

GIBBON'S DARK AGES:  
SOME REMARKS ON THE GENESIS OF THE *DECLINE AND FALL*\*

By P. R. GHOSH

I

It is a striking fact that the years in Gibbon's life about which we know least—the years 1765–72, between his return from the Grand Tour and the commencement of his *History*—are precisely those in which we are most interested, if we wish to study the genesis of his great book. The years 1758–64 are covered with increasing fullness in the journals which Gibbon began to keep in August 1761. From this source, for example, we can trace in detail the somewhat complex evolution of his first published work, the *Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature*—detail enhanced by reference to the manuscript draft which survives.<sup>1</sup> Again, for the period 1773–87 we know exactly what Gibbon was doing: his intellectual course was finally settled, and the six ample quartos of the *Decline and Fall* provide the best possible comment on that course, supplemented and confirmed by increasingly full correspondence and the terse outline in *Memoir E* of the autobiography. But between these two periods we have only meagre and uninformative letters; one apparently unimportant publication, the *Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid* of 1770; and the help we can glean from *Memoirs C* and *D* of the autobiography. These were Gibbon's Dark Ages, and it is this obscure passage in his life which I wish to lighten.<sup>2</sup>

Before doing so, however, some attention must be paid to previous discussion of this period. Most commentators, following the lie of the evidence, have passed over it with the utmost brevity, but one distinct interpretation has emerged, that of Professor Giarizzo, effectively unchallenged since its first statement in 1954.<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 5 of his book ('Verso la *History*') the author discusses the following of Gibbon's texts: *Du Gouvernement Féodal, Surtout en France* (justly ascribed to the years after 1765); *Outlines of the History of the World* between 800 and 1500 (dated to 1765–70);<sup>4</sup> and the *Introduction à l'Histoire Générale de la République des Suisses* of 1765–7, which was intended to cover the years c. 1300–1500. He refers to the note in c. 30 of *Decline and Fall* (III. 283 n. 88)<sup>5</sup> which mentions 'a rough draught of the present History' dating from 'As early as 1771', and since that note deals with the Germanic invasion of Gaul by the remnant of the army of Radagaisus in 406, an event which, according to Gibbon, 'may be considered as the fall of the Roman empire in the countries beyond the Alps' (III. 284), Professor Giarizzo assumes that the draft had an early medieval rather than a late Roman connotation—'un rapido schizzo di storia medievale barbarica'.<sup>6</sup> After this the *Critical Observations* on Virgil are passed over in a line; the *Memoires Littéraires de la Grande Bretagne* are discussed almost exclusively with reference to Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*; and the account concludes with an extraneous reference to Gibbon's reading of Robertson's *History of Charles V*, emphasizing particularly the first volume of that work, the famous 'View of the Progress of Society in Europe, from the Subversion of the Roman Empire, to the beginning of the Sixteenth Century'.

The thrust of this interpretation will be apparent: it is that a sustained period of medieval study covering the thousand years between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance

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<sup>1</sup> Add. MSS 34,880 fols. 130–84, *passim*. I have followed Gibbon's peculiar French usage without attempting to correct it.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the superior critical apparatus of *Edward Gibbon, Memoirs of My Life* ed. G. A. Bonnard (1966), the best edition of the memoirs for scholarly purposes remains *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon* ed. John Murray (1896). For comprehensiveness and clarity, printing the six drafts of the memoirs consecutively will always be preferable to a mangled unitary account, and the latter edition is

cited here. Drafts of the memoirs cited as *Mem.*

See Appendix II for a brief synopsis of the dates of Gibbon's writings in this period.

<sup>3</sup> *Edward Gibbon e la Cultura Europea del Settecento* (1954).

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 208 and n. 94.

<sup>5</sup> All references in the text to *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* are to the edition of J. B. Bury (1909–14); however, references to the volumes in this work assume the volume divisions of the first edition (1776–88). Hereafter abbreviated to *DF*.

<sup>6</sup> *loc. cit.* (n. 3), 216–7.

was an essential and hitherto neglected component in the genesis of the *Decline and Fall*; that volumes 4–6 of that work on the period after 476 were not a mere coda of enormous proportions, but the logical culmination of the whole; that the first (1771) draft of the book covered the medieval period only; and that this derived directly from the *Outlines of the History of the World*—‘un vero e proprio canovaccio per un’opera storica, che poi confluirà nella *History*’.<sup>7</sup> Independently, J. W. Swain has identified the *Outlines* with the 1771 draft itself, as covering the third of the three periods outlined by Gibbon in the Preface to the first volume of *Decline and Fall* in 1776 (800–1453), and has suggested that drafts for the first two periods (c. 98–476; 476–800) were composed but have been lost—a series of conjectures accepted by the editor of Gibbon’s *English Essays*.<sup>8</sup> Though this represents a rather different position from that of Professor Giarizzo, the signal prominence given to the medieval part of *Decline and Fall* remains present.

The objections to this type of interpretation are, however, very grave and may briefly be stated here.

(1) It bears no relation to the account Gibbon himself gives of the genesis of his *History*. In his memoirs we read that,

As soon as I was released from the fruitless task of the Swiss revolutions, I more seriously undertook (1768) to methodize the form, and collect the substance of my Roman decay, of whose limits and extent I had yet a very inadequate notion. The Classics, as low as Tacitus, the younger Pliny and Juvenal were my old and familiar companions: I insensibly plunged into the Ocean of the Augustan history; and in the descending series I investigated, with my pen almost always in my hand, the original records, both Greek and Latin, from Dion Cassius to Ammianus Marcellinus, from the reign of Trajan to the last age of the western Caesars. . . . Through the darkness of the middle ages I explored my way in the Annals and Antiquities of Italy of the learned Muratori; and diligently compared them with the parallel or transverse lines of Sigonius and Maffei, Baronius and Pagi, till I almost grasped the ruins of Rome in the fourteenth Century, without suspecting that this final chapter must be attained by the labour of six quartos and twenty years.

In addition Gibbon notes his indebtedness to the Theodosian Code, ‘a full and capacious repository of the political state of the Empire in the fourth and fifth Centuries’, and also a renewed study of the origins of Christianity and its triumph over Paganism, which bore fruit ‘in an ample dissertation on the miraculous darkness of the passion’ (*Mem. C*, 284–5).

Although Gibbon may have tended to embellish the literary set-pieces in his memoirs, as a record of study their accuracy is unimpeachable and may be checked against the record in his journals.<sup>9</sup> I consider the above evidence conclusive, therefore, in favour of the view that the centre of gravity of Gibbon’s preliminary studies lay in the period before 476 rather than after it. Before 476 he read ‘the original records’ or primary sources; after 476 he relied on secondary authorities, primarily Muratori.<sup>10</sup> The classics were ‘old and familiar companions’, but in the darkness of the middle ages he was forced to ‘explore’ his way. Furthermore, as is implicit here and as Gibbon repeatedly pointed out, his ‘original plan was circumscribed to the decay of the City [Rome] rather than of the Empire’.<sup>11</sup> Before 476 this distinction may have been hard to observe in practice, but afterwards it was not, and Gibbon’s studies were confined to medieval Italy culminating with ‘the ruins of Rome’. There is no mention here of Byzantium, Charlemagne, Mahomet, the Crusades or the Turks, which make up the variegated subject matter of volumes 4–6 woven round the thin and even invisible thread of the ‘Roman Empire’, and still less of the outlines of the history of the *world* between 800 and 1500.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 208.

<sup>8</sup> J. W. Swain, *Edward Gibbon the Historian* (1966), 122–3; P. B. Craddock, *The English Essays of Edward Gibbon* (1972), 57 (hereafter cited as *English Essays*). Though she has not revised her view in *Young Edward Gibbon* (1982), Professor Craddock there adduces arguments from both its style and content which militate against dating the *Outlines* to 1771, 289–94. Preface *DF* I. xxxix–xli.

<sup>9</sup> Compare *Mem. B*, 209–10 with *Le Journal de Gibbon à Lausanne* ed. G. A. Bonnard (1945), *passim*. Hereafter cited as *Journal B*.

<sup>10</sup> As the extract makes clear, Gibbon read the *Antiquitates Italicae Medii Aevi* (1738–42) and the *Annali d’Italia* (1744–9), not the *Rerum Italicorum Scriptores* (1723–51), Muratori’s own collection of primary materials.

<sup>11</sup> *Mem. C*, 270; cf. *DF* IV. 21 n. 52.

The chronological bias in Gibbon's approach is confirmed by what he wrote in successive Prefaces to his work. In the Preface to the first volume, dated 1 February 1776, he divided the thirteen centuries which undermined and destroyed Roman greatness into three periods: the first 'from the age of Trajan and the Antonines' to the subversion of the Western Empire, complete by 'about the beginning of the sixth century'; the second from the reign of Justinian up to the elevation of Charlemagne in 800; and the third from 800 to 1453.<sup>12</sup> The 1776 Preface is indeed a remarkable document. For the first time Gibbon foreshadows the Byzantine theme and its many derivations, the religion of Mahomet, the Carolingian or 'second . . . Empire of the West' and the Crusades, whilst the medieval history of Rome has declined to the level of a glorious appendage, such as it was to be in fact (*DF*, cc. 69–71). This is the enhancement of perspective brought about by the years of work between 1773 and 1776: nevertheless there remains a great distance between the viewpoint of 1776 and that finally achieved in the mid-80s. Whereas the scope of period I in the Preface corresponds exactly with that of volumes 1–3 of the History, periods II and III do not foreshadow the structure of volumes 4–6. Volume 4, for example, ends *c.* 640 rather than in 800 and so does not contain the treatment of Mahomet or Charlemagne promised for Period II in the Preface. These differences point forward to a fundamental divergence in plan from the mid-seventh century onwards, brought about by Gibbon's complete abandonment of a chronological arrangement of material for volumes 5–6. This innovation was only effected in 1784 and it was one which, even then, cost its author 'many designs and many tryals' (*Mem. E*, 332). We should note, too, that in 1776 Gibbon only undertook to write an account of the first of the three periods he outlined: 'With regard to the subsequent periods, though I may entertain some hopes, I dare not presume to give any assurances'—and it was only in March 1782, in the Preface to a new edition of volumes 1–3, that he felt able to give the stated assurance.<sup>13</sup>

From this evidence we must infer that Gibbon's prior interest was in the years up to 476. The medieval section of his History could hardly have been intrinsic to his design if he was not prepared to commit himself to write it; nor could it have been the original part of his design on to which the earlier period was grafted, if that same part of the design remained obscure until the 1780s. If we wish to understand the twenty-year evolution of the *Decline and Fall*, it is the obvious explanation which is the true one: Gibbon started at the beginning with what he knew best, the Latin Classics,<sup>14</sup> and from there he worked forward.

(2) Adopting a more directly critical approach, it may be shown that none of the texts discussed by Professor Giarizzo entirely secures his interpretative conclusions, although they do highlight the important facts that Gibbon's commitment to Rome as a subject was not inevitable, and that he might well have aspired to treat of any country or any period, with the possible exception of the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

For example, it is certain that Gibbon read Robertson's *Charles V* and was especially impressed by its first volume,<sup>16</sup> but yet there is no written record to show what shape this impression took. Again, a book review of Ferguson's *Essay on Civil Society*, deliberately ascribed by Gibbon to a joint authorship with Deyverdun (*Mem. C*, 279–80), comprising but one item among many in a literary review, proves nothing except the substantial nature of the *Memoires Litteraires*: could they decently have avoided reviewing such a book? The note in *Decline and Fall* referring to a 1771 draft makes it clear that what was stated in that draft was an opinion on a nice point of scholarship—that the barbarians who invaded Gaul in 406 were indeed the remnant of Radagaisus' army retiring after their defeat by Stilicho in Italy, rather than tribes emanating from any other source.<sup>17</sup> This is Gibbon the *érudit*, not Gibbon the *philosophe*; the 1771 draft appears to be quite the opposite of

<sup>12</sup> Preface loc. cit. (n. 8).

<sup>13</sup> *DF* I. xli.

<sup>14</sup> cf. A. Momigliano, 'Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method', reprinted in *Studies in Historiography* (1966), 40–55, here 45; G. A. Bonnard, 'L'importance du deuxième séjour de Gibbon à Lausanne dans la formation de l'historien' in *Mélanges d'Histoire et de Littérature Offerts à M. Charles Gilliard* (1944), 401–20, here 405.

<sup>15</sup> His interest in Raleigh carried him into seventeenth-century England, cf. *Gibbon's Journal to January 28th, 1763* ed. D. M. Low (1929), January 1762 (hereafter cited as *Journal A*); for his interest in seventeenth-century France, *ibid.*, 19, 28 August 1762 and *The Letters of Edward Gibbon* ed. J. E. Norton (1956), no. 463 (hereafter cited as *Letters*).

<sup>16</sup> *DF* I. 85–6, 241, 248; cf. *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769) I. 10.

<sup>17</sup> loc. cit., p. 1 above.

