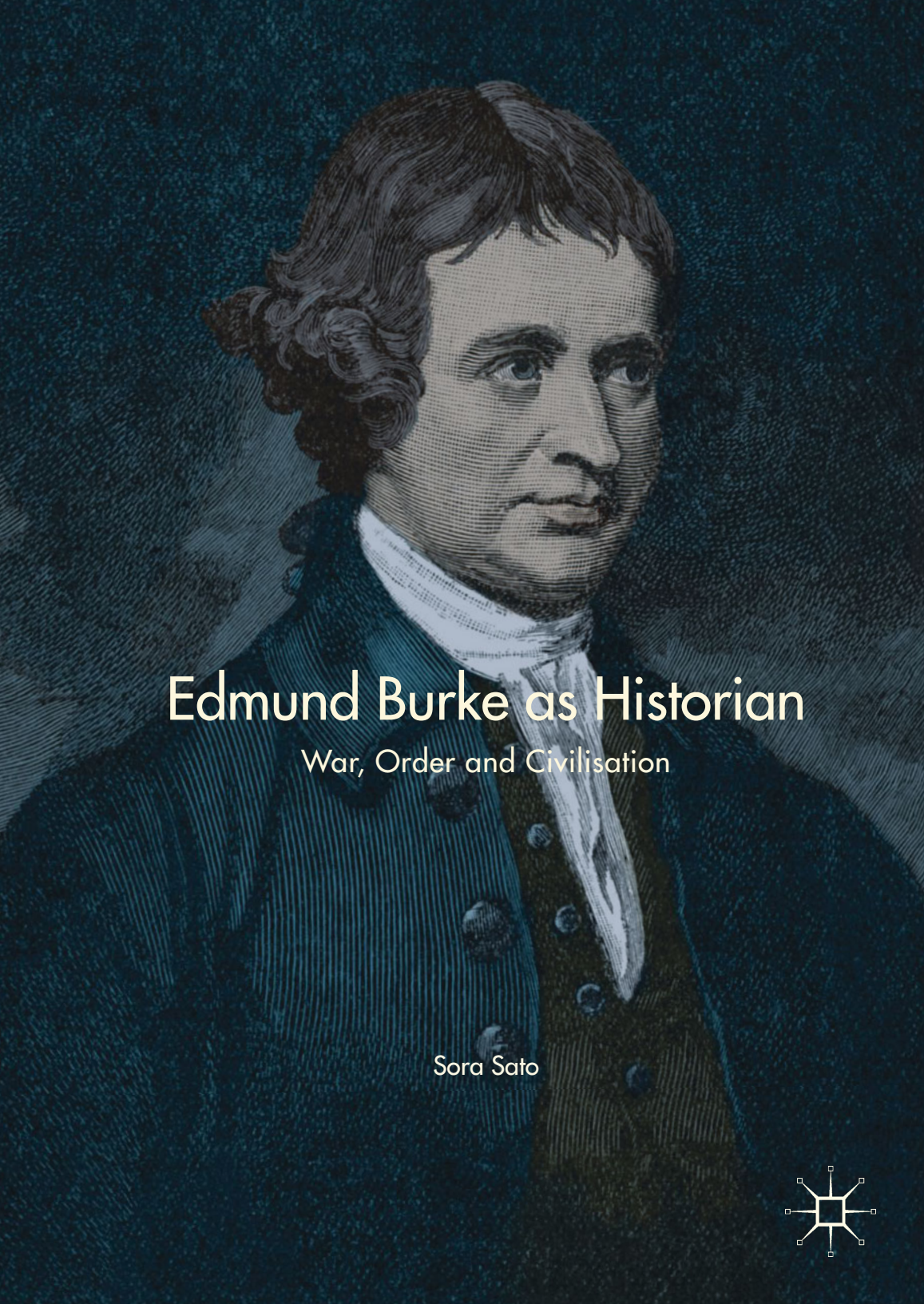

Edmund Burke as Historian

War, Order and Civilisation

Sora Sato

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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-64440-0 ISBN 978-3-319-64441-7 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64441-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017949195

Cover credit: © Lebrecht Music and Arts Photo Library/Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

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The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

To my parents, Hikaru and Masako

Acknowledgements

I began to study Burke's historical thought in September 2009, as my doctoral research project at the University of Edinburgh. Since then, I have met a number of people in the UK, Japan and other countries, and I would like to thank all the people who helped me advance my research.

Firstly, I would like to thank two of my Ph.D. supervisors, Harry Dickinson and Thomas Ahnert. Dickinson suggested this research project to me when I was about to start my doctoral degree. Looking back now, I realise that I was most fortunate to be given this suggestion and to pursue the project with him for more than the last seven years. As all of his students know, he is an ideal supervisor for a postgraduate student, and it is very clear that I would not have been able to complete the present monograph without him. During my doctoral degree and even after that, he read my manuscript drafts literally numerous times and always gave me very helpful comments and suggestions. His help, kindness and industriousness struck me with awe, and I have always appreciated and learned a great deal from his comments. Ahnert has also read a number of draft chapters of my Ph.D. thesis and the present monograph, and provided me with many helpful comments and advice. I would not have been able to complete the project for my Ph.D. and this monograph without his sincere and friendly support over the last several years. Richard Bourke has also helped me to advance my research on Burke, ever since we met at the viva voce of my doctoral thesis. He has kindly given me very encouraging comments and suggestions to the draft manuscripts of this book, to which I am very grateful. Moreover, I owe him

greatly for his great scholarship and research outcomes as every reader of this book will clearly recognise in the following pages. Gordon Pentland also supported the research of my doctoral degree and provided me with helpful comments and suggestions.

I started reading Burke when I was an undergraduate at Hitotsubashi University in Japan. Although I became a postgraduate student of the same university for a short term in 2007, my supervisor Tamotsu Nishizawa recommended and helped me to study abroad in the UK. Now I strongly believe that his advice was absolutely right, and he has continued to support me after I left my country for the UK. I sincerely appreciate all the support and advice that he has offered to me over the last decade. Yuri Yoshino has also supported me since I was an undergraduate. I read Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in depth for the first time in her seminar, and she also kindly informed me about a master's degree programme on the Enlightenment at Edinburgh University. Yoshino kindly read and commented on the entire manuscript of this monograph, which I greatly appreciate. I would also like to thank the members of the 'Burke Study Group' in Japan, which was organised in 2014. I have learned a great deal from many stimulating discussions and conversations with Nobuhiko Nakazawa, Masami Majima, Toshio Tsunoda, Hajime Inuzuka, Hideki Kuwajima, Chihiro Kariya, Kiyoshi Tachikawa, Yoshinori Doi and Kazunori Takahashi. I have also benefited from comments, discussions and advice from Hiroshi Kishimoto, Hideo Tanaka, Hiroko Aoki, Atushi Komine, Yutaka Furuya, Tatsuya Sakamoto, Jun Iwai and many others for my research project.

From April 2014 to March 2017, I was a project research fellow at the University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy (UTCP). I would like to express my gratitude towards the Uehiro Foundation on Ethics and Education for supporting my research. I would also like to thank Yasuo Kobayashi, Shinji Kajitani, Takahiro Nakajima, Tsuyoshi Ishii, Kohji Ishihara and the other members of the institution. Chris Perkins, Richard L. Stevenson, Mark Roberts, and Brian Locke kindly proofread parts of the present monograph. Roberts and Locke also helped me to read the handwritten manuscripts of the eighteenth century. Two anonymous readers for Palgrave Macmillan gave me generous and encouraging comments. Palgrave Macmillan, especially Kristin Purdy, Christine Pardue, Megan Laddusaw and Aishwarya Balachandar helped me in the process of the present publication, to which I am most grateful.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Edinburgh University Libraries, the National Library of Scotland, the Sheffield City Archives, the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, Cambridge University Libraries and Northamptonshire Archives for allowing me to access their invaluable collections, to which the present study clearly is indebted. My research has financially been supported by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO). During the period between September 2009 and August 2012, my doctoral research was awarded a scholarship by these organisations. My research project has also been supported by MEXT/JSPS KAKENHI, grant numbers 16K20978 and 15H03332, and 16K02218, to which I am most grateful.

Parts of Chaps. 1 and 7 of this book are derived from an article published in *History of European Ideas*, 40 (2014), 675–692, available online: http://wwww.tandfonline.com/ [Article DOI:10.1080/01916599.2013.867651]. Parts of Chap. 2, section two draw on an article published in *The History of Economic Thought* (The Japanese Society for the History of Economic Thought), 58:1 (2016), 49–68 (at 60–64). Chapter 3 is derived in part from an article published in *Modern Intellectual History*, 13 (2016), 299–325, available online [Article DOI: 10.1017/S1479244314000481]. Chapter 5 is derived in part from an article published in *History of European Ideas*, 41 (2015), 387–403, available online: http://wwww.tandfonline.com/ [Article DOI: 10.1080/01916599.2014.980114].

Tokyo, Japan Sora Sato
June 2017

Contents

Abbreviations

Account	[Edmund and William Burke], *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (2 vols., London, 1757)
Cavendish Diary, Eg. MS.	Parliamentary Diary of Sir Henry Cavendish, 1768–1774, Egerton Manuscripts, British Library, London
Corr.	*The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland and others, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958–1978)
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 17 August 1813, Bodleian MS Eng Misc d 722., Bodleian Library, Oxford
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (electronic resource)
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary* (electronic resource)
Northamptonshire MS.	Fitzwilliam Manuscripts at the Northamptonshire Record Office

Parl. Hist.	*The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1806*, ed. William Cobbett (36 vols., London, 1806–20)
Parliamentary Register	*The Parliamentary Register or, History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons*, ed. J. Debrett (London, 1780–1796), 45 vols
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., 9 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981–2015)
WWM Bk P	Sheffield Archives, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments. The Burke Papers

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 monograph.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Understanding history requires a variety of human capacities. Memory helps us to recognise a lapse of time and shape our own life, or personal history. The capacity to listen to and understand what other people say leads us to acquire knowledge and recall memories from the past. The ability to read, that had been historically gained only by some people, enables us to access written language and ideas of history created by someone in the past. The act of speaking, writing and communicating with others further helps in developing historical knowledge to create a more acute awareness of society, events and human conduct of the past.

These acts are by no means unusual human capacities and behaviours, which have continued to exist since the distant past. In this sense, Edmund Burke was only one of the individuals who used these capacities effectively to advance his career and his understanding of the world. As an eighteenth-century European intellectual, he regarded his own age as 'enlightened' while being conscious of the confusions and tragedies of previous centuries, which took place primarily in Europe but also spread to other parts of the world. Nevertheless, he was not optimistic as he believed that the enlightened society of his age might possibly be drawn back into disorder again at some point in the future. Burke, who died in 1797, is now part of history, and the present monograph is an inquiry into the historical views, knowledge and awareness of this historical figure, which the present author regards as worthy of substantial investigation.

S. Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64441-7_1

1 Historiography, Scope and Aims

Burke is one of the most widely read and most influential figures among eighteenth-century British political intellectuals. For the last several decades, scholarship has been developed substantially, and various interpretations, both theoretical and historical, have been offered by commentators. On the one hand, theoretically oriented commentators have often read Burke from various perspectives of political theory and ideology. One of the most famous of such readings is 'natural law' interpretations. In the context of the ideological conflicts of the Cold War after 1945, American conservatives regarded Burke as a great thinker indebted to the traditions of classical and Catholic natural law. They considered him to be the one who had advocated the values of the eighteenth-century European world, and whose political thought could be deployed later against communist nations, which were as revolutionary and atheistic as Jacobinism in the late eighteenth century.[1] Burke has also been regarded as a utilitarian since the nineteenth century, and there was once an intense debate between those who supported this view and the 'natural law' school.[2] A Marxist commentator has disagreed with both these interpretations and has presented Burke as a 'bourgeois' politician who advocated both traditional and capitalist orders of society.[3] Behind this interpretation was another tradition of regarding Burke as a 'laissez-faire economist' whose economic thought was essentially identical to that of Adam Smith.[4] Furthermore, scholars of literature and philosophy

[1] For this interpretation, see especially 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). For discussion, see Seamus Deane, 'Burke in the United States', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (Cambridge: Cambrdige University Press, 2012), pp. 221–33.

[2] J.R. Dinwiddy, 'Utility and Natural Law in Burke's Thought: a Reconsideration', *Studies in Burke and His Time*, 16 (1974–5), 105–28.

[3] C.B. Macpherson, *Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[4] For example, see F.Y. Edgeworth, 'Burke', *Dictionary of Political Economy*, ed. R.H. Inglis Palgrave (3 vols., London and New York: Macmillan, 1894–1899), I, 194–5; Donal Barrington, 'Edmund Burke as an Economist', *Economica*, 21 (1954), 252–8; Frank Petrella, 'Edmund Burke: A Liberal Practitioner of Political Economy', *Modern Age*, 8 (1963–1964), 52–60. For the alleged similarities of Burke to Smith, see Dixon Wecter, 'Adam Smith and Burke', *Notes and Queries*, 174 (1938), 310–11; W.L. Dunnes, 'Adam

attempted boldly to link Burke's aesthetics and his political thought,[5] and some commentators of international relations stressed Burke's contributions to thought on international order and relations.[6]

In comparison to theoretical approaches, a historical approach has been produced rather slowly, but it seems to have become more influential in the current scholarship on Burke.[7] At present, many scholars agree that Burke's political thought needs to be understood in the intellectual arena of early modern Britain and Europe and that most of his political ideas, including his response to the French Revolution, were not reactionary, but rather often a variant of the Enlightenment ideas of his age. Well-informed about eighteenth-century British politics and society, such commentators have adopted historically nuanced interpretations which succeeded in uncovering the details of his political life and the historical contexts of his thought, from which various ideas of his on politics and civilisation sprang.[8]

Smith and Burke: Complementary Contemporaries', *Southern Economic Journal*, 7 (1941), 330–46. Some recent commentators were more sceptical of this line of interpretation. See especially, F.P. Lock, *Edmund Burke* (2 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998–2006), I, 133–4, 322, 360–3, 388, 515; Donald Winch, 'The Burke-Smith Problem and Late Eighteenth-Century Political and Economic Thought', *The Historical Journal*, 28 (1985), 231–47; idem, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[5] Neal Wood, 'The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke's Political Thought', *Journal of British Studies*, 4 (1964), 41–64; Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994). For a recent study of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, see *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke's Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard (Dordrecht; London: Springer, 2012).

[6] In particular, see Martin Wight, 'Why is There No International Theory?', in *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, ed. Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (London, 1966), pp. 17–34; R.J. Vincent, 'Edmund Burke and the Theory of International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 10 (1984), 205–18; Jennifer M. Welsh, *Edmund Burke and International Relations: The Commonwealth of Europe and the Crusade against the French Revolution* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

[7] The pioneering work is Charles Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought: An Essay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956).

[8] The importance of the historical context of Burke's thought was stressed in Frank O'Gorman, *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1973). The most detailed account of his life is available with Lock, *Edmund Burke* in two volumes. A recent masterly treatment of Burke's politics and thought is Richard Bourke,

The present book also adopts a historical approach, yet it is applied to the theme which has not been profoundly explored by commentators, that is, Edmund Burke's views of history. This is a theme whose importance has been recognised for a long period of time, but that has nevertheless remained under-researched. While Burke's obvious intelligence was recognised and admired by his contemporaries, this admiration at times included a commendation of his historical knowledge. For instance, one of his contemporaries, Henry Grattan, once remarked, 'His [Burke's] knowledge of history amounted to a power of foretelling'.[9] What was, actually, impressive to his contemporaries was the way in which Burke used history; that is to say, his historical ideas often appeared philosophical, imaginative and hence inspiring. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's words, no one 'ever read history so philosophically as he [Burke] seems to have done', although his speeches and writings include 'so many half truths'.[10] Burke's literary executors, Walker King and French Laurence, correctly recognised the notion of continuity-in-change in Burke's thought:

> 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.[11]

Walter Bagehot was one of Burke's admirers in the high Victorian era, and according to him, 'Burke first taught the world at large… that politics are made of time and place—that institutions are shifting things, to

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Empire and Revolution: Political Life of Edmund Burke (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).

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

[10] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring (2 vols., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), II, 213.

[11] *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.

be tried by and adjusted to the shifting conditions of a mutable world'.[12] Burke's idea of political order was linked to his idea of metaphysical order, and, in particular, his masterly depictions of the essence of society such as 'the partnership between the dead, the living and the future generations' enabled his thought to continue to be influential. As Thomas B. Macaulay remarked, 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 unreal'.[13]

Even more remarkable is an association between his thought and 'historicism' or 'historical prudence', which was expressed as being opposed to the abstract reasoning of the French revolutionaries. According to William Graham, Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* adopted 'the new Historical Method of inquiry and explanation'.[14] Leslie Stephen declared that 'his whole political doctrine from first to last, implies the profound conviction of the truth of the principles embodied in a thorough historical method'.[15] In the nineteenth century, the Burkean image of the British constitution as a great mansion which had been slowly shaped over time prevailed among both Victorian liberals and conservatives, although Burke's influence on them was often hidden rather than explicitly recognised.[16] As Morley once stated, it was, however, clear that his historical thought fitted well with the social and intellectual climate of the day.[17]

Burke's political thought has frequently been identified as a notable example of the historical approach to politics. While modern history has

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[12]Walter Bagehot, 'Letters on the French *Coup d'Ét'at of 1851*', in *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot* (15 vols., London: Economist, 1965–1986), IV, 48.

[13]Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, in *The Works of Lord Macaulay, Complete*, ed. Lady Trevelyan (8 vols., London: Longmans, Green, 1866), VI, 619–20, which was chiefly concerned with Burke's treatment of Indian affairs.

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

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

[16]See Stefan Collini, Donald Winch and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 20.

[17]John Morley, *Burke* (London, 1879), p. 216. For the late nineteenth-century British reception of Burke, see Emily Jones, 'Conservatism, Edmund Burke, and the Invention of a Political Tradition, c. 1886–1914', *Historical Journal*, 58 (2015), 1115–39.

seen a sharp rise in normative, deductive and theoretical political science, there has also existed a strong tradition of historical analysis of politics, exemplified by writers including Montesquieu, Hegel, Marx and Weber. The inclusion of Burke into this tradition seems correct in a broad, though somewhat loose, sense, and he may be of particular interest to modern readers because, unlike many other thinkers within this category, he was actively engaged in real politics as a parliamentarian.[18] According to Carl Menger, Burke 'taught that what existed and had stood the test, what had developed historically, was again to be respected, in contrast to the projects of immature desire for innovation'. For him, Burke's idea of social institutions as 'the unintended result of historical development' was inspiring and seemed to have some implications even for the economics of his age.[19]

In the context of the intellectual tensions in the debate over theory and practice, Burke's 'historicism' was, nonetheless, sometimes regarded as problematic rather than commendable. This was not because his historical thought was expressed in the *Reflections* with his own passionate language and peculiar rhetoric, which some commentators disliked. The problem lay in the interrelationship between history, theory and judgement of politics. That is to say, how could the appeal to history be reconciled with the general ideas of political theory and judgement? Since the publication of the *Reflections*, critics have at various times raised this question, and some of them clearly expressed their criticisms and disappointments. Among such later critics were Lord Acton and Leo Strauss. Acton was initially a great supporter of Burke's thought, yet eventually changed to become one of those critical of Burke's 'historicism'. Ultimately, for Acton, Burke was 'too historic' and his ideas on history

[18] Here the present author is most grateful to Professor Richard Bourke's personal suggestions. The present author, of course, takes all responsibility for any possible errors which might have been included here. For a discussion of Burke's historical political science in the wider context, see Richard Bourke, 'Theory and Practice: the Revolution in Political Judgement', in *Political Judgement: Essays for John Dunn*, ed. Richard Bourke and Raymond Geuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 73–109 (at 99–109). See also Collini, Winch and Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics*; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 1–5.

[19] Carl Menger, *Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences with Special Reference to Economics*, trans. Francis J. Nock, ed. Louis Schneider (New York and London: New York University Press, 1985), p. 173. For this, see also Bourke, 'Theory and Practice: the Revolution in Political Judgement', p. 108.

prevented him from being 'an entire liberal'.[20] According to Strauss, in Burke's thought, a sound social order may historically arise from a variety of accidents. While Burke prepared the way for 'the historical school' and for Hegel, he tended to deny human capacity to shape the political order.[21] Chiefly focusing on the implications of some ideas in Burke's historical thought, however, these critics did not attempt to work out a more comprehensive analysis of it.

Burke's views on history were substantially explored for the first time in two American Ph.D. dissertations submitted in 1956.[22] Both John C. Weston's and Walter D. Love's theses surveyed Burke's works comprehensively and chiefly concentrated on Burke's general ideas on history. The main argument of Weston's dissertation was that Burke's politics had chiefly been characterised by his understanding of history, yet, according to him, the French Revolution had presumably compelled Burke to revise his views of history late in his life.[23] Weston's thesis was also excellent for its survey of the sources of Burke's historical thought.[24] On the other hand, according to Love, whereas history was a source of various 'models and patterns' of societies for Burke, what he had in mind was only 'endurance and stability', not 'a process of change'.[25] Moreover, the substantial research of these two writers in the corpus of

[20] Cambridge University Library, Add. MS 4967, card 61; Add. MS 4967, card 65; Add. MS 4967, card 74; Add. MS 4967, card 76. For Acton's views on Burke, see Seamus F. Deane, 'Lord Acton and Edmund Burke', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33 (1972), 325–35, and G. E. Fasnacht, *Acton's Political Philosophy: An Analysis* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952), pp. 60–3, 190–98, *passim*.

[21] 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), 364–90.

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

[23] Weston, 'Edmund Burke as Historian', pp. 170–3, 225.

[24] See especially Chap. 2 of Weston's thesis.

[25] Love, 'Edmund Burke's Historical Thought', p. 209.

Burke's works enabled them to avoid potential pitfalls associated with the stereotypical understanding of Burke. Both Weston and Love significantly pointed out Burke's opinions on the limited usefulness of history for politics, and they also suggested that his views of history were not organic[26]—a point that commentators had once frequently made.[27] Nevertheless, their works were not a full survey of Burke's historical thought as they were chiefly concerned with his general ideas on history and barely analysed his opinions on the history of particular nations and regions. The present book aims to put forward a more comprehensive analysis of Burke's views on history by exploring both his general account of historical process and his specific thoughts on national and regional histories. It also attempts to achieve this by situating his historical thought in the context of the history of historiography.

Although Burke's views on history represent a neglected field in modern scholarship, it does not mean, of course, that no studies relevant to the theme exist. In 1960, for example, J.G.A. Pocock traced the link between Burke and the idea of the ancient constitution, and this contributed to a better understanding of Burke's notion of the historical continuity of the British constitution, notably expressed in the *Reflections*.[28] In 1982, Pocock also suggested that Burke's idea of chivalry needed to be understood in the intellectual context of his age, particularly in historiographical views developed in the Scottish Enlightenment.[29] Moreover, while Burke's early historical writings such as the *Account of the European Settlements in America* and the *Abridgment of English History* were under-researched until the early 1990s, commentators have recently drawn more attention to these works.[30] Lately, Richard Bourke

[26]The organic view of history here is the idea that society, like a living organism, has naturally grown instead of being artificially constructed.

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

[28]J.G.A. Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas', *The Historical Journal*, 3 (1960), 125–43; reissued in idem, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971).

[29]J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, 25 (1982), 331–349; reissued in idem, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 193–212.

[30]For an overview of the *Account*, see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 125–41; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 162–75. See also Michel Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996); Jeffrey. O. Nelson, 'A Map of

has published Burke's early manuscripts which included a number of comments on history,[31] whereas F.P. Lock's and Bourke's authoritative monographs have uncovered a number of aspects of Burke's historical thought, including the contexts from which it had emerged.[32]

The present monograph also takes account of the fruits of recent research on eighteenth-century historiography. While early commentators tended to isolate Burke's political thought, including his historical ideas, from the intellectual trend of his age, historians today agree that it should be understood in its eighteenth-century context, although many of them have not attempted to situate his historical thought precisely in the historiography of his age. As Pocock remarked in 1987, in general the study of the history of historiography was a relatively neglected area of research, in contrast to the study of the history of political thought, which had been developed substantially since the 1950s.[33] More recently, however, substantial studies on eighteenth-century historiography have been produced, and it has become easier for scholars to trace the missing link between Burke's historical thought and that of his contemporaries and the historical context in which they lived.

Mankind: Edmund Burke's Image of America in an Enlightened Atlantic Context', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Edinburgh University, 2007). One of the early discussions on the *Abridgment* was Knox, 'Edmund Burke: Natural Law and History', pp. 221–60. More recently, R.J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688–1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); editor's preface to the *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 332–7; 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.

[31] Richard Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts', *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 619–52.

[32] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I and II; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*. In general, the present monograph owes much to the achievements of both of these works.

[33] 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* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 255.

In eighteenth-century Britain, there were no professional historians as we have in the twenty-first century and, especially in the first half of the century, British intellectuals were very conscious of the general stagnation of their own historiography, in comparison with the better studies made in continental Europe. In the latter half of the century, the English Edward Gibbon and others, and Scots such as David Hume and William Robertson greatly contributed to improvements in the situation, although Scotland tended to be superior to England in the production of works on science and literature, including historical writings.[34] The Enlightenment historiography often took the form of 'philosophical history', that is, a description of history through which a writer aimed at an analysis of human behaviour and society as a whole and establishing a general theory for these objectives. This style of historiography became widely spread and influential by the time of eighteenth-century thinkers such as Hume, Montesquieu and Voltaire.[35] Among these, the writings of Montesquieu were particularly significant in shaping Burke's thought.[36] The latter could learn much from the former about the way in which politics, history, conquest, religion and manners would work both in a single society and between the global communities, even though Burke did not uncritically receive his mentor's ideas.

[34]For the historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment, among many other things, see Murray G.H. Pittock, 'Historiography', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 258–79; David Allan, 'Identity and Innovation: Historiography in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *A Companion to Enlightenment Historiography*, ed. Sophie Bourgault and Robert Sparling (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 307–41. For eighteenth-century English historiography, see Roy Porter, *Edward Gibbon: Making History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), Chap. 1; Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), Chap. 8; James Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Chap. 6.

[35]Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 4.

[36]For their intellectual relationship, see C.P. Courtney, *Montesquieu and Burke* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963) is still useful. For the outlines of Montesquieu's ideas on history and his historical writings, see, among others, David Carrithers, 'Montesquieu's Philosophy of History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47 (1986), 61–80; Iris Cox, 'Montesquieu and the History of Laws', in *Montesquieu's Science of Politics: Essays on The Spirit of Laws*, ed. David Wallace Carrithers, Michael A Mosher and Paul Anthony Rahe (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), pp. 409–29; Catherine Volpilhac-Auger, et al., 'Introduction', in *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, ed. Jean Ehrard, Catherine Volpilhac-Auger, et al. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998–), II, 3–86.

'Philosophical historians' frequently emphasised the significance of the impartiality of historical writings. Here, 'philosophical' not only meant the pursuit of the truth of human beings and society, but also an emancipation from various political bias, which the Enlightenment thinkers claimed had permeated the historical writings of previous ages. They also attempted to produce 'cosmopolitan history', a history which tried to analyse national and local history from the perspectives of the European legacies and common foundations.[37] Like his contemporaries, Burke was a philosophical historian of the kind prevalent in his age and, as will be shown below, he claimed the significance of impartiality of historical writings, and at times attempted to write a 'cosmopolitan history' during the course of his career. Indeed, he shared a number of views about historiography with his fellow intellectuals, although one of the original aspects of his historical thought was that he employed elements of philosophical history not only in his more genuinely historical writings such as the *Account of the European Settlements in America* and the *Abridgment of English History*, but also in his political debates. Burke's 'historical' approach to politics, especially the appeal to history employed in his attack on the French Revolution, clearly helped to establish the characterisation of Burke as 'the father of modern conservatism'. While he has long been known as an advocate of the gradual evolution of the ancient English constitution and as a defender of the European civilisation of the *ancient regime*, in which the Christian religion and the chivalric code of behaviour had been deeply embedded for centuries, over the last few decades scholars have increasingly realised the significance of the historical contexts surrounding his thought in order to understand its meaning properly.

During his life, Burke read various written material for a variety of purposes, and he also heard his colleagues' speeches in parliament as well as people's talks regarding history on many other occasions. In terms of output, Burke was not just a writer, but was a speaker on the subject of history. Like other historians of his age, he often tried to be a

[37] Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–20. For the general perspectives of the Enlightenment historiography, see especially J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (6 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999–2015). See also Michel Baridon, 'Les Historiens des Lumières et leur Problématique', in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1989), Vol. 264, 963–82.

philosophical and impartial historian. What distinguished him from other historians was, however, his frequent contact with the history used in real politics. As a politician, he often appealed to history rhetorically, ransacking historical origins and evidence to support his arguments, and this political use of history was a significant aspect of 'Burke as a historian'.

Discussing Burke's historical thought is an interesting task, yet this is also a highly artificial work. Given that Burke has long been regarded as a conservative or traditionalist thinker, modern readers may have a stereotypical image of him and may imagine that history is apparently significant to his thought. Yet this is not necessarily correct and it is not the assumption on which the present monograph builds its arguments. He, indeed, studied history in depth and was knowledgeable of it, and he was often 'historically minded'. However, he barely constructed his knowledge about history in a systematic manner. Some of his historical knowledge was acquired unconsciously, whereas at other times it was acquired very consciously. Historical knowledge was needed in order to establish his personal and political identities, and it was also required to advance his political arguments. These were achieved on different occasions, for different purposes, and so Burke's historical thought was by no means a single entity. As Weston and Love pointed out as early as the late 1950s, moreover, Burke was well aware of the limited use of history.

It is clear, from the overall analysis of his writings and speeches, that assuming that history held predominant importance in Burke's thought is a wrong hypothesis. For him, history was significant, but it was just an important element required for an understanding of politics, society and the world. Nevertheless, Burke's works in relation to history are still worth a substantial exploration, since they enable us to better understand his thought and actions, as well the age during which he lived and early modern historiography. While discussing various aspects of Burke's use of history, the ultimate focus of the present monograph is on its 'philosophical' aspect and one of the main aims of this research is to elaborate on our understanding of Burke's ideas regarding the world order, which in his view gradually emerged from the almost chaotic state of society during history.

This will be pursued not only by reconsidering his well-known historical concepts, such as the ancient constitution of England and chivalry as a revolution in manners in medieval Europe, but also by situating his thought in the intellectual contexts relatively neglected by Burke scholars, including the late eighteenth-century debate on 'jealousy of trade',

a discussion on the international politics and economy chiefly relating to early modern European hegemony.[38] As a sceptical advocate of the British (and European) Empire and a statesman of the fiscal-military state, Burke was one of the intellectuals in the eighteenth century who pondered over the nexus between war and commerce, and at times he did so within a peculiar historical perspective. He was not only an intellectual on ancient constitutions and manners, but also a thinker who held a peculiar historical vision of the expansion and competition of the European nations on a global scale during modern eras.

As noted above, Burke's idea of order has been recognised and influential among commentators. It held both metaphysical and inter-generational dimensions, whereas society could maintain continuities after various parts of it changed over time. He has also been regarded as a defender of traditional, capitalist or 'bourgeois' socio-political orders. Even if commentators were not always correct in some of these characterisations, it is clear that Burke's idea of order was both providential and historical. The present monograph aims to add to our understanding of Burke's idea of socio-political and world orders chiefly focusing on his historical vision. By doing so, it also attempts to contribute to our understanding of Burke's political thought and of eighteenth-century historiography at large. His historical descriptions were by no means a unity, but they were created at various occasions for various purposes over several decades. A thorough analysis of these will, nevertheless, make clearer his vision of order, which is clearly of great significance for understanding his political arguments as well as his ideas on history and eighteenth-century historiography as a whole.

[38] Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, *Mercantilism Reimagined:* Political Economy *in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), especially Part Five. Burke was, however, yet to be examined. A brief attempt to examine Burke in the context of 'jealousy of trade' is 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. 117–36 (at 126–36).

2 Approach to Burke as Historian

In a way, it is clearly more difficult and troublesome to analyse Burke's historical thought than to examine that of some of his contemporary historians, chiefly because of the way in which he presented history in his works. In his early literary works, he left relatively definite and forthright ideas on history, whereas reference to history in his later political writings and speeches was frequently fragmentary and rhetorically made use of for various political purposes, although he sometimes attempted to put forward his genuine interpretations of history. After all, his comments on history were various in its contents, purposes and presentations, which helped make it hard to conduct a systematic analysis of his historical thought.

Evidently, in various phases of his life and career, Burke developed, revised and added to his historical thought, although it is not possible to follow the process of every single detail of this development. On some occasions, Burke attempted to establish a genuine theory and views on history. In political debates, however, he often made rhetorical use of history and appealed to it in order to support his political arguments. In the latter case, the historical vision he put forward was frequently only the exhibition of a small fraction of his ideas on a certain historical event rather than the full manifestation of them. As a whole, his references to history were so multiform that any analysis of them must be carefully undertaken.

There is also the problem of consistency in an analysis of Burke's historical ideas. Some historical accounts which he referred to and analysed at an earlier period were not addressed again in his later works. For instance, much of what he wrote in the *Abridgment* was not mentioned again in his later political works. Other ideas on history emerged only at certain periods of his political life. In the *Reflections*, for example, he advanced the idea of chivalry as a significant driving force behind European civilisation. In his other writings and speeches, however, except one letter written just before the *Reflections* was published, he barely advanced a similar idea. Yet, did he have a similar notion in mind before the French Revolution? Although the Revolution of 1789–1790 clearly led him to refer to this particular aspect of history, it may well be asked whether his idea of chivalry could stand independently of the circumstances he had encountered in 1789–1790. It is, of course, not without risk to assume that he held a particular idea about history

throughout his life. It would, however, also not be correct, in some cases, to assume that there is no such consistency in his thought because there is no clear evidence. For example, even if Burke, after entering parliament in 1766, barely wrote and spoke about the Saxons, whom he clearly regarded in his *Abridgment* and *Fragment* as a rude and barbarous people, it is hard to believe that the later Burke changed his mind on this matter.

It is significant to be aware that there are several problems such as these in attempts to analyse Burke's historical thought in a comprehensive manner. It is clear, moreover, that there is more than one approach to the thesis. Apart from his general ideas and theory of history, most of his references to history could be classified into some geographical categories. During his career, Burke wrote and spoke about the histories of England (or Britain), Ireland, France, other countries in Europe, Europe at large, the south and north Americas, the West Indies, South Asia and some other nations located in Africa and Asia. An analysis of his historical ideas by these geographical subjects will make sense to modern readers, and within each category of geography, an analysis could follow either in chronological order or by particular themes. For instance, Burke's views of English history could be analysed in chronological order from ancient to modern times, yet they could also be discussed by some themes, for example, his discussions of the constitution, socio-economic development and the notable historical figures like Alfred the Great, Cromwell, Lord Somers, Robert Walpole and others. It is even possible to discuss these themes without limiting our analysis within the geographical divisions. If Burke's treatment of the historical individuals is a theme to be addressed, the discussion will include not only the Englishmen, but also the great Europeans in history, including Caesar, Agricola, Columbus, Richelieu, Colbert, Louis XIV, and the great Asians or Muslims including Mahomet, Genghis Khan and others. In theory, themes such as his views of ancient history, modern history and economic history could also be set, although some of these subjects might be too little material or less interesting than others.

In the present monograph, the next five chapters chiefly focus on the geographical categories, which the author believes would make good sense to readers, such as England (or Britain), Europe at large, the Americas including the West Indies, Ireland and Asian-Muslim nations. The chapters also attempt to work on these geographical categories in chronological order. This way of analysis appears to be useful chiefly

for two reasons. Because historiography lacks a comprehensive analysis of Burke's historical thought, the chapter structure of the monograph such as this is able to provide readers with a clear map of the subject, which is needed in the current circumstances of Burke scholarship and studies on eighteenth-century historiography. One of the purposes of the monograph also requires this structure of chapter setting. An analysis of Burke's historical thought by geography clearly reveals his idea of how the rise of order took place in different parts of the world, and the discussion of his general ideas on history in the last chapter of the monograph offers a summary of what was made clear in the previous chapters.

In his corpus of works including a number of historical comments and descriptions, English, or British, history was the subject of the largest portion of his surviving works, and this subject is explored in Chap. 2. Burke scarcely referred to Welsh history, and there are only a few references to Scottish history. Although he made a substantial number of comments on Irish history, his views of the history of his native land needs a separate chapter because of its content and the way in which he recognised it. In order to examine his views on English history, we first need to tackle his early works, especially the *Abridgment of English History*. It is also necessary, then, to consider his comments on English history during his political life, and their intellectual relationship to the *Abridgment*. In Burke scholarship, it has at times been pointed out that there were some differences, notably concerning the English ancient constitution, between the *Abridgment* and the *Reflections*; while the early Burke did not particularly stress the continuity of English history, he did so later in the *Reflections*. Recent studies also suggest the significance of the idea of conquest and divine providence in the *Abridgment*. Nonetheless, few commentators have embarked on a comprehensive analysis of Burke's views on English history despite its apparent significance in Burke's political thought.

Chapter 3 addresses Burke's views on European history. He did not leave much evidence of his views on particular European nations except England, Ireland, France and ancient Rome, while at times he referred to the issues relating to the history of the whole of Europe, including his reference to the ancient manners of Europe such as chivalry in the *Reflections*. Like those of some of his contemporaries, it seems that Burke's views on European history best reflected his idea of civilisation. This chapter analyses his ideas on European history from ancient Rome to the French Revolution and seeks to uncover their characteristics.

Although, until the early 1980s, Burke's idea of chivalry was often regarded as indicating his hatred of progress and of the Enlightenment, the study of the Scottish Enlightenment has advanced substantially since then, and it has been made clear that Burke's idea of chivalry was one of the variants of the late eighteenth-century notion of it, although his was slightly different from that of the Scots. This chapter also attempts to situate his ideas on the other aspects of European history, including his ideas on the ancient eras, the Protestant Reformation and the international conflicts in modern Europe, in the intellectual context of his age. In doing so, the chapter seeks to reveal what distinguished him from other thinkers in his views on European history.

One of the purposes of the first two chapters is to shed new light on materials that are very familiar to commentators and to reposition them in his thought. For example, by accommodating Burke's views on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century international conflicts in the European world within the intellectual context of his age, the characteristics of his concept of the 'spirit' and 'principle' of nations is made clear. Chapter 4 is, in a way, a sequel to the historical narratives of these earlier chapters. This chapter begins with an analysis of a collaborative work with William Burke, the *Account of the European Settlements in America*, and then moves on to Edmund Burke's writings and speeches on American affairs from the 1760s onwards. For Burke, the history of the Americas was largely one in which the Europeans settled in the new world, creating here novel manners of life and new political institutions without abandoning their own ancient manners. Hence, for him, the histories of the Americas were not the history of civilisations which had diverged from the European narrative, even though the history of the new continents necessarily included some elements entirely alien to genuine European history, such as the historical analysis of the native inhabitants in the Americas. As modern scholarship has revealed, Burke was 'a friend of America', who was well informed about the circumstances of the new continent, but he might have wrongly held to the view that the central issue in American affairs was taxation.[39] An analysis of his views of the

[39]For Burke on American affairs, for example, see Ross J.S. Hoffman, *Edmund Burke, New York Agent with his letters to the New York Assembly and intimate correspondence with Charles O'Hara 1761–1776* (Philadelphia: 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*, ed.

history of the Americas helps to reveal the intellectual background to his politics and his ideas on American affairs.

The subject of Chap. 5, Burke's views on Irish history, has an appearance and nuance that is distinct from those of the last three chapters. Irish history is the history of Burke's native country, in which he had regularly shown a great interest. As early as the 1960s, historians drew attention to and closely analysed the relationship between Burke and the Irish revisionist historians.[40] Scholars have also on many occasions examined in depth Burke's political commitment to the Irish affairs of his age.[41] His views on Irish history were, however, neglected by them despite the undoubted importance of the subject. Chapter 5 analyses Burke's views of Irish history from the ancient eras to the eighteenth century by placing his ideas in the context of eighteenth-century Irish historiography. The analysis starts with his involvement in the Ossian debate, and then proceeds to his interpretations of and ideas on ancient history of Ireland, Henry II's conquest, the origins of the Irish

Anne Whiteman, J.S. Bromley and P.G.M. Dickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 135–52; T.H.D. Mahoney, 'Edmund Burke and the American Revolution', in *1776*, ed. John Browning and Richard Morton (Toronto, Saratosa: Samuel Stevens, 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*, pp. 156–67.

[40]See Chap. 5, where 'revisionist' chiefly means those who wish to revise and develop substantially the eighteenth-century historiography of Irish history.

[41]For Burke's views of Irish affairs, see T.H.D. Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (Cambridge, Mass.: 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*, ed. Ian Crowe (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 62–75; 'Introduction to Part II', in *WS*, IX, 389-428; C.C. O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992); Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self;* Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); *Edmund Burke's Irish Identities,* ed. Seán Patrick Donlan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007); Crowe, *Patriotism and Public Spirit.*

parliament, the Irish native laws, the extension of English law to Ireland, the impact of the Revolution of 1688–9 on Irish society, and contemporary religious persecution and commercial restraints. Burke's views on Irish history are significant in their own right, but they are also of great interest because of their links to his general ideas on conquest and the Enlightenment, which are explored at the end of the chapter.

Burke's interest in and political commitment to the world often went beyond the European boundaries and at times reached the Americas, Africa, Asia and particularly the Indian subcontinent, and so his historical perspectives included global dimensions.[42] Chapter 6 concerns Burke's views of South Asian history and also of the history of other Muslim nations, including some African societies and countries. His writings on Indian affairs have recently been analysed in detail by some commentators, and this chapter attempts to reassess one of the significant questions these commentators have addressed. While presenting a comprehensive picture of his understanding of the history of these parts of the world, this chapter examines to what extent Burke actually departed from conventional views on Asia, and on Islam, as a region of despotism and servility. This involves drawing attention to the debates of his contemporaries on the theme.

Each of these chapters addresses both Burke's views of individual events in history and his overview of the history of each nation and region. In doing so, they also attempt to reveal the place of Burke's thought in the history of historiography in the British, or Western, world. This way of analysis is quite an artificial reconstruction of his historical thought, divided into geographical and thematic categories. What still needs to be attempted is an analysis of his general ideas on history

[42]The best treatments of Burke on Indian affairs are probably P.J. Marshall's introductory essays in *WS*, V, VI, VII; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, Chaps. 7, 10, 11, 12 and 15. 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, pp. 127–57; Daniel O'Neill, '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; Hampsher-Monk, 'Edmund Burke and Empire', in *Lineages of Empire*.

and of his historical thought reconstructed in chronological order. An analysis of his thought in chronological order is particularly useful and required in the case of Burke because he was not a systematic thinker, but a late eighteenth-century parliamentarian in Westminster whose comments on history were generated as a series of responses to the circumstances he had to face during his political career. The contexts from which his ideas emerged cannot, therefore, be ignored. The final chapter summarises what was discussed in the previous chapters and also explores Burke's general ideas on history by analysing these ideas in chronological order while highlighting some particular themes in his thought that are worth a closer examination.

Burke's views on history have been a neglected field both in Burke scholarship and the studies on the history of historiography, and hence the attempts of each chapter, in a way, mean to fill the gap in modern historiography. This is, however, not be the only purpose of the present monograph. A significant aim of this monograph is to make much clearer Burke's ideas on social and world order by a detailed analysis of his historical understanding of the world and, in doing so, to appreciate better the uniqueness of Burke's political thought and the place of his thought in early modern European ideas.

CHAPTER 2

English History: Conquest, Antiquity and National Spirit

Burke had more knowledge of the history of England than of any other country and region. English history was also the history about which he spoke and wrote most frequently. As an educated Irishman, English history, as well as the history of his own native land, had haunted him since he was young. Although the study of law at the Middle Temple in London was not to his liking, it apparently helped him to be well versed in the politics and jurisprudence of English history. Moreover, several manuscripts he wrote during the 1750s showed his profound interest in English political history at that time. Above all, the *Fragment: An Essay towards an History of the Laws of England* and the *Abridgment of English History* are the most obvious evidence of his early commitment to English history.

After Burke entered parliament in January 1766, the way in which he learned and expressed English history significantly changed. In his political life, in addition to his continued reading of various materials, active communication with colleagues helped develop his interest in and knowledge of history. As a member of the House of Commons, he needed to manifest his own interpretation of English history, attack his opponents' notions of it and make use of history in order to support his own arguments. His interpretation of English history also helped to establish his position and identity in politics. According to his own account, when he associated himself with the Rockinghams in the mid-1760s, he 'was in a situation to discern what sort of Whig principles they entertained, with whom it was his wish to form an eternal

S. Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64441-7_2

connexion'.[1] In his early works such as the *Vindication of Natural Society*, the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*, he repudiated Bolingbroke's and Tory doctrine and expressed a sympathetic attitude to the principles of the Whigs.[2] His allegiance to the Rockinghams, moreover, led him to draw even greater attention to English political history and to the principles of both the Whigs and the Tories. The Rockingham Whigs consciously inherited Pelhamite principles, which Burke absorbed through both his own research and various communications with his colleagues. Although Burke was familiar with and partly made use of the 'country' ideology advanced by Bolingbroke a generation earlier, he and the Rockingham Whigs believed that their political arguments followed traditional Whig tenets.[3] His early political tracts, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* and *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, clearly show that Burke, as he claimed himself, consciously chose the Rockingham brand of Whig principles to establish his political identity. The Whigs during the period of the Revolution of 1688–9 and in the early eighteenth century were repeatedly the object of Burke's admiration, and over and again, he showed respect for Lord Somers, Robert Walpole and other eminent Whigs of the earlier eighteenth century.[4]

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[1] *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), in *WS*, IV, 408.

[2] In particular, see *Fragment: An Essay towards an History of the Laws of England* (c. 1757), 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.'

[3] O'Gorman, *Edmund Burke*, pp. 26, 30–1; Frank O'Gorman, *The Rise of Party in England: The Rockingham Whigs 1760–82* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1975), pp. 263, 268–9, 271.

[4] See *Speech on Economical Reform* (11 February 1780), in *WS*, III, 529. 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. See *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), in *WS*, IX, 227–28. For Burke's mention of the Convention of Pardo, see 'Burke to Charles O'Hara (21 May 1770)', in *Corr.*, II, 138; 'Burke to William Dowdeswell (6, 7 November 1772)', in *Corr.*, II, 364. In 1781, he wrote to Philip Yorke, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, the author of *Walpoliana*, that Walpole 'was a *safe* Minister for this Country' and that his 'Temperance with regard to peace Establishments … proved a foundation for the great things that followed'. See 'Burke to the *Earl of Hardwicke* (5 April 1781)', in *Corr.*, X, 9–10.

Burke also highly spoke of William III as 'an enemy to all persecution',[5] and in doing so, it is clear that religious toleration was, for him, significant part of Whiggism. The Rockingham Whigs, especially Burke, were almost always conscious of their genealogical link to these earlier Whigs when pursuing their political objectives. It is thus important to be aware that Whiggism operated as a political identity for the Rockinghams and that Burke, in his political career, spoke and wrote about English history as a Whig.

The present chapter is an attempt to present a clear overall picture of Burke's views of English history and, in order to do so, both his early historical writings and his later use of the English past in his political life need to be addressed. In his earlier literary career, Burke attempted to produce substantial works on English history, yet in his later political career he did not create such works, and instead often used the evidence of English history to support his present political concerns. The ways in which he committed himself to English history were significantly different between his early and later careers. As shown in detail below, moreover, there is an important contrast between Burke's early works and his later writings and speeches regarding their treatments of the historical continuity of the English constitution. What follows below begins with an analysis of Burke's early writings on English history, and then turns to his later political writings and speeches, focusing on his opinions on English history.

Although Burke's early historical works, the *Abridgment of English History* and the *Fragment*, were often neglected until the early 1990s, some notable scholarship on these works had appeared earlier. In 1960, Pocock pointed out that Burke, in the *Fragment*, was already aware of the concept and importance of the ancient constitution.[6] A few years later, Courtney maintained that the *Abridgment* adopted

[5] *Speech at Bristol Previous to Election* (6 September 1780), in *WS*, III, 641. See also ibid., in *WS*, III, 641–2; he drew on Gilbert Burnet's *History of his Own Times* for his arguments. Burke, elsewhere, wrote: 'my opinion in favour of toleration goes far beyond the limits of that act [Toleration Act of 1689 (1 Will & Mary c 18)]; which was no more than a provision for certain sets of men, under certain circumstances; and by no means, what it is commonly called, an act of toleration'. See 'Burke to William Burgh (9 February 1775)', in *Corr.*, III, 111.

[6] Pocock, 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution', in idem, *Politics, Language, and Time*, pp. 222–4.

Montesquieu's analysis of society by paying attention to the general causes of social change.[7] In the late 1980s, Robert Smith maintained that the *Abridgment* expressed 'progressive Whiggism', while inheriting the old Anglican tradition of providential history. Smith also claimed that Burke's early tract on English history had not taken Magna Carta as the revival of Saxon jurisprudence, which the *Reflections* presumably implied.[8] McLoughlin's article was a pioneering study of the making of the *Abridgment*, in which he made some points concerning the defining characteristics of the work. One of them was that in this work Burke, like Bolingbroke, advanced Whiggish views of English history, and provided a narrative of the English people who had struggled for liberty since ancient times.[9] According to the same commentator, the early Burke, like Burke in the *Reflections* and other works, had already advanced the idea that society and institutions were shaped by historical processes.[10] An equally important conclusion was reached by this and other commentators that it was characteristic of the *Abridgment* that the work offered a cosmopolitan perspective, suggesting that ancient and medieval England had been at times conquered by foreign invaders, and that the country had been influenced and even developed through such conquests and invasions.[11]

Although this cumulative scholarship helped to improve our understanding of the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*, two things have not been clearly established regarding these works. In the first place, these works have not yet been fitted into the history of English historiography to show what distinguished the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment* from other writings on English history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although McLoughlin and F.P. Lock made some comparisons between the *Abridgment* and other works on English history in the eighteenth century, further exploration is needed to confirm the place of this work in early modern English historiography. Second, the intellectual

[7] Courtney, *Montesquieu and Burke*, pp. 13, 46–57.

[8] Smith, *The Gothic Bequest*, pp. 85, 87, 115.

[9] McLoughlin, 'Edmund Burke's *Abridgment of English History*', pp. 54–7.

[10] Ibid., p. 49; the editor's preface to *An Essay towards an Abridgment of the English History* (1757–?), in *WS*, I, 332–7 (at 333, 335–6).

[11] The editor's preface to the *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 332–7 (at 336–37); Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self*, pp. 230–44; Crowe, *Patriotism and Public Spirit*, pp. 183, 198, 203–4, 213–7.

relationship between Burke's historical thought in the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*, and that in his other works has not sufficiently been established. That this relationship has been under-researched has prevented us from a full understanding of the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*, and of Burke's historical thought as a whole.

Moreover, Burke's ideas on English history presented in his political works have never been analysed in a comprehensive manner. Some of them have been very well-known to Burke scholars, quoted and examined repeatedly, but they have more often been treated as part of his political rather than his historical thought. The earlier pages of the *Reflections*, which include his interpretation of the Revolution of 1688–9 and of the history of the English constitution, are among the most famous parts of his works and have been regarded as the archetype of his so-called conservatism. As Pocock suggested, in fact, this part of the *Reflections*, as well as some passages of Burke's note for his parliamentary speech on 16 June 1784, need to be understood in the context of the common law tradition that had developed since the age of Edward Coke. Dickinson also demonstrated that Burke's political thought, including some of his ideas on English history, was a variant of the conservative thought that had been widespread in the late eighteenth century. Nevertheless, it was probably more sophisticated and 'philosophical', in terms of its rhetoric and power of generalisation, than the work of other conservatives of the age.[12] To fully understand Burke's ideas on English history, a further analysis of them in a comprehensive manner is required, including an attempt to situate Burke's thought in the intellectual context of his age and that of previous centuries. Sections three and four of this chapter will particularly compare Burke with his contemporary conservatives and moderates, and with the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, by focusing on their views on English history in more detail than had previously been attempted.

