

GIBBON'S FIRST THOUGHTS: ROME, CHRISTIANITY AND THE  
*ESSAI SUR L'ÉTUDE DE LA LITTÉRATURE* 1758–61\*

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While Gibbon's Roman *History* and his *Memoirs* are established as classic works in any canon of English or historical literature, the first of his three books, the youthful *Essai sur l'Étude de la Littérature* (1758–61), remains the victim of comparative neglect. There has been no edition of this work since 1814, but we can ill afford to ignore a text which is at once the first fruit of Gibbon's intellectual 'creation' at Lausanne in the 1750s,<sup>1</sup> and also serves as an indispensable general and methodological introduction to his *History*.<sup>2</sup> One symptom of our casual attitude lies in the fact that, although the *Essai* is the only one of Gibbon's works which can be traced from its manuscript conception through to final publication, no attempt has been made to explore his compositional and intellectual processes by this route. Furthermore, in an age where every scrap of new text by the great historian has become a precious relic worthy of immediate publication,<sup>3</sup> we have overlooked thereby the last really significant cache of his unpublished writing. Given its subject matter, one may say that the omission is not merely significant but spectacular. In a series of cancelled passages from the *Essai*'s first draft of 1758, Gibbon dealt with topics such as the need for philosophic detachment, rather than sentimental alignment, in discussing Roman history; the role of 'general' or profound causes in explaining Rome's rise and fall; and the significance of Pagan corruption for the rise of Christianity. Knowledge of this material supplies us in turn with a quite new set of perspectives on his maturity: it focuses attention on issues central to Gibbon's conception of history but too little appreciated hitherto — notably his rigorous, theoretical interest in stratified models of historical causation; it lends substance and precision to our understanding of his debts to Continental precursors, Montesquieu in particular, while vindicating Gibbon's own originality; and it casts the first secure light on phases in his intellectual formation — such as the nature of his Protestantism between 1754 and 1759 — which, though they might have been guessed at before, have in fact been ignored. While I hope to publish a full edition of the *Essai* in due course, the aim of what follows is threefold: to outline the genesis of the book; to print the most important MS material; and to indicate some of the principal interpretative consequences which follow.<sup>4</sup>

Physically the MS is somewhat daunting in its intricacy, but in fact the narrative of composition, though highly individual, is readily comprehensible. (The *Essai*'s genesis and chapter structure, through three principal phases or states, are outlined in the accompanying table.) Begun at the very end of his first, formative stay at Lausanne ('environ le 20 Mars 1758')<sup>5</sup> in the middle of a large manuscript book, the *Essai* was always intended to be a loose and flexible work. This is clear from its original title — '*Reflexions sur l'Étude des*

\* I am most grateful to Rhiannon Goldthorpe and Margaret Howatson for help with Gibbon's French and Latin, and to Paul Cartledge for his comments. Translations are mine, French spelling and accents Gibbon's.

<sup>1</sup> *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon* (1896, ed. John Murray), Memoir B, 152. Hereafter cited in the text in the form 'Mem. B/152'.

<sup>2</sup> Besides the discussion which follows, see my 'Gibbon Observed', *JRS* 81 (1991), 132–56.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. M. Baridon, 'Une lettre inédite d'Edward Gibbon à Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard', *Études Anglaises* 24 (1971), 79–87; Paul Turnbull, 'Edward Gibbon: a new letter of 1789', *Journal of Religious History* 13 (1984–5), 213–25.

<sup>4</sup> The MS of the *Essai* is in the British Library Add. MS 34,880 ff. 130–41, 150–57, 175–86 (Hereafter 'Add. MS . . .'). The best printed text is that edited by Lord Sheffield, *The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon, Esq.* (1814) (hereafter 'MW'), iv.1–93. The subject has been discussed once before by P. B. Craddock, *Young Edward Gibbon* (1982), 116–20, 126–31, 133, 135–6, 152–3. Her preference for literal chronology — one thing after

another — produces the brief narrative snatches reflected in these page numbers. This method does not allow any coherent interpretative picture to emerge and her account is also bedevilled by a number of niggling errors of fact.

<sup>5</sup> Add. MS 34,880 f. 130. In 'My Journal Part I' Gibbon assigns the date 8 March 1758 to the commencement of the *Essai*, pr. *Gibbon's Journal to January 28th 1763* (ed. D. M. Low, 1929) (hereafter 'Journal A'). The Journal is an important source but it will be trusted implicitly only by those who believe that Gibbon first started constructing autobiography at the end of his life. All the entries up to 10 May 1760 are constructed retrospectively whilst Gibbon was away from home on militia service and without access to any papers — including the MS of the *Essai*: cf. 23 August 1761 (actually written on 10 September) and n. 45 below. The construction of exact but fallible dates is much in evidence in his *History* and it is this chronologist's habit which most probably explains the great conundrum of why he claimed to 'have been in the forum at Rome on 15 October 1764 (rather than at any date between the 10th and 20th).

TABLE I: ILLUSTRATING THE PRINCIPAL PHASES AND CHAPTER STRUCTURE OF GIBBON'S *ESSAI*

	I	II	III
[Sections of the <i>Essai</i> ]	Lausanne MS: Sequence of Chapters (April 1758)	MS Draft for Maty: Gibbon's Chapter Nos† (August 1758)	Published Chapter Sequence (c. May 1761)
[Introduction: Idée de l'histoire littéraire]	a-i	1-9	I-VIII§
I. Le Gout	j-k  l-o	10-11 12-14 ‹I1› 15-18 19-23 ‹I2›	IX-X XI-XIII XIV-XVII XVIII-XXII
II. La Critique	p ‹C1›	20-23† 23 (fin)-24 ‹C2›  25-8	XXIII-XXVI  XXVII-XXXIV ‹I3› XXXV-XXXVIII ‹I4›#
III. Les Sciences Naturelles		29-33	XXXIX-XLIII
IV. L'Esprit Philosophique		34-37 38-39 ‹C3›  40, 44-50† 50 (fin)-56 ‹C4›  57-9	XLIV-XLVII  XLVII(fin) ‹I5, I6› XLVIII-LV  LV (fin)-LXXIX ‹I7›‡ LXXX-LXXXIII
v. La Religion		60-67 ‹C5›	
[Conclusion]		68	LXXXIII(fin)

‹I1-7› = Inserts 1-7

‹C1-5› = Cancels 1-5

† Gibbon first put chapter numbers on the original MS in its August 1758 state, when it was being fair copied. But even he was somewhat bemused by its complexities and so made a mistake, missing out the final three chapters of I2 on Virgil — which were on a separate page out of sequence [f. 156/p. 227]. He noticed the mistake when he had numbered down to c. 40; without bothering to correct the wrong numbers he then simply advanced the numbering, confusingly by *four* when it should have been by *three*; but c. 40 and c. 44 are in fact sequential.

§ c. 7 became n.\* to c. vi in the published version.

# I4 = n.\* to c. xxxviii.

‡ c. LXXIX in the April 1761 MS. on Paganism [f. 184] reproduces matter from c. 54 of C4.

Belles-Lettres<sup>6</sup> — and from its structure whereby, under a series of section headings (Taste, Criticism, Natural Science, Philosophy, Religion, but *not* Politics), Gibbon 'began to select and adorn various proofs and illustrations which had offered themselves in reading the classics'.<sup>7</sup> In this way he would justify their study. Given such a framework — it was one he used repeatedly thereafter in such works as the *Recueil Géographique* (1763-4) and the *Recueil Sur les Poids* (1768) — he could add or subtract material at will under the various headings,

<sup>6</sup> loc. cit., my emphasis; the term is reiterated in c. vii, the Conclusion and the 1759 'Avis au Lecteur', MW iv. 5-6. The last also supplies Gibbon's first use of the term 'essai', but there is no contradiction between the two ideas.

<sup>7</sup> Mem. B/167, cf. 'Avis au Lecteur', loc. cit. Whether the *Essai* had some personal significance additional to its intellectual rationale is unclear. Gibbon wrote an undated 'Epître Dedicatoire' to Suzanne Curchod which is essen-

tially the same in form and content as the dedicatory letter to his father which actually appeared at the head of the *Essai* on publication: compare MW iv. 3-4 and *The Letters of Edward Gibbon* (ed. J. E. Norton, 1956) (hereafter 'Letters'), No. 21. However, the former was a good deal too playful to have survived into print and tells us nothing certain about any initial intention to publish — an intention belied by its origin in the middle of a manuscript book containing much other scholarly but occasional writing.

should he find better 'proofs and illustrations' than those first thought of. Once this is realized, the lack of sequence in the text becomes comprehensible, and the difficulties which remain in reading it may largely be confined to real problems in construing meaning rather than surface wrestlings with an unexpected form.

When Gibbon left Lausanne on about 8–10 April 1758<sup>8</sup> he had finished the Introduction, the first section on 'Taste' and had begun (at least) the second section on 'Criticism', although the romantic notion that he broke off in mid-sentence when leaving is not merely improbable but false.<sup>9</sup> After the delays imposed by the journey to England and initial residence in London, he resumed work at Beriton on 8 July<sup>10</sup> and completed a first draft through to the Conclusion 'in about six weeks'.<sup>11</sup> Here the first insertions and cancellations began. Besides deleting what was probably a fairly small proportion <C1> of his Lausanne remarks on 'Criticism', he inserted two new pages into the first draft of 'Taste' <I1, 2>.<sup>12</sup> One enunciated the increasingly orthodox view that, whatever other advantages Modern civilization might enjoy, the Ancients were at least superior in their poetry; the second greatly enhanced the weight given to Virgil — a process already begun in c. xvii — as the greatest classical poet, and a focus of normative classical taste.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, by a process familiar to Gibbon (and most authors) the work had expanded well beyond its allotted space in his MS book.<sup>14</sup> Another measure of its growing significance was that at the end of August Gibbon paid a French prisoner-of-war to fair copy the *Essai*, having first added chapter numbers to the original.<sup>15</sup> This is the first gap in the surviving MSS but assuming it was, as Gibbon states, only a copy, its disappearance is unimportant. These creeping steps presaged a much more decisive one after the summer recess — a break which operated as much in letters as in law and politics. Looking 'for a critic and a judge' of his work, the twenty-one-year-old Gibbon lighted upon Matthew Maty, and in late October took the fair copy up to him in London.<sup>16</sup> Even without the retrospective telescoping of the *Memoirs* which describe the August draft as a public 'performance' (Mem. B/168), the clear inference to be drawn from this initiative is that Gibbon now envisaged publishing his work. Maty was a French-speaker raised in the Netherlands, who had lately edited the *Journal Britannique* (1750–5), reviewing English literature for Continental readers. Gibbon had read the *Journal* at Lausanne, where he probably welcomed it as a lifeline home,<sup>17</sup> and his good opinion may also be inferred from the fact that in later life it supplied the model for his and Deyverdun's *Memoires Littéraires de la Grande Bretagne* of 1767–8. Gibbon was obviously not aware that periodicals of this sort were decaying just as their basis in Huguenot emigré culture decayed, but he was surely right in judging Maty to be peculiarly well qualified to judge his 'ambition of new and singular fame, an Englishman claiming a place among the writers of France' (Mem. B/175).