‘ un rapido schizzo di storia medievale barbarica ’, but it bears a close resemblance to the account in the memoirs of Gibbon working through the sources, as he says, ‘ with my pen almost always in my hand ’, making notes on scholarly problems as they occurred for the period before 476 (*Mem. C*, 284). The Swiss History was, of course, a substantial venture; but since it was voluntarily abandoned, it is a moot point whether it demonstrates Gibbon’s aptitude for, or interest in, medieval subjects. The most that can be said is that he considered himself ill-equipped for such a subject on quite different grounds—the remoteness of the materials, in language, location and nature (*Mem. C*, 278).

The brief essay *Du Gouvernement Féodal* is similarly unrevealing. In effect it is a critical book review, where Gibbon worked out his ideas as to the rights and wrongs of Montesquieu’s quarrel with the Abbé Dubos over the establishment of the Frankish monarchy, a subject enlivened by the recent publication of Mably’s *Observations sur l’Histoire de France* (1765).<sup>18</sup> It should not be a matter for surprise that Gibbon made use of, and improved upon, a part of his findings twelve years later in c. 38 of his History (*DF* iv. 130–52 and n. 69). Nor should this obscure the fact that the material was then put to quite different use: instead of asking how it was that feudal government had evolved to its mature form in twelfth-century France—as in *Du Gouvernement Féodal*—in the *Decline and Fall* Gibbon wished to conclude his account of the Western Empire with a brief sketch of the immediate fate of its constituent parts, Britain, France and Spain. As the most important of the three, he concentrated on the Frankish kingdom, inserting a vignette of barbarian laws and manners parallel to those which stud the narrative from c. 9 onwards—a parallel clearly hinted at by Gibbon (*DF* iv. 131). (If, following Robertson,<sup>19</sup> one was unaware of or did not accept Gibbon’s plan and criticised c. 38 as an unnecessary digression, this would show only that his early medieval interests sat awkwardly with his Roman, Imperial design, and that far from being intrinsic and essential, they were a hindrance.) That Gibbon was the master and not the slave of his early essay is demonstrated again in c. 49 (on Charlemagne) where he refuses to recur to this material, which has already served its purpose. The most that the essay *Du Gouvernement Féodal* can tell us about *Decline and Fall* is that it was likely to be informed by an enthusiasm for Montesquieu—but this is not a novel conclusion.

I postpone detailed discussion of the *Outlines of the History of the World*,<sup>20</sup> but we can be sure that this manuscript was not part of the 1771 draft of the History, as urged by J. W. Swain. We have seen that, in the years 1768–72, Gibbon’s preparatory studies post-476 were limited to Italy, and terminated ‘ in the fourteenth Century ’; neither fact corresponds with the scope of the *Outlines* which were, as their title suggests, a world history and which covered the years 800–1500.<sup>21</sup> Equally, Professor Giarizzo’s hypothesis that the *Outlines* preceded the 1771 draft makes little sense in the light of the account in the memoirs, for it supposes that Gibbon first conceived a world history, then retreated to that of Rome and then, years later, arrived at the Byzantine/European production we now have—a complex, not to say contradictory, evolution with no basis in evidence.

But even if none of the above texts has any direct connection with the genesis of the *Decline and Fall*, on their own they would tend to show that in the years 1765–70 Gibbon’s interests were almost exclusively medieval, a fact of some significance in itself. However, it must be said that Professor Giarizzo’s selection of material for discussion is somewhat partial, and that he has tended to ignore a bevy of texts testifying to the vitality of Gibbon’s classical interests at this time. These I list: the *Memoire sur la Monarchie des Médes*, an important essay, longer even than the fragment of Swiss History and more finished; the *Index Expurgatorius*; the *Digression on the Character of Brutus*; the letter to Hurd on the forged origins of the book of Daniel, of 1772; the *General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West*, also of 1772; and to these must be added, of course, the *Critical Observations* on Virgil, published in 1770.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Gibbon’s text is printed in *The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon* (1814 ed.) ed. Sheffield, III. 183–202 (hereafter cited as *MW*); cf. *De l’Esprit des Lois* xxviii. 4, xxx. 10–25, *passim*, J. B. Dubos, *Histoire Critique de l’Etablissement de la Monarchie Française dans les Gaules* (1742).

<sup>19</sup> *MW* II. 249 no. CXLIX.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix I below.

<sup>21</sup> Text printed in *English Essays*, 163–98.

<sup>22</sup> In order the texts are printed in *MW* III. 56–149; *English Essays*, 107–29; *ibid.*, 96–106; *Letters* no. 196; *DF* iv. 172–81; *English Essays*, 131–62. The diverse locations of these pieces, all of the same period, show how badly we need a modern and comprehensive edition of Gibbon’s miscellaneous prose works.

Still, it is only just to offer some solution to the problem raised by the presence of a (modest) corpus of texts on medieval themes early and late, and by Gibbon's avoidance of the classical period in all his plans for full-dress composition before the *Decline and Fall*. The explanation, I suggest, is that Gibbon's addiction to reading the Classics was its own antidote to writing about them. In view of his aversion to the 'abridgement' of Tschudi (*Mem. D*, 408), one can imagine his feelings about the Englishing of Tacitus—and hence the avowedly workaday character of the first embryo of the Roman history, the *Receuil sur la Géographie ancienne de l'Italie*:

L'auteur cependant auroit tort de s'enorgueillir d'un succès qu'il ne devoit qu'à la nature de son sujet, à son travail et qu'à un Esprit juste et methodique. Pour ne parler que de moi-meme, mon Essai ouvrage de jeunesse fait dans deux mois et oublié dans quatre, annonce plus de genie original que ne pourroit faire un pareil traité. Des deux pivots de la reputation, la difficulté et l'utilité du travail, Celui-ci est le plus sur mais le moins flateur.<sup>23</sup>

Viewed in this light, we can see what a wonderful choice of subject the later Empire was: it drew on all the conventional classical enthusiasms,<sup>24</sup> and yet it avoided the period covered by the 'best' sources. It was perhaps the presence of Tacitus, above all, which determined 'the true aera of the decline and fall of the Empire', and which decided Gibbon against deducing 'the decline of the Empire from the civil Wars, that ensued after the fall of Nero or even from the tyranny of Augustus'<sup>25</sup>—a problem which vexed him both before and after the composition of the text. Novel though the subject may have been, it had this in common with all Gibbon's previous historical schemes, that it avoided the inimitable.<sup>26</sup>

## II. GIBBON IN ROME, OCTOBER 1764: NOT A TRUE STARTING POINT

At the very moment when Gibbon's Dark Ages begin, our need for information grows most acute. In effect his journal stops for good on 2 October 1764 with his arrival in Rome,<sup>27</sup> but yet on his own account the experience of Rome was crucial to the genesis of his History. For

the historian of the decline and fall . . . it was the view of Italy and Rome which determined the choice of subject. In my Journal the place and moment of conception are recorded; the fifteenth of October, 1764, as I sat musing in the Church of the Zoccolanti or Franciscan fryars, while they were singing Vespers in the Temple of Jupiter on the ruins of the Capitol. But my original plan was circumscribed to the decay of the City rather than of the Empire; and though my reading and reflections began to point to that object, some years elapsed, and several avocations intervened, before I was seriously engaged in the execution of that laborious work. (*Mem. C*, 270-1)

<sup>23</sup> *Journal B*, 7 December 1763.

<sup>24</sup> It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the source of the emotional appeal of the *Decline and Fall* is the principle of regret for *temps perdu*, the period of 'correct' classical taste. This explains why, from the very beginning, Gibbon harps on the theme of decline (cc. 1-3). As part of an historical argument this seems exaggerated, when there are almost three more volumes to come, but we must not overlook the dictates of literature: first, that Gibbon was in some sense writing a tragedy (we remember his passion for the theatre), which demanded that the tragic motif be stated at the outset; secondly, that the closer in time he was to the period of the Republic, the more keenly the principle of regret would operate. Given such an emotional premiss, the sympathetic and detailed treatment of the fourth century is remarkable, and provides another example of Gibbon, the open-minded author, being deflected from his original position in the course of composition.

<sup>25</sup> Quotations from *Mem. E*, 308, 'Materials for a Seventh Volume' in *English Essays*, 338 respectively; cf. p. 15 and n. 97 below.

<sup>26</sup> One of the most striking and least noticed aspects of Gibbon's choice of subject is that it

coincided with the early stirrings of neo-Classical aesthetic taste, in which interest in late Roman remains 'helped to break up the dominance of Palladianism, and paved the way for the Greek Revival' (J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Greek Revival* (1972), 19). Gibbon was familiar with and appreciative of the literature this interest spawned—Dawkins and Wood on *Palmyra* (1753) and *Balbec* (1757) and Adam on *Spalatro* (1764); cf. *DF* I, 330 n. 77, v. 458 n. 85, I. 422 n. 129 respectively—but he did not adopt the same aesthetic standpoint. For him the art of the later Empire was debased and he charged that Adam 'somewhat flattered the objects which it was [his] purpose to represent' (loc. cit. and n. 130); similarly, though prepared to allot historical significance to Greek art, he preferred St. Peter's in Rome to the temple of Diana at Ephesus (*DF* I, 288-9). But if Gibbon was a conservative, both aesthetically and in his historical preferences, his writing a *lament* for the passage of the period of true Roman greatness and the immense public appeal of the *Decline and Fall* suggest that, however obscurely, he had moved with and caught the shifting tide of taste.

<sup>27</sup> *Gibbon's Journey from Geneva to Rome, His Journal from 20 April to 2 October 1764* ed. G. A. Bonnard (1961), 235 (hereafter cited as *Journal C*).

It is customary to focus on the literary merit of this famous account at the expense of its historical truth. Besides difficulties over the phrase 'the ruins of the Capitol', its central defect is that there was no journal entry for 15 October. But the weaknesses of this account are superficial rather than essential; they reflect Gibbon's love of chronological exactitude and his addiction to written sources. Without sources his memory was as vulnerable in detail as that of any elderly man twenty-five years on; since his memoirs were not those of any other old man, he took, in the first instance, the marginal liberty of extending his journal's existence by a fortnight. But what should not be forgotten is that the passion for truth in all things—great and small—reasserted itself, and the mendacious reference to the journal was dropped in the two later drafts Gibbon wrote of this scene and, incidentally, in the version published by Sheffield after Gibbon's death.<sup>28</sup> The scene of 15 October may, therefore, be defended in the letter<sup>29</sup> and, what is of much greater importance, in spirit. There is no reason to doubt the substantial truths conveyed by the memoirs: that the emotional impact of Rome was immense—a fact confirmed by Gibbon's own correspondence in 1764, 'Whatever ideas books may have given us of the greatness of that people, their accounts of the most flourishing state of Rome fall infinitely short of the picture of its ruins'<sup>30</sup>—and that this experience made a real mark on Gibbon's historiographical evolution. What sort of mark it was can best be understood by placing it in context.

At Lausanne in December 1763 Gibbon had mapped out in detail the nature of the book he hoped to publish on the historical geography of classical Italy—the *Receuil Geographique*.<sup>31</sup> In the following spring he wrote almost the entire text which has come down to us, fully intending to make substantial additions to it in the course of his Italian travels, and then to rewrite the whole on returning to England.<sup>32</sup> Its scope is indicated in Gibbon's journal, where he highlighted 'trois objets generaux . . . qu'il en fit mention. Les divisions des provinces par Auguste et ses successeurs. Les grands chemins de l'Italie et la topographie de la ville de Rome.'<sup>33</sup> Thus, as one might expect, Rome already occupied

<sup>28</sup> *Mem. D, E*, 405–6, 302, *MW* I. 198 respectively.

<sup>29</sup> Three points should be mentioned: (i) Bonnard (*Edward Gibbon, Memoirs of My Life*, 304–5) raises the objection that the phrase 'the ruins of the Capitol' used in drafts *C* and *E* of the memoirs must be inaccurate, since such ruins no longer existed. But in fact the theme of Christian foundations on Roman ruins was for Gibbon a conventional *topos*, symbolic of the triumph of the Christian religion at the expense of Roman power, and it did not necessarily require the literal survival of the ruins in the areas referred to. This is clear from the usage in *DF* I. 433, IV. 66, not to mention a cancelled MS draft of the *Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature* Add. MSS 34,880 fol. 155.

(ii) Bonnard (*loc. cit.*) and D. P. Jordan, *Gibbon and His Roman Empire* (1971), 17–21 both tend to denigrate the historical accuracy of this passage by stressing that Gibbon's principal concern when writing the successive drafts of the memoirs was to increase their literary effect—a suggestion derived from what they perceive to be an increase in such effect. But, leaving aside the uncertain nature of this type of judgement, such a theory runs contrary to Bonnard's own account of the genesis of the memoirs, which states that for the period of the Grand Tour *Memoir C* was a full version, whereas the two later drafts, *D* and *E*, skipped over those years as quickly as possible (*op. cit.*, xxvi–xxvii) in order to concentrate on the later part of Gibbon's life—an account well founded in evidence and in the texts themselves.

