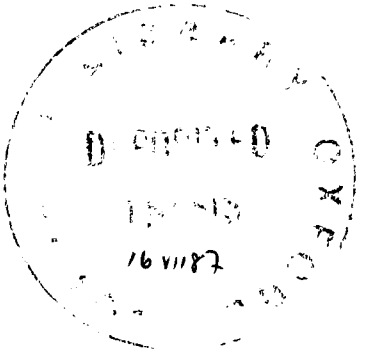
MILTON'S HISTORY OF BRITAIN IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT



by

Nicholas von Maltzahn

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Lincoln College
Oxford
Trinity Term, 1985

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ABSTRACT

The prologue studies the Tory publication of Milton's *Character of the Long Parliament* (1681). It argues that the provenance of this tract is best explained if Milton did in fact attempt to include the Digression in his *History of Britain*. Further ambiguities in Milton's early reputation are discussed in a review of the *History*'s reception.

Chapter I surveys Milton's response to the long-standing demand for a national history and briefly reconsiders his ideas on history and historiography.

Chapter II proposes that his political sympathies led Milton to look to the British legends for his historical subject. The strong Protestant and Tudor associations of such native myth have been largely overlooked, and yet they bear strongly on Milton's proposals for a British historical poem. His reappraisal of the myths in the *History* indicates his disillusionment with his original historical project and reflects his changing opinion of the national character.

Chapter III charts Milton's response to the legends surrounding Lucius, Constantine and the early British church, and traces conflicts between his need to deny church history and his desire to rewrite it. It then turns to his curiously muted views on the Saxon church.

Chapter IV compares the use of Gildas's *De Excidio* in the *History* with Milton's relative silence on Arthur. Milton's regard for this ancient British jeremiad recalls that of the Reformers and suggests the instability of his commitment to purely classical styles of historiography in his time.

Chapter V surveys the conflicting ideological and religious pressures on the history of the Saxons and the Conquest and compares Milton's shifting response to these in his political tracts with his views in the *History*.

The Epilogue returns to Milton's view of the national character, with special reference to the Digression. Presenting his references to climate theory in a wider context, it argues that in moving from a loosely predestinarian position to a belief in free will, Milton first sought some determining natural force to explain England's conduct through the ages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like first to thank Professor John Carey, supervisor of my graduate studies, and Mr. Dennis Burden, who kindly deputized as reader and critic for several terms. I am also very grateful to Dr. Blair Worden who generously read parts of this work in draft. I alone, however, am responsible for the arguments and errors in the thesis.

Finally, I should like to record my gratitude to Dr. Martin Dzelzainis who introduced me to Milton's History when I was an undergraduate. Since then I have benefited greatly from my discussions with him, a debt which will be more fully evident with the forthcoming publication of his work on the ideological origins of the English Revolution.

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NOTE

For ease of reference Milton's prose works are cited as follows:

CP: Complete Prose Works. Gen. ed. D. M. Wolfe. 8 vols. 1953-1982.

CW: The Complete Works. Gen. Ed. F. A. Patterson. 18 vols. New York: 1931-1933.

I have provided references to the Complete Prose translations as much as possible when quoting Latin from the Complete Works; the only work I quote in translation is the Commonplace Book.

Milton's poetry is cited from Complete Shorter Poems, ed. J. Carey, 1968, repr. 1971, and Paradise Lost, ed. A. Fowler, 2nd ed.: 1971.

I have regularized insignificant italicization and capitalization, and made u-v, i-j and other minor features conform to modern practice.

Prologue

Milton's writing of the History of Britain was interrupted late in 1648 when he turned to The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates. He appears to have resumed work on the final books of the History after 1652, probably in the mid-1650s after the completion of the three Defences.[1] Both periods precede years of great accomplishment on his part, first as a controversialist and then as poet, and yet neither is well-served by biographies of Milton.[2] Since the History has lost all currency as a work of historical reference,[3] and is no longer popular for its style, its chief remaining value lies in its evidence for Milton's historical views and related literary, political and religious opinions during its composition. It is to these

1 CP, V. pp. xxxvii-xliii; J. T. Shawcross, 'A Survey of Milton's Prose Works,' in Achievements of the Left Hand, eds. M. Lieb and J. T. Shawcross (Amherst: 1974), pp. 310, 343-344.

2 W. R. Parker, Milton a Biography (Oxford: 1968), pp. 900-903, 1010-1012.

3 Milton's use of his sources has been thoroughly investigated, however, in Fogle's annotated edition of the History for the Yale Complete Prose Works. See also H. Glicksman, 'The Sources of Milton's History of Britain,' University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, II (1920), pp. 105-144, and C. Nicholas, Introduction and Notes to Milton's History of Britain, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, XLIV (1957).

that the more successful studies of the History have gravitated.[4] Following recent studies of the political and religious uses of history in Milton's day,[5] the ideological significance of the History has become more apparent.[6] The main purpose of this thesis is to outline Milton's responses to the key controversies, both secular and ecclesiastical, with which he found himself confronted in writing the History. In each case, the History is considered in a double context: the study of earlier controversy assists with placing the work among Milton's other, often contradictory uses of England's past.

First, however, it is necessary to resolve a long-standing problem about the text of the History as it was

4 See H. Trevor-Roper, 'The Elitist Politics of Milton,' Times Literary Supplement (June 1, 1973), pp. 601-603, as well as C. Firth, 'Milton as an Historian,' Proceedings of the British Academy, III (1907-1908), pp. 227-257 [reprinted in Essays Historical and Literary (Oxford: 1938), pp. 61-102], and F. R. Fogle, 'Milton as Historian,' in Fogle and H. Trevor-Roper, Milton and Clarendon (Los Angeles: 1965), pp. 1-20. Other studies are J. M. French, 'Milton as a Historian,' Publications of the Modern Language Association, L (1935), pp. 469-479; J. A. Bryant, Jr., 'The Evolution of Milton's Concept of History,' Diss. Yale 1948; M. Landon, 'John Milton's History of Britain: Its Place in English Historiography,' University of Mississipi Studies in English, VI (1965), pp. 59-76; F. G. Burroughs, 'Milton's Historical Thought: the Backgrounds of the History of Britain and Its Place in his Intellectual Development,' Diss. Harvard 1970.

5 Especially important to this study are J. G. A. Pocock, The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law (Cambridge: 1957), and The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton: 1975); Q. Skinner, 'History and Ideology in the English Revolution,' Historical Journal, VIII (1965), pp. 151-178, and The Foundations of Modern Political Thought (Cambridge: 1978) II. 'The Age of Reformation,' Part Three.

6 Study of the History has been transformed by Martin Dzelzainis, 'The Ideological Background to Milton's History of Britain,' Diss. Cambridge 1984. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Dzelzainis's work, especially in Chapter V below.

first published in 1670. This concerns the excerpt from the third book known as the Digression. The Digression was first published in part as the Character of the Long Parliament and Assembly of Divines (1681). It also survives in a contemporary manuscript by an unidentified hand.[7] Two related misunderstandings have hampered the study of the Digression. First, the circumstances of its original publication have been ignored and the editorial preface of the Character wrongly taken at face value, although not, it seems, by some readers in the 1680s. Second, although many have supposed the Character to comprise the passages in the History of Britain (1670) objected to by the censor, and reputedly given by Milton to Arthur Annesley, as yet the grounds for this supposition are weak. Since the Character is a telling outburst on Milton's part, it is regrettable that these uncertainties should obscure the significance of the tract.

The first problem concerns the appearance in 1681 of the Character. This publication delighted the Tories and could not have been more timely for them. In 1681, an issue of Heraclitus Ridens expresses their twofold pleasure in the tract. On one hand they could use Milton, the emerging Whig hero, to denigrate the Long Parliament, so countering the

7 The full title of the tract is Mr John Miltons Character of the Long Parliament and Assembly of Divines in MDCXLI (Henry Brome, 1681); the manuscript is Harvard Ms. Eng. 901. My study of the Digression has been much stimulated by Professor Austin Woolrych's forthcoming 'The Date of the Digression in Milton's History of Britain,' a copy of which he kindly communicated to me.

Whigs' invocation of the 1640s for their defence of parliamentary ascendancy. On the other hand, Tories found in the Character a gratifying onslaught against Presbyterians. The author of the dialogue in Heraclitus recognized the importance of the past in 'this Age of the walking of the Ghosts of the Old Rumpers.' His prolocutors quote from the Character at length, first against Parliament-- 'a very fair Character of the state of the Common-wealth'-- and then the Assembly-- 'was this the Picture of the thorough Reformation?'[8] Likewise, the Bishop of Norwich later cited the Character in a memorial sermon for 'our Martyr'd Sovereign, King Charles I.' He too used the tract to scourge the parliamentary cause:

> how much his [Charles's] Enemies sunk below their first Golden Pretences of Reforming our Religion, and removing the Grievance of the People, we may instruct our selves both from their own Writers, and the sad and dismal Confusion of Church and State which followed.[9]

Moore, like Heraclitus Ridens, quotes liberally from the Character to support his defence of the crown.

In fact, the Character appeared through Tory channels. It may well have been edited by Roger L'Estrange himself, a most persistent and vociferous critic of Milton. The polemical thrust of the Character explains why Milton found

8 Heraclitus Ridens, no. 10, April 4, 1681.
9 John Moore, A Sermon Preach'd Before the House of Lords, on January 31. 1697, pp. 25, 26-27. Moore also wrenches a quote out of context from Eikonoklastes, Sermon, p. 33.

a posthumous editor in this quarter. But first the evidence for L'Estrange's involvement needs to be presented.

Henry Brome published the Character. Brome had never published Milton before. He and his family are conspicuous instead for their deep and long-standing commitments with Roger L'Estrange, Tory journalist and pamphleteer. L'Estrange's brother Hamon had already enlisted Brome's services in 1659 for his magnum opus The Alliance of Divine Offices.[10] The following year Roger brought out several works with Brome including No Blind Guides (1660), a major attack on Milton. Thus began a long association between L'Estrange and Henry, then Joanna, then Charles Brome. The Bromes published much that the prolific L'Estrange brought into print; of around one hundred and thirty works by L'Estrange listed in Wing, the Bromes published over a hundred.[11] L'Estrange's biographer maintains that 'never was author more loyally served by publisher than L'Estrange was then by Harry Brome.'[12] They most depended on one another following the lapse of the Press Act in 1679 when L'Estrange, no longer able to wield the imprimatur, redoubled his production of tracts for his cause. In 1680 to 1681, L'Estrange was the author of over half the titles printed by the Bromes.[13] When forced into exile in Scotland

10 Thirty years later the son Charles Brome published the second edition of this work (1690).
11 Donald Wing, Short-Title Catalogue. . . 1641-1700. (New York: 1945-1951), sv. L'Estrange.
12 George Kitchin, Roger L'Estrange (1913), p. 375.
13 P. G. Morrison, Index of Printers, Publishers and Booksellers in Donald Wing's Short-Title Catalogue (Charlottesville, Va.: 1955), sv. Brome.

that winter, L'Estrange especially depended on Brome to publish his pamphlets, on which he relied both for a living and to maintain some of the political influence he had earlier enjoyed as licenser. The Bromes also published L'Estrange's Observator which appeared several times a week from 1681 to 1687.[14] The publisher was recognized as L'Estrange's man. A counterfeit letter satirizing L'Estrange purported to address Brome-- 'Honest Harry'-- from Scotland.[15] Their association also drew notice in Harris's Intelligence (February 11, 1681): 'Here's the old dog Towzer [L'Estrange] come out of his kennel with a brome at's tail.'[16]

The publication of the Character must therefore have met with L'Estrange's approval. Indeed, it is likely that he was responsible for it. L'Estrange had an interest in Milton that found continuing expression long after the poet's death.[17] An attack on the Long Parliament and the Presbyterians from Milton himself provided a useful missile in the pamphlet wars of the time,[18] especially since L'Estrange had already attacked Whigs by impugning their 'predecessors' in the 1640s. In 1681, L'Estrange also

14 Joanna Brome got into trouble for publishing the Observator (Kitchin, L'Estrange, pp. 278n, 328).
15 Kitchin, L'Estrange, p. 262.
16 Kitchin, L'Estrange, p. 266n.
17 From No Blinde Guides (1660) to many later allusions to Milton's works in L'Estrange's works, qv. J. T. Shawcross, Milton: A Bibliography for the Years 1624-1700, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, XXX (1934), nos. 801, 830, 838, 871, 873, 894, 931-934, 969-978.
18 L'Estrange's unpopularity at this point (DNB sv. L'Estrange, 1002b-1003a) may have further sharpened his appetite for such subterfuge.

reprinted his Account of the Growth of Knavery. . . with a parallel betwixt the reformers of 1677 and those of 1641 (Henry Brome, 1678, 1681).[19] As his title indicates, L'Estrange's chief purpose is

> to compare the Project of 77. with that of 40 and 41. and by tracing the Foot-steps of that Rebellion, from the Undeniable Fact of things pass'd, to gather some probable conjecture at things to come.[20]

Elsewhere he reiterated this theme in Tyranny and Popery Lording it Over the Consciences, Lives, Liberties and Estates both of King and People (Henry Brome, 1678). Here too he reviled the Presbyterians of the 1640s as part of his attack on their counterparts in the 1670s.[21] Emphasizing the parallel, Brome republished old tracts by L'Estrange against the Presbyterians.[22] The comparison 'became a favourite cry with the tories.'[23] The Character suited L'Estrange's purposes perfectly. It is therefore noteworthy that the title of M^{r} John Miltons Character of the Long Parliament and Assembly of Divines in MDCXLI incorrectly emphasizes 1641. This date was of course more relevant to L'Estrange's polemics than to the Digression, and featured

19 His response to Marvell's Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government (1677), which he considered an important factor in the popish plot.
20 Roger L'Estrange, An Account of the Growth of Knavery (1678), p. 8.
21 Roger L'Estrange, Tyranny and Popery (1678), pp. 20-23, 33-47.
22 Kitchin, L'Estrange, p. 375.
23 DNB sv. L'Estrange, p. 1001b.

in his repeated attacks on the politics of 'forty-one.'[24] A few months earlier, Thomas Wilson had called upon Milton's attack on the Presbyterians in the Tenure for a similar purpose.[25]

The question remains how the Character came into Brome's or L'Estrange's hands. The obvious answer is that Milton did submit the Digression as part of the History. In this case L'Estrange could have obtained it through his position as Surveyor of the Imprimery, especially given his great interest in Milton. He may well have struck the Digression from the History himself. Throughout the late 1660s and the 1670s, he was licensing literary, historical and miscellaneous tracts.[26] Testimony to his wide and often unwelcome involvement in London's printing industry includes his licensing of the Term Catalogues, one of which lists the first edition of the History.[27]

L'Estrange or his colleagues would certainly have disliked the Digression's praises of liberty and commonwealths. These dominate the passage which links the History to the body of the Digression. Without the link the Digression made no sense in the History and so the whole

24 This does not seem the simple mistake it is sometimes assumed to be, e.g. A. Woolrych, 'The Date of the Digression in Milton's History of Britain,' p. 2.
25 G. Sensabaugh, That Grand Whig, Milton (Stanford: 1952), pp. 106-108.
26 Cf. G. E. Briscoe Eyre (ed.), A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers from 1640-1708 A.D., (1913-1914), II. p. 451-2, for some of L'Estrange's entries at the time of the History's publication.
27 A Catalogue of Books Printed in London (Michaelmas Term, 1670).

section would have been suppressed. L'Estrange then had the Character ready to hand a decade later when he was publishing old material and new at a great rate. He now comfortably omitted the awkward linking passage and set forth Milton's telling condemnation of the Long Parliament and the Presbyterians.

