

Edmund Burke's Ideas on History

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Declaration

This PhD dissertation 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

Edmund Burke's view of history is an aspect of his thought which has, despite the wide recognition of its importance, been neglected by commentators. Drawing particular attention to his views on the specific histories of different parts of the world, this dissertation attempts to reveal a comprehensive analysis of them. According to Burke, England had achieved substantial progress over the course of history by retaining its ancient constitution, overcoming various political crises and relying upon other factors such as public credit, divine providence and sheer chance. While European nations had achieved gradual growth, Burke thought that Europe had been in a state of barbarism and confusion from ancient times until the sixteenth century. In their *Account of the European Settlements in America*, William and Edmund Burke put forward their detailed accounts of the European settlements on the American continent. Taking into consideration Burke's comments on the topic in this work as well as in his other works, the American Indians had, in his view, remained barbarous for a considerable period of time, whereas Burke regarded the colonists of British North America as having developed a unique society, although they still retained European manners and systems. He also seems to have been interested in a revision of contemporary Irish historiography. Although Ireland had benefited from her status as a member of the British Empire, one of the reasons for the halting progress of her society was English lack of respect for Irish manners, especially the long-established persecution of the Roman Catholics. Until around 1782, Burke stereotypically considered Asia, including India, to be historically despotic. Thereafter, however, he changed his mind and frequently contended that Asia had been flourishing until recently, citing that religions, such as Hinduism and Islam, and the rulers of the region had hardly allowed arbitrary power to be exercised. Nevertheless, he was still at times critical of Mahomet, the early Muslims and others. The late Burke occasionally put forward contradictory remarks on Asian-Muslim nations. Burke's view of history is progressive and a great variety of civilisations can be generated so long as humans act rightly. Nations can, however, be unstable, since their fortunes can fluctuate in an unexpected manner.

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Lists of Abbreviations

- Appeal* [Edmund Burke], *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs, in Consequence of Some Late Discussions in Parliament, relative to the Reflections on the French Revolution* (London, 1791).
- Bk P Sheffield Archives, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments. The Burke Papers.
- Corr.* *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland and others, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958-78).
- ODNB* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (electronic resource)
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary* (electronic resource)
- LC* *Catalogue of the Library of the Late Right Hon. Edmund Burke, The Library of the Late Sir M. B. Clare, M.D. Some Articles from Gibbon's Library, &c. &c. ... which will be sold by auction by Mr. Evans ...* ([London], 1833).); reprinted in *Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons*, vol. viii: *Politicians*, ed. Seamus Deane (London, Mansell Information/Publishing Ltd; Sotheby Parke-Bernet Publications, Ltd, 1973).
- LC MS Catalogue of Burke's library dated August 17, 1813, Bodleian MS Eng Misc d 722.
- Parl. Hist.* William Cobbett (ed.), *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1806* (36 vols., London, 1806-20).
- Reflections* Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J.C.D. Clark (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001).
- WS* *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford *et al.*, 8 vols. To date (i-iii, v-ix) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981-).

Note: For the references to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, J.C.D. Clark's edition has been used throughout this dissertation. For the other works of Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* has been used, except for some texts which do not appear in *WS* (eighteenth-

century editions, or other editions of the writings and speeches of Edmund Burke are referred to in such cases).

Introduction

Historiography and Chapter Structure

Burke has been an influential figure in the history of Western ideas. There is a rich secondary literature on his thought and many different ideas and principles have been ascribed to him.¹ Thanks to the substantial development of scholarship on Burke, on eighteenth-century political thought and on many other related fields, much of his thought has been revealed and there might not seem to be much room for further research. Burke's view of history is, however, an aspect of his thought which has been largely neglected by scholars, despite the wide recognition of its importance. This recognition has its own history. While Burke's contemporaries time and again recorded his exceptional intellectual capacities, his historical thought and imagination were always considered to be an important part of them. For example, Henry Grattan once remarked: 'Mr. Burke, the prodigy of nature and acquisition. He read everything, he saw everything, he foresaw

¹ Most notably, the 'Burke revival' took place in American academia after World War II. In this intellectual camp, Burke's indebtedness to natural law tradition was stressed. See Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind from Burke to Santayana* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Publishing, 1953); P.J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958); Francis P. Canavan, *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1960); Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, *The Problem of Burke's Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). A more historical approach also gradually began to appear around the same period and has continued to develop. Charles Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956) was a pioneering work. See also, among many, Frank O'Gorman, *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973); John Brewer, 'Rockingham, Burke and Whig Political Argument', *Historical Journal*, 18 (1975), 188-201. For surveys of Burke scholarship, see Clara I. Gandy and Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke: A Bibliography of Secondary Studies to 1982* (New York and London: Garland Publishers, 1983); Leonard W. Cowie, *Edmund Burke 1729-1797: A Bibliography* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1994); Iain Hampsher-Monk, 'Introduction', in *Edmund Burke*, ed. Iain Hampsher-Monk (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. xi-xx; 'Bibliography' in *Reflections*, ed. J.C.D. Clark, pp. 125-140.

everything. His knowledge of history amounted to a power of foretelling'.² More important, Walker King and French Laurence, Burke's literary executors, drew attention to and well understood Burke's idea of historical change and continuity. According to them, 'the clear and penetrating sight of his [Burke's] mind comprehended in one view all the parts of the immense whole, which varying from moment to moment, yet continuing through centuries essentially the same, extends around and above to every civilized people in every age, and unites and incorporates the present with the generations which are past'.³ His ideas on history were also quite influential among German intellectuals and Victorians in the nineteenth century.⁴ As Paul Langford has put it:

His [Burke's] impact on Romantic and organic trains of thought was marked not only in Britain where it was transmitted through the Lake poets, but in Germany, where his followers included some of the most influential in this genre, Justin Möser, Adam Müller, Novalis. His remarkable ability to bring historical imagination to bear on all kinds of contemporary and controversial questions fired the enthusiasm of generations of historically minded Victorians.⁵

Thomas B. Macaulay once wrote about Burke, chiefly concerning Indian affairs: 'He [Burke] had, in the highest degree, that noble faculty whereby man is able to live in the past and in the future, in the distant and in the

² Stephen Lucius Gwynn, *Henry Grattan and His Times* (London: George G Harrap & Co., 1939), p. 382.

³ *Three Memorials on French Affairs. Written in the Years 1791, 1792 and 1793. By the Late Right Hon. Edmund Burke* (London, 1797), p. xxix. See also James Barry, *The Works of James Barry* (2 vols., London, 1809), I, 252; Francis Hardy, *Memoirs of the Political and Private Life of James Caulfield, Earl of Charlemont* (2 vols., London, 1812), II, 285.

⁴ For a Burkean tradition in nineteenth-century historiography, see J.W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁵ Paul Langford's entry on 'Edmund Burke' in *ODNB*.

unreal'.⁶ Lord Acton found both Catholicism and historicism in Burke's thought. According to Acton, Burke was the 'most historically minded of English statesmen', and his 'theory' was 'supported by the Catholic view of history'. Burke was, however, 'too historic' and his notion of history made him conservative and prevented him from being 'an entire liberal'.⁷ Early commentators on Burke frequently depicted him as a political thinker who argued for the importance of history and tradition against the rationalist theory of politics and enlightenment. William Graham declared that Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* had adopted 'the new Historical Method of inquiry and explanation'.⁸ Leslie Stephen also wrote: 'Burke represents above all things the political application of the historical spirit of the period'. 'His hatred for metaphysics, for discussions of abstract rights instead of practical expediency; his exaltation of 'prescription' and 'tradition'; his admiration for Montesquieu and his abhorrence of Rousseau; his idolatry of the British constitution', Stephen continued, 'and in short his whole political doctrine from first to last, implies the profound conviction of the truth of the principles embodied in a thorough historical method'.⁹ According to Alfred Cobban, 'reason is displaced by utility, and for utility Burke reads history'.¹⁰ As Leo Strauss once declared, it 'has often been said that Burke, in the name of history, attacked the theories which prevailed in

⁶ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, in *The Works of Lord Macaulay, Complete*, ed., Lady Trevelyan (8 vols., London: Longmans, Green, 1866), VI, 619-620.

⁷ Cambridge University Library, Add. MS 4967, card 61; Add. MS 4967, card 74; Add. MS 4967, card 76, quoted in Seamus F. Deane, 'Lord Acton and Edmund Burke', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33 (1972), 325-35 (at 327, 330-31). For Acton's views on Burke, see *ibid.* and G. E. Fasnacht, *Acton's Political Philosophy: An Analysis* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952), pp. 60-3, 190-198, *passim*.

⁸ William Graham, *English Political Philosophy: from Hobbes to Maine* (London: E. Arnold, 1899), p. 92.

⁹ Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century: Ford Lectures, 1903* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1904), p. 198.

¹⁰ Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt Against the Eighteenth Century: A Study of the Political and Social Thinking of Burke, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey* (2nd edn. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960). p. 85.

his age'. Strauss's own interpretation of Burke has remained unique among Burke's critics. While he praised Burke as a thinker returning to the classical view of natural rights, he blamed him for his tendency to deny the ability of human reason to shape the political order. In Burke's opinion, a sound social order may historically arise from a variety of accidents, and human beings cannot decide their own fate. Behind this idea there is Burke's belief in the 'secularization' of providence.¹¹ Burke thus prepared the way for 'the historical school' and for Hegel.¹² The similarity between Burke and Hegel or nineteenth-century biology has, in fact, frequently been suggested.¹³ Recently, historians have increasingly become sceptical of these types of interpretation, since these attempts tend to be anachronistic and make it difficult to reach a more accurate, historically nuanced understanding of Burke's thought.¹⁴

Burke's view of history, or Burke as historian, was substantially explored for the first time in two American PhD dissertations submitted in 1956.¹⁵ John C. Weston's dissertation explored Burke's works almost comprehensively and revealed a number of points regarding his view of

¹¹ Cf. Rodney W. Kilcup, 'Burke's Historicism', *The Journal of Modern History*, 49 (1977), 394-410. Kilcup argues that Burke's 'emphasis on the role of historical understanding did open the way to a radical relativization of the standard of political morality' (at 394).

¹² Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 294-323 (at 304 for the quotation). For his interpretation of Burke, see Steven J. Lenzner, 'Strauss's Three Burkes: The Problem of Edmund Burke in Natural Right and History', *Political Theory*, 19, (1991), 364-390.

¹³ For instance, see Ernest Barker, 'Burke on the French Revolution', in idem, *Essays on Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945). For the analogy with Hegel, see also George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (3rd edn., London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1963), pp. 617-9.

¹⁴ See, for example, Clark, 'Introduction', in *Reflections*, p. 111.

¹⁵ John C. Weston, Jr., 'Edmund Burke as Historian', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of North Carolina, 1956); Walter D. Love, 'Edmund Burke's Historical Thought', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1956). For other PhD dissertations which examined Burke as historian, see Thomas R. Knox, 'Edmund Burke: Natural Law and History', unpublished PhD dissertation (Yale University, 1969); Clara I. Gandy, 'Edmund Burke and the Whig Historians', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Tennessee, 1973).

history. This thesis argues that Burke's politics were chiefly characterised by his understanding of history. Moreover, according to Weston, Burke was not concerned with the progress of universal history, but with the progress of the history of nations and regions. In Burke's later life, his view of history was probably modified by the French Revolution.¹⁶ Walter D. Love's dissertation also surveyed the corpus of Burke's works in depth and chiefly examined his view of history in the abstract. According to Love, Burke kept in mind the model of a good society and his view of history (especially, the history of Europe, America and India) reflected this model. Burke was essentially thinking only of the endurance and stability of a nation, not the process of change.¹⁷ Significantly, both Weston and Love argue that Burke was perceptive about the limited usefulness of history for politics, and also that his view of history was not organic¹⁸ as commentators once frequently suggested.¹⁹

Burke's notion of the use of history is worth further explication. In a famous letter to William Robertson, on 9 June 1777, Burke memorably declared:

I have always thought with you, that we possess at this time very great advantages towards the knowledge of human Nature. We need no longer go to History to trace it in all its stages and periods. History from its comparative youth, is but a poor instructor. When the Ægyptians called the Greeks children in Antiquities, we may well call them Children; and so we may call all these nations, which were able to trace the progress of Society

¹⁶ Weston, 'Edmund Burke as Historian', pp. 170-3, 225. Weston had already pointed out that the early Burke, in the *Abridgment*, had emphasised the importance of impartiality in historians. See *ibid.*, pp. 124-6, 149.

¹⁷ Love, 'Edmund Burke's Historical Thought', pp. 209, 213-4. Love's notion that Burke did not think about historical change has been repudiated by the subsequent scholarship on Burke.

¹⁸ The organic view of history here is the idea that society, like a living organism, has naturally grown rather than has been artificially constructed.

¹⁹ Weston, 'Edmund Burke as Historian', pp. 148, 153, 158, 166, 168, 193; Love, 'Edmund Burke's Historical Thought', pp. 167, 176, 209.

only within their own Limits. But now the Great Map of Mankind is unrolled at once; and there is no state or Gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same instant under our View. The very different Civility of Europe and of China; The barbarism of Persia and Abyssinia. The erratic manners of Tartary, and of arabia. The Savage State of North America, and of New Zealand.²⁰

Here there is a notion of a philosophical historian, i.e., the idea that history is a means of examining human nature and various states of human society. History was, however, becoming unnecessary as these could now be learned from the contemporary situation of the world. Karen O'Brien called his opinion here, 'Burke's report of the death of history'.²¹ The use of history for politics may be even more problematic. In his *Reflections*, while censuring the French revolutionaries who were trying 'to rake into the histories of former ages ... for every instance of oppression and persecution' practised by the clergy, Burke wrote:

In history a great volume is unrolled for our instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind. It may, in the perversion, serve for a magazine, furnishing offensive and defensive weapons for parties in church and state, and supplying the means of keeping alive, or reviving dissensions and animosities, and adding fuel to civil fury.²²

While great political wisdom could be learned from historical lessons, there is always a risk that history could be perverted and wrongly used to justify particular political tenets. After all, political judgement should be made chiefly from a careful consideration of immediate circumstances, not from history. History 'may be learned as habit, not as precept, — and as an

²⁰ 'Burke to William Robertson (9 June 1777)', in *Corr.*, III, 350-1.

²¹ Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 164.

²² *Reflections*, pp. 310-11.

exercise of strengthen the mind, as furnishing materials to enlarge and enrich it, not as a repertory of cases and precedents for a lawyer'.²³ An unprecedented event could always happen in history, such as the growth of the colonies in America or the outbreak of the French revolution. History cannot tell us anything about such events. According to Iain Hampsher-Monk, by these words, Burke meant that 'neither historical nor philosophical questions should be pursued to the detriment of an existing political consensus'. The task of historians is 'to domesticate rather than recover or discover the past'.²⁴

There are some other significant points made by commentators on Burke's relation to historical thought or his attitude towards historians. Burke's indebtedness to Montesquieu is widely recognised today,²⁵ and it has been suggested that his view of history was quite similar to that of his great mentor. Burke learned a lot from Montesquieu's reverence for history and his appreciation of the variety and complexity of societies and human nature.²⁶ As J.C.D. Clark mentions, however, Burke's idea of history also owed much to his reading of classical authors such as Virgil and Horace.²⁷ In addition, it is well-known that Burke's favourite contemporary historian was William Robertson, whereas he was quite critical of Edward Gibbon, David Hume and some others.²⁸

²³ *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *WS*, VIII, 498.

²⁴ Iain Hampsher-Monk, 'Rhetoric and Opinion in the Politics of Edmund Burke', *History of Political Thought*, 9 (1988), 455-484 (at 466-7). Nevertheless, it is hard to believe that Burke always had in mind such a notion. The clearest counter-example is his notion of the Irish rebellion of 1641. As will be seen in Chapter Four, Burke, throughout his career, believed that the interpretation of this historical event had been distorted by English historians and needed to be replaced by one based on historical facts. The true interpretation of 1641, Burke thought, might positively influence the current situation in Ireland.

²⁵ The pioneering work is C.P. Courtney, *Montesquieu and Burke* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).

²⁶ F.P. Lock, *Edmund Burke* (2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998-2006), I, 87.

²⁷ Clark, 'Introduction', *Reflections*, p. 93.

²⁸ See Donald Cross Bryant, *Edmund Burke and His Literary Friends* (St. Louis, 1939), pp. 59, 218, 223, 227. On 8 December 1793, Burke wrote to Arthur Murphy: 'From this

While some further research has subsequently appeared,²⁹ Weston's and Love's dissertations (especially, Weston's)³⁰ still remain the most substantial contributions to the theme of the present dissertation. Although several other secondary sources have also touched on Burke's view of history, they have never explored it seriously. These theses, chiefly focusing on his view of history in the abstract (e.g., what 'progress' meant for Burke), are still very useful to the students of Burke in considering his attitude towards history and the relationship between his historical thought and his political thought. Nevertheless, neither Weston nor Love delved in depth into Burke's view of history based on geography (e.g., what his view of English history was). His view of the particular histories of different parts of the world has been under-researched until today. The present thesis attempts to reveal this and

feigned manner of *false* *setto*, as I think the musicians call something of the same sort in singing, no one modern historian, Robertson only excepted, is perfectly free'. See 'Burke to Arthur Murphy (8 December 1793)', in *Corr.*, VII, 502. In the *Annual Register*, Burke wrote the very favourable review of Robertson's *History of Scotland*. Later, Burke wrote to Robertson to praise his *History of America*. See 'Burke to William Robertson (9 June 1777)', in *Corr.*, III, 350-2. Burke commented on the first volume of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: 'he had just then been reading it, that he disliked the style of writing, that it was very affected, mere frippery and tinsel'. See James Northcote, *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (2nd edn., 2 vols., London, 1819), II, 31. Later, Burke satirized the same work as 'the wise and salutary result of deep religious researches'. See *Parl. Hist.*, 21, col. 237. Burke disagreed with Hume about the evaluation of Mary, Queen of Scots, Charles II and the Irish rebellion of 1641. See my chapters on English history and Irish history. He might have written the critical comments on Voltaire as an historian. See 'Voltaire', in H.V.F. Somerset, *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 118-120. The authorship of this piece of work is, however, still problematic. As will be seen in Chapter Four, Burke was not satisfied with the works of the Irish revisionists whom he had supported. See also *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *WS*, VIII, 498: 'our guides, the historians, who are to give us their true interpretation, are often prejudiced, often ignorant, often fonder of system than of truth'.

²⁹ For instance, see James Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Progress* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994), esp. chapter three. According to Conniff, although Burke's ideas on history were, to some extent, indebted to the classics, the English idea of an ancient constitution and the writings of the Scottish Enlightenment, his historical thought was essentially 'Whiggish Progressivism', i.e., an argument 'from a rise of civilization perspective somewhat similar to Hume's' (*ibid.*, p. 63). This is, however, a quite misty categorisation.

³⁰ Weston published part of his dissertation. John. C. Weston, Jr., 'Edmund Burke's View of History', *The Review of Politics*, 23 (1961), 203-229.

to contribute to the study of early modern historiography as well as to Burke scholarship. Each chapter will chiefly analyse two things: Burke's view of a particular historical period, event or figure, and his possible vision of the complete history of each nation or region. This dissertation focuses on his view of history and does not, on the whole, seek to establish the relationship between it and his political thought.

The geographical divisions in question are, probably, most naturally made between England (or Britain, when examining the period after 1707), Europe, the Americas (including both North and South), Ireland and India (or Asia and Muslim countries). This is mostly because of the amount of material on each nation or region to be found in his works. He examined English history on a number of occasions, but scarcely looked at Scottish or Welsh history. Burke frequently examined the historical state of Europe as a whole, while he also at times addressed French history, but only occasionally the history of other European countries. It, therefore, seems to be appropriate to focus on his discussion of the historical state of Europe, while using national histories as auxiliary material. When considering his view of American history, commentators have generally concentrated on his view of the history of British North America, and have ignored the *Account of the European Settlements in America* until recently. Actually, this early work includes a substantial discussion of the history of the other parts of the Americas. In this dissertation, the Americas as a whole will be examined in the same chapter. In Burke's works, Irish history is significant and quite distinct from English history, and it therefore deserves to be the subject of a separate chapter. Burke's view of the history of India is reconstructed from his works on Indian affairs, but put together and analysed along with his views on the history of other Asian-Muslim nations that has been largely ignored by most commentators.

Although his view of the history of nations and regions has not been

addressed in depth before, this does not mean that no research exists that is relevant to it. Burke's view of English history in particular has quite often been touched upon when commentators have examined his political arguments or philosophy. One of the most significant relevant works is John Pocock's essay on the intellectual origins of Burke's idea of an ancient constitution.³¹ Published in 1960, this essay revealed Burke's indebtedness to the intellectual genealogy of the idea of an ancient constitution. It is now clear that Burke's defence of the British constitution, the Revolution of 1688-9 and English history or his opposition to parliamentary reform based on natural rights required this intellectual tradition. H. T. Dickinson, in his essay addressing the eighteenth-century view of the Glorious Revolution, discussed Burke's view of 1688-9 in the context of the contemporary debate on the event.³² More recently, J.C.D. Clark has argued that Burke's interpretation of 1688-9 was in the mainstream view of the Whigs.³³ Burke's early historical work, *Abridgment of the English History*, has been under-researched until recently,³⁴ but now more commentators have discussed it. According to R.J. Smith, the *Abridgment* expressed 'evolutionary Whiggism' and inherited 'the older Anglican tradition of Providential history'. Smith attempted to explore this work in the context of contemporary historical thought and also spotted 'Burke's changed opinion' between the *Abridgment* and his later works. The *Abridgment* repudiated the notion that Magna Carta had been a reissue of Anglo-Saxon laws, which was later implied in the *Reflections*. Moreover, the *Abridgment* traced the origins of the English constitution to the Germans, whereas Burke, in a later parliamentary

³¹ J. G. A. Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas', *The Historical Journal*, 3 (1960), 125-143, reissued in idem, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971).

³² H. T. Dickinson, 'The Eighteenth-Century Debate on the Glorious Revolution', *History*, 61 (1976), 28-45.

³³ Clark, 'Introduction', *Reflections*, p. 41.

³⁴ One of the early discussions on the *Abridgment* was Knox, 'Edmund Burke: Natural Law and History', pp. 221-260.

speech, was critical of such an attempt.³⁵ Although Smith's analysis makes several interesting points, there is still considerable room for further research. The modern editor of the *Abridgment* has correctly suggested that society was, in this, as in Burke's later works, supposed to be historically shaped, and also that this work included a perspective on European history.³⁶ T.O. McLoughlin and Clark have suggested that the early Burke was already favourable to the Whig view of English history.³⁷ While previous research has chiefly focused on Burke's interpretation of some important historical events or his specific historical works such as the *Abridgment*, no scholar has ever tried to reveal the whole picture of his view of English history. Although it has frequently been recognised that Burke believed in the coexistence of progress and continuity in English history, little has been done to examine the detail and structure of this coexistence. Moreover, few scholars have worked on his views of the English Reformation, the Civil Wars and other significant historical events. Chapter One examines his view of English history comprehensively and analyses all its aspects.

Chapter Two addresses Burke's view of European history. Although commentators have never treated his view of European history in detail, quite a few of them have frequently touched upon it. It has been well recognised that he considered European history as a process of gradual

³⁵ R.J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British thought, 1688-1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 85, 87, 115.

³⁶ Editor's Preface to the *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 332-7.

³⁷ T.O. McLoughlin, 'Edmund Burke's *Abridgment of English History*', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 5 (1990), 45-59; J.C.D. Clark, 'Religious Affiliation and Dynastic Allegiance in Eighteenth-Century England: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine and Samuel Johnson', *English Literary History*, 64 (1997), 1029-67. See also Ian Crowe, *Patriotism and Public Spirit: Edmund Burke and the Role of the Critic in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 174-217, which discussed the *Abridgment* with emphasis on Burke's Irish background and eighteenth-century Irish historiography.

growth towards the prosperity of his own age.³⁸ Some early commentators, who drew particular attention to his mention of chivalry in the *Reflections*, saw him as a medievalist, i.e., a worshipper of particular elements of the middle ages in Europe. This view of Burke often led to the conclusion that he was a nostalgic thinker who did not wish Europe to achieve any further progress. In James Currie's words, Burke expressed a preference for 'the feudal relicts' of modern societies and dreaded 'the progress of commerce, as leading to innovation and change'.³⁹ More recently, as the study of eighteenth-century political thought, including the study of the Scottish Enlightenment, has advanced, this interpretation may now be regarded as untenable.⁴⁰ While it has also been recognised that Burke emphasised the idea that the European nations had inherited similar manners and social systems,⁴¹ recent commentators, interested in Burke's notion of international relations, have, once again, drawn attention to it.⁴² Some commentators are well aware of Burke's notion that France had her own 'ancient constitution', which had been created in the course of history and was well fitted to her.⁴³ Burke's views on the Reformation and religious wars

³⁸ Lock argues that the *Abridgment* had the same vision of European history as that in his later works such as the *Reflections*. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 155.

³⁹ James Currie, *A Letter, Commercial and Political, addressed to the right Honorable William Pitt: in which the Real Interests of Britain in the Present Crisis Are Considered, and Some Observations Are Offered on the General State of Europe*. By Jasper Wilson, Esq. (London, 1793), pp. 42-3.

⁴⁰ For this, especially, see Pocock, 'Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution'; Smith, *Gothic Bequest*; Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 220-255.

⁴¹ For instance, see O'Gorman, *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy*, p. 124.

⁴² See Jennifer M. Welsh, *Edmund Burke and International Relations: The Commonwealth of Europe and the Crusade against the French Revolution* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995); idem, 'Edmund Burke and the Commonwealth of Europe: The Cultural Bases of International Order,' in *Classical Theories of International Relations*, ed. Ian Clark and Iver B. Neumann (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 173-192; *Empire and Community: Edmund Burke's Writings and Speeches on International Relations*, ed. David P. Fidler and Jennifer M. Welsh (Boulder, Colo.: Oxford: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 41, 48.

⁴³ O'Gorman, *Edmund Burke*, p. 129; Clark, 'Introduction', p. 69.

in Europe, however, have hardly been analysed. Moreover, few scholars have drawn attention to his views on the ancient history of Europe or on ancient Rome. In fact, there are a lot of fragmentary comments by him on European history, which have not been examined by commentators. This chapter examines his overall view of European history in detail.

Modern commentators have barely addressed Burke's view of the history of the Americas,⁴⁴ either because they have often ignored or did not attribute to Burke the *Account of the European Settlements in America*. Recently, however, Burke scholars have increasingly been acknowledging Burke's contribution to this work and they have therefore begun to examine it seriously. As F.P. Lock points out, many of the ideas expressed in Burke's political works were already anticipated in this early work.⁴⁵ Michel Fuchs rightly mentions the Burkes' close attention to political economy.⁴⁶ Lock suggests that the *Account* shared with other early writings of Burke a significant concern with the role of providence in human society.⁴⁷ Jeffrey O. Nelson analysed in detail this work and drew attention to its characteristics,

⁴⁴ This, of course, does not mean that Burke's views on American affairs have been under-researched. For Burke on American affairs, for example, see Ross J.S. Hoffman, *Edmund Burke: New York Agent* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1956); Paul Langford, 'The Rockingham Whigs and America, 1767-1773', in *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History Presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland*, eds. Anne Whiteman, J.S. Bromley, P.G.M. Dickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 135-152; T.H.D. Mahoney, 'Edmund Burke and the American Revolution', in *1776, Toronto and Sarasota: Samuel Stevens*, eds. J. Browning and R. Morton (Hakkert & Company, 1976), pp. 53-71; P.J. Stanlis, 'Edmund Burke and British Views of the American Revolution: A Conflict over Rights of Sovereignty', in *Edmund Burke: His Life and Legacy*, ed. Ian Crowe (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), pp. 24-38; J.C. D. Clark, 'Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in America (1777) Or, How Did the American Revolution Relate to the French?', in *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke*, ed. Ian Crowe (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2005), pp. 71-92; Harry T. Dickinson, 'Burke and the American Crisis', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 156-167.

⁴⁵ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 127.

⁴⁶ Michel Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996), p. 109.

⁴⁷ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 140.

including the authors' emphasis on the role of great individuals in history.⁴⁸ Expounding on Burke's thought on American affairs, Dickinson correctly points out that Burke clearly recognised that the colonies had already been developing distinct societies.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, despite the cumulative scholarship, the whole picture of Burke's view of the history of the Americas is still far from having been revealed. Chapter Three seeks to do this by examining both his early writings and his later works.

Chapter Four addresses his view of Irish history. In fact, 'Burke as a writer and student of Irish history' is probably the only theme in this dissertation that has been explicitly known to Burke scholars before.⁵⁰ Weston and Love were, again, the pioneers researching this theme, and it is to their works that the first section of this chapter is heavily indebted.⁵¹ Since their works were published in the early 1960s, scholars have not substantially addressed this theme; only recently has Séan Patrick Donlan addressed it from a different angle.⁵² While Weston and Love have presented a clear picture of Burke as a supporter of contemporary Irish

⁴⁸ Jeffrey. O. Nelson, 'A Map of Mankind: Edmund Burke's Image of America in an Enlightened Atlantic Context', unpublished PhD dissertation (Edinburgh University, 2007), pp. 154-5.

⁴⁹ Dickinson, 'Burke and the American Crisis', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*.

⁵⁰ In more general, the subject 'Burke and Ireland' has been well researched. For this, see T.H.D. Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); L.M. Cullen, 'Burke, Ireland, and Revolution', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 16 (1992), 21-42; idem, 'Burke's Irish Views and Writings', in *Edmund Burke: His Life and Legacy*, pp. 62-75; C.C. O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self*; Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); *Edmund Burke's Irish Identities*, ed. Séan Patrick Donlan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007); Ian Crowe, *Patriotism and Public Spirit: Edmund Burke and the Role of the Critic in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: California: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁵¹ John C. Weston, Jr., 'Edmund Burke's Irish History: A Hypothesis', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 77 (1962), 397-403; Walter D. Love, 'Edmund Burke and an Irish Historiographical Controversy', *History and Theory*, 2 (1962), 180-198.

⁵² Séan Patrick Donlan, 'The "genuine voice of its records and monuments"? Edmund Burke's "interior history of Ireland"', in *Edmund Burke's Irish Identities*, pp. 69-101.

historians, they did not attempt to reveal his own view of Irish history. Donlan tried to do so, referring at times to Burke's relationship with eighteenth-century Irish historiography, but he did not quite succeed in providing a comprehensive picture of the topic in his essay. Although substantially indebted to these works, Chapter Four tries to argue for alternative interpretations. While few commentators have examined Burke on Irish history since the early 1960s, some substantial research on eighteenth-century Irish historiography has been published, which will be utilised in this chapter.⁵³ In doing so, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive account of Burke's view of Irish history.

Chapter Five will examine Burke's historical view of Muslim and Asian nations. While no previous commentators have set up this theme as a research question, some scholars have occasionally mentioned it in addressing Burke's political thought on Indian affairs.⁵⁴ These

⁵³ The pioneering work is Ann De Valera, 'Antiquarian and Historical Investigations in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century' (University College, Dublin, M.A. thesis, 1978). More recently, Francis G. James, 'Historiography and the Irish Constitutional Revolution of 1782', *Éire-Ireland*, 18 (1983), 6-16; Jacqueline R. Hill, 'Popery and Protestantism, Civil and Religious Liberty: The Disputed Lessons of Irish History 1690-1812', *Past & Present* 118 (1988), 96-129; Clare O'Halloran, 'Irish Re-Creations of the Gaelic Past: The Challenge of Macpherson's Ossian', *Past & Present*, 124 (1989), 69-95; idem, 'The Island of Saints and Scholars': Views of the Early Church and Sectarian Politics in Late-Eighteenth Century Ireland', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 5 (1990), 7-20; John Patrick Delury, 'Ex Conflictu Et Collisione: The Failure of Irish Historiography, 1745 to 1790', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 15 (2000), 9-37; Jacqueline Hill, 'Politics and the Writing of History: the Impact of the 1690s and 1790s on Irish Historiography', in D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan (eds), *Political Discourse in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001), pp. 222-239. The most substantial work is Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland c. 1750-1800* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2004). None of them, however, examined Burke's views on Irish history in detail.

⁵⁴ The best treatment of Burke on Indian affairs are probably P.J. Marshall's introductions in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (hereafter, *WS*), ed. Paul Langford *et al.* (8 vols., to date, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981-), V, VI, VII, but see also James Conniff, 'Burke and India: The Failure of the Theory of Trusteeship', *Political Research Quarterly* 46 (1993), 291-309; F.G. Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India: Political Morality and Empire* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); Idem, 'Burke, India, and Orientalism', in *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the*

commentators have correctly argued that Burke, before around 1782 when he became involved in a Select Committee of the House of Commons, shared the contemporary image of Asia as a despotic region, whereas, after 1782, he abandoned this stereotype and began to claim that no Asian government, including the Mogul government, had ever exercised arbitrary power. They have, however, scarcely examined Burke's pre-1782 view of the history of India. Moreover, as will be shown below, they often underestimated (or ignored) Burke's strong hatred of Muslims, which continued even after 1782. This chapter will, in particular, discuss his view of the history of Asian-Muslim nations by drawing attention to the changes and continuities in his attitude toward them.

All chapters of this dissertation will also seek to consider the place of Burke's ideas on history in the history of historiography in Europe. In order to do so, the studies on the early modern historiography which developed over years will be referenced and utilised.⁵⁵ For example, a series of works produced by J.G.A. Pocock provides us with many hints to structure the present thesis.⁵⁶ The works of David Spadafora and Karen O'Brien that

Life and Thought of Edmund Burke, ed. Ian Crowe (Columbia and London, 2005); O'Neill Daniel, 'Rethinking Burke and India', *History of Political Thought*, 30 (2009), 492-523. For Burke's ideas on empire, see Richard Bourke, 'Liberty, Authority, and Trust in Burke's Idea of Empire', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61 (2000), 453-71; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), chap. 3; Iain Hampsher-Monk, 'Edmund Burke and Empire', in *Lineages of Empire: the Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought*, ed. Duncan Kelly (London: British Academy, 2009), pp. 117-136. The fourth volume of J.G.A. Pocock's *Barbarism and Religion* (5 vols., to date, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999-) discussed the eighteenth-century European historiography of Asia. None of these were, however, extensively involved in Burke's historical perspectives of Asia and Islam. For a brief discussion on Burke's view of Indian (Asian) history, see Marshall, 'Introduction', in *WS*, V, 20-1, VI, 21-4, 32-3; Phillips, *Society and Sentiment*, pp. 242-7.

⁵⁵ There are obviously too many relevant sources to do justice to here, and the following discussion is concerned with only some of the secondary sources particularly helpful for the theme of the present thesis. More secondary sources will be referred to in each chapter.

⁵⁶ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: a Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century, A Reissue with a Retrospect*

researched the ideas on history and various historical writings in the eighteenth century are also of great value.⁵⁷ Scholars since the 1970s or even before have drawn attention to the stages theory of historical progress advanced by the eighteenth-century Scottish and French intellectuals,⁵⁸ whereas the historical writings of the Scottish Enlightenment and of other great thinkers in the eighteenth century are now well researched. Studies on English historiography in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have also advanced substantially over the last few decades.⁵⁹ For eighteenth-century men, while history often had immediate political implications, it could also be philosophical in the sense that they believed that studies on history could disclose the nature of human beings and societies. History was

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); idem, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971); idem, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975); idem, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); idem, *Barbarism and Religion* (5 vols., to date. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999-).

⁵⁷ David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990); Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁸ See, for example, Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); H.M. Höpfl, 'From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Journal of British Studies*, 17 (1978), 19-40.

⁵⁹ David C. Douglas, *English Scholars* (London: Cape, 1939) is old, but still useful. For the development of historical writings in eighteenth-century Britain, see Laird Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing: Histories of England in the English Enlightenment* (Lanham, Ma.; London: University Press of America, 1991); Philip Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture: from Clarendon to Hume* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); Mark Salber Phillips, 'Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57 (1996), 297-316; idem, *Society and Sentiment*. For the English ancient constitutionalism, see Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*; Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), chapter 8; Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603-1642* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992); *The Roots of Liberty: Magna Carta, Ancient Constitution, and the Anglo-American Tradition of Rule of Law*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1993).

also greatly relevant to national identities.⁶⁰ The substantial accumulation of scholarly productions for these themes will definitely throw a sidelight on Burke's ideas on and his attitudes towards history, which linked up with the great tradition of historiography in European history.

Sources and Methodology

The chief primary sources used in this dissertation are, of course, the corpus of Burke's works, but, in order to place his views of history in its intellectual contexts and also to examine how he learned and developed various ideas on history, the historical works of the eighteenth century and of previous ages are also surveyed. Among Burke's writings, there are three works whose authorship, despite all scholarly efforts, have remained problematic: *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (1757), *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans* (1779) and contributions to the *Annual Register*. In the case of the *Account*, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, its authorship is not completely clear, though commentators have, in recent years, increasingly been recognising it as Burke's. In this thesis, it is assumed that the *Account* was a collaborative work and that Edmund and William Burke shared the same notions expressed in the *Account*. Burke's view of history, especially, of the history of the Americas, will be interpreted on that basis. Nevertheless, the possibility that Burke did not share the same opinions as William will also be considered briefly. The *Policy* is considered in a similar fashion. In agreement with the modern editor's account, this work will be treated as a collaborative work, and it is here assumed that Edmund Burke agreed with William. The case in which it is assumed otherwise, although unlikely, will also be touched upon. The

⁶⁰ For example, see Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

authorship of the *Annual Register* has also been a matter of dispute among commentators, but almost all of them agree that Burke edited the 1758-64 (first seven) volumes. This dissertation accepts this attribution.⁶¹ There is still a dispute on the 1765-67 volumes. While T.O. McLoughlin's laborious research attributes to Burke the authorship of the opening articles of the 1765-67 volumes,⁶² James E. Tierney shows that John Hawkesworth would have written at least five of the book reviews of the 1766 volume and concludes that Thomas English replaced Burke as editor from the volume for 1766.⁶³ A modern biographer, F.P. Lock follows some earlier commentators and does not agree with McLoughlin's conclusion.⁶⁴ In this thesis, although the authorship is not attributed to Burke, the volumes for 1765-67 will be referred in the footnotes when necessary in the sense that there is some possibility that they are Burke's.

Burke's works can be divided roughly into two sorts: those written before and those produced after he entered parliament. Among the works written before he became a politician, the *Account*, the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment* are historical writings, which examine history as their chief objective. The *Vindication*, the *Popery Laws* and the *Annual Register* also contain many historical references and descriptions. These early works

⁶¹ This thesis proceeds on the assumption that the authorship of the brief comments that introduce extracts in the book-review section, as well as that of the other sections, can be attributed to Burke. This attribution is still presumptive. Burke might have had assistance, as Thomas English (c. 1725-98) later had. In the book-review section, nevertheless, only books that were worthy of praise were chosen (see *Annual Register ... of the Year 1758* (London, 1759), pp. v-vi). Even if someone else had selected a certain book, it would not have been reviewed without the editor's agreement.

⁶² T.O. McLoughlin, *Edmund Burke and the First Ten Years of the 'Annual Register' 1758-1767* (Salisbury: University of Rhodesia, 1975).

⁶³ James E. Tierney, 'Edmund Burke, John Hawkesworth, the *Annual Register*, and the *Gentleman's Magazine*', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 42 (1978), 57-72.

⁶⁴ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 166; Bertram D. Sarason, 'Edmund Burke and the Two *Annual Registers*', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 68 (1953), 496-508; idem, 'Editorial Mannerisms in the Early *Annual Register*', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 52 (1958), 131-3; John Charles Weston, Jr., 'Burke's Authorship of the "Historical Articles" in Dodsley's *Annual Register*', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 51 (1957), 244-9.

express Burke's view of history more plainly than his later political works. His political works are more difficult to analyse for their historical opinions. They are the records of how Burke responded to various specific political circumstances. He, of course, frequently worked with his colleagues or for his party, and uttered or wrote political statements within particular political and historical contexts, where various kinds of historical descriptions are occasionally mentioned. Burke often made use of history in order to support his political arguments, rather than manifesting his candid notions on history, but sometimes he did try to interpret history more straightforwardly, for example, in his descriptions of the ancient constitution, the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution in the *Reflections* and the *Appeal*. We need to be wary of how Burke refers to history each time, and this thesis will briefly try to introduce the contexts of his reference to history when it seems worth doing so. It will also approach his rhetoric with caution, since it might exaggerate or embellish certain aspects of his ideas on history.⁶⁵

There are various methodological problems in seeking to examine Burke's view of history. As there is no single theory that can interpret them all, each problem needs to be addressed individually. Nevertheless, it is clear that there are some patterns to these problems. For instance, how should we treat the events, periods, or nations or persons which Burke never mentioned? Obviously, we do not always have evidence for his views on every single period or geographical region. This limits our conclusions, but we may be able to infer Burke's views on them from his comments on other events or periods.

There is also the problem of coherence. This problem appears, since this dissertation seeks, in part, to establish to what extent Burke produced a

⁶⁵ As Lock has stated, 'Burke often uses arguments from history in ways that appear opportunistic and rhetorical, to support policies and decisions arrived at for different reasons'. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 164.

satisfactory history of each nation or region. We need to think about the relationship between a certain historical description in one work of his and another description in another work, since he never put forward any comprehensive history of any nation or region. Generally speaking, it seems likely that he would have developed his views of certain historical events substantially at particular periods of his life. He might also have changed his view of history during the course of his life. It is often not easy, however, to trace how and when he reached a certain view of history that subsequently emerged in his works. Moreover, apart from his views on the history of Asian-Muslim nations, there are few apparently contradictory remarks (or changed opinions) on history from one work of his to another. Nevertheless, we should not assume that a series of coherent ideas of history underlie everything he wrote or spoke, and we should not treat the corpus of his works as if it was one book expressing a single body of thought.⁶⁶ This approach would be too naïve, and would risk producing a myth, rather than a history, of Burke's thought. What needs to be done is to think about the circumstances of each case carefully and seek to infer correctly from the available evidence. For instance, a problem which frequently appears in this dissertation is the one in which Burke, in his early writings, remarks on a certain historical period or event, but never mentions it again. If it can be justifiably inferred that he retained the same notion up to the latter phase of his life, we may be able to draw a quite significant argument about his view of history. It may, however, be that he sometimes changed his mind, without leaving any evidence of this change. Moreover, in some cases, Burke made his comments on a certain historical issue only in his later works. Again, he may or may not already have had

⁶⁶ The phrase is borrowed from Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics* (3 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), I, 68; Charles Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought*, pp. 2, 4. An attempt to find the coherence of his political ideas faces the same problem.

similar opinions on them in his earlier life, but we should avoid a naïve attempt to read his later views back into his earlier life and assume consistency between the early and the later Burke when there is little evidence to allow us to do so.

The methodological problems which emerge in attempting to uncover Burke's view of history, especially his possible view of a comprehensive history of each nation or region, result from the nature of his works which contain a lot of comments on history, often fragmentary but occasionally quite substantial, that kept appearing over more than forty years. After all, Burke was not a professional historian, but an active politician who has nevertheless left a lot of historical descriptions and ideas worthy of examination. In order to deal with these problems, a reliance on 'inference' or 'possibility' is required. There are, however, some cases where the evidence is so slight that it is not even appropriate to make such an effect.

Chapter One

English History: the Ancient Constitution, Progress and Continuity

Although many commentators have at times touched upon Burke's view of English history, none of them has addressed it comprehensively and thus its complete picture is still unknown. It seems well recognised that a notion of continuity and progress coexists in his view of English history, but nevertheless this coexistence has not been discussed in any detail. This chapter examines Burke's view of English history in depth, and argues that ancient and medieval England was, according to Burke, far from enjoying substantial prosperity, although several significant events brought improvements and laid the foundations for future progress. It will also show that, during the crucial period from the Reformation to the Glorious Revolution, despite various serious crises, the people of England continuously attempted to retain and even succeeded in consolidating the ancient constitution. Finally, it will argue that, after 1688-9, the nation again overcame various political difficulties and achieved substantial progress, which depended upon the ancient constitution and other factors such as public credit, providence and sheer chance.

Clearly, it is not a simple task to analyse Burke's view of English history. He had great knowledge of it and had many opportunities to express his own notions of it throughout his life in his writings and speeches. His commitment to English history took more than one direction. Before looking at his views on English history, it is necessary to introduce preliminary points. Section one explores the relationship between Burke and English history, i.e., how he learned and committed himself to English history during the course of his life. The idea of an ancient constitution also needs to be examined, since Burke often discussed English history within this conceptual framework. Section two explores the intellectual genealogy of

this idea. The subsequent sections examine Burke's views on English history themselves. In the third section, his view of ancient and medieval England is examined; section four addresses the period between the Reformation and the Revolution of 1688-9; and the final section chiefly focuses on how liberty and prosperity in the late eighteenth century had, in his view, been accomplished.

1.1 Burke and English History

Burke's commitment to English history can be traced back to a quite early stage in his life. Even when he was a student at Trinity College, Dublin, it seems certain that Burke studied English history, partly because he was interested in the history of his native country, which had long been dominated by England. It is also well known that the early Burke unwillingly studied law in the Middle Temple. Although his early works such as the *Vindication of Natural Society*, the *Abridgment of the English History* and the *Fragments on the Laws of England* were tainted with the young Burke's hatred of law studies and lawyers, this period in his life provided him with opportunities to contemplate presenting an interpretation of English history. In his first published work, the *Vindication of Natural Society*, he censured and ridiculed Bolingbroke's deism. His main target in this work was probably Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, but Burke may well have read his other works and consolidated his own position about history, including English history. Although he did not disagree with Bolingbroke about his interpretation of ancient history, which both of them considered as barbarous, ignorant and desperately difficult to research because of the lack of reliable records, Burke consciously came to reject Bolingbroke's and hence the Tory position on politics and history.

The *Abridgment of English History* is the most obvious source for his early commitment to English history. It has not been seriously examined until recently, although it is clearly an important work in the sense that many ideas in it foreshadowed those that appear in his own later works. This work needs to be understood in the context of the age and of eighteenth-century historiography. Paul de Rapin de Thoyras's *Histoire d'Angleterre* (1724-36), its translation and continuation, *The History of England, as Well Ecclesiastical as Civil* (1725-45) by Nicholas Tindal and Thomas Carte's *General History of England* (1747-55) were all published before Burke embarked on this genre.¹ For the period from the Civil Wars to the Interregnum, Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and the Civil Wars in England* (1702) was widely read and much praised. The scarcity of English historical writings was, however, commonly lamented among eighteenth-century intellectuals, and the early Burke recognised this, but David Hume's *History of England* (1754-1761), eventually, broke new ground and helped fill in the gap. Burke, in his review of the final instalment of Hume's *History of England*, wrote: 'OUR writers had commonly so ill succeeded in history, the Italians, and even the French, had so long continued our acknowledged superiors, that it was almost feared that the British genius, which had so happily displayed itself in every other kind of writing, and had gained the prize in most, yet could not enter the lists in this. The historical work Mr. Hume first published, discharged our country from this opprobrium'.² Burke was also a reader of the previous instalments of Hume's *History* published in 1754, 1756 and 1759, which may have affected his way of writing the *Abridgment*. Hume seems to have inspired Burke with the idea of the evolution of the constitution, the modernity of English

¹ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 141.

² *Annual Register ... of the Year 1761* (London, 1762), p. 301 *bis* (from the 1760 volume, there are two sequences of page numbers in the *Annual Register*. Following F.P. Lock, I add *bis* to references to the second pagination. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 168n).

liberty and also, probably, the important role of 'an impartial historian', although Burke did not think that Hume was entirely impartial in some respects. In fact, Burke was certainly one of the British intellectuals of this period who were increasingly recognising the need for historians to abandon partisanship in their writings. This was already conspicuous in an earlier volume of the *Annual Register*, where he censured Swift's characterisation of eminent politicians in the reign of Queen Anne. Although acknowledging Swift's great genius, he believed that his work was marred by 'party blindness'.³ Besides, he may also have believed that succinctly arranged history, i.e., history which just focuses on important events, without discussing trivial details, was needed. When reviewing Robertson's *History of Scotland*, he made this point: 'But there is one beauty we have not so generally heard taken notice of, in that work; which is the great judgment of the author in drawing out or abridging his story according as he found the matter more or less important and interesting in itself. The history of Scotland furnished him with a long detail of facts prior to their great revolution in religion and in political connections; but he has happily thrown all of that aside, except what does in some measure lead to and explain the great events of that interesting period'.⁴ Robertson was already one of his favourite historians at this period, when the *Abridgment* was in progress, and Burke would have learned a great ideal from his work.

The *Abridgment* was intended as a one-volume history of England, initially planned to cover the period from Julius Caesar to Queen Anne, with a first edition of 1, 500 copies. Burke could, however, only finish writing the history up to Magna Carta in 1215. By 1760, he had handed in about 30, 000 words to the publisher, and he then wrote about another 60, 000 words by the time he eventually had to abandon the project. The *Abridgment* is, thus, an unfinished work, yet Burke devoted considerable

³ *Annual Register ... of the Year 1758* (London, 1759), pp. 256-7, 262.

⁴ *Annual Register ... of the Year 1759* (London, 1760), pp. 489-490.

time and energy to it.⁵ While this was a Burkean work, several ideas in it need to be situated in the intellectual context of his age. Like many other contemporary historical writings, the *Abridgment* enshrined a sense of progress and it was a work of 'philosophical history' in the sense that the author tried to discover the nature of human beings and society.⁶ It is also important that Burke was, to a considerable extent, under the influence of Montesquieu, both in his methods and his ideas. His mention of 'geography', 'climate' and the 'genius' of a people or of particular institutions were in the manner of Montesquieu, and Burke often laid stress upon the role and development of social institutions rather than upon the actions of particular individuals,⁷ although he characteristically did not agree with his great mentor on the role of Providence. He at times acknowledged the intervention of the divine will into history.⁸ In addition, it is significant to understand that the author was interested in the present as the product of historical forces, even when writing about the ancient and medieval state of the country.⁹

The sources and materials Burke used for the *Abridgment* have largely been identified by modern scholarship. William of Malmesbury, Ordericus Vitalis and Matthew of Paris were obvious sources for Burke and many other eighteenth-century historians, but he recognised that these sources were at times biased and confused.¹⁰ The sources for the Roman period

⁵ T.O. McLoughlin, 'Edmund Burke's "Abridgment of English History"', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 5 (1990), 45-59 (at 48).

⁶ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 125.

⁷ According to C.B. Courteny, Burke was 'the first British historian to copy the historical method of Montesquieu'. See Courteny, *Montesquieu and Burke*, p. 13. It is worth noting that Burke supposed the universal and unchangeable nature of human beings. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 148, 152-3.

⁹ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 333 (editor's preface).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 335 (editor's preface). In general, it seems that Burke found the poverty of sources in the ancient and medieval period and hence acknowledged the possibility that his notion would be overturned by new evidence. See McLoughlin, 'Edmund Burke's "Abridgment of English History"', p. 49.

included Caesar, Tacitus, Cicero, Vitruvius and Justinian. Burke's depiction of the Druids, in his *Abridgment*, derived from the standard sources of his age such as the *De bello Gallico* and the Elder Pliny's *Natural History*. He may also have consulted contemporary historians' accounts, including that of Rapin. For the period of the Saxons and after, he consulted Bede's *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and David Wilkins's *Leges Anglo-Saxonicae ecclesiasticae et civiles* (1721), copies of which were in the library of the Middle Temple, but not in his private library. According to F.P. Lock, Burke 'probably read Wilkins's Latin translations rather than the Old English originals'.¹¹ He also seems to have consulted John Selden's *The Historie of Tithes* (1618), Henry Spelman's *Concilia, decreta, leges, constitutiones, in re ecclesiarum orbis Britannici* (2 vols., 1639-64),¹² William Dugdale's *The History of St Paul's Cathedral* (1658; 2nd edn., 1716), and Robert Brady's *Introduction to the Old English History* (1684).¹³ The library of the Middle Temple in London had many sources for medieval English history,¹⁴ which Burke would have utilised. Moreover, Burke personally owned several sources for British history: George Buchanan's *Rerum Scotticarum Historia* (1643),¹⁵ Edward Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707),¹⁶ William Camden's *Britannia*, edited by R. Gough (3 vols., 1789),¹⁷ Francis Grose's *The Antiquities of England and Wales* (8 vols., 1787),¹⁸ idem, *The Antiquities of Scotland* (2 vols., 1789),¹⁹ Patrick Forbes, *Full View of the*

¹¹ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 146n.

¹² Burke owned a copy of this work. See LC MS; *LC*, p. 28.

¹³ Burke owned a copy of Brady's *Complete History of England from the First Entrance of the Romans, unto the End of the Reign of King Henry III* (London, 1685). See LC MS; *LC*, p. 9.

¹⁴ See *Catalogus librorum bibliothecae Honorabilis Societatis Medii Templi Londini* (London, 1734); Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 145n.

¹⁵ *LC*, p. 3.

¹⁶ *LC*, p. 18.

¹⁷ *LC*, p. 9.

¹⁸ LC MS; *LC*, p. 15.

¹⁹ *LC*, p. 15.

Public Transactions in the Reign of Q. Elizabeth (vol. 1 only, 1740),²⁰ White Kennett's *Complete History of England* (1719) edited by John Oldmixon,²¹ James Macpherson's *History of Great Britain from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hanover* (2 vols., 1775),²² Daniel Neal's *History of the Puritans* (2 vols., 1754),²³ Thomas May's *History of the Parliament of England which Began November the Third, 1640* (1647),²⁴ Thomas Frankland's *Annals of King James and King Charles* (1681),²⁵ Rapin's *History of England* (28 vols., trans. Tindal, 1728),²⁶ John Oldmixon's *History of England from Henry VIII. to George I* (3 vols., 1730-39),²⁷ James Ralph's *History of England during the reigns of King William, Queen Anne, and King George I, with an introductory review of the reigns of the royal brothers Charles and James* (2 vols., 1744),²⁸ David Scott's *History of Scotland* (1728),²⁹ Nathaniel Bacon's *Historical and Political Discourse of the Laws and Government of England* (1739),³⁰ John Dalrymple's *Essay Towards a General History of Feudal Property in Great Britain* (1757),³¹ Henry Wharton's *Specimen of Errors and Defects in the History of the Reformation by Gilbert Burnet* (1693),³² Gilbert Burnet's *History of His Own Time* (2 vols., 1724, 1734),³³ Bevill Higgons's *Historical and Critical Remarks on Bishop Burnet's History of his own time* (2nd edition, 1727),³⁴ Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and Civil*

²⁰ LC, p. 17.

²¹ LC, p. 18.

²² LC, p. 14.

²³ LC MS; LC, p. 16;

²⁴ LC MS; LC, p. 18.

²⁵ LC MS; LC, p. 17.

²⁶ LC MS; LC, p. 20.

²⁷ LC, p. 25. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 145-6.

²⁸ LC, p. 26.

²⁹ LC MS; LC, p. 26.

³⁰ LC MS; LC, p. 8.

³¹ LC, p. 6.

³² LC, p. 23.

³³ LC MS; LC, p. 9.

³⁴ LC, p. 12.

Wars in England (2 vols., 1702),³⁵ Hume's *History of England* (6 vols., 1754-1762),³⁶ William Harris's *Historical and Critical Account of the Life of Oliver Cromwell* (1762),³⁷ Daniel Defoe's *History of the Union between England and Scotland* (1786),³⁸ and so forth.³⁹ While Burke did not repudiate the operation of miracles, he may have relied upon Conyers Middleton (1683-1750).⁴⁰ The influence of Montesquieu is in evidence in the whole nature of the work.⁴¹ The most recent work cited in the *Abridgment* was Frederick Norden's *Travels in Egypt and Nubia* (1757), in which Burke found details on the Druids' worship of serpents. Burke also refers to John Scheffer's *History of Lapland* (1704) for his illustration of the worship of stones.⁴² In fact, 'Burke uses what is known about modern 'savage' nations to illuminate the conditions of ancient Britain'.⁴³ For Thomas Becket and the events of the period, he referred to and summarised, for instance, Gervase of Canterbury's *Opera historica* and *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*. For his account of the Irish language, he referred to but criticised William Temple⁴⁴ and Rapin.⁴⁵ For his depiction of Charles XII of Sweden (1682-1718), Burke may have read Samuel Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) and Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* (1731).⁴⁶

³⁵ LC MS; *LC*, p. 9.

³⁶ LC MS; *LC*, p. 15.

³⁷ LC MS; *LC*, p. 12.

³⁸ *LC*, p. 7.

³⁹ *LC*, p. 2 (British Chronologist, 3 vol.), p. 8 (Fox's *History of James II*, 1808).

⁴⁰ Conyers Middleton, *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which Are Supposed to Have Subsisted in the Christian Church* (London, 1749). Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 152-3.

⁴¹ Burke owned Montesquieu's works. See LC MS; *LC*, p. 14.

⁴² *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 355-6; Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 146-7.

⁴³ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 147.

⁴⁴ William Temple, *An Introduction to the History of England*, in *The Works of Sir William Temple* (2 vols., London, 1720), II, 534. See LC MS; *LC*, p. 28.

⁴⁵ Rapin, *History of England*, III, 56.

⁴⁶ See *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 527n. Samuel Johnson, *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (London, 1749), II, 191-222; Voltaire, *Histoire de Charles XII* (1731). Burke owned Johnson's works. See LC MS; *LC*, p. 17.

