

THE USE OF BIBLICAL AND CLASSICAL ALLUSIONS  
IN AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY AND EARLY  
CONSTITUTIONAL LITERATURE

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## PREFACE

The primary purpose of this thesis is to examine how our founding fathers employed the ancient past in the pamphlet literature of the Revolutionary era. Although English and early colonial history were extremely important in that literature, the abundance of ancient and Biblical references suggested that the ancient past was genuinely instructive for the Patriots, Tories, Federalists, and Antifederalist.

I wish to express appreciation to my advisor, Dr. James Henderson, who gave his unlimited patience, time, guidance, and scholarly assistance. Also I would like to thank the other members of my committee: Dr. Neil J. Hackett, Dr. George Jewsbury, and Dr. Theodore Agnew. They were very understanding and helpful not only on this thesis, but also throughout graduate school.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. REVOLUTIONARY LITERATURE . . . . .	9
III. CONSTITUTIONAL LITERATURE . . . . .	26
IV. CONCLUSION . . . . .	40
V. BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	46
VI. APPENDIX . . . . .	50

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. General Categories of Classical and Biblical Allusions In Revolutionary Literature . . . . .	11
II. Frequency of Historical Allusions by Patriots and Tories . . . . .	14
III. General Categories of Classical and Biblical Allusions in Constitutional Literature . . . . .	28
IV. Frequency of Historical Allusions by Federalists and Antifederalists . . . . .	31
V. Classical and Biblical Allusions in the Literature of the Constitutional Periods . . . . .	42
VI. Usage of Classical and Biblical Allusions by the Four Parties Expressed in Percentages . . . . .	44
VII. Patriots' Use of Biblical and Classical Allusions . . . . .	51
VIII. Tories' Use of Biblical and Classical Allusions . . . . .	52
IX. Federalists' Use of Biblical and Classical Allusions . . . . .	53
X. Antifederalists' Use of Classical Symbols . . . . .	54
XI. Total Number of Citations by the Different Groups . . . . .	56
XII. Comparison . . . . .	57

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the American colonial period great emphasis was placed on history. Many leaders believed that the study of the past would guide them on the right path to the future. Patrick Henry put it most directly when he said, "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past."<sup>1</sup> The literature of the American Revolution and the debates over the Constitution reflect Henry's sentiment. Particularly was this regard for the past revealed in allusions to the classical world and to the Bible.

This emphasis on classical literature is not surprising, for many colonists were familiar with the major events of ancient history. Some even read the writings of Demosthenes, Polybius, Cicero, and Livy in the original. Furthermore, the writers of the Revolutionary Era believed that using historical references, particularly ancient references, made an argument sound much more authoritative. It is true that the knowledge behind references to the classics was sometimes superficial, and that in both the Revolutionary and Constitutional authors at times interpreted the allusions to fit their own arguments."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Patrick Henry, Speech to Virginia House of Burgesses, 1775, Famous American Speeches, Stewart H. Benedict, ed. (New York, 1969), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Bernard Bailyn, Pamphlets of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 24.

Generally, however, the allusions were used correctly. To add weight to their own writings was not the only reason that the Revolutionary authors, and later the Federalists and Antifederalists, used these sources. Writers used them because, more than any other era in history, the classical references showed the strengths and weaknesses of great republics, as well as the characteristics of tyranny and liberty. The example of the Roman Empire seemed particularly relevant to these early writers when England began to pass new measures to regulate the colonies more rigidly after the French and Indian War.

At first the propaganda of the resistance period (1765-1775) stressed the illegalities of the British measures and evoked a sense of common purpose among the Americans. Just before the Declaration of Independence, Patriot propaganda had a different purpose: that of justifying separation from a tyrannical mother country. In both instances pamphleteers found Greek and especially Roman history to be an appropriate "lamp of the past." British restrictions and taxes were compared to the oppression of the far-flung Roman Empire. Rome had sent to her colonies provincial governors who taxed the colonists unmercifully, and the Americans felt that England would do the same to her subject peoples. This concern for liberty grew until the Revolution had actually begun. Indeed, in many ways, the people were so very excited, so aroused about their rights before the first shots were fired, that the Revolution had already been accomplished in this literature.<sup>3</sup>

During the dispute over the Constitution, the situation was

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<sup>3</sup>Charles Francis Adams, ed. The Works of John Adams (10 Vols., Boston, 1856), X, 282. (Hereinafter, Adams, Works).



different, and so were the references to antiquity. The problem was not to curb power but to enlarge it within a republican framework; therefore, the Federalist writers attempted to show how the Constitution was a workable government without the faults of the ancient Greek and Roman governments. The Antifederalists, on the other hand, believed that the Constitution could lead to a form of tyranny because it provided for such a centralized government.

But exactly what part did classical and Biblical references play in the literature of the times? Because there is a vast amount of Revolutionary literature, a sample has been taken of the pamphlet exchanges between Patriots and Tories assembled by Thomas R. Adams in his book American Independence.<sup>4</sup>

The following authors and pamphlets from Adams' American Independence have been examined in this study:

Daniel Dulany, "Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes."

James Otis, "The Rights of the British Colonies."

Richard Bland, "An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies."

Henry Laurens, "Extracts From the Proceedings of the Court."

Sir Egerton Leigh, "The Man Unmasked."

Samuel Seabury, "The Congress Canvassed."

Samuel Seabury, "Free Thought on the Proceedings of the Continental Congress."

Alexander Hamilton, "The Farmer Refuted."

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas R. Adams, American Independence (Providence, R.I., 1965), Passim.

William Gordon, "A Discourse Preached December 15th, 1775."

Joseph Galloway, "A Candid Examination of the Mutual Claims of Great Britain and the Colonies."

Thomas Paine, "Common Sense."

James Chalmers, "Plain Truth."

In addition to those contained in Adams' book, the following writers and works were included in the analysis:

Thomas Jefferson, "A Summary View of the Right of British America."

Jonathan Boucher, "Letters From Virginia."

Charles Ingles, "The True Interest of American Impartially Stated."

Daniel Leonard, "Massachusettensis."

John Adams, "Novanglus."

Thomas B. Chandler, "What Think Ye of the Congress Now?"

John Dickinson, "Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies."

Harrison Gray, "A Few Remarks Upon Some of the Votes and Resolutions of the Continental Congress."

The debate over the Constitution has been examined from the pro-Federalist writings of John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison entitled The Federalist Papers. Other Federalists and the titles of their writings examined are as follows:

Pelotiah Webster, "The Weakness of Brutus Exposed; or some Remarks in Vindication of the Constitution."

Tench Coxe, "An Examination of the Constitution of the United States of America."

James Wilson, "Speech on the Federal Constitution."

John Dickinson, "Letters of Fabius on the Federal Constitution."

Alexander Contee Hanson, "Remarks on the Proposed Plan of a Federal Government."

James Iredell, "Observations on George Mason's Objections to the Federal Constitution."

The Antifederalist writings included in this study are as follows:

Samuel Bryan, "The Letters of 'Centinel.'"

Benjamin Workman, "The Letters of 'Philadelphiensis.'"

James Winthrop, "The Letters of 'Agrippa.'"

Rawlins Lowndes, "Debate in the Legislature and Convention of South Carolina."

James Lincoln, "Debate in the Legislature and Convention of South Carolina."

Patrick Dollard, "Debate in the Legislature and Convention of South Carolina."

