Gómara's *General History of the Indies* (1552) and Girolamo Benzoni's *Historia del Mondo Nuovo* (1565).

<sup>251</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, tr. M. A. Screech (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 122-139.

Nothing in all the world has greater variety than law and custom. What is abominable in one place is laudable somewhere else – as clever theft was in Sparta. Marriages between close relations are capital offences with us : elsewhere they are much honoured.... Murdering children, murdering fathers, holding wives in common, making a business out of robbery, giving free rein to lusts of all sorts – in short there is nothing so extreme that it has not been admitted by the custom of some nation or other.<sup>252</sup>

Montaigne concludes that ‘there is nothing that custom may not or cannot do’. We have become so accustomed to our own views and values that we no longer realize how strange, irrational or immoral our own behaviour appears once it is seen through the eyes of a foreigner. By insisting on the relativity of manners and morals Montaigne effectively denies the universality of moral standards and questions the supposed moral superiority of Western civilization over the ‘barbarism’ of primitive societies. In his essay on the cannibals (*Des Cannibales*) Montaigne argues that these societies are indeed very different from ours which helps to account for the ‘amazing gulf between their souls and ours’.<sup>253</sup>

During the early Enlightenment, Montaigne’s brand of Renaissance scepticism and his use of travel writing to illustrate his notions of moral relativism had been taken to their sceptical extreme by another French philosopher, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706).<sup>254</sup> In his famous *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Bayle, whose considerable influence on the early formation of Hume’s philosophical thought is well attested, had asked for an account of Western nations written from the point of view of a Japanese traveller.<sup>255</sup> Eighteenth-century French and English literature abound in this kind of account in which Paris and London were visited on a regular basis by Turkish spies, Indian kings, Persian travellers and Chinese visitors.<sup>256</sup> The most influential and enduring product of this eighteenth-century fashion are of course the *Lettres Persanes*, first published in

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<sup>252</sup> ‘An apology for Raymond Sebond’ in Montaigne, *Essays*, p. 654f.

<sup>253</sup> ‘Of Cannibals’ in Montaigne, *Essays*, p. 239.

<sup>254</sup> On Hume’s knowledge and use of Bayle see Richard H. Popkin, ‘Bayle and Hume’, in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), pp. 149-159, p. 157.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. the article ‘Japon’ in the second edition of Bayle’s *Dictionnaire* (1702): ‘It would be very entertaining to read an account of the West written by an inhabitant of Japan or China who had lived many years in the great cities of Europe. They would indeed pay us back in our own coin.’ Pierre Bayle, *Political Writings*, ed. Sally L. Jenkinson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 131.

<sup>256</sup> Cf. for example *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (5 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), i, 211-215.

1721. In this highly-crafted work, Montesquieu succeeded in combining the two main perspectives of the travelogue by means of the exchange of 161 letters on a variety of different topics exchanged between three Persian travellers in France and their wives, eunuchs and friends back in Persia. Accordingly, the *Lettres Persanes* cannot strictly speaking be called a pure travelogue, but may be described as a ‘letter-travelogue’, since they represent a blend of two distinct eighteenth-century genres, the epistolary novel and the travel narrative.<sup>257</sup> Montesquieu’s innovative work was extremely popular and highly influential, and it was reprinted and imitated throughout the eighteenth century, not least in Scotland.<sup>258</sup>

The complex structure of the work allows for multiple perspectives on French and Persian societies and reflects the character development of its main protagonist, Usbek, who becomes increasingly alienated from his own harem the more he associates himself with the ideas and values of his European host society.<sup>259</sup> The work accentuates the fundamental cultural differences that separate Eastern and Western civilizations and one of its major themes is the stark contrast between the role and position of women in Persian and French societies. At the same time Montesquieu employs the effective literary device of hinting at the underlying parallels between East and West, which allow him to pass critical judgements on aspects of French society by describing the corresponding features of Persian society. Thus, Montesquieu’s criticism of European monasticism and absolute monarchy is reflected in his vivid depiction of the confined Persian harem and the arbitrariness of Eastern despotism. Moreover, Montesquieu’s protagonists often comment directly on issues, as in Usbek’s letter on suicide and his critical remarks on French laws and customs to his Persian correspondents.

Having thus concluded our survey of the sceptical and often subversive uses to which travel writing had been put by a line of philosophers from Montaigne to Montesquieu,

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<sup>257</sup> For the hybrid eighteenth century genre of ‘letter-travelogue’ see Julia L. Epstein, ‘Eighteenth-Century Travel Letters: The Case of Voltaire’s *Lettres philosophiques*’, in *Genre*, 16 (1983), 115-135.

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Howard, ‘Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau in eighteenth-century Scotland’, 40-63.

<sup>259</sup> The complex structure of the work tends to obscure the degree to which it centres on Usbek’s character. For his character development see the lucid remarks in Frederick M. Keener, *The Chain of Becoming: The philosophical Tale, the Novel, and a neglected Realism of the Enlightenment* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983), pp. 154ff; and Judith N. Shklar, *Montesquieu* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), pp. 29-48.

we now need to return to Hume's 'A Dialogue'. Palamedes defends himself for giving such a seemingly exaggerated account of the inhabitants of 'Fourli' by revealing that the outrageous morals and rustic manners he had described were actually those of the ancients, especially the Athenians, usually the object of the highest admiration and emulation. Thus, Alcheic's highly-applauded murder of Usbek was an 'exact counterpart' of Caesar's assassination by Brutus and his co-conspirators and the description of the banquet of philosophers was lifted directly from Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. By changing the names and omitting some of the circumstances in his account, Palamedes had thus de-familiarized his interlocutor with the ancients to the effect that these highly revered people such as the Athenians now seemed barbarous and immoral. The narrator criticizes Palamedes for using this 'artifice' or literary device in a way that served to highlight the flaws of the ancients and resulted in a deeply unfair misrepresentation of their culture:

Your representation of things is fallacious. You have no indulgence for the manners and customs of different ages. Would you try a GREEK or ROMAN by the common law of ENGLAND? Hear him defend himself by his own maxims; and then pronounce.<sup>260</sup>

By imposing alien ethical norms on the ancients, we presumptuously seek to judge ancient customs by measuring them according to standards unknown to them. Whereas Montaigne had shown that such a method of evaluation is unjust when applied to non-European societies, Hume now extended the argument to the past. In doing so, he made the potential of a rich literary tradition available to the writing of history. If accounts of foreign nations could be written from the detached and sceptical viewpoint of a philosopher, history might be written in a similar manner and with similar results. This has profound and significant implications for the proper understanding of Hume's historical thought and writing, which do not seem to have been fully recognized.<sup>261</sup> Before we can proceed to point out some of these implications, we need to have a closer look at two particular aspects of Hume's 'A Dialogue' which can be viewed as instances

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<sup>260</sup> *EPM*, pp. 188-9.

<sup>261</sup> Hume's extensive literary borrowings from the travelogue genre are not normally recognized by commentators on Hume's historical views, who have long chosen to focus on his political and ideological aspects of his *History of England*.

of Hume's direct engagement with the *Lettres Persanes*, and thus complement our findings about Hume's response to Montesquieu during this period.

The most immediately recognizable parallel between *A Dialogue* and the *Lettres Persanes* is to be found in their respective main characters. Palamedes' character is that of 'a rambler in his principles as in his person', a traveller of the intellectual and material world and it is as such that we may compare him to Usbek, the central figure of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*. We have already noted that the name 'Usbek' is actually mentioned in *A Dialogue* which constitutes a direct reference to the *Lettres Persanes*, a work with which most of Hume's contemporary readers would have been familiar.<sup>262</sup> Usbek's letters to his Persian correspondents revealed the sceptical doubts he has developed as a result of being confronted with European manners and morals which corroded his belief in the dogmatic teachings of the Islamic clergy. In a letter to his fellow traveller, Rhedi, he expresses his sceptical doubts about the universal validity of moral standards: 'Shall I tell you what I think? - what is true at one time is false at another.'<sup>263</sup> The parallels between Montesquieu's and Hume's main characters, Usbek and Palamedes, with regard to the notions of moral relativism they express extend to the examples they chose to explore and illustrate these notions. In his description of the morals, manners and sexual conduct of Alcheic, an Athenian 'man of merit', Palamedes mentions pederasty, incest and adultery. Having committed all of these, Alcheic is still held in the highest regard by his compatriots, even after he has put an end to his own life.<sup>264</sup> Montesquieu's Usbek had also openly and without condemnation discussed the possible justification for suicide in a letter to an Islamic clergyman.<sup>265</sup> In his essay 'Of Suicide', published posthumously but written in the early 1750s, Hume presents a strikingly similar case for the moral neutrality of suicide.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> It is significant that Palamedes uses this name when giving his account of the assassination of Caesar, since Montesquieu's Usbek is a despotic figure obsessed with establishing and maintaining his power over the members of his seraglio.

<sup>263</sup> Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, tr. C. J. Betts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 152. *Lettres Persanes*, ed. Starobinski, p. 186: 'Que veux-tu que je te dise? Vérité dans un temps, erreur dans un autre.'

<sup>264</sup> EPM, p. 187.

<sup>265</sup> Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, pp. 152-4. *Lettres Persanes*, ed. Starobinski, pp. 187-8.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. the pro and contra arguments on suicide in Montaigne's 'A custom of the Isle of Cea', *Complete Essays*, pp. 392-407.



A second and equally striking parallel between *A Dialogue* and the *Lettres Persanes* lies in the similar depiction of the morals and fashions French society. In both works the description of the prevalence of adultery in contemporary French society and the careless attitude adopted by many French husbands towards their wives' infidelity is contrasted with the restricted 'commerce between the sexes' and the rigid morality of the Persian harem (in the *Lettres Persanes*) and ancient Athens (in *A Dialogue*). This draws our attention to a common theme in the two works: the representation and critique of eighteenth-century French society. Montesquieu and Hume discuss French maxims of honour, the law of primogeniture, monasticism, and the role of women in society, and what is more, these are assessed in a similar way. Both authors condemn primogeniture as an unfair law, and both describe the ascendancy of women in France, whose influence has to be reckoned with in state affairs. In short, the depiction of modern French society in *A Dialogue* is akin to that which emerges from the *Lettres Persanes*. This suggests that Hume drew on Montesquieu's social satire for his own critique of modern French society, even when we take into account that some of the observations were fairly commonplace at the time. Thus we can conclude that while Hume's *A Dialogue* responds to the wider tradition of travel writing and the sceptical uses travel accounts have been put to by authors such as Montaigne and Bayle, Hume engages particularly closely with Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* with which *A Dialogue* shares a number of key themes and arguments.

Finally, we need to enquire about the lessons of Hume's *A Dialogue* for the writing of history. Underlying the argument in this piece is Hume's conviction that past civilizations seldom conform to the preconceptions of our own times and, if we judge them on that account, we deprive ourselves of the chance of understanding them. Instead, we need to judge them on their own terms. What is needed then is a truly *historical* understanding of past societies, which takes into account the cultural milieu and particular circumstances under which Greek manners and morals evolved and the practical problems which ancient laws sought to address. Seemingly unaccountable or immoral practices such as incest, pederasty and infanticide become intelligible and can be accounted for by reference to the particular historical circumstances and belief-

systems of antiquity. In pursuing this line of enquiry, Hume could draw on the extensive preparatory work for his scholarly dissertation on ancient demography, which supplied him with powerful material on which he could build a case for the ‘otherness’ of classical societies.

Our inquiry has given us important clues as to the philosophical concepts underpinning this cultural history of antiquity as well as to the biographical impulses and intellectual challenges in response to which Hume formulated this history. It is now time for us to sum up our findings with regard to the insights they might yield into the development of Hume’s historical thought during the early 1750s and the distinctive nature of his idea of philosophical history.

### **3. 2. The Historian as Traveller: Hume’s Idea of Philosophical History**

So far we have traced Hume’s interest in classical history through his extensive reading to the composition and publication of a number of works that can be described as historical and in doing so we have arrived at a period when Hume was commencing to write his *History of England*, published between 1754 and 1762. We have seen that this monumental work, commonly regarded as Hume’s first and only historical work, can in an important sense be said to have been preceded by a fragmentary history of classical antiquity.<sup>267</sup> This was the result of the extensive reading of the Classics at Ninewells, the research that Hume had undertaken for his erudite dissertation on the populousness of the ancient world, and the database on classical literature Hume must have built up in the process of that reading. Taken together the diverse pieces informed by this reading – a dissertation, several essays, two dialogues, and a ‘natural history’ – constitute the

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<sup>267</sup> The fame of Hume’s *History of England* was to eclipse his earlier efforts and obscure the seriousness and sophistication of the fragments of classical history that preceded it. We should, however, note that for Hume’s contemporaries Hume, the historian of England did not quite displace the erudite student of antiquity. When the young James Boswell first met Hume in Edinburgh in 1758, he commented that ‘he has apply’d himself with great attention to the study of the ancients, and is likewise a great historian’. Quoted in Mossner, *Forgotten Hume*, p. 171.

fragments of a history of classical civilization.<sup>268</sup> These display Hume's erudite scholarship – especially in the 'enquiry concerning facts' of the populousness essay – and belie the common misconception that by the standards of his time Hume was not a serious historical scholar. This leads to the question of how Hume's thinking on history developed and whether the traveller and the student of the ancients were useful to the historian of the English constitution. As a result of our investigations we are now in a position to give a fuller consideration to this question than has hitherto been attempted. Three inferences can be drawn from our consideration of Hume's writings of the years 1748-52 and their biographical and intellectual context.

Even though, by 1748, Hume was already inclined to reserve an important role for laws, custom and other 'moral causes' in the shaping of diverse societies in different ages and parts of the world, his commitment to this mode of explanation was reinforced by his travels through Europe. Upon his return from the Continent he was confronted by the challenge of Montesquieu's powerful account of causation in *L'Esprit des Lois*, which presented a new and convincing theory to account for the 'infinite diversity' of human laws and mores. In response to this intellectual challenge, Hume built up an elaborate case for the relativity of moral standards, and the divergence between different sets of manners and mores, which can only be explained by reference to the social and cultural context of the societies or ages in which they evolved. Hume, the moral philosopher, thus requires the expertise of the historian in order to explain the origins of customs and moral standards, which cannot be judged without reference to the 'maxims' of the age in which they were practised. Hume's case against Montesquieu's alleged climatic determinism therefore took the form of an impassioned defence of the integrity and importance of history, and the irreducible complexity of historical reality. It is in the process of his intellectual engagement with Montesquieu on the field of ancient civilization that Hume formulated his own distinctive philosophy of history.

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<sup>268</sup> These have so far not been recognized as 'history' since none of these pieces took the form of a narrative of political deeds, such as the one provided by the classical historians themselves. For interesting reasons to be examined in the next chapter, Hume did not think it feasible to write such a narrative history on this topic and chose instead to write English constitutional history.

The scattered fragments of his classical history took a different form, that of a 'philosophical' history or what we might today call a cultural history in its widest sense, taking in all aspects of what for Montesquieu constituted the *esprit* of a people: their government and laws, their customs and manners, their social and sexual relations, their ideas of morality and honour, and finally their philosophical systems and religious beliefs. What had begun as a wide-ranging investigation of the comparative merits of ancient and modern civilization resulted in a truly 'philosophical' history, which took the form of a reconstruction of the moral and material culture of a past civilization. This reconstruction served to make a subtle and important philosophical point, akin to the one made in Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*. Like Montesquieu and his predecessors, Hume stressed the 'otherness' of different civilizations and the sheer distance that separated them from his own culture, which Montaigne's had described as 'the amazing gulf between their souls and ours'. Yet Hume illustrates his sceptical point about the relativity of manners, mores and standards of morals not by reference to non-European cultures or oriental societies, but by reference to a supposedly familiar European past. In *A Dialogue* Hume de-familiarizes the classical past and reveals it as a strange and profoundly different place. This implies a new attitude towards history: the past thus becomes a foreign country and its history has to be written in the form of a travelogue, which notes the strange customs and mores of civilizations.<sup>269</sup>

We are now in a position to reconsider the most commonly held view concerning Hume's philosophy of history. For this purpose, it may be helpful to recall the most commonly-held view concerning Hume's historical thought as expressed in a recent textbook:

There is ... one core difference that divides all historians into two groups: Those who believe that people in the past were essentially the same as us; and those who believe that they were essentially different. ... David Hume thought

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<sup>269</sup> In this Hume was to be followed by his fellow literati Adam Ferguson who asked for a history of ancient Greece to be written from the viewpoint of a modern traveller: 'It would, no doubt, be pleasant to see the remarks of such a traveller as we sometimes send abroad to inspect the manners of mankind, left, unassisted by history, to collect the character of the Greeks from the state of their country, or from their practice in war.' *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 185.

that all 'men' were so much the same in every age; L. P. Hartley suggested that the past is a foreign country where they do things differently from us.<sup>270</sup> In the light of Hume's *A Dialogue*, which can be read as Hume's extended contribution to this question of difference, this statement needs to be significantly modified if not entirely rejected. Hume's argument in this piece directly contradicts the standard textbook account usually given of his philosophy of history. Far from denying cultural and anthropological diversity, Hume's reflections are in fact a sophisticated precursor of L. P. Hartley's famous dictum.<sup>271</sup> As we have seen, this attitude towards the past can be seen as an application of the popular travelogue genre to the field of history. A strong emphasis on difference or otherness implied in the conception of the past as a foreign country lies at the very core of Hume's conception of philosophical history. By detaching the past from the present, Hume provides his readers with depth and perspective and makes them appear less absolute. Thus, history takes on a new, 'philosophical' role: by providing knowledge about the past it promotes sound philosophical judgement. Implicit in Hume's statements in these works of the Ninewells period is a fundamental change in the role of the historian, as well as a significant shift in the function of history. We can here perceive the grain of an idea of philosophical history that was to come to fruition once Hume began work on his *History of England*. This monumental historical enterprise, to which we must turn in the following chapter, was thus to be informed by the ideas Hume had formulated in the early 1750s and preceded by a forgotten cultural history of classical antiquity.

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<sup>270</sup> John H. Arnold, *History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 96.

<sup>271</sup> See also David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985).

## **Part II**

### **The Construction of an Historical Narrative, 1752-1756**

## 4. Towards a *History of Great Britain*, 1747-56

### 4. 1. 'My Historical Projects': Hume's Intentions Reconsidered, 1747-52

We now come to consider the origins and gestation of Hume's *History of England*, the first instalments of which were published as a *History of Great Britain* in 1754-56. Much scholarly attention and ingenuity has recently been devoted to the origins and making of grand narratives in the eighteenth century. In the case of the most famous of these, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88), written by Hume's contemporary and correspondent Edward Gibbon, we now have several sophisticated accounts of the process whereby this work was conceived and took shape. Recent Gibbon scholarship has focused on three major avenues of enquiry which could also be fruitfully pursued in the study of Hume's historical work: First, Peter Gosh and J. G. A. Pocock have reconsidered Gibbon's 'transformation of intentions' from the initial idea of writing a history of the decline and fall of the city of Rome to the much wider canvass of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire including its successors states in Eastern and Western Europe.<sup>272</sup> Second, David Womersley and particularly Pocock have traced the transformation of the *Decline and Fall* itself through six volumes published over a twelve-year period and spanning the civic and ecclesiastical history of the Western and Eastern Roman Empire from the second century A.D. to 1453.<sup>273</sup> Finally, David Womersley has opened up a new line of enquiry by making a persuasive case for regarding the *Decline and Fall* as it now stands as the product of a 'sequence of

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<sup>272</sup> P. R. Ghosh, 'Gibbon's Dark Ages: Some Remarks on the Genesis of the Decline and Fall', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 73 (1983), 1-23; and J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume I: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 275-291 and *Volume III: Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 381-402. Both Gosh and Pocock's interpretations hinge on Gibbon's statement that 'my original plan was circumscribed to the decay of the City, rather than of the Empire', cf. 'Memoirs of my Life and Writings', in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. William Smith (8 vols., London: John Murray, 1862), i, 1-129, esp. 85-6.

<sup>273</sup> David Womersley, *The Transformation of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988); and J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume Three: The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 419-500. See also Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), pp. 167-203.



interactions between the historian and his readership'.<sup>274</sup> These diverse approaches have contributed to a more sophisticated view of eighteenth-century historical writing by enhancing our understanding of the role and status of authorship, genre, readership, the order of publication and similar factors in the production of multi-volume historical works in eighteenth-century Britain.

These recent developments in Gibbon scholarship are directly applicable to the study of Hume's historical work. Both historians published what was essentially their first and only published work of narrative history over a number of years and in a series of instalments, before subsequently revising and correcting their magnum opus. In both cases the outcome of this process was a monumental work that traced well over a thousand years of history in a fast-flowing narrative. This would suggest that similar approaches might fruitfully be employed to explore both Gibbon and Hume's historical works. Yet a comparison between Gibbon and Hume scholarship highlights the shortcomings and inadequacies of the approaches that have traditionally been used by Hume scholars to describe the comparable process of the gestation and composition of Hume's *History of England*. This is all the more striking when we consider the material available for a reconstruction of both historians' authorial intentions, the process of publishing their work in instalments and their interaction with their readers. Much of the pre-history of the *Decline and Fall* is lost in an ill-documented period often referred to as Gibbon's 'dark ages', leading to much speculation and guesswork as to his original intentions as well as the transformation of these intentions prior to the publication of the first volume of the work in 1776.<sup>275</sup> In contrast to this, there is a wealth of evidence for the composition of the *History of England*, consisting Hume's extensive correspondence

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<sup>274</sup> Cf. David Womersley, *Gibbon and the 'Watchmen of the Holy City': The Historian and his Reputation, 1776-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 6. This interaction is best exemplified by the reception of Gibbon's treatment of religion in the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*, which elicited widespread criticism that in turn prompted a noticeable change in strategy adopted by Gibbon in his treatment of religion in succeeding volumes of the work.

<sup>275</sup> The phrase was coined by P. R. Ghosh who notes that '[i]t is a striking fact that the years in Gibbon's life about which we know least – the years 1765-72, between his return from the Grand Tour and the commencement of his History – are precisely those in which we are most interested, if we wish to study the genesis of his great book.' Cf. 'Gibbon's Dark Ages', 1. See also J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume I: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon*, pp. 275-291 and *Volume Two: Narratives of Civil Government*, pp. 381-396.

with his close friends, publishers and critics as well as the numerous reviews of the several instalments of this work. These mean that the genesis of the *History* over a period of ten years is far better documented than that of any other of Hume's works. There is therefore an odd inverse relationship between the wealth of evidence pertaining to the inception and composition of Hume's *History* and the limited nature of the accounts hitherto given of the gestation of that work.

Given the extensive secondary literature that has grown around Hume's *History of England*, this conspicuous absence of several important and fruitful avenues of enquiry can only be explained by a neglect of certain lines of enquiry in favour of others. Hume scholars have almost exclusively devoted their attention to the philosophical nature, the political content or the narrative structure of the *History of England*, while the circumstances and process of the inception, composition, reception and revision of that work have been largely neglected and remain relatively understudied.<sup>276</sup> To be sure, there have been attempts to reconstruct the process whereby the History of England took shape, yet none of these have utilized the wealth of material now available.<sup>277</sup> In the following, I will attempt to fill this gap, focusing on the genesis of the earliest and in many ways most interesting part of Hume's historical work, his two-volume Stuart history first published under the title *The History of Great Britain* in 1754 and 1756. In so doing, I will draw on the wealth of evidence now available consisting mainly in Hume's correspondence with his friends and publishers, which presents us with a rich and insightful record of his thoughts during this period and which can be complemented with other documentation from this period such as statements by Hume's friends and

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<sup>276</sup> See the trends of Hume scholarship discussed in the Introduction.

<sup>277</sup> On the composition of the *History* see Victor G. Wexler, *David Hume and the History of England* (Philadelphia: Philosophical Society, 1979), pp. 5-14; on the publication history of the work Ernest C. Mossner and Harry Ransom, 'Hume and the "Conspiracy of the Booksellers": The Publication and Early Fortunes of the *History of England*', *Studies in English*, 29 (1950), 162-182; and Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 50-58, 308f. The works' reception in France is described in Laurence L. Bongie, *David Hume: Prophet of the Counter-Revolution* (first published 1965; new edn. Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 2000). Hume's extensive revisions to the text of the *History* are still largely uncharted, but see Frederic L. van Holthoorn, 'Hume and the 1763 Edition of His History of England: His Frame of Mind as a Revisionist', in *Hume Studies*, 23 (1997), 133-152.

publishers and contemporary reviews of his *History*.<sup>278</sup> Such a wide range of evidence is available for few other major historical works of the Enlightenment and it makes possible an unusually close and detailed reconstruction of the process by which this work was conceived and took shape as well as various external circumstances impinging on that process. A close reading of this evidence is required in order to tackle three important but hitherto unresolved or even unaddressed questions so far inadequately addressed: First, when did Hume first consider writing a Stuart history and what was the precise significance of the Advocates' Library in this process? Second, how did he initially conceive of his projected *History of Great Britain*? And last, what were his aims and aspirations as a historian of Britain? By closely considering these questions, none of which have so far been given the attention they require, we can hope to open up the period 1748-1756 from the point of view of Hume's development as a historian.

Before embarking on our reconstruction, we need to consider briefly what has long been the most influential account of the pre-history of Hume's *History* contained in the following passage from Ernest C. Mossner's revised edition of his *Life of David Hume*:

Hume's intention to compose a national history arose out of his pervasive study of the "science of man". The first trials in the actual composition of history were *possibly* made during the unhappy Annandale period, 1744-5, but could hardly have amounted to much. After Hume's return from Turin in 1749, a second trial was *presumably* made. But even London had no public libraries before the opening of the British Museum in 1759 and Hume was always diffident of being rebuffed by the noble Whig families where the private historical collections were to be found. The happy circumstance of his being elected Keeper of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh in January 1752, "a genteel office, though of small revenue", provided him with a library of some 30,000 volumes and the long-sought-for opportunity of turning historian in earnest. The transition from philosopher proper to philosopher-historian was easily made.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Since the appearance of *HL* in 1932 and *NHL* in 1954 that body of evidence has been slowly growing as numerous letters pertaining to the history have come to light and have been published in scholarly journals. In the following, I have sought to make as full use of these as possible though the task will be greatly eased by David Raynor's eagerly awaited edition of Hume's *Correspondence*. The task of reconstructing the reception of the *History* is now greatly aided by the exhaustive collection of contemporary British reviews, *Early responses to Hume's History of England*, ed. James Fieser (2 vols.; Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2002).

<sup>279</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (2nd edn., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 301 (italics mine). Cf. the first edition of Mossner's biography (first edn. 1954; reprinted Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 301.

This account has become a standard reference point for discussions of Hume's development as an historian, yet the first and last sentence of this paragraph indicates that Mossner seriously oversimplifies Hume's complex development from philosopher to historian. As far as Mossner's efforts to date of Hume's first attempts at historical composition are concerned, it will become clear in the course of this section that every single sentence of the passage quoted above can, upon closer examination, be shown to contain an erroneous, inaccurate or insufficiently substantiated interpretative statement. Even so, this passage and the one that it replaces have largely been accepted and have long remained a major reference point for discussions of Hume's *History of England*.<sup>280</sup>

Much of the problem with Mossner's influential account of Hume's development as an historian stems from the fact that this account was initially built on a shaky and ultimately untenable foundation; that is, Hume's purported reading notes on English history, arranged chronologically according to the reigns of English monarchs from the Roman Invasion to Hume's own day. While these notes were never deemed to be written in Hume's own hand, they were endorsed by statements on coversheets that appeared to Mossner to be in Hume's handwriting, with dates ranging from 1745/46 to 1755. By the time Mossner published his revised biography, these reading notes had already been exposed as nineteenth-century forgeries, forcing him to change much of the factual information in the revised 1980 edition of his Hume biography.<sup>281</sup> Though Mossner modified his arguments he did not abandon the conclusions at which he had originally arrived on the basis of faulty evidence. He was well aware however that the basis for his inferences had vanished: 'It is my speculation without factual evidence, that Hume's first trials in the writing of history were made during the unhappy Annandale period

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<sup>280</sup> As such it forms the basis for another influential discussion in Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>281</sup> The five manuscripts held in the National Library of Scotland and the Huntington Library in California are described in Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'An Apology for David Hume, historian', in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 56 (1941), p. 675f. In his 'Preface 1980' written in 1978, Mossner states that he was made aware of the fact that 'the signed, dated, and place-named covers ostensibly in Hume's hand of a series of historical notes were pronounced forgeries'. He states that he attempted to 'straighten out' his argument, yet a comparison between the 1954 and 1980 editions reveals that although the references to the reading notes have been dropped from the latter, Mossner's interpretations which had originally been built on these notes was modified, but by no means entirely abandoned. Cf. Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. viii.

[1744-5].<sup>282</sup> Unsubstantiated conjectures of this kind mar Mossner's work and the reliance of a generation of Hume scholars on his account, and on the forged reading notes on which it ultimately rests, has hindered our understanding of this subject.<sup>283</sup>

To clarify this we need to establish when Hume first considered writing a narrative account of any period of English or British history. The earliest piece of evidence we have for Hume's intention to write any kind of history is a passing remark occurring in a letter written to his friend and kinsman, Henry Home, in January 1747, which was written while Hume was on his return journey from a military expedition against the coast of France in 1747, in which he had served as secretary to General St Clair. Pondering the possibilities suddenly opened up for him by the prospect of a permanent employment in the military, Hume wrote:

I have an Invitation to go over to Flanders with the General, & an Offer of Table, Tent, Horses, &c; I must own, I shou'd have a great Curiosity to see a real Campaign .... Had I any Fortune, which cou'd give me a Prospect of Leisure & Opportunitys to prosecute *my historical Projects*, nothing cou'd be more useful to me; and I shou'd pick up more military Knowledge, in one Campaign, by living in the General's Family & being introduc'd frequently to the Dukes, than most Officers cou'd do after many Years Service. But to what can all this Serve? I am a Philosopher, & so, I suppose, must continue.<sup>284</sup>

Though revealing in other senses, this statement offers only the scantest hint at the nature of Hume's plans and hardly justifies the inference that Hume referred here to a projected *History of England* as alleged by Mossner and by Donald Livingston. In fact,

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<sup>282</sup> Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. 175. Cf. *Life of Hume* (1954 edn.), p. 175-6.

<sup>283</sup> Mossner's interpretation made its way into the influential discussions of Duncan Forbes, Victor G. Wexler and Donald W. Livingston. Cf. Forbes, 'Introduction' to *HGB*, p. 9; Wexler, *Hume and the History of England*, pp. 9-10; and particularly Livingston, *Hume's philosophy of common life* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 212-3: 'Hume's remark in *My Own Life* that the plan of writing a history of England occurred to him in 1752 when he became librarian to the Faculty of Advocates ... is only partially correct and certainly should not be taken as marking the date when he first became interested in history. During the period from 1745 to 1749, while he was very much engaged in writing philosophy, he produced four large manuscripts of notes on English history, chronologically arranged, and an abridgement of English history from the Roman invasion through the reign of Henry II. These early attempts at a history of England are no doubt part of the "historical projects" Hume was contemplating in a letter of 1747, and for which he thought a military expedition with St. Clair would be a benefit (Hume to Henry Home, [January 1747], *NHL*, p. 23).' Livingston's insistence on the reading notes is curious as his book appears four years after Mossner's biography in which these had been exposed as nineteenth-century forgeries. Instead of 'throwing light' on Hume's important letters of 1747/8, the fraught evidence of the notes distorts Livingston's reading of the letters.

<sup>284</sup> Hume to Henry Home, [January 1747], *NHL*, p. 23 (italics mine).

once we discard the inadmissible ‘evidence’ of the reading notes on English history, it is clear that there remains no direct evidence to indicate what these ‘historical projects’ might have been. As will become clear in the following, it is highly misleading to read Hume’s post-1752 project back into this earlier period and conclude that he must have planned an English or British history by at least 1747/8 simply because he wrote one from 1752 onwards. Such interpretations have failed to take into account the significant changes in Hume’s situation that separate both periods and the evidence for a shift in his intellectual preoccupations in the years between 1748 and 1752.

If, on the other hand, we disregard for a moment Hume’s later interests and literary activities and consider only those of the period 1748-52 which we have explored in some detail in the preceding chapters, it will become strikingly clear that English or British history in whatever form was certainly not Hume’s main preoccupation in this period, even if we allow that he published two essays on Whig and Tory principles in the 1748 editions of his *Essays*.<sup>285</sup> As we have seen, there is plenty of evidence for Hume’s other interests, which consisted mainly in the composition of his mature works on moral philosophy, political economy, and the philosophy and sociology of religion. These included at least two works where historical in character, namely the erudite populoussness dissertation and the ‘Natural History of Religion’, which was probably composed during this period.<sup>286</sup> The ‘historical projects’ mentioned in the 1747 letter to Henry Home might therefore have consisted in pieces that were ‘historical’ in nature insofar as they entailed antiquarian excavations of social and economic circumstances or philosophical enquiries into past belief systems. Proper ‘History’ was considered as distinct from such undertakings and generally understood as a truthful record of civil and military transactions framed as a narrative of political and military events. Hume’s 1747 statement is thus somewhat ambiguous as it does not allow us to establish with certainty

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<sup>285</sup> Hume’s two essays on the central tenets of Whig and Tory political thought, ‘Of the Original Contract’ and ‘Of Passive Obedience’, were first published in the *Three Essays, Moral and Political* of 1748 as well as in the ‘Third Edition, Corrected’ of the *Essays, Moral and Political*, which appeared the same year.