For modern commentators, the *Abridgment* includes several themes worth examining. First, as J.G.A. Pocock revealed as early as 1960, this work included Burke's early concern with the idea of the ancient constitution. In his *Abridgment*, he at times remarked on the problem of succession to the English crown, which should be read with his later comments on the same problem in the *Reflections*. More important, his language of manners and his belief in religion as a civilising force are already conspicuous, and are used to censure the naive form of ancient constitutionalism and English lawyers. Second, his attitude towards the ancient and medieval world in general informs us of his position in the eighteenth-century ancients versus moderns controversy and in eighteenth-century historiography. Burke's brief analysis of ancient and medieval Ireland is also helpful in examining his view of Irish history.⁴⁷ Finally, it is significant that the early Burke drew much attention to various conquests in ancient and medieval Britain, which helps us to understand his later position on the American and Indian problems.

The *Abridgment* is the largest, but not the sole record of the early Burke's study of English history. The first seven volumes of the *Annual Register* reviewed several contemporary books relating to English history. The books reviewed in the very first volume included John Brown's *Estimate of the Times and Manners* and William Blackstone's *A Discourse on the study of the law: being an introductory lecture, read in the public schools* (1758), whose arguments on the common law and Norman law may well have drawn Burke's attention and reinforced his position on the history of English law. Burke also highly approved of the account of the aristocratic, military and anti-commercial feudal constitution in William Robertson's *History of Scotland*.⁴⁸ The *Annual Register* also reviewed Hume's *History of England*, William Tytler's *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the*

⁴⁷ See my chapter on Irish history.

⁴⁸ *Annual Register ... of the Year 1759*, pp. 489-494.

Evidences Produced by the Earls of Murray and Morton, against Mary Queen of Scots, with an Examination of the Reverend Dr. Robertson's Dissertation, and Mr. Hume's History, with Respect to that Evidence (1760), *The State Papers of Henry earl of Clarendon, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, during the Reign of King James the Second: and his Lordship's Diary for the Years 1687, 1688, 1689, and 1690*, Adam Anderson's *Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce, from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time* (2 vols., 1764), anonymous, *The Spiritual and Temporal Library of Subjects in England*, in whose review Rapin's view of history was discussed in some details, and *The Plays of William Shakespeare ... [with] added notes by Samuel Johnson*.⁴⁹

When Burke formally became involved in politics, the process of learning English history was quite different from that in his early days. In his active parliamentary life, not only his reading of various kinds of materials but also his various communication with colleagues comprised part of this process. As a member of the Commons, Burke needed to decide and manifest his own interpretation of English history, and had to fight against his

⁴⁹ In fact, drama was one of Burke's long-standing interests, and he thought plays were not irrelevant to history. Later, when Edmond Malone presented him with a copy of his work on the history of the English stage, Burke wrote: 'An History of the Stage is no trivial thing to those who wish to study Human nature in all Shapes and positions. It is of all things the most instructive, to see, not only the reflection of manners and Characters at several periods, but the modes of making this reflection, and the manner of adapting it, at those periods, to the Taste and disposition of mankind. The Stage indeed may be considered as the Republick of active Literature; and its History as the History of that State. The great events of political History when not combined with the same helps towards the Study of the manners and Characters of men, must be a study of an inferiour nature'. See 'Burke to Edmond Malone (*circa* 29 November 1790)', in *Corr.*, VI, 181. In another letter to Malone, Burke mentioned his own view of the history of the English language. See 'Burke to Edmond Malone (5 April 1796)', in *Corr.*, VIII, 455: 'Besides doing every thing which the vindication of the first Genius perhaps in the World required from the hand of him who studied him the most, and Illustrated him the best, you have in the most natural, happy, and pleasing manner, and as if you w<ere> drawn <into it by your> subject, given us a very interesting History <of> our Language during that important period, in which after being refined by Chaucer, it fell into the rudeness of civil confusion and then continued in a pretty even progress, to the state of correctness, strength and elegance, in which we see it in your writings'.

opponents by attacking their notions of history. The problem of interpreting English history was partly the problem of his position and identity in political life. In his *Appeal*, he wrote:

He was at that time [when Burke became a member of the Rockingham party] as likely as most men to know what were Whig and what were Tory principles. He was in a situation to discern what sort of Whig principles they entertained with whom it was his wish to form an eternal connection ... When he entered into the Whig party, he did not conceive that they pretended to any discoveries. They did not affect to be better Whigs than those were who lived in the days in which principle was put to the test. Some of the Whigs of those days were then living. They were what the Whigs had been at the Revolution, — what they had been during the reign of Queen Anne,— what they had been at the accession of the present royal family.⁵⁰

While his early works such as the *Vindication*, the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment* already repudiated Bolingbroke's and Tory doctrine, and revealed his allegiance to the Whigs,⁵¹ his connection with the Rockingham party led him to draw greater attention to the political history of England, and to the genealogy and principles of the Whigs and Tories. Through this process, he deepened his understanding of English history and placed himself within it. The meaning of the Revolution of 1688-9 was crucial to the identity of the Whigs and to Burke's own Whiggism. The Rockingham Whigs consciously inherited Pelhamite principles, and Burke absorbed them through his own research and, presumably, through various communications with his

⁵⁰ *Appeal*, pp. 93-4.

⁵¹ In particular, see *Fragment*, in *WS*, I, 324: 'The spirit of party, which has misled us in so many other particulars, has tended greatly to perplex us in this matter. For as the advocates for prerogative would, by a very absurd consequence drawn from the Norman Conquest, have made all our national rights and liberties to have arisen from the grants, and therefore to be revocable at the will, of the sovereign; so on the other hand, those, who maintained the cause of liberty, did not support it upon more solid principles'.

colleagues.⁵² Although Burke was familiar with and partly used the ‘country’ ideology substantially developed by Bolingbroke a generation earlier, he and the Rockingham Whigs were convinced that their arguments were along the line of traditional Whig political tenets.⁵³ His early political writings such as the *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* (1769) and *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770) clearly show that the early Burke, he claimed himself, consciously chose the Rockingham brand of Whig principles as his political identity, while consciously rejecting Tory doctrine or the ideas of Bolingbroke. Indeed, the Whigs during the period of the Revolution of 1688-9, Queen Anne, George I and George II were repeatedly the object of Burke’s admiration. In his *Thoughts*, he put forward an idealised picture of the cohesiveness of the Whigs in the reign of Queen Anne (although modern historians would agree with his views on this cohesiveness), which he called ‘one of the most fortunate periods of our history’.⁵⁴ In the course of his political life, over and again, he showed respect for Somers,⁵⁵ Walpole and other eminent Whigs.⁵⁶ The Rockingham

⁵² Frank O’Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832* (London: Arnold, 1997), p. 209; Clark, ‘Introduction’, *Reflections*, p. 24.

⁵³ O’Gorman, *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy*, pp. 26, 30-31.

⁵⁴ *Thoughts*, in *WS*, II, 316-7.

⁵⁵ His praise of John Somers presumably drew on Somers’s reputation in the eighteenth century, not on a careful reading of the works of this eminent Whig. See *Reflections*, pp. 165, 168; ‘Speech on Economical Reform’, in *WS*, III, 527-8; Stuart Handley’s entry on ‘John Somers’, *ODNB*. A Whig Burke also did not criticise Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), but his contemporaries such as Adam Smith and Hugh Blair followed Swift’s estimation to censure him as a historian. See *Reflections*, p. 320; Hicks, *Neoclassical History and English Culture: from Clarendon to Hume*, p. 128.

⁵⁶ See ‘Speech on Economical Reform (1780)’, in *WS*, III, 529. ‘When we look over this exchequer list, we find it filled with the descendants of the Walpoles, of the Pelhams, of the Townshends; names to whom this country owes its liberties, and to whom his majesty owes his crown’. In the context of trying to promote war against revolutionary France, however, he retrospectively censured Robert Walpole’s failure to defend his position on the war against Spain in 1739: ‘I observed one fault in his [Walpole’s] general proceeding. He never manfully put forward the entire strength of his cause. He temporised; he managed; and adopting very nearly the sentiments of his adversaries, he opposed their inferences. This, for a political commander, is the choice of a weak post. His adversaries had the better of the argument, as he handled it, not as the reason and justice of his cause enabled him to manage it. I say this, after having seen,

Whigs, especially Burke, were almost always aware of the past of their genealogical link to these Whigs when conducting their politics. It is, therefore, important to recognise that Burke spoke and wrote about English history as a Whig. Also, a caution is needed about which historical periods particularly interested him. When appealing to or consulting English history in their political speeches and writings, Burke and his contemporaries did not often need to examine ancient and medieval history of England. The political issues which they were facing at times required them to manifest their interpretation of modern history, but rarely of ancient or medieval history. Moreover, Burke was quite sceptical of ancient history in general, which might have prevented him from referring to it.

1.2 The Idea of an Ancient Constitution

Through both his research and his own experience, Burke was well aware of the intellectual genealogy of the idea of an ancient English constitution and, without a knowledge of this, it is difficult to understand his notions of English history, especially when he discusses the continuity of the constitution. The idea of the ancient constitution, in fact, provided him with a language to explain English history. This section surveys the historical development and varieties of the idea of an ancient constitution, and

and with some care examined, the original documents concerning certain important transactions of those times. ... Some years after, it was my fortune to converse with many of the principal actors against that Minister, and with those, who principally excited that clamour. None of them, no not one, did in the least defend the measure, or attempt to justify their conduct. They condemned it as freely as they would have done in commenting upon any proceeding in history, in which they were totally unconcerned. Thus it will be. They who stir up the people to improper desires, whether of peace or war, will be condemned by themselves. They who weakly yield to them will be condemned by history'. See *First Letter*, in *WS*, IX, 227-8. According to the modern editor of the *First Letter*, 'many of the principal actors against that Minister' probably means George Lyttelton, 1st Baron Lyttelton (1709-73), William Pitt the Elder (1708-78), William Pulteney Earl of Bath (1684-1764), and Hugh Hume, 3rd Earl of Marchmont (1708-94).

attempts to situate Burke's idea of it in those intellectual contexts.

First, the terms need to be defined precisely. Both in the seventeenth century and in Burke's own age, 'ancient' is an adjective for something that existed in the distant past, but no longer exists or something which has been existing since the distant past. The use of 'ancient' in 'the ancient constitution' was an example of the latter use and always connoted historical continuity. 'The ancient constitution' did not, therefore, mean a bygone constitution, but a constitution which still existed. On the other hand, the term 'constitution' also needs to be defined precisely, but it is not easy to do so, since the English (later, British) constitution has always remained unwritten. Although Thomas Paine and other radicals tried to confine the term to a codified statement of fundamental law, antecedent to government, Burke, as well as most Englishmen or Britons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, used the term in its wider sense. For Burke, it meant all the institutions and practices of government.⁵⁷ Apparently, for him, as well as for most Englishmen, the most fundamental institutions of government were the mixed and balanced government, i.e., the monarch, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons, each possessing a particular authority, but together forming the sovereign legislature. We may therefore define the ancient constitution as a collection of laws and institutions which have existed since the distant past, or as a modern constitution that has ancient foundations.⁵⁸

It is also necessary to pay attention to the origins and characteristics of this kind of political thought. The idea of an ancient constitution is a way of thinking unique and peculiar to English political thought. Although it was not necessarily significant until the 1590s,⁵⁹ its classical formation was to be

⁵⁷ *Reflections*, p. 186n.

⁵⁸ Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution*, p. 19.

⁵⁹ Christopher W. Brooks, 'The Place of Magna Carta and the Ancient Constitution in Sixteenth-Century English Legal Thought', in *The Roots of Liberty*, pp. 77, 108.

given by the eminent common lawyers of the early seventeenth century. The two most significant aspects of the political thinking developed by them were a specific view of history and a unique epistemology. The distinctive attitude toward history was largely the consequence of the fact that the constitution of England was frequently identified with English common law. The English constitution was considered as 'customary', because the English common law was unwritten, and its beginnings were unknown and 'immemorial'. The term 'customary' apparently connotes the idea of historical continuity. The common lawyers thus argued that the English constitution had remained unaltered in some sense from 'time out of mind'.⁶⁰

It should be noted, however, that there were two distinct models of 'historical continuity' in the doctrine of the ancient constitution. One was typically put forward by Sir John Fortescue, who insisted that the constitution and laws of England were literally unchanging. In *De Laudibus Legum Anglie*, Fortescue claimed that England 'has been continuously regulated by the same customs as it is now'. If these customs had not been the best, they would have been changed by kings 'for the sake of justice'. He therefore concluded that 'the customs of the English are not only good but the best'.⁶¹ Although this sort of thinking survived in subsequent ages, it increasingly became unpopular and untenable over the succeeding centuries. As will be shown below, the early Burke criticised this 'naïve' form of the ancient constitution and placed his emphasis instead on the changeable nature of the law, but he may not have realised that the common lawyers before his own age had already developed another model of continuity, which resembled his own view of historical continuity. The other model may have

⁶⁰ Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution*, pp. 4-5.

⁶¹ Sir John Fortescue, *De Laudibus Legum Anglie [In Praise of the Laws of England]* in *On the Laws and Governance of England*, ed. Shelley Lockwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 26-7.

been more influential among his contemporary and subsequent intellectuals. This model was given the classical formulation by John Selden:

'Tis their trivial demand, *When and how began your common law?* Questionless it is fittest answered by affirming, when and in like kind as the laws of all other states, that is, *When there was first a state in that land, which the common law now governs* : Then were natural laws limited for the conveniency of civil society here, and those limitations have been from thence, increased, altered, interpreted, and brought to what now they are; although perhaps, saving the meerly immutable part of nature, now, in regard of their first being, they are not otherwise than a ship, that by often mending had no piece of the first materials, or as the house that's so often repaired, *ut nihil ex pristina materia supersit*, which yet, by the civil law, is to be accounted the same still...⁶²

The 'ship' image of Selden's concept of law influenced Sir Matthew Hale,⁶³ and later William Blackstone⁶⁴ and eighteenth-century English legal thought in general.⁶⁵ The English common law had constantly changed

⁶² John Selden, *Opera*, III, cols. 1891-2, quoted in Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: their Origin and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 84.

⁶³ Sir Matthew Hale, *The History of the Common Law of England*, ed. Charles M. Gray (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 40: 'As the Argonauts Ship was the same when it returned home, as it was when it went out, tho' in that long Voyage it had successive Amendments, and scarce came back with any of its former Materials; and as Titius is the same Man he was 40 Years since, tho' Physicians tells us, That in a Tract of seven Years, the Body has scarce any of the same Material Substance it had before'.

⁶⁴ See Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (4 vols., Oxford, 1765-69), I, 64: 'OUR antient lawyers, and particularly Fortescue, insist with abundance of warmth, that these customs are as old as the primitive Britons, and continued down, through the several mutations of government and inhabitants, to the present time, unchanged and unadulterated. This may be the case as to some; but in general, as Mr Selden in his notes observes, this assertion must be understood with many grains of allowance; and ought only to signify, as the truth seems to be, that there never was any formal exchange of one system of laws for another'. Blackstone went on to argue that the Romans, the Picts, the Saxons, the Danes and the Normans 'must have insensibly introduced and incorporated many of their own customs with those that were before established'.

⁶⁵ Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, p. 84.

according to changing social situations, but it was still the same law, since its very essence had remained unaltered. Here is what we may call a 'high concept of identity', to which Burke also later appealed. As will be shown below, however, Burke took advantage of the eighteenth-century language of manners, which was evidently unknown to such classical common lawyers as Selden or Hale, when arguing that the constitution had changed and developed over time.

The doctrine of the ancient constitution gave birth not only to a unique attitude towards history, but an unparalleled epistemology. One of the most distinctive arguments is that the common law is the product of trial and error over many generations and therefore it contains more wisdom than any individual can achieve in his own lifetime. The English common lawyers considered the common law as the best legal system for the governance of England, because that law was well-suited to the nature and disposition of Englishmen.⁶⁶ We may be able to trace the germ of this unique epistemology to Fortescue's notion that the customs of the English are the best due to their repeated approval by many generations which had existed in the realm. In his famous preface of *Le primer report...en Ireland*, Sir John Davies clearly showed the process by which a custom was made and eventually approved as law. A custom does not turn into a law until it is examined and approved by generations of people through immemorial time. If it is found inconvenient, it will no longer be used and will not acquire the force of law.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ For instance, Sir Edward Coke, *Institutes in The Selected Writings and Speeches of Sir Edward Coke*, ed. Steve Sheppard (3 vols., Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2003), II, 586: 'the Lawes and Customes of this Realme the rather should be reasonably perceived and knowne, and better understood by the tongue used in this Realme'.

⁶⁷ Sir John Davies, *Le primer report des cases & matters en ley resolues & adiudges en les courts del Roy en Ireland. Collect et digest per Sr. John Dauys Chiualer Attorney Generall del Roy en cest realme* (Dublin, 1615): 'For a *Custom* taketh beginning & groweth to perfection in this manner. When a reasonable act once done, is found to bee good & beneficiall to the people, & agreeable to theire nature & disposition, then do they vse it, & practise it, againe, & againe, & so by often iteration & multiplication of

Davies examined how a custom was generated and grew up to become a law, i.e., his idea contained the idea of progress and his epistemology which underpinned these arguments should support inductive reasoning, but this may not necessarily be the case. Sir Edward Coke advanced further in this regard. Law is 'fined and refined' by 'the wisdom of the most excellent men' of several generations, and eventually it achieves the wisdom which no one person can ever attain. The law is, therefore, wiser than any single human being.⁶⁸ In his House of Commons' speech in 1610, Thomas Hedley also provided a classical formulation of this line of argument. He maintained that time, which is the essential ingredient of human laws, is 'wiser than the judges, wiser than the parliament, nay wiser than the wit of man'.⁶⁹ The belief that ancient institutions contain greater wisdom than any particular individual possesses is also found in the works of Sir Matthew Hale.⁷⁰ It was emphasised in Pocock's *Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* that these epistemological arguments foreshadowed those of Burke.

If we accept Coke's argument literally, it seems reasonable to suppose that even the wisest man in history could not really understand the wisdom that had been achieved by long-standing laws, even if 'he had in his head the wisdom of all the men in the world, in any one age'.⁷¹ This line of argument came to challenge the omnipotence of the king's intelligence, and opened a series of debates on epistemology. The controversy between James

the act, it becometh a *Custome*, & being continued without interruption time out of minde, it obtaineth the force of a *lawe*'.

⁶⁸ Coke, *Seventh Reports*, 'Calvin's Case' in *The Selected Writings and Speeches of Sir Edward Coke*, I, 173. See also Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, p. 35.

⁶⁹ *Proceedings in Parliament 1610*, ed. Elizabeth Read Foster (2 vols., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), II, 175. See also, Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, pp. 271-272.

⁷⁰ Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, p. 173: Hale's 'distrust of abstract reasoning, the belief that ancient institutions contain a latent wisdom greater than that of the individual, above all the concept of the law as the fruit of a great social process...' all these are Burke's'.

⁷¹ Coke, *Seventh Reports*, 'Calvin's Case', in *The Selected Writings and Speeches of Sir Edward Coke*, I, 173.

I and Edward Coke was followed by that between Hobbes and Hale. We may also remind ourselves of Fortescue's Prince in the *De Laudibus*.⁷² In the controversy against their opponents who attempted to defend the king's authority, the common lawyers began to address the question of who can reach the best understanding of human laws and what is the best way to learn about the laws. Their answer was quite lucid and proved persuasive. Although the king of England has great intelligence given by God, the lawyers can attain to a better understanding of law than the king, simply because they engage in that specific business both for longer and more intensively than the king can do.⁷³ Knowledge of the law can best be acquired by long study, observation and experience, i.e., by 'artificial reason', reason attained only by particular individuals who engage in a specific profession, but not by 'natural reason', one equally given to every human being by nature.⁷⁴ This is obviously the endorsement of inductive reasoning rather than deductive reasoning. In abstract, but lucid terms, Fortescue claimed:

⁷² Fortescue, *De Laudibus*, p. 16. The Prince 'will render judgements better through others [i.e. judges] than by yourself.'

⁷³ Coke, *Twelfth Reports*, in *The Selected Writings and Speeches of Sir Edward Coke*, I, 481: 'A controversy of Land between parties was heard by the King, and sentence given, which was repealed for this, that it did belong to the Common Law: Then the King said, that he thought the Law was founded upon reason, and that he and others had reason, as well as the Judges: To which it was answered by me, that true it was, that God had endowed his Majesty with excellent Science, and great endowments of nature; but his Majesty was not learned in the Lawes of his Realm of England, and causes which concern the life, or inheritance, or goods, or fortunes of his Subjects; they are not to be decided by naturall reason but by the artificiall reason and judgment of Law, which Law is an act which requires long study and experience, before that a man can attain to the cognizance of it; And that the Law was the Golden met-wand and measure to try the Causes of the Subjects; and which protected his Majesty in safety and peace: With which the King was greatly offended, and said, that then he should be under the Law, which was Treason to affirm, as he said; To which I said, that Bracton saith, *Quod Rex non debet esse sub homine, sed sub Deo et Lege* [The king ought not to be under any man, but under God and the Law]'. See also Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, p. 17n.

⁷⁴ W. Holdsworth, 'Sir Matthew Hale on Hobbes: An Unpublished MS.', *Law Quarterly Review*, 37 (1921), 274-285; Sir Matthew Hale, 'Reflections by the Lrd. Cheife Justice Hale on Mr. Hobbes his Dialogue of the Lawe', *Law Quarterly Review*, 37 (1921), 286-303.

The principles, furthermore, which the Commentator said are effective causes, are certain universals which those learned in the laws of England and mathematicians alike call maxims, just as rhetoricians speak of paradoxes, and civilians of principles of law. These principles, indeed, are not discerned by force of argument nor by logical demonstrations, but they are arrived at, as it is taught in the second book of the *Posteriora*, by induction through the senses and the memory.⁷⁵

The common lawyers did not fully address the question of why the inductive process should be more effective than the deductive one in order to understand human laws. The answer that can be inferred from their discussions is possibly that knowledge of the law includes unanalytic and inarticulate dimensions, which cannot be addressed *a priori*.⁷⁶

These form the theoretical framework of the idea of an ancient constitution, and Burke's idea of it should be considered within this framework. It is, however, not absolutely clear to what extent Burke was 'influenced' by these classical common lawyers. Although he at times referred approvingly to the eminent common lawyers in his works,⁷⁷ his mentions are too brief to prove his immediate connection to any particular classical common lawyer. Nevertheless, it is significant that he was surely in the intellectual tradition of 'the politics of the ancient constitution'. This is, as will be shown below, because, first, he used the vocabulary peculiar to the language of this intellectual discourse such as 'the ancient constitution' or 'time out of mind' when asserting the continuity of English history

⁷⁵ Fortescue, *De Laudibus*, pp. 14-15.

⁷⁶ Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁷ For Burke's reference to Sir Edward Coke, see *Reflections*, p. 182; *WS*, I, 135; II, 239, 349, 354; III, 132, 291, 502-503, 544; VII, 120, 132, 141, 145-146, 165, 246-247, 302; IX, 628, *Corr.* II, 255. For Sir John Davies, *WS*, III, 140, 204; IX, 470, 615. Burke may have read John Selden, *Of the Judicature in Parliaments, A Posthumous Treatise* (1681) and John Selden, *A Brief Discourse Concerning the Power of the Peeres and Commons of Parliament in point of Judicature* (London, 1640). For Selden, see *Reflections*, p. 183; *WS*, VII, 184-185, 222. For Hale, see *WS*, I, 323; VIII, 302-3.

(especially, in the *Reflections* and the *Appeal*), and, second, there is evidence from his parliamentary life, his wide reading, and so forth that he was acquainted with this intellectual tradition. His criticism of the naive form of ancient constitutionalism and of the English lawyers and historians who supported it (which will be examined later) in the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment* clearly shows his awareness of the doctrine of the ancient constitution. His *Appeal* shows that Burke was a careful reader of the documents of the Sacheverell Trial, and that he approved of the claims of the Whigs in 1710 and their view of the English constitution as well as of the Glorious Revolution. In his *Reflections*, he also praised William Blackstone and he placed this great lawyer in the intellectual camp of Edward Coke. He was therefore well aware of the intellectual tradition of ancient constitutionalism, and tried to situate his own argument in this tradition (especially, in the *Reflections* and the *Appeal*, as will be shown below).

Although Burke attempted to situate his view of the English constitution in the intellectual genealogy of ancient constitutionalism, the language of the ancient constitution took various forms, some of which were incompatible with his idea of it. In order to understand Burke's idea of the ancient constitution, it is necessary to examine the prevalence of this doctrine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The doctrine of the ancient constitution prevailed not only among legal professionals, but also among many English politicians who belonged to several different political camps in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Throughout the seventeenth century it was used by the opponents of royal absolutism and it was more arguably influential than John Locke's contract theory among the Whigs. The leading Whigs such as Algernon Sidney, James Tyrrell, Henry Neville and William Petyt were indebted to the doctrine of the ancient constitution in asserting the antiquity of Parliament. One of the aims of

their political ideology was the rehabilitation of the ancient or prescriptive constitution.⁷⁸ The trial of Dr Sacheverell in 1710, as Burke argued in 1791, allowed the Whigs to present their central political tenets, which relied upon the doctrine of the ancient constitution. The dispute between Bolingbroke's *The Craftsman* and Robert Walpole's publicists included another variation of the debate over the ancient constitution and the English past. On the one hand, Bolingbroke and his associates claimed that the constitution in England had allowed the people to enjoy liberties for a long period of time. According to them, the origins of English parliamentary institutions could be traced back to the Saxon or Gothic periods, and English history was a continuous battle between the monarch, who attempted to increase his authority, and the people, who sought to protect their historical rights. English liberties had not entirely been subverted even by the Norman Conquest,⁷⁹ and the constitution had retained its continuity until the eighteenth century. Bolingbroke and his allies urged the English people to resist Walpole's attempts to subvert their liberty by his corruption of parliament and elections as they had previously done similar attempts by the early Stuart monarchs and by James II. Their interpretation of English history was essentially that of the pre-Walpolean Whigs, who appealed to the idea of an ancient and immemorial constitution. In contrast, Walpole and the ministerial writers supporting him had adopted the old Tory version of English history put forward by such scholars as Dr. Robert Brady, and challenged the Opposition's views. These ministerial writers maintained that the idea of an ancient constitution was mythical and that English liberties were not an ancient inheritance. Historically, rulers in England had exercised arbitrary powers and had frequently opposed their people, and,

⁷⁸ H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 64, 71-3, 78-9, 82-3.

⁷⁹ *The Craftsman*, no. 466 (7 June 1735), in *The London Magazine: or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* (London, [1732-1735]), pp. 288-291.

moreover, parliamentary institutions, which the Opposition argued had long limited the power of absolute sovereigns, did not even exist until the thirteenth century. Even after this period, parliament met irregularly and it was frequently controlled by the monarch of the day. In *Ancient and Modern Liberty Stated and Compar'd* (1734), Lord Hervey stressed that all English monarchs before 1688-9, even Queen Elizabeth, whose reign the Opposition propagandists at times commended, had been tyrants.⁸⁰ For him and for the other pro-government propagandists, the English past had, for the most part, been a history of slavery, and real liberty had been achieved only recently as a result of the Glorious Revolution.⁸¹

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the doctrine of the ancient constitution, once more influenced various political situations and camps. As is now well-known, the writings of the American revolutionaries appealed to the doctrine of the ancient constitution, as well as to Lockean contract theory and republican thought, in order to defend themselves from the absolute sovereignty of the Westminster parliament.⁸² The maxims of the

⁸⁰ John, Lord Hervey, *Ancient and Modern Liberty Stated and Compar'd*, introduction by H.T. Dickinson (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1989).

⁸¹ For this partisan debate on the English past in the 1730s, see Isaac Kramnick, 'Augustan Politics and English Historiography: The Debate on the English Past, 1730-35', *History and Theory* 6 (1967), 35-56; H.T. Dickinson, 'Introduction', in Hervey, *Ancient and Modern Liberty Stated and Compar'd*, pp. iii-x. For Bolingbroke's views on English history, see Isaac Kramnick, 'Editor's Introduction', in *Lord Bolingbroke: Historical Writings*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. xi-liv; Simon Varey, *Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), pp. 78-94; R.J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688-1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 57-70; Folke Nibelius, *Lord Bolingbroke (1678-1751) and History: a Comparative Study of Bolingbroke's Politico-Historical Works and a Selection of Contemporary Texts as to Themes and Vocabulary* (Stockholm: Universitet Stockholms: Distributor, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003).

⁸² For this, see H.T. Dickinson, 'Britain's Imperial Sovereignty: The Ideological Case against the American Colonists' in *Britain and the American Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 95-96.

common lawyers such as Coke and Blackstone inspired the colonists.⁸³ British radicals, too, used the idea of the ancient constitution to strengthen the intellectual basis of their arguments, although they failed to persuade a majority to follow them.⁸⁴ Burke was clearly well versed in these varieties of ancient constitutionalism and his idea of the ancient constitution cannot be properly understood without considering them.

1.3 Ancient and Medieval Britain: Barbarism and Rudiments of Progress

For Burke, Britain in ancient and medieval times was a barbarous country. Even if several significant events brought improvement and laid the foundations for future prosperity, British society during this period was far from being civilised. The *Abridgement*, in which most of the materials for his view of ancient and medieval Britain can be found, begins with the period before ancient Rome's invasion and ends with King John's acceptance of Magna Carta in 1215. Ancient Britain at the time of Julius Cæsar enjoyed a pleasant climate and natural advantages, but the people did not appreciate the value of commerce and luxury. Society was simple and liberty was enjoyed with few restraints. Burke's view of the Druid religion, although it owed much to other historians, also interestingly reflected his own notion of the ancient world. Although Burke argued that the Druids had contributed to the 'first openings of civility' in Britain and other European countries,⁸⁵ he disagreed with other historians who highly praised the intellectual abilities and achievements of the Druids. He

⁸³ For Sir Edward Coke and the American Revolution, see Charles F. Mullett, 'Coke and the American Revolution', *Economica*, 38 (1932), 457-471. According to F.W. Maitland, 'Nearly 2500 copies of Blackstone's *Commentaries* were absorbed by the colonies on the Atlantic seaboard before they declared their independence...the common law went straight to the Pacific'. See F.W. Maitland, *Historical Essays*, ed. H.M. Cam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 147.

⁸⁴ Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, pp. 204, 233, 240-242.

⁸⁵ *Abridgement*, in *WS*, I, 348-9.

considered their learning as no more than elementary. Although the discipline of the Druids in Britain was 'in its highest perfection', Britain 'was more barbarous in all other respects than Gaul itself, or than any other country then known in Europe'.⁸⁶ The rituals of the Druids, although 'exercised more uniformly' than those of other heathens, seemed to him barbarous.⁸⁷ In the Saxon period, although the nation was united into one kingdom by Egbert, the succession to the crown was not clearly established nor was it invariable. Hereditary succession was not precisely fixed and popular elections at times took place. As a result, the territory of England was frequently divided and reunited, which was the cause of much mischief.⁸⁸ Burke's admiration for King Alfred contrasted with his view of 'the most desperate condition' of late ninth-century England, which experienced lawlessness, disorder, feeble religion, and the prevalence of poverty and ignorance. From the ninth to the eleven centuries, 'the people of England were the most backward in Europe in all improvements, whether in military or in civil life'. The Saxons were 'a people without learning, without arts, without industry' and highly militant, and their lives depended on pasturage and hunting, which were the obvious characteristics of savage society in general. Their 'ideas of government will necessarily be imperfect',⁸⁹ and they were also 'extremely imperfect in their ideas of law, the civil institutions of the Romans, who were the legislators of mankind, having never reached them'.⁹⁰ The Anglo-Saxon government was, actually, the largest 'theme of panegyrick with all our writers on politicks and history', and these writers persuaded people that 'the crude institutions of an unlettered people had reached a perfection, which the united efforts of enquiry, experience, learning and necessity, have not been able to attain in

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 352.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 357.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 405-6. See also, 408.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 428-9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 448.

many ages'.⁹¹ This is, however, far from the truth. Although William Lambard (1536-1601) described the House of Commons around this period in a way that made it appear to his readers to be the same as that in his age, Burke repudiated such an interpretation of his work. As the Saxon's idea of government was so simple and they did not attach any importance to arts nor commerce, it is highly unlikely that they had substantially developed the system of legislature that was familiar to subsequent generations. Clearly, it must have been the case that the Saxons or even the Normans could not have advanced any parliamentary system that was comparable to that which existed in the eighteenth century. The Saxon parliament, the Witenagemot, which was held annually (or sometimes twice a year) and whose session 'great numbers of all ranks of people attended to promulgate rather than make laws, was certainly 'unformed'. Although what rights the monarch had in this assembly were, like other aspects of this era, far from clear because of lack of historical records, the king, at that time, was probably 'the executive magistrate' who compiled and propounded laws to the assembly for the consent of its members rather than 'a legislator dictating from his own proper authority'.⁹²

Nevertheless, there were, according to Burke, some important rudiments of progress and improvement in the ancient and medieval eras. One of the most significant was the introduction of Christianity into England, which was literally the first step towards civilising the country: 'Light scarce begins to dawn until the introduction of christianity; which, bringing with it the use of letters, and the arts of civil life, affords at once a juster account of things and facts, that are more worthy of relation: nor is there indeed any revolution so remarkable in the English story'.⁹³ The conversion of the people to the Christian religion rendered the manners and laws of the

⁹¹ *Fragment*, in *WS*, I, 325.

⁹² *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 440-3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 390.

Saxons civilised: 'their ferocity was much abated, they became more mild and sociable, and their laws began to partake of the softness of their manners, every where recommending mercy and a tenderness for Christian blood'.⁹⁴ Another important factor in the progress of the constitution in the ancient and medieval eras was increased communication with foreigners brought about by migrations, voyages, pilgrimages and even conquests. Ancient and medieval Britain was, after all, a territory which was many times invaded and conquered by foreign peoples. Britain was first peopled from Gaul, and then Cæsar invaded the country.⁹⁵ The Romans were in many respects superior to the natives of the island. In fact, Burke highly praised the conquest by Gnaeus Julius Agricola (40-93), who, he believed, had contributed much to civilising the ancient/native Britons. Burke did not justify all kinds of conquest, only those which civilised and respected the conquered, Agricola's conquest was depicted as one of these ideal cases. This Roman general was 'a man, by whom it was a happiness for the Britains [*sic*] to be conquered' and 'a man of humanity and virtue; he pitied the condition and respected the prejudices of the conquered'.⁹⁶ Burke seems to have largely followed Tacitus's *Agricola* here, but his characterisation of this ancient ruler was typically his own:

Agricola reconciled the Britains [*sic*] to the Roman government, by reconciling them to the Roman manners. He moulded that fierce nation by degrees to soft and social customs; leading them imperceptibly into a fondness for baths, for gardens, for grand houses, and all the commodious elegancies of a cultivated life. He diffused a grace and dignity over this new luxury by the introduction of literature. He invited instructors in all the arts and sciences from Rome; and he sent the principal youth of Britain to that city to be educated, at his own expense. In short he

⁹⁴ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 404.

⁹⁵ It seems that Burke meant part of the island later known as England, since the Romans never settled in northern Britain (Scotland).

⁹⁶ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 366-7.

subdued the Britains by civilizing them; and made them exchange a savage liberty for a polite and easy subjection. His conduct is the most perfect model for those employed in the unhappy, but sometimes necessary task of subduing a rude and free people.⁹⁷

This is one of the examples of Burke's narrative of Enlightenment, which reminds us of his characterisation of Columbus and his later political works on India. Both Agricola and Columbus contributed to the rise of learning and led rude natives towards a civilised form of society by their tactful treatment of them. The above passage reflects Burke's own idea of how conquerors should deal with foreigners or native savages. Treating barbarous foreigners courteously according to their situation is a consistent ideal throughout his life, including his commitment to the problems of Ireland, America and India. His phrases and vocabulary such as 'reconciling them to the Roman manners', 'fierce' and 'soft and social customs' or 'exchange a savage liberty for a polite and easy subjection' may well be regarded as the language of manners in the context of the Enlightenment of eighteenth-century Britain.

After the Romans retreated and left the country,⁹⁸ the Anglo-Saxons invaded and settled the island. In the medieval era, pilgrimages and the Crusades promoted migration and communications between Britain and other countries. At the end of the eighth century, the minds of the people of Wessex were 'somewhat opened by a foreign communication; by which they became more civilized and better acquainted with the arts of war and of government'.⁹⁹ Burke was favourable to some English monarchs in the Saxon era. His praise of Alfred the Great (849-899) is especially noteworthy.¹⁰⁰ In his efforts to remedy the disorder in Saxon society, Alfred

⁹⁷ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 368.

⁹⁸ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 383.

⁹⁹ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 405.

¹⁰⁰ According to an early biographer, Burke's early poems already included his admiration of this particular king. See James Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character*

‘revived, improved and digested all the Saxon institutions; insomuch that he is generally honoured as the founder of our Laws and Constitution’.¹⁰¹ The Anglo-Saxon laws ‘owe more to the care and sagacity of Alfred than of any of the ancient kings’.¹⁰² He also encouraged learning as well as trade: ‘To cure this deplorable ignorance, he was indefatigable in his endeavours to bring into England men of learning in all branches from every part of Europe; and unbounded in his liberality to them’. Like other Burke’s favourite historical figures, Alfred was so diligent a man that he overcame his own ignorance to acquire a wide range of knowledge, and also so multi-talented as to be good at ship-building and architecture.¹⁰³ In short, he was one of the greatest men in the dark period of English history. Burke also paid tribute to Egbert (775?-839)¹⁰⁴ and Canute the Great (995?-1035).¹⁰⁵

The repeated invasions of the Danes exhausted the country, but the peace achieved during this period exhausted it even more.¹⁰⁶ The descendants of the Danes were the Normans, who inherited the bravery and spirit of enterprise of their ancestors.¹⁰⁷ The Norman Conquest of 1066 was one of the defining moments in English history, and Burke seems to have appreciated it for the same reason as he held high the pilgrimages and the Crusades. According to Burke, ‘England was little known or considered in Europe’ before the period of the Conquest. The Normans changed the bigoted and insular characteristics of England: ‘The English laws, manners, and maxims were suddenly changed; the scene was enlarged; and the

of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke (2 vols., 2nd edn; London, 1826), I, xxvii; *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 408n; Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 154-5.

¹⁰¹ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 411. Burke, however, censured historians, probably including Rapin, who had attributed to Alfred the institution of juries or the distribution of England into shires, hundreds and tythings.

¹⁰² *Fragment*, in *WS*, I, 327.

¹⁰³ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 412-3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 405-7.

¹⁰⁵ *Fragment*, in *WS*, I, 328-330; *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 418-420, 544.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 428.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 423.

communication with the rest of Europe being thus opened, has been preserved ever since in a continued series of wars and negotiations'.¹⁰⁸ While the naïve form of ancient constitutionalism denies any substantial impact resulting from the Conquest,¹⁰⁹ Burke considered it as a great event by which the constitution was improved,¹¹⁰ and highly commended 'the actions, fortunes and character' of William the Conqueror (1028?-87).¹¹¹

It is also noteworthy that he valued Henry II 'as the restorer of the English monarchy',¹¹² and did not blame him for his conquest of Ireland. He also pointed out a parallel between Richard I (1157-99) and Charles XII of Sweden (1682-1718) about their political conducts, fortunes and character.¹¹³ This is an example, as F.P. Lock indicates, of Burke's belief in universal human nature and moral values that allowed him to make comparisons across distant times.¹¹⁴ At the end of his *Abridgment*, Burke reached the historical moment of the Great Charter (Magna Carta) and the Charter of the Forest. He maintained:

The Common Law, as it then prevailed in England, was in a great measure composed of some remnants of the old Saxon customs, joined to the feudal institutions brought in at the Norman Conquest. And it is here to be observed, that the constitutions of Magna Charta are by no means a renewal of the laws of St. Edward, or the ancient Saxon laws; as our historians and law writers generally, though very groundlessly assert. They bear no resemblance in any particular to the laws of St. Edward, or to any

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 453.

¹⁰⁹ The Norman Conquest was one of the popular reference points in the eighteenth-century political debates. See H.T. Dickinson, "The Eighteenth-Century Debate on the 'Glorious Revolution'", *History*, 61 (1976), 28-45 (at 28-9).

¹¹⁰ In his *Fragment*, he also wrote that 'it is obvious, on the very first view of the Saxon Laws, that we have entirely altered the whole frame of our jurisprudence since the Conquest', and even before the Conquest 'the English Law began to be improved, by taking in foreign learning'. See *Fragment*, in *WS*, I, 324, 330.

¹¹¹ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 476-7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 498.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 527.

¹¹⁴ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 154-5. Similar was, in the *Account*, the case of Tigranes I of Armenia (140-55 BC?) and the Aztec emperor. See *Account*, I, 92.

other collection of these ancient institutions. Indeed, how should they? The object of Magna Charta is the correction of the feudal policy; which was first introduced, at least in any regular form, at the Conquest, and did not subsist before it.¹¹⁵

His criticism of the naive form of ancient constitutionalism draws on his conviction that laws are generally transformed according to manners changing over time. For Burke, Magna Carta was a reform 'not to destroy the root, but to cut short the overgrown branches of the feudal service'.¹¹⁶ The Great Charter and the Charter of the Forest 'first disarmed the Crown of its unlimited prerogatives, and laid the foundation of English liberty'.¹¹⁷ Later, Burke argued that Magna Carta had been the first political reform¹¹⁸ and had contributed to the later formation of the House of Commons.¹¹⁹ It was also one of England's fundamental laws¹²⁰ and a sort of starting point from which it was possible to examine the constitutional history of England (and later Britain) with some clarity. Although it may well be certain that there were a number of statutes created in the ancient and medieval ages before Magna Carta, many of which still remained in practice in England's common law, the historical records of these acts were now lost in darkness.¹²¹ Among the positive elements in the ancient and medieval ages, the introduction of the Christian religion and the achievement of Magna

¹¹⁵ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 544.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 546.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 543.

¹¹⁸ See below, p. 72.

¹¹⁹ 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', in *WS*, III, 139-140 where Burke stated, 'Magna Charta, if it did not give us originally the House of Commons, gave us at least an House of Commons of weight and consequence'.

¹²⁰ 'Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe', in *WS*, IX, 610-611, 628.

¹²¹ 'Burke to James de Lancey (9 June 1771)', in *Corr.*, II, 217: 'It is possible enough, that the Judges might have been disqualified by some early Statute. A great part of our Statute Law is lost, and much if not the whole of what we receive as common Law at this day was undoubtedly at first the result of positive constitution by the Legislative Authority; though the Record being lost by the injury of time, the practice remains, as the only Evidence as well as the best interpreter of the Law'. Blackstone had the same view, but probably less extreme. See Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, I, 85.

Carta were especially significant and had lasting influence on subsequent ages of English history. Nevertheless, these early ages seem, in Burke's mind, not to have achieved sufficient progress.

1.4 From the Reformation to the Revolution: The Making of the Ancient but Evolving Constitution

While the early Burke, in the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*, analysed ancient and medieval England in detail, the politician Burke barely wrote and spoke about it. As it is highly unlikely that he changed his mind later and came to consider these periods as flourishing, nevertheless, it may be safely argued that he regarded ancient and medieval ages as low points in the history of England throughout his career. Although both the early and the later Burke rarely made comments on the following more than three hundred years of English history — the period from Magna Carta to the Reformation — the available evidence suggests that Burke presumably thought of this later period as being still barbarous. The constitution around this period certainly remained in his opinion far from the level achieved in his own age.¹²² The next historical event, after 1215, which he interpreted seriously, was the Reformation. Although, in one of his early works, Burke claimed that the English Reformation had had negative effects upon the Irish Catholics, this view did not apply to his evaluation of the impact of the

¹²² In 1789, in the House of Commons, he 'said that gentlemen were fond of resorting to the dark and barbarous time of Henry 6; a period before our constitution was formed'. See *Parl. Hist.*, 27, col., 1231. Other examples are Burke's mention of John Ball, as well as of the Jacquerie, in the *Appeal*, both of which led a peasant riot in the late fourteenth century, and his reference to the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), in the *Reflections*. When quoting Ball's couplet 'When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?' and commenting that 'Of this sapient maxim, however, I do not give him for the inventor. It seems to have been handed down by tradition, and had certainly become proverbial', Burke was right. According to *ODNB*, the couplet 'was a popular proverb which is recorded from at least the early fourteenth century'. See *Appeal*, pp. 144-5; Andrew Prescott's entry on John Ball (*d.* 1381) in *ODNB: Reflections*, p. 310.

Reformation on England.¹²³ In early 1772, commenting on the Feathers Tavern Petition, which campaigned for the abolition of compulsory subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles, Burke told his parliamentary colleagues that the people had been aggrieved by the abuses in the Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation and that he would 'have heartily concurred in the alteration at that time made'.¹²⁴ This did not, however, lead him to support this petition.¹²⁵ Although several reforms had taken at the time of the Reformation, in Burke's view, none of them had altered the 'identity', i.e., the fundamental principles of the Church of England. As an independent body of organisation, the Church of England, in fact, 'has always exercised, a right of reforming whatever appeared amiss in her doctrine, her discipline, or her rites'. In the reign of Henry VIII, the English Church had shaken off papal supremacy. Two versions of the Book of Common Prayer were produced by the hand of Thomas Cranmer in the reign of Edward VI. The *Forty-Two Articles* establishing the doctrines of the Church in England were also created around this period, and later the number of articles was reduced to thirty nine.¹²⁶ In Burke's view, not all the institutions nor regulations produced throughout history are fundamental and unchangeable. Many of them could be abolished or revised according to the changing circumstances. This was the case of the statutes dealing with treasonable offences in the reign of Henry VIII and Charles II, or the case of the Act of Supremacy reinstated by Elizabeth I.¹²⁷ Even the Act of Union in 1707 was, according to Burke, not a fundamental law. The regulations created in the Reformation were another such case. These were only made

¹²³ See my chapter on Irish history.

¹²⁴ 'Clerical Subscription (6 Feb 1772)', in *WS*, II, 364. Burke, actually, acknowledged that 'the established religion of this country has been three or four times altered by act of parliament'. See 'Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol', in *WS*, III, 315.

¹²⁵ Burke argued that the petitioners could worship as Dissenters if they did not want to agree to the doctrines of the Church of England.

¹²⁶ *Parl. Hist.*, 17, col., 277n.

¹²⁷ 'Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe (1792)', in *WS*, IX, 612.

‘from the mere necessity of the case’.¹²⁸ The principles of the churches in Britain, in his view, had continued to be redefined and consolidated over time ever since the Reformation had begun. ‘In England, even during the troubled interregnum, it was not thought fit to establish a *negative* religion’, i.e., a religion created only by the hatred and opposition of Roman Catholicism. The Presbyterian Directory of Worship was approved as a replacement for the Book of Common Prayer by an ordinance of the Westminster parliament in 1645,¹²⁹ and Presbyterianism was established in England by the church discipline ordinances around the same period. Parliament also approved two Westminster Catechisms in 1648. In Scotland, The *Scots Confession* and Presbyterianism were eventually approved by the Act of Union. Above all, the religious affiliation of the crown had been redefined since the Church of England removed itself from under the authority of Rome. While even before the Reformation, it was a fundamental principle of the constitution that the king of England was a Christian ‘according to the national legal church for the time being’, this principle ‘became doubly necessary’ since the Reformation. This was simply because now that the monarch was the head of the Church of England, ‘it would be incongruous and absurd, to have the head of the church of one faith, and the members of another’. Finally, the Revolution Settlement strictly confirmed the Protestant succession of the crown. Although the king may succeed to the throne as a Protestant, as the Act of Settlement of 1701 stipulates, he cannot hold the crown without being a Protestant of the Church of England.¹³⁰ While Burke maintained that these reformations in religion did

¹²⁸ *Parl. Hist.*, 17, col., 283n.

¹²⁹ Burke once stated: ‘But had I possessed a vote, when the directory was going to be established, I would have divided for the Common Prayer; and, had I lived when the Common-Prayer was re-established, I would have voted for the Directory. The reason is obvious, They were not essentially different, neither contained any thing contrary to the scriptures, or that could shock a rational Christian’. ‘Clerical Subscription (6 Feb 1772)’, in *WS*, II, 364.

¹³⁰ ‘Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe (1792)’, in *WS*, IX, 605-6.

not alter the fundamental principles of the British constitution, but rather consolidated them, such a view perfectly fitted with his general concept of the ancient constitution in Britain. He believed, as he told parliament in 1788, that by succeeding in reforming religion, Britain 'had done honor to Europe, to our Cause, to our religion, done honor to all the circumstances of which we boast and pride ourselves at the moment of that revolution'.¹³¹ Although he knew and was critical of the religious strife and persecutions seen in British history, Burke evidently considered the series of religious reformations conducted since the sixteenth century to have led Britain to greater glory.

His evaluation of the Reformation was, however, not the same as that of the monarchs who committed themselves to it. Burke rather seems to have been very critical of the Tudors and the early Stuarts. Among them, he probably most detested Henry VIII, who he once described as 'one of the most decided tyrants in the rolls of history'. Burke censured the king's plunder of the property of the church and the nobility, and even linked him with Roman tyrants and French revolutionaries.¹³² Henry was also criticised for subjugating parliament completely.¹³³

Clearly, Burke knew much about other religious issues which took place after the Reformation. For instance, the Burkes, in the *Account*, drew attention to the rise of Puritans in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. The Protestants, who were persecuted in the reign of Mary I and fled abroad, elaborated their religious doctrines and showed aversion to the episcopal order. They returned to England in the reign of Elizabeth 'with minds sufficiently heated by resentment of their sufferings'. The monarch

¹³¹ "Speech on Opening of Impeachment", in *WS*, VI, 315.

¹³² *Reflections*, pp. 281-2. Here Burke referred to Henry VIII's reign as 'that dark age'. See also Letter to a Noble Lord, in *WS*, IX, 166-7.

¹³³ Edmund Burke, 'National Character and Parliament', in Richard Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), p. 642; *Reflections*, p. 282.

was hard on them:

Queen Elizabeth had enough of the blood of Harry the eighth, to make her impatient of an opposition to her will, especially in matters of religion, in which she had an high opinion of her own knowledge. She advised with the party but very little in the alternations which she thought proper to make; and disliking the notions, which they seemed to entertain in politics, she kept them down during the whole course of her reign with an uniform and inflexible severity.¹³⁴

The Burkes did not agree with some of the monarchs' religious policies during this period.¹³⁵ They were critical of James I at the Hampton Court Conference,¹³⁶ Charles I's conduct and William Laud's persecution of the Puritans.¹³⁷ While the fact that religious freedom did not exist was lamentable, it determined the future course of history.

Although the constitution was consolidated by the Reformation, it was plunged into a serious crisis during the period the Civil Wars of the 1640s and the Interregnum of the 1650s. The English Civil Wars were, in fact, a

¹³⁴ *Account*, II, 134-135.

¹³⁵ It is, however, worth noting that Burke was quite favourable to Mary, Queen of Scots. While Hume was critical to this queen, Burke vehemently disagreed with Hume's assessment and tried to defend her innocence. See David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, foreword by William B. Todd (6 vols., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1983), IV, 399; *Annual Register* (1761), pp. 305-316 *bis*; Bisset, *Life of Edmund Burke*, II, 426; Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 187-8, 190.

¹³⁶ *Account*, II, 135-136: 'The unkingly disputation at Hampton-court did more to encourage the puritans to persevere in their opinions, by the notice which was taken of them, than all king James's logic, as a scholar, backed with all his power as a king, could do to suppress that party. They were persecuted, but not destroyed; they were exasperated, and yet left powerful; and a severity was exercised towards them, which at once exposed the weakness and the ill intentions of the government'.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 136-137. As regards Charles I, the Burkes wrote: 'This prince, endowed with many great virtues, had very few amiable qualities. As grave as the puritans themselves, he could never engage the licentious part of the world in his favour; and that gravity being turned against the puritans, made him but the more odious to them. He gave himself up entirely to the church and churchmen; and he finished his ill conduct in this respect, by conferring the first ecclesiastical dignity of the kingdom, and a great sway in temporal affairs, upon doctor Laud' (*ibid.*, II, 136).

constant reference point in eighteenth-century political debate, and the memory of this crucial period left a deep mental scar on the English ruling class.¹³⁸ Burke at times touched upon this period in his political works. Although a Whig, Burke seems to have subscribed to the constitutional revolution carried out during the early phase of the Long Parliament (i.e., the attempts of parliament to limit the power of Charles I by constitutional means), he avoided seeking any causal relationship between such a constitutional revolution and the catastrophic civil war.¹³⁹ In their *Account*, the Burkes acknowledged that the constitution was overturned by the execution of Charles I,¹⁴⁰ and Burke, in his *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, referred to the period of the Civil Wars and the Interregnum as a troubled age.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, chiefly in his works in the 1790s, he valued it, to some extent, and stressed the historical continuity in this period. In particular, his view of Cromwell and his government is worthy of note. In his *Reflections*, he depicted Cromwell as ‘one of the great bad men of the old stamp’, but rated highly his extraordinary talents, including his great ambition: ‘I do not say (God forbid) I do not say, that the

¹³⁸ J.G.A. Pocock, ‘Introduction’, in Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. idem (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), pp. vii–xlvi (at xi). The traumatic events of the Civil Wars continued to haunt eighteenth-century intellectuals. The Gordon riots of 1780 reminded them of the Puritans, the Levellers, the early Methodists, or the French religious wars such as the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre. See Iain McCalman, ‘Mad Lord George and Madame La Motte: Riot and Sexuality in the Genesis of Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*’, *Journal of British Studies*, 35 (1996), 343–367.

¹³⁹ J.C.D. Clark, ‘Introduction’, *Reflections*, p. 74. Burke recognised the Long Parliament’s confiscation of lands, and correctly found its parallel with the case of the French Revolution. See *Reflections*, p. 322: ‘The long parliament confiscated the lands of deans and chapters in England on the same ideas upon which your assembly set to sale the lands of the monastic orders’. For another comment on the Long Parliament, see Burke, ‘National Character and Parliament’, p. 642.

¹⁴⁰ *Account*, II, 216: ‘In the fatal troubles which brought Charles the first to the block, and overturned the constitution of England, many of the cavaliers fled for refuge to this colony, which by the general disposition of the inhabitants, and the virtue of Sir William Berkley, held out for the crown, until the parliament, rather by stratagem than force, reduced them’.

¹⁴¹ *Thoughts*, in *WS*, II, 286.

virtues of such men were to be taken as a balance to their crimes; but they were some corrective to their effects. Such was, as I said, our Cromwell'.¹⁴² In his *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies* (1794), he claimed that social order had not been overthrown even during the Civil Wars.¹⁴³ Unlike the devastating situation in revolutionary France, religion and morality in that period were not destroyed, and the government of Cromwell was by no means a barbarous tyranny and was even better than that of Charles II in some respects.¹⁴⁴ In his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, Burke presented his most extended notion of this crucial period. Although touching upon Cromwell's usurpation and the military and despotic nature of his government, Burke described him as a rational ruler and commended his respect for the rule of law and for creating a stable government:

Cromwell, when he attempted to legalize his power, and to settle his conquered country in a state of order, did not look for his dispensers of justice in the instruments of his usurpation. Quite the contrary. He sought out with great sollicitude and selection, and even from the party most opposite to his designs, men of weight, and decorum of character; men unstained with the violence of the times, and with hands not fouled with confiscation and sacrilege: for he chose an *Hales* for his chief justice, though he absolutely refused to take his civic oaths, or to make any acknowledgment whatsoever of the legality of his government. Cromwell told this great lawyer, that since he did not approve his title, all he required of him was, to administer, in a manner agreeable to his pure sentiments and unspotted character, that justice without which human society cannot subsist: that it was not his particular government, but civil order itself, which as a

¹⁴² *Reflections*, p. 204. Among his contemporaries, Burke was obviously not alone in being fascinated by Cromwell's talents. Samuel Johnson and David Hume, for example, also admired them. See, for instance, *Reflections*, 204n; N.T. Phillipson, *Hume* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), pp. 90-91.

¹⁴³ Burke's manner of reference to the Civil Wars was potentially different from that of his contemporaries. According to H.T. Dickinson, the Civil War in the 1640s was usually referenced 'whenever evidence was needed to prove how ill-designing men could lead the licentious multitude into the most monstrous political acts'. See Dickinson, 'The Eighteenth-Century Debate on the 'Glorious Revolution'', pp. 28-9.

¹⁴⁴ *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *WS*, VIII, 497-8.

judge he wished him to support.¹⁴⁵

Burke paid tribute to Cromwell's fairness and his wish to preserve social order. Here we may well also find Burke's modified view of Sir Matthew Hale, of whom in the *Fragment*, he was highly critical, although it would not be meaningful to discover here a fundamental change in his ideology, as his early reading of Hale was too unfair (or even too shallow) and his admiration here did not mention the ideology of this eminent lawyer.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, in this work, he applauded the army led by Cromwell and George Monck (1608-1670).¹⁴⁷ By doing so, Burke wanted to argue that the Interregnum had not been as deplorable as the state of revolutionary France in 1791. In fact, Cromwell 'had delivered England from anarchy', and had brought political stability to England. Even so, it is still not easy for modern readers to understand why Burke could commend the discipline of the Cromwell's army so highly, despite the fact that he well knew about Cromwell's brutal religious conquest of Ireland, which he did not mention here.