This reopens the question of the contents of 'the unlicens'd Papers of his History' which, according to Edward Phillips, Milton presented to the Earl of Anglesey.[28] These 'Papers' have often been associated with the Digression,[29] apparently for the simple reason that the Digression does not appear in the History. The omission is assumed to follow from official intervention. Parker and Fogle try to discount this theory by asking why the censor in 1670 would oppose such criticism of the Long Parliament and Westminster Assembly.[30] They ignore, however, the linking passage in the Digression, not in the Character, which celebrates liberty and entertains hopes for a 'well amended commonwealth to come.' As noted above, this link would have

28 Darbishire, Early Lives of Milton (1932), p. 75-76. Phillips noted that the whereabouts of these papers 'is uncertain.' Unfortunately the sale of Anglesey's library in 1686 reveals no trace of them, Bibliotheca Angleseiana (1686). Tantalizingly, the Digression may well have come into the Mostyn Library in the 1680s, CP, V. p. 406, cf. the chronological distribution of the Mostyn holdings reported by the Historical Manuscripts Commission, 4th Report (1874), pp. 347-363.

29 Qv. Nicholas, Introduction and Notes to Milton's History, pp. 8-11.

30 Later in the eighteenth century, Francis Blackburne noted how well such an attack might have suited the licenser in the year of the second Conventicle Act, Nicholas, Introduction and Notes, p. 10. See also Parker, Milton, pp. 939-940; CP, V. p. 409.

caused offence. Without it, however, the Character could not very well be included in the History, even if it delighted L'Estrange and would have readily received the imprimatur.

This version of events also helps explain the variant spellings between the manuscript Digression and the printed Character. The manuscript respects his idiosyncratic orthography much more than the Character does, and yet the Character includes some Miltonic spellings not found in the manuscript. The difference probably originated from different copyists of an original text, that in turn was a copy of a Milton holograph: the Digression based perhaps on the text which went to Anglesey and the Character from a copy taken by L'Estrange.[31]

It has sometimes been assumed that Milton would no longer by 1670 have wished to vent his earlier disillusionment with the Long Parliament and the Westminster Assembly. Parker and Fogle, for instance, agree with the editor of the Character and share his suppositions about the 'tenderness to a Party' which reputedly held Milton back from publishing the Character with the History. This view of 'Party' seems a later Whig and Tory perception, however, and invites a closer analysis of the editorial introduction to the Character.

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31 This explains the variation analyzed by J. T. Shawcross, 'Milton's Spelling: Its Biographical and Critical Implications,' Diss. New York University 1958, pp. 222-225. It may also account for the anomalous crossings out in the manuscript and other small discrepancies between the two texts.

A review of this preface is warranted in any case by the ready application of the Character to Tory ends, and the peculiar circumstances of its publication. It could easily have been L'Estrange himself who wrote the preface to the Character.[32] He need not have made his presence too obvious as the undoctored tract worked very well for him as it was. Even so, the introduction to the Character looks suspiciously like Tory work. Certainly Heraclitus Ridens made good use of it:

> The Rogue, it seems, had in the beginning of the late times adventured his stock in the bottom of the Public Faith, and she was cast away passing up the Straits, and he having made no Ensurance in Crown and Church Land-Office, could never see penny of his money after.[33]

The reader attracted by Milton's name on the title-page was in for a surprise. He might soon have noticed the Tory note in some parenthetic comments in the Preface. First the editor dispatches the Presbyterian or Whig 'Party': 'whom neither this nor much more Lenity has had the luck to

32 Another suggestion has been James Tyrrell (British Museum Catalogue, and hence Wing, Short-Title Catalogue). Why Tyrrell, who thought Milton did too little to uphold the Whig idea of history as it was, would have produced the Character is unfathomable. Although Arthur Annesley may well have received the unlicensed papers he also seems an unlikely sponsor of a work so hostile to his ends. It should be noted that Herschel Baker assumes the author of the preface to have been Brome himself, Baker (ed.), The Later Renaissance in England: Nondramatic Verse and Prose, 1600-1660 (Boston: 1975), p. 925n.

33 Heraclitus Ridens, no. 10, April 4, 1681.

oblige.'[34] In keeping with Tory efforts to blacken parliamentary history, he explains Milton's motive for reclaiming his loan:

> observing how all in Offices had not only feathered their own Nests, but had enricht many of their Relations and Creatures, before the Publick Debts were discharged.[35]

Perhaps the long-standing question of Milton and the 'public faith' can be laid to rest as a Tory fabrication intended both to make the Character more plausible and to discredit further the Whig view of the 1640s. A Tory version of Milton's finances might well assign his losses at the Restoration to the earlier Public Faith.[36] In any case, such editorial matter points to an author unsympathetic to Whig views of the 1640s. Finally, a fierce ambiguity resides in the last sentence of the introduction. It might read as an ingenuous Whig's worship of Milton, or as a Tory slur:

> he had not probably mended his worldly condition in those days, but by performing such Service for them, as

34 CP, V. 440. Note how Jonathan Richardson misread the situation: he believed the Presbyterians-Whigs were by 1681 'a Party quite Subdu'd, and whose Faults the Government was then Willing to Have Forgotten.' Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 238.

35 CP, V. 440.

36 Parker has doubts about this story as it is, deriving as it does from the Character alone. He suspects that the story originated simply from confusion about Milton's losses on his Excise investment at the Restoration. Milton, pp. 397, 996.

> afterwards he did[37] for which scarce anything would appear too great.

This resembles Anthony à Wood's Tory view that Milton 'did great matters to obtain a name and wealth.'[38] In this light the editor's mention of Milton's efforts to recover his money blackens both the conduct of the Long Parliament and Milton's work for the Rump and Protectorate.

The editor of the Character left out the introductory section of the text as preserved in the manuscript Digression. He might easily have omitted the first two pages of the manuscript, in which Milton bridges the gap between the History and the Digression, on the grounds that they spoiled the integrity of the tract by referring to the historical parallel in the History. But their emphasis on liberty and 'a just and well amended common-wealth to come' were also inconvenient to an editor with little tenderness for the party in question.[39]

Milton's view of the Long Parliament in 1670 is itself uncertain; so too is his 'tenderness to a Party.' By 1659, his opinion of the Rump had improved from that which he held in 1654; this is consistent with an increasing nostalgia

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37 CP, V. 440.

38 Wood also jotted 'John Milton, a rogue' in the margin of one of his books. Darbishire, Early Lives, pp. xxvii, 39.

39 CP, V. p. 441. Woolrych ('The Date of the Digression,' p. 23) questions the passages in the Character but not in the manuscript, passages Fogle (CP, V. p. 407) thinks do 'have the true Miltonic ring.' It is difficult to read much into them; if unoriginal they look like glosses and an interfering editor could have done far worse. Fogle, of course, credits the editor 'for all his attempts at being helpful.' CP, V. p. 409.

just before the Restoration for the earlier republican experiment.[40] No evidence survives, however, of his later views on the Presbyterians and the unpurged Parliament he had so scathingly criticized in the Tenure of Kings and Magistrates.[41] On these grounds Milton might well have kept the Digression in the History, in which case his 'tenderness to a Party' may be numbered among the better ironies in the preface to the Character.

Moreover, the chief external reason for doubting that 'the unlicens'd Papers' comprise the Digression is John Toland's report that these concerned the Saxon church. According to Toland, Milton's harsh criticisms of 'the Superstition, Pride, and Cunning of the Popish Monks in the Saxon Times' were taken as a veiled attack on the Restoration episcopacy.[42] But grave doubts surround Toland's evidence on this point. Parker notes that 'Toland, as usual, elaborated on Phillips's account, probably without additional information.'[43] Moreover Toland had the strongest motives for deflecting attention from the Digression, and allowance must be made for his gifted and energetic handling of sources for political purposes. In 1698, the same year as his Life of John Milton, Toland

40 CP, IV. p. 671; VII. pp. 324-325. A. B. Worden, The Rump Parliament (Cambridge: 1974), pp. 86-87; 'Classical Republicanism and the Puritan Revolution,' in History and Imagination, eds. H. Lloyd-Jones, V. Pearl, and A. B. Worden (London: 1981), p. 199.
41 CP, III. pp. 191-192. Parker (Milton, p. 940) and Fogle (CP, V. p. 409) suppose that time lessened his displeasure with the Long Parliament and the Presbyterians.
42 Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 185.
43 Parker, Milton, p. 1133.

published A Defence of the Parliament of 1640, which described that assembly as a model for English parliaments. In Amyntor: or, a Defence of Milton's Life (1699), he announces that he could not 'endure to hear the Members of the Parliament of 40. . . infamously branded.'[44] The vindication of the Long Parliament features prominently in his works.[45] In his Life of John Milton, Toland's information about the censorship of the History seems plausible but at most only part of the whole truth. His jest at this point about the Restoration episcopacy shows how this story suits his anti-clerical views.[46] In short, Toland had every reason to conceal the true nature of the 'unlicens'd Papers' or to direct attention to their anti-clerical character.

Moreover, Toland also attempted to obscure Milton's authorship of the Character elsewhere. His Life of John Milton fails to mention the Character, despite his familiarity with Anthony à Wood's notes which list the Character among Milton's works.[47] Toland's silence on the Character is the more suspicious since he may well be

44 John Toland, Amyntor (1699). Toland is here decrying memorials of the anniversary of Charles's execution; Moore's sermon (1697) which invokes the Character may have been among those on his mind.
45 For Toland's remarkable industry and inventiveness see Edmund Ludlow, A Voyce from the Watch Tower, ed. A. B. Worden, Camden Society, 4th Series XXI (1978) pp. 22-80; for his adulation of the Long Parliament and authorship of A Defence of the Parliament of 1640, see Ludlow, Voyce, pp. 23, 36, 69-70.
46 Darbishire, Early Lives, pp. 185-186.
47 Toland, in Darbishire, Early Lives, pp. 83-197 passim, e.g. pp. 195-196.

responsible for the putatively authoritative additions--'from a Copy corrected by the Author himself'-- to the edition of the History (1694) in A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton (Amsterdam [London]: 1698). Toland's 'green fingers with manuscripts' also obtained A Letter to a Friend and The Present Means and Brief Delineation of a Free Commonwealth for the Milton canon.[48] In fact Wood, a Tory, was the only early biographer of Milton to refer to the Character: he observed with evident satisfaction that it provided a 'notable account of their Ignorance, Treachery, and Hypocrisie.'[49] It went unmentioned by Phillips who, like Toland, had a partisan as well as a personal regard for Milton.[50] It seems unlikely that this was mere oversight. Phillips could hardly have missed the Character when it first came out and wrote after Wood's work became available (1691).[51] Phillips's bibliography of Milton's works appears, however, in his edition of Milton's Letters of State and this seems to have been published in part as

48 The phrase is Blair Worden's, Ludlow, Voyce, p. 24. For his other additions to the Milton canon see Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 171.
49 Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 47.
50 Aubrey's silence on this subject may well be insignificant since he finished his 'Minutes of the Life of Mr John Milton' in the year of the Character's appearance. The Character had appeared by April: it is quoted in Heraclitus Ridens, April 4, 1681, and the Term Catalogue (Trinity, 1681) lists Joanna Brome as publisher of the Character by that May (J. T. Shawcross, Milton: A Bibliography, no. 860). Aubrey's notes were in Wood's hands by September of that year (Darbishire, Early Lives, p. xi).
51 Much rarer works by Milton, such as Observations, were known to Phillips, Letters of State Written by Mr. John Milton (1694), pp. xlix-l.

contribution to the defence of the reputation of the Long Parliament. Again, the omission looks suspiciously like a Whig silence on this awkward subject. Finally, the Whig editors of Milton's prose failed to include the Character in their compendious collection (1698).[52] Whigs must have viewed the piece with either dismay or incredulity: it struck hard at their description of the 1640s as a exemplary time of parliamentary supremacy. The misgivings over the piece have continued among latter-day Whigs. Masson, for instance, had Victorian doubts that Milton wrote the Character: 'what causes us to pause is rather the anti-Miltonism of the sentiments conveyed in a style so generally Miltonic.'[53] In a study of Milton's political beliefs, Don M. Wolfe ignores the Digression, only wondering 'if Milton's condemnation of the Long Parliament is authentic.'[54] Christopher Hill, in setting Milton among the Levellers, believes the Digression directed against 'individual M.P.s.'[55] Even French Fogle, the editor of the History and the Digression in the Yale Press Complete Prose Works of John Milton, cheerfully posits that the Digression originated in the passing 'heat of the moment.'[56] Fogle suggests that the Digression resembles Leveller works of the

52 Toland, although associated with this edition, was not its editor, Parker, Milton, p. 1196.
53 David Masson, Life of John Milton (1859-1894), VI. p. 809.
54 D. M. Wolfe, Milton in the Puritan Revolution (New York: 1951), p. ix.
55 C. Hill, Milton and the English Revolution (1977), pp. 162, 165.
56 CP, V. p. 421-422.

time, but it also bears a close resemblance to other contemporary attacks on political corruption. Clement Walker's History of Independency (1648-1649), for instance, lengthily expressed grievances about sequestrators, committee-men and dishonouring of the public faith that recall the Digression as well as the last lines of Milton's sonnet to Fairfax (August 1648). Lately too, Austin Woolrych has tried to square the tone of the Digression with his perception of Milton's views in 1648 by dating it around 1660.[57] These writers' problems with the Digression derive from assumptions about Milton's mood in the late 1640s reminiscent of Whig opinion.

The Digression rises naturally, however, from its context in the third book of the History. This book is already given over to the jeremiad of Gildas, Milton's chief source at this point. Gildas's influence quite alters the previously humanist cast of Milton's historiography. As will be seen, Milton had a great regard for the De Excidio, and the Briton's hyperbole proved contagious when the History came to describe the aftermath of the Roman departure from Britain.

57 In the as yet unpublished 'Date of the Digression in Milton's History of Britain.' This is the boldest of a series of articles in which Woolrych argues Milton's deep alienation from his earlier cause after 1659: A. Woolrych, 'Milton and Cromwell: "A Short but Scandalous Night of Interruption"?', in M. Lieb and J. T. Shawcross, eds., Achievements of the Left Hand (Amherst: 1974), pp. 185-218; CP, VII. pp. 1-228; 'Political Theory and Political Practice,' in C. A. Patrides and R. B. Waddington, eds., The Age of Milton (Manchester: 1980), pp. 34-71.

Indeed, Gildas's singular influence both reflects and contributes to Milton's misgivings about the national character in 1648. Woolrych manfully maintains that 'it was absurdly premature to pronounce final judgement on the "gaining or loosing of libertie" in 1648,'[58] but in the context of Milton's reading of Gildas it seems natural enough. Nor do the Psalms Milton translated in 1648 reflect the confidence Woolrych ascribes to him.[59]

Moreover, the introductory passage to the Tenure (January, 1649) reads like a gloss on the Digression. Here Milton, despite the solace of Pride's Purge and the impending execution of the king, still fulminates against the Presbyterians and an unreforming nation:

> . . .most men are apt anough to civill Wars and commotions as a noveltie, and for a flash hot and active; but through sloth or inconstancie, and weakness of spirit either fainting, ere thir own pretences, though never so just, be half attain'd, or through an inbred falshood and wickednes, betray oft times to destruction with themselves, men of noblest temper joyn'd with them for causes, whereof they in their rash undertakings were not capable. . .[60]

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58 Woolrych, 'Date of the Digression,' p. 5.
59 CP, V. pp. 431-432; Parker, Milton, p. 325; M. Boddy, 'Milton's Translations of Psalms 70-88,' Modern Philology, LXIV (1966), pp. 3-9; C. P. Collette, 'Milton's Psalm Translations: Petition and Praise,' English Literary Renaissance, II (1972), pp. 243-259. Questioning the likelihood of a date early in 1648, Woolrych still admits 'it is likely enough that Milton went through a period of despondency while the Treaty [of Newport] was in progress,' 'Date of the Digression,' p. 9.
60 CP, III. p. 192.