<sup>286</sup> The *Natural History of Religion* was published in 1757 as part of Hume’s *Four Dissertations*. I concur with those scholars who date the piece to the period 1748-52, the period in which Hume undertook his extensive reading of the classics and composed the first draft of his other major work on the philosophy of religion, the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. See the discussion above, part I, n. 218.



whether or not he was then considering a narrative account of civil history on a grand scale.<sup>287</sup>

‘History’ in capital letters is first mentioned in a letter Hume wrote a year later, in January 1748, and in which he contemplates the prospect of accompanying St Clair on another mission:

I got an invitation from General St Clair, to attend him in his new employment at the Court of Turin, which I hope will prove an agreeable if not a profitable jaunt for me. I shall have an opportunity of seeing Courts & Camps; & if I can afterwards, be so happy as to attain leizure and other opportunities, this knowledge may even turn to account to me, as a man of letters, which I confess has always been the sole object of my ambition. I have long had an intention, in my riper years, of composing some History; & I question not but some greater experience of the Operations of the Field, & the Intrigues of the Cabinet, will be requisite, in order to enable me to speak with judgement upon these subjects.<sup>288</sup>

This quotation contains in a nutshell the predicament Hume found himself in and the obstacles that were to be overcome before he could seriously think of commencing to write a major work of narrative history. In spelling out this predicament in a way that would be understood by his correspondent, Hume reflects the shared assumptions held in the eighteenth century about the status of history and the character of the historian. Two particular themes stand out since they have already occurred in Hume’s 1747 letter quoted above: the prospect of attaining ‘leizure & opportunities’ on the one hand and the stress on ‘military knowledge’ or ‘experience of the operations of the field’ on the other hand. While their direct connection to the writing of history might not be immediately

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<sup>287</sup> Hume’s insistence on the usefulness of ‘military Knowledge’, recurring in the 1748 letter and therefore discussed below, does however point into the direction of conventional narrative history and would have been much less relevant for an erudite dissertation on social and economic conditions, a cultural history of ancient manners or a natural history of religious belief systems.

<sup>288</sup> Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 29 January 1748, *HL*, i, 109. Cf. Livingston’s discussion of the (inauthentic) reading notes which ‘throw light on Hume’s confession in a letter of 1748 that he had long “had an intention, in ... [his] riper years, of composing some History” for which he “had treasured up stores of study and plans of thinking for many years” (L, I, 109).’ This is clearly a misreading of the letter. Livingston’s selective quotation from the letter suggests that Hume’s ‘stores of study and plans of thinking’ refer directly to the ‘intention ... of writing some History’ mentioned earlier in the same letter. Yet these two statements do not occur in the same sentence and are not logically linked in the actual letter. Hume’s ‘stores of study and plans of thinking’ could refer to any of the projects on which he embarked in the period 1749-51, including the second *Enquiry*, the *Political Discourses* and the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*.



apparent, it becomes clear once we consider the prevailing views about the character of the historian.

Narrative history conceived as a record of civil transactions and military affairs was supposed to be written from a privileged vantage point, preferably by a retired statesman with experience in military affairs and first-hand knowledge of the major rulers and politicians.<sup>289</sup> While such a person would traditionally have been a retired statesman, by the mid-eighteenth century an independent man of letters might also qualify for this role on condition that he had acquired a minimum of practical knowledge or experience through an involvement in military action or at the very least manoeuvre.<sup>290</sup> By 1747 Hume had seen action and by 1748 he could claim to have seen both 'Courts & Camps' on his tour of European Courts in the end-phase of the War of the Austrian Succession. He had thus acquired sufficient 'experience of the Operations of the Field, & the Intrigues of the Cabinet' and thereby fulfilled one of the criteria qualifying a man of letters to take up the role of historian. Nevertheless, Hume well knew that knowledge of courts and camps was only one, though an important, prerequisite for an historian. Such knowledge was to be complemented by reading and reflection enabling the historian to speak with experience and detachment about human affairs and it is before this background that we should read Hume's passing comment that he intended to write history 'in my riper years'. What was required above all was 'leisure', the opportunity to devote a number of years to the composition of large-scale historical narrative. Leisure was generally thought of as an outward expression of a certain amount of financial as well as political independence to be possessed by the serious historian.<sup>291</sup> Yet most aspiring historians lacked at least one of these qualities and opportunities and this gave

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<sup>289</sup> Thucydides and Sallust were models among the ancients, Machiavelli and Guicciardini among the Humanists, Bacon and Clarendon in early modern Britain. For this tradition see Peter Burke, *The Renaissance sense of the past* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969); Hicks, *Neoclassical History*; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume II: Narratives of Civil Government*, pp. 7-25; and for Hume's appropriation of it see Phillipson, *Hume*, pp. 76-7.

<sup>290</sup> Thus Edward Gibbon's could write with characteristic irony that '[t]he discipline and evolutions of a modern battalion gave me a clearer notion of the phalanx and the legion; and the captain of the Hampshire grenadiers (the reader may smile) has not been useless to the historian of the Roman Empire.' 'Memoirs of my Life and Writings', in *Decline and Fall*, ed. Smith, p. 72.

<sup>291</sup> See Joseph. M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books. History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1991), pp. 291-326; and in particular Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, chapter 2.

rise to the commonplace remark on the lack or deficiency of historical writing in England which, as Hume later remarked, 'is notorious to all the world'.<sup>292</sup>

In the late 1740s, Hume had little prospect of fitting this role of narrative historian. Despite his various employments as tutor, secretary and aide-de-camp, Hume had a very small fortune. His letters of 1747/8 reflect his growing realization that he had become too old and disinclined to pursue a career in either the army or the church and that the role of tutor suited him little better. For the moment Ninewells offered a retreat and the possibility to pursue his studies, but there was yet no prospect of attaining permanent employment or even a sinecure that might afford sufficient leisure.<sup>293</sup> The thought of turning historian would have seemed pleasing, even tempting, since history was after all the most prestigious as well as the most lucrative literary genre. If the prospect of turning historian may have seemed remote and Hume would have to bide his time and wait for a change of fortune that might allow him to embark on the composition of a large-scale historical narrative. For the moment he had no choice but to continue pursuing his career as a man of letters and an author of philosophical works. As he put it in his 1747 letter to Henry Home: 'But to what can all this Serve? I am a Philosopher, & so, I suppose, must continue.' If the chances of realizing his plan of 'composing some History' had seemed remote in 1747, the situation was not much altered after his return to Ninewells in 1749 following his eventful tour of European courts and during the following three years Hume assiduously furthered his career as both a moral philosopher and a man of letters.

It was only from the summer of 1751 onwards that a combination of events which Hume could not have possibly planned or even foreseen conspired to change his

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<sup>292</sup> Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 28 June 1753, *HL*, i, 179. By the time Hume wrote the complaint had become widespread and few would have disputed Joseph Addison's statement that '[o]ur Country, which has produced Writers of the first Figure in every other kind of Work, has been very barren in good Historians.' *The Freeholder* (1716), quoted in Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, p. 23. Foreign commentators often ascribed this lack of good historians to the 'Spirit of Party' prevailing in Britain, see Voltaire, *Letters concerning the English Nation*, ed. Nicholas Cronk (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), pp. 110-1; and Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 333.

<sup>293</sup> 'I consider, that I am at a critical Season in Life; & that if I retire into a Solitude at present I am in danger of being left there, & of continuing a poor Philosopher for ever. On the other hand, I am not able to form any distinct Project of pushing myself in any particular Profession; the Law & Army is too late, the Church is my Aversion.' Hume to Henry Home, [London, end of June 1747], *HL*, i, 25-6.

circumstances and fortunes. The first of these was the marriage of his older brother John Home in the spring of 1751, which led to Hume's decision to move out of the Ninewells family home and eventually occasioned his permanent move to Edinburgh.<sup>294</sup> Later that year the logic chair at Glasgow University fell vacant and his friends were trying to secure this position for him. Had they succeeded in getting him elected, the possibility of Hume turning historian would have become even more remote. Although their 'project' foundered due to the lack of patronage, it precipitated Hume's success in an election to another post which fell vacant in January 1752.<sup>295</sup> Hume's election as the Keeper of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh appears to have been concerted by his Edinburgh friends and, at least in part intended as a means to compensate for the loss of the Glasgow professorship as well as to secure a living for him.<sup>296</sup> Thus, almost exactly four years after Hume had written about the futility of his aims of writing history and the necessity of remaining 'a philosopher', an unexpected change of circumstances had brought with it the 'leisure and opportunities' he had longed for since at least 1747 and finally placed him in a position that would enable him to realize his plan of 'composing some History'.

In 'My Own Life', an autobiographical sketch written shortly before his death in 1776, Hume briefly comments on his election as Keeper to Scotland's foremost library:

In 1752, the Faculty of Advocates chose me their Librarian, an office from which I received little or no emolument, but which gave me the command of a large library. I then formed the plan of writing the History of England....<sup>297</sup>

<sup>294</sup> Hume later wrote in 'My Own Life': 'In 1751, I removed from the country to the town, the true scene for a man of letters.' (reprinted in Hume, *Essays moral, political, and literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987), p. xxxvi). Yet there was nothing inevitable about Hume's move away from Ninewells as this later statement makes clear: 'I lived several years happy with my brother at Ninewells, and had not his marriage changed a little the state of the family, I believe I should have lived and died there.' Quoted in Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. 240.

<sup>295</sup> Hume ascribed the lack of success mainly to the Duke of Argyll's unwillingness to actively back his candidacy for the professorship; cf. Hume to John Clephane, 4 February 1752, *HL*, i, 164. For the political background see Roger L. Emerson, 'The "affair" at Edinburgh and the "project" at Glasgow: the politics of Hume's attempts to become a professor', in *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, ed. M. A. Stewart and John P. Wright (Edinburgh: EUP, 1994), pp. 1-22, esp. pp. 14ff.

<sup>296</sup> For Hume's election and Keepership see Michael H. Harris, 'David Hume: Scholar as Librarian', in *Library Quarterly*, 36 (1966), 88-98; and Brian Hillyard, 'The Keepership of David Hume', in *For the Advancement of Learning: Scotland's National Library 1689-1989*, ed. P. Cadell and A. Matheson (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1989), pp. 103-109.

<sup>297</sup> 'My Own Life', *Essays*, p. xxxvi.

Hume thus claims that his decision to write a 'History of England' did not precede but was in fact made subsequent to his election as Keeper of the Advocates' Library. This statement has generally been treated with suspicion and scepticism, and regarded as dubious and 'misleading about Hume's debut as a historian'.<sup>298</sup> Yet we have seen that once the forged reading notes are discounted, there remains no evidence to indicate that Hume had any concrete plans for writing a 'History of England' prior to 1752. There is therefore no reason to dismiss out of hand Hume's account that it was only once he found himself in 'command of a large library' that he formed the plan to write a history of England.<sup>299</sup> Once Hume's statement has been accepted, it does however throw up a number of questions concerning the precise nature of the possibilities that opened up as a result of Hume's election as Keeper of the Advocates' Library; questions that have so far not been posed or thoroughly pursued. What exactly was it about the Advocate's Library that allowed Hume to contemplate undertaking a large-scale historical work on English history and could he have conceivably undertaken this work if he had not been elected Keeper in 1752? In order to explore these questions we need to consider how Hume conceived of his new post and the nature of the opportunities it offered to a man of letters in search of an historical subject.

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<sup>298</sup> Wexler, *Hume and the History of England*, p. 9. Cf. Livingston, *Hume's philosophy of common life*, p. 212: 'Hume's remark in *My Own Life* ... is only partially correct'. Duncan Forbes notes: 'It has even been suggested that the *History of England* was the result of an accident: the fact that in 1752 Hume found himself, as the Librarian of the Faculty of Advocates, in charge of a great collection of books.' Forbes vehemently rejected this interpretation in the 'Introduction' to *HGB*, p. 9. While 'accident' may indeed be too strong a word, the role of contingency and the shaping influence of external circumstances have been either neglected or underestimated in scholarly accounts of Hume's transition from philosopher to historian.

<sup>299</sup> Cf. Hume to Matthew Sharp of Hoddam, 25 February 1754, *HL*, i, 184-5: 'I have not been idle. I have endeavoured to make some use of the library which was entrusted to me, and have employed myself in a composition of British History, beginning with the union of the two Crowns.' Yet this and the statement from 'My Own Life' need to be contrasted with a letter Hume wrote to the Dean and Faculty of Advocates' in November 1754: 'When I stood Candidate for the Office of Library keeper, I had in my Intention to attempt a literary Work, which I have since, in a great measure, executed. As soon as it is entirely finish'd, and probably sooner, I shall resign the Office, with thanks for the Advantage, which I have receiv'd from the Use of your Books.' J. C. Hilson, 'More Unpublished Letters of David Hume', in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 6 (1970), 315-326, esp. 322f. While it is no doubt true that Hume immediately grasped the possibilities that would be afforded by the Keepership, he does not state what kind of 'literary work' he may have had in mind in January 1752, although by the time he wrote this letter in November 1754 he was clearly referring to the *History of Great Britain*, the first volume of which was just about to be published.

In fact, it is difficult to conceive of a more ideal opportunity both in terms of time and materials required for the composition of a large-scale historical narrative than being Keeper of the impressive collections of learned books held in Scotland's foremost library.<sup>300</sup> In addition to unrestricted use of the existing collection, Hume had the option of buying books for the Advocates', although the right to do so without previous authorization from the curators was to be withdrawn in November 1754.<sup>301</sup> All evidence indicates that Hume was quick to realize, seize upon, and exploit the unique opportunity offered to him by a post he appears to have regarded as at least in part a sinecure, a paid office with little work attached to it. In a letter to his friend, the physician and classical scholar John Clephane, he describes it as 'a genteel office, though of small revenue', thus indicating that it was not so much the financial benefits which made this office attractive to Hume, but the long sought-after recognition he had finally gained in Edinburgh.<sup>302</sup> A friend of Hume later commented that 'it was not for the Sallary, that he accepted this Employment; but that he might have Easy access to the Books in that Celebrated Library'.<sup>303</sup> The Keepership offered Hume sufficient leisure to pursue his

<sup>300</sup> 'At the time of Hume's election, the Advocates' Library was the greatest library in Scotland.' Harris, 'Hume as Librarian', 92. Cf. Charles Benson, 'Libraries in University Towns', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, vol. II: 1640-1850*, ed. Giles Mandelbrote and K. A. Manley, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 102-121, esp. 119f. On the Advocates' use by the Edinburgh literati see Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, p.112. The Advocates' meant that Edinburgh surpassed even London in terms of the resources required for the composition of historical works, at least until the opening of the British Museum in 1759, cf. Hume's letter to [William Strahan], 25 May 1757, *HL*, i, 251; and Andrew Millar, 18 December 1759, *HL*, i, 317.

<sup>301</sup> Harris, 'Hume as Librarian', 94-97; Hillyard, 'The Keepership of David Hume', pp. 104ff. Hume's confrontation with the curators of the library was occasioned by objections raised by books Hume had ordered from London bookseller in April 1754 which included three works of libertine French literature: La Fontaine's *Contes*, Bussy-Rabutin's *L'Histoire amoureuse des Gaules* and Crébillon's *L'Ecumeiroire*. For Hume's defence see his letter to the Lord Advocate Robert Dundas, 20 November 1754, *HL*, i, 210ff. The significance of this episode has been insufficiently recognized and seems to me to lie in Hume's awareness and defence of three classic texts of the genre of 'philosophical literature'. Such works, often deemed to be politically or morally subversive, were among the most widely read texts of Enlightenment France, cf. Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York and London: Norton, 1995).

<sup>302</sup> Hume to John Clephane, 4 February 1752, *HL*, i, 164. Susan Manning refers to Hume's Keepership as a 'near-sinecure' while Brian Hillyard describes Hume's attitude towards the appointment as 'selfish'. Cf. Manning, 'Hume', *The Continuum Encyclopedia of British Literature*, ed. Steven R. Serafin and Valerie Grosvenor Myer (New York and London: Continuum, 2003), p. 495; and Hillyard, 'The Keepership of David Hume', p. 106.

<sup>303</sup> The clergyman and socialite Alexander Carlyle in his *Anecdotes and Characters of the Times*, ed. and intro. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973), p. 140.

literary projects while he lived in Edinburgh and participated in its manifold social and intellectual activities. At the age of forty, having moved from his family estate into town and subsequently been elected Keeper of the Advocates' Library, Hume had thus finally solved the dilemma he had been confronted with during the previous decade and was now in a position that would allow him to pursue at his leisure his long-held intention of 'composing some History' in 'my riper years'.

Yet Hume had made clear in his 1747/8 letters that the composition of a large-scale historical work did depend on more than 'leisure' and that 'other opportunities' were required. The materials for the composition of such a work were hard to come by, even if we take into account the fact that eighteenth-century histories were often based predominantly if not exclusively on printed rather than manuscript sources. It is therefore doubtful whether Hume would have made the decision to commence an historical work in 1752 or would moreover have been in a position to compose the first volume of his *History* in a relatively short period of time, had he not been in charge of the Advocates' Library. This made a wealth of material available to Hume and he immediately grasped the extent of the resources now at his disposal when he boasted in his letter to John Clephane that he had become 'master of 30,000 volumes'.<sup>304</sup> It is noteworthy that even though the Advocates' was primarily the working library of the Advocates' Faculty, it contained a large section of historical works which was at least as strong as the holdings of legal texts.<sup>305</sup> We need to have a closer look at the nature of the historical works available in the library at the time when Hume assumed the Keepership to see whether these contain volumes on the historical subjects that Hume was proposing to write about.

The earliest catalogue of the Advocates' states that the library 'abounds in Greek and Roman historians', which means that for the first time in his life Hume had unfettered access to an extensive collection of scholarly editions of all the major classical

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<sup>304</sup> Hume to John Clephane, 4 February 1752, *HL*, i, 167.

<sup>305</sup> A comparison of the 'History and Travel' sections in the 1692, 1742 and 1776 catalogues of the Advocates' reveals that due to the curators' acquisition policy historical works had by 1742 outnumbered the law books in the library. Cf. Alex M. Cain, 'Foreign Books in the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Advocates' Library', in *For the Advancement of Learning: Scotland's National Library*, ed. Cadell and Matheson, pp. 110-118.

authors.<sup>306</sup> The library also had extensive holdings of works on modern history in French, Latin and English. There was a large section on English and Scottish history and the Copyright Act of 1710 ensured that works published after that date were automatically acquired by the Advocates' Library. Thus, Hume commanded an extensive collection of books which included a considerable amount of printed historical works on as well as manuscript documents pertaining to Scottish and English history and a numismatic collection. In the absence of any direct evidence as to when or how Hume determined to write English or British history, it is important to note that British history was not the sole or even the main subject matter among the historical holdings of the library. In fact, the Advocates' would have equally well provided Hume with the resources required to write on other historical subjects. For instance, there would have been sufficient material to enable him to compose a narrative history on a subjects from either classical antiquity or the modern European state system, both of which he had explored in some depth in his latest work, the *Political Discourses*, published shortly before his election as Keeper. We shall therefore have to draw on the hints provided in his letters of this period in order to reconstruct in as much detail as possible how Hume arrived at the decision to write English or British history.

#### 4. 2. The Transformation of Hume's *History of Great Britain*, 1752-59

Having endeavoured to reconstruct the process whereby Hume 'formed the plan of writing the History of England', we now need to turn to the second part of his statement

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<sup>306</sup> In his *Oratio* to the 1692 catalogue of the Advocates' Library, Sir George Mackenzie stated that '[t]hree branches of learning are the handmaidens of Jurisprudence, namely, History, Criticism and Rhetoric; for this reason our catalogue abounds in Greek and Roman historians....' By the time of Hume's Keepership the library held multiple editions of the Greek and Roman classics; according to the 1742 catalogue there were ten different editions of Livy alone. Cf. Cain, 'Foreign Books in the 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Advocates' Library', pp. 110, 114. We have seen that Hume was well aware of this collection during the time when he was working on his populosity dissertation at Ninewells and had to rely on friends who were members of the Advocate's faculty to borrow editions of the classics for him as 'the Advocates' ... is scrupulous of lending Classics'. Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 18 February 1751, *HL*, i, 153.



in *My Own Life*. As we have seen, he wrote that once he was in ‘command of a large library’,

I ... formed the plan of writing the History of England; but being frightened with the notion of continuing a narrative through a period of 1700 years, I commenced with the accession of the House of Stuart, an epoch when, I thought, the misrepresentations of faction began chiefly to take place.<sup>307</sup>

Unlike the first part of Hume’s statement, this part has generally been accepted. Nevertheless, we need to approach it with care and consider the situation in at the time Hume wrote this autobiographical piece. By 1776 the *History of England* had appeared in numerous editions, and several reviewers had expressed their puzzlement about Hume’s ‘retrogressive progress’, his unusual way of composing his *History* by working his way backwards from the Stuarts to the Tudors and finally the history of Roman and medieval England.<sup>308</sup> This meant that the separate instalments had initially appeared in the reverse order to that in which they were published from 1762 onwards. As *My Own Life* was from the first to be attached to editions of Hume’s collected works, it offered in fact the first and last public statement Hume made about the order in which his historical work had originally appeared. In accounting for the overall course his literary career had taken, Hume needed to give a clear rationale for his decision to commence his *History* with the Stuarts and subsequently work his way backwards. We need to take this into account when assessing the reliability of Hume’s reasons and why the explanation he gives for this somewhat unusual way of proceeding does sound slightly apologetic. This 1776 statement cannot thus be taken for granted, but must instead be carefully compared with the evidence of Hume’s letters of the early 1750s.

The notion that Hume set out by planning a complete *History of England* is rendered doubtful by the fact that no such plan is mentioned or even hinted at in his letters of the relevant period, which instead suggest that Hume from the start focused on Stuart

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<sup>307</sup> ‘My Own Life’, *Essays*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>308</sup> The phrase ‘retrogressive progress’ occurs in an anonymous review in *The Critical Review* of January 1762. Critics and reviewers who have commented on the order in which Hume composed and published the volumes include Richard Hurd in his *Moral and political dialogues* (1759) and Tobias Smollett in *The Critical Review* of April 1759. Cf. *Early responses to Hume’s History of England*, ed. Fieser, i, 175, 182, 291.

history. This is evident from the first letter that mentions Hume's ongoing work on a history. Writing to Adam Smith on 24 September 1752, Hume states

I confess, I was once of the same Opinion with you, & thought that the best Period to begin an English History was about Henry the 7<sup>th</sup>. But you will please to observe, that the Change, which then happen'd in public Affairs, was very insensible, and did not display its Influence till many Years afterwards. Twas under James that the House of Commons began first to raise their Head, & then the Quarrel betwixt Privilege & Prerogative commenc'd. The Government, no longer opprest by the enormous Authority of the Crown, display'd its Genius; and the Factions, which then arose, having an Influence on our present Affairs, form the most curious, interesting, & instructive Part of our History. ... I confess, that the Subject appears to me very fine; & I enter upon it with great Ardour & Pleasure. You need not doubt of my Perseverance.<sup>309</sup>

This often-quoted statement makes clear that Hume early on settled for the Stuart Age as a proper subject for his history. His response to Smith's advice to begin his history with the first Tudor monarch is interesting, yet it does not allow us to establish whether or not Hume actually seriously pondered writing a Tudor history in 1752. All he states in this letter to Smith is that he was '*once*' of the same opinion about the proper period at which '*an English History*' ought to commence (italics mine). It is by no means clear when and for how long Hume had held this opinion on the best way to start a History of England and when he changed it. Thus, we cannot infer from this quote a direct indication of whether or not he actually contemplated to begin *his* History with the Tudors. In any case, by September 1752 he appears to have been firmly convinced that Stuart history held by far the greatest attraction for him as he considered it 'the most curious, interesting, & instructive Part of our History'. Hume was therefore not inclined to follow Smith's advice, though he later had occasion to regret not having done so.

Having established that Hume is unlikely to have contemplated writing a 'complete History' of England at any point in the early 1750s and that he had early on decided on Stuart history as the most appealing subject, we should now consider the form that this history was to take. Here the most important hint is given in a letter to John Clephane, written when Hume was already considerably advanced in his Stuart history:

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<sup>309</sup> Hume to Adam Smith, 24 September 1752, *HL*, i, 167-8.

As there is no happiness without occupation, I have begun a work which will employ me several years, and which yields me much satisfaction. Tis a History of Britain, from the Union of the Crowns to the present time. I have already finished the reign of King James. My friends flatter me (by this I mean that they don't flatter me), that I have succeeded.<sup>310</sup>

Here Hume first mentions the eventual title of the work, which appeared from 1754 to 1756 as *The history of Great Britain*. From January 1753 onwards Hume employed terms like a 'History of Britain' or 'British History' in his correspondence and it is therefore clear that throughout the period 1753-56 he was engaged in composing a 'History of Great Britain' rather than a 'History of England'.<sup>311</sup> It is surprising to note that this overwhelming evidence has been almost completely overlooked in the older scholarship, in which Hume's Stuart history as it was published in 1754-56 is commonly and incorrectly referred to as a 'History of England'.<sup>312</sup> In recent years, commentators have shown increasing awareness of and sensitivity to the original title of Hume's work and have begun to explore some of its implications, but we still do not possess a full and convincing account of Hume's choice of title.<sup>313</sup>

Underlying this lack of attention to the title of Hume's works seems to be the unspoken assumption that there was nothing particularly unusual about Hume's choice

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<sup>310</sup> Hume to John Clephane, 5 January 1753, *HL*, i, 170.

<sup>311</sup> Cf. Hume to Matthew Sharp of Hoddam, 25 February 1754, *HL*, i, 184; and the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 September 1754, *HL*, i, 193. It is initially puzzling to notice that Hume used the word 'an English History' in his letter to Adam Smith, whereas in his letter to John Clephane and subsequent letters he consistently employed the terms 'History of Britain' or 'British History'. This is explained, however, by the context of the Smith letter in which Hume discusses the history of the Tudor and Stuart period. For reasons discussed below a history of the Tudors could not be entitled a 'History of Great Britain', whereas that of the Stuarts could be written either as an English or as a British history.

<sup>312</sup> It has long been common to commence a discussion of Hume's *History* with some such sentence: 'The first volume of Hume's *History of England*, dealing with the early Stuarts, appeared in 1754.' David Wootton, 'David Hume, the historian', in *CCH*, pp. 281-312, esp. p. 281. Ernest C. Mossner, David Wootton and Philip Hicks fail to mention the original title, the last framing his discussion as if Hume had from the outset worked on a 'general history of England'. Cf. Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), pp. 301-318; and Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, p. 177. Forbes and Phillipson mention the original title only once, but then employ the title *History of England* in their discussions of Hume's Stuart history. See Forbes, 'Introduction' to *HGB*, p. 7; and Phillipson, *Hume*, chapter 5, esp. p. 77. Even where the correct title is used throughout, commentators have long failed to discuss its implications, see f. e. Wexler, *Hume and the History of England*, pp. 14-45.

<sup>313</sup> This change took place in the mid-1990s, possibly under the impact of the 'New British History' propagated by scholars such as J. G. A. Pocock and Colin Kidd. Cf. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British identity, 1689-c.1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), p. 210; O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 57; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion II: Narratives of Civil Government*, pp. 199ff.

of title because it is assumed to have been a common title for seventeenth and eighteenth-century histories. This was certainly not the case; on the contrary, the title 'History of Great Britain' had rarely been used by the time Hume started work on his *History*, even though it became far more widely used after the 1750s, perhaps in part because of the eventual success of Hume's work. Before 1754 the term 'Great Britain' does occur – though not very frequently – in titles of histories written during or concerned with the early Stuart period, especially the British civil wars or 'troubles of Great Britain'.<sup>314</sup> Prior to the publication of Hume's work there were in fact only two works that bore the words 'The History of Great Britain' in their title, neither of which covered exactly the same ground as Hume's projected work, though the first was a history of the life and reign of James VI and I.<sup>315</sup> The title Hume chose fairly early on in his work on the *History* had thus never before been used as the title of an overall History of the Stuart Era. Hume's unusual choice of title has still not been fully accounted for and requires to be explained. It is worth considering the different options available to him in some detail which should allow us to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the meaning of the title *History of Great Britain*.

What then made this unusual title appropriate for Hume's projected Stuart history? First, with the Union of the Crowns of 1603, the political histories of England and Scotland became intertwined in a way that made it impossible to write an English history without reference to Scotland, and to a lesser degree Ireland, especially as the

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Anon., *Britannia triumphalis; a brief history of the vvarres and other state-affairs of Great Britain. From the death of the late King, to the dissolution of the last Parliament* (London: Samuel Howes, 1654); John Davies, *The civil warres of Great Britain and Ireland. Containing an exact history of their occasion, originall, progress, and happy end. By an impartiall pen* (London: Philip Chetwind, 1661); Robert Menteith, *The history of the troubles of Great Britain: containing a particular account of the most remarkable passages in Scotland, from the year 1633 to 1650* [English translation of the *Histoire des troubles de la Grand' Bretagne*] (London: G. Strahan and R. Williamson, 1735). This and the information in the following note is derived from the *English Short Title Catalogue* (ESTC).

<sup>315</sup> Arthur Wilson, *The History of Great Britain being the life and reign of King James I* (London: Richard Lownds, 1652), a title appropriate for a history of the reign of a king who had done so much to encourage the use of the term 'Great Britain' following the Union of the Crown in 1603. The other work is Thomas Salmon, *The history of Great Britain and Ireland; from the first discovery of these islands to the Norman conquest*, (2nd edn., London: John Wyat, 1725). The first edition of this compiled history was entitled *Historical collections, relating the originals, conversions, and revolutions of the inhabitants of Great Britain to the Norman Conquest* (London: John Wyat, 1706), which indicates that the term 'Great Britain' was here employed in the purely geographical sense for the British Isles and does not denote a political entity.

disintegration of the Stuart monarchy during Charles I's troubled reign culminated in a Civil War originating from and encompassing all three Stuart kingdoms. The history of the Stuarts might and perhaps ought to be written as a history of Britain while that of the house of Tudor was essentially a history of England and its direct dependencies, Wales and Ireland. In addition to this, the term 'Great Britain' gained greater currency under the early Stuarts than it had under the Tudors due to James' untiring efforts in promoting his scheme for a more perfect union by employing the term on his seal and in his public pronouncements. His favourite scheme of a 'perfect union' never caught on however and Hume underlines the fact that James' use of the term 'Great Britain' was largely a fiction, designed gradually to bring into being his vision of a political union to which he increasingly realized his subjects on both sides of the Tweed were diametrically opposed.<sup>316</sup> While the term was briefly revived under Cromwell's Protectorate, it largely remained either a purely geographical term referring to the largest of the British Isles or a political term employed by the advocates of an Anglo-Scottish union.<sup>317</sup> This only changed in 1707, when the *Act of Union* brought into existence a new political entity by uniting the separate Stuart kingdoms into 'one Kingdom by the Name of Great Britain'. It was only from this point onwards, that one could truly speak of a true 'History of Great Britain' in a non-geographic, political sense.

Between the Union of the Crowns of 1603 and the Union of Parliaments of 1707, the histories of the three kingdoms had thus been intertwined to a hitherto unprecedented degree, which justified and even called for a 'British' perspective. This raises the question whether Hume chose the title to signify his insistence on writing a truly 'British' history, either in the geographic sense of the happenings on the British Isles or, more likely, in the political sense of a history that gave due attention to the political transactions in all of the Stuart realms, especially the kingdoms of Scotland and England. While Hume clearly showed an awareness of this British dimension of Stuart politics and iconography, it is doubtful whether he ever intended to write a truly British

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<sup>316</sup> *HGB*, pp. 85-6.

<sup>317</sup> For James VI and I and Cromwell's projects see Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Union of Britain in the Seventeenth Century', in *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (first published 1967; Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 2001), pp. 407-426.

history in the modern sense of the term. The finished *History of Great Britain* certainly belies such a notion. The very structure of Hume's narrative in which Scottish and Irish affairs were dealt with in separate sections or relegated to digressions testifies to the fact that Hume regarded Scottish affairs during this period as intimately intertwined with, but ultimately subordinate to, the goings-on in the English realm.<sup>318</sup> While British in geographic scope, the *History of Great Britain* was thus for the most parts written from an anglo-centric perspective in which the history of Scotland and Ireland were treated as in many ways an adjunct to that of England.<sup>319</sup> Despite its treatment of Scottish and Irish affairs, Hume's Stuart History does therefore not offer a more consistently 'British' perspective than other accounts of the Stuart Age written before the 1750s or, for that matter, in the ensuing two hundred years.