Burke, then, approached another defining moment in English history, i.e., the Restoration of 1660. The crisis created by Cromwell's death was resolved by George Monck, who 'freed this nation from great and just apprehensions both of future anarchy and of probable tyranny in some form

¹⁴⁵ *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *WS*, VIII, 302-3.

¹⁴⁶ See *Fragment*, in *WS*, I, 322-3, where his reading of Hale was defective. Burke maintained that, in Hale's *History of the Common Law of England* (1713), 'the great changes and remarkable revolutions in the Law, together with their causes, down to his time, are scarcely mentioned'. Actually, the changing state of law was one of the key arguments of Hale.

¹⁴⁷ *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 321: 'The army which Monk commanded had been formed by Cromwell to a perfection of discipline which perhaps has never been exceeded. That army was besides of an excellent composition. The soldiers were men of extraordinary piety after their mode, of the greatest regularity, and even severity of manners; brave in the field, but modest, quiet and orderly, in their quarters; men who abhorred the idea of assassinating their officers or any other persons; and who (they at least who served in this island) were firmly attached to those generals, by whom they were well treated and ably commanded'.

or other.’¹⁴⁸ Monck arranged for the restoration of the monarchy and the return from exile of Charles II. Burke, however, did not hold high Charles II. He wrote:

The king whom he [Monck] gave us was indeed the very reverse of your benignant sovereign, who in reward for his attempt to bestow liberty on his subjects, languishes himself in prison. The person given to us by Monk was a man without any sense of his duty as a prince; without any regard to the dignity of his crown; without any love to his people; dissolute, false, venal, and destitute of any positive good quality whatsoever, except a pleasant temper, and the manners of a gentleman.¹⁴⁹

Burke’s view of Charles II was not unusual in his age. This king was generally unpopular among Whig historians, partly because of his merciless treatment of the Whigs, including Algernon Sidney and William Russell, after the Rye House Plot of 1683.¹⁵⁰ He continued:

Yet the restoration of our monarchy, even in the person of such a prince, was every thing to us; for without monarchy in England, most certainly we never can enjoy either peace or liberty. It was under this conviction that the very first regular step which we took on the Revolution of 1688, was to fill the throne with a real king; and even before it could be done in due form, the chiefs of the nation did not attempt themselves to exercise authority so much as by *interim*. They instantly requested the Prince of Orange to take the government on himself. The throne was not effectively vacant for an hour.¹⁵¹

Burke did, however, celebrate the restoration of the monarchy in England as the regeneration of the constitution. His emphasis here, again,

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, VIII.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, VIII, 321-322.

¹⁵⁰ Burke once told Edmond Malone that ‘Hume in compiling his history did not give himself a great deal of trouble in examining records, &c.; and that the part he most laboured at was the reign of King Charles II., for whom he had an unaccountable partiality’. See Sir James Prior, *Life of Edmond Malone* (London, 1860), pp. 368-9.

¹⁵¹ *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 321.

seems to have been upon the value of monarchy as an institution rather than on the character of the particular individual on the throne. The Restoration certainly reminded the English people of what their constitution should be and it positively influenced the later Revolution of 1688-9. In his *Reflections*, Burke saw the Restoration in a similar light as the Revolution:

A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve. The two principles of conservation and correction operated strongly at the two critical periods of the Restoration and Revolution, when England found itself without a king. At both those periods the nation had lost the bond of union in their ancient edifice; they did not, however, dissolve the whole fabric. On the contrary, in both cases they regenerated the deficient part of the old constitution through the parts which were not impaired. They kept these old parts exactly as they were, that the part recovered might be suited to them. They acted by the ancient organized states in the shape of their old organization, and not by the organic *moleculæ* of a disbanded people.¹⁵²

Burke regarded both the Restoration and the Revolution as the regeneration of the constitution,¹⁵³ conducted by the 'two principles of conservation and correction'. He also referred to both periods as 'when England found itself without a king', which seems to imply, as J.C.D Clark claims, that it was the result of 'an accident rather than the deliberate result of political actions'.¹⁵⁴

For all British intellectuals after 1688-9, the Revolution of these years was one of the most significant events in English history. When facing various political problems such as the Allegiance Controversy of the 1690s, the Sacheverell trial in 1710,¹⁵⁵ the Bangorian Controversy of the 1720s, the

¹⁵² *Reflections*, p. 170.

¹⁵³ In the *Appeal*, he argued that Joseph Jekyl and Nicholas Lechmere also made this point. See *Appeal*, pp. 115-6.

¹⁵⁴ Clark, 'Introduction', *Reflections*, pp. 34, 41-2.

¹⁵⁵ See *Appeal*, pp. 94-5; See Clark, 'Introduction' *Reflections*, p. 40. Burke was lamenting the disuse of the impeachment in his age (*Thoughts*, in *WS*, II, 294). In a

Jacobite rebellions, the debates on repealing the Test and Corporation Acts, the American crisis from the 1760s, the Regency Crisis of 1788, and the French Revolution, they always reflected on the meaning and implication of 1688-9 and presented various possible interpretations of it. Burke seems to have been well aware of this.¹⁵⁶ According to Burke, the Sacheverell Trial, in particular, provided the Whigs of that time with 'the opportunity of a clear, authentic, recorded declaration of their political tenets upon the subject of a great constitutional event like that of the Revolution'. It is in the proceeding of this trial that the principles of the Whig party are very clearly found. One of his earliest comments on 1688-9 can be traced to a manuscript composed in 1757. In his 'On Parties', succinctly reviewing the history of party strife between Tory and Whig in the period between the Restoration and the Revolution, Burke described the process of their principles coming nearer to each other.¹⁵⁷ In his *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, he stated that at 'the Revolution, the Crown, [was] deprived, for the ends of the Revolution itself, of many prerogatives'. As noted by a modern editor of the work, this was a considered notion of the period.¹⁵⁸ In his works of the 1790s, Burke's emphasis was to show upon what kinds of principle the Revolution of 1688-9 relied. There was a reason why he believed that he needed to do so. At the time, many French revolutionaries insisted that they were imitating the Revolution of 1688-9 in England, and also the English radicals, including Foxite Whigs, considered 1789 as a similar but more advanced

way, his favourable historical view of 1710 as well as Cicero's denouncement of Catiline would have urged him to carry on the Hastings impeachment.

¹⁵⁶ See Clark, 'Introduction', *Reflections*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁷ Edmund Burke, 'On Parties', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', p. 644; Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', p. 631.

¹⁵⁸ See *Thoughts*, in *WS*, II, 259. Burke's view would not, however, be supported by modern scholarship. Although the monarch was deprived of the right to be or to marry a Roman Catholic and of the right to raise a standing army without parliamentary consent, the Revolution only confirmed the restrictions on the monarch which had already been assumed. The present author heavily rests on the modern editor's notion in this regard.

revolution than 1688-9. Burke disagreed strongly with both of these interpretations. According to him, the English radicals such as Richard Price confounded the English Revolution in 1648, the Revolution of 1688-9 and the French Revolution. He wanted to denounce these views of 1688-9 and to show the true principles of 1688-9.

Burke vehemently maintained that the Revolution of 1688-9 was, like all other precedent reformations in England, a reformation based on the principle of reverence for English history and tradition, not on any abstract ideas such as the theory of natural rights. The historical continuity of the constitution had not been lost in 1688-9, but was rather consolidated by the event. While some Tories under Queen Anne insisted that 'the title to the crown was still as indefeasibly hereditary as it had been', the extreme Whigs asserted that 'James II had been dismissed'. Burke, however, argued that James II had virtually abdicated.¹⁵⁹ While acknowledging that, in 1688-9, there was 'a small and a temporary deviation from the strict order of a regular hereditary succession',¹⁶⁰ he still claimed that what was actually done was of a very similar kind based on a fixed policy: 'The crown was carried somewhat out of the line in which it had before moved; but the new line was derived from the same stock. It was still a line of hereditary descent; still an hereditary descent in the same blood, though an hereditary descent qualified with protestantism. When the legislature altered the direction, but kept the principle, they shewed that they held it inviolable'.¹⁶¹ He emphasised Englishmen's efforts to defend their ancient system and principle. The hereditary principle had, actually, subsisted throughout

¹⁵⁹ Clark, 'Introduction', p. 41. Clark argues that the *Reflections* 'presented a mainstream Whig reading of 1688'.

¹⁶⁰ *Reflections*, p. 164, and editor's footnote 71. See also editor's footnote 70. As Clark points out, although Burke rightly suggested that no authoritative documents had pronounced elective monarchy, he did not explain why the deviation from hereditary succession could be looked upon as 'small' or 'temporary'.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

English history,¹⁶² and it was still at the centre of politics even during the period of 1688-9.¹⁶³ Besides, he argued that the Revolution had been necessary in order to defend the ancient constitution, because otherwise the constitution would have been subverted.¹⁶⁴ In his first public pronouncement on the French Revolution, he had already made the same point, and might have gone even further. That is to say, in 1688-9, the essential parts of the constitution were not altered, and its defective parts were corrected in order to consolidate the constitution.¹⁶⁵

1.5 Towards Liberty and Prosperity in the Late Eighteenth Century

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 170-1. Although '[s]ome time after the conquest [i.e. the Norman Conquest] great questions arose upon the legal principles of hereditary descent', 'the inheritable principle survived with a sort of immortality through all transmigrations'.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 165n.

¹⁶⁴ As Burke, in his *Appeal*, argued, the Whigs in 1710 such as Sir John Hawles, General Stanhope, Robert Walpole, Joseph Jekyl, Robert Eyre and John Holland made the same point. See *Appeal*, pp. 101-6, 113-4, 120; *The Tryal of Dr. Henry Sacheverell* (London, 1710), pp. 73-4, 92-3, 108. In his *Appeal*, he actually quoted Nicholas Lechmere, Walpole, Hawles, Stanhope, Jekyll, Eyre and Holland, and also the Prince of Orange. Among them, Burke most quoted from Joseph Jekyll, and his notion seems to have been the closest to that of this particular Whig. See Takamine Matsuura, 'Meiyokakumei Taisei to France Kakumei [The Regime of the Glorious Revolution and the French Revolution]' in *Kindaishi niokeru Seiji to Shiso [Politics and Ideas in Modern History]*, ed. Sachio Shibata and Osamu Naruse (Tokyo: Yamakawa, 1977), pp. 187-8. By referring to these Whigs and showing that his notion in the *Reflections* was consistent with their notion, he tried to defend his own view of the Revolution of 1688-9. See *Appeal*, p. 96. Burke maintained that 'the foundations laid down by the Commons, on the trial of Dr. Sacheverell, for justifying the Revolution of 1688, are the very same laid down in Mr. Burke's *Reflections*'. In the same work, he also argued that the relationship between the American revolutionaries and the British government was the same as that between the English and James II in 1688-9. See *Appeal*, p. 81.

¹⁶⁵ See Edmund Burke, *Substance of the Speech of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, in the Debate on the Army Estimates, in the House of Commons, On Tuesday, the 9th Day of February, 1790*. (London, 1790), pp. 27-30: 'At that period the Prince of Orange, a prince of the blood royal in England, was called in by the flower of the English aristocracy to defend its ancient constitution, and not to level all distinctions. ... What we did was in truth and substance, and in a constitutional light, a revolution, not made, but prevented. We took solid securities; we settled doubtful questions; we corrected anomalies in our law. In the stable fundamental parts of our constitution we made no revolution; no, nor any alteration at all. We did not impair the monarchy. Perhaps it might be shewn that we strengthened it very considerably. ... The church and the state were the same after the revolution that they were before, but better secured in every part'.

For many late eighteenth-century Britons, the constitution of their age was a great source of national pride, and an attempt to explain how the nation had developed such a great constitution while achieving unprecedented prosperity was frequently part of their thinking. The Revolution of 1688-9 was undoubtedly one of the most significant events in the development of this constitution. As was seen above, Burke claimed that the constitution had not lost its continuity, but rather it had even been consolidated in the period between the Reformation and 1688-9. Whatever significance was attached to such a crucial period for making the modern constitution of Britain, he also at times stressed that the constitution of his age was a product of a much longer time span. From the earliest stage of his career, this way of thinking was conspicuous. In his *Abridgment* and *Fragment*, it was one of his main arguments that the constitution had changed and developed over time by making numerous adjustments to the needs brought about by various circumstances and changing manners,¹⁶⁶ a belief which Burke shared with many contemporary moderates and conservatives.¹⁶⁷ While chiefly intending to refute the allegation that the constitution of the Saxons had been the same as that of his own age, however, it is not clear what the early Burke, in these works, thought about the continuity of the

¹⁶⁶ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 453: 'All these things are, I think, sufficient to shew of what a visionary nature those systems are, which would settle the ancient Constitution in the most remote times exactly in the same form, in which we enjoy it at this day; not considering that such mighty changes in manners, during so many ages, always must produce a considerable change in laws, and in the forms as well as the powers of all governments'; *Fragment*, in *WS*, I, 325: 'But the truth is, the present system of our Laws, like our language and our learning, is a very mixed and heterogeneous mass; in some respects our own; in more borrowed from the policy of foreign nations; and compounded, altered, and variously modified, according to the various necessities, which the manners, the religion, and the commerce of the people, have at different times imposed. It is our business in some measure to follow, and point out, these changes and improvements'.

¹⁶⁷ Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, p. 299. In the case of Burke, as has already been noted, the influence of Montesquieu's idea of the general causes of social developments was significant.

constitution since Magna Carta. In the latter stages of his life, especially when he faced the challenging issues of parliamentary reform and the French Revolution, he placed emphasis on the continuity of the constitution. In his draft speech on 7 May 1782, he emphasised that the British constitution had a prescriptive title. It was a constitution whose authority came from the fact that 'it has existed time out of mind'. The king, the Lords, the Commons, and judges and juries, were, in fact, all prescriptive institutions.¹⁶⁸ As regards the House of Commons, he maintained in particular:

The House of Commons is a legislative body corporate by prescription, not made upon any given theory, but existing prescriptively,—just like the rest. This prescription has made it essentially what it is, an aggregate collection of three parts, knights, citizens, burgesses. The question is, whether this has been always so, since the House of Commons has taken its present shape and circumstances, and has been an essential operative part of the constitution; which, I take it, it has been for at least five hundred years.¹⁶⁹

While it is not clear whether Burke had in mind Edward I's 'Model

¹⁶⁸ Edmund Burke, 'On a Motion made in the House of Commons, the 7th of May, 1782, for a Committee to inquire into the state of the Representation of the Commons in Parliament', in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (6 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1906-7), III, 354-5. Although there are in general several definitions for the term 'prescription', in the case of Burke it is, as *OED* states, '[u]ninterrupted use or possession from time immemorial, or for a period fixed by law as giving a title or right; a title or right acquired by virtue of such use or possession'. According to Clark, Burke's idea of prescription was indebted to the idea of an ancient constitution, latitudinarianism of his age and his belief in divine providence. See Clark, 'Introduction', in *Reflections*, pp. 40-2, 86-7, 94-5.

¹⁶⁹ Burke, 'On a Motion made in the House of Commons, the 7th of May, 1782, for a Committee to inquire into the state of the Representation of the Commons in Parliament', in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, III, 356. See also, *Annual Register... for the Year 1766* (London, 1767), p. 39. The author asserted that 'the representation of the commons of Great Britain' was not 'formed into any certain system till Henry the 7th'. If the authorship here could be attributed to Burke, his statements would contradict each other. The historical origin and formation of the House of Commons was, of course, one of the significant points of discussion among eighteenth-century British intellectuals.

Parliament', 'five hundred years' may imply that he probably did not intend to trace the origins of parliament back as far as the Saxon era. In his *Reflections*, he highlighted both the historical continuity of the constitution and Englishmen's unbending will to defend it. As has already been seen, the early Burke, in his *Abridgment*, argued that Magna Carta was 'the correction of the feudal policy'. More than thirty years later, in his *Reflections*, he argued that Magna Carta was the 'oldest reformation' in England. The great lawyers, from Edward Coke to William Blackstone, tried to prove that this great ancient charter had been connected to Henry I's charter and also that both charters had been no more than a reaffirmation of the even more ancient law of the realm.¹⁷⁰ Magna Carta was the starting point for numerous subsequent political reformations, and his point was that those reformations had always tried to maintain the historical continuity of the constitution. Each part of the constitution (the crown, the Lords, the Commons and so forth) has inherited its own rights from its ancestors. In the course of history, while a number of reformations had occurred, these rights had been protected by the fixed policy of Englishmen.¹⁷¹ It had been a repeated process to discern which part of the constitution must be preserved or altered according to pressing circumstances: 'Thus, by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve we are never wholly new; in what we retain

¹⁷⁰ *Reflections*, p. 182.

¹⁷¹ See *Reflections*, pp. 183-4: 'You will observe, that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right [of 1689], it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right. By this means our constitution preserves an unity in so great a diversity of its parts. We have an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and an house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors'. See also, *ibid.*, p. 181: 'All the reformations we have hitherto made, have proceeded upon the principle of reference to antiquity'.

we are never wholly obsolete'.¹⁷² The English constitution continued to evolve over time and, by the late eighteenth century it had achieved unprecedented liberty without losing its original identity. The defining events such as the Reformation, the Restoration and the Revolution of 1688-9, made under the same spirit as the other reformations in English history, were all significant steps towards the greater liberty and prosperity that Britain enjoyed in the later eighteenth century.

Burke considered the English constitution as ancient, but also as having evolved over a long period of time. It was on the preservation of this ancient constitution that the prosperity of the eighteenth century relied and it would not be too much to say that this idea is one of the most significant points he advanced in his view of English history. For Burke, as well as for many contemporary intellectuals, the chief elements of prosperity in late eighteenth-century Britain were its advanced learning and highly developed commerce. In the *Reflections*, while blaming French revolutionaries for persecuting their church, he maintained:

So tenacious are we of the old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of institution, that very little alternation has been made in them since the fourteenth or fifteenth century; adhering in this particular, as in all things else, to our old settled maxim, never entirely nor at once to depart from antiquity. We found these old institutions, on the whole, favourable to morality and discipline; and we thought they were susceptible of amendment, without altering the ground. We thought that they were capable of receiving and meliorating, and above all of preserving the accessions of science and literature, as the order of Providence should successively produce them. And after all, with this Gothic and monkish education (for such it is in the ground-work) we may put in our claim to as ample and as early a share in all the improvements in science, in arts, and in literature, which have illuminated and adorned the modern world, as any other nation in Europe; we think one main cause of this improvement was our not

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5. See also, *ibid.*, pp. 413-4.

despising the patrimony of knowledge which was left us by our forefathers.¹⁷³

Unlike the Dissenters, Low Churchmen and Roman Catholics, he did not claim that a fundamental discontinuity had been caused by the Reformation.¹⁷⁴ As has already been seen above, Burke considered that the Reformation had succeeded in reforming the Church of England 'without changing her identity'.¹⁷⁵ He maintained that ancient religious institutions had contributed to the development of learning.¹⁷⁶ As he considered the church establishment as an essential part of the constitution,¹⁷⁷ it can well be argued that Burke regarded the progress of learning as a product of the ancient but evolving constitution. As for the development of commerce, he may have held a similar opinion. Lamenting the fact that revolutionary France had demolished its 'ancient constitution', he stated:

Had you made it to be understood, that in the delusion of this amiable error you had gone further than your wise ancestors; that you were resolved to resume your ancient privileges, whilst you preserved the spirit of your ancient and your recent loyalty and honour; or, if diffident of yourselves, and not clearly discerning the almost obliterated constitution of your ancestors, you had looked to your neighbours in this land, who had kept alive the ancient principles and models of the old common law of Europe meliorated and adapted to its present state—by following wise examples you would have given new examples of wisdom to the world. You would have rendered the cause of liberty venerable in the eyes of every worthy mind in every nation. You would have

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 264-5.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264n.

¹⁷⁵ See above, p. 57.

¹⁷⁶ In general, Burke saw such religious institutions as the monasteries as the protector and promoter of learning. For example, see *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 400: 'By those voyages [pilgrimages] the seeds of various kinds of knowledge and improvement were at different times imported into England. They were cultivated in the leisure and retirement of monasteries'.

¹⁷⁷ *Reflections*, pp. 263-4; *Parl. His.*, 29, col. 1383n. Burke denied William Warburton's argument that Church and State were separate entities. See J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 250, 255.

shamed despotism from the earth, by shewing that freedom was not only reconcilable, but as, when well disciplined it is, auxiliary to law. You would have had an unoppressive but a productive revenue. You would have had a flourishing commerce to feed it.¹⁷⁸

While Burke here stated that France would have achieved greater liberty and a more stable social order if she had imitated Britain, he implied that Britain had actually improved her commerce over the course of history by preserving its ancient constitution, which had evolved gradually over time. While commerce and learning had substantially advanced in eighteenth-century Britain, he maintained that this development was (at least partly) attributable to Englishmen's protection of their ancient institutions. The defence of the ancient constitution contributed not only to the stability of Britain's politics and society, but also to the progress of commercial arts and learning. Although his belief of an ancient but evolving constitution that contributed so much to prosperity was not original, but was shared by many conservatives in his age, Burke provided one of the most sophisticated expressions of it.

It should, however, be noted that Burke did not contend that all the progress that had taken place in English history could be attributed to the defence of the ancient constitution. As has already been seen, he asserted that progress in the ancient and medieval eras had been brought about by the introduction of the Christian religion or by communications with foreign countries, including conquests, and so this progress was not simply based on the defence of the constitution. Rather, such progress contributed to the development of the constitution. Progress also seems to have owed something to divine providence and the great ability of some particular individuals of the period. Divine providence may, for example, have

¹⁷⁸ *Reflections*, p. 188.

contributed to the spread of the Christian religion over England,¹⁷⁹ whereas such rulers as Agricola, Alfred the Great and Egbert had successfully acted to reconstruct the nation. As regards more recent history, Burke also argued that the introduction of public credit after the Glorious Revolution had contributed much to the growing prosperity of the eighteenth century, rather than plunging the country into financial ruin, as some critics of the national debt claimed. In his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he asserted:

The state of our finances was worse, if possible. Every branch of the revenue became less productive after the Revolution [of 1688-9] ... Publick credit, that great but ambiguous principle, which has so often been predicted as the cause of our certain ruin, but which for a century has been the constant companion, and often the means, of our prosperity and greatness, had it's origin, and was cradled, I may say, in bankruptcy and beggary.¹⁸⁰

While touching upon the desperate financial situation and the ruin of commerce at the end of the Nine Years' War (1688-97), he maintained that this had not been brought about by corruption. Moreover, he seems to have partly attributed prosperity and liberty in Britain and Europe to sheer chance. The civilisations in these regions were not based on 'a regular plan or with any unity of design'.¹⁸¹ In short, Britain had achieved substantial development by the late eighteenth century and this development was brought about by a variety of causes, such as the ancient constitution, providence, public credit, chance, and so forth.

In Burke's view, Britain had also overcome a variety of political crises during the course of these developments. As was seen above, the introduction of public credit was triggered by the financial crisis at the end

¹⁷⁹ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 393-4. Later, Burke also wrote that there was the divine will behind the English presence in India of his day. See 'Fox's India Bill', in *WS*, V, 404; 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 351, 462 (for this, see also Chapter Five).

¹⁸⁰ *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 230.

¹⁸¹ *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 287.

of the seventeenth century. Around the same period, another crisis was caused by the Triennial Act (1694). In his commons speech on 8 May 1780, he claimed:

We have had Triennial Parliaments; At no period of time were seats more eagerly contested? The Expences of Elections ran higher, taking the State of all charges than they do now. The expence of Entertainments was such, that an act, equally Severe and ineffectual as most of the acts against corruption in Elections then made was made against it. Every monument of the time bears witness of the Expence. All the writers talked of it and lamented it.¹⁸²

The constitution was brought to a crisis by triennial parliaments, which led to too frequent general elections, but stability was restored with the passage of the Septennial Act in 1716.¹⁸³ According to modern scholarship, however, Burke's argument does not seem accurate nor convincing enough. He correctly pointed out the public frenzy that was caused by frequent elections, but the cost of contesting elections became in reality much higher after the Septennial Act than under the Triennial Act.¹⁸⁴ In addition, although Burke insisted that the constitution would not survive five triennial elections, the reigns of William and of Anne, in fact, showed that it had survived for more than five triennial elections. While triennial parliaments were an essential part of the Revolution Settlement, of which Burke was a staunch defender,

¹⁸² 'Speech on Duration of Parliaments (8 May 1780)', in *WS*, III, 597. Burke also appealed to Irish history, and argued that the expense of elections there had been increased by their frequency. Nevertheless, as the editor of the work suggests, he seems to be exaggerating.

¹⁸³ In 1770, Burke had already put forward the same notion. See *Thoughts*, in *WS*, II, 293.

¹⁸⁴ See Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England 1734-1832* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 12-13, 106-111, 146, 319.

it is difficult to claim that the Septennial Act was one of the fundamental laws of the constitution.¹⁸⁵

The next sixty years was a highly flourishing period, in which a union of national prosperity, dignity and liberty was achieved.¹⁸⁶ While the nation around this period frequently committed itself to international wars, it did not plunge into a corrupt state. Having maintained this, Burke consciously opposed the thesis proposed by some contemporary critics, such as John Brown that Britain had been plunging into a state of moral decadence.¹⁸⁷ After all, by the late eighteenth century, Britain had achieved unprecedented prosperity and liberty due to various causes, while overcoming many political crises.¹⁸⁸

For Burke and many contemporaries, eighteenth-century Britain was highly enlightened,¹⁸⁹ and contained both 'ancient' and 'modern' elements. That is to say, while the nation retained its great ancient constitution, it was, at the same time, very conscious that its society was post-feudal and had become a leading commercial nation. Eighteenth-century Britain was

¹⁸⁵ O' Gorman, *Edmund Burke*, p. 62.

¹⁸⁶ 'Speech on Duration of Parliaments', in *WS*, III, 599. Here he also stated: 'Never are men so wicked as during a general Mortality. It was so in the great plague at Athens; every Symptom of which (and this its worst Symptom amongst the Rest) is so finely related by a great Historian of antiquity. It was so in the plague of London in 1663'. In Burke's mind, the image of the Great Plague (1665-1666) was associated with that of the Triennial parliament in the sense that both upset the people in England.

¹⁸⁷ See *First Letter*, in *WS*, IX, 192-3. Here he touched upon the state of the country in the period of Seven Years' War (1757-63). In doing so, he could not help reminding himself of John Brown's *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Time*, although he opposed Brown's interpretation of the state of Britain in that crucial period: 'Never did the masculine spirit of England display itself with more energy, nor ever did it's genius soar with a prouder pre-eminence over France, than at the time when frivolity and effeminacy had been at least tacitly acknowledged as their national character, by the good people of this kingdom'.

¹⁸⁸ For instance, Burke rated George II highly. See *Thoughts*, in *WS*, II, 266: 'He [George II] carried the glory, the power, the commerce of England, to an height unknown even to this renowned nation in the times of its greatest prosperity'.

¹⁸⁹ In his opening speech on Hastings's trial, for example, he described Britain as 'a learned and enlightened part of Europe, in the most enlightened period of its time' and 'a Nation the most enlightened of the enlightened part of Europe'. See 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment (16 February 1788)' in *WS*, VI, 315.

also an empire,¹⁹⁰ whose political system was historically unprecedented.¹⁹¹ For many intellectuals of this period, the coexistence of 'the ancient' and 'the modern' was quite natural. The Whigs, including the leading thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, for example, found no contradiction between hereditary monarchy and landed aristocracy on the one hand, and commercial progress on the other.¹⁹² The structure and interests of this society were highly sophisticated and complicated, which were proof of advanced societies, whereas the society of savage nations was always simple. Burke was well aware of religious persecutions in the past, but he conceived that Britain's enlightened society was unlikely to go back to such religious wars as the previous century had experienced.¹⁹³ Like many of his contemporaries, Burke was, obviously, very confident and proud of

¹⁹⁰ 'Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll (3 November 1774)', in *WS*, III, 70: 'We are now Members for a rich commercial *City*; this *City*, however, is but a part of a rich commercial *Nation*, the Interests of which are various, multiform, and intricate. We are Members for that great *Nation*, which however is itself but part of a great *Empire*, extended by our Virtue and our Fortune to the farthest limits of the East and of the West. All these wide-spread Interests must be considered; must be compared; must be reconciled if possible. We are Members for a *free Country*; and surely we all know, that the machine of a free Constitution is no simple thing; but as intricate and as delicate, as it is valuable. We are Members in a great and ancient *Monarchy*; and we must preserve religiously, the true legal rights of the Sovereign, which form the Key-stone that binds together the noble and well-constructed Arch of our Empire and our Constitution'. This passage was also quoted in his *Appeal* in order to show his own consistency from 1774 to 1790. See *Appeal*, pp. 35-36. See also his *Speech at Arrival at Bristol* (13 October 1774), in *WS*, III, 59: 'I found that our prosperity and dignity arose principally, if not solely, from two sources; our constitution and commerce'.

¹⁹¹ Ancient Rome was the only state worth a comparison, but he still found the British Empire unparalleled. See 'Speech on the Declaratory Resolution (3 Feb 1766)', in *WS*, II, 50; Jennifer Pitts, 'Burke and the Ends of Empire', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 145-155. See also, *Annual Register ... for the Year 1766* (London, 1767), p. 40.

¹⁹² See Pocock, 'Introduction', in idem eds., *Reflections*, p. xv; J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A History of Ideology and Discourse' in idem, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 263; J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832* (2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 35.

¹⁹³ Boswell was anxious that such a 'desperate' rebellion as that in the age of Charles II would occur if a bill relaxing the penal laws against Catholics in Scotland passes. In reply to Boswell, Burke seems to have been more optimistic. See 'Burke to Boswell', in *Corr.*, IV, 44-45. For the details of this letter, see my chapter on European history.

contemporary Britain.¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, at the same time, he well recognised various political problems which had existed since the Revolution of 1688-9. For example, the standing army, whose operation was put under the authority of parliament by the Bill of Rights, had been opposed ever since by many people who wanted to substitute a citizen militia for it,¹⁹⁵ despite the fact that Britain had achieved liberty and prosperity 'without the assistance of a militia' since 1688-9.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, as Chapter Four will show in detail, a series of penal laws that had been imposed on the Roman Catholics of both England and Ireland after 1688-9 still remained in force in his own age, and of these he was highly critical. In this respect, it seemed to him that eighteenth-century British society still had much room for improvement.

1.6 Conclusion

Burke committed himself to English history quite differently between the early and latter phases of his life. He could write about it more straightforwardly when he worked on the *Abridgment*, *Fragment* or the *Annual Register*. Once he became involved in parliamentary politics, he, as a Rockingham Whig, referred to English history, chiefly to support his political arguments. Although his *Abridgment* elaborated on ancient and medieval history, the politician Burke mainly discussed modern history, partly out of political necessity and also because of his own interests. The

¹⁹⁴ He opposed the notion of some contemporaries and insisted that the British population was not declining. See 'Speech on Poor Removals Law, (2 March 1774)', in *WS*, II, 403; Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 360. Modern scholarship certainly supports Burke's notion of this. See, for instance, E.A. Wrigley, 'British Population during the 'long' eighteenth century, 1680-1840' in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Volume I: Industrialisation 1700-1860*, ed. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 57-95. In Burke's age, population was one of the significant points for the ancient-modern dispute and was always seen as a barometer of the soundness of a nation.

¹⁹⁵ Edmund Burke, 'Considerations on a Militia', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', p. 649.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 647.

notion of the ancient constitution is one of the key concepts in trying to understand his view of English history. The term 'ancient constitution', by definition, connotes historical continuity. The classical common lawyers developed the doctrine of the ancient constitution, and advanced a unique view of history and epistemology. Although Burke's connection to any particular common lawyer is not clear, he was apparently in this intellectual tradition when asserting the continuity of English history. Burke regarded ancient and medieval England as barbarous and ignorant, although some improvements had taken place and the foundations of the constitution was laid by Magna Carta in 1215. The Reformation improved the constitution without changing its nature and identity. The period between the Civil Wars and the Interregnum was, undoubtedly, a troubled age, yet Burke nevertheless asserted that social order had not been overturned in this period. The Restoration and the Revolution of 1688-9 were efforts to restore the constitution and perhaps to consolidate it as well. The preservation and consolidation of the constitution, in Burke's view, had actually taken place over several hundred years from even before Magna Carta until his own age. Burke argued that this ancient, but evolving constitution was major driving force behind the development of other facets of society, such as the growth of commerce and the improvement of learning. Nevertheless, he did not claim that all progress that had taken place in English history had resulted from the defence and preservation of the ancient constitution. Rather, he mentioned a variety of causes, including divine providence, the role of great individuals, the development of public credit, and sheer chance. England overcame several crises in the course of these developments.

This is how historical continuity and progress 'coexists' in his view of English history. For him, as well as for many contemporaries, it was not strange that 'the ancient' and 'the modern' coexisted in eighteenth-century Britain. Religious persecution, however, which still existed, was, for his

model of civil society, a serious defect in the constitution and an obstacle to further progress.

Chapter Two

European History: Barbarism and Confusion before Prosperity

Burke referred to and examined European history on many occasions throughout his life. In his early writings, he explored it more directly than he did in his later political writings and speeches. While his *Vindication of Natural Society* was a sarcastic work aimed at ridiculing Bolingbroke, Burke frequently referred to ancient history. In the *Abridgment of English History* and the *Annual Register*, he wrote about medieval history as well as ancient history. In his political works, he at times referred to European history as evidence to support his political arguments. As will be seen below, his writings and speeches on India often attempted to compare the Roman Empire with the British Empire of his own age in order to warn the latter about possible future crises. He mentioned European history most frequently in his works on the French Revolution in the 1790s. Viewing the collapse of the existing European system which he so admired, he needed to examine how Europe had developed over time and he ransacked the past for historical analogies with the present catastrophe.

Surprisingly, few commentators have attempted to reveal his view of European history in detail, but this chapter will make such an attempt. Section one considers the European past from the ancient era to the fourteenth century, section two examines Burke's view of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe, and section three analyses his comments on seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Europe. In doing so, it will be suggested that Burke possibly thought, through a considerable period of his career, that Europe had, except for the system and citizens of the Roman Empire, been in a state of barbarism or confusion from the ancient era until the sixteenth century, despite the continuous gradual development of society. The final section also suggests that the French Revolution became

part of Burke's view of history, with his recognition of it as something utterly new in comparison to previous ages.

2.1 Barbarism and Confusion but Gleams of Hope: From the Ancient Era to the Fourteenth Century

Burke's knowledge of the history of ancient Europe owes much to his school and college education. In Trinity College, Dublin, Burke would probably have read the Roman historians such as Livy, Tacitus, Sallust, Justin and also Caesar, Cicero and so forth. The great Greek historians, such as Herodotus and Thucydides, were not read in Trinity College until the late eighteenth century, although Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* was studied.¹ In 1746, Burke once wrote that 'Poetry and history are the Chief branches which are taught [in Trinity College]'.² Around the same period, he spoke highly of Sallust in his letter to Richard Shackleton: 'Salust is indisputably one of the best Historians among the romans, both for the purity of his Language and Elegance of his Stile he has I think a fine easy and diversified narration mixt with reflections moral and political neither very trite and obvious nor out of the way and abstr<act> which is I think the true beauty of Historical observation, neither should I pass by his beautiful painting of Characters—

¹ See John William Stubbs, *The History of the University of Dublin, from its Foundation to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1889), pp. 199-200; R.B. McDowell and D.A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin: 1592-1952 An Academic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 45-46, 69; R. B. McDowell and D.A. Webb, 'Courses and Teaching in Trinity College, Dublin, during the First Two Hundred Years', *Hermathena*, 69 (1947), 9-30. For Burke's undergraduate education and the eighteenth-century curriculum of Trinity College, Dublin, see also Francis P. Canavan, *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1960), pp. 197-211.

² See 'Burke to Richard Shackleton and Richard Burke, Sr (25, 31 July 1746)', in *Corr.*, I, 69.

in short he is an Author that on all accounts I would recommend to you'.³ By the late 1750s, nevertheless, Burke may have modified his opinions because of his reading of some important works by such contemporaries as Montesquieu and Hume. In one of his manuscripts written in this period, Burke criticised Sallust, who wrongly attributed the cause of the glory of the Roman republic to 'the Virtues & Capacity of particular men'. In his view, Sallust was not sufficiently aware of the significance of the character or spirit of the Roman people. Although the fortunes of some ancient Greek city-states, such as Thebes and Athens, fluctuated due to the actions of particular individuals, it was not the case with the constitutionally more sophisticated nations such as ancient Rome and eighteenth-century Britain. In such nations, the character of the people operated steadily and played a more important role in their fate. Like the eighteenth-century Britons, the Romans had a distinct national character of 'haughtiness & superiority & that fixedness of a sudden Resolution'.⁴

As this manuscript indicates, it seems that Burke regarded ancient Rome as superior to ancient Greece or any other nations in these eras. In fact, ancient Europe was, in his view, barbarous and uncertain, except for the societies and the citizens of Rome. While probably this was an opinion

³ See 'Burke to Richard Shackleton (21 March 1746/47)', in *ibid.*, I, 89. At the examination of candidates for a scholarship, Burke was asked a question by an examiner about Catiline's speech in Sallust. See 'Burke to Richard Shackleton (1 June 1746)', in *ibid.*, I, 65-66. According to Sir James Prior, nevertheless, the early Burke preferred the Greek historians, especially Xenophon, to the Roman. See Sir James Prior, *Life of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (5th edn., London: H.G. Bohn, 1854), p. 15. See also, the second edition of the same work: Sir James Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke* (2nd edn., 2 vols., London, 1826), I, p. 23. For his mention of Xenophon (*Cyropaedia*), see 'Burke to Richard Shackleton and Richard Burke (29 November 1746)', in *Corr.*, I, 72-3. To read the classical writers was the centre of the eighteenth-century curriculum. For this, see John.L. Mahoney, 'The Classical Tradition in Eighteenth Century English Political Education', *History of Education Journal*, 9 (1958), 93-97; also, Iain Hampsher-Monk, 'Rhetoric and Opinion in the Politics of Edmund Burke', *History of Political Thought*, 9 (1988), pp. 455-484.

⁴ Burke, 'National Character and Parliament', p. 641; Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', pp. 625-6.

which he retained throughout his life, he detailed aspects of the ancient world in his writings of the same period. In his *Vindication of Natural Society*, while insisting that all history is full of wars, he particularly stressed the misery and confusion of the ancient world, in which political factions and parties were formed to destroy their enemies.⁵ This general view was illustrated with several examples. The successors of Alexander the Great (356 BC- 323 BC),⁶ the kings of ancient Egypt and the ancient Jews⁷ all executed terrible massacres. In the *Vindication*, even ancient Greece and Rome were frankly blamed for their massacres and barbarism.⁸ The author

⁵ *Vindication of the Natural Society*, in *WS*, I, 142: 'The first Accounts we have of Mankind are but so many Accounts of their Butcheries. All Empires have been cemented in Blood; and in those early Periods when the Race of Mankind began first to form themselves into Parties and Combinations, the first Effect of the Combination, and indeed the End for which it seems purposely formed, and best calculated, is their mutual Destruction. All antient History is dark and uncertain. One thing however is clear. There were Conquerors, and Conquests, in those Days'. As the modern editor of this work suggests, he certainly had in mind Bolingbroke who used a similar phrase in his works such as *Remarks on the History of England*, and perhaps also Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 145: 'It is little to say, that the Contentions between the Successors of Alexander depopulated that Part of the World of at least two Millions'.

⁷ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 149: 'The first settling of the Jews here, was attended by an almost entire Extirpation of all the former Inhabitants. Their own civil Wars, and those with their petty Neighbours, consumed vast Multitudes almost every Year for several Centuries; and the Irruptions of the Kings of *Babylon* and *Assyria* made immense Ravages. Yet we have their History but partially, in an indistinct confused manner; so that I shall only throw the strong Point of Light upon that Part which coincides with *Roman* History, and of that Part only on the Point of Time when they received the great and final Stroke which made them no more a Nation; a Stroke which is allowed to have cut off little less than two Millions of that People'.

⁸ Burke's sources for ancient Greece and Rome in the *Vindication* included Herodotus, Plutarch, Xenophon, Justin, Pliny, Tacitus. Burke's sources for Roman history in the *Abridgment* included Plutarch, Caesar, Tacitus, Cicero, Vitruvius, and Bede. His private library catalogues included the works of Caesar, Thucydides, Xenophon, Cicero, Sallust, Livy, Tacitus; and also Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, with the notes of J. L. Vives (1620), *LC MS*, *LC*, p. 8; Joannes Rosinus, *Antiquitatum Romanarum* (1701), *LC*, p. 24; Famiano Nardini, *Roma Antica* (1704), *LC*, p. 16; Jerome Bellicard, *Observations upon the Antiquities of Herculaneum* (1753), *LC*, p. 3; René Aubert de Vertot d'Aubeuf, *Histoire des révolutions ... de la république Romaine* (3 vols., 1767), *LC MS*, *LC*, p. 23; Oliver Goldsmith, *History of Rome* (2 vols., 1769), *LC MS*, *LC*, p. 11; Edward Gibbon, *Histoire de la Decadence de l'Empire Romain* (3 vols., 1777), *LC MS*, *LC*, p. 11; Adam Ferguson, *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* (3 vols., 1783), *LC MS*, *LC*, p. 11; Basil Kennett, *Romæ antiquæ notitia* (1793), *LC*, p. 13;

of the *Vindication* stated that Athens was generally a celebrated republic, but its forms of government immediately let in tyranny.⁹ Moreover, although this republic achieved prosperity, the excessive wealth corrupted the people.¹⁰ At last, the author summed up his view:

Edward Montagu, *Reflections on the Rise and Fall of the Antient Republicks* (1778), LC MS, LC, p. 14; John Potter, *Archæologiae Græca: or, the Antiquities of Greece* (2 vols., 1764), LC, p. 19; Thomas Leland, *Life of Philip of Macedon* (2 vols., 1775), LC MS, LC, p. 13; John Gast, *The History of Greece, From the accession of Alexander of Macedon, till its final subjection to the Roman power* ([1782]), LC MS, LC, p. 15; Goldsmith, *History of Greece* (2 vols., 1796), LC MS, LC, p. 11; *The Works of Tacitus*, translation by Thomas Gordon (2 vols., 1728), LC, p. 28; *The Works of Cornelius Tacitus*, translation by Arthur Murphy (4 vols., 1793), LC, p. 24. Murthy dedicated his translation to Burke (see *The Works of Cornelius Tacitus*, I, pp. v-viii.), and on 8 December 1793, Burke wrote to Murthy to praise his translation, while criticising Gordon's translation: 'You have done what hitherto, I think, has not been done in England: you have given us a translation of a Latin prose-writer which may be read with pleasure. It would be no compliment at all to prefer your translation to the last, which appeared with such a pomp of patronage. Gordon was an author fashionable in his time; but he never wrote any thing worthy of much notice but that work, by which he has obtained a kind of eminence in bad writing: so that one cannot pass it by with mere neglect. It is clear to me that he did not understand the language from which he ventured to translate; and that he had formed a very whimsical idea of excellence with regard to ours. His work is wholly remote from the genius of the tongue, in its purity, or in any of its jargons. It is not English, nor Irish, nor even his native Scotch. It is not fish, nor flesh, nor good red herring.' ('Burke to Arthur Murphy (8 December 1793)', in *Corr.*, VII, 501. See also *ibid.*, VII, 367-8 for another letter to Murphy). At the end of this letter, he was also, although basically very favourable to Tacitus's works, critical of the style of Tacitus and his contemporaries: 'No author thinks more deeply or paints more strongly, but he seldom or ever expresses himself naturally. It is plain, that comparing him with Plautus and Terence, or the beautiful fragments of Publilius Syrus, he did not write the language of good conversation. Cicero is much nearer to it. Tacitus and the writers of his time have fallen into that vice, by aiming at a poetical style' (*Corr.*, VII, 502-3). For another comment on Tacitus, see James Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke* (2 vols., London, 1826), II, 243-6.

⁹ *Vindication*, in *WS*, I, 161: 'The earliest and most celebrated Republic of this Model, was that of *Athens*. It was constructed by no less an Artist, than the celebrated Poet and Philosopher, *Solon*. But no sooner was this political Vessel launched from the Stocks, than it overset, even in the Life-time of the Builder. A Tyranny immediately supervened; not by a foreign Conquest, not by Accident, but by the very Nature and Constitution of a *Democracy*. An artful Man became popular, the People had Power in their Hands, and they devolved a considerable Share of their Power upon their Favourite'.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 163: 'The *Athenians* made a very rapid Progress to the most enormous Excesses. The People under no Restraint soon grew dissolute, luxurious, and idle. They renounced all Labour, and began to subsist themselves from the publick

The whole History of this celebrated Republick is but one Tissue of Rashness, Folly, Ingratitude, Injustice, Tumult, Violence, and Tyranny, and indeed of every Species of Wickedness that can well be imagined. This was a City of Wisemen, in which a Minister could not exercise his Functions; a warlike People, amongst whom a General did not dare either to gain or lose a Battle; a learned Nation, in which a Philosopher could not venture on a free Enquiry. This was the City which banished *Themistocles*, starved *Aristides*, forced into Exile *Miltiades*, drove out *Anaxagoras*, and poisoned *Socrates*. This was a City which changed the Form of its Government with the Moon; eternal Conspiracies, Revolutions daily, nothing fixed and established. A Republick, as an antient Philosopher has observed, is no one Species of Government, but a Magazine of every Species; here you find every Sort of it, and that in the worst Form.¹¹

Burke vehemently condemned Athens. The same accusation was levelled at Rome. Julius Caesar (100 BC-44 BC) was, like many other major figures in history, an instigator of massacres.¹² The Roman Empire was, from its beginning, full of wars and massacres.¹³ Shortly after the quotation given above, Burke wrote:

Rome has a more venerable Aspect than *Athens*; and she conducted her Affairs, so far as related to the Ruin and Oppression of the greatest Part of the World, with greater Wisdom and more Uniformity. But the domestic Oeconomy of these two States was nearly or altogether the same. An internal

Revenues. They lost all Concern for their common Honour or Safety, and could bear no Advice that tended to reform them'.

¹¹ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 165.

¹² Ibid., in *WS*, I, 148: 'The Butcheries of *Julius Cæsar* alone, are calculated by some body else; the Numbers he has been a means of destroying have been reckoned at 1,200,000'.

¹³ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 147: 'Let us hasten to open that great Scene which establishes the *Roman Empire*, and forms the grand Catastrophe of the antient Drama. This Empire, whilst in its Infancy, began by an Effusion of human Blood scarcely credible. The neighbouring little States teemed for new Destruction: The *Sabines*, the *Samnites*, the *Æqui*, the *Volsci*, the *Hetrurians*, were broken by a Series of Slaughters which had no Interruption, for some hundreds of Years; Slaughters which upon all sides consumed more than two Millions of the wretched People'.

Dissention constantly tore to Pieces the Bowels of the *Roman* Commonwealth. You find the same Confusion, the same Factions which subsisted at *Athens*, the same Tumults, the same Revolutions, and in fine, the same Slavery.¹⁴

Like Greece, Rome was also full of confusion and conflicts between factions. The historical descriptions in the *Vindication* obviously need to be treated with caution because of the nature and intention of the work. As is well known, Burke, in this work, pretended to be Bolingbroke and wanted to argue that Bolingbroke's deism would easily turn into anarchism. Intended to ridicule this earlier Tory leader and to warn readers about the danger of his ideas, evidently not all the notions expressed in the work reflected Burke's own genuine opinions. An examination of Burke's other works shows that the general view of ancient history presented in the *Vindication* is very similar to that advanced in Burke's later works, but that his view of ancient Rome is quite different.

The *Abridgment* begins with an overview of the state of Europe before the Romans dominated it. In the northern part of Europe, conquests had been repeated between barbarous nations for many ages. These were the conquests which did not bring progress. Only Roman conquests could provide some progress of manners: 'The northern Europe, until some parts of it were subdued by the progress of the Roman arms, remained almost equally covered with all the ruggedness of primitive Barbarism'.¹⁵ The situation of southern Europe, including Spain, Greece and Italy, was better than that. The geographical features, the mild climate and the interaction with relatively civilised countries nearby such as Phoenicia, Lesser Asia and Egypt, 'the great fountains of the ancient civility and learning', helped to stabilise and improve them, although the last two areas also promoted effeminate manners. The 'original inhabitants of Italy and Greece were of

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 165.

¹⁵ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 338-9.

the same race with the people of northern Europe', but nevertheless they 'came greatly to excel the northern nations in every respect, and particularly in the art and discipline of war'.¹⁶ Although the Gauls frequently attacked Rome, Roman discipline was very much superior to their ferocity. By the time Caesar defeated the Gauls, Rome 'contained many citizens of immense wealth, eloquence and ability'.¹⁷ Actually, the Romans were also much superior to the Britons and the Germans as well. The Germans were utterly barbarous and militaristic. The people subsisted by pasturage and hunting. The Germans did not have laws, but only customs which shaped the nature of the governors and the people. Their idea of government was very imperfect.¹⁸ As a result of Agricola's conquest, Britain could advance.¹⁹ The Romans had 'a fondness for baths, for gardens, for grand houses, and all the commodious elegancies of a cultivated life'. Their learning and arts were far more advanced than those of the ancient Britons.²⁰ The Romans were also 'the legislators of mankind',²¹ and their civil institutions prevailed across Europe, except Britain. As Burke referred to the civil wars which took place after the death of Caesar,²² the 'fierce republican spirit' of the republic,²³ the later tension between emperors and generals, the death of Nero followed by the 'commotions',²⁴ he was probably well aware of the confusion and defects of imperial Rome, but he generally described the Romans as much more civilised than other ancient Europeans.

Among Burke's works, the *Abridgment* was the most detailed on Roman history, but his political writings and speeches also at times referred to this period in history. The fact that the eighteenth-century British elite were

¹⁶ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 339. See also, *ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 453.

¹⁷ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 341.

¹⁸ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 429-432.

¹⁹ See my chapter on English History.

²⁰ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 368.

²¹ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 448.

²² Ibid., in *WS*, I, 359.

²³ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 362.

²⁴ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 369.

very familiar with Roman history through their education is important in understanding Burke's references to ancient Rome in his political works. While Burke, in political debates, often used the history of ancient Rome as a rhetorical device and put forward idealised pictures of it, he certainly saw Rome as civilised. In his *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, Burke referred to the Romans as a people who appreciated the importance of political connections.²⁵ In 1771, while claiming that the order, harmony and even civilisation of Europe owed much to the 'indissolubility' of marriage, he mentioned that the Romans had abhorred divorce, although it was possible under their laws.²⁶ In 1772, asserting the necessity of a regular system of clerical subscription, he claimed that Rome had possessed it and the people of this great republic had been both admirably religious and yet also tolerant.²⁷ He then stated: 'Methinks we would do well to attend to their institutions. The wisest of politicians and statesmen have recommended it to other nations to copy their example'.²⁸ Later, he also informed the Commons that the Romans were 'a nation that understood the decorum of life as well as' the Britons of his own age.²⁹ For Burke, as well as for his contemporaries, Rome also provided a model of territorial expansion. According to Burke, 'the discontented diplomatic politicians' of the ancien regime of France had Machiavelli's *Discourses on the First Ten Books of*

²⁵ *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, in *WS*, II, 316: 'This wise people was far from imagining that those connexions had no tie, and obliged to no duty; but that men might quit them without shame, upon every call of interest. They believed private honour to be the great foundation of public trust; that friendship was no mean step towards patriotism'.

²⁶ 'Speech on Divorce Bill (29 April 1771)', in *WS*, II, 357.

²⁷ *Clerical Subscription* (6 February 1772), in *WS*, II, 363: 'We must, like all other nations, that ever existed, adopt some regular system of subscription. This was the practice among the Jews; this was the practice among the Romans. ... The Romans had their college of priests, who superintended religious matters, consulted the stars, and the flight of birds, took care of the sacred geese and chickens, opened the Sybilline books and explained their meaning. Yet who were more religious than the Romans, who were tolerating?'

²⁸ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, II.

²⁹ 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 237.

Titus Livy and Montesquieu's *Considerations on the Causes of the Grandeur and Decadence of the Romans* as guides for their politics. These politicians observed that the Roman republic had had a more regular plan of national aggrandizement under their senate than the monarchy of modern France had, and that they had frequently acquired more territories within a single year than France had done during the last two centuries.³⁰

Burke did, however, occasionally refer to negative aspects of ancient Rome, and there is some evidence that he possibly looked upon it as less civilised than late eighteenth-century Britain and Europe. According to Burke, Roman governors had taken bribes 'under various pretences'³¹ and the frequency of elections actually 'destroyed Rome'.³² In 1779, writing to James Boswell, who was worried about the riots in Scotland against Catholic relief measures, Burke also stated: 'The Romans of our day are not quite so dangerous an Enemy to Galgacus and his Warriours, as they were

³⁰ *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 282-3. See also, Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', in idem, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, pp. 206-7.

³¹ 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 662-3: 'We have all in our early education read the Verronean orations. We read them not merely to instruct us, as they ought to do, in the principles of eloquence, to instruct us in the manners, customs and Laws of the ancient Romans, of which they are an abundant repository, but we read them for another motive for which the great Author published them, namely that he should leave to the world and the latest posterity a monument by which it should be shewn what course a great public Accuser in a great cause ought to follow, and as connected with it, is what course Judges ought to pursue in such a cause. In these orations you see almost every instance of rapacity and peculation which we charge upon Mr. Hastings. Undoubtedly to[o] many Roman and English Governors have received corrupt gifts and bribes under various pretences, but there is one kind of disgrace belonging to Government which I defy you to find in Verres and the whole Roman tribe of Peculators in a Governor General, Pro Consul or Viceroy'.

³² *Duration of Parliaments* (8 May 1780), in *WS*, III, 596: 'So was Rome destroyd by the disorders of continual Elections; though those of Rome were sober disorders; they had nothing but faction, bribery, bread and stage Plays to debauch them. We have the inflammation of *Liquor* superadded; a fury hotter than any of them. There the contest was only between Citizen and Citizen; here you have the contests of ambitious Citizens of one side supported by the Crown, to oppose to the Efforts (let it be so) of private and unsupported ambition on the other. Yet Rome was destroyd by the frequency and charge of Elections, and the monstrous Expence of an unremitted courtship to the people'. The context was his criticism of the proposal for shorter parliament advanced in the House of Commons.

1700 years ago; or as some of their descendents were a century or two since; I cannot conceive, that Bishop Hay is so dreadful a person as Julius Agricola'.³³ Here he was putting forward the notion that the ancient Romans had been more brutal and warlike than eighteenth-century Britons. As will be seen below, Burke, in his *Reflections*, clearly argued that late eighteenth-century Europe was more civilised and prosperous than all the ancient nations, including Rome.³⁴

Burke also sometimes commented on the fall of Rome, a great debating point for eighteenth-century intellectuals. It was not only a question of historical studies, but also a warning of the potential collapse of modern Britain. In an early manuscript discussing the importance of party divisions, Burke argued that political factions had prospered in the 'Decay' of Rome such as the cabals of Caesar and Pompey under the republic and the Greens and the Blues under the Byzantine Empire. In doing so, he was probably very conscious of the history of political discourse that had focused on the effects of factionalism from Sallust via Machiavelli to the radical Whigs of the early eighteenth century.³⁵ Burke also well knew a common allegation that the influx of wealth from the provinces had corrupted the virtue of the Romans.³⁶ In his writings and speeches, he actually discussed the decline of

³³ 'To James Boswell (1 March 1779)', in *Corr.*, IV, 45.

³⁴ See below, pp. 105-6.

³⁵ Burke, 'On Parties', p. 644. Burke also referred to the partisans of Mark Antony and Gaius Octavius, the factions of Gaius Marius and Lucius Cornelius Sulla, and the Yorkists and Lancastrians in England as the examples of factionalism under the 'unmixed' constitution. These factions did not have general 'Scheme'. They were rather only a group of discontent, envy, a spirit of sedition and ambition. Party were different from faction. In Greece and Italy, the contention between the nobility and the plebeians contributed to preserving the vigour of their constitution until one party utterly destroyed the other. See also Richard Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', pp. 630-2. In his *Reflections*, his view of Sulla and Marius was also low. See *Reflections*, p. 281.

³⁶ Burke applied this to the case of India. 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment (15 February 1788)', in *WS*, VI, 277. See also 'Speech on Sixth Article: Presents', in *WS*, VI, 63; Philip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 46. Among his contemporaries, John Millar argued that although modern Europe, too, experienced the

the Roman Empire more frequently than the fall of its earlier republic. In his *Abridgment*, Burke maintained that the heavy taxes³⁷ and the overextension of its dominions could cause the decay and the ruin of this great empire. Even though the extinction of the empire was probably inevitable, if 'the unwieldy mass of that overgrown dominion' had been divided into separate and independent states, these states might have subsisted by opposing the inroads of the barbarians more effectively. 'For notwithstanding the resources, which might have been expected from the entireness of so great a body', Burke argued, 'it is clear from history, that the Romans were never able to employ with effect, and at the same time, above two armies; and that on the whole they were very unequal to the defence of a frontier of many thousand miles in circuit'.³⁸ The huge territory of the Roman empire made its defence malfunction. In one of his early speeches on Indian affairs, he also asserted that the fall of the Roman Empire had begun with the misgovernment of the provinces. This misgovernment was encouraged by 'the failure of punishment', which arose from 'the inertness or perhaps the corruption of the advocates' rather than from the constitutional defect. This corruption destroyed 'the vitals' of Rome and 'then were all things at stake'.³⁹ Later, in his *Reflections*, Burke referred to the 'unnatural combination' of despotism and popularity as a great cause of the decline of the Roman Empire.⁴⁰ These points were, of

acquisition of great wealth, the Christian religion prevented the possible corruption which had spread in Rome. See John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, ed. Aaron Garrett (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2006), ed. Aaron Garrett, pp. 149, 155.