This attack on the Presbyterians is very like the Digression and only a little more specific. The literary tone of the Digression seems a plausible half-way point between the third book of the History and the introduction to the Tenure.

Finally, if we turn to the manuscript Digression, another kind of textual evidence proves that Milton wrote this passage in 1648. The Miltonic spellings in the manuscript, less evident in the Character, point to their shared derivation from a Milton holograph, consistent with the first books of the History.[61] It is difficult to see how such a range of Milton's spellings were otherwise preserved. Shawcross observes that the spelling in the later books of the History lacks many of the idiosyncrasies found the earlier books:

> The orthography of books V and VI is frequently different from that in the first four books, although it does reflect some Miltonic practices-- I suspect because of the training of the amanuensis either as scribe or as former student rather than by specific attention on Milton's part at this time.[62]

The extent of their Miltonic spellings show that the composition of the Digression/ Character dates from before Milton's blindness, which fits the dates of composition for the History suggested by Milton himself, as well as those

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61 Darbishire also views the manuscript spellings as thoroughly Miltonic, Early Lives, p. 341.
62 Shawcross, 'Survey of Milton's Prose Works,' p. 344; cf. his 'Milton's Spelling,' Diss. N. Y. U. 1958, pp. 222-229.

suggested by the spelling analysis of the History as a whole.

Any argument for a later date, however, does bear tribute to Milton's prescience in seeing some of the consequences of parliamentary misrule in the 1640s. His private jeremiad had the quality of prophecy as well: his description of problems in their early stages became, as Woolrych has shown, far more telling still in the fulness of time. His doubts, however, had started long before. In Of Reformation, although he places the blame on the bishops, he already saw problems in the national character but chose nonetheless-- believing in an elect within the nation-- to exonerate the population at large. The view of the English which emerges in The History of Britain, that curiously unpatriotic but humanist work, and especially in the Character, bespeaks a more widespread exasperation. This frustration with his countrymen colours Milton's later political views, and his elitist republicanism conforms to his increasing disenchantment with the English people.

That the Digression had become so much more appropriate during the intervening years also suggests that Milton may in fact have ventured to preserve it in the History in 1670. Since the Gildas-like jeremiad provides a telling retrospective on the 1640s and 1650s, Milton himself may have considered it as a just appraisal of the national shortcomings which led to the frustration of his political hopes. In so doing, he inadvertently armed his most

inveterate enemy against the Whigs. As such, the Digression and the Character shed light both on Milton's view of his contemporaries and on a perplexing digression in his posthumous career. They also demand a fuller reconsideration of the History itself, with special reference to ideological pressures on Milton's narrative.

As well as incurring the disapproval of the licenser, which paradoxically led to the later publication of the Character, the History as a whole met with a mixed reception. It enjoyed early popularity, as shown by the sequence of early editions: one in quarto (1670, with a second issue in 1671), two in octavo (1677, with a second issue in 1678; 1695, two issues), and another in folio (1694, part of the 1698 Historical and Political Works), before further republication in John Hughes's collection, A Complete History of England (1706).[63]

The History also gained acceptance as a useful authority for English history up to the Conquest, as a number of early references attest. John Aubrey, for instance, cited Milton for details of the Danish invasions, and drew on him as an authoritative reference for the early

63 CP, V. pp. 1-li; Shawcross, 'Survey,' pp. 339-340. For a fuller description of these editions see K. A. Coleridge, A Descriptive Catalogue of the Milton Collection in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand (Oxford: 1980), pp. 31-36, 96-100.

histories.[64] Other works in this period show similar signs of respect for the History and even plagiarize from it.[65] In Wheare's conspectus of historical literature, Edmund Bohun identified the History's special usefulness:

> it is of the greater value, because few of our English Writers begin (to any purpose) before the Norman Conquest, passing over all those times that went before it with a slight hand.[66]

Bohun's approval was echoed by a later reviewer in Leipzig, who studied the History as part of the Hughes Complete History of England.[67]

The History also was much admired for its literary merit. Seeking to describe the best style for a history, Thomas Blount resorted to Milton's prescription of 'plain and lightsom brevity.'[68] Many believed that Milton had

64 John Aubrey, Natural History of Wiltshire, ed. J. Britton (1847), p. 50; Wiltshire, The Topographical Collections, ed. J. E. Jackson (Devizes: 1862), pp. 66, 74, 258. These and the following references in large part derive from work by J. T. Shawcross, 'Survey of Milton's Prose Works,' pp. 341-343; Milton: The Critical Heritage (1970-1972); Milton: A Bibliography.

65 Thomas Blount, Animadversions upon Sir Richard Baker's Chronicle, and It's Continuation (1672), pp. 20, 58; Aylett Sammes, Britannia Antiqua Illustrata (1676), pp. 48, 50, 83; James Tyrrell, The General History of England, both Ecclesiastical and Civil (1697), I. pp. viii, 20; and against Tyrrell, Zachary Grey, A Defence of our Antient and Modern Historians (1725), pp. 2-6. For plagiarism see [Christopher Milton?], The State of Church-Affairs In this Island of Great Britain Under the Government of the Romans, and British Kings (1687), passim.

66 Degory Wheare, The Method and Order of Reading Both Civil and Ecclesiastical Histories, trans. E. Bohun (1685), p. 171.

67 Acta Eruditorum (Leipzig: 1709), pp. 289-293.

68 Blount, Animadversions, pp. 98-99.

achieved this goal. Sammes, for example, was happy 'to use Mr. Miltons own words' on the great subject of the fall of the Roman Empire, and later quoted from Gildas's De Excidio 'as it is most elegantly translated by Mr. Milton.'[69] Tyrrell later quoted from Milton with and without crediting his source.[70] Bohun noted in his diary (August 4, 1677) that the History was written 'with neat and perspicuous brevity and not less elegance'; a few years later he repeated that 'the style and composure of this History is delicate, short and perspicuous.'[71] In the eighteenth century, William Warburton believed that in the History Milton had found the best vehicle for his prose style.[72]

Others were less impressed with Milton's achievement. Anthony à Wood, whose misgivings about Milton have been noted, reported that 'when it first came abroad,' the History,

> had only the reputation of the putting of our old Authors neatly together in a connex'd story, not abstaining from some lashes at the ignorance, or I know not what, of those times.[73]

69 Sammes, Britannia, pp. 387, 476; he also quotes a verse translation from the History, p. 559.
70 Tyrrell, General History, pp. 110-111, 115-116, 150, and (second pagination) 116.
71 Edmund Bohun, The Diary and Autobiography, ed. S. Rix (Beccles: 1853), p. 33; Wheare, Method of Reading Histories, p. 171.
72 J. T. Shawcross, Milton: The Critical Heritage, II. p. 90.
73 Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 46.

Even those who valued the History could entertain doubts on the subject of his style. The preface to Hughes's Complete History thought Milton's approach peculiar to his genius--'he appears with the Majestick Air of old Greece or Rome'--but perhaps outmoded: 'Mr. Milton chose to write (if the Expression may be allow'd) a hundred Years backward.'[74]

Some uncertainty about Milton's style may also derive from his failure to provide quite the national history that was being called for later in the seventeenth century. A desire for a more ample style of history, that might delve into points of controversy more fully, seems to have increased later in the century. This is noticeable in comments on the brevity of Milton's treatment of his subject in the History. Bohun, for instance, respectfully suggested that for 'a short course of English History' the reader might 'begin with Milton first, then Daniel and Trussell. . .'[75] In his diary, he recorded that in reading the History, 'nothing interested me so much as the causes of the Norman conquest.' These causes he saw as 'the general corruption of morals' and the disputed succession.[76] Tyrrell drew the same conclusion, quoting Milton, who had quoted Malmesbury, for the purpose.

Greater demands on history were surfacing, however, and Tyrrell was less content than Bohun simply to moralize about

74 A Complete History of England, ed. John Hughes (1706), I. sig. A1[r].
75 Wheare, Method of Reading Histories, p. 177. This is, of course, precisely what John Hughes sought to supply in his Complete History.
76 Bohun, Diary, p. 33.

the Conquest. More cutting in his criticism of the History, he believed that it suffered especially from omissions on the Saxon church and state. Milton did not research widely enough, according to Tyrrell, thus

> confining himself too much to the relating of Military Matters, and almost wholly neglecting Ecclesiastical Affairs, or looking into those things which he by way of Contempt called Cathedral Registers.[77]

What troubled him most, however, was that Milton's History failed to support the claims for the ancient constitution that Tyrrell so ardently promoted, not least in his General History. In political debate, Tyrrell urged the historical continuity of the commons, thus disputing historically based claims for royal prerogative such as those advanced by Robert Brady's Complete History of England (1685-1700). But 'that Grand Whig, Milton,' disappointed him by 'not giving us any Account of the Antient Saxon Laws, and Original Constitutions of this Kingdom.'[78] Tyrrell therefore found the History surprisingly 'dry and imperfect.' It provided slim pickings for the constitutional or ecclesiastical controversialist.

Others too found that Milton's work failed to answer the questions they put to it. Sharing Tyrrell's political concerns, John Oldmixon observed that

77 Tyrrell, General History, p. vi.
78 Tyrrell, General History, p. vi.

> Milton, in what he has written of the English History has been so careful of Redundancy, that he has not allow'd Words enough for his Matter, which was capable of more.[79]

In his work on Hughes's Complete History, Oldmixon quietly sought to amend this fault in the History by adding several additions to its text which 'attempt to make the History a less reticent and less ambiguous Whig document.'[80] His opponent Zachary Grey, who identified Milton among 'a Succession of Antimonarchical or Republican Historians,' was therefore especially glad to cite Milton against Oldmixon.[81]

As with the Character, the History contributed little to the successful transformation of Milton the Puritan to Milton the Whig. Such ambiguities originate in Milton's ideals for the writing of history and in the historical controversies he confronted in writing the History. A closer look at these follows in the chapters below, beginning with Milton's response to the long-standing demand for a national history.

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79 John Oldmixon, Clarendon and Whitlock Compar'd (1727), p. xiv. He later extols Milton's 'Perfection of Historical Style,' p. xv. From another political perspective, Laurence Echard similarly distinguished between an 'Original History' and an 'Abridgement,' explaining: 'the Examples of Milton and Daniel soon convinc'd us, that Abridgements might be useful and acceptable to the Nation; but upon a careful Examination of those two considerable Writers, we found them really too short and confin'd to answer our Ends and Designs.' The History of England (1707-1718), I. sig. a1^{r}.

80 M. Dzelzainis, 'The Ideological Context of John Milton's History of Britain,' pp. 12-14.

81 Grey, Defence of our Historians, pp. 2-6, 56.

Chapter 1

The Background to Milton's Historiography

i. The call for a national history.

In sixteenth and seventeenth-century England there was a long-standing complaint about the lack of a national history worthy of England's glorious past. The complaint had already found full expression by the end of Elizabeth's reign, and the dissatisfaction with available histories increased under James-- owing in part to the enhanced 'British' feeling after his succession. The complaint presupposes a tradition of native heroism as yet insufficiently celebrated; a conviction that the national heritage is second to none leads to patriotic dismay that English historiography has not satisfied its chief obligation: to record and to promote the conduct of England and Englishmen throughout history.

A lofty vision of such an English history drew impetus from a Protestant sense of the nation's special status. Thus during the English Reformation, John Bale implored 'some learned Englishman,'

> to set forth the English Chronicles in their right shape, as certain other lands have done afore them, all affections set apart. I cannot think a more necessary thing to be laboured to the honour of God, beauty of the realm, erudition of the people, and commodity of other lands, next the sacred scriptures of the Bible, than that work would be.[1]

A number of works, especially those of Bale and Foxe, advanced this cause. Englishmen remained dissatisfied with the available native histories, however, and voiced their concern in more modest terms than such soaring assertions of England's place in the vanguard of the Elect.

In 1596, for instance, Sir Henry Savile lamented the lack of a national history in his dedication of Rerum Anglicarum scriptores post Bedam praecipui.[2] Savile proposes the reform of English historiography first in an attack on Polydore Vergil and then in his praise for the medieval historians whose works he here collects and edits. To be worthy of the name, the national history must have a reliable narrative, mature interpretation, and a spirited but concise style. Savile blames Polydore for failing to provide a factual record, and explains that the foreigner's ignorance of English affairs has led to many errors in his history. Furthermore, Polydore's lack of either good judgement or natural genius invalidates his interpretation of English history. On the same basis, Savile praises William of Malmesbury especially for his diligent service to

1 John Bale, Select Works, ed. H. Christmas (Cambridge: 1849), p. 8.
2 Sir Henry Savile, Rerum Anglicarum scriptores post Bedam praecipui (1596), sig. *2^{r-v}.

truth and for his mature judgement of the past. The other historians included in the Rerum Anglicarum-- Henry of Huntingdon, Roger of Hoveden, Aethelweard, and Ingulf-- earn their selection for having similarly provided truthful histories.[3]

Writing to Elizabeth, Savile professes not to know by what misfortune the surpassing glory of English kings has escaped due notice. It is his concern with style, however, that distinguishes his call for a national history. He emphasizes the literary quality of historiography, demanding both spirit and brevity. He disparages the meagre style of Polydore and scorns the ignoble adornments of recent artisan historians. The latter have been unequal to their task for social and literary reasons:

> Nostri ex faece plebis historici, dum maiestatem tanti operis ornare studuerunt, putidissimis ineptiis contaminarunt.[4]

This criticism shows the humanists' condescending view of more old-fashioned chronological compilations. In particular this may refer to Stow, a tailor by trade. The move from the simpler style of the chronologies was later attacked by Edmund Howes, who continued Stow's work, for filling 'great Volumes with superfluous curiosity, lofty stile, and needlesse Eloquence.'[5] Savile, however, as

3 Savile was of course mistaken in accepting Ingulf.
4 Savile, Rerum Anglicarum, sig. *2^{r}.
5 John Stow and Edmund Howes, Annales, or, a Generall Chronicle of England (1631), sig. *8^{v}.

befitted an English scholar of international repute, demanded more attention to style by native historians. The only restraint urged by Savile is brevity, fitting from the translator of Tacitus. He is eager for a brilliant history to illumine England's shadowy past. The persistent metaphor in his preface to the Rerum Anglicarum associates historiography with bringing light to shine upon dusty obscurity, and it is understood that this light is in part a literary lustre.