[12] H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), Chap. 8.

1 International Exchanges Towards Civilisation

Burke initially intended to produce a one-volume history of England, covering the period from Julius Caesar to Queen Anne, with a first printing of 1500 copies. He only managed to write an account of English history up to Magna Carta in 1215. By 1760, he had handed in about 30,000 words to the publisher, and he had written about another 60,000 words by the time he eventually abandoned the project. The *Abridgment* is, thus, an unfinished work, yet Burke devoted considerable time and energy to it.[13] Some ideas in it were typical, or rather conventional, of the intellectual context of his age,[14] whereas other ideas and aspects were peculiarly his own. Like other historical writings of the age, the *Abridgment* enshrined a strong sense of progress and the idea of 'philosophical history' in the sense that it sought to uncover the nature of human beings and society.[15]

The *Abridgment* therefore needs to be understood within the context 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 his project.[16] Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and the Civil Wars in England* (1702–04) was widely read and commended in Burke's time. Even so, the poverty and scarcity of writings on English history were commonly felt and lamented among eighteenth-century intellectuals including Burke. It was David Hume's *History of England* (1754–61) that finally discharged Britain 'from this opprobrium'.[17] In the process of planning and writing his own history of England, Burke probably read

[13] McLoughlin, 'Edmund Burke's *Abridgment of English History*', p. 48.

[14] Both in method and ideas, Burke was influenced by Montesquieu, although he did not follow his mentor in some respects such as on the role of Providence. According to Courteny, Burke was 'the first British historian to copy the historical method of Montesquieu'. See Courteny, *Montesquieu and Burke*, p. 13. Like many of his contemporaries, Burke assumed the universal and unchangeable nature of human beings. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 155.

[15] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 125.

[16] Ibid., I, 141.

[17] *Annual Register … for the Year 1761* (London, 1762), p. 301 (second pagination). See also Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 141–2.

Hume's *History* carefully. Hume's ideas on an evolving constitution, and the modernity of English liberty,[18] and his emphasis on the importance of impartiality in historical writing would have been noticed by Burke, although he did not agree with Hume's scholarship nor regard him as 'an impartial historian', at least in some respects.

Burke was one of these eighteenth-century intellectuals who emphasised the need for historians to abandon partisanship in their writings. In his edited *Annual Register*, he censured Swift's characterisation of eminent politicians in the reign of Queen Anne, because he believed that Swift was misled by 'party blindness'.[19] Burke also valued succinctly arranged history that focused on important events without being burdened by too much irrelevant detail. William Robertson's *History of Scotland* was an exemplary work from this standpoint: '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'. These were probably the words of Burke.[20] Robertson was his favourite historian, and Burke would have learned from his work when the *Abridgment* was in progress.

The sources and materials Burke made use of in the *Abridgment* have largely been identified by modern scholarship (especially, by T.O. McLoughlin, James T. Boulton and F.P. Lock). William of Malmesbury, Ordericus Vitalis and Matthew of Paris were obvious sources for Burke and many historians of his age, even though he believed that these authors were at times biased and confused.[21] The sources for the Roman period included Caesar, Tacitus, Cicero, Vitruvius and Justinian.[22] Burke's depiction of the Druids derived from the standard sources of his age, such as Caesar's *De bello Gallico* and the Elder Pliny's *Natural History*.[23] He may also have consulted the accounts of contemporary

[18] Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', p. 638.

[19] *Annual Register … for the Year 1758* (London, 1759), pp. 256–7, 262.

[20] *Annual Register … for the Year 1759* (London, 1760), pp. 489–90.

[21] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 335 (editor's preface). In general, it seems that Burke was aware of the poverty of sources on the ancient and medieval periods and he acknowledged the possibility that his views could be overturned by new evidence. See McLoughlin, 'Edmund Burke's *Abridgment of English History*', p. 49.

[22] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 146.

[23] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 349 (editor's note); Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 158–60.

historians, including those produced by Rapin. For the period of the Saxons and after, he read Bede and David Wilkins,[24] and also presumably John Selden,[25] Henry Spelman,[26] William Dugdale,[27] Robert Brady, and others.[28] The library of the Middle Temple in London owned several sources for medieval English history,[29] which Burke could have utilised. He also personally owned a number of sources for British history, including George Buchanan,[30] Edward Lhuyd,[31] William Camden,[32] Francis Grose,[33] Patrick Forbes,[34] White Kennett,[35] James Macpherson,[36] Daniel Neal,[37] Thomas May,[38] Thomas Frankland,[39] Rapin,[40] John Oldmixon,[41]

[24] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 146. Burke seems to have read the Latin translations of Wilkins' *Leges Anglo-Saxonicae ecclesiasticae et civiles*, copies of which were in the library of the Middle Temple. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 146 (note).

[25] *The Historie of Tithes* (1618).

[26] *Concilia, decreta, leges, constitutions, in re ecclesiarum orbis Britannici* (2 vols., 1639–1664), which Burke owned: LC MS; *LC*, p. 28.

[27] *The History of St Paul's Cathedral* (1658; 2nd edn., 1716).

[28] *Introduction to the Old English History* (1684). 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): LC MS; *LC*, p. 9.

[29] See *Catalogus librorum bibliothecae Honorabilis Societatis Medii Templi Londini* (London, 1734); Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 145 (note).

[30] *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (1643): *LC*, p. 3.

[31] *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707): *LC*, p. 18.

[32] *Britannia*, edited by R. Gough (3 vols., 1789): *LC*, p. 9.

[33] *The Antiquities of England and Wales* (8 vols., 1787); *The Antiquities of Scotland* (2 vols., 1789): LC MS; *LC*, p. 15.

[34] *Full View of the Public Transactions in the Reign of Q. Elizabeth* (vol. 1 only, 1740): *LC*, p. 17.

[35] *Complete History of England* (1719) edited by John Oldmixon: *LC*, p. 18.

[36] *History of Great Britain from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hanover* (2 vols., 1775): *LC*, p. 14.

[37] *History of the Puritans* (2 vols., 1754): LC MS; *LC*, p. 16;

[38] *History of the Parliament of England which Began November the Third, 1640* (1647): LC MS; *LC*, p. 18.

[39] *Annals of King James and King Charles* (1681): LC MS; *LC*, p. 17.

[40] *History of England* (28 vols., trans. Tindal, 1728): LC MS; *LC*, p. 20.

[41] *History of England from Henry VIII to George I* (3 vols., 1730–1739): *LC*, p. 25. See Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 145–46.

James Ralph,[42] David Scott,[43] Nathaniel Bacon,[44] John Dalrymple,[45] Henry Wharton,[46] Gilbert Burnet,[47] Bevill Higgons,[48] Clarendon,[49] Hume,[50] William Harris,[51] Daniel Defoe[52] and so forth.[53] Burke did not repudiate the operation of miracles, and he may have relied upon Conyers Middleton in this regard.[54] The influence of Montesquieu is evident in the whole of the *Abridgment*.[55] The most recent work referred to in the work was Frederick Norden's *Travels in Egypt and Nubia* (1757), from which Burke learned about the Druids' worship of serpents.[56] He also referred to John Scheffer's *History of Lapland* (1704) for his illustration of the worship of stones.[57] In his analysis of Thomas Becket and the events of that period, Burke was presumably indebted to Gervase of Canterbury's *Opera historica* and *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*.[58] For his account of the Irish language,[59] he referred to,

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[42] *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): *LC*, p. 26.

[43] *History of Scotland* (1728): LC MS; *LC*, p. 26.

[44] *Historical and Political Discourse of the Laws and Government of England* (1739): LC MS; *LC*, p. 8.

[45] *Essay Towards a General History of Feudal Property in Great Britain* (1757): *LC*, p. 6.

[46] *Specimen of Errors and Defects in the History of the Reformation by Gilbert Burnet* (1693): *LC*, p. 23.

[47] *History of His Own Time* (2 vols., 1724, 1734): LC MS; *LC*, p. 9.

[48] *Historical and Critical Remarks on Bishop Burnet's History of his own time* (2nd edn., 1727): *LC*, p. 12.

[49] *History of the Rebellion and Civil* Wars *in England* (2 vols., 1702): LC MS; *LC*, p. 9.

[50] *History of England* (6 vols., 1754–1762): LC MS; *LC*, p. 15.

[51] *Historical and Critical Account of the Life of Oliver Cromwell* (1762): LC MS; *LC*, p. 12.

[52] *History of the Union between England and Scotland* (1786): *LC*, p. 7.

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

[54] Conyers Middleton, *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which Are Supposed to Have Subsisted in the Christian Church* (London, 1749). For this, see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 152–3.

[55] Burke owned Montesquieu's works: LC MS; *LC*, p. 14.

[56] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 355–6; Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 146–7.

[57] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 355–6; Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 146–7.

[58] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 507 (editor's note).

[59] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 510.

but criticised William Temple[60] and Rapin.[61] For his depiction of Charles XII of Sweden, Burke may have read Samuel Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) and Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII* (1731).[62]

The *Annual Register* also recorded Burke's study of English history during this period. He was the editor of this periodical for at least the first seven years from 1758 to 1764[63] and he reviewed some contemporary works relevant to English history, including John Brown's *Estimate of the Times and Manners*, William Blackstone's *A Discourse on the Study of the Law: Being an Introductory Lecture, Read in the Public Schools*, Robertson's *History of Scotland*,[64] the final instalment of Hume's *History of England*, and others.[65] It should be noted that the period of producing the *Abridgment* largely overlapped with that of editing this annual

[60]William Temple, *An Introduction to the History of England* (London, 1708; first published in 1695), 26–7. See LC MS; *LC*, p. 28.

[61]M. (Paul) Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England*, *as well Ecclesiastical as Civil* (15 vols., Dublin, 1731), III, 56.

[62]See *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 527 (editor's note). Samuel Johnson, *The Vanity of Human Wishes. The Tenth Satire of Juvenal, Imitated by Samuel Johnson* (London, 1749); Voltaire, *Histoire de Charles XII* (1731). Burke owned Johnson's works: LC MS; *LC*, p. 17.

[63]For this, see Lock, Edmund Burke, I, 166.

[64]Burke highly valued its accounts of the feudal constitution. See *Annual Register … of the Year 1759*, pp. 489–94.

[65]William Tytler, *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the 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, *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 detail; and *The Plays of William Shakespeare … [with] added notes by Samuel Johnson*. In his letter to Edmond Malone in 1790, Burke claimed that the history of the stage was useful for the study of the history of manners and characters, without which the 'great events of political History … 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 referred to the history of the English language, 'in which after being refined by Chaucer, it [the English language] 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'. See 'Burke to Edmond Malone (5 April 1796)', in *Corr.*, VIII, 455.

periodical, and thus that Burke's substantial historical work might have reflected the fruit of his efforts as an author and editor of the periodical.

Whatever his initial intention was, what Burke, in reality, produced was a work on English history spanning from before the Roman invasion to the Magna Carta. Despite the fact that the *Abridgment* was a succinct and unfinished work, it is very rich in content since it carries Burke's various political and historical ideas. While chiefly describing English history from ancient times to the early thirteenth century, he still wove in it his views of ancient, medieval and modern histories of Britain, Europe and beyond as well as his general notion of the Christian religion, political institutions and civilising processes. A cosmopolitan perspective, indeed, marks the entire narrative of the work.

The *Abridgment* also expresses Burke's attitude towards the study of history. Ancient and medieval histories are generally difficult to analyse accurately due to a shortage of available evidence. Hence, historians need to be cautious in their conclusions and reasoning, whereas Burke found that historians had often overstretched and distorted the historical fact. His assessments of historical figures in the *Abridgment*, which clearly reflected his ideas on politics and politicians, were also intriguing. Burke strongly disliked a monotonous, flat delineation of history and instead aimed at making his narrative of premodern England philosophical and linking it to the formation of modern society. The *Abridgment* was, in short, not merely a description of ancient and medieval England, but rather a quite ambitious exhibition of Burke's analysis of historical politics and the world order.

In early British history, the British people had arrived on the island from Gaul, but later, the Romans at times attempted to invade. Although Julius Caesar made an expedition to Britain twice and defeated its inhabitants, who were divided among a large number of petty, disorderly countries, he left the island without any plan for absolute conquest.[66] Later, Claudius, his legate Plautius, Ostorius, Paulinus and others were also engaged in expeditions to the island. Among them,[67] Paulinus was notably destructive in his command. He attempted to

[66] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 340–5.

[67] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 360–3.

destroy the Druids and committed many cruelties against the Britons, and such brutality and his misrule provoked a widespread rebellion.[68]

Despite frequent victories, Rome could not completely conquer the Britons until Julius Agricola became the governor there. Although historians often attributed the Britons' prolonged opposition to their 'extraordinary bravery', this was not true in Burke's view. Some causes of the opposition certainly lay in the natural and social environment of Britain and also manners of the people there. Deep forest and morass often prevented the progression of the Roman military, and there were no substantial cities or towns for cantonment. Although the Romans frequently defeated the Britons, this did not mean a complete victory over the people. There was no clear distinction between inhabitants and soldiers among the savage Britons, and they emerged from the wild for warfare at many times after a defeat. The Romans were hence not able to make a perfect conquest until they subdued 'the nature of the country'.[69] The Roman conquest, nevertheless, changed to a happy event after Agricola began to rule the Britons. Burke stressed the importance of Agricola's government:

> Agricola reconciled the Britains 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 spent the principal youth of Britain to that city to be educated, at his own expense. In short he 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 rule and free people.[70]

The introduction of Roman manners did not bring about the rigorous oppression of the conquered. Agricola respected their 'prejudice'.[71] He

[68] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 363–5.

[69] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 369–70.

[70] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 368.

[71] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 367.

was a great figure of virtue and benevolence, and the Britons were fortunate to have him as their ruler. Indebted to Tacitus's *Agricola*, Burke's views on this ruler still reflected his own notion of an ideal conqueror.

The end of the fourth century and the early fifth century saw the Roman Empire decline by the attacks of various tribes. In the midst of this confusion, the Romans deserted Britain, and because of this, Britain plunged into an utterly wretched state of society.[72] 'After a peaceable possession of more than three hundred years', Burke maintained, 'the Britains derived but very few benefits from their subjection to the conquerors and civilizers of mankind.'[73]

After the Romans left, the Saxons invaded and settled in England. In the mid-fifth century, while almost every part of Europe was in confusion and disorder, the state of Britain was the worst. Compared with the situation of the nations on the continent, two things were particularly distinctive of England. While ancient languages subsisted and mixed with the language of the German conquerors in all other parts of Europe, in the case of England, the Saxons were barely influenced by the local inhabitants there in their language. Moreover, none of the Saxons were Christians when Augustine came to England for his missionary work, whereas the Christian religion flourished on the continent after the northern irruptions. According to Burke, it could be inferred that the original inhabitants were diminished to a large extent, although not extirpated as some historians wrongly asserted.[74]

The period after the decline of Rome was an utterly confused age for Britain, and the descriptions of the period by previous historians were also perplexing. The story of King Arthur constituted part of this 'fabulous and heroick age of our nation'. In the middle of darkness, however, a ray of hope was given by the introduction of Christianity. Ethelbert, the king of Kent, was among the first converts, and the new religion prevailed among the Saxons very rapidly under the protection of the king. The Saxons were an utterly barbarous and fierce people, yet the conversion led them towards more refined manners. They became more moderate and sociable, and their laws began to change in response to their

[72] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 382–4.

[73] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 384.

[74] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 388–9.

milder manners.[75] Burke's emphasis on the advantages of Christianity clearly derived from his belief in this religion and the role of providence. Although distancing himself from an unenlightened superstition, he still tried to find the divine intervention in the progress of the Christian religion in Britain during history. That is, 'the reality or opinion of such miracles was', Burke wrote, 'the principal cause of the early acceptance and rapid progress of christianity in this island'.[76]

The introduction of the Christian religion into England was also a significant event in establishing communication between England and the continent. Kings in England, like Ine (?–728), headed for Rome and Jerusalem for religious pilgrimages, and these travels brought to England knowledge and sources of improvement, which were further developed in remote monasteries.[77] According to Burke, providence willed such an intermixture of peoples across a broader area.[78] In the kingdom of Wessex, contact with foreign nations contributed to improvements in the arts of war and government.[79] What Burke stressed in the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment* was the fact that ancient and medieval Britain had been shaped through frequent contacts with continental Europe, and he clearly at times depicted conquests and invasions as a form of 'international exchange' that would contribute to the formation of a civilisation.

The effects of conquests and interactions with overseas regions were emphasised, partly because the author intended to criticise ancient constitutionalism, which still prevailed in English historiography and political discourse. In Burke's view, the Saxons lacked interest in learning and various arts, subsisted on hunting and pasturage, and did not establish the advanced constitution that historians had frequently attributed to them. William Lambard (1536–1601), for instance, insisted that the Commons had attended parliament in the Saxon period in the same manner as in his own age. Burke clearly rejected this as a historical fact. The Saxons' idea of government was too restricted to develop a

[75] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 389–391, 404–5.

[76] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 393–4. For this, see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 152–3.

[77] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 399–400, 405.

[78] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 399.

[79] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 405.

legislature of such an advanced kind, and they did not develop any arts, not even commerce to any great extent.[80]

The same is true of their jurisprudence. Its apparent imperfections prevented an enlightened historian from maintaining that 'the crude institutions of an unlettered people had attained an height, which the united efforts of necessity, learning, enquiry and experience, can hardly reach to in many ages'.[81] This passage appears to put forward the idea frequently advanced in his later writings that the English constitution, or social institutions in general, could develop into maturity only through a long historical process. In his attack on ancient constitutionalism, then, conspicuous was that it was characterised by the eighteenth-century language of manners and the Montesquieuan idea of the general causes of social change. For Burke, ancient and medieval England did not develop a constitution like the one present in England in the late eighteenth century.

In the late Saxon period, the kingdom was molested with several bloody wars with the Danes, which clearly exhausted the nation, although 'the peace, which for a long time they were obliged to buy dearly, exhausted it yet more'.[82] The Danish invasions were, therefore, not useful for shaping the nation. The Norman Conquest of 1066, another defining moment of English history, was more productive. Before the conquest, England was barely known to the European nations on the continent, but, after it, communications between them substantially increased. Like pilgrimages, the Conquest promoted international exchange.

In stressing this point, Burke was prepared to maintain that this was how a civilisation was formed during history. Even before the Conquest, English laws began to change by taking in the scholarship advanced in other nations, yet the Conquest, if not improving laws, transformed them, and also altered manners and the language of public proceedings.[83]

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[80] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 440–3. For Lambard's views of parliament, see William Lambard, *Archeion, or, A Discourse upon the High Courts of Justice in England* (London, 1635), pp. 238–76.

[81] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 444.

[82] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 428.

[83] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 453; *Fragment*, in *WS*, I, 324, 330–1.

These conquests and invasions provided opportunities for the English nation to be shaped, but it totally depended upon the nature of rule how they affected the nation. Fortunately, post-Saxon England received some able foreign monarchs such as a Danish King, Canute the Great and William the Conqueror. The former chose to rule 'by the inclination of his subjects than the right of conquest',[84] and the latter governed the English people 'with equity according to their ancient laws, by treating them on all occasions with the most engaging deportment'.[85] That is to say, both kings attempted to rule with respect for the conquered, their manners, institutions and history. This was evidently what Burke believed to be the right way of completing conquest as was highly commended in the case of Agricola.

Political institutions were further revised by the monarchs who followed these kings. Henry I's charter of liberties was 'the first of the kind'.[86] He also compiled a new body of laws in order to reconcile the different opinions between those who adhered to St. Edward's laws and those who supported the new laws of William the Conqueror.[87] Henry II instituted itinerant justices to weaken the power of the unruly barons and sheriffs, and he also allowed the commonalty to arm themselves, which presumably marked 'the origin of the militia'. This king did not, however, initiate a reform on clerical affairs, as he knew 'how dangerous it was to attempt removing foundations so deeply laid both in strength and opinion'.[88]

Laws, therefore, continued to be revised and several new institutions were established after the Conquest, although the barons, whose power was often troublesome in medieval times, still remembered the ancient Saxon liberty.[89] In 1215, they forced King John to sign the Great Charter and the Charter of the Forest, 'which first disarmed the Crown of its unlimited prerogatives, and laid the foundation of English liberty'.[90] Magna Carta intended 'the correction of the feudal

[84] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 419.

[85] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 459.

[86] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 486.

[87] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 489.

[88] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 517.

[89] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 540.

[90] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 543.

policy', not 'a renewal of the laws of St. Edward, or the ancient Saxon laws'.[91] At the end of the *Abridgment*, Burke still aimed at a refutation of naïve ancient constitutionalism. The Great Charter, however, did not just limit the royal power. By granting tenants the same liberties as the barons enjoyed, the Great Charter also prevented the barons from turning too powerful and hence kept England from plunging into 'the worst imaginable government, a feudal aristocracy'. 'This was a very happy circumstance to the growing liberty', Burke wrote.[92] In France, by contrast, the unruly vassals overwhelmed the monarchy.[93]

The *Abridgment* was a narrative of English history, but it did not go beyond 1216, despite Burke's original intention of writing a history up to the age of Queen Anne. That the work was unfinished made not only Lord Acton lament the loss of a historical work presumably better than that of Hume,[94] but also made it difficult for later commentators to explore the early Burke's historical thought, especially his views on English history after 1216. If the *Abridgment* had been completed, a much clearer picture of Burke's early views on the modern period of English history would have existed and it would have been possible to compare these with the views on English history he expressed in his later writings and speeches. This is to be regretted, as the early Burke apparently had a considerable knowledge of English history of the thirteenth century onwards.

Without a complete work on English history by the early Burke, the only thing modern commentators can do is an attempt to reconstruct his views on English history through a close scrutiny of his other early works. In these works, the idea of the progress of the English constitution, that is, the superiority of the modern constitution over the ancient one, is conspicuous. For instance, in a recently published minute, entitled 'Considerations on a Militia', Burke opposed the introduction of a militia in modern England, preferring to support the standing army established after 1688–9 and regarding the militia as a relic of

[91] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 544.

[92] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 547.

[93] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 547, 552.

[94] Lord Acton, *Essays on Church and State*, ed. D. Woodruff (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968), p. 455.

feudal times.[95] Unlike neo-Harringtonian thinkers, that is, those who were influenced by James Harrington's concept of property and shared views of citizenship, but not his views of the past, Burke did not trace an ideal polity to the medieval period, an attitude that was consistent with what he wrote in the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*. At the end of this minute, he also warned of the possibility that armed citizens in the cities might 'overturn in a moment that Glorious fabrick of Government which had cost their Ancestors such Expence of Study to form [and] of Labour to raise up, of Blood to cement & of treasure to secure'.[96] This, as well as the passages in the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment* cited above, shows that Burke already held an idea of political institutions shaped through a long historical process, and there is no doubt that he saw the English constitution as a prominent example of such a development.

The *Account of the European Settlements in America* further demonstrates the early Burke's disapproval of naïve ancient constitutionalism.[97] This work approved of the progress achieved by the development of settlements in America, chiefly from the seventeenth century, in which the critical attitudes towards the medieval age were clear and England was regarded as one of the European powers gradually leaving the dark ages for much greater prosperity in the late eighteenth century. The French Richelieu (1585–1642) and Colbert (1619–1683), and the English Walter Raleigh (1554–1618), were commended as persons well aware of the significance of commerce and colonies in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when European nations gradually began to make substantial progress.[98] In this view of history, it was evidently assumed that England's society and constitution in the middles ages had been far from maturity.

The *Annual Register* (1758–1764), too, occasionally recorded Burke's awareness of improvements in English society over recent history. In 1761, when reporting the death of George II, he commented,

[95] Edmund Burke, 'Considerations on a Militia (March 1757)', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest ', pp. 650–1; Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', p. 637.

[96] Burke, 'Considerations on a Militia', p. 652.

[97] The *Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) maintained that the English constitution had been infringed by monarchs after the Norman Conquest, but nevertheless English liberty had been preserved (*WS*, I, 171–2). Although this clearly shows Burke's awareness of Bolingbroke's historiography, it is unlikely that Burke adopted the same historical views.

[98] *Account*, II, 4–8, 133, 211–2.

'When future historians come to speak of his late Majesty, they will find both in his fortune and his virtue, abundant matter for just and unsuspected panegyric.' In his reign, people 'enjoyed perpetual peace at home, and abroad on many occasions acquired great glory'. Agriculture, commerce and manufactures developed 'under the internal tranquillity they enjoyed, and the wise regulations that were made in every session of his parliaments'. In Burke's view, 'these improvements' were 'no way checked, but rather forwarded, in one of the most general and wasteful wars that has raged in the world for many centuries'.[99]

This periodical, however, also provides us with something hard to square with the later Burke's thought. As Herbert Butterfield once noted, the attitudes of the 'historical article' towards the old Whigs and George III appear to be incompatible with the later Burke's thought:

> It is, indeed, not altogether easy to determine whether the limitations on the executive power ought or ought not to be extended further, by any other sort of popular control, than the laws themselves have carried them; for as, on one hand, a constitution may be lost, whilst all its forms are preserved; on the other, it seems repugnant to the genius of every stable government to conduct itself by any other principles, than those which clear law has established, or to direct its actions by so uncertain, variable, and capricious a standard, as that of popular opinion.[100]

To write a contemporary history, the journalist Burke made efforts to inform his readers of the positions of both the old Whigs and the Crown, and as 'an impartial historian', he was careful not to incline to either side. The passage here, however, enables commentators to recognise at least some distance between Burke in 1764 and his position after pledging allegiance to Rockingham.[101] If his views on politics were different, so would have been his ideas on the recent history of Britain, although the limited evidence makes it hard to proceed to a deeper analysis.

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[99] *Annual Register … for the Year 1760*, p. 39. For Burke's comments on George II, see also *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* (1770), in *WS*, II, 266.

[100] *Annual Register … for the Year 1763* (London, 1764), pp. 41–2.

[101] Cf. Herbert Butterfield, *George III and the Historians* (London: Collins, 1957), pp. 46–50, 57. 'After weighing the pros and cons, however, it [the *Annual Register*] decided on successive occasions in favour of the King.': ibid., p. 47.

2 The Early Burke and the Historiography of England

In his attack on ancient constitutionalism,[102] Burke's explicit target was some eminent intellectuals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Nathaniel Bacon, Hale and Lambard.[103] The origins of the doctrine of ancient constitutionalism could, however, be traced back to the remoter past of English history, of which Burke was well aware.

In the thirteenth century, Henry de Bracton produced a legal concept that attributed the authority of English law to the customs of the kingdom. For the constitutional discourse of future generations, Sir John Fortescue's *In Praise of the Laws of England*, first published around 1543, was even more significant, in which the author contended that the reason why English laws were the best was due to the antiquity of laws, which guaranteed their pre-eminence.[104]

Nonetheless, the antiquity of law was not always the most significant focus of the common lawyers of England. Late in Elizabeth I's reign, influenced by the humanist tradition of the Renaissance and medieval Roman law, lawyers were keen to prove that English law was a pre-eminent system of reason rather than that of antiquity. Only after James I's accession to the throne, the common lawyers drew greater attention to the legal thoughts of Bracton and Fortescue, which they regarded as providing them with a powerful language against Stuart absolutism.[105]

While Sir Edward Coke was an eminent figure who contributed to this revival of Fortescue's idea of the ancient law, he was still untypical

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[102] Parts of the present section (Chap. 2, section two) draw on Sora Sato, 'Seifuku to Koryu no Bunmeishakaishi: Shoki Baku to Kinsei Buriten ni okeru Rekishijyojyutsu no Keifu [Conquests, International Exchanges, and Civilization: The Early Writings of Burke and the Historiography of Early Modern Britain]' (in Japanese), *The History of Economic Thought* (The Japanese Society for the History of Economic Thought), 58:1 (2016), 49–68 (at 60–4). The present author is very grateful to the editors of the journal for this reference.

[103] *Fragment*, in *WS*, I, 325.

[104] 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; Yoshinori Doi, *Igirisu Rikken Seiji no Genryū : Zenki Sutyuāto Jidai no Tōchi to Korai no Kokusei ron [The Roots of English Constitutionalism: the Ancient Constitution and the Politics in the Early Stuarts]* (Tokyo: Bokutakusha, 2006), pp. 44–8, 56–7.

[105] Doi, *The Roots of English Constitutionalism*, pp. 76–7.

in the sense that he emphasised the unchangeable nature of English law more than most other legal thinkers of his age. The common lawyers of Coke's generation were well aware that a literally immemorial constitution was far from a historical truth, although the historical continuity of English law was still significant to their political arguments. Instead of adopting the mythical doctrine of total immutability, many of them developed the concept of the ancient constitution in which both elements of change and continuity could coexist in a subtle manner.

It was John Selden who offered a classical expression for this model of ancient constitutionalism,[106] and Hale, Blackstone and the later Burke were among those who adopted the Seldenian type of ancient constitutionalism for their political arguments. In Selden's and Hale's metaphor, the English constitution was like the legendary Argonauts' Ship, which could preserve its own identity despite a number of modifications added over the long-time journey.[107] It is not explicitly clear from the text to what extent Burke, in the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*, recognised this form of ancient constitutionalism. What he criticised was the constitutional doctrine of the Fortescueian type, and his censure of Hale was unfair in this regard, as Hale, in his *History of the Common Law in England*, at many points mentioned the progress and improvement of laws without abandoning the Seldenian model of ancient constitutionalism. In Hale's view, although the Conquest of 1066 did not fundamentally alter English law, new laws and customs seem to have been 'secretly and insensibly' introduced into the realm,[108] and English law had certainly improved by John's reign.[109] Hale was close to Burke in his view that the transformation of the law was caused by international communications.[110] Like the later Burke, he also stressed the changeable nature of law as a result of changing circumstances and necessity while holding to the concept of continuity-in-change in law. The *Abridgment* and

[106] Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603–1642* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 6–7.

[107] John Selden, 'Notes upon Sir John Fortescue Knight, Lord Chief Justice of England', in Sir John Fortescue, *De Laudibus Legum Angliæ* (London, 1660), pp. 17–8; 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.

[108] Hale, *History of the Common Law of England*, pp. 42, 48, 59–60, 67.

[109] Ibid., pp. 84–5.

[110] Ibid., p. 43.

the *Fragment*, by contrast, barely developed such a concept of continuity, which led modern readers to wonder to what extent the early Burke was conscious of the intellectual genealogy of the Seldenian idea of the constitution.

Also important was the intellectual link between Burke, the members of the Society of Antiquaries and some eminent scholars of feudal law, such as William Camden,[111] Henry Spelman, Robert Brady and others,[112] who refuted the idea of an immemorial constitution and accepted the great impact of the Norman Conquest on English law.[113] In maintaining the transformation of English law, Burke's position was closer to their position, and thus there was less originality in the *Abridgement* in this respect.

Moreover, it seems that Burke targeted for his criticism the historiography of Rapin and Bolingbroke, which emphasised the constitutional continuity since Anglo-Saxon times. According to Rapin, although all European constitutions established by the northern tribes had once been mixed and limited monarchies, almost all of them had been lost through historical fluctuations. England was the only country which had preserved its free constitution into the eighteenth century.[114] As is well known, Rapin's historiography was authoritative until Hume's publications, and it crucially influenced Bolingbroke, who disputed with the Court Whigs over English history during the 1730s.[115] Bolingbroke and

[111] Burke owned Camden's *Britannia*, but this was an English-translated, enlarged version of three volumes by Richard Gough published in 1789: *LC*, p. 9; LC MS. For Camden's *Britannia* and his historiography, see for instance, Christopher Brooks and Kevin Sharpe, 'History, English Law and the Renaissance', *Past & Present*, 72 (1976), 133–42; William Rockett, 'The Structural Plan of Camden's Britannia', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 26 (1995), 829–41.

[112] Burke was a reader of both Spelman and Brady and owned their works: LC MS; *LC*, p. 28 (Henry Spelman, *Concilia, decreta, leges, constitutions, in re ecclesiarum orbis Britannici*, 2 vols., 1639–64). LC MS; *LC*, p. 9 (Robert Brady, *Complete History of England from the First Entrance of the Romans, unto the End of the Reign of King Henry III*, London, 1685).

[113] Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, Chaps. 5 and 8.

[114] Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England, as well Ecclesiastical as Civil*, I, preface, 'The Origin and Nature of the English Constitution'; ibid., II, 136; 'A Dissertation on the Origin of the Government of England, &c.', in ibid., XIV, 398–400.

[115] For this dispute, see, for instance, Isaac Kramnick, 'Augustan Politics and English Historiography: The Debate on the English Past, 1730–35', *History and Theory*, 6 (1967),

his associates defended the idea of an ancient constitution and of English liberty allegedly existing since Anglo-Saxon times,[116] and depicted English history as a continuous conflict between subjects, who attempted to protect their rights and liberties, and rulers, who sought to undermine them. According to this view of English history, the liberties of the subject were once again challenged by Robert Walpole and others who endeavoured to corrupt parliament and the electoral system. As Pocock and others have revealed, the 'neo-Harringtonian' thinkers idealised a gothic polity, of which Harrington himself was critical, as embodying a mixed constitution while drawing on Harrington's idea of the relationship between the distribution of property and the balance of power.[117]

The Court Whigs attempted to refute such an interpretation of the constitution by relying on Robert Brady's Tory version of English history and insisting that the idea of the pre-eminent constitution existing from the era of the Saxons was mythical and that it was only after 1688–9 that the people of England enjoyed genuine liberty. Among them, John Lord Hervey, in his *Ancient and Modern Liberty Stated and Compar'd*, asserted that all English monarchs, including Elizabeth I who was so commended by Bolingbroke and others, who had reigned before the Revolution had been tyrants.[118]

Evidently, the ideas on English history developed in the *Abridgement* were incompatible with those advanced by Bolingbroke and his associates. As has already been shown, it was the idea of historical continuity since the Saxon period that Burke refuted so clearly. It is also apparent that the neo-Harringtonian idea of an idealised gothic polity does not fit with Burke's views on the constitution. Although there is no clear

35–56; idem, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 24–30, 127–36, 177–81.

[116]For example, see Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, 'Remarks on the History of England', in *The Works of Lord Bolingbroke* (4 vols., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967), I, 318.

[117]J.G.A. Pocock, 'Machiavelli, Harrington and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century', in idem, *Politics, Language and Time*, pp. 104–147.

[118]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). See also H.T. Dickinson, 'Introduction', in Hervey, *Ancient and Modern Liberty Stated and Compar'd,* pp. iii-x.

evidence of how Burke evaluated the historical arguments advanced by the Court Whigs of the 1730s, it is highly unlikely that he was ignorant of them. Rather, he was presumably well aware of their historiographical arguments as well as their politics.

It is, then, significant to situate Burke's and these Court Whigs' arguments in the history of early modern English historiography. First, the *Abridgment* was not original in its historiography in stressing the change of laws brought by conquests, as predecessors, notably Spelman, Brady and the Court Whigs of the 1730s, had already made this point very clearly. Burke well knew the historiography of these predecessors, and thus it was not difficult at all for him to argue for the discontinuity of the English constitution. In addition, although the idea of conquest as a form of international exchange characterised the whole text of the *Abridgment*, Burke was not entirely unique in this regard either. In 1695, for instance, William Temple's *Introduction to the History of England* developed a similar idea of the Norman Conquest which led to increased social intercourse with the Continent and hence helped to civilise England in several respects.[119] From such a historical description, Burke might have found an influence on his own historical conclusions. Nevertheless, his conception of conquest could still remain distinctive in treating it as one of several ways by which international exchange could be facilitated.

A study of contemporary works further uncovers the place of the *Abridgment* in the history of English historiography. Blackstone's *Discourse on the Study of the Law* was commended in Burke's edited *Annual Register*.[120] Nevertheless, how did Burke read Blackstone's comment that the ancient common law had survived in English society after the Norman Conquest?[121] Published between 1765 and 1769, the *Commentaries on the Law of England* acknowledged and lamented the great impact of the conquest of 1066, that is, destroying the liberties of the Anglo-Saxon period, which were not recovered until the reign of

[119] Temple, *An Introduction to the History of England*, pp. 306–9.

[120] *Annual Register … for the Year 1758*, pp. 453–9.

[121] Sir William Blackstone, *An Analysis of the Laws of England. The Third Edition; To Which is Prefixed An Introductory Discourse on the Study of the Law* (Oxford, 1758), p. xxxviii. The review in the *Annual Register* included this part of the *Discourse*. See also Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Law of England* (4 vols., Oxford, 1765–69), I, 17.

Charles II.[122] According to Blackstone, England's post-1066 history was a process of recovering the Anglo-Saxon liberties from the blow given to them in 1066. Not only in the *Abridgment*, but also in any later work of his, however, Burke did not accept this interpretation of history.

Hume's *History of England* was, too, positively reviewed in the *Annual Register*, as it rescued English historiography from a long period of low esteem in which no native historian could produce a first-rate history of England.[123] While it is hard to confirm whether Burke abandoned his projected history because of Hume's publications, a comparative analysis of Hume's *History* still helps to illuminate several issues regarding the *Abridgment*.

Like Burke's *Abridgment*, Hume's *History* refused to endorse naïve ancient constitutionalism. Although ancient and medieval ages could not be researched in detail because of an acute shortage of evidence, these periods were beyond doubt full of barbarism, ignorance and confusion. The Germans and the Saxons were warlike, little interested in commerce while their societies lacked refined arts. As such they could not have possessed a pre-eminent constitution like that of eighteenth-century Britain, although the people enjoyed a rough form of personal liberty. Both Burke and Hume believed that it was possible to infer the development of the constitution from the state of manners—an attitude that represented, in a way, the rise of the new historiography in the eighteenth century.

The notion of chivalry was another historiographical development of the age to which they had contributed. According to Hume's *History*, the idea of chivalry reached England with the conquest of 1066, and this helped to improve the manners and inner lives of the people. It instilled a sense of gallantry, made a point of honour, and left a lingering influence which continued to exist even after a great revival of arts and learning had taken place.[124] Chivalry here, as well as that advanced in Burke's *Reflections* and Hume's own earlier essay,[125] needs to be understood

[122] Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Law of England*, IV, 431, 435.

[123] *Annual Register … for the Year 1761*, p. 301 (second pagination).

[124] 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), I, 15–6, 160–9, 174, 188 (the Germans and the Saxons), 486–7 (chivalry).

[125] David Hume, 'An Historical Essay on Chivalry and Modern Honour', National Library of Scotland, MS. 23159, IX, 4, transcribed by Ernest Campbell Mossner, *Modern Philology*, 45 (1947), 54–60.

within the intellectual contexts of the late eighteenth century, in which several other thinkers considered chivalry as a civilising force.

Since the *Abridgment* does not discuss the impact of the chivalric tradition on later eras, it is not entirely clear whether the early Burke saw it as a great driving force behind European civilisation as he did later in the *Reflections*. Nevertheless, the idea that women's chastity was connected to the idea of 'knight errantry' still showed its apparent connection to the eighteenth-century understanding of chivalry as a historical phenomenon.

In addition, Burke's views on the Wittenagemote, the Anglo-Saxon parliament, were not substantially different from Hume's. Both of them agreed that the Saxons had not developed their legislative system to the extent the eighteenth century had achieved, and this view constituted their refutation of naïve ancient constitutionalism. The *Abridgment* presumed that all ranks of people attended parliament in the Saxon era, yet they did so not for legislation, but for acclamation and promulgation of the laws.[126]

Hume offered a more cautious interpretation than Burke. Bishops and abbots attended it without doubt. The aldermen or governors of counties also joined and gave statutes their approval. The problem was how to interpret 'wise-men', who had often been referred to as participants. According to the 'monarchical faction', this meant judges, or men well versed in jurisprudence. For the 'popular faction', they were supposed to be the representatives of the boroughs, that is, of the commons. A careful consideration of the descriptions given by all ancient historians suggests that they would have been the aristocrats rather than the commons. Besides, as commerce was undeveloped in Anglo-Saxon cities, in which inhabitants of the lower ranks had to depend upon their superiors, it was unlikely that the commons were allowed to attend parliament. Hume, therefore, supposed the Saxon government to have been aristocratic.[127]

Moreover, there was no substantial difference between the two works in their analysis of Magna Carta. According to Hume, Magna Carta did not establish a novel system of jurisprudence and legislation, nor did it revise the distribution of power, yet it brought about a new phase of constitutional history by securing more liberty and property for the

[126] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 440–1.

[127] Hume, *History of England*, I, 163–5.

people.[128] For most intellectuals of the age, as well as for Burke and Hume, Magna Carta was a historical monument, in which the cornerstone of English liberty, however insufficient, had been laid.

The *Abridgment* and the *History* are, however, more substantially different in other respects. An apparent difference lies in their accounts of the introduction of the Christian religion into England. In the *Abridgment*, it was a defining moment in the history of medieval England, because it offered a great gleam of hope amid utter darkness and helped advance learning and turned the Saxons' manners of life into more moderate ones. Without doubt, Burke held this line of opinions throughout his life. On the other hand, Hume was evidently far more sceptical of Christianity. Although maintaining that the introduction of the Christian religion had contributed to linking the kingdom to more civilised countries on the continent, he did not admit that it had helped spread more civilised manners among the Saxons.[129]

The concept of conquest was not identical either between the *Abridgment* and Hume's *History*. As noted above, Burke's originality lay in the generalised idea of conquest he put forward as a form of international exchange that could be the vital step towards a more civilised society.[130] Although Hume well recognised the significance of historical changes brought by the Conquest, that is, the introduction of feudal law, primogeniture, the idea of chivalry and others, like other

[128] Ibid., I, 487–8.

[129] Ibid., I, 50–1. Other historians did also not, to the same extent as Burke, stress the transformation of manners and civilising effects caused by the introduction of the Christian religion, although they acknowledged that manners of the Saxons were improved by it. See Rapin, *The History of England*, I, 135–6, 143–7; 197–264; Thomas Carte, *A General History of England from the Earliest Times* (4 vols., London, 1747–1754), I, 221–80; Tobias George Smollett, *A Complete History of England, Deduced for the Descent of Julius Caesar to the Treaty of Aix La Chapelle, 1748* (4 vols., London, 1757–1758), I, 89–90.

[130] Eighteenth-century historians, including Rapin and Hume, acknowledged, with a series of similar anecdotes, the civilising effects of the Roman conquest led by Agricola of ancient Britain. See Rapin, *The History of England*, I, 49–53; Carte, *A General History of England from the Earliest Times*, I, 120–30; Smollett, *A Complete History of England*, I, 36–40; Hume, *History of England*, I, 9–10. Although these historians and Burke were alike in this respect, it seems that Burke emphasised more than the others the significance of the event as an ideal case of conquest.

eighteenth-century historians, he did not claim for 1066 the role of international exchange which contributed to civilising the country.[131]

Long before the *Abridgment* was written, the idea of conquest, especially regarding the Norman Conquest, had been a focus of dispute with regard to English history. Burke was very conscious of the history of this dispute, committed himself to it, and seems to have introduced a novel concept to the idea of conquest. Although his opinions were closer to the seventeenth-century scholars of feudal law, he differed from these scholars in using the language of manners to explain the changing nature of English law. Moreover, he put forward the idea of conquest as a means of increased exchanges with a wider world and as a development which formed an important phase in the civilisation of the English nation. It was with this renewed concept of conquest that the *Abridgment* could contribute to the revision of early modern English historiography. Conquest was no longer merely relevant to the question about whether English law was immemorial in its nature. It was now regarded by Burke as one of the significant forces behind the emergence of new order and the progress of civilisation.

3 The Modern History of the Ancient and Evolving Constitution

After he associated himself with the Rockinghams, it seems that Burke developed a stronger sense of the historical continuity of English history. Rockingham and his associates consciously linked themselves to the old Whig tradition which had existed since at least 1688–9, but had recently collapsed.[132] Burke's acquaintance with the aristocrats of the party and his profound commitment to their politics probably made him reconsider the role of the landed interest in politics and history without

[131] Hume, *History of England*, I, 455, 473, 486; Rapin, *The History of England*, II, 209–86; ibid., XIV, 400–2; Smollett, *A Complete History of England*, I, 214–40. Carte criticised William Temple's views of the Norman Conquest by arguing that they were based on imagination rather than fact and stressed the harmful effects of the Conquest on the country. See Carte, *A General History of England from the Earliest Times*, I, 450–2.

[132] For this theme, see Warren M. Elofson, 'The Rockingham Whigs and the Country Tradition', *Parliamentary History*, 8 (1989), 90–115.

neglecting the role of other interests such as commercial one.[133] It was landed gentlemen, especially the great Whig families, in Burke's opinion, that should take the lead in politics, and they were the only people who could provide society with political stability. Some of his letters around the period, a 1774 famous letter to the Duke of Richmond in particular, made clear this point and Burke's general opinion on governing a country. The aristocracy, according to Burke, are 'the great Oaks that shade a Country and perpetuate your [i.e. the aristocracy's] benefits from Generation to Generation', and 'their houses become the publick repositories and offices of Record for the constitution'. These oaks should be a living tradition of the great families led by their own vigorous actions and characters, not the dead one found 'in rotten parchments under dripping and perishing Walls'.[134] This is what English history and its ancient constitution should be, although in reality the history was somewhat, but not entirely, different from this ideal.

Burke's early tracts and speeches in his political life also included the idea of the historical continuity of the English constitution.[135] In the late 1760s, he was already expressing his commitment to royalty by saying that 'it [royalty] was the oldest and one of the best parts of our constitution'.[136] Moreover, Burke and the Rockinghams had incidentally an opportunity to deliberate over the idea of 'prescription' when they

[133] In 1770, Burke once contended that 'parliament was not meant to be a representation of the landed property only, but of the commercial interest … existing in times earlier than any annals or history can give testimony of'. See *Parl. His.*, XVI, 920–1.

[134] 'Burke to the Duke of Richmond', in *Corr.*, II, 377. See also 'Burke to the Marquess of Rockingham ([24] November 1769)', in ibid., II, 112; J.W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 23.

[135] *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, in *WS*, II, 175; *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments Respecting North America 1754–1783*, ed. R.C. Simmons and P.D.G. Thomas, vol. III 1768–1773 (Millwood, New York: Kraus International Publications, 1984), p. 72.

[136] Burke's intervention in the Commons debate on 28 February 1769; *Sir Henry Cavendish's Debates of the House of Commons during the Thirteenth Parliament of Great Britain*, ed. John Wright (2 vols., London: 1841–1843), I, 273. Cf. Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVII. 99: The Whigs 'supposed & asserted Monarchy even when they would most limit it'. For these, see Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 254, 819.

engaged in the debates on the Nullum Tempus bill in 1768.[137] Although Burke was well informed about the concept, even before this period, the Nullum Tempus affair was almost the first occasion when he could apply it to real politics.[138] Not until around 1772, however, did he clearly express the Seldenian idea of continuity-in-change of the constitution.

After entering parliament, Burke barely discussed Anglo-Saxon or Norman England, although Magna Carta was an exception, being 'the oldest reform' in English history and of great significance to constitutional history for Burke as well as for many other statesmen. In the *Reflections*, Burke maintained that the great lawyers from Coke to Blackstone had endeavoured to prove that Magna Carta was connected to Henry I's charter and that both of these had no more than reaffirmed even more ancient jurisprudence. While these lawyers were probably correct to a considerable extent, even if they were wrong in some respects, this would rather demonstrate Englishmen's great preference for antiquity.[139]

Although Burke rarely made comments on the following (more than) 300 years of English history—the period from Magna Carta to the Reformation—the available evidence suggests that he looked upon these later periods as still barbarous. The constitution around these periods certainly remained, in his opinion, far from the level achieved in his own day.[140] The next historical event, after 1215, that he interpreted

[137] For this, see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 244–7; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 246–50.

[138] '"Mnemon" to the *Public Advertiser* (24 February 1768)', in *WS*, II, 75–9; '"Mnemon" to the *Public Advertiser* (4 March 1768)', in *WS*, II, 79–83; '"Mnemon" to the *Public Advertiser* [March 1768]', in *WS*, II, 83–6. In 1772, the dispute over Nullum Tempus was extended to church property. Burke, again, appealed to prescription to argue against ecclesiastical claims. 'Speech on Church Nullum Tempus Bill (17 February 1772)', in *WS*, II, 364–67.

[139] *Reflections*, p. 182. Magna Carta was a fundamental law and contributed to the formation of the House of Commons in later periods. See *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792), in *WS*, IX, 610–1, 628; *Speech on Conciliation with America* (22 March 1775), in *WS*, III, 139–40.

[140] 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'. *Parl. Hist.*, XXVII, 1231. Other examples are Burke's mention of John Ball, and of the Jacquerie, in the *Appeal*, both of which led a peasant revolt in the late fourteenth century, and also his reference to the Hundred Years War (1337–1453), in the *Reflections*. See *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, in *WS*, IV, 450–1; *Reflections*, p. 310.

seriously, was the Reformation. In early 1772, debating 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'.[141] Although several reforms had taken place at the time of the Reformation, in Burke's view, none of them had altered the 'identity', that is, the fundamental principles of the Church of England. As an independent organisation, the Church of England '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 shook 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, although later the number of articles was reduced to thirty nine.[142]

In Burke's view, not all the institutions nor regulations produced throughout history were fundamental and unchangeable. Many of them could be abolished or revised according to changing circumstances. This was the case of the statutes dealing with treasonable offences in the reign of Henry VIII and Charles II, or with the case of the Act of Supremacy of Elizabeth I.[143] Even the Act of Union in 1707 was not a fundamental law. These were only made 'from the mere necessity of the case'.[144] 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', that is, a religion created only by hatred of and opposition to 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

[141] 'Speech on Clerical Subscription (6 February 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.

[142] *Parl. Hist*., XVII, 277 (note).

[143] *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* , in *WS*, IX, 612.

[144] *Parl. Hist*., XVII, 283 (note).

1645,[145] and Presbyterianism was established in England by the church discipline ordinances around the same period. Parliament also approved of two Westminster Catechisms in 1648. In Scotland, the *Scots Confession* and Presbyterianism were confirmed by the Act of Union.

Above all, the religious affiliation of the crown had been redefined since the Church of England removed itself from being 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' after 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 of 1689 strictly confirmed the Protestant succession to the crown. Although the monarch might succeed to the throne as a Protestant, as the Act of Settlement of 1701 stipulates, he or she cannot hold the crown without being a Protestant of the Church of England.[146]

Whereas Burke maintained that these reforms in religion did not alter the fundamental principles of the British constitution, but rather consolidated them, such a view fitted perfectly 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'.[147] Although he knew and was critical of the religious strife and persecutions seen in British history, Burke evidently believed that the series of religious reformations conducted since the sixteenth century had led Britain to greater glory.

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[145] Burke 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.' 'Speech on Clerical Subscription (6 February 1772)', in *WS*, II, 364.

[146] *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* , in *WS*, IX, 605–6.

[147] 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment (15, 16, 18, 19 February 1788)', in *WS*, VI, 315.

His evaluation of the Reformation was, however, not the same as that of the monarchs who committed themselves to it. Rather, Burke seems to have been very critical of the Tudors and the early Stuarts, and among them Henry VIII was occasionally a particular target to be denounced. Burke censured the king's plunder of church property, described him as 'one of the most decided tyrants in the rolls of history' and also linked him with Roman tyrants and French revolutionaries.[148] This outright hatred deserves attention and may perhaps be of some importance in thinking of its place in eighteenth-century historiography.

In his *Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu maintained that the monarch's abolition of monasteries and hospices led to the rise of the spirit of trade and industry,[149] an interpretation that Burke did not seem to accept. In Hume's *History of England*, Henry VIII's attack on the monasteries seems to be regarded as one of the causes of the decline of feudalism and the changing balance of power in English society.[150] Hume, however, paid much greater attention to a historical event in the previous reign, that is, to Henry VII's statute for the alienation of the lands of the lords. The significance of this statute had, in the seventeenth century, been recognised by Francis Bacon and James Harrington,[151] but was first suggested to Hume by Lord Kames.[152] Hume, however, did not stress its importance, as the statute was no more than the codification of the custom prevailing in the age before Henry VII's reign. In his view, the greatest cause of the fall of feudalism was, in fact, not Henry VII's statute but the novel manners brought about by the rise of commerce around that time.[153] Burke may or may not be aware of this tradition in

[148] *Reflections*, pp. 281–2. Here Burke referred to Henry VIII's reign as 'that dark age'. See also *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796), in *WS*, IX, 166–7.