³⁷ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 375-6: 'In a word, the taxes in the Roman empire were so heavy, and in many respects so injudiciously laid on, that they have been not improperly considered as one cause of its decay and ruin'.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 377-8.

³⁹ 'Motion for Papers on Hastings', in *WS*, VI, 63. Burke's draft notes for this speech read: 'I remember that Ascanius, that antient commentator has observed that one great Cause of the ruin of the Roman provinces, and the growth of oppression and speculation had arisen are *prevaricatione accusatorum*. A Horrible and foul enormity, because it poisons in the very medicine'. See Bk P 9/76.

⁴⁰ *Reflections*, pp. 410-411.

course, quite familiar to eighteenth-century European intellectuals. Unlike Gibbon and Voltaire, however, Burke never insisted that the Christian religion had been a chief cause of the enervation and collapse of the Roman Empire.⁴¹

Burke's descriptions of the general state of Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire were even more conventional. Like most other historians of his age, Burke believed that hopeless disorder spread out all over Europe in so-called Dark Ages. According to the *Abridgment*, the northern nations which had overrun the Roman Empire, were initially 'rather actuated by avarice than ambition, and were more intent upon plunder than conquest'. Although later they began to establish systems of government in their conquered territories, they did not have effective institutions on right notions of legislation. This resulted in a lengthy period of disorder and a lack of vision in their politics. The Goths, the Burgundians, the Franks, the Vandals, and the Suevi first stretched over the territory of the Roman Empire and afterwards waged continual wars on each other. Their wars, like those of other savage tribes, lacked military discipline and were full of brutality and caprice. 'Tumult, anarchy, confusion overspread the face of Europe', Burke wrote, 'and an obscurity rests upon the transactions of that time, which suffers us to discover nothing but its extreme barbarity'.⁴² Actually, it was not only the northern tribes who attempted invasions. Some European nations such as Spain and Italy were largely harassed by a group of barbarians who came from the south, although these invasions of the

⁴¹ For example, see Peter Burke, 'Tradition and Experience: The Idea of Decline from Bruni to Gibbon', *Daedalus*, 105 (1976), 137-152 (pp. 143, 146); O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 48.

⁴² *Abridgment*, in WS, I, 453-4. See also *Vindication of Natural Society*, in WS, I, 149: 'But there have been Periods when no less than universal Destruction to the Race of Mankind seems to have been threatened. When the *Goths*, the *Vandals*, and the *Huns* poured into *Gaul*, *Italy*, *Spain*, *Greece*, and *Africa*, carrying Destruction before them as they advanced, and leaving horrid Desarts every where behind them'.

southern barbarians never completely succeeded in France.⁴³ While Europe was generally in confusion, the rise of the Papal and imperial powers gave birth to a framework of European politics which was to linger on into subsequent ages.⁴⁴ Burke was quite favourable in his view of Charlemagne (742-814). The contention between the imperial and the papal powers that ensued and the division into the factions as the supporters on each side led to the rise of the city states in Italy such as Venice, Genoa, Florence, Sienna, Pisa and other republics. Although their martial governments did not fully appreciate the value of commerce, these cities became very powerful and prosperous.⁴⁵

Feudalism spread over every corner of continental Europe at about the same period. All the kingdoms developed nearly the same form of government, from which 'arose a great similitude in the matters of their inhabitants'. The conduct of the courts and the manners of the people were certainly influenced by this feudal discipline. Nearly forty years later, Burke was to maintain that the similarities between European nations had contributed to making the peace of the region, but the early Burke had emphasised the backwardness of the politics of the age. Unlike those of modern Europe, the sovereigns, in this period, were 'only a greater lord, among great lords' and did not possess any substantial political power to control their subordinates. Instead, subjects conducted war and peace 'at pleasure', and justice was dispensed arbitrarily. Another hundreds years were needed until military discipline had imposed and better systems of government had developed.⁴⁶

⁴³ This meant the Muslim invasions of the eighth century. See my chapter on the history of Asian-Muslim nations.

⁴⁴ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 454-5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 456: 'whilst commerce was neglected and despised by the rustick gentry of the martial governments, they grew to a considerable degree of wealth, power, and civility'.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I.

Although Burke's view of the middle ages was generally low, nevertheless, he found some gleams of hope in the darkness. The first crusade was one of them, which Burke described as 'one of the most extraordinary events, which are contained in the history of mankind'.⁴⁷ In an age when the power of the Pope was being enlarged, the first crusade contributed to diffusing 'a spirit of adventure'. Crusades were able to recruit many followers when the Pope approved of them. The Canon law had fully developed by the time of Innocent III (1161-1216), and its object was the extension of the Pope's prerogative powers.⁴⁸ Significantly, Burke linked the first crusade to the development of chivalry:

A great part of Europe was in the same deplorable condition. It was then that some gallant spirits, struck with a generous indignation at the tyranny of these miscreants, blessed solemnly by the Bishop, and followed by the praises and vows of the people, sallied forth to vindicate the chastity of women, and to redress the wrongs of travellers and peaceable men. The adventurous humour, inspired by the Crusade, heightened and extended this spirit; and thus the idea of knight errantry was formed.⁴⁹

This passage, about the situation of the early twelfth century, might anticipate Burke's later idea of chivalry, but his general opinion of this century was extremely low.⁵⁰ On 26 June 1780, in a speech opposing Sir George Savile's Bill to restrain Roman Catholics from educating the children of Protestants, 'he quoted the opinion of Thomas Aquinas, in the 12th century, against breaking the law of nature, and he contended, that

⁴⁷ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 481. Evidently, many of his contemporaries also commented on the Crusades. For instance, Hume dismissed them as the monument of human folly, Voltaire saw them as 'the last explosion of barbarian restlessness' but Robertson rehabilitated them as 'an event fortunate in its outcome'. See O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, pp. 49, 91.

⁴⁸ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 534, 548.

⁴⁹ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 495.

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 517. Writing about the late twelfth century, Burke wrote that '[a]t that time Europe had not emerged out of barbarism'.

the parent had full right to dispose of the education of the child, and said the darkness of the 12th century rises against the light of the 18th'.⁵¹ While Burke here probably quoted Aquinas as an authority in order to support his position, it seems to have been taken for granted that the twelfth century had been a dark era.

The book reviews in the *Annual Register* may provide us with more evidence for his views of the middle ages or of the period regarded as the dawn of the modern era.⁵² His favourable review of Robertson's *History of Scotland* in the 1759 volume of the *Annual Register* particularly drew attention to the author's account of feudal institutions, which are 'one of the best specimens of his mastery'. The people who overturned the Roman Empire created the same form of government all over Europe.⁵³ Although the political system in Europe changed in some significant ways before the fourteenth century, there still remained 'the aristocratical spirit of the feudal constitution'. In the countries with feudal governments, splendour and luxury were unknown to the courts, a martial spirit prevailed, and commerce did not develop at all.⁵⁴ Robertson was evidently critical of the

⁵¹ 'Speeches on Bill to Secure Protestantism (26 June 1780)', in *WS*, III, 609-610; *Parl. Hist.*, 21, col., 720.

⁵² Burke may, however, have been quite familiar with European history at such an era in an earlier stage of his life. A letter to Richard Shackleton in 1744 ends with the phrase 'The Subjects of the Mod: Hist: 13th begins with Present State of Naples and ends with france: 14th france total: 15 france total'. The reference is to the contents of a Dublin edition of Thomas Salmon's *Modern History: or, The Present State of All Nations*. See 'Burke to Richard Shackleton (24 November 1744)', in *Corr.*, I, 38.

⁵³ *Annual Register ... for the Year 1759* (London, 1760), p. 490: 'At the time when Robert Bruce began his reign in Scotland, the same form of government was established in all the kingdoms of Europe. And the surprising similarity in their constitution and laws, demonstrates that the nations which overturned the Roman empire, and erected these kingdoms, though divided into different tribes, and distinguished by different names, were originally the same people'.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 491: 'But long before the beginning of the fourteenth century, the feudal system had undergone many changes, of which the following were most considerable. Kings formerly elective, were then hereditary; and fiefs granted at first during pleasure, descended from father to son, and were become perpetual. These changes, not less advantageous to the nobles than to the prince, made no alteration in the aristocratical spirit of the feudal constitution. ... At a time when pomp and splendor

feudal system and the middle ages, and Burke probably agreed with this view of history on the whole. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, Europe had been dominated by barbarism and disorder for a long time.⁵⁵ In 1765, the *Annual Register* reviewed Anderson's *History of Commerce*⁵⁶ and extracted the author's description of the fourteenth century and of the improvement of navigation caused by the invention of the compass. In one of the passages extracted, Anderson had drawn attention to the progress of commerce and navigation which had taken place in the fourteenth century, but also stressed that Europe in those ages still existed in darkness and ignorance.⁵⁷ Again, since the reviewer was generally quite favourably disposed to this book, he would probably have agreed with this notion.

were unknown, even in the palaces of Kings; when the officers of the crown received little salary besides the fees and perquisites of their office; when embassies to sovereign courts were rare; when armies were composed of soldiers who served without pay; it was not necessary that a King should possess a great revenue; nor did the condition of Europe, in those ages, allow its princes to be opulent. Commerce made little progress in the kingdoms, where the feudal government was established. Institutions, which had no other object but to inspire a martial spirit, to train men to be soldiers, and to make arms the only honourable profession, naturally discouraged the commercial arts'.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 493: 'But the Barbarians, who over-ran Europe, having destroyed most of the great cities, and the countries which they seized being cantoned out among powerful barons, who were blindly followed by numerous vassals, whom, in return, they were bound to protect from every injury; the administration of justice was greatly interrupted, and the execution of any legal sentence became almost impracticable. These, rapine, murder, and disorder of all kinds prevailed in every kingdom of Europe, to a degree almost incredible, and scarce compatible with the subsistence of civil society'.

⁵⁶ In his private library, Burke owned Adam Anderson's *An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce* (2 vols., 1764), LC MS, LC, p. 8; and its revised version by William Combe (6vol., Dublin, 1790), LC, p. 1.

⁵⁷ *Annual Register ... for the Year 1764* (London, 1765), p. 251: 'The character of this fourteenth century is of much greater importance to mankind than any, or perhaps than all, the preceding ones, considered in a purely mercantile sense. Great improvements are effected in naval commerce throughout the greatest part of Europe, and in the dimensions of shipping, more especially in Italy, Spain, the Hanse-towns, and the Netherlands, whereby gradual approaches were making towards constituting the remarkable difference which has since so eminently appeared between nations, in proportion to their greater or lesser cultivation of foreign commerce, and of manufactures, fisheries, mines, and other commercial improvements. ... Yet Mr. Rymer, in the dedication to the late queen Anne of his III^d Tome of the *Fœdera*, tells her very

Nevertheless, it was far from the truth that these barbarous periods had left nothing of benefit to subsequent ages. In his works of the 1790s, Burke at times explained how European nations and systems developed over the course of history and he stressed that the foundations of modern Europe could be traced to the long distant past. In his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he wrote about how European nations had acquired their homogeneity by sharing political systems and manners:

The whole of the polity and oeconomy of every country in Europe has been derived from the same sources. It was drawn from the old Germanic or Gothic customary; from the feudal institutions which must be considered as an emanation from that customary; and the whole has been improved and digested into system and discipline by the Roman law. From hence arose the several orders, with or without a Monarch, (which are called States) in every European country; the strong traces of which, where Monarchy predominated, were never wholly extinguished or merged in despotism. In the few places where Monarchy was cast off, the spirit of European Monarchy was still left.⁵⁸

European states had grown up from the same historical ancestry such as the ancient German and Gothic customs, feudal institutions and Roman jurisprudence. These common origins of societies created a great homogeneity over the region. Europe was, at the same time, a great religious union, i.e., a region which shared the Christian religion. In Burke's words, 'The nations of Europe have had the very same christian religion,

truly, "that these were times of great struggle and disorder all Europe over, and the darkest period of times." And the supposed royal author of the memoirs of the house of Brandenburg speaks much to the same effect, viz. "That ignorance was at its highest pitch in this and the next succeeding century."

⁵⁸ *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 248. The European nations came to have a similar system of education as well. See *ibid.*, in *WS*, IX, 248-9: 'From all those sources arose a system of manners and of education which was nearly similar in all this quarter of the globe; and which softened, blended, and harmonized the colours of the whole. There was little difference in the form of the Universities for the education of their youth, whether with regard to faculties, to sciences, or to the more liberal and elegant kinds of erudition'.

agreeing in the fundamental parts, varying a little in the ceremonies and in the subordinate doctrines'.⁵⁹ In his *Letter to William Smith* (1795), he also wrote:

All the principal religions in Europe stand upon one common bottom. The support, that the whole, or the favoured parts, may have in the secret dispensations of Providence, it is impossible to tell: But humanly speaking, they are all *prescriptive* religions. They have all stood long enough, to make prescription, and its train of legitimate prejudices, their main Stay.⁶⁰

Here two points should be made. First, a latitudinarian Burke did not accentuate the sectarian distinctions between the Christian factions, although he well knew about religious tensions and conflicts within the Christian sects throughout history. Second, this passage clearly shows that Burke considered Christianity as an historical heritage of all Europe. He manifested this idea by relying upon the concept of prescription. The similarity of social institutions, manners and religions was characteristic of European nations, and, in their effect, this similarity was helpful in bringing harmony to the region. In his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he stated:

As to war, if it be the means of wrong and violence, it is the sole means of justice amongst nations. Nothing can banish it from the world. ... The conformity and analogy of which I speak, incapable, like every thing else, of preserving perfect trust and tranquillity among men, has a strong tendency to facilitate accommodation, and to produce a generous oblivion of the rancour of their quarrels. With this similitude, peace is more of peace, and war is less of war. I will go further. There have been periods of time in which communities, apparently in peace with each other, have been more perfectly separated than, in later times, many nations in Europe have been in the course of long and bloody wars. The

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Letter to William Smith* (1795), in *WS*, IX, 662.

cause must be sought in the similitude throughout Europe of religion, laws, and manners.⁶¹

The homogeneity between European nations contributed to securing peace. Moreover, in Burke's view of European history, shared manners, especially the Christian religion and the chivalric code of conduct, were also significant driving forces behind the civilisation of the region. In his *Reflections*, Burke famously stated:

This mixed system of opinion and sentiment had its origin in the antient chivalry; and the principle, though varied in its appearance by the varying state of human affairs, subsisted and influenced through a long succession of generations, even to the time we live in. If it should ever be totally extinguished, the loss I fear will be great. It is this which has given its character to modern Europe. It is this which has distinguished it under all its forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia, and possibly from those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world. It was this, which, without confounding ranks, had produced a noble equality, and handed it down through all the gradations of social life. It was this opinion which mitigated kings into companions, and raised private men to be fellows with kings. Without force, or opposition, it subdued the fierceness of pride and power; it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance, and gave a domination vanquisher of laws, to be subdued by manners.⁶²

Although Burke praised the 'principle' of chivalry, whose influence, he claimed, had continued until his own age, he did not pay tribute to the era itself when chivalry was formed. Burke was not a medievalist. What he

⁶¹ *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 248.

⁶² *Reflections*, pp. 238-9. Even before publishing the *Reflections*, Burke made the same point. See 'Burke to Philip Francis (20 February 1790)', in *Corr.*, VI, 90-1: 'Is it absurd in me, to think that the Chivalrous Spirit which dictated a veneration for Women of condition and of Beauty, without any consideration whatsoever of enjoying them, was the great Scource of those manners which have been the Pride and ornament of Europe for so many ages?'

wanted to say was rather that the development of chivalry had been an important step leading towards modern society. Moreover, while referring to 'the most brilliant periods of the antique world', he may well have had in mind the flourishing state of ancient Rome. As has been argued above, although Burke considered ancient Rome to have been very civilised, the state of late eighteenth-century Europe was even better. He maintained:

Nothing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization, have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles; and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion. The nobility and the clergy, the one by profession, the other by patronage, kept learning in existence, even in the midst of arms and confusions, and whilst governments were rather in their causes than formed. Learning paid back what it received to nobility and to priesthood;⁶³

This passage has long attracted readers and has been variously interpreted. It needs to be borne in mind, nevertheless, that Burke was now writing about how modern society in Europe had developed through the course of history, i.e., he argued that civilised society in Europe had resulted from the preservation of its traditional manners and institutions. The very foundation of European civilisation, however, now threatened to disappear with the events of 1789. He further claimed:

If, as I suspect, modern letters owe more than they are always willing to own to antient manners, so do other interests which we value full as much as they are worth. Even commerce, and trade, and manufacture, the gods of our œconomical politicians, are themselves perhaps but creatures; are themselves but effects, which, as first causes, we choose to worship. They certainly grew under the same shade in which learning flourished.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Reflections*, pp. 241-2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Probably, this is not the first time he put forward the idea that the development of commerce owed much to the Christian religion.⁶⁵ In short, despite his generally low views on the ancient and medieval eras, Burke at times maintained that the flourishing state of the modern periods was indebted to some significant systems and styles of life that had derived from those shaped in these eras.

Burke's ideas on chivalry and Christianity cannot be properly understood without considering the context of the contemporary debate on them.⁶⁶ In his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), Adam Ferguson asserted that chivalry led to a veneration of women, and that the Christian religion enjoined on barbarians refined sentiments such as meekness and compassion.⁶⁷ William Robertson and John Millar also considered chivalry as an ameliorating influence on manners, whereas they believed that the Christian religion had not only moderated manners or promoted learning, but had also led to the material progress of society.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, according to Pocock, the historians of the Scottish Enlightenment tended to stress the role of commerce as a means of generating civilised manners, whereas Burke's point in the passage above was the opposite: ancient

⁶⁵ See *Account*, I, 192-3.

⁶⁶ The present author discussed this problem in some more detail in his 'Law, Religion and Manners: The Shaping of Civil Society in Burke's *Fragment on the Laws of England* and *Abridgment of English History*', *Bulletin of the Center for Historical Social Science* (Hitotsubashi University), 30 (2010), 33-46 (at 42-45).

⁶⁷ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 192. Burke owned one copy of this work. See LC MS. He also owned Richard Hurd, *Moral and Political Dialogues; with Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (3 vols., London, 1765). See LC MS; *LC*, p. 12.

⁶⁸ William Robertson, *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance, and Its Connexion with the Success of His Religion, Considered* (Edinburgh, 1755), pp. 38-40, 42; William Robertson, 'View of the Progress of Society in Europe' in *The Works of William Robertson* (12 vols., Reprint of the 1794 edn. London: Routledge Thoemmes, 1996), III, 80-86, 91; 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 University Press, 1997), p. 69; John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, pp. 133, 137, 141.

manners, especially chivalry and Christianity, could somehow bring about the growth of commerce and the progress of letters. That is to say, in his views, modern styles of life, including commercial arts, did not replace traditional modes of life, but rather the former needed the latter for their own development, and both now coexisted (although such ancient manners were certainly modified and had become more sophisticated by the eighteenth century).⁶⁹

Burke's view of the middle ages is quite significant for the overarching argument of this chapter, but here there is a problem of coherence. His early writings often addressed the general state of Europe and stressed its negative aspects, whereas his works in the 1790s turned attention to some particular factors in the middle ages which provided the foundations of modern society. It is possible that the later Burke still retained his early view of the middle ages, since he never offered a positive judgement of this era and moreover there was no reason for him to change his mind. Facing revolutionary France, which attempted to demolish the traditional institutions of Europe, he needed to explain how modern Europe emerged from the past. It is noteworthy that contemporary historians, such as Ferguson and Robertson, also considered the Christian religion and the chivalric principle to have contributed to civilising European society, while they, too, were not admirers of the medieval period. On the other hand, it seems less clear whether the early Burke already had the idea that these elements in the middle ages had given birth to the foundations of the modern age, since his early comments on chivalry in the *Abridgment* did not mention its influence on modern society and also the *Abridgment* was written before the appearance of the significant writings by Richard Hurd,

⁶⁹ Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', in idem., *Virtue, Commerce and History*, esp. pp. 199, 210. See also R.J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688-1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 112-126.

Ferguson and Robertson, which might later have influenced the formation of his thought.

2.2 More Changes and Hopes but Still Confusion : The Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

For Burke, Europe from the ancient era to the fourteenth century was dominated by barbarism and confusion, but nevertheless there were in this period some important seeds of future developments. Burke's view of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was quite similar to that of the previous century. For example, in reviewing a work called *The Life of Erasmus* of 1758,⁷⁰ the early Burke argued that the age of Erasmus (1469-1536) was the era of 'the first dawn of literature', and that Erasmus himself contributed to enlightening the European world, which had been barbarous and ignorant for many centuries.⁷¹ This view of European history and Burke's description of Erasmus are worth comparing to the descriptions in the *Account*. In the beginning of this work, the Burkes wrote that there had been 'an extraordinary coincidence of events' around the time of the discovery of the Americas. A series of epochal events, such as the invention of printing, the making of gunpowder, the improvement of navigation, the revival of ancient learning, and the Reformation, as well as the general awareness of the new continents, took place one after another in a relatively short space of time, and 'all of these conspired to change the face of Europe entirely'. The principal monarchies in Europe also began to take shape and to become

⁷⁰ John Jortin, *The Life of Erasmus* (2 vols., London, 1758-1760), vol. I. In his private library, Burke owned Samuel Knight, *The Life of Erasmus* (1726), LC MS; LC, p. 13.

⁷¹ See *Annual Register ... for the Year 1758* (London, 1759), p. 463: 'THE life of no author is better calculated to interest our curiosity than that of Erasmus. He lived at the first dawn of literature, and was himself one of the principal lights which dispelled that gloom of ignorance and barbarism, which had overspread the world for so many ages'.

powerful around the same period.⁷² The age of Columbus, in fact, marked a watershed in European history, from which the nations of the region were to begin to move towards the prosperity of the modern age. The Burkes, however, immediately turned back to the barbarity of society which had existed before this time in history. According to them, before 'this period, the manners of Europe were wholly barbarous'. Even in Italy, 'where the natural mildness of the climate and the dawning of literature had a little softened the minds of the people, and introduced something approaching towards politeness', the authors maintained that, 'the history preceding this æra, and indeed for some time after it, is nothing but one series of treasons, usurpations, murders, and massacres: nothing of a manly courage, nothing of a solid and rational policy'.⁷³ The Burkes criticised medieval society by using the contemporary language of manners and politeness, whereas they regarded their own age as enlightened and contrasted it with the darkness of the middle ages. Although Italy was considered to have been the first country among the European countries that had moved into modernity, what they emphasised was the barbarity and confusion of its society in the middle ages. The authors were also highly critical of the monarchs of the fifteenth century: Louis XI (1423-1483), Charles VIII (1470-1498) and Edward IV (1442-1483) were blamed for their short-sightedness, barbarity and lack of politeness. 'If the courts had made such poor advances in policy and politeness, which might seem the natural growth of courts at any time', the Burkes went on to say, 'both the courts and the people were yet less advanced in useful knowledge'. Around that time, scholars focused their interests on Latin, whose learning the authors viewed as 'only the dotage of the scholastic philosophy of words'. Mathematics was little valued or barely

⁷² *Account*, I, 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, I, 3-4. In his private library, Burke owned Francesco Guicciardini's *Storia d'Italia*. See LC MS; LC, pp. 11 (Guicciardini, *The History of Italy, from the year 1490, to 1532* (10 vols., London, [1754]), wanting vol. 7), 15.

developed.⁷⁴ As the progress of learning was definitely important for modernity, the Burkes saw the learning of the late fifteenth century as under-developed, when they compared it with their own age which they considered much more advanced. It was against this barbarity and ignorance that the enlightened Columbus needed to fight.

Another barometer of modernity was commerce. According to the Burkes, by the second half of the eighteenth century, the study of commercial trade was looked upon as one of 'the liberal sciences' and 'one of the most considerable branches of political knowledge'. In the age of Columbus, however, it was not a subject that the elite class of people had earnestly pursued. At that time, commerce was 'in the hands of a few, great in its profits, but confined in its nature'. The idea of the balance of trade was far from being understood. A great number of 'clogs' (imposts, customs and duties) were imposed upon commercial trade without judicious thought. Even in England, where there were 'the most trading and reasoning people in Europe', the right notion of economic policies was not well recognised and they developed only slowly. What the Burkes were lamenting was the lack of sagacious minds reflecting on political economy rather than the absence of free trade.⁷⁵ They were putting forward the idea that a civilised nation would certainly develop commerce and also the serious study of it. This seems to be the same line of reasoning found in Burke's *Reflections*, where it was maintained that the study of finance ought to advance as a nation develops substantially.

The available evidence shows that Burke clearly saw the fifteenth century as still barbarous and ignorant, although he often pointed out the germs of progress which were to bring Europe prosperity. His descriptions of the next century had a quite similar tone. While acknowledging the great advantage of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, he emphasised

⁷⁴ *Account*, I, 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 47.

that the sixteenth century had still been an age of confusion and disorder. This point was particularly made in one of his speeches which addressed his constituents in Bristol in 1780. In this speech, Burke maintained that, although the age of the Reformation was 'one of the greatest periods of human improvement', it was also certainly 'a time of trouble and confusion'. Before this period, European nations were still in the 'vast structure of superstition and tyranny', which had taken ages to build. This evil structure evidently linked up with a large number of political interests and influenced various aspects of a nation including its manners, laws, institutions and policies. It was so deeply rooted in society that it was impossible to eliminate it 'without a violent concussion of itself and all about it'.⁷⁶ Burke's emphasis on the confusion caused by religious conflicts was remarkable, but has been neglected by his commentators. He went on to say:

When this great revolution was attempted in a more regular mode by government, it was opposed by plots and seditions of the people; when by popular efforts, it was repressed as rebellion by the hand of power; and bloody executions (often bloodily returned) marked the whole of its progress through all its stages.

Burke argued that although religious affairs were no longer the cause of political tumults in the late eighteenth century, they were certainly so in the age of the Reformation. It was religion that 'made a principal ingredient in the wars and politics of that time'. The wild enthusiasm of religion contaminated politics, and *vice versa*. Political interests in the period 'poisoned and perverted the spirit of religion upon all sides'.⁷⁷ The Protestants were 'infected, as the Popish had been before, by worldly interests and worldly passions' and became a persecutor of the Roman Catholics and sometimes of other denominations of Protestantism. The

⁷⁶ 'Speech at Bristol Previous to Election', in *WS*, III, 639.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, III.

spirit of such persecutions arose not only from 'the bitterness of retaliation', but also from 'the merciless policy of fear':

It was long before the spirit of true piety and true wisdom, involved in the principles of the Reformation, could be depurated from the dregs and feculence of the contention with which it was carried through. However, until this be done, the Reformation is not complete; and those who think themselves good Protestants, from their animosity to others, are in that respect no Protestants at all. It was at first thought necessary, perhaps, to oppose to Popery another Popery, to get the better of it.

Whatever the cause was, laws against the Catholics had been passed in several European nations, especially in England and Ireland. These laws were as 'bloody' as those previously enacted in Catholic nations. In some cases, the laws were not particularly savage, but had an even worse effect, since 'they were slow, cruel outrages on our nature, and kept men alive only to insult in their persons, every one of the rights and feelings of humanity'.⁷⁸ His analysis of the Reformation was now being directed toward his criticism of the persecution of Roman Catholicism, which still lingered in his age. The Reformation, however beneficial, had been accompanied by great confusions in society and fierce religious hostility to enemies. The Reformation cannot be completed unless all religious persecutions cease.

This was not the last comment Burke made on the Reformation and its results. On 21 February 1782, writing to Viscount Kenmare, in the context of his censure of the religious persecution of the Catholics (especially, their limited chance of education), he commended the Council of Trent for stipulating the discipline of the Catholic seminaries.⁷⁹ In his *Thoughts on*

⁷⁸ Ibid., in *WS*, III, 639-640.

⁷⁹ In this letter Burke touched upon the corruption of the Greek and Latin Churches. See 'Burke to Lord Kenmare (21 Feb 1782)', in *Corr.*, IV, 412-3: 'There is a great resemblance between the whole frame and constitution of the Greek and Latin Churches — The secular Clergy in the former, *by being married*, living under little restraint, and having no particular Education suited to their function, are universally

French Affairs (1791), Burke traced an analogy between the French Revolution and the Reformation. According to him, the French Revolution scarcely resembled any previous revolutions 'which have been brought about in Europe, upon principles merely political'. It was a revolution of doctrine and theoretical dogma, and rather resembled 'those changes which have been made upon religious grounds, in which a spirit of proselytism makes an essential part'. The last revolution of this kind was the Reformation. Both the Reformation and the French Revolution were not local events within a single country, but great political and religious events which profoundly affected all countries in Europe.⁸⁰ The character of both events may well be called ideological.

The division between Catholic and Protestant, which was caused by the Reformation, not only split one nation from another, but every state was divided within itself by it. Burke maintained that the effects of the

fallen into such contempt, that they are never permitted to aspire to the dignities of their own Church; and it is not held respectful to them to call them *Papas*, by their true and antient appellation; but those who wish to address them with civility, always call them Hieromonachi. In consequence of this disrespect, which I venture to say, in *such a Church*, must be the consequence of a secular Life, a very great degeneracy from reputable Christian manners, has taken place throughout that great Member of the Christian Church. It was so with the Latin Church, before the *restraint on Marriage*. Even that restraint gave rise to the greatest disorders before the Council of Trent, which, together with the emulation raised, and the good example given by the reformed Churches, wherever they were in View of each other, has brought on that happy amendment, which we see in the Latin communion both at home and abroad. The Council of Trent has wisely introduced the discipline of *Seminaries*, by which Priests are not trusted for a Clerical institution even to the severe discipline of their own Colleges; but after they pass through them, are frequently, if not for the greater part, obliged to pass through peculiar methods, having their particular ritual Function in View. It is in a great measure to this, and to similar methods used in *foreign education*, that the Popish Clergy of Ireland, miserably provided for, living among *low* and ill regulated people, without any discipline of sufficient force to secure good manners, have been hindered from becoming an intollerable nuisance to the Country, instead of being, as, I conceive, they generally are, of very great Service to it'. In his private library, Burke owned Paolo Sarpi, *The Historie of the Council of Trent*, translated by Nathaniel Brent (London, [1620]). See LC MS; LC, p. 27.

⁸⁰ *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 341: 'That effect was to introduce other interests into all countries, than those which arose from their locality and natural circumstances. The principle of the Reformation was such, as by it's essence, could not be local or confined to the country in which it had it's origin'.

Reformation had been dominant over European history in the last two centuries: 'Few wars were made, and few treaties were entered into in which they [the principles to which the Reformation gave rise] did not come in for some part. They gave a colour, a character, and direction to all the politicks of Europe'.⁸¹ Compared with his statement in 1780 mentioned above, these passages discussed neither the advantages nor disadvantages of the Reformation. In his *Reflections*, Burke raised some examples of the confusion around this period. One of them was the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre (23-24 August 1572):

Your citizens of Paris formerly had lent themselves as the ready instruments to slaughter the followers of Calvin, at the infamous massacre of St. Bartholomew. What should we say to those who could think of retaliating on the Parisians of this day the abominations and horrors of that time? ... In this tragic farce they produced the cardinal of Lorraine in his robes of function, ordering general slaughter. Was this spectacle intended to make the Parisians abhor persecution, and loath the effusion of blood?—No, it was to teach them to persecute their own pastors;⁸²

Probably, this was not the first time he linked 1789 with the Massacre of St Bartholomew.⁸³ Chiefly denouncing revolutionary France, he was highly critical of Louis II de Guise (1555-88) and the religious persecution of the sixteenth century. He continued:

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, VIII, 342.

⁸² *Reflections*, p. 312.

⁸³ According to J.C.D. Clark, when, in a letter of 9 August 1789, Burke wrote 'England gazing with astonishment at a French struggle for Liberty and not knowing whether to blame or to applaud! The thing indeed, though I thought I saw something like it in progress for several years, has still something in it paradoxical and Mysterious. The spirit it is impossible not to admire; but the old Parisian ferocity has broken out in a shocking manner', Burke already had in mind St. Bartholomew's Day and the wars of the Fronde (1648-53). See 'Burke to the Earl of Charlemont (9 August 1789)', in *Corr.*, VI, 10; Clark, 'Introduction', *Reflections*, p. 61.

Such is the effect of the perversion of history, by those, who, for the same nefarious purposes, have perverted every other part of learning. But those who will stand upon that elevation of reason, which places centuries under our eye, and brings things to the true point of comparison, which obscures little names, and effaces the colours of little parties, and to which nothing can ascend but the spirit and moral quality of human actions, will say to the teachers of the Palais Royal,—the Cardinal of Lorraine was the murderer of the sixteenth century, you have the glory of being the murderers in the eighteenth; and this is the only difference between you. But history, in the nineteenth century, better understood, and better employed, will, I trust, teach a civilized posterity to abhor the misdeeds of both these barbarous ages.⁸⁴

Burke here linked the Revolution in France with the Massacre of St Bartholomew and considered both as 'barbarous', while contrasting this situation with the 'civilized' nineteenth century. His low view of Henri IV (1553-1610) may well be read along with this point of view. For Burke, Henri IV was in part the cause of the confusion of the French civil wars rather than a man who terminated this disorder. In his *Reflections*, he wrote:

For Henry of Navarre was a resolute, active, and politic prince. He possessed indeed great humanity and mildness; but an humanity and mildness that never stood in the way of his interests. He never sought to be loved without putting himself first in a condition to be feared. He used soft language with determined conduct. He asserted and maintained his authority in the gross, and distributed his acts of concession only in the detail. He spent the income of his prerogatives nobly; but he took care not to break in upon the capital; never abandoning for a moment any of the claims, which he made under the fundamental laws, nor sparing to shed the blood of those who opposed him, often in the field, sometimes upon the scaffold. Because he knew how to make his virtues respected by the ungrateful, he has merited the praises of those whom, if they had lived in his time, he would have shut up in the Bastile, and brought to punishment along

⁸⁴ *Reflections*, p. 313.

with the regicides whom he hanged after he had famished Paris into a surrender.⁸⁵

While Henri IV had been popular even during the Revolution, Burke thought that his popularity did not reflect reality and kept his eyes on the cruelty of the monarch. The French translator of the *Reflections*, Pierre-Gaëton Dupont (1762-1817) spotted 'this severe observation'⁸⁶ and asked for some alterations, but Burke did not change his mind. He wrote to Dupont:

How many bloody battles did he fight against the far greater Majority of the people of France? How many Towns did he sack and plunder? Was his Minister and favourite ashamed to take the share of pillage that had fallen into his hands? ... He [Henri IV] had been almost a monster in cruelty, as well as a driveller in policy, if he had done otherwise than he did. But if he was thus indulgent to a few dozens of starving people it cannot be forgotten, that it was he who starved them by hundreds and thousands, before he could be in a condition to <bestow> this scanty mercy to a few of the miserable individuals.⁸⁷

Although Burke approved of the issue of the Edict of Nantes (1598), here he did not mention it as an achievement of Henri IV. His stress was on the

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 306. Burke owned Enrico Caterino Davila, *Histoire des guerres civiles de France* (2 vols., 1657), LC, p. 7; idem, *Historia delle guerre civili di Francia* (2 vols., 1755), LC MS, LC, p. 7; idem, *The History of the Civil Wars of France* ([London], 1678) (LC MS; LC, p. 10); François Eudes de Mézeray, *Histoire de France, depuis Faramond jusqu'à maintenant* (3 vols., Paris, 1643-1651), LC, p. 18; Charles Jean François Hénault, *Nouvel abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France* (Paris, 1752), LC MS; LC, p. 15; Huraut, *Dictionnaire historique de Paris* (4 vols., Paris, 1779), LC, p. 12.

⁸⁶ 'Pierre-Gaëton Dupont to Edmund Burke – [27 October 1790]', in *Corr.*, VI, 144. Voltaire's Henri IV and his view of French history were apparently different from Burke's, but would still be worth a comparison. Progress in society and politics were commenced by Francis I, interrupted by religious wars but revived by Henri IV before slowing down in the government of Louis XIII. See, for example, Diego Venturino, 'Généalogies du Grand Siècle' in *Voltaire et le Grand Siècle*, ed. Jean Dagen and Anne-Sophie Barrovecchio (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2006), p. 7.

⁸⁷ 'Burke to Pierre-Gaëton Dupont (28 October 1790)', in *Corr.*, VI, 147-8. In this letter Burke drew some information from the *Mémoires de Maximilien de Bethume, Duc de Sully ...*, *Mis en ordre, avec des remarques par M.L.D.L.D.L.* (3 vols., London, 1747), which he owned in his private library. See LC MS; LC, 24.

French king during the civil confusion as a man who rather contributed to it. Nevertheless, the civil wars in the late sixteenth century were not fatal to the vital force of France. In the earlier pages of the *Reflections*, he maintained:

It is a thing to be wondered at, to see how very soon France, when she had a moment to respire, recovered and emerged from the longest and most dreadful civil war that ever was known in any nation. Why? Because, among all their massacres, they had not slain the *mind* in their country. A conscious dignity, a noble pride, a generous sense of glory and emulation, was not extinguished. On the contrary, it was kindled and inflamed. The organs also of the state, however shattered, existed. All the prizes of honour and virtue, all the rewards, all the distinctions, remained.⁸⁸

Later in the same work, Burke also traced another historical analogy between 1789 and the Münster Rebellion of the 1530s. 'When the Anabaptists of Munster, in the sixteenth century, had filled Germany with confusion by their system of levelling and their wild opinions concerning property', he wrote, 'to what country in Europe did not the progress of their fury furnish just cause of alarm'?⁸⁹ The contemporary catastrophe taking place before his eyes reminded him of the European past which had struggled with the spirit of 'epidemical fanaticism'. Burke was apparently critical of such religious zealotry and lamented the social disorder caused by it. Here we may add his low view of Phillip II (1527-1598). In his speech on 6 September 1780, Burke stated: 'the bigotry of a free country, and in an enlightened age, would have re-peopled the cities of Flanders, which, in the darkness of two hundred years ago, had been desolated by the superstition of a cruel tyrant. Our manufactures were the growth of the persecutions in

⁸⁸ *Reflections*, pp. 204-5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

the Low Countries'.⁹⁰ The 'cruel tyrant' here is Phillip II, and Burke was probably highly critical of this king's persecution of Calvinism in the Netherlands. Burke was a reader of Robert Watson's *The History of the Reign of Philip the Second, King of Spain* (2 vols., 1777), and he, in his previous speech, clearly regarded the king as a tyrant.⁹¹

Burke's view of the Reformation and of the sixteenth century was similar to that of the Scottish Moderates and his other contemporaries who considered the sixteenth-century reformers as still smeared with the superstitions of Catholic dogmas, although Burke, on the available evidence, did not give this great event the clear-cut status within European history, as Robertson did.⁹² Although his early writings did not touch upon negative aspects of the sixteenth century as often as his later works did, it seems likely that the early Burke already held similar views. While he paid tribute

⁹⁰ 'Speech at Bristol Previous to Election (6 September 1780)', in *WS*, III, 651. In an early manuscript, Burke stated that the people of Ghent had been liable to be furious and unruly during history, despite the fact that it had been an affluent and great manufacturing city. See Burke, 'Considerations on a Militia', p. 652.

⁹¹ 'Speech on Cavendish's Motion on America (6 November 1776)', in *WS*, III, 254-5: 'I have been reading a work given us by a country, that is perpetually employed in productions of merit. — I believe it is not published yet; — the History of Philip the Second, and I there find, that that tyrannical monarch never dreamt of the tyranny exerted by this administration. — Gods! Sir, shall we be told, that you cannot analyze grievances? — that you can have no communication with rebels, because they have declared for independency! — Shall you be told this, when the tyrant Philip did it after the same circumstance in the Netherlands. — By edict he allowed their ships to enter their ports, and suffered them to depart in peace; — he treated with them; — made them propositions; — and positively declared that he would redress all their grievances'. Burke was sent this book by the author and owned it (*LC*, p. 25). The *Annual Register ... for the Year 1776* reviewed this book. Also, see 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', in *WS*, III, 139: 'During the reigns of the kings of Spain of the Austrian family, whenever they were at a loss in the Spanish councils, it was common for their statesmen to say, that they ought to consult the genius of Philip the Second. The genius of Philip the Second might mislead them; and the issue of their affairs shewed, that they had not chosen the most perfect standard'.

⁹² See O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, pp. 141-8; Phillipson, 'Providence and progress: an introduction to the historical thought of William Robertson', in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, pp. 69-70; O'Brien, 'Robertson's place in the development of eighteenth-century narrative history', p. 75; Colin Kidd, 'Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55 (2004), 502-519 (at 513-5).

to some notable individuals, such as Erasmus, it is wrong to assume that he considered that dramatic improvements had taken place between the late fifteenth century and the sixteenth century. Rather, throughout his career, he believed that the general state of Europe had improved only gradually. The sixteenth century was one of the turning points of European history, yet it was still not an age that was fully enlightened.

2.3 Emerging from Barbarism and Confusion? : The Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries

The available evidence for his view of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which is largely about seventeenth-century French politics, seems much more positive, although he was certainly critical of the political ambition and religious persecution of Louis XIV. In their *Account*, for instance, the Burkes were quite favourable to the Cardinal et Duc de Richelieu (1585-1642) and Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683). Although French politics had been full of civil wars and had not previously shown much interest in commerce, Richelieu and Colbert changed the country's direction. The Burkes maintained that the period of Richelieu's dominance must be regarded as the true era of progressive French policy. 'This great man' calmed down domestic affairs, exalted 'the royal authority upon the ruins of the power of the nobility', and modelled a great system of diplomacy, which 'has raised France to such a pitch of greatness'. Richelieu was also well informed about the importance of commerce and of colonies, i.e., 'what serves most effectually to support commerce'.⁹³ During the first half of the seventeenth century, France, which had struggled with civil wars in the previous century, at last achieved substantial progress: the establishment of a powerful monarchy and diplomatic system, and the development of commercial arts. What Richelieu initiated was, however, not completed by

⁹³ *Account*, II, 4.

himself. It was 'that great, wise, and honest minister Colbert, one of the ablest that ever served any prince', who brought Richelieu's plan to perfection, carried his commercial policies in particular into execution and left 'things in such order, that it was not difficult, when favourable circumstances offered, to make France one of the first trading powers in Europe, and her colonies the most powerful, their nature considered, of any in America'.⁹⁴ Commerce finally emerged into the spotlight of history, having being led by such a distinguished politician as Colbert. France was damaged by the War of the Spanish Succession, and her commerce was plunged into a deplorable condition. Nevertheless, she quickly recovered and increased her trade again substantially, despite her engagement in new wars. In contrast, the Netherlands, which had historically grown up to be a great commercial and prosperous country undeterred by her involvement in savage and costly wars, saw her trade shrink during the forty years after the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 when she enjoyed a long period of peace. The Burkes therefore advanced the idea that war could animate national vigour, whereas peace could debilitate it. In more general terms, although all European nations continued to engage in wars during the eighteenth century, they were still able to thrive.⁹⁵

What seventeenth-century France achieved was not only to advance commercial arts. The constitution of the nation also developed during this period. While Burke seems to have believed that the French constitution had been properly founded in 1614,⁹⁶ which saw the last meeting of the Estates General before 1789, the French monarch had become considerably more powerful by the mid seventeenth century. According to Burke, the

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 4-5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 17-18. See also my chapter on the history of the Americas.

⁹⁶ *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *WS*, VIII, 331-2: 'I am constantly of opinion, that your states, in three orders, on the footing on which they stood in 1614, were capable of being brought into a proper and harmonious combination with royal authority'.

French monarchy was historically a great supporter of some republican countries in Europe. Both the Swiss Republic and the Dutch Republic had grown up under French protection. In the Peace of Westphalia (1648), a republican constitution was established in the Holy Roman Empire, which shattered the Habsburg dynasty's 'pretensions' to creating a centralised empire. Nevertheless, this did not mean that the French government had allowed a republican system to develop within France. Through these political actions, the French monarchy was rather consolidated. Although the monarchy in France substantially contributed to establishing Protestantism in Germany in the seventeenth century, especially with the Treaty of Westphalia, this monarchy under Louis XIII had destroyed 'the republican system of the Protestants at home', i.e., the Huguenots who had adopted a defiant attitude towards royal authority.⁹⁷

The mid seventeenth century to the early eighteenth century was, in fact, a period when the system of international relations in Europe was founded. In his writings of the 1790s, chiefly in order to assert that revolutionary France was destroying the European diplomatic system, he often referred to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the Treaty of Utrecht (1713). The former, dominated by France, established the independence of the German states and a measure of religious toleration in Europe. France was 'the author of the treaty'⁹⁸ and 'the Protector of the three religions', i.e., Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism.⁹⁹ The latter, which Burke regarded as 'one of the fundamental treaties that compose the publick law of Europe', prevented the ambitions for universal monarchy of Louis XIV, by concluding that no part of the Spanish dominion in the West Indies should

⁹⁷ *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 291.

⁹⁸ *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 351. See also, *ibid.*, in *WS*, VIII, 348-9.

⁹⁹ 'Letter to William Elliot (26 May 1795)', in *WS*, IX, 36.

be ceded to France.¹⁰⁰ Burke denounced revolutionary France for destroying the established order of early modern Europe.

Despite the fact that he admitted that the constitution, commerce and science had advanced in France (as will be seen below), Burke was also highly critical of some aspects of France in this period. In particular, he vehemently censured the political ambitions and religious persecution of Louis XIV, although acknowledging the rise of learning, arts and wealth in France during his reign. As early as 1765, Burke, in his *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws*, denounced the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in October 1685. Criticising the Penal Laws in Ireland and seeking an historical analogy, he declared: 'of all the instances of this sort of legislative artifice, and of the principles that produced it, I never met with any which made a stronger impression on me, than that of Louis XIVth, in the revocation of the Edict of Nantz'.¹⁰¹ His notion of religious toleration, which was already conspicuous in his early works, naturally led to his criticism of Louis's decision to renew the persecution of the French Huguenots. This act of revocation, he argued, 'threw so dark a cloud over all the splendour of a

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 274-5. See also *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 96: 'When this war ended (I cannot stay now to examine how) the object of the war was the object of the Treaty. When it was found impracticable, or less desirable than before, wholly to exclude a branch of the Bourbon race from that immense succession, the point of Utrecht was to prevent the mischiefs to arise from the influence of the greater upon the lesser branch. His Lordship is a great Member of the Diplomattick Body; he has of course all the fundamental Treaties, which make the publick Statute Law of Europe, by heart; and indeed no active Member of Parliament ought to be ignorant of their general tenor and leading provisions. In the Treaty, which closed that war, and of which it is a fundamental part, because relating to the whole Policy of the Compact, it was agreed, that Spain should not give any thing from her territory in the West Indies to France. This Article, apparently onerous to Spain, was in truth highly beneficial'. Burke vehemently condemned that this had been breached by revolutionary France and Spain of that time. See also Bk P 25/32, where Burke wrote: 'I look upon her [Spain's] Breach of a Treaty which makes one of the great pillars of the publick Law of Europe, I mean her Breach of the Treaty of Utrecht in the surrender her Share of Hispaniola to the French Regicides to be no other than the effect of that Servitude, in which that State, and every state which allies itself with this commonwealth of Robbers is held'.

¹⁰¹ *Tracts relating to Popery Laws* (1765), in *WS*, IX, 459.

most illustrious reign'.¹⁰² In another early writing, Burke also claimed that the emigration of these skilful refugees to England contributed to the progress of the English economy.¹⁰³ In his later political speeches in the Commons, he drew more attention to Louis's vast military and political despotism. In his great 'Speech on Economical Reform' (1780), he stated: 'I am not in dread of the gallant spirit of its brave and numerous nobility: I am not alarmed even at the great navy which has been so miraculously created. All these things Louis the fourteenth had before'.¹⁰⁴ This was followed by his criticism of the lack of public credit in the French financial system. In his first speech on the French Revolution, he also maintained:

In the last century, Louis the Fourteenth had established a greater and better disciplined military force than ever had been before seen in Europe, and with it a perfect despotism. Though that despotism was proudly arrayed in manners, gallantry, splendour, magnificence, and even covered over with the imposing robes of science, literature, and arts, it was, in government, nothing better than a painted and gilded tyranny; in religion, an hard stern intolerance, the fit companion and auxiliary to the despotic tyranny which prevailed in its government.¹⁰⁵

While being critical of a king tyrannical in politics and intolerant in religion, Burke nevertheless acknowledged the growth of arts, manners and science during Louis's reign. In a significant passage in the *Reflections*,

¹⁰² Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 460.

¹⁰³ *Annual Register ... for the Year 1763* (London, 1764), p. 3. Here Burke tried to understand the situation in China in the seventeenth century with the analogy to the French case: 'On the conquest of China by the Tartars, in the last century, great numbers fled their country, filling all the considerable towns, not only of the Philippines, but of the Moluccas and Sunda islands, with an ingenious and industrious people, who brought with them, and diffused into all these countries, the skill of manufacture and the spirit of commerce. The conquest of China had nearly the same effect in this part of the world, which the revocation of the edict of Nantes produced in ours'.

¹⁰⁴ See *Speech on Economical Reform* (1780), in *WS*, III, 488.

¹⁰⁵ Burke, *Substance of the Speech of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, in the Debate on the Army Estimates, in the House of Commons, On Tuesday, the 9th Day of February, 1790*, pp. 9-10.

where he wrote about the dreadful union between the monied interest and the political men of letters, he did not fail to refer to Louis's patronage of these intellectuals.¹⁰⁶ As the French Revolution advanced, Burke continued to stress the threat posed by the French revolutionaries and insisted on the need for military intervention in French affairs. He insisted that the present crisis was worthy of comparison with that brought to Europe by Louis XIV and that British and European intervention would be as justified now as it had been in the previous century. In his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), he wrote: 'The princes of Europe, in the beginning of this century, did well not to suffer the monarchy of France to swallow up the others. They ought not now, in my opinion, to suffer all the monarchies and commonwealths to be swallowed up in the gulph of this polluted anarchy'.¹⁰⁷ Although monarchy was a form of government well suited to France, Burke, as a Whig, was naturally critical of the absolutism of Louis XIV. He now drew more attention to international relations in Europe in the early eighteenth century. In his *First Letter to a Regicide Peace* (1796), he insisted: 'If to prevent Louis the XIVth from imposing his religion was just, a war to prevent the murderers of Louis XVIth from imposing their irreligion upon us is just'.¹⁰⁸ Although Louis XIV's ambitions were dangerous enough, Burke knew that they had not succeeded. Burke's view of Louis XIV was close to the typical view held by his British contemporaries. Although he was a reader of Voltaire and Hume, unlike them, he did not

¹⁰⁶ See *Reflections*, p. 275: 'Along with the monied interest, a new description of men had grown up, with whom that interest soon formed a close and marked union; I mean the political Men of Letters. Men of Letters, fond of distinguishing themselves, are rarely averse to innovation. Since the decline of the life and greatness of Lewis the XIVth, they were not so much cultivated either by him, or by the regent, or the successors to the crown; nor were they engaged to the court by favours and emoluments so systematically as during the splendid period of that ostentatious and not impolitic reign'.

¹⁰⁷ *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791) in *WS*, VIII, 306.

¹⁰⁸ *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 238. See also David Armitage, 'Edmund Burke and Reason of State', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 61 (2000), 617-634 (at 631n).

applaud Louis by arguing that the great monarch had stabilised internal politics and promoted the industry of the French people.¹⁰⁹

His comments on the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries centred on French affairs, and he barely referred to the other countries in Europe. Nevertheless, Burke certainly believed, for instance, that the Polish constitution had been defective for ages up to this period, chiefly due to the Polish nobility's unique parliamentary device, the *Liberum veto*.¹¹⁰ He was also probably critical of the politics and constitution of Russia, a country usually considered as one of the European powers in the eighteenth century. In the 1762 volume of the *Annual Register*, he contended that 'that extensive part of the world was drawn out of barbarism' by the institutions of Peter the Great (1672-1725).¹¹¹ Here it seems that Burke was favourable to the historical introduction of European manners and institutions to the country. Almost thirty years later, writing to Catherine II (1729-96), he also maintained that the introduction of European manners had civilised the Russian Empire: 'The Debt, which your Imperial Majesty's august Predecessors have contracted to the ancient manners of Europe, by means of which they civilized a vast Empire, will be nobly repaid, by preserving those manners from the hideous change with which they are now menaced'.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, pp. 67-8. See also, J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (5 vols., to date. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999-), II, 137; N.R. Johnson, 'Louis XIV and the Age of Enlightenment: The Myth of the Sun King from 1715-1789', *Studies of Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 172 (1978), 1-350.

¹¹⁰ In his *Thoughts on the French Affairs*, Burke maintained: 'It is not to be imagined because a political system is, under certain aspects, very unwise in it's contrivance, and very mischievous in it's effects, that it therefore can have no long duration. It's very defects may tend to it's stability, because they are agreeable to it's nature. The very faults in the constitution of Poland made it last; the *veto* which destroyed all it's energy preserved it's life'. See *Thoughts on the French Affairs* (1791), in *WS*, VIII, 368. Burke was generally critical of Polish politics. See *Vindication*, in *WS*, I, 159-160; *Annual Register ... for the Year 1763* (London, 1764), p. 45.

¹¹¹ The country, however, 'began perceivably to decay, until her [the Empress Elizabeth (reign 1741-62)] accession to the throne'. See *Annual Register ... for the Year 1762* (London, 1763), p. 11.

¹¹² 'Burke to the Empress of Russia (1 November 1791)', in *Corr.*, VI, 444.

This was, however, only part of his views on Russian history and society. In the same volume of the *Annual Register*, Burke also argued: ‘The regular succession which has been so often broken, and the great change of manners [i.e. the introduction of European manners by Peter the Great], which in less than a century has been introduced, have left in Russia a weakness amidst all the appearance of strength, and a great facility to sudden and dangerous revolutions’.¹¹³ Moreover, in a letter of 1774, Burke wrote: ‘Russia seems to me still to retain though under European forms and names too much of the Asiatick Sprit in its Government and manners to be long well poised and secure within itself’.¹¹⁴ Even if the introduction of European manners contributed to civilising the country, Russia still contained heterogeneous elements and her politics remained unstable and fragile.

As Poland and Russia were not regarded by him as major powers in Europe, his views on these countries were not immediately related to his evaluation of the general state of Europe. Although Burke may well have seen European-wide events around this period such as the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) as another example of political confusion or an explosion of barbarism, there is almost no evidence for his views on this great historical event.¹¹⁵ In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, given the improving science and commerce, in addition to an international order established by the treaties of Westphalia and Utrecht, Europe was evidently

¹¹³ See *Annual Register ... for the Year 1762* (London, 1763), p. 17.

¹¹⁴ ‘Burke to [Adrian Heinrich von] Borcke [post 17 January 1774]’, in *Corr.*, II, 514. See also *Annual Register ... for the Year 1765* (London, 1766), p. 5, where the author maintained that Russia had been embedded in religious and civil prejudice: ‘The head of the former [Catherine II of Russia], wisely considering, that as much as it may be her duty to deserve, it is, considering her want of an hereditary, or even elective title, as much her interest to win, the affections of her subjects, not only shews the greatest desire to make them happy, but endeavours it by such means as may not too glaringly clash with their deep-rooted prejudices either civil or religious; a method of proceeding suited only to such a sovereign as her predecessor Peter the Great, whose pretensions to the crown were themselves supported by these prejudices’.

¹¹⁵ Burke referred to it in his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (*WS*, IX, p. 229), but did not examine in detail.

moving towards a civilised state. As such Europe might already have been no longer a region of barbarism or confusion, but this was not exactly what Burke said. If we try to reveal his evaluation of the general state of Europe of this period, there are obvious limitations in the evidence at our disposal.

2.4 Towards the Late Eighteenth Century and the French Revolution Situating in the Context of History

Although Burke's Europe was full of barbarism and confusion, at least until the sixteenth century, he found several elements in these centuries pointing towards a modern society. Roman law, Christianity and the principle of chivalry, in particular, provided the foundations for the prosperity achieved in the modern era. While some great events such as the discovery of America and the Reformation were certainly significant steps towards the development of modern Europe, the age when these events occurred was still full of confusion and disorder. In France, the late sixteenth century witnessed civil wars and the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw the growth of Louis XIV's absolutism and religious intolerance. Nevertheless, the civil wars never destroyed the foundations of French society, and the political and economic system had considerably advanced since the early seventeenth century, and the growth of various arts took place during Louis XIV's reign. French history had experienced ebbs and flows, but its society had, by the late eighteenth century, reached an advanced stage of development.¹¹⁶ The fact that the French population had continued to grow from the late seventeenth century up to the late

¹¹⁶ See *First Letter*, in *WS*, IX, 190: 'Such, and often influenced by such causes, has commonly been the fate of Monarchies of long duration. They have their ebbs and their flows. This has been eminently the fate of the Monarchy of France. There have been times in which no Power has ever been brought so low. Few have ever flourished in greater glory. By turns elevated and depressed, that Power had been, on the whole, rather on the encrease; and it continued not only powerful but formidable to the hour of the total ruin of the Monarchy'.

eighteenth century proved the soundness of French politics, ¹¹⁷ however absolute its government system was.