This concern with style shows openly in Sir John Hayward's histories. In 1599, he complains that the instruction available in English histories lies buried in 'the drosse of rude and barbarous English.' His note to the reader in The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie IIII sings the conventional praises of history as a source of edification. He emphasizes, however, that a noble style enhances the appeal of historical instruction. Hayward explains that space forbids his enlarging upon questions of historiography as he would wish. Nonetheless, he has at least prepared the reader for the preoccupation with narrative style that distinguishes his colourful history of Richard II.[6]

Hayward's complaint about unworthy histories of England finds fuller expression in his dedication of The Lives of the III Normans, Kings of England (1613). He again maintains that the English honour is 'basely buried in the

6 John Hayward, The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie the IIII (1599), sigs. $A3r_{-A4^{v}}$.

dross of rude and absurd writings.' As in Savile, a dedication to royalty proposes that historiography be encouraged as a vehicle of national fame. Hayward exalts the complaint by setting it in a reported conversation with the late Prince Henry. Contemporary memorials of the dead prince were so encomiastic that his reproof of existing English histories certifies both the honour of the historian's office and the unworthiness of national histories to date. The 'too late born or too soon dying, Prince Henry of famous memory' had

> complained much of our histories of England, and that the English nation, which is inferior to none in honourable actions, should be surpassed by all in leaving the memory of them to posterity.[7]

Hayward even suggests that men worthy to be national historians have disdained a pursuit so sullied by unworthy writers. He describes other historians' unworthy efforts in his preface to Sir Roger Williams's The Actions of the Lowe Countries (1618).[8]

The contending traditions are evident in Philemon Holland's translation of Camden's Britannia. Originally, Camden had defended his Latin in modest terms that point to his less ambitious style, modelled on Biondo's restraint rather than on more lavish models inappropriate to his

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7 John Hayward, The Lives of the III Normans, Kings of England (1613), sig. $A2^{r-v}$.
8 Williams, Actions of the Lowe Countries, sigs. $*4^{r}-A1^{v}$.

'chorography.'[9] Anticipating censure of 'the silly web of my stile, and rough hewed forme of my writing,' he acknowledges that he has not studied 'to picke flowres out of the gardens of Eloquence.'[10] This is not merely false modesty on Camden's part; it bespeaks the workmanlike intentions that govern the expanding editions of his magnum opus. The differing historical styles show in any comparison of Philemon Holland's belletrist translation of Britannia with the Latin original, however, or even with Sir Richard Knolles's less ornate translation of that work.[11]

A different reaction to the expanding volumes of the chroniclers was Bacon's emphasis on a greater organization of historical material, which in turn demanded a more scientific investigation of the past. Where Hayward's stylistic preoccupations represent a literary reaction to the low style predominant in sixteenth-century chronicles, Bacon's interest lies in the better education of men in practical matters. To a Machiavellian degree, he stresses the political instruction available in civil history. In Of the Advancement of Learning (1605), Bacon believes that the national history still waits to be written; he even suggests that to expedite the success of this most necessary venture, the history be restricted to the period 'from the

9 Among studies of Italian historiography in the early modern period, see D. Hay, Annalists and Historians (1975), and E. Cochrane, Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance (Chicago: 1981).

10 William Camden, Britain, trans. Philemon Holland (1610), sig. A4^{v}.

11 MS Ashmole 849, Camden, Britannia, trans. Richard Knolles.

Uniting of the Roses to the Uniting of the Kingdoms.'[12] Furthermore, since James's monarchy unites the island under a single ruler, Bacon emphasizes the lack of a 'British' history. He likens the potential history of the now united Britain both to sacred history and to Virgil's imperial epic. This naturally lends honour to the hitherto unfilled office of national historian. Allowing for the hyperbole common in such addresses to the king, Bacon still seems to have had vaulting ambitions for the national historian.

This general complaint about English histories seems to have been a commonplace by 1613, when Samuel Daniel notes the demand for some better organization of the materials for English history. In his dedication of The First Part of the History of England, Daniel's criticism of English histories begins with a stout defence of the nation's glorious past. The difficulty, in his view, lies in the enormous task of capturing even a small part 'of the vertue of the whole.' He too complains about the inadequacies of English historiography, and adds that it is generally 'held to be some blemish to the honor of our Country, to come behinde other Nations in this kinde.'[13]

Edmund Bolton's Hypercritica (1618) provides the fullest summary of topics touched upon by the traditional complaint. Bolton believes that there has never been a

12 Francis Bacon, Works, eds. J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath (1857-1874), III. p. 336. Bacon provided the first instalment of such a history with his Henry VII.
13 Samuel Daniel, The First Part of the Historie of England (1613), sig. $A2^{v}$.

complete history of England and that 'having had all other Honours it wanteth only that.' His prolegomenon to a national history confirms Daniel's earlier indication that the complaint was often voiced. Bolton insists that it is the common wish 'THAT THE MAJESTY OF HANDLING OUR HISTORY MIGHT ONCE EQUAL THE MAJESTY OF THE ARGUMENT.'[14] Referring to Savile's complaint and proposals for the national history, Bolton remarks on the general disappointment when that great man chose to edit St. Chrysostom in Greek rather than perform 'this other immortal Office to his native Country.' The Hypercritica commends the useful collections of Savile and Speed as preparations for a general history of England, contrasting them with those 'vast vulgar Tomes procured for the most part by the husbandry of Printers.'[15] In censuring the low style of many contemporary historians Bolton demands a competent style to secure immortality for both the historian and his subject. Like Savile, however, he warns against literary art interfering with the truth. Wisdom will be as necessary as eloquence 'to write the History of so great and noble a People as the English.'[16]

Milton hoped to write this national history. He certainly was familiar with the complaint. Among these examples alone, he knew the works of Savile, Hayward and Bacon, and probably Daniel's as well. He relied on the 1601

14 Edmund Bolton, Hypercritica, in J. E. Spingarn (ed.), Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford: 1908), I. p. 96.
15 Bolton, Hypercritica, p. 97.
16 Bolton, Hypercritica, p. 84.

edition of Savile's Rerum Anglicarum for Malmesbury, Huntingdon, and other medieval sources.[17] He cites Hayward in his Commonplace Book and in Of Reformation.[18] He shows his familiarity with Bacon's Advancement of Learning as early as 1632, and had probably first read it as an undergraduate.[19] He had probably also read Daniel's popular history: Holdsworth's Directions includes it in a collegiate prospectus, and it appeared in a number of editions, including a continuation.[20]

In the History Milton set out to answer the demand for such a history, worthy of its great theme. In his tracts from Of Reformation to the Defence of Himself, as well as in his poetry, Milton keeps promising great works. These frequent promises function in part as certificates of his dedication to religious and patriotic ends. At an early stage, his patriotic fervour seizes on England's past as a suitable subject. As we shall see, The History of Britain shows the frustration of this enthusiasm when Milton applied his high ideals of historiography to England's past.

17 CP, V. pp. 9-10, 138.
18 CP, I. pp. 504, 535.
19 CP, I. p. 287.
20 H. F. Fletcher, The Intellectual Development of John Milton (Urbana: 1956-1961), II. pp. 648, 658. John Trussell, A Continuation of the Collection of the History of England (1635).

ii. Milton's response to the call for a national history.

Milton repeatedly shows his concern about how the traditional complaint might be answered. Finding a subject for his national history, as well as an appropriate way of treating it, engages his interest from an early date. Before the History, there seems to be some uncertainty on Milton's part whether his was to be a poet's or a historian's response to the call for a national history. The high literary standards of the humanists allowed confusion on this issue. The ambiguity leads to a real conflict in Milton, one which can be traced from early in his career until the late 1650s at least.

At first a poetic response seems likely. Milton explains that he had been strongly attracted to historical poetry in his youth.[21] As early as the Vacation Exercise, when he invokes his native language he professes his hope to write 'of kings and queens and heroes old.'[22] In the third Prolusion, his description of history emphasizes its poetic virtues:

> Historia pulchre concinnata nunc inquiteos animi tumultus sedat & componit, nunc delibutum gaudio reddit, mox evocat lachrymas, sed mites eas & pacatas, & quae moestae nescio quid voluptatis secum afferant.[23]

21 CP, I. pp. 889-891.
22 Vacation Exercise, l. 47.
23 CW, XII. p. 164. [CP, I. p. 244]

Similarly, in Ad Patrem he declares that historical poetry was the highest entertainment in the golden age, when the vates celebrated heroic deeds. Milton later reuses almost the same line, but making the vates native, to praise ancient British culture, so indicating a British tradition in which he hopes to participate.[24]

At the end of the 1630s he attempted to act on his belief that historical poetry distinguishes the nation. Passages in both Mansus and Epitaphium Damonis reveal his growing absorption with the proper celebration of English history. In the former, he voices his desire to write a patriotic work which would describe British heroism in defence against foreign invasion-- necessarily an Arthurian subject since such heroic resistance otherwise played a small part in British history. He confidently refers to 'magnanimos heroas' who deserve a better memorial than they have yet received. His exaltation of his subject prompts him to beg for the inspiration necessary to commemorate British deeds in a suitably high style. The promise with which Milton concludes Mansus shows no misgivings about British myth as the subject which best deserves his poetic treatment.[25]

In Epitaphium Damonis, Milton's preoccupation with his patriotic task interrupts even his lament for Diodati. In the middle of a pastoral elegy for a friend, Milton wishes

24 Ad Patrem, l. 46: 'Heroumque actus, imitandaque gesta canebat.' Cf. Mansus, l. 43.
25 Mansus, ll. 80-84.

he were done with such alien forms and could instead take up his British subject. He already professes himself content with the restricted fame that writing a national historical poem would provide. He indicates that the hopes for a historical poem expressed in Mansus had almost become a reality, and explains that his historical subject was of the greatest importance. He specifies some elements of his British poem: Trojan migrations, supernatural deceptions, and an imperial theme. He had begun to celebrate them in a lofty strain but found himself unable to sustain this style for long. To write about British history from the Trojan settlers to Arthur, Milton wishes to transform his 'fistula.'[26] Despite uncertainties in this passage, it seems that Milton, wishing to supply the as yet unwritten British epic in English, had made a beginning which he could not continue. In any case, by the late 1630s Milton shows an interest in the problem of the English history, and hints at his efforts to solve it.

In the early 1640s, Milton's awareness of the traditional complaint also shows in his interest in the proper record of contemporary history. He seeks to make current events famous by his literary skill. In the conclusions to Of Reformation and the Second Defence, he implies that without his work the traditional complaint might apply to contemporary records as well as to past history. Like the past, the present requires due

26 Epitaphium Damonis, ll. 162-178.

celebration and censure. In Of Reformation, Milton believes that the reformation needs better witness of its progress as well as better criticisms of its shortcomings. The prayer with which he concludes the tract testifies to God's care for 'this great and Warlike Nation.'[27] This exultant providential historiography expresses Milton's certainty of the national election. It also expresses his reservations about his contemporaries' blindness to the historical importance of the present. To alert them to the significance of the immediate past, Milton reiterates the conventional examples of the wreck of the Spanish Armada and the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. In recent times, God has raised 'this Britannick Empire to a glorious and enviable heighth.'[28] Milton expects that a proper national history will put England in the vanguard of Christian peoples. The saving of the nation includes 'some one' who will

> bee heard offering at high strains in new and lofty Measures to sing and celebrate thy divine Mercies, and marvelous Judgements in this Land throughout all AGES.[29]

This high role of national historian clearly remains to be filled. Just as clearly, Milton sees himself as the most likely candidate for it. Again, his personal view transforms the traditional complaint. In Of Reformation, he

27 CP, I. p. 616.
28 CP, I. p. 614.
29 CP, I. p. 616.

turns the complaint into a religious vocation. England's need for a suitably elevated historiography-- one that will sound through 'amidst the Hymns, and Halleluiahs of Saints'-- demands a new style. Style seems the principal challenge; Milton is confident that England itself deserves celebration.

Moreover, in The Reason of Church-Government Milton provides substantial evidence that he was not only acutely aware of the complaint about histories, but also deeply interested in how it might best be answered. He assumes that England still lacks a national historian: the nation remains to be celebrated in the same way as 'Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, or those Hebrews of old.'[30] He makes the Sallustian observation that the Greeks' literary talents raised the reputation of their achievements, and thus implies his own high objectives. He does, however, emphasize the inadequacy of English historiography. Historically, 'England hath had her noble atchievements made small by the unskilfull handling of monks and mechanicks.' He himself has given deep consideration to a style suitable for England's glory. He maintains that he lacks room for a full description of his musings on this subject. Nonetheless, his relatively long summary of available models for the national epic shows his wide investigation of poetic historiography. Milton stresses the didactic value of a good style but warns against the excess ornamentation that

30 CP, I. pp. 812.

he opposes to true eloquence. His censure of 'libidinous and ignorant Poetasters' indicates his dissatisfaction with any squandering of such a valuable resource as poetry.

The celebration of England is especially to be desired since it would fulfil both a Christian and a patriotic duty. Milton shows the confidence in England characteristic of the traditional complaint. He professes to be 'content with these British Ilands as my world.' Thus he hopes to find a man in the national history 'in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian Heroe.' By means of such an epic subject, the historian will best be able to meet his patriotic obligations as 'as interpreter & relater of best and sagest things.' In 1642, Milton's faith in the worth of 'our own ancient stories' is unimpaired. He sees no reason why there should not be an English epic to match those of other nations. He emphasizes that, given the necessary talent in historiography, the poet's chief duty is to choose a suitable subject for his epic. The greatest subject is God's omnipotence and its expressions, with particular reference to

> the deeds and triumphs of just and pious Nations doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ.[31]

Milton complains that many have misused the talent which should be used for this celebration. Were he less eager to

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31 CP, I. pp. 811-817.

be the national historian himself, it seems he might have dwelled longer on the lack of 'glorious and lofty Hymns' praising God's providence in England's history. But he takes a personal view. His aspirations lead him to explore how he might remedy the situation rather than merely to reiterate the usual complaint.

Milton also shows his interest in becoming the national poet in An Apology Against a Pamphlet. One of his chief motivations to self-discipline is his 'hope to write well hereafter in laudable things. . . to sing high praises of heroick men or famous Cities,' and this echoes his earlier desire to 'imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu, and publick civility.'[32] He repeats this wish in the Defence. There he uses the complaint about unworthy English histories to make a rhetorical gesture of despair at the challenge of giving contemporary events in England their due. He emphasizes that 'illustrium virorum aut civitatum res gestas vix reperiatur tot seculis qui luculente possit scribere.'[33] In the 1658 edition of the Defence, however, Milton shows that he has overcome his professed fears, and he invokes the Horatian theme: he has left for posterity 'monumentum, ut video, cuiusquemodi est, non facile interiturum.'[34] Similarly, in the later Readie and Easie Way he calls the Defence 'a written monument' of the English triumph.[35] He has successfully completed a great task

32 CP, I. p. 890, 816.
33 CW, VII. p. 6. [CP, IV. p. 305]
34 CW, VII. p. 554. [CP, IV. p. 536]
35 CP, VII. p. 421.

since in recent English history the important events so plainly display the workings of providence. Milton is proud that the government selected him to write the necessary history of modern English affairs, and he implies that this selection recognizes his long preparation to celebrate glorious deeds.