It is worth asking whether the title may perhaps have been chosen as an appealing and marketable title. After all, this was the moment when a 'North British' identity was being fashioned and advocated by sections of the Edinburgh literati and 'Great Britain' became a more frequently employed term that had positive connotations.<sup>320</sup> It is therefore possible – though it does not seem to have been contemplated by Hume scholars – that the inclusive title 'History of Great Britain' might have been adopted by Hume – and subsequently by his publishers – for its potential appeal to an audience on

<sup>318</sup> In most chapters of the *History of Great Britain* events and conditions in the Celtic fringe of the Stuart realms were relegated to sections entitled the 'State of Affairs in Scotland' or 'State of Ireland', cf. *HGB*, pp. 117-123, 140-153, 449-465, 546-555; and *The history of Great Britain. Vol. II.: Containing the Commonwealth, and the reigns of Charles II. and James II.* (London: A. Millar, 1757 [1756]), pp. 4-7, 187-194, 265-274, 339-348, 389f.

<sup>319</sup> Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, p. 210: 'Hume abandoned the *History of Britain*, the only volumes of which constitute a history of seventeenth-century England interspersed with critical reflections on Scotland and Ireland, for the *History of England*, not only because a properly British history would have been more burdensome, technically difficult and awkward to structure, but because it would not have served as a more comprehensive explanation of modern British history than the history of England.' See O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 57, for a similar view.

<sup>320</sup> For the creation of a North British identity and its role in the cultural politics of the Scottish literati see Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of Early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Culture', in *Scotland and England, 1286-1815*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Edinburgh: John Donaldson, 1987), pp. 226-246; and 'The Scottish Enlightenment' in *The Enlightenment in national context*, eds. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), pp. 19-40; David Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century: Union and Enlightenment* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 34-39. For a different view that emphasises Scottish 'national pride' see Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book*, pp. 34, 61-73, 147. For the creation of an overall British identity in the eighteenth century see Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1992).



both sides of the Tweed.<sup>321</sup> None the less, while it may indeed have been useful to write a British history for a British audience, the choice of title presupposes that Hume could expect his prospective audience would deem such a title appropriate for the kind of historical narrative he was engaged in writing from 1752 to 1756. This is indicated by the fact that once Hume settled on Tudor history as the subject of his next instalment, he immediately switched to the title *History of England* as the appropriate title for a narrative account of the reigns of the English monarchs from Henry VII to Elisabeth I. Taken on its own, the potential commercial appeal of the title 'History of Great Britain' does not constitute a sufficient and convincing explanation for Hume's adoption of this title for his Stuart history.

An important clue is provided in the above-quoted letter that Hume wrote to John Clephane in January 1753, in which he specifies the form he intends his *History of Great Britain* to take: 'It divides into three very moderate volumes; one to end with the death of Charles the First; the second at the Revolution; the third at the Accession, for I dare come no nearer the present times.'<sup>322</sup> This is a frequently overlooked but highly significant statement which indicates that Hume intended to complement the two Stuart volumes he eventually published in 1754 and 1756 with a third volume which would deal with later Stuart history from the Revolution of 1688/89 to the Accession of the House of Hanover in 1714. That Hume seems to have held this plan for at least a year is indicated by a letter from his Edinburgh publisher, Gavin Hamilton, to William Strahan, written on the verge of the publication of Hume's first volume. Describing the structure of Hume's projected work, Hamilton states that 'the three volls contians [*sic*] three grand periods, the first from the union of the Crowns to the death of the king, the 2<sup>d</sup> voll from the death of the king to the Revolution, and the last till the treaty of Utrecht'.<sup>323</sup> This suggests that until at least January 1754 Hume's plan for a three-volume Stuart

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<sup>321</sup> Yet there is circumstantial evidence to the contrary consisting in the fact that in January 1754, when Hume had already settled on the title 'History of Great Britain', his Edinburgh publisher Gavin Hamilton failed to even mention this title in a letter to his London printer William Strahan, instead describing Hume's *History* as 'the prittyest thing ever was attempted in the English History'. Cf. Hamilton to William Strahan, 29 January 1754, quoted in Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), pp. 302-3.

<sup>322</sup> Hume to John Clephane, 5 January 1753, *HL*, i, 170.

<sup>323</sup> Gavin Hamilton to William Strahan, 29 January 1754, quoted in Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. 303.



history had remained essentially unchanged, with the slight difference that the third volume would end in 1713 rather than 1714. In either case Hume's *History of Great Britain* as envisaged in 1752-54 would have been a complete history of Stuart Britain, spanning the entire Stuart Age from the Union of the Crowns to the last years of Queen Anne's reign.<sup>324</sup>

Yet the evidence that Hume originally intended to continue his *History of Great Britain* until 1713/14, is important in a different sense. His initial plan for a Stuart history comprising three volumes has important implications for our understanding of the projected work and helps to account for its unusual title. Had the work been executed as he originally envisaged it, it would have constituted a complete history of the Stuart Age, beginning with the accession of the house of Stuart to the English throne and ending with or a year prior to the succession of the House of Hanover to the British throne. An important part of Hume's discussion of Anne's reign would have necessarily been the negotiations and parliamentary proceedings that led up to the Act of Union of 1707 by which Great Britain as a political entity was brought into existence. Conceived as a three-volume history of the Stuart Era, the work would therefore have spanned the entire period between the promotion of a 'perfect union' by James VI and I and the eventual realization of such a Union in 1707. The work as envisaged by Hume in the years 1752-54 would have been more than a pre-history of modern British society. Comprising the entire Stuart Age, it would have constituted a true 'History of Great Britain' in the sense of a narrative of the pre-history and coming into being of the British state 1603-1713/14, taking the story up to and beyond the Act of Union of 1707. As such it would have culminated in either the Hanoverian accession of 1714, which brought about the increasingly stable regime Hume had described in his *Essays*, or in the peace-

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<sup>324</sup> The assertion in Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. 302, that Hume was '[o]riginally planning to commence with the reign of Henry VII and continue down to the accession of the House of Hanover' is inaccurate as it conflates Hume's 1752 letter to Adam Smith (to the effect that he was *once* of the opinion that an 'English History' should commence with Henry VII) with his 1753 letter to John Clephane (stating that *his* 'History of Britain' then in progress should eventually comprise three volumes and end with the Hanoverian Accession). Such inattention to dates and a failure to distinguish properly between different phases in the transformation of Hume's authorial intentions have long hindered a proper reconstruction of the process whereby the *History of Great Britain* and subsequently the *History of England* took shape.

treaty of Utrecht which established the modern-European state system and consolidated Britain's place within it.<sup>325</sup>

This clearly contradicts the prevailing view among commentators that Hume planned to write a history of the early Stuart and Restoration periods, ending with the Revolution of 1688-89. Hume's Stuart history, as it was published between 1754 and 1756, is generally regarded as an account of the pre-history and coming into being of the modern British constitution. Thus, Nicholas Phillipson asserts that 'the *History* was written to a specific agenda which had been developed in earlier philosophical and political writing' and which meant that 'Hume's primary purpose was to discover the origins of the modern constitution and the party system and to show exactly on what foundations [they] had been built.'<sup>326</sup> While this view is generally accepted, commentators have been at a loss to account for the fact that Hume, having brought his narration up to the Revolution of 1688, inexplicably failed to provide an account of the profound constitutional transformation that took place in the eventful decades following the Revolution and leading up to the Hanoverian Succession. It was, after all, in these decades of party conflict and constitutional change that Britain's eighteenth-century

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<sup>325</sup> If Hume had indeed, as the above-quoted letter by Gavin Hamilton suggests, planned to end his third Stuart volume with the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), we need to enquire why he may have regarded this as a more appropriate end-point than the Hanoverian Accession in 1714. The only scholar that appears to have given this any consideration speculates that Hume 'resolved to conclude his narrative with the in 1713 'to avoid the necessity of describing the Jacobite plot which was formed by some of Anne's ministers, and was baffled by her sudden death. Such a matter was of too delicate a nature to have much attraction for a man whose love of tranquillity grew far more rapidly even than his years.' G. Birkbeck Hill (ed.), *Letters of David Hume to William Strahan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 3. This is an interesting suggestion and might well have been the case had Hume been pondering to writing his *History* in the direct aftermath of the second Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, when – as we have seen – he omitted his topical essay 'Of the Protestant Succession' from the *Three Essays* appearing in 1748. By 1752, however, Hume evidently thought that this threat of Jacobitism and the controversies surrounding it had sufficiently subsided for him to publish this particular essay, a fact that makes it seem doubtful whether Hume would have sought to avoid retelling an incident that might after all provide an interesting occasion to recall the salutary political lessons he had already drawn for his audience in 1752. Thus we should perhaps search not for any event that Hume might have wanted to avoid by stopping short in 1713, but for the potential significance of the mention of 'the last till the treaty of Utrecht' as the end-point of his narration. The Treaty saw the recognition by France and Spain of the Hanoverian Succession, which was to take place upon Anne's death in 1714. Yet it was of wider European significance as it both concluded the War of the Spanish succession and was generally regarded as having inaugurated the modern European state system. For the place of the Treaty of Utrecht in Enlightenment historiography see Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. Vol. II: Narratives of Civil Government*, pp. 137, 170-1, 219.

<sup>326</sup> Phillipson, *Hume*, p. 11.

constitution was formed. As J. G. A. Pocock puts it with regard to the growth of crown patronage after 1688-9:

By Hume's time it was already a commonplace that the Revolution had replaced the royal prerogative with the more informal and insidious 'influence of the crown', and in Hume's judgement that was exactly what it should have done. But the history of this achievement could not be written if one decided to stop short in 1689, and Hume and all his readers knew this perfectly well. The history of both England and Great Britain would have to be carried on at least to 1714, through the great wars in which William III had involved his new kingdoms and which, terminating the threat of universal monarchy in Europe, had made possible the government of a unified Britain by the new devices of standing army, public credit and parliamentary interest. ... All these themes, and many supporting ones, were well known to Hume and had been daringly and minutely analysed in his *Essays*. But he did not write the narrative history to which they should provide the philosophical matrix. Instead of going past 1689, he turned back to the preconditions of 1603.<sup>327</sup>

Both Phillipson and Pocock point out that 1688 was after all only the beginning of a process that led to the intricately balanced Hanoverian constitution Hume had dissected in his *Essays, Moral and Political* in 1741/2.<sup>328</sup> This raises a problem unresolved in the existing literature, namely that there exists an interpretative gap between the culminating point of Hume's Stuart history, the Revolution of 1688-9, and the subject of his 1741/42 *Essays, moral and political*, the Walpolean system of government, which meant that the latter could not be fully explained without reference of the profound constitutional changes that had taken place in the period 1689-1714. Yet commentators have failed to take proper notice of the fact that Hume did originally contemplate completing his pre-history of the Hanoverian constitution by providing a narrative account of these changes.

While accurate for the *History of England* as it stands now, this interpretation is misleading for the work as Hume evidently conceived of it in the early 1750s. The notion that the *History of Great Britain* was from the outset designed as a pre-history of that constitution Hume had described and analysed in his *Essays* is difficult to sustain if we consider that when Hume's first mentioned that title to Clephane he wrote that he was working on 'a History of Britain, from the Union of the Crowns to the present time'.

<sup>327</sup> Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. Vol. II: Narratives of Civil Government*, p. 221, see also pp. 198ff.

<sup>328</sup> Cf. Phillipson, *Hume*, p. 108, who notes that in 1688/89 'the Crown still lacked the influence it was to enjoy in the age of Walpole. It had been impossible to regularize its relations with Parliament, and politics stayed subject to the fluctuations of speculative opinions in Parliament.'

Hume immediately qualifies this by stating that he does not intend to go beyond the Hanoverian Accession and locates the pragmatic reason for this decision in the restricted availability of the manuscript sources required for the writing of contemporary history.<sup>329</sup> Most commentators have tended to overlook the fact that prior to 1756 Hume shows no sign of having – in Pocock’s words – ‘decided to stop short in 1689’ and indeed states repeatedly that he ultimately intended his narrative ‘to be carried on at least to 1714’. That Hume never ventured beyond 1688 should not lead us to believe that his *History* was from the outset designed to culminate in the Revolution of 1688. Indeed, we shall shortly see that the overwhelming evidence of his letters does not allow us to see this failure to produce a continuation to the existing two volumes of his history of Stuart Britain as a foregone conclusion. Yet Pocock is correct in stating that Hume never actually continued his narrative beyond 1689. Hume’s failure to write the third volume of his projected History of Stuart Britain is made even more striking by his clear and often-stated intentions of ‘writing the Period after the Revolution’.<sup>330</sup> This underlines the need for a fuller account of the reasons for that failure and poses the question of when and why he abandoned his original plan of completing his Stuart history with a last volume on the period 1689-1714.

Hume’s first Stuart volume, covering the contentious Early Stuart and Civil War period, was published in November 1754. Never before had the stakes been so high for Hume, both in terms of the dignity of the genre he had written in as well as the potential profits to be reaped from a multi-volume historical work, and never before had he been so sure of his success. The response was far from encouraging: Instead of being praised for its impartiality, the work was branded as a partisan history by the reviewers and the initial print-run did not sell well. If Hume had the highest hopes, his disappointment was

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<sup>329</sup> This letter reveals that even the accession of the House of Hanover was not a fixed end-date for Hume’s *History* as he initially conceived of it. While he had started off by saying that he was engaged in writing ‘a History of Britain, from the Union of the Crowns to *the present time*’ (italics mine), he immediately qualified this by saying that he did not plan to go beyond 1714. In a P.S. to the letter Hume stated his reason for this qualification: ‘When I say that I dare come no nearer the present time than the Accession, you are not to imagine that I am afraid either of danger or offence; I hope, in many instances, that I have shown myself to be above all laws of prudence and discretion. I only mean, that I should be afraid of committing mistakes, in writing of so recent a period, by reason of the want of materials.’ Hume to John Clephane, 5 January 1753, *HL*, i, 170-1.

<sup>330</sup> See Hume to [William Strahan], 25 May 1757, *HL*, i, 251, and further letters cited below.

all the more crushing. It is difficult to overstate the extent of the severe disappointment Hume felt upon the reception of his first Stuart volume.<sup>331</sup> Work on the second volume, which had been considerably advanced, immediately began to falter.<sup>332</sup> It appears to have been this sense of disappointment that induced him to reconsider his initial plan for a three volume *History of Great Britain* and made him contemplate embarking instead on a Tudor history as friends had advised him to do.<sup>333</sup> Writing to William Strahan in September 1756, on the eve of the publication of the second volume of his *History of Great Britain*, Hume justified his reluctance to commit himself to writing the follow-up volume on the period after 1689:

I am sensible that the subsequent [i.e., post 1689] Period of History has many Advantages; but I despair of procuring Materials for writing it; at least, while I remain in this part of the World. However, as Accidents may make me change my Resolution, you may, if it be not too late, put simply *The End* at the Conclusion of the Volume; which neither promises nor excludes another Volume. I own, that the public has shown so little Disposition to recewe [*sic*] what I think Truth, that I am much discourag'd in this Undertaking.<sup>334</sup>

To Hume's readers the '*The End*' could signal either the end of the second volume or the end of the overall *History of Great Britain*. This reveals Hume's ambivalent attitude towards the project of writing later Stuart history. For a while he kept pondering the question whether he should complete his Stuart history with a third volume or go back to

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<sup>331</sup> Hume's letters of this period reflect the sense of sheer disbelief at the reception of his efforts to be impartial. As late as 1776 Hume dwelt at length on this episode and recalled the profound sense of discouragement he had felt upon the reception of his first Stuart volume in his brief autobiography 'My Own Life', *Essays*, p. xxxvii.

<sup>332</sup> Although Hume eventually 'resolved to pick up courage and persevere' in the composition of the second volume, he later confessed to a friend that he had done so 'with infinite Disgust & Reluctance'. As a result the second volume of Hume's *History of Great Britain* was only completed in April 1756, later than expected. See 'My Own Life', *Essays*, p. xxxvii; and Hume to William Mure of Caldwell, [Feb 1757], *HL*, i, 242. Cf. Hume to William Strahan, 3 May 1755, *HL*, i, 221: 'To tell the Truth, I was so discourag'd this last Winter, that I have not been so assiduous as I might have been.'

<sup>333</sup> Hume to Lord Elibank, 8 June 1756, in Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'New Hume Letters to Lord Elibank, 1748-1776' in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 4 (1962/3), 431-460, esp. 440.

<sup>334</sup> Hume to William Strahan, 30 September 1756, in Werner Stark and Heiner Klemme, 'Ein unbeachtet gebliebener Brief von David Hume', in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 72 (1990), 214-219, esp. 214. The text of the first volume concludes with 'The End of the First Volume.' Cf. Hume, David, *The history of Great Britain, Vol. I: Containing the reigns of James I. and Charles I.* (Edinburgh: Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill, 1754), p. 473. Acting on Hume's letter, Strahan did indeed put 'THE END' at the conclusion of the second volume following an appendix which contained two source documents. Cf. Hume, *The history of Great Britain, Vol. II* (1757 [1756] edn.), p. 459.

the pre-history of the Stuarts.<sup>335</sup> By May 1757 he had eventually followed the advice Adam Smith had given him five years earlier and was already at work on a history of the Tudor Era.<sup>336</sup>

Nevertheless, even the decision to turn back to the Tudors did not signal the end of Hume's History of Stuart Britain. Around the time of the publication of the Tudor volumes in 1759, as after the completion of his second Stuart volume in 1756, Hume pondered for a while whether to continue his history 'forward' rather than 'backward' and consulted his friends about this and he might well have done so under the appropriate title *History of Great Britain*. At times the British period after 1688/9 seemed to hold greater attraction to him, especially as he pondered the prospect of having to write the history of medieval England. This dilemma is expressed in a letter of April 1759, in which we find him returning to the idea of writing a third Stuart volume:

The Truth is, I hesitate extremely about my Plans & Schemes. There are many People who invite me to come forward with my History, & write the Reigns of K. William & Q. Anne. Several have offered me their Assistance in procuring Papers & historical Documents for this Purpose; and in general I foresee a greater Facility in this Undertaking than I at first apprehended. This work would be more entertaining both to me & the public, than the diving into old, barbarous & obscure Reigns; where I could scarce hope to communicate any thing new, and might even fail of making my Narration entertaining.<sup>337</sup>

It was only in the early summer of 1759, that Hume reluctantly and unenthusiastically settled on writing the history of medieval England. Even after that date, Hume did not entirely abandon his original plan to continue his Stuart history and although his enthusiasm at the thought of writing a continuation steadily decreased after 1759, it was almost another ten years before he was prepared openly and conclusively to renounce any intention of writing a continuation to his *History*.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> 'Shall I go backwards or forwards in my History? I think you us'd to tell me, that you approv'd more of my going backwards.' Hume to Adam Smith, [February or March 1757], *HL*, i, 246. See also Hume to William Mure of Caldwell, [Feb 1757], *HL*, i, 243.

<sup>336</sup> 'I have already begun and am a little advanc'd in a third Volume of History. I do not preclude myself from the View of going forward to the Period after the Revolution; but at present I begin with the Reign of Henry the 7th. It is properly at that Period modern History commences.' Hume to Andrew Millar, 20 May 1757, *HL*, i, 249.

<sup>337</sup> Hume to Lord Elibank, 2 April 1759, in Mossner, 'New Hume Letters to Lord Elibank', 448.

<sup>338</sup> Upon receiving a pension from George III in early 1768, Hume expressed his intention to fulfil the King's expectation connected with this pension and 'continue my History', yet in October of the same



Having established when Hume abandoned the plan to continue his Stuart history, we need to consider the distinct, but related question of when the existing volumes of Hume's Stuart history were finally incorporated into the work that had appeared between 1759 and 1761/2 under the title *The History of England*. The few scholars who have commented at all on the change of title maintain that Hume 'abandoned' the *History of Great Britain* and hence his multivolume history 'became the *History of England* with the publication of the Tudor volumes'.<sup>339</sup> This interpretation is highly questionable as we shall see that it was not until the summer of 1759 that Hume decided to write the medieval volumes instead of completing his Stuart history with the reigns of the last two Stuart monarchs. It becomes untenable, however, once we take into account the fact that, while Hume's Tudor volumes appeared under the title *The History of England* in 1759, the two Stuart volumes which had originally appeared in 1754 and 1756 were being republished under the title *The history of Great Britain, under the house of Stuart*. That this was not merely down to decisions made by publishers and printers is documented by a letter to his publisher in which Hume explains the rationale behind his decision to retain the title *History of Great Britain* for the second edition of the Stuart volumes.

The Title of it will be *History of Great Britain under the House of Stuart, in two Volumes*. As the Title of the other Volume will be *History of England under the House of Tudor*. By this Means they will be different Works; and some few Repetitions which will be unavoidable in this Method of composing them, will be the more excusable.<sup>340</sup>

Hume thus decided to retain the title *History of Great Britain* for the Stuart volumes while he was engaged in the composition of his Tudor history, which he then still envisaged as a single volume, but which eventually appeared in two volumes in 1759.<sup>341</sup>

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year he wrote 'I believe, however, I shall write no more History', and categorically rejected all of William Strahan's offers in May 1770: 'I am fully determined never to continue my History, and have indeed put it entirely out of my power by retiring to this Country [i.e. Scotland], for the rest of my Life.' Cf. Hume to the Marquise de Barbentane, 24 May 1768, *HL*, ii, 177; Hume to Baron Mure of Caldwell, 18 October 1768, *HL*, ii, 188; Hume to William Strahan, 22 May 1770, *HL*, ii, 223. For the royal pension see Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. 555.

<sup>339</sup> Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, p. 210; O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 57.

<sup>340</sup> Hume to William Strahan, [July 1758], *HL*, i, 283.

<sup>341</sup> 'I am very assiduous in writing a new Volume of History, and am now pretty well advanc'd: I find the whole will be comprizd in one Volume, tho' somewhat more bulky than any of the former.' Hume to



As they stood in that year, Hume's Tudor and Stuart histories, taken together, covered the two hundred year period from 1485 to 1688/9, yet for the reason Hume indicates he chose to present them as two separate, though evidently related, historical works. Thus distinguished from the *History of England*, the *History of Great Britain* stood as a freestanding historical work throughout the 1750s. It was not until the addition of the medieval volumes in 1761/2 and the publication of all volumes in a chronologically ordered series or set from 1762 onwards that all editions of Hume's *History* appeared under the new title *The history of England, from the invasion of Julius Cæsar to the revolution in 1688*. It was therefore only in the early 1760s that the title *History of Great Britain* was finally abandoned and effectively replaced and Hume's Stuart History, which he had commenced writing ten years earlier, was ultimately integrated into a larger work that would henceforth be referred by Hume, his publishers, readers, and critics as *The History of England*.

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Andrew Millar, 3 September 1757, *HL*, i, 265. See also Hume to Captain James Edmonstoune of Newton, 29 September 1757, *NHL*, p. 43: 'I am engag'd in writing a New Volume of History from the Beginning of Henry the VII till the Accession of James the I.'

## 5. Hume's Bid to Occupy the Vacant 'Post of Honour in the English Parnassus'

### 5. 1. *KTHMA ES AEI*: Hume's Thucydidean Aspirations as a Historian

Having sought to establish why Hume chose to work on a British history, we need to enquire what form that history was to take. His most significant statements on his nascent *History of Great Britain* occur in the letter to his friend, John Clephane, then in London, written in January 1753 when Hume was already considerably advanced in his Stuart history. We have seen that this was the first letter that mentions the eventual title of the work and outlines Hume's overall plans and ambitions for this project. Written while Hume was in the midst of composing the first Stuart volume, it contains a number of highly significant insights into his conception of the work. Having stated that he had already finished writing the reign of James VI and I, Hume goes on to outline his aims and ambitions for his historical work:

You know that there is no post of honour in the English Parnassus more vacant than that of History. Style, judgement, impartiality, care – everything is wanting to our historians; and even Rapin, during this latter period, is extremely deficient. I make my work very concise, after the manner of the Ancients. ... The work will neither please the Duke of Bedford [an eminent Whig politician] nor James Fraser [an ardent Jacobite]; but I hope it will please you and posterity. *KTHMA ES AEI* ['a possession for all time']. So, dear Doctor, after having mended my pen, and bit my nails, I return to the narration of parliamentary factions, or court intrigues, or civil wars, and bid you heartily adieu.<sup>342</sup>

Taken together with Hume's letter to Adam Smith written in September 1752, this is one of the earliest and in many ways Hume's single most important statement on his projected *History of Great Britain*. This programmatic passage contains in condensed form the entire rationale and programme for Hume's *History*. At the outset, he bemoans the lack of proper history and in so doing repeats the commonplace notion about the deficiencies of English historical writing. Noting the qualities absent in previous British historians – '[s]tyle, judgement, impartiality, care' –, Hume sets out to provide the history evidently lacking. A close reading of this passage and similar ones in Hume's

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<sup>342</sup> Hume to John Clephane, 5 January 1753, *HL*, i, 170-1.

letters of the period will therefore provide indications not only about the shape of the work then in progress, but will furthermore give us an indication of the kind of history Hume intended to write and the kind of historian he aspired to become.

As Hume proceeded in his research and writing, it became clear to him that the deficiency in British historical writing was greater than he had initially apprehended and consisted in far more than the failure to produce an elevated historical narrative: 'The more I advance in my undertaking, the more am I convinced that the History of England has never yet been written, not only for style, which is notorious to all the world, but also for matter; such is the ignorance and partiality of all our historians.'<sup>343</sup> Partiality and lack of style were the most frequent complaint of reviewers, and Hume knew he had to overcome these if he wanted to occupy the vacant seat in the English Parnassus. It was thus paramount for Hume to succeed in conveying a notion of his impartiality, and his letters of that period constantly refer to that notion.<sup>344</sup> In practice this meant setting himself apart from the party historians who were writing to please an audience and who therefore tended to reinforce existing prejudices and preconceived notions. Impartiality was thus the most important quality to aspire to and Hume's Edinburgh publisher confirmed his view that he had achieved it when he described the first Stuart volume as 'neither whig nor tory but truly imparshal [*sic*]'.<sup>345</sup> For Hume as well as his publishers it was therefore of paramount importance to convey a notion that he would indeed provide the much-requested, truly impartial history that would fill the void in British

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<sup>343</sup> Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 28 June 1753, *HL*, i, 179.

<sup>344</sup> This is evident from the following remarks in Hume's letters: 'I have the impudence to pretend that I am of no party, and have no bias.' (Hume to Matthew Sharpe of Hoddam, 25 February 1754, *HL*, i, 185); 'I certainly deserve the Approbation of the Public, from my Care and Disinterestedness, however deficient in other Particulars.' (Hume to William Strahan, 30 November [1756], *HL*, i, 235); 'I think I have kept clear of Party in my History' (Hume to William Strahan, [November or December 1760], *HL*, 336). Yet Hume came to reconsider his earlier estimation of his supposedly impartial historical narrative when revising his account of the reigns of first two Stuarts in 1763: 'In this new Edition, I have corrected several Mistakes & Oversights, which had chiefly proceeded from the plaguy Prejudices of Whiggism, with which I was too much infected when I began this Work. ... As I began the History with these two Reigns, I now find that they, above all the rest, have been corrupted with Whig Rancour, and that I really deserv'd the Name of a party Writer, and boasted without any Foundation of my Impartiality'. (Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 12 March 1763, *NHL*, pp. 69-70).

<sup>345</sup> Gavin Hamilton to William Strahan, 29 January 1754, quoted in Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. 303.

literature.<sup>346</sup> Paradoxically impartiality, which found its expression in a neglect of present interest and an appeal to posterity, could thus become a selling point with an eighteenth-century readership. Though he knew that expectations were going to be high, Hume was clearly convinced that he had succeeded.<sup>347</sup>

While 'impartiality' was the most important objective, it was not the only one required to secure the success of the work: 'The first Quality of an Historian is to be true & impartial; the next to be interesting.'<sup>348</sup> This underlines the fact that history was still to a great extent judged according to the standards that applied to literature.<sup>349</sup> This required a certain kind of narrative that would keep readers interested. As we have seen, Hume wrote to Clephane that 'I make my work very concise, after the manner of the Ancients.' This was a conscious decision for a particular kind of history, a decision on which he elaborated in a later letter to the prospective translator of the first volume, the Abbé Le Blanc, written after he had finished the first volume of the *History of Great Britain*:

If you consider the vast Variety of Events, with which these two Reigns, particularly the last, are crowded, you will conclude, that my Narrative is rapid, and that I have more propos'd as my Model the concise manner of the antient Historians, than the prolix, tedious Style of some modern Compilers. I have inserted no original Papers, and enter'd into no Detail of minute, uninteresting Facts. The philosophical Spirit, which I have so much indulg'd in all my Writings, finds here ample Materials to work upon.<sup>350</sup>

The decision to adopt the classical historical narrative as his model was thus a conscious one that entailed the rejection of the style adopted by his immediate predecessors. Like his insistence on his own impartiality, Hume's effort to provide an 'interesting' narrative

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<sup>346</sup> For the notion of impartiality see in eighteenth-century historical writing see Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, pp. 13-4, 161-2.

<sup>347</sup> Ten years later, when he was revising his account of the reigns of the first two Stuarts, Hume had occasion to change his initial assessment of his own impartiality: 'As I began the History with these two Reigns, I now find that they, above all the rest, have been corrupted with Whig Rancour, and that I really deserv'd the Name of a party Writer, and boasted without any Foundation of my Impartiality'. Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, 12 March 1763, *NHL*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>348</sup> Hume to William Mure of Caldwell, [October 1754], *HL*, i, 210.

<sup>349</sup> 'History was regarded, without qualification, as a branch of literature.' Karen O'Brien, 'History and Literature 1660-1780', in *The Cambridge History of English Literature 1660-1780*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 365-390, esp. p. 365.

<sup>350</sup> Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 September 1754, *HL*, i, 193. This passage raises questions about what constitutes a 'concise narrative' and where Hume's Stuart history exhibits the workings of a 'philosophical Spirit', questions that will be addressed in the ensuing chapter.

was thus indicative of a wish to dissociate himself from his predecessors. An author of such a narrative needed to avoid ‘the prolix, tedious Style’ and superfluous ‘Detail of minute, uninteresting Facts’ that made antiquarian histories dull reading to all but antiquarians. ‘Interest’ was the criterion by which events, episodes and characters were selected and others, minute and potentially of little interest to the general reader, were being discarded.<sup>351</sup> Hume was well aware of the crucial importance of a readable and engaging style and was convinced that a ‘lively interesting Narration & an elegant Style ... commonly determine’ a book’s success with the public.<sup>352</sup>

Hume boldly states his highest ambition as a historian and his own high expectations of the work he was then engaged in composing in a classical reference which he knew his learned friend would recognize as the line from Thucydides who had famously described his work as not intended to please an immediate audience, but rather as ‘a possession for all time’ (*KTHMA ES AEI*).<sup>353</sup> Hume thus associates his own aspirations as a historian with those of Thucydides by invoking the famous claim that occurs in the opening section of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. It is here worth recalling that in his populoussness dissertation Hume had stated that ‘The first page of THUCYIDES is, in my opinion, the commencement of real history’.<sup>354</sup> This sentence is generally

<sup>351</sup> As Hume’s friend and correspondent Hugh Blair would later state it: ‘It is by means of circumstances and particulars properly chosen that a narration becomes interesting and affecting to the Reader. These give life, body, and colouring to the recital of facts, and enable us to behold them as present, and passing before our eyes.’ Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric* (1783) cited in Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and sentiment: genres of historical writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), p. 42.

<sup>352</sup> Hume to John Clephane, 18 February 1755, quoted in an appendix to J. C. A. Gaskin, ‘Hume’s Attenuated Deism’, in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 65 (1983), 160-173, esp. 172. In a letter of the same year Hume defended his controversial depiction of Charles I tragic fate by saying that a sufficient motive for this was provided by ‘my Interest as a Writer, who desires to please & interest his Readers’. Hume to William Strahan, 3 May 1755, *HL*, i, 222.

<sup>353</sup> ‘My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last for ever.’ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner, with an introduction and notes by M. I. Finley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 48. On this passage see Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. I: Books I-III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 61-2. In the introduction to his translation of Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes commented on this passage: ‘[Thucydides] affected least of any man the acclamations of popular auditories, and wrote not his history to win present applause, as was the use of that age: but for a monument to instruct the ages to come; which he professeth himself, and entitleth his book *KTHMA ES AEI, a possession for everlasting*.’ Cf. ‘Of the Life and History of Thucydides’, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (11 vols.; London: Bohn, 1839-45; reprinted London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1997), vol. viii, p. xxi.