According to Burke, monarchy was a fundamental part of the constitution of France, and a republican form of government did not suit the nation. While 'France had been always taken and understood as a Monarchy', the nation had been powerful and prosperous under this form of government.¹¹⁸ The royal authority had been in harmony with the three estates composed of the clergy, the nobility and the commoners on the foundation made in 1614. In fact, this 'constitution by estates, was the natural, and only just representation of France. It grew out of the habitual conditions, relations, and reciprocal claims of men. It grew out of the circumstances of the country, and out of the state of property'.¹¹⁹ Although Burke certainly believed that the French constitution under the old regime had been far from an ideal¹²⁰ and inferior to the British one, it was also true

¹¹⁷ In his *Reflections*, he referred to a French census ordered in the early eighteenth century, and to Jacques Necker's and Richard Price's estimates rather approvingly and argued for increase in the population of France: 'I think the population of France was by them, even at that period [1730], estimated at twenty-two millions of souls. At the end of the last century it had been generally calculated at eighteen. On either of these estimations France was not ill-peopled. Mr. Necker, who is an authority for his own time at least equal to the Intendants for theirs, reckons, and upon apparently sure principles, the people of France, in the year 1780, at twenty-four millions six hundred and seventy thousand. ... I certainly defer to Dr. Price's authority a good deal more in these speculations, than I do in his general politics. ... After abating much (and much I think ought to be abated) from the sanguine calculation of Dr. Price, I have no doubt that the population of France did increase considerably during this later period: but supposing that it increased to nothing more than will be sufficient to compleat the 24,670,000 to 25 millions, still a population of 25 millions, and that in an increasing progress, on a space of about twenty-seven thousand square leagues, is immense'. See *Reflections*, p. 296. Burke owned Necker's *De l'Administration des Finances de la France* (3 vols., [Paris], 1784). See LC MS.

¹¹⁸ 'Burke to Richard Burke, JR (18 August 1791)', in *Corr.*, VI, 359. See also *Appeal*.

¹¹⁹ *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *WS*, VIII, 331-2.

¹²⁰ For instance, see 'Burke to Captain Thomas Mercer (26 February 1790)', in *Corr.*, VI, 97. In this letter, Burke described the government before 1789 as 'abusive'. See also 'Speech on Public Expenses (15 December 1779)', in *WS*, III, 469. Commending Jacques Necker's economic reform, Burke once stated that the national finance in France had not previously been well managed: 'The keeping this supply in reserve by France, is the work of œconomy, — of œconomy, in the Court formerly the most prodigal, and in an

that he acknowledged that this constitution had been a product of history which was well developed and well suited to the circumstances of the nation.

Burke also surely believed that not only France, but also Europe at large, had gradually achieved real progress and that his age was the highest point of history. He once declared: 'In the long series of ages which have furnished the matter of history, never was so beautiful and so august a spectacle presented to the moral eye, as Europe afforded the day before the revolution in France'.¹²¹ By having said this way, late eighteenth-century Europe was firmly placed in his view of history. Although Burke was convinced that the prosperity of his own age rested upon the ancient manners and political systems of Europe, this did not mean that the prosperity had been achieved as the result of any blueprints. As he stated in his *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 'The State of the Christian World have grown up to their present magnitude in a great length of time, and by a great variety of accidents ... Not one of them has been formed upon a regular plan or with any unity of design'.¹²²

The liberty and prosperity of modern Europe was seriously threatened by the outbreak of the French Revolution, and so this revolution was incorporated in Burke's overall view of history with his recognition that the French Revolution brought to the world something wholly new in history. On 21 September 1791, for instance, he wrote to Lord Grenville: 'The present Situation of affairs is so singularly favourable to the Cause of the oppressed Party in France, that I do not believe, there has been a similar

administration of finance the most disorderly and corrupt. Absolute monarchies have been usually the seats of dissipation and profusion; republics of order and good management. France appears to be improved'.

¹²¹ *Letter to William Elliot* (26 May 1795), in *WS*, IX, 39. Burke was, nevertheless, highly critical of the political system of Poland. See also, *Reflections*, p. 241: 'Europe undoubtedly, taken in a mass, was in a flourishing condition the day on which your Revolution was compleated'.

¹²² See *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 287. In their *Account*, the Burkes made the same point for the colonies of British North America. See my chapter on the history of the Americas.

conjuncture in the History of Europe'.¹²³ Almost three months later, he also stated: 'A Combination of things has taken place unprecedented in the annals of Europe'.¹²⁴ A similar statement is found in his *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791), where he further generalised his claim. According to him, the current state of France must not be judged by what has been observed anywhere else. The situation did not resemble that of any other country at all: 'Analogical reasoning from history or from recent experience in other places is wholly delusive'.¹²⁵ That is to say, something utterly new in history was occurring in France. Two years later, he again returned to the same point, but put forward more specific reasons:

There are some fundamental points in which nature never changes — but they are few and obvious, and belong rather to morals than to politicks. But so far as regards political matter, the human mind and human affairs are susceptible of infinite modifications, and of combinations wholly new and unlooked for. Very few, for instance, could have imagined that property, which has been taken for natural dominion, should, through the whole of a vast kingdom, lose all its importance and even its influence. This is what history or books of speculation could hardly have taught us.¹²⁶

What he particularly had in mind was the confiscation of the churches' property and the issuing of the *assignat*, as a form of paper money. In 1796, in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, he repeated this opinion with an odd historical example:

¹²³ 'Burke to Lord Grenville (21 September 1791)', in *Corr.*, VI, 407.

¹²⁴ 'Burke to the Archbishop of Nisibis (14 December 1791)', in *Corr.*, VI, 458.

¹²⁵ *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 367.

¹²⁶ *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *WS*, VIII, 498. See also Pocock, 'Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', in *idem*, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, pp. 193-212. This is one of the passages in which Burke declared the uselessness of history at considering the contemporary political situations.

In the French Revolution every thing is new; and, from want of preparation to meet so unlooked for an evil, every thing is dangerous. Never, before this time, was a set of literary men, converted into a gang of robbers and assassins. Never before, did a den of bravoës and banditti, assume the garb and tone of an academy of philosophers. ... The men of property in France confiding in a force, which seemed to be irresistible, because it had never been tried, neglected to prepare for a conflict with their enemies at their own weapons. They were found in such a situation as the Mexicans were, when they were attacked by the dogs, the cavalry, the iron, and the gunpowder of an handful of bearded men, whom they did not know to exist in nature.¹²⁷

Burke referred to the case of 'the Mexicans' in order to maintain that an extraordinary thing had happened in France. Moreover, in his *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), he referred to Louis XVI as 'a diligent reader of history' to make the same point: 'but nobody told him ... that the world of which he read, and the world in which he lived, were no longer the same'.¹²⁸ Burke at times tried to convince his readers of the extraordinary nature of the French Revolution, which was, as a consequence, firmly placed in his overall view of history.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Burke's view of European history more comprehensively than any commentator has previously attempted. The first section treated the period from the ancient era to the fourteenth century. In that period, much of ancient Europe was full of barbarism and ignorance, but the Romans were the exception. Burke's mentions of ancient Rome, on various occasions, show that he basically saw it as a civilised society, although he was aware of its defects and he occasionally referred to it as less civilised than late eighteenth-century Britain or Europe. After the

¹²⁷ *Letter to a Noble Lord*, in *WS*, IX, 174-5.

¹²⁸ *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 290-1.

collapse of Rome, Europe in his opinion fell into complete darkness. Nevertheless, Burke characteristically looked upon Christianity and chivalry, as well as the civil institutions of Rome, as significant foundations for the later development of modern Europe.

Although the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had experienced significant events, such as the discovery of the new world and the Reformation, which were eventually to bring progress, Europe at this time was still subject to considerable instability. There were not yet sufficient developments in commerce, learning and polite manners. The Reformation, despite its sublime spirit and noble principles, caused social confusion and terrible wars of religion. His descriptions of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were frequently more positive, but they were mainly concerned with the affairs in France, not about the general state of Europe, although he highly valued the international order established by the treaties of Westphalia and Utrecht. Burke did not examine some important events in this period such as the Thirty Years' War in any detail. It seems, therefore, unclear what he thought about the state of Europe as a whole.

During the course of history, Europe, as a whole, had gradually achieved real progress and the late eighteenth century was the highest point of development so far reached. This prosperity, however, was being plunged into a great crisis caused by the French Revolution, which was an event totally unparalleled in previous history.

Chapter Three

The History of the Americas: Expanding and Renewing Manners

Burke had several opportunities to acquire knowledge of the Americas during his career. In the summer of 1756, the early Burke collaborated with William Burke in bringing out an *Account of the European Settlements in America*,¹ and he learned a great deal about the Americas through his commitment to this work. The *Account* was published anonymously in two volumes in 1757. At this time, Britain and France were still engaged in continual wars, and the circumstances of the time offered the Burkes a chance to expand their literary careers and solve their financial problems. Largely a work about the historical aspects of the Americas, the *Account* is an obvious source for this chapter. It is also almost the only work of Burke's which examined the histories of Mexico and Peru. Without this work, it is not possible to pursue the theme, 'Burke's view of the history of the Americas'. His substantial contribution to *The Annual Register* was another opportunity to deepen his knowledge of America. In particular, in having to write its first substantial essay on recent events, which often reported and analysed the situation in North America, because of the Anglo-French conflicts there during the Seven Years' War, Burke needed to compile materials from newspapers and other printed sources. His early literary career also helped him to commit himself to American affairs after entering parliament. As a leading spokesman for the Rockingham Whigs, who took a great interest in the American crisis of the 1760s onwards, Burke tackled American affairs and opposed government policies on the American colonies. A series of his parliamentary speeches argued for conciliating the colonies and led him to be called 'a friend of America'. From December 1770 to August 1775, Burke also served as the colonial agent for the legislative

¹The date of composition of the *Account* can be estimated as the summer of 1756 by the internal evidence of the work. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 129.

assembly of New York and he was repeatedly informed of their grievances against the British government during these years.² Although Burke did not have any first-hand knowledge of the American colonies, nevertheless, few British politicians seem to have worked harder than he did to keep themselves informed about American affairs. While his historical vision of British North America was often deployed in order to support his political arguments, these are interesting in themselves and are worthy of careful analysis.

This chapter deals with Burke's view of the history of the Americas, i.e., the histories of both North and South America. In doing so, the *Account* is a key source, but there is the problem of its authorship. The first section addresses this problem as well as the sources upon which this work relied. In section two, the historical descriptions of the European settlements in the Americas in the *Account* are examined in order to reveal their characteristics. Burke's view of the histories of the American Indians and of British North America are discussed in section three and four respectively.

3.1 Authorship and Sources of the *Account of the European Settlements in America*

The authorship of the *Account* has been considered as problematic, and this work has not always been regarded as Edmund Burke's, since it was believed to have been written largely by William Burke. A letter from James Boswell to William Temple on 3 May 1779 claims that Edmund denied authorship: 'It is an erroneous report that he wrote the *European Settlements*: he told me he did not, a friend of his did, and he revised it'.³ Boswell also recorded that Burke, in 1782, told him: 'I revised it' and 'do not

² For this, especially, see Hoffman, *Edmund Burke, New York Agent with his letters to the New York Assembly and intimate correspondence with Charles O'Hara 1761-1776*.

³ *Letters of James Boswell*, ed. C.B. Tinker (2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), II, 285.

say that there is nothing in it by me'.⁴ In another letter to Temple, on 28 November 1789, Boswell again wrote, 'Burke said to me 'I did not write it; I do not deny that a friend did, and I revised it''. This time he also referred to Edmond Malone's words. Malone was one contemporary who did not believe Burke's denial. Boswell wrote: 'Malone tells me that it was written by Will. Burke, the cousin of Edmund, when they were in Wales, but it is every where evident that Burke himself contributed a great deal to it'.⁵ Later, in his biography of Burke, James Prior also insisted that 'there is ... no question but that he [Burke] wrote, if not the whole of it, at least by far the greater part', although he did not know that Burke's denial of the authorship existed in Boswell's letters.⁶ Despite his awareness of Burke's disclaimers, Thomas Macknight still believed that 'much, if not all, is indisputably his [Edmund Burke's] composition'.⁷

Given these available testimonies and the text of the *Account*, how should we treat this particular work? First of all, the *Account* should not be ignored and is worth serious examination in this chapter. This is because, first, it evidently contains a substantial discussion of the history of the Americas, second, Burke may have 'contributed' (by any means, and to whatever extent) to this work, and, third, several 'Burkean' ideas are found in the work. It is hard, however, to confirm the exact authorship or the attribution of opinions in this work. If Burke's reported words are trustworthy, it would be impossible to attribute the work solely to Edmund, but, at the same time, it may very likely be that he substantially committed himself to the project and contributed to the process of its composition, since

⁴ *The Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle*, ed. G. Scott and F.A. Pottle (London, 1928-1936), II, 286. See also Michael Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996), p. 87.

⁵ *Letters of James Boswell*, II, 387; Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self*, p. 87. See also Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 127-130; Boswell's Journal, 5 May 1776, in *The Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle*, XI, pp. 268-9.

⁶ Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 66.

⁷ Thomas Macknight, *History of the Life and Times of Edmund Burke* (3 vols., London, 1858-60), I, 105.

Burke over and again stated (or, was reported as saying) that he 'revised it'. If Burke told Boswell the truth, William must have written more of the work than Edmund did. It is, however, difficult to confirm to which particular parts of the work Burke contributed, as it is not clear what 'revised it' exactly means. There is also the possibility that Burke largely shared the opinions of the work with William, even if the person who actually wrote it was William. In this chapter, it is assumed that the *Account* is a collaborative work (the term 'the Burkes' or 'the authors' is therefore used below) and that the Burkes shared the views expressed in the work with each other. This is an assumption which may or may not be true, but later the case in which this assumption is not made will also be briefly considered.

In terms of the sources which the *Account* relied upon, *Navigantium atque itinerantium bibliotheca, or A Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels*, edited by John Campbell, is the only one, which was mentioned in the preface of the work. The authors acknowledged that their section on Brazilian history (that is, Portuguese America) owed much to this work, although the accounts of the French and English settlements in the work did not satisfy them.⁸ For their account of the Dutch occupation of Brazil or to describe the method of cultivation of tobacco, for example, the authors consulted Campbell's detailed account of it.⁹ The Burkes also relied upon some other important contemporary sources. As well as Campbell's *Collection*, they mostly used Amédée Francois Frézier's *Voyage to the South-Sea, and along the Coasts of Chili and Peru, in the years 1712, 1713, and*

⁸ *Account*, I, 'preface'. See also, *ibid.*, II, 21-2. The Burkes reckoned that the production of the Caribbean islands in the French settlements was underestimated in the *Complete Collection*, although it is obvious that they highly valued the work in general.

⁹ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 128; *Account*, I, 293-4, II, 207-8; John Campbell, *Navigantium atque itinerantium bibliotheca. Or, a Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels. Consisting of above Six Hundred of the Most Authentic Writers* (2 vols., London, [1744]-48), II, 174-181, 229-30. Campbell's name does not appear on the title page as this was published as a revised version of a compilation by John Harris (Harris's name was on the title page). Here I follow F.P. Lock to treat this work as a new work edited by Campbell.

1714. (London, 1717; originally published in French in 1716) to discuss the situation on the west coast of South America. Some other minor sources were, however, referenced for this, including Richard Walter's *A Voyage round the World* (1748), Charles-Marie de la Condamine's *Succinct Abridgement of a Voyage Made within the Inland Parts of South America* (1747; first published in French, 1745) and an article in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society, 18 (1694), 78-100.¹⁰ They depended heavily upon Joseph-Francois Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages ameriquains* (1724) in examining the manners and character of the native Indians. This source is also proof that the authors could read French, since this book was not translated into English until recently.¹¹ Daniel Neal's *The History of New-England, Containing an Impartial Account of the Civil and Ecclesiastical Affairs of the Country, to ... 1700* (2nd edn., 1747) was perhaps their chief source for the Salem trials.¹² The authors also referred to William Douglass's *A Summary, Historical and Political, of the ... British Settlements in North-America* (1749-51) for population figures in New England.¹³ These sources are significant in attempting to situate the *Account* in the context of contemporary accounts of the Americas.

3.2 European Settlements in the Americas

In the *Account*, the Burkes put forward historical descriptions of the European discovery of, and settlements in, the Americas. In the following, it is argued that there are several characteristics of their descriptions: their attention to the role of particular individuals and of divine providence,

¹⁰ Burke owned La Condamine's *Succinct Abridgement of a Voyage Made within the Inland Parts of South America*. See *LC*, p. 5.

¹¹ Joseph-Francois Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians compared with the Customs of Primitive Times* by Father Lafitau, ed. W.N. Fenton and E.L. Moore (2 vols., Toronto, 1974).

¹² Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 133n.

¹³ *Account*, II, 162.

Burkean ideas on the influence of the Christian religion, their interest and analysis of political economy of the colonies and the authors' tendency toward generalisation.

One of the most obvious characteristics of their narrative was their particular attention to the role of 'great men' in American history.¹⁴ In the beginning of the *Account*, writing about the European discovery of the Americas, the Burkes devoted the first eight chapters of the work to the character of Christopher Columbus (1451-1506). Columbus was the first important individual mentioned in the *Account*, and the authors described him as an enlightened figure who broke new ground for European nations. In contrast to this great man, however, the state of Europe was far from being enlightened.¹⁵ Columbus was a person who 'undertook to extend the boundaries which ignorance had given to the world'.¹⁶ Persuading people about the necessity of his projects, he had to fight against their inveterate prejudices and ignorance: 'His whole time was spent in fruitless endeavours to enlighten ignorance, to remove prejudice, and to vanquish that obstinate incredulity, which is of all others the greatest enemy to improvement'. The authors, however, depicted Queen Isabel as a great supporter of Columbus, whereas they were not favourable to King Ferdinand.¹⁷ In his second voyage, Columbus used his cavalry to fight against the American Indians. While the Indians were savages who believed horses could fly, the enlightened Columbus 'did not rely upon these prejudices, though he made all imaginable use of them'.¹⁸ The Burkes' Columbus was a clever, brave, and tactful figure. One of the most significant aspects of his character is, however, his treatment of the natives:

¹⁴ For this, see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 138-140; Nelson, 'A Map of Mankind', pp. 153-5.

¹⁵ See my chapter on European history.

¹⁶ *Account*, I, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 8: 'It must not be omitted here, in honour to the sex, and in justice to Isabella, that this scheme was first countenanced, and the equipment made by the queen only; the king had no share in it'.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 22.

But the circumstances of Columbus, the measures he was obliged to preserve with his court, and his humane and gentle treatment of this people, by which he mitigated the rigour of this conquest, take off much of the blame from him, as the necessity of taking up arms at all never arose from his conduct, or from his orders. On the contrary, his whole behaviour both to the Spaniards and Indians, the care he took to establish the one without injury to the other, and the constant bent of his policy to work every thing by gentle methods, may well be an example to all persons in the same situation.¹⁹

This is a very Burkean idea of conquest, which Edmund himself was to advance in his later works on British colonial America, India and Ireland. The authors of the *Account* put forward the same idea in discussing the slave trade. Conquest is a natural activity in history, but the conquerors have to treat the conquered with humanity and mercy.

The Burkes' Columbus was also a very able seaman. When the pilots became lost on the voyage across the Atlantic, Columbus correctly predicted where they were: 'This, added to a series of predictions and noble discoveries, made his skill seem something prophetic, and exalted his character in this respect above all the seamen before his time'. When many seamen mutinied, Columbus was quite tactful in dealing with the problem. In addition, he, actually, predicted the eclipse of the moon and showed it to the Indians:

By this mutiny the admiral's authority and strength was considerably weakened, whilst the natives were exasperated by the disorders of the mutineers; but Columbus found means to recover his authority, at least among the Indians. Knowing there would shortly be a visible eclipse of the moon, he summoned the principal persons in the island; and by one who understood their language told them that the God whom he served, and who created and preserves all things in heaven and earth, provoked at their refusing to support his servants, intended a speedy and severe judgment upon them, of which they should shortly see

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 31-32.

manifest tokens in the heavens, for that the moon would, on the night he marked, appear of a bloody hue, an emblem of the destruction that was preparing for them. His prediction, which was ridiculed for the time, when it came to be accomplished struck the barbarians with great terror.²⁰

Columbus here was a man who possessed a scientific mind. The authors of the *Account* described Columbus as embodying the virtues of a great man of Enlightenment: 'In his character hardly is any one of the components of a truly great man wanting'.²¹ The character of Columbus, the authors stressed, 'was extremely different from that of all with whom he dealt, and from that of most of those who pursued his discoveries and conquests'.²² The Burkes' image of Columbus was similar to that found in other works of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.²³ Even in the sixteenth century, Las Casas looked upon Columbus as a rational and scientific-minded man, but Las Casas's Columbus was at the same time a divine agent. Columbus as a man who came to the New World to achieve the divine plan was gradually replaced by Columbus as a man of more modern and rational spirit. William Robertson's Columbus, for example, was no longer the agent of providence.²⁴

The character of Columbus was an ideal one for the Burkes, but the conqueror of the Aztec empire, Cortez, although regarded as an able soldier, did not share Columbus's disinterested spirit. Addressing the discovery and conquest of Mexico, the Burkes chiefly focused on the interaction between Montezuma, 'prince of capacity and courage, but artful, hypocritical, and

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 53-54.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I, 59.

²² *Ibid.*, I, 59.

²³ See Nelson, 'A Map of Mankind', pp. 159-160; Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World* (New Haven; London : Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 89-115.

²⁴ Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, pp. 96-7, 100.

cruel',²⁵ and Cortez. One of the reasons why Cortez was able to conquer the country was that he made use of Montezuma's 'irresolute disposition'.²⁶

In their narrative regarding the Inca empire of Peru, which was the only other 'civilised' country established in the Americas by native peoples, there are also some key figures who dominate the Burkes' narrative. In fact, the description of the character of the conquerors of Peru is remarkable. Francis Pizarro possessed 'a penetrating sagacity into the nature of man', but was not commended by the authors so much, because of his 'craft and dissimulation'. Diego de Almagro was given much higher praise: he was not only brave and tough, but also 'patient, laborious, and temperate'. While not avaricious, he was cruel, like all the other adventurers to America, but this 'was much mitigated by the intercourse he had with an Indian woman'. The Burkes' praise of the first king of Peru, Mango Capac, is also worth noting. Capac was 'a prince of great genius' and shaped his country by subtle means. He discovered the superstitious nature of the Peruvian people, made use of their veneration of the sun and 'pretended that he was descended from that luminary'.²⁷ This tactic may remind readers of Columbus' taking advantage of the eclipse of the moon. Although largely relying upon military force to conquer the country, he succeeded in uniting and civilising 'the dispersed and barbarous people'. He made the people obey laws and support arts, and he improved their manners by introducing 'the institutions of a benevolent religion'. As a result, the character of the Peruvians became industrious and ingenious, and also developed 'a soft unwarlike temper'.²⁸ In the Americas, they were the only people who entirely obeyed royal authority and also made substantial advances in agriculture and arts. They did not, however, bring their arts to perfection and were inclined to superstition. The Burkes'

²⁵ *Account*, I, 68.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 71.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 128-129.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 129-130. The Peruvians 'seem to have had a strong resemblance to the ancient Egyptians'.

depiction of the Peruvians had much in common with that presented by many of their contemporaries. For Robertson as well, Capac was an able leader who helped civilise the country.²⁹ The people, different from the savage or the atrocious Mexicans, did not have barbarous manners, and the Incas conquered other countries 'in order to reclaim and civilize the vanquished, and to diffuse the knowledge of their own institutions and arts'. Their moderate manners resembled those of civilised nations and 'must be ascribed ... to the genius of their religion'.³⁰ At the end of their history of Peru, the authors added another two interesting depictions of historical figures: Cristóbal Vaca di Castro (1492-1566) and Pedro de la Gasca (1485-1567?), to both of whom the Burkes were favourable. Again, their characters reflected the authors' characterisation of ideal historical figures: disinterestedness and a diligent contribution to mankind. In particular, Castro was aware of the important role of religion and the clergy and tried to promote the conversion of the Indians. He also founded several towns, supported education and improved the royal revenues.³¹

In their discussion of the French settlements in North America (part five of the *Account*), the Burkes again highlighted the role of leading individuals. Although France began to attempt to make a settlement in North America

²⁹ William Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, IX, 203.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, IX, 209-210. See also the *Annual Register for the Year 1777* (London, 1778), p. 218. The editor, at length reviewing and largely commending Robertson's *History of America*, wrote: 'These inhuman subverters of the empire of the Incas, destitute of the genius and greatness of mind of Cortes, exceeded him so far in cruelty, that their barbarous actions, if they cannot lessen the enormity, at least take away from the effect produced by the recital of the worst parts of his conduct. These cruelties appear the more lamentable, as the manners, disposition, government, the civil and religious institutions of the Peruvians, were moderate, mild, and equitable; far removed from the harshness of government, fierceness of disposition, gloomy superstitions, and bloody rites of the Mexicans'.

³¹ *Account*, I, 156; for Gasca, see *ibid.*, I, 157. 'Peter de la Gasca, a man differing only from Castro, that he was of a milder and more insinuating behaviour, but with the same love of justice, the same greatness of soul, and the same disinterested spirit'. Robertson's Gasca has the same character. See William Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, IX, 125-6, 146-8.

in the age of Francis I, their first settlement was actually made in 1625. The authors praised Cardinal Richelieu as a farsighted politician, who was aware of the advantages of establishing colonial settlements and who chose Monsieur de Poincy (Phillippe de Longvilliers de Poincy 1583–1660) as a governor. De Poincy was well versed in the mechanical arts and taught the colonists how to produce sugar. He was also a distinguished administrator.³² The Burkes stated:

He made admirable regulations for the speedy and impartial administration of justice; and knowing that all order must depend for it's blessing above, and it's effect here upon an attention to religion, he ordered a proper number of churches to be built in all the islands under his care, and settled priests in them, with a competent, but not a superfluous provision; but he did not think monasteries and monks so compatible with a new colony.³³

The French settlements started to flourish under their able governors. As will be seen later, the leading individuals in the English settlements such as William Penn and Lord Baltimore were also commended because of their distinguished ability. The Burkes summarised their view as follows:

It is one of the most necessary, and I am sure it is one of the most pleasing parts of this design, to do justice to the names of those men who by their greatness of mind, their wisdom and their goodness, have brought into the pale of civility and religion, these rude and uncultivated parts of the globe; who could discern the rudiments of a future people, wanting only time to be unfolded, in the seed; who could perceive amidst the losses and disappointments and expences of a beginning colony, the great advantages to be derived to their country from such undertakings; and who could pursue them in spite of the malignity and narrow wisdom of the world. The antient world had it's Osyris and Erichthonius, who taught them the use of grain; their Bacchus, who instructed them in the culture of the vine; and their Orpheus

³² *Account*, II, 5-7.

³³ *Ibid.*, II, 7.

and Linus, who first built towns and formed civil societies. The people of America will not fail, when time has made things venerable, and when an intermixture of fable has moulded useful truths into popular opinions, to mention with equal gratitude, and perhaps similar heightening circumstances, her Columbus, her Castro, her Gasca, her De Poincy, her Delawar, her Baltimore, and her Pen.³⁴

Unlike many of Edmund Burke's works, the *Account* laid stress upon the role of particular individuals as major forces in developing a country and diffusing the spirit of enlightenment. As the *Account* is a collaborative work, we might need to be cautious about this aspect.

Another distinctive feature of the *Account* is its emphasis upon divine providence,³⁵ which was a theme in Edmund's early writings, such as the *Philosophical Enquiry* and the *Abridgment*. In the *Account*, for instance, the divine will protected Columbus from a storm which demolished his enemies.³⁶ The natural environment in the new continent was also affected by divine providence. In the islands of the West Indies, it was the wind and the rain which rendered the tropical heat tolerable.³⁷ The dogs and cats carried from England to Hudson's Bay 'acquired a much longer, softer, and thicker coat of hair than they had originally'.³⁸ Providence may also have played a role when European colonists of various national characters sought wealth in America.³⁹ 'There seems to be a remarkable providence in casting the parts', in the Burkes' words, 'if I may use that expression of the several European nations who act upon the stage of America'. The Spaniard, who was 'proud', 'lazy' and 'magnificent', had 'a soft climate to indulge his love of ease, and a profusion of gold and silver to procure him all these luxuries his pride demands, but which his laziness would refuse him'. Although the

³⁴ *Account*, II, 215-216.

³⁵ For this, especially see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 140.

³⁶ *Account*, I, 50-1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 90-1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 284.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 55-7.

Portuguese, who was enterprising abroad, also sought and possessed gold and diamonds, their manner of doing so was more useful and less ostentatious than that of the Spaniards. The English were 'thoughtful and cool, and men of business rather than of great industry, impatient of much fruitless labour, abhorrent of constraint, and lovers of a country life', and they were inclined to agriculture rather than mining. The commerce of England flourished by allowing individuals to pursue their own interests rather than imposing restraints upon them which they resented. While the French are 'active, lively, enterprising, pliable and politic', they 'are notwithstanding tractable and obedient to rules and laws which bridle these dispositions, and wind and turn them to proper courses'. 'This people have a country', the Burkes wrote, 'where more is to be effected by managing the people than by cultivating the ground; where a pedling commerce, that requires constant motion, flourishes more than agriculture or a regular traffic'. The Burkes also depicted the Dutch as frugal and diligent. Moreover, providence intervened when men of misfortune and distemper contributed to establishing the English settlements in the West Indies and North America. These men could even be dangerous at home, but they often succeeded in these settlements and helped provide the important driving forces behind the development of the settlements.⁴⁰

In fact, the Burkes' discussion of religion foreshadowed Edmund's later ideas of this subject. The *Account*, like most of Edmund Burke's works,

⁴⁰ Ibid., II, 104-105: 'These are the several sorts of people, who with very few exceptions, have settled the West-Indies, and North America in a good measure. And thus have we drawn from the rashness of hot and visionary men; the imprudence of youth; the corruption of bad morals; and even from the wretchedness and misery of persons destitute and undone, the great source of our wealth, our strength and our power. ... Since experience has taught us, that as there is no soil or climate which will not shew itself grateful to culture, so that there is no disposition, no character in mankind, which may not be turned with dextrous management to the public advantage. Those rulers, who make complaints of the temper of their people in almost any respect, ought rather to lament their own want of genius, which blinds them to the use of an instrument purposely put into their hands by providence, for effecting perhaps the greatest things'.

described the Christian religion as a significant driving force behind developments. The Burkes doubted the cruelties of the Spanish colonists and especially rejected the notion that the cruelties were done by 'the instigation of the priests'. Although the Spanish clergy were in general ignorant and conversant with neither the true spirit of the Christian religion nor the true nature of the human mind, there was no evidence that the murder of the Indians was instigated by them. The native inhabitants rather 'found their only refuge in the humanity which yet remained in the clergy'.⁴¹ The defence of religion as the depository of humanity was Burkean enough, and the doubtful attitude towards Spanish cruelty should be compared with some other works of the age. As Jeffrey Smitten has argued, the predominant assumption of the inferiority of Hispanic civilisation led some eighteenth-century critics, typically Horace Walpole, to regard Spanish conduct in the colonies as barbarous. Among eighteenth-century British historians, however, John Campbell and the authors of the *Account* questioned the accuracy of the popular notions of the Spanish atrocities and tried to understand Spanish activities in their settlements.⁴²

At a later point in their work, the Burkes endorsed the behaviour of the Spanish clergy once more. The Spanish missionaries in Chile erected a college, gave the young Indians an education, and contributed to preserving peace between the Spanish settlements and Indian societies.⁴³ Although many contemporary critics, the authors insisted, had censured the Jesuits, the Burkes considered them beneficial to the colonies. In Paraguay, the Indians were 'an innocent people, civilized without being corrupted' under the Jesuits' jurisdiction.⁴⁴ In the Portuguese settlements in Brazil the priests chosen as the governors of each parish or district were one of the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I, 124.

⁴² Jeffrey Smitten, 'Impartiality in Robertson's History of America', *Eighteenth-Centuries Studies*, 19 (1985), 56-77 (at 62-3).

⁴³ *Account*, I, 265.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 274-275.

significant forces which led the country to prosperity.⁴⁵ To these may well be added the policy conducted by Monsieur de Poincy, as mentioned above, and the Burkes' praise of religious toleration by William Penn and Lord Baltimore as will be seen below. Christianity as a civilising force is a theme typical of Edmund's other works, and it is quite clearly regarded as a major historical force in the *Account*.

It is also noteworthy that the Burkes devoted many pages to the analysis of the commodities produced by and trade conducted by these European settlements. While drawing attention to the production of various commodities in the settlements, the authors analysed the economic policies of European courts and governors. It merits attention that they were not critical of the policies regulating the trade.⁴⁶ For example, according to them, the Spanish court was most concerned with how the products of their colonial possessions could be monopolised by themselves and 'how they shall get the greatest returns upon the smallest quantity of goods'. This court, in fact, excluded 'all strangers' from their trade. The Burkes commented: 'These views, which would be impolitic in any power in Europe besides, are judicious enough in Spain'.⁴⁷ They were also not necessarily critical of the Portuguese and French monopolies over the trade of their American colonies. In the beginning of the second volume, the authors referred to the case of the French West Indian company: 'The trade under proper regulations was laid open, yet protected under the wings of their great India company. These regulations took place about 1680, and the benefits of this arrangement were great, and soon apparent. Exclusive companies may probably be useful to nourish an infant trade'.⁴⁸ As will be seen later, Edmund Burke also endorsed the effect of the English Navigation Acts. Although commentators

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 300-301.

⁴⁶ See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 125-164.

⁴⁷ *Account*, I, 228.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 8.

have at times argued that Burke was a staunch defender of free trade, such evidence shows that it was not necessarily the case.

The Burkes maintained that the policies regulating trade had contributed to the prosperity of European nations and their colonies. They also argued that the trade of the colonies had been substantially advanced in a relatively short space of time. For example, according to the authors of the *Account*, the commerce and trade from the French settlements had been growing since the early eighteenth century. The Burkes attempted to explode the contemporary popular notion that Britain had caused French commerce to decline by its efforts during the War of the Spanish Succession. In fact, France had achieved increased prosperity through the progress of her colonies. After the war and the Treaty of Utrecht, the French West-Indian colonies continued to produce substantial quantities of sugar, indigo, coffee, and so forth. The authors' point was to inform their contemporary British readers about the strength of France, of which Britain continuously needed to be wary. They also tried to generalise their point:

Nations like France and England, full of people of spirit and of industry, easily recover all the losses of war ... Wherever the vital principle subsists in full vigour, wounds are soon healed. Disorders themselves are a species of remedies; and every new loss not only shews how it may be repaired, but, by the vigour it inspires, makes new advantages known. Such losses renew the spirit of industry and enterprise; they reduce things to their first principles; they keep alive motion, and make the appetites of traders sharp and keen. While the spirit of trade subsists, trade itself can never be destroyed.⁴⁹

Generalisation was one of the characteristics of the *Account* and this made the *Account* one of the most 'philosophical' works among contemporary works on the history of the Americas. As has already been seen in Chapter Two, the Burkes maintained that all European nations had increased in

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 16-17.

wealth despite their continual wars. The peaceful situation of the Dutch Netherlands over the last forty years caused her trade to slump. These arguments may remind us of a famous passage in the *Reflections* that argued that the development of commerce in Europe had relied upon the fundamental social principles of the region, i.e., 'the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion'. In his *Reflections*, Burke also alleged that the stagnation of the Ottoman empire was due to the too peaceful situation of her society. In his *Abridgment*, the early Burke also insisted that conquest might bring nations prosperity and civilisation.

3.3 The American Indians

Since the end of the fifteenth century, encounters with American Indians had led Europeans to rethink their ideas about human nature in general and about their own civilisation in particular. European travellers and philosophers excited their mind and expanded their speculations by reflecting upon the implications of the discovery of the American Indians.⁵⁰ In 1785, for instance, William Guthrie eloquently stated: 'THE discovery of America has not only opened a new source of wealth to the busy and commercial part of Europe, but an extensive field of speculation to the philosopher, who would trace the character of man under various degrees of refinement, and observe the movements of the human heart, or the operations of the human understanding, when untutored by science or

⁵⁰ See, for instance, William Guthrie, *A New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar: and Present State of the Several Kingdoms of the World*. (9th edn., London : 1785), p. 763. Guthrie continued: 'So striking seemed the disparity between the inhabitants of Europe, and the natives of America, that some speculative men have ventured to affirm, that it is impossible they should be of the same species, or derived from one common source. This conclusion, however, is extremely ill founded'. See also P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 187.

untainted with corruption'. Burke was one of these European intellectuals, and the *Account* and some other works of his discussed the nature, character and manners of American Indians. In these works, it seems to have been assumed implicitly that their manners of life had been continuously barbarous over a long time, although there were some changes and exceptions.

The barbarity and backwardness of the Indians were seen as the result of some specific aspects of their lives. The Indians chiefly engaged in war and hunting, and agriculture was the work of women. They were idle and slept half the day. In the *Account*, the manners and customs of the Indians were, the Burkes maintained, almost the same throughout North and South America. Like many contemporaries, they considered the manners of the Indians as savage and similar to those of ancient Europeans or of any country in the distant past. One of the most remarkable points the Burkes made was that the Indians were irreligious: 'A people who live by hunting, who inhabit mean cottages, and are given to change the place of their habitation, are seldom very religious'.⁵¹ Nevertheless, their ceremonies 'seem to shew they had once a more regular form of religious worship' and their festivals have 'many things that very probably came from a religious origin'. The Indians perform these ceremonies 'as things handed down to them from their ancestors, without knowing or enquiring about the reason'. The Burkes acknowledged that the Aztecs and the Incas were religious, but these nations were exceptions.⁵² These notions deserve attention. First, we may ask how firmly such notions were rooted in Edmund's mind in particular. Around the same period, when he referred to the American

⁵¹ *Account*, I, 166.

⁵² *Ibid.*, I, 166-167: 'The Americans have scarce any temples. We hear indeed of some, and those extremely magnificent, amongst the ancient Mexicans and Peruvians; but the Mexicans and Peruvians were comparatively civilized nations. Those we know at present in any part of America are no way comparable to them'. Here there seems to be an assumption that the civilised people are usually religious.

Indians in his *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke seems to have looked upon them to be religious: 'Almost all the heathen temples were dark. Even in the barbarous temples of the Americans at this day, they keep their idol in a dark part of the hut, which is consecrated to his worship'.⁵³ Moreover, it is necessary to compare the *Account* with its sources and the other works of the eighteenth century to understand better the Burkes' opinions on this subject. The *Account* owed much of its opinion of the Indians to Joseph-Francois Lafitau's work and it expressed admiration for him: 'Whoever considers the Americans of this day, not only studies the manners of a remote present nation, but he studies, in some measure, the antiquities of all nations; from which no mean lights may be thrown upon many parts of the ancient authors, both sacred and profane. The learned Lafitau has laboured this point with great success, in a work which deserves to be read amongst us much more than I find it is'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Lafitau's views on the American Indians were not exactly the same as was the Burkes', since he apparently acknowledged that the Indians were religious. It seems even to be one of his main arguments to reject atheism and therefore to demonstrate that all men, including American savages, need religion. Did the Burkes intentionally ignore Lafitau's prime intention, or was their reading of this source defective?⁵⁵ The Burkes' opinions are probably better understood by reading those of their contemporaries such as William Robertson. For Robertson, the rise of religious sentiments is largely proportional to the progress of society and human intelligence. If society is extremely barbarous, the intellectual capacity of human beings must be so limited that they cannot advance their ideas of God. In the Americas, there

⁵³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 59

⁵⁴ *Account*, I, 161.

⁵⁵ See Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*, I, 28-30, 92, 281. See also Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 58; Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, pp. 204-5.

are some tribes who do not have any idea of divinity or religious rituals, which could be ascribed to the barbarity of their society. Other tribes such as the Natchez and the Bogota have more advanced ideas and systems of religion, as well as more elaborate political institutions.⁵⁶ Although Robertson's analysis was more subtle, the Burkes' account of the irreligiousness of the Indians seems to have resulted from a similar line of thought.⁵⁷

The barbarity of the Indians was most clearly seen in their style of warfare. Their behaviour, such as their supposed cannibalism and their tearing off the scalp from their enemies' heads, were literally shocking to the Burkes and to other contemporaries. Their ways of life in general reminded the Europeans of the ancient state of mankind, but the cruelty of their wars was probably unprecedented and even beyond the characteristics of any other human beings.⁵⁸ On 6 February 1778, in the House of the Commons, when opposing the employment of the Indians as a subsidiary army, Edmund Burke stated that the Indians' manners of wars 'was so horrible,

⁵⁶ Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, VIII, 181-198. Robertson was very critical of Lafitau's work. See *ibid.*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, VIII, 182, 470.

⁵⁷ It seems that no modern scholars described the Indians of the Americas as being irreligious. See, for instance, J. Eric S. Thompson, *Mexico before Cortez: An account of the Daily Life, religion and Ritiual of the Aztecs and kindred people* (New York: C. Scribner & Sons, 1937); J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya History and Religion* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970); Bernabé Cobo, *Inca Religion and Customs*, translated and edited by Roland Hamilton (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990); Ake Hultkranz, *The Religion of the American Indians* (new edn., Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

⁵⁸ *Address to the Colonies* [January 1777], in *WS*, III, 282-3: 'You will not, we trust, believe, that born in a civilized country, formed to gentle manners, trained in a merciful religion, and living in enlightened and polished times, where even foreign hostility is softened from its original sternness, we could have thought of letting loose upon you, our late beloved Brethren, these fierce tribes of Savages and Cannibals, in whom the traces of human nature are effaced by ignorance and barbarity. We have wished to have joined with you, in bringing gradually that unhappy part of mankind into civility, order, piety, and virtuous discipline, than to have confirmed their evil habits, and encreased their natural ferocity, by fleshing them in the slaughter of you, whom our wisher and better ancestors had sent into the Wilderness, with the express view of introducing, along with our holy religion, its humane and charitable manners'.

that it not only shocked the manners of all civilized nations, but far exceeded the ferocity of any other barbarians that have been recorded either by ancient or modern history'. In this speech, the cruelty of the Indians was considered as innate and incurable.⁵⁹

In the *Account*, the Burkes supposed that the Indians had not achieved any progress during the course of history, at least since their encounter with the Europeans. The Indians at the time of Columbus, those who communicated with the Spanish clergy, or the Indians of the eighteenth century were all considered to be savages and barbarians. This assumption seems to have been applied in Burke's other works, but it was acknowledged that some changes had taken place in their ways of life. For example, when the Europeans came to the Americas for the first time, the Indians were almost naked 'except those parts which it is common for the most uncultivated people to conceal'. The Indians had then begun to buy 'a coarse blanket' from the colonists in order to wear it.⁶⁰ They also had not known any alcohol until the Europeans introduced it to them, 'but now, the acquirement of these [spirituous liquors] is what gives a spur to their industry, and enjoyment to their repose. This is the principal end they pursue in their treaties with us; and from this they suffer inexpressible calamities'.⁶¹ The introduction of alcohol caused social disorder, including the killing of each other. It has already been shown that the Spanish clergy, according to the Burkes, 'civilised' some Indians by converting them to Christianity. Later, in the *Annual Register* of 1763, Burke implied that the English colonists had not treated the Indians properly, which had kept them ferocious:

⁵⁹ *Parl. Hist.*, XIX, col., 695. See also, *ibid.*, 19, col., 697: 'their employment could have answered no purpose; their only effective use consisted in that cruelty which was to be restrained; but he shewed, that it was so utterly impossible for any care or humanity to prevent or even restrain their enormities, that the very attempt was ridiculous'. This notion is incompatible with that in the *Annual Register* of 1763. See below.

⁶⁰ *Account*, I, 162.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, I, 163.

Habits of ill treatment to the Indians, must incite them to a frequent renewal of hostilities. This will keep alive at once their military and their savage spirit. They will always be enemies, and barbarous enemies. Their extirpation will never be so certain a consequence of these wars, as the retardment of the growth and prosperity of our colonies, which must be the inevitable result of them. Whereas by kind and gentle treatment, the Indians will forget the use of arms, which they will no longer be forced to have recourse to; their ferocity will be softened; their savage way of life will be altered; their wants will be increased; and our people mixing with them, first by commerce, and (when the prudence of government shall think it adviseable) by settlement, they will gradually assimilate to the English, and, at length, add usefully to the number of those, whom it is now their sole study of destroy.⁶²

Here Burke attributed the barbarous conduct of the Indians to the ill treatment of them rather than to their inherent racial inferiority.⁶³ At an earlier point, Burke had also claimed that the interaction with other Indian tribes had made the Iroquois corrupt. In the mid seventeenth century, the Iroquois became the most powerful tribe of American Indians. They also continued to attack the French colony in Canada for a long time in a very cruel manner:

⁶² *Annual Register ... for the Year 1763*, p. 32.

⁶³ Robertson's discussion of the Indians in his *History of America*, which was one of the most celebrated parts of his work, explicitly pointed to the racial inferiority of the Indians, which was probably not obvious to Burke. According to Robertson, 'the inferiority of the Americans was conspicuous'. They were utterly unacquainted with metals, and in the case of war they are easily defeated by civilised nations, despite the fact that fighting was the chief occupation of their men, because of their lack of foresight and their inferior weapons. See William Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, II, 126, 167-8. In his famous letter of 1777, Burke told Robertson that the author's discussion of the Indians was the most interesting part for him. He largely celebrated the whole work, but also claimed that, 'I only think that in one or two points you have hardly done justice to the savage Character' of the native Indians. See 'Burke to William Robertson (9 June 1777)', in *Corr.*, III, 351. The *Annual Register* for 1777 also made the point: 'Dr Robertson has taken no notice of the eloquence or poetry of the Americans, which are among the most distinguished properties of mankind in a state of savage nature'. See *The Annual Register for the Year of 1777*, p. 218.

But having suffered some repulses in that war, becoming perhaps jealous of the growing power of the English, and finding among the Indian nations nothing that was capable or willing to give them any disturbance, they fell gradually into more quiet dispositions, and began to enjoy the fruit of that sovereignty they had so long and so earnestly contended for.

The historians of our colonies represent this people [Iroquois] as originally of very pure and severe manners. But they were corrupted by an intercourse with those [other Indian] nations, by whose debauchery they were enabled to conquer them. Luxury, of which there may be a species even among savages, by degrees enervated the fierce virtue of the Iroquois, and weakened their empire, as it has done that of so many others. Their numbers, which their frequent wars in some degree lessened, were yet more diminished in time of peace;⁶⁴

Again, there is here an idea that the environment and particular circumstances affect the manners of life. Moreover, here is an idea characteristic of Burke that peace rather than war has a negative effect on society. Overall, the manners of the Indians were supposed to have been altered in some ways during the course of history, particularly in relatively recent ages, although it still seems to have been assumed that the barbarity of the Indians had not changed much over time.

3.4 British North America

Always seeking the implications of it for American affairs and other political issues of his own age, the history of British North America did matter to Edmund Burke. In the *Account*, the Burkes devoted the largest sections of this work to their descriptions of the history of the English settlements in North America. In the 1760s and the 1770s, Edmund Burke grappled with the American crisis in parliament and at times put forward an historical

⁶⁴ *Annual Register ... for the Year 1763*, p. 23.

perspective of the colonies, chiefly to support his political arguments. His writings and speeches clearly show that he well recognised that the American colonists had developed a unique society, while they had still retained some of their inherited European manners and systems. The development of the colonies, in his view, owed much to the British constitution as well as to some other factors.⁶⁵

In their *Account*, the Burkes drew attention to several unique aspects of the colonial societies of British North America: the large number of independent yeomen, their prominent republican spirit,⁶⁶ the absence of a hereditary aristocracy and various forms of government,⁶⁷ as well as a distinct natural environment and the production of particular commodities. As regards forms of government, in particular, the Burkes examined three distinct types of government in British North America: royal, proprietary and charter. A royal government was given birth to through the growth of the first English colony in North America, i.e., the settlement of Virginia. Initially, this colony was governed by a president and a council appointed by the crown. When the colony became more populous, however, it was considered as inappropriate to govern the colony in a very dissimilar way to the mode practised by the home government. A type of legislature resembling the House of Commons in England was created and called the lower house of assembly. Another branch of legislature, sometimes called the upper house of assembly, was also formed, which was, to a certain extent, the counterpart of the House of Lords at Westminster. When a bill passed these two bodies, it was brought to the governor of the colony who could approve or disapprove of it. While the upper house of assembly was a part of

⁶⁵ The characteristics shown in section two, of course, apply to the historical descriptions of British North America in the *Account*. Here Burke's political works as well as the *Account*, regarding his view of the history of British North America, are examined.

⁶⁶ *Account*, II, 161-2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 288-9.

legislature, it also played the role of a privy council to the governor. The power of the governor was bound by this role. The upper house of assembly also sometimes acts as a court of chancery. Originally shaped in Virginia, this mode of government became diffused over many English colonies, including the islands of the West Indies and Nova Scotia, by the mid-eighteenth century.

A proprietary government was a government which was granted to a particular individual. In the beginning of the English settlements in America, it sometimes occurred that an individual who had great influence at court was given a large tract of land in America and privileges to govern them. He needed to show his dependence upon the crown, but this was usually done with some petty gifts such as an Indian arrow. Although this type of government used to prevail in such English settlements as those in the Island of Barbados, the island of St. Lucia, Carolina, and New Jersey, in the mid-eighteenth century only Pennsylvania and Maryland still adopted it. A charter government is a form of democracy, which originally existed in all provinces of New England and still remained in Connecticut and Rhode Island. Like many contemporaries, the Burkes were quite critical of this form of government. 'This state of unbounded freedom', the Burkes wrote, 'I believe, contributed in some degree to make those settlements flourish; but it certainly contributed as much to render their value to their mother country far more precarious, than a better digested plan would have done that might have taken in the interests both of Great Britain and of the new settlement'.⁶⁸

By the end of the 1760s, Burke would come to know of the further growth of the colonies and the changing situation in their society. In his *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* (1769), he expounded on the rapid increase of trade with the colonies, and acknowledged that the

⁶⁸ *Account*, II, 289-293.

colonies in North America had grown up to be distinct entities:⁶⁹

Whoever goes about to reason on any part of the policy of this country with regard to America, upon the mere abstract principles of government, or even upon those of our own antient constitution, will be often misled. ... The object is wholly new in the world. It is singular: it is grown up to this magnitude and importance within the memory of man; nothing in history is parallel to it. All the reasonings about it, that are likely to be at all solid, must be drawn from its actual circumstances.⁷⁰

In another speech, he also stated that the British colonies in America were different from the colonies of ancient Greece and Rome, and that the British colonial possessions needed to be governed according to their character, i.e., their love of liberty.⁷¹ In his great 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', Edmund Burke, again, stressed the rapid growth of the colonies. He estimated the growing population of the colonies to be at least 2.5 millions and he also showed how British trade with North America and the West Indies had greatly increased from 1704 to 1772.⁷² What made the

⁶⁹ For example, see H. T. Dickinson, 'The Friends of America': British Sympathy with the American Revolution' in *Radicalism and Revolution in Britain, 1775-1848: Essays in Honour of Malcolm I. Thomis*, ed. Michael T. Davis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 1-29.

⁷⁰ *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, in *WS*, II, 193-4.

⁷¹ 'Speech on Declaratory Resolution (3 February 1766)', *WS*, II, 50: 'An Englishman must be subordinate to England, but he must be governed according to the opinion of a free land. Without subordination, it would not be one Empire. Without freedom, it would not be the British Empire. ... We cannot resort to the example of Roman or Greek colonies. Nor must we seek for it in the older part of our constitution about the method of governing an Empire, the existence of which they could not even conceive'.

⁷² 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', in *WS*, III, 111-4. Burke put the total exports in 1704 to North America and the West Indies at £ 483, 265; to Africa at £ 86, 665 (the sum is £ 569,930); in 1772 to North America and the West Indies at £ 4,791,734; to Africa at £ 866,398; from Scotland to North America, the West Indies and Africa at 364,000 (the sum is 6,022,132). The editor of *WS* notes that Burke's figure for Scotland includes exports to the foreign West Indies as well as the British West Indies. According to Sir Charles Whitworth, the total figure for North America and the West Indies, including the exports from Scotland, was £ 4,791,750. See Sir Charles Whitworth, *State of the Trade of Great Britain in its Imports and Exports, Progressively, from the Year 1697* (London, 1776), pp. lxiii-lxiv. The total export of

colonies distinct, however, was not only their material and demographic growth, but the temper and character of the Americans themselves. It was their fierce spirit of liberty that characterised the colonies, and this American spirit, according to Burke, had been formed from six sources: their English descent, their various forms of government, the Protestantism of the north, their manners of life, especially slavery in the south, their study of the law, and their remote distance from the mother country.

The colonists were evidently the descendants of European people, especially those who came from England.⁷³ In his 'Speech on Conciliation with America' (22 March 1775), Burke returned to this theme over and over again.⁷⁴ As will be seen below, it was claimed that the colonists' English descent had contributed to making for harmony within the empire. Burke maintained that the colonists' fierce spirit of liberty, which might not be acceptable to the mother country, was inherited from the spirit of Englishmen:

For, in order to prove, that the Americans have no right to their Liberties, we are every day endeavouring to subvert the maxims, which preserve the whole Spirit of our own. To prove that the Americans ought not to be free, we are obliged to depreciate the value of Freedom itself; and we never seem to gain a paltry advantage over them in debate, without attacking some of those principles, or deriding some of those feelings, for which our

England, including that to the colonies in 1704 was also given as £ 6,509,000 (in the MS. this was £ 6, 552,019.18.4, which also appeared in Burke's *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, as the editor of *WS* notes). The difference between this and the export to the colonies given above was calculated as £ 487,868 (which is incorrect, actually £ 486,868). In 1789, David Ramsay gave the same figures to the whole export trade of England and the export to the colonies, but he may have consulted Burke's work. See David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, ed. Lester H. Cohen (2 vols., Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1990), I, 48.

⁷³ See *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (United States Bureau of Census, Washington, DC, 1975, pt.2), p. 1168. In 1790, 60.9 per cent of the colonists were of English descent.

⁷⁴ 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', in *WS*, III, 130, 164.

ancestors have shed their blood.⁷⁵

Burke also underlined that the colonists of New England were Protestants, who were by definition 'the most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion':

All protestantism, even the most cold and passive, is a sort of dissent. But the religion most prevalent in our Northern Colonies is a refinement on the principle of resistance; it is the dissidence of dissent; and the protestantism of the protestant religion.⁷⁶ This religion, under a variety of denominations, agreeing in nothing but in the communion of the spirit of liberty, is predominant in most of the Northern provinces; where the Church of England, notwithstanding its legal rights, is in reality no more than a sort of private sect, not composing most probably the tenth of the people. The Colonists left England when this spirit was high; and in the emigrants was the highest of all:⁷⁷

Burke did not use the term 'puritanism' to mention the early emigrants from England, but he certainly had it in mind. In the mid-eighteenth century, the colonists no longer defined themselves as Puritans, but under a

⁷⁵ Ibid., in *WS*, III, 127. See also, *ibid.*, in *WS*, III, 120. The Americans were 'not only devoted to Liberty, but to Liberty according to English ideas, and on English principles. Abstract Liberty, like other mere abstractions, is not to be found'.

⁷⁶ By saying so, 'Burke came closer to the historical uniqueness of English-speaking America'. See J.G.A. Pocock, 'Political thought in the English-speaking Atlantic, 1760-1790: (i) The imperial crisis', in *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 277-8.