In the Second Defence too, Milton had proposed something like epic intentions. There he had been concerned with contemporary events. England is as noble as any nation in history; Englishmen

> editis post orbem conditum exemplis factisque fortissimis, & gravi dominatione rempublicam, & indignissima servitute religionem liberavit.[36]

Having recently supplied a defence of the great actions of the Commonwealth, Milton gratefully accepts the opportunity further to celebrate English deeds.[37] He likens his approach to this history of contemporary events to that of the epic poet who chooses a single event to present the entire history of his representative hero: 'Achillis puta ad Troiam, vel Ulissis reditum, vel Aeneae in Italium adventum.'[38] This shows that his ambitions as a writer of epic still relate to his achievements as a prose historian. Milton explains that he therefore has satisfied his patriotic duty by having celebrated 'unam saltem popularium

36 CW, VIII. p. 2. [CP, IV. pp. 549]
37 CP, IV. p. 558.
38 CW, VIII. p. 252. [CP, IV. p. 685]

meorum heroice rem gestam.' He answers the traditional complaint by asking, 'omnia universi populi praestare quis possit?'[39] He alone has been chosen for this supreme task.[40] He is eager to commemorate Cromwell's excellence because Cromwell seems a potentially epic figure:[41] 'qui non modo regum res gestas, sed Heroum quoque nostrorum fabulas factis exuperasti.'[42] Milton is confident of his subject; he explains that his theme surpasses that of the ancients as much as their eloquence does his sadly limited prose.[43] As noteworthy, however, is the uncertainty about genre that still attends such pronouncements.

It seems therefore that Milton has more than rhetorical effect in mind when he reiterates his desire for a grander literary treatment of his subject than that appropriate for his present work.[44] He complains that he is confined by the style he has chosen and that it is inadequate for the necessary celebration of his country. He directs the traditional complaint against both contemporary historians and himself, and calls for a new historiography to compass Cromwell's feats:

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39 CW, VIII. p. 252. [CP, IV. p. 685]
40 CP, IV. p. 549.
41 CP, IV. p. 660.
42 CW, VIII. p. 224. [CP, IV. p. 672]
43 CP, IV. p. 554. This seems to have been more than just convenient panegyric. Milton, for instance, was given a collection of state papers, perhaps with a view to his writing more on the subject, John Nickolls, Original Letters and Papers of State (1743), $A1^{r}$-$A2^{v}$. Parker, Milton, p. 959. Late in 1659, Henry Oldenburg asks Milton if he is writing such a contemporary history but Milton replies that he is not, the times being worthier of silence, CP, VII. pp. 513, 515.
44 CP, IV. p. 554.

> quae justae sane historiae grande opus, & iterum quasi campum quendam dicendi, & exaequata rebus narrandi spatia desiderant.[45]

He maintains that his discourse burns to commemorate the names of his illustrious contemporaries.[46] In answer to the traditional demand for such a national monument, Milton responds that the English deeds were almost beyond praise. He alone was well prepared to defend England with the necessary memorial. Responding to the complaint, he concludes that he for one had succeeded, that there had at least been one man,

> qui egregie tum facta, tum qui fecissent, condecorare & victuris in omne aevum celebrare laudibus potuerit.[47]

In looking to posterity, however, Milton hints that the great actions he celebrates already had reached their period.

In his desire to see the Defence and his other political tracts as the patriotic history to which he had earlier aspired, Milton indicates that the History itself could not fulfil any such patriotic function. Perhaps he had had enough of such unheroic historiography. In any case, he continued with his much gloomier assessment of the

45 CW, VIII, p. 214. [CP, IV. p. 668]
46 CP, IV. p. 675.
47 CP, IV. pp. 685-686.

English in the History and drew the work to a close with the Conquest. Here his earlier perspective on the Saxon shortcomings remains unchanged. In the autobiographical passage in the Second Defence, he tells of his work on the History as if to prove his worth; this eminently respectable work was to fill his time when he expected an abundance of leisure. He had undertaken 'historiam gentis, ab ultima origine. . . ad haec usque tempora, si possem, perpetuo filo deducendam me converti.'[48] Defending himself, Milton is glad to mention the History among his ongoing projects. In this context, the History proves his desire to serve his nation; he makes it sound like an eminently respectable work of patriotic devotion. So indeed it may have been intended, but, as it turned out, its patriotism was stern and censorious, at a far remove from that celebration of the nation which more chauvinistic writers had demanded.

Revising the Defence for a new edition in 1658, he looked back on his work for the Commonwealth and likened himself to Cicero, who could claim 'illam urbem sua unius opera esse salvam.'[49] Such patriotic historiography, however, now seemed to belong to the past. Not only had he sought to defend his own nation, the ultimate concern of his earlier public references to history, but he now planned still greater things on behalf of 'quarumvis gentium

48 CW, VIII. p. 136. [CP, IV. p. 627]
49 CW, VII. p. 556. [CP, IV. p. 536]

hominibus totique praesertim nomini Christiano.'[50] He clearly no longer conceives of the History as a work of this order.

iii. Milton's models for his prose history.

Nonetheless, Milton's History of Britain stands as a major attempt to provide an English national history. In its introduction, he takes the long-standing demand for the national history for granted, and briefly expresses his criticisms of English histories to date. He intends to satisfy this demand by providing, for God's glory, and the good of the British nation,'

> that which hitherto hath been needed most, with plain and lightsom brevity, to relate well and orderly things worth the noting.'[51]

His emphasis on the selection of worthy subjects and on a suitable style illustrates the usual response to the traditional complaint about the ill-handling of inappropriate matters from England's past. Savile's formulation of what was needed may lie behind Milton's expression of his intention. In any case, they shared similar precepts, based on their respect for classical historians and for the ideal of the national history.

50 CP, IV. p. 537. Parker, Milton, p. 518 holds that this is more likely a reference to the De Doctrina than Paradise Lost.
51 CP, V. p. 4.

Milton's success in imitating these models was admired by his seventeenth and eighteenth-century critics. Warburton spoke of the History's 'idiom and turn of period being Latin,' and admired Milton's 'air of the antique' and 'great simplicity.'[52] Monboddo concurred that 'the stile of the history is altogether classical, such as might be expected from so great a scholar as Milton.' He also thought Milton's prose came 'as near to the Greek or Latin composition as the imperfect grammar of our language will admit,' and hence that Milton's prose was the best in the English language 'if it be true that the antient authors ought to be our standards for that composition.'[53] The Preface to Hughes's Complete History proposed that even those who upheld the superiority of the ancients over the moderns would agree that Milton rivalled his classical counterparts.[54] Moreover, although reserving judgement on Milton's stylistic achievement, Hughes evidently identified this classicist approach with the earlier humanists' devotion to classical models. This close emulation-- of Sallust for particular subjects, for instance, or Tacitus for annals-- was characteristic of a by now old-fashioned humanist tradition of patriotic histories.[55] Certainly

52 Shawcross, Critical Heritage, II. p. 90.
53 Shawcross, Critical Heritage, II. p. 279. Monboddo seems, however, to have been unaware of Milton's admiration for Sallust and Tacitus, and wishes for something grander than Milton's 'short cut of stile.'
54 Hughes (ed.), Complete History, sig. A1^{r}.
55 For an account of the best British history of this type, see H. R. Trevor-Roper, 'George Buchanan and the Ancient Scottish Constitution,' English Historical Review, Supplement 3 (1966).

Milton's intense preoccupation with Latin models, and his classical treatment of liberty, resembles earlier humanist work as much as that of seventeenth-century classical republicans.

In the humanist tradition, Milton's choice of classical models is noteworthy. Milton himself saw his task as the provision of history on classical lines, improved by a Christian understanding of providence. He had, of course, given profound consideration to 'the stories of these Greek and Roman exploits, wherein I found many things both nobly done, and worthily spoken.'[56] His views on these models are expressed in part in two letters (1657) to Henry De Brass, an otherwise unknown Frenchman. They are also reflected, of course, in the History, most of all in the second book, which describes the Roman occupation of Britain.

Judging classical historians, Milton clearly gave the palm to Sallust. In 1657, by which time Milton probably had finished the History, he expresses his preference for Sallust among classical historians in writing to De Brass. The first letter implies that the subject had already come up in conversation, as Milton mentions having discussed 'these matters personally.' The letter also hints at problems about which 'for many ages historians seem to have been in the dark,' problems to which Milton professes to have no answer. The praise for Sallust centres on his style: he joined 'brevity with abundance' and wrote

56 CP, I. p. 493.

'gravely and clearly in plain and temperate language.' Even Milton's favourable comparison of Sallust to the widely admired Tacitus emphasizes the latter's merit in imitating Sallust. The second letter confirms this valuation and adds other classical historians from whom precepts may be derived.[57]

Sallust was exemplary not only for his prose style but for his moral elevation in judging the corruption of Rome. Milton of course associates such eloquence with virtue. He clearly approves of Sallust's stern views, as his repeated references to the Roman's works show. He continued to invoke Sallust as he moved 'from casual acceptance of academic commonplaces to his own independent verdict.'[58] Milton's early references to Sallust seem to reflect the school-boy's familiarity with some Sallustian precepts.[59] In the late 1640s, his use of Sallust reveals a deeper affinity for the classical republican. Milton includes a Sallustian observation in the opening paragraph of The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates and makes further use of

57 CP, VII. pp. 500-501, 506. I. Samuel, 'Milton and the Ancients on the Writing of History,' Milton Studies, II (1970), pp. 131-148, maintains that Milton's infrequent judgements in the History mean that he repudiated Sallust's example, this despite the late date of the letters. Instead, she believes that Lucian's prescriptions tally more closely with Milton's practice, and hence that Lucian must have overtaken Sallust in Milton's estimation. It seems far-fetched to give Lucian's less consequential work such prominence in determining Milton's views on historiography, especially as he shows none of Lucian's concern about the corruption of historians by the rewards for flattery. Milton's list of authorities for De Brass seems less studied than Samuel takes it to be.

58 Samuel, 'Milton and the Ancients,' p. 132.

59 E.g. CP, I. pp. 812, 903.

Sallust in Eikonoklastes, where quotations from Catiline and the Jugurthine Wars appear on the title-page below Proverbs 28: xv-xvii.[60] In this connection it should be noted that, as early as 1640, Hobbes had arrived at his famous perception that the monarchy suffered when men studied 'the books of policy, and history of the ancient Greeks, and Romans.'[61] Aubrey may have been aware of Hobbes's view when he explained that Milton wrote against monarchy owing to 'his being so conversant in Livy and the Roman authors.'[62] In Milton's case this classicism complements his religious convictions.

Sallust's legacy was profound. His work had much influenced Tacitus, Livy and other classical historians. Sallust's reputation also benefited from the approval of St. Augustine, whom Milton, when polemical necessity allowed, could name among the 'great writers' and considered one of the 'prime fathers.'[63] 'The eloquent Sallust,' as Augustine termed him, 'a historian renowned for his veracity,' had testified to the prevalence of corruption in Roman society.[64] Sallust could only praise the early history of the republic. Although Augustine finds fault even in this

60 CP, III. p. 190, and the reproduction of the title-page, interleaved after CP, III. p. 336.
61 Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford: 1946), p. 214. I am grateful to Dr. Blair Worden for alerting me to Hobbes's early apprehensions on this score, qv. Hobbes, The Elements of the Law, ed. F. Toennies (Cambridge: 1928), p. 138; cf. De Cive: The Latin Version, ed. H. Warrender (Oxford: 1983), pp. 3, 73, 191, 199.
62 Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 14.
63 CP, II. pp. 643, 685.
64 St. Augustine, The City of God, trans. H. Bettenson (Harmondsworth, Middsx. [Penguin Books]: 1972), pp. 259, 11.

early period he does not much question Sallust's authority since the historian's strictures on later Roman history so answer the purposes of The City of God.[65] This contributed to Sallust's great popularity in the Middle Ages, which Milton would have known from such works as Henry of Huntingdon's History.[66] His status as a moralist sustained a vogue for his writings and his popularity remained unequalled until the mid-sixteenth century.[67]

Milton's favourable comparison of Sallust to Tacitus is noteworthy. It runs against the trend shown by publishing history, for instance, which indicates Tacitus overtaking Sallust as the eminent classical historian by the beginning of the seventeenth century.[68] De Brass himself had perhaps introduced the subject of Tacitus's reputation; in any case Milton sees him as the lesser example for the modern historian. Tacitism did not influence Milton that strongly. He invokes the reputation of Tacitus, 'scriptoris boni, et tyrannis adversissimi,'[69] but he does not make much use of the historian's reputation as a political writer. In the Defence, Milton cites Tacitus for the Briton's duces bellorum in order to question the assertion that all of

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65 St. Augustine, The City of God, pp. 67-69, 109, 111, 121, 197, 199.
66 B. Smalley, 'Sallust in the Middle Ages,' in Classical Influences on European Culture, A.D. 500-1500, ed. R. R. Bolgar (Cambridge: 1971), pp. 171-175.
67 P. Burke, 'A Survey of the Popularity of Ancient Historians, 1450-1700,' History and Theory, V (1966), pp. 136-137.
68 Burke, 'Survey,' pp. 148-151.
69 CW, VII. p. 318. [CP, IV. p. 443]

Britain 'olim regibus paruerit.'[70] He also notes that the powers of German kings, according to Tacitus, resides ultimately with their followers.[71] He is swift to rebuke Salmasius's wrong reading of Tacitus, and observes instead an example from Tacitus confirming that Roman kings were not above the law.[72]

Similarly, Milton has a high regard for Livy, whom he considers one of his 'surer' sources for Roman history.[73] Milton considers Livy with Cicero as unsurpassed Roman authorities on the rights of kings.[74] Livy too had testified to the rights of the Roman people which the Caesars seized.[75] It was in this context that Toland thought of Livy as the prototype for the long-needed national historian.[76] Other historians favoured by seventeenth-century classical republicans were Plutarch and Polybius. Milton shared this taste. Both in Eikonoklastes and in the Defence he seizes on Plutarch's account of Lycurgus's exemplary submission to the law.[77] Polybius he had read by 1641, when he noted how English government expresses the Polybian idea of balance.[78] Later he maintains that Polybius too is an 'author gravissimus' who confirms the virtue of tyrannicides.[79] In Milton's second

70 CW. VII. p. 408. [CP, IV. p. 479]
71 CP, IV. pp. 448-449.
72 CP, IV. p. 442.
73 CP, V. p. 16.
74 CP, IV. p. 443.
75 CP, IV. p. 442.
76 Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 187.
77 CP, III. p. 590; IV. pp. 370-371, 438.
78 CP, I. p. 599.
79 CW, VII, p. 306. [CP, IV. p. 439]

letter to De Brass, Polybius heads the list of historians with worthy precepts, though this may just reflect his chronological precedence.[80] Polybius's style is offputting, however, and Milton seems only to adopt the Greek's position against fictional speeches in histories-- a departure from Sallust and Tacitus's example.[81]

All these influences must have left Milton anxious about his history of the Romans in Britain. He explains at the outset that the sources for this early period are good: 'a story of much truth, and for the first hunderd years and somwhat more collected without much labour.'[82] Moreover, previous English authors had 'laid together' these 'only Roman Authors' to good effect.[83] Milton avoids the evident temptation of more extensive remarks on Roman history. He insinuates that other national historians had sometimes wandered beyond the compass of English interests, and he himself cannot help showing his misgivings about Caesar and the subordination of 'the Roman Free State' to imperial rule.[84] Stylistic economy, however, seems Milton's chief concern, and the proof that the British were originally redoubtable foes.