<sup>354</sup> ‘Of the Populoussness of Ancient Nations’, *Essays*, p. 422.

understood as expressing Hume's opinion that the origin of history lies in Thucydides rather than in the *Histories* of his older contemporary Herodotus, which Hume described as 'HERODOTUS'S wonderful [i.e. non-factual] narrations'.<sup>355</sup> Yet I would like to suggest that it can also be read literally as a specific reference to the actual 'first page' or opening section of Thucydides work, the *Apologia* which contains a programmatic exposition of what Thucydides considered as constituting 'real history'. It is in this opening section that the famous lines occur which Hume quoted in his letter to Clephane. Hume's letters of the period, in which he conceived and executed his *History of Great Britain*, indicate that he aspired to excel in the Thucydidean tradition in three important ways, which require a further examination: the type of history to be written, the choice of subject matter and the appeal to posterity.

Like Hume, Thucydides had set himself apart from his predecessors whom he described as being 'less interested in telling the truth than in catching the attention of their public' and whom he charged as being unreliable.<sup>356</sup> His true innovation however consisted in the fact that he provided an alternative to the Herodotean cultural history in the form of a largely novel and profoundly influential notion of political history.<sup>357</sup> Practitioners of history in the eighteenth century were looking back to Thucydides as a model political historian to be studied and imitated.<sup>358</sup> As for Thucydides, for Hume 'real history' was primarily political history, a truthful record of wars and statecraft. This

<sup>355</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', *Essays*, p. 424.

<sup>356</sup> *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. Warner, p. 47.

<sup>357</sup> 'The most important achievement of Thucydides was to persuade his successors that history is political history.' Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 45. On Thucydides conception of political history see Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1998), pp. 28-31.

<sup>358</sup> Hicks, *Neoclassical History* contains by far the fullest discussion of Thucydides impact, but slightly overstates his case by classifying eighteenth-century histories as belonging to either a 'Livian genre' or a 'Thucydidean genre' (*Neoclassical History*, p. 16). This is dubious in the light of the fact that Polybius rather than Thucydides was deemed to be 'the master of political, diplomatic, and military wisdom' until at least the end of the seventeenth century and was only beginning to be replaced by Thucydides by the mid-eighteenth century, cf. Momigliano, *Classical Foundations*, p. 49. At the same time Livy's work was losing some of its former authority, cf. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 633-4. Hicks somewhat artificial categories lead him to contrast 'Clarendon's Thucydidean history of the Civil War' with 'the Livian history of the entire English past supplied by Hume' (*Neoclassical History*, p. 209). Even if we accept Hicks' restrictive categories it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Hume's *History of Great Britain* was certainly more Thucydidean than Livian with regard to style and subject matter, even if his overall *History of England* may be Livian in scope.

was a commonplace Hume wholeheartedly accepted. In the case of Stuart history this meant ‘the narration of parliamentary factions, or court intrigues, or civil wars’ referred to in his letter to Clephane. This echoes his earlier description of history as ‘[t]he records of wars, intrigues, factions, and revolutions’ and, in the fullest phrase ‘those Annals of Wars, & Politics, Intrigues, & Revolutions, Quarrels & Convulsions, which it is the Business of an Historian to record & transmit to Posterity.’<sup>359</sup> Thucydides’ brand of political history as described in the apologia was characterized by two elements, namely the extensive use of set speeches and the stress on the underlying causes of political events.<sup>360</sup> Both are of vital importance for the understanding of Hume’s narrative, but, as they concern not so much the ambition of the historian as the practice of history we cannot draw on the evidence of the letters and must consult instead the narrative of the *History of Great Britain* itself, which will be analysed in the following chapter.

Such a history required a suitably grand subject matter. In setting his work apart from that of his predecessors, Thucydides claimed that the Peloponnesian war was the grandest possible subject, having involved the entire Hellenic world, as well as being the most relevant for contemporary readers. He therefore not only defended his decision to write the history of the war in which he participated, but his choice of subject matter, maintaining that this was indeed the most worthy subject for a historical narrative. Exceeding in greatness even the Persian War described by Herodotus, the Peloponnesian War was thus ‘a great war and more worth writing about than any of those that had taken place in the past’.<sup>361</sup> Hume agreed with this assessment when stating in the first *Enquiry*: ‘The PELOPONNESIAN war is a proper subject for history’.<sup>362</sup> As we have seen, Hume himself used similar terms to Adam Smith in order to justify his choice of the Stuarts, by

<sup>359</sup> *EPM*, p. 150; ‘Draft of Preface to a volume of D Hume’s History’ (c. 1756) printed in Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), p. 306.

<sup>360</sup> ‘The explicit formulation of a distinction between profound and superficial causes is arguable [Thucydides] greatest single contribution to later history-writing’, Hornblower, *Commentary*, p. 65. These are of profound importance to the understanding of Hume’s approach to the writing of narrative history and in particular the set-piece political debates that characterise the *History of Great Britain* and will therefore be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>361</sup> *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. Warner, pp. 35, 48. Some modern historians maintain that Thucydides slightly overstated the case for ‘his’ war, while others have come to agree with his assessment, cf. Hornblower, *Commentary*, p. 62.

<sup>362</sup> *EPM*, p. 106.



stating that ‘the Subject appears to me very fine’ as this period was ‘the most curious, interesting, & instructive Part of our History’. Due to its upheavals, civil war and constitutional changes, Stuart history had more than a fair share of those intrigues, factions, quarrels, wars and revolutions that formed the main subject matter of history. In addition, it was also the period closest to the present and, since ‘the Factions, which then arose, having an Influence on our present Affairs’, it would be the most relevant and most instructive period for a mid-eighteenth century readership.<sup>363</sup> Hume repeated this assessment two years later upon having finished the first volume: ‘I esteem this Period, both for signal Events & extraordinary Characters, to be the most interesting in modern History’.<sup>364</sup>

The kind of history Hume wrote, the choice of subject matter together with the ‘impartial’ and ‘interesting’ way in which he wrote it, seemed to set the work up for immediate success. Yet we have seen that the critical reviews and the slow sales initially confounded Hume’s high hopes. The profound sense of disappointment and disillusionment upon the hostile reception of his history and the persistent criticism of his treatment of both politics and religion found expression in what appears to have been a draft of a preface or explanatory note to be prefixed or attached to the second volume written in either 1755 or 1756. This draft manuscript is the closest thing we have to an *apologia* for Hume’s *History of Great Britain*.<sup>365</sup> After having given a thorough defence of his controversial treatment of religion, Hume goes on to provide a short but scathing statement on the unfavourable reception accorded to the work of a historian who thought he had taken sufficient care to put himself beyond the reproach of partiality:

As to the civil & political Part of his Performance, [the author] scorns to suggest any Apology, where he thinks himself intitled to Approbation. To be above the Temptations of Interest is a Species of Virtue, which we do not find by Experience to be very common: But to neglect at the same time all popular & vulgar Applause, is an Enterprize much more rare & arduous. Whoever in a

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<sup>363</sup> Hume to Adam Smith, 24 September 1752, *HL*, i, 167-8.

<sup>364</sup> Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 September 1754, *HL*, i, 193.

<sup>365</sup> This draft appeared as a much-altered footnote in the second volume of the *History of Great Britain* published late in 1756. Cf. Hume, *The history of Great Britain, Vol. II* (1757 [1756] edn.), pp. 449-50.

factions Nation pays Court to neither Party, must expect that Justice will be done to him by Time only, perhaps only by a distant Posterity.<sup>366</sup> This passage reveals a real sense of bitterness, a refusal to accept the reception his work had received from contemporaries, and strikes an accusatory note. In fact, this is the closest Hume ever comes to insulting his readers and it is thus not surprising to note that this passage of the draft did not find its way into the published work.<sup>367</sup> As this note shows, Hume had not given up on the notion of writing for posterity, but now the classical commonplace had taken on a polemical edge, consisting in his expressed preference for posterity over his contemporary readers. As he wrote to a friend in May 1755: 'It is not so easy to put right what has once been set wrong; but Time does Justice to every body; at least to every Book.'<sup>368</sup>

In the end, due to the eventual commercial success and critical acclaim his work received, Hume was able to resolve this tension and reconcile the two aims, though at a cost. The sense of idealism and the lofty aims with which Hume had commenced work on the first Stuart volume did not survive untarnished his profound disappointment about

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<sup>366</sup> MS in Hume's handwriting in the Keynes Library, King's College, Cambridge. Found among the papers of Gilbert Elliot of Minto papers, it is endorsed by his son 'Draft of Preface to a volume of D Hume's History'. It appears doubtful to me whether this draft was ever meant to be a 'Preface' rather than an lengthy foot- or endnote given that none of the instalments of Hume's *History* include a preface. The piece is printed in full by Mossner, *Life of Hume* (1980 edn.), pp. 306-7, who dates it to 1756. Mossner's conjecture is based on the fact that parts of the draft appeared in altered form in the second volume of the *History* published in 1756. To be sure, the draft makes reference to the second volume, but then Hume had originally meant to publish that volume in 1755 as is clear from a remark in his first letter to the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 September 1754, *HL*, i, 194: 'The Second Volume of my History will be publishd in a twelvemonth after the first.' In addition to this a number of formulations used in the draft have direct parallels in Hume's letters of the period February - May 1755. See in particular Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 26 February 1755, in Jérôme Vercruysse, 'Lettre et Corrections Inédites de David Hume', in *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, 2 (1970), 33-37; Hume to William Strahan, 22 March 1755, in Heiner Klemme, "'And Time Does Justice to All The World": Ein unveröffentlichter Brief von David Hume an William Strahan', in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 29 (1991), 657-664, esp. 659-661; Hume to William Strahan, 3 May 1755, *HL*, i, 221-2. The slightly accusatory tone of the passage cited above is far removed from the more detached and cautious tone of the 1756 footnote and more reminiscent of Hume's expressions of disappointment in early 1755. For these reasons I would cautiously date the draft to spring 1755.

<sup>367</sup> As this draft was found in the papers of Gilbert Elliot of Minto, I would furthermore conjecture that Hume followed his usual practice of sending his more controversial pieces to Minto to ask him for advice. Given Elliot's well-known prudence and circumspection as well as his advice against publication of the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* in 1751, it was probably he who dissuaded Hume from publishing a piece that was more likely to insult than to appease Hume's critics.

<sup>368</sup> Hume to Michael Ramsay, 3 May 1755. Cf. Hume to William Strahan, 22 March 1755: '[T]ime does Justice to all the World.', both quoted in Klemme, "'And Time Does Justice to All The World'", 660 note 16.

its initial reception. Hume's authorial decisions about the *History* as reflected in his letters reveal him to have become somewhat less idealistic and more cautious and pragmatic. As we have seen, he admitted that he finished the second Stuart volume 'with infinite Disgust & Reluctance' and a more pragmatic attitude seems to have crept in by 1759, when he finally and without any sense of enthusiasm decided to write the medieval volumes of the *History of England*.<sup>369</sup> Not even the thought of posthumous fame could ultimately motivate Hume to commit himself to continuing his *History* and Strahan cajoled him in vain by saying that it would be 'the only thing wanting to fill up the Measure of your Glory as the Great Historian and Philosopher of the Eighteenth Century' whose work 'will remain for ever the Standard History of this country'.<sup>370</sup> The inherent conflict between commercial success and writing 'a possession for all time' is perhaps best expressed by Edward Gibbon in a letter to Hume dating from October 1767, long after Hume had completed his *History of England* but before he had finally abandoned its continuation. While maintaining that aspiring historians like himself were writing for an immediate rather than a posthumous audience, Gibbon stressed that the author of the *History of England* was sufficiently qualified to harbour much higher aspirations: 'A Hume ... may leave a *KTHMA ES AEI*'.<sup>371</sup>

<sup>369</sup> This is evident from a letter he wrote to Adam Smith upon signing the contract for that part of the *History of England*: 'I shall execute this Work at Leisure, without fatiguing myself by such ardent Application as I have hitherto employd. It is chiefly as a Ressource against Idleness, that I shall undertake this Work: For as to Money, I have enough: And as to Reputation, what I have wrote already will be sufficient, if it be good: If not, it is not likely that I shall now write better.' Hume to Adam Smith, 28 July 1759, *HL*, i, 314.

<sup>370</sup> William Strahan to Hume, May 25 1771, in Birkbeck Hill (ed.), *Letters of David Hume to William Strahan*, p. : 'If you write another volume, which the best judges of writing are daily enquiring after, you may demand what you please for it. It shall be granted. ... I heartily wish you would seriously think of setting about it. It is the only thing wanting to fill up the measure of your glory as the Great Historian and Philosopher of the Eighteenth Century. But you certainly do not see this matter in the same light I do, otherwise you would not hesitate one moment in continuing a Work, which (imperfect as it is in point of time) will remain for ever the Standard History of this country.'

<sup>371</sup> Gibbon had consulted Hume about his historical work, a history of Switzerland, written in French and eventually left unfinished. Hume had encouraged Gibbon to write his history in English, which he considered likely to become the *lingua franca* of future centuries. Cf. Hume to Edward Gibbon, 24 October 1767, *HL*, ii, 170-1. Gibbon replied the next day: 'A Hume (you will excuse the instance) may leave a *KTHMA ES AEI*, but the ambition of us plebeian writers is limited to a much narrower term, both of space and of duration. My vanity will be gratified, If I am read with some pleasure by a few of my contemporaries, without aiming to instruct or amuse our posterity on the other side of the Atlantick Ocean.' *The Letters of Edward Gibbon*, ed. J. E. Norton (3 vols., London: Cassell, 1956), i, 222.

## 5. 2. 'Impartial Reasoners': Hume, Rapin, and the Quest for Impartiality

We have seen that among all the qualities requisite for an historian impartiality ranked highest. This was Hume's main concern while writing his history, as is reflected in the numerous references to impartiality in his letters of the period. Hume knew all along that the success of his *History of Great Britain* would depend largely on whether people accepted his claim to be above party. Upon its publication his *History* was immediately accused of being biased, but we should not seek to project this back into his state of mind during the time he composed the first Stuart volume. The letters written just before the publication of that volume reflect a genuine sense of complacency on Hume's part as he clearly felt he had done all he could do to ensure that the work would be hailed as the first truly impartial history of Stuart Britain. This should lead us to enquire how he sought to convey a sense of his impartiality in his narrative. This, it will be argued, can best be done by an in-depth analysis of a neglected feature of Hume's *History of Great Britain*, namely the set-piece political debate. Such an analysis will allow us to work out the meaning and implications of Hume's concept of impartiality in contrast to that of his main rival for the 'post of honour in the English Parnassus', the Huguenot historian Paul de Rapin-Thoyras (1661-1725), who was Hume's predecessor both as an analyst of the British party-system and as an historian of the British constitution. The differences between their respective ideals of impartiality and the degree to which those ideals were actually realised in their historical works can best be brought out by a close comparison between the political debates they inserted into their narratives in order to shed light on the constitutional conflicts of early Stuart Britain. Before we embark on this investigation, it will be requisite to provide a brief account of how Rapin's *History of England* had established itself as the most impartial of all histories of England by the mid-eighteenth century and to consider when and how Hume came to believe that it by no means merited this high reputation.

Rapin-Thoyras, more widely known as Rapin, was a French Huguenot who spent most of his life in the tolerant and intellectually vibrant climate of the Dutch Republic.<sup>372</sup> Having come to Britain as part of the invasion launched by William of Orange, he continued to be connected with influential Whig politicians, and this connection enabled him to consult state documents for his *Dissertation sur des Whigs et les Torys* (1717) and his multi-volume *Histoire d'Angleterre* (1723-1725). Even though these works were written with the aim of explaining the British party system and English constitutional history to a foreign audience, their peculiar combination of engaging set-pieces and antiquarian erudition greatly appealed to the British reading public. The standard translation by Nicholas Tindal's (1725-1731) was an immediate bookselling success and remained immensely popular. Holding its ground against the works of competitors such as Thomas Carte, James Ralph and William Guthrie, who failed to provide a similarly accessible account of the English past and were generally perceived as having succumbed to their party biases, Rapin's work remained the standard *History of England* until at least the mid-eighteenth century and continued to be read for a long time afterwards.<sup>373</sup>

Rapin himself was well aware of the pitfalls of partiality and stated in his *History* that 'there is scarce any Hopes of seeing an impartial History of *England*, from the beginning of King *James the First's* Reign, to our Time'.<sup>374</sup> Yet he was somehow convinced that he had managed to escape this dilemma and to free himself from party bias: 'For my part, [I] am not engaged in either of the Parties, and aim only at Truth'.<sup>375</sup> Though Rapin had influential Whig connections, his status as a foreigner who had written his *History of England* in the Dutch Republic was sometimes invoked to explain how he had managed to succeed whereas native historians had failed. Rapin's ambitious claim to have written

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<sup>372</sup> For Rapin see Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'Our First Whig Historian: Paul de Rapin-Thoyras', in Trevor-Roper, *From Counter-Reformation to Glorious Revolution* (London: Pimlico, 1992), pp. 249-265; and M. G. Sullivan, 'Rapin de Thoyras, Paul de (1661-1725)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23145, last accessed 28 Sept 2007].

<sup>373</sup> See Laird Okie, *Augustan Historical writing: Histories of England in the English Enlightenment* (Lanham and London: University Press of America, 1991), pp. 47-73 and Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, pp. 143-169.

<sup>374</sup> Paul Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England*, tr. Nicholas Tindal (15 vols.; London: James and John Knapton, 1725-31), ix (1729), 377.

<sup>375</sup> Rapin, *The History of England*, xi (1730), 15.

the impartial account of English history was largely accepted in the years succeeding the publication of his work in England, when Tindal's translation of the *History of England* soon attained an authoritative status that made it desirable for both Whigs and Tories to draw on this work for their own party-political accounts of English constitutional history. Scottish men of letters were equally willing to accept Rapin's claim to impartiality as is clear from Adam Smith remark that while '[i]t has been the fate of all modern histories to be wrote in a party spirit [,] Rapin seems to be the most candid of all those who have wrote the affairs of England'.<sup>376</sup> Statements such as this reveal that by the time Hume wrote his *Essays* and his *History of Great Britain*, Rapin continued to be acclaimed as the historian who had come closest to realising the elusive ideal an impartial history of England.

Hume had been aware of Rapin's work since the early 1730s and had come to share his friend's positive assessment of the Huguenot historian. Hume's earliest account of Stuart history and the emergence of the British party system in the seventeenth century, contained in his *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741/42), shares some similarity with Rapin's, on whom he appears to have drawn for his assessment of the reigns of the first two Stuarts. Consider the following concise account of 'the first rise of parties in England, during the great rebellion' in Hume's essay 'Of the Parties of Great Britain' (1741):

The *English* Constitution, before that Time, had lain in a Kind of Confusion; yet so, as that the Subjects possess'd many noble Privileges, which, though not, perhaps, exactly bounded and secur'd by Law, were universally deem'd, from long Possession, to belong to them as their Birth-Right. An ambitious, or rather an ignorant,<sup>377</sup> Prince arose, who esteem'd all these Privileges to be Concessions of his Predecessors, revokeable at Pleasure; and in Prosecution of this Principle, he openly acted in Violation of Liberty, during the Course of several Years. Necessity, at last, constrain'd him to call a Parliament: The Spirit of Liberty arose: The Prince, being without any Support, was obliged to grant every Thing requir'd of him: And his Enemies, jealous and implacable,

<sup>376</sup> Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (The Glasgow edition of the works and correspondence of Adam Smith, vol. iv)*, ed. J. C. Bryce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 116. In 1747 Henry Home (later Lord Kames) called Rapin 'a most judicious historian', while Robert Wallace stated in the mid-1740s that Rapin 'appears the most partial impartial of our historians'. Both quoted in Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), p. 234 note 3.

<sup>377</sup> Hume later replaced 'ignorant' with 'misguided'.

set no Bounds to their Pretensions. Here then begun those Contests, in which it was no Wonder, that Men of that Age were divided into different Parties; since, even at this Day, the Impartial are at a Loss to decide concerning the Justice of the Quarrel.<sup>378</sup>

This description of Charles as an ‘ambitious, or rather ignorant, Prince’ who ‘openly acted in Violation of Liberty’ is strongly reminiscent of Rapin’s interpretation of Stuart history.<sup>379</sup> This is unsurprising as Rapin was still widely considered as the historian who had come closest to providing a standard historical account of the Stuart Age.

Even before taking up the post of librarian and embarking on his reading or re-reading of the main accounts of Stuart history, Hume seems to have developed doubts about Rapin’s depiction of the Stuarts kings as bent on subverting an ancient constitution by deliberately usurping the privileges of their subjects. In a footnote to his essay ‘Of the Protestant Succession’, either written when this essay was first composed around 1748 or added immediately before its eventual publication in 1752, Hume called Rapin ‘the most judicious of our historians’, while at the same time hinting at his disagreement with the French historian’s assessment of the first two Stuarts:

It appears from the speeches, and proclamations, and whole train of King JAMES I.’s actions, as well as his son’s, that they considered the ENGLISH government as a simple monarchy, and never imagined that any considerable part of their subjects entertained a contrary idea. This made them discover their pretensions, without preparing any force to support them; and even without reserve or disguise, which are always employed by those, who enter upon any new project, or endeavour to innovate in any government. ... As these were very common, if not, perhaps, the universal notions of the times, the two first princes of the house of STUART were the more excusable for their mistake. And RAPIN, the most judicious of historians, seems to treat them with too much severity, upon account of it.<sup>380</sup>

This is the earliest instance of Hume entertaining any doubt about the French historian’s interpretation of early Stuart history and it is here that we can discern the nucleus of

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<sup>378</sup> ‘Of the Parties of Great Britain’ in Hume, *Essays, moral and political* (Edinburgh: printed for A. Kincaid, 1741), pp. 124-5. Cf. *Essays*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>379</sup> It is this similarity that has led Duncan Forbes to conclude that ‘Rapin seems to be behind Hume’s short and very general account of the events leading to the Civil War in the essay on the *Parties of Great Britain* of 1741.’ Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics*, p. 61. I disagree with Forbes’ assertion that Hume does not ‘name or distinguish James I and Charles I’ in the passage quoted above. That Hume is thinking about Charles rather than James seems clear from what reads like a reference to Charles’ Personal Rule (1629-40): ‘[H]e openly acted in Violation of Liberty, during the Course of several Years [until] [n]ecessity, at last, constrain’d him to call a Parliament’.

<sup>380</sup> ‘Of the Protestant Succession’, *Essays*, pp. 644-5.



Hume's diverging interpretation of this crucial period of British history. According to Hume, no design to subvert the constitution could possibly be ascribed to James I or Charles I, whose actions only testified to their naivety concerning the nature of the constitution and their lack of prudence with regard to their own controversial policies. Any fair assessment of their political outlook and actions needed to take into account the prevailing notions about the English constitution, which was regarded by many of their subjects as an absolute monarchy. This leads us to a closer consideration of the following stages in the gradual process by which Hume came to change his initially positive assessment of his Huguenot predecessor.

Hume appears to have closely read Rapin's volumes on the Stuarts while in the process of composing his own *History of Great Britain*, as is evident from his extensive use of the Huguenot historian's work as a source for his own narrative of Stuart history.<sup>381</sup> If Hume had come to develop doubts about Rapin's interpretation by 1752, these doubts were to be confirmed and amplified when he came to make up his mind about the early Stuarts and construct his own account of the constitutional struggles in which they had been involved. On having completed his narrative of James' reign Hume remarked to John Clephane in January 1753 that '[s]tyle, judgement, impartiality, care – everything is wanting to our historians; and even Rapin, during this latter period, is extremely deficient'.<sup>382</sup> As he proceeded in the writing of his Stuart history, this dissatisfaction hardened into the outright contempt expressed in a remark he made in June of the same year: 'Rapin, whom I had an esteem for, is totally despicable'.<sup>383</sup> Having reviewed and reversed his earlier assessment of Rapin's qualities as a historian, Hume was careful to convey his revised opinion of the Huguenot historian when amending his earlier essays for republication, replacing the words 'Rapin, the most judicious of our historians' in the passage from the essay 'Of the Protestant Succession' quoted above with 'Rapin, suitable to his usual malignity and partiality'.<sup>384</sup> This

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<sup>381</sup> Hume's changing opinion of Rapin has been discussed by Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 260ff; Wexler, *David Hume and the History of England*, pp. 13ff; Phillipson, *Hume*, p. 79.

<sup>382</sup> Hume to John Clephane, 5 January 1753, *HL*, i, 170.

<sup>383</sup> Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 28 June 1753, *HL*, i, 179.

<sup>384</sup> 'Of the Protestant Succession', in *Essays*, p. 654 note 1

suggests that a profound change of mind had taken place sometime after Hume had commenced work on his *History of Great Britain* in 1752. Hume commented on this complete reversal of his earlier assessment of Rapin in a letter he wrote to his prospective translator, the Abbé Le Blanc, in July 1757: 'To tell the Truth, I was carry'd away with the usual Esteem pay'd to that Historian, till I came to examine him more particularly, when I found him altogether despicable; & I was not asham'd to acknowledge my Mistake.'<sup>385</sup>

In little more than a decade, Hume had nearly come full circle in his interpretation of Stuart history. In his *History of Great Britain* he had put forth an account that was partly conceived as a refutation of the claims made by Rapin and others concerning the supposed guilt of the early Stuarts and in so doing he had entirely revised the interpretation he had set forth in his *Essay, Moral and Political* of 1741/42. Hume was well aware of the fact that his readers could not help but notice the discrepancies between the different evaluations of James I and Charles I in his succinct account of 1741 and the grand narrative of 1754-56, yet he did not substantially revise his earlier account in successive editions of his *Essays and Treatises*. He did however use the occasion of a new edition of that work, published in two-volume in 1758, to attach a note to the essay 'Of the Parties of Great Britain' in which he distances himself from his earlier views:

Some of the opinions delivered in these Essays, with regard to the public transactions in the last century, the author, on more accurate examination, found occasion to retract in his *History of GREAT BRITAIN*. And as he would not enslave himself to the systems of either party, neither would he fetter his judgment by his own preconceived opinions and principles; nor is he ashamed to acknowledge his mistakes. [To which was added, in the edition of 1777:] These mistakes were indeed, at that time, almost universal in this kingdom.<sup>386</sup>

<sup>385</sup> Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 22 July 1757, *HL*, i, 258.

<sup>386</sup> 'Of the Parties of Great Britain', in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects. A New Edition*. (London: A. Millar; Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1758), p. 47 note. The final sentence was added to the last edition which Hume had proofread before his death in 1776, cf. *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects. In Two Volumes* (London: T. Cadell; Edinburgh: A. Donaldson and W. Creech, 1777), i, 73. Eugene F. Miller erroneously states that it also occurs in the 1770 edition, cf. the variants in *Essays*, p. 616. It needs to be pointed out that the list of variants in Miller's LibertyFund edition, the most complete and most widely used edition of Hume's *Essays* currently available, is marred by the editor's reliance on the incomplete and unreliable list of variants printed in the Green and Grose edition of 1889. This problem will no doubt be amended in the two-volume edition of Hume's *Essays*, edited by T. L. Beauchamp and

This disclaimer indicates the extent to which Hume had abandoned his earlier views. Had the change in his interpretation of Stuart history been a mere matter of nuances, Hume would have undoubtedly made use of the opportunity offered by successive republications of 'these Essays' in his *Essays and Treatises* to silently correct his views, as he had done with a number of statements on other subjects. That he felt the need to openly admit to the discrepancies between his interpretations of Stuart history in his early political essays and his account of the same period in his *History of Great Britain* indicates that he felt this discrepancy to be too great to escape the attention of his readers or to be amended without rewriting substantial sections of his early political essays, in particular the essay 'Of the Parties of Great Britain'. As it was, Hume had profoundly changed his views on the constitutional conflict which had led to the breakdown of the Stuart constitution under Charles I.

Hume's realisation that Rapin was far from being an 'impartial' and 'judicious' historian went hand in hand with his conviction that he himself had achieved the impartiality which Rapin had only claimed to possess. Whereas Rapin had come to realise that every historian writing the history of the Stuarts 'will be looked upon as Partial, by one or other of the two Factions',<sup>387</sup> Hume composed his own history assured of his success in achieving the status of impartial historian. In June 1753, when writing to a friend about his increasing awareness of the deficiencies of English historical writing and his discovery that Rapin was 'despicable', Hume added: 'I may be liable to the reproach of ignorance, but I am certain of escaping that of partiality'.<sup>388</sup> In this regard he was to be sorely disappointed, as we have seen. Reviewers praised the literary qualities of the work but pointed out that '[i]n regard to impartiality, and an inviolable respect to truth, the indispensable and essential qualifications of an Historian, he appears to us greatly deficient'.<sup>389</sup> Hume's success with the reviewers did not completely silence

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M. Box, which is currently under preparation and will form part of *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume*.

<sup>387</sup> Rapin, *The History of England*, ix, 377.

<sup>388</sup> Hume to James Oswald of Dunnikier, 28 June 1753; *HL*, i, 179.

<sup>389</sup> Anon. [William Rose], review of Hume's *The history of Great Britain. Vol.II. Containing the Commonwealth, and the reigns of Charles II. and James II.*, in *The Monthly Review*, 16 (January 1757), reprinted in *Responses*, i, 160-172, esp. 172.

these voices and Macaulay brought similar charges against Hume in the nineteenth century. Hume's *History* is treated far more favourably in the influential reassessment of his political and historical writings put forth by Duncan Forbes, who insisted that Hume largely succeeded in realising his aspiration to become an impartial political essayist and historian.<sup>390</sup> Forbes' emphasis on the central importance of the concept of 'impartiality' to the understanding of Hume's objectives in his political and historical writings is largely accepted in current Hume scholarship, though by not every Hume scholar is convinced that this claim is actually borne out in Hume's *History*.<sup>391</sup> In order to shed some fresh light on this important problem, we need to proceed to a close examination of a crucial but neglected feature of the *History of Great Britain*, the set-piece political debate.

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<sup>390</sup> Cf. Forbes, 'Introduction' to *HGB*, pp. 43-54; Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, passim.

<sup>391</sup> This is evident from the following assessment. Having analysed Hume's reliance on Tory historians, Laird Okie states: 'What cannot be accepted is the current image of Hume as impartial scholar or skeptical *philosophe*, determined to seek the truth about the past amidst a mire of partisan commentaries. Hume's anti-Whig preconceptions distorted his analysis and skewed his interpretation.' Cf. Okie, 'Ideology and Partiality in David Hume's *History of England*', *Hume Studies*, 11 (1985), 1-32, esp. 27.

## 6. Narrative and Philosophy in Hume's *History of Great Britain*: The Case of the Set-Piece Debates

### 6. 1. Party-Political Debates in Rapin and Hume's Narratives of Stuart History

Hume's claim to have replaced Rapin and avoided what he regarded as the latter's excessive partiality can ultimately only be assessed by examining his own narrative and comparing it to that of his predecessor. This will allow us to establish whether Hume's ambitious claims concerning his impartiality as a historian are actually borne out by his narrative account of Stuart history. Since a comprehensive comparison of Rapin's and Hume's narratives would transcend the scope of the present work, it will be necessary to confine the present enquiry to a number of representative passages of both works that afford illuminating points of comparison. One such point is presented by their respective accounts of the dispute between James VI and I and the Commons in 1621, which was precipitated by the king's dissolution of his third parliament and led to a general debate concerning the boundaries of royal prerogative and parliamentary privilege. This important episode occupies a prominent place in both Rapin and Hume's narratives of the constitutional struggles of the Stuart Age. Both historians insert a particular form of debate into their narrative of this dispute between Crown and Commons and these debates shed light on their respective ideals of impartiality and the degree to which these ideals have been realised in their histories. This difference is best brought out by a comparison of Rapin's and Hume's use of set-piece political debates and the narrative accounts in which these debates are embedded.

Having related the events leading to the dissolution of James' third parliament including long verbatim quotations from the declarations on both sides, which is followed by a lengthy digression in which he seeks to evaluate the claims of both sides with regard to the origins and nature of the royal prerogative on the one hand and parliamentary privileges on the other hand.<sup>392</sup> Having set out the case for both sides in a

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<sup>392</sup> See Rapin, *The History of England*, ix, 489-492 (quotations from the Protestation of the Commons and James' reply) and pp. 494-498 (digression on royal prerogatives and parliamentary privileges).

paragraph each, Rapin concludes that the disputed question was such that it could not be decided either way and that it therefore ought to have been avoided at all costs. He consequently accords blame to James I and his successors down to James VII and II for their imprudence in engaging in 'this Quarrel'. Rapin then explicitly apologises to his readers for inserting such a digression into the body of his history, which he justifies by saying that it 'seems of Use to set the Reader right, and help him to judge impartially of the Differences which sprang up in this, and brought forth so many Calamities in the following Reign'.<sup>393</sup> At this point Rapin does not immediately resume the narration of the history of events, but instead reflects on the issues arising from the dispute between James and the Commons:

But the saddest Consequence of the Rupture between the King and Parliament, was the Division among the Subjects, who went over more and more to the two opposite Parties which are in being at this Day, with some difference, under the Name of *Tories* and *Whigs*. These two parties which were now beginning to be formed, were contended at first with wrangling and contesting with one another, in defence of the King's or the People's Rights, with respect to what had occasioned the Dissolution of the Parliament.<sup>394</sup>

For Rapin, as for Hume, the significance of the turbulent parliamentary session of 1621 consisted in the fact that in hindsight this period could be identified as the moment at which the two factions originated that shaped the constitutional struggles of the Stuart Era. This was consequently a crucial period in British political history due to the fact that these same factions survived to become institutionalised and dominate the eighteenth-century political scene.