⁷⁷ 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', in *WS*, III, 121-2. Tucker opposed this view of history: 'Sir, this Account is not exact, and stands in Need of some Correction. When the Emigrants fled from *England*, they were universally Calvinists of the most inflexible Sort. But they were very far from being of that Species of Protestants, whom you describe; and of which spreading Sect, there are but too many Proselytes both in *Great-Britain, Ireland, and America*; I mean, the modern *new-light* Men, who protest against every Thing, and who would dissent even from themselves, and from their own Opinions, if no other Means of Dissention could be found out. Such Protestants as these are very literally PROTESTERS; but it is hard to say, what they are besides ... In short, their Aim was to establish a republican Form of Government built on republican Principles both in Church and State. But, like all other Republicans ancient and modern, they were extremely averse from granting any Portion of that Liberty to others, which they claimed to themselves as their unalienable Birth-Right'. See Josiah Tucker, *A Letter to Edmund Burke* (Glocester, 1775), pp. 18-19.

variety of denominations, and the established Church of England was just one of them. In the southern colonies, a large part of the people belonged to the Church of England, and Burke supposed that they had an even stronger spirit of liberty, but this time he attributed it not to their religion but to their possession of black slaves brought from Africa:

It is that in Virginia and the Carolinas, they have a vast multitude of slaves. Where this is the case in any part of the world, those who are free, are by far the most proud and jealous of their freedom. Freedom is to them not only an enjoyment, but a kind of rank and privilege ... The fact is so; and these people of the Southern Colonies are much more strongly, and with an higher and more stubborn spirit, attached to liberty than those to the Northward. Such were all the ancient commonwealths; such were our Gothick ancestors; such in our days were the Poles; and such will be all masters of slaves, who are not slaves themselves. In such a people the haughtiness of domination combines with the spirit of freedom, fortifies it, and renders it invincible.⁷⁸

Burke seems to have relied upon Andrew Burnaby's work, and his views on the impact of slavery have been regarded as valid.⁷⁹ This, however, provoked some contemporaries, such as Josiah Tucker, who abominated slavery and

⁷⁸ 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', in *WS*, III, 122-3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, III, 123n. See Andrew Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North America in the Years 1759 and 1760. With Observations upon the State of the Colonies* (1775; 2nd edition, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1960), pp. 22-24: 'In consequence of this, they seldom show any spirit of enterprize, or expose themselves willingly to fatigue. Their authority over their slaves renders them vain and imperious, and intire strangers to that elegance of sentiment, which is so peculiarly characteristic of refined and polished nations. Their ignorance of mankind and of learning, exposes them to many errors and prejudices, especially in regard to Indians and Negroes, whom they scarcely consider as of the human species; so that it is almost impossible, in cases of violence, or even murder, committed upon those unhappy people by any of the planters, to have the delinquents brought to justice: for either the grand jury refuse to find the bill, or the petit jury bring in their verdict, not guilty ... The public or political character of the Virginians, corresponds with their private one: they are haughty and jealous of their liberties, impatient of restraint, and can scarcely bear the thought of being controuled by any superior power. Many of them consider the colonies as independent states, not connected with Great Britain, otherwise than by having the same common king, and being bound to her with natural affection'.

insisted that the right theory of morality was always compatible with that of commerce. The system of slavery is the most inefficient for cultivating land, and there has been no single country in history which was well cultivated, full of manufactures and simultaneously preferred slavery to hiring free men.⁸⁰ Burke also added education, especially the study of law, and natural remoteness from the mother country as causes of the growth of their 'disobedient' spirit.⁸¹

Among contemporaries, Burke was, of course, not the only one who had pointed out the uniqueness of the colonies. While attacking Burke's view of the colonists despite his conservative political thought being remarkably similar to Burke's, Tucker was also well aware of the distinctiveness of the Americans. For both Burke and Tucker, the Americans were the offspring of the Puritans, who had brought the spirit of liberty to the new world. In contrast to Burke, who still looked upon them as fellow heirs of English liberty, however, Tucker sought to link them to political radicalism. Although in the late eighteenth century the colonial Americans of New England were no longer fanatical Puritans, they were now the disciples of John Locke. Moreover, the antipathy to the Church of England and their tendency towards religious and political disorder were still at the heart of their thought. In Tucker's views, their doctrines and policies were incompatible with both the British constitution and the true principles of

⁸⁰ Tucker, *A Letter to Edmund Burke*, pp. 22-3: 'For my Part, I am thoroughly convinced, that the Laws of Commerce, when rightly understood, do perfectly coincide with the Laws of Morality; both originating from the same good Being, whose Mercies are over all his Works. Nay, I think it is demonstrable, that *domestic* or *predial* Slavery would be found, on a fair Calculation, to be the most onerous and expensive Mode of cultivating Land, and of raising Produce, that could be devised. And I defy you, with all your Learning and Acuteness, to produce a single Instance from History either antient or modern, of a Country being well cultivated, and at the same Time abounding in Manufactures, where this Species of Slavery (I mean the *domestic* or *predial*) is preferred to the Method of hiring free Persons, and paying them wages'.

⁸¹ 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', in *WS*, III, 123-5. In his *History of American Revolution*, David Ramsay echoed (or even lifted some passages from) Burke's 'Speech on Conciliation'. See Ramsay, *History of American Revolution*, I, 26-30.

the Christian religion.⁸² For him, these Lockean people, holding republican tenets, were dangerous enough, and therefore should be allowed to separate from the mother country so that Britons were not affected by their thoughts.⁸³ The fierce 'American' spirit of liberty was gradually prevailing in England, Tucker feared, and he unfairly regarded Burke as advocating radical republicanism in both England and the colonies.⁸⁴ Many contemporary Americans, including Franklin⁸⁵ and Ramsay, also recognised the uniqueness of their own society. American intellectuals earnestly tried to absorb the idea of the developmental stages of history, which was advanced by enlightened writers in Europe, and Ramsay, for instance, was confident that America had already arrived at a stage of maturity which enabled her to form an independent nation.⁸⁶ Although Burke, Tucker and Ramsay all drew attention to the uniqueness of the colonies, their views were evidently incompatible with each other.

In the *Account*, the authors also at times paid attention to the role of great men and governors in the history of British North America. For example, the Burkes commended William Penn and Lord Baltimore, who brought Pennsylvania and Maryland respectively to a flourishing state. According to them, Penn was not a great writer of theology or ethics, but a distinguished legislator and founder of a colony.⁸⁷ In particular, the Burkes admired Penn's attempt to establish religious toleration: 'He made the most perfect freedom, both religious and civil, the basis of this establishment ...

⁸² Tucker, *A Letter to Edmund Burke*, pp. 19-20: 'THE present Dissenters in *North-America* retain very little of the peculiar Tenets of their Fore-fathers, excepting their Antipathy to our established Religion, and their Zeal to pull down all Orders in Church and State, if found to be superior to their own'.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁵ For instance, Franklin pointed out that there were few poor and praised religious toleration in North America. See Benjamin Franklin, *Two Tracts: Information to Those Who Would Remove to America. And, remarks concerning the savages of North America* (London, 1784), pp. 18-19, 24.

⁸⁶ O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 20.

⁸⁷ *Account*, II, 189.

All persons who profess to believe one God, are freely tolerated; those who believe in Jesus Christ, of whatever denomination, are not excluded from employments and posts'.⁸⁸ This may well be regarded as intending to criticise the Test Act in Ireland. The Burkes were also highly favourable to toleration in Maryland conducted by Lord Baltimore, himself a Catholic:

Maryland remained under the governors appointed by the parliament and by Cromwell until the restoration, when lord Baltimore was re-instated in his former possessions, which he cultivated with his former wisdom, care, and moderation. No people could live in greater ease and security; and his lordship, willing that as many as possible should enjoy the benefits of his mild and equitable administration, gave his consent to an act of assembly, which he had before promoted in his province, for allowing a free and unlimited toleration for all who professed the Christian religion of whatever denomination. This liberty, which was never in the least instance violated, encouraged a great number, not only of the Church of England, but of Presbyterians, Quakers, and all kinds of Dissenters, to settle in Maryland, which before that was almost wholly in the hands of Roman Catholics.⁸⁹

For the Burkes, religious toleration was a landmark of Enlightenment. When stating in 'all persuasions the bigots are persecutors; the men of a cool and reasonable piety are favourers of toleration',⁹⁰ it is likely that they, in particular, had in mind the social situation in Ireland. Of course, British North America was not necessarily tolerant in religion, for the opposite was often the case. It should be noted that the authors drew attention to religious conflicts in the colonies. In the new world the Puritans, who had fled from the persecution in England, had to fight against other Christian denominations including the Jesuits, Catholics in general, the Quakers and the Anabaptists. The Salem witch trial 'was the last paroxysm of the

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 191.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 222-223. The authors also commended religious toleration in Rhode Island, where there 'is an unlimited freedom of religion, agreeable to the first principles of its foundation' (*ibid.*, II, 165).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 148.

puritanic enthusiasm in New England'.⁹¹ In fact, religious conflicts 'form the greatest part of the history of New England, for a long time'.⁹² Nevertheless, in their view, the religious problems in the colonies did not have a fatal effect on their development.

Not only in Pennsylvania or Maryland there were good governors. In the case of Virginia, the distinguished leaders also contributed to developing the settlement. Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1552-1618) was a genius in many fields, and the Burkes highly valued his ability: Raleigh 'was the first man in England who had a right conception of the advantages of settlements abroad; he was then the only person who had a thorough insight into trade, and who saw clearly the proper methods of promoting it'.⁹³ The Burkes also commended Thomas West 3rd Baron, De La Warr (1577-1618). The early settlement of Virginia had been threatened by attacks by local Indians, by famine and by the unwise behaviour of the colonists. De La Warr sympathised with the misfortunes of the people, analysed the situation well and reconstructed the settlement. He was, again, an historical figure whose character was compatible with the Burkes' ideal: unselfish and showing an unwearied and diligent devotion to the best interests of society. According to the Burkes, 'he was indefatigable in doing every thing that could tend to the peopling, the support, and the good government of this settlement'.⁹⁴ In the case of Georgia, they also commended James Oglethorpe (1696-1785), who 'very generously bestowed his own time and pains, without any reward,

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, II, 155.

⁹² *Ibid.*, II, 146.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, II, 211-212. Later, in his 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', Burke described Raleigh as 'one excellent individual'. See *WS*, III, 132. Cf. Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, XI, 36, 49.

⁹⁴ *Account*, II, 214-215. See also *ibid.*, II, 213: 'Regardless of his life, and inattentive to his fortune, he entered upon this long and dangerous voyage, and accepted this barren province, which had nothing of a government but it's anxieties and it's cares, merely for the service of his country'. William Robertson held a similarly high opinion of De La Warr. Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, XI, 87-8.

for the advancement of the settlement'.⁹⁵ While, in the *Account*, the Burkes referred to the peculiar circumstances of the colonies, they also emphasised that the development of the colonies owed much to these inexhaustible and disinterested governors. This, however, did not mean that the colonies had been formed upon any regular plan, but had developed as a result of the free actions of the people, the natural environment and even many accidents which the Burkes considered as important.⁹⁶

The *Account* was chiefly the history of the Europeans who discovered and settled in the two new continents, and the authors seem to have taken it for granted that the Americans were the offspring of common ancestors and inherited the manners and institutions of Europe.⁹⁷ By the 1770s, seeing the traditional relationship with the colonies plunge into a crisis,

⁹⁵ *Account*, II, 257. As J.O. Nelson points out, Burke came to know Oglethorpe in the 1760s through Samuel Johnson and the Club circle. In a letter of 1777, Burke commended him 'as one of the most distinguished of their founders', and stated: 'May you see the Colony, planned by your Sagacity, and planted by your care, become once more a free and flourishing Member of a free and flourishing Empire! But if this be too much a hope from a Country, which seems to have forgot the true source of its dignity and greatness, may you never have the misfortune of having led Englishmen into servitude and misery in a strange land!' See 'Burke to Oglethorpe (2 June 1777)', in *Corr.*, III, 343-4; Nelson, 'A Map of Mankind', pp. 180-1.

⁹⁶ *Account*, II, 288: 'The settlement of our colonies was never pursued upon any regular plan; but they were formed, grew, and flourished, as accidents, the nature of the climate, or the dispositions of private men happened to operate'. As has already been seen, Burke later maintained that European nations had grown up to the present prosperity without any uniform plan.

⁹⁷ The Burkes, however, considered that it was absurd for the colonies to use exactly the same laws as England, since they were already the different political societies shaped by their historical experience and their unique circumstances: 'And indeed the laws of England, if in the long period of their duration they have had many improvements, so they have grown more tedious, perplexed, and intricate, by the heaping up many abuses in one age, and the attempts to remove them in another. These infant settlements surely demanded a more simple, clear, and determinate legislation, though it were of somewhat an homelier kind; laws suited to the time, to their country, and the nature of their new way of life. Many things still subsist in the law of England, which are built upon causes and reasons that have long ago ceased; many things are in those laws suitable to England only'. See *ibid.*, II, 296. This passage may have reflected the early Burke's hatred of jurisprudence. His Montesquieuan position was, nevertheless, compatible with that in the *Abridgment* and the *Reflections*: law needs to be changed according to circumstances.

Burke attacked government policy from the Rockinghams' viewpoint, but warned the Americans, who had begun the campaign toward independence, not to separate from the mother country. In doing so, he characteristically emphasised the similarity between the English and the American people. He argued that these two people had the same origins and shared the same character, which had created strong ties and considerable harmony within the British Empire. In his 'Speech on Conciliation with America' (22 March 1775), he maintained: 'My hold of the Colonies is in the close affection which grows from common names, from kindred blood, from similar privileges, and equal protection. These are ties, which, though light as air, are as strong as links of iron'.⁹⁸ An emphasis on descent and similarity of manners and character between the two people was probably his most deep-rooted idea. After 1789, he at times stressed the common ground of European society now being destroyed by the French revolutionaries. In his *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1797), he wrote:

I do not know why I should not include America among the European Powers, because she is of European origin; and has not yet, like France, destroyed all traces of manners, laws, opinions, and usages which she drew from Europe. As long as that Europe shall have any possessions either in the southern or the northern parts of that America, even separated as it is by the ocean, it must be considered as a part of the European system.⁹⁹

The idea that a nation is formed by its manners of life, not just on geographical division, is characteristic of Burke. The manners and institutions of the Europeans had been extended to America, and the people had not demolished them since their early settlements.

Facing a crisis of the empire, Burke, like many other contemporaries in Britain, did not want the colonies to be independent. He insisted that 'a

⁹⁸ 'Speech on Conciliation with America' (22 March 1775), in *WS*, III, 164.

⁹⁹ *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 325.

people of one origin and one character should be directed to the rational objects of Government by joint Counsels, and protected in them by a common force'. In addition, Burke, as well as many contemporaries, strongly believed in the excellence of the British constitution:

None but England can communicate to you the benefits of such a Constitution. We apprehend you are not now, nor for ages are likely to be capable of that form of Constitution in an independent State. Besides, let us suggest to you our apprehensions, that your present union (in which we rejoice, and which we wish long to subsist) cannot always subsist without the authority and weight of this great and long respected Body, to equipoise, and to preserve you amongst yourselves in a just and fair equality. ¹⁰⁰

Warning about the future of America¹⁰¹ clearly reflected his views on the history of the region. While the colonists advanced their societies substantially, the British constitution had, according to Burke, been essential to their development. In the *Account*, the Burkes at times endorsed various regulations imposed upon the trade of the colonies, which had, they thought, contributed to their development. In his *Speech on American Taxation* (19 April 1774), Burke argued that the Navigation Acts were 'the corner-stone of the policy of this country with regard to its

¹⁰⁰ 'Address to the Colonists', in *WS*, III, 283.

¹⁰¹ Even Burke mentioned the possibility of the civil wars. See *ibid.*: 'It may not even be impossible, that a long course of war with the Administration of this Country, may be but a prelude to a series of wars and contentions among yourselves ...'. See also *Annual Register ... for the Year 1766* (London, 1767), pp. 41-2. According to the author, in the course of history, the colonies were 'gradually' shaped into their present various constitutions 'by accident and circumstances' as all other governments were, but these colonies 'were never separated from the mother country'. This was the situation of British America, which was a product of history, and they and the British government should preserve it. Like Burke, taking into consideration the historical path of the colonies, the author reached his own conclusion. Different colonies have different systems of government, and once the colonies lost the authority of the British parliament over them, 'there would be no end of feuds and factions among the several separate governments', ending up with the undesirable situation that the colonies must change their constitutions and create new governments, or 'fall under some foreign power'. The author's Burkean arguments and choice of words might persuade modern readers to reconsider its authorship.

colonies'. It was 'the system of a monopoly' and forced the colonies to submit to 'commercial servitude'.¹⁰² The acts 'attended the Colonies from their infancy, grew with their growth, and strengthened with their strength'. Fishery, agriculture and ship-building in the colonies owed their development to the capital yielded by this monopolistic system. In short, the growth of the colonies was not achieved under 'perfect freedom', but under 'an happy and a liberal condition'. Burke strongly believed that the colonies had flourished under the superintendence of the British government. If the British Empire was facing new circumstances resulting from the growth of the colonies, it should be possible, he claimed, for the constitution to be adapted to such a changing situation, as it had been in previous ages.¹⁰³

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined in detail Burke's view of the history of the Americas. The first section discussed the authorship and sources of the *Account*. Although the problem of the authorship can never be completely resolved, in this chapter, the *Account* is assumed to be a 'collaborative work', in which Burke shared notions with William. In section two, the historical descriptions of the European settlements in the Americas in the *Account* were explored, and it was argued that there were several things characteristic of them: their attention to the role of the particular individuals and providence, the Burkean idea of the Christian religion, their interest in and analysis of the political economy of the colonies and the authors' tendency towards generalisation. The next section discussed Burke's view of the history of the American Indians and argued that Burke presumed that the manners of the Indians had remained barbarous for a long period of time, although he also acknowledged that there had been

¹⁰² *Speech on American Taxation*, in *WS*, II, 426-9.

¹⁰³ 'Address to the Colonists', in *WS*, III, 283-5.

some changes in them. In the final section, Burke's view of the history of British North America was addressed, and it was maintained that the colonists had, in Burke's view, been developing their distinct societies, whereas still inheriting European manners and institutions, and also that Burke attributed the development of the colonies to several causes: the British constitution, the free actions and efforts of the colonists, the natural environment and sheer accidents.

If the *Account* cannot be attributed to Burke (however unrealistic it is to assume so), how are these arguments modified? Evidently, the points made in section two come to be solely William's. The arguments in section three can still be retained, although we lose the most substantial evidence to support them. As regards Edmund Burke's view of the history of British North America, his view of the distinct but still European-like colonies, which continued to be under the great support of the British constitution, can certainly be kept. The other points would also remain as Burke's. Although we lose some of the clearest pieces of evidence, it is highly unlikely that Burke did not have such notions.

Chapter Four

Irish History: Suppressed Manners and Incomplete Prosperity

Born and brought up in Ireland, Burke could obviously absorb and access a variety of information about Ireland. He must have seen poverty at first hand in the country and heard people talk about Ireland's problems.¹ His family history may also tell us something about his attitudes toward Ireland. His father Richard may or may not have been a recently converted Protestant of the Church of Ireland,² but his mother certainly remained a Catholic throughout her life. Although Burke's father-in-law, Christopher Nugent, was also a Catholic, Nugent had a Presbyterian wife who brought up her daughter (i.e., Burke's future spouse) as a Protestant.³ His personal background naturally made him interested in the history of his native country and may help explain his attitudes towards Irish affairs in general.⁴ When he was a student at Trinity College, Dublin, although Irish history was not on the curriculum, he seems to have educated himself about it.⁵ In 1746, for example, he wrote to Richard Shackleton: 'I spend three hours almost every day in the publick Library where there is a fine Collection of Books— the best way in the world of killing thought— as for other Studies I am deep in Metaphysics and poetry. I have read some history. I am endeavouring to get a little into the accounts of this our own poor Country'.⁶ The 'publick Library' probably means Trinity College Library. While the young Burke, before entering the Westminster parliament, worked upon many subjects of study, Irish history was clearly one of his principal

¹ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 2.

² There is, however, no conclusive evidence on this. See *ibid.*, I, 3-5.

³ The editor's 'Introduction to Part II', in *WS*, IX, 407.

⁴ For Burke's Irish background and its possible shadow over his entire life, see especially Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: a Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992).

⁵ See 'To Richard Shackleton (12 July 1746)', in *Corr.*, I, 68. The 'publick Library' probably means Trinity College Library.

⁶ 'To Richard Shackleton (12 July 1746)', in *Corr.*, I, 68.

concerns.⁷ He might even have planned to write a history of Ireland. On 27 November 1761, George Montagu wrote to Horace Walpole: 'Mr Bourke that you saw at Mr Hamilton's at Hampton Court is going to publish an history of Ireland, and then you will know the little that is to be known of this kingdom'. On 8 December 1761, however, Walpole responded: 'I had been told that Mr Bourk's history was of England, not of Ireland—I am glad it is the latter, for I am now in Mr Hume's England'.⁸ As Walpole noted, what Burke had actually been producing was English history, i.e., the *Abridgment of the English History*. Even so, as will be seen below, in this work, he at times made comments on Irish history.

⁷ In his private library, Burke owned many books relating to Irish history, including: Louis Augustin Alemand, *Historia monastique d'Ireland* (Paris, 1690), LC, p. 12; *Histoire Monastique d'Irelande* (Paris, 1690), LC, p.12; Edmund Borlase, *The History of the Irish Rebellion* (Dublin, 1743), LC, p. 17; William Camden, *Britannia: or, a Chorographical Description of the Flourishing Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the Islands Adjacent* (3 vols., London, 1789), LC MS; Thomas Campbell, *A Philosophical Survey of the South of Ireland, in a series of letters to John Watkinson, M.D.* (1778), LC, p. 23; LC MS lists a work called 'Campbell's Political Survey 2 vols.'; Thomas Campbell, *Ecclesiastical and Literary History of Ireland* (1789), LC MS, LC, p.4; John Curry, *An Historical and Critical Review of the Civil Wars in Ireland* (Dublin, 1775), LC, p. 15; idem., *An Historical and Critical Review of the Civil Wars in Ireland* (2 vols., 1786), LC MS, LC, p. 4; Francis Grose, *The Antiquities of Ireland* (2 vols., London, 1791), LC, p. 15; 'IRELAND—A List of Payments to be made for Civil Affairs, to begin from the first day of April, 1684, *Manuscript*, 2 vol', LC, p. 19; Thomas Leland, *The History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II.* (3 vols., 1773), LC MS, LC, p. 16; Thomas Leland, *The History of the Life and Reign of Philip King of Macedon: the Father of Alexander* (2 vols., second edition, London: 1775), LC MS; Sylvester O'Halloran, *A General History of Ireland* (2 vols., 1778), LC MS, LC, p. 16; 'Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion', LC MS; Edward Lhuyd, *Archaeologia Britannica, giving some Account Additional to What has hitherto been Publish'd, of the Languages, Histories, and Customs of the Original Inhabitants of Great Britain* (Oxford: 1707), LC MS; James Simon, *An Essay towards an Historical Account of Irish Coins, and of the currency of foreign monies in Ireland. With an appendix: containing several statutes, proclamations, patents, acts of state, and letters relating to the same.* (Dublin, 1749), LC MS; Charles Vallancey, *A Vindication of the Ancient History of Ireland* (Dublin, 1786), LC, p. 22; Charles Vallancey, *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, vol. 5 (Dublin, 1790), LC MS, LC, p. 23. Burke was also a subscriber of James Mullala's *A View of Irish Affairs since the Revolution of 1668, to ...1795*, etc. (2 vols., Dublin, 1795). See WS, IX, 392n.

⁸ *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis et al. (48 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1937-1983), IX, 405, 407. See also, Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 193.

Burke, who moved to London in 1750 to study law at the Middle Temple, returned to Ireland for two periods in the early 1760s as private secretary to William Gerard Hamilton (1729-1796), Chief Secretary of Ireland from 1761. Through this political apprenticeship, he learned about Irish politics. Around the same period, he seems to have worked upon his *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, in which Burke at times displayed his knowledge and view of Irish history while in the process of denouncing the penal laws.

After becoming a British MP, he did not cease to speak and write about Irish affairs. In the late 1770s, the American War of Independence seriously affected the Irish economy and the trade restrictions imposed by the British parliament made Irishmen even more exasperated than ever before. Burke deplored the restraints on Irish trade and maintained that a more liberal policy would promote the welfare of the whole empire.⁹ In 1782 and 1783 when Irish legislative independence was debated and granted, although he acknowledged that parliamentary independence must be conceded to Ireland, Burke certainly wished Ireland to remain closely linked with Britain and the British constitution.¹⁰ A vigorous campaign for further Irish Catholic relief which began at the end of 1791, once again drew Burke's attention to Irish affairs and led him to produce his *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*. Around the same period, his son Richard was appointed an agent of the Catholic Committee in Ireland and (although he was soon dismissed) he helped deliver the Catholic petition to George III. Although Burke made a visit to his native country only once after 1766 (for three weeks in 1786), the contemporary political situation continued to provide him with opportunities to look into Irish affairs. Almost every work of his on Ireland is informed by his vision of Irish history and Burke, of course, knew that most contemporary Irish problems had historical origins that involved its relations with Britain.

⁹ The editor's 'Introduction to Part II', in *WS*, IX, 400-1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, IX, 404-5.

As has been seen in the introduction of this thesis, 'Burke and Irish history' was a theme which has long been known to modern commentators. Nevertheless, it has not necessarily been addressed sufficiently. This is surprising, since his views on Ireland have been recognised as significant in considering his thought as a whole and it seems obvious that his views on Irish history can be a key to understanding his attitude to his native country. This chapter seeks to put forward a more comprehensive account of Burke's views on Irish history than that has been previously offered by modern scholars. Section one considers Burke as a supporter of eighteenth-century Irish historiography, and this provides us with some important clues to his views on Irish history. His communications with Charles O'Connor (1710-91), John Curry (c.1702-80), Thomas Leland (1722-1785), Colonel Charles Vallancey (1712-1812) and Thomas Campbell (1733-1795) are the chief subjects examined here. In section two, Burke's own views on Irish history are analysed. In particular, his views on ancient Ireland, Irish poetry (including Burke's evaluation of James Macpherson's works), medieval Ireland in general, the Brehon law, the effects of the English Reformation on Ireland, the Rebellion of 1641, the impact of the penal laws on the Catholics, the growing 'prosperity' of Ireland after 1688-9, and Anglo-Irish constitutional relations, will all be examined.

4.1 Burke and Irish Historiography

During the eighteenth century, several Irish historians attempted to overcome and refute the histories of Ireland written by English historians. While English protestant historians and the Scot, David Hume, described the native Irish as barbarous savages, these Irish revisionist historians tried to refute this accusation and insisted that ancient Ireland had possessed a high culture and civilisation. The revisionists also wanted to

repudiate the English interpretation of the Irish Rebellion of 1641 which maintained that Irish Catholic savages had slaughtered many Protestant settlers. This interpretation enabled the English to justify the subsequent property confiscations and religious suppression in Ireland, whereas the Irish revisionists and Burke, as shall be seen, claimed that the rebellion had in reality been provoked by the actions of the Protestant leadership. Burke was, in fact, very active in supporting the Irish revisionists who tried to write a new style of Irish history. Although this is an issue to which commentators have not frequently drawn attention, it is certainly important to our present theme.

By the year 1763, Burke came to be acquainted with Charles O'Connor and John Curry, whose historical studies he tried to support. O'Connor was the only published historian, until the 1760s, who knew the ancient Irish language. In 1753, he published his *Dissertations on the Ancient History of Ireland*. A revised edition of this work was published in 1766, and he wrote to Burke promising to send him a copy.¹¹ The 1766 edition's preface acknowledged Burke's support, and even seems to have expected his future contribution to the subject.¹² O'Connor hoped till the late 1760s that Burke would write a revisionist history of Ireland.¹³ John Curry was interested in modern history and published *A Brief Account of ... the Rebellion of ...October, 1641* (1747), which was the first work written by a native

¹¹ 'O'Connor to Burke (25 April 1765)', in *Letters of Charles O'Connor of Belanagare: A Catholic Voice in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. Robert E. Ward et al. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), p. 174.

¹² Charles O'Connor, *Dissertations on the History of Ireland* (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1766), pp. xv-xvi: 'To one who fell into so unbeaten a Track, Nothing can be more gratifying than the Countenance and Encouragement of Men, whose own Writings will edify future, as they do the present Times. In this Number, the Writer must justly place *E. Burke* ... Among other Instances, he supplied the Writer with *Irish Comments* on the Aphorisms of *Hippocrates*, written in the 13th Century'.

¹³ J.C. Weston, Jr., 'Edmund Burke's Irish History: A Hypothesis', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 77 (1962), 397-403 (at 398); *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London, 1881), p. 486a.

Irishman about that subject.¹⁴ He also published *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion* (1758). Burke read his *Historical Memoirs*, and passed it on to Tobias Smollett, who was the editor of the *Critical Review*, in which a quite favourable review appeared in 1761.¹⁵ Around the same period, Burke had an opportunity to meet an English Protestant historian, Ferdinando Warner, and, in the *Annual Register*, he wrote a very favourable review of his work.¹⁶ In 1764, Burke also asked Curry about information on the period of the 1641 Rebellion and also gave him an 'excellent hint' for improving the *Historical Memoirs*.¹⁷ Burke carried this book to England and intended to support the publication of a revised edition 'under [his] inspection, & correction'. In the event, however, he did not support the publication of Curry's new edition.¹⁸ Burke's own changing situation must have been behind this decision. After entering parliament, he seems to have become more cautious of his connections with Roman Catholics because of English prejudice against Catholicism and suspicions about his own religious opinions. Although he continued to sympathise with their plight, he could not now be so outspoken. He was often ridiculed and attacked as a crypto-papist by his opponents at Westminster,¹⁹ and even his patron, Rockingham, and his colleagues in the party would not have been pleased with such connections if they had discovered more about them.²⁰ In an age when

¹⁴ Weston, 'Edmund Burke's Irish History: A Hypothesis', p. 399.

¹⁵ 'O'Connor to John Curry (8 Aug 1768)', in *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, p. 489b.

¹⁶ See *Annual Register for the Year 1763* (London, 1764), pp. 257-264 *bis*; Weston, 'Edmund Burke's Irish History: A Hypothesis', p. 399. In fact, almost no one had written a general history of Ireland until Warner's *History of Ireland to the Year 1171* (1763) (only volume one was published) appeared.

¹⁷ Weston, 'Edmund Burke's Irish History: A Hypothesis', p. 399; *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, pp. 489b, 480a.

¹⁸ Walter D. Love, 'Edmund Burke and an Irish Historiographical Controversy', *History and Theory*, 2 (1962), 180-198 (at 182).

¹⁹ Burke was even believed to be a secret Jesuit and at times was so caricatured. For this, see Nicholas K. Robinson, *Edmund Burke: a Life in Caricature* (New Haven: London: Yale University Press, 1996).

²⁰ See O'Brien, *The Great Melody*, p. 49.

Catholics were not admitted to public office, both Burke and his enemies well understood and kept in mind the historical hostility to Roman Catholicism in Britain.

Thomas Leland was another Irish historian to whom Burke offered his support. When visiting Beechwood, in September 1765, Burke discovered by accident some manuscripts in Sebright's library written in old Irish (originally collected by Edward Lhuyd (1660-1709) and purchased by Sir John Sebright's grandfather in 1713). In 1769, Burke borrowed these manuscripts (two volumes) and sent them to Leland.²¹ He expected Leland to become a 'philosophical historian' in Ireland and to write the truth about Irish history, especially about the problem of the Rebellion of 1641. Nevertheless, Leland's *History of Ireland*, published in 1773, disappointed him. Later, in a letter to his son Richard, Burke stated:

Leland went over them with me and poor Bowdens, long since dead; We agreed about them; but when he began to write History, he thought only of himself and the Bookseller — for his History, was written at my earnest desire—but the mode of doing it varied from his first conceptions — Had he been more firm he would have sold his work quite as well as he did.²²

In 1783, Colonel Charles Vallancey sent Burke the twelfth number of his *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis* and wrote to him that, in it, the ancient history of Ireland 'cleared of fable and proved to be founded on fact' would be found.²³ The twelfth number of the *Collectanea* made use of the manuscripts

²¹ *Corr.*, V, 15n. In the 1770s, these manuscripts were circulated among Leland, Vallancey and others, but were returned to Sebright through Burke. Eventually, Trinity College was given the manuscripts on 31 October 1786. See *Corr.*, V, 108n; W.D. Love, 'Edmund Burke, Charles Vallancey and the Sebright Manuscripts', *Hermathena*, 95 (1961), 21-35.

²² 'To Richard Burke, Jr (20 March 1792)', in *Corr.*, VII, 104. See also Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 510-511. Burke does not seem to have been content with Leland's description of the battles between the houses of Desmond and Butler.

²³ 'Vallancey to Burke (25 June 1783)', Bk P 1/1816.

discovered by Burke in the library of Sir John Sebright, and Vallancey insisted that these manuscripts established his 'system of deriving the 2nd Colony of the Irish from the ancient Etrurians settled at Crotona or Cortona'.²⁴ Burke wrote to Vallancey:

It is true, that being but a poor linguist, and an ill-informed antiquarian, I am incapable of bringing any thing but docility and admiration to such enquiries. Ireland is surely much obliged to you for the infinite pains you have taken in letting her know what she is, and what she has been. My merit in this matter, or indeed rather my fortune, has only been the accidental discovery, at my friend Sir John Seabright's, of the Irish manuscripts, of which you have made so good an use, and my sending them over to Ireland.²⁵

Although appreciating Vallancey's industry, he cautioned:

But, after asking your pardon for presuming upon any advice in a matter so much above my knowledge, I shall tell you, what a judicious antiquary [probably, Charles O'Connor] about twenty years ago told me, concerning the Chronicles in verse or prose, upon which the Irish histories, and the discussions of antiquaries are founded, that he wondered, that the learned of Ireland had never printed the originals of these pieces, with literal translations into Latin or English, by which they might become proper subjects of criticism; and, by comparison with each other, as well as by an examination of the interior relations of each piece within itself, they might serve to shew how much ought to be retained, and how much rejected. They might also serve to contrast or confirm the histories, which affect to be extracted from them, such as O'Flaherty's²⁶ and Keating's²⁷ ... If I were to give my opinion to the Society of Antiquaries, I should propose that they should be printed in two columns, one Irish and the other Latin, like the Saxon chronicle, which is a very valuable monument; and above all things, that the translation should be exact and literal. It was in the hope that some such thing should

²⁴ Ibid. See also *Corr.*, V, 108.

²⁵ 'Burke to Colonel Charles Vallancey (15 August 1783)', in *Corr.*, V, 108.

²⁶ Roderic O'Flaherty (1629-1718 or 1716), *Ogygia: seu Rerum Hibernicarum Chronologia & etc.* (1683).

²⁷ Geoffrey Keating (1569-1644), *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (1634).

be done, that I originally prevailed on Sir John Seabright to let me have his manuscripts, and that I sent them by Dr Leland to Dublin. You have infinite merit in the taste you have given of them in several of your collections. But these extracts only encrease the curiosity and the just demand of the publick for some entire pieces. Until something of this kind is done, that ancient period of Irish history, which precedes official records, cannot be said to stand upon any proper authority.²⁸

Burke showed the same kind of caution when Vallancey published the fourteenth number of his *Collectanea, A Vindication of the Ancient History of Ireland* (1786) and sent him a copy. While expressing in his letter (on 29 November 1786) an appreciation of Vallancey's industry and erudition, he manifested his distrust of any certainty about ancient history and re-emphasised the necessity of translating ancient Irish historical documents.²⁹ Both the letters show that Burke was not satisfied with Vallancey's scholarship and approach,³⁰ although he acknowledged his own inability to judge the problem. In the summer of 1787, Thomas Campbell came over to Beaconsfield to see Burke, and discussed Irish history with him. Burke

²⁸ *Ibid.*, in *Corr.*, V, 109-110.

²⁹ 'Burke to Colonel Charles Vallancey (29 November)' in *Corr.*, V, 290-1: 'It is indeed a work of uncommon sagacity and erudition, and as entertaining as it is instructive ... Whether your system is fully established, is beyond my decision. I know, that for the first time, you have interwoven and connected, in a manner not easy to be hereafter separated, the Irish antiquities, with those of the polite and learned nations, which are not a whit less uncertain, than those of their new ally ... Will you have the goodness to pardon me for reminding you of what I once before took the liberty to mention; my earnest wish that some of the ancient Irish Historical Monuments should be published as they stand, with a translation in Latin or English. Until something of this kind is done, criticism can have no secure anchorage'.

³⁰ See also Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 508-9. The author recorded a conversation between Burke and 'Mr. T', who was invited to breakfast in December 1786: 'life is short, and, in some respect, it would be a pity that a man of genius should waste his time in such pursuits [i.e., translating the Brehon laws]. *Mr B.* To set a man of genius down to such a task, would be to yoke—a courser of the sun in a mud cart. No, no, one of your cool, plodding, half-burnt bricks of the creation would be the fittest person in the world for such studies. *T.* Colonel Vallancy has laboured hard in that mine. *Mr B.* Yes, in that race he has carried off the prize of industry from all his competitors, and if he has done nothing more, he has wakened a spirit of curiosity in that line, but he has built too much on etymology, and that is a very sandy foundation'.

advised Campbell 'to touch as lightly as possible upon the times preceding the invasion from England', and also passed four folio volumes of manuscripts on to Campbell.³¹ Burke wished Campbell to write a modern history of Ireland. Burke's letter to Vallancey (of 29 November 1786) was made public in the *Dublin Chronicle* on 10-12 April 1788. Campbell read and wrote to the *Chronicle* to stress that, although Vallancey seemed to interpret Burke's letter as an expression of approval for his work, the letter in fact contained serious criticism of it. After quoting Burke's suggestion about translating Irish manuscripts, Campbell wrote to Vallancey: 'Now here you must, in the first place, acknowledge, that, instead of complimenting, Mr. Burke meant to rebuke you, in his polite way, for not following that advice which, it appears, he once had given you; for why else should he beg your pardon?'³² Campbell's *Strictures on the Ecclesiastical and Literary History of Ireland* was published in Dublin in August 1789 (and in London in 1790), and the letters published originally in the *Dublin Chronicle* were also reprinted in the work as a 'supplement'. In its preface, Campbell noted Samuel Johnson's advice as well as Burke's, and stated that in this work he followed the former, although he was never to try the latter in practice. According to Campbell, Johnson once advised O'Connor to carry on this research into the period in Irish history from the introduction of Christianity by St. Patrick to the invasion of the country by the forces of Henry II. While his *Strictures* was dedicated to Burke, it concentrated on the early Christian period of the country. Embarrassed and indignant by what Campbell had written, Vallancey sent another letter to Burke:

³¹ Thomas Campbell, *Strictures on the Ecclesiastical and Literary History of Ireland* (Dublin, 1789), p. 3; John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century: Consisting of Authentic Memoirs and Original Letters of Eminent Persons; and Intended as a Sequel to the Literary Anecdotes* (8 vols., London, 1817-58), VII, 773; *Dr. Campbell's Diary of a Visit to England in 1775*, ed. James L. Clifford, with an Introduction by S.C. Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 20.

³² Campbell, *Strictures*, p. 304.

Sir,

When I had the honour of receiving a letter from you, on your perusal of my *Vindication of the ancient history of Ireland*, I considered it as an applause of my undertaking. Proud of your countenance of my labours, the letter was handed about amongst my friends, and by some means or other, it was copied & printed in a daily paper, in opposition to a critical review of my work, carrying on at that time by Dr Campbell & Dr Ledwich—both had a personal enmity to me, but as they signed fictitious names, their abuse passed unnoticed. Dr Campbell has lately published strictures on the ancient history of Ireland. The work is dedicated to you, and I must suppose you are in possession of a Copy. In this work, the Doctor has introduced all that had appeared in the periodical papers: among others, is a criticism on your letter to me, which I apprehend, has in many parts, perverted the sense of it. I am now about putting to press another Volume of the *Collectanea* ... Dr Campbell now appearing openly, the author of a work dedicated to you, in which I am endeavoured to be exposed in a very ludicrous light, it behoves me to answer him in an Appendix to this volume. Permit me, Sir, to ask, if the explanation given to your letter; contains the sense you meant to express. — if so, I must acknowledge myself a blockhead, and to have misconstrued a letter, I thought replete with applause.³³

Both Vallancey and Campbell regarded Burke as an authority and wanted him to be on his own side. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Burke was far from being satisfied with their works (Campbell may well have been aware of this). Burke's further communications with them are not recorded. He was not specifically interested in their dispute, and even seems to have been disgusted with it. On 20 March 1792, he asked his son Richard to retrieve the manuscripts lent to Campbell: 'Agenda—I. get the Books out of Dr Campbells hands. Let him not trifle with you. I have trifled in giving them to him!'.³⁴

It seems worth noting that the Irish revisionist historians paid particular attention to and tried to explode Hume's representation of the

³³ 'Vallency to Burke (8 October 1789)', Bk P 1/2186.

³⁴ 'Burke to Richard Burke, Jr (20 March 1792)', in *Corr.*, VII, 104.

Irish published in his *History of England*. Like many English historians, the Scot Hume maintained that the 'Irish, from the beginning of time, had been buried in the most profound barbarism and ignorance'.³⁵ Relying upon John Temple, he also regarded 1641 as proof of the incurable cruelty of the Irish.³⁶ Although the Irish revisionists seem to have highly valued Hume as the most philosophical historian of his age,³⁷ they tried many times to refute his view of the Irish past. They wanted to show that Hume was 'careless' or 'not emancipated from those national prejudices'.³⁸ According to his early biographer, Burke, whose view of the Irish was clearly different from that of Hume, once had an argument with Hume about the interpretation of the 1641 Rebellion.³⁹ Hume maintained that Ireland had not had a 'philosophical' historian. Burke and the Irish revisionists endeavoured to create such a historian, but eventually failed.

As regards Burke's view of Irish history, these records of his communications with the Irish revisionists, Hume and others probably indicate that he was more interested in modern Irish history than ancient history, and especially in the 1641 rebellion. This is, as will be seen in the

³⁵ Hume, *History of England*, I, 339; Campbell, *Strictures*, p. 25. See also Hume, *History of England*, V, 335.

³⁶ Hume, *History of England*, V, 338-47 (ch. 55).

³⁷ For instance, see *Letters of Charles O'Connor of Belanagare*, p. 204.

³⁸ Campbell, *Strictures*, p. 27n.

³⁹ See Robert Bisset, *The Life of Edmund Burke* (2 vols., London, 1800), II, 426-7: 'Mr. Hume and he [Burke] had met at Garrick's, and the massacre [of 1641] was one of the subjects discussed. Mr. Burke endeavoured to prove that the received accounts were in a great degree unfounded, or at least very much exaggerated, and quoted affidavits deposited in Trinity College, Dublin. He described various absurd stories that had been propagated and believed by many concerning the Irish; among others, that the ghosts of the murdered Protestants frequented the banks of the Shannon almost from its source to the sea. Mr. Hume maintained the justness of the account, which makes a part of his history. It must be owned that the evidence is much stronger in favour of Mr. Hume's position than Mr. Burke's. In the first place, independent of testimony, it is perfectly consonant to the ferocious and bloodthirsty character so often exhibited by the Irish in their most enormous atrocities'. Nevertheless, modern historians' interpretation of the event is closer to Burke's. See William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (5 vols., London: Longmans, Green, 1892), I, 46-99; *A New History of Ireland III Early Modern Ireland, 1534-1691*, ed. T.W. Moody *et al.* (Oxford, 1976), p. 291; Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 188.

next section, further confirmed by a close reading of his texts.

4.2 Burke's Views on Irish History

In the eighteenth century there was an intense debate on Irish history, to which Burke, to some extent, committed himself. The debate was highly polemical, not a pure pursuit of historical truth, and it concerned the period from ancient to modern times. Although Burke did not have much knowledge about early Irish history, and was presumably more interested in its modern than its ancient history,⁴⁰ the available evidence does show he had a lasting interest in the ancient history of his native land. One example is his admiration of Irish poetry. Poetry was one of his favourite genres and he, as well as many contemporaries, did not question that poetry 'was highly cultivated by the ancient Irish'.⁴¹ When James Macpherson's works were published,⁴² he was very fascinated by them. While well aware that the problem of 'Ossian' was largely related to the historical origins and national identity of Scotland and Ireland, in his review of *Fingal*, he enthusiastically praised the genius of the poet, although he also did not fail to mention that the age when the poem was composed had been 'ignorant and barbarous'.⁴³ This initial enthusiasm for Macpherson's works evidently reflected his wish for the true story of both ancient and modern Ireland to be revealed, but nevertheless this attitude did not last long. On 19 September 1763, Hume reported to Hugh Blair: 'I was told by Burke, a very ingenious Irish

⁴⁰ *WS*, IX, p. 392 (editor's Introduction); *Corr.*, II, 285; 'Burke to Colonel Charles Vallancey (15 August 1783)' in *ibid.*, V, 108-9.

⁴¹ Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 509.

⁴² In the early 1760s, Macpherson published three collections of poems purporting to be translations of the works of a legendary warrior and bard in Scotland and Ireland, Ossian, originally written in Gaelic. The poems immediately brought about enthusiasm and controversy. For Ossian issues, for instance, see O'Halloran, 'Irish Re-Creations of the Gaelic Past: The Challenge of Macpherson's Ossian'.

⁴³ See his review of the *Fingal* in the *Annual Register for 1761* (London, 1762), p. 281 *bis*.

gentleman, the author of a tract on the Sublime and Beautiful, that on the first publication of Macpherson's book, all the Irish cried out, *we know all these poems, we have always heard them from our infancy*. But when he asked more particular questions, he could never learn, that any one had ever heard, or could repeat the original of any one paragraph of the pretended translation'.⁴⁴ By the early 1770s, Burke changed his position completely and became increasingly doubtful about the authenticity of those poems.

Burke's letter to Thomas Percy on 24 March 1772 shows that he was now convinced that the poems were forgeries, while it also indicates his continuous attention to the Ossian controversy. In this letter, Burke stated:

The Dissertations I spoke of are in the Journal des Scavants ... They are a sort of refutation of the System laid down in Some late forgeries relative to the fabulous Heroes so frequently mentioned in the Irish Histories & Romances ... These dissertations are not so much on the genuineness of the Poems, as on some historical matter intended by the Macphersons to be grounded on them. Nothing can be more obvious than that Fingal &c have been written originally in English.⁴⁵

Fifteen years later, according to Boswell, Burke dismissed *Fingal* once more by saying that 'it was culpable to carry on a literary imposture upon which *facts* could be founded, so as that the world should be deceived as to manners and ancient history'.⁴⁶ Even so, it seems that he still strongly believed in the excellence of Irish poetry, which had fascinated some ancient Irish kings and Burke himself, but which was now scattered and which

⁴⁴ *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), I, 400.

⁴⁵ See 'Burke to Thomas Percy (24 March 1772)', in F.P. Lock, 'Unpublished Burke Letters (II), 1765-97', *English Historical Review*, 114 (1999), 636-57 (at 640).

⁴⁶ *Boswell: The English Experiment 1785-1789*, ed. Irma S. Lustig and Frederick A. Pottle (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. 150.

Burke wished to see collected.⁴⁷

In larger perspective, in the late eighteenth-century interpretation of ancient Ireland, there were two main variations: an 'Oriental' system and a 'Northern' or 'Scandian' system. The former was an interpretation that claimed that the early settlers in Ireland came from the east and that, in particular, 'Milesians' brought the arts and letters of the Phoenicians and Egyptians with them. This interpretation claims that there was a substantial civilisation in ancient Ireland, almost equivalent to that of ancient Rome. On the other hand, the Scandian view held that Ireland was exposed from the beginning of time to northern invaders from Scandinavia and Britain, and especially to a Danish invasion in the ninth century. In this interpretation, the ancient Irish were barbarians and there had not been any civilisation until the Anglo-Normans invaded the country in the later twelfth century. The advocates of this interpretation dismissed the manuscripts about ancient Ireland as medieval fabrications.⁴⁸ In his *Abridgment of English History*, Burke seems to have commented upon this problem. For example, he states:

The people of Ireland lay claim to a very extravagant antiquity, through a vanity common to all nations. The accounts, which are given by their ancient chronicles, of their first settlements are generally tales confuted by their own absurdity. The settlement of the greatest consequence, the best authenticated, and from which the Irish deduce the pedigree of the best families, is derived from Spain; it was called Clan Milea, or the descendants of Milesius and Kin Scuit, or the race of Scyths, afterwards known by the name of Scots. The Irish historians suppose this race descended from a person called Gathel, a Scythian by birth, an Ægyptian by education, the contemporary and friend of the prophet Moses. But these histories, seeming clear sighted in the obscure affairs of so blind an antiquity, instead of passing for treasuries of ancient

⁴⁷ Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 509-510. He mentioned 'Sedulius' as 'an excellent poet'.

⁴⁸ Love, 'Edmund Burke and an Irish Historiographical Controversy', pp. 183-4.

facts, are regarded by the judicious as modern fictions.⁴⁹

Here, as well as in the *Vindication of Natural Society* and other works, Burke was cautious of any certainty about ancient history. Burke read Paul de Rapin de Thoyras and some other modern historians and agreed with them in this particular respect, but he was not uncritical of them. According to Burke, it is most probable that Ireland was first inhabited by migrants from Britain. These two regions were geographically close enough to make the coast of each visible from the other side. In the ancient era, the language, manners and religion were almost the same in the two countries. Clearly, Burke was not a supporter of the 'Oriental' system when he maintained that the Milesian migration, 'whenever it arrived in Ireland, could have made no great change in the manners or language, as the ancient Spaniards were a branch of the Celtæ, as well as the old inhabitants of Ireland'. Although Sir William Temple (1628-99) and Rapin maintained that there was a difference between the Irish language and the other languages, this was not true. In fact, Irish resembled not only the languages of the Welsh and Armorick, but also Greek and Latin. As regards religion, Druidism had prevailed in Ireland in the ancient period, but declined when St. Patrick propagated a new religion in the fourth century. The 'Christian religion was', Burke wrote, 'embraced and cultivated, with an uncommon zeal'. While the rest of Europe had been afflicted with deep confusion and disorder following the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the island became 'a refuge for learning, almost extinguished every where else'. Science, cultivated in the monasteries, flourished in seventh- and eighth-century Ireland. In subsequent centuries, the Danes and other pagans, however, plundered the monasteries and utterly demolished the meditative life in Ireland as they did in other countries. As soon as such destructive wars even expelled these invaders themselves, Ireland was plunged into internal strife. The ancient

⁴⁹ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 509-510.

learning and repose never returned, and a state of ignorance, poverty and barbarism covered the country to a greater extent than over the rest of Europe. Disorder prevailed in the Irish church as well as in the civil economy of the country, which provided the Pope with a plausible pretext for giving Henry II a commission to conquer the country, in order to carry out reforms.⁵⁰ Although Burke's views on early medieval history of Ireland were probably not extraordinary, he disagreed with some other contemporary historians in arguing for a thriving state of Ireland before the Danish invasions.⁵¹ A key feature of his view of Irish history was his description of the moment of Henry II's conquest. He wrote:

Before the effect of this first impression had time to wear off, Henry, having settled his affairs abroad, entered the harbour of Cork with a fleet of four hundred sail, at once to secure the conquest, and the allegiance of the conquerors. The fame of so great a force arriving under a prince, dreaded by all Europe, very soon disposed all the petty princes, with their King Roderic, to submit and do homage to Henry. They had not been able to resist the arms of his vassals, and they hoped better treatment from submitting to the ambition of a great king, who left them every thing but the honour of their independency, than from the avarice of adventurers, from which nothing was secure.⁵²

This passage needs to be read along with one of his early manuscripts, 'Hints of Ireland', where he argued that the Irish chiefs pledged their allegiance to Henry, but never submitted themselves to the people of England.⁵³ These opinions must also be understood within the context of

⁵⁰ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 510-511.

⁵¹ Hume, who considered the Irish to have been utterly barbarous and ignorant, claimed that the Danes' inroads had improved the state of the country. See Hume, *History of England*, I, 340.

⁵² *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 513.

⁵³ Edmund Burke, 'Hints of Ireland', in Richard Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 642-644 (at 642-3): 'It is in the Histories of that time that the Irish Princes did Homage

Irish historiography advanced since the end of the seventeenth century.

The conquest by Henry II was one of the defining moments in Irish history and it was, in eighteenth-century Irish historiography, often connected to the problem of the Irish legislature. The Irish patriots from the 1690s to the 1780s at times argued that Henry II and his successors had granted the Irish people the right to live under their own legislature, in exchange for their voluntary submission to the Crown.⁵⁴ They were, to a large extent, indebted to William Molyneux's *The Case of Ireland's being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England, Stated* (1698), which, reprinted as it was several times during the eighteenth century, became the mainstay of the Anglo-Irish claims to the constitutional reforms demanded in the eighteenth century. Eminent Irish writers such as Jonathan Swift memorably mentioned Molyneux in their works, whereas Charles Lucas's *Tenth Address to the Freeholders and Free Citizens of Dublin* (1749) helped establish the popular myth that *The Case* was burned by the public hangman ordered by the English Commons in 1698. In his celebrated parliamentary speech on the subject of the legislative independence of the Irish parliament, on 22 February 1782, Henry Grattan seems to have referred to Molyneux in calling for the independence of the Irish legislature.⁵⁵ While Burke must have known this line of argument and its

and swear fealty to H[enry] 2. ... But suppose the Irish chiefs never so willing to do this Homage & to submit themselves to the people of England'.

⁵⁴ S.J. Connolly, 'Introduction: varieties of Irish political thought' in *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. S.J. Connolly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 11-26. Their argument would, however, not be supported by modern historiography, since no historical evidence proves that either an English or an Irish parliament existed in the twelfth century.

⁵⁵ See Patrick Kelly, 'William Molyneux and the Spirit of Liberty in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 3 (1988), 133-148 (at 133, 136, 137-9, 142). For Molyneux, see also J.G. Simms, *William Molyneux of Dublin 1656-1698* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1982); Patrick Kelly, 'Recasting a tradition: William Molyneux and the sources on *The Case of Ireland ... Stated* (1698)', in *Political Thought in Seventeenth-Century Ireland: Kingdom or Colony*, ed. Jane H. Ohlmeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 83-106; Patrick Kelly, 'Conquest versus consent as the basis of the English title to Ireland in Molyneux's *Case of Ireland*

historical contexts, there is evidence that he might have accepted the Anglo-Irish interpretation of the origins of the Irish parliament. In his 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', he maintained that Ireland had not had a parliament before the English conquest, although she had never been governed by a despotic power. 'But we have all the reason in the world to be assured', Burke argued, 'that a form of Parliament, such as England then enjoyed, she instantly communicated to Ireland'.⁵⁶ In so arguing, he did not intend to examine the origins of the Irish legislature as far as the contemporary Irish patriots did. As R. B. McDowell suggests, it does not seem that Burke, in the 1760s and the 1770s, had any complaint against Anglo-Irish constitutional relations.⁵⁷ His point was rather that Ireland had flourished under her separate but not independent legislature. An attempt to conquer the kingdom by arms in the reign of Elizabeth was fruitless and, in fact, it was the English constitution, not her arms, that conquered Ireland. Burke believed that the modern foundation of the Irish parliament had largely been established in 1614 when new parliamentary boroughs were created by James I. Although Ireland had only a 'partial' parliament before that time, she had had a 'general' parliament since then.⁵⁸ Forty new boroughs were added to the Irish parliament in order to bring the Irish House of Commons to a state of dependence⁵⁹ and to destroy 'the then natural interests of the Country'.⁶⁰ The Protestant representatives returned from these boroughs were 'installed by force and violence'.⁶¹ The Irish constitution had not been substantially altered by the English since then.

... *Stated* (1698)', in *British Interventions in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. Ciaran Brady and Jane Ohlmeyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 334-356.

⁵⁶ 'Speech on Conciliation with America' (22 March 1775), in *WS*, III, 139-140.

⁵⁷ R.B. McDowell, 'Burke and Ireland', in *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion*, ed. David Dickson, Daire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), 102-114 (at 104).

⁵⁸ 'Speech on Conciliation with America' (22 March 1775), in *WS*, III, 140.

⁵⁹ 'To Unknown--- [February 1797]', in *Corr.*, IX, 256 (or *WS*, IX, 674).

⁶⁰ 'Burke to French Laurence ([23] November 1796)', in *Corr.*, IX, 125.

⁶¹ 'To Unknown--- [February 1797]', in *ibid.*, IX, 256 (or *WS*, IX, 674).

Although he was, of course, not fond of such an antagonistic policy against the Irish Catholics, Burke was convinced that the 'actual' Irish constitution 'fabricated' ⁶² in 1614 had now acquired prescriptive titles. ⁶³ This constitution was further consolidated by subsequent great events. In his 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', Burke asserted that the principle of the Irish constitution 'was respected by usurpation; restored with the restoration of Monarchy, and established, I trust, for ever, by the glorious Revolution'. 'This has made Ireland the great and flourishing kingdom that it is', he continued, 'and from a disgrace and a burthen intolerable to this nation, has rendered her a principal part of our strength and ornament'. ⁶⁴ By being successfully combined with England, Ireland could enjoy prosperity. As will be shown below, while Burke was highly critical of the penal laws which were one of the devastating effects of the Williamite conquest of Ireland in 1689-91, unlike the Irish patriots, he never wished the Irish legislature or Ireland herself to be entirely separate from Britain. ⁶⁵ Although by the summer of 1782 he reluctantly had to accept the legislative independence of the Irish parliament, the achievement of the 'Irish revolution of 1782' as well as the memory of the American Revolutionary War were enough to make Burke restless and wonder whether his worst fear of the total separation of Ireland from Britain might be realised. ⁶⁶

The conquest of Ireland by Henry II was also a starting point in thinking

⁶² 'Burke to French Laurence (12 May 1797)' in *Corr.*, IX, 336.

⁶³ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, II, 407n. For the details of James I's Irish parliament, for example, see T.W. Moody, 'The Irish Parliament under Elizabeth and James I: A General Survey', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 45 (1939/1940), 41-81.

⁶⁴ 'Speech on Conciliation with America' (22 March 1775), in *WS*, III, 140.

⁶⁵ He actually censured the patriots such as Dr Charles Lucas (1713-71). For example, see 'Burke to Charles O'Hara (3 July 1761)', in *Corr.*, I, 139-140; 'Burke to Charles O'Hara (18 November 1771)', in *ibid.*, II, 287.