[149] Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 456.

[150] Hume, *History of England*, III, 229–30, 251–2, 255–6.

[151] Francis Bacon, *The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh* (1622); James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656); idem, *The Art of Lawgiving* (1659).

[152] 'Hume to Gilbert Elliot of Minto (9 Aug 1757)', in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (2 vols, Oxford University Press, 1932), I, 261–2.

[153] Hume, *History of England*, III, 77, IV, 384. Smith drew little attention to Henry VII's statute of alienation. For Hume and Smith on this subject, see Tatsuya Sakamoto, *Hyumu no Bunmei Shakai: Kinro, Chishiki, Jiyu [David Hume's Civilized Society: Industry, Knowledge, Liberty]* (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1995), pp. 282–4, 312–3. For their views of the decline of feudalism, see also Chap. 3 of this book.

English historiography, but, at least, he did not explicitly refer or appeal to it in his writings and speeches. Henry VIII's confiscation of church property caused a power shift from the clergy to the gentry, which for Burke presumably only meant great persecution of the former whose property and social status had been prescriptive.

In a broader perspective, it is significant that Hume, Smith and Burke all attempted to understand English history by setting it in the European context.[154] For the Scottish thinkers, it was clear that England had taken the same historical path with other European nations until the sixteenth century. For them, especially, it was significant that these European nations, including England, had established absolute monarchy, brought by the dissemination of luxury during the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth century. The decline of feudal society meant a great step towards the modern commercial society. In doing so, they intended to replace the Whigs' myth of English exceptionalism with their own narrative of European civilisation.[155]

Burke was, too, far from accepting the myth, and his strategy of undermining it in the *Abridgment* was, as already seen, to demonstrate and stress the effects of the cultural and political exchanges between England and Europe. During the 1790s, without losing this sight, he also drew attention to the common foundations of European civilisation inherited since the distant past. While both Hume and Smith were also clearly aware of these points, it is not clear to what extent Burke shared their notion of the role of luxury in undermining the feudal society in Europe.

Nevertheless, for all of them, the first half of the seventeenth century had seen the critical deviation of English politics and constitution from the European typology. This deviation meant a crucial step towards the achievement of political liberty to an extent that mankind had never seen before. The seventeenth century had, however, also been a turbulent period, which had left a deep mental scar on the English ruling

[154] For Hume's and Smith's European perspectives on English history, see Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, pp. 297–8; Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity 1689–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 120, 211–3.

[155] Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, pp. 111–2, 120, 208–9, 211–4; Anna Plassart, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2015), pp. 31, 73–4.

class, from which posterity should learn several lessons.[156] In 1780, in the context of his appeal for economical reform, Burke stated that 'the unfortunate Charles the First' had failed to reform the constitution properly, whereas defending 'himself on the practice of the Stuart who went before him, and of all the Tudors'—an example of 'inheritance of absurdity'.[157] As a Whig, he seems to have endorsed the constitutional revolution carried out during the early phase of the Long Parliament to limit the power of Charles I, yet he avoided seeking any causal relationship between such a constitutional revolution and the catastrophic civil war.[158] As he told parliament at another occasion, 'between the years 1640, & 1648 there were many expulsions' of MPs from parliament,[159] and the lower House first ruined the Lords, and then 'did behead the King'.[160] The constituencies were also destroyed. During this troubled age, the balance of the constitution was apparently lost.[161] The Civil Wars during the 1640s well represented the evil consequences of politicised religion, and the knowledge of this part of English history clearly taught Burke how to react to the radical political movements in England which surged after the breakout of the French Revolution.[162]

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[156] J.G.A. Pocock, 'Introduction', in Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. idem (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), pp. vii–xlviii (at xi). See also *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, in *WS*, II, 286. 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), 343–67.

[157] *Speech on Economical Reform* , in *WS*, III, 491.

[158] Here the present author heavily depends on J.C.D. Clark, 'Introduction', in *Reflections*, p. 74. Burke recognised the Long Parliament's confiscation of lands, and correctly found its parallel in the French Revolution. See *Reflections*, p. 322.

[159] 'In the end this House was expelled by the majority, till the minority expells the majority, till it was reduced to forty six Members'. See Cavendish Diary, Eg. MS., 219, fol. 403. The context was the affairs of the Middlesex Election.

[160] Ibid., Cf. *Account*, II, 216, where the Burkes evidently acknowledged that the constitution had been overturned by the execution of Charles I.

[161] 'Speech on Parliamentary Incapacitation (31 January 1770)', in *WS*, II, 234–5. For a similar comment, see Burke, 'National Character and Parliament', p. 642.

[162] Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 686, 700.

Yet, chiefly during the 1790s in the context of his criticism of revolutionary France, Burke valued and stressed the historical continuity of the English constitution and its society during and after the Civil Wars. In particular, he positively evaluated Cromwell and his government. In *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', Burke wrote, 'that the 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.'[163] In *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, Burke contended that social order had not been overthrown even during the Civil Wars.[164] 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.[165]

In his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, Burke presented his most extended treatment 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

[163] *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*, p. 204 (editor's note); N.T. Phillipson, *Hume* (London:Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), pp. 90–1.

[164] Burke's manner of reference to the Civil Wars was potentially different from that of his contemporaries. According to 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 H.T. Dickinson, 'The Eighteenth-Century Debate on the "Glorious Revolution"', *History*, 61 (1976), 28–45 (at 28–9).

[165] *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies* (1793), in *WS*, VIII, 497–8.

> 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 judge he wished him to support.[166]

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 he had been critical in the *Fragment*. This did not, however, mark 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.[167]

Moreover, in this work, he applauded the army led by Cromwell and George Monck (1608–1670). According to Burke, 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'. What a civilised nation took away from society was barbarous and fanatical warriors, not the military arts nor genuine religious sentiments themselves. Polite men of letters and sociable merchants were indispensable to a modern civilised nation, yet the nation would not reach any perfection without the disciplined military force. In this standard, England of the Interregnum was never as deplorable as revolutionary France of 1791, in which 'no good army can exist on their principles'. After the usurpation, 'Cromwell had delivered England from anarchy', and after his death, 'Monk freed this nation from great and just apprehensions both of future anarchy and of probable tyranny in some form or other'. Life and property were protected under the republican form of government.[168]

At this point, comes the moment of the Restoration of 1660. Monck arranged for the restored monarchy and the return from exile of Charles II. Burke, however, did not hold Charles II in high regard. He wrote:

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[166] *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *WS*, VIII, 302–3.

[167] For Burke's views of Hale in his *Fragment*, see section two of this chapter.

[168] *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *WS*, VIII, 320–1.

> 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.[169]

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.[170] Burke 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.[171]

The English people learned a lesson from the civil wars, recognised the significance of their ancient constitution and supported the Restoration. It was under the spirit of 1660 that the Revolution of 1688–9 was carried out. Burke was not alone in adopting this *model of learning*, as other conservatives, such as John Reeves, shared this idea. Nevertheless, their historical thought clearly differed in another respect. Reeves believed that the dangerous 'French principles' had plunged, in the 1790s as well

[169] Ibid., in *WS*, VIII, 321–2.

[170] 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.

[171] *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 321.

as in the 1640s, the country into a political crisis, but for Burke the situation in France after 1789 was utterly unparalleled in history.[172]

Burke celebrated the restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660 as the regeneration of the constitution. His emphasis was placed upon the value of monarchy as an institution rather than on the character of the particular individual restored to 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 the *Reflections*, Burke saw the Restoration in the same 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 risque 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.[173]

Burke regarded both the Restoration and the Revolution as the regeneration of the constitution,[174] 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 that it was the result of a mere accident rather than the outcome of political planning.[175]

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[172] John Reeves, *Thoughts on the English Government …Letter the Second* (London, 1799), pp. 51, 105; idem, *Thoughts on the English Government …Letter the First* (London, 1795), pp. 21–2, 71.

[173] *Reflections*, p. 170.

[174] In the *Appeal*, he argued that Joseph Jekyl and Nicholas Lechmere also made this point. See *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), in *WS*, IV, 425–6.

[175] Clark, 'Introduction', in *Reflections*, pp. 34, 41–2.

For the British ruling class in the eighteenth century, the Revolution of 1688–9 was of crucial importance and the defining moment in English history. From the Sacheverell trial in 1710 to the French Revolution, they reflected on the meaning and implication of 1688–9 on a number of occasions and presented various possible interpretations. It was 1688–9, not 1649 or any other date, that was the most crucial moment with regard to its political implications for the eighteenth-century governing class.[176] Immersed in such an intellectual arena from his early career, Burke, in an early memorandum, lamented the disappearance of the party divisions that used to exist at the time of the Revolution and that had gradually declined after the two Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745.[177] As a Whig apprehensive about the enlarged influence of the crown, in his *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), Burke a little exaggerated the reductions made to the crown's prerogatives as a result of the Revolution of 1688–9.[178] Yet, later, his focus was often on the nature and principles on which the Revolution of 1688–9 operated. Before the French Revolution, he occasionally interpreted 1688–9 from a relatively populist perspective. In 1777, he maintained that the Revolution of 1688–9 was 'a departure from the ancient course of the descent of this Monarchy', and that the 'People at that time reenter'd into their original rights'. What was done at this Revolution could not be authorised by the positive laws, but 'the freedom and safety of the Subject, the origin and cause of all Laws, required a proceeding paramount and superior to them'. The 'happy establishment out of which both King and Parliament were regenerated' clearly owed to 'the free choice therefore of the People, without either King or

[176] For this, for example, see ibid., in *Reflections*, p. 39.

[177] Edmund Burke, 'On Party (1757)', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', 644–5.

[178] See *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, in *WS*, II, 259: 'At the Revolution, the Crown, [was] deprived, for the ends of the Revolution itself, of many prerogatives'. It is, however, difficult to support Burke's views with 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. Here the present author is heavily indebted to the modern editor of the *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* : *WS*, II, 259 (editor's note).

Parliament'.[179] With the Regency crisis of 1788, he also contended that 'the compact' had been 'dissolved' in 1688–9, when 'all right and power' reverted 'to the people'.[180] The point of emphasis, however, shifted according to the circumstances that he encountered and responded to. In the 1790s, facing revolutionary France and the English radicals who endorsed it, he needed to show the fundamental difference between the events of 1688–9 and 1789 and stressed that the revolution by the Englishmen was an act for the preservation of their ancient constitution.

For the French revolutionaries, the 1688–9 English Revolution was the example that they were following, and for the English radicals, including some Foxite Whigs, 1789 was a similar though more advanced revolution than that of 1688–9. Burke strongly disagreed with these interpretations of history. According to him, the English radicals such as Richard Price confounded the English Revolution of 1649, the Revolution of 1688–9 and the French Revolution. He wanted to denounce these views of 1688–9 and to reveal the true principles enshrined in that Revolution.

Burke and other conservatives of his day were alike in seeing 1688–9 as parallel to 1660, yet he went even further. According to him, the Revolution of 1688–9 was the same as all other precedent reformations in England in its principles. That is, it was a reformation based on the principle of reverence for English history and tradition, not on any abstract ideas such as the theory of universal natural rights. The historical continuity of the constitution had not been lost in 1688–9, but had rather been consolidated by events. In the reign of Queen Anne, some Tories insisted that 'the title to the crown was still as indefeasibly hereditary as it had been', and the extreme Whigs asserted that 'James II had been dismissed'. Instead, Burke contended that James II had virtually abdicated and that the throne had been left vacant.[181] Although there was, in 1688–9, 'a small and a temporary deviation from the strict order of a regular hereditary succession',[182] what was actually done was of a very similar kind to past reformations:

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[179] 'Address to the King (January 1777)', in *WS*, III, 273.

[180] 'Speech on Regency (22 December 1788)', in *WS*, IV, 253.

[181] Clark, 'Introduction', in *Reflections*, p. 41: the *Reflections* 'presented a mainstream Whig reading of 1688.'

[182] *Reflections*, p. 164 and editor's note 71. See also ibid. (editor's note 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'.

> 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.[183]

He emphasised Englishmen's efforts to defend their ancient constitution and traditional principles. The hereditary principle had subsisted throughout English history,[184] and it was still at the centre of politics even during the events of 1688–9.[185] Interestingly, in the *Reflections*, he also maintained that the 'Revolution of 1688 was obtained by a just war, in the only case in which any war, and much more a civil war, can be just'.[186] To dethrone James II was not a constitutional matter, but a necessary act in the form of a 'civil war' that the English people had to undertake in 1688 in order to defend their constitution. A foreign Protestant prince, William of Orange's intervention was justifiable only in such political circumstances.[187] In the *Appeal*, Burke claimed once more that the Revolution of 1688–9 had been a necessary act[188] for preserving the ancient constitution, because otherwise the entire constitution would have been subverted. He also stressed

[183] Ibid., p. 170.

[184] 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' (ibid., p. 171).

[185] Ibid., p. 165 (editor's note 73).

[186] Ibid., p. 180.

[187] For this, see J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Fourth English Civil War: Dissolution, Desertion, and Alternative Histories in the Glorious Revolution', in *The Revolution of 1688–1689: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Lois G. Schwoerer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 52–64. See also David Armitage, 'Edmund Burke and Reason of State', in idem, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 154–71 (at 164–5).

[188] In December 1788, he already presented both the Revolution of 1688–9 and the Restoration of 1660 as 'acts of necessity'. See 'Speech on Regency (22 December 1788)', in *WS*, IV, 253.

that the Whigs in managing the Sacheverell trial of 1710 made the same point.[189]

If his emphasis on the idea of prescription and of the antiquity of the constitution emerged from the particular political circumstances he faced, so did his stress upon the hereditary principle which had existed over a long span of history and had survived the crisis of 1688–9. The Regency Crisis between December 1788 and March 1789 provided Burke and other politicians with an opportunity to reflect on England's constitutional history, especially the succession to the crown in the past. At this time, he was already advancing the claim that the events of 1660 and 1688–9 were acts of necessity,[190] and, in particular, he stressed with Fox and other colleagues the hereditary principles of the English crown while dismissing the claims that it was somehow elective, as he was to do so again in the *Reflections*. This does not mean that a new interpretation had been abruptly adopted at the time of the Regency Crisis, but rather that he only confirmed what he already had in mind. Even so, however, through the process of the Regency Crisis, Burke worked hard on the issues, consolidated his idea on the historical continuity of the English constitution and prepared himself for the historical thinking which was soon to be more fully advanced in the *Reflections*.[191]

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[189] *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, in *WS*, IV, 411–8, 423–8; *The Tryal of Dr. Henry Sacheverell* (London, 1710), pp. 59, 73–4, 92–3, 108, 259, 273, 288. In the *Appeal*, he most quoted from Joseph Jekyll among the Whigs leaders. See Takane Matsuura, 'Meiyokakumei Taisei to Furansu Kakumei [The Glorious Revolution Regime and the French Revolution]' in *Kindaishi niokeru Seiji to Shiso [Politics and Thought in Modern History]*, ed. Michio Shibata and Osamu Naruse (Tokyo: Yamakawa, 1977), pp. 187–8.

[190] Blackstone maintained that the Convention Parliaments of 1660 and 1689 had been conducted on the principle of necessity, which Burke may well have had in mind. See Blackstone, *Commentaries*, I, 147–8.

[191] WWM Bk P 15; 'Burke to William Weddell (31 January 1792)', in *Corr.*, VII, 58; *Parl. Hist.*, XXVII, 711–2 (Fox's defence of hereditary principles). See also John Derry, *The Regency Crisis and the Whigs 1788–9* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Bruce E. Gronbeck, 'Edmund Burke and the Regency Crisis of 1788–1789', in *Rhetoric: a Tradition in Transition: in Honor of Donald C. Bryant with a Reprinting of his "Rhetoric, its Functions and Scope" and "'Rhetoric, its Functions and Scope' Rediviva",* ed. Walter R. Fisher (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1974), pp. 142–77.

4 Habits of Mind, the Crisis of the Revolution Settlement and the Triumph of the Fiscal-Military State

The political circumstances from the late 1770s helped lead Burke and other conservative Whigs to stress the advantages of England's ancient constitution. His memorandum on the debate on 16 June 1784 was his response to the radical movements in favour of parliamentary reform, in which he emphasised that the British constitution had a prescriptive title. It was a constitution whose authority derived 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.[192] As regards the House of Commons, Burke 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.[193]

If Burke had in mind the development of the parliamentary system in Henry III's reign, his understanding corresponded with the opinions

[192] 'Speech on Parliamentary Reform (16 June 1784)', in *WS*, IV, 219. Although there are in general several definitions for the term 'prescription', the case of Burke applies to, 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.

[193] 'Speech on Parliamentary Reform (16 June 1784)', in *WS*, IV, 220. 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.

held by other intellectuals of the eighteenth century.[194] Evidently, 'five hundred years' implied that he did not intend to trace the origins of parliament back as far as the Saxon era. In the *Reflections*, he further highlighted the historical continuity of the constitution, which was traced back to the period before Magna Carta, although the Saxon era was still not subject to his serious consideration.[195] Magna Carta was the outset for a number of subsequent political reformations, and his point was that these reformations had always tried to maintain the historical continuity of the constitution.

Significantly, Burke's concept of historical continuity was twofold: the continuity of the constitution and the continuation of the policy upheld by Englishmen in their reformations, that is, 'the stationary policy of this kingdom'. The latter was as significant as the former for the purpose of his arguments. According to Burke, this 'powerful prepossession towards antiquity' was a much better guide in conducting politics than the natural right theory advanced by English radicals and French revolutionaries. Here perhaps lay one of the original elements in the historiography of the *Reflections*, distinct from other late eighteenth-century conservative writings on politics and history. Many conservatives appealed to the idea of prescription and constitutional antiquity in order to combat the arguments of the radicals. Regarding this, although Burke's arguments were probably more sophisticated in rhetoric and generalisation, they may have also been merely a variant of the conservative case at this time. As has already been shown, the hereditary principle was deployed not only in the *Reflections*, but also by Fox and others during the Regency Crisis and later by John Reeves. In contrast, although conservatives in the late eighteenth century were certainly aware of the habit of Englishmen inclining towards antiquity, whether consciously or unconsciously, they often failed to make use of it to refute the political arguments of the radicals. Burke's *Reflections*, but not his *Appeal* or his notes on the debate on

[194] Hume, *History of England*, II, 56–7; Blackstone, *Commentaries*, I, 145; Reeves, *Thoughts … the Second Letter*, p. 117. See also Rapin, 'A Dissertation on the Origin of the Government of England, &c.', in idem, *History of England*, XIV, 404. Here Rapin was cautious about whether participation of the Commons into parliament actually had taken place in the reign of Henry III. De Lolme traced the origins of the House of Commons to the reign of Edward I. See Jean Louis de. Lolme, *The Constitution of England, or An Account of the English Government* (Dublin, 1775), p. 19.

[195] *Reflections*, p. 182.

16 June 1784, contrasted 'the stationary policy' of Englishmen with the metaphysical theory of the radicals. He generalised the idea of the former and stressed its importance. In subsequent centuries, this generalisation certainly helped lead students of politics to regard the *Reflections* as a classic work of conservatism.

Burke believed the English constitution to be ancient, but also to have evolved over a long period of time.[196] It was on the preservation of this ancient constitution that the prosperity of the eighteenth century largely depended and it would not be too much to say that this idea is one of the most significant in his understanding of English history. For Burke, as well as for many of his contemporaries, the chief causes of the prosperity of 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 despising the patrimony of knowledge which was left us by our forefathers.[197]

Unlike the Dissenters, Low Churchmen and Roman Catholics, Burke did not claim that a fundamental discontinuity had been caused by the Reformation.[198] As has already been seen above, Burke believed that the

[196] Earlier than the *Reflections*, in one of his memorandums on American affairs, he wrote: 'Your ancestors took much time to digest, to order, to settle the excellent Frame of your Government.' See Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVII. 54.

[197] *Reflections*, pp. 264–5.

[198] Ibid., p. 264 (editor's note).

Reformation had succeeded in reforming the Church of England 'without changing her identity'. He stressed that ancient religious institutions had contributed to the development of learning.[199] Because he regarded the church establishment as an essential part of the constitution,[200] it can be argued that Burke saw 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. Bemoaning the fact that revolutionary France had demolished her 'ancient constitution', he wrote:

> 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 shamed despotism from the earth, by shewing that freedom was not only reconcileable, 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.[201]

The defence of an ancient, meliorated constitution enabled nations to achieve not only political freedom, but even material progress and sound finances. In his full-scale attack upon revolutionary France, Burke included a general maxim in politics and his views on English history. Advanced commerce and learning in eighteenth-century Britain,

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[199] 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'.

[200] *Reflections*, pp. 263–4; *Parl. His.*, XXIX, 1383 (note). 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.

[201] *Reflections*, p. 188.

according to Burke, were, at least partly, attributable to Englishmen's defence of their ancient institutions. Although Burke was clearly not alone among eighteenth-century conservatives in deploying such ideas, his development of them was more elaborate and sophisticated than that of many others.

It should be noted, however, that Burke did not maintain 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 shown, he asserted that progress in the ancient and medieval eras had been caused by various intermittent connections with foreign countries, including the introduction of the Christian religion and the impact of a series of conquests. Such progress rather contributed to the development of the constitution than the other way around. Progress also owed something to divine providence and the great abilities displayed by some particular individuals. Divine providence may, for example, have contributed to the spread of the Christian religion over England,[202] and such rulers as Agricola, Alfred the Great and Egbert had successfully acted to reconstruct the nation. Significantly, Burke, in the *Abridgment* and other works, generalised and applied these points to more recent periods of history.

After the Revolution of 1688–9, the nation had progressed substantially and prosperity had been brought in the eighteenth century, although its government and society were still quite feeble in several respects at the beginning of the century.[203] The point was, in particular, the fact that war, military affairs and commerce went hand in hand throughout this period.[204]

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[202] *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 *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, in *WS*, V, 404; 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 351, 462. For this, see also Chap. 6.

[203] In 1769, in the context of his critical response to William Knox, he wrote: 'I have a manuscript of [Charles] Davenant, which contains an abstract of our trade for the years 1703 and 1704 … England was then a rich and flourishing nation.' See *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, in *WS*, II, 143. As the modern editor of this work notes, there is no evidence that Davenant wrote the manuscript Burke mentioned. See Sheffield Archives, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments, MS., R 61/25. For his reference to Davenant and the same manuscript, see also *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 112.

[204] Burke once wrote, 'Our [Britain's] natural strength is a maritime strength, as trade is our natural employment: these must always go hand in hand, and they mutually support each other.' *Annual Register… for the Year 1758*, p. 12.

At the time of the Utrecht settlement, the protective measures were successful in developing the infant industries in Britain.[205] 'If at the Treaty of Utrecht we had then made the proposed Treaty of Commerce', Burke wrote around 1787, 'I think it would most clearly have been ruinous to us. We were not then in that *adult* State with regard to our Trade'.[206] Britain's economy continued to grow, but it was clear that behind this growth, including the establishment of commerce in the Mediterranean, was the advancement of her military capacity.[207] Although Britain was nearly matched with, or even inferior to Louis XIV's France in her military power,[208] Britain's struggles against this great monarch successfully preserved European liberty despite her immature empire, including Scotland, which was recently united with, yet still hostile against England, and Ireland as 'the heaviest of the burthens' due to England's ill management.[209] When Burke, in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, reminded his readers of the history of these struggles for his crusade against revolutionary France,[210] he was only one of many who supported the Whiggish tradition of British diplomacy—the 'Old System', the term established by the Duke of Newcastle—in the late eighteenth century.[211]

By the time of the late eighteenth century, the British military, especially her naval power, came to exceed her most formidable neighbouring country, France, and this superiority evidently helped to expand the Empire.[212] Wars were frequently caused by the insatiable desire for wealth and the ambition for hegemony. Among them, the War of

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[205] 'Speech on French Commercial Treaty (21 February 1787)', in *WS*, IV, 237.

[206] Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVII. 50, quoted in *WS*, IV, 237.

[207] *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1797), in *WS*, IX, 323–4.

[208] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), in *WS*, IX, 231–2; 'Second Speech on Conciliation (16 November 1775)', in *WS*, III, 187.

[209] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 230.

[210] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 195–6, 229–38; *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 336.

[211] H.M. Scott, '"The True Principles of the Revolution": The Duke of Newcastle and the Idea of the Old System', in *Knights Errant and True Englishmen: British Foreign Policy, 1660–1800,* ed. Jeremy Black (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1989). pp. 55–91.

[212] *Annual Register … for the Year 1759*, p. 5. See also *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), in *WS*, IX, 281.

Jenkins' Ear was 'a war of plunder' led by British public opinion.[213] Burke, on the other hand, readily agreed with the success of the Seven Years War, which advanced Britain 'to an high pitch of prosperity and glory' and in which commerce was 'for the first time united with, and made to flourish by war'.[214]

Public credit was another cause of the country's prosperity rather than its suspected decline after 1688–9. Despite the fact that it had 'so often been predicted as the cause of our certain ruin', in his opinion, pubic credit had actually been 'the constant companion, and often the means' of promoting British prosperity.[215] This view of public credit is important in considering his views on the modern history of England as a whole. Even before entering parliament, Burke did not plunge into pessimistic views of Britain's economy, and as a politician he had more than a few chances to renew his knowledge and confirm his belief in the growing economy of Britain and Ireland. Before 1760, under the limited monarchy of the early Hanoverians, British society had enjoyed unprecedented growth, but the constitution suddenly faced a new political crisis with the accession of George III in that year. The king's friends attempted to subvert the constitution not only by destroying its equilibrium, but also by diffusing their perverted views of the British society.

From the 1760s onwards, Burke, hence, clearly feared the fundamental deterioration of British politics and actually saw the decline of her empire. 'The reason, I conceive, why the military power has never been admitted into the polity of this Country is', Burke was reported to have stated in the House of Commons in March 1769, 'because we have constantly entertained a jealousy of all bodies of men, who have a separate interest, and separate feelings of their own, distinct from the mass, and

[213] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 226.

[214] Burke's memorial to Pitt in the Guildhall, London, quoted in Marie Peters, *Pitt and Popularity: The Patriot Minister and London Opinion during the Seven Years' War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. vi; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 71, 391. Cf. Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVII. 56, which was written shortly after the repeal of Stamp Act: 'The War made an appearance of Wealth in the Colonies fallacious to them & to us. The peace immediately swept it off.'

[215] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 230. See also *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 287. According to him, even sheer chance helped to shape prosperity and liberty in Britain as well as Europe at large.

body of the people'.[216] This balance of power in domestic politics was, however, now being undermined by the invasion of the military authority. In the same year, he also told his parliamentary colleagues that 'this House has had contests with the Crown' and the House of Lords. The Middlesex Election affair was the first case in which 'this House has had a contest with the people', and this 'would be the most destructive civil war ever carried on'.[217] In fact, the House of Commons 'is the Theatre, & Stage, on which all the several factions have fought their battles', and 'they have exercised their detestable vengeance upon each other. victory, triumphs, defeats, & factions have alternately prevailed'.[218] The House of Commons 'has been the field of blood', as the Civil Wars during the 1640s mostly clearly showed. Nevertheless, the party divisions which had emerged in the late seventeenth century, in his view, had not necessarily damaged the constitutional politics. 'Great rage and party animosity had subsisted between Whigs and Tories', he was reported to have stated in 1793. Yet, neither of them 'were inimical to the Constitution'.[219]

Burke, however, barely shared dismal prospects about the socio-economic state of Britain with Hume and other contemporaries.[220] He was rather diametrically the opposite, at least in his judgement on the British economy. In 1769, as a response to William Knox's *Present State of the*

[216] Cavendish Diary, Eg. MS. 219, fol. 15. For discussion of this passage, see Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 265.

[217] Cavendish Diary, Eg. MS. 219, fol. 115.

[218] Cavendish Diary, Eg. MS. 219, fol. 402.

[219] *Morning Herald*, 23 March 1793 cited in Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 23 (note).

[220] During the 1760s and the 1770s in particular, Hume expressed a negative view of Britain's politics and economy. For this, see 'Hume to Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto (16 October 1769)', in *Letters of David Hume*, II, 208 ('Progress of Madness and Folly and Wickedness in England'); 'Hume to William Strahan (25 October 1769)', in *The Letters of David Hume*, II, 210; 'Hume to the Rev. Thomas Percy (16 January 1773)', in *The New Letters of David Hume*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 199; John Home, *A Sketch of the Character of Mr. Hume and Diary of a Journey from Morpeth to Bath 23 April–1 May 1776*, ed. David Fate Norton (Edinburgh: The Tragara Press, 1976), p. 16 (24 April 1776: 'the two most civilized nations, the English and the French, should be on the decline'). See also Hume, *History of England*, IV, 373. For discussion of these sources, see Ryu Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 226; Harris, *Hume*, pp. 437–8.

Nation, he published the *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, in which he stressed the recent growth of the trade, manufactures and government revenue of Britain. According to Burke, Britain's stable public credit showed its national strength and financial skills, in both of which the nation was superior to France.[221] In the *Observations*, he intended to defend Rockinghamite policies, while refuting Knox's gloomy diagnosis of the British economy and finances. In 1774, he also repudiated the view that England's population was in decline. This was impossible under the increased production of provisions and the excellent constitution.[222] Later, Burke also asserted that the living standards of the poor had improved over the last several decades, which basically meant an improvement of the general standard of the country's economy.[223]

A work reminiscent of the *Observations* was the *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, whose chief purpose was the justification of Britain's continuation of the war against revolutionary France. For this purpose, Burke needed to oppose the prevailing notions within the country that an even larger public debt would lead to the decline of Britain's economy. Similar ominous prophecies on Britain's economy and society had existed throughout the eighteenth century, and Burke, in the course of his career, at times objected to them. One of his earlier targets was William Knox, yet he could think of many others as well, who offered wrong diagnoses of British society and distorted interpretations of her recent history.[224] What he dreaded was the possible consequences of such an 'evil presage', that is, the subversion of the Revolution Settlement rather than the presage itself.

In the latter part of the *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, Burke maintained that the British economy, in several indexes and items, had expanded since the beginning of the war against revolutionary France.[225] According to him, all wars, in which Britain was engaged during the eighteenth century, except the American revolutionary war, showed the

[221] *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* (1769), in *WS*, II, 122–4, 140–2, 148–9. His analysis was indebted to William Dowdeswell (see editor's preface, in *WS*, II, 105–6).

[222] 'Speech on Poor Removals Law (2 March 1774)', in *WS*, II, 403.

[223] 'Thoughts and Details on Scarcity' (1795), in *WS*, IX, 122.

[224] *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 371.

[225] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 362–79.

same trend: her exports declined for some time after the opening of the war, but then recovered and expanded after peace was restored.[226]

Burke was very conscious that commerce had taken a form of international competition among the nations in modern Europe, and his idea of the interrelationship between war and commercial development, or more generally prosperity, was crucial to his understanding of the modern age. This belief characteristically included a psychological analysis of the subject. At an earlier point, Burke insisted that the present war against revolutionary France did not bring 'penury, cold, hunger, nakedness' to society, by which the population of the lower classes sometimes significantly declined. He rather insisted that excessive peace, rather than war, might cause depopulation and the decline of society in general:

> The excesses of delicacy, repose, and satiety, are as unfavourable as the extremes of hardship, toil, and want, to the increase and multiplication of our kind. Indeed, the abuse of the bounties of Nature, much more surely than any partial privation of them, tends to intercept that precious boon of a second and dearer life in our progeny, which was bestowed in the first great command to man from the All-gracious Giver of all, whose name be blessed, whether he gives or takes away. His hand, in every page of his book, has written the lesson of moderation. Our physical well-being, our moral worth, our social happiness, our political tranquillity, all depend on that controul of all our appetites and passions, which the ancients designed by the cardinal virtue of Temperance.[227]

These opinions are linked with his justification for further public loans, which might have influence 'on account of the temper which it indicated in our own people' rather than 'on the enemy [revolutionary France]'. A public loan, according to Burke, 'brings to light what, under the most discouraging appearances, I always reckoned on; that with it's ancient physical force, not only unimpaired, but augmented, it's ancient spirit is still alive in the British nation'.[228] The 'ancient spirit' is a term suggesting the collective national spirit which had continued to exist since earlier times (not necessarily the distant past), and which was vital to the country's development and stability.

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[226] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 382–3.

[227] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 359.

[228] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 345–6.

As will be shown in some detail in the next chapter, a similar opinion exists in the *Account of the European Settlements* and the *Reflections*. In Burke's views on English and European history, modern wars did not necessarily impede the growth of the economy or of prosperity in general; indeed, they sometimes helped facilitate it by invigorating the 'spirit' of the nation. The emphasis of the passage above was placed on 'moderation', suggesting that too profound a peace might render the people mentally lethargic yet what he wanted to say was essentially the same as in other works. Almost throughout his career, he was concerned with the vigour of the collective mind, according to whose state a nation might rise, decline or stagnate. This analysis of psychology is underpinned by his ideas on ancient manners, religions and constitutions, all of which constitute the foundations of society. The 'spirit' of nations does not plunge into a crisis unless these, either formal or informal, socio-political *institutions* are thoroughly damaged. A number of wars took place in modern times, yet they did not necessarily undermine or destroy this 'spirit', but could rather at times serve to activate it.

Although it might not be clear whether his psychological analysis is convincing enough to modern readers, it surely played a significant role in his historical and political thought. At almost the end of his life, he was offered statistical figures by Laurence and King which clearly showed the increase in revenue and import of Britain during wartime between 1793 and 1796.[229] For Burke, this appeared to be proof of his belief in the thriving state of British economy in the preceding years.

Like his views on constitutional continuity, his positive evaluation of the British economy emerged in a series of responses to major intellectual debates at this time, that is, to the arguments of William Knox, John Brown and others, who expressed serious concern about Britain's economic predicament. Nevertheless, such an evaluation would not have been solely dependent on the political and intellectual contexts that Burke encountered, as it appeared repeatedly on various different occasions. His views on British socio-economic history were substantially distinct from and more positive than those of his political opponents.

Although he was one of the eighteenth-century intellectuals who were well aware of the 'jealousy of trade' among European nations and who

[229] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, II, 564; *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 362–8, 372–3, 376–9.

were particularly interested in the outcomes of the interaction between war and commerce, Burke did not necessarily interpret this interaction in as negative a fashion as Hume, Tucker, Smith and others did. In the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith contended that Britain's economic growth had been retarded, though it still continued, during her engagement in civil and international wars. Wars destroyed much capital, and diverted a great amount of capital to the maintenance of unproductive labour.[230] Burke clearly acknowledged that wars had been in general destructive, and even he would, in theory, have understood Smith's ideas on the efficient use of capital if presented to him. Yet, Burke's attention turned in a different direction and his conclusion was rather that the interaction between war and commerce had not, despite some material losses, been harmful in several cases, but helped to have even sometimes stimulated the prosperity of England as well as of other European countries during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

If Burke's views on the British economy and finance were less sceptical than Hume's and Smith's, his views on recent constitutional history were full of a sense of impending crisis. The constitution had faced several crises since 1688–9 brought about by the Triennial Act in 1694,[231] the arguments for the creation of a militia, the growing influence of the crown since 1760 and the recent proposals for radical political reforms. His grief following the outcome of the General Election of 1784, when the Foxite Whigs suffered a heavy defeat, may succinctly summarise his opinions on recent English history:

> The form of the constitution remains indeed in all its exteriour parts as sound as ever; but the Spirit of that constitution which has governed since the revolution is formally rejected and the Letter authoritatively preferred; This has left us (in the most favourable point of view for our affairs) just

[230] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner and W.B. Todd (2 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), I, 344–6.

[231] *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, in *WS*, II, 293; 'Speech on Duration of Parliament (8 May 1780)', in *WS*, III, 597. For Burke, triennial parliaments increased the expense of elections and caused public frenzy and the Septennial Act in 1716 restored stability to the nation. For discussion of Burke's ideas, see O'Gorman, *Edmund Burke*, p. 62. See also 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.

> where we were at the End of the reign of Charles the second; and the resemblance of that period in the history of our Liberties without any of the collateral aids does not auspicate any thing towards the resurrection of principles similar to ours. To preserve that Spirit of the constitution has been the Object of our party ever since I became of it and for some time before if I understood them and myself rightly. … The Nation is rich; and Trade flourishes as it did for its measure in the End of Charles the Seconds reign; and as then the people say little of any thing else.[232]

While the historical analogy helped him and the readers of his letter to understand the political situation in 1784, this reflected his views of English history after the Revolution of 1688–9, in which the growing economy and flourishing society coexisted with several political crises which might yet lead the country to ruin. He believed that the result of the General Election of 1784 meant that all the efforts of his party over more than two decades had achieved nothing, but the essential 'form' of the constitution remained undamaged and society was still thriving. It was, actually, not until the French Revolution that he felt the greatest fear for the total subversion of both Britain's constitution and society.

5 Burke and English History

For Burke, the constitution was at the centre of his thought on British politics, as it was in his thinking on English (or British) history. While he also surveyed the nation's society and economy in depth, the analysis of them was often not separate from that of the constitution. He strongly believed that the socio-economic state of a nation was greatly affected by the constitution, and that therefore that society and government were always closely linked. He also knew that this was the case throughout history. Burke often searched history for the true form of the English constitution, and in doing so he had to think about the defining events and social changes in history which had largely affected the constitution, and about the origins and the continuity of the constitution. Most of these analyses cannot be regarded as wholly pure historical research in the sense that they intended to contribute to the politics of his age, or at least to understanding it. Burke sometimes attempted to put forward his genuine interpretation of English history rather than trying to

[232] 'Burke to Henry Homer (November 1786)', in *Corr.*, V, 294–6.

touch upon history in a rhetorical manner. His views on the Revolution of 1688–9 developed in the *Reflections* and the *Appeal* were the examples of such an interpretation. Even in these cases, it is obvious that he had political purposes and arguments to advance behind his interpretations of English history. In the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*, although he was not yet involved in real politics when producing these works, it seems to be the case that he intended to influence the society and politics of the age by presenting impartial, philosophical and correct views on English history.

It is, therefore, important to understand what Burke's intention was in order to read his works on English history properly. While it is true, as already seen, that his early historical writings produced a quite distinct narrative of English history from that in his later works, the differences and the contrast between them could be explained partly by the fact that they were written for different purposes and contexts. On the one hand, it is evident that Burke's early works, particularly the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*, did not stress the historical continuity of the constitution but rather at times rejected a naïve, visionary, ancient constitutionalism. Yet this was partly the outcome of the purposes of these works, which intended to show the gradual evolution of the English constitution towards the early thirteenth century that was greatly affected by the foreign conquests, cultural interactions and social changes taking place in the country. The naïve form of ancient constitutionalism, therefore, had to be refuted not only as it was a wrong interpretation of history, but also as it could possibly be detrimental to the English politics of the age. On the other hand, some of Burke's later works emphasised the historical continuity of the constitution without failing to acknowledge the substantial changes and progress of the constitution and society over time. The emphasis on continuity was particularly conspicuous in the minutes of the Commons debate that took place on 16 June 1784, in which Burke bitterly attacked the radical demands for parliamentary reform, and in the *Reflections*, where he stressed the fundamental differences between the English Revolution of 1688–9 and the French Revolution of 1789. In both cases, the total subversion of the constitution and the Revolution Settlement had to be avoided by rejecting the radical doctrines of politics. It was characteristic of the *Reflections*, moreover, that Burke explicitly drew the attention of his readers to the significance of considering their own past for conducting politics.

Nevertheless, these differences did not mean that the historical thought in his early works was inconsistent with that in his later works. The *Abridgment* attacked the Fortescueian model of ancient constitutionalism, which stressed the literal immutability of the English constitution from time immemorial, not the Seldenian concept of the constitution, in which its essential historical continuity was preserved even though various changes and mutations had occurred. Although R.B. Smith suggests that Burke, in the *Reflections*, implied the continuity of the constitution from the Anglo-Saxon period to the Magna Carta, this is not clear in the text nor is it significant for the purpose of his arguments.[233] According to Pocock, in the *Fragment*, it was assumed that the process of making law could be tracked back to history, such an idea had faded in the 16 June 1784 minutes, in which the immemorial nature of law had been underlined.[234] This, too, might not be entirely correct in its interpretation, because the idea that law is altered and shaped by its interaction with various factors in society was advanced in both Burke's early historical writings and his later political works.[235] The emphasis on the historical continuity of the constitution in the 16 June 1784 minutes evidently did not exclude the idea of the mutability of the law.

It is also important to note that Burke's political writings and speeches barely discussed the period before 1215, whereas the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment* did not examine the period after 1215 in detail. In other words, his early historical writings chiefly focused on the ancient and early medieval eras, whereas his political works more frequently addressed modern periods. This difference inevitably makes it difficult to confirm the extent to which Burke was consistent in his views on English history throughout his career. It is, of course, not possible to reveal in detail what the early Burke thought of particular historical events during the modern period, like the Restoration of 1660, which he did not mention in his early writings. Furthermore, even questions more relevant to his overall views on English history are not easy to answer. Did the early Burke already hold to the Seldenian concept

[233] Smith, *The Gothic Bequest*, p. 115.

[234] Pocock 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution', in idem, *Politics, Language and Time*, pp. 224–7.

[235] See, for example, 'Report on the Lords Journals (30 April 1794)' in *WS*, VII, 142, 163, 168.

of the constitution, or what did he think of the historical continuity of the constitution in the period after 1215? If the *Abridgement* had been completed up to Queen Anne's reign as initially planned, a more detailed comparison of the early with the later Burke would have been possible. The fact that Burke, in the *Abridgment* and in his other early works, did not explore in detail English history after the period of Magna Carta necessarily limits our analysis.

Nevertheless, it is not difficult to find consistency in Burke's thought between his early and later writings despite the apparent difference in their emphasis on aspects of the English constitution. As has been suggested, one of the striking features of the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment* lies in their emphasis on the formation of the English nation through its interaction with European countries during the ancient and medieval eras and also in its concept of conquest as a form of international exchange driving a country towards civilisation. Clearly, Burke did not discard this view on the formation of the English nation in his later works. In the *Reflections*, soon after he maintained that not only modern learning but also commercial arts owed greatly to 'the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion', that is, 'these old principles',[236] he wrote that it is 'not clear, whether in England we learned those grand and decorous principles, and manners, of which considerable traces yet remain, from you, or whether you took them from us'. Nonetheless, it was doubtless that 'France has always more or less influenced manners in England'.[237] In 1794, he also wrote that while English law had made a rigid application of technical rules in ancient times, this 'antique' rigour was relaxed and laws came to be accommodated to a variety of human concerns related to commerce, empire and other matters that arose in the modern eras.[238] Late in his life, Burke still clearly held to the historical vision that the English nation, including its laws and societies, had been shaped and advanced through a number of interactions within the international community.

Moreover, the idea of social institutions as a historical product—one of Burke's central ideas on politics and society—emerges very clearly in

[236] *Reflections*, pp. 241–2.

[237] *Reflections*, p. 243.

[238] 'Report on the Lords Journals', in *WS*, VII, 162–3. See also Sato, 'Conquests, International Exchanges, and Civilization', pp. 56–7.

the *Abridgment* and in 'Considerations on a Militia', as well as in his later works. If the *Account* is taken as one of Burke's works, it seems to suggest that Burke, almost throughout his career, considered national spirit as a fundamental element of society which could seriously affect the rise and fall of a nation. The 'spirit' of the English nation had been maintained by its distinctive ancient constitution, as the spirit of Europe at large was shaped by ancient manners such as the Christian religion and the chivalric code of behaviour. Burke occasionally seems to have gone further, stating that even frequent wars in modern times had contributed to arousing the otherwise sluggish mind and spirit of the people.

While this chapter has suggested that Burke's sense of, as well as his vocabulary and rhetoric related to, the continuity of English history possibly intensified in his later life after he had entered politics, it is also clear that he, throughout his career, held to the idea of the modernity of the English constitution, that is, the notion that the free constitution of the country had been realised by and secured after the Revolution of 1688–9. To Burke and his contemporaries, the coexistence of 'ancient' and 'modern' elements in the constitution was natural. The antiquity of the constitution could be traced back to the time of the Magna Carta or even before, yet the modern liberal constitution was shaped into being only after 1688–9. This constitution had evolved and was still evolving over time by adjusting to a number of reformations, and the English society had also improved during modern history with its expanding commerce. It was, however, also true that the constitution had been exposed to several crises since 1688–9, of which Burke was very conscious and apprehensive of the consequences, even though these crises had not yet checked the progress of English society.

CHAPTER 3

European History: Vigour, Enthusiasm and Principles

One of the most famous historical concepts developed by Burke is his idea of chivalry. It was once frequently considered as reflecting his preference for the medieval past and his opposition to the progressive condition of modern Europe. The suspicion about his 'anti-Enlightenment' or 'counter-Enlightenment' was not totally dispelled until historians properly embarked on a study of the eighteenth-century idea of chivalry. There is now a general consensus among commentators that Burke's notion of chivalry needs to be considered as linked to this idea, and it is also well known that what he advanced in the *Reflections* was not a defence of feudal society, but an interpretation of European history in which chivalry, coupled with the Christian religion, greatly influenced subsequent centuries and contributed to producing modern enlightened societies in Europe.

It is less known, however, that Burke was well aware of not only the feudal barbarism but also the confusion and disorder that existed in European societies in the sixteenth century and even thereafter, despite the fact that civilised manners and constitutions were gradually developed during the modern period. As will be seen below, the early Burke already held a great knowledge of European history from ancient to

This chapter is derived in part from Sora Sato, 'Vigour, Enthusiasm and Principles: Edmund Burke's Views of European History', *Modern Intellectual History*, 13 (2016), 299–325.

S. Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64441-7_3

modern times, in which he had a great interest. Like his contemporaries, he learned about the ancient world through school education and his own readings. He also absorbed the historical awareness of his age and much knowledge from the works of the age, and he applied what he learned to his own historical writings and made rather frequent use of the knowledge to support his political arguments.

His account of European history was, however, still distinct from that of his contemporaries. He stressed the role of manners, institutions and principles in shaping the foundations of European civilisation rather than in bringing the decline of feudalism, the rise of absolute monarchies and the formation of the balance of power among nations. This was the historical thought which emphasised the role of the common foundations of civilisation without losing sight of the diversity of manners and constitutions among the nations. Burke's idea of chivalry was part of his close attention to the foundations of civilisation, and this attention helped distinguish his perspective from that of his contemporaries. Although his emphasis on the foundations of civilisation apparently resulted from his reaction to the French Revolution, it is also clear that this thinking did not solely depend upon the specific contexts of the 1790s, as shown below.

1 Barbarism and Grandeur in Ancient Times

Burke's knowledge of the history of ancient Europe owed much to his school and college education. At Trinity College, Dublin, Burke probably read the Roman historians such as Livy, Tacitus, Sallust and Justin, as well as Caesar, Cicero and so forth. The great Greek historians, such as Herodotus and Thucydides, were not read there 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

[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. 45–6, 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 at Trinity College, Dublin, see also Canavan, *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke*, pp. 197–211.

are taught [in Trinity College].'[2] Around the same period, he spoke highly of Sallust in a letter to Richard Shackleton.[3] By the late 1750s, however, 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 of this period, Burke censured 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, this was not the case with constitutionally more sophisticated nations such as ancient Rome and eighteenth-century Britain. In such nations, the character of the people played a more important role in their fate. Like 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 appears that Burke regarded ancient Rome as superior to ancient Greece or any other nation at this time. In fact, ancient Europe was, in his view, barbarous and uncertain, except for the society and the citizens of Rome. While this was probably an opinion held throughout his life, he detailed aspects of the ancient world in his writings of the same period. In the *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] The successors of Alexander the Great (356–323 BC),[6] the rulers of ancient Egypt, and the ancient Jews[7] all carried out terrible massacres. In the *Vindication*, even ancient Greece and Rome were clearly accused of massacres and barbarism. The *Vindication* stated that Athens was a celebrated republic,

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

[3] See 'Burke to Richard Shackleton (21 March 1746/47)', in *Corr.*, I, 89.

[4] Edmund Burke, 'National Character and Parliament', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', p. 641; Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', pp. 625–6.

[5] *Vindication of Natural Society*, in *WS*, I, 142.

[6] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 145.

[7] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 149.

but its form of government soon degenerated into tyranny.[8] Although this republic achieved prosperity, its excessive wealth corrupted the people.[9] A similar accusation was levelled at Rome. Julius Caesar (100–144 BC) was, like many other major figures in history, guilty of massacres. The Roman Empire was, from its inception, equally full of wars, massacres and strife.[10] Like Greece, it was also rife with political confusion and factional conflict.[11] These pseudo Bolingbrokean views on history in the *Vindication* could not, of course, fully reflect Burke's genuine opinions on it. In particular, his views on ancient Rome were clearly different in other works.

The *Abridgment of English History* begins with an overview of the state of Europe before the Romans were dominant. In northern Europe, there had been repeated conquests between barbarous nations across generations, but these conquests did not bring progress to northern Europe until the Romans arrived.[12] The situation of southern Europe, including Spain, Greece and Italy, was better. There, geography, climate and 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 also promoted effeminate manners. The 'original inhabitants of Italy and Greece were of the same race with the people of northern Europe', but these countries 'came greatly to excel the northern nations in every respect, and particularly in the art and discipline of war'.[13]

Although the Gauls frequently attacked Rome, Roman discipline was very much superior to their ferocity. By the time Caesar defeated the Gauls, Rome grew up to a nation in which there were many wealthy and talented citizens.[14] The Romans were also much superior to the Britons and the Germans. Like Hume and Smith, Burke did not accept Montesquieu's claim that the origins of modern European liberty was

[8] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 161.

[9] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 163.

[10] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 147–8.

[11] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 165.

[12] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 338–9.

[13] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 339. See also, ibid., in *WS*, I, 453.

[14] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 341.

rooted in the Germanic tribes.[15] For Burke, the Germans were utterly barbarous and militaristic, subsisting by pasturage and hunting. They did not govern by laws, and only customs shaped the nature of the governors and the people. Their ideas on government were imperfect.[16] In their nations, men could not carry arms unless their chiefs allowed them to do so. This relationship of subordination gave birth to militaristic government in ancient Europe. The government largely depended upon two principles, that is, 'ambition' and 'admiration'. The former is a desire to take the lead among others, whereas the latter is 'a sort of secondary ambition', a desire to follow leaders. In Burke's view, 'these two principles, strong both of them in our nature, create a voluntary inequality and dependence'.[17]

The Roman government was also militaristic but much more advanced and sophisticated, although the people had become 'degenerate' after the republic was transformed into empire. The emperors were required to maintain their authority by showing soldiers their military capacities, and conquests of other tribes were often planned to meet this purpose. In particular, an invasion of Britain was an expedition to a remote country and thus at a low risk for damaging the nucleus of the empire.[18] It took, however, more than half a century until Rome totally defeated the Britons. One of the causes of this was the change of the general character of Roman politics. When Rome was republic, 'one uniform spirit animated one body through whole ages', that is to say, 'war was so prosecuted as if the republick could not subsist, unless that particular enemy were totally destroyed'.[19] Rome was, however, now an empire whose dominion was very extensive, and the rulers feared more from disaffection with government rather than from animosity towards it. Accordingly, their foreign policy became more moderate and tended to seek a point of compromise. 'Their politicks were more like those of the present powers of Europe, where kingdoms seek rather to spread their influence, than to extend their dominion; to awe and weaken,

[15] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, pp. 165–8.

[16] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 429–32.

[17] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 429.

[18] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 360.

[19] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 368.

rather than to destroy.'[20] While the taxes in the empire were heavy and often imposed injudiciously, the tax system was intended to impoverish the provinces. 'The Roman government, to the very last, carried something of the spirit of conquest in it'. This over-taxation, however, helped to lead the empire itself into decline.