However, Maty sat idly on the MS for nearly two months whilst, by an invidious contrast, Gibbon continued to reflect on his work in the country at Beriton. In this period he focused on one, central point in the text, where he upheld the historical detachment of the philosopher

<sup>8</sup> *Letters*, 23, cf. Journal A. 11 April 1758.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Craddock, op. cit. (n. 4), 119–20. Gibbon's text does indeed break off in mid-sentence but only because the page ends: reference to his pagination (rather than B.L. foliation) reveals that he tore out the next page of his book, p. 185, and started anew on a clean sheet, p. 187/f. 135 'Reprises à Beriton . . .'. We cannot know how far he continued, but since the cancelled passage <C1> was not a false start intellectually, being obviously in line with what he wrote later, it seems unlikely that he went on for very long.

<sup>10</sup> Add. MS 34,880 f. 135 contradicts Journal A 11 July 1758; but the latter is followed by Gibbon in Mem. B/168.

<sup>11</sup> By its imprecision Journal A for once speaks the language of truth, loc. cit. Craddock, op. cit. (n. 4), 126, has no warrant for saying that the whole was finished on 10 August; this date applies only to <I2> on Virgil: Add. MS 34,880 f. 156.

<sup>12</sup> The assertion that these are not enumerated by Gibbon overlooks Journal A 8 March 1758, cf. Craddock, loc. cit. <C1> = Cancel 1, <I2> = Insert 2, cf. Table 1.

<sup>13</sup> Chapters 19 and 20–3 may or may not be two separate stages in the elaboration of the Virgilian theme, since they appear in different, but logically sequential places: ff. 133b, 156–7 respectively.

<sup>14</sup> He originally allowed thirteen folio pages (ff. 130–41 plus one torn out). Having filled this up, he had to jump over previously filled pages to f. 150 (his p. 215), finishing on f. 155 (p. 225): cf. Journal A 18 March 1762 for a typical parallel.

<sup>15</sup> Journal A 24 Aug. 1761, cf. *Letters*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> Mem. B/168; *Letters*, 28; cf. Journal A 'October' 1758.

<sup>17</sup> 'Common Place Book', entry 'Middleton, Conyers', Add. MS 34,880 f. 76b, cf. Mem. E/300 n. 15. Much as Gibbon appreciated the intellectual benefit of this stay at Lausanne, he never concealed his constant homesickness: *Letters*, 5–23 *passim*, cf. Mem. B/152–3. Gibbon's Bentinck Street Library also included Maty's modish *Essai sur l'Usage* (1741): G. Keynes Kt., *The Library of Edward Gibbon* (1980).

(c. XLVII).<sup>18</sup> His original idea <C3> had been to supply a worked example of this by examining parallel cases of Pagan and Jewish fable. But it proved hardly suited to his purpose, since the result was to demonstrate *not* the detachment required by the opening, but the uncertainty of his Christian commitment. He had to argue that the story of Jacob and Esau might seem equivalent to — and as foolish as — Livy's fable of the Sabine bull, but that, if considered in its 'mystical sense', the former was clearly more meaningful. There was no well-tempered irony here, only a painful ambivalence, and the appeal to mysticism could satisfy neither Christian nor philosopher.

Gibbon, therefore, wrote a long insertion <I5> dated 3 November, ambiguously titled 'Addition ou changement', but which was indeed a change since it abandoned religion for a purely secular treatment. Detachment was now exemplified by turning a sharply sceptical eye on the double standards applied by the Roman Republic to itself and to its allies even in its freest and most 'virtuous' epoch. Such a detached view of Rome is, of course, present in the writings of Montesquieu and Voltaire, but Gibbon outstrips them in the detail and severity of his handling of the Republic; and in setting this within an overall context of ardent advocacy of the study of the Ancients, he was wholly individual. We have here, at a very early date, the characteristically bittersweet flavour of his later *History*, mixing cold-blooded scrutiny of Roman politics with warm admiration for many aspects of antique (and still primarily Latin) culture — a flavour that many fail to catch today. None the less, the new passage continued to dissatisfy Gibbon — perhaps because it excluded religion or was it just too long? — and on 3 December he wrote the final, brief paragraph to c. XLVII that we now have <I6>.<sup>19</sup> This achieves detachment by the fairly easy route of mocking the Roman deification of emperors, although the emphasis on evaluating Rome variably — as enlightened in some respects but superstitious in others — continues to reflect his earlier attempt, *mutatis mutandis*.

When Gibbon came up to London later that month (December 1758), the contrast between his own industry and Maty's indolence was painfully exposed, and the resultant quarrel produced a perfectly ambiguous result. Maty did finally read the *Essai* — 'He finds it as I hoped; good in general, but many faults in the detail'<sup>20</sup> — yet then, reverting to his former passivity, he failed to answer Gibbon's subsequent letters (which were presumably eager to discuss both his own 'Changements' and Maty's ideas about revision) and so provoked what looked like a final breach. When Gibbon wrote to his father 'tout est fini',<sup>21</sup> this implied the apparent end not only of a literary contact but also of the *Essai*'s chances of publication.

Such a statement may seem paradoxical in that next February, on a short visit to Beriton, Gibbon wrote a Preface ('Avis au Lecteur') to the *Essai*, besides revising once more its treatment of Criticism.<sup>22</sup> The insertions made at this time are the only portions of the *Essai* for which we have no MS but it is improbable that any major loss results: we cannot, indeed, assess the degree of revision they sustained when being printed in 1761, but given that for the rest of the text this was essentially a matter of phraseology and detail only, we may presume it to be similarly limited. In their content these insertions clearly reflect the temptation to stretch the literary chassis by adding better or fuller illustrations. Gibbon added a long note <I4> at the end of c. xxxviii elaborating a defence of the true synchronicity of Dido and Aeneas (following Newton's chronology), which he had first made a year before at Lausanne.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, he removed his primary illustration of critical method — a discussion of whether or not the priestly dignity of the Flamen Dialis was extant or not prior to its revival by Augustus <C2>,<sup>24</sup> — and replaced it with a much fuller discussion <I3> of Louis de Beaufort's assault on the reality of the first ever treaty made by Rome and Carthage (as cited by Polybius), made in his famous

<sup>18</sup> References to chapters in Roman numerals refer to the published, and in Arabic to the August 1758, version of the *Essai*: see Table 1.

<sup>19</sup> Add. MS 34,880 f. 159.

<sup>20</sup> *Letters*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> *Letters*, 32. The episode exemplifies the pre-Victorian habit of doing (or trying to do) business through what we would call the Christmas 'holiday'.

<sup>22</sup> Dated 3 February 1759, MW iv. 6. The insertions and 'preface' are noted in Journal A but its chronology is again awry: 11 Feb. 1759. In the *Memoirs* Gibbon supposed that it was at this date he was 'suppressing a third, adding a

third, and altering a third' of the *Essai* (Mem. B/169). But the really major deletions and additions date from April 1761 (see n. 52 below): a clear illustration of the fallibility of Gibbon's memory without documentary assistance.

<sup>23</sup> 'Remarques Critiques sur le Nouveau Système de Chronologie du Chevalier Newton', 23 Jan. 1758 pr. MW iii. 152–69, here 153–4; cf. also *Essai* c. vii n. †.

<sup>24</sup> Add. MS. 34,880 ff. 135–6. Gibbon also added n. † to the much revised conclusion to c. XLVII on 5 February (f. 158b): this deployed Lucretius as a hostile analyst of popular Roman religion, while effectively declaring Gibbon's own faith in natural religion (see n. 38).

*Dissertation sur l'Incertitude des Cinq Premiers Siècles de l'Histoire Romaine* (1738).<sup>25</sup> The deleted passage was feeble — Cicero's rhetorical allusion to the priests of Jove in 43 B.C. cannot be taken as suggesting there was a Flamen Dialis at that date, thus there is no real critical problem — and the insertion is an important, if excessively ingenious statement, where he comments directly on the important debate on historical Pyrrhonism which had raged in the 1720s. But if this change was for the better, still Gibbon's critical stance — fully alert to the need for source criticism but rejecting a merely destructive evidential positivism — was unaltered: the conclusion of the new argument merely expands that of the old.<sup>26</sup>

However, his activity did not betoken confidence in publication. On the contrary, when read in context the opening words of the 1759 Preface betray the fundamental self-doubt of the author: 'C'est un véritable essai que je produis au grand jour. Je souhaiterois me connoître.'<sup>27</sup> The 'essay' — the first time it was called such — was not just an intellectual attempt, but a trial of the author's own worth for good or ill. No doubt this was in part the ruthless scepticism of a powerful mind (cf. Mem. B/172), but it also led him into gloomy prognostications of public apathy and silence should he publish. Pursuing the train of thought, he promised to submit to such dismal verdicts: 'point de Philippiques contre mon siècle, point d'appel à la posterité'. It was the language of a (temporarily) beaten man: unsure of his powers, economically and socially at the mercy of his father, and still a stranger in his own country;<sup>28</sup> a man who was attempting something essentially novel both intellectually and in terms of his audience, but whose chosen route (Maty) had proven a dead-end. As the *Memoirs* concede, the Preface was aimed at the desk drawer, not 'au grand jour' (Mem. B/169).

So it proved. Gibbon did nothing with the *Essai* for nearly two years, although, in the year available to him before the Militia was embodied, he continued to produce scholarly work in manuscript on other subjects — notably the 'Principes des Poids, des Monnoies, et des Mesures des Anciens' in the summer of 1759.<sup>29</sup> The new and ultimately successful impetus to publish came from another source and followed quite other channels. In the winter of 1760–1 Edward Gibbon Senior urged his eccentric (but talented) son to publish, with a view to getting a diplomatic job — an old idea (Mem. B/158) — and to relieving the straitened family fortunes. Their argument was renewed in March 1761 and, as in so many areas, Gibbon Junior capitulated. David Mallet, his father's friend, made an 'easy' arrangement with a publisher and by the end of April the final MS was at the printers.<sup>30</sup> The two elder men also controlled the distribution of complimentary copies on publication in June, with a palpable eye to the job-market: books were sent to a number of active politicians on a list with a Buteite and old Tory bias, including one to the King's Minister himself.<sup>31</sup> The one remnant of the son's original procedure was to call in Maty to correct the proofs while he was away in the country on militia duty, although Maty exceeded his commission by contributing a letter 'À l'Auteur', which appraised the project of writing in French and was also laced with richly ironical reference to their former ups and downs: 'The feeling which caused you to send me [these proof sheets] has pierced my heart'.<sup>32</sup>

Gibbon's last and largest revision of the *Essai* was thus effected under external pressure, but it hinged on what was for him the most private of all concerns — a shift in his religious opinions. We have already noticed the instability of his views in respect of the Old Testament. This was, in fact, part of more general doubts about Christian revelation raised by his youthful conversion and reconversion in 1753–4. In an important insertion in Draft C of the *Memoirs* Gibbon noted that 'in the latter end of the year 1759 the famous treatise of Grotius (de veritate

<sup>25</sup> Gibbon had sought out Beaufort on his return journey to England in April 1758, but never found anything to say about the meeting — a striking silence: Journal A 23 April 1758, Mem. B/154.