Rapin's remark on the first formation of two opposing factions during the crisis of 1621 is immediately followed by a set-piece debate outlining the arguments of the two sides in a paragraph each:

The *Royalists* affirmed, the *Commons* meant to make a Republican Government of the *English* Monarchy. ... *England* was originally a Monarchy, and had all along continued upon the same Foot: But the Foundations thereof were going to be undermined, by making the King subject to the Parliament. At first they were only *Remonstrances* that were made to the King, afterwards, *Advice* and *Counsels* were added; but these *Counsels* were soon converted into

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<sup>393</sup> Rapin, *The History of England*, ix, 498.

<sup>394</sup> Rapin, *The History of England*, ix, 498.

*Instructions*, and the *Instructions into Orders and Commands*: In a Word, if the *Commons* were suffered to go on, the King would soon become a mere *Doge*. ... In short, it was a strange Thing, that under a Monarchical Government, the People, or their *Representatives* should tell the King how he was to govern his Kingdom....

The Favourers of the People said on their Part, the King was not satisfied with *England's* being a Monarchy, but would make it an absolute Monarchy. He affected to confound the several Kinds of Monarchies, whereof some were more, others less absolute, in order to acknowledge one sort only, to which he ascribed an unlimited Power. The *English* Monarchy was not of this kind, but began with the Parliament, which being as ancient as the Regal Dignity, formed, together with the Sovereign, the absolute Power the King would assume to himself alone. The Parliament had Their Privileges, as the King had His, nor could be deprived of them, without destroying the Nature and Constitution of the *English* Government. ...

This is Part of what was then said on both Sides, and is what served to cherish Dissention between the two Parties, who have scarce ever since ceased to revile one another.<sup>395</sup>

This passage resembles the set-piece debate Hume was to insert into his own narrative account of James' dispute with his parliament. We shall have occasion to assess the similarities and differences between the two debates in due course, but it is worth noting at this stage that the significant differences between Rapin's and Hume's accounts of the build-up to the dissolution of James' third parliament can only be fully brought out by taking into account the structural as well as the interpretative elements of their respective narrative of these events. We have seen that Rapin inserted a lengthy digression into his narrative which he justified by saying that it seemed useful 'to set the Reader right' and help him to form an impartial judgement about the constitutional dispute which originated in James' reign and was to prove so disastrous for his successor. Hume largely avoided the insertion of lengthy digressions and extensive direct quotations from the declarations of both parties which had served both the Earl of Clarendon and Rapin as a means to ostentatiously demonstrate their supposed impartiality by presenting their readers with both sides of a given argument, thus enabling them to form their own judgements.<sup>396</sup> Yet Rapin's digression was problematic in other ways too: While he set

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<sup>395</sup> Rapin, *The History of England*, ix, 498-502.

<sup>396</sup> See for instance Edward Hyde, first earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England begun in the Year 1641*, ed. W. Dunn Macray (6 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), i, 536-541.



forth the case for both sides, he made clear towards the end of the digression that since the constitution was obscure in this crucial regard, James as well as his son and grandsons were to be blamed for imprudently engaging in this dispute. While he had thus 'impartially' set forth the cases for both sides, he had also 'helped' the reader to judge by pointing out that regardless which side of the constitutional argument one tended to agree with, King James VI and I was ultimately to blame for starting a quarrel that was to prove his successors unravelling. In other words, the Stuart kings had brought their troubles onto themselves.

We have seen that Hume had justified his decision not to insert any quotations from state papers into the body of his History by saying that he had sought to avoid 'the prolix, tedious Style of some modern Compilers'.<sup>397</sup> As for digressions, Hume realized from the beginning that he could not entirely avoid them since he needed to provide his readers with summary accounts of the most important constitutional developments before the start of his narration in 1603.<sup>398</sup> The number of digressions in the text can thus be explained with reference to the fact that Hume decided to commence with the reign of James VI and I instead of beginning with an account of the preceding periods of English history. When he eventually turned back to write the history of the Tudors following the publication of the second volume of his *History of Great Britain* in 1756, Hume came to realize that he had made his task more difficult by having starting with the Stuarts. Writing to John Clephane in September 1757, he states that

I am now very busily engaged in writing another volume of History, and have crept backwards to the reign of Henry the VII. I wish, indeed, that I had begun there: For by that means, I should have been able, without making any digressions, by the plain course of the narration, to have shown how absolute the authority was, which the English kings then possessed, and that the Stuarts did little or nothing more than continue matters in the former tract, which the people were determined no longer to admit.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 Sep 1754, *HL*, i, 193.

<sup>398</sup> 'The preceding Events or Causes may easily be shown in a Reflection or Review, which may be artfully inserted in the Body of the Work, & the whole, by that means, be render'd more compact & uniform.', Hume to Adam Smith, 24 September 1752, *HL*, i, 168.

<sup>399</sup> And he adds: 'By this means I should have escaped the reproach of the most terrible *ism* of them all, that of Jacobitism.' Hume to John Clephane, 3 September 1757, *HL*, i, 264.

Hume clearly thought that his *History* would have been all the more persuasive if its message had been conveyed by the narrative alone rather than by a combination of narrative and digressions. In this view, the ‘plain course of the narration’ which its sequence of events and examples had an explanatory potential far greater than that of any digression, since it could make the reader perceive the course of Tudor and Stuart constitutional history. Hume implemented this strategy in later editions of the *History of England* when he took the digressions out of the main body of the text and relegated them to foot- and endnotes, thus allowing the narrative of events to stand on its own and as it were to speak for itself. Yet this should not obscure the fact that Hume had already employed a similar strategy when first composing his *History of Great Britain*. He only used a small number of digressions in his account of the escalation between king and commons in James reign, which is largely presented in the form of a narrative. This is clearly done in an attempt to distance himself from the kind of historical writing historians like Rapin had practised, as is clear from Hume’s remark that he had ‘more propos’d as my Model the concise manner of the antient Historians, than the prolix, tedious Style of some modern Compilers’.<sup>400</sup> It is in the context of Hume’s considerations about the explanatory potential of historical narrative that we need to understand the place and function of the set-piece debates in the *History of Great Britain*. These debates are one of the most prominent and remarkable features of Hume’s *History* and they present us with a test case of the degree to which he was able to translate his lofty ideal of impartiality into actual historiographical practice.<sup>401</sup>

Hume’s *History of Great Britain* contains seven proper set-piece political debates. When we consider their place in the narrative, it is striking to note that all of these debates are supposed to have taken place during three relatively brief periods. The first two debates are set in the period of increasing constitutional tensions that commenced with James’ rejection of the Protestation of the Commons in 1621 and led to the debate about the Petition of Right in 1628. Both these events provide opportunities for Hume to

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<sup>400</sup> Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 September 1754, *HL*, i, 193.

<sup>401</sup> Only three modern commentators seem to have taken any notice of this remarkable device: Forbes, ‘Introduction’ to *HGB*, pp. 15-6 and 25-6; Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, pp. 180-1; Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, pp. 63ff.

present the opposing opinions arising during these disputes.<sup>402</sup> No debates are to be found in Hume's account of Charles' so-called Personal Rule (1629-1640) for the obvious reason that no parliament was called during this period of relative calm. Two debates are inserted in Hume's narrative of the turbulent years 1640-42, which saw the rapid disintegration of the Charles rule, namely the debate about subsidies during the Short Parliament in 1640 and Charles rejection of the Grand Remonstrance of 1641.<sup>403</sup> Hume's narrative of the Civil War (1642-49), the years of the British Republic and Cromwell's rule (1649-60) and the first twenty years of Charles' reign are without debates. The final three debates are to be found in the last third of Hume's second Stuart volume, in the account of the period extending from the Exclusion Crisis (1679-81) to the Revolution of 1688/89. These comprise the debate about the Bill of Exclusion, the debate during the first session of James II's first parliament about revenue for life, and finally the first session of the Convention Parliament in early 1689.<sup>404</sup> Though the debates are confined to these three relatively brief periods, these are decisive periods, which receive a relatively extended narrative treatment in Hume's *History*.

What is common to these three periods is that they were all times of constitutional crisis, precipitating either an assertion of royal authority as after 1629 or an escalation into full-scale constitutional conflict as in 1642. Significantly, the debates are said to have taken place during periods in which parliament sat and in which a forum existed that allowed opposing opinions to be voiced. The debates also presuppose a situation in which neither the royalist nor the parliamentary camp oppress the other side to such a degree that open debate becomes impossible. Even though the debates themselves are sometime framed as having taken place 'throughout the nation', they are invariably sparked by either a debate between monarch and parliament or a dispute between opposing factions in parliament. It is perhaps significant to note in this context that the first set-piece debate in the first volume of Hume's *History of Great Britain* follows

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<sup>402</sup> *HGB*, pp. 182-5 (*HE*, v, 93-6) and *HGB*, pp. 294-6 (*HE*, v, 192-6).

<sup>403</sup> *HGB*, pp. 382-5 (*HE*, v, 273-5) and *HGB*, pp. 472-6 (*HE*, v, 352-6).

<sup>404</sup> *The History of Great Britain, Vol. II: Containing the Commonwealth, and the Reigns of Charles II. and James II.* (London: A. Millar, 1757 [1756]), pp. 323-5 [debate about the Bill of Exclusion], pp. 379-81 [debates about revenue for life], and pp. 437-9 [debate about settlement of the succession]. Cf. *HE*, vi, 388-91, 454-6, 524-6.

shortly after the digression giving an account of the rise of court and country parties during the reign of James I.<sup>405</sup> Likewise, the first set-piece debate of the second Stuart volume follows a few pages after Hume has discussed the origins of Whig and Tory parties during the Exclusion Crisis.<sup>406</sup> It is thus the rise of parties, which prepares the ground for the set-piece debates, and, conversely, the occurrence of such debates underscores the rise of opposing political principles and contrasting views about the nature of the English constitution. Insofar as they reflect the rise of party political principles, the set-piece political debates of Hume's *History* can be adequately described as party political debates.

The first set-piece debate of the *History* occurs at the end of the fourth chapter of his account of the reign of James I. This debate is preceded by the description of James' third parliament which Hume regards as a pivotal period in British constitutional history, a period that witnessed the first formation of court and country parties.<sup>407</sup> The turbulent second session of that parliament led to an intense confrontation between King and Commons over the latter's right to advise the former on points of foreign policy. The very language of Hume's account of this confrontation conveys the build-up of tensions between the monarch and his Parliament: the Commons' '*bold* step' of framing a remonstrance to remind the King of their ancient rights elicited a '*violent* letter' from James, which in turn triggered the parliamentarians' '*vigorous ... answer*'.<sup>408</sup> In this manner the conflict slowly escalated to the point at which James tore the remonstrance out of the Commons' journal book with his own hand before eventually dissolving Parliament after a session that had lasted less than four weeks. Having traced this chain of events that led to the intensification of the quarrel between King and Commons, Hume emphasises the symbolic significance of James' act:

The King having thus, with so rash and indiscreet a hand, torn off that sacred veil, which hitherto covered the English constitution, and which threw an

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<sup>405</sup> *HGB*, pp. 169-73. This digression was later relegated to an endnote, cf. *HE*, v, 556-559, note.

<sup>406</sup> *HE*, vi, 381.

<sup>407</sup> 'This parliament is remarkable for being the epoch, in which were first regularly formed, tho' without acquiring these denominations, the parties of COURT and COUNTRY; parties, which have ever since continued, and which, while they often threaten the total dissolution of the government, are the real cause of its permanent life and vigour.' *HGB*, p. 169.

<sup>408</sup> *HGB*, pp. 178f (Hume's italics).

obscurity upon it, so advantageous to royal prerogative; every man began to indulge himself in political reasoning and inquiries; and the same factions, which commenced in parliament, were propagated thro' out the nation. In vain, did James, by reiterated proclamations, forbid the discoursing of state-affairs. Such proclamations, if they had any effect, served rather to inflame the curiosity of the public. And in every circle or society, the late transactions became the subject of argument and debate.<sup>409</sup>

Hume, following Rapin, ultimately puts the blame on James for the imprudent rather than unjust act of exposing the essentially obscure nature of the Elizabethan constitution with regard to the limits of royal prerogative and the extent to which parliamentary privileges could be regarded as royal concessions. As Hume had remarked to Adam Smith upon commencing his work on the *History*: 'Twas under James that the House of Commons began first to raise their Head, & then the Quarrel betwixt Privilege & Prerogative commenc'd'.<sup>410</sup> James VI and I had transformed a petty quarrel between a king and his parliament into a constitutional dispute that had the potential to unsettle the foundations of the Elizabethan constitution. The immediate effect of this was the widening of a constitutional conflict from a dispute between king and Commons to a public debate encompassing the whole nation, during which constitutional questions of relative obscurity were propelled into the public realm, where they 'became the subject of argument and debate'. This wider debate was still conducted along the dividing line that had initially opened up in parliament, where two factions had begun to be formed which took the sides of king and Commons.<sup>411</sup> This moment in Stuart history therefore not only marks a widening of the debate, but an extension of party distinctions that led to the first formation of court and country interests and Hume consequently locates the ultimate origins of these party distinctions in this particular period. The narration leading up to the debate thus bears out the statement Hume made earlier in the same chapter to the effect that James' third parliament was 'remarkable for being the epoch, in which were first regularly formed, tho' without acquiring these denominations, the parties of COURT and COUNTRY; parties, which have ever since continued, and which, while

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<sup>409</sup> *HGB*, p. 182; *HE* V, 93. The edition of 1778 contains an additional footnote which identifies the pulpit and the press as those media which carried the debate to a large audience throughout the country.

<sup>410</sup> Hume to Adam Smith, 24 Sep 1752, *HL*, i, 168.

<sup>411</sup> *HGB*, p. 182.

they often threaten the total dissolution of the government, are the real cause of its permanent life and vigour'.<sup>412</sup>

The escalation of what had started as a petty quarrel between king and Commons ultimately led to the ensuing debate, which is summarized in the following two paragraphs that constitute the first set-piece debate of the *History of Great Britain*:

All history, said the partizans of the court, as well as the history of England, justify the king's position with regard to the origin of popular privileges; and every reasonable man must allow, that, as monarchy is the most simple form of government, it must first have occurred to rude and uninstructed mankind. The other complicated and artificial additions were the successive invention of sovereigns and legislators; or, if they were obtruded on the prince by seditious subjects, their origin must appear, on that very account, still more precarious and unfavourable. In England, the authority of the king, in all the exterior forms of government and in the common style of law, appears totally absolute and sovereign; nor does the real spirit of the constitution, as it has ever discovered itself in practice, fall much short of these appearances. The parliament is created by his will; by his will it is dissolved. It is his will alone, though at the desire of both houses, which gives authority to laws. ... Subjects are not raised above that quality, though assembled in parliament. The same humble respect and deference is still due to their prince. Though he indulges them in the privilege of laying before him their domestic grievances, with which they are supposed to be best acquainted, this warrants not their bold intrusion into every province of government. And, to all judicious examiners, it must appear, "That the lines of duty are as much transgressed by a more independent and less respectful exercise of acknowledged powers, as by the usurpation of such as are new and unusual."

The lovers of liberty, throughout the nation, reasoned after a different manner. It is in vain, said they, that the king traces up the English government to its first origin, in order to represent the privileges of parliament as dependent and precarious: Prescription and the practice of so many ages, must, long ere this time, have given a sanction to these assemblies, even though they had been derived from an origin no more dignified, than that which he assigns them. If the written records of the English nation, as asserted, represent parliaments to have arisen from the consent of monarchs, the principles of human nature, when we trace government a step higher, must show us, that monarchs themselves owe all their authority to the voluntary submission of the people. But, in fact, no age can be shown, when the English government was altogether an unmixed monarchy: And if the privileges of the nation have, at any period, been overpowered by violent irruptions of foreign force or domestic usurpation; the generous spirit of the people has ever seized the first

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<sup>412</sup> HGB, p. 169.

opportunity of re-establishing the ancient government and constitution. ... Nor is it sufficient to say, that the mild and equitable administration of James, affords little occasion, or no occasion of complaint. How moderate soever exercise of his prerogative, how exact soever his observance of the laws and constitution; "If he founds his authority on arbitrary and dangerous principles, it is requisite to watch him with the same care, and to oppose him with the same vigour, as if he had indulged himself in all the excesses of cruelty and tyranny."<sup>413</sup>

Each of these two paragraphs of equal length and structure contains a succinct paraphrase of the stance adopted by one of the two emerging parties. The two sets of arguments evolve around one fundamental issue, the origins and limitations of England's monarchy, and the arguments Hume attributes to '[t]he lovers of liberty' are in some regards a response to those of 'the partizans of the court'. Both sides develop general arguments by drawing on conflicting accounts of English constitutional history as well as conjectural accounts of the origin and limitations of monarchical government based on general principles of political philosophy and human nature. In both cases the assertions of the first half of the paragraph with regard to the location of sovereignty in the English constitution are succeeded by inferences concerning the lawful behaviour of the people and the monarch in accordance with the accounts given of the proper boundaries of ancient privileges and royal prerogatives. The last sentences of each paragraph are given in inverted commas and are by this means distinguished from the preceding arguments which were rendered in a language more reminiscent of Hume's earlier political writings than of the speeches and declarations of early seventeenth-century England. The inverted commas could be understood as signalling direct quotations from a source document, though Hume does not provide any footnote references. It seems more likely that he inserted this element of direct speech at crucial points of the set-piece debate in order to lend greater immediacy to the lines of reasoning attributed to both sides. In either case, the quotation marks underline the dialogic character of the debate in which one set of arguments is opposed by and put in direct contrast to another.

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<sup>413</sup> *HGB*, pp. 182ff.



These two stances are followed by a third paragraph that concludes the chapter. Here the reader might expect Hume to merely sum up the outcome of the debate and appraise its role in the constitutional struggles of early Stuart Britain:

Amidst all these disputes, the wise and moderate in the nation endeavoured to preserve, as much as possible, an equitable neutrality between the opposite parties; and the more they reflected on the course of public affairs, the greater difficulty they found in fixing just sentiments with regard to them. On the one hand, they regarded the very rise of opposite parties as a happy prognostic of the establishment of liberty; nor could they ever expect to enjoy, in a mixed government, so invaluable a blessing, without suffering that inconvenience, which, in such governments, has ever attended it. But, when they considered, on the other hand, the necessary aims and pursuits of both parties, they were struck with apprehension of the consequences, and could discover no plan of peaceable accommodation betwixt them. .... The turbulent government of England, ever fluctuating betwixt privilege and prerogative, would afford a variety of precedents, which might be pleaded on both sides. In such delicate questions, the people must be divided: The arms of the state were still in their hands: A civil war must ensue; a civil war, where no party or both parties would justly bear the blame, and where the good and virtuous would scarce know what vows to form, were it not that liberty, so requisite to the perfection of human society, would be sufficient to byass their affections towards the side of its defenders.<sup>414</sup>

This paragraph is in an important sense a part of the actual set-piece debate, as it introduces the views of a third group, distinct from ‘the partizans of the court’ and ‘[t]he lovers of liberty’, which Hume labels ‘the wise and moderate in the nation’. We do not get to know the reflections of this group with regard to the dispute over privilege and prerogative and the nature of the Stuart constitution. Instead, we are told that ‘the wise and moderate’ regard with some dismay a result of the rise of factionalism and the polarisation of opinion concerning the nature of the constitution, the prospect of a civil war as the ultimate outcome of these disputes and the impossibility of maintaining their ‘equitable neutrality’ in the expected struggle between the advocates of liberty and authority. Yet while these reasoning are attributed to a group in Stuart Britain and given in the past tense, they do not read like anything likely to have been said at the time. Indeed, the remark that ‘they regarded the very rise of opposite parties as a happy prognostic of the establishment of liberty’ reads very much like a sentence from one of

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<sup>414</sup> *HGB*, pp. 184-5; *HE*, v, 95-6.

Hume's earlier essays about British party politics. There is therefore some considerable ambiguity as to whether the views stated in this paragraph are supposed to reflect opinions held in Stuart Britain or whether an idealized group of 'wise and moderate' serve as the mouthpiece for the historian representing views he recommends to the 'wise and moderate' among his readers.

Having established that Hume diverged from the manner of history writing practiced by Clarendon and Rapin, we now need to examine the way in which he appropriated the kind of set-piece debate employed by Rapin. Though there are no direct verbal parallels between the debates that Rapin and Hume inserted into their respective narrations of the events of 1621, both debates have a number of features in common. They are both concerned with the same issue, the true nature of the English monarchy as reflected in the disputed question of the origins and nature of privilege and prerogative, and in both cases a summary of the arguments of either side is presented in a paragraph each. Even the order of presentation is the same, as the views of the royalist or court party are being presented before those of the 'favourers of the people' whom Hume calls 'the lovers of liberty'. These formal, structural and conceptual similarities between Rapin's and Hume's debate are too striking to be purely coincidental. Hume appears to have closely read Rapin's *History of England* during the time when he composed his own account of Stuart history and he extensively used this work as a source for his *History of Great Britain*. This was the time when Hume came to change his mind about Rapin's supposed impartiality and his remarks on the Huguenot historian reveal the fact that he had paid partial attention to those elements of Rapin's text which reveal the strong Whig bias underneath what Hume came to regard as a mere veneer of impartiality. We can thus infer that Hume would have read the passage discussed above with great care and he appears to have adopted and appropriated the idea of inserting this kind of debate at a corresponding point of his own narrative in order to make a similar point regarding the rise of party distinctions and the opposing sets of arguments championed by the two

factions. Rapin's 1621 debate should consequently be regarded as the immediate model of Hume's first set-piece debate.<sup>415</sup>

While the basic similarities between the two debates appear at first very striking, a closer comparison reveals a number of small but significant differences between Rapin and Hume's use of this literary device. We have seen that Rapin claimed that his balanced presentation of the legal cases for each side of the dispute in the preceding digression was designed to help the reader to form an impartial judgement and it seems clear that he devised the twofold structure of the set-piece debate with a similar purpose in mind. It is interesting to note, though, that while Rapin does indeed set out the case for the royalist and parliamentarian side in a paragraph each, the two paragraphs are not of equal length. This means that the views of the Royalist side are presented in little over a page while the arguments of '[t]he favourers of the people' are given two pages. Such an imbalanced presentation can be taken as an indication of the Rapin's own bias towards the latter side and thus undercuts his claim to impartiality. Hume evidently took greater care to balance the two opposing arguments by setting them out at more or less equal length. More significantly, he went to great lengths to ensure that the arguments of both sides were finely balanced out. In cases where the arguments of one party had evidently been weaker than those of the other, Hume went so far as to improve the weaker side's case by inserting arguments which had not been or could not even have been employed by the historical actors themselves as they drew on philosophical principles that have a distinctly eighteenth-century flavour. Hume's care in ensuring that a proper balance is struck between the two parties, conspicuously apparent from his presentation of the arguments of both sides, can be understood as a way of ostentatiously demonstrating his own impartiality as a historian.

Hume's deviation from Rapin's use of the set-piece debate and his attempt to refashion this literary device as a means to convey his impartiality becomes even more evident when we look at the second debate in his *History of Great Britain*. Like the first debate, inserted toward the end of Hume's account of James' third parliament, the

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<sup>415</sup> Duncan Forbes appears to have been the only commentator who has hinted at this remarkable similarity between Rapin's and Hume's set-piece debates, cf. his 'Introduction' to *HGB*, pp. 26. Forbes does not, however, note the specific parallels between Rapin and Hume's 1621 debates.

second debate occurs at a decisive moment of early Stuart history, the framing of the Petition of Right during his Charles' third parliament. Having provided excerpts from the dramatic speeches leading up to the framing of the petition in 1628, Hume gives the case for and against acceptance of the petition by the 'partizans of the commons' and the 'partizans of the court' in two paragraphs of equal length, once again balancing out the arguments of both sides.<sup>416</sup> This is followed by a third, shorter paragraph, which commences with the sentence: 'Impartial reasoners will confess, that the subject is not, on both sides, without its difficulties'.<sup>417</sup> In this paragraph Hume reviews the arguments from an 'impartial' standpoint, drawing on eighteenth-century constitutional experience as well as on his own general reflections about political maxims which he had earlier outlined in his *Essays, Moral and Political*. This paragraph thus differs markedly from the third stance in Hume's first set-piece debate insofar as the arguments contained therein are no longer attributed to any particular group in Stuart Britain. Instead these arguments are presented in the present tense, which suggests that when writing of '[i]mpartial reasoners' Hume means none other than himself and his polite eighteenth-century readership.

'Impartiality' thus represents a quality that is not to be sought for in the historical protagonists of seventeenth-century Britain, but rather an attitude to be adopted by eighteenth-century Britons with regard to the constitutional struggles of the preceding century. As such impartiality could be understood as a quality that elevated the historian and his readers above the party struggles of the past. Hume did not attempt to re-enact these struggles, but instead sought to encourage his readers to view them with detachment and to transcend prevailing party divides when forming their own judgements about Stuart history. In so doing Hume was sure that he had succeeded in transcending these party divides himself. This assuredness was not shared by all commentators, in fact, two successive reviewers for the *Monthly Review* accused Hume of partiality.<sup>418</sup> Others were convinced that he was indeed the first who had succeeded in

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<sup>416</sup> *HGB*, 295ff; *HE*, v, 192-195.

<sup>417</sup> *HGB*, 296; *HE*, v, 195.

<sup>418</sup> Anon. [Roger Flexman], review of Hume's *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I: Containing the Reigns of James I. and Charles I.*, in *The Monthly Review*, 12 (March 1754), reprinted in *Early Responses*, ed.

providing the long-sought-for impartial *History of England*. Among these more sympathetic commentators was Voltaire, who had earlier complained about the lack of ‘good Historians’ in Britain and partly attributed that lack to the prevailing ‘Spirit of Party’.<sup>419</sup> Voltaire clearly thought that Hume’s *History* had achieved the status of impartial history of England and his review of the work in the *Gazette littéraire de l’Europe* of 1764 takes the form of an extended reflection on the ideal of the historian’s impartiality. Voltaire evaluates Rapin’s reputation as an impartial historian and contrasts it with Hume’s achievement:

Rapin Thoiras, étranger, semblaient seul avoir écrit une histoire impartiale; mais on voit encore la souillure du préjugé jusque dans les vérités que Thoiras raconte; au lieu que dans le nouvel historien [Hume] on découvre un esprit supérieur à sa matière, qui parle des faiblesses, des erreurs, et des barbaries, comme un médecin parle des maladies épidémiques.

And he accordingly delivers his verdict of Hume:

M. Hume, dans son Histoire, ne paraît ni parlementaire, ni royaliste, ni anglican, ni presbytérien; on ne découvre en lui que l’homme équitable.<sup>420</sup>

## 6. 2. The Fortunes of Thucydidean Speeches and Debates in Classical and Early Modern Historical Writing

In the preceding section we have characterised the set-piece debates of the *History of Great Britain* as literary devices that have been inserted at decisive moments in Hume’s narration of the political history of the Stuart Era and serve the purpose of presenting the conflicting political opinions held by groups, factions and parties in Stuart society at these moments. We have examined the first of these debates in some detail in order to analyse its internal structure and establish its relationship with a similar debate in

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Fieser, i, 2-21, esp. 2. Anon. [William Rose], review of Hume’s *The History of Great Britain. Vol. II: Containing the Commonwealth, and the Reigns of Charles II. and James II.*, in *The Monthly Review*, 16 (January 1757), reprinted in *Early Responses*, ed. Fieser, i, 160-172, esp. 172.

<sup>419</sup> Voltaire, *Letters concerning the English Nation*, ed. Nicholas Cronk (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 110.

<sup>420</sup> Voltaire, review of *L’Histoire complète de l’Angleterre depuis Jules César jusqu’à sa révolution, par M. David Hume*, in *Gazette littéraire de l’Europe* (2 mai 1764), in *Mélanges*, iv (1763-1766), accessed online through <http://www.voltaire-integral.com> [last accessed on 28 September 2007].

Rapin's *History of England*. The comparison between the debates found in both historians' narrative of James' third parliament has revealed that Hume may well have modelled his set-piece debate on Rapin's concise summary of the English constitution held by the royalist and parliamentarian sides. It may be doubted, however, whether Rapin provided the sole model for Hume's remarkable use of set-piece political debates, especially if we recall his statement to the effect that in composing his first Stuart volume he had 'more propos'd as my Model the concise manner of the antient Historians, than the prolix, tedious Style of some modern Compilers'.<sup>421</sup> The present chapter seeks to extend our investigation of the possible sources for Hume's set-piece political debates by placing the debates in a far wider context, namely that of classical and early modern historical writing. The ensuing section will provide a concise survey of the place of invented speeches and debates in classical and humanist historical narratives with a particular focus on the work of historians whom Hume is known to have read. The insights gleaned from this survey will subsequently be compared with the results of our analysis of Hume's debates, which should in turn allow us to formulate a sharper definition of Hume's set-piece political debates and arrive at a more comprehensive interpretation of their overall place, function and significance in the *History of Great Britain*.

The speeches and debates to be found in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* serve as the most convenient starting point for our survey, both because Thucydides' innovative use of speeches, debates and dialogues provided the model for much subsequent historical writing and due to Hume's knowledge of the work, reflected in his statements on Thucydides, which we have discussed earlier. To be sure, fictitious speeches had been a constant feature of Greek epic poetry before Thucydides and had already featured large in the *Histories* of his older contemporary Herodotus in line with the classical conviction that history was made up of words and deeds.<sup>422</sup> In Thucydides'

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<sup>421</sup> Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 September 1754, *HL*, i, 193.

<sup>422</sup> 'Conventional Greek theory regarded history as a matter of ... action and speeches.' Frank W. Walbank, 'Speeches in Greek Historians', in Walbank, *Selected Papers: Studies in Greek and Roman History and Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), p. 242. See also Michael Grant, *The Ancient Historians* (London: Duckworth, 1995), p. 88-9.

narrative, however, these speeches assume novel functions that make them at the same time an integral part of the narrative of events and a means by which a political analysis of these events is being conveyed to the reader. The speeches are perhaps the most conspicuous and distinctive feature of Thucydides' *History*, which contains more than fifty orations given in direct speech that taken together make up almost one fourth of the text.<sup>423</sup> Thucydides was the first historian who explicitly commented on the sources on which he had drawn for his speeches and the method he had employed in framing them:

In this history I have made use of set speeches some of which were delivered just before and others during the war. I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches which I listened to myself and my various informants have experienced the same difficulty; so my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words that were actually used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation.<sup>424</sup>

This statement has sparked an intense debate among commentators about the authenticity or lack thereof of Thucydides' speeches, yet in the present context it will be sufficient to point out that whatever reports Thucydides may have had of speeches actually delivered during the war, he clearly felt free to adapt these in accordance with what he thought would have been appropriate given the circumstances of the situation in which such speeches were alleged to have been delivered.<sup>425</sup> This statement does not explicitly tell us anything about the role of speeches in the *History*, however, and we will therefore have to turn to the text of this work in order to assess the place and function of speeches and debates in Thucydides' narrative.

The fifty-two direct speeches occurring in all but two of the eight books of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* fall into three main categories, which can be distinguished according to the speeches' subject matter and structure as well as their

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<sup>423</sup> 'Twenty-four per cent of [Thucydides'] whole work consists of such orations'. Grant, *The Ancient Historians*, p. 88. A complete list of the speeches is provided in William C. West, 'A Description and Listing', in *The Speeches in Thucydides: A Collection of Original Studies with a Bibliography*, ed. Philip A. Stadter (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), pp. 2-15, esp. pp. 7-15.

<sup>424</sup> This passage occurs in the *archaologia* prefixed to the work, cf. the Loeb edition of Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. C. Foster Smith (4 vols.; London: Heinemann, 1919-23), i, 39. The translation is taken from a more recent edition, cf. *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. Warner, p. 47.

<sup>425</sup> For an overview of the intense scholarly debate that has evolved around this passage in Thucydides' *apologia* see Simon Hornblower, *Thucydides* (London: Duckworth, 1987), pp. 45-72, and Hornblower's *A Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), i, 59-60.



function in the wider context within which they occur. Public orations made in assemblies of the peoples differ from speeches made by ambassadors in the course of negotiations and from hortatory orations by generals to their armies before battle.<sup>426</sup> In all three cases the speeches are delivered before a specific audience with the aim of convincing, motivating or discouraging that audience to adopt or avoid a particular course of action and the vast majority of speeches consequently take the form of what is known in classic rhetoric as deliberative orations.<sup>427</sup> Thus far Thucydides is entirely in keeping with the rhetorical rules and practices of his day, even though his speeches are of a higher stylistic finesse and complexity than those ordinarily delivered on such occasions.<sup>428</sup> His true innovation lies in the manner in which he has combined speeches, sometimes presenting them in pairs sometimes in groups of up to five orations. When pairing his speeches to form proper debates, Thucydides employs the device of 'antilogy', the antithetical presentation of opposing views on a particular problem or situation, which had been developed by the Sophists.<sup>429</sup> This allows him to present in a vivid and immediate manner the views of opposing historical characters, their conflicting political principles, and the different courses of actions proposed by them to their fellow citizens, allies or enemies. In so doing Thucydides forged the speeches into

<sup>426</sup> Cf. West, 'A Description and Listing', in *The Speeches in Thucydides*, ed. Stadter, pp. 2-15. For this distinction see also F. W. Walbank, 'Speeches in Greek historians', pp. 253. A similar distinction between three basic types of speeches was made by Adam Smith in his *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 163-4: '[Thucydides] orations] are sometimes supposed to be delivered before the commencement of the war and are employed either to persuade the people to enter upon the war or to dissuade them from it; or they are the orations of Ambassadors either asking an Alliance, or defending the condu[e]ct of their countries, or settling the demands of the contending powers either before the war broke out or in order to bring about an accommodation; or they are those of Generalls at the head of their armies encouraging them to battle.'