Three revolutions of the internal policy, which took place from the early third century towards the fourth century, extended citizenship to all freemen in the empire, divided the empire into two large territories, and established the Christian religion there.[21] The empire, however, decayed rapidly by exposing itself to the inroads of the barbarians. One of the problems was its overgrown dominion. Burke wondered: if this dominion had been divided into states, each of which was separate and independent, might these states have subsisted by opposing the invasions more effectively, even if the empire had perished.[22] As 'the legislators of mankind',[23] whose civil institutions disseminated across Europe except for the Saxons in England, the Romans were evidently more civilised than the other ancient Europeans. In the *Abridgment*, nevertheless, Burke advanced quite a balanced view of the Romans by turning his eyes to their degeneration and defections frequently.

In his later political writings and speeches, in rhetoric made for developing political arguments, Rome was often more idealised,[24] but its negative aspects were also at times employed as a historical lesson.[25] The fact that the eighteenth-century British elite were very familiar with Roman history through their education is crucial in considering Burke's references to ancient Rome in his political works. Nevertheless, he also

[20] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 369.

[21] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 373, 376, 378, 380.

[22] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 377–8.

[23] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 448.

[24] *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, in *WS*, II, 316 (importance of political connections); 'Speech on Divorce Bill (29 April 1771)', in *WS*, II, 357 (indissolubility of marriage); 'Speech on Clerical Subscription', in *WS*, II, 363 (piety and religious toleration).

[25] 'Speech in Reply (28, 30 May, 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 16 June 1794)', in *WS*, VII, 662–3 (bribes); 'Speech on Duration of Parliaments', in *WS*, III, 596 (the destructive effects of frequent elections). In the latter, Burke insisted that 'Rome was destroyd by the frequency and charge of Elections'. The context was his opposition to the introduction of shorter parliaments in Britain.

genuinely regarded ancient Rome as a model of civilisation,[26] although he presumably saw it as less civilised than late eighteenth-century Britain or European nations.[27]

The fall of Rome was a great discussion point for eighteenth-century intellectuals, to which Burke sometimes drew great attention, as it was not only an historical question but also a warning of the potential collapse of contemporary Britain. In an early manuscript discussing the importance of party divisions, Burke maintained that political factions had prospered during the 'Decay' of Rome, such as during 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 adverse effects of factionalism from Sallust via Machiavelli to the radical Whigs of the early eighteenth century.[28] Burke also knew of the common allegation that the influx of wealth from the provinces had corrupted the virtue of the Romans.[29]

As a whole, he discussed the decline of the Roman Empire more frequently than the fall of its earlier republic. In his *Abridgment*, as already noted, Burke maintained that heavy taxes[30] and the overextension of its dominions helped to cause the decay and ruin of this great empire.[31] In the debate on Indian affairs, he claimed that the fall of the Roman Empire had begun with the misgovernment of the provinces,

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[26] 'Speech on Clerical Subscription', in *WS*, II, 363.

[27] See below and also 'Burke to James Boswell (1 March 1779)', in *Corr.*, IV, 45.

[28] Burke, 'On Parties', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', pp. 645–6. 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 examples of factions under the 'unmixed' constitution. Party should be distinguished from faction. In Greece and Italy, the contentions between the nobility and the plebeians contributed to preserving the vigour of their constitution until one party utterly destroyed the other. These historical examples contributed to the formation of his idea of party, which could be traced back to around 1757. See Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', pp. 629–35.

[29] Burke applied this to the case of India. 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 277. See also 'Speech on Sixth Article: Presents (21 April, 7 May 1789)', in *WS*, VII, 63; Philip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 46.

[30] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 375–6.

[31] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 377–8.

and he did so in order to warn his listeners that the same might happen to the British Empire.[32] 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.[33] These points were, of course, quite familiar to eighteenth-century European observers. 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.[34]

2 Barbarism and Confusion but Gleams of Hope: From the Post-Roman Era to the Fourteenth Century

Disorder spread over Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire. In particular, Britain suffered devastating damage when 'desolated of its inhabitants, abandoned by its masters, stripped of its artizans, and deprived of all its spirit'.[35] According to Burke, 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 nor an advanced idea 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 spread over the Roman Empire and afterwards waged continual wars upon one another. Their wars, like those of other savage tribes, were devoid of military discipline and were very brutal. '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'.[36] It was

[32] 'Speech on Motion for Papers on Hastings (20 February 1786)', in *WS*, VI, 63. See also WWM Bk P 9/76. His understanding of Rome clearly provided him with a language to censure corruption in the imperial politics of his age. For this, see especially, P.J. Marshall, 'Introduction', in *WS*, VI, 29–31, 34.

[33] *Reflections*, pp. 410–1.

[34] For example, see Peter Burke, 'Tradition and Experience: The Idea of Decline from Bruni to Gibbon', *Daedalus*, 105 (1976), 137–52 (at 143, 146); O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 48.

[35] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 384.

[36] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 453–4. See also *Vindication of Natural Society*, in *WS*, I, 149.

not only the northern tribes who attempted invasions. Some European nations such as Spain and Italy were harassed by different barbarians who came from the south, although these invasions never entirely succeeded in France (Burke meant the Muslim invasions of the eighth century). While Europe generally remained in confusion, the rise of the papal and imperial powers provided European politics with a framework which would continue to stand effectively in subsequent ages.[37] Burke's view of Charlemagne (742–814) was quite favourable. 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.[38]

At about the same period, feudalism reached every corner of continental Europe. All the kingdoms developed similar forms of government, from which 'arose a great similitude in the manners of their inhabitants'.[39] The conduct of the courts and the manners of the people were certainly influenced by this feudal discipline. Nearly forty years later, Burke still maintained that the similarities of European nations had contributed to securing the peace of the region, yet the younger Burke had emphasised the backwardness of the politics of the age. Unlike modern Europe in this period, sovereigns 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.[40] Another 100 years were needed before military discipline and better systems of government developed.

Nevertheless, there were some gleams of hope in the darkness. The first crusade, which Burke called 'one of the most extraordinary events, which are contained in the history of mankind', was one of them.[41] 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

[37] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 454–5.

[38] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 456.

[39] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 456.

[40] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 456. Fragile monarchies eroded by oppressive aristocratic powers were a characteristic of the medieval feudal societies widely recognised by eighteenth-century historians.

[41] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 481.

to recruit many participants when the Pope approved of them. 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.[42] Significantly, chivalry was shaped in the progress of the first crusade:

> 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.[43]

At this period, European society was in a very low state, and it was to continue to be so over the next several centuries. Yet this did not mean that there was not any positive element in it. Like other descriptions of chivalry in the eighteenth century, it was here linked to the vindication of the fair sex and social justice. Unlike his view of it in 1790, however, in the *Abridgment* Burke did not address the contributions of the chivalric codes to modern society.[44]

Among his contemporaries, Hume saw the eleventh and twelfth centuries as the period marking the revival of learning and the improvement of political systems. When Justinian's Pandects were discovered, the ecclesiastics played a great role in adopting and spreading them throughout Europe.[45] Moreover, although after the collapse of Rome, the European system of government tended to be tyrannical and possession of property was generally unstable, the situation was improved around this period by the establishment of communities and corporations granted privileges by sovereigns.[46] Before and around the fourteenth century, however, European society had still been dominated by the

[42] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 534, 548.

[43] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 495.

[44] See ibid., in *WS*, I, 517; 'Speeches on Bill to Secure Protestantism (26 June 1780)', in *WS*, III, 609–10; *Parl. Hist.*, XXI, 720.

[45] Hume, *History of England*, II, 519–20.

[46] Ibid., II, 522–4. See also Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, book iii, chap. iii.

aristocratic spirit of the feudal constitutions.[47] According to Robertson's *History of Scotland*, splendour and luxury were, at that time, unknown to the courts, a martial spirit prevailed, and commerce was not developed.[48] As Adam Anderson stressed, although navigation improved and commerce advanced with the invention of the compass in the fourteenth century, darkness and ignorance still prevailed in most parts of Europe.[49]

During the 1790s, when he was obsessed with the idea that revolutionary France threatened to ruin the foundations of modern Europe, Burke drew attention to the positive legacies of these barbarous periods. That is, in his view, European states had grown up from common historical origins such as ancient German and Gothic customs, feudal institutions, Roman jurisprudence and the spirit of monarchy,[50] and these common origins of societies established considerable homogeneity over the area.

Christianity was also a great cause of the unity of the Europeans. All denominations of the religion agreed in their fundamentals, while there were a few differences in their doctrines and the manners of ceremonies.[51] In their effect, these institutions, manners and religions were helpful in securing peace in the region.[52] Moreover, as Burke famously declared, in his *Reflections*, the principle of chivalry had provided

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[47] Burke may, however, have been familiar with European history of this period at 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 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.

[48] William Robertson, *The History of Scotland, During the Reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI. Till His Accession to the Crown of England* (2 vols., London, 1759), I, 12–8; *Annual Register … for the Year 1759*, pp. 489–94. Burke may have reviewed Robertson's *History of Scotland*.

[49] Adam Anderson, *An Historical and Chronological Deduction of the Origin of Commerce* (2 vols., London, 1764), I, 142–5; *Annual Register … for the Year 1764* (London, 1765), pp. 250–6. In his private library, Burke owned Anderson's *Historical and Chronological Deduction*. See LC MS; *LC*, p. 8; and its revised version by William Combe (6 vols., Dublin, 1790): *LC*, p. 1.

[50] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 248. The European nations also came to possess a similar system of education. See ibid., in *WS*, IX, 248–9.

[51] Ibid. See also 'Letter to William Smith (29 January 1795)', in *WS*, IX, 662.

[52] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 248.

modern Europe with its main characteristics.[53] It was to this principle that modern Europe owed its superiority over Asian states and even over excellent ancient countries (in maintaining this, Burke may well have had in mind the flourishing state of ancient Rome). What he paid tribute to was the 'principle' of chivalry, whose influence, he claimed, had continued to his own age, not the period when the principle was formed. Burke was not a medievalist. He wanted to claim that the development of chivalry had been an important step leading towards modern society. A few pages later, the principle of chivalry was rephrased as 'the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion', and we are told that the nobility and the clergy have also been the protectors of learning.[54] Learning was, however, not the only thing which owed its advancement to such traditional manners and to the people who embodied them. Commerce also grew for the same reasons, and 'may decay with their natural protecting principles'. He further maintained:

> Where trade and manufactures are wanting to a people, and the spirit of nobility and religion remains, sentiment supplies, and not always ill supplies their place; but if commerce and the arts should be lost in an experiment to try how well a state may stand without these old fundamental principles, what sort of a thing must be a nation of gross, stupid, ferocious, and at the same time, poor and sordid barbarians, destitute of religion, honour, or manly pride, possessing nothing at present, and hoping for nothing hereafter?[55]

In the same spirit, in one of his survived manuscripts, he wrote that '[i]n destroying the original principle of modern manners—arts & commerce may suffer also.'[56] Despite his generally low opinion of the ancient

[53] *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?'.

[54] *Reflections*, pp. 241–2.

[55] Ibid., p. 242. This was not the first time he put forward the idea of commerce whose growth owed much to the Christian religion. See *Account*, I, 192–3.

[56] Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVII. 75: 'Notes on the French Revolution'. For this manuscript, see Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 705. Cf. 'Sketch of a Negro Code (*post* 9 April 1780)', in *WS*, III, 565: 'whereas Religion, Order, Morality and Virtue are the

and medieval world, Burke at times maintained that the flourishing state of the modern period was indebted to some significant systems and styles of life that had been shaped by these earlier eras.

Once more, among eighteenth-century intellectuals, he was, of course, not alone in advancing the idea of chivalry and the Christian religion as driving forces behind European civilisation. Ferguson, Millar, Robertson, Kames, and even Hume appreciated the positive influence of chivalry on later ages. Many of them also acknowledged that Christianity had polished manners and promoted learning.[57] Burke, nevertheless, stressed more than any of them the indebtedness of modern society to ancient manners and spirit for its development.[58] What was unique was the link he established between ancient manners and commercial arts. Also, he presumably drew more attention than these Scots to the role of chivalric spirit in stabilising the otherwise bloodily hierarchical society in Europe.[59] The 'old feudal and chivalrous spirit of *Fealty*' contributed to building up a harmonious society by tempering the passions of both kings and subjects.[60] 'It was this opinion', Burke wrote, 'which

elemental principles, and the knowledge of Letters, Arts, and handicraft Trades, the chief means of such civilization and improvement'.

[57] Richard Hurd, *Moral and Political Dialogues; with Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (3 vols., London, 1765); Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 191–3; John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks,* ed. Aaron Garrett (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund, 2006), pp. 133–5, 137, 141–2; 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. 38–43; idem, 'View of the Progress of Society in Europe' in *The Works of William Robertson* (12 vols., Reprint of the 1794 edn. London, 1996), III, 80–6, 91; Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man* (4 vols., Edinburgh, 1778), II, 307–8; Hume, *The History of England*, I, 486–7. Burke owned Hurd's *Moral and Political Dialogues*: LC MS; *LC*, p. 12., Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*: LC MS and Hume's *History of England*: LC MS; *LC*, p. 15. For a favourable review of Ferguson's *Essay*, see *Annual Register … for the Year 1767* (London, 1768), pp. 307–16. For Montesquieu's views of chivalry, see Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 562.

[58] For this, see Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', idem, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, p. 199.

[59] For this, see Daniel I. O'Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), pp. 135–6, 146–7.

[60] *Reflections*, p. 241.

mitigated kings into companions, and raised private men to be fellows with kings.'[61] By restraining fierce sentiments and uncontrollable desires for power among the ranks, the refined passions inspired by chivalry had long prevented European society from plunging into tyranny and bloody anarchy. For him, the French Revolution meant the removal of this spirit.

Moreover, Burke's view of chivalry and Christianity was underpinned by his strong conviction that society could revive and develop again even after experiencing adverse conditions if it did not undermine the fundamental principles on which it was substantially based. Closely combined with his powerful rhetoric, such a way of thinking was one of the reasons why Burke's ideas on European history, including those on chivalry, became unique and more philosophical than those advanced by many of his fellow historians. Interestingly, the same philosophical underpinnings also exist in his descriptions of the subsequent ages of European history.

3 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 also in this period some important seeds of future developments. Burke's views on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were quite similar to those he expressed on the previous centuries. For example, in his review of John Jortin's *Life of Erasmus* of 1758,[62] Burke claimed 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.[63] In fact, there had been 'an extraordinary coincidence of events' around the time of Erasmus and 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 new continents,

[61] Ibid., p. 239.

[62] *Annual Register … for the Year 1758*, pp. 464–9. Burke reviewed volume one of John Jortin, *The Life of Erasmus* (2 vols., London, 1758–1760). In his private library, Burke owned Samuel Knight, *The Life of Erasmus* (1726): LC MS; *LC*, p. 13.

[63] See *Annual Register … for the Year 1758*, p. 463.

occurred one after another in a relatively short space of time. According to Edmund and William Burke, 'all of these conspired to change the face of Europe entirely'. The powerful monarchies in Europe also began to emerge around the same period.[64] The age of Columbus, in reality, marked a watershed in European history, from which the nations of the region began to move towards the prosperity of the modern age. Clearly, this was a view Burke shared with his contemporaries. 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, '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'.[65] 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 among European countries to proceed towards modernity, what the Burkes emphasised was the barbarity and confusion present in 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.[66] 'If the courts had made such poor advances in policy and in 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

[64] *Account*, I, 3.

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

[66] Among his surviving manuscripts, there is a brief note on Louis XI, Charles VIII, Louis XII and others. See Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVII. 13.

'only the dotage of the scholastick philosophy of words'. Mathematics was little valued or barely developed.[67]

If the progress of learning was one indication of modernity, commerce was another. According to the Burkes, by the second half of the eighteenth century, the study of commerce became 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 which the elite class of people had earnestly pursued. At that time, commerce was 'in the hands of a few, great in it's profits, but confined in its nature'. The concept 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 opinions about economic policies did not prevail, but advanced only slowly. What the Burkes lamented was the lack of sagacious minds reflecting on national wealth rather than the absence of free trade.[68]

Nevertheless, they found great hopes for the future in the late fifteenth century, a defining moment in which the exploration of the new continent had begun. What urged the Europeans to carve out the new world in the Americas for themselves was their 'insatiable thirst of gold' and 'romantick hopes of miraculous treasures', not a 'remote prospect of commerce'. The Burkes may well have agreed with some of his contemporaries that the Europeans' extreme avarice had greatly undermined the societies of the New World, yet the Burkes' conclusion was that 'America had never been in the state it now is; nor would those nations ever have had the beneficial colonies',[69] if this disposition had not existed.

The Burkes depicted the discovery of the new world as a great event of European history which triggered to dispel the dark clouds lying over so many years, and they did not develop a perspective on the event from the point of view of the native inhabitants or view it as part of world history, as historians today may wish to do. However lamentable this is to modern readers, this fact clearly tells us that American history was, in the Burkes' view, largely part of European history. European history,

[67] *Account*, I, 5.

[68] Ibid., I, 47.

[69] Ibid., I, 46.

then, encountered another great event soon after this discovery—the Reformation.

In Burke's view, although the early sixteenth century was still an age of confusion and disorder, evidently the great advances resulted from the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. This was a point made particularly in one of his speeches that addressed his constituency in Bristol in 1780. According to him, the age of the Reformation was 'one of the greatest periods of human improvement', yet it was also certainly 'a time of trouble and confusion'. Before this period, European nations were still within a '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'.[70] Burke's emphasis on the confusion caused by religious conflicts was striking:

> 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.

Although Burke insisted that 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'.[71] Protestants were 'infected, as the Popish had been before, by worldly interests and worldly passions' and became persecutors of Roman Catholics and sometimes of other denominations of Protestantism. The spirit of persecution arose not only from 'the bitterness of retaliation', but also from 'the merciless policy of fear':

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[70] *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, in *WS*, III, 639.

[71] Ibid., in *WS*, III, 639.

> 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 Catholics had been passed in several European nations, especially in England and Ireland. These laws were as 'bloody' as those previously enacted against Protestants in Catholic nations. In some cases, the laws were not particularly savage, but had an even worse effect, because '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'.[72] Burke's analysis of the Reformation was now being directed toward his criticism of the persecution of Roman Catholicism, which still occurred in his own age. The Reformation, however beneficial, had been accompanied by great confusion in society and fierce religious hostility toward enemies. In his *Life of Erasmus*, Jortin approved of Erasmus's latitudinarian attitude to Christianity.[73] Burke would have found such a characterisation satisfactory and endorsed their theological position. Although Burke and Jortin differed from Erasmus in their endorsement of the advent of Protestantism, all three were of the same opinion in lamenting gruesome sectarian conflicts within the Christian religion, which continued over extended periods of time.

On 21 February 1782, writing to Viscount Kenmare, in the context of his censure of the religious persecution of Catholics (especially, their limited chance of education), Burke commended the Council of Trent for establishing the discipline of Catholic seminaries.[74] In his *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791), Burke also developed an analogy between the

[72] Ibid., in *WS*, III, 639–40.

[73] Jortin, *Life of Erasmus*, I, 609.

[74] In this letter, Burke referred to the corruption of the Greek and Latin churches. See 'Burke to Lord Kenmare (21 Feb 1782)', in *Corr.*, IV, 412–3. In his private library, Burke owned Paolo Sarpi, *The Historie of the Councel of Trent*, translated by Nathaniel Brent (London, [1620]): LC MS; *LC*, p. 27.

French Revolution and the Reformation.[75] 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 limited events taking place within a single country, but great political and religious events which profoundly affected all the countries in Europe.[76] The division between Catholic and Protestants not only divided one nation from another, but led to every state being divided within itself. The effects of the Reformation had dominated European history over the last two centuries.[77]

The French Revolution clearly reminded Burke of the major disturbances caused by the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century, and the knowledge of these conflicts supplied him with a language to depict this contemporary catastrophe. One of these conflicts was the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (23–24 August 1572). Intending to denounce revolutionary France, he was highly critical of Louis II de Guise (1555–1588) and the religious persecution of the sixteenth century.[78] Burke was also critical of Henri IV of France (1553–1610). Although approving of the Edict of Nantes (1598), which endeavoured to tolerate Protestantism in Catholic France, Burke did not refer to it as this French monarch's achievement. For him, Henri IV was rather a cause of the confusion of the French civil wars than the man who terminated this crisis.[79]

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[75] Later, Tocqueville made the same point in his *Old Regime and the Revolution* (book i, chapter iii).

[76] *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791), in *WS*, VIII, 341.

[77] Ibid., in *WS*, VIII, 342.

[78] *Reflections*, pp. 312–3. Probably, this was not the first time he linked the events of 1789 with the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. In a letter of 9 August 1789, he 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', in *Reflections*, p. 61.

[79] *Reflections*, 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,

Burke knew about the popularity of this king in France and, in the *Reflections*, consciously opposed his historical reputation. When Pierre-Gaëton Dupont asked him to revise his description of Henri IV in the *Reflections*, Burke still insisted, 'What I have said of him is strictly true.'[80] Although Dupont argued that Henri IV was 'engaged in many wars, for the greatest part of his life, by Just Causes',[81] this was far from the truth. Henri IV never compromised on his power and ambition, and fought 'against the far greater Majority of the people of France' on a number of occasions. He took advantage of 'the Law of War', and 'the Famine he caused [in Paris] was his Necessity'.[82] The interpretations of Henri IV in the *Reflections* and the letter to Dupont were some of the examples in which Burke as a politician explicitly attempted to advance his genuine notion of history.

Apart from the popular king of France, Burke held an opinion on the French civil wars of the period. More than twenty years before the *Reflections* was published, as a rebuttal of William Knox's claims, which pointed out the similarity between France of Henri IV's reign and post-1763 Britain,[83] Burke stressed the devastating situation of French politics which had 'just recovered out of twenty-five years of the most cruel and desolating civil war that perhaps was ever known'. After the civil wars in the sixteenth century, French politics was still unstable, and there were even some 'pretenders' to the crown. The national finance, which the Duc de Sully attempted to rescue, was in utter disorder. In comparison, Britain was, after the Seven Years Wars, 'wearied, but not broken'.[84]

This view of French history was certainly retained during the rest of his career. In the *Reflections*, however, it was also suggested that the

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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. In the letter to Pierre-Gaëton Dupont on 28 October 1790, 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: LC MS; *LC*, p. 24.

[80] 'Burke to Pierre-Gaëton Dupont (28 October 1790)', in *Corr.*, VI, 146.

[81] 'Pierre-Gaëton Dupont to Burke (27 October 1790)', in *Corr.*, VI, 144.

[82] 'Burke to Pierre-Gaëton Dupont (28 October 1790)', in *Corr.*, VI, 147–8.

[83] William Knox, *The Present State of the Nation* (London, 1768), pp. 97–9.

[84] *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, in *WS*, II, 207–8.

French civil wars in the late sixteenth century were not fatal to the vital force of France:

> 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.[85]

The purpose here was, of course, to reveal the nature of the Revolution of 1789 and its evilness. The civil wars in France, as well as those in seventeenth-century England, were evidently detrimental to the nation, although the English one was perhaps more moderate. In both cases, however, social order was not entirely subverted as it was in revolutionary France.[86]

The Münster Rebellion of the 1530s was another example of religious conflict. The Anabaptists of Münster 'filled Germany with confusion by their system of levelling and their wild opinions concerning property'.[87] The contemporary catastrophe taking place in revolutionary France before his eyes reminded him of the European past as a violent struggle with the spirit of 'epidemical fanaticism'. Burke detested such religious enthusiasm and lamented the social disorder caused by it.[88] Nevertheless, none of these cases fundamentally subverted the social order of Europe. It was only revolutionary France which threatened to do so.

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[85] *Reflections*, pp. 204–5.

[86] *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 302–3, 321–2; *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *WS*, VIII, 497–8.

[87] *Reflections*, p. 324.

[88] Here we may add his low view of Phillip II (1527–98), of whose persecution of Calvinism in the Netherlands Burke was probably highly critical. See *Speech at Bristol Previous to Election*, in *WS*, III, 651. Burke was a reader of Robert Watson's *The History of the Reign of Philip the Second, King of Spain* (2 vols., 1777), and, in his previous speech, he clearly regarded the king as a tyrant. See 'Speech on Cavendish's Motion on America (6 November 1776)', in *WS*, III, 254–5: *LC*, p. 25. See also *Speech on Conciliation with America* , in *WS*, III, 139.

For Burke, as well as for his contemporaries, the period between the late fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century meant the dawn of modern times. His views were, however, different from theirs in some respects. Although he well recognised the significance of the balance of power in modern international politics, he did not examine closely how this balance was established in the sixteenth century as Robertson, Hume and others did. More important, Burke was barely concerned with the causes of the decline of feudalism and of the rise of absolutism in these eras, whereas these were one of the major interests in Scottish historiography during his time.

In Smith's narrative, the rise of commerce and manufactures led the great barons to their personal consumption of luxurious products, and, in doing so, they dismissed a number of tenants and retainers who had long been the source of their own power and also the causes of the confusion in European society. The decline of the barons caused by this loss of dependants crucially helped the sovereigns increase their power and establish a more regular government in their countries.[89] This was 'the silent revolution of commerce',[90] which Hume and Smith regarded as a key to understanding European history. While Burke clearly considered the late fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century as the period of the rise of absolute monarchy in Europe, he did not contend that this socio-political change had been a consequence of the growth of commerce.

For Burke as well, the feudal lords were utterly rude, fierce and barbarous, and hence a great cause of the disorder of medieval Europe, yet he still did not believe, unlike Smith, that 'the power of the nobles has allways been brought to ruin before a system of liberty has been established', because 'the nobility are the greatest opposers and oppressors of liberty that we can imagine'.[91] The facts that he was favourable to primogeniture and entail,[92] and that he vehemently censured Henry

[89] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, book iii, chapter iv.

[90] For this phrase, see for instance Maria Pia Paganelli, 'Is a Beautiful System Dying?: A Possible Smithian Take on the Financial Crisis', *The Adam Smith Review*, 6 (2011), 269–82 (at 280).

[91] Adam *Smith*, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ed. R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael and P.G. Stein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 264.

[92] *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, in *WS*, IV, 433; *Thoughts on the French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 347; *Reflections*, p. 259.

VIII's confiscation of church property[93] might be the evidence for the divergence of his historiography from that of some eminent Scottish historians of his age. Unlike James Mackintosh, Burke also did not maintain that commerce, which first grew under the shade of chivalry, had at the end overthrown 'the feudal and chivalrous system'.[94] The French Revolution became a trigger to reveal some major differences lying between Burke and the Scottish intellectuals in their views of European history. What he particularly drew attention to was not the meaning of the collapse of the feudal system, but the role of prescriptive manners and opinions, that is, a specific social order which sprang from the chaotic state of ancient and medieval societies.

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

When Burke discussed the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, his target of discussion was frequently France and his evaluation of these centuries was more positive than that of previous eras. In their *Account*, the Burkes spoke highly of the Cardinal et Duc de Richelieu and Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Although earlier French politics had been ravaged by civil wars and had not promoted commerce, Richelieu and Colbert changed the direction of French history. The period of Richelieu's dominance should be regarded as the true era of progressive French policy. 'This great man' stabilised domestic affairs, exalted 'the royal authority upon the ruins of the power of the nobility', and established 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, 'what serves most effectually to support commerce'.[95] 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

[93] *Reflections*, pp. 281–2; *Letter to a Noble Lord* , in *WS*, IX, 166–7. See also Burke, 'National Character and Parliament', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', p. 642.

[94] James Mackintosh, *Vindiciae Gallicae: Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers, against the Accusations of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke* (London, 1791), in idem, *Vindiciae Gallicae and Other Writings on the French Revolution*, ed. Donald Winch (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), p. 87.

[95] *Account*, II, 4.

monarchy and diplomatic system, and the development of commercial arts. Although Richelieu initiated these changes, they were not acknowledged as being solely by his own efforts. It was 'that great, wise, and honest minister Colbert, one of the ablest that ever served any prince', who brought Richelieu's plans to fruition, 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'.[96] Commerce finally emerged into the spotlight of history,[97] having being led by such a distinguished politician as Colbert. In the seventeenth century, the Europeans came to recognise how their countries could develop by advancing commerce and establishing their overseas settlements.

In the early eighteenth century, France was damaged by the War of the Spanish Succession and her commerce was plunged into a deplorable condition. Nevertheless, the country, including its commerce, quickly recovered despite her engagement in new wars. In observing this, the Burkes did not hesitate 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.[98]

In the second edition of the *Account* published in 1758, immediately after this passage, was added, 'While the spirit of trade subsists, trade itself can never be destroyed.'[99] By contrast, the Netherlands, which had

[96] Ibid., II, 4–5.

[97] Cf. David Hume, 'Of Civil Liberty', in idem, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), pp. 87–96 (at 88): 'Trade was never esteemed an affair of state till the last century'.

[98] *Account*, II, 16–7.

[99] [Edmund and William Burke], *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (2nd edn., 2 vols., London, 1758), II, 17.

historically grown up to be a great commercial and prosperous country, despite its involvement in savage and costly wars, saw its trade shrink over the forty years after the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, the period in which it enjoyed profound peace. Here the Burkes were stressing their belief that war could animate national vigour, whereas peace could debilitate it. Although all European nations continued to engage in wars during the eighteenth century, they were still able to thrive.[100]

This passage in the *Account*, as well as other evidence,[101] clearly tells us that even before 1789, Burke believed that nations could revive and develop, despite all the difficulties they might face, so long as their social foundations remained intact. His vocabulary reminds us of Montesquieu's *esprit général*, although Montesquieu himself did not advance such an analysis of society and history as Burke did here and elsewhere. A similar belief was advanced notably by Machiavelli in the sixteenth century, and by Bolingbroke and Brown in the eighteenth century,[102] but it is not clear whether these thinkers influenced Burke (rather, he disliked all of them). Although he did not attempt to identify wholly what these social foundations were (he presumably assumed that these could not be fully articulated), they certainly included long-established religion and the code of chivalry in Europe. Such social foundations also vary from one country or region to another as they are shaped into various forms over time.

Burke's idea on the relationship of commerce and war was also not entirely typical in the late eighteenth-century discourse on political economy. His contemporaries, notably Hume, Tucker and Smith, were convinced and lamented that European nations had been seriously damaged in their economy and society by the frequent recent wars caused by 'jealousy of trade'. Burke was well aware of the fact that this kind

[100] *Account*, II, 17–8.

[101] See *Speech on Fox's India Bill* (1 December 1783), in *WS*, V, 401–2, where he claimed that, although the early invaders to India brought great turmoil to the country, they did not utterly ruin its society: 'With many disorders, and with few political checks upon power, Nature had still fair play; the sources of acquisition were not dried up; and therefore the trade, the manufactures, and the commerce of the country flourished.'

[102] For Brown, see John Brown, *Estimate and Principles on Manners* (2 vols., London, 1758), I, 18–9.

of jealousy had existed in recent history[103] and agreed that modern international wars had been destructive and had sometimes adversely affected European nations. Wars, nevertheless, were not only unavoidable, but also could be part of the process of emulation among nations and also contributed to the preservation of the psychological equilibrium of their peoples. In viewing wars as a means of emulation, Burke appears to be closer to Ferguson, Kant and others. Although wars were destructive in some respects, Burke maintained that European nations had been able to continue to develop in modern times because these wars did not ruin their 'spirit' and their 'principle'.

Seventeenth-century France advanced the commercial arts and also developed its constitution. While Burke seems to have believed that the French constitution had been properly founded in 1614,[104] when the Estates General last met before 1789, the French monarch had become much more powerful by the mid-seventeenth century. According to Burke, the 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. At the Peace of Westphalia (1648), a republican constitution was established in the Holy Roman Empire that shattered the Habsburg dynasty's 'pretensions' to creating a centralised empire. Nevertheless, this did not mean that the French monarchy had allowed a republican system to develop within France. Instead, the power of the French monarchy was consolidated. Although the monarchy in France substantially contributed to establishing Protestantism in Germany in the seventeenth century, especially through the Treaty of Westphalia, under Louis XIII it had destroyed 'the republican system of the Protestants at home', that is, the Huguenots who had adopted a defiant attitude towards royal authority.[105]

The mid-seventeenth century to the early eighteenth century was a period when a new system of international relations was being shaped in Europe. In his writings of the 1790s, chiefly in the context of advancing his claim that revolutionary France threatened to ruin the European diplomatic system, Burke often referred to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648)

[103] *Account*, I, 6 (Venice and Georgia in the age of Columbus), 228 ('Jealousy is the glaring character of the court of Spain, in whatever regards their American empire').

[104] *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 331–2.

[105] *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 291.

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'[106] and 'the Protector of the three religions', that is, Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism.[107] As 'one of the fundamental treaties that compose the publick law of Europe', the peace of Utrecht ended the War of the Spanish Succession and prevented the ambitions for universal monarchy of Louis XIV by concluding that no part of the Spanish dominions in the West Indies should be ceded to France.[108] Burke was very conscious of the significance of the balance of power as a principle enshrined in this Treaty and in international politics of modern Europe.[109]

After 1789, while carefully reading Vattel,[110] he proclaimed that the 'balance of power had been ever assumed as the known common law of Europe at all times, and by all powers: the question had only been (as it must happen) on the more or less inclination of that balance'.[111] His aim here was to explain the necessity of the warfare against revolutionary France, which 'constantly rejected the very idea of the balance of power, and treated it as the true cause of all the wars and calamities that had afflicted Europe'.[112] Burke, however, certainly knew that the revolutionaries were partly correct in their claim. More than thirty years previously, he had clearly acknowledged and lamented that the balance of power had not prevented a number of wars in modern Europe. As the chief editor of the *Annual Register* and a reporter of the Seven Years War, Burke wrote, the 'balance of power, the pride of modern policy, and originally invented to preserve the general peace as well as freedom of Europe, has

[106] *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 351. See also, ibid., in *WS*, VIII, 348–9.

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

[108] *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 274–5. See also *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1795), in *WS*, IX, 96; Bk P 25/32.

[109] Armitage, 'Edmund Burke and Reason of State', in idem, *Foundations of Modern International Thought*, pp. 166–7.

[110] See Edmund Burke, 'Extracts from Vattel's Law of Nations', in *Three Memorials on French Affairs. Written in the Years 1791, 1792 and 1793. By the late Right Hon. Edmund Burke*.

[111] *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 338.

[112] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 339.

only preserved its liberty. It has been the original of innumerable and fruitless wars'.[113]

Even so, the united opposition to the threat of Louis XIV's attempt at universal monarchy was, without doubt, largely a success and worth general applause, as it clearly contributed to protecting the balance of power and liberty of Europe. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, French military power was superior to that of the British,[114] and it was hence of a great threat to Britain and the whole of Europe that required a united opposition, not just British confrontation. Louis XIV's vast military ambitions and political despotism, the objects of Burke's attention for a long time,[115] evidently deserved careful historical reflection. During the 1790s, he claimed that the great crisis posed by revolutionary France was worthy of comparison with that brought about in Europe by Louis XIV and also that British and European intervention would be as justified now as it had been in the past.

In the course of his career, Burke also at times denounced the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in October 1685,[116] Louis XIV's decision to renew the persecution of the French Huguenots, which 'threw so dark a cloud over all the splendour of a most illustrious reign'.[117] As a British intellectual, a Whig and a latitudinarian, Burke was naturally critical of the king's desire for universal monarchy,[118] absolutism and religious intolerance.[119] Yet he did also acknowledge the advancement of French society during Louis XIV's reign such as the growth of arts, manners and

[113] *Annual Register … for the Year 1760*, p. 2.

[114] 'Second Speech on Conciliation (16 November 1775)', in *WS*, III, 187.

[115] See *Speech on Economical Reform*, in *WS*, III, 488; *Speeches on the Army Estimates* (9 February 1790), in *WS*, IV, 285–6, 300–1, 304.

[116] *Tracts relating to Popery Laws* (1765), in *WS*, IX, 459–60.

[117] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 459–60, where Burke aimed to establish a historical analogy with the Penal Laws in Ireland. See also *Annual Register … for the Year 1763*, p. 3; 'Speech on French Corps Bill (11 April 1794)', in *WS*, IV, 615.

[118] *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* in *WS*, VIII, 306.

[119] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 238. Burke's view of Louis XIV was close to the typical view held by his British contemporaries. For the eighteenth-century views of Louis XIV and his reign, for instance, see N.R. Johnson, 'Louis XIV and the Age of Enlightenment: The Myth of the Sun King from 1715–1789', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 172 (1978), 1–350; O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, pp. 67–8 (Voltaire's and Hume's views); Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, I, 111, II, 137.

science.[120] This French king, although apparently blameworthy, still did not kill 'the mind' of France and Europe.

Overall, it is clear that France held the central place in Burke's views of European politics of the seventeenth century onwards, and this was very natural in considering her influences on it. The United Provinces and Prussia also advanced their societies under their capable rulers, whereas Spain and Portugal declined and greatly reduced their presence in European politics in contrast to the substantial rise of Britain and France in the seventeenth century. A great amount of bullion from the American continent did not enrich the Spanish nation, where 'is seen so little money' at the end. Portugal secured independence from Spain in 1640, but could not develop her society greatly.[121] 'The character of her government was narrow and bigoted, and the whole system of her commerce preposterous. If, on the one hand, a long peace added to the resources of her revenue, it, on the other hand absolutely annihilated her military'.[122] In the east, Poland remained stagnant for a number of years chiefly due to the nobility's parliamentary privilege, the *Liberum* veto, which meant that any measure lacking unanimous support was not enacted.[123] In Russia, Peter the Great's introduction of European manners and institutions generated a desirable influence on its society, yet its politics and constitution still remained problematic.[124]

After the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), another European-wide event of confusion and barbarism, it was clear, however, that Europe was moving forward to a civilised state by improving science and commerce substantially and by establishing the international order. Like many of his contemporaries, it is likely that Burke regarded Europe after

[120] *Reflections*, p. 275 (Louis XIV's patronage of intellectuals).

[121] *Annual Register … for the Year 1762* (London, 1763), pp. 6–7; *Account*, I, 285–6.

[122] *Annual Register … for the Year 1762*, p. 7.

[123] *Thoughts on the French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 368. Burke was generally critical of Polish politics. See *Vindication*, in *WS*, I, 159–60; *Annual Register … for the Year 1763*, p. 45.

[124] See *Annual Register … for the Year 1762*, p. 11; 'Burke to the Empress of Russia (1 November 1791)', in *Corr.*, VI, 444 (the context was Burke's plea to Russia to intervene in French affairs); *Annual Register … for the Year 1762*, p. 17; '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 steeped in religious and civil prejudice.

Utrecht as moving out of a chronic state of barbarism, that is to say, the establishment of the *ancien regime*.[125]

5 The Consequences of Animated Spirits

In Burke's view, European history was full of wars and disputes from ancient to modern times. Society was dominated by barbarism and confusion, at least until the sixteenth century, and it was only from the seventeenth century that it began to depart from such barbarity. Important was that several key socio-political orders such as Roman law, Christianity and the principle of chivalry were shaped and deeply rooted in various European countries, and these orders offered the foundations of civilisation. The point of Burke's view of European history was his attention to the historical role of these socio-political orders and foundations. In other words, he believed that prosperity in eighteenth-century Europe largely drew on ancient manners and institutions. His belief is clearly discerned in his works of the 1790s, yet it could be traced to his earlier writings.

What he feared throughout his career was, then, an attempt to undermine such foundations of civilisation. In France, the late sixteenth century witnessed civil wars and the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries experienced the growth of Louis XIV's absolutism and religious intolerance. These were absolute horror and evil, yet neither the civil wars nor any ruler destroyed the foundations of French society. Similarly, in England, both the consequences of the Civil Wars of the 1640s and Cromwell's republican experiment were not fatal to the future development of English society. French history had experienced ebbs and flows, but its society had, by the late eighteenth century, reached an advanced stage of development.[126] The fact that the French population had continued to grow from the late seventeenth century up to the late eighteenth century proved the soundness of French politics,[127]

[125] Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, I, 110.

[126] See *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 190.

[127] 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 maintained that there had been an increase in the population of France. See *Reflections*, p. 296. Burke owned Necker's *De l'Administration des Finances de la France* (3 vols., [Paris], 1784): LC MS.

however its political system was inclined to absolutism. According to Burke, monarchy was an essential component of the French constitution, and a republican form of government would not have suited the nation. 'France had been always taken and understood as a Monarchy', and the nation had been powerful and prosperous under this form of government.[128] Royal authority had been in harmony with the three estates composed of the clergy, the nobility and the commoners on the foundations established 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.'[129] Although Burke certainly believed that the French constitution under the old regime was far from ideal,[130] and was undoubtedly inferior to the British one, it is also true that this constitution, which was the product of history, was well developed and well suited to the particular circumstances of the nation. In other words, for Burke, France was still a paradigm of civilisation and prosperity even though parts of the political system were defective.

Burke certainly believed that not only France, but also Europe at large, had gradually achieved genuine progress and that his own age was the highest point of historical development.[131] European nations 'have grown up to their present magnitude in a great length of time, and by a great variety of accidents', he once wrote.[132] Therefore, prosperity, in his view, had not been achieved on the basis of any blueprint. At the same time, behind this civilising process, he contended that there was the lasting influence of the chivalric code, which was more concerned with the veneration of women than with admiration for a courageous warrior.

Like many of his contemporaries, he also believed that the peoples of Europe had rendered their style of life and their passions 'civilised' and 'polite' during relatively recent times. Burke may also have believed that the sophistication of manners had developed from the commercial

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[128] 'Burke to Richard Burke, JR (18 August 1791)', in *Corr.*, VI, 359. See also *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, in *WS*, IV, 402.

[129] *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 331–2.

[130] For instance, see 'Burke to Captain Thomas Mercer (26 February 1790)', in *Corr.*, VI, 97.

[131] *Letter to William Elliot* (26 May 1795), in *WS*, IX, 39; *Reflections*, p. 241.

[132] *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 287.

arts, although he did not stress it to the extent that the Scottish contemporaries did. In his view, 'politeness' was, however, not the only landmark of a civilised state, but the disciplined military was also characteristic of modern European nations.

Prosperity was achieved despite European nations' engagement in a number of mercantile wars during modern times. Burke was very conscious of this fact. As he lamented in the *Annual Register*, although the balance-of-power policy had preserved liberty in Europe during modern times, wars did not cease to exist.

The Seven Years' War caused the diplomatic revolution, and France engaged in several wars with Britain during the eighteenth century, whereas once-risen countries such as Spain and Portugal substantially declined during the same century. Although war is destructive in nature and is not convenient for commerce, it does not prevent the growth of civilisation unless it undermines the foundations and essential principles underpinning it. History tells us that war is inevitable in human society, but its nature could change over time. Eighteenth-century Europe still engaged itself in a number of wars, but its warfare was not as barbarous nor cruel as it had been in the distant past. With its military discipline as well as its improved arts and laws, modern European civilisation excelled when compared to all Asian civilisations and its own previous civilisations.[133]

Civil commotions, rather than international wars, could be more fatal in some cases. In commercial society, in particular, they could happen as the consequences of urbanisation. His early manuscript, 'Considerations on a Militia' is a minute in which the early Burke put forward his defence of the establishment of a constitutional standing army in Britain since 1689, and opposed those who argued for its substitution by a citizen militia. In this manuscript, in seeking to warn people of the possible dangers caused by the introduction of a citizen militia, Burke maintained that people in commercial cities tended to have a 'mutinous & turbulent' spirit and that their governments were always in danger of collapse. According to Burke, this had been historically true. 'Whilst Paris remained unbound by a strong Military force her mutinies were frequent & violent to the last degree', Burke wrote, 'she has often

[133] 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 283. See also, ibid., in *WS*, VI, 352–3; *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 320.

besieged & has often forced her kings to fly.' The cases of other great cities such as Ghent and Constantinople were similar. Even in Britain 'our Manufacturing towns the people are almost constantly engaged in seditious Cabals or open risings'.[134]

Although he did not accept John Brown's interpretation that the British people had recently degenerated into frivolity and effeminacy, Burke was certainly well acquainted with the contemporary discourse about the damaging effects of commercial activities on a people's private morals and public spirit.[135] The belief that urban inhabitants were rebellious was, however, clearly incompatible with the more prevalent concept of commercial citizens as polite and unwarlike. It was also not reconcilable with Montesquieu's idea of improved communications in modern times preventing conspiracies against sovereigns.[136] All of these ideas are, nevertheless, alike in asserting that people in towns were sociable in the sense that they frequently communicated with each other and tried to combine together in their activities. For Burke, as well as for others, commerce promotes people's communications within a nation as well as with the wider world.[137] The idea of unruly people living in cities might be considered as a development of the eighteenth-century idea of commerce as a strong influence on bringing together large numbers of people.

This idea may help us to understand some passages in Burke's writings on the French Revolution. According to Pocock, 'energy' and 'combination' are key terms for an understanding of the *Reflections* and *Letters on a Regicide Peace*.[138] In the Revolution of 1789, the conspiracy

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[134] Burke, 'Considerations on a Militia', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', p. 652.

[135] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 192–3. For his review of Brown's *Estimate of the manners and principles of the time*, see *Annual Register … for the Year 1758*, pp. 445–53.

[136] Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de. Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains and de leur décadence*, in *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*, ed. Jean Ehrard, Catherine Volpilhac-Auger, et al. (Oxford, 1998–), II, 95, 263–4; Paul A. Rahe, 'The Book that never was: Montesquieu's *Considerations on the Romans* in Historical Context', *History of Political Thought*, 26 (2005), 43–89 (at 75–6).

[137] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 399.

[138] Pocock, 'The Political Economy of Burke's Analysis of the French Revolution', in idem, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*; idem, 'Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm: the Context as Counter-Revolution', in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture. Vol. III. The Transformation of Political Culture*

against the French government was conducted by an alliance between the burghers and the monied interest, whereas rural society, that is, the landed gentlemen, the yeomen and the peasants could not exert such an influence. This was because their lifestyles did not enable them to unite in order to plan a conspiracy:[139]

> In towns combination is natural. The habits of burghers, their occupations, their diversion, their business, their idleness, continually bring them into mutual contact. Their virtues and their vices are sociable; they are always in garrison; and they come embodied and half disciplined into the hands of those who mean to form them for civil, or for military action.[140]

Although it is not easy to appreciate what Burke really meant here, the idea of people becoming unruly citizens because they lived in urban concentrations may provide a clue to such a riddle. Burke believed that French society was being subverted by the combined efforts of her own people living in towns. These people were fanatic in ways comparable to zealots during the violent religious wars of the sixteenth century, but they were also 'energetic' in the ways in which city dwellers always were. This was not the first time such riots had occurred, as Burke well knew. Manufacturing and commercial cities, including Paris, had suffered from such uprisings in the past. The poor became desperate when they were short of provisions as had often been the case throughout history. This time, however, the people, being both energetic and vigorous, were inspired by the novel concept of human rights, which had been utterly unknown in the past,[141] and their conspiracy threatened to subvert not only their own government, but all the social systems which European nations had built up over the long course of history.

1789–1848, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989), pp. 19–43.

[139] *Reflections*, pp. 363–4. See also *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 344–6.

[140] *Reflections*, p. 364.

[141] What was happening in France was utterly new to history and extraordinary in its nature. See 'Burke to Lord Grenville (21 September 1791)', in *Corr.*, VI, 407; 'Burke to the Archbishop of Nisibis (14 December 1791)', in *Corr.*, VI, 458; *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 367; *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *WS*, VIII, 498; *Letter to a Noble Lord*, in *WS*, IX, 174–5; *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 290–1.

This 'combination' was different from the 'connection' in the politics of ancient Rome and the English politics of Anne's reign, which brought various social and political interests into harmony.[142] In *ancien regime* France, this effective network did not exist. Absolutism was consolidated during the seventeenth century, especially after the Fronde of 1648–1653. 'To strengthen itself the Monarchy had weakened every other force: To unite the Nation to itself, it had dissolved all other ties', Burke told the Chevalier de la Bintinaye in 1791. 'When the chain, which held the people to the Prince was once broken', he continued to state, 'the whole frame of the commonwealth was found in a State of disconnection.'[143]

Although his opinions on France before and after 1789 were probably closer to Burke's than he acknowledged,[144] Tocqueville thought that Burke failed to understand that the old regime of France had been a 'dead' body, and that the Revolution had only 'dismembered' this body.[145] According to him, for 'several centuries the French nobility had constantly [been] impoverished'.[146] While this was a phenomenon prevailing 'in all parts of the Continent', England was an exception where 'the old noble families that still existed had not only kept but greatly increased their wealth', and where 'the different classes, although solidly connected to each other by common interests, still often differed in mind and mores'.[147] While for the historians of eighteenth-century Scotland, the establishment of absolute monarchy meant a step towards modern commercial society, for Tocqueville it was a path to democracy, although he did not particularly highlight the decline of feudalism in the sixteenth century. A careful reading of French history shows, Tocqueville claimed, that the cause of the spreading evils after

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[142] Richard Bourke, 'Edmund Burke and Enlightenment Sociability: Justice, Honour and the Principles of Government', *History of Political Thought*, 21 (2000), 632–56 (at 651–2).

[143] 'Burke to the Chevalier de la Bintinaye [March 1791]', in *Corr.*, VI, 242.

[144] For this and the following discussion, see Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 751–2, 926. For Tocqueville's views of history in the *Old Regime and the Revolution*, see for instance, Delba Winthrop, 'Tocqueville's "Old Regime:" Political History', *The Review of Politics*, 43 (1981), 88–111.

[145] Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, ed. François Furret and Françoise Mélonio (2 vols., Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998–2001), I, 147.

[146] Ibid., I, 150.

[147] Ibid., I, 151.

the French Revolution should be attributed to 'the art which most of our kings practiced, of dividing people in order to govern them more absolutely'.[148]

As has been already shown, Burke was well aware of the lack of an effective network in French society, but he did not clearly point out that this was the outcome of the policy of the monarchs as Tocqueville did. What was rather shared by both men was the recognition of a particular characteristic of the Revolution. Tocqueville maintained that the French Revolution was 'a political revolution which acted like and began to look like a religious revolution',[149] which was very similar to Burke's opinion in the 1790s. When Britain's war against revolutionary France began in February 1793, Burke was conscious that this new war was of a different nature from other eighteenth-century wars. The previous wars with France, including wars against other European nations, were battles over territory or commercial profits. The war against revolutionary France was, however, an ideological war, by which the established order of civilised Europe might be totally overturned if Britain were defeated.[150] While what urged him to support the war was his fear that the French Revolution might bring the entire European world back to a barbarous age, he was not entirely certain of the future direction of history when he lay on his deathbed in 1797.

[148] Ibid., I, 191.

[149] Ibid., I, 99.

[150] 'Speech on War with France (12 February 1793)', in *WS*, IV, 546 (editor's preface).

CHAPTER 4

The History of the Americas: The Spread and Transformation of 'Europe'

However far, geographically, the continent was from Europe, the history of the Americas was largely, for Burke, the continuation of the story of our previous chapters. It is, therefore, appropriate to explore his views on this part of the world immediately after addressing those on England (Britain) and European nations. Without an examination of his views on the history of the Americas, Burke's views on neither British nor European history would be comprehensively understood. The history of the Americas,[1] of course, also included histories utterly distinct from those of Britain and Europe in some respects, as it involved a history of different locations, a history of the interaction between Europeans and Amerindians, and a genuine history of the latter. All aspects of this American history, then, constitute the background of Burke's attitudes towards American affairs from the late 1750s to the early 1780s.

Burke's proper engagement with analysing the history of the Americas began in the summer of 1756, when he collaborated with William Burke in bringing out the two volumes of *An Account of the European Settlements in America*.[2] In producing this work during the Seven Years

[1] For eighteenth-century historiography of this subject, see Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, IV, part three; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (California, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[2] The 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.

S. Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64441-7_4

War, Edmund and William Burke had both personal reasons and a more public purpose for this publication. On the one hand, they wanted to expand their literary careers and simultaneously needed to solve their financial problems, and they also intended to influence colonial policy by giving a succinct, largely historical and impartial analysis of the colonies of the European nations. In retrospect, the *Account* is almost the only work of Burke's to examine the histories of Mexico and Peru. The attempt to publish *The Annual Register* was another opportunity to deepen his knowledge of British North America. In writing each issue's initial substantial essay on recent events, which necessitated the reporting and the analysing of the ongoing Seven Years War and the recent history of the colonies, Burke needed to research relevant material from newspapers and other printed sources.[3]

Although he never visited the colonies, or any part of the 'New World' and hence had no first-hand knowledge of it, his own literary career during the 1750s clearly helped him to work on American affairs after he entered parliament in 1766. As a leading spokesman for the Rockingham Whigs, he made special efforts to inform himself of and worked hard on these affairs and frequently opposed the policies of successive governments on the American crisis. A series of his parliamentary speeches arguing for conciliation with the colonies led to his being called 'a friend of America'. From December 1770 to August 1775, Burke also served as the colonial agent for the legislative assembly of the colony of New York and he was repeatedly informed of their grievances against the British government during these years.[4]

What Burke really wished to do was to turn the clock back to the time before 1764, to a state of peaceful relationship between Britain and the American colonies. Having realised that this would be totally impossible, by the end of 1778 he came to approve of the independence of the colonies. Although he modified his position on the question of how to deal with the colonies following the progression of unfortunate circumstances, his expressed opinions were frequently underpinned by his historical views, which remained almost the same and consistent throughout his career. His views on the history of the Americas, as will

[3] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 169.

[4] 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.*

be shown, inform us of his ideas on both the uniformity and diversity of European and British civilisations as well as some limits of his general concept of civilisation. The present chapter explores these issues by examining first his idea of the history of the European settlements, and then of the social development of the British colonies in the Americas and of the Amerindians.

1 European Settlements in the Americas

Burke's views of the history of the Americas can be largely, but not exclusively, traced to his co-authored *Account of the European Settlements in America*, and for him this history was basically part of European history dealing with the Europeans' advance into the new continents from the late fifteenth to the eighteenth century. This is also a history characterised by 'Burkean' philosophy and views of the world, and such causes as providence, the Christian religion, religious toleration, generosity and political economy play a significant part in the narrative.

An obvious characteristic of the *Account* was the authors' close attention to the role of 'great men' in shaping the history of the advances in the new continents and the formation of the settlements there.[5] The Burkes devoted the first eight chapters of the work to the conduct and the character of Christopher Columbus (1451–1506). Columbus was the first significant individual discussed in the *Account*, and the authors depicted 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. Columbus was a person who 'undertook to extend the boundaries which ignorance had given to the world'.[6] Convinced of the significance of his own projects, he fought against the inveterate prejudices and ignorance of the age; that is to say, his 'whole time was spent in fruitless endeavours to enlighten ignorance, to remove prejudice, and to vanquish that obstinate incredulity'. Fortunately, Queen Isabel, but not King Ferdinand, supported Columbus, and he could finally put his projects into practice.[7]

[5] For this, see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 138–40; Nelson, 'A Map of Mankind', pp. 153–5.

[6] *Account*, I, 5.

[7] 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'.

In his second voyage, Columbus used his cavalry to fight against the Amerindians. While the Amerindians were the savages who believed that horses could fly, the enlightened Columbus 'did not rely upon those prejudices, though he made all imaginable use of them'.[8] The Burkes' Columbus was a clever, brave, and tactful figure. What deserved the greatest attention was, nevertheless, his treatment of the native inhabitants:

> 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.[9]

Conquest is a natural activity in history, yet the conquerors must treat the conquered with humanity and mercy. This is, in Burke's view, the best way of establishing a colony and an empire. The conduct of Columbus reminds us not only of that of Agricola in the *Abridgment*, but also of Burke's discussion of America, India and Ireland in his later works.

The Burkes' Columbus was also a very able seaman. When the pilots became lost on the voyage across the Atlantic, Columbus correctly predicted their location, and this, 'added to a series of predictions and noble discoveries, made his skill seem something prophetic, and to exalt his character in this respect above all the seamen before his time'.[10] When seamen mutinied, Columbus was also very tactful in dealing with the problem. He, moreover, predicted the eclipse of the moon and showed it to the native inhabitants:

> By this mutiny the admiral's authority and strength was considerably weakened, whilst the natives were exasperated by the disorders of the mutineers;

[8] Ibid., I, 22.

[9] Ibid., I, 31–2.

[10] Ibid., I, 35.

> 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 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.[11]

Here Columbus was a man of scientific mind. After all, the character of Columbus 'was extremely different from that of all with whom he dealt, and from that of most of those who pursued his discoveries and conquests'.[12] The authors did not hesitate to present the idealised picture of this historical figure. 'In his character hardly is any one of the components of a truly great man wanting', the authors maintained.[13]

The Burkes' image of Columbus seemed to be the outcome of their assessment of the history of the European progress to the new continents. In the sixteenth century, Las Casas presented Columbus as a man of reason and a scientific man, yet his Columbus was also a divine agent. Towards the eighteenth century, Columbus as an agent to realising the divine plan was gradually replaced by Columbus as a man of modern and rational spirit. William Robertson's Columbus was, for example, no longer an agent of providence.[14] Supported by divine will, the Burkes' Columbus was primarily an enlightened figure who helped to break the perennial paralysis of the European societies to lead them to the starting point towards a more advanced age. This means, after all, that the Burkes basically endorsed both Columbus's conducts and the European attempts to settle and make empires in the New World.[15]

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[11] Ibid., I, 53–4.

[12] Ibid., I, 59.

[13] Ibid., I, 59.

[14] Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 96–7, 100.

[15] For the Burkes' characterisation of Columbus, see also Nelson, 'A Map of Mankind', pp. 159–60.

The character of Columbus was an idealised one, but that of the conqueror of the Aztec empire was not. In providing a detailed account of the discovery and conquest of Mexico, the Burkes chiefly focused on the interaction between Cortez and Montezuma, 'prince of capacity and courage, but artful, hypocritical, and cruel'.[16] One of the reasons why Cortez was able to conquer the country was that he took advantage of Montezuma's 'irresolute disposition'.[17]

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 character of the conquerors of Peru was 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'.[18]

Despite the similar circumstances of the birth, Diego de Almagro was worth much higher praise; he was not only brave and tough, but also 'patient, laborious, and temperate'. Although not avaricious, he was cruel, yet this was mitigated by his contact with an Indian woman.[19]

The first king of Peru, Mango Capac, also deserved terms of high commendation. He was a prince of great genius and advanced his country by subtle means. He found the Peruvian people superstitious, made use of their veneration of the sun and pretended that he was descended from that celestial object.[20] Largely relying upon military force to conquer the country, Capac 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 they also developed 'a soft unwarlike temper'. In the Americas, they were the only people who entirely obeyed royal authority and also made substantial advances

[16] *Account*, I, 68.

[17] Ibid., I, 71.

[18] Some years later, Burke expressed a negative assessment of Cortez and Pizarro as tyrants oppressing the native inhabitants of the New World. See 'Burke to Charles O'Hara [*ante* 23 August 1762]', in *Corr.*, I, 147.

[19] *Account*, I, 128–9.

[20] Ibid., I, 129.

in agriculture and the arts. They did not, however, bring their arts to perfection and were inclined to superstition.[21]

The Burkes' depiction of the Peruvians had much in common with that presented by many of their contemporaries. For Robertson too, Capac was an able leader who helped civilise the country.[22] 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'.[23]

At the end of their history of Peru, the Burkes added another two interesting depictions of historical figures: Cristóbal Vaca de 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, that is, disinterestedness and a diligent contribution to the welfare of mankind. In particular, Castro was well aware of the significance of religion and of the clergy, and he endeavoured to promote the conversion of the Indians. He also founded several towns, supported education and improved the royal revenues.[24]

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[21] Ibid., I, 129–30. The Peruvians 'seem to have had a strong resemblance to the antient Egyptians' (ibid., I, 130).

[22] William Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, IX, 203.

[23] Ibid., in *The Works of William Robertson*, IX, 209–10. See also the *Annual Register for the Year 1777* (London, 1778), p. 218 (second pagination). 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.'

[24] *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 Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, IX, 125–6, 146–8.

In their discussion of the French settlements in North America, the Burkes again highlighted the role of leading individuals. Although France began to attempt to make a settlement in North America in the age of Francis I, their first settlement was not established until 1625. The authors presented Cardinal Richelieu as a farsighted politician, who was aware of the advantages of making colonial settlements and who chose Monsieur de Poincy (Phillippe de Longvilliers de Poincy 1583–1660) as a colonial governor. De Poincy was well versed in the mechanical arts and taught the colonists how to produce sugar. He was also a distinguished administrator.[25] The Burkes wrote:

> 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.[26]

The French settlements began to flourish under such able governors. As will be seen below, 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 and Linus, who first built towns and formed civil societies.

[25] *Account*, II, 5–7.

[26] Ibid., II, 7.

> 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.[27]

While there is infrequent emphasis on the role of individuals in shaping society in Burke's works, the authors of the *Account* believed that it is appropriate and an effective kind of rhetoric to emphasise individuals in the history of the Americas, without neglecting other causes of social development. This is, even so, still a Burkean narrative as the characters of these individuals reflected the ideas developed by Burke that great veneration for the conquered and the Christian religion would lead society to stability and prosperity.

Like other writings of the early Burke such as the *Philosophical Enquiry* and the *Abridgment*, the *Account* also emphasised the interventions of divine providence in its narrative.[28] The divine will, for instance, protected Columbus from a storm, which destroyed his enemies.[29] The natural environment was also influenced by divine providence. In the islands of the West Indies, it was the wind and the rain which rendered the tropical heat tolerable.[30] The dogs and cats carried from England to Hudson's Bay acquired 'much longer, softer, and thicker coat of hair than they had originally'.[31]

Providence may also have intervened when European colonists of various national characteristics sought wealth in the Americas. 'There seems to be a remarkable providence in the 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 Portuguese, who was enterprising abroad, also sought and possessed gold and diamonds, their manner of doing so was more useful and less

[27] Ibid., II, 215–6.

[28] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I,140.

[29] *Account*, I, 50–1.

[30] Ibid., II, 90–1.

[31] Ibid., II, 284.

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 individuals being allowed to pursue their own interests rather than imposing restraints upon them, which they resented. The French are 'active, lively, enterprizing, pliable and politic', and 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.[32]

The European settlements grew into a variety of systems and manners according to their national characters. Burke presumably regarded the English settlements, which flourished with liberty enjoyed by the colonists, as the best of these settlements. Almost two decades later, Smith made this point clearer than the Burkes: '[p]lenty of good land, and liberty to manage their own affairs their own way, seem to be the two great causes of the prosperity of all new [English] colonies.' Moreover, according to Smith, 'the political institutions of the English colonies have been more favourable to the improvement and cultivation of this land, than those of any of the other three nations [Spain, Portugal and France]'.[33] Although Burke would have agreed with Smith in such a view, he did not show as much of an interest as Smith did in a more general and systematic analysis of institutions to improve society and achieve prosperity.

Furthermore, it was an outcome of providential intervention that 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 significant driving forces behind the development of the settlements.[34] 'And thus have we drawn from the rashness of hot and visionary men; the imprudence of youth; the corruption of bad morals;

[32] Ibid., II, 55–6.

[33] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, II, 572.

[34] *Account*, II, 104–5.

and even from the wretchedness and misery of persons destitute and undone, the great source of our wealth, our strength and our power', the Burkes wrote. As everything on earth is a product of the divine will, rulers should learn the manners of making the best use of 'an instrument purposely put into their hands by providence, for effecting perhaps the greatest things'.[35] In history, men could recognise a providential event only after it happens, but they always need to seek for a link between society and the metaphysical order behind it.

The Burkes' account of religion also foreshadowed Edmund's later ideas on the subject. Like Edmund Burke's other works, the *Account* regarded the Christian religion as a significant civilising force of society. This idea was presumably reflected even in their account of the Spanish priests in the colonies, who other historians often maintained instigated other colonists to commit the cruelties. Although the Spanish clergy of the age were generally ignorant and not conversant with either the true spirit of the Christian religion or the true nature of the human mind, according to the Burkes, there was no evidence that the murder of the native inhabitants was instigated by them. Instead, the Amerindians 'found their only refuge in the humanity which yet remained in the clergy'.[36]

As Jeffrey Smitten has suggested, the predominant assumption of the inferiority of Hispanic civilisation led some eighteenth-century critics, typically Horace Walpole, to believe in the total barbarity of the Spanish colonists. Among eighteenth-century British historians, however, John Campbell and the authors of the *Account* were sceptical of the accuracy of the notion of the Spanish atrocities and tried to understand Spanish activities in their settlements.[37]

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, provided the young Amerindians with an education and contributed to preserving peace between the Spanish settlements and the Amerindian societies.[38] Although many contemporary critics censured

[35] Ibid., II, 104–5.

[36] Ibid., I, 124.

[37] Jeffrey Smitten, 'Impartiality in Robertson's History of America', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 19 (1985), 56–77 (at 62–3).

[38] *Account*, I, 265.

the Jesuits, the Burkes considered them to be beneficial to the colonies. In Paraguay, the Amerindians were 'an innocent people, civilized without being corrupted' under the Jesuits' jurisdiction.[39] In the Portuguese settlements in Brazil, the priests were chosen to the governors of each parish or district, leading the country to prosperity.[40] To these may well be added the policy conducted by Monsieur de Poincy as mentioned above, and the Burkes' admiration for religious toleration executed by William Penn and Lord Baltimore as will be seen below.

Moreover, the *Account* is a significant work which recorded the early Burke's ideas on political economy. In Europe, where the value of political economy, commerce and the making of the settlements in the new continents was not appreciated until the late sixteenth century, the seventeenth century saw the great awakening to its commercial hegemony over the globe. Burke shared with Smith, Raynal and Kant the sentiment of indignation against the extreme avarice and plunder of the Europeans in the new world, and for him it was clear that the consequences of their greed had been disastrous. Nevertheless, he diverged from these eminent contemporaries when he highlighted the fruits of avarice in his age, driven by the prospect of immediate gains to be offered by the discovery of bullion.[41]

As of international and colonial trade, the *Account* put forward largely similar ideas as those in the later works of Edmund Burke. The authors were critical of the monopolistic companies like Hudson's Bay Company, whereas they approved of the exclusion of foreigners from the colonial trade.[42] Frederick V was endorsed for his efforts to create an open market for international commerce.[43] In general, monopoly reduces production whilst bringing a great profit to the trading company, and more products are supplied with smaller gains to companies in an open market.[44] A monopolistic company might be of great use for bringing up an infant industry and for a remote trade with a barbarous nation.[45]

[39] Ibid., I, 274–5.

[40] Ibid., I, 300–1.

[41] Ibid., I, 46–7.

[42] Ibid., II, 8, 53–4, 280–2.

[43] Ibid., II, 53–4.

[44] Ibid., II, 119; ibid., II, 281.

[45] Ibid., II, 8.

These opinions show the authors' understanding of and belief in economic theory and policy, yet the *Account* was the work intended to inform readers of the strategy for the colonial policies in the eighteenth-century international competition, rather than a work contributing to the establishment of modern economics. France was the particular target for mature reflection in this respect. England had 'been engaged for above a century with France in a noble contention for the superiority in arms, in politics, in learning, and in commerce', the Burkes maintained.[46] The British people tended to be jealous of the development of this rival nation, yet what was important was to make a fair judgement on their systems and policies and to advance a strategy to compete with it.

As already discussed in Chap. 3, the Burkes emphasised the prompt recovery of French commerce after the Utrecht Treaty (the French West Indian colonies continued to produce substantial quantities of sugar, indigo, coffee and so forth), which they attributed to the inextinguishable vitality of the French nation.[47] In addition, they believed, some of the French systems such as the trade council were superior to the British ones, and Britain should emulate the excellent policies by the French government towards the colonies. As the French understood well, the colonies were worth a costly maintenance, that is to say, 'a little judicious expence is often the best œconomy in the world'.[48]

In general, the colonies had contributed to national welfare by offering luxury goods, and more importantly, by improving the balance of trade.[49] The Burkes proposed the specialised production of the British colonies, the direct export from the colonies to the foreign market, and the limited import from abroad to the colonies.[50] Although they argued for removing the ineffective regulations existing in British commerce, the aim of their proposals was to establish a better-regulated system of the empire rather than to create the deregulated market.

Burke well knew that advanced political economy was one of the most significant products of modern Europe and that it had been closely linked to the Europeans' interests in their extended colonies, and to the

[46] Ibid., II, 47.

[47] Ibid., II, 15–7.

[48] Ibid., II, 110–1.

[49] Ibid., II, 107.

[50] Ibid., II, 176.

intense competition and wars among them. Although he acknowledged that there was still some room for improvement, he endorsed the value of political economy, the colonies and even wars among the European nations. This, after all, meant a general, if not full, endorsement of the processes of the history of the Americas as part of the imperial history of modern Europe.

2 British Colonies

The British colonies in America were an outcome of the European progress to the New World following the age of Columbus, but their history was, for British intellectuals and politicians, more significant than the history of the other European colonies, as it was directly linked to the British imperial politics of the late eighteenth century. For Burke, the history of British North America chiefly meant two things: the spread of British systems to the new continent and the rise of a distinct society there that rapidly emerged during recent history without the loss of ancient manners. To tackle American affairs in the 1760s and the 1770s, it was, in his view, significant to recognise both elements, which could provide a framework for the problems of these periods of time.

Burke's recognition of the uniqueness of the colonists could be traced back to the *Account*, where the authors also took for granted their inheritance of 'Englishness'. Among their uniqueness was the large number of independent yeomen, their prominent republican spirit,[51] the absence of a hereditary aristocracy and various forms of government,[52] as well as a distinct natural environment and the production of particular commodities.

As regards forms of government, the Burkes examined three distinct types of government in British North America: royal, proprietary and charter. Royal government arose in the first English colony in North America, that is, 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 at home. A type of legislature resembling the House of Commons

[51] Ibid., II, 161–2.

[52] Ibid., II, 288–9.

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 the legislature, it also played the role of an executive privy council to the governor. The upper house of assembly also sometimes acted as a court of chancery. The power of the governor was limited by these other bodies. Originally shaped in Virginia, this mode of government had become 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 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 granted 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 like 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 preserved it.

A charter colony allowed the colonists to erect institutions of their own design. This originally applied to all provinces in New England, and was particularly democratic 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.'[53]

In the 1760s and the 1770s, Burke continued to recognise the growth of the colonies, which was unprecedentedly rapid, and the newly emerging circumstances. While he drew attention to the fact that the features of the colonies largely derived from their historical origins, he

[53] Ibid., II, 289–93.

was also strongly aware that Britain should discern the true character of these novel circumstances to deal with the issues appropriately. 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 colonies in North America had grown up to be distinct entities:

> 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.[54]

The British colonies were different from the colonies of ancient Greece and Rome,[55] and they were what the British people could not previously conceive.[56] In his great 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', he estimated the growing population of the colonies to be at least 2.5 million and he also showed how British trade with North America and the West Indies had greatly increased between 1704 and 1772.[57] What made the colonies distinct was, however, not only their rapid economic and demographic growth, but the temper and character of the people, that is, their fierce spirit of liberty. This American spirit, according to Burke, had been formed chiefly from six sources: their English descent; their various forms of government; the Protestantism of the north colonies; their manner of life, especially slavery in the

[54] *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, in *WS*, II, 193–4.

[55] Cf. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, II, 558. According to Smith, unlike the modern European colonies in America and the West Indies, both Roman and Greek colonies 'derived their origin either from irresistible necessity, or from clear and evident utility'.

[56] 'Speech on Declaratory Resolution (3 February 1766)', in *WS*, II, 50.

[57] *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 111–4. Cf. *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, in *WS*, II, 143. In 1789, David Ramsay showed the same figures to the whole export trade of England in 1704 and the export to the colonies in 1772 as Burke's, 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. For Ramsay's *History of the American Revolution*, see O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, Chap. 7.

south; their study of the law; and their remote distance from the mother country.

First, the colonists were evidently the descendants of European people, especially those who came from England.[58] In his speech on 22 March 1775, Burke returned to this theme over and over again.[59] The colonists' English descent had contributed to establishing harmony within the empire until recently. Burke reminded his parliamentary colleagues that the American spirit of liberty, although it might not be acceptable to the mother country, derived 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 ancestors have shed their blood.[60]

The spirit of liberty was also the spirit of the English people, which was forged amid the confusions of the past and had been maintained in Britain until the eighteenth century. The British people should, therefore, hold the idea of an imagined community bridging spatial distances, in which a single national spirit laid the foundations of societies on both sides of the Atlantic. The Americans were, in this perspective, brethren. An attempt to destroy them was to attack the community and the spirit of Englishmen themselves. In an earlier point, Burke traced the historical origins of the colonists' spirit in greater detail:

> 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

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[58] See *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (2 vols., Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975), II, 1168; *WS*, III, 120 (editor's note). In 1790, for instance, 60.9 percent of the colonists were of English descent, 8.7 percent were German and 1.7 percent were French.

[59] *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 130, 164.

[60] 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.'

> protestantism of the protestant religion.[61] 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 ...[62]

Burke did not use the term 'puritanism' to refer to the early emigrants from England, although he certainly had the term in mind. His point here was to seek the link between the Puritan spirit of liberty and the British one, which continued to exist in his day.

For Josiah Tucker, however, this was a gross error. Puritanism was the enfant terrible of Protestantism. 'When the Emigrants fled from *England*', he argued, 'they were universally Calvinists of the most inflexible Sort.' Although these emigrants possessed a fierce spirit of liberty, 'they were extremely averse from granting any Portion of that Liberty to others'. Their aim was 'to establish a republican Form of Government built on republican Principles both in Church and State', which clearly conflicted with the constitution adapted by the British nation.[63] Where Burke traced a common foundation for the colonies and the mother country, Tucker found the remnants of religious conflicts from the previous century. Burke, of course, knew of these conflicts and his assessment of them was not far from Tucker's, yet his attention here was drawn to the history in which the colonists had kept harmony with the mother country and had developed their societies substantially.

While the established Church of England was merely one of many denominations for colonists in the north, it was the one to which a large proportion of the settlers belonged in the southern colonies. Burke contended that the southerners had an even stronger spirit of liberty, yet it was, in his view, due to their possession of black slaves brought from Africa rather than to their religion:

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[61] 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. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 277–8.

[62] *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 121–2.

[63] Josiah Tucker, *A Letter to Edmund Burke* (Glocester, 1775), pp. 18–9.

> 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.[64]

For his views on the impact of slavery, he may have relied upon Andrew Burnaby's work.[65] This passage, however, provoked Tucker again, who abominated slavery and maintained that the right theory of morality was always compatible with that of commerce. The system of slavery was the most inefficient for cultivating land, and there was no single country, throughout history, in which agriculture and manufactures were developed and in which simultaneously slavery was preferred to hiring free men.[66]

Burke also referred to education, especially the study of law, and natural remoteness from the mother country as causes of the growth of their

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[64] *Speech on Conciliation with America* , in *WS*, III, 122–3.

[65] Ibid., in *WS*, III, 123 (editor's note). 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* (2nd edn., Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1960; first published in 1775), pp. 22–4: '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.'

[66] Tucker, *A Letter to Edmund Burke*, pp. 22–3.

'disobedient' spirit.[67] Among contemporaries, he was, of course, not the only one who had pointed out the uniqueness of colonial manners and character. While attacking Burke's views on the colonists, despite his conservative political thought being remarkably similar to Burke's, Tucker was also well aware of the distinctiveness of the Americans.[68] For both Burke and Tucker, the Americans were the offspring of the Puritans, who had brought an excessive 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 Americans of New England were no longer fanatical Puritans, they were now, he believed, the disciples of the natural rights ideology of John Locke. Moreover, their antipathy to the Church of England and their tendency towards religious and political disorder were still at the centre of their thinking. In Tucker's view, their doctrines and policies were incompatible with both the British constitution and the true principles of the Christian religion.[69] For him, these Lockean radicals, holding republican tenets, were dangerous enough, and therefore they should be allowed to separate from the mother country so that British people would not be affected by their thoughts.[70] 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.[71]

American intellectuals, too, recognised the uniqueness of their own society, and they also earnestly learned the stadial theory of social development in history advanced by their European contemporaries. Ramsay believed that America had already reached the stage of maturity capable

[67] *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 123–5. In his *History of American Revolution*, Ramsay echoed (or even lifted some passages from) Burke's 'Speech on Conciliation with America'. See Ramsay, *History of American Revolution*, I, 26–30.

[68] For the intellectual relationship between Burke and Tucker, see J.G.A. Pocock, 'Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke, and Price: A Study in the Varieties of Eighteenth-Century Conservatism', in idem, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, pp. 157–191.

[69] Tucker, *A Letter to Edmund Burke*, p. 19: '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.'

[70] Ibid., pp. 10–1.

[71] Ibid., p. 14.

of forming an independent nation.[72] Although Burke, Tucker and Ramsay all drew attention to the uniqueness of the colonies, their views were evidently incompatible with one another.

The history of British North America was also the history in which the role of distinguished individuals should be highlighted. In particular, Pennsylvania and Maryland flourished by establishing religious toleration under the governance of William Penn and Lord Baltimore respectively. According to the Burkes, Penn 'made the most perfect freedom, both religious and civil, the basis of this establishment … 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.'[73] Similar policies were also adopted in Maryland by 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.[74]

This evidently reflected the authors' idea of the Christian religion and the Enlightenment. The Burkes believed that in 'all persuasions the bigots are persecutors; the men of a cool and reasonable piety are favourers of toleration'.[75] Their comments also may have meant a tacit critique

[72] O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 20.

[73] *Account*, II, 191.

[74] Ibid., II, 222–3. The authors also commended religious toleration in Rhode Island, where there 'is an unlimited freedom of religion, agreeable to the first principles of it's foundation' (ibid., II, 165).

[75] Ibid., II, 148.

of the religious situation in Ireland. In an age of enduring religious antagonism, Pennsylvania and Maryland created an earthly paradise for Christians that did not exist either in Britain, Ireland or Europe at large.

These examples were, of course, by no means typical of the British colonies in America. The diametric opposite had often been the case. Religious conflicts, the Burkes wrote, 'form the greatest part of the history of New England, for a long time'.[76] In the new world, for example, the Puritans, who had fled from 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 of 1692 'was the last paroxism of the puritanic enthusiasm in New England'.[77] After all, however, the religious troubles in the colonies did not have a fatal effect on their economic, social and political development.

Pennsylvania and Maryland were not the only states to which great governors brought a flourishing state. The oldest English colony, Virginia, was also indebted to distinguished leaders for its development. The initial plan to make a settlement was advanced by Sir Walter Raleigh, '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'.[78] The early history of Virginia was, however, not a bright one. The settlement had often been threatened by attacks from local Amerindians, by famine and by the unwise behaviour of the colonists. It was Thomas West, 3rd Baron De La Warr (1577–1618) who reconstructed this settlement by governing both the colonists and the Amerindians well. His character was again the Burkes' favourite: unselfish and showing an un-wearying and diligent devotion to the best interests of society.[79] The same applied to James Oglethorpe (1696–1785), who 'very generously bestowed his own time and pains, without any reward, for the advancement of the settlement' of Georgia.[80]

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[76] Ibid., II, 146.

[77] Ibid., II, 155.

[78] Ibid., II, 211–2. Later, in his *Speech on Conciliation with America*, 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.

[79] *Account*, II, 212–5.

[80] Ibid., II, 257. As 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'. See 'Burke to General

Burke was well aware of the fact that the wilderness, foreignness and unexpectedness of the New World required the English colonists, especially in the early phases of the development of the colonies, to possess bravery, determination, inexhaustibility and disinterestedness. This fact clearly made the history of the Americas distinct from other histories. It did not, however, mean that the colonial histories were mostly 'great man history', or that the colonies were formed by the regular plans of a few individuals. Great figures certainly contributed to establishing them, but, as in other parts of the globe, the colonies also developed as a result of the free actions of the people, the nature of the environment, and even as a consequence of a number of contingencies.[81]

The history of the Americas had, in reality, much in common with the histories of other countries and regions, especially with European history—a fact of which Burke was quite conscious. In his view, it was rather part of the history of the Europeans. In the *Account*, the Burkes took it for granted that the Americans were the offspring of common ancestors and inherited the manners and institutions of Europe.[82] By the 1770s, witnessing with his own eyes Britain's relations with the colonies plunged into crisis, Burke attacked government policies from the Rockinghams' viewpoint, but warned the Americans, who had begun to challenge the sovereign authority of parliament, not to separate from the mother country. In doing so, he characteristically emphasised the genealogical closeness between the English and the American peoples. He stressed that these two people had the same origins and shared the same characteristics, which had created strong ties and considerable harmony within the British Empire. In his 'Speech on Conciliation with

James Oglethorpe (2 June 1777)', in *Corr.*, III, 344; Nelson, 'A Map of Mankind', pp. 180–1. In 1780, in the context of his censure of the board of trade, Burke asserted that 'Georgia, which, till lately, has made a very slow progress; and never did make any progress at all, until it had wholly got rid of all the regulations which the board of trade had moulded into its original constitution.' See *Speech on Economical Reform*, in *WS*, III, 537.

[81] *Account*, II, 288.

[82] The Burkes, however, considered that it was absurd for the colonies to use exactly the same laws as England, since they were already different political societies shaped by their historical experience and their unique circumstances. See ibid., II, 296. The Burkes' Montesquieuan position was compatible with that in the *Abridgment* and the *Reflections*: law needs to be changed according to circumstances.

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.'[83] An emphasis on descent and similarity of manners and character between the two peoples was probably his most deep-rooted belief.

Facing a crisis in the empire, Burke, like many other contemporaries in Britain, did not want the colonies to be independent. He insisted that 'a 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 his colleagues, 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.[84]

Warnings about the future of America[85] clearly reflected his views on the history of the region. While the colonial societies had grown rapidly

[83] *Speech on Conciliation with America* , in *WS*, III, 164.

[84] 'Address to the Colonists', in *WS*, III, 279, 283.

[85] Even Burke mentioned the possibility of civil wars. See ibid., in *WS*, III, 283: '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*, 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.

and substantially, the British constitution had, according to Burke, been essential to their development.

Burke strongly believed that the colonies flourished under the superintendence of the British government. During the period between 1660 and 1763, the project of the colonies had always been the project of commerce. The Navigation Acts were then, he maintained on 19 April 1774, 'the corner-stone of the policy of this country with regard to its colonies'. It was 'the system of a monopoly' and forced the colonies to submit to 'commercial servitude'. The acts 'attended the Colonies from their infancy, grew with their growth, and strengthened with their strength'. Fishing, 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 accomplished under 'perfect freedom', but under 'an happy and a liberal condition'. Burke claimed that 'a parliamentary revenue from thence was never once in contemplation'. By and after the enactment of the Stamp Act, however, the project of the colonies turned into the project of revenue and oppression. For him, the 'scheme of a Colony revenue by British authority appeared therefore to the Americans in the light of a great innovation'.[86] But, 'Every Tax is not revenue'.[87] The Stamp Act was repealed by the Rockingham administration, as Burke reflected back in his note, 'from an opinion, that a General Law upon the Colonies was not suitable to their Circumstances at that time & not consistent with the principles of Commercial Policy on which they were formed'.[88] The rhetoric and analysis here are historical ones, which are typical of Burke. British colonial policy had recently diverged from the right course shaped by history, and he wished it to return to the state before 1763.

The history of the English settlements in America began with the avarice of the settlers and with fanatical persecutions. Although both of these causes were not laudable in themselves, they brought a significant consequence, that is, the formation of the flourishing colonies, and the project of commerce had been shaped in the seventeenth century and had, roughly speaking, succeeded until the late eighteenth century. Burke did not regard the mercantilist policies firmly established in

[86] *Speech on American Taxation* (19 April 1774), in *WS*, II, 426–9.

[87] Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVII. 55.

[88] Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVII. 56.

modern history as a false dawn, as Smith did in the *Wealth of Nations*. Instead, he believed that the ministerial policies from 1764 had led to the breakdown of the imperial project which had hitherto proceeded well.

After the Americans signed a military alliance with Catholic and absolutist France in February 1778, many Britons ceased to regard the colonists as their brethren or fellow subjects. Burke, however, still held to his original view.[89] Although he had to accept the virtual independence of the colonies by December 1778, he still considered the Americans as 'Englishmen by blood'.[90] In March 1782, Burke also wrote to Franklin that the resolution of the Commons for ending the war would 'lead to a speedy peace between the two branches of the English nation'.[91] In early May of the same year, he pressed for the total abolition, or the substantial revision, of the Navigation Acts,[92] which he believed had been a key to the maintenance of the British Empire across the Atlantic. For him and others, the dissolution of the empire was now clear, and they needed to look for the second best policy according to the circumstances. Even so, the past still meant a great deal to him and other Rockinghams. The original constitutional and economic relationship between America and Britain could be restored, they believed, if the 'genuine' Whigs took office. His memorandum, presumably prepared in March 1782, stated that the connection between England and America was 'natural' and 'suitable to the Nature and circumstances of things'.[93] Burke was far from being unaware of the fact that new circumstances required a new imperial order, but it seems that he was strongly convinced that

[89] For this, see Stephen Conway, 'From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners: British Perceptions of the Americans, circa 1739–1783', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 59 (2002), 65–100. See also P.J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America c. 1750–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 356, 358.

[90] 'Burke to Dr John Erskine (12 June 1779)', in *Corr.*, IV, 87.

[91] 'Burke to Benjamin Franklin (28 February 1782)', in *Corr.*, IV, 419. See also 'Burke to Henry Laurens (27 March 1782)', in *Corr.*, IV, 428.

[92] For his advocate of the repeal, see *Parliamentary Register*, VII, 106; *Morning Chronicle*, 3 May 1782, both cited in, *WS*, IV, 130 (editor's note). For his comments on the revision, see 'Hints of a Treaty with America' (*ante* 20 March 1782), in *WS*, IV, 130–1.

[93] 'Hints of a Treaty with America', in *WS*, IV, 128–31.

history remained useful in finding a satisfactory resolution to the dispute between Britain and the American colonies.

By the early 1790s, however, he had departed from his earlier reluctance to accept an independent America and he came to value highly the recently founded country, including its recent history. The Americans 'were a people singularly well qualified to form themselves into a Republic', and the 'guardianship' of Britain over the country for ages before their independence had 'prevented them from turning into those excesses that other Republicks had gone into'. They even benefited from their experience of waging war against the mother country. Through this war, they acquired military discipline, which 'produced order, regularity, temper, obedience, and submission to authority'.[94]

Furthermore, the Americans 'have brought their government as near as possible to the British Constitution' despite the absence of monarchy and ancient aristocracy in the country.[95] In stating this, he had in mind revolutionary France, which could be compared adversely with independent America. In Burke's view, unlike France, which 'destroyed all traces of manners, laws, opinions, and usages which she drew from Europe', America, even after achieving independence, maintained close affinities with Britain and Europe through manners and constitutional arrangements. Therefore, the United States of America should be included 'among the European Powers'. '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', he asserted, 'it must be considered as a part of the European system.'[96] The idea that a nation is formed by its culture and social manners, not just by geography, is characteristic of Burke. The manners and institutions of the Europeans had been extended to America, and the people had not demolished them long after their early settlements. In asserting that the Americans 'had never dreamt of the *Rights of Man*', his views on the history of the United States clearly reflected his idea of the place as 'old Europe', while

[94] 'Speech on Quebec Bill (6 May 1791)', in *WS*, IV, 329.

[95] *Oracle*, 7 May 1791.

[96] *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 325.

underestimating the role of the concept of natural rights in the newly formed nation.[97]

3 The Amerindians

Although the Amerindians evidently constitute part of Burke's views on the Americas, his depiction of the native inhabitants is distinct from his thought on other respects of the New World. This is not simply because the narrative of the Amerindians was not that of the Europeans, but because of Burke's views on their manners and characters. For him, the extreme barbarity, fierceness and cruelty of the Amerindians indicated their almost total lack of humanity. This belief in 'dehumanization' prevented him from appreciating and locating the societies of the Amerindians in his map of civilisations that intrinsically presumed the diversity of human manners and cultures on earth.[98] The natives of the New World were barbarians, and they had, in Burke's view, been so since they first encountered the Europeans.

This view was not unusual among Europeans of many generations, nor was he extraordinary in advancing his general thought through an analysis of them. Indeed, the natives of the American continents had, since the fifteenth century, been a great source of inspiration for the Europeans and had led them to rethink their ideas on human nature and civilisation. In William Guthrie's words, 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 philosophers.[99] The European travellers and intellectuals sought for the implications of

[97] 'Speech on Quebec Bill', in *WS*, IV, 329–30. See also Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 922.

[98] Cf. Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to write the History of the New World*, pp. 48–9: the enlightened Scottish historians such as Robertson and Kames did not see that the Amerindians well fitted with their stadial theories.

[99] 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 continues: '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.

the existence of the Amerindians, and their newly acquired knowledge of the New World certainly helped develop their historical thought as well as other intellectual capacities. The manners and societies of these people could sometimes inform the Europeans of the growth of cultural diversity over the globe during history, yet these more frequently urged them to be convinced of the primitive nature and barbarism of that part of the world, and to believe that the state of their society had remained the same from the distant past (which was almost equivalent to the view on the Amerindians as a people 'without history')[100] and also to find some analogy with the societies of ancient times, which they could know only through reading and imagination.

According to the *Account*, the barbarity and backwardness of the Amerindians were an outcome of aspects of their lives. They chiefly engaged in war and hunting, and agriculture was the work of women. They were idle and slept half the day. The manners and customs of the Amerindians were, in the Burkes' view, almost the same throughout North and South America. Like many contemporaries, the Burkes regarded the manners of these native inhabitants as savage and analogous to those of ancient Europeans or of any country in the remote past.

One of the most striking points the Burkes made was their conclusion that the natives there were often irreligious. In their generalised terms, 'A people who live by hunting, who inhabit mean cottages, and are given to change the place of their habitation, are seldom very religious.'[101] 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 Amerindians 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.[102]

[100] Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to write the History of the New World*, pp. 48–9.

[101] *Account*, I, 166. Cf. 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, where the author seems to assume the people 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.'

[102] Ibid., I, 166–7: '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

These ideas need to be understood by considering the references of the work and other works of the eighteenth century on the subject. The *Account* acknowledged its indebtedness to Joseph-François Lafitau's work for its opinion of the Amerindians and expressed admiration for him. According to the Burkes, to study the Amerindians is useful, to some extent, for understanding 'the antiquities of all nations', and 'no mean lights may be thrown upon many parts of the ancient authors, both sacred and profane'. 'The learned Lafitau has', in their view, 'laboured this point with great success'.[103] Nonetheless, Lafitau's views on the Amerindians were not exactly the same as the Burkes', because he apparently believed that the Amerindians were religious.[104] It appears even to be one of the main arguments of his work 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?[105]

The Burkes' ideas could rather be closer to those of their contemporaries. For William Robertson, for example, the rise of religious sentiments is largely proportional to the progress of society and human intelligence. In a barbarous society, he believed, the intellectual capacity of human beings must be so limited that they cannot advance their idea of God. In the Americas, there are some tribes who do not have any idea of divinity or religious rituals, which could be ascribed to the barbarous nature of their societies. Other tribes, such as the Natchez and the Bogota, have more advanced ideas and systems of religion, as well as more elaborate political institutions.[106] Although Robertson's analysis

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any part of America are no way comparable to them.' Here there seems to be an assumption that the civilised people are usually religious.

[103] *Account*, I, 161.

[104] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 137.

[105] See Joseph-François 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), 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.

[106] Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, VIII, 181–98. Robertson was very critical of Lafitau's work. See ibid., in *The Works of William Robertson*, VIII, 182, 470.

was subtler, the Burkes' account of the irreligiousness of the Amerindians seems to have resulted from following a similar line of thought.

The barbarity of the Amerindians 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 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 nature of any other human beings.[107] On 6 February 1778, in the House of the Commons, when opposing the employment of Amerindians as a subsidiary army, Edmund Burke stated that the Amerindians' style of warfare 'was so horrible, 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'. The excessive cruelty of the Amerindians, seen as innate and incurable, made it impossible for Burke to situate them in the history of human societies.[108] The Amerindians had, in Burke's view, not achieved any substantial progress over the course of history, at least since their encounter with the Europeans. These people at the time of Columbus, those who communicated with the Spanish clergy or the Amerindians of the eighteenth century were all considered savages and barbarians.

This, of course, did not mean that nothing had literally changed in their life over time. When the Europeans arrived in America for the first time, the Amerindians appeared almost naked. The people had then

[107] *Address to the Colonies* [January 1777], in *WS*, III, 281–82: '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.'

[108] *Parl. Hist.*, XIX, 695. See also ibid., XIX, 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'.

begun to buy 'a coarse blanket' from the colonists to wear.[109] Although they also had not known alcohol until the Europeans introduced them to it, spirituous liquors now became one of their favourites, 'what gives a spur to their industry, and enjoyment to their repose'. This was, however, also the great cause of social disorder. From 'this they suffer inexpressible calamities',[110] even killing each other. In the *Annual Register* of 1763, Burke also maintained that the English colonists had not treated the Amerindians properly, and this kept them ferocious:

> 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.[111]

Here Burke attributed the barbarous conduct of the Amerindians to the ill treatment of them rather than to their inherent racial inferiority.[112]

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[109] *Account*, I, 162.

[110] Ibid., I, 163.

[111] *Annual Register … for the Year 1763*, p. 32.

[112] Robertson's discussion of the Amerindians in his *History of America* was one of the most celebrated parts of his work and explicitly pointed to their racial inferiority. According to Robertson, 'the inferiority of the Americans was conspicuous'. They were utterly unacquainted with metals, and in the case of war they were 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 Robertson, *The History of America*, in *The Works of William Robertson*, VIII, 126, 167–8. In the famous letter to Robertson in 1777, Burke wrote that his analysis of the Amerindians was the most interesting part of the book. Nevertheless, 'I only think that in one or two points you have hardly done justice to the savage Character' of the Amerindians. See 'Burke to William Robertson (9 June 1777)', in *Corr.*, III, 351. The *Annual Register* for 1777 also stated: 'Dr Robertson has taken no notice of the eloquence or poetry of the Americans, which are among the most

At an earlier point, Burke 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 Amerindians. They also continued to attack the French colony in Canada for a long time in a very cruel manner:

> 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 …[113]

The environment and particular circumstances could influence manners of life. Here there also seems to be an idea characteristic of Burke that peace, rather than war, could provide a cause for a decline in population.

As already noted, since their discovery of the 'New World', according to the *Account*, the Spanish colonists murdered the natives inhabitants and plunged the societies of the New World into confusion, although their clergy 'civilised' some Amerindians by converting them to Christianity.[114] It is, therefore, far from the truth that the Europeans had contributed to the general welfare of the natives of the Americas. The facts would rather turn out to have been the opposite. While barbarity had remained a distinct feature of the Amerindians' manners and character, the encounter with the Europeans had at many times affected their

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distinguished properties of mankind in a state of savage nature.' See *Annual Register … for the Year 1777*, p. 218 (second pagination).

[113] *Annual Register … for the Year 1763*, p. 23.

[114] *Account*, I, 284–6. See also *Vindication*, in *WS*, I, 150 ('the horrid Effects of Bigotry and Avarice, in the Conquest of *Spanish America*').

lives adversely. This is the conclusion derived from Burke's comments on the Amerindians rather than what he directly suggested. Although Burke negatively assessed the Europeans' 'ill treatment' of the native inhabitants there, he never disavowed the value of their progress to the new continent and, unlike in the case of India and St. Eustatius, he even did not argue for moral obligations to the conquered people there.

For Burke, the history of the Americas was, to a large extent, an extension of European history, and the value of making European settlements in the Americas was clear, even though European avarice for the bullion they initially seized could not be praiseworthy. The progress to the New World was an evolution of European history, which had contributed to the development of the societies in Europe. Although it was clear that they were adversely affected by the adventures and avarice of these newcomers, the Amerindians did not fit well into the main part of Burke's American history. The historical narrative of the Amerindians existed in his thought, yet it was often separate from that of the Europeans. Nor could they fit well into Burke's general model of civilisations in which there could be a great variety of valuable cultures and manners. The Amerindians had, in Burke's view, largely remained singular and unintelligible, although wretched, beings.

CHAPTER 5

Irish History: Antiquity, Conquest and Incomplete Liberty

Born and raised in Ireland, Burke was naturally informed by a rich experience of his native land. He saw the country's poverty at first hand and grew up amid discussions of the contemporary issues and history of Ireland.[1] His father, Richard Burke (d. 1761), was born in Munster and may or may not have been a convert to the Church of Ireland, which was convenient for his practice as an attorney. Mary Nagle, Burke's mother, was the daughter of a prominent Catholic family in Cork. Her father, Garrett Nagle was a Jacobite, and even after the Williamite confiscation of 1691, he managed to retain his property.[2] For the people of Cork, especially for the Catholic residents there, the recent history of the southern regions of the nation was unforgettable. In October 1649, the New Model Army attacked Wexford town and massacred both soldiers and residents. In March 1689, King James II landed at Kinsale, but his campaign for regaining the British crown miscarried after his defeat at

[1] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 2.

[2] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 14. See also L.M. Cullen, 'The Blackwater Catholics and County Cork Society and Politics in the Eighteenth Century', in *Cork: History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1993), pp. 535–84 (at 552).

This chapter is derived in part from Sora Sato, 'Edmund Burke's Views of Irish History', *History of European Ideas*, 41 (2015), 387–403.

S. Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64441-7_5

the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. After this, many Catholics obviously experienced a reduction in their powers and, to a great extent, influence in their lands. The young Burke spent some years in Cork, where he stayed with his mother's relatives.[3] His elder sister, Juliana, was brought up and remained with her mother's religion, Roman Catholicism. Later in 1757, Burke himself married the Catholic, Jane Nugent—an outcome of his acquaintance and friendship with a Catholic physician Christopher Nugent.

At the boarding school at Ballitore, Burke might have learned Irish history as well as British history if his experience was similar to that of his fellow students.[4] While Irish history was not a part of the curriculum at Trinity College, Dublin, he still educated himself about it. In a 1746 letter to Richard Shackleton, he wrote, 'I spend three hours almost every day in the publick Library' and 'I have read some history.' His reading included Irish history, and he was 'endeavouring to get a little into the accounts of this our own poor Country'.[5] Because it was quite clear that the causes of the piteous plight of the country were rooted in the past, his interest in Irish society naturally led him to analyse its history.

After moving to London in 1750, Burke 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. Although the political apprenticeship under Hamilton was not largely successful, he learned about Irish politics through this experience. Around this 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 denouncing the penal laws. He might even have planned to write a history of Ireland in this period. 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

[3] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 21.

[4] Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 48. Cf. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 24–5.

[5] 'Burke to Richard Shackleton (12 July 1746)', in *Corr.*, I, 68. The 'public Library' probably means Trinity College Library.

glad it is the latter, for I am now in Mr Hume's England'.[6] As Walpole noted, what Burke had actually been producing was a history of England, that is, the *Abridgment of the English History*. Even so, as will be seen below, in this work he at times made comments on Irish history. After 1766, Burke made a visit to his native country only once (for three weeks in 1786), yet the contemporary political situation continued to provide him with opportunities to consider 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.[7] In 1782 and 1783, when Irish legislative independence was debated and granted, he certainly wished Ireland to remain closely linked with the British constitution.[8] 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 a public letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe. Around the same period, his son Richard was appointed an agent of the Catholic Committee in Ireland and passionately, although unsuccessfully, engaged in the business of Catholic relief, which Edmund strongly supported. While almost every work by Burke on Ireland is informed by his vision of Irish history, he was very conscious of the fact that most contemporary Irish problems had historical origins that involved its relations with Britain.

Like those of other commentators of the age, Burke's ideas on Irish history were distinct from his views on the histories of the other parts of the world. In his analysis of Irish history, moreover, he was closer to a genuine historian in the sense that he was eager to seek out the historical truth. This was chiefly because an account of Irish history was, in the eighteenth century, directly linked to contemporary issues of Britain's government of the Irish nation, and he was well aware of this nature of Irish history. In his opinions on Irish politics, which barely changed throughout his career, Burke's particular wish was to abolish the

[6] See 'George Montagu to Horace Walpole (27 November 1761)', in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis and others (48 vols., London, 1937–1983), IX, 405; 'Walpole to Montagu (8 December 1761)', in *Walpole's Correspondence*, IX, 407. See also Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 193.

[7] The editor's 'Introduction to Part II', in *WS*, IX, 400–1.

[8] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 404–5.

penal laws and trade restrictions that had been imposed by the English government in the past, so that social justice and the spirit of industry could take root in Ireland and the fuller integration of the British Empire could be promoted. Behind such political views there was a largely coherent historical vision of Ireland.

As will be seen below, Burke's surviving comments on Irish history spanned widely from ancient to modern periods, and he held fairly clear notions of each period. As a man conscious of living in the enlightened age, while analysing Irish history, he tried to be an impartial and philosophical historian, who fervently wished to correct historiographical errors that adversely affected the general view of Ireland, by revealing aspects of its historical truth. By so doing, he also earnestly aimed to change Ireland's political situation in his own age. For Burke, 're-writing' Irish history was a serious issue, in which he maintained an unwavering interest, and hence he did not hesitate to help other historians of his age, who likewise wished to make substantial revisions on the historiography. During his life, he also eye-witnessed the changing situation, including some substantial improvement, in Ireland's politics and society, and these observations constituted part of his views on Irish history. A study of Burke tackling the problems of Irish history, nevertheless, not only clarifies his views on this but also his place in early modern historiography.[9] It also informs us of the way in which his ideas on the history

[9] Burke's views on Irish history have been neglected by modern historians, but see, for example, 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. Eighteenth-century Irish historiography has also been relatively under-researched, but more historians have worked on it in recent years. The most substantial work for this theme is Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland c. 1750–1800* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2004). Recent studies also include 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 *Political Discourse in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Clare

of other parts of the world were linked to his views on Irish history, and how the significant parts of his political thought were shaped through an exploration of the history of his native land.

1 As Supporter of Revisionists

Burke became acquainted with and close to Irish historians such as Charles O'Conor and John Curry in the early 1760s and he supported their revisionist attempts.[10] In 1747, Curry published *A Brief Account of … the Rebellion of October, 1641*, which was the first work produced by a native Irishman on the subject.[11] In 1758, he also published *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion*, which Burke read and passed on to Tobias Smollett, the editor of the *Critical Review*.[12] Later, Burke provided Curry with an 'excellent hint' for improving the *Historical Memoirs*.[13] Burke carried this book to England and intended to support the publication of a revised edition under his supervision.[14] Around the same period, Burke also came to know an English Protestant historian,

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O'Halloran, 'Historical Writings, 1690–1890', in *Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, ed. Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (2 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), I, 599–632.

[10] John C. Weston, Jr., 'Edmund Burke's Irish History: A Hypothesis', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 77 (1962), 397–403 and Walter D. Love, 'Edmund Burke and an Irish Historiographical Controversy', *History and Theory*, 2 (1962), 180–98 are the pioneering and still leading works of the theme, to which the present section clearly owes. See also Walter D. Love, 'Edmund Burke, Charles Vallancy and the Sebright Manuscripts', *Hermathena*, 95 (1961), 21–35; idem, 'Charles O'Conor of Belanagare and Thomas Leland's 'Philosophical' History of Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, 13 (1962), 1–25.

[11] Weston, 'Edmund Burke's Irish History', p. 399.

[12] 'O'Conor to John Curry (8 Aug 1768)', in *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London, 1881), p. 489; Weston, 'Edmund Burke's Irish History', p. 399. Burke owned both 1775 and 1786 editions of Curry's *Historical and Critical Review of the Civil Wars in Ireland*: LC MS; *LC*, pp. 4, 15.

[13] Quoted in Weston, 'Edmund Burke's Irish History', p. 399. See also *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, pp. 480, 489; 'Dr John Curry to Edmund Burke (8 June 1765)', in *Corr.*, I, 201–3.

[14] Weston, 'Edmund Burke's Irish History', p. 399.