George Mason, "Objections to the Proposed Federal Constitution."

Richard Henry Lee, "Letters from the Federal Farmer."

Patrick Henry, "Debate in the Virginia Convention."

George Mason, "Debate in the Virginia Convention."

William Grayson, "Debate in the Virginia Convention."

George Clinton, "The Letters of 'Cato.'"

Robert Yates, "The Letters of 'Brutus.'"

Melancton Smith, "Debate in the New York Convention."

Gilbert Livingston, "Debate in the New York Convention."

Thomas Tredwell, "Debate in the New York Convention."

Samuel Spencer, "Debate in the North Carolina Convention."

"The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention of Pennsylvania to their Constituents."

"The Letters of 'Montezuma.'"

"The Letters of 'John Dewitt.'"

"The Letters of 'A Republican Federalist.'"

"A Letter of Luther Martin."

"A Manifesto of a Number of Gentlemen from Albany County,  
New York."

The following analysis is partly quantitative. References or allusions written in a word, sentence, or paragraph that directed the attention of the reader to the Biblical or classical past were computed. Allusions were classified into topical categories. Roman references were organized into such categories as Roman mythology, Roman history, and Latin quotations. Latin quotations were classified according to the author and the period in which he wrote. Likewise, Greek allusions have been separated into categories of Greek history and Greek mythology.

Biblical references were included as well, since they are references to the ancient past. Revolutionary literature addressed an audience, some of whom knew classical literature, but all of whom were familiar with the teachings of the Bible. As Gordon Wood noted, "Religious terms and the revelations of scripture possessed a special force that scarcely contradicted but instead supplemented the knowledge about society reached through the use of history and reason."<sup>5</sup> During the Constitutional period, the Bible appears to have been less important because the audience, delegates to the various ratifying conventions, especially New York, was more educated. Writers addressing such an audience did not have to depend on Biblical references to reach

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<sup>5</sup>Gordon Wood, Creation of the American Republic (Cambridge, 1965), p. 24.

the people; they relied instead on Greek and Roman historical references. Too, many of the Revolutionary authors were clergymen while those who debated the Constitution in the press were mainly planters, lawyers, and political leaders.

The analysis that follows asks the basic question: which writers relied most upon classical and Biblical allusions? Additional questions have been posed: were these references used correctly, and if incorrectly, do they appear to be mere embellishments to make an argument sound more persuasive? Was one period of classical history used more than any other? What part did the Bible play, and was its use significant? What do these allusions reveal regarding the ideological posture of the writers?

The examination has revealed that references to Greek and Roman history were used in both Revolutionary and Constitutional periods, Roman references, particularly from the late Republic, were used more in the Revolutionary literature. It is clear that Patriots regarded Rome as a conqueror of people with no real plan of establishing a representative and fair government, and that the analogy between Britain and Rome riddled with inflation, poor leadership, and corrupt government was compelling. Greek references appear more prominently in the Constitutional era because of the parallel between the Greek confederations and the Articles of Confederation.<sup>6</sup> There are a few references in Constitutional writings to Greece after the Third Sacred War, but these were allusions largely used by the Federalists who recognized in these ancient writings the liabilities which necessitated Isocrates to

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<sup>6</sup>James Madison, "Federalist Number 18," The Federalist Papers (New York, 1788), p. 122, (Hereinafter Cited as The Federalist Papers).

call on Philip of Macedon to bring order from chaos.

Altogether, Biblical and classical allusions were to be a guide for the future. As Patrick Henry said, "I know of no way of judging the future but by the past."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Patrick Henry, Speech to Burgesses, Famous American Speeches, Benedict, ed., p. 21.

## CHAPTER II

### REVOLUTIONARY LITERATURE

John Adams once said that "the real American Revolution was the radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people."<sup>1</sup> Recent historians, particularly Bernard Bailyn, have attached great importance to the ideological factor when explaining the American Revolution. Bailyn and others have argued that the pamphlet exchanges were instrumental in effecting the type of Revolution to which Adams referred.

Bailyn argues that the most important element in the language of the pamphlets of the Revolution was the Radical Whig political philosophy of the early eighteenth century, and that while Patriots used the example of ancient history it was mainly to embellish this argument. A careful survey of the pamphlet literature of the Revolution shows, however, that although the Whig political philosophy was most important, the Revolutionaries were also guided by history and used classical and Biblical references for more than embellishment. Patriot writers turned to these sources so often that one can only conclude that such ancient authorities conveyed substantial authority. The use of "the lamp of the past" by the Tories was even more evident, for in the on-going dialogue between Patriots and Tories the appeal to ancient history escalated as

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<sup>1</sup>Adams, Works X, 283.

Tories attempted to refute Patriot allusions to classical and Biblical precedents. In the writings of the Patriots William Gordon and Thomas Paine, and the Tory authors Charles Ingles and James Chalmers, allusions to classical and Biblical sources occurred at an average frequency of one reference on each page.

Table I outlines the general categories of classical and Biblical allusions employed by both Patriots and Tories.



TABLE I  
 GENERAL CATEGORIES OF CLASSICAL AND BIBLICAL  
 ALLUSIONS IN REVOLUTIONARY LITERATURE

Categories	Patriots (137 Citations)	Tories (263 Citations)
Old Testament	36%	27%
New Testament	4%	5%
Both	10%	5%
Bible Total	50%	37%
Roman History	22%	20%
Roman Mythology	4%	---
Latin Quotations	15%	21%
Roman References Total	41%	41%
Greek History	8%	18%
Greek Mythology	1%	4%
Greek References Total	9%	22%
Total	100%	100%

This table shows that there were both similarities and differences among the Patriots and Tories. Both tended strongly to prefer Roman to Greek sources when appealing to the classical past. There were sometimes differences, however, for the Patriots were partial to the use of the Old Testament rather than to classical history. The Tories, on the other hand, preferred to appeal to the classical past. The two groups also differed in the frequency of their references to classical and Biblical sources. Despite the fact the twenty pamphlets surveyed were almost evenly divided between Patriots and Tories (1336 pages for the Patriots and 1185 pages for the Tories with the approximately the same number of words per page), the Tories had almost twice as many allusions to these ancient sources as did the Patriots. There are a number of reasons for these emphases, principally the logic of the argument as it continued over time, and the character of the different Patriots and Tories who argued in the debate.

The Patriot argument began not as a call for independence, but as a criticism of innovations in English administrative and taxation policies that seemed to deprive the colonists of their liberties as Englishmen. Americans were convinced, as Bailyn has clearly shown, that a very likely source of these problems was the ambition of corrupt and overly ambitious ministers who were misinterpreting the English constitution. The colonists saw a dangerous chain of events that included the expanded jurisdiction of juryless admiralty courts, new taxes in the Stamp Act and Townshend Acts, and a direct assault on chartered colonial liberties in the so-called "Intolerable Acts" of 1774. Searching the past for precedents that would make this dangerous pattern more understandable, and resistance to such acts more legitimate,

naturally the Patriots closely examined the corruption of the late Roman Republic and the early empire--an era that offered compelling parallels with what seemed to be happening in America during the 1760's and early 1770's. The major themes, such as the fear of tyranny, that the writers of the pamphlets developed from Roman history will be discussed later.