<sup>26</sup> Compare c. 24 'C2' with c. xxxiv; again the crucial injunction, 'Balançons des vraisemblances critiques' which first appeared in c. 23 was saved for c. xxvi of the final version; and c. v had already upheld 'une ignorance modeste et savante'.

<sup>27</sup> MW iv. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Preface dated 16 April 1761, MW iv. 6.

<sup>29</sup> pr. MW v. 66–119; cf. Journal A [Summer] 1759.

<sup>30</sup> This account derives from Gibbon's memo of ?late

summer 1761, Add. MS 34,882 ff. 52–3, pr. MW iv. 1–2; Journal A 11 Jan.–10 June 1761 *passim*; Mem. B/169–70 — in descending order of source-critical priority.

<sup>31</sup> Journal A 30 May, 10 June 1761. Of course Gibbon Junior controlled the complimentary copies which went to his friends at Lausanne: to Becket 30 May 1761, *Sotheby's* 19 Feb. 1963, item 446.

<sup>32</sup> MW iv. 7 (my translation), cf. Mem. B/170. The dearth of Gibbon Junior's correspondence at this time would also seem to reflect the dominance of his elders, but leaves us in the dark as to how the quarrel with Maty was made up; no doubt he was, as always, more relaxed about it than the young Gibbon.

Religionis Christianae) first engaged me in a regular tryal of the evidence of Christianity<sup>33</sup> — a major intellectual event but one discreetly omitted from the retrospectively constructed 'Part I' of his first Journal. The result was the final reduction of his religious views to fixity, and the end of the pilgrimage begun in 1753: 'By every possible light that reason and history [could] afford' he now became a confirmed, though private, sceptic about Christian revelation, but one who retained his faith in religious, natural, and moral order in general.<sup>34</sup>

Thus the existence of the 1758 *Essai* draft on Roman religion <C5>, composed immediately prior to his reading of Grotius, is of exceptional importance in allowing us to trace the shift in his views precisely: Gibbon can at last be said to have a credible religious biography. In the draft the decadence of ancient Paganism is urged as evidence on behalf of Christian revelation — a unique glimpse of Gibbon writing as a Protestant — but there are also clear anticipations of his later self. So the basis of his support for Christianity is not personal and doctrinal but on grounds of external, social order: Christ was 'the legislator of the Christians', whilst Roman degeneracy made Gibbon 'feel how much men stood in need of a new law' (cc. 62, 63). The premium on social conservatism here, focusing on the corruption of the monarchy and 'the butchery of the whole of the ancient nobility' as the sources of 'the General corruption', clearly agrees with that of his maturity. The great difference is that later he did not conflate public conformity to the prevailing national religion with private assent to an absolute and universal one, as exemplified by the early Church — this being a palpable relic of his Catholic phase.

Another symptom of vestigial Catholicism lies in the striking comment that 'the Cross was erected on the ruins of the Capitol' [c. 67]. At first sight this seems practically identical to that opening c. 15 of the *History*: 'a pure and humble religion . . . finally erected the triumphant banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol'.<sup>35</sup> However, had the 1758 remark betokened a historical project, it must have implied a teleological scheme proceeding from the Roman Empire to the Papacy: a good illustration of the confusion and inconsistency enmeshing the reconverted, 'Protestant' Gibbon at this date.<sup>36</sup> Contrast with the *History* is apparent: here the treatment of the Papacy is only cursory — as part of the joint succession to Roman *imperium* alongside the Empire of Charlemagne and his successors — and Gibbon's decision to take an 'Eastern' or Byzantine route after 476 is the strongest mark of this. Of course, once the thousand-year vacancy of the 'dark ages' was past, Western history found its climax in the ruins of Rome; but classical Rome had not only survived the Papacy, so that its ruins became an alternative focus for 'pilgrimage' (Mem. C/266, cf. *DF* vii.338), it had in some sense *converted* it. Notwithstanding the other evils of its government, the Papacy was now a restorer of Roman monuments, a patron of classical learning, and the pimp at whose command 'the perfect arts of architecture, painting, and sculpture have been prostituted' to produce the neo-classical triumph of St Peter's: 'the most glorious structure that ever has been applied to the use of religion' (*DF* vii.337). This change in perspective — the final passage, one might say, from Catholicism to Classicism — must also be explained by reference to the famous séance amidst 'the ruins of the Capitol' in October 1764, when the new conception of Rome's ruins, alongside its modern, neo-classical 'miracles', dawned upon him; but the shift of 1759 was a necessary first step.<sup>37</sup>

If revelation had not been propped up by his deeply-held commitment to 'public worship' as 'the only solid foundation of the religious sentiments of the people' (*DF* iii.218), we may

<sup>33</sup> An insertion on quarto paper in the folio MS, Add. MS 34,874 f. 68b, para. beginning 'After my library . . .', Mem. C/248–50; Mem. B/191 also alludes to this but in more distant and confused fashion.

<sup>34</sup> For the distinction between his private, and the deists' public, espousal of natural religion, see my 'Gibbon's Timeless Verity: Nature and Neo-Classicism in the Late Enlightenment', in D. Womersley (ed.), *Proceedings of the Gibbon Bicentenary Colloquium* (Voltaire Foundation, forthcoming), §.I.

<sup>35</sup> *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (hereafter cited in the text as *DF*) (ed. J. B. Bury, 1909–14), ii.1.

<sup>36</sup> Thus J. G. Pocock's interpretation of the religious component of Gibbon's *History* as part of 'an Anglican and Protestant story' seems to me fundamentally confused, a

confusion compounded by his belief that Gibbon and Voltaire were unbelievers, rather than believers in natural religion: 'Edward Gibbon in History', *The Tanner Lectures in Human Values* (1990), xi. 291–364, here 341, cf. 339, 361 etc. Contrast Gibbon's own tactful, if evasive, formulations in Mem. B/137, C/249–50.

<sup>37</sup> Quotations from Mem. C, 270, 268; cf. *Letters*, 61. My remark that Gibbon's initial plan of 1770–1 to write a history of the City of Rome would be 'a history of the transformation of the heart of the Empire into the seat of the Papacy', is clearly in error: 'Gibbon Observed', 136. The importance of the Papacy to that plan can be deduced from the sources listed in Mem. C/284, and from the fragments of the project which survive in the *History*, e.g. cc. 69–71.

suspect that Gibbon might, even in 1758, have slipped away from dogmatic Christianity into natural religion. The 1758 draft uses the enlightened language of 'the Supreme Being' rather than the Christian 'God', and the case for natural religion, unlike that of materialism or atheism, is strongly put. He understands its adherents to be 'numerous and bold' (c.61), and rejects what he calls the 'extreme' Christian tactic of blackening the names of the greatest men of antiquity, Plato, Seneca, Cicero, in order to subvert the natural religionists' claim that there was 'a System of obligations known to all nations, adopted by priests, prescribed by legislators, taught by philosophers and hymned by poets'.<sup>38</sup> By this date, as we would expect from the nature of his studies at Lausanne (Mem. B/137-41, C/231-3), the core of his loyalty to Classical authors — for Gibbon the indispensable accompaniment to natural religion — was unshakeable. Knowing this, we can hardly be surprised that he should feel the need to try the evidence of Christianity for the 'first' time in 1759 (Mem. C/249), particularly once he was removed from the supervision of Pastor Pavilliard in Lausanne, nor that the distance he travelled under the impact of Grotius was relatively short: to an acceptance that timeless values were found in nature and human nature — the latter exemplified, above all, by the culture of Latin antiquity — rather than in Christian doctrine.

Still, his shift in view was of major consequence when Gibbon came back to the *Essai* in 1761. Its final section, 'La Religion' was now obsolete, and the need to reconstruct a religious justification for the study of classical 'Belles Lettres' underlay all that followed. In the 'Journal' that he wrote up later Gibbon connected the reconstruction with his reading of two books in the first four months of 1761: Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, which he had not read at Lausanne but which became one of his favourite religious texts, and then a portion of Isaac de Beausobre's *Histoire . . . du Manichéisme* (1734-9);<sup>39</sup> the theme linking them (he suggested) was the treatment of 'the ancient Philosophical Theology'.<sup>40</sup> No doubt these were crucial to him personally in reinforcing the views derived from reading Grotius, and it is noticeable that he continued reading Beausobre after the *Essai* was off his hands;<sup>41</sup> but they were really more of a counterpoint to the challenge which remained outstanding from his first attempt — to explain the existence of unphilosophical superstition, regardless of, or despite, the existence of a higher, classical wisdom — than of direct relevance.<sup>42</sup>

In fact his writing and his reading in early 1761 reflect a multiplicity of concerns.<sup>43</sup> At the same time as he meditated writing on ancient Paganism, he composed (on 14 March) the opening to a MS book entitled 'Extraits raisonnés de mes lectures' — remarks on how and what to read, from which he inferred how and what to record, and plainly preparatory to the miscellaneous record they commenced.<sup>44</sup> On 9 April he returned to Beriton after a bizarre attempt to stand for Parliament — another of his father's ideas — leaving him two and a half weeks Easter holiday in which to write. The first fruit of a busy stay was the 'Recherches Critiques' into Charles VIII's title to Naples on 14 April; only then did he return to the *Essai*, a move announced by its second and final Preface dated 16 April.<sup>45</sup> This order of priorities

<sup>38</sup> c. 66, cf. the additional n. † to c. XLVII of 5 February 1759 on Lucretius who 'proved [the fact of] Divinity despite himself, by relating the phenomena of nature to general causes'.

<sup>39</sup> Journal A 11 Jan., 23 Feb. 1761. When Gibbon states that he read 'the first four books of M. de Beausobre' before revising the *Essai* in late April, he means the first four books of the *second* or dogmatic part of the work. The nine books in this part tally with the nine books Gibbon lists in his reading: Journal A 20 March, 25 June 1761. Part II seems to have been more fruitful in his later work, too, cf. *DF* v. 103 n. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Journal A 23 Feb. 1761.

<sup>41</sup> Journal A 30 May, 25 June, cf. [25] Dec. 1761.

<sup>42</sup> However c. LVII and n. †, cc. LXIII-LXIV illustrate some marginal usage.

<sup>43</sup> In 1758 by contrast the only departure from the strict course of composition was the 'Extrait Critique de plusieurs Memoires lues à l'Academie des Belles Lettres' of 2 October, Add. MSS ff. 158-9b. But: (1) it was very brief; (2) it remained in the subject area of the *Essai* and is effectively used in c. xvii n. †; (3) it occurred in a slack period between finishing the first draft and taking it up to Maty; (4) it would seem to be an act of pardonable rejoicing at being reunited with his favourite academic

serial, and somewhat modifies the famous reference to the £20 banknote in Mem. B/164.

<sup>44</sup> Add. MS 34,880 ff. 160-3.