<sup>427</sup> 'Thucydides' speeches are dramatic re-enactments of attempts at persuasion, not vehicles for expressing personal opinion.' Tim Rood, *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 40, cf. p. 44.

<sup>428</sup> Thucydides was taken to task for the unusual stylistic complexity of his speeches by the ancient critic Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Critical Essays*, tr. Stephen Usher (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1974), i, 563-619. Thomas Hobbes was later to defend Thucydides against Dionysius' criticisms, cf. 'Of the Life and History of Thucydides', in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (11 vols.; London: Bohn, 1839-45; reprinted London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1997), vol. viii, p. xxix-xxx.

<sup>429</sup> For Thucydides' use of antilogies and T. Rood, *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation*, p. 46 and Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, tr. Gilbert Highet, (3 vols.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1946), i, 398. Cf. Hobbes' comments in 'Of the Life and History of Thucydides', p. xxx.

a powerful tool capable of serving a variety of expositional and interpretative purposes within the *History*.

Thucydides' orations, paired speeches and political debates have been inserted at crucial points in the narrative of political and military events, thus focusing the readers' attention on particular moments of decision and presenting them with the different courses of action that had been available at these particular moments. They thus stand out from the narrative of events and therefore 'serve as landmarks in his work'.<sup>430</sup> This is perhaps best illustrated by the debate that resulted in the declaration of war in 432 BC and was concerned with those disputes between the city-states of Athens and Corinth over several of their colonies that Thucydides regarded as the superficial causes of the war. This debate is set in the Spartan assembly and takes the form of a series of speeches delivered before that assembly by the delegates of Corinth, the representatives of Athens, the Spartan king and a Spartan politician.<sup>431</sup> Most speeches are preceded by a brief remark on the speaker, then given in direct speech (*oratio recta*) and followed by a short summary of how they were received by the audience. At the end of debates Thucydides comments briefly on the division of opinion among the audience and in cases where a vote was taken he reports the majority vote.<sup>432</sup> Though the speeches constituting this debate are extensive and range over a variety of specific issues, they are all essentially concerned with one fundamental problem, the growth of Athenian imperialism, which was perceived as oppressive by Athens' allies and as threatening to Spartan hegemony on the Peloponnesus. Following the speeches, the Spartan assembly voted to the effect that the truce had been broken and war could soon be declared. Significantly, Thucydides adds, that this was 'not so much because they were influenced by the speeches of their allies as because they were afraid of the further growth of Athenian power', exhibiting once again his distinction between pretexts and real causes

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<sup>430</sup> H. D. Westlake, 'The Settings of Thucydidean Speeches', in *The Speeches in Thucydides*, ed. Stadter, pp. 90-108, esp. 105.

<sup>431</sup> *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. Smith, i, 107-149.

<sup>432</sup> For the structure of the speeches and debates see Westlake, 'The Settings of Thucydidean Speeches', esp. pp. 91-95.

for war that underpins his entire account of the war.<sup>433</sup> The Spartan debate is immediately followed by the so-called *Pentecontaetia*, a substantial digression which outlines the growth of Athenian power over the preceding half-decade, which in turn gives way to a final speech by the Corinthian representatives, supposed to have been given at a second congress of Sparta's allies, which makes the case for war against Athens with even greater vehemence.<sup>434</sup> This is followed by the vote of all the allies for war and the ensuing declaration of war precipitates the eventual outbreak of the Peloponnesian War a year later.

The speeches that make up the Spartan debate are thus one of the main vehicles for Thucydides' central thesis locating the ultimate cause of the war in the growth of Athenian imperialism. While reflecting and illuminating the particular circumstances in which they were delivered, they provide the reader with different perspectives on Athens' rise to imperial power. Modern scholarship consequently regards the speeches as an integral part of Thucydides' extended analysis of the long-term causes of the Peloponnesian War, and Adam Smith advanced a similar interpretation in Hume's day. According to Smith, Thucydides' objective in composing his *History* was

to explain the causes which brought about the severall important events that happened during this period [and] all his Orations are excellently adapted to this Idea of historically writing. There are three things which are principally concerned in bringing about the great events of a war (and as it is the history of a war which he writes it is in such he is principally concerned), Viz. The Relative Strength of the contending powers at the commencement of the war; The Strength, Fidelity and Good will of their severall allies; and the circumstances in which the armies on both sides were placed, and the different incidents which influenced the success of each particular battle. The whole of his orations are employed in explaining some one or other of these causes.<sup>435</sup>

Smith reappraises Thucydides' speeches as the prime means through which the Greek historian undertakes his masterful elucidation of the different sets of causes of military

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<sup>433</sup> *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. Smith, i, 149. This translation is taken from *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. Warner, p. 87. Thucydides' distinction between profound and superficial causes of events, which informs his analysis of the long-term causes of the Peloponnesian War, is discussed in Jaeger, *Paideia*, iii, 394, and Grant, *The Ancient Historians*, p. 81.

<sup>434</sup> Cf. *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. Smith, i, 149-195 (the *Pentecontaetia*) and 195-209 (the second Congress at Sparta).

<sup>435</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 163. After comparing Thucydides with other historians, both ancient and modern, Adam Smith stated that '[t]here is no author who has more distinctly explained the causes of events than Thucydides'. Smith, *LRBL*, p. 95.

and political events. Having differentiated between three major groups of speeches, Smith maintains that all the speeches Thucydides inserted into his narrative ‘tend to illustrate the causes or circumstances of some important event or one nearly connected with them’.<sup>436</sup> Modern scholarship concurs with Smith’s assessment that a major function of the speeches lies in the uncovering of underlying causes.<sup>437</sup> The causal link between words as recorded in the speeches and deeds as related in the narrative allows readers to assess the political and military actions in the light of the speeches that preceded these actions. Conversely, the reader is invited to judge the success of the arguments employed in the speeches according to the success or failure of the strategies or policies proposed by the speakers. By means of their interrelation Thucydides’ speeches and his narrative thus become mutually illuminating.<sup>438</sup>

Thucydides’ search for the deep and hidden causes of events ensures his work is a political history elucidated by political philosophy. This makes it possible to regard Thucydides as a historian concerned with applying the political philosophy of his time to the writing of narrative history. In his seminal study of the intellectual culture of classical Athens, Werner Jaeger made a convincing case for regarding Thucydides as a political thinker as well as a political historian:

[Thucydides] needed a special opportunity to disclose the intellectual, the universal aspect of events. The numerous speeches which punctuate his book are particularly characteristic of his narrative method: for they are above all else the medium through which he expresses his political ideas. ... This is a very important device, explicable not by a historian’s passion for exactitude but by a politician’s wish to penetrate to the ultimate political ground for every event. ... His belief that, after considering the peculiar circumstances of each case, he could set down what was demanded by the situation (*τα δέντα*) was based on his conviction that every standpoint in such a conflict had its own inevitable logic, and that a man who watched the conflict from above could develop that logic adequately. Subjective as that may appear, it was what Thucydides held to be the objective truth of his speeches. And we cannot

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<sup>436</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, 166-7.

<sup>437</sup> Cf. Grant, *The Ancient Historians*, p. 91.

<sup>438</sup> ‘Speeches link both with other speeches, so that the reader is invited to compare different attitudes, and with the surrounding narrative, which may confirm or deny the speaker’s perceptions.’ Rood, *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation*, p. 43. This work provides a subtle and acute analysis of what Rood calls ‘the interaction of speech and narrative’ in Thucydides’ text.

possibly appreciate it without doing justice to the political thinker concealed in the historian.<sup>439</sup>

Thucydides' orations thus add a further dimension to his narrative of events, thereby ensuring that his *History* is far more than a mere chronicle of the political events and the fortunes of war. The narrative of events is rendered intelligible as well as meaningful by speeches and debates reflecting the ideological and party-political conflicts underpinning those events. Thucydides' mastery lies in the fact that this commentary is not separated from the history of events, but instead 'translated into intellectual events' in the form of the speeches and debates.<sup>440</sup>

Yet while the speeches reflect Thucydides' political thought and analysis, it would be inaccurate to describe them as mere mouthpieces of the historian. To be sure, they contain general reflections about human nature, power and justice, which can at least in part be taken as representative of Thucydides' own political philosophy. Yet the sentiments of the speeches that advocate specific courses of action in preference to others cannot necessarily be taken as indications of the author's own opinion, since they are assigned to individual historical actors and are often directly opposed by the next speaker. In the words of another scholar, the speeches enable Thucydides to become 'a historian not only of the history of a war, but specifically of the intellectual history of the parties involved in that war, himself being detached from and not necessarily adhering to such reflections or theories and their applications as he records'.<sup>441</sup> By giving the arguments of both sides, the impartial political philosopher withholds his own judgement and leaves the reader to assess the strength of the arguments put forth by the opposing sides. Thucydides' paired speeches and debates thus invite judgement from the reader without diminishing the impartiality of the historian.

It will be necessary to briefly survey the use of speeches in other main historians of the classical period in order to assess the impact made by Thucydidean orations and debates on subsequent historical writing. While Thucydides had emphasised the

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<sup>439</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, i, 391-2.

<sup>440</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, i, 398.

<sup>441</sup> Hans-Peter Stahl, 'Speeches and Course of Events in Book Six and Seven of Thucydides', in *The Speeches in Thucydides*, ed. Stadter, pp. 60-89, esp. p. 62. Stahl goes on to say that 'it is Thucydides' intention to be, at his highest level, a historian of the *intellectual* history of the Peloponnesian War'.

importance of striking a balance between what was really said and what ought to have been said in any given historical situation, his immediate followers were even more outspoken about the fact that the orations in their histories represented their own inventions, inserted into the narrative to reflect their own opinions or increasing the dramatic potential of their work.<sup>442</sup> Though Polybius took them to task for doing so, he himself inserted numerous speeches into his own work, thus recognising the function of speeches to ‘sum up events and hold the whole history together’.<sup>443</sup> By this time the use of orations in works of narrative history had become an accepted practice and invented speeches constituted a central part of an historian’s established literary repertoire. As such orations were employed with considerable frequency and to great effect by the Latin historians, especially Sallust, Livy and Tacitus, who went to great length to imitate and, if possible, excel their Greek predecessors, in particular Thucydides. Sallust modelled his concise style on that of Thucydides and included orations in his history of the conspiracy of Catiline, which culminated in the paired speeches delivered by Cato and Caesar before the Senate.<sup>444</sup> Livy’s use of invented orations is even closer to that of Thucydides insofar as his speeches make up a considerable part of his narrative and are used in a variety of ways to disclose the characters and motives of historical actors.<sup>445</sup> Tacitus deviates furthest from the Thucydidean model insofar as he employed speeches almost exclusively as devices that allow him to disclose the character of rulers and bring out the dramatic or tragic elements of the unfolding events.<sup>446</sup> In his lecture Adam Smith compared each of these historians to Thucydides with regard to the use they made of deliberative orations in their histories. While Smith appraises all of the Latin historians, in particular Livy, he regards their speeches as falling short of the analytic quality and functionality of Thucydides’ orations.<sup>447</sup>

<sup>442</sup> Cf. F. W. Walbank, ‘Speeches in Greek historians’, pp. 246ff.

<sup>443</sup> Quoted in F. W. Walbank, ‘Speeches in Greek historians’, pp. 247-8. According to Polybius ‘a historian should not ..., like a tragic poet, try to imagine the probable remarks of his characters ... but should simply record what really happened and what really was said, however commonplace’.

<sup>444</sup> Sallust, [Works], tr. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1921; rpt. 2005), pp. 89-101 (Caesar’s speech) and 101-109 (Cato’s oration). Cf. Grant, *The Ancient Historians*, p. 205-6.

<sup>445</sup> Grant, *The Ancient Historians*, p. 226-7.

<sup>446</sup> Grant, *The Ancient Historians*, p. 292.

<sup>447</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, pp. 163-9.

Due to the revival of Latin, and subsequently Greek, literature in fifteenth and sixteenth-century Europe, the works of the Greek and Roman historians mentioned were much admired and their works were considered as exemplary models of masterful historical writing, worthy of imitation by the humanist historians themselves. The humanists considered the invented oration mainly as a rhetorical embellishment of historical narratives to the extent that the description of every major battle was generally preceded by stylised hortatory orations or military harangues written in strict accordance with the rules of classical rhetoric. Due to the humanists' emphasis on the art of rhetoric and the power of persuasion, speeches constituted one if not the most important formal element of the narrative of the fortunes of a city or commonwealth written in the literary genre known as 'true history'.<sup>448</sup>

These conventions and practices are reflected in Niccolò Machiavelli's close adherence to humanist prescriptions in his *Florentine Histories* (1525), even though this work was written well after the initial flourish of Florentine historical writing in the late fifteenth-century. Machiavelli, who had read Thucydides in a Latin translation, inserted elaborate descriptions of battles and character sketches into the body of his *Histories* and his orations are composed in strict accordance with the rules of classical rhetoric.<sup>449</sup> Yet in his use of invented speeches Machiavelli goes beyond his humanist predecessors insofar as his orations are far more than mere rhetorical embellishments or collections of memorable sayings and serve a functional role in his historical account.<sup>450</sup> His debates, which present the opposing viewpoints of groups and factions within Florentine society, reflect the overall concern of his *Histories* with what he calls 'the hatreds and divisions

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<sup>448</sup> For the humanist conception of 'true history' see Peter Burke, *The Renaissance sense of the past* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), and Peter E. Bondanella, *Francesco Guicciardini* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), pp. 94-7, 104.

<sup>449</sup> Cf. Quentin Skinner's concise and lucid *Machiavelli* (first publ. 1981; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), esp. pp. 88-97.

<sup>450</sup> Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) chapter 3 ('The Power of Words'), esp. pp. 103-107.



in the city'.<sup>451</sup> Machiavelli's 'antilogies' thus serve as illustrations of the theme of civil discord that provides the *leitmotif* of his narrative of the political history of Florence.

The work of another Florentine historian, Machiavelli's contemporary and friend Francesco Guicciardini, marks the beginning of a novel understanding of political history and a markedly different approach to the writing of narrative history. Guicciardini experimented with humanist conventions, which he sought to adapt to a new and more pragmatic role of history, the teaching of concrete political lessons in times of crises.<sup>452</sup> This new version of history found expression in his late historical masterpiece posthumously published in 1561 under the title *The History of Italy* and it is this work that best displays Guicciardini's novel and innovative use of invented orations.<sup>453</sup> Guicciardini's skilful handling of complex political events within the European framework of his narrative made him in the eyes of many a worthy successor of the great classical historians and led Voltaire to state that 'Italy had, in Guicciardini, its Thucydides'.<sup>454</sup> The nature of Guicciardini's speeches and debates and their function within his historical narrative can best be appreciated by examining the paired speeches about the government of Florence, which he inserted at a prominent place in the *History of Italy*.<sup>455</sup> At the beginning of the second book of that work Guicciardini's narrative shifts from the history of military and diplomatic events that formed the subject matter of the first book to the internal affairs of the city-state of Florence. An increasing demand for an extension of popular participation in the government of the city led to a public debate in the popular assembly with the aim of reconsidering and restructuring the form of government. In order to make alterations to the constitution, the magistrates met in the council chamber where Guicciardini inserts lengthy speeches by two citizens,

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<sup>451</sup> For this theme see Gisela Bock, 'Civil Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*', in Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (eds.), *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), pp. 181-201, esp. 181, 186-7.

<sup>452</sup> This is the central thesis of Felix Gilbert's masterful *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965).

<sup>453</sup> The work was posthumously published in 1561 under the title *The History of Italy*, which was not Guicciardini's. The title is slightly misleading insofar as the work is framed as a history of the European state system and the disruption of Italy's peace by foreign invaders.

<sup>454</sup> Quoted in P. E. Bondanella, *Francesco Guicciardini*, p. 135.

<sup>455</sup> Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, tr. Sidney Alexander (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), pp. 76-83.

Paolo Antonio Soderini and Antonio Vespucci, representing the two opposing viewpoints in this debate. According to Soderini, 'the desire for liberty is ancient and almost innate in this city' and a popular government should therefore be preferred over any other.<sup>456</sup> Soderini claims that rational argument and historical experience point to such a constitutional solution that would provide a remedy against all the dangers attending free and participatory forms of government. His opponent also claims 'reason', 'experience' and even 'authority' for his side while painting a pessimistic picture of human nature and warning of 'the tyranny of the people'.<sup>457</sup> While the Soderini argues for 'a free regime', Vespucci advocates 'limited participation and authority'.<sup>458</sup> Following the speeches, Guicciardini sums up the decision of the assembly by stating that due to the very nature of this council, which comprised only a limited number of citizens, 'the prevailing point of view toward a limited form of government would have triumphed' had it not been for Savonarola's intervention and advocacy of 'an absolutely popular government', which was indeed established.<sup>459</sup>

As an instance of Guicciardini's skilful appropriation of humanist vocabulary the constitutional debate about the reorganisation of the Florentine government illustrates the different functions that paired speeches could serve in his *History*. Perhaps the most immediately evident purpose of this debate is the aim 'to characterize the attitude and aims of social groups within a society'.<sup>460</sup> The paired speeches that constitute the debate about the reorganisation of the Florentine constitution reveal the attitudes felt and the changes advocated by the many as well as the few. While the humanists believed in the

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<sup>456</sup> Guicciardini, *History of Italy*, pp. 76-7.

<sup>457</sup> Guicciardini, *History of Italy*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>458</sup> Guicciardini, *History of Italy*, p. 83.

<sup>459</sup> Guicciardini, *History of Italy*, p. 83.

<sup>460</sup> Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, pp. 298-9. Gilbert identifies a number of these: 'In his second *History of Florence*, Guicciardini used speeches in a functional way, and in the *History of Italy* he employed them still more purposefully ... . He used them to emphasize the facts or events which were particularly relevant to the decision which a government had to make. Moreover, he used them to characterize the attitude and aims of social groups within a society; to show how men misjudged events; or to point out the difference between a reasoned evaluation of events and the distortion resulting from man's insistence to giving free reign to his desires and passions. By means of speeches the historian fulfilled the function of a judge: Guicciardini indicated how policy was to be conducted if it were managed rationally, and how it was conducted in reality. In the *History of Italy* speeches are devices to disclose the multidimensional character of the historical process.'

capacity of rhetoric to change men's minds and determine their actions, Guicciardini's evaluation shows a stronger sense of political realism as is evident from his judgement that the constitutional programme advocated by the second speaker in the debate was more likely to have been adopted by the council since it was in their interest to retain the reigns of government in the hands of the few. This should not, however, be taken as meaning that the outcome of debates is predetermined. The insertion of speeches at moments of decision underscores the fact that there were alternative courses of action available at any given historical moment and serves to demonstrate the essential openness of history. Felix Gilbert has accordingly described Guicciardini's set speeches as 'devices to disclose the multidimensional character of the historical process'.<sup>461</sup>

So far we have confined our examination of Guicciardini's debates to their place and function within his narrative of political and military events, yet to do so is surely to miss an important dimension of the debates, which are to some degree free-standing political essays. This dimension can only be fully appreciated once we consider the speeches in the overall course of Guicciardini's literary career. Before composing his *History of Italy*, Guicciardini had written at length about political matters with particular regard to the constitutional history of his native city of Florence, especially in his *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*. Here he set out a case for a mixed constitution in the form of a debate between four citizens about the history of Florentine government.<sup>462</sup> In the course of this debate, arguments in favour of a return to an idealized ancient constitution are rejected, as are the ones of those who propose to base the constitution on abstract political principles without consulting the lessons of history. These debates are not only related to Guicciardini's other political works but bear a distinct resemblance to the constitutional debate in his *History of Italy*.<sup>463</sup> Set-piece orations and debates can therefore be regarded as literary devices employed by Guicciardini in an attempt to apply his political insights to his narrative account of

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<sup>461</sup> Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, p. 299. A concise but lucid assessment of Guicciardini's orations is provided by Mark Phillips, *Francesco Guicciardini: the historian's craft* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), esp. pp. 96-7.

<sup>462</sup> The *Dialogue* was begun in 1521 but not published until after the author's death. Cf. P. E. Bondanella, *Francesco Guicciardini*, pp. 49ff.

<sup>463</sup> This point is well stated in P. E. Bondanella, *Francesco Guicciardini*, p. 60.

political history without having to insert a tedious commentary that would have been incompatible with strict humanist prescriptions for the writing of such an account.<sup>464</sup> Guicciardini's use of paired speeches and constitutional debates in his *History of Italy* thus enable him to effectively integrate his political thinking into his political history.

Guicciardini's new political history exerted a profound influence on British historiography through Francis Bacon's use of the *Storia d'Italia* as a model for his own *History of the Reign of Henry VII* (1622). Bacon's conception of civil history was akin to that of the Florentine pragmatic historians, especially in its insistence that the role of history lies in providing lessons of statecraft. Bacon's knowledge of Guicciardini's work is well attested and he quoted the latter's historical work in several of his writings. There are a number of structural similarities between their works, including the chronological rather than thematic arrangement of the narrative, the focus on political and military events, the emphasis on the European framework of national history and the use of character sketches and elaborate orations.<sup>465</sup> The most important difference between the two works lies in their respective scope, however, since Bacon's work is to a far greater degree centred on a particular ruler and is therefore as much political biography as political history.<sup>466</sup> Bacon shared with Guicciardini a Tacitean emphasis on uncovering the true causes of events and the hidden motives of rulers, a psychological interest which is reflected in the carefully drawn character sketches of his *History*.<sup>467</sup> The most striking similarity between their historical narratives consists in the use of orations, which are elaborately constructed and contain numerous political maxims.<sup>468</sup> Bacon's *History* even

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<sup>464</sup> That Guicciardini regarded his speeches and debates as free-standing pieces – or, in Felix Gilbert's words, as 'independent essays' – is evident from the fact that the unfinished draft for his second *History of Florence* contains elaborate speeches; cf. Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, p. 245.

<sup>465</sup> Vincent Luciani, 'Bacon and Guicciardini', *PMLA*, 62 (1947), 96-113, esp. 113. Having discussed Bacon's extensive use of Guicciardini's work and examined the similarities in style and subject matter between their main historical works Luciani concludes that 'Bacon used [Guicciardini's] *Storia [d'Italia]* as a model for his own *History of Henry VII*'.

<sup>466</sup> 'Bacon's work is both a political biography and a politic or pragmatic history, a study not only of actions but of policy and statecraft.' Perez Zagorin, *Francis Bacon* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998).

<sup>467</sup> Cf. Brian Vickers, 'Introduction' to Francis Bacon, *The History of the Reign of King Henry VII and Selected Works*, ed. B. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), pp. xi-xxxv, on Bacon's debt to Tacitus (pp. xv-xix) and his sustained psychological portrait of the Henry VII (pp. xxiii-xxix).

<sup>468</sup> On Bacon's orations and 'dialogue orations' see B. Vickers, 'Introduction', p. xx, and V. Luciani, 'Bacon and Guicciardini', pp. 110, 112.

features two instances of paired speeches in the manner of Guicciardini, though the more important of these consists in a specific exchange between an ambassador of the French king Charles VIII and King Henry's emissaries rather than in a rehearsal of general constitutional arguments.<sup>469</sup> Despite such differences, it is clear that Bacon drew on the Florentine historians, in particular Guicciardini, for the overall structure as well as the speeches and orations of his influential work of political biography and political history.

After Bacon there was a decline in the fashion of inserting invented speeches in British historiography, which was partly due to the rise of erudition with its emphasis on exact documentation rather than the relation of exemplary words and deeds. Historians and commentators shared a general ambivalence about whether speeches ought to have any place in works of narrative history.<sup>470</sup> Thomas Hobbes wrote appreciatively about the speeches in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* and defended Thucydides' use of deliberative rhetoric against the latter's main ancient critic, the Greek historian and rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus.<sup>471</sup> Hobbes' contemporary Edward Hyde, later Earl of Clarendon, on the other hand, refrained from inserting invented speeches into the body of his *History of the Rebellion*.<sup>472</sup> Their place was taken by lengthy direct quotations from the declarations of royalists and parliamentarians during the build-up to the Civil War. The intense party political debates that began to evolve around early Stuart history at the time Clarendon wrote his *History* and which continued well into the next century called for documentation in any narrative account of this contested period of British political history.

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<sup>469</sup> See the orations in direct speech by the French ambassador Robert Gagvien (Bacon, *History*, pp. 73-78) and the reply by the Lord Chancellor (pp. 78-80), as well as the indirect speeches by Charles VIII's envoys (pp. 41-43) and the King's answer (p. 43).

<sup>470</sup> For the declining popularity of set speeches in British historical writing during the early modern period see Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, pp. 58-59 and 230-231.

<sup>471</sup> Thomas Hobbes, 'Of the Life and History of Thucydides', in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (11 vols.; London: Bohn, 1839-45; reprinted London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1997), vol. viii, pp. xxi, xxix-xxx. Dionysius was not opposed to the insertion of invented speeches into works of history, but censured Thucydides' orations on stylistic grounds, cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Critical Essays*, tr. Stephen Usher (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1974), i, 563-613.

<sup>472</sup> Cf. Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, pp. 58-9: 'Clarendon was very much a man of his time when he chose to dispense with invented speeches.'

The insertion of lengthy quotations from documents to be found in seventeenth-century works of history tended to interrupt the flow of the narrative and was consequently regarded as a breach of the rules of historical writing. Writing about the way in which he had composed his *History*, Clarendon defended his own use of such extensive quotations:

[T]here is a great deal of difference between troubling the series of grave and weighty actions and counsels with tedious relations of formal despatches (though of notable moment), and the relating solemn acts and consultations, from which all the matter of action is raised and continued. ... And therefore you will find D'Avila (who I think hath written as our's should be written, and from whence no question our Gamesters learnt much of their play) insert the declarations of both sides in the main body of the story, as the foundations upon which all that was after done, was built.<sup>473</sup>

Underpinning this is a fundamental assumption that Clarendon shared with those classical and humanist historians who believed that actions were generally preceded by words and that the former could not be fully understood or assessed without reference to the latter. Words mattered because they could sway men's minds one way or the other and therefore it was necessary to relate exactly what had been said when people took sides in a conflict.<sup>474</sup> Yet whereas the humanists had opted for speeches that could be integrated into the flow of the narrative, Clarendon and his contemporaries replaced these literary devices with extracts from source documents, which reflected more accurately what had actually been said or written at decisive moments in the run-up to the constitutional conflict of the 1640s.<sup>475</sup>

By the early eighteenth century the use of extracts from documents had become an established practice in British historical writing, a fact to which the works of Rapin and his contemporaries testify. Speeches, on the other hand, had almost entirely fallen out of fashion. In his public lectures on rhetoric and belles letters, delivered in Edinburgh

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<sup>473</sup> Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon to the Earl of Bristol, quoted in Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>474</sup> For the Humanists' belief in the power of words see Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), chapter 3, esp. pp. 75-6.

<sup>475</sup> 'The forth book contains all the passages from the King's going to York to the setting up the standard; which time being wholly spent in talk, and all that followed of action proceeding from that talk, I have been obliged to set down (which I had a great mind to have avoided) many declarations even *in terminis*'. Clarendon to the Earl of Bristol, quoted in Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, p. 60.

between 1748 and 1750, Adam Smith found occasion to comment on this trend and provide his own assessment of the role of orations in works of narrative history. Smith followed Hobbes in criticising the practice of inserting lengthy ‘dissertations’ into works of narrative history and he thought that it was partly this practice that had rendered modern works of history considerably ‘less interesting than those wrote by the Ancients’.<sup>476</sup> Orations, on the other hand, were not open to the same kind of criticism:

Speeches interspersed in the narration do not appea[r] so faulty (tho they may be of considerable length) as long observations or Rhetoricall [sic] declamations. The Stile inde[e]d is altogether different from that of the Historian as they are oratoricall compositions; But then they are not in the authors own person, and therefore do not contradict the impartiality he is to maintain. Neither do they interrupt the thread of the narration as they are not considered as the authors, but make a part of the facts related. They give also an opportunity of introducing those observations and reflections which we observed are not so properly made in the person of the writer. ... The only objection then that can be made against the using speeches in this manner is, [t]hat tho they be represented as facts, they are not genuine ones. But neither does [he] desire you to consider them as such, but only as being brought in to illustrate the narration.<sup>477</sup>

This dense and important statement outlines the advantage of inserting speeches into works of narrative history. According to Smith speeches have two advantages over dissertations and digressions, namely that they can be fully integrated into historical accounts without interrupting the flow of the narrative of events and that they do not compromise the historian’s impartiality. Smith furthermore confronts the objections traditionally raised by those who were reluctant to accord invented speeches a place in post-classical historical writing. He admits that the ‘oratorical’ style of such speeches necessarily differs from the style maintained throughout the rest of the narrative and concedes that such speeches ought to be regarded as fictitious rather than genuine.<sup>478</sup>

Smith justifies the presence of invented speeches in an otherwise factual historical narrative by pointing out that they serve a dual purpose insofar as they convey certain facts about the situation in which they have been delivered and allow the historian to

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<sup>476</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 102.

<sup>477</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 103.

<sup>478</sup> Humanists historians tended to be outspoken about the fact that they generally invented orations and felt justified in doing so since they regarded the speeches in classical histories as fictitious; cf. Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, pp. 211, 298.



insert his 'observations and reflections' without compromising either the stylistic unity of the narrative or the sense of impartiality to be upheld by the historian. Thus we have seen that Smith considered Thucydides' speeches as an effective means for conveying 'the causes which brought about the severall important events that happened during this period'.<sup>479</sup> In Smith's view speeches are thus 'brought in to illustrate the narration', or, as he put it with regard to Thucydides, they 'tend to illustrate the causes or circumstances of some important event or one nearly connected with them'.<sup>480</sup> Smith's statement is an important reappraisal of the role and function of speeches in works of narrative history. He appears to be advocating a reversal of the trend that saw speeches fall out of fashion and replaced by lengthy source documents.

Smith's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* conclude our review of the fortunes of speeches and the variety of uses to which they were put in classical and early modern historical writing. We have seen that set-piece orations and debates allowed historians like Thucydides and Guicciardini to bring the insights of political philosophy to bear on political history. Turning now to an in-depth examination of Hume's place in this historiographical tradition, we may first recall what importance Hume attached to Thucydides, whom he regarded as the first political historian and indeed the first true historian. There is plenty of evidence both direct and circumstantial to suggest that Hume was also familiar with the works of the other historians discussed above, especially Sallust, Livy, Tacitus among the ancients,<sup>481</sup> and Machiavelli and Guicciardini among the moderns.<sup>482</sup> Hume was certainly familiar with Bacon's

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<sup>479</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 163.

<sup>480</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, pp. 166-7. In Smith's usage the term 'illustrate' connotes more than a mere provision of illustrative examples of what has been described in the narrative, but rather that they help to shed light on the particular situation within which they are delivered, either by providing 'facts' about that situation or by giving 'observations and reflections' which are put into the mouth of historical protagonists.

<sup>481</sup> Apart from Hume's use of Thucydides work for his populoussness dissertation there are numerous references to Sallust, Livy and Tacitus in Hume's early *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741/2) as well as the *Political Discourses* (1752). Cf. *Essays*, passim.

<sup>482</sup> A list and brief discussion of Hume's varied remarks on Machiavelli is provided in Frederick G. Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli: Political Realism and Liberal Thought* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), p. 9-10. Guicciardini's *Storia d'Italia* is mentioned in book II of the *Treatise* (1739) as well as in a letter of the same year. Cf. *Treatise*, p. 244; Hume to Francis Hutcheson, 17 September 1739, *HL*, i, 33-4. Further references occur in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) and the *Political Discourses* (1752), cf. *EPM*, pp. 112, 182; *Essays*, p. 273. Hume made extensive use of the work as a

philosophical work, though there is no evidence to suggest that he had in fact read Bacon's *History of the Reign of Henry VII* before commencing to write his Tudor history in 1757.<sup>483</sup> Likewise there is nothing to suggest that he had read Clarendon before commencing work on his *History of Great Britain*.<sup>484</sup> Hume would not have missed the significance of their speeches, even though he does not explicitly comment on the use of speeches in his extant statements on the craft of the historian and the art of historical narrative. Though we cannot ascertain whether Hume had attended Smith's Edinburgh lectures or indeed whether these lectures were in fact delivered in the form in which they have come down to us, it is intriguing and perhaps significant to note that Smith reappraised the role of invented speeches in historical writing shortly before Hume embarked on the composition of his own narrative history.<sup>485</sup> Yet since the available sources do not allow us to speculate whether Hume and Smith ever discussed the role of speeches in history, we shall have to turn to a closer examination of the text of the *History of Great Britain* to see whether our examination of classical and humanist orations and debates can help us understand the peculiar set-piece debates Hume chose to insert into his narrative of Stuart history.