When the Patriots finally advocated total separation from the Mother Country, references to the classical past tended to be overshadowed by an appeal to the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. As can be seen from Table II, Patriot writers who most frequently referred to the Bible were William Gordon and Thomas Paine, both of whom were writing in 1776, and both of whom advocated independence. Their argument, it seems, required the most authoritative of all appeals for the widest possible audience. Paine was a master propagandist who understood well the uses of scriptural authority directed toward the American colonists. Thus fully 97% of his allusions to the ancient past were to the Bible, almost exclusively the Old Testament. Paine went to great lengths to show that "Monarchy is ranked in scripture as one of the sins of the Jews, for which a curse in reserve is denounced against them."<sup>2</sup> When not directly discussing Biblical condemnations of monarchy Paine might add a Biblical allusion while referring to a contemporary event such as "the fatal 19th of April, 1775," which caused Paine (or so he declared) to reject "the hardened, sullen tempered Pharoah of England forever ...."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Paine, "Common Sense" Tracts of the American Revolution 1763-1776, Merrill Jensen, ed. (New York, 1967), p. 428, (Hereinafter Cited as Tracts).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

TABLE II  
 FREQUENCY OF HISTORICAL ALLUSIONS  
 BY PATRIOTS AND TORIES

Patriot			Tory		
Allusions Per Page			Allusions Per Page		
Name	Bible	Ancient	Name	Bible	Ancient
Otis	0	1/1.6	Ingles	1/1	1/1
Adams	1/7	1/2	Chalmers	1/8	1/1.2
Bland	1/6	1/3	Leonard	0	1/4.8
Hamilton	0	1/3	Leigh	1/11	1/5
Laurens	0	1/3.5	Galloway	0	1/6
Jefferson	0	1/10	Chandler	0	1/6
Paine	1/1.1	1/15	Seabury**	0	1/22
Dickinson	1/67	1/17	Seabury*	0	1/27
Gordon	1/.9	1/18	Boucher	0	1/27
Dulany	0	0	Gray	1/2.5	0

\* "The Congress Canvassed"

\*\* "Free Thought on the Proceedings of the Continental Congress"

The Tories answered the Patriots with references from the same sources and for the same reasons. This helps to account for the rather surprising fact that the Tories placed almost twice as much emphasis on classical and Biblical references as did the Patriots (see Table I). Ancient history and the Bible can be interpreted differently, as James Chalmers, a Maryland planter who eventually raised a Tory regiment to fight for the British, made clear in his reply to Thomas Paine's Common Sense. Chalmers, writing under the pen name Candidus in a pamphlet entitled Plain Truth, stated, "We might indeed remind our Author, who so readily drags in the Old Testament to support his sinister measures, that we could draw from that source, many texts, favorable to Monarchy . . . .,"<sup>4</sup> and since England, like Rome, might have to defend herself against the "Huns and Alaricks of the North," it would be impolitic as well as ungrateful for the Americans not to support the Mother Country against such menacing threats.<sup>5</sup>

As can be seen from Table II, not all authors, Patriot or Tory, used classical and Biblical allusions with the same frequency. Charles Ingles, James Chalmers, Egerton Leigh, and Harrison Gray were significantly more prone to allude to the ancient past than were the other Tories, for example. Egerton Leigh used a very high percentage of classical allusions. This fact shows that it is necessary to examine the emphases of individual writers as well as the overall trends in the pamphlet literature of the Revolution. Leigh wrote a very lengthy pamphlet The Man Unmasked, a writing which accounted for 94 of the 248 classical and Biblical allusions used by the Tories. Leigh's pamphlet

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<sup>4</sup>James Chalmers, "Plain Truth," Tracts, p. 452.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid p. 467.

with an appendix and postscript ran to fully 214 pages in which he included 19 references to the Bible, 18 allusions to Greek history, and 57 references to Roman history and Latin phrases related to classical antiquity.

The Man Unmasked was a lengthy response by Leigh to a criticism of his behavior as judge of the admiralty court in Charleston by Henry Laurens whose ships had been condemned for smuggling in Leigh's court. After considerable rioting led by Charleston's Sons of Liberty, Leigh drew upon classical precedents to stress the interconnectedness of society, the necessity of maintaining law and order in men's relationships with each other, and the dangers that ambitious and power-hungry men, such as Laurens, posed to the stability of society. He also drew upon Juvenal, the Roman satirist, to show why civilized men, unlike beasts, should be united by bonds of benevolence. True Tories drew upon Roman history not to show the inevitable tendencies of existing governments to become corrupt, but to show that without proper observance of the law, people could be misled by ambitious and power-hungry men. Leigh compared the riots in Charleston with comparable events in Rome, and emphasized that "libertas non est licentia," a phrase that reinforced the Tory argument that liberty had its bounds.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the Tories appealed to the past because they were defending an essentially conservative position. It was very natural for them to use antiquity to show why resistance to duly established authority was dangerous. Thus, the Tory, Joseph Galloway, in his A Candid Examination of the Mutual Claims of Great Britain and the Colonies, sought to

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<sup>6</sup>Egerton Leigh, The Man Unmasked, Charleston, 1769, p. 132.

establish the principles upon which "all government from the earlier ages have been established" by turning back to Roman history. He cited Cicero's definition of government: "Multitude juris consensu et utilitatis communione faciata," which he translated for his readers, "A multitude of people united together by a communion of interests, and common laws to which they all submit with one accord."<sup>7</sup> Thus the past proved to have as many uses for conservative Tories as for the radical Patriots.

Before turning to the major historical themes that dominated the use of classical and Biblical allusions in the arguments between the Patriots and the Tories, it is appropriate to show that certain authors did not use the ancient allusions in their arguments. This fact was particularly true of three Tories, Thomas Bradbury Chandler, Samuel Seabury and Jonathan Boucher, who chose to stress the present dangers rather than past precedents in their writings immediately preceding the Declaration of Independence. However, the best example of this disregard for the ancient past was Thomas Jefferson, in his Summary View of the Rights of British America. Jefferson did not ignore the past entirely; he chose to emphasize the pre-Norman England rather than the classical and Biblical past with which he was fully acquainted. Reflecting his commitment to an agrarian philosophy that marked his later political ideology, Jefferson focused upon the early days of England when sturdy yeomen presumably fashioned a democratic system that was later corrupted by the intrusion of Norman feudalism.

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Galloway, "A Candid Examination of the Mutual Claims of Great Britain and the Colonies," Tracts, p. 353.

The literature of both the Patriots and Tories focused on corruption of a ministry influenced by Norman-feudal traditions that had perverted the earlier democratic simplicity of the Anglo-Saxons. Egerton Leigh believed that the overly ambitious were attempting to sway the people and comparing similar situations occurring in Roman history. This stress on corruption was accompanied by other themes in the uses of the past by the pamphleteers of the Revolution.