<sup>45</sup> For this sequence: Journal A 9 April 1761; 'Recherches Critiques' Add. MS 34,880 ff. 164-73 dated at beginning; 1761 preface pr. MW iv.6. While the chronology of Journal A cannot be relied on as exact in 1758-9 (n. 5 above), its character changes when Gibbon entered militia service in May 1760: gone are the persistent vague references to 'Sept.', 'Ab. Sept. 18th.' or 'This summer' which mark it previously — I quote from 1759 — and which clearly suggest that the few precise dates are chronologist's constructions. Although a degree of such construction will have remained (cf. 23 August 1761), Gibbon either kept a pocket book or had access to some other record of the movements and doings of his regiment. Not only is this highly probable in itself and perhaps a business necessity; it also accounts for the extremely detailed record of military movements etc. in the journal, which Gibbon could not possibly have remembered and had no motive for inventing. Militia business provided a firm chronological skeleton into which literary entries might be inserted; hence the chronology of the latter is reliable wherever it can be tested, see e.g. n. 47.

makes it quite clear that the *Essai* was no longer the sole or even central feature on Gibbon's mental horizon as it had been in 1758. He had moved on from the discussion of method and principle to thoughts of a substantive 'Historical composition'.<sup>46</sup> While it would be unfair to say that the new material required for the *Essai* was composed casually, it was certainly done with clinical detachment and at great speed: 'Being at length, by my father's advice determined to publish my *Essai*, I revised it . . . struck out a considerable part, and wrote the chapters from 57–78 [*recte* LV (fin)–LXXVIII], which I was obliged to copy out fair myself'.<sup>47</sup> This statement is more delphic than it may seem. The first draft of the new portion, dated 23 April, was entered into the new MS book, following on the 'Recherches' on Charles VIII;<sup>48</sup> but it is unclear when it was revised — as it had been when it was published. Only the speed of the composition (though not of its intellectual gestation) is palpable, since the first draft must have been completed within ten days.<sup>49</sup>

The long insertion <I7> composed in this way on 'the System of Paganism' represented a shift in focus away from the early history of Christianity. This was presumably deliberate. When Gibbon confronted the subject again in the 1770s, he knew full well the difficulty and delicacy of the task, as is evident from the siege-like nature of his preparations (Mem. C/285; E/308). The 1761 insertion still emphasized Pagan degeneracy, but instead of this lending credence to Christianity, it now represented a falling away from those truths of natural religion — 'les vérités de la nature . . . dans leur majestueuse simplicité' (c.LXI) — to which Gibbon still adhered. Indeed, although there is much careful historical work here, the argument relies heavily on *a priori* conceptions of human, and particularly savage, nature to make its case (cc.LXVif). But he remained proud of this section to the end of his life, and though he suggested developments to the argument, he did not seek to shake it: strong testimony to the subsequent constancy of his religious views (Mem. B/173).

His much quoted remark of 1791, that in the *History* he had been 'attached to the old Pagan establishment', might seem to imply a subsequent abandoning of the limpid scepticism of the *Essai* regarding Pagan religion.<sup>50</sup> This is far from the case. The remark itself will not support the inference, whilst both the 1761 portion of the *Essai* and the *History* agree in emphasizing the superstitious and ridiculous elements of Paganism: in particular — and here was Gibbon's trademark — the importance of 'the Egyptian superstition, of all the most contemptible and abject' (*DF* i.35, cf. cc.LX–LXIII). His attachment to Paganism rested only, as he said in 1791, on its socially conservative function as an institution or 'establishment': he countenanced its doctrine no more than he did that of Catholicism in Ancien Régime France, and so grouped them both under the rubric of 'superstition'. To be sure, the positive, institutional aspect of Paganism was not stressed in 1761 as it was to be, however moderately, in the *History*;<sup>51</sup> but then his doctrinal and anthropological treatment of religion did not require it. Nevertheless, the room for such a positive development is clear even within the Christian framework of 1758 <C5>, where the social collapse associated with Paganism is only weakly substantiated. The charge of a 'General corruption' is founded on the behaviour of emperors and the social élite (c.63, cf. c.46/LI): but, even in 1758, Gibbon was well aware that the *moeurs* of the empire could not be inferred from those of its emperors (cc.55–56) <C4>. Again, the social 'peace, abundance and prosperity' attributed to Augustus' reign (c.65) pointedly contradicts the picture of general Pagan dissolution, and so anticipates the more

<sup>46</sup> Journal A 14 April 1761.

<sup>47</sup> Journal A 23 April 1761, a date tallying with that on Add. MS 34,880 f. 175.

<sup>48</sup> Add. MS 34,880 ff. 175–86.

<sup>49</sup> i.e. 16–26 April; he left Beriton for London on 27 April 1761, Journal A. The composition of the *Essai* did not quite end with its final revision for the press, since in the summer of 1762 Gibbon made some MS additions to the notes — c. xvii n. \*, xviii n. \*, the remark to c. xx n. \*, the remark to c. xli n. †, c. lxiii n. † — which can be found in Add. MSS 34,882 ff. 54–9. These were incorporated into the printed text in MW iv by Sheffield; cf. Journal A 14, 19 June 1762.

<sup>50</sup> *Letters*, 771. So far as the 1790s are concerned, the remarks might imply that, under the impact of the French Revolution's attack on the Church and a reading of Burke thereon, his previous attachment to Paganism weakened.

This would (again) be to misread the letter and the simultaneous comment in Mem. E/342 n. 66, where Gibbon *maintained* his attachment to the old Pagan religion as 'an old superstition' analogous to the French Church. He was in fact reduced to the predictable but awkward position of defending *both* the Ancien Régime *and* his own past views, despite the fact that, as he well knew, his free treatment of Christianity under the latter head might be construed as friendly to the Revolution — and this was what happened. Gibbon was not inconsistent, but he had allowed a philosophic 'smile' at Christianity to spill over into the public realm, where the social utility rather than truth of religion was primary: *DF* i.31–6, vi.134 and n.49, Bishop Hurd to King George III (10 Nov. 1796), *The Later Correspondence of George III* (ed. A. Aspinall, 1962–70), no. 1463.

<sup>51</sup> e.g. *DF* i.31–6, ii.17–20.



positive treatment of 'the superstition of the people' in the *History* (DF 1.32). Thus while examination of the *Essai* and its drafts casts a sharp light on the degree to which the *History* is interpretatively rather than empirically constructed — its formal evidential basis notwithstanding — it also confirms Gibbon's broad constancy of view and of preoccupation: in this case with established religion as an instrument of social order and hierarchy.

The most obvious failing of the new section on Paganism was its length. With typical precision Gibbon states that the text was 'augmented above a fourth',<sup>52</sup> rendering it quite out of scale with the sections written two and half years before. Furthermore, though it should properly have replaced the final section on Religion, Gibbon decided to insert it in the previous one on Philosophy (§.IV). Probably this, too, reflected sensitivity on matters religious — he was still a long way from sustaining the proud Pascalian irony of the 1770s — since it meant that he could then dispense with an explicitly religious section altogether. But by doing so he badly disrupted the sequence of the argument, which now ran from a sophisticated theoretical and methodological treatment of causality (cc.XLVIII–LV), on to the discussion of Paganism from a quite different perspective, and then back to the discussion of causes (cc.LXXIX–LXXXII). Knowledge of the genesis of the text may elucidate, but cannot dispel the reader's perplexity at this. Finally, to prevent §.IV swelling out of all proportion, he had to sacrifice the otherwise innocent chapters on Rome's rise and fall <C4>. These had previously supplied the principal illustration of 'Esprit Philosophique', but might now be construed as repetitive, since they too dealt with Roman decline, albeit from a secular perspective. Their deletion was a loss and Gibbon felt it so.<sup>53</sup> Our regret at the virtual burial of what proved to be a crucial conceptual underpinning for the *History* may perhaps be discounted; but for him too, it was a rare case when his conscious mastery of historical technique was slighted. Of course, decisions about how to revise the text were his own and, as we shall see, he had his reasons; but still such losses stem from the conflation of two essentially separate pieces of work (from 1758 and 1761) due to the need to publish, and for this his father bears the responsibility.

Of course, there have always been readers, since Maty himself, willing to accuse the *Essai* of formal difficulty — 'Point d'ordre ni de liaison'<sup>54</sup> — but in general this charge is not true, provided one bears in mind its sectional organization. The insertions <I2, 3> on Virgil and Beaufort only develop lines of argument already present; the final rewriting of c. XLVII <I6> shortens and simplifies the text; whilst <I1> is really too short to matter. The real difficulty of reading the *Essai* is partly that it is written in French, and so stands outside the canon of English Literature and its many readers, and partly the difficulty of reading Gibbon in any form: a man who was both an original mind and a believer in Tacitean concision of style. The insertion on Paganism was the one handle Gibbon gave to critics of the *Essai*'s form and, as we have seen, this reflects chiefly on extraneous circumstances.

Quite as remarkable as the cancelled passage on early Christianity is that which outlines the theory of 'general' or profound causes and applies it to Rome's rise and fall <C4>. The idea that the historical causation could be stratified into layers of varying importance was implicit in all Enlightenment thinking which distinguished between the realms of laws and manners and that of high politics, although it is Montesquieu's contrast between the realm of 'Fortune' and 'general causes' which supplies the specific precedent to Gibbon's discussion.<sup>55</sup> But in the cancelled draft the twenty-one-year-old Gibbon had already gone beyond his predecessor: both by the centrality he assigned to the idea of stratification, an idea which Montesquieu adumbrates but does not develop; and by his determination to apply it *historically*, both to specific cases and to longer-term historical process.<sup>56</sup> Indeed he was too enamoured of the notion to let it disappear entirely, and gave a brief summary in the final version of c. LV. This view of causation as stratified between general and partial (or profound and superficial) layers

<sup>52</sup> Journal A [31 December] 1762; in the printed text the insertion occupies twenty in a text of seventy-eight pages, MW iv.69–89.

<sup>53</sup> See below.

<sup>54</sup> MW iv.8; cf. G. Bonnard, 'Gibbon's *Essai* . . . as judged by contemporary reviewers and by Gibbon himself', *English Studies* 32 (1951), 145–53.

<sup>55</sup> *Considérations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Décadence* (1734) c. xviii, effectively alluded to in *Essai* c. 1.v.

<sup>56</sup> Montesquieu's primary concern was to establish a

whole range of causal regularities (and thus determining factors) in social explanation. So, although he knew that a sphere of individual and random action remained ('Fortune'), he had little interest in it. Hence his failure to explore the idea of stratified causation, with its possibility of disjointed and even contrary motion. This was perhaps the most important difference between the philosopher and the philosophic historian such as Gibbon. Compare <C4> with Montesquieu's 'Essai sur les Causes', *Oeuvres Complètes* (ed. R. Caillois, 1949), ii.39–68.

is the same as that deployed in the 'General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West' of 1772, and then in the *History* itself. In 1758 emphasis on the primacy of 'general' causes over 'partial' ones led to the remarkable paradox that, despite the German massacre of Varus and his legions in A.D. 9, 'the name of the vanquished imposed itself on the victors, and instead of marching on a terrified Capitol, they thought themselves lucky to be left in peace in their marshes' (c. 55). A battle, a mere event, could not of itself subvert the moral force of Rome based on centuries of civilizing and military achievement, whereas later, when that moral force was slipping away and only technical prowess remained,<sup>57</sup> the greatest of warrior emperors and military victories could not prevent barbarian inundation. The *History* reflects the same mode of thinking: by upholding profound, moral decay as the 'general' explanation of Roman decline, and also throughout its detailed texture, of which one telling example is Gibbon's preoccupation with 'the Roman name' as 'the proper subject of our inquiries'<sup>58</sup> — a precise echo of thirty-odd years before.