⁶⁶ 'Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election (6 September 1780)', in *WS*, III, 633; 'Burke to Earl Fitzwilliam (20 November 1796)' in *Corr.*, IX, 122.

about the problem of the relationship between the native Irish law and the English common law in Ireland. In his *Strictures*, Campbell argued, that if Henry II had made 'a complete reduction of Ireland' and 'communicated to all the natives the common benefits of the English laws and the English constitution' then 'England and Ireland would have been long since, incorporated as one people'. What Henry accomplished, however, was far from being an encouraging union, but was in fact 'mutual depression and mutual destruction'.⁶⁷ The framework of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century debates on this problem was provided by Edmund Spenser and Sir John Davies, and the latter had claimed that the native Irish customary law, traditionally called the Brehon law, was largely regarded as the cause of the barbarism of the Irish people and of their frequent revolts and that the English common law should have been adopted in Ireland at an earlier age. Davies looked upon the customs of gavelkind⁶⁸ and tanistry⁶⁹ as particularly iniquitous.⁷⁰ Davies' critique of the Brehon law was so influential that even the Irish revisionists were at times obliged to accept his characterisation of it. In the second edition of the *Dissertations* (1753), O'Connor asserted that Ireland had flourished for several ages under its native law, and that it was important to understand that the Brehon law had been made for their peculiar manners and policies under their own legislature in the distant past.⁷¹ What O'Connor wanted to maintain was that

⁶⁷ Campbell, *Strictures*, p. 251.

⁶⁸ *OED*, Irish gavelkind: 'a system of tribal succession, by which land, on the decease of its occupant, was thrown into the common stock, and the whole area redivided among the members of the sept'.

⁶⁹ *OED*, 'A system of life-tenure among the ancient Irish and Gaels, whereby the succession to an estate or dignity was conferred by election upon the 'eldest and worthiest' among the surviving kinsmen of the deceased lord'.

⁷⁰ Sir John Davies, *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never Entirely Subdued* (London, [1612] 1747), pp. 120-3, 133-4, 167-174. See also Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland* (Dublin, 1763), pp. 6-17.

⁷¹ In the manuscript draft and the first edition of the work, however, he was less willing to defend the Brehon law or even to be to some extent critical of it. See O'Connor,

the Irish native law operated well under Ireland's independent polity, but, once the Anglo-Normans invaded the country, the English common law was required in order to deal with the new political situation. In this sense, he agreed with Davies that the English law should have been extended to Ireland earlier.⁷² Warner and Leland also wrote that tanistry and gavelkind were causes of instability and barbarism.⁷³ It is in the context of this historiography that we need to situate Burke's notion of the Brehon law. In the *Abridgment*, he claimed:

This order prevailed in Ireland, where the Northern customs were retained some hundreds of years after the rest of Europe had in a great measure receded from them. Tanistry continued in force there, until the beginning of the last century. And we have greatly to regret the narrow notions of our lawyers, who abolished the authority of the Brehon law, and at the same time kept no monuments of it; which if they had done, there is no doubt but many things of great value towards determining many questions relative to the laws, antiquities and manners of this and other countries had been preserved.⁷⁴

While this passage may reflect the early Burke's hatred of lawyers in general, his sympathy for the Brehon legal tradition was perhaps unique to him. Nevertheless, he also realised the problems that accompanied the practice of the Brehon law:

This order of succession, called Tanistry, was said to have been invented in the Danish troubles, lest the tribe, during a minority, should have been endangered for want of a sufficient leader. It was probably much more ancient; but it was, however, attended with very great and pernicious inconveniencies, as it was

Dissertations on the Antient History of Ireland (Dublin, 1753), pp. 5, 48, 80-81, 130, 132-3.

⁷² O'Connor, *Dissertations* (1766), p. 140.

⁷³ Ferdinando Warner, *The History of Ireland*, pp. 89-92; Leland, *History of Ireland*, I, xxxiii-xxxiv.

⁷⁴ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 432.

obviously an affair of difficulty to determine who should be called the worthiest of the blood; and a door being always left open for ambition, this order introduced a greater mischief than it was intended to remedy. Almost every tribe, besides its contention with the neighbouring tribes, nourished faction and discontent within itself.⁷⁵

Throughout his life, he did not lose interest in the ancient customs and laws of Ireland. His discovery of the Sebright manuscripts was a substantial contribution to the problem. Late in life, he still wished the Brehon law to be translated,⁷⁶ which would provide strong historical evidence that would help to demonstrate the uniqueness of Ireland.

The subject in which Burke was most interested in Irish affairs was the problem of religion, especially the long-standing persecution of the Roman Catholic majority. From early till late in his life, he constantly had the same active determination to tackle this problem. As has already been seen, in his *Abridgment*, Burke asserted that the introduction of Christianity had led to the development of science in the seventh and eighth centuries, only for it to be destroyed by the invasion of the Danes. In his *Tracts relating to Popery Laws* (1765), Burke examined the religious affairs of medieval Ireland. In this work, he was quite favourable to James Ussher (1581-1656), whom he regarded as one of the 'most able antiquaries', and who had maintained that the Christian religion which had existed in Ireland before its union with the English crown had not been very different from Protestantism. According to Burke, if this was not an historical fact, at least it could probably be argued that the papal authority had been much weaker in Ireland than in other Catholic countries. The union of Ireland under the English monarch was promoted by Pope Adrian IV in order to make the Church of Ireland more subordinate to the Holy See. This was an arbitrary grant by the pope, on which the English monarchs thereafter founded their title in Ireland for a

⁷⁵ Ibid., in *WS*, I, 511. See also, *ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 512.

⁷⁶ Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 508.

considerable period of time, at least until the Reformation.⁷⁷ In 1395, when the Irish princes submitted to Richard II (1377-99), they were bound by their covenants to pay fines to the Apostolic Chamber.⁷⁸ While, by this time, papal authority had been substantially reduced in England by the monarchs' efforts, there had been a substantial increase of it in Ireland.⁷⁹

Burke probably read Ussher's *Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish and British* (1631) because of his interest in religion,⁸⁰ and in the origins of Irish religion in particular. Like him, commentators today still highly value Ussher's scholarship.⁸¹ It is, however, obvious that Ussher advanced his argument in order to persecute the Irish Catholics. This is evidently incompatible with Burke's denouncement of the penal laws, and it may well be questioned whether Burke was cognizant of the historical context of Ussher's discourse. Moreover, the Irish revisionists whom Burke supported, such as Charles O'Connor, clearly rejected Ussher's notion. When Ferdinando Warner published his *History of Ireland*, O'Connor wrote: while 'Dr. Warner has revived the old exploded Usserian chimera', 'Such a groundless hypothesis hardly deserves a serious refutation'.⁸² This brief reference might, however, not be enough to establish a substantial difference in opinion between Burke, O'Connor and others about Ussher.

Another defining moment in Irish history was the Reformation of the sixteenth century. The description of the Reformation was apparently

⁷⁷ *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, in *WS*, IX, 469.

⁷⁸ Burke's reference was to Sir John Davies's *Discoverie of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued* (1612).

⁷⁹ *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, in *WS*, IX, 470: 'By this time, so far as regarded England, the Kings had extremely abridged the Papal power in many material particulars; they had passed the Statute of Provisors; the Statute of Premunire; and indeed struck out of the Papal authrotiy all things at least that seemed to infringe on their temporal independence. In Ireland, however, their proceeding was directly the reverse: there they thought it expedient to exalt it at least as high as ever'.

⁸⁰ In his private library, Burke owned Ussher's *Britannicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates* (1639). See *LC*, p. 24.

⁸¹ For instance, see Alan Ford's entry on 'James Ussher (1581-1656)', in *ODNB*.

⁸² 'Charles O'Connor to John Curry (M.D., 23 July, 1763)', in *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, pp. 476-7.

another debating point in Irish historiography. According to Charles O'Connor, while the English had charged the 'perverseness' of the Irish on their 'nature' since the twelfth century, after the Reformation they attributed it to their 'religion'.⁸³ Thomas Leland did not detail the effect of the Reformation on Ireland, because he was afraid of an angry response from the English. In his *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, while denouncing the penal laws, Burke embarked on an historical assessment of the effect of the English Reformation on Ireland. Although 'the abettors of our Penal Laws' maintain that society cannot subsist with 'this old possessed superstition', i.e., Roman Catholicism, this notion apparently conflicts with the historical evidence. According to Burke, 'society not only exists, but flourishes at this hour with this superstition, in many Countries, under every form of Government; in some established, in some tolerated; in others, upon an equal footing'. In Britain and Ireland, civil society certainly existed before the Reformation. The people there were 'happy enough, in their opinion at least, before the change', and partook of the benefits produced in society. They are, however, now persecuted and excluded from these benefits. Since such persecutions were not necessary at all, 'our very Reformation is made in a degree noxious'. 'If this be improvement', Burke maintained, 'truly I know not what can be called a depravation of society'.⁸⁴ In Ireland, the Reformation was a turning point in the fortunes of the inhabitants. Although in England and Scotland the Reformation was a necessary and moderate reform, in Ireland its consequences were very different. It seems clear that Burke did not intend to criticise the English Reformation itself. Although the English Reformation was an admirable historical event, in his view, the Reformation in Ireland had long been stained by a series of futile persecutions of the

⁸³ O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*, p. 146; James Touchet, *The Earl of Castlehaven's Memoirs: or his Review of the Late Wars of Ireland* [ed. Charles O'Connor] (Waterford, 1753), editor's preface, pp. xiii, xv.

⁸⁴ *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, in WS, IX, 468.

Roman Catholics majority.

For the Irish revisionists, as well as for Burke, one of the greatest tragedies in Irish history after the Reformation was the Irish Rebellion of 1641. Re-interpretations of the 1641 rebellion were a focal point for them in their historiography, and probably it was so in Burke's views on Irish history. As we have already seen, the revisionists criticised those English historians as well as David Hume, who had asserted that the 1641 rebellion was decisive proof of the cruelty of the Irish Catholics. Instead, they maintained that the rebellion was 'provoked' by the long-standing religious persecution practised by the Protestant governing minority. While Burke supported the Irish revisionists, and wanted a true interpretation of 1641 to be written, he himself at times expressed his own views of it in his works. When Burke, in his *Abridgment*, wrote, 'the continual efforts of the Irish, for more than four hundred years, proved insufficient to dislodge them [the English]', he may have had in mind the rebellions of 1641 and 1688 as well as the rebellion of Silken Thomas in 1536-7 and the revolt of the northern earls in the 1590s.⁸⁵ In his *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, Burke also stated:

It cannot, I confess, be denied, that those miserable performances which go about under the names of Histories of Ireland, do indeed represent those events after this manner; and they would persuade us, contrary to the known order of Nature, that indulgence and moderation in Governors is the natural incitement in subjects to rebel. But there is an interior History of Ireland, the genuine voice of its records and monuments, which speaks a very different language from these histories, from Temple and from Clarendon, these restore Nature to its just rights, and policy to its proper order. For they even now show to those who have been at the pains to examine them, and they may show one day to all the world, that these rebellions were not produced by toleration, but by persecution; that they arose not from just and mild government, but from the most unparalleled oppression.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 514.

⁸⁶ *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, in *WS*, IX, 478-9.

In denouncing Sir John Temple (1600-77)'s *The Irish Rebellion* and Clarendon's *True Historical Narrative of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England, 1702-4*, Burke surely believed that the Irish rebellions had been misrepresented by these historians and by other contemporaries. His view of 1641 was most clearly expressed in his letter to William Markham (posted on 9 November 1771), in which he wrote:

W.B. [William Burke] and my Brother most certainly never have spoken to you on the Subject. They know little or nothing of the Irish History. They have never thought on it at all; *I* have studied it with more Care than is common, and I have spoken to you on the Subject, I dare say 20 times. This mustard Bowl is *my* thunder. "Me—Me—adsum qui feci, ille nec ausus nec potuit." Indeed I *have* my opinion on that part of history, which I have often delivered to you; to every one I conversed with on the Subject, and which I mean still, to deliver whenever the occasion calls for it. Which is "That the Irish Rebellion of 1641 was not only (as our silly things called Historys call it), not utterly *unprovoked* but that no History, that I have ever read furnishes an Instance of any that was so *provoked* ". And that "in almost all parts of it, it has been extremely and most absurdly misrepresented".⁸⁷

There are three points to which we need to draw attention in this letter. Burke maintained that he had studied Irish history earnestly, and so he was entitled to his own opinions; 1641 was placed at the core of Irish history in his mind; and 1641 had been twisted in the interpretations so far offered by historians. Towards the end of his life, he still held to the same viewpoint. He believed that a series of oppressive policies since those of Arthur Chichester (1563-1625), especially the cruel policies of Thomas Wentworth (1593-1641),⁸⁸ had 'kindled at length the flames of that rebellion which

⁸⁷ 'To Dr William Markham [*post* 9 November 1771]', in *Corr.*, II, 285.

⁸⁸ Arthur Chichester served as lord deputy of Ireland during 1605-1616, and so did Thomas Wentworth during 1631-39. For the details, see John McCavitt's entry on

broke out in 1641'.⁸⁹ In 1641, the Irish claimed that they were loyal to the king, but it was true that they rebelled against the authority of the English parliament. Even if the rebellion of 1641 was an unpardonable crime, they should not be punished forever. In 1792, in his *Letter to Richard Burke*, Burke maintained:

They [true Statesmen] ought not to call from the dead all the discussions and litigations which formerly inflamed the furious factions which had torn their Country to pieces; they ought not to rake into the hideous and abominable things which were done in the turbulent fury of an injured, robbed, and persecuted people, and which were afterwards cruelly revenged in the execution, and as outrageously and shamefully exaggerated in the representation, in order, an hundred and fifty years after, to find some colour for justifying them in the eternal proscription and civil excommunication of a whole people.⁹⁰

Burke did not change his opinion that the English had exaggerated Irish Catholic cruelty in the 1641 rebellion in order to justify their present persecution of the Catholics. His interpretation of 1641 seems to have been consistent throughout his career.

Further conflicts took place when James II landed in Ireland in 1689 with French forces and raised further forces there. 'It was then the affairs of Ireland became an Object of regular attention', because the Irish Catholics endangered the ancient constitution that the English were seeking to restore by means of the Glorious Revolution.⁹¹ The Irish parliament now held under James, controlled by Catholics, executed just as rigorous a series of religious policies against the Protestants as the English had done

'Arthur Chichester (1563-1625)'; Ronald G. Asch's entry on 'Thomas Wentworth (1593-1641)', in *ODNB*.

⁸⁹ *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 616.

⁹⁰ *Letter to Richard Burke*, in *WS*, IX, 655-6.

⁹¹ *Foreign Troops in Ireland* (15 February 1776), in *WS*, IX, 501.

towards the Irish Catholics.⁹² After their defeat by the forces of William III, the consequences were fatal for their future. In his *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792), Burke argued that although the Revolution of 1688-9 was brought about by admirable principles, what was done in Ireland subsequently did not necessarily accord with these principles. According to him, 'many things were done from the necessities of the time, well or ill understood, from passion or from vengeance, which were not only, not perfectly agreeable to its principles, but in the most direct contradiction to them'. In Ireland, 'some millions of people' were deprived of all their civil rights and any interest in the constitution of their native country. This was not compatible with 'the declared principles of the Revolution'. Burke acknowledged that the Revolution of 1688-9 had, like the Reformation, produced very different effects on Ireland. In England, it was a struggle by the majority of the people to establish their liberties 'against the efforts of a very *small faction*, who would have oppressed them'. In Ireland, by contrast, it meant 'the establishment of the power of the smaller number, at the expence of the civil liberties and properties of the far greater part; and at the expence of the political liberties of the whole'. 'It was, to say the truth', he maintained, 'not a revolution, but a conquest, which is not to say a great deal in its favour'.⁹³ Although Burke believed that the political regime established by the Glorious Revolution had helped Ireland to flourish⁹⁴ as a

⁹² *Letter to Richard Burke*, in *WS*, IX, 656-7. In this public letter, he wrote that the reaction of the Irish to 1688, including the patriot parliament, was blameable, and that the English parliament's subsequent confiscation of Catholic property was excusable. See also *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 617. It is not correct that Burke supposed that the parliament held in Ireland by James II had repealed Poyning's Law.

⁹³ *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792), in *WS*, IX, 613-4.

⁹⁴ In his supposed letter to 'Michael Smith', which has at times been described as manifesting his first impressions of England, Burke stated: 'What a contrast between our poor country, where you'll scarce find a cottage ornamented with a chimney'. When arriving in London in 1750, he would have been impressed with the prosperity of the English capital and have realised more clearly the poverty of Ireland. As the editor of the *Corr.* notes, however, the authenticity of this letter may be questioned. See *Corr.*, I, 357-363 (the above quotation is at 360). More than thirty years later, Burke

significant part of the British Empire, the penal laws were the main cause of the misfortunes of eighteenth-century Ireland and were the grievances, which Burke most wanted to remove.⁹⁵ In fact, in his works on Ireland, he frequently drew attention to and criticised the passing and continuance of the penal laws.⁹⁶ He regarded those of Queen Anne's reign as particularly savage. The act 'to prevent the further growth of popery' (2 *Anne*, c. 6) prevented Catholics and Protestant Dissenters from holding office of trust or profit under the crown. This act also prohibited Catholics from buying land or renting it on lease for more than thirty-one years, where a lease should be at a rent of two-thirds the yearly value at least. Besides, there was a provision in which at the death of a Catholic property-owner, his estate had to be divided among all of his sons. If the eldest son converted to Protestantism, however, he was allowed to inherit the whole estate.⁹⁷ While he maintained that the act 'to prevent the further growth of popery' aroused no opposition in the Protestant controlled Irish parliament,⁹⁸ Burke was obviously well informed about the provisions of this particular act and the

acknowledged the ongoing progress of his native country. See Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 507: 'Mr. B. I paid that country a visit last summer, for the purpose of seeing a sister, a widow (Mrs. French, I believe); I had not seen it for twenty years before. T. It is very much changed within the last twenty years. Mr. B. Very much for the better. T. A spirit of industry has pervaded almost every quarter of the kingdom; the morals of the people are improved, the country-gentlemen, in many parts, have relinquished the favourite amusements of the chase for the plough. Mr. B. Not as much as I could wish, but still more than I expected'.

⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it should be noted that although denouncing the confiscation of Catholic property in the seventeenth century, he considered that the new owners of the forfeited property had already acquired prescriptive titles, and so these should not be returned to the Catholics. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, II, 406-7.

⁹⁶ See, in particular, *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, in *WS*, IX, 435-452, 472-3, 480-1; *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 601, 610-611, 615.

⁹⁷ See J.G. Simms, 'The Establishment of Protestant Ascendancy, 1691-1714', in *A New History of Ireland IV Eighteenth-Century Ireland 1691-1800*, ed. T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 1-30. See also J.G. Simms, 'The Making of a Penal Law (2 Anne, c.6), 1703-4', *Irish Historical Studies*, 12 (1960), 105-118.

⁹⁸ *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, in *WS*, IX, 473, 480-1.

Catholic hostility to it.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, however wicked the penal laws of first William's and then Anne's reign were, these laws did not exclude all Catholics from voting for members of the Irish House of Commons. At that time, a Catholic with the necessary property qualifications could vote if he took the oath of allegiance and the abjuration oath.¹⁰⁰ At times, Burke vehemently denounced the Disenfranchising Act, which prohibited the Catholics from voting, and which meant the exclusion of the great body of people from the constitution because of their religious affiliations. Neither the declarations of the Great Charter nor the principles of the Revolution of 1688-9 could be used to endorse such an act of disfranchisement.¹⁰¹ Burke, however, probably did not recognise correctly when this disfranchisement had been enacted. In his *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, for example, he wrote: 'In consenting to such a statute, the Crown would act at least as agreeable to the laws of God, and to the true profession of the gospel, and to the laws and customs of the kingdom, as George I. did when he passed the statute which took from the body of the people, every thing which, to that hour, and even after the monstrous acts of the 2d and 8th of Anne, (the objects of our common hatred) they still enjoyed inviolate'.¹⁰² While he also stated that twenty-five years had passed since 1688-9 'before a domineering party, on a party principle, had ventured to disfranchise, without any proof whatsoever of

⁹⁹ The Catholic Relief Act of 1778 repealed provisions in two Acts of 1 Anne favouring the purchase by Protestants of forfeited estates. Burke called this relief act 'great acquisition', which made the Catholics 'for the first time acknowledged as Subjects and protected as such' (*Corr.*, IV, 18-19). For this relief act, see also, *ibid.*, III, 449, 455-7; IV, 6, 20, 87, 248-9, 263-4; IX, 422-3; X, 7. In 1782, another relief act was enacted. Clearly, he found it still unsatisfactory. See his *Letter to Lord Kenmare* (21 February 1782), in *WS*, IX, 564-580.

¹⁰⁰ 'Letter to Lord Kenmare' (21 February 1782), in *WS*, IX, 570. See also 'Address and Petition of the Irish Catholics' (1764), in *WS*, IX, 433.

¹⁰¹ *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 628.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, in *WS*, IX, 610.

abuse, the greater part of the community',¹⁰³ it was actually in 1728, in George II's reign that the Roman Catholics in Ireland were disfranchised.¹⁰⁴

Despite such inaccuracy, Burke's view of Irish history had a clear message. In his opinion, Ireland had struggled with 'above 400 years of continual War',¹⁰⁵ which did not necessarily mean 'a contest between two religious factions; but between two adverse nations'. The statutes of Kilkenny (1366) shows that 'the spirit of the popery laws, and some even of their actual provisions, as applied between Englishry and Irishry, had existed in that harassed country before the words Protestant and Papist were heard of in the world'.¹⁰⁶ Although the present problems were clearly concerned with religion, what also underlay the tensions was the great antagonism between the two nations. Burke detected a coherence in the series of oppressive policies imposed on Ireland ever since their early settlements. Nevertheless, his strongest point was that no country had suffered more from religious disputes than Ireland. Before the Reformation, the English had continuously tried to force Ireland to submit to the authority of the Holy See. After the Reformation, religious persecution continued, although the attempt to convert the Irish to Protestantism did not succeed.¹⁰⁷ While Burke clearly recognised that European and English

¹⁰³ Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 628.

¹⁰⁴ His contemporaries such as Curry, Foster and Grattan also misunderstood the date. See J.G. Simms, 'Irish Catholics and the Parliamentary Franchise, 1692-1728', *Irish Historical Studies*, 12 (1960), 28-37. The Catholic Relief Act of 1793 granted Catholics the franchise on the same basis as Protestants. This act, in Burke's words, 'have restored three Millions of Citizens to their King and their Country' ('Burke to Henry Grattan (8 March 1793)', in *Corr.*, VII, 360). For this relief act, see also *ibid.*, VII, 349-51; VIII, 129.

¹⁰⁵ See Bk P 8/173: 'The English driven out. Return. The Introduction of a new Religion by force. Not as in England and other places. An attempt on all the property of the Inhabitants under pretext of Title in the Crown. The war of 41 and its consequences. Cromwell's Letter. Sir W. Petty's State. Popery Laws. Comparison with their antient State their present distress a kind of prosperity. 'Compared with their late condition it is miserable.' For this manuscript, see also *WS*, IX, 515n.

¹⁰⁶ *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 615.

¹⁰⁷ See 'Tracts relating to Popery Laws', in *WS*, IX, 471: 'they continue at this day an oppressive system, and may for four hundred years to come, to eradicate opinions,

history were also full of religious persecutions, he drew attention to the extraordinary case of Ireland. 'The system which we have just reviewed, and the manner in which religious influence on the Publick is made to operate upon the Laws concerning property in Ireland', Burke maintained, in his *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, 'is in its nature very singular, and differs, I apprehend, essentially, and perhaps to its disadvantage, from any scheme of religious persecution now existing in any other country in Europe, or which has prevailed in any time or nation with which history has made us acquainted'. He continued: 'I believe it will not be difficult to shew that it is unjust, impolitick, and inefficacious; that it has the most unhappy influence on the prosperity, the morals, and the safety of that country'.¹⁰⁸ For Burke, the penal laws imposed on the Roman Catholics were a defect in the British constitution and retarded Ireland from further progress. He was, of course, well aware of the fact that these penal laws had not been the only problem. Burke strongly believed that the restrictive laws on Irish industry had been another obstacle to progress.¹⁰⁹ In his 'Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland (22 May 1778)', for instance, he wrote: 'Do they forget, that the whole Woollen Manufacture of Ireland, the most extensive and profitable of any, and the natural Staple of that Kingdom, has been in a manner so destroyed

which by the same violent means they had been four hundred years endeavouring by every means to establish. They compelled the people to submit, by the forfeiture of all their civil rights, to the Pope's authority, in its most extravagant and unbounded sense, as a giver of Kingdoms; and now we refuse even to tolerate them in the most moderate and chastised sentiments concerning it. No country, I believe, since the world began, suffered so much on account of Religion; or has been so variously harassed both for Popery and for Protestantism.'; *Letter to Richard Burke*, in *WS*, IX, 651: 'Two hundred years of experiment shew it to be unalterable. Many a fierce struggle has passed between the parties. The result is—you cannot make the people Protestants—and they cannot shake off a Protestant Government'. See also *Letter to William Smith* (29 January 1795), in *WS*, IX, 663: 'Two hundred years dreadfully spent in experiments to force that people to change the form of their Religion have proved fruitless'.

¹⁰⁸ *Tracts relating to Popery Laws*, in *WS*, IX, 452.

¹⁰⁹ In 1780, however, commercial concessions were granted to Ireland. For Burke's comments on these concessions, see his 'Speech on Trade Concessions to Ireland (6 December 1779)', in *WS*, IX, 535-542; *Letter to Thomas Burgh* (1 January 1780), in *WS*, IX, 543-563.

by restrictive Laws of *ours*, and (at our persuasion, and on our promises) by restrictive Laws of *their own*, that in a few years, it is probable, they will not be able to wear a Coat of their own Fabrick?¹¹⁰ Even if Ireland was, to some extent, flourishing as a part of the British Empire, it was certainly true that a variety of oppressive policies of England had impeded the country from further growth.

4.3 Conclusion

The early Burke, before entering parliament, was very interested in 'rewriting' Irish history. After he became a politician, he may have become more wary of his communications and relations with the Irish Catholics, but he nevertheless did not cease committing himself to the problem of Irish historiography. Although he was deeply disappointed with Leland's work, he was not satisfied with Vallancey's scholarship and was irritated with Campbell, his writings and other records, including the exhibition of his disappointment and irritation itself, show his lasting concern with the problem. His review of Macpherson's works shows that he viewed the age of 'Ossian' as barbarous, and Burke, in his *Abridgment*, clearly did not endorse the position of the 'Orientalist' view of the early settlement of Ireland. According to other evidence, nevertheless, he seems to have continued to believe in the merits of Irish poetry, including the ancient poems.

Although the protection of Christianity had brought flourishing science to seventh- and eighth-century Ireland, the nation was plunged into another barbarous state after the invasions of the Danes and other northern tribes. Burke's sympathy with the Brehon law was possibly unique, even compared

¹¹⁰ 'Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland (22 May 1778)', in *WS*, IX, 516. Burke may well have had in mind Molyneux's argument about the woollen goods in Ireland. In 1699, the Irish parliament imposed export duties on Irish woollen goods (10 *Will. III*, c. 5) and the Westminster parliament, in the same year, prohibited the export of Irish wool to foreign countries (10 and 11 *Will. III*, c. 10).

with the Irish revisionists of his own age, although he was not uncritical of it. As has been seen, Burke maintained that Ireland had flourished by combining herself successfully with the English constitution. This notion might have been both politically orientated and reflecting his own genuine views. As a staunch advocate of Whig principles, Burke was definitely expected to justify the British Empire, whereas other evidence shows that he certainly recognised the growth of the prosperity of the Irish nation. Unlike the Irish patriots, of whom he seems to have been critical, his chief concern with Ireland was not the problem of the Irish legislature. He was rather most interested in the religious affairs which had continued to plague the nation during modern history. Throughout his career, Burke considered the Irish Rebellion of 1641 to have been 'provoked' and continuously endeavoured to remove the penal laws that had been imposed on the Roman Catholics after the Williamite Conquest of 1689-91. In his view, the series of religious persecutions, as well as other oppressive policies, had obstructed the further progress of Irish society.

Chapter Five

The History of Asian-Muslim Nations: 'Ancient Constitution' of Despotism?

Asia has a long history, and so has the history of the Western perception of the region. Famously, in his *Politics* (book iii, chapter xiv), Aristotle developed the idea of political despotism and asserted that the Asian was more slavish than the European and inclined to accept despotic rule.¹ Through the great efforts of many generations to understand his philosophy and translate his ideas into other European languages, his linking of despotism with Asia gradually prevailed and was revised.² For the intellectuals of early modern Europe, the Ottoman Empire and Russia seem to have exemplified Aristotle's idea of despotic governments. They also increasingly received information about Asia from people who travelled and stayed long there, and confirmed this great philosopher's notions. Montesquieu's works, especially his *Spirit of the Laws*, are important not because his views on Asia were original, but because his work as a whole became highly influential among contemporary intellectuals. His views, such as 'in Asia there reigns a spirit of servitude that has never left it, and in all the histories of this country it is not possible to find a single trait making a free soul',³ was conventional, but, in contrast to Aristotle, he argued that Asian despotism had been sustained not only by their customs, but also by fear created by their monarch's terrible power.⁴ Montesquieu

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), p. 92: 'Because non-Greeks are by nature more slavish in their character than Greeks, those in Asia being more so than those in Europe, they tolerate rule by a master without any complaint'.

² For this, see R. Koebner, 'Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 14 (1951), 275-302. See also Melvin Richter, 'Despotism', in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas* (5 vols., New York: Scribner, 1973), II, 1-18.

³ Charles de Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne M. Cohler *et al* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 284.

⁴ Whelan, *Burke and India*, pp. 232-3.

and many other contemporaries depicted Islam as the epitome of despotism and often associated Asia with Islam, since they found several Muslim nations in the region from Turkey to India.

Burke, from his early career, carefully read both Aristotle and Montesquieu and he was particularly under the influence of the latter. These authors, other Western literature and various communications with his contemporaries, may well have informed him of the Western perception of the Asian-Muslim world. Although it is not necessarily clear to what extent he was interested in Asia and Islam at large, his interest in India in particular was very clear and largely personal. It is well-known that Samuel Johnson marvelled at the young Burke's knowledge about India.⁵ Charles James Fox told Lord Holland that Burke 'spoke of the piety of the Hindoos with admiration, and of their holy religion and sacred functions with an awe bordering on devotion'.⁶ It is also clear that his personal connections and his public life drew his attention to India. His 'cousin' and friend William Burke speculated but lost heavily in East India stocks. More important, the Rockinghams largely supported the East India Company and they opposed state intervention in the Company's affairs, which they believed would result in the increasing influence of the crown. As a spokesman for the Rockinghams, Burke had himself commended the East India Company. In the late 1770s, the Rockinghams also waged a campaign for the reinstatement of George Pigot, who was the governor of Madras but arrested by the Company's troops. In September 1777, William Burke landed in India as part of this campaign, but he soon came back to London and immediately disputed with John Macpherson about affairs there.

⁵ Donald Cross Bryant, *Edmund Burke and His Literary Friends* (St. Louis, 1939), p. 16; Thomas W. Copeland, 'Johnson and Burke', in *Statesmen, Scholars and Merchants*, ed. A. Whiteman, J.S. Bromley, and P.G. M. Dickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 300.

⁶ Henry Edward Lord Holland, *Memoirs of the Whig Party During My Time* (2 vols., London, 1852), I, 5-6.

Macpherson was the London agent of the Nawab at Madras, for whom the British expelled the Raja of Tanjore in 1773, and he brought out a pamphlet which argued in favour of the Nawab's rule. Edmund and William Burkes collaborated in producing *An Enquiry into the Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans in India* (1779) to counterattack Macpherson. Later, during 1781-3, Burke was also involved in a Select Committee of the House of Commons. This was the turning point through which he could deepen his knowledge and change his views on the Company and on India quite radically. He now came to believe that the Company had been greatly corrupt and had damaged Indian society. In the late 1780s, his focus gradually shifted to the first Governor-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings, and he at last determined on a formal impeachment of him. While it was through such a personal history that he acquired much of his knowledge of the Asian-Muslim world, especially India, his views on the history of the region were also developed through this process.

This chapter aims to examine Burke's views of the history of the Asian-Muslim nations, which have not been addressed by previous commentators. Section one examines Burke's view of the history of India and maintains that, before 1782, he regarded India as a despotic nation, in which he thought that the Hindus had been persecuted by Muslims. After 1782, however, he seems to have changed his mind and he began to claim that India had been a flourishing nation until recently and that the Hindus were a significant factor in developing their civilisation while the Muslims helped preserve Hindu society and contributed to the further development of the sub-continent. Section two addresses Burke's views on the history of Asian-Muslim nations at large and seeks to show that, after 1782, he claimed that Asia had not been despotic throughout history, but had existed under the rule of law, although he remained highly critical of the early Muslims and occasionally so about the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim countries. The

obvious and most substantial sources for the present theme are his writings and speeches on Indian affairs, but relevant comments in his other works are also utilised.

5.1 Antiquity, Conquest and Decline: the History of India

The available evidence shows that Burke considered India within the conventional Western perspective on Asia and Islam until the early 1780s. First of all, the history of India, like the history of the other Asian nations, was a history of despotism. In the *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans*, the Burkes claimed that there was 'no settled law or constitution, either to fix allegiance, or to restrain power' in India and Asia at large.⁷ This general remark evidently includes the suggestion that the situation in the region had always been so throughout history. In a parliamentary speech in 1781, he also asserted that the people of India were familiar with a despotic system of rule⁸ and that this 'familiarity had rendered it congenial' to their nature. Although the British constitution is apparently better than theirs, in Burke's view, it should not be imposed upon them if they prefer 'their old laws and their ancient system'.⁹

⁷ *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans*, in *WS*, V, 113.

⁸ Nevertheless, this was not always the case. As early as 1772, Burke stated, 'It is a mistake when it is said the [Indian] Government is arbitrary. There is an equitable government by the Coran'. See 'Speech on 30 March 1772', British Library, London, Egerton. Manuscripts 239, f. 271; quoted in the editor's 'Introduction', in *WS*, V, 2.

⁹ 'Speech on Bengal Judicature Bill (27 June 1781)', in *WS*, V, 140-141. This is obviously a Montesquiean way of thinking. Cf. 'Speech on Rohilla War Charge (1 June 1786)', in *WS*, VI, 109: 'In India to be sure it could not be expected that they could practise Magna Charta. But there they had the law of nature and nations, the great and fundamental axioms on which every form of society was built. These, in conjunction with the collected experience of ages, the wisdom of antiquity, and the practice of the purest times, formed a system which in every country was venerable and popular'. While Burke again referred to differences between European and Indian societies, his emphasis here was that India was a civilised country whose system was understandable and based on the same universal morality on which European societies were also based.

Burke may possibly have regarded Indian history as one in which the Hindus had been persecuted by the Muslims. This is what we may be able to infer from his general remarks on both peoples. In the *Policy*, there is a sharp contrast between the characters of Muslims and Hindus: 'The native Indians, under their own native government, are, to speak without prejudice, a far better people than the Mahometans; or than those who by living under Mahometans, become the depressed subjects, or the corrupted instruments of their tyranny; they are of far milder manners, more industrious, more tractable, and less enterprising'.¹⁰ For the Burkes, Muslims were aggressive, despotic and rapacious, whereas Hindus, although slavish, were a good-natured people. When Hindus live under a Muslim government, they are ready to obey their tyrannical rulers. Since the Burkes, of course, presumed that both peoples had been together in the region for many centuries, it seems legitimate to infer that they were putting forward a narrative in which despotic Muslims had persecuted obedient Hindus through the course of history. This may be further supported by the following passage:

It is not however enough, it seems, that many great and originally independent Indian Provinces, formerly kingdoms, have been subjected to the Mahometans. Tanjore alone (among many to whom the same justice is due) is rescued, half ruined as it is; and this escape of an unhappy Prince and country, is represented to a British Parliament, and a Christian people, as the greatest of all subjects of sorrow and lamentation.¹¹

In many parts of India, the native inhabitants had been subjected to Muslims. Tanjore was an exception, but was now facing a crisis. The Nawab of Arcot, supported by the East India Company, had oppressed the Hindu princes, nobility and inhabitants 'of so many once flourishing and opulent

¹⁰ *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans*, in *WS*, V, 113. See also *ibid.*, in *WS*, V, 48, 66, 110, 112n, 114-121.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, V, 120.

countries'.¹² In other words, the Nawab had subverted the 'ancient and respectable establishments'.¹³ At a later point, Burke also asserted that over 'several periods', 'the spirit of Mahometan domination' had tended 'to destroy the eminent nobility, who were compelled by us to a dependence upon it'.¹⁴ Mainly with regard to the recent affairs of southern India, the Burkes asserted that those provinces under Hindu governments had been better ruled than those under Muslim governments and had flourished until recently.¹⁵

Burke ceased to claim that India had been a despotic nation, from around 1782 when he became involved in a Select Committee of the House of Commons, although he retained his opinions of Hindus and his Montesquieuan way of thinking. When addressing, again, the problems of the Carnatic and Tanjore in 1785, Burke described these provinces as flourishing until recent troubles had affected them. Their prosperity owed much to their great rulers, rather than to the natural environment, because over generations they had built and preserved a number of reservoirs and watercourses across the region. Hinduism was behind this civilising process, which led them to make considerable efforts to build up their own territories.¹⁶ In 1786, when prosecuting Hastings for his responsibility for

¹² *Ibid.*, in *WS*, V, 45-6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, V, 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, V, 114-5.

¹⁵ Even if the authorship of the *Policy* is not attributed to Burke, our argument here would not change much, since Burke definitely approved of Hindus throughout his career, whereas he seems to have been critical of Muslims, at least, until around 1782.

¹⁶ 'Nabob of Arcot's Debts (28 February 1785)', in *WS*, V, 522: '... in the happier times of India, a number almost incredible of reservoirs have been made in chosen places throughout the whole country ... These are the monuments of real kings, who were the fathers of their people; testators to a posterity which they embraced as their own. These are the grand sepulchres built by ambition; but by the ambition of an unsatiable benevolence, which, not contented with reigning in the dispensation of happiness during the contracted term of human life, has strained, with all the reachings and graspings of a vivacious mind, to extend the dominion of their bounty beyond the limits of nature, and to perpetuate themselves through generations of generations, the guardians, the protectors, the nourishers of mankind'. See also, 'Introduction', in *WS*, VI, 22.

the recent Rohilla War, Burke briefly explained how the Rohillas settled in India in the early eighteenth century. According to him, the Rohillas were one of 'the most distinguished of the Tartar nations', and the Muslims in India had continually been recruited from them as well as from Persia. The greatest number of them came to India around 1724, probably with the consent of the Mogul emperor, Farrukhsiyar (1687-1719).¹⁷ At this era, whenever the Mogul emperors, who considered themselves to have Tartar origins and favoured Tartar nations, found the *Umara* (Muslim nobility) or the Hindu Rajas disobeying their authority (this nobility and the Rajas rarely obeyed their ruler even in the most flourishing periods of the empire), they were willing to hire Muslim mercenary soldiers to suppress this disobedience. The Rohillas were such a Muslim people and, like other Muslims, acknowledged the supreme power of the Mogul emperor and submitted themselves to him. They spread out over both sides of the Ganges and established the most orderly government that had hitherto existed in India. While Burke maintained the character of the Rohillas to be 'a free people',¹⁸ this was almost his first praise of Muslims. If Burke was still, as before 1782, considering the Tartars as rapacious and cruel, the point made above would not make sense. He might, however, have been introducing some new ideas about Islam. The Rohilland was, he stated, 'the Garden of Eden', which had 'its populous and splendid town, its beautiful villas, and its rich vineyards'. This flourishing province and the 'innocent and industrious' Rohillas were totally destroyed by the Oudh and the East India Company's army led by Hasting. Burke vehemently condemned their conduct and, in particular, described Siraj al-Daula as 'a monster of ferocity and cruelty'.¹⁹ As P.J. Marshall has suggested, here the analogy to the case

¹⁷ Here there is an apparent inaccuracy. The 1720s were the reign of Muhammad Shah (known as Roshan Akhtar).

¹⁸ 'Rohilla War Speech', in *WS*, VI, 99-100.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, VI, 110.

of Tanjore in 1779 seems to be quite evident. In both cases, the people whom Burke admired were persecuted and their once flourishing countries were destroyed by the ferocious authorities which were supported by the Company's arms. There are also, however, some differences. While, in 1779, he emphasised Muslims as ferocious and despotic, Burke, in 1786, did not criticise Islam itself. Both the Rohilla and the Oudh were Muslims, but he praised the former and condemned the latter, not drawing particular attention to their religion. As Burke's view on the praiseworthy Rohillas and the contemptible Oudh are not supported by any serious modern research, it can be argued that his notions on both cases were, to considerable extent, the product of his own thoughts.²⁰

Burke's altered image of India was fully revealed in his opening speeches at Hastings' impeachment. First, he explained to his colleagues the nature, character, principles and institutions of the Hindus, all of which Burke highly approved. According to him, Hindus 'are the original inhabitants of Hindoostan', who have lived there through all times of history except 'the grand era', i.e., the Biblical dating of the Creation. Their 'manners, religion, customs and usages' are 'appropriate to themselves and no ways resembling those of the rest of mankind'.²¹ In particular, they have inherited the 'caste' system from ancient times, which was 'the fundamental part of the constitution of that Commonwealth, both in their Church and in their State'.²² After 1782, Burke never again tried to state that the Hindu social system was slavish. Instead, he went on to speak of their character:

Their stability has been proved by their holding on for a time and duration commensurate to all the Empires which History has made us acquainted with. And still they exist in a green old age, with all the reverence of antiquity and with all the affection to

²⁰ See editor's preface, in *WS*, VI, 80-2.

²¹ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 301.

²² *Ibid.*, in *WS*, VI, 303.

their own institutions that other people have to novelty and change. And accordingly they have stood firm in their own Country and cast their roots deep in their native soil, because they cast them nowhere else than in their native soil, and fixed their opinions in their native soil, and bound them together. Their religion has made no Converts; their dominion no conquests; and in proportion as they were concentrated within and hindered from spreading abroad, they have grown to double force and have existed against Bigotry, against persecution, against all the fury of Foreign Conquests, and almost against the fury and avarice of the English Dominion established among them.²³

Burke described the Hindus as conservative, moderate and passive. They were, in fact, 'the softest in their manners, approaching almost to feminine'.²⁴ In a sense, their manners and institutions appear to show 'their weakness', but actually show 'their force', since they had withstood many conquests in the course of their long history. Burke found the reason for the strength and stability of their institutions in the connection between their religious and political institutions. He thus maintained that, 'whatsoever wherever the Hindoo Religion has been established, that Country has been flourishing'.²⁵ In other places, Burke maintained that the Hindus had governed themselves by their ancient laws called 'Gentoo Laws', which had nothing to do with arbitrary power.²⁶ As some commentators have supposed, Burke's praise of the Hindus seems to be relevant to his general interest in the different customs and habits of the human species. While many contemporaries referred favourably to the Hindus as a moderate and conservative people, his approval of Hindus, including his historical view of them, was probably more enthusiastic than those of his contemporaries, but he never entirely departed from the conventional view of them expressed in

²³ Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 305.

²⁴ Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 302.

²⁵ Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 305.

²⁶ Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 365, 465; *First Report*, in *WS*, V, 171.

his own day.²⁷

After explaining the nature and social institutions of the Hindus, he offered the House of Lords during Hastings' impeachment a brief historical summary of the conquests made by Muslim tribes. He divided this history into six phases. If the age before the Muslim conquests was 'the first era', the next was 'the era of the Prophet Mahomet, who has extended his dominion, influence and religion over that part of the world'. This was 'an era of great misfortune to that Country [India] and to the world in general'. 'There can be no doubt', Burke continued, 'that the enthusiasm which animated his first followers, the despotism that was connected with his religion, and the advantages that his followers had over the broken disunited countries of the world, extended its influence vastly. This I wish you to consider and remark as the era of the Arabs'.²⁸ Mahomet and his followers were fanatical, aggressive and despotic. As before 1782, Burke here was highly critical of the Muslims and of Mahomet. The Muslims extended their dominion to all parts of India, especially in the north. At first, they had attempted to change the religion and manners of the native inhabitants 'with the ferocious arm of their prophetic sword', but they soon realised that this policy was not working well. Although still trying to increase the influence of their religion in India, the Muslims, in this period, never ruined the native nobility, gentry or landholders.²⁹

²⁷ For eighteenth-century European perception of Hindus, see *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. P.J. Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Jeng-Guo S. Chen, 'Gendering India: Effeminacy and the Scottish Enlightenment's Debates over Virtue and Luxury', *The Eighteenth-Century*, 51 (2010), 193-210.

²⁸ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 307. Later, Burke stated that the Muslims 'about seven hundred years ago [i.e. at the end of the eleventh century] obtained a footing in that Country and ever since have in a great degree remained Masters of it'. See 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 568.

²⁹ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 308. See also his *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, in *WS*, V, 401-2, where he stated: 'The several irruptions of Arabs, Tartars, and Persians, into India were, for the greater part, ferocious, bloody, and wasteful in the extreme: our entrance into the dominion of that country was, as generally, with

The next era was 'the history of the Tartars, or the era of Tamerlane'. They, too, did not demolish Hinduism, but rather conquered the other Muslims.³⁰ Tamerlane came to India 'as the great Reformer of the Mahometan Religion'. Although there were Muslim tyrants who abused their power in several regions of India, he fought against those tyrants and attempted to restructure their countries. Relying upon Holwell's *Interesting Historical Events*,³¹ Burke depicted Tamerlane as a great conqueror who allowed his blood to mix with the native nobility of the country, and who also did not impose *Jizya* (a poll tax), which the Muslims 'have laid upon every Country over which the sword of Mahomet prevailed', upon the Hindus (the non-Muslims).³² In short,

Tamerlane, however he may be called from his name as Tartar, was no barbarian; that the people who submitted to him did not submit with the abject submission of slaves to the sword of the conqueror, but admitted an Emperor who was just, prudent and politic, instead of the ferocious, oppressive Mahometans who had forced their sword into the country.³³

Different from other 'ferocious, oppressive' Muslims, Tamerlane was approved of by the native inhabitants. At that time, the country 'resembled more a Republic of Princes with a great Chief at their head than a Country in absolute, uniform, systematic subjection from one end to the other'. During the reigns of Tamerlane and his successors, the Hindu princes and people were not in an abject situation, as Hastings had asserted.³⁴ It should,

small comparative effusion of blood; ... the Asiatic conquerors very soon abated of their ferocity, because they made the conquered country their own'; 'The Tartar invasion was mischievous; but it is our protection that destroys India'.

³⁰ See 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 568: 'the foundation of the Bengal Empire there was overturned by Tamarlane'.

³¹ John Zephaniah Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan* (London, 1766-7).

³² This is usually attributed to Akbar, not to Tamerlane.

³³ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 309.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, VI, 309-310.

however, be noticed, in the passage quoted above, that there is not only Burke's praise of Tamerlane, but also his long standing negative view of Muslim rulers.

Although Hastings insisted that the institutions of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan had been arbitrary, Burke tried to refute this statement.³⁵ Burke stressed that both Tamerlane³⁶ and Genghis Khan³⁷ governed by the rule of law in their empire in order to show that their rule was not an exercise in arbitrary power. Moreover, both of them were elected by their people, although Burke acknowledged that Tamerlane had been cruel in his conquests. He asserted that morality in Asia was the same as that in Europe and he applied some Western concepts, such as the rule of law, to the situation in these remote regions.

The next era Burke examined was the era of Akbar the Great (1542-1605), the third Mogul Emperor. The people of the Mogul were not the original inhabitants of India, nor were the Muslims who came there from Arabia or Persia. They originally had their own religion and constitutions, but 'have blended with the other, namely the Mahometans'.³⁸ In 1576, Bengal came under the Mogul rule of the emperor, Akbar. His conquest of Bengal was a triumph over a Muslim dynasty and, since he did not conquer the country but rather defeated the prince of that country, the native inhabitants were not deprived of their property. Although 'severe revenges were taken by the Princes in that Country', which Burke stated resembled 'the Wars of the Roses in this Country [England]', Hindus 'were a favoured,

³⁵ Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 354-361; 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 268-272, 283.

³⁶ For Tamerlane, other than Holwell, Burke referred to *Institutes Political and Military written originally in the Mogul Language by the Great Timour, improperly called Tamerlane*, translated by William Davy and Joseph White (Oxford, 1783). See 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 271.

³⁷ For evidence, Burke referred to François Pétis de La Croix, *The History of Genghizcan the Great ... by the Late M. Petis de la Croix Senior* (London, 1722). He owned this work; LC MS.

³⁸ 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 265.

protected, gently treated people'.³⁹ What is surprising here is Burke's moderate treatment of Akbar, since many contemporary commentators on Hindostan history, even those who opposed him, tended to value highly this emperor's liberal policies in politics and religion. Not only for Robertson, but also for Alexander Dow and Edward Law, Akbar was a benevolent monarch, who should be clearly distinguished from most other Muslim rulers.⁴⁰ As he may well have been well informed of the emperor's character and policies, it is not clear why Burke did not further elaborate on Akbar's appeasement of the Hindus. He also seems to have considered Aurangzeb a tyrant, but did not try to blame him,⁴¹ even though this emperor was frequently denounced by eighteenth-century European critics.

The decline of the Mogul dynasty was followed by the age of the rising independent *subahdars*, which was, Burke acknowledged, 'a troubled and vexatious era'. According to Burke, there were five *subahdars*, and they were brought to a state of independence, partly due to the political calamities and confusions of the Mogul empire caused by 'the disputes of the successors of Tamerlane', and also partly because of Nadir Shah's cruel invasion of India in 1738-9. Bengal was plunged into confusion by men such as Alivardi Khan and Siraj al-Daula, both of whom Burke considered to be tyrants and usurpers. Nevertheless, the social order of the Hindus was preserved in that era.⁴² The decline of the empire and the death of Nadir Shah were also largely related to the collapse of the Indian economy. Before

³⁹ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 310-311.

⁴⁰ William Robertson, *An Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (London, 1791), p. 272; *Speeches of the Managers and Counsel in the Trial of Warren Hastings*, ed. Edward Augustus Bond (4 vols., London, 1859-61), II, 535; Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan, translated from Persian* (London, 1772), p. xxiv. Burke owned Robertson's *Historical Disquisition* (LC MS; *LC*, p. 20); Dow's *History* (LC MS; *LC*, p. 7).

⁴¹ See 'Burke to Philip Francis (19 November 1790)', in *Corr.*, VI, 171, where Burke stated that 'I feel myself much more disposed to sentiments of resentment and indignation against the tyranny of Mr. Hastings and Monsr Barnave, than against that of Aurangzeb, and Lewis the 14th'.

⁴² 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 311.

these events, commercial trade between Bengal and other provinces of India, Persia, Tartary and Turkey had flourished for a long period. A large amount of gold, silver and many other commodities were involved in these commercial transactions. Social disorder in Persia followed the death of the shah and ruined Indian trade. This declining trade and the fall of the Mogul emperors led to the fall of the great marts in Agra and Delhi.⁴³ Siraj al-Daula's rule in Bengal was replaced by that of the East India Company, which was the beginning of 'the era of the British Empire' in India.⁴⁴ Burke declared, the 'year 1756 is a memorable aera in the history of the world—It introduced a new power, with new manners, new customs, new opinions, new laws, into the Bosom of the East'.⁴⁵ He characteristically regarded the British settlements in India as the introduction of new manners and opinions, i.e., the introduction of British (or European) manners into India. He did not question the justice of the British presence in India, which to him was no more than a natural incident in history or the result of divine providence. In his comments on 'Fox's India Bill', Burke stated: 'All these circumstances are not, I confess, very favourable to the idea of our attempting to govern India at all. But there we are; there we are placed by the Sovereign Disposer: and we must do the best we can in our situation. The situation of man is the preceptor of his duty'.⁴⁶ In his 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', he also stated: 'My Lords, it is not to be had by conquest; for by conquest, which is a more immediate designation of the hand of God, the conqueror only succeeds to all the painful duties and subordination to the power of God which belonged to the Sovereign that held the country before'.⁴⁷ The problem was the nature of that rule. 'No conquest

⁴³ 'Ninth Report of Select Committee (25 June 1783)', in *WS*, V, 229-230.

⁴⁴ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 311. See also, *ibid.*, in *WS*, VI, 315.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, VI, 314.

⁴⁶ 'Fox's India Bill', in *WS*, V, 404. He made the same point thirteen years later. See 'Burke to French Laurence (28 July 1796)', in *Corr.*, IX, 62.

⁴⁷ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 351.

give[s] such a right by which it may rule others at its pleasure', he argued, 'for conquest that is force, convert[s] its own injustice, into a just title'.⁴⁸ According to Burke, although India experienced several political revolutions and changes of circumstances over the course of its history, the social order of the Hindus was never destroyed until Hastings actually began his efforts to govern that country.⁴⁹

Overall, for Burke, the civilisation in India was neither a barbarous nor primitive one such as that to be found in the Americas. Rather, he regarded it as well-matured as that of the European nations. In his *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, he compared the people of India with the Indians in South America and, while regarding the latter as savages, depicted the former as 'a people for ages civilized and cultivated; cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods'. India had long been civilised, even before England was. Its social structure was comparable to that of Europe. There had long been princes, nobility and an 'antient and venerable priesthood', which was 'the depository of their laws, learning, and history'. Society was well developed along with vigorous commercial, financial and agricultural activities, and the country was also full of various social ranks, manners and religions.⁵⁰ For Burke, the well-established rulers, nobility and

⁴⁸ Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 462.

⁴⁹ Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 312. Similar views on Indian history were expressed by Luke Scrafton. According to him, the Indian economy was thriving and the ancient laws of the land remained in force until Nadir Shah's invasion and the recent wars between Britain and France. Scrafton was, however, critical of the Maratha, whose military spirit had corrupted their manners and weakened their commercial arts. He also assumed that Muslims were more ferocious than did Burke, in his works on India after 1782. See Luke Scrafton, *Reflections on the Government of Indostan* (London, [1770]), pp. 13-15, 20-21, 24-26. Burke once referred to Scrafton's *Reflections* approvingly. See 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 279.

⁵⁰ He emphasised the similarity between India and Europe, largely because he wanted to make that unfamiliar country understandable to the audience of his speeches. The Nabob of Oude might, it was said, be similar to the king of Prussia. The landed interests in Bengal were quite analogous to those in France. See *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, in *WS*, V, 390, 425. For Burke, as well as for many contemporary intellectuals, the 'distinction of ranks' is evidence of developed society. William Robertson, for example, remarked: 'FROM the most ancient accounts of India we learn, that the distinction of

priests, the development of commercial arts, and the complexity of society were the signs of a civilised society, and he presumed that this had long been the state of India. Moreover, as has already been seen, both Hindus and Muslims had enforced the rule of law in their societies ever since the distant past. Nevertheless, Burke shared the contemporary view that European civilisation was, especially in the modern age, superior to any Indian civilisation. In his opening speech on Hastings' impeachment, Burke stated:

And accordingly it did happen that the possession and power of assertion of these great authorities coinciding with the improved state of Europe, with the improved state of arts and the improved state of laws, and (what is much more material) the improved state of military discipline; that coinciding with the general fall of Asia, and the relaxation and dissolution of its governments, with the fall of its warlike spirit, and the total disuse almost of all parts of military discipline.⁵¹

Despite his veneration of the antiquity and culture of Hindus, Burke asserted that Indian civilisation, even though it was well-developed, had begun to decline in recent times⁵² and the rising European civilisation had overtaken it. We may also remind ourselves of a passage in the *Reflections* where Burke praised chivalry as the great cause of modern European civilisation, which he stated was superior to any great nations in Asia or in the ancient era.⁵³

ranks and separation of professions were completely established there. This is one of the most undoubted proofs of a society considerably advanced in its progress'. See Robertson, *Historical Disquisition*, p. 258.

⁵¹ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 283. See also, *ibid.*, in *WS*, VI, 352-3; the editor's 'Introduction', in *WS*, VI, 33.

⁵² In his *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, Burke claimed: 'When the countries, of which it is composed, came into our possession, they were all eminently peopled, and eminently productive; though at that time considerably declined from their antient prosperity'. See *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, in *WS*, V, 389.

⁵³ See my chapter on European history.