The fear of tyranny, a consequence of corruption, occupied the writers of both factions. John Adams believed that England was tying the chains of slavery around the American colonies.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the colonies should unite and break these chains of bondage before it was too late. Adams compared the American dilemma with that of the Romans. He noted how the Romans resisted tyranny, and he urged the colonials to do the same. He pointed out that only through the resistance of the Roman people to the Tarquin kings "were the great Roman orators, poets, historians, the great teachers of politeness, the pride of human nature, and the delight and glory of mankind, for 1700 years enabled to exist."<sup>9</sup> Even if the colonies lost, would they be in a worse state? Adams did not think so. They would hardly be losers if unsuccessful because if they lived, they "would be slaves after an unfortunate effort; and slaves they would have been if they had not resisted."<sup>10</sup>

The Tories, on the other hand, believed that even though the Romans had expelled the kings and begun the Roman Republic, the people were not completely free and at peace. The Roman Republic itself was in a

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<sup>8</sup> Adams, "Novanglus," Tracts, p. 304.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



constant state of war, both domestic and foreign.<sup>11</sup> In the three Punic Wars with Carthage, the only reason that Rome finally won was that she elected a dictator to lead the country in this time of great need. The Tories further felt that by abolishing the monarchy, the colonists would eventually be burying themselves in chaos.<sup>12</sup> The civil war of Rome had been the "most frightful picture of massacres, proscriptions and forfeitures that had ever been know to man."<sup>13</sup> The leaders of these wars had been guilty of far more cruelty and oppression than had other tyrannies of the past.<sup>14</sup> Worse, all such cruelty and oppression was done in the name of liberty and democracy. The Tories felt this same agony would fall upon the American colonies if they declared their independence from Britain. If by some strange turn of fate the colonies did win the war of independence, they would ultimately destroy themselves by civil war. The Tories feared that on the conclusion of the war the big army which the colonists had built would turn upon and destroy the colonies themselves, thereby creating a "more tyrannical government than what they had rebelled against."<sup>15</sup>

The Patriots believed that one man rule would develop into tyranny. Even though Caesar "never dared to assume the title king," he was in effect a king.<sup>16</sup> The Patriots felt that Caesar began Rome's tyranny and ultimate destruction. John Dickinson commented "Caesar ruined the

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<sup>11</sup>James Chalmers, "Plain Truth," Tracts, p. 454.

<sup>12</sup>Daniel Leonard, "Massachusettsensis," Tracts, p. 288.

<sup>13</sup>Chalmers, "Plain Truth," Tracts.

<sup>14</sup>Charles Ingles, The True Interest of American Impartially Stated (Philadelphia, 1776), p. 23.

<sup>15</sup>Leonard, "Massachusettsensis," Tracts, p. 288.

<sup>16</sup>James Otis, "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved," Tracts, p. 115.

Roman liberty,"<sup>17</sup> while John Adams argued that Caesar enslaved Rome and built his own greatness in its ruins.<sup>18</sup>

The Patriots knew that Caesar, of course, was a great military commander, and that this was one way he grasped power. The Roman people had trusted Caesar because of his great accomplishments for he filled the treasury of Rome and brought home many captives. But he also learned to work around the system of government so that he could obtain even greater power, and he made his army loyal to him first and to the republic of Rome second. The Patriots also knew that after giving power to Caesar and his followers, Rome had discovered too late that the seeds of tyranny had already been planted.<sup>19</sup>

The Patriots saw a parallel between the way Caesar grasped power and the policies England was adopting toward her American colonies. The ministry might retreat when colonials objected to a tax or an action of Parliament but other measures designed to effect the same end were levied against them. For example, the Stamp Act was repealed and the Townshend Acts followed. The latter were repealed, but after the Boston Tea Party the Intolerable Acts were legislated. Altogether, the succession of acts seemed to threaten the same pattern that Rome had experienced when losing its liberties.

There were other parallels between England and Rome. The British Empire in just a few years had grown quite extensively, and it became more and more difficult for England to govern her empire effectively.

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<sup>17</sup>John Dickinson, "Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania," Tracts, p. 144.

<sup>18</sup>John Adams, "Novanglus," Tracts, p. 300.

<sup>19</sup>James Otis, "The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved," Tracts, p. 115.

Likewise, after Rome conquered more and more colonies, she found her form of government was not able to govern the empire efficiently. When this situation came about, Rome had to depend first upon her military power, and then upon the tyrant. As John Dickinson put it, "a new servitude may be slipped upon us, under the sanction of usual and respectable terms," just as "the Caesars ruined the Roman liberty...."<sup>20</sup>

Another theme already alluded to that was drawn from the classical past by the Tories in particular was that of the disorders associated with popular government, or democracy. Tory writers felt that democracy resulted in riotous actions by mobs.<sup>21</sup> Some Tories admitted that while democracy might be a worthy form of government, the American colonies were too large for effective popular rule. "Democracy may do well enough for a single city or small territory," argued Charles Ingles, "but for a country as large as the American colonies it would be too unwieldy."<sup>22</sup> Roman history and indeed the whole of political theory associated with the classical past proved the point, for it was after Rome gained more and more territory that she shifted from popular government to the rule of tyrants, a transition marked by numerous disorders and riotous actions.

Even the Patriots did not fully trust popular government, for they were afraid that this form of government would cause riots and turbulent times. John Adams and John Dickinson, as well as Charles Ingles and Joseph Galloway, were concerned about the threat of mobs in the resistance effort. The best that the Patriots could offer by way of counter-argument was summarized by John Adams: "Consider the tumults in the

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<sup>20</sup>Dickinson, "Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania," Tracts, p. 144.

<sup>21</sup>Ingles, "The True Interest of American Impartially Stated," Tracts, p. 53.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

free kingdoms, consider the tumults in ancient Rome, in the most virtuous of her periods, and compare them with ours," meaning, of course, that the colonials had been less riotous than their ancient predecessors.<sup>23</sup>

Another theme discussed by the Tories was the danger of inter-colonial disputes (e.g. boundary conflicts) leading to internal war once the authority of Great Britain was gone. The Tories drew upon classical precedents to demonstrate that jealousy between contending colonial states would produce a continuous state of civil war. The jealousy between the republics of Rome and Carthage was one example of this tendency. After Rome had established a republic, and Carthage had built a flourishing trade, the two cities engaged in the Punic Wars. Tory writers held that in ancient history commercial republics, particularly Carthage, were ceaselessly engaged in bloody warfare.<sup>24</sup>

Still another theme filled with ancient allusions which emerged late in the pamphlet literature, largely because of the argument of Thomas Paine in his Common Sense, was the criticism of monarchy. Paine's attack upon monarchy, and particularly George III, was somewhat different from the earlier Patriot arguments. The earlier Patriots criticized Parliament and that body's offensive measures, but they professed their loyalty to the King. By early 1776, however, the colonial movement toward independence had ripened sufficiently for Paine to make his attack.

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<sup>23</sup>John Adams, "Novanglus," Tracts, p. 330.

<sup>24</sup>Ingles, "The True Interest of America Impartially Stated," Tracts, p. 46.

Paine's criticism of monarchy included many references to the Bible, particularly to the Old Testament, as previously mentioned. His argument included many different points: that according to the scriptures there were no kings in the early ages of the world; that the prophets Gideon and Samuel disapproved of a government of the kings; and that "the Almighty" opposed monarchial government, for example. Paine went to rather great lengths to associate warfare with kings, for it was the pride of kings that caused most wars, and the tragic history of the Jews could be attributed to their monarchs. Paine also devoted much space in his pamphlet to an attack upon the principle of hereditary succession, and asserted that since Adam's sin was transmitted to posterity, "it unanswerably follows that original sin and hereditary succession are parallels."<sup>25</sup> Having associated monarchy with divine disapproval in so many ways, the course for the American colonies was clear: declare independence and repudiate the monarchy of England.