Of course we can find changes in his view of Roman decline between 1758 and the composition of the *History*, but they relate to historical specifics, not fundamental outlook. (On the other hand, they illustrate just how important specificity was to Gibbon.) Two stand out. The assertion that it was under the early emperors, from Augustus to Trajan, that the Romans 'achieved the conquest of the universe' (c. 55 and n. \*) stands in marked contrast to the opening of the *History* where, 'The principal conquests of the Romans were achieved under the republic; and the emperors, for the most part, were satisfied with preserving those dominions which had been acquired by the policy of the senate . . .' (*DF* i.1–2). These contrasting views again illustrate the extent to which Gibbon was indulging in vulnerable interpretative construction, whilst displaying constancy of preoccupation. In both accounts military conquest reflected the decay of domestic liberties; where Gibbon changed his mind was in accounting for the survival of the Empire — an issue which he admitted to be problematic in the 'General Observations' of 1772 (*DF* iv.174). Then, as in 1758, Gibbon curtly supposed that imperial survival rested on acquired military and moral supremacy, and thus that its decay was the simple running-down of a system made powerful by inertial force; but by 1776 his appreciation of Augustus' 'moderate' system abroad heralds an account of imperial survival of a vastly more subtle, less linear kind. Indeed his first three volumes might more properly be called *The History of the Decline, Revival and Fall of the Roman Empire* — revival being centred on the years 268–363 — and his concern to explain survival is the underlying explanation of their prodigious length relative to time-span. That there is a considerable tension between this perspective and that of controlling 'general' causes is, however, undeniable.

Secondly, while his broad chronological scheme remained constant — even down to a precise emphasis on Claudius Gothicus' reign as the origin of Roman military recovery (c. 55; *DF* c. 11) — his dating of final dissolution in the West changed. In 1758 and in the 'General Observations' of 1772 it is located at the death of Theodosius in A.D. 395 (c. 55; *DF* iv.174). However in the *History* 'the disastrous period of the fall of the Roman empire . . . may justly be dated from the reign of Valens' (*DF* iii.73) — in particular from his invitation to the Goths to cross the Danube in 376, which supplied 'the principal and immediate cause of the fall of the Western Empire of Rome' (*DF* iii.139, n. 143). For Gibbon this was a refinement in precision which came from detailed inquiry. Jibes about the degenerate sons of Theodosius 'who by their baseness brought utter ruin upon the Western and Eastern empires' had been the stock in trade of (one might say) the Renaissance schoolboy,<sup>59</sup> and it was this traditional wisdom which underlay his early, schematic presentations. But in the third volume of the *History* (1781) Gibbon foreshadows the manner of the modern academic, presenting his modification of the traditional view as an interpretative novelty, stemming from careful scrutiny of primary sources and at the expense of the latest and best commentator, Montesquieu (*DF* loc. cit.).

<sup>57</sup> c. 56, cf. *DF* i.18.

<sup>58</sup> *DF* v.180. The Roman 'name' is a major topos of the *History*, particularly in the third volume, as the public sign of Roman credibility brought into disrepute: *DF* iii.197–379 *passim* (twelve references). The moral power of 'names' continues to feature largely in the last three volumes. For example, Gibbon had great difficulty deciding whether Byzantium was worthy of the 'Roman' name

or not — an important ambivalence! e.g. *DF* vi.61, 422 — and hence the variety of labels (Greek, Roman, Oriental) he applied to it. For further discussion of stratification in the *History* see my 'Conception of Gibbon's *History*', in R. Quinault (ed.), *Gibbon and Empire* (C.U.P., forthcoming), §.1.

<sup>59</sup> e.g. Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government* (ed. T. G. West, 1990), here 233, cf. 214.

Such advertisement of technical merit is neither Gibbon's greatest nor most attractive virtue, but it was deeply significant of the emergent status of historical method in the Enlightenment as central to all humane, as well as some forms of scientific, inquiry.

But far the greatest change lay in Gibbon's attitude to Roman decline as a literary and historical subject. Despite the maturity of his historical technique, in 1758 he had not isolated decline as a topic: it remained part of the continuum of Roman history as a whole (although, on the other hand, he did not follow Montesquieu's extension of the continuum beyond 476 through to 1453). Nor did he hesitate to delete it in favour of what he saw as the more interesting subject of religion. He was, as we have seen, repelled by Roman politics and militarism, whilst the wider virtues of classical culture which he espoused in the *Essai* could hardly yield a specific topic for historical composition — or so it seemed — because the result would be impossibly large, encyclopaedic even. This perspective was reflected in the various subjects he canvassed between 1761 and 1767, all of which related to much later periods — from Richard Coeur de Lion through to Walter Raleigh — and we can see why it was so hard for him to break out of it. The insight that Rome's ruins, literal and metaphorical, supplied the basis for a properly sublime historical subject; the realization that he could write a 'Roman' history drawing on established classical taste (Mem. E/311) which was at the same time an entirely novel exploration of the remote past; the full integration of religious and secular history; and the acceptance of a universal or encyclopaedic format — all these steps and more had to be taken before the *History* could be commenced in 1773. His treatment and his deletion of Roman history in 1758–61 illustrate *both* the possibility and the difficulty of that event.

In unravelling the genesis of the *Essai*, we have gone a good way towards understanding the measure of Gibbon's intellectual development during his first stay at Lausanne between 1753 and 1758, and thus his formation as a whole. Amongst its central features, we cannot omit that banal but potent dominance exercised over Gibbon by his father — be it in love, soldiering, or publishing — which was the primitive source of the son's obsession with freedom (Mem. F/61). Secondly, the drafts of the *Essai* confirm what is apparent from the unpublished text: that in the sphere of historical method, the chief source of his claim to intellectual originality, Gibbon was precocious. His views on historical causation and stratification at twenty-one were essentially the same as those of twenty and thirty years later, and his claim to owe his 'creation' 'in Genius or learning' to his time at Lausanne is amply borne out (Mem. B/152). By contrast his religious opinions were stultified rather than nurtured by the plaster-cast Protestantism that had been effectively imposed upon him by Pastor Pavilliard (however grateful Gibbon may have been to be freed from the 'superstitious' side of Catholicism). The *Essai* drafts reveal for the first time his state of mind on returning home: how he had internalized Pavilliard's teaching to a considerable extent, and thus why he did not seek to confront it directly for over a year; but they also show him to have been a loose and incoherent Protestant, who was already well on the way to becoming a private adherent of natural religion — a stance achieved and reinforced by his reading between 1759 and 1761. Finally, however assured he may have been as a theorist or philosopher of history, by 1761 he had lost interest in purely abstract discussions of that kind, as the history of the *Essai*'s publication reveals, and had entered a new arena, that of planning and structuring a specific historical 'composition'. By a remarkable conjunction, he associated this new and higher<sup>60</sup> ambition with a change of subject area. None of his new plans drew on his primary expertise in the Latin classics, and one covert sign of the new departure lay in the hasty deletion of his considerations on the grandeur and decadence of Rome from the *Essai* in April 1761. This shift was to be a principal root, and symptom, of the difficulties he experienced during the 1760s in his frustrated attempts to enact 'the role of an historian'.<sup>61</sup> Of course much more than this can, and should, be said about the *Essai* and its drafts. The point I would ultimately

<sup>60</sup> Although we place the greatest emphasis on discussions of method, Gibbon's failure to print his full discussion of general and partial causes, like Montesquieu's disinterest in using his 'Essai sur les Causes' (n. 56) as anything other than a private working-paper, reflects a different set of priorities, and one which would have been

upheld as valid only a generation ago. Cf. 'The Conception of Gibbon's *History*', op. cit. (n. 58), §.II.

<sup>61</sup> 'Idée de quelques sujets pour une Composition Historique', 26 July 1761, Add. MSS 34,880 f. 185. On his later difficulties see my 'Gibbon's Dark Ages', *JRS* 73 (1983), 1–23.

contend for here is their centrality to *any* reading of Gibbon not void of historical content, a position he himself must have shared.<sup>62</sup>

EDWARD GIBBON, *ESSAI SUR L'ÉTUDE DE LA LITTÉRATURE MAJOR CANCELLED PASSAGES FROM THE MS DRAFTS (1758)*

### Symbols used in the text

(†)	Gibbon's own marking for a note or reference.
<i>italic</i> <	Gibbon's deletions.
<ordinary>	Gibbon's insertions.
<i>italic</i>	Marks points where the MS and published text coincide.
[50]	Chapter numbers in MS draft.
LV	Chapter numbers in published text.
[ ]	Editorial insertions.
<C1-5; I5>	See Table, p. 149.

<C1> [On 'criticism'] Add. MS 34,880 f. 134

[20] XXXII . . . *La critique est selon moi, l'art de juger des écrits et des écrivains, ce qu'ils ont dit, s'ils l'ont bien dit, s'ils ont dit vrai.* On sent assez combien de quelle justesse d'Esprit, quelle finesse, quelle penetration sont necessaire[s] pour se servir de cet Instrument de la raison. Si la plupart de nos Etudes utiles et agreables par elles-memes ne deviennent absolument necessaires que par les habitudes d'attention, d'amour de la verité, d'exactitude de jugement, qu'elles forment peu à peu dans ceux qui s'y addonnent[,] je ne connois aucune Etude qui doive l'Emporter sur la Critique. On a dit avec Raison qu'une bonne Geometrie etoit une Excellente Logique, je crois qu'on pourroit le dire encore mieux d'une bonne Critique. Les Mathematiques ac[c]outument l'ame à suivre le fil d'une demonstration à travers d'un grand nombre de preuves intermediaires, non sentir toute la' [. . .]<sup>63</sup>

<C2> [An illustration of 'criticism'] Add. MS 34,880 f. 135

[23] XXVI . . . *La critique balance les differens degrés de Vraisemblance. C'est en les comparant que nous réglons tous les jours nos actions, que nous décidons souvent de notre sort.* Il est des Genies qui semblent nés pour fonder ou pour detruire des Empire[s] pour changer la face de la terre. <Le tranquille exercice des loix, les evenemens journaliers de[sic] Gouvernement pesent à leurs grandes ames, à force d'etre exaltes, ils sont inutiles.<sup>64</sup> *Balançons des Vraisemblances critiques.*>

[24] On croit generalement qu'après la mort de Merula assassiné pendant les Guerres Civiles de Marius, la dignité de Flamen Dialis ou de Pretre de Jupiter dont il etoit revetu[,] demeura vacante jusqu'au tems d'Auguste, pendant Septante-deux ans. Tacite ( )<sup>65</sup> et Dion l'affirment formellement,( )<sup>66</sup> et Sueton le donne assez à entendre lorsqu'il dit qu'Auguste retablit plusieurs ceremonies anciennes oubliées pendant les desordres dont il venoit de tirer le peuple Romain; la dignité de Flamen Dialis je trouve parmi elles.<sup>67</sup> Voila des Temoignages bien exprés. Mais ecoutons Ciceron, qui tonne dans le Senat contre Antoine. On a rendu dit-il des honneurs Sacrileges à la memoire de César. Le cadavre d'un homme mort a reçu ce culte qui n'etait dû qu'aux Dieux Immortels. *Est ergo Flamen ajouta-t-il ut Jovi ut Marti ut Quirino sic Divo Julio M. Antoninus*<sup>68</sup>. [f. 136] Disons nous que l'Orateur a consideré cet Ancien Sacerdoce comme subsistant toujours quoique de son temps il ne fut pas rempli? Nous servirons nous de son autorité pour terrasser[?] des historiens exacts mais non contemporains? Le sens de Tacite et de Sueton et de Dion est sans difficulté, mais ils ont pu se tromper? Ciceron n'a pu se tromper mais nous pouvons avoir mal pris son sens. En un mot <le degré de> la probabilité que les Historiens savoient ce fait l'emporte sur celle que nous entendons Ciceron, ou bien lui cedent-ils[?]? Peu m'importe comment l'on decide cette question, pourvu qu'on y reconnoisse combien les recherches des Critiques sont delicates, et avec quelle precaution il faut les examiner.