To summarise this section, Burke, before 1782, saw India as a permanently despotic country and perhaps believed that the Muslims had persecuted the Hindus for long periods of time. After his inquiries during the Select Committee, he abandoned these notions and claimed that, although the early Muslims were cruel, their governments in India had not been arbitrary and did not destroy the social order of the Hindus. It was the government imposed by Hastings and the East India Company which demolished the ancient establishments in India. At the same time, for Burke, the civilisation of India, although well-matured, was declining and had recently been surpassed by the European civilisation.⁵⁴

5.2 The History of Islam and Asia

When Burke, in his *Vindication*, described the confusion of the ancient world, Asia was part of it. Ancient historians such as Diodorus Siculus, Justin, Herodotus, and Xenophon informed him of the politics and wars of ancient Egypt, Persia, and West Asia. Sesostris, a king of Egypt (d. 1926 B.C.), overran the Mediterranean coast, Semiramis, an Assyrian queen, attempted a war in India, Xerxes, a king of Persia (c. 519-465 B.C.), invaded Greece and Mithridates, a king of Pontus on the Black Sea (120-63 B.C.),

⁵⁴ For all his efforts to persuade his audience that Indian society is understandable because it shares the same morality and similar social systems, Burke's view of India was challenged by the defence of Hastings. On 12 Feb. 1792, Edward Law claimed that Burke had 'wanton'd at pleasure', talking about the ancient history of India. According to Law, the Hindu or the Brahmanical era were not such a peaceful and harmonious age, as Burke maintained, but rather a bloody time in which many wars occurred. Enumerating the cruelties of Tamerlane, Aurangzeb, Nadir Shah, and even 'a prince of great generosity' Akbar, Law maintained that the government of India had been 'hereditary despotism' since the beginning of its history. Moreover, while Burke claimed that the British had overturned the ancient prescriptive government in India, Law insisted that there had not been such a government in the nation, since every country in India, including the Maratha, had only enjoyed short histories. See *Speeches of the Managers and Counsel in the Trial of Warren Hastings*, II, 532-545.

massacred the Romans.⁵⁵ For the purpose of this work, here the disordered political situation of ancient Asia seems to have been much stressed. Since he was generally sceptical of ancient history, Burke probably regarded ancient Asia, ancient Europe or any other part of the world of this period as existing in a relatively unknown but surely barbarous era. He might, nevertheless, have valued some aspects of the ancient people in Asia and Africa. In 1757, the Burkes characterised the ancient Egyptians as industrious and ingenious, although superstitious and without bringing their arts into perfection.⁵⁶ In 1762, when reprinting accounts of Anquetil-Duperron (1731-1805)'s journey to India, Burke added a brief preface where he mentioned ancient Persia as having 'the manners of so considerable a people'.⁵⁷

There seems to have been a more general assumption about Asian history in his mind. If Burke, before 1782, regarded India as having been despotic since the distant past, it is highly unlikely that he considered the sub-continent to be a special case in the history of Asia. It may rather be the case that he generally conceived that the whole of Asia had always inclined towards despotism throughout history. Also, in their *Policy*, for the Burkes, Indian despotism was largely a product of Muslim governments. After maintaining that the Hindus, under their own native governments, were a much better people than the Muslims, the Burkes immediately added that the Arabians, the Tartars, the Persians and their Muslim tribes were 'full as rapacious, and infinitely more fierce and cruel, than the English who are sent to make their fortunes in India in a civil or military capacity'.⁵⁸ This

⁵⁵ *Vindication*, in *WS*, I, 142-7.

⁵⁶ *Account*, I, 130.

⁵⁷ See *Annual Register ... for the Year 1762* (London, 1763), p. 101 *bis*. His reference to Duperron is important in considering his possible reading [Abraham-Hyacinthe] Anquetil Duperron's *Législation Orientale, Ouvrage dans Lequel, en Montrant Quels Sont en Turquie, en Perse et dans l'Indoustan, les Principes Fondamentaux du Gouvernement ...* (Amsterdam, 1778).

⁵⁸ *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans*, in *WS*, V, 113.

most probably reflected the authors' historical view of Islam (i.e., the Muslims' policy of conquest since the middle ages).⁵⁹ Fierceness and cruelty were, in their view, fundamental aspects of the nature of Muslims, a conclusion which they were quite confident could be proved historically.⁶⁰ In his *Abridgment*, Burke briefly wrote of the Muslim invasions of southern Europe in the eighth century. A body of barbarians from Africa called the Sarazens was 'animated by a fury not unlike that, which gave strength to the northern eruptions, but heightened by enthusiasm and regulated by subordination and an uniform policy, began to carry their arms, their manners and religion, into every part of the universe'. Spain was completely overpowered by their military strength, and Italy was also harassed by it. These Muslim invasions were vigorous and frequent, and alarmed all Europe.⁶¹ Like many of his contemporaries, Burke prevented a vivid

⁵⁹ For Burke, as well as for his contemporaries, Islam was essentially an alien element in India, as it spread out from Tartary or Persia to other parts of Asia including India. See 'Rohilla War Speech (1 June 1786)', in *WS*, VI, 99: 'All the Mahomedans in India are strangers, and for many Generations past every distinguished person of that Country has been an Adventurer from Tartary or Persia'.

⁶⁰ The inferential analysis here might be supported by more general comments on Asia and Islam in his early works. As early as 1756, in his *Vindication of Natural Society*, Burke linked Asia to despotism and unfavourably referred to the Chinese Constitution and the Buddhist clergy in China. See *Vindication of Natural Society*, in *WS*, I, 157-8, 171: 'The Consideration of this made Mr. Locke say, with great Justice, that a Government of this kind was worse than Anarchy; indeed it is so abhorred, and detested by all who live under Forms that have a milder Appearance, that there is scarce a rational Man in *Europe*, that would not prefer Death to *Asiatick* Despotism.'; 'You may criticise freely upon the *Chinese* Constitution, and observe with as much Severity as you please upon the absurd Tricks, or destructive Bigotry of the Bonzees.' In 1757, in their first collaborative work, the *Account*, the Burkes stated that Asia was, in general, absolute and slavish. See *Account*, I, 130. Regarding Islam, in his *Vindication*, Burke put forward the stereotypical image of a Sultan as a despotic ruler. See *Vindication*, in *WS*, I, 158-9: 'The Tyranny is even more felt, as every Individual of the Nobles has the Haughtiness of a Sultan; the People are more miserable, as they seem on the Verge of Liberty, from which they are for ever debarred'. The Burkes, in the *Account*, too, represented Muslims as aggressive conquerors who devoted themselves to the expansion of their religion. See *Account*, I, 31: 'The Mahometan great merit is to spread the empire and the faith; and none amongst them doubt the legality of subduing any nation for these good purposes'.

⁶¹ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 454. A similar description is found in the *Vindication*: 'About this Time, another Torrent of Barbarians, animated by the same Fury, and encouraged

historical image of the rapid expansion of early Islam over the earth, i.e., an image of Islam as a cruel religion of conquest. Such a religion was historically a great enemy of the Christian religion. In his *Abridgment*, Burke also made this point clear, addressing the Christian struggles to retake their holy places from the Muslims. In the tenth century, pilgrimages were regarded as highly praiseworthy and became frequent, but Jerusalem had been occupied by the Muslims, 'who, against all the rules of humanity and good policy, treated the Christian pilgrims with great indignity'. The Christians certainly filled their minds with 'hatred and resentment' against the Muslims, and Pope Urban II and Peter the Hermit urged them to undertake a military expedition to recover control of the Holy Land.⁶² The merciless Muslims were infidels and religious enemies rather than being savages and it was legitimate to wage a religious crusade against them.

Burke may well have been informed of other historical episodes recording the conflicts between the two religions. Such knowledge might have been expressed in a letter of 1772, where he referred to Turkey as savage and maintained: 'Any people but the Turks so seated as they are would have been cultivated in 300 years, but they grow more gross in the very native soil of civility and Refinement'.⁶³ By contending that Turkey had not improved over the last three hundred years, he probably meant the state of the nation since 1453, the year when the Ottomans captured Constantinople. If 'the very native soil of civility and Refinement' implied Constantinople, the seat of the Western Roman Empire, it could be that

by the same Success, poured out of the South, and ravaged all to the North-east and West, to the remotest Parts of *Persia* on one hand, and to the Banks of the *Loire* or further on the other; destroying all the proud and curious Monuments of human Art, that not even the Memory might seem to survive of the former Inhabitants'. See *Vindication*, in *WS*, I, 150.

⁶² *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 482.

⁶³ 'Burke to [Adrian Heinrich von] Borcke-[post 17 January 1774]', in *Corr.*, II, 514.

Burke was lamenting the Muslims' capture of what had long been the capital of the Byzantine Empire.⁶⁴

After 1782, as has already been seen, Burke maintained that many past governments in India had neither been despotic nor arbitrary, and at times he applied this notion to the whole Asia. In order to refute Hastings' allegation that Asian history was nothing more than a series of exercises in arbitrary power,⁶⁵ he tried to show that there had not been any arbitrary government in Asia during its long history, and he insisted that Hastings had done something previously unknown to history in that region. While many parts of Asia were governed by Muslims, their rulers governed under the rule of law. Their Bible, the Koran itself, does not authorise the exercise of any arbitrary power.⁶⁶ Throughout Asia, there is a great priesthood, which interprets the law and which is an independent body protected from the fury of the sovereign power. In Turkey,⁶⁷ there is the ancient law which limits the sovereign's power. Although the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire has great executive powers, he has to subject himself to the law. He is more strictly under the rule of law than any European sovereign. In fact, he cannot dispose of the life or property of any of his subjects, nor declare war

⁶⁴ Later, in his *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, Burke depicted Mahomet II (1430-81), who captured 'the capital of the Christian World', i.e. Constantinople as 'the ferocious enemy of all philosophy and religion'. See *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 108.

⁶⁵ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 348-9. See also 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 259; *Journals of the House of Commons*, XLI, 695-6. Also, see *Parl. Hist.*, 26, col., 638. On 27 February 1787, Major Scott told Burke that Muslim governments in Bengal had been despotic, whereas the British replaced them with the best form of government.

⁶⁶ 'And, if any man will produce the Khoran to me, and will but shew me one text in it that authorizes in any degree an arbitrary power in the Government, I will declare that I have read that book and been conversant in the affairs of Asia to a degree in vain. There is not such a syllable in it; but on the contrary, against oppressors by name every letter of that law is fulminated.' See 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 353. Burke owned *The Koran, Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohammed, Translated into English Immediately from the Original Arabic* (London, 1734): *LC*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ Burke clearly classified Turkey as part of Asia, and this is noteworthy as several contemporaries tended to regard it as Europe.

or peace without the support of the law. If he were regarded as violating the principles of the law, he would be deposed by it.⁶⁸ Significantly, Burke assumed that Turkey, as well as other Muslim nations, had its 'ancient' constitution which enforced the rule of law on all levels of society, even upon the Sultan. In claiming so, Burke evidently challenged contemporary views of Islam and Turkey and also made an apparent departure from his own early position on them.

Nevertheless, Burke, around the same period, occasionally expressed contradictory notions of Turkey and Islam, which have often been ignored by commentators.⁶⁹ In his *Reflections*, Burke referred to the decline of Persia, which was 'bleeding under the ferocious sword' of Nadir Shah, and to 'the barbarous anarchic despotism of Turkey' in order to argue that the *ancien regime* of the French monarchy had been much better than the situation of either Asian country. In particular, as regards Turkey, Burke asserted that 'the finest countries in the most genial climates in the world are wasted by peace more than any countries have been worried by war; where arts are unknown, where manufactures languish, where science is extinguished, where agriculture decays, where the human race itself melts away and

⁶⁸ 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 352-4. See also, 'Speech on Bill to Amend 1784 India Act (22 March 1786)', in *WS*, VI, 67. Although 'the Turkish government had been blazoned forth by the advocates of arbitrary power as a true model of that sort of government', nevertheless 'there were principles of freedom' in it.

⁶⁹ Burke does not seem to have discarded his old abhorrence of Islam. The following discussion will be enough to demonstrate this, but one of the most obvious pieces of evidence was a letter of 1792, in which he called Islam 'one of the worst heresies of that Protestant Sect' and asserted that its dogma endorsed 'the servitude of all mankind that do not belong to it'. See 'Burke to Richard Burke, JR (23 March 1792)', in *Corr.*, VII, 118. Presumably, P.J. Marshall recognises Burke's continued abhorrence of Islam, but does not examine in detail this problem, particularly regarding Burke's view of the history of the Muslim nations. See his 'Introduction' in *WS*, VI, 23-4, where Marshall mentions that Burke 'had his share of contemporary prejudices about Islam'; 'Burke's portrayal of India was not entirely original to him. He reproduced old European stereotypes about Hindu immutability and Islamic intolerance and added to them more up-to-date material provided for him by his informants'. It seems probably more appropriate to argue that Burke's prejudice against Islam should include his personal hatred of it. See also, Marshall, 'Introduction' in *WS*, V, 14; Marshall, 'Introduction' in *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 39.

perishes under the eye of the observer'.⁷⁰ Such a contention was apparently incompatible with his previous evaluation of the same nation. In 1792, in a speech in the House of Commons, he also criticised some of his colleagues who were seeking to regard Turkey as part of the balance of power in Europe and enthusiastically insisted:

He had never before heard it held forth, that the Turkish empire was ever considered as any part of the balance of power in Europe. They had nothing to do with European power; they considered themselves as wholly Asiatic. Where was the Turkish resident at our court, the court of Prussia, or of Holland? They despised and contemned all christian princes, as infidels, and only wished to subdue and exterminate them and their people. What had these worse than savages to do with the powers of Europe, but to spread war, destruction, and pestilence amongst them? The ministers and the policy which should give these people any weight in Europe, would deserve all the bans and curses of posterity. All that was holy in religion, all that was moral and humane, demanded an abhorrence of every thing which tended to extend the power of that cruel and wasteful empire. Any christian power was to be preferred to these destructive savages.⁷¹

For Burke, the Ottoman Empire was an Asiatic country,⁷² to which he here referred unfavourably, and, above all, it was a powerful Muslim nation. On

⁷⁰ *Reflections*, p. 295. The dreadful image of Nadir Shah was quite common to his contemporaries. As has already been seen, Burke, in another work, also mentioned the social disorder of Persia since the death of Nadir Shah. See above, pp. 235-6. See also *ibid.*, p. 299. Here he again described Turkey as despotic.

⁷¹ *Parl. Hist.*, 29, cols., 76-77. For another comment on Turkey as an enemy of the Christian religion, see *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *WS*, VIII, 307. For Turkish history, Burke, for example, owned Demetrius [Cantemir], *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire*, trans. Nicholas Tindal (London, 1756). See *LC MS*; *LC*, p. 9.

⁷² The author of the *Annual Register* for the year 1765, while considering Turkey as part of Europe, praised Mustafa III for his political decisions and encouragement of science: 'The present emperor of that ill-governed and illiterate, yet, from its numbers and enthusiastic servility to its head, dangerous neighbour to some of the Christian powers, seems to be a very different man from all his predecessors. Under him, the spirit of Turkish despotism and jealousy seems to be in some degree lowered'. Implying that the despotic national character was deep-rooted in their history, the author maintained that the political situation was changing to the more favourable than the

this occasion, he seems to have attempted to remind his colleagues of the history of this empire as a longstanding archenemy of Christians. The image of Turkey here as 'worse than savages' is obviously not compatible with that he had put forward some years earlier.

It may be worth referring here to his view of two Muslim countries in North Africa. In his *French Affairs*, Burke incidentally referred to the Algerian republic and the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt. The evil governments in both Algiers and Egypt had, according to him, existed for centuries, and their viciousness was well-suited to their nature.⁷³ In his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he contended that Algiers possessed a similar constitution to that of revolutionary France. In both countries, 'an handful of obscure ruffians' dominated 'a fertile country, and a brave people'. Both were also countries composed of evil and dangerous factions. In fact, Algiers was 'formed out of the very scum, scandal, disgrace, and pest of the Turkish Asia'. Unlike revolutionary France, however, Algiers was far from Britain. It was also neither powerful nor infectious. At the same time, it was 'an old

European had ever had. See *Annual Register ... for the Year 1765*, pp. 5-6. This view seems to be quite different from Burke's views on Turkey that appear in his works.

⁷³ See *French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 368: 'What can be conceived so monstrous as the Republick of Algiers? And that no less strange Republick of the Mammalukes in Egypt? They are of the worst form imaginable, and exercised in the worst manner, yet they have existed as a nuisance on the earth for several hundred years'. Burke must have had in mind that these were Muslim countries. It is not quite certain that he condemned these countries, because they were Muslim. At least, the presence of these countries in his age would have contributed to his image of Islam. It may not be correct to argue, however, that 'he must have regarded [these two nations] as aberrant in light of the generally more favourable view of Asian government that he had formulated by the time of Hastings's trial', since his abhorrence of Islam was conspicuous around this period. See Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India*, p. 57. See also F.G. Whelan, 'Burke, India, and Orientalism', in *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke*, ed. Ian Crowe (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2005), p. 129 (and footnote 7) where the author states: 'Burke sometimes assumes that Muslims generally are warlike and conquering peoples, an image that draws upon a familiar historical image of medieval Arab warriors. More often, Burke takes a favorable view of the mostly Muslim Indian gentry as a genuine aristocracy entitled to respectful treatment'. Although Whelan recognises Burke's before-1782 prejudice about Muslims, he tends to overlook Burke's abhorrence of Islam after 1782.

creation'.⁷⁴ In saying so, Burke appears to have assumed that the evilness of Algiers had existed since the distant past.⁷⁵ Again, it is not clear how such an idea can stand with his more favourable notions on Islam mentioned above.

Burke's views of the early Muslims, too, do not fit well with his statements such as 'no Mahometan is born who can exercise any arbitrary power'. As was seen above, even in his works on Indian affairs published after 1782, Burke was highly critical of Mahomet and his early followers who invaded India. In his works on French affairs during the 1790s, he occasionally inserted similar historical images into his texts. In his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, Mahomet was depicted as a fanatical infidel 'in light of Asia' and a great enemy of Christian Europe.⁷⁶ In his *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, Burke also wrote:

Would it be wise to estimate what the world of Europe, as well as the world of Asia, had to dread from Jinghiz Khân, upon a contemplation of the resources of the cold and barren spot in the remotest Tartary, from whence first issued that scourge of the human race? Ought we to judge from the excise and stamp duties of the rocks, or from the paper circulation of the sands of Arabia, the power by which Mahomet and his tribes laid hold at once on the two most powerful Empires of the world; beat one of them totally to the ground, broke to pieces the other, and, in not much longer space of time than I have lived, overturned governments,

⁷⁴ *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, XI, 257-9.

⁷⁵ In addition, he would have known about the Barbary pirates, who for ages had harassed European merchant ships in the Mediterranean.

⁷⁶ See *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 305-6: 'Never shall I think any country in Europe to be secure, whilst there is established, in the very centre of it, a state (if so it may be called) founded on principles of anarchy, and which is, in reality, a college of armed fanatics, for the propagation of the principles of assassination, robbery, rebellion, fraud, faction, oppression, and impiety. *Mahomet*, hid, as for a time he was, in the bottom of the sands of Arabia, had his spirit and character been discovered, would have been an object of precaution to provident minds. What if he had erected his fanatic standard for the destruction of the Christian religion in *Juce Asiae*, in the midst of the then noon-day splendour of the then civilized world?'

laws, manners, religion, and extended an empire from the Indus to the Pyrenees?⁷⁷

Here Genghis Khan and Mahomet and his followers emerge as destructive conquerors. Although it must not be forgotten that at this time Burke was chiefly preoccupied with French affairs, not with the history of Asia, it seems to be quite misleading to suggest that he only had in mind, in the 1780s and 1790s, the image of historical Asia as 'the Garden of Eden' or as the region in which the rule of law was firmly established. It seems that Burke was still being haunted by its negative past, in which the tyrannical Muslims and other great Asian conquerors such as Genghis Khan and Nadir Shah had conquered many countries of the region and had threatened the peace of Europe.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, Burke's views on the history of Asian-Muslim nations have been examined. Section one showed that, before 1782, he regarded India as a despotic nation. While Hindus had been persecuted by Muslims in the course of history, Hindu provinces were, none the less, described as having flourished until recently. After 1782, he was still critical of the early Muslim invasions of India, but highly approved of Tamerlane and insisted that the Muslims, whose governments were far from despotic, but were based on rule of law, had not destroyed the social order of the country. Burke saw India as a mature and flourishing country until her recent decline. Section two addressed his historical views on Asia and Islam in general and suggested that Burke, who considered the region of Asia and Islam as historically

⁷⁷ *Second Letter*, in *WS*, IX, 289. The Persian empire of the Sassanids was overthrown around 640, and Multan in the Punjab was captured in 713. See also *ibid.*, in *WS*, IX, 278, where he wrote: 'Their [the philosophers and the politicians of revolutionary France] temporal ambition was wholly subservient to their proselytizing spirit in which they were not exceeded by Mahomet himself.'

despotic in his earlier works, seems to have abandoned this conventional view around 1782, but that, nevertheless, quite contradictory views on the history of the region still existed in his later works. Burke seems to have been highly critical of Mahomet and the early Muslims throughout his life and perhaps also considered the Ottoman Empire to be an historic archenemy of Christian Europe (this may indicate the limits of his ideas on religious toleration).

Whether before or after 1782, his account of Asia and Islam frequently concerned their political actions and systems, i.e., whether their politics were (or had been) despotic. He also tended to stress the homogeneity of Asian-Muslim countries. This was partly due to his simple assumption of the homogeneity of Hindus and Muslims throughout his works, and also partly because, after 1782, he attempted to refute Hastings' claim that Asian history was full of despotic governments. Burke scarcely touched upon the historical developments of the legal or political systems in the region,⁷⁸ nor did he draw particular attention to the commercial interactions between Europe and Asian-Muslim nations throughout history. Among his contemporaries, William Robertson, for example, drew attention to Muslim commercial activities and pointed out that commercial interactions reduced hostility and promoted mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims, although historical events such as the Crusades interrupted such peaceful interactions.⁷⁹ Edward Gibbon also stated that the caravans had provided the Arabs with knowledge and politeness.⁸⁰ It seems that Burke's commercial humanism did not turn to these points. Moreover, while commentators have tended to praise Burke's knowledge of India, this is, of

⁷⁸ For contemporary awareness of this development in Muslim nations, for instance, see Sir James Porter, *Observations on the Religion, Law, Government, and Manners of the Turks* (2nd edn. London, 1771), pp. 45-8.

⁷⁹ Robertson, *Historical Disquisition*, pp. 97-106, 115, 119-122, 146-8.

⁸⁰ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley (3 vols., London: Allen Lane, 1994), III, 164.

course, a matter of comparison. He was indeed much better informed about India than many of his contemporaries, whereas his knowledge was more concerned with contemporary political issues than with history. His knowledge of Indian history, as well as that of the history of Asian-Muslim nations, was much thinner than his knowledge of English or European history. His historical descriptions of the Asian-Muslim world were relatively coarse, at times inaccurate and even fanciful. Clearly, there are many historical periods, events or personalities that he did not mention. These limits are, of course, quite understandable since he was a man who lived in the eighteenth-century Western world.

Burke's account of Asian-Muslim nations was, in a way, a response to the long history of ideas about them that had developed ever since Aristotle. When opposing the ideas of Montesquieu and Hastings, and asserting that Asia was historically not despotic and that India had been flourishing until recently, it might be argued that he was putting forward a theory of history in which every society could develop its own unique civilisation with a number of universal characteristics, if the manners of the people, which are unique in each culture, are properly preserved. This theory and his ideas on Asia were contradicted, however, when he censured Mahomet, his followers and Ottoman Turkey. Although it is not easy to explain away this contradiction, it is possible that both the contradictory images of Asia and Islam reflect his genuine opinions. It is true that Burke's discussions of them were presented when he had different political objectives on different occasions. In the impeachment of Hastings, Burke needed to emphasise the contrast between historical India and the present situation of the sub-continent in order to criticise Hastings and the East India Company. The idealised view of Asia was created to meet this objective. On other occasions, it was convenient to make use of the image of despotic Asia and Islam in order to stress the evils and savagery of revolutionary France. Even so,

Burke's hostile attitude towards the early Muslims and to Turkey was part of his genuine thinking rather than being a mere rhetorical device or a reproduction of conventional stereotypes, since it appeared time and again throughout his life and in various different contexts. So, was his praise of Islam and Asia only rhetoric to buttress his political arguments? Although he needed such rhetoric to persuade his audience of the impeachment, it is unlikely that it had nothing to do with his genuine opinions. If he did not consider Asia and Islam as praise-worthy at all, Burke could have chosen other rhetorical devices or other ways of criticising Hastings. Although such contradictory remarks may show that his knowledge about them was incomplete (his remarks on British and European history were often more elaborate and hardly ever showed such contradictions, despite the fact that they appeared in many different contexts and circumstances), it is pointless to censure Burke for this inconsistency. Rather, it seems to be more important to think about what these contradictory ideas, standing in parallel in his works, might tell us about his thought in general.

Conclusion

Burke's Idea of History

Burke's Idea of Historical Change

This thesis has examined in detail Burke's view of the histories of particular societies and specific parts of the world. Underlying all these different histories were more general beliefs about the causes of historical change such as human nature, religion, divine providence, conquest, war, the natural environment, human manners and actions, commerce and sheer chance. These beliefs can be reconstructed from various different fragments scattered throughout his works. For instance, Burke, in his *Enquiry*, interestingly discussed the link between human nature and the formation of manners by examining the effects of imitation and ambition. According to him, imitation is, like sympathy, a passion which arises from the 'natural constitution' of human beings. It was divine providence that created this constitution and directed humans to feel pleasure in imitation. Burke claimed: 'It is by imitation far more than by precept that we learn every thing; and what we learn thus we acquire not only more effectually, but more pleasantly. This forms our manners, our opinions, our lives. It is one of the strongest links of society'.¹ Imitation is, in fact, 'one of the great instruments used by providence in bringing our nature towards its perfection'. Nevertheless, it was not the only thing divine providence implanted in human beings. Burke maintained that, if human beings just repeatedly imitated one another, their lives would never improve, i.e., they would remain the same as they were at the beginning of the world. 'To prevent this', he asserted, 'God has planted in man a sense of ambition, and a satisfaction arising from the contemplation of his excelling his fellows in

¹ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 49.

something deemed valuable amongst them'.² Here, humans are, by the hand of God, destined to achieve progress. This is an example of his idea of the relationship between human nature, divine providence and the development of civil society, although it is not clear that he retained this idea in his later works.

What Burke certainly had in mind throughout his career was the idea of human beings as religious animals. Although he did not definitely claim that God made humans religious, to be religious was none the less the very essence of human nature. As Burke, in his *Reflections*, pronounced, 'religion is the basis of civil society' and 'man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only our reason but our instincts'.³ If this is so, it is also supposed that a religious animal develops a variety of arts and leads his society towards civilisation. In his *Abridgment*, Burke maintained that 'Justice was in all countries originally administered by the priesthood' and that 'The first openings of civility have been every where made by religion'.⁴ For Burke, religion was probably the most significant aspect of human life and one of the most important driving forces behind civilisation. The idea of religion as a civilising force applied to Christianity in particular. In the *Account*, after expounding on the barbarous activities of the American Indians, the Burkes suggested the advantage of the Christian religion. According to them, this religion had taught people to be compassionate towards their enemies, which was 'neither known nor practised in other religions'. It had also informed them about the value of various arts in civil life such as commerce and literature. While these arts may have undermined 'some of the natural virtues by the luxury which attends them', they had 'taken out likewise the sting of our natural vices, and softened the ferocity of the human race without enervating their

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³ *Reflections*, pp. 254-5.

⁴ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 349.

courage'.⁵

A determined Anglican latitudinarian, Burke believed almost all denominations of Christianity to be a driving force behind many civilisations. In particular, he often linked the Christian religion with the development of learning. According to him, learning had always been protected in monasteries, where there were supposed to be many intelligent monks and scholars. Monasteries had always played an important role in the civilising process in England, early Ireland and Europe at large. India was supposed to have had similar institutions. In his works on Indian affairs after around 1782, he regarded Hinduism as one of the most important causes of prosperity. As was seen in Chapter Five, however, his treatment of Islam requires caution. In his works before 1782, he stressed the idea that Islam was despotic, but this idea does not fit well into the idea of religion as a civilising force. Even after 1782, while often claiming that Islam had contributed to civilising nations, he at times regarded it as a destabilising force in society. Here there may be possible contradictions, although there is nevertheless no doubt that he basically believed in the role of religion as a significant driving force behind every civilisation. It is also important that Burke frequently drew attention to the fact that religious persecutions had damaged societies in the course of history. As has already been seen, he was highly critical of the penal laws imposed on the Irish Catholics, of Louis XIV's revocation of the edict of Nantes, and so forth. In contrast, he at times argued that religious toleration led societies to liberty and prosperity, such as in William Penn's Pennsylvania, in Lord Baltimore's Maryland and in India, where the Muslims had not destroyed Hinduism.

Burke's belief in religion was, after all, closely related to his belief in divine providence. As a powerful historical force, providence occasionally,

⁵ *Account*, I, 192-3. See also Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 138.

but crucially, intervenes in human history.⁶ As was maintained in his *Abridgment*, he believed: 'It is by no means impossible, that, for an end so worthy, Providence, on some occasions, might directly have interposed'.⁷ For example, Providence contributed to spreading mankind over the earth in early history. In the ancient era, 'the spirit of migration' was intense, whereas commerce was undeveloped, nature produced many obstacles to human beings and travel was extremely difficult. The chief causes of migration in this era were people's style of life and frequent wars rather than increasing population. Neither of these causes contributed to increasing population. While hunting and pasturage brought people to the places where they might eventually settle, war could expel the conquered from their native soil and force them to escape to a new land, even to a region with a harsh climate such as the far north. The northern part of the world was peopled as early as the southern part even though the climate of the latter was fitter for human habitation. Behind this phenomenon, Burke assumed, was 'a wonderful disposition of the Divine Providence'.⁸ In England, providence might also have contributed towards spreading the Christian religion to the people.⁹ In the *Account*, divine providence saved Columbus from the storm, placed different nationalities of European immigrants in suitable lands, even caused physical changes in animals and taught the native Indians how to live in their lands. For Burke, even conquest could occasionally take place through divine providence. By causing migration, pilgrimage and conquest, Providence 'strongly appears to have intended the continual intermixture of mankind'.¹⁰ At the end of his

⁶ For this, see Kilcup, 'Burke's Historicism'. Cf. Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler*, p. 68.

⁷ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 393.

⁸ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 346-7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 393-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, in *WS*, I, 399.

life, however, although he may have believed the French Revolution to have been caused by the divine will, he struggled to understand its intention.¹¹

Conquest could, either positively or negatively, affect the fate of nations. The Roman conquest refined the ancient Britons and their society. The Norman Conquest altered English manners and laws and opened their communications with other European nations. In these cases, conquest was, in a sense, a form of 'communication' with foreigners that brought a new culture to the defeated. Like pilgrimages, Crusades or commerce, conquest occasionally had an effect on transmitting culture from one nation to another, and by such means a nation could be civilised. History did not, however, always record such positive results from acts of conquest. In Irish history, conquests at times obstructed the progress of the nation. The Danes destroyed Irish science, which had flourished in earlier centuries. The Williamite Conquest of 1689-91 led to the imposition of the evil penal laws on the Irish Catholic majority. Although the early Muslims' conquest of India was cruel, the Muslims never destroyed Hinduism and their society, which led the subcontinent to its flourishing state. How conquest worked out depended upon how the conquerors treated the conquered.

Although he was well aware of the destructive nature of war, Burke was not a naïve pacifist. He believed that war could sometimes strengthen a nation and stimulate its growth, whereas peace might, on the contrary, weaken a nation on occasion. As was seen in Chapter Two and Three, the Burkes, in the *Account*, maintained that although the Dutch Netherlands had grown up to be a powerful trading nation in the midst of great wars, the peace brought to the country after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 was one of the causes of the subsequent decline of Dutch commerce. The commerce of France was severely damaged by the War of the Spanish Succession, but it soon completely recovered and had even advanced by the time the next war

¹¹ This problem is discussed in Weston, 'Edmund Burke View of History', pp. 226-7. Cf. Kilcup, 'Burke's Historicism', pp. 406-410.

began. Later, in his *Reflections*, Burke claimed that the Ottoman Empire had declined during peaceful times.

Probably first informed by Montesquieu, Burke also took into consideration the natural environment as a significant factor in historical change. In his *Abridgment*, he argued that, in ancient times, the peculiar configuration of the earth and the mild climate in southern Europe had contributed to civilising the region.¹² As was seen in Chapter Three, Burke believed that one of the causes of the growth of the American spirit of liberty was the great distance of the British colonies from the mother country. The following passage may also help us to understand his idea of the relationship between the natural environment, particular circumstances, and human manners. In his 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', in which he opposed the idea that the crown should stop any further grants of land to the colonists, he stated:

But, if you stopped your grants, what would be the consequence? The people would occupy without grants. They have already so occupied in many places. You cannot station garrisons in every part of these deserts. If you drive the people from one place, they will carry on their annual Tillage, and remove with their flocks and herds to another. Many of the people in the back settlements are already little attached to particular situations. Already they have topped the Apalachian mountains. From thence they behold before them an immense plain, one vast, rich, level meadow; a square of five hundred miles. Over this they would wander, without a possibility of restraint; they would change their manners with the habits of their life; would soon forget a government, by which they were disowned; would become Hordes of English Tartars;¹³

This extraordinary passage may have struck Josiah Tucker as odd, but it surely reflected Burke's idea of the importance of manners. The natural

¹² Ibid., in *WS*, I, 339. In the *Account*, the same point was made about late medieval Italy. See *Account*, I, 3.

¹³ 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', in *WS*, III, 129.

environment and peculiar circumstances could influence manners in various ways. In this case, the peculiar environment and circumstances in America transformed the colonists' manners.

The manners of mankind are a key concept in examining Burke's ideas on history as well as in his thought in general. The language of manners was already conspicuous in his early works, and it was so in his later political works as well. According to him, manners could influence a variety of human activities and institutions. When Anderson's *Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce* was reviewed in the *Annual Register*, Burke probably prefaced the extracts by saying that commercial trade provides information about 'the history of the human mind in different ages and countries', since it is greatly influenced by manners.¹⁴ In his *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, he may also have been arguing that manners could influence politics when he wrote that 'Every age has its own manners, and its politics dependent upon them'.¹⁵ In his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he claimed that laws also depend on manners:

Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them, in a great measure the laws depend. The law touches us but here and there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or sooth, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in. They give their whole form and colour to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them.¹⁶

This is one of the most lucid discussion of manners that he put forward, and he did so when he was becoming highly critical of the French revolutionaries, who replaced the ancient manners of Europe with

¹⁴ See *Annual Register ... for the Year 1764* (London, 1765), p. 250.

¹⁵ *Thoughts*, in *WS*, II, 258.

¹⁶ *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), in *WS*, IX, 242.

barbarous ones. As was seen in Chapter One, the early Burke, in his *Abridgment* and *Fragment*, had already put forward the idea that laws alter over time according to changing manners and circumstances.¹⁷ On 7 May 1782, in the draft of his speech to the House of the Commons, he maintained that a nation is shaped by the 'moral, civil, and social habitudes of the people', as well as by peculiar circumstances, 'which disclose themselves only in a long space of time'.¹⁸ Burke, throughout his career, retained the idea that manners were one of the chief influences in shaping society. In his view, the prosperity of eighteenth-century Europe owed much to the preservation of traditional manners such as the Christian religion and the spirit of chivalry. This way of thinking is quite similar to that deployed in his analysis of eighteenth-century Britain. The prosperity of Britain resulted, in part, from the protection of the ancient constitution of England. This also leads to the idea that a nation could revive and achieve progress as long as the foundations of society were not ruined. As Chapter One and Two have shown, Burke was well aware of England and other European nations having suffered from several political tumults and confusions over the course of history. He maintained, nevertheless, that neither Cromwell in England, nor Henri IV and Louis XIV in France had destroyed the very essence of their nations. Similarly, in the *Accounts*, the Burkes put forward the idea that nations could 'easily recover all the losses of war' as long as the vital 'principle' and 'spirit' of the people continued to exist.¹⁹

Burke supposed that manners become more elaborate and refined as society progresses. The temper of people becomes more moderate accordingly. The barbarity of the ancient Britons or the American Indians

¹⁷ A similar argument was made later in his 'Report on the Lords Journals (30 April 1794)', in *WS*, VII, (esp., at 142, 168).

¹⁸ Burke, 'On a Motion made in the House of Commons, the 7th of May, 1782, for a Committee to inquire into the state of the Representation of the Commons in Parliament', in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, III, 355.

¹⁹ *Account*, II, 16.

formed a striking contrast to the civility of modern Europeans. Although he did not advance a developed stadial theory of social development, Burke had in mind the clear distinction between the civilised and the savage. Primitive people are ignorant, often ferocious and warlike. Their occupations are normally hunting and pasturage. Their society is simple and no refined culture exists. In civilised nations, by contrast, societies are more populous²⁰ and more sophisticated and complex. The manners of the people are more elaborate and diverse. The elite provide a lead in politics and culture, and hence a variety of arts, learning and commerce, in particular, can flourish. By the late eighteenth century, European nations such as England and France had substantially developed these arts. This may, however, be a relatively recent achievement. As was seen in Chapter Three, the Burkes, in the *Account*, informed their readers with regret that mathematics and commercial trade were barely studied by late fifteenth-century European scholars, although these scholars had devoted themselves to learning Latin. As society advances and the economy develops, knowledge about commerce and finance becomes important in managing political affairs. In fifteenth-century Europe, the study of commerce was undeveloped, partly because commercial activities were still marginal to most people's lives. In a commercial nation such as eighteenth-century Britain, the science of finance and commerce advances.²¹ In fact, for Burke, developed commerce, as well

²⁰ For many eighteenth-century intellectuals, population was a barometer of the soundness of a nation's political and economic situation. As has already been seen, Burke repudiated the notion that the British population in his age was declining. He also believed that French population had increased since the end of the seventeenth century. In both cases, Burke was correct. Indian countries had been populous until Hastings plunged them into decline. See *Reflections*, p. 295: 'No country in which population flourishes, and is in progressive improvement, can be under a *very* mischievous government'.

²¹ See *Reflections*, p. 396: 'Through the revenue alone the body politic can act in its true genius and character, and therefore it will display just as much of its collective virtue ... It is therefore not without reason that the science of speculative and practical finance, which must take to its aid so many auxiliary branches of knowledge, stands high in the estimation not only of the ordinary sort, but of the wisest and best men; and

as advanced learning, are among the chief marks of a civilised society. He must have held the view that commerce helped nations communicate with each other, exchange cultural knowledge²² and refine their manners. It seems, nevertheless, that Burke did not advance this kind of notion as far as did some of the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Rather, as had already been shown, in the *Reflections*, he elaborated on an idea that the development of commerce was indebted to the preservation of traditional manners and institutions. Moreover, for Burke, commerce did not only render people 'polite', but also at times 'mutinous'. In his early manuscript, 'Considerations on a militia', opposing his British contemporaries, who supported the idea of the introduction of a citizen militia, he maintained that a commercial people easily inclined to seditious cabals and uprisings as they were energetic and closely involved with each other. Although, in the past, the savage nations often utilised the militia or 'feudal' armies to defend themselves, such military force was not menacing, since the people of those nations, who were poor and dispersed, did not possess a mutinous spirit nor opportunities to create cabals. As the histories of Britain and European countries inform us, great manufacturing cities had frequently been disturbed by their unruly citizens.²³

In Burke's view of history, historical changes occasionally take place without human intention. The historical forces that caused such unintended consequences were, for example, divine providence and sheer chance. Nevertheless, human actions also played a fairly significant role in determining the course of history. In ancient times, Agricola civilised the Britons. Englishmen had accomplished numerous reformatations, since the

as this science has grown with the progress of its object, the prosperity and improvement of nations has generally encreased with the encrease of their revenues'. Public virtue is displayed in the management of the public revenue. Among modern commentators, Pocock has drawn particular attention to this. See the 'Introduction' to his edition of the *Reflections*.

²² *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 399.

²³ Burke, 'Considerations on a militia', pp. 650-652.

era of Magna Carta, without destroying the nature of their constitution. Cromwell and Monck played a significant role in preventing England falling into anarchy. Richelieu and Colbert were the key individuals in the rise of France in the seventeenth century. As was seen in Chapter Three, the role of 'great men' was particularly emphasised in the *Account*. The European settlements in the Americas owed much to the enlightened mind and the endeavours of Columbus, Castro, Gasca, Poincy, De La Warr, Baltimore and Penn. Mahomet and Genghis Khan had a great impact on Asian history. As a great reformer of Islam, Tamerlane succeeded in reconciling himself with the native inhabitants of India. Burke was convinced that Warren Hastings and the French revolutionaries were changing the course of history in a negative fashion. This does not mean, of course, that his view of history was a form of 'great-men history', a history in which particular individuals were supposed to determine the entire history of nations. As was seen in Chapter Two, in one of his early manuscripts, he criticised Sallust who believed that the greatness of Rome had relied upon the greatness of particular individuals. Immersed in a Montesquieuan way of thinking, Burke always sought to detect the 'spirit' and 'character' of a people that he saw as a more significant factor influencing historical change. This methodology did not, at the same time, deny the role of individuals in history.

It was, actually, humans themselves who were largely responsible for building their nations. Late in his life, Burke frequently put forward the idea that a nation is not a natural formation, but an artificial product.²⁴ Government exists independently of natural rights in order to satisfy

²⁴ Presumably, however, Burke believed that the origins of a nation could not be discovered in any detail. As ancient history is obscure, so are the origins of government. He once maintained: 'There is a secret veil to be drawn over the beginnings of all governments. They had their origin, as the beginning of all such things have had, in some matters that had as good be covered by obscurity. Time in the origin of most governments has thrown this mysterious veil over them'. See *Opening of Impeachment* (16 February 1788), in *WS*, V, 316-7.

human wants.²⁵ Every nation is based on an original contract and is shaped by its peculiar manners, institutions and circumstances during the course of its history. Each generation has a 'duty' to inherit and maintain the particular original contract of their nation.²⁶ A breach of the original contract leads to the dissolution of a nation, but Burke never advised any people to break their original contract by force, since he knew that this led not only to the dissolution of government, but also that of 'a people'.²⁷ Even if people continued to live in the same region, they would become a different people after a breach of the original contract. If people retained their original contract, it would be possible for the same nation to exist in another place.²⁸ In England, the Revolution of 1688-9 was accomplished in order to restore the ancient constitution, which was formed by an original contract and developed over long ages, but had then been temporarily subverted by James II.²⁹ In 1789, another violation took place in France. The original contract was broken, the ancient manners were destroyed and the French 'people' as a nation were dissolved.

Nothing was more important to Burke than to have a nation governed in harmony with its peculiar manners and circumstances. Time and again, Burke put forward the idea that each particular society has a unique and

²⁵ *Reflections*, p. 218.

²⁶ *Appeal*, p. 122: 'Children are not consenting to their relation, but their relation, without their actual consent, binds them to its duties; or rather it implies their consent, because the presumed consent of a rational creature is in unison with the predisposed order of things. Men come in that manner into a community with the social state of their parents, endowed with all the benefits, loaded with all the duties of their situation'.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125: 'In a state of *rude* nature there is no such thing as a people. A number of men in themselves have no collective capacity. The idea of a people is the idea of a corporation. It is wholly artificial; and made like all other legal fictions by common agreement. What the particular nature of that agreement was, is collected from the form into which the particular society has been cast. Any other is not their covenant. When men, therefore, break up the original compact or agreement which gives its corporate form and capacity to a state, they are no longer a people'.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

optimum form of government. In the debates on American affairs, he frequently argued that the colonists should be governed according to their temper, their institutions and their circumstances. As was seen in Chapter Three, this argument was partly derived from his belief that the colonists had been developing a unique society across the Atlantic, while still retaining their inherited European manners. In his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (3 April 1777), he did not hesitate to generalise this notion: 'social and civil freedom ... [are] shaped into an infinite diversity of forms, according to the temper and circumstances of every community'. One method of ruling a particular nation may not be applicable to other nations. The native inhabitants in India needed to be governed in a different way from those in Virginia. After all, the optimal form of government is different from one place and one society to another. Burke declared, 'If any ask me what a free Government is? I answer, that, for any practical purpose, it is what the people think so'.³⁰ This definition of a free government was ridiculed by Samuel Johnson,³¹ but certainly reflected one of Burke's fundamental political ideas and shaped his theory on the historical development of nations.

Burke expressed similar ideas on other occasions. In 1781, he insisted that the people of India had been so used to living in a slavish state that the British should not impose their own political system upon them. Behind such a notion there was a more general idea that social institutions could shape a people's spirit and character. In one of his early manuscripts, Burke had already maintained that both ancient Rome and modern Britain had advanced excellent political systems which formed their national character

³⁰ *Letter to the Sheriffs to Bristol*, WS, III, 316-8.

³¹ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Comprehending an Account of His Studies and Numerous Works, in Chronological Order* (2 vols., London, 1791), II, 165.

and genius and resulted in their greatness.³² Since India was well suited to a different form of government from the British one, this may have been a consequence of their long-lasting despotic constitutions which had rendered their character servile.

Although later he seems to have changed his opinions on India and her governments, Burke did not change his general ideas on government. In his *Appeal*, while criticising revolutionary France, he still insisted that he was not an 'enemy' of republicanism. As 'the circumstances and habits of every country, which it is always perilous and productive of the greatest calamities to force, are to decide upon the form of its government',³³ a republican form of government could be best applied to a certain type of nation. It is, however, not suitable for other nations such as England or France. In the course of history, England had preserved its ancient constitution and had devised a mixed form of government composed of the monarch, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. When maintaining that France had her own 'ancient constitution' before the Revolution of 1789,³⁴ Burke did not mean, of course, that France had possessed exactly the same governmental institutions as Britain. Instead,

³² Burke, 'National Character and Parliament', pp. 640-1; Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', pp. 625-6.

³³ *Appeal*, pp. 45-6.

³⁴ For Burke, the constitutions of both England and France were prescriptive. According to him, if there is a long-established institution, it should be presumed that it is a good institution, since it has adapted itself to numerous different circumstances and changing habits of the people over a long course of time. Politicians should, therefore, preserve such an institution. A prescriptive institution may be the product of the ability of humans to make right judgments over the long run. On 7 May 1782, in his draft speech, he asserted: 'man is a most unwise and a most wise being. The individual is foolish. The multitude, for the moment, is foolish when they act without deliberation; but the species is wise, and when time is given to it, as a species, it almost always acts right'. See Burke, 'On a Motion made in the House of Commons, the 7th of May, 1782, for a Committee to inquire into the state of the Representation of the Commons in Parliament', in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, III, 355. It is, however, not clear how this idea fitted into his view of some Muslim nations which were supposed to have been under tyranny or to have been stagnating for hundreds of years.

he was ready to acknowledge that the best constitution for France would be different from that which served Britain best. In his idea of history, a variety of civilisations could develop over time, and he, in fact, observed such a diversity of civilisations (especially, from around 1782, when he began to insist that there had been substantial civilisations in Asia ever since the distant past). It is by human actions rather than by divine providence that the diversity of civilisations is generated.

Burke's ideas on the variety of civilisations may, however, have had obvious limits within the framework of eighteenth-century ideas on politics. Like many of his contemporaries, he was generally critical of democratic forms of government. He could not imagine any civilisation which was well governed by the general public.³⁵ It is the landed ruling class—propertied, educated, leisured, independent and experienced—that is best fitted to provide political leadership, and he definitely believed that a landed nobility was needed for the long-term stability and prosperity of a nation.³⁶ Burke might also not have been able to imagine a free state without a mixed system of government and party divisions. 'It is certain', he once asserted, 'no free Government ever was without parties'.³⁷ It was parties that kept the constitutional balance in a mixed form of government by offering opposition to the sovereign's power, an idea on which he elaborated in the context of

³⁵ The common people have an ability to detect the evil in governments, but they do not have the capacity to rule the nation. See *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792), in *WS*, IX, 621.

³⁶ *Letter to a Noble Lord*, in *WS*, IX, 183: 'no great Commonwealth could by any possibility long subsist, without a body of some kind or other of nobility, decorated with honour, and fortified by privilege. This nobility forms the chain that connects the ages of a nation, which otherwise (with Mr. Paine) would soon be taught that no one generation can bind another. He felt that no political fabrick could be well made without some such order of things as might, through a series of time afford a rational hope of securing unity, coherence, consistency, and stability to the state. He felt that nothing else can protect it against the levity of courts, and the greater levity of the multitude'.

³⁷ Burke, 'On Parties', p. 646.

British political discourse. Since he strongly believed in such an idea about politics, it may not have been easy for him to conceive of their absence.

In addition, it should be noted that Burke was conscious of the similarities of civilisations, as well as their diversity, that had existed and still survived in different parts of the world. As has been seen, in his opinion, all European nations had shared similar manners for a very considerable period of time, and the American colonies too had inherited European manners. Burke even emphasised the similarity between Indian and European societies, while recognising their obvious differences.

In Burke's view, the fortunes of any nation could never be clearly predicted in advance. As has already been seen, the Burkes, in the *Account*, asserted that the development of the English colonies in America was partly due to sheer accident. Similarly, Burke maintained that European nations had been shaped by a whole variety of accidents. The confiscation of church property and the issue of the *assignat* during the French Revolution were totally unpredictable events.³⁸ In the beginning of his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he refuted the analogy of the vicissitude of nations with the human life-cycle³⁹ and suspected that the 'history of mankind' was still not complete enough to reveal 'the internal causes which necessarily affect the fortune of a State'. These causes are certainly present, but difficult to identify. Burke continued:

We have seen States of considerable duration, which for ages have remained nearly as they have begun, and could hardly be said to ebb or flow. Some appear to have spent their vigour at their commencement. Some have blazed out in their glory a little before

³⁸ See *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *WS*, VIII, 498: 'Very few, for instance, could have imagined that property, which has been taken for natural dominion, should, through the whole of a vast kingdom, lose all its importance and even its influence. This is what history or books of speculation could hardly have taught us'. For this, see Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', in *idem*, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, pp. 193-212.

³⁹ The same point was made in his *Letter to a William Elliot* (1795), in *WS*, IX, 40-1.

their extinction. The meridian of some has been the most splendid. Others, and they the greatest number, have fluctuated, and experienced at different periods of their existence a great variety of fortune. At the very moment when some of them seemed plunged in unfathomable abysses of disgrace and disaster, they have suddenly emerged. They have begun a new course and opened a new reckoning; and even in the depths of their calamity, and on the very ruins of their country, have laid the foundations of a towering and durable greatness. All this has happened without any apparent previous change in the general circumstances which had brought on their distress.⁴⁰

In history, there have been a variety of nations whose fortunes have been different from one to another. Their fortunes also often changed without any clear symptoms of rise or fall.⁴¹ Burke's history, led by providence and by a human nature designed by God, is necessarily progressive and over time a variety of civilisations could be generated if humans act rightly. Nations could also, however, be very unstable, since their fortunes could fluctuate in an unexpected manner.

Burke's Place in the History of Historiography

It must be a matter of concern how Burke's ideas on history fit into the history of historiography. As this dissertation has shown, Burke was very familiar with various historical writings from the ancient to the modern periods and also with several different historiographical traditions. His early education informed him of ancient Greek and Roman historiography,

⁴⁰ *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 189.

⁴¹ Burke may have had in mind this kind of idea throughout his career. See *Annual Register ... for the Year of 1758*, pp. 444-5, where, reviewing John Brown's work, he declared: '[A] man must shut his eyes in good earnest, not to perceive that nations at one period strongly marked with all the characters of vice and barbarism, by some happy conjuncture emerge to light at another; and distinguish themselves by virtue, by patriotism, by those arts that improve and adorn life; these nations fall again into corruption, vice, and ignorance. ... However, this degeneracy is by no means in an even course, some commonwealths having been most glorious in their beginnings; others after they had long continued'.

which had a lasting influence on his thinking. English historiography, including the notion of ancient constitutionalism, also gave him a particular perspective on history. In his *Abridgment* and *Fragment*, Burke criticised the ancient constitutionalism, developed by William Lambard, Hale (misrepresented by Burke), Paul de Rapin, Bolingbroke and some other historians, who assumed that the constitution of their day had been the same as that in Saxon times. In his political writings, he later put forward the argument that the English constitution retained its essential form, despite several great political and religious upheavals such as the Reformation, the Restoration of 1660 and the Revolution of 1688-9. In order to forge his own idea of the ancient constitution, Burke consulted the speeches of the Whig prosecutors during the trial of Sacheverell, the works of William Blackstone and other historical records. Even so, his texts show that his idea of it was a product of his own thinking and that it was more elaborate than any other notion of it previously produced. This was also the case with his other historical concepts. While his doctrine of prescription also derived partly from the idea of an ancient constitution, Burke's political position led him to use the moderate Whig notion of an original contract (for Burke, as well as for many of his contemporaries, John Locke's idea of the original contract was too radical to adopt). Nevertheless, his language of these was quite unique and often more sophisticated than that presented by many of his predecessors. In his historical interpretation of eighteenth-century Britain, Burke also explicitly rejected 'Estimate' Brown's view of a Britain, whose excessive wealth and luxury had led the nation into decadence. For him, despite some political problems, late eighteenth-century Britain was at the peak of her greatness.

As an Irishman, Burke also came to know the arguments of William Molyneux, the Irish patriots, and the revisionist historians of his age. As has been seen in Chapter Four, Burke seems to have accepted Molyneux's

interpretation of Henry II's conquest of Ireland. He also agreed with the Irish revisionist historians that English historians, such as John Temple and Clarendon, and the Scot David Hume, had been mistaken in presenting the Irish rebellion of 1641 as an event in which many innocent English settlers were slaughtered by the cruel Irish Catholics. The revisionists' works, however, did not satisfy Burke. Unlike some of the revisionists, and also unlike Samuel Johnson, he may have believed that the modern history of Ireland was more important than its ancient history. Burke was sceptical of the ancient historical records in general, and also believed that modern society was superior to the ancient world. Moreover, he did not explore the origins of the Irish legislature as far as the Irish patriots did. His chief concern was religious strife in that kingdom, but he also found the national antagonism between England and Ireland to have existed even before the religious issues caused by the Reformation came to the fore. Evidently, Burke had his own views on Irish history and at times he attempted to put forward what he believed was closest to the historical truth.

In more general terms, Burke's ideas on history were, to a considerable extent, a product of his own age. For instance, the premise of the universality of human nature was one very commonly held by eighteenth-century intellectuals. The idea of progress substantially developed in the eighteenth century, to which Burke naturally accommodated his historical ideas. For him, the late eighteenth century had, before the French Revolution took place, seen European societies at their peak of civilisation. Since he stressed the advances in commerce and learning and the growing population of modern times, and probably believed in the superiority of modern Europe to ancient Greece and Rome, Burke was on the side of the 'moderns' in their dispute with the 'ancients'.⁴²

⁴² For the eighteenth-century quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, for example, see Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 26-28, 34-47, 333-341.

Among his contemporaries, Montesquieu and the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment are particularly of importance. The former's science of civilisations greatly helped to shape Burke's views on society and history and even provided him with the language to criticise some types of historiography such as Sallust's and the ancient constitutionalism. This great French thinker, as well as the general intellectual climate of the eighteenth century may also have been responsible for Burke's idea of despotic Asia. Even so, Burke later departed from Montesquieu's image of Asia and developed his own idea of it, which supposed that prosperity and liberty had been long-standing in the region. He also did not accept Montesquieu's notion of depopulation in modern Europe.⁴³ Moreover, Burke's concept of divine providence was his own, rather than an idea borrowed from Montesquieu or anyone else. He was, of course, not the only one who acknowledged occasional interventions of divine will in history, and he may well have been versed in the contemporary discourse of the historical role of divine providence and miracles including Conyers Middleton's and Hume's sceptical views. If it was a general notion among Protestants, as Middleton and Gibbon noted,⁴⁴ that miraculous powers had ceased in the early fourth century, when the Christian religion was granted a civil status in the Roman Empire, Burke might have been more 'credulous' than many contemporary Protestants, since he did not wholly discount the possibility that miracles had occurred in late sixth-century and early seventh-century Saxon England. Having argued that the people's 'belief' in miracles was the main cause of the rapid progress of Christianity in

⁴³ Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, translated by C.J. Betts (London: Penguin, 1973), pp. 202-4. See also idem, *The Spirit of the Laws*, p. 452.

⁴⁴ Middleton, 'The Introductory Discourse', in idem, *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which Are Supposed to Have Subsisted in the Christian Church*, pp. xlvi-xlviii; Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, I, 474n.

England, however, he was cautious not to be regarded as such a credulous Protestant or crypto-Catholic.⁴⁵

The thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment often developed a parallel discussion of points Burke made in his works. For him, as well as for the Scottish philosophers, for example, history could generate both intended and unintended consequences as the result of human actions. Burke and these Scots also drew attention to the uniformity as well as the diversity of civilisations. In fact, Burke's views on history were closer to their model than to a Machiavellian type of cyclical history (as seen above, Burke explicitly refuted this) or any other historiography. Nevertheless, Burke was slightly different from the Scottish thinkers in some respects. For instance, although Burke shared with Robertson, Millar and Ferguson the idea of chivalry as the first step towards modern society and of commerce as a driving force leading to modern society, no one more emphasised than Burke the indebtedness of eighteenth-century European prosperity to the ancient manners of the region. He also seems to have laid more stress on the diversity of civilisations than did his Scottish contemporaries, while underlining the importance of forms of government which were best fitted to the peculiar manners and circumstances of any society (this was another idea he drew from Montesquieu). Although he was probably aware of the stadial theory of social development, it does not seem that Burke was particularly obsessed with the idea of stages of civilisation. His idea that a great diversity of societies could grow over the course of history may not easily fit into the Scottish historians' broader subdivision of stages of social development. We may also consider the uniqueness of his notions of conquest, war, national fate and others, which seem difficult to trace to their intellectual origins. While it is certainly true that Burke's ideas on history could be derived from or be influenced by various traditions of European

⁴⁵ *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 393-4. See also, Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 152-3.

historiography, these ideas should also be seen as the product of his own reflections.

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