(iii) Craddock in *Young Edward Gibbon*, 183, n. 79, etc. starts the hare that Gibbon referred to a journal entry for 15 October, because the first page on Rome in the *Receuil Geographique* was written on 15 October 1763, as can be deduced from the journal entry for that date. This expresses so low an estimate of Gibbon's 'early and constant attachment to the order of time and place' (*Mem. B*, 121)—an attachment evident on every page of the

memoirs—that I am unable to follow it. Furthermore, if we consult the journal for 15 October 1763, we find no paragraphs of enthusiasm for Rome, only disappointment at such a bad day's work on the *Receuil* in which only one page has been written, the working day having been disrupted by the financial problems raised by the arrival of a letter from home—which fact entirely dominates the journal entry. This was hardly the stuff of inspiration for the author of the memoirs consulting his journal at the end of his life. In fact, as the last sentence of the *Decline and Fall* makes clear (VII. 338), the scene on the ruins of the Capitol was always in Gibbon's mind, independent of any journal entry, and I suggest that 15 October was an over-precise expression for 'about a fortnight' after his arrival in Rome on the 2nd.

<sup>30</sup> *Letters* no. 61.

<sup>31</sup> Printed as 'Nomina Gentesque Italiae Antiquae' in *MW* IV. 157–326.

<sup>32</sup> Craddock, *Young Edward Gibbon*, 182–6, discusses the textual evolution of the *Receuil*, but neglects the chronological aspect of this, aside from her emphasis on 15 October 1763 (*cf. n. 29*) which, in this context also, proves misleading. The *Receuil* was in fact written in two parts: a first, much smaller part in the summer of 1763, and a second, larger part in the spring of 1764. Between 8 September 1763 and 19 February 1764 there are no journal entries referring to actual composition of the *Receuil*, with the meagre and isolated exceptions of 15, 20 October 1763, which amounted to slightly more than one MS page. It is clear that this interval was caused by Gibbon's preferring to finish his reading, before writing up the text, *cf. Journal B*, *loc. cit.* and 31 December 1763. For the hope that travel would augment the account, *ibid.*, 7 December 1763, 29 March 1764; for re-writing in England, 7 December 1763.

<sup>33</sup> *Journal B* 7 December 1763.

a prominent position in the *Receuil*, a prominence borne out in the text as written,<sup>34</sup> and it is in this sense that it might be called the remote ancestor of the *Decline and Fall*.

Nevertheless, at the very moment when he was making a case to himself for future publication, a doubt hung over the *Receuil*. As we have seen,<sup>35</sup> Gibbon felt forced to acknowledge that the book would be worthy rather than striking, and this question mark was confirmed by the experience of travel. To be sure, his journal is full of accounts of antiquities—sculpture, coins and manuscripts—but these could not be of substantial use in an historical geography. Instead of the great increase foreseen, Gibbon made just three additions to his text as the result of personal observation on tour.<sup>36</sup> Two out of these three additions were the result of evidence supplied by inscriptions, and had the *Receuil* been persevered with, this would have been the principal new source tapped, although even then it would have come from books—Gruter, Reinesius and Muratori.<sup>37</sup> Devotedly as he worked in the field, Gibbon became convinced that the returns were marginal, and his mature reliance on the printed word was confirmed.<sup>38</sup> Thus travel failed to supply the *Receuil* with that extra stratum of material which was to raise it above a mere digest of printed authorities, and in this way the project died of stultification. Recognition of the fact was painful—throughout a long stay at Florence Gibbon remained obstinately loyal to its continuance<sup>39</sup>—but lack of material was conclusive: during the last three weeks in Florence his journal falls silent, and in Rome this silence becomes absolute.

Gibbon's experience in Rome was, therefore, strangely bittersweet. On the one hand, his one plan for classical publication expired; on the other, the physical presence of the Eternal City kindled 'the flame of enthusiasm' anew. It is in this context that we must interpret the famous account in the memoirs: devoid of classical projects, the idea of writing the history of Rome crossed his mind. From the hindsight of 1789–90 this was 'the moment of conception'; but as the metaphor will allow, and as the memoir frankly implies, in 1764 the interval between conception and any future birth remained indefinitely extensible. The Roman history was a nice, perhaps a consolatory, but certainly an insubstantial idea.

That Gibbon settled on no distinct alternative to the *Receuil* is strikingly demonstrated by the cessation of his journal, and also by what he did write in Rome. Two items survive. There is, first, a brief abstract of findings from the Abbé Gravina's book *Del Governo Civile di Roma*, of which Gibbon was lent a manuscript copy, where he makes the comment that the book's 'principal subject [is] the revolutions of the city after the fall of the empire; a subject which interests me very much'.<sup>40</sup> The comment should be taken at no more and no less than face value: it again confirms the truth of the account in the memoirs—that Gibbon was interested in the history of the city at this time—but it does no more than that. Only the accident of coming across the book elicited this meagre one-line remark, a remark related to the Abbé Gravina's subject rather than to Gibbon's more catholic interests,<sup>41</sup> and which was without further consequence. Much more substantial is the second piece written in Rome, the essay *Sur les Triomphes des Romains* of November–December 1764.<sup>42</sup> It comprises three elements: an historical analysis of what gave a Roman general the right to triumph; a topographical study of the route of the triumphal road in Rome; and an evocation of 'le spectacle'—though the last is only a fragment. So far as we can make any inference from this text, it shows that Gibbon was nicely poised between historical geography and history; but certainly, two months after that famous 15 October he had not settled on pure history.

<sup>34</sup> Sections VI–VIII on Rome and its environs take up over half the printed text; Rome was also the geographical starting point in the MS, Add. MSS 34,881 fol. 125b.

<sup>35</sup> Above, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *MW* iv. 203–6; 224–5; 314, cf. *Journal C* 13 June, 10 July, 30 August 1764.

<sup>37</sup> *Journal C* 30 August 1764.

<sup>38</sup> As is well-known, the finest topographical set-piece in the History, that on Constantinople (c. 17), was of a place Gibbon had never visited. For places he had seen, the fruits of observation were kept to a

minimum and he remained anxious to supply printed sources even so, cf. D. P. Jordan, *Gibbon and His Roman Empire*, 54–6.

<sup>39</sup> *Letters* no. 60; *Journal C* 30 August 1764.

<sup>40</sup> *MW* v. 39–41, here 39.

<sup>41</sup> Unlike Gravina, Gibbon had an interest in the entire history of the City and, as we have seen (p. 3 above), with its chief emphasis on the period pre-476.

<sup>42</sup> The text is printed in *MW* iv. 359–98, but is artificially divided into three by the editor, cf. Add. MSS 34,880 fols. 229b–238b.

On the face of it, then, the Grand Tour had been a failure—a pleasurable interlude, but one which had made no lasting impression—and this is the explanation of what appears from hindsight to be the great hiatus in Gibbon's development during the years 1765–72. For Gibbon returned to Buriton in June 1765 without any definite plans at all, and in consequence of this vacancy he reverted to precisely those projects which had occupied his mind before setting out on tour two years previously—the Swiss and Florentine histories.<sup>43</sup> Having always preferred the former, he was easily persuaded by Deyverdun into the blind alley of writing the Swiss History. It was not the case that Gibbon had made up his mind to write the history of Rome, but that the 'seed somehow did not germinate'.<sup>44</sup> 'Somehow' is, at best, the hopeful postulate of a missing explanation, yet it is hardly likely that one as conscious of his mental development as Gibbon would have failed to record so notorious a deviation from his ultimate goal. There was no deviation because there was, as yet, no goal.

### III. 1765–8: DECLINE, FALL AND SIGNS OF RECOVERY

Effectively the *Introduction à l'Histoire Générale de la République des Suisses* was Gibbon's sole scholarly effort over the next three years (1765–7).<sup>45</sup> In that time only two introductory chapters were written. Prima facie there were grounds for hoping that this, his first attempt at full-dress historical composition, would yield a more fruitful result—particularly his previous residence in Lausanne and the history's theme of emergent liberty. But this was not so. Even the most hopeful aspect, the libertarian theme, sat ill with a man whose view of history and human nature was fundamentally sceptical and pessimistic.<sup>46</sup> However, the remoteness of the materials was conclusive. It was not simply the difficulty of obtaining and translating them: this caused an immense amount of time to be spent making comparatively little progress—for the time taken over two chapters of Swiss history Gibbon would be writing more than a volume on Rome in the 70s and 80s—but it could be overcome to some extent, as the memoirs concede (*Mem. C*, 276). Far more depressing was the mental gap to be bridged. In the lengthy fragment Gibbon wrote there are but three notes to books he had read without special reference to the task in hand, all of them introduced by way of digression.<sup>47</sup> Despite the universality of the theme, there was no connection between the history of medieval Switzerland and the mainstream of European historiography, in which Gibbon was so well read; and there was no indigenous tradition of writing sufficiently developed for an alien author to engage with actively. Hence Gibbon's feeling that he had written but an 'abridgement', 'a slight and superficial Essay', from which 'fruitless task' he was soon happy to be released (*Mem. D, C*, 408, 278, 284). In this way the verdict of 1762 was confirmed, when he had put aside the Swiss for the Medicis and for the same reasons.<sup>48</sup> We are often told how beneficial Switzerland was in introducing Gibbon to the French Enlightenment,<sup>49</sup> but this was so only within limits: the country was valuable as a clearing house for exiles—Giannone, Voltaire, Montesquieu—but it was unimportant in itself. Gibbon may have profited from the former, but in attempting the Swiss History he paid the price of the latter consideration.

The years 1765–7 represent the most barren period of Gibbon's maturity. Apart from the Swiss History, and because of its monopoly of his efforts, no text may be dated with

<sup>43</sup> Compare *Journal A* 26 July 1762 and *Memoir C*, 275–6.

<sup>44</sup> H. R. Trevor-Roper, 'The Idea of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' in *The Age of the Enlightenment, Studies Presented to Theodore Besterman* ed. W. H. Barber et al., 413–30, here 427. Craddock has evolved a variant of this hypothesis—that Gibbon could only work part-time before his father's death, and so, while awaiting this consummation, engaged only on small-scale projects. However, (i) the limitations on Gibbon's time were as significant after 1770 as before; (ii) were the premiss sound, the conclusion would not follow and (iii) the hypothesis fails to take account of the Swiss History of 1765–7, indubitably a first-class project, cf. *Young Edward Gibbon*, 230.

<sup>45</sup> Text printed in *MW* III. 239–329. For a very useful discussion, see H. S. Offler, 'Gibbon and the Making of his Swiss History', *Durham University Journal* 1949, 64–75. For an explanation of the texts allotted by Craddock, *Young Edward Gibbon*, 231–7, to 1765 see below n. 83.

<sup>46</sup> In addition to the well-known remark in *DF* I. 84, cf. *Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature* c. XLVII, *Journal B* I September 1763; 'Notes' printed in *English Essays*, 319, etc.

<sup>47</sup> The authors are Giannone, Muratori and Mosheim; cf. *MW* III. 242; 248 n.; 283 respectively.

<sup>48</sup> cf. *Journal A* 26 July 1762, *Mem. B*, 196–7.

<sup>49</sup> Trevor-Roper, 'The Idea of the Decline and Fall', 419.



certainly or probability to this time, except the brief series of *Hints*<sup>50</sup> and Gibbon's share in writing the first number of the *Memoires Litteraires de la Grande Bretagne*. This review first crops up in correspondence with the publisher, Becket, in September 1767 (completion of the first number being promised for December),<sup>51</sup> but it should not be reckoned very high in the scale of Gibbon's activities. For him reviewing books was a leisure activity to set off against the principal project in hand—as, for example, at Lausanne when he went through the fifty volumes of the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée*, digesting them in his journal while at the same time studying to produce the *Receuil Geographique*.<sup>52</sup> Nor can the *Hints* be presented as a substantial scholarly production. Written on small cards in seventeen numbered sections, they fall in fact into three main sections of diffuse and general reflections. Numbers I–VIII centre on the French civil wars of the sixteenth century and may have been prompted by a re-reading of Davila; <sup>53</sup> IX–XIII are loosely grouped around the theme of religion, touching on the nature of popery, lessons of the early history of Christianity and freedom of thought *inter alia*; XIV–XVI supply the one properly unified meditation, headed 'Character and Conduct of Brutus', and have source references in addition; lastly, under XVII there is a brief paragraph of reflections on a miscellany of historians. Overall the *Hints* are striking for their lack of direction. They are unlike any of Gibbon's other scholarly remains, however casual or fragmentary, in that they are not in connected prose, and they are almost entirely without source references, excepting the section on Brutus. Thus they lack all pretence to literary or scholarly finish. For a meticulous scholar and writer such as Gibbon this is most striking: it would be exaggerated to posit a breakdown of morale, but it may well be suggested that at this time he had lost his sense of purpose and intellectual confidence. The one exception to this is that classical studies still provoked him to disciplined and original thought, and the habit of familiar recourse to the classics was never undermined.

Of course, the barrenness of these years must be put into perspective. Gibbon's time was not all his own, nor was it exclusively devoted to study. From his arrival in England in 1758 until his move to Bentinck Street in the spring of 1773, the normal pattern of Gibbon's life (while in England) was to follow the conventional oscillation between London while Parliament was sitting and the country in the summer and autumn. It would not be true to say that he did no academic work in town, though he did lead a very social and frequently dissipated life, but if he did do some reading there, writing was necessarily confined to Buriton with its library. In innumerable examples there is no exception to this rule.<sup>54</sup> Thus the time wasted in 1765–7 was not the whole year, only the summer and autumn writing season. Nevertheless, when all allowance is made, the period dominated by the Swiss History was much less fertile than the years preceding the composition of the *Decline and Fall*, despite the enhanced personal difficulties attending the latter.