Tories had an entirely different view of monarchy. The Tories contended from the very beginning of the resistance movement that the Patriots were making an indefensible challenge of royal authority. Charles Ingles seemed to support the divine right theory of monarchy with his statement "God removeth kings and set up kings Himself."<sup>26</sup> Referring to the Bible, Ingles contended that God set up a king for the Jews, his chosen people. Although Saul, Israel's first king, turned away from God and committed suicide, his successor David was also chosen by God. The lesson for the American colonial was clear: to tamper with

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<sup>25</sup>Paine, "Common Sense," Tracts, p. 416.

<sup>26</sup>Ingles, "The True Interest of America Impartially Stated," Tracts, p. 32.

the institution of monarchy was to invite the wrath of God.

Whether these conflicting interpretations from similar sources were embellishments or were very compelling and persuasive in the pamphlet literature of the Revolution is not an easy question to answer. Some writers chose pen names in Latinized form, such as the Tory Daniel Leonard who wrote under the pen name "Massachusettensis," and John Adams, his adversary, who responded with a series of essays entitled "Novanglus." Such usage was very common during the period of the American Revolution. Possibly the reason was not so much the background and the true meaning of the pen name as much as the fact that the men wanted to appear learned and sophisticated. In a somewhat similar way, John Dickinson in his Letters From a Pennsylvania Farmer, ended each essay with a Latin quotation, a device that appears to have been mere embellishment. But Dickinson, whose pamphlets were second in impact only to Paine's Common Sense, made many allusions to classical history in his essays (see Table II), and the quotations he chose were so apt, one is persuaded that such classical allusions conveyed authority as well as ornamentation. His letter number IV, discussing the Stamp Act, ended with the quotation "Habemus quidem senatus consultum,--tranquam galdium in vagina repositum," or, "We have a statute, laid up for future use, like a sword in the scabbard."<sup>27</sup> Letter number X, the next to the last of the series, ended "Et majores vestros et posteros cogitate," or, "Remember your ancestors and your posterity."<sup>28</sup> It is certainly likely that the appeal to the classical past evoked a very special force for the

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<sup>27</sup>Dickinson, "Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania," Tracts, p. 143.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid, p. 163.

Revolutionary generation.

Thus the special aptness of the classical allusions used, the frequency with which they appeared in both Patriot and Tory writings, the striking parallels between the history of the Roman and English empires, and the distinct shift from classical references to Biblical ones when the Patriots were struggling with the idea of renouncing the monarchy, all suggest that the recall of distant history was an important part of the Patriot argument; and the appeal to ancient sources was also valued by the Tories, judging from the even higher frequency with which the Tory writers employed classical allusions.

Finally, that this appeal to ancient history was hardly discarded, but was used again during the next great crisis in American affairs--the debate over the Constitution--strongly suggests that the Americans of this generation, sensible of the momentous nature of their undertakings, were appreciative of the "lamp of the past."

## CHAPTER III

### CONSTITUTIONAL LITERATURE

Classical allusions were used in the debate over the Constitution, much as they were in the controversy over independence. Still, there were interesting differences in the uses of the past. Ancient historical references were used more than Biblical allusions in the writing of this period because the authors tended to address the intelligentsia and did not have to depend upon Biblical sources to arouse the people. The Federalists, for example, who stressed the need for unity among the diverse states, naturally turned to Greek history in a comparison of the Greek leagues to the American Confederation. Such references were used not merely as embellishment but for the authority conveyed by the historical precedent.

The authors of the Articles of Confederation believed they had suffered from the tyranny of George III and Parliament, and they wanted no part of any form of centralized authority against which they were fighting so hard throughout the Revolutionary War. Therefore, when they established the Articles of Confederation they purposely created a weak national government.

The founding fathers discovered that the Articles of Confederation were not sufficient for the needs of the United States. The Congress had no power to force either the states or the people to obey the Articles or Congressional laws. The Articles were basically a league of friend-



ship among the states, and the Congress more a diplomatic assembly than a national legislature. The Continental Congress did not have the power to tax or regulate commerce. It could raise armies but had no way to fill their ranks; it could borrow money but had no way to repay the money. The national government could ask the state governments for money; but if the states did not respond, the national government was unable to coerce the states into compliance.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the framers of the Articles of Confederation were afraid that if the central authority was too strong then the separate states would be destroyed or they would be made mere districts without any real political power.<sup>2</sup> But during the post-war period when the Confederation threatened to break up, nationalists managed to call a convention in Philadelphia. This convention was attended by the most distinguished men from the various states. These men decided that the Articles of Confederation could not be amended adequately, and that an entirely new constitution needed to be written. Many in the states were very discontented with the Federal Constitution produced by the convention because the delegates had been authorized not to write a new frame of government but only to amend the Articles. Thus when the document was submitted to ratifying conventions in the thirteen states a brisk dialogue ensued between supporters and opponents of the Constitution--the Federalists and Antifederalists. The writers of these essays used every device and every piece of knowledge necessary to prove their point. Although these men used ancient history at times only to embellish

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew McLaughlin, The Confederation and the Constitution (New York, 1967), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 124.

arguments, usually their historical allusions were an effective means to explain the current problems of the Confederation. Table III below outlines the general categories of the classical and Biblical allusions employed by both the Federalists and Antifederalists.

TABLE III  
GENERAL CATEGORIES OF CLASSICAL AND BIBLICAL  
ALLUSIONS IN CONSTITUTIONAL LITERATURE

Categories	Federalists (353 Citations)	Antifederalists (124 Citations)
Old Testament	1%	19%
New Testament	1%	4%
Both	0	4%
Total Biblical	2%	27%
Roman History	26%	50%
Roman Mythology	1%	2%
Latin Quotations	1%	0
Total Roman References	28%	52%
Greek History	66%	19%
Greek Mythology	4%	2%
Total Greek References	70%	21%
Total	100%	100%

Table III reveals some remarkable differences between the emphases of Federalists and Antifederalists. Neither the Federalists or Antifederalists used the Bible with the same frequency that had marked the argument between the Patriots and Tories. Still, it is important to note that over a quarter of Antifederalist references to the ancient past were Biblical, while the Federalists rarely cited the Bible. There is one basic reason for this that will be relevant to other generalizations about the literature: a large percentage of the sample of Federalist literature is taken from the very important Federalist Papers. These essays were published in the New York press, and therefore available to the general reading public. However, the attention of the authors was directed specifically toward the fifty-seven members of the New York ratifying convention, which was a relatively small and elite audience. Biblical allusions seemed more persuasive to the less educated parts of the population. It was natural, therefore, that Biblical allusions were absent from the Federalist Papers and that the Antifederalists, who tried to reach a wider audience, should have used the Bible to a greater extent. Too, the Antifederalist James Winthrop, a Puritan-minded colleague of Sam Adams, accounted for many of the Antifederalist Biblical references (see Table IV) when addressing a Massachusetts audience that continued to value religious authority. On the other hand, Madison and Hamilton, like many Federalists, were more sophisticated in their thinking and did not have to depend upon Biblical allusions to sway their audience.