Ferdinando Warner, and, in the *Annual Register*, he wrote a favourable review of his work.[15]

In the early 1760s, O'Conor and Curry appear to have asked Burke to write an address delivering the loyalty and plight of Irish Catholics to George III,[16] which was, in Curry's words, 'left with me [Curry], in the year 1764' and 'found by us here so excellent a performance in every respect'.[17] In 1765, O'Conor also wrote a letter to Burke and promised to send a him a copy of his *Dissertations on the History of Ireland* (1766), whose preface acknowledged Burke's support.[18] O'Conor might even have hoped till the late 1760s that Burke would write a revisionist history of Ireland.[19] Burke's entrance into the English political world in 1765, however, might have affected his relationship with these Catholic historians of Ireland and he did not support the publication of Curry's new edition after all. As a MP of Westminster, Burke now needed to be more cautious of his connections with Roman Catholics.[20] In political debates, he was often ridiculed and attacked as a crypto-papist by his opponents,[21] and even his patron, Rockingham, and his colleagues in

[15] See *Annual Register … for the Year 1763*, pp. 257–64 (second pagination); Weston, 'Edmund Burke's Irish History', p. 399. Warner's *History of Ireland* intended a general history of Ireland, but only volume one was published in 1763.

[16] 'Address and Petition of the Irish Catholics (1764)', in *WS*, IX, 429–34. See also Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 217.

[17] 'John Curry to Edmund Burke (18 August 1778)', in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, between the Year 1744 and the Period of his Decease, in 1797*, ed. Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam and Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Bourke (4 vols., London, 1844), II, 237–8.

[18] 'O'Conor to Burke (25 April 1765)', in *Letters of Charles O'Conor of Belanagare: A Catholic Voice in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. Robert E. Ward et al. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), p. 174; Charles O'Conor, *Dissertations on the History of Ireland* (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1766), p. xv: '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*, Esq'.

[19] Weston, 'Edmund Burke's Irish History', p. 398; *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, p. 486.

[20] Love, 'Edmund Burke and an Irish Historiographical Controversy', p. 182.

[21] 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).

the party would not have been pleased with his connections with Irish Catholics if they had discovered more about them.[22] In an age when Catholics were not admitted to public office, both Burke and his colleagues well understood the meanings of the historical hostility to Roman Catholicism in Britain. Nevertheless, after 1765, he continued to contact Curry and supported other revisionist historians in Ireland.

In 1771, Burke still strongly believed that 'our History of Ireland [was] so terribly defective' and he 'did, and with success, urge a very learned and Ingenious friend of yours and mine in the University of Dublin to under take it'. This was Thomas Leland, another Irish historian of the age to whom Burke offered his support. 'I dare say He [Leland] will do it ably and faithfully', Burke wrote, yet continued, 'but if He thinks, that any thing unfavourable to his principles will be deduced, from telling the truth or cares for Vulgar Malignity', then 'He is much more below the task than I can yet prevail on myself to think him.'[23]

Earlier, in September 1765, Burke visited Beechwood and discovered by accident some manuscripts in Sir John Sebright's library written in old Irish (originally collected by Edward Lhuyd and purchased by Sebright's grandfather in 1713). In 1769, Burke borrowed these manuscripts (two volumes) and sent them to Leland.[24] He expected Leland to become a 'philosophical historian' in Ireland and to write the truth about Irish history, especially about the Rebellion of 1641. Nonetheless, for Burke and the Irish revisionists, Leland's *History of Ireland*, published in 1773, was far from satisfactory. Later, Burke wrote to his son Richard:

> 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

[22] See O'Brien, *The Great Melody*, p. 49.

[23] 'Burke to Dr William Markham [post 9 November 1771]', in *Corr.*, II, 285.

[24] *Corr.*, V, 15 (editor's note). See also Leland, *History of Ireland*, I, xxvi. 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, 108 (editor's note); Love, 'Edmund Burke, Charles Vallancey and the Sebright Manuscripts'.

> 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.[25]

After such disappointment, he still at times supported other historians. In 1783, Colonel Charles Vallancey sent Burke the twelfth number of his *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*[26] 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.[27] The twelfth number of the *Collectanea* made use of the manuscripts discovered by Burke in Sebright's library, 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'.[28] Burke wrote back to him:

> 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.[29]

Vallancey's strenuous efforts were clear, but their achievement was still far from being satisfactory. Burke began to state the reason why Vallancey's work was still not convincing:

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[25] 'Burke to Richard Burke, Jr (20 March 1792)', in *Corr.*, VII, 104. See also Sir James Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke* (2nd edn., 2 vols., London, 1826), I, 510–1. Burke does not seem to have been content with Leland's description of the battles between the houses of Desmond and Butler. Burke owned Leland's *History of Ireland* (in three volumes): LC MS; *LC*, p. 16. The *Annual Register* positively reviewed Leland's *History*. See *Annual Register … for the Year 1773* (London, 1774), pp. 255–66.

[26] The catalogue of Burke's private library records the fifth volume of *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*: LC MS; *LC*, p. 23.

[27] 'Vallancey to Burke (25 June 1783)', WWM Bk P 1/1816; quoted in *Corr.*, V, 108 (editor's note).

[28] Ibid; quoted in *Corr.*, V, 108 (editor's note).

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

> 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 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 ...[30]

In the rest of the letter, Burke became closer to a genuine historian than on other occasions. 'If I were to give my opinion to the Society of Antiquaries', he continued, 'I should propose that they should be printed in two columns, one Irish and the other Latin … and above all things, that the translation should be exact and literal.' He maintained that 'ancient period of Irish history, which precedes official records, cannot be said to stand upon any proper authority' until 'something of this kind is done'.[31]

In 1786, Vallancey published the fourteenth number of his *Collectanea*, *A Vindication of the Ancient History of Ireland* and sent Burke a copy. Burke's response to this new publication expressed in another letter to the author was almost exactly the same as that to the previous work of Vallancey.[32] When Vallancey made public Burke's letter (of 29 November 1786) in the *Dublin Chronicle* on 10–12 April 1788, he pointed to Burke's words as approval for his work. One of their contemporaries, Thomas Campbell read this and wrote to the *Chronicle* to stress that Burke's letter in fact contained serious criticism of Vallancey's work: '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'.[33] In August 1789, Campbell's *Strictures on the Ecclesiastical and Literary History of Ireland* was published in Dublin (also, in London in 1790),[34]

[30] Ibid., in *Corr.*, V, 109.

[31] Ibid., in *Corr.*, V, 109–10.

[32] 'Burke to Colonel Charles Vallancey (29 November)' in *Corr.*, V, 290–1.

[33] Thomas Campbell, *Strictures on the Ecclesiastical and Literary History of Ireland* (Dublin, 1789), p. 304.

[34] Love, 'Edmund Burke and an Irish Historiographical Controversy', pp. 191–3. Burke owned the 1789 edition of Campbell's *Strictures*: *LC*, p. 4. He also owned Campbell's *Philosophical Survey of the South of Ireland* (1778): *LC*, p. 23. See also LC MS (Campbell's 'History of Ireland').

and the letters published originally in the *Dublin Chronicle* were also reprinted in the work as a 'supplement'.

Campbell himself was one who was offered Burke's advice on the subject. When he visited Beaconsfield in the summer of 1787, he was told by Burke 'to touch as lightly as possible upon the times preceding the invasion from England', and also passed his collection of Irish manuscripts on to Campbell.[35] Burke wished him to write a modern history of Ireland. He was, however, not the only person advising Campbell. As noted in the preface of the *Strictures*, Campbell also received suggestions from Samuel Johnson, who encouraged him to work on the period in Irish history between the introduction of Christianity by St. Patrick and the invasion of the country by the forces of Henry II. While his *Strictures* was dedicated to Burke, Campbell followed Johnson's advice, not Burke's, and concentrated on the early Christian period of the country. Soon after the publication of the *Strictures* in Dublin, embarrassed by Campbell's words, Vallancey sent another letter to Burke:

> 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. … 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.[36]

Both Vallancey and Campbell regarded Burke as an authority and wanted him to be on their side. Burke was, however, not largely interested in their dispute, but rather he seems to have been disgusted with

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[35] Campbell, *Strictures*, pp. 1, 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, 1817–1858), 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.

[36] 'Vallancey to Burke (8 October 1789)', WWM Bk P 1/2186; quoted, for example, in Love, 'Edmund Burke and an Irish Historiographical Controversy', p. 193.

it. Burke's further communications with them are not recorded. On 20 March 1792, he asked his son Richard to retrieve the manuscripts lent to Campbell and said: 'Agenda-I. get the Books out of Dr Campbells hands. Let him not triffle with you. I have triffled in giving them to him!'[37]

Burke shared with revisionist historians the belief that Irish history should be substantially rewritten in an impartial manner. While attempting to refute traditional interpretations based on English and Protestant prejudices, they also wanted to argue against Hume's views on Irish history. Although both Burke and these historians rated Hume's *History of England* highly in general, they noticed his biased views on the Irish nation. While Campbell, in his *Strictures*, took a sceptical attitude towards and was critical of the interpretation of ancient Ireland as the glorious age, that had been recently reproduced by such historians as O'Conor and others, he also wrote that 'a mind so philosophical as Mr. Hume's was not emancipated from those national prejudices which every where enslave the vulgar'.[38] In O'Conor's view, Hume's *History of England* was, on the whole, 'an excellent and useful work', yet it was needed to 'urge him about some corrections and retractations relatively to Ireland'.[39] O'Conor, in particular, wanted Hume to reconsider and change his depictions of the 1641 Rebellion. Burke was exactly the same in this regard. According to Robert Bisset, when Hume, in a note of his *History of England*, listed the denial of this rebellion as one of 'touchstones of partymen',[40] 'Burke considered himself, though no Catholic, as referred to', and when he met Hume later, Burke 'endeavoured to prove that the received accounts were in a great degree unfounded, or at least very much exaggerated'. In response, however, 'Hume maintained the justness of the account'.[41]

Burke and the revisionist historians were alike in hoping that the truth about Irish history would be revealed and that it would positively

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

[38] Campbell, *Strictures*, p. 27 (note).

[39] 'O'Conor to Curry (12 June 1762)', in *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, pp. 470–1. In another letter, O'Conor also wrote: 'Hume and Smollet, the best modern historians we ever had in England'. See *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, p. 465.

[40] Hume, *History of England*, IV, 395 (note).

[41] Robert Bisset, *The Life of Edmund Burke. ...* (2 vols., London, 1800), II, 426.

influence the Irish politics of their age. In supporting the revisionist historians, Burke also wished that Ireland would have a 'philosophical historian' for its own history, but he was aware that his and the revisionists' endeavours had eventually failed. The reason for this failure was chiefly that a revisionist history of Ireland after the English conquest of 1172 had not been written. While many historians had focused on the ancient and pre-conquest history of the nation,[42] and Burke was not without interest in this, what he believed was more important, however, was the discovery of the historical truth about modern Ireland and the production of its impartial and philosophical history. As will be seen below, Burke agreed with Curry's accounts of the 1641 rebellion, but he presumably believed that a general history of Ireland after Henry II's intervention needed to be produced. Warner's history did not extend beyond 1172, Leland's was unsuccessful and Campbell and other revisionists did not work on the theme. What he wished would be produced for historiography could, nevertheless, be partly reconstructed from his own comments on Irish history.

2 Enthusiasm and Impartiality: Towards Henry II's Conquest

While Burke presumably believed that a modern history of Ireland would be more significant[43] because of its relevance to contemporary issues of Irish politics, he was still interested in ancient Ireland. He was aware that little was known about it in his age, and, throughout his career, he wished that more facts and truth of ancient Ireland would be revealed. Even though he himself was not greatly informed on the early history of his native land, Burke still believed that some arts, especially poetry, had reached a high standard of sophistication there in ancient times. One of the reasons why he was initially fascinated with the publication of James Macpherson's *Fingal* was his strong belief in the excellence of the poetry

[42] Other than those mentioned above, Burke was a correspondent of Sylvester O'Halloran and owned his work, *A General History of Ireland, from the earliest accounts to the Close of the Twelfth Century* (2 vols., London, 1778): LC MS; *LC*, p. 16; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 210 (note).

[43] For the evidence, see *Annual Register … for the Year 1763*, p. 264 (second pagination; review of Warner's *History of Ireland*) and his advice to Campbell mentioned above.

of ancient Ireland. In his long review of *Fingal* in the *Annual Register*,[44] he contended that Macpherson's achievements were chiefly twofold: the discovery of 'inestimable relicks of the genuine spirit of poetry' in ancient times, and his fine translation of the work into English, which Burke regarded as literal and maintaining the original spirit of the poems.[45] In Burke's view, nevertheless, although the poems themselves were magnificent, the era in which *Fingal* was composed was 'an ignorant and barbarous age'. While some sceptical critics, like Ferdinando Warner, questioned the credibility of the historical narrative produced by Ossian,[46] it was likely that it was a production of the distant past, which well conveyed 'that primitive air' and 'simple manners of remote ages'.[47] By the early 1770s, Burke came to be convinced that Macpherson's work was a fabrication,[48] yet his interest in and views on ancient Ireland, including its poetry, were largely consistent throughout his career.[49]

In the eighteenth century, Irish historians debated whether the native Irish had been barbarous or civilised in ancient times, or, put in another way, whether Ireland had had a substantial civilisation far before the English intervention in the late twelfth century. This was partly because the assessments of the origins of the nation were closely linked to the general assessment of Ireland and its people. The English commentators conventionally asserted that the Irish people and their society had been totally barbarous in ancient times, and that the Anglo-Norman

[44] *Annual Register … for the Year 1761*, pp. 276–86 (second pagination). In the preceding year, he also reviewed *Fragments of ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Gallic or Erse language*. See *Annual Register … for the Year 1760*, pp. 253–6 (second pagination).

[45] *Annual Register … for the Year 1761*, p. 276 (second pagination).

[46] *Annual Register … for the Year 1761*, pp. 277, 281 (second pagination); Ferdinando Warner, *Remarks on the History of Fingal, and other Poems of Ossian* (London, 1762).

[47] *Annual Register … for the Year 1761*, p. 278 (second pagination). Burke owned Macpherson's *Fingal*: *LC*, p. 17.

[48] 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). See also *The Letters of David Hume*, I, 400. In the late 1780s, Burke once more expressed his rejection of Macpherson's work. See *Boswell: The English Experiment 1785–1789*, ed. Irma S. Lustig and Frederick A. Pottle (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. 150.

[49] Later, he was reported to have said: 'Poetry was highly cultivated by the ancient Irish' and 'Sedulius was an excellent poet.' See Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 509.

conquest of the island in the twelfth century was a great blessing, as it meant the arrival of a more civilised nation, although England's endeavours to civilise the Irish barbarians often turned out to be fruitless.[50] This line of interpretation was often characterised by a great contempt for and hostility to the native Irish, and it was also convenient for a justification of the English rule of Ireland in modern times.[51] Although the Scot Hume did not intend to support the English commentators, he contended, in his *History of England*, that the 'Irish, from the beginning of time, had been buried in the most profound barbarism and ignorance'. That the Romans did not conquer them was, in his view, the great cause of their barbarity.[52] Largely motivated to refute such an interpretation, some Irish historians supported a diametrically opposite interpretation of the history of their native land. In their view, the arts and science of Phoenicia and Egypt introduced by the Milesians brought the island to a substantial civilisation.[53] In Warner's view, however, neither of these interpretations were 'impartial'.[54] In the late eighteenth century, influenced by the 'philosophical history' developed by Hume and others, more historians on Irish history came to take a sceptical attitude towards the origins and ancient state of the Irish nation, and Warner's comments also reflected such an intellectual disposition.[55]

Likewise, Burke tried to be an impartial historian rather than being highly polemical. While his analysis of the early history of Ireland was not extensive, his own position in this dispute was clear. According to

[50]For instance, see Sir John Davies, *A Discoverie of the True Causes why Ireland was never Entirely Subdued, nor brought under Obedience of the Crowne of England, until the Beginning of His Maiesties Happie Raigne* (London, 1747; first published in 1612), pp. 13–4 and *passim*: Sir John Temple, *The History of the General Rebellion in Ireland. Raised upon the three and twentieth day of October, 1641* (Cork, 1766; first published in 1646), pp. 1–14.

[51]Warner, *History of Ireland*, p. viii.

[52]Hume, *History of England*, I, 339. See also ibid., I, 340: the invasions by the northern tribes, including the Danish ones, 'which had spread barbarism in other parts of Europe, tended rather to improve the Irish'.

[53]For the 'Scandian' and 'Oriental' interpretations of ancient Ireland, see Love, 'Burke and an Irish Historiographical Controversy', pp. 183–4.

[54]Warner, *History of Ireland*, p. iv.

[55]See also Campbell, *Strictures*, p. 10. For detail overviews of the late eighteenth-century interpretations of ancient Ireland, see O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*, pp. 13–70.

his comments in the *Abridgment*, Ireland's natural environment was generally similar to that of England. The island had a number of lakes and was blessed with fertile soil, but it was also full of bogs and morasses. 'Whilst it possesses these internal means of wealth, it opens on all sides a great number of ports, spacious and secure, and by their advantageous situation inviting to universal commerce.' In the age of ancient Rome, nevertheless, neither port nor commercial trade was developed there.[56]

He was also not a supporter of the myth of the Milesian origins of ancient Ireland. In the *Abridgment*, Burke wrote, the 'people of Ireland lay claim to a very extragavant [sic] antiquity, through a vanity common to all nations', and the 'accounts, which are given by their ancient chronicles, of their first settlements are generally tales confuted by their own absurdity'. In the early settlements of the Island, the best families arrived from Spain, who were called 'Clan Milea, or the descendants of Milesius and Kin Scuit, or the race of Scyths, afterwards known by the name of Scots'. According to the Irish historians, 'this race descended from a person called Gathel, a Scythian by birth, an Ægyptian by education, the contemporary and friend of the prophet Moses'.[57] Although such a narrative of history was 'seeming clear sighted in the obscure affairs of so blind an antiquity', it was 'regarded by the judicious as modern fictions'. Although it is not clear how the early settlements were made, it is, by 'rational conjectures', 'most probable that Ireland was first peopled from Britain'. At that time, the 'language, the manners, and religion of the most ancient inhabitants of both [England and Ireland]' were 'nearly the same', and whenever the Milesians arrived in Ireland, they could barely change the manners and language of the people 'as the ancient Spaniards were a branch of the Celtæ, as well as the old inhabitants of Ireland'. Burke did not endorse the thesis of the glory of ancient Ireland advanced by some Irish historians, and he was also critical of other interpretations regarding the early history of his native land. Although William Temple (1628–1699) and Rapin asserted 'from ignorance' that the Irish language was different from the language of all other nations, this was

[56] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 509. Later, according to Prior, Burke stated that soil in Ireland was generally favourable to agriculture as opposed to the popular notion. See Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 508.

[57] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 509–510. See also 'Burke to Charles O'Hara (10 July 1761)', in *Corr.*, I, 141: 'In our old fabulous History I think I have read that the Prophet Moses advised the antient Scots to go as far Westward as possible'.

simply not true.[58] In Burke's view, many words were remarkably similar not only to Welsh and Armorican, but also to Greek and Latin.[59]

In regard to religion in ancient Ireland, Druidism flourished until the preaching of St. Patrick in the fourth century. The introduction of the Christian religion to Ireland, like everywhere else, greatly contributed to improving society, and Burke agreed with other historians of his age that this religion was supported and encouraged 'with an uncommon zeal' and that Ireland, during the seventh and eighth centuries, became 'a refuge for learning, almost extinguished every where else' in Europe, whose societies generally plunged into a chaotic state after the collapse of Rome. This was a high moment of Irish history, but the situation was radically transformed by the invasions of the Danes and the pagans in the next few centuries. These invaders plundered the monasteries and utterly demolished the meditative life in Ireland as they did in other countries, and they themselves were expelled by the same destructive wars. After that, however, neither the ancient science nor tranquillity of the nation returned, and Ireland's society fell into internal strife and a state of total ignorance, poverty and barbarism, to a greater extent than the rest of Europe. Disorder prevailing in the church and the civil economy of the country offered the Pope 'a plausible pretext' for authorising Henry II to invade the island.[60]

While he strongly believed in the flourishing state of ancient poetry and of the Christin religion before the northern invasions in the Middle Ages, Burke did not regard Ireland as a whole as having reached a civilised state before the Anglo-Norman conquest.[61] Although some arts including poetry were highly sophisticated and learning was advanced by monasteries, in his view, other aspects of the Irish nation and society were evidently savage ones. As will be seen in the next section, the native Irish legal system called Brehon laws also operated as a cause of political disorder and barbarism.

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[58] Temple, *Introduction to the History of England*, pp. 26–7; Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England*, III, 56.

[59] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 510.

[60] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 510–1.

[61] According to his comment in 1775, however, it was 'never governed by a despotic power'. *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 139.

In regards to the nation's economy, agriculture was not substantially developed while people were 'much more addicted to pasturage'. This was 'a remnant of the Scythian manners' rather than resulting from the quality of soil. In the island, there were few towns highly populated and fortified, and the clans lived dispersed over their own territory, which was, for Burke, a general characteristic of uncivilised society. If people lived scattered, they would not have been sociable. This was common to many European nations in ancient and medieval times and most savage tribes of the New World in modern times. International trade was also not developed at that time, although it was still carried out in the walled towns near the seacoast originally built by the Danes. Moreover, the Irish militia, called Kerns and Galloglasses, were less disciplined and possessed inferior weapons. By Burke's standard, before 1172 the native Irish, unsociable and militarily undisciplined, were savages typical of those commonly found in ancient and medieval Europe.[62]

3 Constitutional Relationship

The fact that Burke did not regard ancient Ireland as highly developed did not mean, however, that he accepted the vulgar English thesis that the Anglo-Norman conquest had bestowed good fortune on the Irish barbarians. It was rather an outcome of his sceptical attitude towards ancient and medieval times and an application of his views on Europe for these periods to the Irish nation. This was an aspect of his strategy for responding to previous historiography, in which he attempted to analyse his native land in equal terms with England and other European nations. Burke, however, also showed a preference for one of the traditions of Irish historiography concerning the interpretation of the Anglo-Norman invasions in the late twelfth century. According to the *Abridgment*, around the time of 1172, the formidable military power of Henry II, 'dreaded by all Europe', urged all the Irish 'petty' princes to submit and pay homage to the king. These princes, then, 'hoped better treatment from submitting to the ambition of a great king, who left them every thing but the honour of their independency'.[63] One of his notes, presumably written in the late 1750s, 'Hints of Ireland', further advanced

[62] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 512.

[63] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 513.

the analysis of the implications of the Anglo-Norman intervention in Ireland. Although the Irish chiefs submitted to Henry II, it did not mean that they had given him 'absolute power over them'. Furthermore, this submission was not to the English parliament nor was the subjection founded on 'the right of Conquest'. That is, 'neither expressly nor tacitly could they [the Irish chiefs] have been supposed to give the *People* of England, any power over their Lives, Liberties, or Estates'. The submission to Henry II was essentially 'a compact' created between the monarch and the Irish people.[64]

In maintaining the above, his analysis clearly derived from William Molyneux's *Case of Ireland*,[65] but he did not make every single point that Molyneux put forward. In particular, it is worth noting that he did not mention Henry II's grant of legislature to Ireland. According to Molyneux, in his intervention, Henry II granted Ireland not only English law and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but also the freedom of holding its own parliament as a separate and distinct kingdom.[66] In 1748, appealing to Molyneux's thesis, Charles Lucas (1713–1771) strongly argued against the English policies plunging Ireland into servitude.[67] While Burke, in his early writings, implied that Ireland had remained a separate nation at the time of Henry II's intervention, he barely explored the origins of the Irish legislature, which may have reflected his opinions on the Anglo-Irish constitutional relationship of the age.

Furthermore, Burke drew attention to the fact that feudal institutions had been introduced to Ireland after Henry II's conquest. The compact between the king and the Irish people was, in his view, a feudal institution in which the Irishmen were granted tenure by Henry, and which was at that time 'in force in every place where the Gothic Rules'

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[64] Edmund Burke, 'Hints of Ireland', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', 642–4 (at 643).

[65] Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', p. 626. Cf. T.O. McLoughlin, *Contesting Ireland: Irish Voices against England in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), p. 163.

[66] Molyneux, *The Case of Ireland*, p. 17.

[67] Charles Lucas, *A Tenth Address to the Free Citizens, and Free-Holders, of the City of Dublin* (Dublin, 1748). In his private letters, Burke censured Charles Lucas. For example, see 'Burke to Charles O'Hara (3 July 1761)', in *Corr.*, I, 139; 'Burke to Charles O'Hara (10 July 1761)', in *Corr.*, I, 140; 'Burke to Charles O'Hara (18 November 1771)', in *Corr.*, II, 287.

existed.[68] Burke, in the *Abridgment*, also wrote, 'Many of the English were established in their particular conquests, under the tenure of knights' service, now first introduced into Ireland'.[69] As in his analyses of ancient and medieval England, he attempted to examine late twelfth-century Ireland from a European perspective.[70]

Later, on 22 March 1775, Burke further advanced his account of Irish constitutional history and emphasised the historical connection between Ireland and England, from which he believed that Ireland had largely benefited. While Ireland did not have a parliament before the Anglo-Norman invasion in the late twelfth century, 'a form of Parliament, such as England then enjoyed, she instantly communicated to Ireland' after the conquest. A variety of feudal institutions were also 'early transplanted into that soil; and grew and flourished there'. In short, after the English invasion in 1172, 'almost every successive improvement in constitutional liberty, as fast as it was made here, was transmitted' to Ireland. Nevertheless, Ireland had only 'a partial Parliament' until the reign of Elizabeth I. The nation acquired 'a general Parliament' only after the failure of the late sixteenth-century attempt of military suppression of the Irish people.[71] As Burke maintained in other works during the late 1790s, 'a great part of the Constitution of the Irish House of Commons was founded about the year 1614' in the reign of James I, when forty parliamentary boroughs were newly created and the Protestant representatives were 'seated and installed by force and violence'.[72] This chiefly aimed at 'the destruction of the then natural interests of the Country'[73] and brought the House 'into a state of dependence'. Although the principle under which this policy was conducted was 'so vicious',[74] by the late eighteenth century the system acquired the prescriptive sanction,[75]

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[68] Burke, 'Hints of Ireland', in Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', p. 643.

[69] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 513–4. In the *Annual Register*, Warner's *History of Ireland* was, in its review, criticised for its supposition that manors had existed in Ireland before the English conquest. See *Annual Register … the Year 1763*, p. 264 (second pagination).

[70] Bourke, 'Party, Parliament, and Conquest', p. 627.

[71] *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 139–40.

[72] 'Burke to Unknown--- [February 1797]', in *Corr.*, IX, 256 (or *WS*, IX, 674).

[73] 'Burke to French Laurence ([23] November 1796)', in *Corr.*, IX, 125.

[74] 'Burke to Unknown--- [February 1797]', in *Corr.*, IX, 256 (or *WS*, IX, 674).

[75] Lock, *Edmund Burke*, II, 407 (note). For the details of James I's Irish parliament, see T.W. Moody, 'The Irish Parliament under Elizabeth and James I: A General Survey',

and hence the Irish House of Commons should 'stand on its present basis'.[76]

In this speech on 22 March 1775, Burke did not discuss the effects of penal laws and trade restrictions imposed on post-1688–9 Ireland, and the content of his speech largely was selected, depending on its context and purpose. At the eve of the American Revolutionary War, in order to stress the necessity of avoiding the possible collapse of the British Empire, Burke needed to focus on the significance of the Anglo-Irish constitutional relationship. The 'principle' of the Irish constitution was, according to him, 'respected' at the time of the Cromwellian revolution and was 'restored' at the Restoration of 1660. It was, then, 'established, I trust, for ever, by the glorious Revolution'. Before 1688–9, Ireland was 'a disgrace and a burthen intolerable' to England, but it thereafter became 'a principal part of our strength and ornament'.[77]

Despite the fact, which Burke did not mention in this speech, that Ireland had not been fully integrated to the system of the British Empire after the Revolution of 1688–9, Ireland continued to benefit from England's supervision of the nation. Although his analysis of Irish history in his speech on 22 March 1775 was indebted to the circumstances of the period, his comments clearly reflected his genuine views on the history of the constitutional relationship between Britain and Ireland. For him, Ireland's separate but not independent legislature was satisfactory in its relationship with Britain.[78] If this relationship was destroyed, it would lead to a further crisis of the British Empire and it would also be fatal to the Irish nation. In 1782, the Irish government achieved the independence of its legislature, and Burke reluctantly had to accept this by the summer of the same year. Throughout his career, however, he never wished the total separation of Ireland from Britain, and it is clear

Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature, 45 (1939/1940), 41–81.

[76] 'Burke to Unknown--- [February 1797]', in *Corr.*, IX, 256 (or *WS*, IX, 674). See 'Burke to French Laurence (12 May 1797)', in *Corr.*, IX, 336: 'the actual constitution, which was in a great part fabricated in 1614'.

[77] *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 140.

[78] See R.B. McDowell, 'Burke and Ireland', in *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion*, ed. David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), pp. 102–14 (at 104).

that this conviction was supported by his belief in the advantages of a constitutional link between the two nations.

Burke knew that these advantages could not have existed without the legal unification of the two kingdoms in the reign of James I—another historiographical issue in Irish history. Looking back at the earlier period, the conquest of Ireland by Henry II not only provided later generations with the problem of the origins of the Irish legislature but also produced an issue regarding the relationship between native Irish law and English law in Ireland. In the *Case of Ireland*, Molyneux wrote that English common law had been established in Ireland during the reigns of Henry II, John and Henry III,[79] but he did not mention who actually received the benefits of this application of the law, a point that Davies had highlighted in his work earlier in the seventeenth century. According to Davies, while the 'English Colonies, and some few *Septs* of the Irishry', were admitted to 'the benefit and protection of the Lawes of England', the law was not extended to the majority of the people there.[80] This was, in his view, 'a great defect' in the civil policy,[81] as the continuous use of the ancient laws by the Irish people after Henry II's conquest was the cause of their frequent rebellions.[82] In particular, the custom of tanistry made all possession uncertain and brought to the nation great confusion and barbarism.[83]

The English common law should have been adopted in Ireland at an earlier period after the conquest, and this should be, in Davies' view, the conclusion drawn from a significant lesson that needed to be learned from both English and European history. In ancient times, Rome frequently accomplished 'a perfect & absolute conquest' by offering the conquered their own law,[84] and Agricola's conquest of Britain was an example of this.[85] In the eleventh century, William the Conqueror succeeded in conquering England by governing the Normans and the

[79] Molyneux, *Case of Ireland*, pp. 17, 23, 31–4, 38–9.

[80] Davies, *Discoverie*, p. 102.

[81] Ibid., p. 118.

[82] Ibid., p. 167.

[83] Ibid., pp. 120, 169–70.

[84] Ibid., p. 127.

[85] Ibid., p. 128.

Saxons under a single law.[86] A similar case appears in Edward I's and Henry VIII's application of English law to Wales.[87] In conclusion, 'there can never be unity & Concord in any one Kingdom, but where there is but one King, one Allegiance, and one Law'.[88]

In the late eighteenth century, Davies' critique of the Brehon law and his notion of the extension of English law to Ireland was influential, and even the revisionist historians were at times obliged to accept his ideas. In the second edition of the *Dissertations*, O'Conor emphasised the harmony and positive interactions between the refined arts, manners and the constitution of ancient Ireland, including its native laws. Among the Irish arts, in particular, 'Music and Poetry arrived to the greatest Perfection, when it answered in antient Time so many good Purposes of Religion and Government', and they 'entered into the Policy, and regulated the Manners, of the Nation'.[89] The laws of the nation were also 'suited to the Times', but once the Anglo-Normans invaded, the customs of gavelkind and tanistry 'proved destructive'.[90] O'Conor acknowledged that during the times of 'Desolation' from the reign of Henry II to that of Elizabeth I, the ancient laws of Ireland were 'for the most Part useless, hurtful, or impracticable'.[91] In this line of argument, he agreed with Davies that 'had this [Irish] People been granted the Benefit of the *English* Laws, it would go infinitely farther towards securing their Obedience'.[92]

O'Conor's works were well known to other revisionist historians, but his views on the Brehon laws were barely approved by them.

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[86] Ibid., pp. 129–30.

[87] Ibid., pp. 131–3.

[88] Ibid., p. 123. For Davies on the Brehon law, see Hans S. Pawlisch, *Sir John Davies and the Conquest of Ireland: A Study in Legal Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 55–81.

[89] O'Conor, *Dissertations on the History of Ireland*, pp. 74, 90.

[90] Ibid., p. 131. See also ibid., p. 133.

[91] Ibid., p. 137.

[92] Ibid., p. 140. For O'Conor's historiography, see McLoughlin, *Contesting Ireland*, pp. 135–60; O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*; idem, 'Historical Writings, 1690–1890', pp. 607–10; John Wrynn SJ, 'Charles O'Conor as a "Philosophical Historian"', in *Charles O'Conor of Ballinagare, 1710–1791: Life and Works*, ed. Luke Gibbons and Kieran O'Conor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), pp. 72–80 and other articles in *Charles O'Conor of Ballinagare, 1710–1791*.

Warner and Leland admitted that gavelkind and tanistry had been the causes of the instability of property and society.[93] Campbell shared the opinions of Edmund Spenser, Davies and Blackstone that 'the jurisdiction of the Brehons was altogether arbitrary and uncertain'.[94] He also accepted Davies' conclusion and maintained that if Henry II 'had made a complete reduction of Ireland', 'he would have communicated all the natives the common benefits of the English laws and the English constitution' and then both English and Irish people 'would by this time, have consulted mutual aggrandisement and mutual happiness'.[95]

Burke's comments on the Brehon laws, as well as on the application of English law to Ireland, were not extensive, yet were clear in their points. In the *Abridgment*, he drew attention to the history and operation of tanistry:

> This order [tanistry] 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.[96]

Throughout his life, Burke did not lose interest in the ancient laws of Ireland, and later in his life, he still desired that the Brehon laws be translated.[97] He did not, however, fail to point out that the Brehon laws were the cause of social confusion:

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[93] Warner, *The History of Ireland*, pp. 89–92; Thomas Leland, *The History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II* (3 vols., 1773), I, xxxiii–iv.

[94] Campbell, *Strictures*, pp. 42–3. See also ibid., p. 200.

[95] Ibid., pp. 251–2. See also ibid., pp. 200–1.

[96] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 433.

[97] In 1764, the *Annual Register* reviewed Warner's *History of Ireland*, and commented that the author should have explained the Brehon laws in more detail. *Annual Register … for the Year 1763*, p. 258 (second pagination). See also Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 508; 'Burke to Colonel Charles Vallancey (29 November 1786)', in *Corr.*, V, 292.

> 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 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.[98]

The native Irish also confined a succession of various arts, including poetry and music, to their own relatives. Although this practice was 'well enough calculated to preserve good arts and useful discipline', 'when these arts came to degenerate', it was 'equally well calculated to prevent all improvement, and to perpetuate corruption, by infusing an invincible tenaciousness of ancient customs'.[99] While Burke's analysis was neither innovative nor unique, it is clear that he was less willing than O'Conor to emphasise the harmony and pre-eminence of Irish society before the English conquest.[100]

In his 'Speech on Conciliation with America (22 March 1775)', Burke agreed with Davies that 'the refusal of a general communication of these rights, was the true cause why Ireland was five hundred years in subduing'. That is, 'nothing could make that country English, in civility and allegiance, but your laws and your forms of legislature'. An attempt to conquer the kingdom using arms in the reign of Elizabeth was fruitless, and it was 'not English arms, but the English constitution, that conquered Ireland'.[101] The extension of English law evidently benefited Ireland; yet this alone did not lead to full prosperity for Ireland and the union of the empire. It was also, however, impossible for Burke to accept Davies' idea with respect to the military conquest of the Irish people that 'a hostile country like a soil must be broke with Iron before it can

[98] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 511.

[99] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 512.

[100] For further discussion of the eighteenth-century views on the Irish native laws, see Seán Patrick Donlan '"Little Better than Cannibals": Sir John Davies and Edmund Burke on Property and Progress', *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly*, 54 (2003), 1–24; idem, 'The "Genuine Voice of its Records and Monuments"?', pp. 77–80; O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*, pp. 127–40.

[101] *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 140.

receive the seed of Laws and institutions'.[102] For Davies, England's failure to militarily defeat the Irish people was another cause of their long-term disobedience, whereas such an attempt would, in Burke's view, have established mere tyranny and led to even more frequent warfare and rebellions. Later, in his *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, he wrote more critically of Davies who 'boasts of the benefits received by the natives, by extending to them the English law'.[103] Although the full application of English law was certainly beneficial, oppression and persecution had continued to exist in England's policy towards Ireland. In his analysis of Irish history, almost throughout his career, Burke's greatest attention was drawn to the situation of the nation from the seventeenth century onwards.

4 Religious and Civil Liberties

By the late eighteenth century, in Burke's view, Ireland's constitutional relationship with England was established on a solid foundation and operated fairly well on it. This did not, however, mean that the Irish nation was governed without problems. Burke was, throughout his life, particularly concerned with the problem of the long-standing persecution of Roman Catholicism, and he often read Irish history from the perspectives of the nation's struggles with religious issues. He was, again, most interested in the modern history of Ireland regarding these issues, that is, its history since the Reformation, without ignoring the issues of ancient and medieval times.

In his 'Tracts relating to Popery Laws', Burke conducted a detailed exploration of the religious affairs of Ireland before the sixteenth-century Reformation. According to his account, one of the 'most able antiquaries', James Ussher (1581–1656) may or may not have been correct in his contention that the Christian religion in Ireland before the Anglo-Norman conquest was not very different from Protestantism in modern times.[104] It was, in Burke's view, at least 'very probable' that

[102] WWM Bk P 6/202, reproduced in *WS*, III, 204. Cf. Davies, *Discoverie*, p. 9.

[103] *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792), in *WS*, IX, 615. For Burke's reading of Davies on American and Canadian affairs, see Richard Bourke, 'Edmund Burke and the Politics of Conquest', *Modern Intellectual History*, 4 (2007), 403–32 (at 417–20).

[104] Burke owned Ussher's *Britannicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates* (1639): *LC*, p. 24. In his *History of Ireland*, Warner also made this point, of which O'Conor was highly critical: 'Dr. Warner has revived the old exploded Usserian chimera, that the religion established

papal authority was, at that time, much weaker in Ireland than in other European countries. In the late twelfth century, Pope Adrian IV allowed Henry II to invade the island so that 'the Church of Ireland should be reduced to the same servitude with those that were nearer to his See'.[105] From that time almost down to the Reformation, the English monarchs continuously pretended their title to the island to be founded on the grant by Rome and called for the obedience of the Irish 'not on principles of subjection', but 'as Vassals and mesne Lords between them and the Popes'. By the time of the submission of the Irish chiefs to Richard II (1377–1399), while papal authority was substantially reduced in England by the monarchs' efforts, it was maintained and even consolidated in Ireland.[106]

Yet the Reformation in the sixteenth century significantly changed the nation's situation. Like other defining events in Irish history, to discuss the impact of the English Reformation on Ireland, in particular, supplied a test of the historiographical and political position for historians. Not everyone, therefore, tried to be outspoken. According to Curry, by offering 'an agreeable general view' to the description of the Reformation, in his *History of Ireland*, Leland eschewed stimulating his readers.[107] Presumably, however, it was obvious to many Irish critics that since the twelfth century the English had ascribed the 'perverseness' of the Irish to their 'nature', but, after the Reformation they attributed it to their 'religion'.[108]

For Burke, although the Reformation provided, indeed, a plausible pretext for the English to justify their oppressive rule of Ireland, this only meant to change the appearance, not the substance, of things. The confrontation between England and Ireland did not originally result

here by the Roman missionaries in the fifth century was that now established here by law'. See Warner, *History of Ireland*, pp. 297–8; 'Charles O'Conor to John Curry (M.D., 23 July, 1763)', in *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, p. 476.

[105] 'Tracts relating to Popery Laws', in *WS*, IX, 469.

[106] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 469–70.

[107] Love, 'Charles O'Conor of Belanagare and Thomas Leland's "Philosophical" History of Ireland', p. 11. For Leland's discussion of the effects of the Reformation on Ireland, see Leland, *History of Ireland*, II, 155–218.

[108] 'Advertisement', in John Curry, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion in the year 1641* (London, 1758), p. xv.

from religious disputes between Catholics and Protestants, but it largely derived from the inveterate antagonism between the two nations, which had endured since the period long before the Reformation. Burke found this an extraordinary case in history. Although the Norman Conquest of 1066 was 'one of the most rigid conquests that we read of in history', he wrote in the *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, 'the Normans softened into the English' some time after their landing. In ancient times, the Roman conquest of Gaul produced a similar effect. 'For a much longer period than that which had sufficed to blend the Romans with the nation to which of all others', however, the English had been antagonistic to the native Irish. The statutes of Kilkenny (1366) showed that the spirit of penal laws had already existed in 'that harassed country' before the division between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism occurred. The same spirit, then, animated the policies both during and after the Revolution of 1688–9. During modern history, in short, the 'original scheme was never deviated from for a single hour'.[109]

It is clear, nevertheless, that the Reformation offered Protestants a strong means of denouncing Roman Catholicism in Ireland. While the 'abettors of our Penal Laws' claimed that society would not subsist with 'this old possessed superstition', Burke was able to find a number of counterexamples to this, and argued that 'society not only exists, but flourishes at this hour with this superstition, in many Countries, under every form of Government'. In Ireland, the majority of people 'were happy enough, in their opinion at least' before the Reformation. At that time, they partook of all the benefits produced in society. They were now, however, excluded from almost every benefit of society. Burke concluded, 'our persecutions are so far from being necessary to its existence, that our very Reformation is made in a degree noxious'. What was done in Ireland was clearly 'a depravation of society'.[110] In stating so, he intended not only to criticise the persecutions against Catholics, but also to show how the Reformation should be. Although the Reformation itself was an admirable historical event, it was long tainted by a series of futile persecutions, fierce disputes and brutal conflicts. If Protestantism only remained a 'negative religion', that is, a religion denying the value of other Christian denominations without the establishment of their own

[109] *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 615.

[110] 'Tracts relating to Popery Laws', in *WS*, IX, 468.

religious tenet, it would not be true Protestantism,[111] nor would social stability be firmly established.

In Ireland, Silken Thomas opposed Henry VIII's decision to leave Rome and revolted against the monarch in 1536–7. During Elizabeth I's reign, 'three notorious and maine Rebellions' by Shane O'Neill, Desmond and Tyrone occurred[112] and exhausted both Ireland and England. Nevertheless, what far more critically influenced the mind set and policies of the eighteenth century was the rebellion of 1641 in Charles I's reign. This great rebellion produced another historiographical issue in subsequent ages regarding its interpretation. In 1646, Sir John Temple published *History of the Irish Rebellion*, in which he maintained that the rebellion of 1641 was definite proof of the barbarism of Irish Catholics. Widely regarded as an authoritative account of the historical event, Temple's work remained influential into the late eighteenth century. Hume's account of the Irish Rebellion of 1641 in his *History of England* often drew on Temple's work and, like his predecessor, claimed that the rebellion had taken place amid a peaceful situation in which Irish Catholics enjoyed great religious freedom.[113] The English Protestants 'were massacred by their nearest neighbours, with whom they had long upheld a continued intercourse of kindness and good offices'.[114] While Hume's emphasis on the brutality of the 1641 rebellion may have been derived from his general aversion to religious fanaticism,[115] the Irish revisionist historians, O'Conor and Curry, did not look upon it as such, but rather as a manifestation of his biased hatred for the Irish. For them, it meant the continuation of the traditional English arguments since Temple, yet Hume's opinions still drew special attention, because he was presumably the most 'philosophical' historian of this age. In his publications on the 1641 Rebellion, Curry targeted for criticism Edmund

[111] See *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election* (6 September 1780), in *WS*, III, 639; *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 604–7; 'Burke to Unknown [February 1797]', in *Corr.*, IX, 261. See also *Thoughts on French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 341–2.

[112] Davies, *Discoverie*, p. 71.

[113] Hume, *History of England*, V, 338; Temple, *The History of the General Rebellion in Ireland*, pp. 25–7.

[114] Hume, *History of England*, V, 342.

[115] David Berman, 'David Hume on the 1641 Rebellion in Ireland', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 65 (1976), 101–12 (at 108–10); O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*, p. 141.

Borlase (1620–1682),[116] Temple and Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, and Curry also added Hume to the list, after the first instalment of his *History of England* appeared in 1754. Curry doubted the contention that Catholics had enjoyed religious liberty before 1641,[117] and questioned several other assertions made by English and Protestant writers, including the number of murders, their degree of cruelty,[118] and the extent to which the rebellion spread over the country.[119] In his view, the cause of the insurrection lay in the oppression and persecution of Catholics which existed before 1641.[120]

Burke clearly sided with Curry and O'Conor in this historiographical issue and his own views on the Irish Rebellion of 1641 were consistent throughout his career.[121] In his letter to William Markham in 1771, Burke strongly insisted that '*I* have studied it [Irish history] with more Care than is common' and 'I *have* my opinion on that part of history', that is, 'in almost all parts of it, it [the rebellion of 1641] has been extremely and most absurdly misrepresented'.[122] In claiming so, he explicitly referred to Temple[123] and Clarendon, but he had in mind Hume as well. Although the Protestant and English writers, who were 'full of passion and of error', contended that 'indulgence' and 'moderation' had been 'the natural incitement in subjects to rebel', this was far from the historical truth and 'contrary to the known order of Nature'. In

[116] Burke owned Borlase's *History of the Irish Rebellion* (Dublin, 1743): *LC*, p. 17.

[117] For example, see John Curry, *A Brief Account from the most Authentic Protestant Writers of the Causes, Motives, and Mischiefs, of the Irish Rebellion, on the 23d Day of October 1641* (London, 1747), pp. 12–3; idem, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion in the Year, 1641* (London, 1758), pp. 38, 54–5.

[118] Curry, *Brief Account*, pp. 28–9; idem, *Historical Memoirs*, pp. 86–99.

[119] Curry, *Brief Account*, p. 27.

[120] Curry, *Brief Account*, pp. 17–8; idem, *Historical Memoirs*, pp. 70–1. For more details of Hume and the Irish revisionists on 1641, see especially Berman, 'David Hume on the 1641 Rebellion in Ireland'; O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*, pp. 141–57; John Gibney, *The Shadow of a Year: The 1641 Rebellion in Irish History and Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), pp. 50–3, 70–1, 81–103.

[121] A recent analysis of Burke's interpretation of the 1641 Rebellion is Katherine O'Donnell, 'Edmund Burke and the Long Seventeenth-Century in Ireland' (translated into Japanese by Haruko Takakuwa), *Shiso*, 1063 (2012), 208–29.

[122] 'Burke to Dr William Markham [*post* 9 November 1771]', in *Corr.*, II, 285.

[123] For Burke's reference to Temple, see 'Burke to Richard Burke, Jr (20 March 1792)', in *Corr.*, VII, 104.

reality, the Irish rebellions in modern times 'were not produced by toleration, but by persecution'. That is, 'they arose not from just and mild government, but from the most unparalleled oppression'.[124]

In the early seventeenth century, the oppressive measures were executed by Arthur Chichester (1563–1625), Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford (1593–1641) and others,[125] which 'kindled at length the flames of that rebellion which broke out in 1641'.[126] The Irish rebels, then, claimed that they rose against the English parliament but not against the Crown. The rebellion had been 'the enormous and unpardonable' crime, as Burke admitted, and the Irish Catholics were soon avenged by Cromwell, who 'had himself rebelled against the very Parliament whose sovereignty he asserted'.[127] Even so, vengeance on eighteenth-century Catholics would not be justified. While history 'records many things which ought to make us hate evil actions', it cannot 'teach us to punish innocent men on that account'.[128] Burke wrote, 'true Statesmen' should not 'call from the dead all the discussions and litigations which formerly inflamed the furious factions which had torn their Country to pieces', and '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'. In reality, however, after 1641, Irish Catholics were severely revenged and 'outrageously and shamefully exaggerated in the representation' in order to justify 'the eternal proscription and civil excommunication of a whole people'.[129]

The Revolution of 1688–9 provided the Irish Catholics with another opportunity for a revolt against English authority, although Ireland also benefited in later years from the fruit of this revolution, in which

[124] 'Tracts relating to Popery Laws', in *WS*, IX, 479.

[125] Arthur Chichester served as Lord Deputy of Ireland during 1605–1616, and so did Thomas Wentworth during 1631–1639. For the details, see John McCavitt's entry on 'Arthur Chichester (1563–1625)'; Ronald G. Asch's entry on 'Thomas Wentworth (1593–1641)', in *ODNB*.

[126] *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 616.

[127] See also Burke's possible allusion to Cromwell's conquest of Ireland at 'Burke to Charles O'Hara [*ante* 23 August 1762], in *Corr.*, I, 147. For Burke's critical views of Cromwell, see this and WWM Bk P 8/173; *Parl. Hist.*, XXVII, 1098. See also *Account*, II, 61–2.

[128] 'Letter to Richard Bourke', in *WS*. IX, 655.

[129] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 655–6.

the ancient English constitution 'obtained a *thorough repair*'. Soon after 1688–9, Irish Catholics supported James II and raised their army, to which Louis XIV also offered assistance,[130] and they resisted William of Orange 'on the very same principle that the English and Scotch resisted King James'. The policies adopted by the Irish parliament under James II were as rigorous with regard to the Protestants as the English ones were with regard to the Roman Catholics.[131] The long-standing antagonism easily turned into vengeance. James II's defeat in 1691, however, reversed the situation completely, and it was fatal for the fortunes of Irish Catholics.

After 1691, the Revolution of 1688–9 meant to Ireland 'a conquest, which is not to say a great deal in its favour' and the establishment of the political power of the minority at the sacrifice of the civil liberties and properties of the absolute majority of the nation. Burke saw the effects of the Revolution of 1688–9 on Ireland as clearly conflicting with the fundamental principles underlying it. The Revolution was a great struggle to preserve the liberty of the people. In Ireland, however, it became a severe conquest based on feelings of fear, jealousy and abhorrence. That is, 'many things were done from the necessities of the time', and also from passion and vengeance 'which were not only, not perfectly agreeable to its principles, but in the most direct contradiction to them'.[132]

In this spirit, the penal laws were imposed on Catholics during the reign of William of Orange and that of subsequent monarchs. In Burke's view, the Act of 1704 (2 *Anne*, c.6) and its amendment in 1709 (8 *Anne*, c.3) were particularly 'ferocious' and hence 'the objects of our

[130] 'Speech on Foreign Troops in Ireland (15 February 1776)', in *WS*, IX, 501.

[131] 'Letter to Richard Burke (*post* 19 February 1792)', in *WS*, IX, 656–7. In this public letter, Burke wrote that the reaction of the Irish to 1688, including the patriot parliament, was blameworthy, 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 Poynings' Law.

[132] *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 613–4. Burke was, of course, highly critical of the confiscation of Catholic property in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, he maintained 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.

common hatred'.[133] While the 1704 act 'to prevent the further growth of popery' prevented Catholics and Protestant Dissenters from holding an office of trust or profit under the crown, it also prohibited Catholics from buying land or renting it on lease for more than thirty one years, where a lease was stipulated at a rent of at least two-thirds its annual value.[134] Primogeniture ceased to be effective and the principles of gavelkind were adopted so that Catholics' landed properties would be dissipated, unless they were converted to Protestantism.[135] As Burke pointed out, the Irish House of Commons of the period was the least opposed to the enactment of the 1704 Act.[136] Under the penal laws, Catholics were also deprived of the right of self-defence, a right guaranteed by natural law. Although 'many wise communities have found it necessary to set several restrictions upon it', the case of Ireland was 'an universal prohibition' for all Roman Catholics, 'at all times, and under all circumstances, to use or keep any kind of weapons whatsoever'.[137] Their rights to education and marriage were also severely restricted. For Burke, these measures represented a 'departure from the Spirit of the common Law'.[138]

Even more iniquitous was the parliamentary disfranchisement of Roman Catholics enacted during the reign of George II. This was a great injustice unknown in British history before 1728, and neither England's 'oldest fundamental laws' nor the principles and practices of the Revolution of 1688–9 endorsed such an iniquity.[139] Even Queen Anne's penal laws allowed Catholics to vote at a parliamentary election by taking

[133] *Letter to Lord Kenmare* (21 February 1782), in *WS*, IX, 570; *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 610. See also 'Letter to William Smith', in *WS*, IX, 664.