It is not the case that, with the abandonment of the Swiss History in the winter of 1767–8 (*Mem. C*, 277–8), Gibbon immediately reverted to a Roman project. As he says, 'I gradually advanced from the wish to the hope, from the hope to the design, from the design to the execution, of my historical work, of whose nature and limits I had yet a very inadequate notion' (*Mem. D*, 411). Even this cautious account tends to overestimate the unilinear nature of Gibbon's progress, and it must never be forgotten that, as late as 1773, 'all was dark and doubtful' (*Mem. E*, 308). For all its marvellous finish, the writing of the *Decline and Fall* was a continual voyage of discovery for the author.

In fact, after the sustained, unitary effort of the Swiss History, Gibbon marked time by producing a proliferation of smaller pieces. On the pattern of the commonplace book of 1755–8, the volume of 1762 headed 'Extraits raisonnés de mes Lectures' or the *Receuil* of 'pieces detachées' of 1764–5,<sup>55</sup> in 1768 he started a blank manuscript book and steadily filled it with miscellaneous scholarly papers of more or less weight. It includes four items:

<sup>50</sup> *English Essays*, 88–95; for dating see *ibid.*, 55–6, 559.

<sup>51</sup> *Letters* nos. 76–7; in fact the first volume was published in April 1768, J. E. Norton, *A Bibliography of the Works of Edward Gibbon* (1940), 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Journal B* esp. 21 March 1764.

<sup>53</sup> Text printed in *English Essays*, 88–95, here 88 esp.; cf. *Mem. F*, 57.

<sup>54</sup> For a particularly explicit case, *Journal A* 11 February 1759. For the general picture of town and country activity, *Mem. B, C, E*, 161, 273–4, 286, 302—'the dull division of my English year'—and *Letters* nos. 23, 83, 165, 219, etc.

<sup>55</sup> Add. MSS 34,800 fols. 1–159, 160–219, 220–238b respectively.

*Du Gouvernement Féodal*; the *Memoire sur la Monarchie des Mèdes*; *Relation des Noces de Charles Duc de Bourgogne*; and the *Abstract* of the first book of Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. In addition to this, Gibbon also produced an untitled manuscript published by Lord Sheffield under the misleading heading *Dissertation sur les Poids, les Monnoies, et les Mesures des Anciens*.<sup>56</sup>

No previous writer has mentioned the MS volume of 1768, but its existence is not in doubt. Although split up, it has at least survived within one volume in the British Library, and Gibbon's original pagination can be traced across the extraneous items—this evidence being, of course, confirmed by the uniformity of both paper and handwriting.<sup>57</sup> The four items in the volume are written in consecutively without breaks on the model of Gibbon's three previous commonplace books. Thus, though none of the items is dated, by the nature of the layout they must have been written sequentially, and on the basis of the extensive precedents where the items are all dated, we may confidently suppose that each item was the product of a successive period of work—a supposition supported, as we shall see, by the other available evidence.

By great good luck the first item in the 1768 volume, the essay *Du Gouvernement Féodal*, can be dated with precision, so supplying us with a starting date for the whole. One of the principal books reviewed in the essay is Mably's *Observations sur l'Histoire de France*, which was only published in 1765, and another is Dubos's *Histoire Critique de l'Établissement de la Monarchie Française dans les Gaules*. Gibbon certainly read the latter at Lausanne in the 1750s<sup>58</sup>—directed to it, presumably, by reading Montesquieu—but he appears not to have owned a copy. Thus in a letter to the bookseller Becket of December 1767,<sup>59</sup> in addition to books for the *Memoires Littéraires* and on current affairs, he asks for a copy of Dubos and also for another book on the same theme, Du Buat-Nançay on *Les Origines, ou l'Ancien Gouvernement de la Monarchie de la France, de l'Allemagne et de l'Italie* (1757). In fact Du Buat-Nançay does not appear in Gibbon's references, and we must assume that he was not able to get hold of it,<sup>60</sup> but the order for these books is nearly conclusive evidence for the dating of *Du Gouvernement Féodal*, which may be put at some time near the beginning of 1768.

The *Memoire sur la Monarchie des Mèdes* follows *Du Gouvernement Féodal* in the manuscript volume of 1768, and the external evidence confirms that of manuscript sequence in favouring a date at this time. For example, the proem to the *Memoire* refers to Gibbon's friendship with Bougainville—the product of his Paris visit—and the death of the latter,<sup>61</sup> both of which occurred in 1763, so the text must date from after Gibbon's return home in 1765. A remark in the memoirs supplies a more specific date—'I had almost prepared for the press an Essay on the Cyropaedia, which in my own judgement is not unhappily laboured' (*Mem. C*, 286)—in describing Gibbon's literary activities between the cessation of the Swiss History and the death of his father (1768–70). There can be no doubt that the 'Essay on the Cyropaedia' and the *Memoire sur les Mèdes* are one and the same: the last third of the latter is entirely taken up with a discussion on the nature and function of the Cyropaedia,<sup>62</sup> and this forms the culmination of the argument on Persian chronology, which is the underlying concern of the whole.

The *Memoire* is a lengthy piece, whose weight and substance mark it out from the other texts of this period for publication—as the autobiography states. Just as *Du Gouvernement Féodal* took Gibbon back to review Montesquieu, here, too, he was recurring to

<sup>56</sup> Garbled text in *MW* v. 120–60.

<sup>57</sup> The items comprising the 1768 MS volume are in Add. MSS 34,881 and are laid out thus:

	B.L. folio	Gibbon's pagination
<i>Du Gouvernement Féodal</i>	65–75	1–10
<i>Memoire sur la Monarchie des Mèdes</i>	75b–120	11–56
<i>Relation des Noces de Charles Duc de Bourgogne</i>	215–216	57b–58b
<i>Abstract</i> of Blackstone	216b–241	59–83b

It will be observed that one page (56b–57) is missing of Gibbon's pagination. This is because, on occasion, he left a blank page between the various items, and such pages have been deleted; thus, for example, in

the 1762 volume 'Extraits raisonnés de mes Lectures' (Add. MSS 34,880 fols. 160–219), pp. 1, 17, 32 of Gibbon's pagination are all missing for this reason.

<sup>58</sup> Add. MSS 34,880 fol. 78b (Commonplace book 1755–8).

<sup>59</sup> *Letters* no. 82.

<sup>60</sup> It is not in G. L. Keynes, *The Library of Gibbon: A Catalogue of his Books* (1980 ed.), and it would appear to have been altogether a rare book in England—the earliest edition in the Bodleian Library, for example, is Paris, 1789.

<sup>61</sup> *MW* III. 58.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, III. 122–49; *contra* J. W. Swain, *Edward Gibbon the Historian*, 109, M. Baridon, *Edward Gibbon et le Mythe de Rome* (1975), 263.

familiar enthusiasms—Xenophon and ancient chronology—which long pre-dated his Grand Tour.<sup>63</sup> The *Memoire* might be thought to have a special interest as the first piece Gibbon wrote on a classical subject since his return from Italy, but, as the other texts from this period show, his interests remained quite unfocused. Thus the third item in the MS volume of 1768—the *Relation des Noces de Charles Duc de Bourgogne*—testifies along with other fragments<sup>64</sup> to the maintenance of Gibbon's later medieval interests, another theme from the early 1760s. However, the text itself, taken from the well-known account in the *Mémoires* of Olivier de le Marche,<sup>65</sup> is purely derivative and without interest, except insofar as it testifies to Gibbon's love of spectacle.<sup>66</sup>

Another text which is indiscriminate in its chronological conspectus is the untitled manuscript on coins, weights and measures which, for the purposes of discussion, I christen the *Receuil sur les Poids, les Monnoies et les Mesures*. Pace Lord Sheffield,<sup>67</sup> this was not confined to antiquity, but in a series of open-ended sections ranged throughout history into the eighteenth century; and whereas the ancients were awarded one section, there were five headings for the modern world. As in the case of the *Receuil Geographique*, the plan of this manuscript clearly supposed that Gibbon might add to the various sections over time, but though he did rewrite some passages immediately after writing the first draft,<sup>68</sup> this was as far as he got, and the text remains sadly incomplete. Once more, as in the texts of the MS volume of 1768, we see Gibbon picking up threads from before his Grand Tour,<sup>69</sup> another period when his literary production was multifarious and without concentration.

I have tentatively assigned the date 1768 to the *Receuil sur les Poids*, but it should be said at once that the external evidence is not conclusive. It is reasonable to assume that it comes from this period—the Dark Ages—in Gibbon's life in that it is not referred to in journals covering the years 1758–64, and the paper and handwriting are uniform with those of the MS volume of 1768.<sup>70</sup> Again, the *Receuil* would appear to belong to the same phase of Gibbon's development as the texts in that volume—miscellaneous, unfocused, consolidatory rather than path-breaking—and its open-ended plan supplies a simple explanation for its absence from that particular manuscript book. But though the date cannot, I think, be fixed beyond what is merely probable, there is one last piece of information we should consider—that the *Receuil*, like the first three items in the MS volume of 1768, is written in French.

The paucity of discussion of Gibbon's use of language is a most striking weakness in previous commentary on his formative years.<sup>71</sup> Despite this, one must assume that it is

<sup>63</sup> cf. *English Essays*, 5–8, *MW* III. 150–69.

<sup>64</sup> *Index Expurgatorius* no. 39, in *English Essays*, 122–3; review of Horace Walpole, *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third* in *MW* III. 331–49. The particular 'Noces' handled by the *Relation* were, of course, those of Charles the Bold with Margaret of York, sister of Edward IV, in 1468.

<sup>65</sup> ed. H. Beaune and J. D'Arbaumont (Société de l'Histoire de France, 1883–5), cf. III. 101–201.

<sup>66</sup> The *Relation* opens with a striking *obiter dictum* commending the study of *mœurs*, arts and commerce as well as of wars and treaties (*MW* III. 202–3). This, like the statement in *DF* II. 168–9, is a useful amplification of the famous *mot* that 'Wars and the administration of public affairs are the principal subjects of history', *DF* I. 255 (my emphasis).

<sup>67</sup> Above, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Prof. Craddock has painstakingly traced the MS sequence of the 1759 *Principes des Poids, des Monnoies, et des Mesures des Anciens* (*Young Edward Gibbon*, 354, n. 12), but falters before the *Receuil* on a similar theme (*ibid.*, 231–2). In fact, Gibbon wrote a first draft on quarto paper, Add. MSS 34,881 fols. 50–b, 36–38b, 41–b, 45b, 52, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49 and then rewrote or added sections on foolscap: fols. 24–35, 42–43b. That there was no significant interval between these two stages seems to me strongly suggested by the identity of the hand, and the fact that

the new material is not in any way additional matter collected and appended to the various original sections, but is directly complementary. Sections which were re-written—such as the *Avant-propos*—result in the original being discarded, whilst some sections in the original—such as that on *l'Antiquité*—were barely started, and assume the lengthy foolscap re-write which in fact took place (cf. fols. 50b, 36, 27b–35). In the final, rather messy product foolscap and quarto pages sat together, vainly awaiting the copyist.

<sup>69</sup> i.e. back to the *Principes des Poids* . . . printed in *MW* v. 66–119, which can be dated to 1759 from *Journal A*, after 11 April 1759.

<sup>70</sup> There is an immense and progressive change in Gibbon's hand throughout his adult life, cf. p. 20 below.

<sup>71</sup> An exception is H. L. Bond, *The Literary Art of Edward Gibbon* (1960), 19–20. One consequence of this blind spot has been the bizarrely conceived edition of Gibbon's *English Essays*. Since the editor has made no sufficient consideration of Gibbon's use of language (p. vi), this is a purely miscellaneous collection of material for the period before 1772, selected on no principle. Because of his history of tacking between English and French, any edition of Gibbon's prose works must be comprehensive to be satisfactory.

a factor of considerable interest for the examination of his literary style and, as here, in charting his intellectual evolution. The fundamental principle underlying Gibbon's choice of language was, as he himself says, that 'Les idées ont produit les mots'.<sup>72</sup> Thus residence and social intercourse in England after his return in 1758 caused him to adapt language to thought and revert to using English—first in his journal and then, at a higher level, in the essay reviewing Hurd's Commentary on Horace.<sup>73</sup> At the same time he was undergoing an intensive course of reading in the English classics where, according to the memoirs, 'the perfect recovery of my own language was the serious and laudable object of my diligence' (*Mem. C*, 251). By the same principle, travel to Paris and Lausanne in 1763–4 caused even the journal to lapse into French, but yet at the very end of that work, the notes made in Rome in December 1764 are in English.<sup>74</sup> In short, though Gibbon's use of French in the years 1756–68 was quite firmly rooted—particularly for finished, scholarly works—it was not inflexible nor irreversible, nor should the foreign element in his character be taken for granted.