[25] xxxv *Une nouvelle considération embarrasse la critique d'une nouvelle difficulté. . . .*

<sup>62</sup> See my 'Gibbon Observed', op. cit. (n. 2), 138.

<sup>63</sup> The cancelled passage ends here (the bottom of f. 134, Gibbon's p. 185) but the immediate nature of the argument can be followed from its re-deployment in c. xxvi: the chain of critical probabilities corresponds to intermediate proofs in maths. The opening phrases about finesse and penetration are also re-used in c. 21/xxiv, the immediate replacement for this crossed-out passage.

<sup>64</sup> The first version of the sentence ran: 'Les details de Gouvernement, la tranquille administration des Loix elles ne scauroient s'en occuper. Eclairissons notre Idée par un exemple.' The meaning of the obscure preamble is probably explained by the fact that this sentence and its

replacement (but not strictly the preceding one) refer forward to Cicero. His reference to the priest of Jove in the quotation below is thus loose — as befits his 'great soul' — rather than precise and legalistic: thus the critical dilemma is resolved.

<sup>65</sup> *Annals* III.58, where the interval of vacancy is stated as seventy-five years.

<sup>66</sup> *Roman History* LIV.36.1.

<sup>67</sup> In *Augustus* 2.31.

<sup>68</sup> *Philippic* II.43: 'Is M. Antony then the priest of the divine Julius, just as Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus have their priests?'

«C3» [An illustration of philosophic detachment] Add. MS 34880 f. 140

[37] XLVII. . . . *J'aime à les surprendre qui détestent chez le Barbare ce qu'ils admire chez le Grec, qui qualifient la même Histoire d'impie chez le Payen, et de sacrée chez le Juif.*

[38] Un Boeuf d'une grandeur demesuréé naquit dans le pays de Sabin. Les Devins promirent l'Empire du monde aux compatriotes de celui qui la sacrifiait dans le temple de Diane à Rome. Le Sabin obeit, conduit [f. 141] sa Victime à Rome et la presente au Sacrificateur. Le Romain frappé du peril de la patrie et croyant tout legitime pour le detourner, eluda la prédiction par une ruse. 'Le Tibre coule au bas de la montagne <dit-il> purifiez vous dans la riviere et alors nous immolerons votre offrande à la Deesse.' Le Sabin rempli de zele court executer ce precepte[,] le Romain saisit l'occasion et immole la Victime fatale à Diane et à sa patrie. <Nous lisons ce fait et nous savons bien nous etonner de la credulité des Romains, de croire de pareilles fadaises, et de la superstition de Tite Livre de les mander à la posterité.<sup>69</sup> Attacher le destin du monde à une puerilité, decerner le prix à la fourberie et l'Injustice. Quelles Idées qu'elles sont indigne de la grandeur et de l'equité de l'Etre Supreme: que ces payens etoient malheureux! la religion etouffoit chez eux les lumieres de la raison.>

[39] Je cherche un fait à peu près pareil dans les annales des Hebreux, et j'en trouve le meme à tous egards dans le Stratageme dont se servit Jacob pour derrober à son frere Esau la benediction de leur pere. Les objets ne sont point changés mais nos yeux le sont. Nous n'y apperçevons plus rien de petit, plus d'absurde. Tout nous y paroît grand et admirable, et si le bon sens s'en effarouche d'abord, les commentateurs savent trouver dans le sens Mystique de quoi faire taire les plus obstinés. Il en est comme du heros et du «Voleur» dans Boileau. On admire César, mais

Qu'on livre son pareil en France à La Reynie  
Dans trois jours nous verrons ce phenix de guerriers  
Laisser sur l'Echaffaut sa tete et ses lauriers.<sup>70</sup>

«I5» [A secular illustration in lieu] Add. MS 34880 f. 157-b

3 Novembre 1758 Addition ou changement à p. 197 [f. 140]

[37] *J'aime à voir les jugemens des hommes prendre une teinture de leur preventions, à les surprendre qui n'osent [pas] tirer des principes qu'ils reconnoissent pour vrais les conclusions qu'ils sentent etre exactes[,] qui detestent chez le barbare ce qu'ils admirent chez le Grec.* Ils louent une action de leurs compatriotes[,] la Retrouvent-ils chez leurs ennemis, aussitot elle leur semble atroce. Ce défaut est de tous les peuples mais les Romains nous en offrent les exemples les plus marqués. Invincibles parce qu'ils croyoient l'etre[,] ils pensoient et ils agissoient comme si leurs voisins etoient des ennemis leurs alliés des sujets. Leur Grandeur les affermit dans ces idées. Lorsqu'un Consul venoit de faire d'un pays florissant une vaste solitude, civiliser les barbares, etablir la paix, *faire* <c'etoit le nom [sic] qu'on donnoit à son Expedition. Mais si ces memes barbares reduits au desesper par la cruauté des Gouverneurs et par l'avarice des traitans (†) cherchoient à mourir au moins les armes à la main leur revolte paroissent une perfidie digne des plus grands chatimens. Ils [les Romains] avoient compris combien il leur etoit legitime, combien il etoit beau de chercher à mettre fin aux differends des autres peuples, qu'ils pouvoient meme employer des menaces et intimider le moins pacifique par la crainte de leur union avec ses ennemis. Ils etendoient[?] le principe trop loin. Le role de Mediateur devint pour eux celui d'arbitre. Non seulement ils conseilloyent la paix mais ils decidoient des conditions et accabloient sous l'effort de leurs armes ceux qui s'y montrent refractaires. Tite Live ouvert au hazard en fournira vint exemples. Celui de Popillius est le plus fameux. "[Antiochus,] Donnez la paix à Ptoloméé et abandonnez l'Egypte. Voila les ordres du Senat. >Declarez si vous< y obeissez vous? >Repondez avant que de sortir de ce cercle.< Vous ne sortirez de ce cercle [avant] que vous ne m'ayez repondû.["](\*) Les Romains applaudissoient de cet usage de leur pouvoir, et leurs alliés les admiroient en tremblant. Mais >lorsque les memes Allies presumoient de< des qu'un autre peuple osoit croire que ce privilege ne se bornoit aux Romains, Ceux ci envisageoient les memes objets d'une maniere bien differente.<sup>71</sup>

Dans le tems que la republique meditoit la conquete de l'Asie, les [f. 157b] Rois de Syrie etoient les seuls adversaires à craindre. Avant de les terrasser il falloit les affoiblir. Les Gouverneurs des provinces peu faits à respecter un matire eloigné s'ac[c]outumoient à l'Independance mais ils chanceloient sur leurs trones mal assurés. Les Villes libres se plaignoient qu'un prince Grec voulut leur oter cette liberté dont elles avoient jouis sous les rois barbares. Proteger tous les mecontens paroissoit aux Romains un plan de >politique< conduite adroit sur et specieux. Il ne trompa pas leur esperance. La Ville de Rhode >s'attacha à eux de bonne heure< forma de bonne heure une étroite liaison avec eux. Dans les guerres de Philip et d'Antiochus, la flotte Rhodienne soutint sa reputation et fit pencher la victoire. L'amitie dirai je ou la

<sup>69</sup> *History of Rome* 1. 45, cf. *DF* 1. 367.

<sup>70</sup> Boileau, *Satire XI*, ll. 82-4. La Reynie was lieutenant of police in Paris. (I owe this reference to Dr Michael Hawcroft.)

<sup>71</sup> Inserted paragraph break.

politique des Romains detacha des etats d'Antiochus la Lycie et la Carie pour en recompenser leurs alliés (.) Mais les Rhodiens éclairés sur leurs vrais interets[,] »*sentirent*« comprirent à la fin que les victoires de la republique les assujetis[s]oient insensiblement. Faut-il donc etonner s'ils voyoient de mauvais oeil la chute prochaine de Persée [Perseus] seule barriere qui leur restoit [?] Ils envoyerent des Ambassadeurs au Roi et au Senat: leur commission les rendoit[?] Mediateurs »*de la paix*« d'une reconciliation. Ils devoient les [both sides] y exhorter et faire entendre meme qu'ils se joindroient à »*celui*« l'ami de la paix. "Ne nunc quidem [haec] sine indignatione legi audirive posse certum habeo. Inde existimari potest qui habitus animorum audientibus ea patribus fuerit."<sup>72</sup> C'est »*ainsi que s'exprime*« voila la reflexion du judicieux Tite Live[,] mais plus Romain que judicieux. Bien loin de peser les propositions des Rhodiens[,] on les renvoya avec une response dictée par le mepris et la colere. La guerre finie<sup>73</sup> le Senat songea à punir[?] leur attentat, un Tribun les denonça au peuple et ce ne fut qu'apres avoir fait essuyer à leurs deputés mille humiliations que le Senat »*les admit*« voulut les entendre. Les maximes du Droit Naturel et la pratique des Romains leur eussent fourni une defense trop solide pour ne pas irriter leurs juges. Ils le sentirent et n'employerent que les prieres les plus soumises. Ce fut par des aveux de leur faute et par de souvenir de leurs services passés qu'ils tacherent d'emouvoir le Senat. Caton les seconda. Cet austere [familier?] prevenu comme ses Compatriotes »*que tout etoit legitime*« que tout etoit permis pour servir sa patrie, fut assez éclairé pour »*sentir*« voir que ce principe justifiait les Rhodiens. Il parla en leur faveur. Les raisons de Caton et les larmes des Deputes sauvoient la ville. On ne »*songea*« parla plus de la detruire de fonds en comble. Mais on oublia que les Romains lui devoient en grande partie la conquete de l'Asie[,] on lui ota les provinces de Lycie et Carie, et on cita dans la suite cette sentence comme une preuve de la clemence de la republique, et de la douceur avec laquelle elle traitoit les plus grands criminals.( )

(†) Les Harangues de Ciceron contre Verres. V. surtout L.IV C.19 et L.V. C.41-46 font voir jusqu'à quel point on les portoit. Si l'on se rappelle que la Sicile »*la plus ancienne des provinces*« premiere province de la republique etoit regardeé plutot comme un allié que comme un pays de conquete, on ne sera plus surpris de lire dans Tacite Vie d'Agricole C.15, 19 l'etat des provinces qui ne s'etoient pas concilié la protection des Romains par une prompte submission.