This attempt to uphold the national character leads Milton to treat his sources more analytically. He

80 CP, VII. p. 506.
81 CP, V. p. 80. Polybius's example may also have influenced A Brief History of Moscovia, J. A. Bryant, Jr., 'Milton and the Art of History,' Philological Quarterly, XXIX (1950), pp. 15-30.
82 CP, V. p. 39.
83 CP, V, p. 41.
84 CP, V. pp. 41-42.

repeatedly notes the Briton's courage, and contrasts it with their lack of 'wise conduct'. He is especially alert to any difficulties the Romans faced in their conquests in Britain, from Caesar to Agricola, and points out their sense of achievement whenever they subdue the Britons.[85] Suetonius's story of the Romans' unopposed conquest strikes Milton as improbable, so much so that he skeptically turns to Geoffrey's legends of British resistance to redress the balance.[86] At the same time, it was of course significant that only Roman sources survived from this early period. Moreover, Milton agrees with Tacitus's views on the decline of Roman virtue, and on the subsequent British loss of virtue through imitation of Roman fashions.[87]

These 'republican' historians, especially Sallust and Tacitus, seem to have taught Milton how an elevated style might help a history to survey the past with a sombre ethical purpose. Milton's emphasis on decorum, 'which is the grand master peece to observe,'[88] demanded a gravitas appropriate for a national history. He could not unbend as the inadequacies of his subject became apparent. His classicist observance of the doctrine of the levels of style struggled to encompass the very mixed materials in his sources. Sometimes too, the sources proved scanty and the historian needed to expand, not compress, the slender evidence before him. The mixed style of the annals, and

85 CP, V. pp. 66-68, 71, 93, 95, 99.
86 CP, V. p. 67.
87 CP, V. pp. 68, 85.
88 CP, II. p. 405.

especially of such martyrologies as the Acts and Monuments, plainly did not meet the needs of the national history as understood by Milton. Nor did the sort of analytical thought emerging in work such as Daniel's Collection influence Milton. In his discussion of literary realism, Erich Auerbach remarks about Tacitus that:

> an ethically oriented historiography, which also on the whole proceeds in strict chronological order, is bound to use an unchangeable system of categories and hence cannot produce synthetic-dynamic concepts of the kind we are accustomed to employ today.[89]

In Milton's History, this decorous, static subordination of narrative to moral categories and to chronology is seldom much disturbed.

The chief exception to this even movement of the History can be found in Book Three. Here three factors combine, especially in the Digression: the example of Gildas, the idea of a national character, and the relation of past to the present. Milton picks up the fervour of Gildas's denunciation while condensing Gildas's ornate prose. A personal note surfaces in Book Three, a despair at the failings of his contemporaries in the 1640s, which breaks the reserve and refinement of Milton's style. Later in the History, that part written after Milton's blindness, the material further betrays his stylistic intent, and his

89 Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton: 1953), p. 38.

elevated tone seems more and more remote from the content of his narrative.

In this connection, it is worth mentioning a rather different historian for whom Milton had a most profound regard, and whose example may have encouraged Milton's lack of restraint in Book Three of the History. This is Josephus, whom Milton thought an author 'not less believ'd than any under sacred.'[90] This was a common view; the editor of The Works of Josephus (1676) extolled it above all other histories: 'no other can equal it, in Antiquity, in Continuance, and in Authority.'[91] The reasons for Milton's respect are in part Sallustian: Josephus was 'legum suae gentis interpres idoneus, in sua repub. versatissimus.'[92] Earlier too, Milton had shown his respect for Josephus's authority on Jewish law.[93] Milton thought highly of Jews, if not Judaism.[94] Most significant of all, however, Milton is greatly interested to find that 'Josephus right well hath noted' that Moses

> knowing how vaine it was to write lawes to men whose hearts were not first season'd with the knowledge of God and of his workes, began from the book of Genesis, as a prologue to his lawes.[95]

90 CP, III. pp. 582-583.
91 The Works of Josephus (1676), sig. A2^{r}.
92 CW, VII. p. 76. [CP, IV. p. 344]
93 CP, II. pp. 646-647.
94 CP, III. p. 326.
95 CP, I. p. 747.

Josephus was the most popular of the Greek historians in the Renaissance.[96] Like Jeremiah, Josephus disparaged the hopes of the Jewish insurgents of his day, a parallel to which Josephus himself drew attention. The Jewish War includes anti-revolutionary polemic reminiscent of Milton's temper in the Digression. Josephus justifies his own stance in part by seeing himself as a prophetic figure along Jeremiah's lines.[97]

In the History itself Milton steps back from such involvement for the most part. If his role as historian is compared with some of the other roles he takes on, his restraint in search of respectability is plain. Earlier in the 1640s, Milton had appropriated Bucer for his self-defence, and translated passages from the reformer that matched his own position.[98] In so doing he had provided a lengthy list of testimonies to Bucer which thus become testimonies to Milton. Similarly, he first identifies himself with Cicero half-seriously in the Second Defence and then, in the additional conclusion to the 1658 edition of the Defence, makes an entirely serious claim to the same distinction.[99] His tack as national historian lay in a similar identification of himself with the classical historians most revered for their ethical and literary standards.

96 Burke, 'Survey,' pp. 136-137.
97 Josephus, The Jewish War, vol. III, trans. H. Thackeray, (Loeb: 1928), p. 323.
98 T. Corns, 'Milton's Quest for Respectability,' Modern Language Review, LXXVII (1982), p. 777.
99 CP, IV. pp. 536.

Milton seldom acknowledges any virtue in later, and in his view lesser, historians. Savile's dislike for the inadequacies of medieval English writers may have influenced Milton's perception of the problem, but such disparagement of medieval monks and their records was common.[100] During the course of the History, Milton frequently remarks on the shortcomings of his medieval sources. Since the Roman Empire, good historians are scarce. He reiterates the complaint he had earlier expressed in The Reason of Church-Government about those 'dubious Relaters,' the monks.[101] In the History 'monkish Writers' fall afoul of Milton time and again. Bede, for instance, devotes himself to 'superstition and monastical affectation,' miracles and extremes of royal piety. Otherwise he is obsessed with chronology, and yet his dates do not tally with those of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.[102] Concerning Geoffrey of Monmouth, Milton suggests that an entire treatise could be devoted to the monk's credibility: Monmouth is untrustworthy on foreign subjects and much of his domestic history is suitable for verse only. At one point he condemns him for 'simple Fraud' and in general Monmouth's word carries little weight.[103]

100 Keith Thomas, The Perception of the Past in Early Modern England, Creighton Trust Lecture (1983), pp. 9-11.
101 CP, V. pp. 127-8, [398].
102 CP. V. 229-230.
103 CP, V. pp. 9, 30, 37, 58, 141-142, 195.

Milton gives John Brompton less credit still.[104] Matthew of Westminster is faulted for adding long tales.[105]

The chief exceptions to Milton's dislike of medieval historians are William of Malmesbury and Matthew of Paris. He shares Savile's regard for Malmesbury-- 'both for stile and judgement. . . the best Writer of them all.'[106] Malmesbury was conspicuous for that imitation of classical historians characteristic of Anglo-Norman historians. He too clearly found the jeremiad a congenial mode and when times changed for the worse he wrote a commentary on Lamentations.[107] Milton only criticizes Malmesbury for adorning his history incredibly, a fault he shares with Henry of Huntingdon, and he censures Malmesbury's use of old songs and verse for his narrative. Malmesbury, however, learned more from classical example than Huntingdon did. Huntingdon's fictional adornment of his narrative often led him into error: 'little credit is to be plac'd in Huntingdon single.'[108] Here Milton's doubts are magnified by his problems with Huntingdon's knotted translations of

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104 CP, V. pp. 271, 380-381.
105 CP, V. p. 243; Milton was of course unaware that Matthew of Westminster was the same man as Matthew Paris 'the best of our Historians.'
106 CP, V. pp. 230, 306, 314.
107 A. Gransden, Historical Writing in England, c.550-c.1307 (1974), p. 180. H. Farmer, 'William of Malmesbury's Life and Works,' Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XIII (1962), pp. 39-54, Farmer, 'William of Malmesbury's "Commentary on Lamentations",' Studia Monastica, IV (1962), pp. 293-297.
108 CP, V. pp. 162-163, 287; see also 234, 236, 372.

Anglo-Saxon sources.[109] In sum, Milton complains that except for William of Malmesbury,

> what labour is to be endur'd, turning over Volumes of Rubbish in the rest, Florence of Worster, Huntingdon, Simeon of Durham, Hoveden, Mathew of Westminster, and many others of obscurer note, with all thir monachisms, is a penance to think.[110]

Moreover, this tirade appears to come at the point where Milton interrupted his History.[111] Nonetheless, his views on his sources seem the same before and after his sojourn as defender of the Commonwealth against tyranny and calumny. He greets the new impetus of Twysden's collection of sources (1652) without enthusiasm, and only spares this material his full displeasure because he relies on it heavily. For those who prefer to avoid antiquarian studies, Milton provides exactly what Savile had proposed:

> ex situ, & squalore, pulvereque everum, & in lucem primus emitterem vetustissimos rerum nostrarum authores, non illos quidem facundos, sed fides rerum gestarum interpretes.[112]

Thus he would make it possible for anyone to 'know at once what may be known of our antient story, sifted from Fables

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109 CP, V. 263, 274-275, 368-369.
110 CP, V. 230.
111 It is uncertain exactly where the break might fall, but the break at this point seems to fit the interruption in Milton's writing of the History. CP, V. p. 230
112 Savile, Rerum Anglicarum, f. ii[r].

and impertinences.' The humanist ideal of a national history had not been abandoned yet.

In the History, Milton seldom refers to contemporary historians. He prefers to use the earliest source wherever possible, and therefore uses Malmesbury more than any other post-Conquest historian. In a revealing aside he shows his deep dependence on narrative sources rather than the armoury of historical techniques that Camden, Spelman, Selden and others had been developing. Discussing Malmesbury and Huntingdon with reference to pre-Conquest history, he adds simply: 'For neither they then we had better Authors of those times.'[113]

Among more recent writers he does name, he attacks Buchanan and relegates Camden to a lesser office than that of national historian. Milton variously questions Buchanan's judgement, compares him unfavourably with better authorities, maintains him mistaken, and denounces him outright.[114] He only agrees with Buchanan when the Scot criticizes British historians.[115] Another foreign writer whom Milton dismisses is the Dane Pontanus, who had recently finished a history of Denmark (1631). He doubts Pontanus' story, finds fault with his reliance on foreign sources, and blames him for leaving unconscionable gaps in his national history.[116] Such foreign sources for native history did not

113 CP, V. p. 230.
114 CP, V. pp. 250-251, 191, 123, 133, 170-171.
115 CP, V. pp. 302-303. He also relishes Buchanan's attacks on monarchy, CP, IV. pp. 371, 481, 592.
116 CP, V. pp. 242, 260, 275, 332.

survive English insularity. On the other hand, Milton lists Camden among chorographers, revealing his own narrow definition of the true historian.[117] He had already dismissed Camden as an obscurantist 'antiquitarian' in Of Reformation.[118] There Camden struck Milton as the type of 'those who take pleasure to be all thir life time, rakeing in the Foundations of old Abbies and Cathedrals.' Milton will avoid Camden's involvement in historical debate as well as his use of rough names. He would rather not thus 'wrincle the smoothness of History';[119] he sees this as a disservice to the literary status appropriate to a national history. Like his views on the medieval historians, therefore, Milton's remarks on Buchanan, Pontanus, and Camden show the patriotism in his dissatisfaction with available histories of England. By contrast with Savile, though, he does not dwell overmuch on the failures before him. Instead, he tries to become the one man who in Savile's words

> totum corpus [historiae nostrae] ea fide, eaque dignitate scriptis complexus sit, quam suscepti operis magnitudo postularet.[120]

Responding to the complaint, Milton announces himself as the national historian.

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117 CP, V. pp. 239-240.
118 CP, I. pp. 541-542.
119 CP, V. pp. 230, 239; see also CP, V. pp. 4, 180.
120 Savile, Rerum Anglicarum, sig. *2[r].

iv. Eloquence and virtue: the national historian's role.

In examining his sources, Milton closely associates the quality of historical records with the status of the deeds recorded and of the culture that preserves such records. He virtually equates eloquence with virtue. This position leads him to study the literary quality of historical records-- just as he examines that of pamphlets and of polemical works such as Salmasius's Defensio Regia-- in order to judge the virtue of those persons and nations whose reputation they preserve. Unlike earlier historians, however, Milton comes to believe that his own eloquence should serve a better purpose than to celebrate a history which he discovers to be far from glorious.

Crucially for Milton's historiography, the relation of eloquence to virtue is a continuing source of conflict in both his verse and his prose. Not only does his concern for virtuous eloquence fire his literary ambition, but his idea of the eloquence of virtue features prominently in his study of the past. He defines real eloquence as the expression of the truth. At the same time, he expects expressions of the truth to embody its harmony and proportion. A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle reveals Milton's early distinction between eloquence and rhetoric. Much of the drama in the masque comes from his pitting the good use of language against the bad. The latter is made to seem no less deft than the former; as in Paradise Lost, the control

of rhetoric itself seems to have no moral weight outside of its applications. Lengthy discourse dominates the action in the Masque: Milton emphasizes the struggle between false rhetoric and Christian eloquence. The Lady's light rebuke of Comus's smooth flattery introduces this opposition in their first encounter.[121] In their later confrontation, she storms against the iniquity of his fluent and inventive language. Since 'vice can bolt her arguments,' the strength of rhetoric is not a standard by which to judge the truth in any moral argument. Similarly, in the early Prolusions, Milton plays down the power of formal rhetoric which he maintains 'in re mediocriter laudabili maxime elucere vim Eloquentiae,' though this is itself a rhetorical device.[122] He notes that he is academically bound to serve rhetoric, and thus brings into question his loyalty to the subject at hand. The beauty of rhetoric need not relate to the truth of its subject.

Thus for all the 'dazzling fence' of his 'gay rhetoric,' Comus finds that the Lady's lesser rhetorical gifts can still over-power his argument. Despite his dexterity with 'reason's garb,' he understands that

> She fables not, I feel that I do fear
> Her words set off by some superior power.[123]

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121 Masque, ll. 270-271.
122 CW, XII. pp. 252, cf. CP, I. pp. 290, 310, 245.
123 Masque, ll. 799-800.

A crucial uncertainty resides, however, in the ambiguity whether this 'power' is superior to the Lady herself or just to Comus. In the event, the force of true eloquence transcends baser languages of persuasion. Virtuous speech need not falter, even if its audience is unfit to be convinced. The imminence of the Attendant Spirit, however, supernaturally chills the enchanter, as the natural powers of virtue are attended by extraordinary providence.

In the Seventh Prolusion, Milton had similarly distinguished true eloquence from mere rhetoric, although he did not use these words with consistently different meanings. He enthusiastically associated poetry and learning, sacred eloquence and knowledge.[124] In the period ending with Comus, he tries to claim a 'superior power' in eloquence but relates this power first to the virtue that true eloquence expresses.

The Christian's virtue and better knowledge of truth therefore especially qualify him for eloquence. Milton first expounds his view of Christian speech in On the Morning of Christ's Nativity. Here the language of truth overcomes an older false language. Extraordinary providence dispenses the lawful Word to relieve man from his subjection to the rule of ordinary providence. Milton emphasizes the deference of the old supernatural order to the new.[125] He stresses Christ's significance in this respect: the golden age can return only when the Word redeems us 'on the bitter

124 CP, I. pp. 288, 305.
125 On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, ll. 29-44.

cross.' The change in the rule of nature awaits a new rational language available in Christ; knowledge is thrust upon the pagan world through His life. Until then, the triumphant return of Truth, Justice, and Mercy must be delayed. At the Nativity, He, the incarnate Word, is as yet 'infant'-- without language-- but the pagan gods immediately give way. Their passing is largely a linguistic succession; they become either silent or incoherent. The new Christian language rejects the pagan gods, and subordinates nature to a secondary role in the workings of providence. After the Fall, man's rehabilitation depends on this divine intercession. Language is given a new and rational basis, and true eloquence becomes possible:

> For doubtlesse that indeed according to art is most eloquent which returnes and approaches neerest to nature from whence it came; and they expresse nature best, who in their lives least wander from her safe leading, which may be call'd regenerate reason.[126]

Man's holy song is not enough for the new order. Even so, inspiration may provide Milton with the more exalted voice for which he hopes. In Elegia Sexta he prays that his lips may be touched by hallowed fire, that he be allowed the gift of prophetic utterance.