In the four years 1765–8 all those of Gibbon's scholarly writings which we can date are in French; English was used only for miscellaneous jottings such as the *Hints* and the *Index Expurgatorius*. The complement of this fact is that the earliest datable English text of this period is the pamphlet *Critical Observations* on Virgil, composed in the summer of 1769.<sup>75</sup> From this starting point, and relying on the principle that 'Les idées ont produit les mots', I should like to postulate the following: that Gibbon wrote all his scholarly works in French up till the winter of 1768–9 (or the end of the writing season for 1768); that he changed over to English in the summer writing season of 1769; that the change was a complete one, i.e. he did not then revert to French; that the cause of his continuing to write in French for so long after his return to England was relatively accidental, the accident that 'during four successive summers' (1765–8) Gibbon enjoyed the society of Deyverdun more or less continuously at Buriton, then his first and only intimate friend (*Mem. C*, 273); and that the change in language coincided approximately with Deyverdun's departure in 'the middle of 1769'.<sup>76</sup>

Several comments may be made on these propositions. First, the supposition of a clean break from French to English is the more likely, *prima facie*, when we consider how important the conscious control of literary style and of scholarly language were to Gibbon—the latter problem having exercised him continuously since 1758.<sup>77</sup> Secondly, it is not true to say that the cause of Gibbon's change of language lay in the abandonment of the Swiss History in the winter of 1767–8.<sup>78</sup> After reading the *Introduction* Hume had queried the use of French: 'Why do you compose in French, and carry faggots into the wood . . .?';<sup>79</sup> but in reply, though he had freely confessed to faults of style, Gibbon defended his choice of language at length and promised only that he would finish the History and then render it into English.<sup>80</sup> In the memoirs, too, although he discussed the use of French on this occasion (*Mem. C, D*, 278, 408), he never linked the abandonment of the language with that of the history—and this position is clinched by the secure dating of French texts to a period after the Swiss History, to say nothing of the *Memoires Littéraires*. Thirdly, the crucial importance of Deyverdun in determining Gibbon's choice of

<sup>72</sup> 'Le Séjour de Gibbon à Paris' ed. G. A. Bonnard in *Miscellanea Gibboniana* (1952), 83–107, here 93; cf. *Principes des Poids* . . ., *MW* v. 66. This principle is, of course, related to the better known 'The style of an author should be the image of his mind', *Mem. E*, 308, cf. *DF* III. 164 n. 61.

<sup>73</sup> *English Essays*, 27–53.

<sup>74</sup> *Journal C* December 1764, 236 f. The correct language would, of course, have been Italian, but Gibbon's Italian was too poor and his residence too brief, *Mem. C*, 267.

<sup>75</sup> *Letters* nos. 108–9, and n. 2 to 108.

<sup>76</sup> D. M. Low, *Edward Gibbon* (1937), 203. Given the paucity of evidence 'middle' is a *mot juste*: we know that Deyverdun was abroad by 22 September 1769 (Meredith Read, *Historic Studies in Vaud, Berne and Savoy* (1897), II. 380–1), but there is one other piece of information, which has been ignored hitherto, Gibbon's distinct assertion that Deyverdun was

with him 'during four successive summers' at Buriton from 1765 (*Mem. C*, 273). Given Gibbon's intense interest in precise chronology, and his evident concern both in the memoirs and elsewhere always to account exactly for time spent (e.g. *Mem. E*, 315–6; *Journal B* 31 December 1763), it would be hard to overestimate the chronological nicety of the former, and every date mentioned must be taken as exact, unless proven otherwise. From this we conclude that Deyverdun was not with Gibbon in the summer of 1769, when the first English language texts were being written.

<sup>77</sup> See the proem to the *Principes des Poids*, *MW* v. 66, for reflections on this subject in 1759.

<sup>78</sup> *contra* Bond, *The Literary Art of Edward Gibbon*, 20.

<sup>79</sup> *Mem. C*, 277 n.

<sup>80</sup> *Letters* no. 80.

language is rather confirmed by the memoirs, when their author records that 'My ancient habits, and the presence of Deyverdun, encouraged me to write in French for the Continent of Europe' (*Mem. C*, 278). To be sure, Gibbon is referring here specifically to their co-operation over the Swiss History, but the influence of Deyverdun extended beyond this. Their other, chief co-operative venture was the *Memoires Litteraires*, the very existence of which assumed that the largest literary and scholarly audience was on the Continent and that its language was French. It was when the *Memoires Litteraires* had clearly failed—so undermining this premiss—and when, at the same time, the influence of Deyverdun was removed,<sup>81</sup> that Gibbon was most likely to revert to his native tongue.

Gibbon's use of language is undeniably important but, so far as dating goes, it can never be quite conclusive. However, if we accept the linguistic basis for dating advanced above, one may dot the i's on the chart of Gibbon's activities in 1768–9 to produce a result which has, at least, the merits of simplicity and consistency with such evidence as we possess. We know already<sup>82</sup> that Gibbon commenced the manuscript book whose first item is *Du Gouvernement Féodal* near the beginning of 1768; we may now further surmise that the three French items in this book were all finished by the winter of 1768–9. The *Memoire sur la Monarchie des Médès*, which runs to nearly 100 pages of octavo, would thus appear to be Gibbon's principal production for 1768, and the *Receuil sur les Poids* is rather confirmed as coming from the same year. The MS volume started in 1768 now takes on a special interest, because its fourth and last item, the *Abstract* of Blackstone, is in English. Assuming, as above,<sup>82</sup> that the items were written in sequence, we can actually witness the point at which Gibbon changed from French to English and identify the *Abstract* as Gibbon's first finished English text. This identification coincides very sweetly with the evidence of the memoirs, which assign the *Abstract* to the period 1768–70 and single it out as 'my first serious production in my native language' (*Mem. C*, 286). I assign the text, then, to 1769, coming just before the *Critical Observations* on Virgil, which were the principal effort for the summer and autumn of that year.<sup>83</sup>

Alas, the *Abstract* of Blackstone is far more interesting for its language than for its content. Substantively, it is no more than what its title implies and it represents yet another diversification of intellectual energies in the aftermath of the Swiss History. As Gibbon makes clear, it was a quite isolated product—'the first and, indeed, the sole fruit of my legal studies.'<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the change in language marks another point in the advance from darkness out into the Roman light: the period of essay-length, somewhat backward-looking writing was not yet past, but it is a notable fact that, with the partial exception of the Letter to Hurd on the book of Daniel,<sup>85</sup> all Gibbon's output from the summer of 1769 to the commencement of the *Decline and Fall* in the spring of 1773 relates to Rome.

#### IV. 1768–72: THE ROMAN ROAD AT LAST

Gibbon distinctly tells us that his first step on the Roman road was taken in 1768 (*Mem. C*, 284), that is, at a time when his major scholarly output was the *Memoire* on the Medes and *Du Gouvernement Féodal*. The explanation of his statement is to be found, I suggest, in the *Index Expurgatorius*.<sup>86</sup> In the forty-eight paragraph meditations of this document only three (nos. 39, 47, 48) do not relate to classical subjects; it represents,

<sup>81</sup> It is just possible that there was some connection between the failure of the *Memoires Litteraires* and Deyverdun's willingness to depart from England. There is no evidence for this, but then, as we have seen (n. 76), the whole episode is rather murky, though it is of some importance.

<sup>82</sup> Above, p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> Taking up Gibbon's remark in the *Abstract* that 'we have only the first Volume' of Blackstone—the second being published in 1766—Prof. Craddock has allotted that text to 1765, and this has caused her, in turn, to bunch up other texts in that year, the *Receuil sur les Poids* and the *Relation des Noces de Charles Duc de Bourgogne* (*English Essays*, 55, 63; *Young Edward Gibbon*, 231–4). But, as demonstrated in the text, both the memoirs and the existence of the

1768 MS volume indicate a later date, and so this scheme falls to the ground. Gibbon's statement that he had only the first volume of Blackstone must be taken as a simple statement about his possession, not a reference to dates of publication.

<sup>84</sup> *Mem. D*, 409; text printed in *English Essays*, 59–87. As the memoirs make clear (loc. cit.), the *Abstract* was part of the process whereby Gibbon 'adopted the style and sentiments of an English gentleman', and had no connection with his academic development nor, in particular, his study of the Theodosian code.

<sup>85</sup> *Letters* no. 196; this drew on Persian chronology as much as on the early history of Christianity.

<sup>86</sup> *English Essays*, 107–29.

therefore, the fruits of a sustained course of classical reading, where extraneous items have been almost entirely squeezed out. It has been dated with considerable surety to 1768–9,<sup>87</sup> and it may be argued that of these two years 1768 is much the more likely, given the presence of entries (nos. 39, 47) which derive directly from books reviewed in the *Memoires Littéraires* at that time.<sup>88</sup>

With such a date and character, it may plausibly be suggested that the *Index* represents the first stage in Gibbon's Roman studies. Its classical reflections are almost all devoted to Rome rather than Greece, and many of the authors cited or discussed tally with those named in the memoirs, as being part of his course of reading from 1768 onwards—Lardner, Muratori, Tillemont, Mosheim, Eusebius, Pagi.<sup>89</sup> Certainly it is the record of a man at the very beginning of an intellectual enquiry—no more than a chart of books read, a commonplace book unified only by its area of study, which accords with Gibbon's statement that he plunged into his researches 'insensibly' (*Mem. C*, 284). As yet it remained subordinate to the finished works produced at the same time and, if this argument be accepted, we see just what the origins of the *Decline and Fall* were—humble, unconscious and without apparent direction.

The next link in the evolutionary chain is provided by the two 'Roman' texts which may be dated to 1769—the *Digression on the Character of Brutus* and *Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid*.<sup>90</sup> Of course, the second of these is well-known; published in February 1770, it was written in 1769.<sup>91</sup> The dating of the *Digression* is more problematical. A series of factors point to the later 1760s, but without precision. An aside to the three Peasants of Switzerland and a comically learned reference to various Swiss chronicles indicate that it was probably written in the wake of the Swiss History; <sup>92</sup> again its very clear derivation from numbers XIV–XVI of the *Hints* of 1765–7 <sup>93</sup> points to a similar period; lastly, if we accept that manuscripts can be dated on the basis of language, the *Digression*, written in English, must come from 1769 or later. I assign it to 1769 because it is similar to the *Critical Observations* on Virgil in both its subject, the very last period of the Republic, and its origin, which was quite independent of any plan for a Roman history, and thus one might give it the same date. This makes sense within the scheme of Gibbon's development sketched here, but it is as well to be aware that this date is speculative.<sup>94</sup>

What may be said with some confidence is that, after the unconscious beginnings represented by the *Index Expurgatorius*, the second phase of Gibbon's preparation for an historical composition was the refurbishing or writing up of themes in Roman history which he had worked out previously. This singular procedure, repeated in two distinct cases, bears an affinity to the several pieces written in 1768, all of which had connections with interests developed before Gibbon set out on tour; but the more directly repetitive element involved in the 'Roman' texts of 1769, as well as the publication of the *Critical Observations*, may suggest a testing of the waters preparatory to the plunge.

If the essay on Brutus derives ultimately from 1765–7, the *Critical Observations* go back much further, to a journal entry of August 1761, when Gibbon noted that he had 'perused the VIth Book of Virgil, and the system of Warburton upon it in the first volume of his Divine Legation and found many things to say, to explain the one and destroy the other.'<sup>95</sup> Commentators have persistently depreciated the worth of the *Critical Observations*, and it may be that the underlying cause of such depreciation is that no direct connection with the *Decline and Fall* can be perceived.<sup>96</sup> But not only does this overlook the fact that the true significance of the *Critical Observations* lies precisely in its independent origin; it ignores, too, the considerable indirect light this text and the *Digression* cast on

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, 56, 560–1.

<sup>88</sup> No. 39 in the *Index* also coincides in its use of the *Mémoires* of Olivier de la Marche with the *Relation des Noces*, dated to 1768 above (p. 13); cf. *English Essays*, 123.

<sup>89</sup> cf. *Mem. C, D*, 284–5, 411–2. The specifically Greek entries are nos. 28, 30–2.

<sup>90</sup> *English Essays*, 96–106; 131–62.

<sup>91</sup> *loc. cit.*, (n. 75).

<sup>92</sup> *English Essays*, 96, 104 n. 4.

<sup>93</sup> cf. *ibid.*, 93–4.

<sup>94</sup> There are two manuscripts of the *Digression*, Add.

MSS 34,880 fols. 264–72b; 34,881 fols. 242–8b, neither of which help us since both are written by copyists, though the first has marginal corrections by Gibbon. Craddock, *Young Edward Gibbon*, 355 n. 38 speculates that the second copy might have been made for the proposed seventh volume of *Decline and Fall*; this would be quite consistent with the account of vol. 7 offered below, p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> *Journal A* 13 August 1761.

<sup>96</sup> J. Cotter Morison, *Gibbon* (1878), 63–5; G. M. Young, *Gibbon* (1932), 65; Craddock, *Young Edward Gibbon*, 276, etc.

the History. For example, both texts show what a strong interest Gibbon had in the period of transition from the Republic to the Empire, and so make short work of the criticism that he neglected or 'forgot' to consider the importance of this period when deciding to start with Trajan and the Antonines.<sup>97</sup> Again, the *Critical Observations* testify to Gibbon's continuing absorption in the study of ancient religion and its connection with politics, a theme foreshadowed in the *Essai*<sup>98</sup> and which is, of course, a hallmark of the *Decline and Fall*.