When Antifederalists referred to classical history, they, like the Patriots before them, preferred to cite Roman history. The Federalists, on the other hand, shifted emphatically to what was a less customary

region of classical allusions in the literature of both Revolutionary and Constitutional periods, the history of Greece. The different uses of the past were appropriate to the purposes of the two sides of the argument over the Constitution. Antifederalists stressed that the new frame of government was dangerously centralized, so it was logical that they should refer, as the Patriots had, to the precedent of the Roman empire and its tyrants. "Thus Caesar, when he seized the Roman liberties, caused himself to be chosen dictator [which was an ancient office], continued to senate, the consuls, the tribunes, and censors, yet changed Rome from the most free, to the most tyrannical governments in the world."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the Federalists used Roman history to their advantage upon occasion. Hamilton, in Number 70, defended a powerful executive of the type called for in the Constitution. Hamilton cited examples from Roman history showing that the Roman Republic resorted to dictators in times of crisis. But the Federalists had an additional concern; they were intent upon demonstrating the inadequacies of the Articles of Confederation as well as the virtues of the new Constitution. Hence they naturally turned to the examples of the Greek leagues and confederations that had been unstable and incapable of resisting foreign invasions. It was this emphasis that best explains the high percentage of Greek references in Federalist literature.

It should be pointed out that one individual, James Madison, was particularly responsible for the high level of allusions of Greek history because of his influential role in the authorship of the Federalist Papers. Indeed, Madison was responsible for fully 48% of the classical

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<sup>3</sup>Samuel Bryan, "The Letters of Centinel," The Antifederalists, Cecelia Kenyan, ed. (New York, 1966), p. 18, (Hereinafter Cited as The Antifederalists).

TABLE IV  
 FREQUENCY OF HISTORICAL ALLUSIONS BY  
 FEDERALISTS AND ANTIFEDERALISTS

Federalists			Antifederalists		
Allusions Per Page			Allusions Per Page		
Name	Bible	Ancient	Name	Bible	Ancient
Dickinson	1/7.5	1/.5	Yates	1/34	1/1.4
Madison	0	1/1	Grayson	1/25	1/1.5
Wilson	0	1/3.5	Mason*	0	1/2
Coxe	0	1/4	Lincoln	0	1/2
Hamilton	0	1/4.2	"A Rep. Fed."	0	1/2
Iredell	0	1/5	Bryan	1/12	1/2
Hanson	1/37	1/5	Clinton	1/21	1/2
Jay	0	1/12	"Montezuma"	0	1/2.3
Webster	1/2	0	Winthrop	1/3.5	1/2.5
			Penn. Minority	0	1/3
			Henry	0	1/3
			Tredwell	1/3.5	1/3.5
			Dollard	0	1/4
			Lowndes	0	1/6
			Workman, B.	0	1/6
			Mason**	0	1/6
			Bill of Rights	0	1/7
			Martin	0	1/14

TABLE IV (CONTINUED)

"DeWitt"	1/10	1/20
Lee	0	1/19
Smith	1/5	1/20
Number of Gentlemen	1/8	0
Spencer	0	0
Lancaster	0	0

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\* Objections to the Proposed Federal Constitution

\*\* Debates in the Virginia Convention

allusions used by the Federalists included in this analysis. Eighty-three percent of those allusions, all references located in one essay, Federalist number 18, were to Greek history. Madison in this essay discussed in substantial detail the different types of leagues in Greek history, explaining why each failed adequately to defend the members of the confederation. Madison's stress on ancient history was no accident, for he was very familiar with that subject.<sup>4</sup>

Antifederalists were more uniform in their utilization of the ancient past. Although some pamphlets were merely a page or two long, lengthier tracts written by Grayson, Bryan, Clinton, and Winthrop contained ancient references on the average of one reference per every three pages. Fully half of the 24 authors examined employed ancient allusions on an average of at least one reference every three and one-half pages. Seven of the authors alluded to the ancient past on an average of every other page. Thus, unlike the case of Madison in the Federalist literature (or that of Leigh in the Tory pamphlets), there is less need to emphasize the influence of a particular author or authors when discussing the Antifederalists. That Antifederalists should have drawn upon the ancients with such regularity and uniformity may be attributed not only to the appropriateness of the Roman past, but also to their desire to appear as learned as their more talented and skillful Federalists opponents, even while appealing to a broader audience and using more Biblical allusions calculated to reach that audience.

Before examining the themes developed by the two parties, it is

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<sup>4</sup>Richard M. Gummere, "The Classical Ancestry of the United States Constitution," American Quarterly, Vol. 15, 1958, p. 174. When Thomas Jefferson, probably Madison's best friend, was in Paris, he shipped copies of Polybius and sets of other ancient authors to Madison.

worth noting that in this pamphlet literature classical pen names were particularly popular, further revealing the influence of Greece and Rome on these writers. The most famous of these pen names was "Publius," the pseudonym adopted by Jay, Hamilton, and Madison, the authors of the Federalist Papers. "Publius" was a term associated with the Romans, but it is likely that these authors of the Federalist Papers hoped to evoke in their audience a sense of public spirit and civic virtue in the connotation the name conveyed. Other Federalists wrote under different pen names. John Dickinson used the pen name "Fabius." Fabius was a famous Roman general also known as "The Delayer," whose policy was to follow and harass Hannibal's forces without causing a direct engagement. (It is likely that when Dickinson adopted this name, he was aware that Washington had been described as a "Fabian.") Alexander Contee Hanson took the pen name "Aristides." Aristides, a Greek also known as "The Just," and one of the democratic leaders of Athens most famous for his patriotism, had organized the Delian Confederacy. Hanson in his essay discussed the Amphictyonic Council of the confederacy and its strengths and weaknesses.

In turn, the Antifederalists' pen names were as varied as were their arguments against the Constitution. Benjamin Workman took the pen name "Philadelphines." At first one would think that he had Latinized Philadelphia and that he meant to be the spokesman for the people of Philadelphia. Actually, this pen name had deeper meaning than that. Philadelphines was the nickname for Ptolemy II of Egypt who ruled from 285-246 B.C. Ptolemy had the greatest navy known to the ancient world. It was somewhat anomalous that what Workman advocated in his "Letters of Philadelphines" was practically the same thing that Ptolemy II had urged in



his writing, a strong navy and the encouragement of commerce, objectives that were more characteristic of Federalists than Antifederalists. George Clinton took on the pen name "Cato" in his writings. Cato in Roman history was very distrustful of anything new. Cato was also a very respected senator against whom no Roman could argue. It was thus appropriate that Clinton, the most popular political figure in New York, wrote against the Constitution, a radical innovation in the new republic. Another Antifederalist, Robert Yates, wrote under the pen name "Brutus." Brutus believed in republican principles. An idealistic statesman, Brutus joined the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar because he felt that Caesar had become a tyrant. Yates wanted representatives to be responsible to their constituents, a strong central government that could be responsive to the people.

Not only do pen names reveal the influence of the ancients, but very basic themes throughout the Federalist and Antifederalist writings show great dependence on classical precedents. One of the major themes in the Constitutional period, as well as in the Revolutionary period, was the fear of tyranny. The Federalist writers believed that other countries would overpower the new nation so long as it remained a weak confederation. Hamilton said: "A firm union will be of the utmost moment to the peace and liberty of the States,"<sup>5</sup> and in Hamilton's view, tyranny would follow in the train of foreign invasion.