Owing to this new language, the Christian poet can write in a higher strain than the pagan could. In Elegia Sexta, writing to Diodati about the Nativity Ode, Milton

126 CP, I. p. 874.

argues against the facile imitation of classical models. He believes his own eloquence to belong to a different tradition:

> Diis etenim sacer est vates, divumque sacerdos,
> Spirat et occultum pectus, et ora Iovem.
> At tu si quid agam, scitabere. . .[127]

The classical line must find new employment. Milton chooses to apply it to the style of language introduced by Christ's birth. A new knowledge unavailable to pagans allows the Christian to overcome their skepticism.[128] Milton believes that his merit as a writer largely depends on his living as a Christian; his own talent must be considered only in 'proportion with over and above of being a Christian.'[129] The access of civility and eloquence available to Christians suffered in the Catholic Middle Ages[130] but since the Reformation they have gained a new vitality. Again, his religious and humanist preoccupations coincide.

Milton's prose in the early 1640s reveals his great faith in the potential for eloquence in his day. He believes that in a time of reformation the pursuit of truth will be especially intense. He expects eloquence, therefore, to enjoy a new prosperity since 'true eloquence I find to be none, but the serious and hearty love of

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127 Elegia Sexta, ll. 77-79.
128 CP, I. p. 302.
129 CP, I. p. 812.
130 CP, I. pp. 292-293.

truth.'[131] He also claims that literary art comes more naturally to the virtuous. There seems to be an element of wishful thinking here as Milton seeks to make his devotion to his art a part of his search for salvation. He explains that he can applaud the art of unvirtuous authors although deploring those authors themselves.[132] But the zeal of the virtuous to inquire and teach gives them a special command over language. Language organizes itself for the zealous, Milton likes to think, although he is uncertain quite how this happens:

> whose mind soever is fully possest with a fervent desire to know good things, and with the dearest charity to infuse the knowledge of them into others, when such a man would speak, his words (by what I can expresse) like to many nimble and airy servitors trip about him at command, and in well order'd files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places.[133]

This passage reflects Milton's long-standing interest in inspiration, a supernatural source of language assisting virtue. In these effusions lies a strong desire to identify eloquence with virtue and with the special interest of God in his elect. In any case, Milton maintains that he has believed since his youth that his literary talent would most fully express itself if employed for virtuous ends.[134] In Comus the Lady states the general principle: only 'good men

131 CP, I. p. 949.
132 CP, I. p. 890.
133 CP, I. p. 949.
134 CP, I. pp. 889-890.

can give good things.'[135] Milton applies this with special reference to the poet:

> he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to bee a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things.[136]

The distance between language and self are thus diminished, and God's intercession on behalf of both invoked.

The association of virtue and eloquence gives the literary criticism in Milton's controversial prose a deeper significance than might sometimes be inferred from its waspish personal tone. It also increases the importance of his statements about his own writing. He often seems to inquire into his own ethical standing by examining his eloquence. In his work he likes to question, and afterwards to reassert, his verbal art, as much as to examine his private life. He remains very self-conscious about his aspirations to true eloquence. In both Defences he indicates that 'is solus magnus est appelandus, qui res magnas aut gerit, aut docet, aut digne scribit.'[137] An eloquent record of an historical event is an achievement second only to any heroism recorded.[138] In the Defence of Himself, Milton wonders whether, in his struggles to discredit Salmasius and More, he has not himself lost sight

135 Masque, l. 702.
136 CP, I. p. 890.
137 CW, VIII. p. 96. [CP, IV. p. 601]
138 CP, IV. p. 305.

of this ideal. At the conclusion of his self-defence, he turns to defend himself from himself. He justifies his lengthy polemics and their distance from any worthy record of great things. He explains that he has lowered himself because the situation demands such righteous vituperation. Condemnation and praise each has its importance.[139] Milton insists that eloquence must be properly applied to the censure of the wicked and the praise of the good. Otherwise the study of either rhetorical technique has no purpose. He indicates that there is an eloquence in condemnation, and a rare eloquence at that, since the elect can call down God's wrath on the guilty, and they alone can be fearless in their denunciations.[140] Again the virtuous use of language is infused with a divine element.

Milton of course sees himself among this elect, and reviews his life in this light. He professes that when he praises and condemns his contemporaries it is with skills honed in 'that literary leisure' of his youth. He believes himelf to have acted on principle:

> it were proper either not to have spent our youth in pastime at imaginary eloquence, or, when it is needful to our country, when the commonwealth requires it, casting exercise shafts aside, now to venture into the sun, and dust, and field of battle, now to exert real brawn, brandish real arms, seek a real enemy.[141]

139 CP, IV. p. 794.
140 CP, IV. pp. 575, 795.
141 CP, I. p. 662.

The violence of such an active eloquence attracts Milton. He often justifies strong censure as a Christian duty: with any enemy to truth, 'it will be nothing disagreeing from Christian meeknesse to handle such a one in a rougher accent.'[142] Such 'zeal of truth' is a sign of a writer's calling. In bad times, therefore, it is his responsibility to attack his contemporaries. Milton defends the asperity of his 'grim laughter' on the grounds that right reason is the force behind 'those two most rationall faculties of humane intellect anger and laughter.'[143] Speaking ill of something, when speaking true, is well within the province of eloquence. In The History of Britain, Milton emphasizes that some men have distinguished themselves by rising above their time and denouncing it. As he had shown in Comus, virtuous speech need not falter, even if its audience is unfit to be convinced.

We have seen that Milton's association of virtue and eloquence gives a special significance to his attacks on his opponent's eloquence. He implies that if a cause is a good one its defence will be eloquent. In the Defences, he again defines true eloquence as 'quae in ipsa veritate Suada est';[144] it requires hard work, clarity and discrimination. Milton scorns 'Flosculos.'[145] He convicts Salmasius and More of a wide variety of crimes against eloquence. He never relieves his attack on Salmasius's literary

142 CP, I. p. 662.
143 CP, I. p. 664.
144 CW, VIII. p. 104. [CP, IV. p. 604]
145 CW, VII. p. 40. [CP, IV. p. 324]

shortcomings. From the beginning of the Defence, Milton criticizes him for wordy dishonesty and repeatedly scorns his Latin. He characterizes him as a pedant and a grammarian, as a barbarous rhetorician overflowing with words but lacking any substance.[146] Again, Salmasius is a dirty foreigner, unskilled in letters, and a sordid failure 'non moribus solum sed syntaxi etiam.'[147] Salmasius has not devoted himself thoroughly enough to great writers;[148] as a result, his eloquence and his virtue suffer alike. In fact Salmasius cannot raise his low diction even when faced with greater subjects.[149] Milton hopes that his own rhetoric avoids the futile wordiness which he finds in Salmasius's work, and that he can honour his cause, 'nobilissimae, et seculorum omnium memoria dignissimae.'[150] Whatever the ostentation in this proclamation, he does seem to expect the quality of his subject to lead him to eloquence. Later, by contrast, Milton explains that the unlucky More is so much lesser an opponent than Salmasius, and in conduct so much more open to the foulest imputation, that his style can be treated more lightly.

Applied at the level of national literatures, this association of virtue and eloquence gives a writer, especially one who intends to write a national history, new responsibilities as a citizen. England's literary

146 CP, IV. pp. 306, 301.
147 CW, VII. p. 62, cf. CP, IV. pp. 336, 333.
148 CP, IV. p. 389.
149 CP, IV. pp. 604, 313.
150 CP, IV. p. 302.

reputation reflects the quality of her civil virtue. Milton's defeat of Salmasius in literary as well as political battle is intended to assume a larger significance. Again, Milton's vocation as a religious and political reformer is of a piece with his humanist regard for good Latin. The opening of the Second Defence is therefore self-congratulatory. Milton announces that he had succeeded in his patriotic literary duty. The victory of his eloquence has corroborated his proof of the civil virtue of the English. Moreover, he notes that in vanquishing England's enemy he was denied the use of his native language. He implies that he can suitably celebrate his great subject in English alone.[151]

Milton also believes that the state of the native language influences national virtue as well as reflecting it. In his letter to Benedetto Buonmattei (1638), he maintains that next to a wise governor, he most reveres the man who puts language into order. This defender against barbarism guards against the subversion of the entire civil spirit. Historically, a patriotic pride in and cultivation of language consistently reveal a flourishing empire or state. Since a grammarian preserves the language from 'probo gentis saeculo,' he provides some access to the old virtues associated with this bygone eloquence. Only the literary man can enoble the citizenry. Milton explains the connection:

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151 CP, IV. p. 554.

> verba enim partim insita & putida, partim mendosa, & perperam prolata; quid nisi ignavos, et oscitantes, & ad servile quidvis iam olim paratos incolarum animos haud levi indicio declarant?[152]

Both Buonmattei and Salmasius are grammarians but only the former has promoted eloquence. Salmasius's slavish rhetoric could never prepare a nation for liberty. Milton explains his views on patriotic literature in his first letter to Philarus (1652). There he argues the importance of the national epic for national pride. He first compliments the Greeks' traditional eloquence. Were this eloquence to be revived, it would fill the Greeks with a new civic pride. The most important stimulus to modern Greek nationalism, therefore, would be a modern historical poem treating their ancient 'virtutem, industriam, laborum tolerantiam.' Liberty never comes without effort, but eloquence helps to rouse the virtue necessary for liberty. Literature supplies historical examples, enhances the attractions of fame, and provides for some national sense of identity. Milton concludes his letter showing his seriousness about the results of such an epic:

> Hoc si quis effecerit. . . neque ipsos sibi Graecos neque ullam Gentem Graecis defuturam esse confido.[153]

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152 CW, XII, p. 32. [CP, I. p. 329-330]
153 CW, XII. p. 58. [CP, IV. p. 853]

Milton again finds literature a most influential part of the search for liberty. Furthermore, the necessary qualifications for an epic poet are strikingly pragmatic: a patriotic zeal for lost liberties matched by great prudence and military skill. The early historical connection between humanist calls for liberty and the grammarians remains unbroken.[154]

Something in a nation's past must first deserve celebration if an eloquent history-- such as that for which there had been so much demand in England-- is to be written. In this vein, Milton stresses the legacies of the golden age in Italian history and of the Greeks' ancient virtue. Epic history can follow only from virtuous deeds. Only the virtuous can hope for the lasting good fame that eloquence supplies. In the History, he observes that posterity demands the 'searching stile of an intelligent, and faithfull Writer' for any enduring record.[155] Under such scrutiny, only good actions can win an encomiastic memorial as they deserve. Milton reiterates his association of virtue and eloquence in his theory of history and historiography:

> worthy deeds are not often destitute of worthy relaters: as by a certain Fate great Acts and great Eloquence have most commonly go hand in hand, equalling and honouring each other in the same Ages.[156]

154 Cf. Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, I. pp. 28-41.
155 CP, V, p. 40.
156 CP, V. pp. 39-40.

He believes that learning, valour, eloquence, history, and civility increase and diminish together. When the Empire declined they grew scarce, as is evident from the lack of good historians at the time.[157] In the Middle Ages, the unlearned and superstitious monks supply only dubious records, both in civil and religious matters.[158]

Milton concludes that virtue in history is inextricably linked to eloquence in historiography. He associates flaws in the historical record with the shortcomings of the history recorded:

> when the esteem of Science and liberal study waxes low in the Common-wealth, wee may presume that also there al civil Vertue, and worthy action is grown as low to a decline[.] and the Eloquence, as it were consorted in the same destiny, with the decrease and fall of vertue corrupts also and fades.[159]

In bad times, a writer should either remain silent about events which are 'below all History'[160] or, as Milton approves in Gildas's example, denounce his times when celebration is impossible. A historian is no historian if he unduly praises a nation. In the History, Milton hopes that by telling the truth, his work will redound to God's glory, and to 'the good of the British nation.'[161] As it

157 CP, V. pp. 127, 104.
158 CP, V. p. 127
159 CP, V. p. 40.
160 CP, V. p. 2.
161 CP, V. p. 4.

proved, he could not remain silent but his tone of jeremiad distinguishes his historiography.

v. Milton on providence.

Before studying Milton's experiences as the national historian, a brief examination of his presuppositions about history is in order. Some expressions of these beliefs have been noted above in the description of his complaints about the shortcomings of English histories in his time. A quick survey of his view of history will permit a clearer understanding of his manipulations of historical material.

Milton believed that history interprets the past as a display of God's providence. Providence is God's will acting in the world. God is supremely rational; natural law expresses this right reason. Because of natural law, history exhibits a certain order. There is a linear progress from Creation to Apocalypse. At the same time, events largely follow a pattern of cause and effect. Therefore history is instructive: a knowledge of the past, by induction, supplies some knowledge of the present and of the future. Milton remains true to these principles however variously he applies them to historical and contemporary events.

In its emphasis on the efficiency of natural causes, Milton's historiography exemplifies the seventeenth-century historians' greater preoccupation with secular history. In

the seventeenth century, the changing interpetation of providence led to new demands on historiography. The change entailed a lessening of confidence in direct divine intervention and an increase of curiosity in the interpretation of natural cause and effect. This interpretation was to yield explanatory and predictive models of historical causation. The transition has been seen as a reduction of God's role.[162] Certainly it limits the doctrines of providence and favours historical narratives explaining the patterns of natural law as manifest in past events. The historian could succeed only in the study of second causes. Without such a division of divine and secular knowledge, speculation about God's partially revealed plan might support any variety of conclusions about His overall purpose. In this context, Milton's views on history are unexceptional, except for the accommodation of his developing belief in the doctrine of free will. With some definition of his concept of providence and natural law, his idea of history provides us with a critical tool for the study of his historiography.

Milton's views on providence are expressed at length in his De Doctrina Christiana. There he divides God's efficiency into internal and external categories.[163] He

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162 Among the many observations on this change, see Herschel Baker, The Wars of Truth, (New York: 1952), pp. 12-25; C. A. Patrides, Milton and the Christian Tradition (Oxford: 1966), pp. 220ff; F. Smith Fussner, The Historical Revolution, (1962), p. 25; C. Webster, The Great Instauration (1975), pp. 1-6.

163 CP, VI. p. 153.

subdivides external efficiency into further categories of which the last is God's government of the universe. This government, or providence, divides into the general and the special government of things.[164] God orders nature, our circumstances, and the consequences of our actions.[165] Milton maintains, however, that the vindication of God's justice demands some measure of free will in man. God restricts his universal government to give our free will room to express itself:

> Nihil itaque Deus decrevisse absolute censendus est, quod in potestate libere agentium reliquit.[166]

For man's special benefit, God extraordinarily provides miracles to produce effects outside the usual order in nature. These exemplary proofs of His existence support man's faith.