The third and penultimate stage in Gibbon's hesitant shuffle towards Roman history came, I think, in 1771-2, when he made a reconnaissance in force through the history of the City of Rome. Yet at this most interesting moment, indeed for the three years 1770-2, there is a striking gap in the evidence and no manuscripts have come down to us. Underlying this gap there is an important but unspoken principle of more general application: that in no case has a manuscript draft of a work completed and published by Gibbon survived. The single exception to this is the *Essai*, which escaped because it was part of a much larger manuscript book, interleaved with many other items.<sup>99</sup> The converse of this principle is that there is almost no unpublished work mentioned by Gibbon in his journal or memoirs which has not survived<sup>100</sup> (a strong argument, incidentally, for supposing that such texts as the *Outlines of the History of the World* were independent works, whatever indirect relation they may have had to the *Decline and Fall*). The truth of these general rules governing the survival of manuscripts is confirmed not only by what still exists, but also by what we know to have been destroyed. Gibbon was an incessant reviser of his work and we know, among many examples, of the re-writing of cc. 1-2 and 15-16 of *Decline and Fall* several times over<sup>101</sup>—manuscripts which would be of the utmost interest as illustrating the historian in his workshop—but none of these has survived. The gap in the evidence for 1770-2 is a further case in point, since, as Gibbon says, he investigated 'the original records' before 476 'with my pen almost always in my hand' (*Mem. C*, 284), which must imply some written production now lost.

The reason for this policy of calculated destruction of papers seems clear enough—Gibbon was not anxious to reveal the 'secret history' of his masterpiece. Pride caused at once the preservation of unpublished texts and the ban on peering beneath the polished surface of the History, except on Gibbon's own terms, via the account he would give in the memoirs.<sup>102</sup> In this way the unconscious, unplanned evolution which we can discern at almost every stage would be decently veiled.

But though the manuscripts relating to Gibbon's Roman studies of 1771-2 no longer exist, some attempt can be made to reconstruct their outlines. Three principal suggestions may be made. First, that serious work on Rome did not begin until 1771. As we have seen, the major production of 1769 was *Critical Observations* on Virgil, a quite independent work; in 1770 the main writing season was totally disrupted by the death of Edward Gibbon Senior. As Gibbon reported to Deyverdun, his father's final illness had set in 'Au commencement de l'été . . . Dans toute sa maladie, je ne me suis jamais absente de Beriton un seul jour, à peine ai je quitté sa Chambre un seul instant: tout, jusqu'à mes lectures, a été interrompu . . .' <sup>103</sup> His reading was interrupted, and of writing there is no mention. That 1771 was the real starting date derives some further, slight confirmation from the reference

<sup>97</sup> cf. J. M. Robertson, *Gibbon* (1925), 99; G. W. Bowersock, 'Gibbon on Civil War and Rebellion in the Decline of the Roman Empire' in *Daedalus* (Summer 1976), 63-71, here 63, 69-70.

<sup>98</sup> cc. LXII-LXIV esp.

<sup>99</sup> It constituted nos. 13 and 18 of a *Cahier des dissertations*, Add. MSS 34,880 fols. 130-41, 150-9.

<sup>100</sup> There are two exceptions to this: (i) *juvenilia* of which Gibbon was ashamed, and which were superseded by later work, such as the 'critical enquiry into the age of Sesostris, and the parallel lives of the Emperor Aurelian and Selim the Turkish Sultan' (*Mem. B*, 122). The former was overtaken by *Les principales Époques de l'Histoire de la Grèce et de l'Égypte* and *Remarques Critiques sur le nouveau Système de Chronologie du Chevalier Newton* in *MW* III. 150-69, both of January 1758. (ii) One mature

work, 'An ample dissertation on the miraculous darkness of the passion' (*Mem. C*, 285), which is subsumed in *DF* II. 74-5.

<sup>101</sup> On cc. 1-2 *Letters* no. 316 may be preferred to *Mem. E*, 308; on cc. 15-16, *Mem. E* loc. cit., 315-6.

<sup>102</sup> We should remember that this account was never written. *Memoir E*, the only draft for the period after 1772, is the merest précis; *Memoir C*, which stops in effect in 1770, is fuller for our period, the Dark Ages, but it is only a first attempt. Had the spaciousness of the final *Memoir F* been sustained, the autobiography would have run to double the length of Sheffield's edition, the extra weight coming almost wholly in the last 20-25 years of Gibbon's life; cf. *Edward Gibbon, Memoirs of My Life* ed. Bonnard, xxiv-xxvii.

<sup>103</sup> *Letters* no. 125; cf. *Mem. C*, 286.

to the draft of the History which was 'As early as 1771' (*DF* III. 283 n. 88), which tends to imply that Gibbon thought 1771 very early indeed when writing *c.* 1780.

Secondly, that there was no continuous prose draft of an historical work. The account already quoted<sup>104</sup> clearly implies this, and the description in a later draft of the memoirs is, if anything, yet more precise. After describing his course of reading once more, Gibbon concludes by noting that 'These various studies were productive of many remarks and memorials,' and gives as an instance 'a Critical dissertation on the miraculous darkness of the Passion' (*Mem. D.*, 412). Preparation for a history of Rome produced, therefore, only 'remarks and memorials', a commentary on his reading which might, on occasion, run into connected and even lengthy prose fragments; but the basis of these fragments was that of the isolated scholarly problem, not an attempt at a continuous history. This and no more is the meaning of the phrase 'a rough draught' of the History dating from 1771 (*DF* III. 283 n. 88), even though, by their purposive nature, such studies represent a great advance on the undirected reading digested in the *Index Expurgatorius*.

Still, this body of preparatory work was substantial and Gibbon was not disposed to waste it. Only thus can we account for the remarkable fact that in 1776, before he knew what amount he would write or what span of time he would cover, he was already foreshadowing a supplementary volume to the History! The description of Gibbon's preparatory studies in the memoirs corresponds closely with that in the 'Advertisement to the Notes' of the first volume of *Decline and Fall*:

Should I ever complete the extensive design which has been sketched out in the preface, I might perhaps conclude it with a critical account of the authors consulted during the progress of the whole work; and, however such an attempt might incur the censure of ostentation, I am persuaded that it would be susceptible of entertainment as well as information. (*DF* I. xliii)

In 1790, after the completion of his extensive design, Gibbon showed that he had not forgotten this idea, by writing to Cadell giving a description of the proposed contents for a seventh volume which points even more clearly to their origins as preparatory materials, although by now no longer confined to the fruits of 1771-5:

1. a series of fragments, disquisitions, digressions &c more or less connected with the principal subject.
2. Several tables of geography, chronology, coins, weights and measures, &c; nor should I despair of obtaining from a gentleman at Paris some accurate and well-adapted maps.
3. A critical review of all the authors whom I have used and quoted.<sup>105</sup>

The relation of 1. to the main text is explicit; item 3 is a direct repetition of the proposal of 1776; and item 2 would have given Gibbon the chance to revisit the happy hunting-grounds of erudition and to refurbish the texts of his youth in the light of a wealth of subsequent knowledge.<sup>106</sup> Only d'Anville's maps would have been entirely new.<sup>107</sup>

A third salient feature of Gibbon's preparatory work was that it was confined principally to the history of Rome rather than that of the Empire. Gibbon tells us repeatedly that such was the original nature of his plan;<sup>108</sup> the point at issue is when and how he made the transition to the broader theme. The medieval component of the study plan described in the memoirs for the years up to 1772 is, I think, conclusive evidence that this transition did not take place until very late, that is, in 1772. Only if Gibbon had been intending to write a history of the city would he have been led through medieval Italy to 'the ruins of Rome in the fourteenth Century' (*Mem. C.*, 284). Had he been working on the Empire this must have involved him in Byzantine history, if only of the sixth and early seventh centuries, when the Eastern Empire still sustained some of the full Mediterranean pretensions of the Empire before 476. For this period at least, Byzantium *was* a conventionally

<sup>104</sup> Above p. 2; cf. p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> *Letters* no. 768; the reasons why the supplementary volume was never produced are already set out in the Preface to the Fourth Volume of 1 May 1788, *DF* I. xlv-xlvi.

<sup>106</sup> e.g. the *Principes des Poids, des Monnoies, et des Mesures des Anciens* of 1759, and the section

'L'Antiquité' from the *Recueil sur les Poids . . .* of 1768, Add. MSS 34,881 fols. 27b-35.

<sup>107</sup> The identification rests on Gibbon's well-known admiration for d'Anville, e.g. *DF* II. 436 n. 35, and on his previous attempt to secure maps from him for the *Decline and Fall*, cf. *Letters* no. 387.

<sup>108</sup> loc. cit. (n. 11).



acceptable topic—as Gibbon himself acknowledged by the composition of his fourth volume<sup>109</sup>—but of such an approach there is no sign in the memoirs. We should note, too, that the one substantive point on which Gibbon refers us to his preparatory studies—the fate of Radagaisus' army in 406—is directly linked to the history of Rome, since it marks the conclusion of a barbarian invasion of Italy which had Rome as its goal; thus of Radagaisus 'it was universally believed that he had bound himself by a solemn vow to reduce the city into a heap of stones and ashes' (*DF* III. 279, cf. 283 n. 88).

It must be conceded, of course, that before 476 the history of Rome and the history of the Empire are much harder to disentangle. Gibbon's reading must have brought this to his notice—the conflation of themes is strikingly exemplified in Ammianus Marcellinus, for instance—and it was the difficulty of separating them out that was, I suggest, the principal factor which ultimately led him into writing about the Empire rather than the City. But originally, at least, he had felt able to distinguish between the two. This distinction was to be found in the progressive alienation of the provinces from Rome during the life of the Empire:

Du tems de Virgile [l'image de Rome personnalisée] auroit été juste. Rome regardée comme une Deesse qu'on invoquoit dans ses temples existoit pour les peuples aussi bien que pour les poètes. Mere des Citoyens, maitresse des provinces elle representoit cet empire qui lui obeissoit. Mais lorsque l'Empire n'étoit plus qu'un assemblage de pays soumis au même prince, Rome lui étoit devenue étrangère; et cette ville réduite à son idée Physique ne representoit plus rien que des murs, des temples et des maisons bâties sur sept montagnes et situées sur les bords du Tybre.<sup>110</sup>

This was in no way a new argument. It was the necessary derivative of the traditional argument that Rome had collapsed because of the greatness of its territorial extent—so leading to the alienation of the provinces and the ultimate collapse of a disunited Empire—an argument in continuous employment since the Renaissance and finding its most recent representative in Montesquieu, whom Gibbon quoted to this effect in the *Essai* and again in the *General Observations* on the fall of the Western Empire of 1772.<sup>111</sup> Thus within the traditional historiographical framework he could find a justification for limiting his history to that of the City, so evading the seemingly limitless burden of the Empire.

The idea that the preparatory studies of 1771–2 did not entail a prose draft, and that they focused on the history of Rome only, is strongly supported by Gibbon's emphasis on his lack of clarity in 1773 when starting to compose the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*: 'At the outset all was dark and doubtful—even the title of the work, the true aera

<sup>109</sup> A treatment of the Empire which carried through to sixth- and early seventh-century Byzantium had been conventional since the Renaissance, cf. Sigonius, *Historiarum de Occidentali Imperio* 284–565 (1577). A corollary of this was considerable flexibility (or uncertainty) as to when the Western Empire did collapse. Robertson in his *History of Charles V* (1769) defined the subversion of the Empire as covering the whole period 395–571 (I. 10 n. c.). Montesquieu in *Considerations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Décadence* (1734) was equally imprecise: in c. 19 on the fall of the Western Empire he ranges from Valentinian to Zeno, and though nominally he goes up to 1453, the death of Heraclius in 642 is reached in c. 22 out of 23, which indicates the balance of his account. A cultured member of Gibbon's literary audience, Lord Hardwicke, also considered that sixth-century Byzantine history was germane, though the rest was 'not very interesting and often disgusting', cf. *MW* II. 254–5, no. CLII. It appears, then, that an insistence on the importance of the late fifth century and the year 476 was something of an innovation by Gibbon, the product of his love of precise chronology and of his original preoccupation with Rome and the West. The full impact of this innovation was not felt until the Preface of 1776, adhered to in the terminus of volume 3 of *Decline and Fall*. These

quite ignore 565 or 642 as markers and focus on the two dates 476 and 800. Previously, in the *General Observations* on the fall of the Western Empire, Gibbon had still been glancing forward (*DF* IV. 174), as was conventional, to the reconquest of Italy from the East, and this was the position he was driven back to in writing volume 4 (cf. p. 21 below). Nevertheless, due to the way the *Decline and Fall* was published, and the division marked by the insertion of the *General Observations*—which, of course, reflected Gibbon's intentions at that time (1781)—we still tend to regard the History as divided into two three-volume units (e.g. M. Baridon, *Gibbon et le Mythe de Rome*, 750); whereas, insofar as a binary division is possible, the divide must come at the end of volume 4 (cf. below p. 21). Gibbon's wavering between 476 and 642 as marker dates constitutes another striking example of his failure to control the large-scale structure of his work in advance.