Despite their advocacy of limited government, many Antifederalists felt that the people themselves did not know what was good for them. Antifederalists also brought forth the theme of tyranny. They gave

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<sup>5</sup>Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist Number 9," The Federalist Papers, p. 71.

historical examples in which people allowed their government ultimately to decline into a tyranny. "Was not Caesar himself chosen by the people?", declared the Virginian William Grayson.<sup>6</sup> Caesar first took over the government of Rome during a time of great military crisis. When Pompey declared Caesar an outlaw, Caesar returned and caused Rome to fall into civil war. Caesar's army was loyal to him first and to Rome second. It was Caesar's grateful army which placed him in the highest office of Rome and drove Pompey from the city. At the beginning of Caesar's rule, he was champion of the common people. But Caesar had himself declared dictator and he almost became a Roman Emperor. Caesar's critics said that he planned to be crowned king and worshiped as a god. Caesar's growing ambitions led him to seize all of Rome's liberties and to change Rome from a republic to a tyranny. This was what Antifederalists such as Samuel Bryan warned would happen under the central government created by the Constitution.<sup>7</sup>

Although the literature of the Constitutional period referred much more to classical than Biblical themes, the Antifederalists did warn against monarchy by citing the Bible. "The Letters of Agrippa" stated that when Moses freed the Israelites people, he tried to establish a form of republicanism in the country.<sup>8</sup> He gave the people the Mosaic Laws which were really nothing more than the Ten Commandments. The nation of Israel was then blessed with a government made by Heaven, but later the people became disenchanted with this form of government and they asked

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<sup>6</sup>William Grayson, "The Virginia Convention," The Antifederalists, p. 285.

<sup>7</sup>Bryan, "The Letters of Centinel," The Antifederalist, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup>James Winthrop, "The Letters of Agrippa," The Antifederalist, p. 149.

Samuel, a prophet of God, to give them a king.<sup>9</sup> Samuel, whose primary mission in life was to organize the Jews into a kingdom, tried to dissuade the Jews from this foolish notion of a king, but to no avail. For Winthrop, the powerful executive called for in the Constitution might lead to popular support for a king.

Many of the Antifederalists felt that the system of the three branches with checks and balances on each branch was a very good system. Yet the government would still have to be run by men. One Antifederalist then asked what if a man were bad such as Caligula or Nero?<sup>10</sup> This type of man would enslave the entire country. And if men were not bad when elected to office, as George Clinton suggested, would not flattery and power drive them to be overly ambitious?<sup>11</sup> This had been true of Caesar in ancient history. Would not these elected men, therefore, enslave the country for which the colonists fought so hard in the Revolutionary War? Patrick Henry argued that "examples come from ancient Greece and Rome that people lost their liberties because of carelessness and ambition of a few."<sup>12</sup> Antifederalists contended that throughout the pages of history it was the exception, rather than the rule, for men of great wisdom, such as Lycurgus or Solon, to be elected to office.<sup>13</sup>

Antifederalists stressed the danger of a tyrant. The Federalists, on the other hand, used classical history to illustrate what they perceived to be a greater danger--civil war among the thirteen states.

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<sup>9</sup>James Winthrop, "The Letters of Agrippa," The Antifederalists, p. 149.

<sup>10</sup>A Republican Federalist, The Antifederalists, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup>George Clinton, "The Letters of Cato," The Antifederalists, p. 301.

<sup>12</sup>Patrick Henry, "Speech to Virginia Convention," The Antifederalists, p. 241.

<sup>13</sup>A Republican Federalist, The Antifederalists, p. 114.

James Madison and other Federalists turned to Greek history to reinforce this theme, stressing that Sparta and Athens were always competing against each other. When the Greeks attempted to form confederations, they usually failed, not because they lacked strong principles and good leaders, but because either Sparta or Athens did not want to join. Both states suspected the other had a better position, and the resultant petty jealousies produced the Peloponnesian Wars that lasted for over a generation. According to the Federalists, such wars brought slavery and tyranny for all of Greece.<sup>14</sup> As Madison stated in one of his essays, "never would the chains of slavery be upon the Graecial states if it had not been for the petty jealousies."<sup>15</sup>

Careful examination of the use of classical allusions in the debate over the Constitution reveals a major theme that is not usually associated with the founding fathers—the fear of democracy. Many of the Federalists and even the Antifederalists believed that democracy would not work, or at least that it would not produce a stable government. Both the Federalists and Antifederalists believed that democracy was prone to result in mob rule, and that the common people were not capable of deciding issues for themselves. Many of the Antifederalists feared that just as the republicanism in Rome had failed because leaders corrupted the votes of the people, the same sort of corruption would occur under the republican form of government which the proposed Constitution would set up.

One Federalist said that the people in general do not lack virtue,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>James Madison, "Federalist Number 18," Federalist Papers, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>McLaughlin, p. 138.

but that their basic good nature had been diverted by the faults of the Confederation, especially the failure of their state governments to comply with the constitutional requisitions.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Continental Congress of the United States had not been built upon democracy. Federalists could be consistent in supporting a new government built upon the ideas of republicanism where the general populace had representation, but not control. Many of American's founding fathers felt that true democracy was a synonym for mob rule, that the common man was not intelligent enough to vote sensibly.

The Constitution of the United States was rooted in the history of England and more immediately in the Colonial and Revolutionary experience.<sup>18</sup> But in interpreting their experience, the framers frequently consulted the more distant classical past. The Constitution was a new government framed in 1787, but it also contained precedents from ancient history. The Federalists and Antifederalists were educated men who used the ancient allusions not merely as embellishments but also as a confirmation of their views of the nature of man and government. The "lamp of the past" assisted the Federalists and Antifederalists in their aims.

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<sup>17</sup>McLaughlin, p. 130.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 183.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Americans of the Revolutionary era knew that history had witnessed the growth, decline and fall of many empires. Their decision to separate from England and to create a new nation were momentous actions, as they were fully aware, and in the debates that accompanied these actions it was natural for them to refer to the past for guidance. In particular they recalled ancient and Biblical history. Some authors who participated in the debates used classical and Biblical allusions merely as embellishments, but these kinds of references were used so frequently that their employment cannot have been simply ornamental. Some authors interpreted the allusions to fit their own special purposes, but generally the allusions were used without distortion. The evidence is substantial that Americans of the Revolutionary generation tried to profit from the past as well as to use history for propagandistic purposes.

Apart from the matter of whether the past was appreciated for its educative or merely propagandistic value, the frequency of references to classical and Biblical sources during the two debates over independence and the Constitution sheds additional light upon the ideological posture of Patriots and Tories, Federalists and Antifederalists. Table V indicates that the favorite source from antiquity for pamphlet writers during the debate over independence was ancient Rome, although Biblical

sources were almost as significant. During the debate over the Constitution, on the other hand, Greek allusions were substantially more important than either Roman or Biblical references. The reason for this, as has already been suggested, is that the analogy between the corruption of ancient Rome and the condition of the English empire during the 1760's and 1770's seemed particularly apt, while the parallel between the ancient Greek confederations and the problems connected with the Articles of Confederation was extremely compelling.