[134] 'Tracts relating to Popery Laws', in *WS*, IX, 442–6. See also 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: Clarendon Press, 1986), 1–30 (at 18–19); J.G. Simms, 'The Making of a Penal Law (2 Anne, c.6), 1703–1704', *Irish Historical Studies*, 12 (1960), 105–118.

[135] 'Tracts relating to Popery Laws', in *WS*, IX, 436–8.

[136] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 473, 480–1.

[137] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 449.

[138] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 437.

[139] Burke incorrectly believed that Irish Catholics were deprived of parliamentary franchisement in George I's reign. See *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 610, 628. His contemporaries, including 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 oaths of allegiance and abjuration.[140] Burke declared, 'no nation in the world has ever been known to exclude so great a body of men (not born slaves) from the civil state'.[141]

After the Reformation, conflicts between England and Ireland often occurred as the result of religious antagonisms. England continuously brought 'new people full of those opinions and intending to propagate them' to Ireland in an attempt to eradicate the opinions of the 'old' inhabitants there.[142] The enactment of the penal laws after the Revolution of 1688–9 meant the start of new oppressive policies by the English government, although these were still the continuation of the oppressive system that had existed since the distant past. These laws were in their nature 'very singular' and differed 'from any scheme of religious persecution' developed in the other European countries. Religious disputes and conflicts were common to European history, yet Ireland was an extraordinary case.[143] 'No country', Burke contended, 'since the world began, suffered so much on account of Religion; or has been so variously harassed both for Popery and for Protestantism.'[144]

The penal statutes were clearly unjust, but they were also obstructive to the progress of 'all the advantages, to which the bounty of Nature has entitled' Ireland. In Burke's view, a nation flourishes by bolstering 'national union' through directing industry, knowledge, skill, morals, the execution of justice and courage 'to one point and making them all centre in the publick benefit'.[145] The effects of the 'popery' laws, however, were diametrically the opposite, that is, 'the most unhappy influence on the prosperity, the morals, and the safety'.[146] These laws did not allow the majority of the people to exercise their own industry and 'laudable avarice', which 'every wise State has cherished as one of the first principles of its greatness'.[147]

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[140] *Letter to Lord Kenmare*, in *WS*, IX, 570. See also 'Address and Petition of the Irish Catholics (1764)', in *WS*, IX, 433.

[141] *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 628.

[142] 'Tracts relating to Popery Laws', in *WS*, IX, 471.

[143] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 452.

[144] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 471. For his reference to the 1728 act, see also 'Address (14 December 1792)', in *WS*, IV, 523.

[145] 'Tracts relating to Popery Laws', in *WS*, IX, 476–7.

[146] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 452.

[147] Ibid., in *WS*, IX, 476–7.

The spirit of industry of the Irish people was also undermined by restrictive laws on their trade. During the reign of Charles II, Britain began to restrict Irish commerce. In Burke's words, there were 'no such restrictive powers before the year 1663, the 15th of Charles II', when the Navigation Act was applied to Ireland for the first time.[148] On 6 May 1778, Burke also stated that a 'kind of left-handed policy' had 'deprived her of the freedom enjoyed under that act [Navigation Act], and she had ever since remained under the most cruel, oppressive, and unnatural restriction'.[149] In 1698, the Irish parliament imposed export duties on Irish woollen goods (10 *Will. III*, c. 5) and, a year later, the Westminster parliament prohibited the export of Irish wool to any country except England (10 and 11 *Will. III*, c. 10).[150] In Burke's view, in 'the last Century, the Irish woollen Trade was beginning to make some small progress', yet this trade was 'checked', and the linen trade was encouraged by being granted bounties and exemption from duties.[151]

Shortly after entering parliament, in 1766, Burke became engaged in a government attempt to revise the British commercial regulations which still existed in his age, and he desired to make Ireland 'somehow *hooked* into this System', although he could not do it.[152] In the late 1770s, in the *Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland*, he also earnestly argued for free trade from Ireland to Britain. He did so because, after the American declaration of independence, he believed that concessions in commerce must be provided for Ireland in order to prevent any further dissolution of the empire. He was also strongly convinced that both Ireland and Britain would benefit from freer imperial trade. What he had in mind was not a modern economics of free trade nor the nineteenth-century concept of a night watchman state, but rather a hope for Ireland's full integration into the British empire. The failure to achieve this had prevented

[148] 'Speech on Irish Trade (15 February 1779)', in *WS*, IX, 528. See also 'Speech on Irish Trade (6 May 1778)', in *WS*, IX, 519–20.

[149] 'Speech on Irish Trade (6 May 1778)', in *WS*, IX, 520.

[150] See *WS*, IX, 516 (editor's note with corrections).

[151] 'Burke to the Duke of Portland (25 May 1782)', in *Corr.*, IV, 455. See also 'Burke to Harford, Cowles and Co. (2 May 1778)', in *Corr.*, II, 443 (or *WS*, IX, 516): 'the whole Woollen Manufacture of Ireland … has been in a manner so destroyed by restrictive Laws of *ours*, and (at our persuasion, and on our promises) by restrictive Laws of *their own*'.

[152] 'Burke to Charles O'Hara (1, 4 March 1766)', in *Corr.*, I, 240. See also Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 222–3; ibid., II, 17; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 234.

both Britain and Ireland from reaching a greater prosperity. By integrating Ireland fully into the imperial order and allowing all the residents of the country to make use of 'the natural faculties which God has given to them, and to all mankind',[153] the spirit of industry that had been suppressed for ages would finally be resuscitated. In believing so, he knew that trade concessions would not be 'innovation' in any sense, but they would rather be 'no more than restorations of what the wisdom of a British Parliament had, on a former occasion, thought proper to invest Ireland with'.[154]

Burke's views on Irish commerce were similar to those who supported free trade between the two kingdoms in late eighteenth-century Ireland. In Burke's friend John Hely Hutchinson's views, Ireland developed her commerce and economy to a considerable extent during the seventeenth century, although some social and political crises such as the 1641 rebellion and James II's tyranny temporally arrested their growth.[155] Only after the 1699 legislation, the nation's economy critically turned stagnant. The lesson Hutchinson learned from what happened to Irish commerce in the period from 1699 to Queen Anne's reign was that a country could suffer more 'from laws restraining the commerce, discouraging the manufactures, fettering the industry, and above all breaking the spirits of the people' than 'war, invasion, rebellion, massacre'.[156] It was clear to Burke as well that commercial restraints and penal laws had been as great the hindrance to development of the nation as wars and rebellions during modern history. The empire, which would supply Ireland with equal terms of commerce and encourage people's industry, was needed. For Burke, as for other supporters of free trade, the Irish past clearly suggested what the British government should do to achieve further progress in Ireland.

[153] *Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland* (23 April and 2 May 1778), in *WS*, IX, 509.

[154] 'Speech on Irish trade (6 May 1778)', in *WS*, IX, 519.

[155] J.H. Hutchinson, *The Commercial Restraints of Ireland Considered in a Series of Letters to a Noble Lord. Containing An Historical Account of the Affairs of That Kingdom, so far as They Relate to This Subject* (Dublin, 1779), pp. 13–34 (second letter).

[156] Ibid., pp. 31–2.

5 Irish History and Enlightenment Ideas

Throughout his life, Burke's overall view of Irish history was largely downbeat, but he nevertheless observed history moving forward during his lifetime and at times the situation improved. In 1778, provisions in two Acts implemented by Anne favouring the Protestants' purchasing of forfeited estates were repealed by the Catholic Relief Act, and Burke called this act 'a great acquisition', which led to Catholics being 'for the first time acknowledged as Subjects, and protected as such'.[157] The Catholic Relief Act of 1793, which granted Catholics the franchise on the same basis as Protestants, 'restored three Millions of Citizens to their King and their Country'.[158] There were still a variety of hostile responses and opposition to such religious toleration. Notably, the Scottish riots in 1778–1779 and the Gordon Riots in 1780 astonished Burke and his contemporaries, serving as a reminder of the religious fanaticism of previous centuries. Nevertheless, Burke knew that the prevailing spirit of the Enlightenment in his age would relax religious tensions.

In 1780, commercial concessions were also granted to Irish trade.[159] Burke knew, in fact, that the Irish economy and society at large had gradually, but substantially, developed in recent years.[160] While this development was, as Burke was reported to have said, 'Not as much as I could wish, but still more than I expected',[161] it 'has been chiefly owing to her own natural advantages, and her own Efforts', which, 'have prevailed in some measure over the Mischeivous [sic] Systems'.[162] It was, nevertheless, also true that, as with the American colonies, the pre-eminent British constitution underpinned the progress of Irish society, and Britain itself had always benefited from this. In Burke's view, late

[157] See 'Burke to Garrett Nagle (25 August 1778)', in *Corr.*, IV, 18–9. For this relief act, see also *Corr.*, III, 449, 455–7; ibid., IV, 6, 20, 87, 248–9, 263–4; ibid., IX, 422–3; ibid., X, 7. In 1782, another relief act was enacted. Clearly, he still found it unsatisfactory. See *Letter to Lord Kenmare*, in *WS*, IX, 564–80.

[158] 'Burke to Henry Grattan (8 March 1793)', in *Corr.*, VII, 360. For this relief act, see also *Corr.*, VII, 349–51; ibid., VIII, 129.

[159] For Burke's comments on these concessions, see his 'Speech on Trade Concessions to Ireland (6 December 1779)', in *WS*, IX, 535–42; *Letter to Thomas Burgh* (1 January 1780), in *WS*, IX, 543–63.

[160] *Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland*, in *WS*, IX, 517.

[161] Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 507.

[162] 'Burke to Harford, Cowles and Co. (2 May 1778)', in *Corr.*, III, 443–4.

eighteenth-century Ireland was definitely not a nation as barbarous as Ireland and Europe in the distant past, but was much more enlightened.

The only issue which caused Burke to be apprehensive was the political movement to separate Ireland from the British Empire and Constitution. For Hutchinson and others, the Irish Declaratory Act of 1720 (6 *Geo. I*, c.5) was a great cause of 'dissidence and discord between two Kingdoms', though Burke did not regard it as such.[163] In June 1782, the Declaratory Act was repealed[164] and an independent legislature was finally realised in Ireland, which led to the Irish nation being 'a co-ordinate, though less powerful state'.[165] Burke hoped that it would not be a vital step towards a complete separation from Britain, to which the Irish people, inspired by the American case, might be urged. He also did not wish the union between the two kingdoms to be realised in the near future,[166] and he differed from Adam Smith in this regard. Towards the end of his *Wealth of Nations*, Smith maintained that a union between Ireland and Britain would undermine the power of the Irish aristocrats and lead to a flourishing Ireland's society, as it had in Scotland after 1707.[167] Here, Smith's idea was derived from his understanding of modern British (and European) history and his general aversion to the aristocracy. It was clear to Smith, as well as to Burke, that Irish politics and society had long struggled with the divisions resulting from profound prejudices and animosities, and Smith applied his favourite theory of modernisation to the analysis of Irish history and its future. Burke believed that religious toleration and free trade would bring an enlightened society to Ireland, but his views on Irish history led him to

[163] 'John Hely Hutchinson to Burke (6 April 1782)', in *Corr.*, IV, 436; 'Burke to John Hely Hutchinson [post 9 April 1782]', in *Corr.*, IV, 440.

[164] For Burke's comments on this, see 'Speech on Affairs of Ireland (29 December 1782)', in *WS*, IX, 583. Previously, Burke protested against the hasty rush to its repeal. See 'Speech on Irish Crisis (8 April 1782)', in *WS*, IX, 581.

[165] 'Speech on Irish Commercial Propositions (19 May 1785)', in *WS*, IX, 591. See also 'Burke to Earl Fitzwilliam (20 November 1796)', in *Corr.*, IX, 122.

[166] See 'Burke to Samuel Span (23 April 1778)', in *Corr.*, III, 434. 'This union is a business of difficulty; and, on the principles of your letter, a business impracticable.' See also *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, in *WS*, IX, 632: 'I really do not see how this threat of an union can operate, or that the Catholics are more likely to be losers by that measure than the churchmen.' See also 'Burke to French Laurence (12 May 1797)', in *Corr.*, IX, 336.

[167] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, II, 944.

the conclusion that this could be achieved under English supervision of the Irish nation in the form of an empire.

While Irish history clearly offered Burke a vision of Irish politics, it also contributed to shaping his own views on the history of other parts of the world. In the *Abridgment*, as seen in Chap. 2, Burke highlighted the effects of conquest during the earlier history of England, including Agricola's rule of the Britons. In the *Account*, he highly commended Columbus's treatment of the native inhabitants of the New World and the practice of religious toleration in English settlements in North America conducted by such governors as William Penn and Lord Baltimore. These historical evaluations clearly implied in his critique of Irish history that such admirable governors had not existed in Ireland at any point in history. It is also true to say that it was Ireland's past which helped to produce his depictions of these historical figures and of English and American histories of the period. Burke's Agricola and Columbus embodied the ideal conquerors of an alien nation, whereas William Penn and Lord Baltimore exemplified the competent governors of religious toleration. Burke presumably had in mind the historical circumstances of his native land in depicting these great historical figures, and hence Irish history contributed to shaping Burke's own general notion of politics and enlightened society, including his idea of conquest and religious toleration.

In modern history, both Ireland's efforts to shake off English power, and England's efforts, after the Reformation, to extinguish Roman Catholicism completely failed.[168] Burke hoped that both the English and the Irish nations would accept this historical fact, and aim for harmonious coexistence and co-prosperity within the framework of the empire. For him, the history of Irish religion and politics offered a clear example of the difficulties of eradicating people's ancient opinions. Furthermore, in Irish history, there were also a number of military conflicts caused by antagonism and religious opposition, and it was clear that these conflicts adversely affected the development of the nation. In fact, until the early seventeenth century, the Irish nation and the English nation had 'above 400 years of continual War'.[169] Even

[168] 'Letter to Richard Burke (*post* 19 February 1792)', in *WS*, IX, 651.

[169] See WWM 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.

after this, great rebellions and unrest often occurred. Ireland's past, nevertheless, taught Burke and other intellectuals of his age that social and economic development could be substantially arrested without a war of annihilation in a 'divided' nation where the spirit of industry was undermined by misgovernment which suppressed people's manners, religion, opinions and economic activities. As already noted in Chap. 3, Burke once stated that the laws against Roman Catholics were often 'bloody', but, 'where those laws were not bloody, in my opinion, they were worse' since 'they were slow, cruel outrages on our nature'.[170] Burke observed that the popery laws enacted after 1691 had not brought great warfare, even though social and political unrest at times occurred, to Ireland, but they were one of the main causes of social stagnation. It was clear that both the penal laws and commercial restraints greatly undermined the Irish people's spirit of industry. While Burke's views on Irish history were clearly distinct from his views on the history of other nations and regions, as Irish history held obvious implications for the politics of his age, his Irish history still linked itself to his views of other histories and his political theory by casting its own shadow on them. Without Irish history, his political theory and historical thought as a whole would have been different from what they are now presented. In this sense, Irish history provided a significant foundation for his thought.

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, 515 (editor's note).

[170] *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, in *WS*, III, 640.

CHAPTER 6

The History of Asian-Muslim Nations: 'The Garden of Eden'?

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. These intellectuals also increasingly received information about Asia from people who travelled and stayed there long, 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 the claim that 'in Asia there reigns a spirit of

[1] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. 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.

S. Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64441-7_6

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] were conventional, but, in contrast to Aristotle, he contended that Asian despotism had been sustained not only by Asian customs, but also by fear created by the terrible power of monarchs there.[4] Montesquieu and many of his contemporaries depicted Islam as the epitome of despotism and often associated Asia with Islam, because they found several Muslim nations in the region from Turkey to India.

By the late 1770s, nevertheless, a number of works on Indian history that were more historically nuanced had been produced, and these led European historiography to depart from the stereotypical depiction of Indian society.[5] In 1763, Robert Orme's *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan* was published and the *Annual Register* reviewed it the next year.[6] In 1772, William Bolts[7] and Alexander Dow published their works. Although Dow generally asserted that India had, like the other Asian countries, been despotic, he drew fair attention to several positive aspects of its society.[8] Adam Smith's analysis of India in his *Wealth of Nations* was presumably, to some extent, indebted to Bolts[9] and it contained parallels with other contemporary works on the subject. In France, Raynal published the first edition of his *Histoire des deux Indes* in 1770, and some early parts of the work included a historical narrative of the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, in 1778, Anquetil-Duperron published the *Législation Orientale* and directly challenged Montesquieu's theory of oriental despotism. In these works, while the points of emphasis varied, some common narratives of history were shared by the authors, which indicated the degree of achievement of European historiography at this time.

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[3] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 284.

[4] Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India*, pp. 232–3.

[5] Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 517, 534–7.

[6] Robert Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from the Year MDCCXLV* (2 vols., London, 1763).

[7] William Bolts, *Considerations on India Affairs; Particularly Respecting the Present State of Bengal and its Dependencies* (3 vols., London, 1772).

[8] Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindostan, from the Death of Akbar, to the Complete Settlement of the Empire under Aurungzebe* (London, 1772).

[9] For this, see Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (2 vols., London, 1904), II, 139 (editor's note).

For these authors, India was a country with a long history, where the moderate, conservative and industrious Hindus and the more aggressive Muslims had lived in harmony and led the country to prosperity. Since antiquity, India had been a prosperous commercial region.[10] As Raynal commented, 'the trade carried on by the Indians with the oldest commercial nations' was 'a proof of their great progress in the arts of industry'.[11] In the modern era, the commercial activities of the inhabitants and international trade were encouraged under the Mogul empire.[12] According to Dow, despotism 'appears in its most engaging form, under the Imperial house of Timur'. 'The uncommon abilities of most of the princes, with the mild and humane character of all, rendered Hindostan the most flourishing empire in the world during two complete centuries.'[13] Moreover, a kind of rule of law had certainly existed in the country. 'The despotism of Hindostan', Dow maintained, 'it ought to be observed, was never a government of mere caprice and whim.' The Muslims 'carried into their conquests a code of laws which circumscribed the will of the prince', and also 'the practice of ages had rendered some ancient usages and edicts so sacred in the eyes of the people, that no prudent monarch would chuse to violate either by a wanton act of power'.[14] The country was, however, plunged into great confusion in recent years,[15] and the situation was aggravated by the English East India Company by the 1770s.[16] As will be seen below, Burke's writings

[10] Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions*, I, 8; Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, ed. Campbell, Skinner and Todd, I, 35, 380.

[11] Guillaume–Thomas Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, trans. J.O. Justamond, F.R.S. (8 vols., London, 1783). I, 49. Burke owned the English translated version of this work published in 1788: *LC*, p. 20.

[12] Bolts, *Considerations on India Affairs*, I, 13; Dow, *The History of Hindostan*, p. xxxvi.

[13] Dow, *The History of Hindostan*, p. xxiii.

[14] Ibid., p. lii. See also Bolts, *Considerations on India Affairs*, I, 19–20.

[15] Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions*, I, 36; Bolts, *Considerations on India Affairs*, I, 32.

[16] Bolts, *Considerations on India Affairs*, I, 12. The Indian economy was thriving and the ancient laws of the land remained in force until Nadir Shah's invasion. See Luke Scrafton, *Reflections on the Government of Indostan. With a Short Sketch of the History of Bengal …* (London, 1770), p. 25.

and speeches on India, especially those in the 1780s and the 1790s, advanced a largely parallel narrative of Indian history.

India was, in Burke's own words, the country with which 'nature had almost forbad intercourse'. Dominion over it was, nevertheless, providentially acquired by Britain during recent history.[17] While it is not necessarily clear to what extent Burke was interested in Asia and Islam in general, 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 of India.[18] 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'.[19] 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.[20] More important, the Rockinghams offered the East India Company considerable support and they opposed state intervention in the Company's affairs, which they believed would result in the increasing influence of the crown.[21] 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 had been arrested by the Company's troops. In September 1777, William Burke visited India as part of this campaign, but he soon came back to London and immediately disputed with John Macpherson about affairs there. 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 Burke collaborated in producing *An Enquiry into the Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans in India* (1779) to counterattack Macpherson. Later, during 1781–1783, Burke was also involved in

[17] Northamptonshire MS. A. XIV. 6A; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 660.

[18] 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*, p. 300.

[19] Henry Edward Lord Holland, *Memoirs of the Whig Party During My Time* (2 vols., London, 1852), I, 5–6.

[20] 'Introduction', in *WS*, V, 5–6. See also Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 237, 257, 270–1.

[21] See, for instance, Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, 337.

a Select Committee of the House of Commons.[22] This was the turning point in his involvement in Indian affairs, through which he could elaborate on his own perceptions of the Company and its affairs. He now came to be convinced that the Company had been extremely 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 eventually determined to pursue his formal impeachment.

While it was through such 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 part of this knowledge. Since early in his career, Burke had carefully read both Aristotle and Montesquieu and he was particularly influenced by the latter. Nevertheless, Burke's ideas on India and Asia in general were not shaped solely by the notions of these authorities. Burke was not ignorant of the development of literature on the Indian subcontinent published by the late 1770s, which had helped to temper stereotypical views of Asia by presenting more details of Indian history and society than provided previously. Burke's comments on the history of the subcontinent should be read in the context of this development.[23]

Despite recent historiographical development into Burke's perspective on Indian affairs and the British empire, few systematic attempts have been made to establish Burke's understanding of the history of Asian-Muslim nations, including South Asian history. This chapter seeks to fill this gap in the scholarship by examining Burke's ideas on the history of these nations while also situating these ideas within the larger intellectual context of his age.[24] It begins with an analysis of Burke's views on the history of the Indian subcontinent and proceeds to examine his comments on a more general history of Asian-Muslim nations. In doing so, the entire chapter concerns both the changes and the continuity in Burke's attitudes towards these nations.

[22] 'Introduction', in *WS*, V, 1–27; the editor's preface to the Burkes' *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans* (1779), in *WS*, V, 41–3.

[23] See Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 517, 534.

[24] For the eighteenth-century European historiography of Asia, see, for instance, Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, IV.

1 Antiquity, Conquest and Decline: The History of India

There is not a great deal of evidence for Burke's views on historical India before the early 1780s. Nevertheless, it is clear that he was interested in India since his early career and that he regarded it as a substantial civilisation. For example, in the *Annual Register*, he depicted India as 'a vast kingdom, yielding in its dimensions to few in Europe, but to none in the fertility of its soil, the number of its inhabitants, and the richness of its commerce'.[25] On 30 March 1772, in a speech to the Commons, he also contended that the Indian government was not arbitrary because it was equitably ruled by the Koran.[26] Therefore, Burke's views on India around this period had already departed from the Aristotelian stereotypical image of Asia. Nevertheless, conventional views on Asia, especially on Islam, were not entirely abandoned and they were sometimes convenient for advancing particular political arguments. In a collaborative work with William Burke, *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans* (1779), Edmund Burke maintained that there was 'no settled law or constitution, either to fix allegiance, or to restrain power' in India and Asia at large.[27] Here he clearly implied 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 rule, and that this 'familiarity had rendered it congenial' to their nature. Although the British constitution was apparently better than theirs, it should not be imposed upon them if they preferred 'their old laws and their ancient system'.[28]

Moreover, Burke may possibly have regarded Indian history as one in which the Hindus had been persecuted by the Muslims. In the *Policy*, there is a sharp contrast between the characters of Muslims and Hindus. For the Burkes, Muslims were aggressive, despotic and rapacious, whereas Hindus, although slavish and less enterprising, were a good-natured and industrious people. If Hindus lived under a Muslim

[25] *Annual Register ... for the Year 1758*, p. 32.

[26] Egerton MS. 239, fol. 271.

[27] *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans*, in *WS*, V, 113.

[28] 'Speech on Bengal Judicature Bill (27 June 1781)', in *WS*, V, 140–1. Cf. 'Speech on Rohilla War Charge (1 June 1786)', in *WS*, VI, 109.

government, they showed obedience to their tyrannical rulers.[29] In fact, in many parts of India, the native inhabitants had been subjected to Muslims. Tanjore was an exception, but it was now facing a crisis.[30] 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 countries'.[31] In other words, the Nawab had subverted 'ancient and respectable establishments'.[32] At a later point, Burke also contended 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'.[33] Chiefly regarding the recent affairs of southern India, the Burkes asserted that these provinces under Hindu governments had been better ruled than those under Muslim governments and had flourished until recently.

Burke ceased to present India as a despotic nation around 1782, that is, from the time when he became involved in the Select Committee and began to denounce the corruption of the Company. He was, nonetheless, still clear in retaining his previous opinions of Hindus and in his Montesquieuan way of thinking. In 1785, addressing, again, the problem of the Carnatic and Tanjore, Burke described these provinces as flourishing until the recent troubles. In his view, this prosperity owed much to those great rulers, rather than to the natural environment, who over generations had built and preserved a number of reservoirs and watercourses in the region. Hinduism was behind this civilising process, leading these rulers to make considerable efforts to build up their own territories.[34]

In 1786, moreover, when prosecuting Hastings for his responsibility for 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

[29] *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans*, in *WS*, V, 113. See also ibid., in *WS*, V, 48, 66, 110, 112, 114–21.

[30] Ibid., in *WS*, V, 120.

[31] Ibid., in *WS*, V, 45–6.

[32] Ibid., in *WS*, V, 46.

[33] Ibid., in *WS*, V, 114–5.

[34] *Speech on Nabob of Arcot's Debts* (28 February 1785), in *WS*, V, 522.

from Persia. The greatest number of them came to India around 1724, probably with the consent of the Mogul emperor, Farrukhsiyar (1687–1719).[35] In this era, the Mogul emperors, who considered themselves to have Tartar origins and favoured Tartar nations, found *Umara* (the 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). These emperors were, then, 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 along both sides of the Ganges and established the most orderly government that had hitherto existed in India. Burke maintained the character of the Rohillas to be 'a free people'.[36]

If he still, as before 1782, regarded the Tartars as rapacious and cruel, the point made above would not make sense. The Rohilland was, he remarked, 'the Garden of Eden', which consisted of '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 army of Hastings' Company. Burke vehemently condemned their conduct and, in particular, described Siraj al-Daula as 'a monster of ferocity and cruelty'.[37]

Burke's altered image of India was fully revealed in his opening speeches at Hastings' impeachment in February 1788. First, he explained to his colleagues the nature, character, principles and institutions of the Hindus, to all of which Burke was highly favourable. According to him, the Hindus 'are the original inhabitants of Hindoostan', who have lived there through all times of history except 'the grand era', that is, 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'.[38] They have also inherited the 'caste' system from ancient times, which was 'the fundamental part of the constitution of

[35] Here there is an apparent inaccuracy. The 1720s were the reign of Muhammad Shah (known as Roshan Akhtar).

[36] 'Speech on Rohilla War Charge', in *WS*, VI, 99–100.

[37] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 110.

[38] 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 301.

that Commonwealth, both in their Church and in their State'.[39] After 1782, Burke never again attempted to maintain that the Hindu social system was slavish. Burke rather described the Hindus as conservative, moderate and passive: 'And still they exist in a green old age, with all the reverence of antiquity and with all the affection to their own institutions that other people have to novelty and change … Their religion has made no Converts; their dominion no conquests'.[40] They were, in fact, 'the softest in their manners, approaching almost to feminine'.[41] At first glance, he continued, their manners and institutions appeared to reveal 'their weakness', but actually exhibited 'their force', as they had withstood a number of conquests over their long history. Burke attributed the strength and stability of their institutions to the connection between their religious and political institutions, and contended that 'whatsoever wherever the Hindoo Religion has been established, that Country has been flourishing'.[42]

In other places, he also maintained that the Hindus had governed themselves by their ancient laws called 'Gentoo Laws', which had nothing to do with arbitrary power.[43] Burke's admiration for the Hindus seems consonant with his general interest in the customs and habits of the human species. Since many contemporary intellectuals referred favourably to the Hindus as a moderate and conservative people, his approval of the Hindus did not depart from the conventional view of them expressed in his day, though his admiration was probably more enthusiastic than that of most of his contemporaries.[44]

After explaining the character of the Hindus and their social institutions, Burke offered the House of Lords a brief historical summary of the conquests made by Muslim tribes. He divided this history into six phases.

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[39] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 303.

[40] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 305.

[41] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 302.

[42] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 305.

[43] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 365, 465; *First Report Select Committee:* 'Observations' (5 February 1782), in *WS*, V, 171.

[44] For eighteenth-century European perceptions 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.

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.'[45] 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 would not be successful. Although still attempting to increase the influence of their religion in India, the Muslims, in this period, never destroyed the wealth or authority of the native nobility, gentry or landholders.[46]

The next era was 'the history of the Tartars, or the era of Tamerlane'. They, too, did not destroy Hinduism, but rather conquered the other Muslims.[47] Tamerlane reached 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 these tyrants and attempted to restructure the government of these countries. Relying upon Holwell's *Interesting Historical Events*,[48] 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 upon

[45] '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 (28, 30, May, 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 16 June 1794)', in *WS*, VII, 568.

[46] 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 308. See also his *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, in *WS*, V, 401–2.

[47] See 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 568: 'the foundation of the Bengal Empire there was overturned by Tamarlane'.

[48] John Zephaniah Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan* (London, 1766–1767).

the Hindus *Jizya* (a poll tax), which the Muslims 'have laid upon every Country over which the sword of Mahomet prevailed'.[49] 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.[50]

Distinct from other 'ferocious, oppressive' Muslims, Tamerlane won the approval of the native inhabitants of India. 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 reduced to an abject situation, as Hastings had asserted.[51] Although Hastings insisted that the institutions of Tamerlane and Genghis Khan had been arbitrary, Burke refuted this statement.[52] Burke stressed that both Tamerlane[53] and Genghis Khan[54] governed by the rule of law in their empire in order to show that their politics were not the exercise of arbitrary power. Both of them were also elected by their people, although Tamerlane had, Burke acknowledged, been cruel in his conquests. While adopting some Western concepts, notably the idea of the rule of law, to explain the political tradition of these distant regions, Burke contended that morality in Asia was essentially the same as that in Europe.

The next era that Burke examined was the era of Akbar the Great (1542–1605), the third Mogul emperor. The Mogul people were not

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[49] 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 308–9. This is usually attributed to Akbar, not to Tamerlane.

[50] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 309.

[51] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 309–10.

[52] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 354–61; 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 268–72, 283.

[53] 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*, trans. William Davy and Joseph White (Oxford, 1783). See 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 271.

[54] For evidence, Burke referred to *The History of Genghizcan the Great … by the Late M. Petis de la Croix Senior* (London, 1722). He owned this work: LC MS.

the original inhabitants of India, and nor were the Muslims who arrived there from Arabia or Persia. They originally had their own religion and constitutions, but 'blended with the other, namely the Mahometans'.[55] In 1576, Bengal came under the Mogul rule of the emperor, Akbar. His conquest of Bengal was a triumph over the Muslim dynasty there and, as he did not conquer the whole 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 contended resembled 'the Wars of the Roses in this Country [England]', the Hindus 'were a favoured, protected, gently treated people'.[56] What might be surprising is Burke's moderate treatment of Akbar, given that many contemporary commentators on Hindostan history, even those who opposed Burke, tended to value highly this emperor's liberal policies in politics and religion. For Robertson, Alexander Dow and Edward Law, Akbar was a benevolent monarch, whose conduct could be clearly distinguished from that of most other Muslim rulers.[57] As it seems likely that Burke was well informed about the emperor's character and policies, it is not clear why Burke did not elaborate further on Akbar's appeasement of the Hindus. Moreover, he regarded Aurangzeb as a tyrant, but did not denounce this emperor as vehemently as some of his European contemporaries did.[58]

The decline of the Mogul dynasty was followed by the age of the rising independent *subahdars*, that is to say, 'a troubled and vexatious era'. Here, once more, his narrative was identical to that produced by his contemporaries. According to Burke, there were five *subahdars*, and they became independent, partly because of the political calamities and

[55] 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 265.

[56] 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 310–11.

[57] 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, 1859–1861), II, 535; Dow, *The History of Hindostan, translated from Persian*, p. xxiv. Burke owned Robertson's *Historical Disquisition* (LC MS; *LC*, p. 20) and Dow's *History* (LC MS; *LC*, p. 7).

[58] 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.'

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. Even so, the social order of the Hindus was, in Burke's view, still maintained in that era.[59]

The decline of the Mogul empire and the death of Nadir Shah were linked to the collapse of the Indian economy. Before 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 traded. Social disorder in Persia, then, 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 markets in Agra and Delhi.[60]

In 1756, Siraj al-Daula's rule in Bengal was replaced by that of the East India Company, which marked the beginning of 'the era of the British Empire' in the Indian subcontinent.[61] Burke declared that this year '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.'[62] The introduction of British manners was not a pleasant event, as it meant the final dissolution of ancient manners and Indian economy in the subcontinent.

The East India Company had engaged in commerce with India long before it acquired the territorial revenue, and the Company had conducted its business fairly well until the mid-1760s, although Burke acknowledged that the Company's commercial policies had been restrictive and had therefore adversely affected the prosperity of Indian society.[63] In recent years, however, the Company's commercial project had been transformed into a project of conquest, and this change had brought a great confusion to Indian society.[64] In 1765, the *Annual Register* stated that the Company had always been a 'trading' interest,

[59] 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 311.

[60] *Ninth Report of Select Committee* (25 June 1783), in *WS*, V, 229–30.

[61] 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 311. See also, ibid., in *WS*, VI, 315.

[62] Ibid., in *WS*, VI, 314.

[63] *Ninth Report of Select Committee*, in *WS*, V, 241.

[64] Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, p. 635.

yet it had recently also changed to become a 'conquering' force in India.[65] By the early 1780s, this transformation had become more visible, and Burke was determined to censure it. Despite the fact that India had experienced several political revolutions and major changes of circumstances in the course of its history, according to Burke the social order of the Hindus was never destroyed fundamentally until Warren Hastings began his efforts to govern the country.[66] While he wished that India would restore its 'ancient constitution', he also urged the East India Company to return to the previous practices in which commerce had operated on a relatively equitable basis. In doing so, Burke did not question the justice of the British presence in India, which was, to him, no more than one of the contingencies naturally occurring during history or even an outcome of divine providence.[67]

Overall, for Burke, civilisation in India was neither a barbarous nor a primitive one, such as that to be found in most places of the Americas. Rather, he regarded it as well-matured, like that of the European nations. In his *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, he compared the people of India with the Amerindians in South America and, while regarding the latter as savages, he 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 were 'the depository of their laws, learning, and history'.[68] Indian society was well developed along with its vigorous commercial, financial and agricultural activities. The country also possessed various social ranks, manners and religions. For Burke, the well-established rulers, nobility and priests, the development of commercial arts and the complexity of society were

[65] *Annual Register ... for the Year 1764*, p. 256.

[66] 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 312. Although Scrafton produced a similar narrative of Indian history, he was critical of the Maratha, whose military spirit had corrupted their manners and weakened their commercial arts. See Scrafton, *Reflections on the Government of Indostan*, pp. 13–5, 20–1, 24–6. Burke once referred to Scrafton's *Reflections* approvingly. See 'Speech in Reply', in *WS*, VII, 279.

[67] *Speech on 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. See also 'Speech on Opening of Impeachment', in *WS*, VI, 351, 462.

[68] *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, in *WS*, V, 389.

signs of a civilised society, and he believed 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 since the distant past.

Burke, however, also 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.[69]

Despite his veneration of the antiquity and the culture of the Hindus, Burke asserted that Indian civilisation, even though well developed, had declined in recent times and the rising European civilisation had overtaken it.[70] This view is compatible with a passage in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in which Burke presented the chivalric tradition as the main cause of modern European civilisation, and in which, he declared, this civilisation was superior to that in Asia or in ancient times.[71]

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[69] '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.

[70] See *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, in *WS*, V, 389. For all his efforts to persuade his audience that Indian society was understandable because it shared the same morality and similar social systems, Burke's view of India was challenged by the defence of Hastings. On 12 February 1792, Edward Law claimed that Burke had 'wantoned at pleasure', talking about the ancient history of India. According to Law, Hindus or the Brahmanical era was 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, as every country in India, including the Maratha, had short histories. See *Speeches of the Managers and Counsel in the Trial of Warren Hastings*, II, 532–45.

[71] *Reflections*, pp. 238–9.

2 The History of Islam and Asia

In the *Vindication of Natural Society*, Asia was one strand of a larger narrative of the confused world that had existed in ancient times. Ancient historians, such as Diodorus Siculus, Justin, Herodotus and Xenophon informed Burke of the politics and wars of ancient Egypt, Persia and West Asia. Sesostris, a king of Egypt (d. 1926 B.C.), had overrun the Mediterranean coast, Semiramis, an Assyrian queen, had attempted a war in India, Xerxes, a king of Persia (*c.* 519–465 B.C.), had invaded Greece, and Mithridates, a king of Pontus on the Black Sea (120–163 B.C.), had massacred Romans.[72] For the strategic purpose of the *Vindication*, the disordered political situation of ancient Asia here was greatly stressed. Even so, as he was generally sceptical of ancient history, Burke clearly regarded ancient Asia, as well as ancient Europe, as existing in uncertain but still apparently confused times. He may, nevertheless, have valued some aspects of the ancient peoples of Asia. In 1757, in the *Account*, the Burkes characterised the ancient Egyptians as industrious and ingenious, although superstitious and failing to bring their arts to perfection.[73] In 1762, when reprinting accounts of Anquetil-Duperron's (1731–1805) journey to India, Burke wrote a brief preface where he mentioned that ancient Persia had 'the manners of so considerable a people'.[74]

Moreover, in the *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans*, Indian despotism was depicted as 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 Muslims 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'.[75] This presumably reflected the authors' historical view of Islam, that is, the Muslims' policy of conquest since the

[72] *Vindication*, in *WS*, I, 142–7.

[73] *Account*, I, 130.

[74] See *Annual Register … for the Year 1762*, p. 101 (second pagination). His reference to Anquetil-Duperron is important in considering his possible reading [Abraham-Hyacinthe] Anqueil-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).

[75] *Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans*, in *WS*, V, 113.

Middle Ages.[76] Fierceness and cruelty were, in their view, the fundamental characteristics of Muslims—a conclusion which they believed could be proved from historical evidence.

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 power, and Italy was also harassed by it. These Muslim invasions were violent and frequent, and they alarmed all Europe.[77]

Like many of his contemporaries, Burke had in mind a vivid historical image of the rapid expansion of early Islam over the earth. This was an image of Islam as a cruel religion of conquest. Islam was also historically a great enemy of the Christian religion. In his *Abridgment*, Burke wrote that the medieval Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem had been obstructed by the Muslims, a policy which helped provoke the first crusade. In the tenth century, pilgrimages were regarded as highly praiseworthy and became frequent. 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.[78] The merciless Muslims were infidels and religious enemies rather than savages.

Burke may well have been informed of a number of other historical episodes recording the conflicts between the two religions. Such knowledge might have been expressed in a letter of 1774, where he regarded the Turks as savage and maintained: 'Any people but the Turks so seated

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[76] For Burke, as well as for his contemporaries, Islam was essentially an alien component in India, and it spread out from Tartary or Persia to other parts of Asia including India. See 'Speech on Rohilla War Charge', 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.'

[77] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 454. A similar description is found in the *Vindication of Natural Society*. See *Vindication*, in *WS*, I, 150.

[78] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 482.

as they are would have been cultivated in 300 years, but they grow more gross in the very native soil of civility and Refinement.'[79] By contending that the Turks had not improved over the last 300 years, he was probably referring to the state of the Ottomans since 1453, the year when they had captured Constantinople from its Christian rulers. If 'the very native soil of civility and Refinement' implied Constantinople, it may be possible that Burke was lamenting the Muslims' capture of what had long been the capital of the Byzantine Empire.[80]

From around 1782, as has already been seen, Burke contended that many past governments in India had been neither despotic nor arbitrary, and at times he applied this belief to the whole of Asia. In order to refute Hastings' allegation that Asian history was nothing more than a series of exercises in arbitrary power,[81] Burke tried to show that there had been no arbitrary government in Asia throughout during its long history, and he insisted that Hastings had practised something unknown in 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, did not authorise the exercise of any arbitrary power.[82] Throughout Asia, there was a great priesthood, which interpreted the law and which was an independent body protected from the fury of the sovereign power.

In the Ottoman Empire,[83] there was an ancient law which limited the sovereign's power. Although the Sultan of the Empire had great executive powers, he subjected himself to the law. He was more strictly under the rule of law than any European sovereign. In fact, he could not

[79] 'Burke to [Adrian Heinrich von] Borcke-[post 17 January 1774]', in *Corr.*, II, 514.

[80] Later, in his *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, Burke depicted Mahomet II (1430–1481), who captured 'the capital of the Christian World', that is, Constantinople, as 'the ferocious enemy of all philosophy and religion'. See *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 108.

[81] '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.*, XXVI, 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.

[82] '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.

[83] Burke clearly classified Turkey as part of Asia, whereas several contemporaries tended to regard it as a region of Europe.

dispose of the life or property of any of his subjects, nor declare war 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.[84] Significantly, Burke assumed that the Turks, as well as other Muslim nations, developed their 'ancient constitution' which enforced the rule of law on all levels of society, even upon the Sultan himself. In maintaining this, Burke evidently challenged conventional views of Islam and the Ottoman Empire, yet this may have resulted from his absorption of the opinions of recent European historians who had advanced a similar line of argument.

In his *Observations on the Religion, Law, Government and Manners of the Turks*, James Porter asserted the Turkish government 'to be much more perfect and regular, as well as less despotic, than most writers have represented it'.[85] Although Porter did not fail to pay homage to Montesquieu, he rejected his precursor's conclusion 'that the Grand Seignor's despotism swallows up every right of the subject throughout that empire'.[86] Under the rule of the Koran, and ancient laws and customs, the Ottoman Empire could not properly be called a despotic society, but rather it may have been 'a limited monarchy'.[87] If Burke did not agree with every single point made by the historians of his age on the Ottoman Empire and other Asian countries, he still presumably made use of the development of contemporary historiography to support his arguments against Hastings.

Around the same time, however, Burke occasionally depicted the Turks and Islam in quite a different manner.[88] In the *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

[84] '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.

[85] Sir James Porter, *Observations on the Religion, Law, Government, and Manners of the Turks* (2nd edn., London, 1771), p. xiv.

[86] Ibid., p. 49.

[87] Ibid., p. xxxv.

[88] Burke did not relinquish his abhorrence of Islam. In a letter of 1792, 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.

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 the Ottoman Empire, 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'. There agriculture and manufacturers decay, learning disappears and 'the human race itself melts away and perishes under the eye of the observer'.[89] Such a contention was apparently incompatible with his previous evaluation of the same power. In 1792, in a speech in the Commons, he also criticised some of his colleagues who regarded the Ottoman Empire as part of the balance of power in Europe and strongly 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.[90]

For Burke, the Ottoman Empire was an Asiatic power, to which he here referred unfavourably, and, above all, it was a powerful Muslim society. He appears to have attempted to remind his colleagues of the history of this empire as a longstanding arch-enemy of Christianity.

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[89] *Reflections*, p. 295. The dreadful image of Nadir Shah was quite common to his contemporaries. As has already been seen, Burke, elsewhere, also mentioned the social disorder of Persia following the death of Nadir Shah. See also ibid., p. 299, where he again described Turkey as despotic.

[90] *Parl. Hist*., XXIX, 76–7. For another comment on Turkey as an enemy of the Christian religion, see *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 307. For Turkish history, Burke, for example, owned Voivode of Moldavia Dimitrie Cantemir, *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire*, trans. Nicholas Tindal (London, 1756): LC MS; *LC*, p. 9.

Africa could be even worse in the sense that here there was no hope of building up any substantial civilisation. As he surely recognised, the slave trade was an abominable business,[91] the African trade in general tended to be monopolistic[92] and European behaviour in this strange world had still confused the local inhabitants and their societies.[93] Yet, in his view, Africans themselves did not have the capacity to civilise their own countries. In 1777, he stated that 'Africa, time out of mind, had been in a state of slavery'. The slave trade meant, therefore, that 'the inhabitants only changed one species of slavery for another'.[94] In 1789, Burke contended that Africans and those living near the Black Sea 'were both equally barbarous, both equally destitute of those refinements which attended a refined polity'. In other words, they 'had never been found capable of the blessing'.[95] In 1793, after he saw the uprisings of slaves in the French West Indies, he once more referred to 'base maroon Negroes, born in the Barbarism of Africa, renderd more Barbarous by the corruption of Slavery'.[96]

In his *French Affairs*, the Algerian republic and the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt were specific targets for his criticism. The evil governments in both countries had, according to him, existed for centuries, and

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[91] *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 131; 'Speeches on African Slave Trade (5 June 1777)', in *WS*, III, 340–1; Burke's speech in parliament on 14 May 1778, quoted in *WS*, III, 563; *Parliamentary Register*, XXIII, 604; 'Speech on Abolition of the African Slave Trade (21 May 1789)', in *WS*, IV, 277.

[92] Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVIII. 25. See also ibid., A. XXVIII. 22A.

[93] *Parl. His.*, XIX, 305. In his speech, Temple Luttrell briefly summarised the history of the British engagement in the African trade (ibid., XIX, 299–308), which Burke listened to. See also Northamptonshire MS. A. XXVIII. 23B.

[94] 'Speeches on African Slave Trade (5 June 1777)', in *WS*, III, 341.

[95] 'Speech on Abolition of the African Slave Trade (21 May 1789)', in *WS*, IV, 278. In another report of this speech, Burke was reported to have said: 'Civilization and a traffic in men were utterly incompatible. Look at the two quarters of the globe where it chiefly prevailed, the coast of Africa and the coasts of the Black Sea. The whites in the one quarter were in a state almost as savage and as barbarous as the blacks in the other' (*General Evening Post*, 21–3 May 1789). Cf. Prior, *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, I, 512; *WS*, IV, 278 (editor's note). Here, however, Burke was reported to have said that Africa was 'healthy, civilized, and so fertile, that the reaper trod on the heels of the sower. But the thirst of European avarice and cruelty had raised a barrier round the coasts of that quarter, which prevented all communication with the inoffensive inhabitants'.

[96] WWM Bk P 10/74, quoted in *WS*, IV, 272 (editor's note).

their viciousness was well-fitted to their nature.[97] In his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he also contended that Algiers had 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 geographically far from Britain. It was also neither powerful nor infectious. At the same time, it was 'an old creation'.[98] In so arguing, Burke presumed that the evilness of Algiers had existed since the distant past.[99]

Burke's views on the early Muslims also do not fit well with his claim that Islam was not necessarily an 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. Mahomet was a fanatical infidel 'in light of Asia' and a great enemy of Christian Europe.[100] This prophet and his followers, as well as Genghis Khan, were also destructive conquerors.[101] While it must not be forgotten that Burke was, at this time, chiefly preoccupied with French affairs, not with the history of Asia, it is misleading to state 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 had been firmly established. Rather, he was still 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 peoples in the region and had even threatened the peace of Europe.

[97] See *French Affairs*, in *WS*, VIII, 368. Burke must have had in mind that these were Muslim countries, although it is not clear that he condemned these countries because they were Muslim.

[98] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, XI, 257–9.

[99] In addition, he would have known about the Barbary pirates, who for ages had harassed European merchant ships in the Mediterranean.

[100] See *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, in *WS*, VIII, 305–6.

[101] *Second Letter*, in *WS*, IX, 289. See also ibid., in *WS*, IX, 278.

3 Perspective on Non-European Civilisations and Its Limit

Burke's account of Asian-Muslim societies was, in a way, a response to the long history of ideas about them that had developed ever since Aristotle. In particular, from around 1782, he intentionally aimed to refute the conventional understanding of these societies. As already mentioned, however, whether he was conscious of it or not, his account of India was clearly parallel to that of some of his contemporaries in several respects. Burke's views on Indian history, therefore, need to be read in the context of the historiographical development of his age.

It is clear, nevertheless, that these views should also be regarded as his own elaboration. In his views on Indian history, the ancient manners, religion and constitution of the subcontinent, all of which had not been destroyed until the English 'conquest' of recent years, had played the roles in establishing a substantial civilisation, and this was an application of his idea of the civilising process derived from his account of the rise of modern Europe. While he needed to show the similarity between European and Indian civilisations in order to make the subject of his discussion intelligible to the audience at the Hastings' trial, he himself could not appreciate the Indian civilisation without seeing it through the lens of the European model of society and civilisation. Although aspects of his thought on India might, therefore, be partly 'Ornamentalist',[102] it is significant that Burke also clearly accepted the intrinsic value of Indian civilisation. For him, the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent possessed the same human nature and moral code as the Europeans, and this was due to the fact that natural law, and ultimately the divine will, ruled the region as well as the other regions of the globe. In presuming this, he took a great step towards the establishment of the global, and non-Eurocentric perspectives, of the formation of civilisations. In this view, Europe was not the centre, and surely not the only location, of the advanced civilisations of humanity.

Burke's ideas, however, also had obvious limitations. Clearly, he was not prepared to put forward a universal theory of a diversity of

[102] Daniel I. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016). See also my review of this book, Sora Sato, 'Book Review: Daniel I. O'Neill, Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire', *Intellectual History Review*, 27 (2017), 277–9.

civilisations emerging in various regions on earth during history. Although he strongly insisted, at Hastings' trials, that the Ottoman Empire was not despotic and it upheld the rule of law, he did not believe, as his statements on other occasions show, that this Empire had created a civilised society equivalent to modern European societies. The case of Africa was similar, or even worse. While the northern African nations were influenced by the Ottomans and were degenerating, some nations in other parts of the African continent had been dispirited by the long-standing practice of slavery.

It even seems possible to maintain that his ideas on Asia and Islam plunged into an apparent contradiction when he censured Mahomet, his followers and Ottoman Turkey, as the idea of Islamic civilisation as the 'Garden of Eden' clearly conflicted with that of the merciless rulers and despotic societies devoting themselves to this religion. Although it is not easy to explain away this disparity, it is possible that the two contradictory images of Asia and Islam reflected his genuine opinions. It is true that Burke's discussions of them were influenced by his different political objectives on different occasions. In the impeachment of Hastings, Burke needed to stress the contrast between historical India and the present situation of the subcontinent in order to criticise Hastings and the East India Company. This necessity, which had clearly not existed before 1782, coupled with an even stronger conviction about the self-sufficiency of Indian society, helped to shift his delineation of historical Asia, and his idealised view of the region 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 Turkey was part of his genuine thought rather than a mere rhetorical device or a reproduction of conventional stereotypes, as it appeared time and again throughout his life in various contexts. Was, on the other hand, his admiration for Islam and Asia only rhetoric in order to support his political arguments? Although he needed such rhetoric to persuade his audience at the impeachment, it is unlikely that it had nothing to do with his genuine opinions. If Burke had not considered Asia and Islam as praiseworthy, he could have chosen other ways of criticising Hastings. Such contradictory remarks may show that his knowledge of Asia and Islam was incomplete (his remarks on British and European history were often more developed and hardly ever showed such obvious

contradictions, despite the fact that they appeared in many different contexts and circumstances).

Nevertheless, the shift in his opinions must not be exaggerated, as some continuity in his position is apparent. Throughout his career, while Burke castigated and condemned the early Muslims, he was quite favourable towards Hindus. Despite his comments already quoted, it is hard to believe that Burke, even before 1782, considered that a systems of laws and property rights had not existed in India.

Burke's account of Asia and Islam definitely had limitations that flowed from a particular type of thinking. It frequently concerned the political actions and systems in the region, that is, whether Asian politics were (or had been) despotic. It 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 development of the legal or political systems in the region,[103] nor did he draw particular attention to commercial interactions between Europe and Asian-Muslim nations throughout history. Among his contemporaries, William Robertson drew attention to Muslim commercial activities, pointing to the fact that commercial interactions reduced hostility and promoted mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims, although historical events such as the Crusades interrupted such peaceful interactions.[104] Edward Gibbon, too, maintained that commercial caravans had provided the Arabs with knowledge and good manners such as politeness.[105] Burke's commercial humanism hardly turned to these points.