<sup>110</sup> *Journal B* 19 December 1763.

<sup>111</sup> *Essai* c. LXXXI; *DF* IV. 173–4; cf. Montesquieu, *Considerations* . . . , c. 9. That this argument was an eighteenth-century commonplace can be seen from Vertot, *Histoire des Révolutions arrivées dans le Gouvernement de la République Romaine* (1720 ed.), Discours Préliminaire, which also locates some of its classical origins.

of the decline and fall of the Empire, the limits of the Introduction, the division of the chapters, and the order of the narrative' (*Mem. E.*, 308). The great difficulty experienced in composing the opening chapters<sup>112</sup> points the same moral: Gibbon could hardly have experienced these doubts and difficulties if he had been working on the history of the Empire since 1769, still less if he had already mapped out a prose draft. In this connection we should also consider the *General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West*.

This most important essay can be securely dated to 1772. It is one of the curiosities of scholarship that the information necessary to its dating has been in print since 1896, but though occasionally an alert eye has spotted this, the vast majority still continues to ignore it.<sup>113</sup> In his memoirs Gibbon states that the *General Observations* were written before Louis XVI's accession to the throne, that is, in May 1774 (*Mem. E.*, 324 n. 48). In fact we may suppose that they were written before the main text was commenced in February 1773, since they represent a canvassing of general ideas as to the nature of the Decline and Fall inferior in substance to the text, and it is improbable that Gibbon would have gone back to write these in the middle of his first volume. In addition, a gratuitous aside in the *Observations* to the Book of Daniel and Jerome's comments on a prophecy therein (*DF* IV. 173 n. 5) gives a *terminus a quo*, since these were subjects raised by the publication of Hurd's *Introduction to the Study of the Prophecies* in March 1772. This prompted Gibbon's reply to the Bishop 'some months' later,<sup>114</sup> to which Hurd replied in his turn on 29 August 1772. We also know the date of Gibbon's departure from Buriton to London for the winter,<sup>115</sup> and thus the *General Observations* may be dated with some confidence to the months August–November 1772.

The great significance of this essay—which only survived because Gibbon cheekily and culpably inserted it as spice at the end of his third volume (*DF* IV. 172–81)—is that it is the first time we see the Imperial theme clearly stated, in its title. An examination of the text reveals that it marks the transition from the history of Rome to that of the Empire.

In the first four paragraphs of the *General Observations* Gibbon outlines the entire career of Roman power. The first traces the early rise of the city, and the reasons why it subjugated first Italy and then a large part of Europe. The opening sentence of the next paragraph summarizes this, and at the same time highlights the ambivalence of Gibbon's personal position, poised between the history of the city and of the empire: 'The rise of a city, which swelled into an empire, may deserve, as a singular prodigy, the reflection of a philosophic mind.' The second paragraph, then, is about the empire, the debilitating effect of, and its collapse under, the weight of its conquests. As we have seen, this was a conventional argument and Gibbon was content merely to repeat it, without even the subtle twist he had himself put on it eleven years previously in the *Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature*.<sup>116</sup> Not surprisingly, it is this paragraph which has drawn most hostile comment from scholars,<sup>117</sup> because, as Gibbon's first attempt to integrate the Imperial theme with his previous studies on the city, it is the work of a beginner. Had he really been at work on the history of the empire for four, or even two years, the shafts aimed at this passage would be more justifiable. In the third paragraph Gibbon is again acutely poised between the themes of the city and the empire, when he considers the contribution to the collapse of the Western Empire made by the translation of the capital to Constantinople. To devote a whole paragraph out of three (nos. 2–4) on the causes of Imperial decline to the significance of the site of the capital, shows how largely Rome still bulked in his mind. In the *Decline*

<sup>112</sup> loc. cit. (n. 101).

<sup>113</sup> G. M. Young was the first to notice and the only one to use this information, *Gibbon* (1932), 93; he has been followed by J. W. Swain, *Edward Gibbon the Historian* (1966), 124, and Prof. Craddock, who, however, takes *before* May 1774 to mean *in* 1774, *Young Edward Gibbon*, 238. Not a single author in either of the bicentennial essay collections—*Daedalus* (Summer 1976), 'Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire'; *Gibbon et Rome à la Lumière de l'Historiographie Moderne*, Université de Lausanne, Faculté des Lettres XXII, 1977—displays awareness of the correct date of the

*General Observations*, and most assume, tacitly or explicitly, that they were written in 1781 at the end of volume 3 of the History e.g. *Daedalus* loc. cit., 46, 67, 81–2, 149–50, 165–6, 182–4, 239, etc.

<sup>114</sup> *Letters* no. 196; for Hurd's reply, *MW* II. 83, no. XXXI.

<sup>115</sup> He went up to town between 15 and 19 November: *Letters* nos. 205–6.

<sup>116</sup> c. LXXXI.

<sup>117</sup> e.g. C. Dawson, 'Edward Gibbon', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 1934, 159–80, here 176; D. P. Jordan, *Gibbon and His Roman Empire*, 70 f.; *Daedalus* (Summer 1976), 81, 149–50.

and *Fall* itself, though this factor is mentioned (*DF* I. 407 f.), it becomes but one nail in a well-secured coffin.

The fourth paragraph considers the role of Christianity in the fall of the Western Empire. I conceive that, originally, it was Gibbon's inveterate *enthusiasm* for matters ecclesiastical which involved his preparatory studies of 1771–2 in the early history of the Church (*Mem. C, D*, 285, 411–2), though he may have perceived an ultimate link between the histories of Christianity and of *urbs Roma* in the establishment of the Papacy. However this may be, the bald fact was that for the principal period under consideration, before 476, the city of Rome had no central position in Christian history.<sup>118</sup> There was no real link between Gibbon's ecclesiastical and his secular studies, which may account for their being listed discretely in the memoirs and allotted the epithet 'various' (*Mem. D*, 412). Thus even as late as 1771–2 there was a fundamental incoherence in Gibbon's plan of study, determined more by the inertia of his previous interests than by a rational approach towards a clearly perceived end.

The switch to Imperial history resolved his difficulty. The history of religion was much more easily handled from an imperial perspective—indeed Gibbon later got into trouble for relying too heavily on the congruency of the Empire with the spread of Christianity.<sup>119</sup> The *General Observations* represent a first attempt at integrating ecclesiastical and Imperial history and, parallel to his attempt with secular history in the second paragraph, Gibbon's account relies on a long-standing, conventional argument—that Christianity undermined the Empire by undermining its virtue—an argument which can be taken back at least to the Renaissance<sup>120</sup> or even, *mutatis mutandis*, to Augustine. But the difference between the paragraph on religion and that on the secular causes of imperial decay is that the former represents a very good summary of what later appeared in the final text, whereas the latter does not. This reflects both on Gibbon's immense prior knowledge of ecclesiastical history,<sup>121</sup> and on his acceptance of the traditional terms of debate—either Christianity did or did not undermine Roman moral fibre; it was simply a question of balancing or choosing between these two. Neither in the *General Observations* nor in the *History* was Gibbon original in his overall treatment of Christianity; the effect of the latter was achieved solely by tone of voice and mastery over detail.

The *General Observations*, then, represent a crucial turning point. The Imperial theme is firmly stated for the first time, and the first, halting effort is made at the large-scale integration of hitherto disjoint bodies of material. This essay did not determine where the *History* should begin—'the true aera of the decline and fall of the Empire'—since it ranged back to Polybius and the Punic wars; nor, therefore, could it settle the title of the work, the limits of the Introduction, *et cetera* (*Mem. E*, 308). Nevertheless, after the *General Observations*, the drafting and redrafting of the opening chapters of the *Decline and Fall* become comprehensible as the next step in a progression, which would not have been the case at any time previously. Gibbon's Dark Ages are at an end, and his evolution is, relatively speaking, come out into the light.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Two brief conclusions may be noted. First, that though Gibbon's relative stagnation in the years 1765–72 is usually explained<sup>122</sup> primarily on personal grounds—the illness and death of his father and the accelerating decline of the family fortunes—intellectual factors provide a far more complete explanation. Gibbon can be shown to be cautious and hesitant in his progress towards Roman history, and this reflects not only a pardonable

<sup>118</sup> This point is not reached until c. 45 of the *Decline and Fall* (v. 34 f.).

<sup>119</sup> cf. *DF* II. 67–9 and *A Vindication of Some Passages in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Chapters of the History of the Decline and Fall* . . . printed in *English Essays*, 229–313, here 268–70.

<sup>120</sup> e.g. Macchiavelli, *Discorsi* II. 2. Gibbon's involvement with Macchiavelli, though unsung, was extensive, cf. *Journal A* 'Ab. Nov 20th.' 1759; *Mem. B, C*, 121, 267, in addition to his interest in

writing a Florentine history.

<sup>121</sup> Especially since 1759–61, *Mem. B, C*, 191, 249, 257.

<sup>122</sup> D. P. Jordan, *Gibbon and His Roman Empire*, e.g. 14–15 and Craddock, *Young Edward Gibbon*, e.g. ix, 230, 257, 284 are two recent and extreme examples of this tendency. Though not so vulgarly put, the underlying premisses of these books are at but one remove from those of 'psychobiography'.

lack of omniscience on his part, but also the two crushing set-backs he suffered in the mid-1760s: the Grand Tour entirely failed to provide him with intellectual direction after having promised so well at Lausanne during the drafting of the *Receuil Geographique*; then came the exhaustion of what was apparently his sole remaining intellectual capital, with the abandonment of the Swiss History. The memoirs rarely, if ever, lie, but Gibbon's assertion that 'As soon as I was released from the fruitless task of the Swiss revolutions, I more seriously undertook (1768) to methodize the form, and collect the substance of my Roman decay' (*Mem. C*, 284) is one of the outstanding cases of humane suppression and mendacious inference throughout the six drafts. In fact he was so badly scarred by the experience that it was five years before he dared embark again on first-class historical composition.

Secondly, the step-by-step approach typical of Gibbon's Dark Ages was carried over into the years after 1772, and was to have fundamental consequences for the structure of the *Decline and Fall* itself. If we are to seek a metaphor for the architecture of that book, it is not to be found in what is classical and unitary, but, paradoxically, in the gothic and cumulative.<sup>123</sup> But if that architecture is sublime only in its parts rather than in its entirety, it is the price paid for the highest historical virtues—flexible sympathies, open-mindedness and, above all, passion for truth. It is 'a strict and inviolable adherence to truth' by an author who regarded this not only as 'the first virtue of more serious history', but also 'as the foundation of every thing that is virtuous or honourable in human nature',<sup>124</sup> which underlies the diverse structure of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This, together with its literary style, its remarkable contribution to historical method and its intensely compelling original subject, renders it secure in its present elevation as the first classic of English-language historiography.

*St. Anne's College, Oxford*

#### APPENDIX I. THE DATE OF THE *OUTLINES OF THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD*

The textual history of Gibbon's Dark Ages would be incomplete without some explanation of the date and function of the manuscript headed *Outlines of the History of the World*.<sup>125</sup> Of all Gibbon's surviving manuscripts this is the most problematical. It is undated and without source references. In content the manuscript follows its title exactly: it is an extremely concise survey, which sometimes descends to the level of a mere catalogue, of salient events in the years 800–1500. This is pursued century by century; within that division the treatment is sometimes country by country, sometimes thematic, or else a mixture of the two.<sup>126</sup> The principal focus is on the great powers of Western Europe, but the Arabs, the Turks and the Tartars all receive coverage, likewise the voyages of discovery to Africa and America in the fifteenth century, so justifying the title 'world history'. Subject matter, then, is of little help in tracing the identity of the text: it is apparently total in scope but yet there is no unifying argument. The few interpretative fingerprints that have crept in tell us that it is indeed by Gibbon, but not when he wrote it.<sup>127</sup>

There is just one internal reference in the text of any assistance, the relatively lengthy and detailed treatment of Swiss history, which also contains the only mention of 'authentic documents'<sup>128</sup> throughout: from this we may reasonably assume a date in or after 1765–7. There remains the evidence of the handwriting. Of course, this is unsatisfactory by its very nature, but not so unsatisfactory as may be supposed, given the known and very marked change in Gibbon's hand over the years c. 1760–80. With its help we can certainly accept Craddock's rejection of Lord Sheffield's attribution to 1758–63.<sup>129</sup> In fact the hand is Gibbon's finest, that is, least crabbed, and therefore his latest. It is only less fine than that for the drafts of the memoirs (1789–92) in that it is much larger; the conscious effort in the latter to produce an elegant finish is lacking, which coincides with what we know of the content of the work and its lack of source references, and suggests that the

<sup>123</sup> For some evidence of this, above p. 3, below p. 22. I find myself anticipated in this conclusion by Dean Milman, 'Guizot's edition of Gibbon', *Quarterly Review* 50 (January 1834), 273–307, here 288—which authority I prefer to M. Baridon, *Gibbon et le Mythe de Rome*, 749 f.

<sup>124</sup> cf. *A Vindication*, *English Essays*, 234; *Mem. A*, 353.