(\*) Les Romains conduiserent[sic] cette affaire avec finesse. Les Ambassadeurs de Ptoloméé vinrent implorer leurs secours peu de jours avant la fin des *Quinquatrica* environ le 19 Mars A.U.C. 585. Ils [the Romans] parurent prendre avec chaleur les interets de leur allié. Popilius et ses collegues partirent dans trois jours. Mais comme la Guerre Macedonienne paroissoit d'un evenement douteux[,] ils s'arreterent plusieurs mois à Delos sous un assez mince pretexte. Ils ne s'embarquerent pour l'Egypte que lorsque la nouvelle de la bataille de Pynda (donnée le 4 Septembre A.U.C. 585) eut aplani toutes les difficultés. V. Tit. Liv. L.XLIV. C.19, 20, 29, et L.XLV. C.10, 11, 12.

(.) Liv: Hist: Rom: L.XXXVIII C.39.

( ) Liv: Hist: Rom: L.XLIV. C.14.15. L.XLV. C.20-26. Polyb: Legat: XCIII. Diodor: Sic: Legat. XIX. Salust[sic]: in Bell. Catilin: [51.5] p. 143, 144. Edit: Thys:

«C4» [General and partial causes in Roman history.] Add. MS 3488o f. 151-2

[50] LV. *L'étude des causes déterminées, mais générales, doit plaire aux uns [speculative system builders] et aux autres [believers in chance]. Ceux-ci y voyent avec plaisir l'homme humilié, les motifs de ses actions inconnus à lui-même, lui-même le jouet des causes étrangères, et de la liberté de chacun, l'origine d'une nécessité générale. Ceux-là y retrouvent l'enchaînement qu'ils aiment, et les spéculations dont leur esprit se nourrit.* Personne ne doute de l'influence de ces causes. Le philosophe cherche la cause des guerres Civiles de l'Angleterre pour le moins[s] autant dans la religion les moeurs la disposition du peuple Anglois que dans les actions particulieres de leur prince. Mais en reconnaissent cette Influence sachons lui donner des bornes.<sup>74</sup>

[51] Il y a des faits Isolés qui ne tiennent à rien, une cause partielle, du dessein du caprice les a produit et on ne peut [pas] remonter plus loin sans se jeter dans une fausse subtilité. Posons même pour premier principe qu'on ne doit recourir aux causes generales qu'après avoir epuisé en vain l'Energie des causes particulieres. Comparons la grandeur d'un Effet avec celle de la cause partielle qui paroît y avoir donné naissance[;] si nous trouvons que celle-la l'emporte[,] alors et alors seulement, généralisons nos Idées. Nous parviendrons facilement au premier ressort et nous lui trouverons une force suffisante pour faire mouvoir toute la machine.

[52] Faisons »*attention*« entrer dans cette comparaison non seulement la grandeur mais encore la durée respective de la cause et de l'Effet, l'une peut quelquefois nous faire illusion l'autre ne sauroit nous tromper. La folle ambition de Xerxes a pu bouleverser la terre et donner occasion à cette leçon importante que les nombres des trésors et l'orgeuil ne peuvent rien contre la discipline la liberté et la Vertu, mais pour la continuité des Efforts, pour la constance inébranable du peuple Romain sous les plus affreux révers il faut chercher une cause plus generale, toujours subsistante et toujours agissante. La

<sup>72</sup> 'I am sure that, even today, this cannot be read or listened to without indignation. So it can be inferred what the feeling was in the minds of the senators as they listened to it.' Livy, *History of Rome* XLIV. 14.

<sup>73</sup> i.e. with Perseus of Macedonia.

<sup>74</sup> Compare the striking, if fragmentary remarks on civil wars in 'Hints. Nos. I-VI', which show a similar awareness of stratified motion in history pr. *The English Essays of Edward Gibbon* (ed. P. B. Craddock, 1972), 88-90.

raison en est claire. Le hazard «la volonté d'un homme» peuvent donner le branle à de grands mouvemens mais il est rare que les effets d'une cause aveugle «passagere ou inconstante» soient uniformes et suivis. Lucrece meurt par le crime des Tarquins et sa propre Vertu. Aussitot le Genie des Romains se reveille, les Tarquins et la Royaute fuissent devant lui. C'est vain que Porsenna tonne aux Portes de Rome. Les Romains savent mourir, ils ne savent [pas] servir. Porsenna admire la force qui donne la liberté à l'ame[;] il «se retire» laisse à ces lions dechainés un Courage depuis si fatale à l'Italie. La Republique s'affermir avec elle la haine immortale des Rois ( ). Resoudra[-]t[-]on ce desespoir cette opiniatreté en le mecontentment qui produisent quelques actes de Violence ? Ne les puiserons nous pas plutôôt dans la constitution du Gouvernement Romain [?]

[53] A l'examiner avec attention nous sentirons que la mort de Lucrece a été à l'Etablissement de la liberte ce que sont les trompettes à une bataille; le signal et non la cause. Les Rois de Rome possedoient une autorité grande mais mal definie, et cependant ils la possedoient d'une facon bien précaire: pour la reprendre le peuple n'avoit qu'à vouloir.(B) Ils estoient juges, pouvoir immense dans un tems ou les loix ecrites estoient en petit nombre, les appels au peuple [f. 152] encore plus rares. Ils estoient Generaux et dans un tems ou les guerres n'estoient que des Incursions. Il leur estoit bien aisé de les susciter, et de les soutenir. Mais sans soldats sans trésors une «petite» nation feroce pauvre et peu nombreuse eclairoit de près toutes leurs demarches, et cette nation n'estoit ni eblouie par le faste imposant d'un Monarque[,] ni aveuglé par les prejugués d'un droit divin, ni attaché à une famille par les liens de la reconnaissance et de l'Habitude.

[54] Des Historiens republicaines ont noirci peutetre le caractere «du dernier des Tarquins». <sup>75</sup> Il a pu etre moins mechant mais non moins faible. Si cette unite d'action ou plutot d'effet decoula du jeu d'un grand nombre d'acteurs[,] dont «la situation» le caractere et les vues estoient cependant bien differentes et qui ont travaillé d'une maniere uniforme dans les tems bien eloignés, je conclus hardiment l'existence d'une cause plus generale que la Volonté d'un chacun. Borné et aveugle elle ne voyoit qu'une partie de ces effets, souvent pas meme cette partie. Il [est] bien humiliant pour les hommes de comparer leur decisions au jet de dez; mais si l'on voyoit Cent mille dèz presenter toujours les mêmes faces, accuseroit on de subtilité celui qui en chercheroit la cause caché?

[55] Mais c'est lorsqu'elles produisent des effets combattûs par toutes les causes partiales qu'on peut mettre en jeu, qu'elles se devoient avec le plus d'eclat. Dans le premier siecle de L'Empire «des Cesars» les fers des Romains estoient pèsans mais couverts de lauriers. Malheureux chez eux, i[s] achevoient la conquete de l'Univers (\*).

Et nunc siquid abest, Italis adjudicat armis. <sup>76</sup>

Les barbares redoutoient les armes des Romains; l'orgueil des Arsacides s'humilia devant celui des Césars (†). La fiere Germanie immola «à la liberte» trois legions[,] l'Elite de l'armée, mais le nom des Vaincûs en imposa aux Vainqueurs, et au lieu de marcher au Capitole epouvanté, ils se crurent heureux qu'on les laissa tranquilles dans leur marais. Cependant les souverains du monde estoient presque tous <sup>77</sup> furieux au foibles[,] peu dignes de commander les legions, jaloux de quiconque l'estoit davantage ( ), donnant un pouvoir Illimité aux Affranchis, liant les mains aux grands hommes. Le Spectacle que ce meme Empire depuis «Aurelien» Claude II [Gothicus] à Théodose nous offre est précisément le revers de celui ci. Pluieurs Tyrans mais tous, si l'on excepte un Constantius et un Valens, des princes qui aimoient la guerre et que l'entendoient[,] cependant les barbares limitrophes attaquent l'empire sous les plus grands hommes, l'innoendent des qu'un le [sic] prince leur paroît moins redoutable, et le renversent quatorze ans [410] apres la mort du grand Théodose. «Le Philosophe» L'Historien qui s'arrete aux causes partiales[,] comment expliquera t-il ce Phénomene ?

[56] L'Esprit Philosophique en trouvera sans difficultés les raisons. Il verra à la premiere de ces Epoques, le monde convaincû que l'Empire des Romains ne connoitroit jamais de bornes ni d'Espce ni de tems,

His Ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono[;]  
Imperium sine fine dedi. <sup>78</sup>

À la seconde il en attendoit la prochaine dissolution.(†) Les Vertus militaires qui n'abandonnerent les Romains que longtems apres toutes les soeurs, estoient enfin passées chez les Barbares. Ceux ci instruits par leurs malheurs, et persuadés combien les Romains devoient de Triomphes à leur désunion avoient

<sup>75</sup> This monarchist and revisionist emphasis in favour of the Tarquins is reiterated in *DF* v.280-1: a telling example of Gibbon's extraordinary coherence in, and care over, detail.

<sup>76</sup> 'Nunc, et siquid abest, Italis adjudicat armis', Horace, *Epistles* 1.18.57. 'And now if anything is lacking, he [Augustus] awards it to the arms of the Italians.'

<sup>77</sup> Gibbon then inserted the word 'su' here, which, however, seems to make no sense.

<sup>78</sup> 'To these people I [Jupiter] allot neither boundaries nor a period: I have given them dominion without end,' Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.278-9.

formé de ces lignes puissantes des François, des Allemands, qui fondoient sur une Monarchie, dont la division la moins pernicieuse étoit celle de l'Orient et de l'Occident.

[57] LXXX. *Le procédé de la Nature est assez different de celui de nos Philosophes; . . .*

(B) l'un faisoit des Tyrans, l'autre les punissoit.<sup>79</sup>

(\*) Sans compter plusieurs provinces qui ne couterent point de sang[,] La Rhétie la Pannonie, la Dalmatie, la Dacie, la Grande Bretagne, l'Armenie la Mésopotamie la Paléatine furent soumises à l'Empire entre le regne d'Auguste et celui de Trajan.