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historical source in Tudor volumes of his *History of England* (1759): there are sixteen references in the first and one in the second Tudor volume, cf. *HE*, iii, 89-201; iv, 379.

<sup>483</sup> Hume's knowledge of Bacon's work is well attested. References to Bacon as natural philosopher can be found in *Treatise*, p. 5, *Essays*, pp. 55, 83, 209, 265-6, *EHU*, p. 185, *EPM*, p. 109. See also Hume on Bacon as prose writer, *Essays*, pp. 91-2. There appears to be no evidence indicating that Hume had read or consulted Bacon's *History of the Reign of Henry VII* prior to the mid-1750s. In his assessment of the role and importance of Bacon in literary and intellectual terms, Hume considers Bacon 'as a public speaker, a man of business, a wit, a courtier, a companion, an author, a philosopher', but does not explicitly deal with the historian. When composing his own account of the Tudor period, however, Hume was to make extensive use of Bacon's *History* as a source, cf. *HE*, vol. iii and iv, *passim*.

<sup>484</sup> Interestingly, there is no single reference to Clarendon in Hume's writings prior to 1754, when Hume appears to have perused and made extensive use of the *History of the Rebellion* as a source for his own narrative of the reign of Charles I and the run-up to the Civil War. See the discussions of Clarendon's work in 'Of Tragedy' (published as part of the *Four Dissertations* in 1757) and in the second volume, dealing with Clarendon's later political and literary career. *Essays*, pp. 223-4, for Hume's assessment of Clarendon qualities as a historian see *The history of Great Britain. Vol. II. Containing the Commonwealth, and the reigns of Charles II. and James II.* (London: printed for A. Millar, 1757), pp. 127-8. See also *HE*, vi, 154; as well as *The history of Great Britain. Vol. II.* (London: printed for A. Millar, 1757), p. 180. See also *HE*, vi, 215.

<sup>485</sup> The two were friends by at least the autumn of 1754, when Hume wrote his first extant letter about his ongoing work on a *History*. We have seen that he discussed the 'Elocution' of parts of his work with Smith, who seemed to have offered constructive criticism at every stage of the work. The earliest extant letter from Hume to Smith dates from 24 September 1752, cf. *HL*, i, 167-9.

The preceding survey of the various uses of orations and debates in classical and humanist historical writing and in particular in the works of Thucydides and Guicciardini provides us with a useful interpretative framework for our examination of the function of the set-piece political debates in the *History of Great Britain*. Bringing the insights we have gleaned during this survey to bear on Hume's debates will allow us to establish in how far these literary devices ought to be understood as variants of the Thucydidean model. In so doing we will pay particular attention to the theme and internal structure of the set-piece debates as well as to their semi-fictional character, before considering whether they constitute a continuation of Hume's earlier preoccupations with party ideologies and political opinion. This will lead us to consider in how far the debates can be regarded as part of Hume's attempt to provide a history of opinion within the framework of a wider political history and if so, what they tell us about his approach to the writing of such a history. Finally, we will seek to identify the overall place and function of the debates within the narrative structure of the *History of Great Britain*, which will in turn provide the basis for our concluding assessment of the wider significance of the debates for our understanding of the nature of Hume's political history of the Stuart Age and its overall relationship to his political philosophy.

### **6. 3. Between Political Science and the Natural History of Opinion: The Nature and Significance of Hume's Set-Piece Political Debates**

Even at first glance the set-piece debates of Hume's *History of Great Britain* can be seen to be markedly different from the orations and debates found in major works of classical and humanist historical writing. The most obvious difference consists in the fact that they are not given in direct speech (*oratio recta*) as the classical orations, though it needs to be remembered that it was not unusual for classical and humanist historians to present orations in indirect speech or insert a *précis* of what had been said. Yet Hume clearly departs from the classical convention of ascribing speeches to specific persons, or at least specific social groups such as the inhabitants of a town or the followers of a politician. Instead, the stances in his set-pieces debates either characterise the division of

opinion throughout the entire nation, or, more specifically, the positions associated with either of the two emerging camps (Royalist and Parliamentary) or parties (Whig and Tory). Hume's debates are more abstract in other regards too: they are not delivered on very specific occasion, but sum up the controversies that raged over a certain decisive period. Accordingly, they do not deal with the specific circumstances of a historical moment and therefore do not – to use Adam Smith's formulation – 'make a part of the facts related' such as the strength of opposing armies or the fate of politicians.<sup>486</sup> Most importantly, they lack the immediacy and rhetorical fervour of the classical and humanist orations, which were designed to mirror the passions motivating the speaker and engage the sentiments of the reader. It is thus misleading to regard the set-piece debates that constitute such a characteristic element of Hume's *History* as little more than an updated version of the classical oration.<sup>487</sup> This should not lead us to dismiss the link between these two distinct literary devices, however, since only a careful and systematic comparison can bring out the true extent of the differences or similarities and reveal how far Hume's debates served the functions traditionally assigned to invented speeches or at least occupied a similar place in the narrative.

Hume's debates have an important precedent in the coupled speeches to be found in Western historical writing since Herodotus, which serve to present opposing viewpoints and contrasting political opinions. Like Hume's set-piece debates, the orations found in the ancient and early modern histories we have surveyed could take the form of debates in which two or more opinions on a matter of dispute were put before the reader. It has been noted above that such coupled speeches, known in classical rhetoric as 'antilogies', presented a dialectical engagement with a controversial topic through the contrast of diametrically opposed viewpoints.<sup>488</sup> We have seen that paired speeches feature prominently in the works of a number of classical and post-classical historians, but

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<sup>486</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 103.

<sup>487</sup> Philip Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, p. 180: 'Not only did the war and politics and didacticism of the classical historian find a place in the *History*, so did the invented speeches, or at least something that looked very much like them. Neoclassicists had disagreed about the propriety of putting words in the mouths of protagonists in order to dramatize and clarify issues at hand, but Hume found the device to be useful ... . It was remarkable that this telltale conceit of classical historiography survived into the third quarter of the eighteenth century, but Hume did modify the invented speech to serve his own goals.'

<sup>488</sup> The device is discussed in G. Bock, 'Civil Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*', p. 187.

Hume's debates bear a particular resemblance to those of Thucydides and Guicciardini. The paired speeches and debates in Thucydides' narrative are preceded by a brief introductory remark on the speaker or the occasion and followed by a summary of the division of opinion, and our analysis of Hume's set-piece debates has shown them to be framed by similarly concise statements, which serve to link the debates to the overall narrative and to provide the necessary background information about the setting and outcome of the debates. While the basic similarities between Thucydides and Hume's debates are largely structural, the set-piece debates in Guicciardini's *History* share more concrete structural and conceptual aspects with those in the *History of Great Britain*. We shall have occasion to discuss these once we come to assess the overall place and function of the set-piece debates in Hume's narrative. For the moment it is sufficient to note that insofar as they present antithetical viewpoints on a subject, Hume's debates can be aptly described as 'antilogies'.

We have yet to appraise the similarities between Hume's set-piece debates and the debates in classical and humanist histories with regard to the latter's most controversial aspect, the fact that, as Adam Smith put it, 'they are not genuine ones', i.e. that they were generally deemed to have been invented by the historian.<sup>489</sup> Thucydides characterised his method of composing the debates by stating that while he had sought to keep as closely as possible to 'the general sense of the words that were actually used', he had made 'the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation'.<sup>490</sup> His speeches thus reflect, at least in part, the historian's view of what would have been appropriate given the circumstances of the specific situations in which these speeches were supposed to have been delivered. Many historians and critics from Polybius to Hugh Blair frowned upon this kind of fictional element as a violation of the truth-claim of history, but Werner Jaeger has reminded us that while such an approach to the speeches may appear unacceptably subjective to us, 'it is what Thucydides held to be the objective truth of his speeches' insofar as it revealed the universal and regular rather

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<sup>489</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 103.

<sup>490</sup> *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. Smith, i, 39. The translation is taken from a more recent edition, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, tr. Warner, p. 47.

than the particular and contingent dimension of political events.<sup>491</sup> It remains to be seen whether the debates in Hume's *History* reflect a similar approach.

We have seen that Hume chose to use his own words and sometimes arguments rather than those available to him in the historical sources and that on occasion he even went so far as to improve the arguments of the weaker side in the interest of maintaining his aim of impartiality. The most lucid critical assessment of the practice Hume adopted when composing his set-piece debates is that put forth by the eminent Whig lawyer, critic and publicist Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1824:

Mr Hume's summaries of the conflicting views of different parties at particular eras, have been deservedly admired for the singular clearness, brevity, and plausibility with which they are composed: – But, in reality they belong rather to *conjectural* than to authentic History; and any one who looks into contemporary documents will be surprised to find how very small a portion of what is there imputed to the actors of the time had actually occurred to them, and how little of what they truly maintained is there recorded in their behalf. The object of the author being chiefly to give his readers a clear idea of the scenes he described, he seems to have thought that the conduct of the actors would be best understood by ascribing to them the views and motives, which, upon reflection, appeared to himself most natural in their situation. In this way, he has often made all parties appear more reasonable than they truly were; and given probability and consistency to events, which, as they actually occurred, were not a little inconceivable. But in so doing, he has undoubtedly violated the truth of history – and exposed himself to the influence of the most delusive partialities.<sup>492</sup>

This is an important interpretative statement that provides us with a number of helpful leads for our investigation of Hume's set-piece debates, which Jeffrey aptly describes as 'summaries of the conflicting views of different parties at particular eras'. Jeffrey crucially states that these debates 'belong rather to *conjectural* than to authentic History' and we shall later have occasion to enquire what he means by conjectural history and whether he accurately represents Hume's approach to the set-piece debates. For the moment it is sufficient to note that his statement to the effect that Hume attributed to historical actors those views 'which, upon reflection, appeared to himself most natural

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<sup>491</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, i, 392.

<sup>492</sup> Francis Jeffrey, review of George Brodie's *History of the British Empire* (1822), in *Edinburgh Review* 40 (March 1824), pp. 92-146, partly reprinted in *Early Responses*. Cf. *Early Responses*, ii, 274 note 1 (the italics are Jeffrey's).

in their situation' is very close to Thucydides' attempt 'to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation'. While Jeffrey acknowledges Hume's didactic aim of employing the debates as means to clarify party opinions for the benefit of his readers, the inclusion of semi-fictional debates into a historical narrative was clearly an unacceptable practice in the eyes of this nineteenth-century critic. Hume himself had stated that '[t]he first Quality of an Historian is to be true & impartial'; in considering his set-piece debates Jeffrey found him wanting on both accounts.<sup>493</sup>

Debates in classical and humanist histories were not only characterised by their internal structure and their fictional character, but also by their place within the overall narrative. This is reflected in Polybius' statement that the function of speeches was to 'sum up events and hold the whole history together'.<sup>494</sup> We have seen that both Thucydides and Guicciardini inserted orations and debates at crucial moments in the narrative of political and military events, thereby focusing their readers' attention on particular moments of decision and presenting them with the different courses of action available at these particular moments. In both classical and humanist historical writing the interplay between debates and narrative mirrored the causal relationship between thought and action, deliberation and implementation. Clarendon defended the need to relate the 'solemn acts and consultations, from which all the matter of action is raised and continued', though we have seen that he dispensed with fictional orations and debates and instead followed the Italian historian Davila in inserting lengthy quotations from the written declarations of both sides of the conflict 'as the foundations upon which all that was after done, was built'.<sup>495</sup> Turning once again to Hume, we find that he too inserts his debates at key points in the narrative of constitutional history and presents the views of both sides in the heated controversies sparked by such crucial events as the framing of the Petition of Right (1628), Charles' rejection of the Grand Remonstrance (1641), the Exclusion Crisis (1680) and the framing of the Declaration of Right (1689). Hume's debates, too, 'serve as landmarks in his work' insofar as they draw the reader's

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<sup>493</sup> Hume to William Mure of Caldwell, [October 1754], *HL*, i, 210.

<sup>494</sup> Polybius, quoted in F. W. Walbank, 'Speeches in Greek historians', p. 247.

<sup>495</sup> Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon to the Earl of Bristol, quoted in Hicks, *Neoclassical History*, pp. 59-60.



attention to the key junctures in the history of the Stuart constitution.<sup>496</sup> Their function goes beyond merely highlighting these turning points, however, since they act as reminders that there were always alternative courses of action available and that the outcome of these crucial debates was consequently not predetermined. Like Guicciardini's paired speeches Hume's set-piece political debates thus become, in Felix Gilbert's phrase, 'devices to disclose the multidimensional character of the historical process'.<sup>497</sup>

These considerations about the place of set-piece debates in historical narratives provide us with an important hint concerning their function. We have seen that by inserting his debates at crucial points in his narrative of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides was able to forge them into an effective tool that allowed him to probe into the causes of the events in accordance with what Adam Smith identified as his main objective in composing the history of that war, namely 'to explain the causes which brought about the severall important events that happened during this period'.<sup>498</sup> The speeches delivered at the Congress at Sparta, which precipitated the outbreak of the war, look beyond the superficial causes for the war and constitute a major vehicle for Thucydides' central thesis locating the ultimate cause of the war in the growth of Athenian imperialism and its pretension to hegemony in the Greek world. We have seen that insofar as they probe into the underlying causes of events Thucydides' debates are 'explicable not by a historian's passion for exactitude but by a politician's wish to penetrate to the ultimate political ground for every event'.<sup>499</sup> Hume's narrative is similarly concerned with the uncovering the deep and sometimes hidden causes of the events leading up to the constitutional crises of the Stuart Age such as the steady growth of the middling ranks after the decline of the feudal system and the resulting pretensions of the Commons to exert a corresponding influence on the way in which royal

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<sup>496</sup> Westlake, 'The Settings of Thucydidean Speeches', p. 105. Mark Salber Phillips observes that Hume 'marks significant occasions again and again by presenting the arguments of the opposing sides'. Cf. Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), p. 63.

<sup>497</sup> Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, p. 299.

<sup>498</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 163.

<sup>499</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, quoted above, n. 169.

prerogatives such as the levying of taxes were exercised. The set-piece debates of the *History of Great Britain* are part of this extended enquiry into the causes of the British Civil Wars as well as the crises of later Stuart history insofar as they reveal the ideological underpinnings of party-political conflicts. The debates in Hume's *History* consequently fulfil a function similar to that which Adam Smith had assigned to invented speeches, namely to provide 'an opportunity of introducing those observations and reflections which we observed are not so properly made in the person of the writer'.<sup>500</sup>

The parallels we have just observed between the uses of paired speeches and debates in Hume's and Thucydides' work go further, however, and it is intriguing to note that both historians employ debates to probe into the ideological causes of factional conflict and war. We have seen that a modern commentator has characterised Thucydides as 'a historian not only of the history of a war, but specifically of the intellectual history of the parties involved in that war, himself being detached from and not necessarily adhering to such reflections or theories and their applications as he records',<sup>501</sup> and this description can equally well be applied to Hume since he presents the build-up to the Civil War as at least in part an ideological conflict. His work differs markedly from Thucydides', however, insofar as the latter is primarily concerned with external politics and war, while the *History of Great Britain* focuses mainly on internal politics, constitutional conflict and civil strife. While Hume employs set-piece debates in a broadly similar fashion to present the views of opposing camps and factions, he goes beyond Thucydides in fashioning them into a powerful device that allows him to trace the emergence of opposing sets of opinions about the nature of the ancient constitution and reveal the different stages of the process whereby these opinions congealed into the party doctrines familiar to his readers. In this regard Hume's use of debates is even closer to Guicciardini's constitutional debate about the reorganisation of the Florentine government, which highlighted the ideological struggle between those who were actuated by what one of the speakers called 'the desire for liberty' and those who

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<sup>500</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 103.

<sup>501</sup> H.-P. Stahl, 'Speeches and Course of Events', quoted above, n. 171.

advocated 'limited participation and authority'.<sup>502</sup> Though ostensibly concerned with specific policy issues, Hume's set-piece debates are thus essentially constitutional debates, which present the opposing opinions of parties and groups within society concerning the nature of the English constitution and reflecting the tension between the two fundamental and conflicting principles inherent in any constitution, authority and liberty. If like Thucydides Hume was using debates to account for the build-up to a war, like Guicciardini he employed debates to analyse fundamental controversies about the nature of a polity's constitution.

So far we have sought to interpret Hume's set-piece debates in the light of their relationship with classical orations and debates, their semi-fictional character as well as their place and function in the wider narrative. This complements our examination of the extent to which Hume drew on Rapin's *History* when writing his first debate about the 1621. We have seen that this debate is clearly modelled on Rapin, though they also share a number of features with the paired speeches and debates in classical and humanist historical writing. In our examination we have so far neglected a third possibility, namely that the debates may owe something to Hume's own earlier writings, in particularly his essays on political and historical matters. Even though Francis Jeffrey already tentatively raised this possibility, it has not been explored in more recent scholarship. In the following we will therefore briefly consider in how far the debates can be said to represent a continuation of Hume's earlier preoccupations.

The set-piece debates of the *History of England* with their dialectic presentation of contrasting viewpoints bear a striking resemblance to a number of literary devices employed by Hume in his earlier writings. From the *Treatise* onwards, Hume had made use of an argumentative strategy that allowed him to present two sets of opposing arguments to the reader before subsequently proceeding to outline his own position, often in an attempt to integrate the arguments of both sides and thereby reconcile seemingly conflicting viewpoints. This particular manner of exposition can be found in almost all of Hume's writings and is indicative of a dialectic turn of mind that has been

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<sup>502</sup> Guicciardini, *History of Italy*, pp. 76-83.

identified as a hallmark of his philosophy.<sup>503</sup> While in his earlier writings Hume presented carefully balanced summaries of the opposing arguments, he increasingly had recourse to the more vivid dialogue form and in the period he spent at Ninewells between 1749 and 1751 he composed both *A Dialogue* and the first draft of his *Dialogues concerning the Natural History of Religion*. The latter work is preceded by introductory remarks in the form of a fictive letter from ‘Pamphilus to Hermippus’, which contains some of Hume’s most lucid statements on the dialogue form. He commences these remarks by criticising modern philosophical dialogue for its didacticism, but goes on to justify the suitability of this genre by stating that ‘[t]here are some subjects, however, to which dialogue-writing is particularly adapted, and where it is still preferable to the direct and simple method of composition’.<sup>504</sup> This is the case with

[a]ny question of philosophy ... which is so *obscure* and *uncertain*, that human reason can reach no fixed determination with regard to it; if it should be treated at all; seems to lead us naturally into the style of dialogue and conversation. Reasonable men may be allowed to differ, where no one can reasonably be positive: Opposite sentiments, even without any decision, afford an agreeable amusement: And if the subject be curious and interesting, the book carries us, in a manner, into company; and unites the two greatest and purest pleasures of human life, study and society.<sup>505</sup>

While it is important to keep in mind that Hume is here writing about philosophical rather than historical subjects, this statement can nevertheless help us to shed light on his set-piece political debates. The controversy over the nature of the Stuart constitution was just such an ‘*obscure* and *uncertain*’ question,<sup>506</sup> since the precise extent of parliamentary privileges boundaries and the exact boundaries of royal prerogatives had not yet been fixed. Consequently this too was a question about which ‘[r]easonable men may be allowed to differ’ and it was here too that the contrast of ‘[o]pposite sentiments’

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<sup>503</sup> Cf. the extended discussion of ‘Hume as dialectical thinker’ in Donald W. Livingston, *Hume’s philosophy of common life* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 34-59.

<sup>504</sup> *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: OUP 1993), p. 29.

<sup>505</sup> *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, p. 30.

<sup>506</sup> Cf. Hume’s remark what precipitated the first set-piece debate was the fact that James had ‘torn off that sacred veil, which had hitherto covered the English constitution, and which threw an obscurity upon it, so advantageous to royal prerogative’. *HE*, v, 93.

engaged the reader's attention, although it is clear from the detached style of the debates that Hume did not want to draw his readers into the debate but rather sought to teach them to judge such party disputes from the detached and moderate stance of '[i]mpartial reasoners'.<sup>507</sup> On the whole, therefore, the set-piece debates reflect the dialectic manner of exposition that is so characteristic of Hume's philosophical and political writings.

While the set-piece debates share certain general features with Hume's earlier philosophical and political writings, the resemblance between the debates and the *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741-2) is particularly striking. We have seen that scholars working on Hume's political and historical thought have demonstrated the extent to which he drew on his earlier preoccupation with the history of the mixed British constitution and the party system that grew out of and developed alongside that constitution when commenced writing a political history of the Stuart Age in the early 1750s. While these preoccupations are clearly reflected in the *History of Great Britain* as a whole, it is worth noting that the set-piece debates themselves are not so much concerned with the actual nature of the constitution or even the rise of opposing parties as with the *opinions* which different groups, factions and later parties within society held about that constitution. Hume had emphasised the axiomatic importance of 'opinion' to his project of a science of politics when stating in 1741 that it is 'on opinion only that government is founded' and he had sought to classify different types of opinions on which the rule of the few over the many was founded and by means of which it was being perpetuated.<sup>508</sup> As a result of the crucial role Hume had accorded to opinion, 'the central task of the science of politics' became therefore, in the words of a modern commentator, 'to account for the formation and transformation of [the] fundamental opinions' that underpin all political associations.<sup>509</sup> The set-piece political debates of the *History of Great Britain* can be regarded as a primary means by which Hume undertook this central task as therefore as an extension of his science of politics.

Once we understand the set-piece debates as exemplifying Hume's interest in the history of political opinion and in particular the opinions which had formed around the

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<sup>507</sup> HE, v, 195.

<sup>508</sup> 'Of the First Principles of Government', in *E*, p. 32.

<sup>509</sup> Knud Haakonssen, 'The structure of Hume's political theory', in *CCH*, pp. 182-221, esp. p. 195.

English constitution, we need to enquire what they tell us about the way in which he sought to write the history of political opinion. Once again a helpful lead is provided by Francis Jeffrey, who, as we have seen, regarded the set-piece debates of Hume's *History* as belonging 'rather to *conjectural* than to authentic History' insofar as Hume had used them to ascribe to historical actors 'the views and motives, which, upon reflection, appeared to himself most natural in their situation'.<sup>510</sup> Jeffrey further elaborated on this point when remarking about the set-piece debates that

[s]uch a hypothetical *integration* of the opinions likely to prevail in any particular circumstances, seems at all times to have been a favourite exercise of [Hume's] ingenuity. Very early in life, for example, he composed four Essays, to which he gave the names of the Epicurean, the Stoic, the Platonist, and the Sceptic – and prefixed to them the following very characteristic notice. 'The intention of these Essays is not so much to explain accurately the sentiments of the antient sects of philosophy, as to deliver the sentiments of the *sects which naturally form themselves in the world*, and entertain different ideas of human life and of happiness. I have given each of them the name of the philosophical sect to which it bears the greatest affinity.' These very words, we think, might be applied, with very little variation to most of the summaries of which we have been speaking. They, too, are mere conjectural views of the different sentiments that may be supposed naturally to arise in the world at particular periods; and they are given under the name of the historical party to which they bear the greatest affinity.<sup>511</sup>

Taken together with the passage quoted earlier, this is probably the most important interpretative statement made about the set-piece political debates in Hume's *History*. Jeffrey aptly describes Hume's debate as a 'hypothetical *integration* of the opinions likely to prevail in any particular circumstances' and draws an insightful comparison between the debates in Hume's *History* and the argumentative strategy in some of his early *Essays*, namely the four essays on the theme of human happiness as represented by the ancient schools of philosophy.<sup>512</sup> Jeffrey's comparison of Hume's set-piece debates with these early essays allows him to apply Hume's own description of the argumentative strategy he employed in these essays to the set-piece political debates of

<sup>510</sup> Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* 40 (1824), reprinted in *Early Responses* ii, 274 note 1.

<sup>511</sup> Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* 40 (1824), reprinted in *Early Responses* ii, 274 note 1 (the italics are Jeffrey's).

<sup>512</sup> 'The Epicurean', 'The Stoic', 'The Platonist', and 'The Sceptic' (*E*, pp. 138-80) were published as part of the second instalment of Hume's *Essays, Moral and Political* in 1742 and therefore not '[v]ery early in [Hume's] life', as Jeffrey mistakenly suggests.

the *History*, which Jeffrey accordingly characterises as ‘mere conjectural views of the different sentiments that may be supposed naturally to arise in the world at particular periods’.

Jeffrey’s interpretation, drawing on Hume’s phrase that he sought to outline the debates which ‘naturally form themselves in the world’, opens up the intriguing possibility that the set-piece debates should perhaps be understood as constituting a natural history of opinion. We may note in this context that it was in the period just before or even during the time when he wrote his Stuart history that Hume composed his *Natural History of Religion*, which Dugald Stewart would later cite as an example of what he famously labelled ‘*Theoretical or Conjectural History*’.<sup>513</sup> It is important to keep in mind, however, that both in Hume’s *Natural History of Religion* and in Stewart’s later account of conjectural history the historian was to resort to philosophical conjecture only to make up for the gaps in the historical record concerning early periods by drawing on what little evidence existed and supplying the rest by means of *a priori* arguments drawn from the regularities observed in human nature and societies.<sup>514</sup> Yet there was no shortage of evidence for what was spoken in parliament during the great constitutional crises of the Stuart Age, even if we concede that it may have been very difficult for Hume to reconstruct accurately the divisions of opinion in the country as a whole. Jeffrey is clearly puzzled by Hume’s evident decision to ignore the recorded views of ‘the actors of the time’ and instead insert his own summaries of opposing political opinions containing arguments that did not and in some cases could not have occurred to them. Hume’s decision to compose ‘hypothetical’ debates in cases where records of actual debates had been preserved and were available to him is remarkable and in order to understand it we must follow Jeffrey’s lead and look for the direct antecedent of these set-piece debates in Hume’s philosophical and political writings composed before 1752.

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<sup>513</sup> Dugald Stewart, ‘Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.’, in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980; rpt. Indiana: Liberty Classics, 1982), pp. 263-351, esp. 293.

<sup>514</sup> Dugald Stewart, ‘Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith’, pp. 292-6.



It should be noted that while Hume had indeed stressed the importance of both party and opinion as central themes of his political science as early as 1741, he had not at that stage combined his interests in political parties and political opinions by providing a comprehensive analysis and critique of party political opinions. This only happened in 1748 with the publication of the third instalment of his *Essays, Moral and Political* and it is consequently to these *Essays* that we must look in our search for direct antecedents of the set-piece political debates of Hume's *History*. The third instalment of his essays, which appeared in 1748 under the title *Three Essays, Moral and Political*, was originally to have consisted of Hume's two essays on the respective central tenets of Whig and Tory political ideologies, 'Of the Original Contract' and 'Of Passive Obedience', as well as a third one entitled 'Of the Protestant Succession'.<sup>515</sup> We have noted earlier that Hume, or rather his friend Charles Erskine acting on his behalf, withdrew this last piece before publication and replaced it with the essay 'Of National Characters'. In the form in which it was originally conceived, the collection would have examined the controversy between the Whigs and Tories over the origins and foundation of political allegiance as well as the conflict between the advocates of the House of Stuart's claim to the British throne and the defenders of the Hanoverian Succession. As such the slim volume would thus have consisted of the two 'debates' in which Hume demonstrates his impartiality and moderation by presenting balanced summaries of contested party political arguments.

When comparing Hume's 1748 essays to the set-piece debates in his *History*, it needs to be borne in mind that the former are primarily concerned not with historical but rather with current party political debates, even if we allow for the fact that Augustan political discourse was intrinsically a discourse about history and vice versa. The essays on Whig and Tory doctrines are written from a general and abstract viewpoint that allows Hume to draw on the principles of his political science in order to evaluate the validity of party

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<sup>515</sup> That this is the order in which the essays were originally supposed to appear is suggested by the order in which Hume mentions them in his letter to Charles Erskine, cf. Hume to Charles Erskine, Lord Tinwald, 13 February 1748, *HL*, i, 112. When the collection entitled *Three Essays, Moral and Political* eventually appeared in late 1748, the essays on Whig and Tory doctrines had been relegated to second and third place and the first essay was 'Of National Characters'.

political arguments that still had currency in his own day. This is confirmed by Hume's remark to a correspondent that the line of argument laid down in his essay 'Of the Original Contract' provided 'a short, but compleat Refutation of the political Systems of Sydney, Locke, and the Whigs'.<sup>516</sup> By contrast, the essay 'Of the Protestant Succession' is framed as a hypothetical debate set in the period between the Revolution Settlement and the Hanoverian succession, as is made clear by the opening paragraph of the essay:

I SUPPOSE, that a member of parliament, in the reign of King WILLIAM or Queen ANNE, while the establishment of the *Protestant Succession* was yet uncertain, were deliberating concerning the party he would chuse in that important question, and weighing, with impartiality, the advantages and disadvantages on each side. I believe the following particulars would have entered into his consideration.<sup>517</sup>

These sentences make clear that we ought to regard the following line of argument as a hypothetical, conjectural rather than an accurate summary of what had demonstrably been said by a specific member of parliament under William or Anne. These opening remarks are followed by a long paragraph presenting 'the great advantage resulting from the restoration of the STUART family', which is immediately followed by another one of equal length outlining '[t]he advantages of the HANOVERIAN succession', after which Hume interposes the following remark:

These are the separate advantages of fixing the succession, either in the house of STUART, or in that of HANOVER. There are also disadvantages in each establishment, which an impartial patriot would ponder and examine, in order to form a just judgement upon the whole.<sup>518</sup>

This time it is no longer a member of parliament but more generally 'an impartial patriot' who seeks to come to a balanced assessment of the disadvantages of either course of settling the succession, which anticipates the '[i]mpartial reasoners' who formed the third, hypothetical group in the set-piece debate about the framing of the Petition of Right in the *History of Great Britain*.<sup>519</sup> Both the introductory remarks of Hume's essay on the Protestant Succession and the ensuing debate closely resemble the

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<sup>516</sup> Hume to Lord Elibank, 8 January 1748, in Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'New Hume Letters to Lord Elibank, 1748-1776', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 4 (1962/3), 431-460, esp. 437.

<sup>517</sup> 'Of the Protestant Succession', in *E*, p. 502.

<sup>518</sup> 'Of the Protestant Succession', in *E*, p. 506.

<sup>519</sup> *HE*, v, 195.

set-piece political debates in Hume's *History*, which, as we have seen, evolve along a similar structural pattern.

The historical setting of the debate that opens Hume's essay 'Of the Protestant Succession' obscures the topical nature of the arguments and appears like a deliberate attempt to impose a certain amount of distance and detachedness on a problem that had been both highly topical and deeply controversial in the period immediately preceding the essay's intended date of publication in 1748. The reverberations of the suppressed Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 and its aftermath, including the violent attempts to 'pacify' the Scottish Highlands, could still be felt at the time of the intended publication of this essay in early 1748 and they had sparked an intense debate among the lawyers and literati of Edinburgh. Writing to Charles Erskine Hume stated that he had examined the question of the Protestant Succession 'as coolly & impartially as if I were remov'd a thousand Years from the present Period'.<sup>520</sup> Hume had thus framed the debate between the adherents of the Stuart cause and the defenders of the Hanoverian Settlement as a *historical* debate, and it is this that separates this essay from the numerous other dialectical presentations of opposing philosophical and political arguments.<sup>521</sup> The historical framework of the essay 'Of the Protestant Succession' as well as the specific structural similarities it shares with Hume's later set-piece debates suggests that we should regard this essay and as the immediate precursor to the set-piece political debates in the *History of Great Britain*.

The debate that opens 'Of the Protestant Succession' would not feel out of place in the *History of Great Britain* and it is noteworthy that Hume did in fact insert a very similar set-piece debate into his narrative of the Revolution of 1688/89. This debate occurs during the first session of the Convention Parliament when James II, who had fled the kingdom following William's invasion in 1688, was declared by the Commons

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<sup>520</sup> Hume to Charles Erskine, Lord Tinwald, 13 February 1748, *HL*, i, 112.