<sup>125</sup> *English Essays*, 163–98.

<sup>126</sup> Most frequently territorial headings are supplemented by paragraphs on learning, commerce, the feudal system, etc.

<sup>127</sup> Craddock, *English Essays*, 564–6 seeks to trace these.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*, 195.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, 57; cf. *MW*, Contents for volume III.

*Outlines* were for study purposes rather than an end in themselves.<sup>130</sup> The hand may also be compared with that in Gibbon's surviving letters,<sup>131</sup> and we may reasonably conclude that the text is much more likely to date from after 1780 than before.

Given this evidence, two possibilities still remain open. One is that the *Outlines* bear no relation to the *Decline and Fall* whatever. Were they a sketch for one of those 'visionary designs' that sometimes floated in Gibbon's mind towards the end of his life? <sup>132</sup> But this is unlikely, in that there is no corroborative evidence; and also, to pursue any design based on the *Outlines* would be to repeat large tracts of volumes 5 and 6 of *Decline and Fall*. Perhaps, then, the text represents a handy précis for the use of an adolescent protégé, such as Maria Holroyd? But to explain Sheffield's ignorance, it must be supposed that for some unexplained reason the document was never given to her.

If we except some such contorted hypothesis, the second possibility, that the *Outlines* were connected in some way with the History, is much the more likely. The great paradox and central difficulty of this text is that, on the one hand, it covers so much of the same ground as volumes 5 and 6 of the *Decline and Fall*—which, it is fair to add, is the very considerable truth underlying the interpretation of Professor Giarizzo<sup>133</sup>—yet on the other hand, it also includes a great deal of material which lies outside the History. Given the first point, the conclusion that the two were in some way connected is almost impossible to resist; but from the latter it is as clear that the *Outlines* were not a draft for the History. Among many details, we should note that the *Outlines* become fuller as they progress through the centuries, and concentrate more and more on the later medieval French and English monarchies—leading features entirely opposed to the design of the last volumes of the *Decline and Fall*.

I suggest that this paradox is susceptible of resolution, but it requires, first, some consideration of the nature and scope of the *Decline and Fall*. Before 476 the history of the Roman Empire was without question the best focus for a European history—on its own account and through its dealings with its neighbours—and in Gibbon's hands its scope could be widened yet further, as, for example, in c. 26, to the utmost bounds of the known world. Gibbon knew, of course, that he was not writing a world history, but given the nature of the evidence then available, he could forgive the ancients who 'gradually usurped the licence of confounding the Roman monarchy with the globe of the earth' (*DF* 1. 29), a licence he usurped in turn: 'the empire of the Romans filled the world, and when that empire fell into the hands of a single person, the world became a safe and dreary prison for his enemies' (*DF* 1. 89–90).

From the first, then, Gibbon was writing something more than European history, even if it was not a comprehensive world history; one which might be defined as a philosophical account of selected themes in world history. In the Preface of 1776 he makes it clear that, were he to continue after 476, his scope would remain as extensive as before, hence the inclusion of the religion of Mahomet, Charlemagne and the Crusades in his design, and hence the somewhat bombastic claim with which the Preface closes: 'The execution of the extensive plan which I have described would connect the ancient and modern history of the World'.<sup>134</sup> But after 476 the use of the Empire as a centre for an history so broadly conceived became a solution of declining efficiency. Faced by this problem in 1782, Gibbon nevertheless persisted in the same approach for Volume 4, up to the death of Heraclius in 642. Given the importance of the wars between Byzantium and Persia in the East, Justinian's conquests in the West, and the maintenance of the religious unity of Eastern and Western Christendom, this was not unsatisfactory. But from the seventh century on, such an approach became impossible: the connections between Byzantium and the West snapped and for Gibbon, like his contemporaries, Byzantine history over the next four to five hundred years lost its interest.<sup>135</sup>

So when, in 1784, at the end of the composition of volume 4, Gibbon again confronted the problem of how to continue his philosophical world history—its themes selected so as to connect the ancient and modern histories of the world—he lacked a central or dominant political entity around which his great canvas might be organized. This was the problem which, as he notes, cost him so 'many designs and many tryals' (*Mem. E*, 332), and resulted in an entirely different organization of volumes 5 and 6. It was a solution of which Gibbon was justly proud:

... I should have abandoned, without regret, the Greek slaves and their servile historians, had I not reflected that the fate of the Byzantine monarchy is *passively* connected with the most splendid and important revolutions which have changed the state of the world. The space of

<sup>130</sup> Add. MSS 34,880 fols. 239–59b.

<sup>131</sup> cf. Add. MSS 34,886; also *Letters* II plate iv, III plate iv, D. M. Low, *Edward Gibbon* plate (a) opp. 258.

<sup>132</sup> *Letters* no. 677.

<sup>133</sup> Above, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> *DF* 1. xl–xli. It is curious that G. M. Young forgot this sentence when attempting to trace the

origin of the image it contains, *Gibbon*, 134. On Gibbon and world history cf. also A. Momigliano, 'Eighteenth Century Prelude to Mr. Gibbon' in *Gibbon et Rome* (1977), 57–70, here 69–70.

<sup>135</sup> For Gibbon's prejudicial distaste for Byzantine history of this period see *Letters* no. 518; Preface 1 March 1782, *DF* 1. xli.

the lost provinces was immediately replenished with new colonies and rising kingdoms; the active virtues of peace and war deserted from the vanquished to the victorious nations; and it is in their origin and conquests, in their religion and government, that we must explore the causes and effects of the decline and fall of the Eastern empire. Nor will this scope of narrative, the riches and variety of these materials, be incompatible with the unity of design and composition. As, in his daily prayers, the Musulman of Fez or Delhi still turns his face towards the temple of Mecca, the historian's eye shall always be fixed on the city of Constantinople. The excursive line may embrace the wilds of Arabia and Tartary, but the circle will ultimately be reduced to the decreasing limit of the Roman monarchy. (*DF* v. 182-3)

Whereas in volumes 1-3 Roman history provided a real centre for the work, in volumes 5-6 the history of Byzantium was of relatively little interest in itself, but it was retained as the artificial or *passive* centre for the organization of material. It provided a criterion whereby some ten other adjacent themes of importance might be selected (*DF* v. 183-5), so establishing the connection between the ancient and the modern worlds. It is a device which compels admiration as an attempt to order a vast time-span, but yet it draws astonishment as an essentially unreal mode of organization<sup>136</sup>—one which, unsurprisingly, has never been followed since.

The understanding that the *Decline and Fall* was in some sense a world history, and that in its later stages Gibbon experienced considerable difficulty in executing this design, is of great assistance in interpreting the function served by the *Outlines of the History of the World*. Both in 1781-2 and in 1783-4 there occurred a major hiatus in Gibbon's composition, in each case of about a year (*Mem. E*, 325, 331). In 1781 no pause need have occurred at all; in 1783-4 time was taken up by the move to Lausanne, but this delay was extended over several months<sup>137</sup> and was itself followed by the 'designs and tryals' we have noted. I suggest that Gibbon's hesitancy at these two points reflects not only on his taste for 'the luxury of freedom' (1781) or 'the joy of . . . arrival' in Lausanne (*Mem. E*, loc. cit.), but also on the very real intellectual obstacles barring his progress;<sup>138</sup> that the *Outlines* date from at or about one of these two times;<sup>139</sup> and that what crossed his mind—however briefly or tentatively—was to conclude the history of the Roman empire at the end of volume 4, where it ceased to provide any real focus of events, and to start an entirely new book c. 800. He would still be writing on the same basis as before—select, philosophical, world history—but it would no longer be organized with reference to the Eastern Empire, which had ceased to be of interest.

If these conjectures are just, then the *Outlines* represent a preliminary canvassing of material for a new book. In turn their composition may well have helped Gibbon make up his mind to reject any plan for an entirely new work, since it is evident from the text that he discovered no leading idea about which to group his material. The only theme which did emerge—the increasing pre-eminence of Anglo-French history in the later medieval period—was far too partial, chronologically and geographically, to say nothing of Gibbon's previous rejection of English medieval history as a subject in 1761.<sup>140</sup> The *Outlines* proved to be a blind alley and he reverted to the history of the Empire, exploiting the device of Byzantium as a 'passive' centre of events. In this way a formal consistency with the original design mapped out in the Preface of 1776 was preserved, and with it, perhaps, Gibbon's dignity.

The solution advanced is a remarkable one, but it is that which best fits the evidence before us. As we have seen, the handwriting of the manuscript points to a date in the 1780s or later. Secondly, the idea that the *Decline and Fall* be abandoned explains why the *Outlines* do not contain a single paragraph heading for Byzantium, and why they studiously ignore the affairs of that empire except insofar as Crusaders or Turks ravaged it. But despite these fundamental differences from volumes 5 and 6 of the Roman History, the proffered explanation also resolves the paradox as to why the *Outlines* fit into the time scheme of that work. Again, in the light of the argument adduced above<sup>141</sup> on the survival of manuscripts, the survival of this manuscript suggests that it did constitute a new departure, entirely independent of the *Decline and Fall*. Lastly, the view taken of the *Outlines* coincides with the position consistently argued above, that the writing of his History was a voyage

<sup>136</sup> cf. Dawson, 'Edward Gibbon', *Proc. Brit. Acad.* 1934, 168-9.

<sup>137</sup> Gibbon's books arrived in Lausanne on 2(?) February 1784 (*Letters* no. 613), but composition was not resumed until the very end of May (*ibid.*, no. 618); the 'A.D. 1784. July etc.' of *Mem. E*, 331 is not quite accurate.

<sup>138</sup> For example, in the period before he resumed the *Decline and Fall* at Lausanne, Gibbon clearly did spend time at his desk studying (*Letters*, no. 608); it should also be remembered that since the *Outlines* lack source references and are so general in content,

they could have been written not only in the period February-May 1784 but also in the period before then, when Gibbon's books had not yet arrived.

<sup>139</sup> Gibbon had one chapter of volume 4 to write after settling at Lausanne, which was finished when he resumed writing in June 1784, *Mem. E*, 326, cf. J. E. Norton, *A Bibliography of the Works of Edward Gibbon*, 57. If the *Outlines* were written in 1784, they might fall either side of this month.

<sup>140</sup> *Journal A* 4 August 1761.

<sup>141</sup> p. 15.

of discovery for Gibbon, and that, from volume to volume, he was never quite sure how it would turn out.

Of the two dates suggested, 1781–2 or 1784, the latter is perhaps the more likely, in that Gibbon explicitly refers to the ‘many designs and many tryals’ he undertook then (*Mem. E*, 332), and the *Outlines* may be comprehended under this phrase. But he had long been aware that Byzantine history would cease to attract him, and so to provide a real focus for writing, some two centuries after the fall of the Empire in the West; in 1776, too, he had adjudged the year 800—the starting date of the *Outlines*—to be something of a dividing line.<sup>142</sup> The text could then have been written before 1784 and since, by 1784, Gibbon had moved his dividing line back *c.* 150 years as a result of composing volume 4 of the *Decline and Fall*, this might argue for the earlier (1781–2) date of composition. But more than this cannot be said; doubtless conjecture has already been pushed beyond its proper limit, where it ceases to be useful interrogation of evidence, and becomes the mere search for definite solutions.

APPENDIX II. A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF GIBBON'S WRITINGS  
(based on the scheme of dating set out in the text)

1761	<i>Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature</i> published.
Jan. 1763	Gibbon sets out on Grand Tour.
May 1763–Apr. 1764	<i>Recueil Geographique</i> (also known as <i>Nomina Gentesque Italiae Antiquae</i> ) written at Lausanne.
Oct. 1764–Mar. 1765	Gibbon at Rome (includes six weeks in Naples).
Oct.–Dec. 1764	<i>Abstract</i> of Abbé Gravina, <i>Del Governo Civile di Roma</i> <i>Sur les Triomphe des Romains</i>
July 1765	Gibbon returns to England.
1765–7	<i>Introduction à l'Histoire Générale de la République des Suisses</i> <i>Hints</i>
1767–9	<i>Memoires Litteraires de la Grande Bretagne</i> (co-edited with Deyverdun).
1768	<i>Du Gouvernement Féodal</i> (1) <i>Memoire sur la Monarchie des Mèdes</i> (2) <i>Relation des Noces de Charles Duc de Bourgogne</i> (3) <i>Recueil sur les Poids, les Monnoies, et les Mesures</i> (also known as <i>Dissertation sur les Poids, les Monnoies, et les Mesures des Anciens</i> ) <i>Index Expurgatorius</i>
1769	<i>Abstract</i> of Blackstone (4) (Items numbered 1–4 constitute the MS commonplace book started in 1768). <i>Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid</i> (published in 1770). <i>Digression on the Character of Brutus</i>
1770	Death of Gibbon's father.
1772	<i>General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West</i>
Spring 1773	Gibbon begins composition of the <i>Decline and Fall</i> .
1776	Publication of the first volume of the <i>Decline and Fall</i> .
1784	<i>Outlines of the History of the World</i>
July 1787	Gibbon completes composition of the <i>Decline and Fall</i> .

<sup>142</sup> See n. 135; also Preface 1 February 1776, *DF* I. xxxix–xli.