TABLE V  
 CLASSICAL AND BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS IN THE LITERATURE OF  
 THE REVOLUTION AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL PERIOD

Categories	Revolutionary	Constitutional
Old Testament	3%	4%
New Testament	5%	2%
Both	33%	1%
Total Biblical Allusions	41%	7%
History	28%	30%
Mythology	1%	1%
Latin Quotations	19%	1%
Total Roman Allusions	48%	32%
History	10%	57%
Mythology	1%	4%
Total Greek Allusions	11%	61%
	—	—
Total	100%	100%



Both periods of debates were marked by certain basic themes. The theme of tyranny was central in both periods, but it was especially significant during the debate over independence. Fully 48% of all ancient references in that debate were directed toward the history of the Roman Empire. The character of republicanism with its implied criticism of monarchy was a second important theme that is reflected in both the high level of allusions to the Bible during the Revolutionary era and the references to Rome and Greece in both eras. The concern over the instability of republican, not to mention democratic, government was evident in the literature surrounding both debates. Tories pointed to the internal weaknesses of republicanism by connecting the turbulence of the decade before independence with the riots in ancient Rome while the Federalists stressed the weaknesses of republic federations such as the Grecian leagues. Tories, Patriots, Federalists and Antifederalists all, in varying degrees, disapproved of democracy and its attendant licentiousness, but Tories and Federalists stressed this theme more than their counterparts in the two debates.

Although the tendency to cite Roman history during the Revolutionary era and Greek history during the debate over the Constitution was common to all parties, and although all groups discussed certain central themes, there were significant differences of stress and accent in the usage of classical and Biblical allusions that show interesting linkages between Tories and Federalists on the one hand, and Patriots and Antifederalists on the other. Table VI demonstrates that Patriots and Antifederalists were significantly more prone to use Biblical allusions than were their Tory and Federalist counterparts, for example. While certain individuals such as Thomas Paine and James Winthrop were more responsible than other

Patriots and Antifederalists for this emphasis, it is notable that Paine and Winthrop were among the more influential propagandists of both eras. While all four camps showed a pronounced tendency to refer back to Roman history, the Antifederalists confirmed this leaning of their Patriot predecessors more than did the Federalists, so that the sum of percentages for Roman allusions was markedly higher for the Patriot-Antifederalist groups than for the Tory-Federalist groups. Finally, both Tories and Federalists--but especially the later--were significantly more likely to cite Greek history than were the Patriots and Antifederalists.

TABLE VI  
 USAGE OF CLASSICAL AND BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS BY THE  
 FOUR PARTIES EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGES

Category	Patriots	Antifederalists	Sum	Tories	Federalists	Sum
Bible	50	27	77	37	2	39
Rome	41	52	93	41	28	69
Greece	9	21	30	22	70	92

These linkages between the Patriots and Antifederalists, and the Tories and Federalist, do not prove much in themselves, but they do provide support for the notion that the Antifederalists were the ideological descendents of the Patriots. Likewise, although in a somewhat more complex fashion, the Federalists can be interpreted as the descendents of the Tories.

The pattern of classical and Biblical allusions suggests that

articulate Federalists and Tories tended to be socioeconomic conservatives who were concerned with political stability, while Patriots and Antifederalists, despite their uneasiness with pure democracy, by and large placed greater trust in the people and showed greater fear of consolidated power than their Tory and Federalist counterparts. It will be remembered that Biblical allusions were more appropriate than classical references for literature aimed at a broad audience, and the Patriots and Antifederalists were most prone to use Biblical symbols--a usage which shows an orientation toward, and presumably a sympathy with, the general populace. The high frequency of allusions to Roman history by both Patriots and Antifederalists demonstrated their persistent concern with the dangers of centralized power. In the more elitist Tory-Federalist groups, on the other hand, Roman history was either employed to illuminate the threat of mob rule (the concern of the Tories) or, as with the Federalists, subordinated to references to Greek history that illustrated the dangers not of tyranny but of chaos deriving from weak political authority.

Generalizations such as those above must be understood in the specific context of the debates, of course. That the sample of Federalist literature includes such a large quantity of essays aimed at the New York ratifying convention may have given the Federalists a more elitist cast than they truly had, for example. Still, the overall image of elitist Tories and Federalists pitted against more populist Patriots and Antifederalists is compatible with much of the interpretive literature on the two eras. In sum, the ancient past helped Americans to comprehend their own times; too, their use of the "lamp of the past" can help us better to understand them.

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A P P E N D I X



TABLE VII  
 PATRIOTS' USE OF BIBLICAL AND  
 CLASSICAL ALLUSIONS

Patriot	Number of Citations	Bible	Greek	Roman
Jefferson, T.	2			100%
Paine, T.	45	93%		7%
Adams, J.	30	23%	17%	60%
Dulany, D.	--			
Hamilton, A.	27			100%
Gordon, W.	20	95%		5%
Laurens, H.	6		17%	83%
Otis, J.	13			100%
Bland, R.	9	33.3%	11.1%	55.6%
Dickinson, J.	41	2.4%	12.2%	85.4%

TABLE VIII  
 TORIES' USE OF BIBLICAL AND  
 CLASSICAL ALLUSIONS

Tories	Number of Citations	Bible	Greek	Roman
Boutcher, J.	1		100%	
Seabury, S.*	1			100%
Seabury, S.**	1			100%
Ingles, C.	124	50.8%	21.8%	27.4%
Leonard, D.	6			100%
Leigh, E.	110	17.2%	16.4%	66.4%
Chandler, T.	4			100%
Galloway, J.	8		12%	88%
Gray, H.	7	100%		
Chalmers, J.	40	12.5%	27.5%	60%

\* "The Congress Canvassed"

\*\* "Free Thoughts on The Proceedings of The Continental Congress"

TABLE IX  
 FEDERALISTS' USE OF BIBLICAL  
 AND CLASSICAL ALLUSIONS

Federalists	Number of Citations	Bible	Greek	Roman
Madison, J.	174		83%	17%
Jay, John	2			100%
Hamilton, A.	70	1%	38%	61%
Webster, P.	6		17%	83%
Coxe, T.	5		20%	80%
Wilson, J.	2			100%
Hanson, A.	8	12.5%	62.5%	25%
Iredell, J.	7			100%
Dickinson, J.	97	7%	60%	33%

TABLE X  
 ANTIFEDERALISTS' USE OF  
 CLASSICAL SYMBOLS

Antifederalists	Number of Citations	Bible	Greek	Roman
Bryan, S.	14	14%		86%
Penn. Minority	5			100%
"Montezuma"	3		33.3%	66.7%
Workman, B.	3		33.3%	66.7%
"DeWitt, J."	3	66.7%		33.3%
"A Republican Farmer"	4		50%	50%
Winthrop, J.	19	42%	21%	37%
Martin, L.	1			100%
Lowndes, R.	1			100%
Lincoln, J.	2			100%
Dollard, P.	1		100%	
Mason, G.*	2			100%
Lee, R. H.	2			100%
Henry, P.	3		33.3%	66.7%
Grayson, W.	11	9%		91%
Clinton, G.	14	7%	36%	57%
Yates, R.	7	14%		86%
Number of Gentlemen from Albany County	1	100%		

TABLE X (CONTINUED)

Smith, M.	5	80%	80%
Livingston, G.	1	100%	
Tredwell, T.	8	50%	50%
Spencer, S.			
Lancaster, W.			
Bill of Rights	2		100%

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\* "Objections to the Proposed Federal Constitution"

\*\* "Debates in the Virginia Convention"

TABLE XI  
TOTAL NUMBER OF CITATIONS BY  
DIFFERENT GROUPS

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	Number of Citations	
Patriots	181	37%
Tories	303	63%
	—	—
Total	484	100%
Federalists	353	74%
Antifederalists	124	26%
	—	—
Total	477	100%

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TABLE XII  
COMPARISON

Categories	Federalists and Tories	Antifederalists and Patriots
Bible	15%	31%
Greece	40%	10%
Rome	45%	59%
Total	100%	100%

VITA

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