<sup>521</sup> It is before this background that should read the statements Hume made in his letter to Charles Erskine, where he shows himself aware that it was precisely the detached and impartial stance which he had adopted in this essay and which was reflected in the fact that the arguments of the followers of the Stuarts were presented on an equal footing with those of the defenders of the Hanoverian Succession, that could easily be held against him and those with whom he associated in an atmosphere in which everything that could be construed as an expression of sympathy with the Stuart cause was regarded with extreme suspicion.

to have ‘abdicated the government’ and thereby to have left the throne vacant. This met with opposition from the Tory peers in the House of Lords and the ensuing debate between Tories and Whigs revolved around the question of the lawfulness and expediency of the two proposed constitutional solutions according to which the Crown should either be settled on a regent nominally ruling in James’ name or else on William and Mary.<sup>522</sup> Hume comments about the manner in which this debate was conducted in parliament:

Never surely was national debate more important, or managed by more able speakers; yet is one surprised to find the topics, insisted on by both sides, so frivolous; more resembling the verbal disputes of the schools than the solid reasonings of statesmen and legislators. In public transactions of such consequence, the true motives, which produce any measure, are seldom avowed.<sup>523</sup>

It is clear that Hume disapproves of the manner in which this momentous parliamentary debate was conducted and he discusses the ‘frivolous’ topics or ‘verbal disputes’ that revolved around the question whether James had ‘forfeited’ the crown, ‘abdicated’, or else had ‘deserted’ the throne of England.<sup>524</sup> By contrast, the set-piece debate, inserted just a few paragraphs earlier in the narrative, reflects none of these trivialities and technicalities. Instead, the two opposing sets of argument display a systematic and balanced manner of arguing about the application of general constitutional principles and the expediency of particular political actions, which seems much closer to what Hume called ‘the solid reasonings of statesmen and legislators’. This confirms Francis Jeffrey’s assessment that Hume ‘seems to have thought that the conduct of the actors would be best understood by ascribing to them the views and motives, which, upon reflection, appeared to himself most natural in their situation’.<sup>525</sup> This conjectural approach is common to both the debate that opens Hume’s essay ‘Of the Protestant Succession’ and the debates in his Stuart history and marks the former out as a possible model on which he could have drawn for the latter.

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<sup>522</sup> *HE*, vi, 523-8.

<sup>523</sup> *HE*, vi, 526-7.

<sup>524</sup> *HE*, vi, 527.

<sup>525</sup> Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* 40 (1824), reprinted in *Early Responses* ii, 274 note 1.

Having identified a dialectical approach and an attempt to write the natural history of opinions as those aspects which the set-piece debates of the *History of Great Britain* share with Hume's earlier philosophical and political writings, particularly his early *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741/2), we are now in a position to attempt an overall assessment of the nature and functions of debates within Hume's narrative of Stuart history. This will in turn lead us to consider the significance of the debates for Hume's *History of Great Britain* as a whole as well as their overall importance to our understanding of Hume's concept of political history as embodied in that work. For the purpose of locating the precise place occupied by the debates in the overall structure of the *History* it will be useful to introduce a distinction between two structural levels of any grand historical narrative, the narrative and the metanarrative. While the narrative consists in a chronological account of the history of events, the metanarrative comprises the main underlying theme or themes of that account. In the present context, the term 'metanarrative' should thus be understood as describing the overall interpretative framework employed by the historian to lend meaning and unity to his narrative of the history of events. This basic distinction should facilitate our attempt to locate the place occupied by the debates in Hume's *History*.

The first thing that strikes us when we consider the overall place of the set-piece debates in the *History of Great Britain* and their relationship to the rest of the text is the extent to which they have been successfully integrated into Hume's narrative account of Stuart history. Thematically the debates fit into what Hume described as 'the narration of parliamentary factions, or court intrigues, or civil wars' and they constitute an integral part of his account of the rise of parliamentary factions as well as the descent of factional conflict into civil war.<sup>526</sup> We have seen that Hume was from the very beginning intent on composing a fast-flowing or 'rapid' historical narrative 'after the manner of the Ancients', a narrative that would not be encumbered by those extended quotations and frequent digressions that had become the hallmarks of antiquarian history.<sup>527</sup> We have seen that Adam Smith had defended the use of invented speeches in historical writing on

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<sup>526</sup> Hume to John Clephane, 5 January 1753, *HL*, i, 170-1.

<sup>527</sup> Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 September 1754, *HL*, i, 193.

the grounds that they did not ‘interrupt the thread of the narration as they are not considered as the authors, but make a part of the facts related’ and this observation applies to Hume’s set-piece political debates as well.<sup>528</sup>

While they are embedded in the narrative of political events, the set-piece debates stand out from that narrative in at least one important respect. In the narrative Hume is concerned with giving a more or less detailed account of particular actions and individual characters, whereas the set-piece debates are composed from an abstract, general viewpoint. In contrast to the orations found in classical works of history, they are neither attributed to individual speakers nor concerned with specific policy issues. Even though the debates are sparked by specific disputes between the King and the Commons or between adherents of opposing factions or parties, the lines of argument developed in these debates go beyond such issues and raise the debates to the level of general reflections about the nature of the English constitution.

We have seen that the first debate, inserted at the close of Hume’s account of James’ turbulent third Parliament, was conducted between ‘the partizans of the court’ and ‘[t]he lovers of liberty’,<sup>529</sup> and most debates in the *History of Great Britain* represent the same fundamental divide between those who regarded the English constitution as an absolute monarchy and those who deemed it a limited one. On the most fundamental level the dispute about the extent of parliamentary privileges and the limits of royal prerogative which dominated Stuart history was a particularly intense manifestation of the basic struggle between liberty and authority inherent in any mixed constitution, which in the British case had lead through constitutional breakdown, civil war and revolution to the eventual establishment of a mixed and balanced constitution. Most modern commentators have identified the struggle between liberty and authority as the fundamental metanarrative theme of Hume’s *History*.<sup>530</sup> While Hume’s interest in the struggle between liberty and authority in the English constitution was, as we have seen,

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<sup>528</sup> Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, p. 103.

<sup>529</sup> *HE*, v, 93-95.

<sup>530</sup> Cf. Phillipson, *Hume and the contributors to Nicholas Capaldi and Donald W. Livingston (eds.), Liberty in Hume’s History of England*. International archives of the history of ideas, vol. 130 (Dordrecht and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990).

expressed in the digression that preceded the first set-piece debate, the same theme is dramatised in the debates themselves. The set-piece debates transcend the account of political actions in the course of which they are related insofar as they are concerned with those abstract, fundamental constitutional issues that determined political history in the Stuart Age and therefore point towards Hume's overall concern in the *History of Great Britain* with the structure and transformation of the Stuart constitution. In the widest sense, the debates can consequently be understood as literary devices that enable Hume to convey his meta-historical reflections on the wider political and philosophical issues at stake in this period of English constitutional history.

The set-piece debates, while fully integrated into the narrative of Hume's Stuart history, clearly reflect the predominant metanarrative theme of that history, the struggle between the opposing principles of liberty and authority. Since they are part of both the narrative and the metanarrative level of the work, the debates have the unique potential to connect the works' narrative of political actions with its metanarrative of constitutional development. In this way they serve as links between the narrative and meta-narrative levels of Hume's *History*, anchoring its overarching theme – the momentous constitutional struggle between authority and liberty – in the narrative of events leading up to the Civil War and the Revolution of 1688. We have seen that the speeches in Thucydides' *History* also are at the same time an integral part of the narrative of events and a device used to convey the political analysis of these events. By this means Thucydides' orations and debates serve the function of rendering the narrative intelligible as well as meaningful by providing an analysis of the ideological and party-political conflicts underpinning those events. Hume's analysis, like Thucydides', 'does not appear as a tedious running commentary, but is usually translated into intellectual events, by the speeches, and is thus put directly and vividly before the thoughtful reader'.<sup>531</sup> As 'intellectual events', Hume's set-piece political debates reflect the interplay between the narrative account of civil transactions and the *History's* metanarrative of constitutional transformations.

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<sup>531</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, i, 398.



In order to round off our concluding assessment of the set-piece political debates we need to look beyond the *History of Great Britain* and consider the wider significance of these debates for our understanding of the relationship between Hume's political philosophy and his political history. We have identified the set-piece debates as a vehicle for his treatment of the metanarrative theme of the continuous struggle between liberty and authority that led to the establishment of the mixed and balanced British constitution. As such, the debates can be understood as a direct expression of Hume's political thought, which was concerned with precisely these themes, as his *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741-48) abundantly show. Thucydides' speeches have been described as being 'above all else the medium through which he expresses his political ideas',<sup>532</sup> and this applies to some degree to Hume's debates as well, though we have seen that while Hume draws freely on arguments he had earlier developed within his political science, it would be misleading to regard any of the stances in this debates as exclusively representing his own political views. The fictitious debate that opens Hume's essay 'Of the Protestant Succession' is only the most immediate of numerous parallels that could be drawn between the political insight provided by Hume's essays and the debates of his *History*. The debates thus provided Hume with an opportunity to bring his extended analysis and critique of party-political opinions about the British constitution to bear on his account of British constitutional history. The set-piece political debates therefore represent an element of Hume's political science in his political history. The set-piece political debates can therefore be understood as focal points within the text of Hume's *History of Great Britain*, since they allow the rays of Hume's political thinking to illuminate his narrative of Stuart history.

This has led Duncan Forbes to state that the debates 'belong to political philosophy, not history', but it is a slightly misleading statement as Hume's *History*, as Forbes acknowledges elsewhere, is primarily a political history informed by political philosophy.<sup>533</sup> What Werner Jaeger said about Thucydides' speeches and debates is true for Hume's as well: 'we cannot possibly appreciate it without doing justice to the

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<sup>532</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, i, 391.

<sup>533</sup> Duncan Forbes, 'Introduction', in *HGB*, pp. 7-54, esp. p. 16.

political thinker concealed in the historian'.<sup>534</sup> Ultimately, Hume's *History* – like Thucydides' – is a work of political history elucidated by political philosophy and the set-piece debates are the main vehicle through which the latter enters the former. The debates thus constitute a major element of continuity between Hume's political science of the 1740s and his political history of the 1750s. We have seen that Guicciardini's debate about the reorganisation of Florence can be regarded as a similar element of continuity between an earlier stage in the philosopher's career, in which he presented an analysis of the Florentine constitution in the form of a dialogue and a later stage, in which a similar constitutional debate is inserted into a full-scale narrative of political history. As a literary device the set-piece debate enabled Guicciardini as well as Hume to apply their political insights to political and constitutional history without having to inserting tedious digressions and by this means to effectively integrate political thinking and political history. The set-piece debates therefore constitute a major link between Hume's political philosophy and his political history.

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<sup>534</sup> Jaeger, *Paideia*, i, 392.

## Conclusion: Hume and the Writing of History *En Philosophie*

The present study has provided a survey and analysis of Hume's intellectual and literary career from the publication of the first *Enquiry* in 1748 to that of his *History of Great Britain* in 1754 and 1756 with regard to the development of his views on the philosophy of history, the transformation of his intentions to write a narrative history and the construction of an 'impartial' narrative of the Stuart Age as reflected in Hume's use of set-piece political debates. We shall now proceed to assess the significance of our findings in order to address the important question of the development of Hume's thinking on history during this period and the possible interconnections between such a development and the overall trajectory of his literary career. We have seen in the introduction that those commentators who have insisted on an overall continuity in Hume's thinking have often simplified the development and unfolding of his works, which is evident from J. B. Black's remark that Hume's 'philosophy stands to his history in the relation of a *Prolegomenon*, and both, taken together, represent an organic unity.'<sup>535</sup> Though Hume scholarship has advanced enormously since Black wrote at the beginning of the century, Hume's transformation from moral philosopher to philosophical historian is still sometimes represented as a straightforward process. Over thirty years ago, Duncan Forbes sounded a cautionary note against any account of Hume's intellectual and literary career written along such straightforward lines, insisting that '[t]here is no single route leading directly from Hume's philosophy of human nature to his *History of England*'. According to Forbes,

[t]hose who think that Hume's *History* is the sort of history one would expect from his science of man must be working with an abridged and oversimplified notion of the latter. There is enough social realism and sociological emphasis in Hume's philosophy of human nature to have provided (in theory, and forgetting the enormous technical difficulties in writing narrative history of a revolutionary nature) a quite different sort of *History* to the one actually written. Suppose a reader knowing Hume only from Book III of the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries* and certain of the essays, or parts of them, were to be told that Hume had also written a *History of England*, and then asked to hazard a

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<sup>535</sup> J. B. Black, *The Art of History: A Study of Four Great Historians of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1926), p. 79.

guess as to what sort of a history he would expect it to be. Might he not be justified in replying: 'I note what Hume has to say about sympathy, social experience, national character, the evolution of morality, social rules and institutions, and "moral" causes; so on the whole I expect to see a social history, with the emphasis on the gradual evolution of English society and social institutions, on national character (and possibly its development), on the Common Law and manners and customs etc., neglecting "physical causes".' Would he not be surprised to learn that the narrative has often been criticized for being too narrowly political?<sup>536</sup>

In this thought experiment Forbes presents us with a lucid exposition of one of the most challenging interpretative problems confronting Hume scholars. This problem stems from the apparent contradictions and inherent complexities of Hume's intellectual career, which render problematic any attempt to put forth a straightforward interpretation of the relationship between a 'science of man' that emphasises the social and cultural dimension of human nature and a narrative history that is largely focused on constitutional and party-political history. In the following we will seek to provide a provisional interpretative solution to this problem by drawing on insights gleaned from our examination of several areas of Hume's work and career in the main body of this study.

The present investigation of Hume's career in the late 1740s and early to mid-1750s has revealed that his manifold intellectual preoccupations in the period spanning the years 1748 to 1752 are markedly different from those of the post-1752 period to the extent that they constitute a distinct intellectual project. Hume partly developed this project while he was engaged in a close reading of a wide range of classical sources for his erudite dissertation 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations'. Hume's profound interest in the history of classical antiquity has so far not been properly recognised by modern scholars, though it is reflected in James Boswell's remark about Hume to the effect that the latter 'has apply'd himself with great attention to the study of the ancients, and is likewise a great historian'.<sup>537</sup> The fame of Hume's *History of England* has subsequently eclipsed his earlier pieces, which taken together constitute a cultural history of classical antiquity, and obscured the seriousness and sophistication of the

<sup>536</sup> Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), p. 121.

<sup>537</sup> Quoted in Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Forgotten Hume: Le bon David* (New York: Columbia UP, 1943), p. 171.

philosophy and methodology of history that underpinned these pieces. It is the contention of the present study that Hume's reflection on the historicity of human nature and attempts to assemble a complete picture view of classical civilisation that comprises all aspects from economic conditions to religious thought and amounts to an agenda for a new kind of philosophical history.

The concept of history Hume worked out in the period 1748-52 differs widely from the one reflected in the *History of Great Britain*. This draws our attention to the fact that the question asked by Forbes in the passage quoted above can be regarded as *une question mal posée* since it does not take proper account of the fact that Hume was to some degree compelled to write a history that would today be considered as 'being too narrowly political'. To the eighteenth-century history was political history, a distinct literary genre that demanded an elegant and elevated narrative of statecraft and warfare, embellished with set-pieces and judicious reflections. This in effect imposed strict limitations on the historian reflected in the fact that lengthy digressions and discussions of evidence were considered as infringements of the humanists had called 'the rules of history'. Hume's earlier foray into classical terrain in his populoussness dissertation could therefore not be called 'history' in this sense; instead it was a work of erudite scholarship displaying Hume's skill in 'the critical art', the reading and use of historical sources. Given this distinction we should not be surprised to find that Hume ended up composing a history with a strong political focus.

Yet while we have seen that Hume took care to observe classical and humanist prescriptions for the writing of history, he did at the same time strive to write a work that displayed the workings of '[t]he philosophical Spirit, which I have so much indulg'd in all my Writings'.<sup>538</sup> It has been argued in the present study that the principal means through which Hume affected the reconciliation between narrative and philosophical elements in his history consisted in the set-piece political debates. Though its significance has been largely overlooked by modern commentators, it is argued that it is this ingenious device, even more than that of the character sketch and the survey of economic and cultural history in the appendices, which best reflects Hume's conception

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<sup>538</sup> Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 12 September 1754, *HL* i, 193.

of political history as philosophical history. The effectiveness of these devices rests in the fact that they are embedded in the narrative while serving a number of functions, from providing summaries of party opinions to conveying to the reader the all-important impression that the work they were reading had been written by an impartial historian. So far we have stressed the clear distinction between cultural history as envisaged by Hume in the late 1740s and early 1750s and political history as enshrined in the *History of Great Britain* (1754-56), yet we should enquire whether the two share some common characteristics.

Here we need to look beyond the *History of Great Britain*, since an illuminating, though so far overlooked, instance of convergence between political and cultural history can be found in the first Tudor volume of the *History of England*, published in 1759. In his account of the reign of Henry VIII Hume examines the arguments that has been put forth at the time in favour of the king's right to divorce his first wife Catherine of Aragon 'by the principles of sound philosophy'. Hume commences this examination by considering in the light of 'natural reason' why marriage between close relatives has generally been forbidden. He then goes on to discuss the history of marriage laws in Greece, Rome and ancient Israel, accounting for the often widely differing prescriptions in each of these cultures by reference to the manners and mores of the societies in which they occur, which he in turn seeks to trace back to common human traits.<sup>539</sup> This way of proceeding is of course reminiscent of *A Dialogue*, a piece on which Hume draws directly for his discussion of incest and the role of women in this passage of his Tudor volume. Hume, the reader of the classics has thus not been entirely useless to Hume, the historian. Tudor and, more generally speaking, Christian concepts of marriage are considered by Hume in their widest possible perspective, which serves to underline the relativity of manners and mores in human societies as well as their dependence on a number of wider social and cultural factors. This passage can thus be regarded as a point

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<sup>539</sup> *HE*, iii, 191f. It is interesting to note and seems to have gone unremarked that this is the only passage from Hume's *History of England* that Thomas Jefferson copied into his commonplace book. Cf. *Jefferson's Literary Commonplace Book*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989), pp. 38ff.

of convergence between Hume's *A Dialogue* and his *History of England*, between moral philosophy and philosophical history.

This instance of Hume's awareness of the variation of customs across history leads us to consider the extent to which the *History* could be said to follow the philosophy of history Hume had outlined in *A Dialogue*. We have seen that Hume formulated a position akin to but in many ways distinct from a historicist position. The first review to comment on the extent to which such a position was maintained throughout Hume's narrative of Stuart history was the *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*. In December 1755 this journal, which had already reviewed most of Hume's writings published before that date, carried a review of the first volume of the *History of Great Britain*:

It is well known that Mr. Hume is well acquainted with the world and is wont to serious observation of customs. In this volume we find the quite rare talent of using this knowledge for the purpose of enlightenment and promoting the usefulness of history. It is a well know rule that the historian, if he wants to uncover the historical motivations of the period in question, must put himself in the times about which he writes and that he must judge the action of people not according to principles popular today, but rather, according to those principles which predominated in those days about which he writes. The rule is least observed by those historians who work on the history of recent times, probably due to the prejudice that, as they believe, in such a short time no noticeable changes in the political mind-set can be discerned. Other historians err by not giving the reader any guidance in order that they themselves might see the differences between past and present constitutions and the rules of state that derive from them. To his advantage Mr. Hume has generally avoided these errors and from his book one becomes well acquainted with what Great Britain looked like at the time of King James and King Charles.<sup>540</sup>

The reviewer approves of Hume's practice to judge historical actors according to the practices and rules of their time rather than his. This is particularly true of the standards of political judgement which depended on the state of the constitution at the time as well as other factors such as the prevailing manners and religious beliefs. Yet it would be

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<sup>540</sup> Anon., review of *The History of Great Britain*, vol. 1, in *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, 147 (December 1755), translation printed in *Responses*, i, 22-25. The reviewer was most impressed by Hume's appendix to the reign of James I: '[T]he last main section of the history of King James the First ... was the section that best pleased us because it gives news of the civil government, ecclesiastical government, manners, finances, navy, commerce, manufacture, colonies and learning and the arts in England during the time under discussion.'



wrong to infer from this that Hume was a proto-historicist whose views anticipate the classical exposition of historicism by Hegel and Ranke. This becomes clear when we consider the latter's well-known assertion that 'every epoch is immediate to God, and its worth is not at all based on what derives from it but rests in its own existence, in its own self'.<sup>541</sup> Hume never envisaged such a position, which would have been irreconcilable with his conception of the role of history. To Hume history was a selective narrative that fulfilled a didactic role and presupposed value judgements on the part of the historian, not an attempt to reconstruct history in its entirety and 'merely show the past as it really was'.<sup>542</sup>

Having thus surveyed different elements of 'philosophical history' in Hume's work of the 1740s and 1750s, we may enquire whether these can be translated into a definition of the term with regard to Hume's manner of thinking and writing about history. Hume is generally deemed to have 'followed the practice of writing history *en philosophe*', although the possible meanings of that expression are rarely discussed.<sup>543</sup> It was coined by Voltaire who from 1738 onwards had repeatedly called for history to be written 'en philosophe'.<sup>544</sup> In 1744 he was to renew this call in a short piece entitled *Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire* in the following terms: 'Il faudrait ... incorporer avec art ces connaissances utiles dans le tissu des événements. Je crois que c'est la seule manière d'écrire l'histoire moderne en vrai politique et en vrai philosophe.'<sup>545</sup> According to Tobias Smollett Hume had excelled in this manner of writing history. In his review of the Tudor volumes, Smollett particularly applauded 'the skill with which our author has involved the reflections of a philosophical historian in the detail of his facts, in a manner

<sup>541</sup> 'Ich aber behaupte, jede Epoche ist unmittelbar zu Gott, und ihr Wert beruht gar nicht auf dem, was aus ihr hervorgeht, sondern in ihrer Existenz selbst, in ihrem eigenen Selbst'. Leopold von Ranke, *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte. Vorträge dem Könige Maximilian II. von Bayern gehalten* (1854), reprinted in Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke, tr. Wilma A. Iggers and K. von Moltke (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), p. 53.

<sup>542</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der Romanischen und Germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514* (1824), reprinted in Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, p. 137 (translation modified, MB).

<sup>543</sup> Black, *The Art of History*, p. 79.

<sup>544</sup> 'Lettre a M. L'Abbé Dubos', 30 October 1738, in *Œuvres Historiques*, ed. René Pomeau (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 605-607, esp. p. 607. Cf. Voltaire to Nicolas-Claude Thieriot, 31 October 1738, quoted in Haydn Mason, *Voltaire* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), p. 41.

<sup>545</sup> 'Nouvelles considérations sur l'histoire' (1744), in *Œuvres historiques*, ed. Pomeau, pp. 46-49, esp. pp. 48-9.

which throws a light upon every subject, without sensibly interrupting the course of the narration'.<sup>546</sup> A history written *en philosophe* was therefore above all a history that succeeded in integrating philosophical reflections into the body of a narrative history of events. While these reflections might either be of a political nature or consist in remarks on the social, cultural and economic framework of the history of events, it was important that they were woven into the very fabric of the narrative. Insofar as Hume's set-piece political debates were fully embedded in his narrative of constitutional conflict while reflecting the metanarrative theme of constitutional development, they exemplify Hume's conception of philosophical history.

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<sup>546</sup> Tobias Smollett, review of *The History of England, under the House of Tudor*, in *The Critical Review*, 7 (April 1759), reprinted in *Responses*, i, 181-193, esp. 184-5.

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## APPENDIX

### A List of Classical Citations in Hume's 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations'

The following is a list of the classical works cited in Hume's essay 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', first published in 1752 as part of his *Political Discourses*. This list provides the basis for my discussion of Hume's reading during the period he spent at Ninewells between 1749 and 1751 (see Chapter 2.1). Collectively, the titles listed below provide us with a general indication of the extent of Hume's classical reading during this period, though it must be born in mind that citations cannot strictly speaking be taken as proof that Hume actually read the classical work to which he refers. Due to the obscure nature of some of the works listed below as well as Hume's limited access to classical texts during the period in question, it is at least possible that references to those classical works which are cited only once may in fact have been second-hand citations, i.e. references culled from works of antiquarian scholarship rather than collected during a reading of the classical texts themselves. For this reason the discussion of the works in this list revolves around those classical works which Hume cited more than just once or twice, as it is assumed that in these cases there is a greater likelihood that he actually read the texts in question.

All references are to page numbers in the Liberty Classics edition of the *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, which is the most complete modern edition of Hume's *Essays*. Though most citations of classical works are to be found in the notes rather than the text of this essay, I have refrained from referring to specific footnotes by number since the numbering of footnotes in this edition differs from that in the editions produced in Hume's lifetime due to the fact that the editor Eugene F. Miller has inserted his own explanatory notes among Hume's notes while at the same time numbering all notes consecutively. I have also indicated those cases in which Hume merely alludes to a classical text without providing any reference to specific parts or pages of that text. An

attempt has been made to identify citations added by Hume after the first publication of this essay in 1752, since it is assumed that these later additions probably reflect reading subsequent to that undertaken during the Ninewells period, 1749-51. It should be remembered, however, that the list of variant readings provided in the *LibertyClassics* edition is incomplete and not entirely reliable. It is to be expected that a far more reliable resource will soon be available to Hume scholars in the form of the forthcoming edition of Hume's *Essays*, edited by T. L. Beauchamp and M. Box with the assistance of Michael Silverthorne.

Classical author and work as cited by Hume	Page number of citation in Hume's 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' (Essays, ed. Miller, 1987)
1. Aeschines, <i>Against Ctesiphon</i>	409, 417
2. Aelius Lampridius, <i>Augustan History</i>	421
3. Aeschines, <i>Against Timarchus</i>	429
4. Ammianus Marcellinus, <i>History of Rome</i>	443
5. Appian, <i>Roman History</i>	396, 402, 406, 408, 424, 454
6. Aristides, <i>To Rome</i>	437, 459
7. Aristophanes, <i>The Knights</i>	391 [added in 1758]
8. Aristotle, <i>Ethics</i>	447
9. Aristotle, <i>Generation of Animals</i>	450 [added in 1777]
10. Aristotle, <i>Politics</i>	391 [added in 1758]
11. Arrian, <i>Anabasis of Alexander</i>	416
12. Athenaeus, <i>Deipnosophistai</i>	427, 429, 431, 460
13. Aurelius Victor, <i>History of the Caesars</i>	440 [mentioned]
14. Caesar [Hirtius], <i>The Spanish War</i>	456
15. Caesar, <i>The Gallic War</i>	402, 453 (2x), 454 (3x), 455 (2x)
16. Cato, <i>De re rustica</i>	394
17. Cicero, <i>Against Verres</i>	418, 427
18. Cicero, <i>De Haruspicum Responsis</i>	456
19. Cicero, <i>Letters to Atticus</i>	418
20. Cicero, <i>Philippic</i>	407
21. Cicero, <i>Pro Coelio</i>	385
22. Cicero, <i>Tusculan Disputations</i>	441
23. Columella, <i>On Agriculture</i>	378, 385 (2x), 388, 395, 396, 420, 451 (2x), 457
24. Cornelius Nepos, <i>Lives of Illustrious Men</i>	390
25. Demosthenes, <i>Against Aphobus</i>	391, 417 (4x), 429 (2x), 430
26. Demosthenes, <i>Against Aristogeiton</i>	427
27. Demosthenes, <i>Against Leptines</i>	432
28. Demosthenes, <i>Against Meidias</i>	390
29. Demosthenes, <i>Against Onetor</i>	385
30. Demosthenes, <i>On the Embassy</i>	402
31. Demosthenes, <i>On the Navy Boards</i>	430
32. Demosthenes, <i>Third Philippic</i>	429
33. Diodorus Siculus, <i>Library of History</i>	403 (2x), 406, 409f (5x), 410, 413, 415, 416 (2x), 418 (2x), 422, 423 (3x), 424, 425, 428, 432, 433, 435, 443 (2x), 444 (2x), 449, 454, 459, 464

34.	Diogenes Laertius, <i>Lives of Philosophers</i>	423
35.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, <i>Roman Antiquities</i>	413, 428, 437 (2x)
36.	Donatus, Commentary on Phormio	394
37.	Florus, <i>Epitome of Roman History</i>	397 (2x)
38.	Herodian, <i>History of the Empire</i> [Latin translation by Politian]	443, 444, 445, 453
39.	Herodotus, <i>History</i>	417 (2x), 427, 436 [added in 1753-4]
40.	Hesiod, <i>Works and Days</i>	393
41.	<i>Historia Augusta</i>	434, 440, 445, 446
42.	Horace, <i>Odes</i>	388, 445
43.	Horace, <i>Satires</i>	389, 445
44.	<i>Institutes [Roman Law]</i>	406
45.	Isocrates, <i>Areopagiticus</i>	409
46.	Isocrates, <i>Panathenaicus</i>	412
47.	Isocrates, <i>Panegyricus</i>	390, 411, 432
48.	Isocrates, <i>To Philip</i>	411
49.	Josephus, <i>The Jewish War</i>	444, 460
50.	Justin, [ <i>Epitome of</i> ] <i>Philippic History</i>	436, 456
51.	Justinian, <i>Pandectas [Digest]</i>	392
52.	Juvenal, <i>Satires</i>	396, 437, 449
53.	Livy, <i>History of Rome</i>	402, 406, 416, 432 [added in 1770], 436 (2x), 456
54.	Lucan, <i>The Civil War</i>	397
55.	Lucian	400 [mentioned]
56.	Lucian, <i>On Salaried Posts in Great Houses</i>	462
57.	Lucian, <i>The Ship or the Wishes</i>	432
58.	Lysias, <i>Orations</i>	407 (2x), 408, 411, 412, 417, 424, 427, 429, 434
59.	Martial, <i>Epigrams</i>	389, 397
60.	Olympiodorus	440 [mentioned]
61.	Ovid	452 [mentioned]
62.	Ovid, <i>Amores</i>	385
63.	Ovid, <i>Letters from Pontus</i>	450
64.	Ovid, <i>Tristia</i>	450
65.	Paterculus, <i>Roman History</i>	425, 456
66.	Pausanias, <i>Description of Greece</i>	435
67.	Petronius, <i>Satyricon</i>	389, 450 [added in 1758]
68.	[Pindar], <i>Commentary on</i>	431 [mentioned]
69.	Plautus, <i>Stichus</i>	429
70.	Pliny the Younger, <i>Letters</i>	438

71.	Pliny, <i>Natural History</i>	388, 395, 397, 403, 425 [added in 1777], 438ff, 443, 445, 447, 458
72.	Plutarch, <i>Lives</i>	384, 391, 396, 403, 406, 415, 425, 426, 427, 431, 456
73.	Plutarch, <i>Moralia</i>	398, 399, 409
74.	Plutarch, <i>On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance</i>	461
75.	Plutarch, <i>The Obsolescence of Oracles</i>	460
76.	Polybius, <i>Histories</i>	402, 406, 424, 430, 433, 435 (2x), 446, 450, 452, 461
77.	Publius Victor [?], <i>The Regionaries</i>	434
78.	Quintus Curtius, <i>History of Alexander</i>	443
79.	<i>Res Gestae Divi Augusti</i> [Acts of Augustus]	441
80.	Sallust, <i>Histories</i> [fragmentary]	442
81.	Sallust, <i>War with Catiline</i>	408
82.	Seneca the Elder, <i>The Controversies</i>	396f
83.	Seneca, <i>De Tranquillitate Animi</i>	409
84.	Seneca, <i>Epistulae Morales</i>	386, 438
85.	Seneca, <i>On Providence</i>	389
86.	Sextus Empiricus, <i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i>	399
87.	Strabo, <i>Geography</i>	388, 390, 394, 422, 426, 427, 437, 443, 447, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454 (2x), 456, 458, 460, 461
88.	Suetonius, <i>Lives of the Caesars</i>	384, 388, 438, 442 (2x), 443 (2x), 444f, 457
89.	Suetonius, <i>Of Illustrious Rhetoricians</i>	385
90.	Suidas	460
91.	Tacitus, <i>Annales</i>	388 (2x), 393, 395 [added in 1753-4], 404, 438, 461
92.	Tacitus, <i>Germania</i>	398, 453
93.	Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>	405
94.	Tertullian, <i>De Anima</i>	458f
95.	Theocritus, <i>Idylls</i>	423
96.	Thucydides, <i>History of the Peloponnesian War</i>	402, 403, 409, 418, 427, 428 (3x), 430, 431 (3x), 432, 436 [added in 1753-4]
97.	Valerius Maximus, <i>Memorable Deeds and Sayings</i>	438
98.	Varro, <i>On Agriculture</i>	388, 395 (3x), 396, 451, 457
99.	Virgil, <i>Georgics</i>	456f
100.	Vitruvius, <i>On Architecture</i>	437, 438
101.	Xenophon, <i>Apology for Socrates</i>	427
102.	Xenophon, <i>Banquet</i>	411

103.	Xenophon, <i>Constitution of Lacedaemonians</i>	435
104.	Xenophon, <i>Hellenica</i>	433 (2x)
105.	Xenophon, <i>Memorabilia</i>	428
106.	Xenophon, <i>On Estate Management</i>	394, 420
107.	Xenophon, <i>The Expedition of Cyrus</i>	401, 452
108.	Xenophon, <i>Ways and Means</i>	394 [added in 1753-4], 428, 430 (2x)
109.	Xenophon [?], <i>Constitution of the Athenians</i>	429