Furthermore, while commentators have tended to commend Burke's knowledge of India, this is, of course, a matter of comparison. He was indeed much better informed about India than many of his contemporaries, but his knowledge was more concerned with contemporary political issues than with history. His historical descriptions of the

[103] For contemporary awareness of this development in Muslim nations, for instance, see Porter, *Observations on the Religion, Law, Government, and Manners of the Turks*, pp. 45–8.

[104] Robertson, *Historical Disquisition*, pp. 97–106, 115, 119–22, 146–8.

[105] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley (3 vols., London: Allen Lane, 1994), III, 164.

Asian-Muslim world were, in fact, relatively coarse and at times inaccurate and even fanciful. These flaws are, of course, to be expected even from an enlightened figure of the eighteenth-century Western world. Overall, Burke's ideas on historical Asia and the Muslim world demonstrate both the intellectual attainments and the limitations of the European Enlightenment's science of man.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: Burke and History

At birth, Burke was already surrounded by various historical circumstances and environment that were later to help shape his political and historical thought. Ireland, his native country, was still facing severe socio-political conditions after centuries of disputes with her near neighbour, England. By contrast, after the turbulent seventeenth century and the defining political compromise of the Revolution of 1688–9, England under George II was more prosperous than ever. Benefiting from its recently acquired political stability and its expanding empire, England was becoming a great commercial nation. Although the rebellion in the American colonies and the East India Company's extensive domination over South Asia had not begun yet, imperial issues were soon to shape Burke's environment and to influence his thinking.

1 Literary Life and History

It is not easy to determine how an individual comes to hold a particular historical perspective of the world, but it is clear that a starting point for Burke's ideas on history was his life and study at the school of Ballitore and Trinity College, Dublin, where he read a variety of historical works including some on ancient Greece and Rome. At Ballitore, according to Richard Shackleton, Burke 'made the reading of the *classics* his diversion,

S. Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64441-7_7

rather than his business' and he 'was particularly delighted with history and poetry'.[1] At Trinity College, he also read Irish history outside the curriculum, and discussed the political and social problems of his country with his fellow students. It was natural for him and his friends to consider Irish history critically as the political and social issues were rooted in history and developed over a long period of time. To think of Irish history entailed, in part, a critique of English history as it involved the discussion of Ireland's constitutional relationship with England throughout centuries of history.

Burke moved to England in 1750 and studied law at the Middle Temple, London, but he did not become a lawyer, due to his determination to pursue a literary career. 'Several Scattered Hints concerning Philosophy and Learning', an unpublished essay written in the mid-1750s, was a product of such a personal disposition. Here, he already displayed the essence of his social and political thought, which was largely historical. Burke believed that a great variety of opinions and manners existed in the global community, and these were by no means static themselves, but would rather change over time: 'every Age has its own' customs, characters and manners.[2] To be conversant with this fact would lead people to wear away prejudice and to make 'a great variation in the Conduct to be pursued in the Management of Affairs'. 'Custom is to be regarded with great deference especially', Burke also wrote, 'if it be an universal Custom; even popular notions are not always to be laughed at.' As customs or 'forms and ceremonies' are found 'in all nations, and at all times', and ancestors, who were 'ruder indeed than we', practised them, these are 'suitable to our nature'.[3] Mere speculation is, in Burke's view, naked reason, which is not reliable. Reason is needed, yet it should be artificial reason, which enables one to make subtle judgments of the infinitely various circumstances arising from both history and the present

[1] *London Evening Post*, April 14–17th 1770, reprinted in The Late Arthur P.I. Samuels, *The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 403.

[2] Cf. *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, in *WS*, II, 258: 'Every age has its own manners, and its politicks dependent upon them'.

[3] Edmund Burke, 'Several Scattered Hints concerning Philosophy and Learning', in *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*, ed. H.V.F. Somerset (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 81–98 (at 85, 90, 95). For further discussion of this essay, see Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 80–9.

combination of things. This way of thinking, leading Burke to the arguments developed in the *Vindication of Natural Society* and later those of his politics, is socio-political thought that demands a close investigation of the complexities of society and an acute awareness of the historical dimensions to it.

A work written in collaboration with William Burke, an *Account of the European Settlements in America*, produced a summary and analysis of the history of the Americas from the late fifteenth century to the late eighteenth century, and one of the authors' intentions was to influence the British colonial policies of the age. After their gradual emergence from medieval stagnation, Europeans had come to realise the significance of commerce and colonisation, which meant the beginning of a great competition for hegemony over extended areas of the globe. The Burkes were favourable to this historical expansion of Europe, and they drew attention to the great figures, such as Columbus, Castro, Gasca, Delaware, Baltimore and Penn, who had played a significant role in the formation and advancement of the colonies. Among his works, the *Account* was particularly conspicuous in its treatment of such 'great men', but it is not true that Burke, in his other works, neglected the role of eminent individuals in shaping history. In the *Abridgment*, he commended Agricola as a great conqueror who helped civilise the ancient Britons. As his works in the 1790s suggest, although Cromwell was a wicked man who subverted the constitution, he and Monck saved England from plunging into an anarchic state during the constitutional crises in the seventeenth century. In Europe, Louis XIV had been intolerant in religion and had posed a threat to the balance of power in Europe, although this monarch also contributed to the rise of learning and the arts in France.

In Asian history, Burke never endorsed Mahomet and his conquests, conquests that caused great confusion in the region, but he spoke highly of Ghengis Khan and Tamerlane in the context of the Hastings trial. It is, nonetheless, significant that Burke did not often emphasise the role of 'great men' in history, and his more common approach to history and society was to draw attention to the role of the 'spirit', 'character' and 'manners' of a nation and age. As one of his early memoranda shows, the greatness of ancient Rome and modern Britain was rooted in their national character rather than being the accomplishment of particular individuals.

Burke's aesthetic work, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, does not provide us with much information about his historical thinking, but it is not entirely irrelevant to this theme. According to this work, human beings learn through imitation, which helps shape their manners, opinions and connections in society. In order to lead them towards improvement, however, divine providence planted 'ambition' in their consciousness.[4] Burke's 'ambition' somehow played a similar role to Kant's 'unsociable sociability', which was also supposed to guide humanity out of the stagnation of eternal peace. Behind this model of theoretical history there also existed the divine providence (or 'nature'), which was intent on promoting the progress of humanity and human society.

The 'imitative' and 'ambitious' animal was, above all, a 'religious animal'. Throughout his career, Burke believed that this innate religious consciousness was a key force influencing the rise of civilisations. In the *Abridgment*, 'Justice was in all countries originally administered by the priesthood', and '[t]he first openings of civility have been every where made by religion', he maintained.[5] Religion was one of the most important aspects of human nature and influences on life, and so he simply could not believe that atheists were capable of building a substantial or long-lasting civilisation.

The connection of religion with the rise of civilisation derived in part from his staunch belief in the value of religion, especially of Christianity, but it also owed to his opinions on European history. Like many intellectuals of the age, he was very conscious of the disastrous consequences of the religious wars and religious persecution in past centuries. Burke was highly critical of the long-standing persecution of Irish Catholics by post-Reformation Protestant England and also of Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes which had previously granted a degree of toleration to French Protestants. He commended the practice of religious toleration throughout history, such as the toleration of all Christian denominations by Lord Baltimore and William Penn in North America.

He regarded religious toleration as a means of improving and civilising society, and he did not doubt that civil society would flourish best under tolerant and rational, not fanatical, Christians. As early as the

[4] Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 50.

[5] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 349.

1750s, he was already convinced of this and he maintained that the Christian religion, unlike other religions, could teach people the value of various arts, including commerce, as well as urging mercy towards enemies.[6] This religion had rendered the manners and temper of its devotees more moderate as had been the case of the Saxons' conversion in the Middle Ages.

For a long period of his career, he was interested in the established religions in India, especially the Hindu religion. In his parliamentary campaign against Hastings, he often applied the idea of religion as a civilising force to Hinduism and at times to Islam. Whether or not these statements reflected his genuine opinions, they derived from his strong interest in the role of religion in society generally. Burke did not simply focus on the contributions of the Christian religion to the rise of European civilisation, but attempted to advance further. His broad intellectual vision and interests, as well as the circumstances of his age, encompassed the growth of various civilisations across the wider world.

As his interest in religion largely sprang from his personal belief in divine providence, it is clear that he believed that providence sometimes intervened in and determined the course of history. The *Abridgment* explained how providence helped humans to spread over the earth in early history. In ancient times, although commerce and navigation were underdeveloped, the spirit of migration was intense and widespread among all mankind. The chief cause of migration in this period of time was not increasing population, as many writers claimed, but people's manners of life and wars of aggression, both of which were unfavourable to the multiplication of the human race. Hunting and pasturage placed people where they eventually settled, and wars expelled the conquered from their original to the new land. Despite the fact that the north was an area with a harsh environment, it was peopled as early as the south, whose environment was generally more fitted to human life. Burke presumed that the 'wonderful disposition of the Divine Providence' existed behind this phenomenon.[7] In England, providence helped the to spread among the people there. According to the *Account*, divine providence saved Columbus from storms, placed Europeans of different nationalities in suitable lands, caused physical changes in animals

[6] *Account*, I, 192.

[7] *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 345–7.

and helped develop the colonies by accommodating unfortunate and delinquent people who settled there. For Burke, even conquest occurred through the divine will. In facilitating migration, pilgrimage and conquest, providence intended the intercourse of humanity across the world.[8]

Conquests, which had frequently occurred during history, greatly interested Burke from his early career. While it was a natural phenomenon in human society, there was clearly a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' conquests in his mind. In admirable conquests, like Agricola's over ancient Britons, the conquered were treated generously by the conquerors and were led to a more civilised state. These conquests did not lead to oppressive tyrannies. Burke, for instance, did not value highly the Danish invasion of Ireland because it wrecked the peace, stability and learning of the country, nor England's more recent conquests of Ireland. In particular, he was highly critical of the latter throughout his career.

Nevertheless, not only his Irish origin, but also, later in his life, his profession as a statesman of the British empire urged him to rethink what conquests should be. Chiefly from the 1780s, Burke explored the history of South Asia in some detail to compare its successive governments with its recent domination by the East India Company. Although early Muslim invaders of India were ferocious and cruel, they and other conquerors in subsequent ages did not utterly destroy Indian society, at whose centre lay Hinduism. In the context of his vehement attack on Britain's recent means of dominating the subcontinent, he attempted to put forward a historical vision in which the former conquerors and the conquered had lived together harmoniously.

In his early writings, Burke's attention to the importance of commerce was also conspicuous. If some conquests in early history were caused by divine providence and the early conquests of the Americas by the Europeans were horrible due to the avarice for gold and silver bullion, more recent European conquests of other parts of the globe were chiefly motivated by the urge for imperial expansion and commercial success. As the *Account* made clear, the commercial arts had rapidly developed in Europe since the seventeenth century and the growth of these arts became a remarkable characteristic of modern European society, in which the science of political economy was also substantially advanced.

[8] Ibid., in *WS*, I, 399.

Later, when Burke, in his *Reflections*, maintained that the study of public finance had developed along with the object of investigation, there was a recognition in it that both complex economic activities and the study of political economy were products of a modern civilised society. The *Account* perhaps showed that this recognition already existed in his early thought. Commerce could, according to the *Abridgment*, facilitate people's interactions, communicate culture to other countries and refine manners.[9] To be informed of the state of commerce of previous centuries enables people to be conversant with the manners of life in the past.[10] In a commercial society, people, especially those in towns, easily unite together and organise themselves to rebel against authority. In 'Considerations on a Militia', he expressed his fear of urban concentrations of population, reminding his readers of the history of European cities, cities that had been at times harassed by unruly armed citizens. In the savage nations in the past, the system of the militia operated well, because the people were poor and scattered in different places to live, which made it difficult for them to unite to fight against their government.[11] If commerce grows and helps people to create an interconnected network of common interests, however, it is perilous to allow urban citizens to organise militias. This was, in his view, a truth that history convincingly proves.

These ideas on religion, providence, conquest and commerce unquestionably demonstrate that the early Burke already had in mind a clear distinction between barbarism and civilised society, and also the defining characteristics of both. The savages, including the Ameridians and ancient Britons, were warlike, ferocious, simple in their manners and chiefly engaged in hunting and pasturage. As civil society progresses, the temper of people becomes more moderate and subtle while their manners become diverse, complex and elaborate. In the *Account*, the *Abridgment* and his other works, he explained how the Christian religion would operate as a significant driving force towards a greater civilisation by rendering people's character and manners of life more moderate and decent. On the other hand, interestingly, the native inhabitants in the Americas were characterised as irreligious. As an intellectual of the late eighteenth

[9] *Reflections*, p. 396; *Abridgment*, in *WS*, I, 399.

[10] *Annual Register … for the Year 1764*, p. 250 (second pagination).

[11] Burke, 'Considerations on a Militia', pp. 650–2.

century, Burke naturally absorbed the idea of progress, and his general interest in religion, especially his belief in the Christian religion, formed a strong link between religious life and the civilising process in his thought. He also learned from Montesquieu, however, the idea that the operation of law is greatly dependent upon a variety of factors in society.

This set of intellectual concepts led him to depart from various types of preference for the ancient and medieval past which had frequently been held by previous generations. The *Account* assumed that the ruling classes of Europe had not appreciated the values of commercial arts, colonies and political economy until the late sixteenth century, and Burke, in 'Consideration on a Militia', maintained that the militia was a relic of feudal society and not only useless but rather dangerous to the stability of English society after 1688–9. In the *Abridgment*, Burke repudiated the naïve theory of the English ancient constitution, which presumed both immutability and insularity from the Saxon period, by appealing to the idea of progress and of various factors of society influencing the laws of the nation. His vivid awareness about the growth of European societies and his strong belief in the primacy of the constitution of modern Britain, in addition to his Montesquieuan thought of manners and social interactions, prevented him from accepting the myth and arguments of ancient constitutionalism. The early Burke also well recognised the inferiority of English historiography, and hence he celebrated the publication of Hume's *History of England*, while he also commended Robertson's *History of Scotland* for its succinct style of writing, a style he himself attempted to adopt in his own historical writings. Overall, his literary career as the author of the *Abridgment* and the *Fragment*, the collaborator of the *Account* and the editor of the volumes of the *Annual Register*, in addition to his acute awareness and considerable knowledge of contemporary historiography, seems to allow us to maintain that the early Burke established himself as a substantial historian of the age.

2 Political Application

In 1766, Burke became a parliamentarian, and his career turned in a different direction and entered a new phase, and so did his approach to history. Although it is not easy to articulate fully what his entry into the political world, and his association with the Rockingham Whigs in particular, brought to his historical thought, the fact that he sympathised

with the ideology of the Rockinghams and established his political identity as an heir of the mainstream Whigs is significant. In his encounter with the new political crisis caused by the increased influence of the crown, he definitely had to rethink the meaning of English history, especially the period from the Revolution of 1688–9 to his own age even if he did not radically change his views of it.

Through this process, we begin to observe the emergence of one of the most significant Burkean ideas on history, that is to say, the need for the landed interest to take a quasi-permanent role as the leaders of the country to ensure its political stability, as a 1772 letter to the Duke of Richmond suggested. It is, of course, perfectly possible to assume that he developed a similar idea before this period, yet the new environment and circumstances definitely compelled him to express such a historical view of society more explicitly than before.

Furthermore, Burke's involvement in the *nullum tempus* debate in 1768 and 1772 helped develop his idea of prescription, in which he argued that a prescriptive right could be used to oppose the claim of the crown or the church to recover property it had long ago alienated.[12] The principle of prescription could clearly contribute to social stability through the increased security of property. The same principle could also help establish political stability by its application for the defence of institutions. The fact that an institution is in use for a long period of time, in his view, shows possible evidence of its high credence, which politics should take into consideration. Burke did not, however, offer unconditional priority to the idea of prescriptive right of political institutions. If it is apparent that prescriptive institutions violate justice, necessity and convenience for people and society, they must be replaced by superior ones. In December 1772, in a debate on the navy estimates, Burke claimed that it was absurd 'to preclude every improvement, however obvious and necessary, in the constitution' even if there existed a prescriptive institution.[13] In May and June 1774, in the parliamentary debate on the Quebec Act, he argued for the introduction of English law to the recently acquired colonies in Canada and did not defend the

[12] '"Mnemon" to the *Public Advertiser* (24 February 1768)', in *WS*, II, 75–9; '"Mnemon" to the *Public Advertiser* (4 March 1768)', in *WS*, II, 79–83; '"Mnemon" to the *Public Advertiser* [March 1768]', in *WS*, II, 83–6; 'Speech on Church Nullum Tempus Bill (17 February 1772)', in *WS*, II, 364–7.

[13] *Parl. Hist.*, XVII, 543–4, 549.

prescriptive title that could presumably be claimed by the French jurisprudence there. 'I will go upon presumption', Burke said, 'when I have no other ground to judge upon.'[14] For him, the superiority of the English system over the French one was evident enough to favour the change.[15]

The historical ideas advanced in his political works are at times intellectually pre-eminent and more frequently stirring imagination as rhetoric, yet they are not easy to analyse, because they were often fragmentary comments and were also adopted to meet particular political purposes rather than being an attempt at providing genuine historical arguments. Nevertheless, in the sense that other politicians could barely do the same thing, it was a significant achievement that he could advance the rich contents and sophisticated arguments of his political writings and speeches by appealing to historical knowledge and images drawn from the past.

Although such intellectual gifts did not always bring him political success, they have frequently been admired ever since. As has already been seen, Burke's views of history began to emerge even more clearly by the late 1760s and 1770s. William Robertson was his favourite historian and he enjoyed reading Robertson's *History of America* published in 1777, although he was not uncritical of the author's description of the Amerindians. As he wrote to Robertson, in his age he could observe, before his eyes, a variety of societies at different stages of development from the savage to the civilised. The acquisition of 'the Great Map of Mankind' made it no longer necessary for late eighteenth-century men to study every minute detail of history in order to uncover human nature and the various states of human society. Ancient history, in particular, was 'a poor instructor'.[16] This did not mean, of course, either

[14] *Debates of the House of Commons in the Year 1774, on the Bill for making more effectual Provision for the Government of the Province of Quebec, Drawn up from the Notes of the Right Honourable Sir Henry Cavendish*, ed. J. Wright (London, 1839), p. 88.

[15] *Debates of the House of Commons in the Year 1774*, pp. 192, 196, 213, 288–9. For Burke's involvement in the debate on Quebec Act and his idea of the priority of utility over prescription, see Bourke, 'Edmund Burke and the Politics of Conquest'; idem, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 460–70. For Burke's views on prescription in relation to inalienable rights and social utility, see Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, pp. 426, 577.

[16] 'Burke to William Robertson (9 June 1777)', in *Corr.*, III, 350–1. This was called 'Burke's report of the death of history' by Karen O'Brien. See O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, p. 164.

that history had generally become unnecessary for social analysis or that Burke himself had become ahistorical.

During the 1760s and 1770s, when closely involved in several issues facing the British empire, he was rather at times profoundly historical in both his mind-set and his political analysis. For instance, he refused to take the pessimistic interpretations of recent British history put forward by his contemporaries such as John Brown and William Knox. In his discussion of American affairs, it was clear that the imperial relationship existing before 1765 was worth preserving. Furthermore, in the context of his commitment to the affairs of the East India Company and to the impeachment of Warren Hastings in the 1780s, he often explored the issues from historical perspectives. While Asian history by no means occupied a substantial portion of his historical enquiries, he was keen to absorb contemporary scholarship on Asian-Muslim nations and at times added to it his own interpretations and theories on society so that his political discourse could be more persuasive.

Moreover, although the issues of Ireland were not continuously at the centre of his politics, they were never forgotten and rather haunted his life and thoughts intermittently. As seen in Chap. 5, he attempted to support the Irish revisionist historians from the 1760s up until the late 1780s. The abolition of the Catholic penal laws was one of his great objectives throughout his career. He really wished for the historical truth of the 1641 Irish rebellion to be revealed and he expressed his own opinions on it on several occasions, as the wrong interpretations of the event put forward in English and Protestant accounts tended to be used to justify the subsequent penal laws. For Burke, Irish history was apparently not a story of a bright past, long swamped by its wretched subordination to English interests. By the 1780s he believed that his native country was thriving in its economic and social conditions, although there was still much room for further improvement. While he never wished for Ireland's political independence from Britain or even for radical changes in its constitutional relations with England, he was strongly convinced that the fuller integration of these two nations in empire, facilitated by freer trade and the abolition of the penal laws, would advance Ireland to a more civilised state. This conclusion was derived from his own recognition of the advantages of the English constitution from which Ireland had benefited, as well as of the defects in England's commercial policies towards Ireland which had retarded the progress of his native country.

A basic framework of political argument that he applied on various occasions was that politics required the careful analysis of circumstances, and the characters and manners of the people. This was a claim which reflected his own political theory, but it also often represented his understanding of the situations he himself encountered during his political career. For example, his argument that the American colonists should be governed according to their distinct tempers, institutions and circumstances obviously resulted from his clear awareness of the peculiarity of these colonial societies, while he also recognised the European features of their societies. The spirit of the puritans, the distance from the mother country and slavery in the south helped create the American spirit. In 1775, as a response to the view that the crown should make no further grants of land to the colonists, Burke claimed:

> 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 ...[17]

This claim struck Josiah Tucker as odd and so he derided the idea that a particular environment might transform human beings into a different sort of mankind,[18] which was nevertheless not far from the essence of Burke's views on mankind and its manners. In 1781, furthermore, Burke contended that the people of India were used to living in a slavish state, and hence that the British way of politics should not be imposed on them coercively. In the context of his severe reprimand of the East India Company and his support for the impeachment of Warren Hastings in the following years, he emphasised that the rule of law had been long

[17] *Speech on Conciliation with America*, in *WS*, III, 129.

[18] Tucker, *A Letter to Edmund Burke*, p. 43.

established in Indian society. He believed that the governance of the Indian states should be conducted with proper respect for their particular manners and political systems, including the Hindu and Muslim religions, which had been rooted in the country since the distant past. A similar belief appeared in the *Appeal*, in which he declared himself not to be an enemy of republicanism, which was a system and idea that could certainly fit the circumstances of some countries, but not, he stressed, those of England or France. For Burke, England retained an ancient constitution, and yet it had continuously adopted a number of reforms adapting it to changing circumstances, whereas the French constitution had emerged from its peculiar circumstances and modes of life to reach its modern form. In Burke's historical understanding, in every country there emerge distinct social conditions and unique modes of life, and a civilised nation can exist and prosper only when it is governed with respect for these peculiarities. In theory, therefore, different civilisations could be formed in harmony with their particular circumstances and lifestyles. Burke, indeed, observed a diversity of civilised states which had emerged in Europe and beyond, and he was advancing his theory of diversity by generalising this observation.

A clear and significant example of his idea of social diversity is that of religious belief across the globe. Regarding the Christian religion, different denominations were established in different nations and regions. In Burke's view, these should be regarded 'as divisions, made for convenience and order, than Seperations, from a diversity of Nature, or from irreconcileable contradiction in principles'.[19] In New England, independent congregational churches were established, whereas Roman Catholicism was introduced in Canada by the French nation and maintained with the Quebec Act of 1774.[20] Burke believed that the emergence of such 'divisions' would be inevitable and wished that they would be tolerated in order to maintain social and political order. As noted in Chap. 2, while obviously acknowledging the significance of the Toleration Act of 1689, Burke wrote to William Burgh in a 1775 letter that 'my opinion in favour of toleration goes far beyond the limits of that act'.[21] In the same letter, he continued by maintaining that 'I would give

[19] 'Burke to Dr John Erskine (12 June 1779)', in *Corr.*, IV, 85.

[20] 'Burke to Edmund Sexton Pery (18 July 1778)', in *Corr.*, IV, 7.

[21] 'Burke to William Burgh (9 February 1775)', in *Corr.*, III, 111.

a full civil protection … to Jews Mahometans and even Pagans; especially if they are already possessed of any of those advantages by long and prescriptive usage'.[22] Both his idea about religious diversity and that about toleration were historical as well as political, and here they were closely linked to one another.

There are, however, obvious limits to his idea of the diversity of civilisations. The native inhabitants of the Americas were, for instance, largely excluded from his concept of substantial civilisations, although Burke valued the empires of Incas and Aztecs to some extent. Their barbarity, fierceness and irreligiousness, in his view, almost dehumanised them. Although Burke often endorsed and showed respect to the Muslim civilisations in his works on Indian affairs, his occasional very negative assessments of Islam and Muslim nations make it unclear whether Burke genuinely regarded them as achieving substantial civilisations. In his model of a civilised society, moreover, it was presupposed that the landed interest exercised a major role in politics, and hence there was virtually little room to imagine a constitution based on popular sovereignty and no room for the concept of a civilised political society established on the foundation of universal natural rights.

As he himself declared, he did not undervalue ancient and modern republics such as Sparta, Athens and the United States of America. While reflecting on the history of independent America, however, he still described the newly established nation as a republic in which people 'have guarded their Constitution by reciprocal checks…[and] have established in imitation of the House of Lords and House of Commons in this Country [Britain], a Congress and a Senate'.[23] He also once maintained 'that monarchy was the basis of all Government, and that the nearer to monarchy that any Government approached, the more perfect it was, and *vice versa*'.[24] Convinced of the benefits of a mixed and balanced constitution and of party-led politics in the preservation of liberty and stability, he did not advance many other ideas on how to create a successful political society.

It is also clear that Burke was well aware of and very interested in the similarities and uniformity of several different civilisations. He was

[22] Ibid., in *Corr.*, III, 112.

[23] *Oracle*, 7 May 1791.

[24] 'Speech on Quebec Bill', in *WS*, IV, 343.

conscious of the differences between Britain, France and other European nations in their constitutions and manners, but he stressed the existence of the long-standing common foundations of civilisation shared by these countries, especially in his works in the 1790s. In his historical thought, of particular importance was his strong belief that civilised Europe had been established on the basis of common religious and civil modes of life and a shared legal heritage. During the 1780s, he also pointed to the similarities of Indian or Asian society to European society, although acknowledging the obvious differences between these civilisations. Furthermore, his piety and belief in the role of religion in society urged him to assign a similar role to both Christianity and Hinduism. He maintained, and presumably sincerely believed, that these religions had been a driving force behind their respective civilisations. In addition, according to him, the rule of law had long existed in India and in other Asian nations under their Muslim governments. These were, of course, political arguments made in the context of the prosecution of Hastings and also for the purpose of enabling his audience to more easily understand and become more familiar with Indian societies.

Burke presumably believed in the diversity of manners and of social conditions in the global community throughout most of his career. His more conservative political and historical thought, however, began to emerge in a clear form only later in his career. He opposed parliamentary reform movements in the late 1770s and campaigned against revolutionary France in the 1790s, both of which compelled him to emphasise legitimacy and validity of the ancient inheritances of nations. While this did not contradict his previous thinking of politics, there were certainly elements of what later generations called 'conservatism' in it. The purpose of his famous 16 June 1784 minute was to undermine the arguments of the advocates of radical reform by contending that the English constitution was a prescriptive institution which conformed to the manners and circumstances of the nation, held latent wisdom and thus deserved maintenance. In doing so, he did not hesitate to generalise the case. A nation is formed, he stated, by adjusting to the habitual customs and practices of the people, which will eventually lead their institutions in the right direction during the long process of trial and error.

These ideas were a precursor of his later arguments in the *Reflections*, and this classical work advocating a crusade against the French Revolution was primarily intended to display his political arguments, rather than to reveal historical truth. Nevertheless, in order to explain

what revolutionary France was demolishing, how the traditional political conducts of the English people were distinct from those of the French revolutionaries in the 1790s, and also what consequences might befall France and the wider world, Burke frequently delved rather deeper into history. That his analysis of history was conspicuously philosophical was one of the reasons why future generations have awarded this work classic status.

Burke emphasised that the Revolution of 1688–9 had been a type of revolution fundamentally different from that of 1789 by suggesting that the former had been made to defend the ancient constitution of the nation, not to destroy it. Generally, an institution that survived while undergoing several reforms over time was prescriptive and it presumably fitted well with the character of the nation. It was the product of the great insights of several generations, which was a claim he had made in his 16 June 1784 minute. The French Revolution subverted prescriptive institutions and established modes of life and long-held opinions, and here there was a recipe for the revival of barbarism. Unlike the English people, the French revolutionaries relied solely on their own reason and dismissed long-standing prejudices based on the latent wisdom of previous generations. Although these revolutionaries were pretending to discover a new type of morality, such a thing simply did not exist, as morality, as well as principles of government and the idea of liberty, had been known for some time.[25] History recorded a number of crimes and acts of violence committed by past generations, but historical knowledge should not be misused to justify present persecution and acts of vengeance.[26] While the idea of prescription was advanced most clearly and effectively in his 16 June 1784 minute and in the *Reflections*, the validity of the established institutions which had grown throughout history was plainly expressed as early as the 1750s in such works as 'Consideration on a Militia' and the *Abridgment*.

What was novel in his arguments, in his attack on the French Revolution, was the way in which he described the ascending trajectory of European history from the medieval modes of life towards the

[25] *Reflections*, pp. 250–1.

[26] He argued so against revolutionary France as well as against England's long persecution of the Catholics in Ireland. See *Reflections*, pp. 310–1; 'Letter to Richard Burke', in *WS*, IX, 655–6.

establishment of modern prosperity. The development of learning and commerce which was somehow connected to the spirit of chivalry and Christianity he underlined in maintaining that the Revolution ruined this basic foundation of European civilisation. He also pointed to the fact that the civil wars in sixteenth-century France had not destroyed the 'mind' of the nation, and thus that the French nation had been able to develop in subsequent ages. As Chap. 3 has suggested, these ideas were not newly invented through his encounter with the Revolution of 1789, as similar ideas can be traced back to the *Account* as well as to his writings on Indian affairs. Consciously or not, it was one of the patterns of his thinking, which made him closer to some predecessors and contemporaries and distinguished him from others, to draw special attention to the 'spirit' and fundamental 'principle' operating within societies.

This mode of thinking is a particular feature of his use of historical evidence. Europe had experienced a great deal of confusion, wickedness and abuses throughout the stagnant medieval era, turbulent religious conflicts around and after the Reformation, and several international wars caused by global competition for commercial hegemony from the seventeenth century onwards. Nevertheless, by the late eighteenth century, European nations had accomplished substantial progress and had reached the highest state of development so far experienced by mankind. Burke had to explain this historical process by putting forward his own narrative and interpretation.

On a premise that war would never cease to exist, Burke's Europe experienced a history in which the foundations of civilisation had been shaped and continued to exist. These foundations had helped advance various civilised arts, despite the occurrence of a number of wars, confusion and other terrors greatly harassing society. War and conquest had at times helped lead countries to prosperity. On the other hand, profound peace had sometimes arrested the development of nations. In his *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, Burke contended that the balance of the psyche was significant. Too profound a peace may be the same as a devastating war in making humans mentally deranged, and thus it might undermine society too.[27]

[27] Burke did not, of course, approve of every kind of war. For his reflections on international war, see Northampton MS. A. XXVII. 5, where he contemplated the 'Law of Nations with regard to War'. In his view, 'all its *Laws* must be laws of *Necessity*'.

In his writings on revolutionary France, he also made clear his ideas on the formation and dissolution of nations. Whereas he believed that only limited truth could be traced in ancient history and that the origins of all governments could not be fully discovered, he still inherited the Whiggish concept of the original contract and used legal terms in expressing his ideas on the formation of society and government. Society was a contract, a partnership agreement 'between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born'.[28] As individuals are born in a long-established order and it is their 'duty' to maintain the original contract of the nation, this contract should not be easily broken. If it were broken, it would mean the dissolution of political society, even if the 'people' continued to live in the same geographical space. In a state of 'rude' nature, in this definition, there was no 'people'. Revolutionary France broke its original contract, and therefore the people were no longer 'French'.[29]

Although Burke was entirely convinced of the extreme wickedness of the French Revolution, it seemed that he struggled to appreciate the meaning of this great event in history. History can generally teach various lessons, yet it does not repeat itself. It therefore 'may be learned as habit, not as precept', that is, 'not as a repertory of cases and precedents for a lawyer'.[30] Due to the infinite possible combinations of things, history occasionally generates something utterly unexpected, novel and sudden like the Revolution of 1789. In the beginning of the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he repudiated the idea advanced by some of his contemporaries that likened the vicissitudes of nations to human life from infancy towards decrepitude[31] by maintaining that commonwealths were not 'the physical order' but 'artificial combinations', that is, 'the arbitrary productions of the human mind'. There should be 'internal causes which necessarily affect the fortune of a State', but these causes are not easily discovered.

[28] *Reflections*, p. 261.

[29] *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, in *WS*, IV, 442–5, 447.

[30] *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *WS*, VIII, 498. See also *Reflections*, pp. 310–1.

[31] In the *Estimate and Principles on Manners*, Brown also rejected the analogy between humans and nations, to which Burke's analysis here might owe something. See Brown, *Estimate and Principles on Manners*, I, 213–5.

> 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 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.[32]

As the history of mankind was not complete enough to offer any theory clearly explaining the internal causes of a country's fortunes, these sudden turns were often considered to be the consequences of sheer chance or divine will.[33] At the final phase of his life, it seems that the Revolution of 1789 operated so as to make the historical vision of Burke rather obscure and blurred, or even confused, rather than leading to a clearer insight into history.

3 History of Historiography

As has already been made clear in the present research, Burke was well informed of several kinds of historiography, including Greek, Roman, English, Scottish, Irish, other European and Montesquieuan an historiographies, which were transmitted to and existed in his age, and so it is clear that he was influenced by a number of historians and histories. His ideas

[32] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 188–9. Cf. *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 patrotism [sic], 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.'

[33] *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *WS*, IX, 189.

on history, therefore, had much in common with these historiographies in some respects, although he was also distinct from them in others.

For instance, he shared with many Enlightenment thinkers a belief in the universal and constant nature of human beings, and the view that history involved both intended and unintended consequences of various causes. Like many of his contemporaries, he also believed that European and American colonial societies had accomplished substantial progress in modern times, and hence the idea of progress was firmly established in his mind. Burke did not hold to a Machiavellian cyclical view of history and it is clear that he was closer to the Enlightenment historians of his age in believing and observing the progress that had taken place over past centuries.

Among his contemporaries, Robertson, Millar and Ferguson, as well as Burke himself, advanced the idea of chivalry as a revolution in manners in the Middle Ages which had helped lead European society to a more civilised state, although Burke stressed the impact of the chivalric legacy on the eighteenth century more than these Scottish philosophical historians. Burke and the Robertsonian moderates in Scotland also developed the similar idea of the European Reformation, the view in which the Reformation was highly beneficial to European society in the end, although its thought was, born in the great confusion of the sixteenth century, still largely contaminated.[34] Moreover, Burke's idea of the diversity of civilisations was, to some extent, an outcome of his absorption of the Montesquieuan way of analysing the world. As the *Spirit of the Laws* taught him, there were various modes of human life, according to which a variety of laws could be generated across the global community.

Burke's ideas were, nevertheless, also the product of his own reflections on the societies and histories of civilisations. He believed in the advancement of learning and commerce and the general increase in

[34]For the Scottish Moderates' views on the Reformation, see O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment*, pp. 141–8; idem, 'Robertson's Place in the Development of Eighteenth-Century Narrative History', in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, ed. Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 75; N.T. Phillipson, 'Providence and Progress: An Introduction to the Historical Thought of William Robertson', in ibid., pp. 69–70; Colin Kidd, 'Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55 (2004), 502–19 (at 513–5).

population during the modern era, and also in the superiority of modern Europe over ancient Greece and Rome. In doing so, he was, of course, not alone in these beliefs, nor in being sceptical of what could be known of ancient eras because of the shortage of reliable evidence.

Burke's historical thinking was, however, quite distinct from that of his contemporaries in other respects. Although he certainly observed that society had achieved substantial progress during modern times, he was not like Turgot, Condorcet, Price or others who believed that history could continue to progress without any substantial limitation. As already seen, he believed instead that civilisations would always be unstable due to fluctuating fortunes and unexpected turns. His idea also differed from Hume's pendulum view of history, which presumed that the decline of arts and sciences would follow their own progress at some point and vice versa during the history of 'perpetual flux'.[35]

Furthermore, Burke's attention to the diversity of civilisations distinguished him from Smith and others who substantially advanced the stadial theory of social developments, although this does not suggest that Burke's view of history did not embrace a belief in stadial development. His idea of phased social development was, however, relatively immature, and this is clearly discerned particularly in comparison with Smith's more subtle classification of civilisations. In Burke's mind, although there existed a clear distinction between the 'savage' and the 'civilised', he supposed that hunting, pasturage and agriculture at times belonged to the same phase of development. On the other hand, Smith was also very conscious of a great diversity of societies and cultures across the globe, even though he did not stress it in quite the manner that Burke did.

Among his contemporaries, Montesquieu is of particular importance in his impact on Burke, but there still exist at least some significant differences between them. Burke placed more stress on the role of divine providence in history than his great mentor. He also did not accept Montesquieu's views on ancient Rome, nor his belief in the Gothic origins of a free society, a decline in population in modern Europe, or the perpetual existence of Asian despotism. Furthermore, although Burke was delighted to see Hume's *History of England* published, it did not

[35] David Hume, 'Of the Original Contract' in idem, *Essays*, p. 476; idem, *History of England*, II, 519. For Hume's pendulum theory of history, see Susato, *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*, Chap. 7.

mean that he entirely accepted Hume's views on history. As Chap. 2 has made clear, the Christian religion played a more positive role in history in the *Abridgement* than in Hume's *History of England*, and the idea of conquest as a power leading towards a civilised state were also emphasised more in Burke's than in Hume's history of England. Their views of Mary, Queen of Scots, Charles II and the 1641 Irish Rebellion were also irreconcilable.

Burke and the Irish revisionist historians were alike in believing that the 1641 rebellion had been one of the tragic consequences of the English persecutions of the Catholics and also in claiming that the penal laws and commercial restrictions had retarded the development of the Irish economy. Even so, Burke also believed that Irish society had progressed substantially in recent times under the protection of the British constitution. On the one hand, as he strongly believed in the benefits of the British constitution and empire, he never supported the possible independence of Ireland from Britain, which the more radical Irish patriots hoped to achieve in the end. On the other hand, searching for evidence favourable to their political aims, the patriots closely examined the historical origins of the Irish parliament, a question which did not interest Burke greatly. In expressing his views of American affairs, what distinguished him from some eminent contemporaries was his belief that the close and peaceful connection between the colonies and the mother country had operated well in the past and had brought prosperity to both sides of the Atlantic. In believing this strongly, Burke could not conclude that the separation of the colonies from Britain would not adversely affect the development of the commerce of both. If it were possible for both sides to develop together in the future after the colonies had won their independence, this development would be secured only by 'revising', not 'totally replacing', the existing commercial system.

Even more defining features of Burke's historical thought lay in his views on war and on modern society. Generally, he and his contemporaries belonged to a generation which was very conscious that the whole of Europe had greatly suffered from the religious wars of the sixteenth century. A number of eighteenth-century critics also reflected on the meaning and consequences of the more recent international conflicts among Europeans over the search for colonial hegemony. Unlike several of his contemporaries, however, Burke did not believe that any decline in the economy and morality of the British people was caused by the growing public debt or the desire for excessive luxury. He was at times

conscious that he was countering his contemporaries, including John Brown and William Knox, who held a pessimistic view of recent developments and of Britain's future. The *Account* appeared in 1757, the year when Brown's best-selling *Estimate* was also published. More than 30 years later, while looking back on this period of his life, Burke did not believe that Britain had been threatened by growing 'effeminacy' during the Seven Years War, and the fact was rather that Britian's own vigour had led the nation to greater prosperity. This view of British history was also difficult to reconcile with Hume's, as Hume suspected that Britain had already reached her own peak of civilisation and would experience a decline in future. Hume's essay 'Jealousy of Trade' was published in 1758, which Burke may have read as he was presumably a careful reader of the same author's *History of England* around this period when he was working hard to produce the *Abridgment*. Burke would certainly have agreed with Hume's contention that the European nations had progressed to date through their own efforts to learn from their rival trading neighbours. In addition, he clearly did not endorse the idea that warfare should be continued until the total ruin of rival nations could be realised—a policy which Hume vehemently denounced in this essay. Burke nonetheless diverged from Hume, Smith, Tucker and others, and he might instead have been a little closer to other contemporaries such as Kant, in his contention that the wars between European nations had often constituted part of the process of emulation. In both Burke's and Kant's historical imagination, war had been one of the main factors in helping mankind spread over the earth in early history. In Kant's model, especially, war was also one of the consequences of a significant aspect of human nature, 'unsociable sociability'.

While Burke opposed the notion of imposing military control over the colonies, he did not stress the futility of war generally in relation to commercial development as Tucker did. Burke may well have been able to appreciate, in theory, Tucker's criticism of wars as well as Smith's contention that a great amount of capital was destroyed and wasted in wars in order to maintain unproductive labour and this led to a slowdown in economic growth. It appears, however, to be characteristic of Burke's thought that he turned attention to more fundamental causes of the development of nations that were largely shaped by their ancient manners and constitutions. Published in 1795 when Burke's *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* appeared, Kant's 'Towards Perpetual Peace' contended that the spirit of trade would widely prevail on earth and lead

mankind towards future peace.[36] Burke would, at least in logical terms, have understood what Kant meant here just as he could understand Montesquieu's idea that the 'natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace'.[37] Nothing, he believed, is clearer than the fact that commerce creates a close network of interests among nations, whereas 'War is a time of inconvenience to trade'.[38] War breaks this network, and hence all warring nations will suffer a massive loss of commerce. European history taught the moderns about the barbarity and disadvantages of war of plunder and of annihilation. From their own experience, 'military men … found that the Ends of War are better answerd by abating from its rigour', and merchants found 'interruptions to their commerce by the capricious wars of princes'.[39] The lessons from history led modern Europe to improve the manners of war and social order, although recent history at times saw the relapses of such barbarity as the affairs of St. Eustatius and other examples showed.

Burke simply could not believe that it would be possible to extinguish war from the world. Although it was self-evident that war was irreconcilable with commerce, European history informed him of the fact that commerce and other arts had developed over time despite the frequent wars from which nations had suffered. For him, the 'spirit' and 'principle' of nations as the foundations of civilisation were what could explain, at least partly, how such substantial developments had been achieved in the past.

[36] Immanuel Kant, 'Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', in idem, *Towards Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, ed. P. Kleingeld, trans. D.L. Colclasure (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 92. For the comparative analysis of Burke and Kant, for instance, see Bourke, 'Theory and Practice: the Revolution in Political Judgement', in *Political Judgement: Essays for John Dunn*., pp. 99–105; Armitage, 'Edmund Burke and Reason of State', in idem, *Foundations of Modern International Thought*, pp. 170–1.

[37] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 338.

[38] *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, in *WS*, II, 123.

[39] 'Speech on St Eustatius (14 May 1781)', in *WS*, IV, 93.

4 War, Order and Civilisation

Burke's ideas on history, developed and expressed in various ways during his literary and political career and stretching over half a century, are by no means a single entity but an aggregate of several different lines of thought, consisting of genuine interpretations and knowledge of history, political rhetoric, mere fragmentary comments and so forth. From the perspective of geographical divisions, it is also clear that his knowledge of history was unbalanced and uneven. Burke was knowledgeable regarding the histories of England, Ireland and Europe, whereas his knowledge of the histories of Asian-Muslim nations was comparatively slim, even deficient, although he was still well informed on the subject by eighteenth-century standards.

While his historical thought consisted of a variety of distinct ideas, it is also true that many of his ideas about history took the form of political thought. This meant that he developed one of the versions of 'practical' history in Oakeshott's sense. That is, Burke often wrote, spoke and thought about history in relation to 'the present', especially in relation to the politics, society and civilisations of his age. His 'practical' history included several different manners and modes. As a Westminster politician, he often appealed to history in his rhetorical use, and ransacked historical origins of political institutions. A parliamentary orator, he simply had to behave like this. His 'Irishness' constituted a part, but not the whole, of his identity, whereas his Anglicanism and, above all, his Whiggism were also significant parts of his personal and political identities. In his early historical writings, he tried to be an impartial historian, but he was still 'practical' in the sense that he aimed to make a contribution to revising the political understandings of his age, by putting forward his own vision of history. While Burke knew, for example, that his refutation of a naïve form of ancient constitutionalism may help to shape what he believed was a more accurate understanding of English politics, his depictions of Columbus, Pen and Baltimore were clearly intended to inform readers about the way that a conquest should be conducted and about the significance of religious tolerance. Moreover, Burke was often 'philosophical' in both his early and later works, and this part of his historical thought was often aimed at the pursuit of revealing the essentials of society and human beings, which almost always included a vision or understanding of contemporary society. It was only on a few occasions that he seemed to be closer to a 'scientific' position, such as when

mentioning the 'internal causes of nations' fortunes', in the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*. In other cases, including his interest in and examination of ancient and medieval Ireland, his historical thought was more 'historical'.[40]

While the present monograph has discussed various aspects of Burke as a historian, its ultimate focus is on his idea of philosophical history, that is, the relationship between his historical vision and his generalised ideas about politics, society and civilisations. Among the distinctive features of Burke's historical thought, one of the most important was his strong awareness of the growth of various different 'traditions' (ancient manners and constitutions) across the globe. In his thought, while history had experienced a number of wars, conflicts and confusions which plunged into chaos many nations and regions on earth, it is also true that the foundations of civilisations gradually and spontaneously emerged during history in form of socio-political orders. Burke's uniqueness is located, in eighteenth-century historiography and political thought, in his emphasis on the role of these foundations in the formation of society and on their importance for conducting politics. A civilisation develops by founding itself on ancient manners and constitutions. In European nations, the Christian religion and chivalric code of behaviour became the foundations of their civilisation, whereas the Hindu religion played a similar role in India. Britain shared some significant bases of society with other European nations, yet this nation and its empire also advanced themselves under the constitution firmly established by the 1688–9 Revolution, which greatly helped safeguard the liberty and property of the people. The British American colonies and Ireland, too, needed this pre-eminent constitution for their development.

Although wars and conquests continued to take place in modern times as they had previously, one of the greatest reasons why substantial civilisations emerged in Europe and also in India was, according to Burke, the fact that their ancient manners and institutions had not been ruined. It is, of course, not true that Burke presumed that substantial civilisations and the foundations of society had been formed in every corner of the earth. Few elements of civilisation, in his view, existed in the

[40]For the terms of 'practical', 'scientific' and 'historical', see Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), Chap. 3; idem, 'The Activity of being an Historian', in idem, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (new and expanded edn., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), pp. 151–83.

societies of the Amerindians, and his comments on Muslim and African countries at times denied the substance of such foundations and the development of civilised societies in these countries.

The awareness of the rise of various social orders and institutions during history is significant in analysing the whole of Burke's political thought, and this view of history could be combined with his idea of the infinite diversity of socio-political circumstances. In his political life, Burke time and again argued for the significance of recognising particular circumstances for conducting politics. His emphasis on the significance of comprehending circumstances is an aspect of his political thought, yet it could be an element of his historical thought too. After all, politics need to deal with various particular circumstances changing over time and place, and ancient manners and institutions often contribute to producing these circumstances in which these manners and institutions themselves gradually change over time without entirely losing their original forms. Hence, both his idea of a varieties of 'traditions' and the idea of changing circumstances are the concepts created for understanding and conducting politics properly. These are, however, also Burke's world view per se.

In Burke's view, a variety of ancient manners, religions, constitutions and opinions across the globe were developed into the current shape spontaneously (in the sense that either of these was not formed under the blueprint of individuals). Politics needed to be conducted by being well aware of the function of these socio-political (formal or informal) institutions and orders which had been formed through history. If these institutions and orders are destroyed, the extent of the damage is incalculable. In this spirit, Burke defended prescriptive political and social institutions, opposing the attempts of the deists or the pessimists in Britain, the East India Company and the French Revolutionaries to innovate them.

His condemnation of government intervention in labour and grain markets in the 'Thoughts and Details on Scarcity' should also be understood in this vein. Agriculture naturally organises a hierarchical and multi-layered order of farm implements, the beast, the labourer and the farmer. The last two parties of these make their free contracts from which both of them can benefit. This is a 'tacit convention' that 'arise from a thousand nameless circumstances'. What statesmen are required to do is to distinguish 'what belongs to laws' from 'what manners alone can regulate', as the latter can 'produce a *tact* that regulates without difficulty,

what laws and magistrates cannot regulate at all'.[41] In Burke's model of society, a variety of social orders spontaneously emerge through the stream of time and humans have to manage their own society according to these orders. It is, therefore, indispensable for statesmen to be aware of the function of the orders.

It is also important to recognise that there is an epistemological dimension to his historical thought. In Burke's view, on the one hand, history sometimes moves by means of non-human factors such as providence and natural climates. As already seen, however, 'commonwealths' are 'the arbitrary productions of the human mind'. With this definition, it could presumably be possible that manners, various circumstances and society at large are also artificial products, that is, *phenomena* rather than things in themselves. It is, hence, only humans that are able to recognise the growth of a variety of manners, institutions and orders across the globe and changes in social circumstances. In this model, social order can be shaped by physical, supernatural or artificial causes or by the combinations of these, yet only humans (and a creator of the universe) could recognise its entity and meaning.

Burke scholarship recognised the distinctiveness of his idea of social order a long time ago, an idea that has been understood as metaphysical, intergenerational, traditionalistic and even (incorrectly) capitalistic. What the present study has made clear was that this idea of order was characterised by his attention to the role of ancient institutions which formed the foundations of civilisations despite the outbreak of a number of disastrous wars and violent conflicts during history.

Burke's views on history critically help reveal his idea of social and world orders, which clarify the features of his political thought as well. Although he had a greater knowledge of European societies than of the societies of the other regions and clearly acknowledged the superiority of eighteenth-century European civilisation to that in Asia, this did not mean that he held a Eurocentric interpretation of the world. His survey of non-European regions shows his acute recognition of the growth of various different socio-political orders over time and his consideration of how Britain and European countries should approach non-European people and societies spreading over the globe. The purpose of this consideration was clear and practical, and it suggested that he attempted

[41] 'Thoughts and Details on Scarcity', in *WS*, IX, 128, 144.

to present the way of politics for a better management of the empire. Nevertheless, it was also a manifestation of his critical interest in world order, which he believed was ultimately created by the divine will.

This world view and political thought may well be, as some commentators note, regarded as more 'liberal' than the thinkers before or after his age who believed the absolute superiority of European civilisation over other civilisations.[42] Burke was rather one of the eighteenth-century European intellectuals who showed great respect to diverse cultures and manners across the globe. Among his contemporaries, for instance, Johann Gottfried von Herder also seemed to be mesmerised by a great diversity of living modes of mankind.[43] Burke was, however, closer to Montesquieu in arguing for the significance of this diversity for conducting politics.

In the future, Burke will continue to be considered as 'the father of modern conservatism', which may or may not be the most appropriate characterisation of him. In any case, the twenty-first century conservatives should learn from his respect for a variety of manners and opinions on earth so that they should avoid an illiberal, exclusive or badly nationalistic thinking. They should also learn from his belief that politics is dependent on changing circumstances so as not to create dogmatic and too speculative way of politics.

Burke's idea of institutions and social orders is not even dissimilar from that of some economic historians today in terms of his particular attention to the role of both formal and informal institutions in socio-economic performance. Indeed, he did not believe that any single institution could apply best to every country and region as some twenty-first-century economists do not believe that the Anglo-American system should be adopted in every country. Although presuming that people across the world operated under the same human nature and they all were ultimately led by the sole divine will, he believed that the optimal socio-political institutions, both formal and informal, could vary from one country to another, and that society would not develop without profound respect to the peculiar institutions and genius of people shaped in

[42] For this, see especially Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*.

[43] Unlike Herder, nevertheless, Burke did not stress incommensurableness of different nations and societies. See Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, p. 243. For Herder's ideas on social diversities, see also Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), Chap. 6.

each society during history. In order to understand what he really meant by his ideas on manners, institutions and social order, however, it needs to be appreciated that these ideas are the outcome of his own reflections upon the essence of the world, that is, his belief in the growth of a great variety of ancient manners and institutions and in the mutability of socio-political circumstances. This belief was a particular view of the universe, which led to a peculiar way of thinking about politics.

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S. Sato, *Edmund Burke as Historian*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64441-7