(†) Tiridate frere de Vologése Roi des Parthes vint se prosterner aux pieds [de] Neron devant tout le peuple Romain, il se donna le titre de son Esclave, et assura l'Empereur qu'il partageoit son adoration avec le Soleil. Neron le reçut avec bont[é] et lui accorda le royaume de l'Armenie. *Dion. l.LX p. 717 718 [recte 63.5.2]. Tillemont Histoire des Empereurs. Tom. I. p. 510*

(‡) Lorsque Romulus consulta les oiseaux à la fondation de Rome, Douze Vautours lui apparurent; Les Augures trouvoient dans le nombre de ces oiseaux, la durée de la Ville; c'étoit ou douze ans, ou Cent vin[gt], ou Douze Cen[t]s. Les deux premieres periodes [s']étoient écoulées depuis longtems, et dans le cinquieme siecle de l'Ère Chrétienne, on attendoit avec frayeur l'Expiration de la dernière. Ses craints remplirent l'Italie lorsqu'en 402, les Goths y firent leur première Irruption. La terreur influa cependant sur le «caractere» calcul des Romains car il s'en falloit Quarante Cinq ans que la terme fatal ne fût arrivé. *V. Howel's History of the World. Tom. II. p. 538. L'Histoire de la Monarchie Française par l'Abbe du Bos. Tom. I. 80*

◀C5> [Roman History a defence of Christian revelation] Add. MS 3488o ff. 153-5

La Religion [60] [Section] v. La litterature se fait honneur de se ranger sous le drapeau de la Theologie[,] non de cette Theologie Contentieuse qu'on pourroit peindre comme la muse de la Tragedie [avec] un masque au visage, un poignard à la main; mais de cette doctrine celeste, assez bienfaisante pour ne precher à ses enfans que la Vertù, assez grande pour la recompenser chez ses ennemis. Cette doctrine est un corps de preceptes mais il est fondé sur des faits qui se sont passé chez ces memes peuples qui sont l'objet des travaux du Litterateur. Les livres ou nous les puisons ces faits, sont-ils aussi «anciens» qu'ils nous paroissent? Ne contiennent ils rien de contraire aux moeurs connus de ces tems? la religion des payens, le Gouvernement Romain, l'État des provinces nous y sont depeints avec fidelité [?] La moindre Erreur la moindre contradiction dévoilerait l'Imposteur et mettroit les livres sacrés dans la classe de ces Romains favoris de Don Quichotte dont un des heros fabuleux enleva aux Sarrassiens l'Image de Mahomet, quoique les principes religieux de ce peuple leur defendit non seulement le culte des Idoles, mais même l'usage de la Sculpture. Nos Theologiens ont sustenù ce combat avec honneur. [f. 154] Toute la science toute la subtilité des Incrédulés n'a pu convaincre les Ecrivains inspirés d'une seule meprise[,] leur autorité doit l'emporter sur celle de toutes les autres histoires car je n'en connois aucune sortie victorieuse d'une pareille Epreuve.

[61] La Physique partage avec les Belles Lettres l'honneur de defendre la religion, et il faut convenir que le nombre des preuves qu'elle lui fournit n'est égale que par leur solidité. Elles ont pour but l'Existence de l'Être supreme qui se derobe quelquefois à notre meditation mais qui se devoit toujours à nos yeux. Cependant tout utiles qu'elles sont pour confirmer la foi du sage, elles servent peu à dissiper les sophismes des Ennemis. Les adversaires de l'Être suprême sont en petit nombre et cachés, peutetre n'existent ils nulle part; ceux de la révélation sont nombreux et hardis.

[62] Plus nous nous appuyons de nos connoissances Philologiques, mieux nous eviterons des ecueils qui ne sont que trop ordinaires. Lorsqu'on vante l'excellence de la morale Chrétienne[,] sa conformité avec les plus pures lumières de la religion naturelle[,] Platon Senèque, Cicéron sont cités pour prouver que le Christianisme n'étoit point un nouveau joug imposé aux hommes, mais un Systeme de devoirs connu de toutes les nations, adopté par les prêtres, «ordonné par les legislateurs», enseigné par les Philosophes, chanté par les poetes( ). Caton, Aristide, Socrate viennent reprocher aux Chrétiens leurs Vices, «et pour faire rougir davantage», on exalte leur vertu pour déprecier les notres. Mais d'un autre côté veut-t-on faire comprendre aux hommes ce qu'ils doivent à la revelation, on ne trouve point de couleurs assez fortes pour peindre l'aveuglement et les erreurs des plus grands hommes[,] les défauts des meilleurs, et le vice et la corruption qui inondoit la terre quand le legislateur des Chrétiens y vint apporter la paix et la lumiere.

[63] L'Etude approfondie de l'Antiquité nous fera éviter ces extremes, nous y verrons des principes generaux vrais payer dans leurs details et leurs applications aux prejuges de leur siecle ce tribut dont les ages les plus libres ont peine à s'exempter[;] les systems de Philosophie se prêtant à tous les genies faire souvent du misantrophe intraitable, un citoyen garanti des tentations par l'Idée de sa propre grandeur; du debauché effrené[,] un Voluptueux delicat éclairé et bienfaisant[;] Mais après avoir rendu hommage à la vertu d'un petit nombre on fremira d'horreur à la corruption Generale. Une histoire telle que celle de Sueton me fait sentir combien les hommes avoient besoin d'une loi nouvelle. J'y vois presque partout les vices les plus dangereux et les plus avilit[s,] sans marcher à tete levée la Vertù meprisé et persecuté, la decence la plus simple, pronéé comme la plus sublime Vertu. Ce n'est que chez les Empereurs Romains

<sup>79</sup> (A) is a note to c. 49, printed as the final clause to c. LIV.

<sup>80</sup> Gibbon had already noted down this story in his 'Common Place Book' begun in 1756, under 'Roman

Empire', Add. MS 34,88o f. 31, and he used it again twenty-five years later in the *History*, iii. 506: striking testimony to a sure and early interest in the power of ideas, as also to a ready transcendence of naive empiricism.



que je vois ce que sont les hommes libres du joug de la religion, sourds à la voix de la honte, élevés au dessus des punitions humaines.

[64] On a demandé si l'on ne pouvoit pas aimer la vertu pour elle meme, [mais] celui qui s'est engagé dans l'histoire degoutante de ces monstres ne s'ecrira t il <plutot> pas a tout moment, Ces hommes n'ont-ils point aimé le mal pour lui-meme ? Je leur pardonne leurs debauches infames, la boucherie de toute l'ancienne Noblesse de la republique m'afflige sans m'etonner. Des politiques pouvoient immoler à regret à leur crainte ceux qui ne portoient qu'à[sic] gemissant les fers de leurs egaux[,] souvent de leurs inferieurs[,] quelquefois des plus viles des hommes. Mais je les vois qui repandent le sang avec plaisir[,] qui se plaisent dans les tourmens des malheureux. On se souvient de ce sang froid de tyran Tibere. "Je n'auerois garde de te haccorder,[""] [= accorder] repondit il au miserable qui demande pour grace derniere une morte prompte, je ne t'ai pas encore pardonné (.). Son digne Elève Caligula voulant raffiner sur ses plaisirs, et les des executions vulgaires[,] quoique ses bourreaux fideles à ses volontés frappoient les Victimes de maniere qu'ils se sentoient mourir([†])[,] >se resolut de< voulût se donner le spectacle charmant d'un Senateur dechiré en pieces par ses confreres. Le senat complaisant se prêta à ses desires et acheta sa grace par son infamie. ([\*]) César ne leur pardonna que l'ordres membres dechirés de [f. 155] la victime trainés par les rues et ensuite rassemblés devant lui.

[65] Que ces tyrans ont du faire regretter la memoire d'Auguste, sa jeunesse dissolu et cruelle ne servit qu'à donner du relief aux travaux du reste de sa vie, qui firent succeder la terre la paix l'abondance et la prosperité aux horreurs des guerres Civiles. Que sa conduite a du inspirer une vive reconnaissance à ses sujets. Aussi nous voyons des peres mourans dans ces instans où la flatterie se tait ordonner à leur fils de remercier les dieux de ce qu'ils laissoient Auguste après eux ( ). Auguste meurt, l'aigle s'envole du bucher, le Senat lui donne une place parmi les dieux[,] il lui decerne des pretres et des temples ( ). La Politique s'unit à la reconnaissance. En divinirant Auguste quel eclat, ses successeurs n'ajoutent ils pas à leur gouvernement à leur famille, à leurs nnes [?] Les payens ne devoient pas etre plus choqués de l'Apotheose d'Auguste que de celle de Bacchus ou de Thesée. Comme eux son origine passoit pour divine, des prodiges dont quelqu'uns eblouissent pour un les Philosophes accompagnoient sa naissance, ( ) comme eux

Post ingentia facta Deorum in templa recepti[,]  
Dum terras hominumq[ue]: colunt genus, aspera bella  
Componunt, agros assignant, oppida condunt<sup>81</sup>

et comme eux les hommes le pouvoient croire reçu parmi les dieux dont il étoit descendu. Un Senateur <qui avoit ete[?] Préteur> il [prêta] serment que la nouvelle divinité à l'exemple de Romulus lui avoit apparu dans toute la splendeur de la majesté Celeste.<sup>82</sup>

[66] Cependant la Philosophie éclairée de ce siecle dissipa sans effort toute ce[tte] Illusion, le Dieu Auguste ne passa jamais que pour une machine de la Politique; le peuple le negligeoit[,] le plus superstitieux de ses successeurs s'en moqua( ) et l'on connoit la recompense que ce lache flateur Numerius Atticus reçut de Livie comme le prix de son parjure.<sup>83</sup>

[67] Dix huit ans [plus tard] un homme obscur perit par la >main du< supplice le plus infame. Il sortoit d'une nation meprisée de toute la terre. Les disciples l'annoncent pour Dieu mais dieu d'un nouvel ordre[,] mais destructeur de tous les dieux de la terre. Cependant sa doctrine s'etend. Persecuté partout, partout il renaît de ses cendres. Ses ennemis s'acharnent pour le combattre, ils se refutent par leurs propres aveux ( ). On erige le croix sur les debris de Capitoile. Le Magi et le Druide[,] le Stoicien et l'Epicurien se reunissent à croire une doctrine qui etonne la raison et qui amortit.

[68] LXXXIII. Voilà quelques rélexions qui m'ont paru solides sur les différens utilités des Belles-Lettres. J'auerois trop bonne opinion de moi-meme pour ne pas croire qu'un autre eut fait beaucoup mieux sur le meme sujet, trop mauvaise si je n'esperois pas que dans un age moins preçote et avec une erudition plus etendue j'auerois pu achever quelque chose de moins defectueux. Cependant tel qu'il est, je ne la crois pas absolument mauvais. On peut dire que ces remarques sont vraies mais usées, on peut aussi alleguer qu'elles sont nouvelles mais paradoxiques.[sic] Quel auteur aime les Critiques ? cependant la premiere me deplairait le moins: l'avantage de l'art m'est plus cher, que la gloire de l'artiste.

(.) Sueton. L.III.C.61  
([†]) Sueton. L.IV. C.30  
([\*]) Idem. L.IV. C.28

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<sup>81</sup> 'Their mighty deeds done, they were received into the dwellings of the Gods, while [previously] they were tending the soil and the race of men, settling harsh conflicts, distributing lands, founding cities . . .', Horace, *Epistles* II. 1. 6-8.

<sup>82</sup> Suetonius, *Augustus* 2.100.

<sup>83</sup> 'The price of perjury' was 1 million sesterces, Dio Cassius, *Roman History* LVI.46.2. Numerius Atticus is of course alluded to at n. 82 above.