Otherwise, however, ordinary providence prevails. In His ordinary providence, God sustains the universe by the system of cause and effect which He established in Creation. Milton explains that this providence is too often called 'Natura.' In fact, the maintenance and preservation of natural causation are the perpetual expressions of divine law.[167] Nature expresses ordinary providence. By means of nature-- 'vel rei essentiam, vel communem illam legem, qua

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164 CP, VI. p. 326.
165 CP, VI. pp. 329-330.
166 CW, XIV. p. 64. [CP, VI. p. 155]
167 CP, VI. p. 340.

nascuntur omnia atque agunt '[168]-- we may learn all we need to know about right reason. The existence of right reason is evidence for the existence of God.[169] Whereas, however, the domain of ordinary providence covers all natural matters, God restrains his omnipotence in moral and religious affairs.[170] Causation, therefore, does not limit the freedom of the will.[171] Providence works chiefly through natural causes. It is expressed in natural law and thus this law supplies evidence of God. Man operates among natural causes and his actions have effects determined by natural laws. But the source of man's actions, his will, is free. Human behaviour is not determined by ordinary providence.

A short survey of a few of Milton's applications of these principles illustrates his distinction between the realms of ordinary providence and of the freedom of the will. A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle expresses many of Milton's early ideas about nature. The dramatic impasse between Comus and the Lady develops precisely because of his misunderstanding right reason in nature and because of her affirmation of the independence of her will. After the Lady maintains 'Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind,'[172] Comus argues about nature in vain. Mistaking the right reason of bounty, he abuses the natural relation of cause

168 CW, XIV. p. 26. [CP, VI. p. 131]
169 CP, VI. p. 132.
170 CP, VI. pp. 397-398.
171 CP, VI. p. 158.
172 Masque, l. 662.

and effect.[173] His horror at 'waste fertility' exemplifies his ignorance of the true expressions of ordinary providence.[174] The Lady defends ordinary providence and asserts its 'sober laws' against Comus's 'false rule pranked in reason's garb.'[175] Most importantly, she emphasizes nature's innocence.[176] As Milton explains in the De Doctrina, nature operates in neither moral nor religious concerns,[177] the forbidden apple itself contained no evil. Comus can only proceed with his lawlessness by leaving his unsuccessful logic for a more forceful application of cause and effect. He dismisses the Lady's persuasive protest as 'mere moral babble, and direct/ Against the canon laws of our foundation.'[178] Comus has his own laws which contradict morality; inasmuch as they are supernatural laws, extraordinary providence is required to confound them. In the conclusion to Comus, Milton affirms the efficiency of this special providence. Virtue is usually free without needing extra help. Milton believes that only in the event of a weakening in virtue's ordinary efficacy would extraordinary providence come to the rescue.[179] Only in extraordinary circumstances can man hope for extraordinary providence.

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173 Masque, ll. 678-683.
174 Masque, l. 728.
175 Masque, ll. 765, 758.
176 Masque, l. 761.
177 CP, VI. pp. 397-398.
178 Masque, ll. 806-807.
179 Masque, ll. 1018, 1021-1022.

In Of Reformation, Milton has a similar view of the operations of ordinary and extraordinary providence. He believes that the delay in the reformation of the elect nation is an unusual circumstance which might merit the help of extraordinary providence. His prayer for such help at the end of Of Reformation emphasizes his belief in England's election:

> let them all take Counsell together, and let it come to naught, let them Decree, and doe thou Cancell it, let them gather themselves, and bee scatter'd. . . for thou art with us.[180]

Only in such singular times may one hope for God's special administrations. Miracles should not otherwise be expected. Milton dislikes simplistic providential explanations of the status quo. On the question of the distribution of justice in this life, he shows some inconsistency. As in De Doctrina, he draws attention to the apparent discrepancy between justice and reality. He argues here that divine favour does not directly express itself in apparent worldly success. For instance,

> worldly possession. . . is the rightfull lot and portion, even of the wickedest men, as frankly bestow'd on them by the aldispensing bounty, as rain and Sunshine.[181]

180 CP, I. pp. 615-616.
181 CP, I. p. 608, cf. Matthew 5, xlv.

On the other hand he often presupposes that ordinary providence so orders natural cause and effect that individual and national virtue are usually rewarded. Men and nation's moral and religious choices normally earn just reward or punishment. This is why Milton eagerly desires national reformation. Natural law secures liberty for virtue: for example, 'Lordship and victory are but the pages of justice and vertue.'[182] In private and civil affairs, license invites oppression.[183] He believes that nature usually provides swift retribution against those who weaken in virtue.

In Of Reformation, Milton certainly accepts this view of the good consequences of virtue, though he may have been prompted to take this position for rhetorical purposes. He proposes, in effect, that the protection often expected from extraordinary providence may be found largely in ordinary providence. Whether or not this is a rhetorical position in this pamphlet, in later works Milton shows himself quite certain about the natural punishment for sin. In the History, he agrees whole-heartedly with Malmesbury's pessimistic conclusion:

> And as the long suffering of God permits bad men to enjoy prosperous daies with the good, so his severity oft times exempts not good men from thir share in evil times with the bad.[184]

182 CP, I. p. 597.
183 CP, I. p. 588.
184 CP, V. p. 403. Interestingly, this was incorrectly italicized in the first edition.

In the De Doctrina, Milton maintains that sometimes a whole nation is punished for the sin of one citizen, a common preoccupation at the time.[185] In the De Doctrina and in his final poems, of course, he studies this on a more universal level.

Milton's pessimistic conclusions in the History reflect what seems to be a loss of faith in the national election. Less confident of Britain's singular role in history, he lowers his expectations of extraordinary providence. He seeks more natural explanations for the national and individual good or bad fortune, and begins to posit an increasing degree of national and individual self-determination. This change is partially disguised by the persistent influence of the more primitive providentialism of his sources. In the second book of the History-- that based on Roman sources-- the providentialism is largely ordinary, natural causation. In the other books, extraordinary providence is more evident. Milton reacts against this influence of his sources but his narrative still depends on the work of the medieval writers and thus reflects in part their predisposition to view history as a display of God's direct management of His plan. Milton expresses his dislike of the monk's excessive belief in, and invocation of, extraordinary providence in events that he

185 CP, VI. p. 387. Cf. A. B. Worden, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Sin of Achan,' in History, Society and the Churches: Essays in Honour of Owen Chadwick, eds D. Beales and G. Best (Cambridge: 1985), pp. 125-145

indicates were probably natural. He is skeptical of the miraculous element in the chronicles, 'where I leave it to be sought by such as are more credulous then I wish my Readers.'[186] He complains that Bede's history is filled with 'many legends of Visions and Miracles. . . bare of civill matters.'[187]

Milton nonetheless relies on many exempla from these sources. One such story, that of the ancient British king Mempricius, shows his vacillation in handling the providentialism of the early writers. In this case, the narrative exposition of extraordinary providence demands that Mempricius dies as he deserves. This might be termed the 'fitting death' convention: Mempricius is 'giv'n over to unnatural lust' and therefore, to complete the iconography of wolfish lust, is 'devowr'd by Wolves.'[188] In a narrative full of these examples, however, such insistent poetic justice leads the more skeptical reader to question the likelihood of so many miraculous interventions on God's part.

Usually, therefore, Milton qualifies these stories with some doubts about their sources, using various tricks to provide them without lending them his authority. Thus the story of Mempricius derives from 'fabulous and counterfet Authors.'[189] Milton questions another report of providential intervention by showing the motives of its

186 CP, V. p. 252.
187 CP, V. p. 229.
188 CP, V. p. 19.
189 CP, V. p. 5.

authors: the Normans hated Godwin and so gave out that his death displayed a divine judgement on Godwin's perjury.[190] Elsewhere, questioning but not denying the agency of extraordinary providence, Milton says of Saint Edward's vision only that 'the event prov'd it true.'[191] In another, similar interpolation, he suggests that should God show his hand it would be as a sign to the godly: thus a priest's prediction of a man's fate perhaps proved correct owing to God's 'bearing witness to his Minister.'[192] Milton therefore finds the monks especially unreliable in civil matters because they so persistently confuse the manifestation of ordinary and extraordinary providence. In this respect especially, the monks are 'blind, astonish'd, and strook with superstition as with a Planet';[193] their misunderstanding of providence is a crucial shortcoming in their narratives. Nonetheless, it was on their stories that Milton was forced to depend, especially because of his humanist assumptions about historiography. Moreover, the first such source with which he had to contend was the most egregiously fabulous, the British history of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

190 CP, V. pp. 383-384.
191 CP, V. p. 393.
192 CP, V. p. 212.
193 CP, V. p. 127.

Chapter II

Milton on the Ancient Britons

In the 1640s, Milton shows a growing impatience with secular and ecclesiastical invocations of historical authority. He questions the prescriptive validity of secular history as much as he does that of ecclesiastical history. His interpretation of secular history usually points to a priori principles which he finds illustrated by historical examples; he seldom analyzes history to discover principles. History is instructive but only after precepts, derived primarily from reason and Scripture, have supplied the understanding necessary for learning from the past. Milton's eschatological expectations sometimes attract him to the historical authority of prophecy, as for instance, in his incomplete rejection of the Constantine legends. In such cases the past has a prescriptive hold on the present. In most of his ecclesiastical and secular history, however, Milton denies the past any authority except as a store of corroborative examples for truth determined by faith and reason. He consciously rejects the claims of historical precedent, and consistently identifies his adversaries as slavish followers of tradition:

> in vaine doe they oppose custome to us if they be overcome by reason; as if custome were greater then Truth, or that in spirituall things that were not to be follow'd, which is revel'd for the better by the holy Ghost. . . for Custome without Truth is but agednesse of Error.[1]

Milton seldom believes that the past can provide a charter like reason or sacred history.

Milton relaxes his suspicions about historical authority, however, when it comes to evidence for the English national character. In the 1640s he has increasing misgivings about the English capacity for self-government and disciplined freedom. His historical research revealed long-standing shortcomings in the national character. Furthermore, these shortcomings seemed to find expression in the failings of contemporary secular and ecclesiastical governments. After Of Reformation, when Milton gradually loses faith in England's apocalyptic progress, he speculates about some natural alternatives to the directly divine influence on Englishmen's wills. Only later did he accept the freedom of their wills with less qualification. He was never sure of what the secondary cause for national characters was, but remained convinced that the English were predestined, though by some natural cause, to lack civil virtue and Christian discipline.

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1 CP, I. p. 561; he is quoting from Cyprian. See also CP, I. p. 569n. and II. p. 223: 'Error supports Custome, Custome count'nances Error.'

In the History, he describes this national character in both the British and the Saxon periods. His characterization of these ancestral inhabitants retreats from two major traditions in British historiography. The first tradition proclaimed the reputedly Trojan origins of Britain and believed in the historic triumphs of Arthur. By Milton's time this tradition had been largely discredited. Another emerging tradition sought an English political and cultural inheritance from the Saxons and minimized the Norman influence on English history: the beginnings of the 'whig' interpretation of the Saxon legacy. Milton subscribes to neither the popular legends nor the historicist myths of his contemporaries. Rejecting the authority of both, he questions their value to the nation. At the same time, he partly adapts them for his historical description of the national character; his version of the British and Saxon myths supply the basis for his characterization of the English. This preoccupation with the national character distinguishes the History of Britain among seventeenth-century histories.

i. The dispute over the British history.

In the eighteenth century, Milton's view of the British legends met with opposite responses from two readers especially sensitive to any imputation against Welsh history. Aaron Thompson, translator of Geoffrey of

Monmouth, lauded Milton's example in preserving the legends, which he contrasted with their neglect by Camden and Camden's followers. Thompson selectively quoted from the History on the justification for reading the British history; he believed that 'Milton gives no contemptible Reasons for his own Conduct in pursuing the old beaten Tract.'[2] More perceptively, Lewis Morris identified Milton among the foremost English historians whom he was eager to refute in his defence of Welsh history.[3] These contradictory opinions testify to the ambiguity of Milton's work on the British history, about which he himself appears to have had mixed feelings.

A much wider tradition than historians' opinion influenced Milton's views of the legendary British. There were imperial, aristocratic, and legal, as well as national and local invocations of the myths. Among these, historical scholarship played an important but by no means dominant part. The traditional stories had a popularity independent of their political uses. References to them tapped a patriotic vision of Britain's honourable origins and a deep respect for antiquity. The Trojan and Arthurian stories did not become unfashionable, as has been suggested, owing to their association with the absolutist ambitions of James and

2 Aaron Thompson, The British History, Translated into English from the Latin of Jeffery of Monmouth (1718), p. lxxvi.
3 R. Jones (ed.), 'Letters Addressed by Lewis Morris to Edward Richard,' Y Cymmrodor, I (1877), p. 163.

Charles.[4] A nostalgic view of this mythical past was by no means peculiar to the proponents of royal supremacy. Many sought ancestral precedents or counterparts to themselves in a prehistorical Britain, often despite their own protestations that such historical enquiry was fruitless. Milton's changing relation to the myth does not much define his allegiance to any one party or movement, nor does it reflect his approbation of the Saxons or his 'repudiation of the absolutism of the Tudors and Stuarts.'[5] His references to the myth provide no precise index to his political beliefs. His skeptical response to Geoffrey of Monmouth's version of early British history was common among historians with a wide range of political and scholarly motives. Many of them enjoyed royal sponsorship, starting with Polydore Vergil who had provoked much of the sixteenth-century debate over the legends. Instead, Milton's eventual dislike of the legends shows his general disillusionment in the 1640s with both English history and his contemporaries.

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4 This is the thesis of the much cited study by R. F. Brinkley, Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century (Baltimore: 1932). Brinkley asserts, for instance, that from the 1620s to 1640s the English were 'drawn from the glamor of an Arthurian dream to the cold practicality of a study of fact,' Arthurian Legends, p. 39. In fact, the British legends scarcely register in constitutional studies, and Saxon studies had begun long before. E. M. W. Tillyard, The Miltonic Setting (Cambridge: 1938), p. 181; Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (Oxford: 1962), p. 402; J. D. Merriman, The Flower of Kings (Lawrence, Kansas: 1973), pp. 56-57 are among those whose interpretation of Milton's change of epic plan has been vitiated by this misunderstanding of the British history's political significance. R. F. Jones, The Triumph of the English Language (Stanford: 1953) warns against Brinkley's view, p. 270.

5 Brinkley, Arthurian Legend, p. 141.

Geoffrey's Historia Regum Britanniae had been criticized by many historians. William of Newburgh, Ralph Higden, and other medieval chroniclers had questioned Geoffrey's credibility and doubted the authenticity of the 'very old book' that he claimed as his source.[6] In the early sixteenth century, Polydore Vergil reiterated the suspicions more systematically and largely dismissed the legends. Polydore's work, commissioned by Henry VII, was published under Henry VIII without disturbing that king with its slighting references to the British myth.[7] Nor does the reaction to Polydore reveal any royal animus against such defamation of the Trojan Brutus or of Arthur. Historians began to desert Geoffrey in increasing numbers. Rastell, Twyne, Lily, Foxe and Languet expressed various doubts about the traditional prehistory and the stories of Arthur, and many qualified their acceptance of Geoffrey's tale.[8] At the same time, however, Polydore's Historia Anglica (1534) provoked many to defend the British history. Leland, Price, Lhuyd and others took up the British cause and protected patriotic interests, usually Welsh and sometimes English, which were threatened by the Italian's corrosive skepticism.

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6 T. D. Kendrick, British Antiquity (1950), pp. 12-14, 34-35.

7 Polydore Vergil, English History, ed H. Ellis (Camden Society 36: 1846), pp. 26, 29-31. Polydore, supplied the founding history, but gave only a brief, if not undiplomatic, account of Arthur's possible glory, English History, pp. 121-122.

8 John Foxe, The Acts and Monuments, ed. J. Pratt (1853-1870), I. p. 323; F. J. Levy, Tudor Historical Thought (San Marino: 1967), pp. 73, 177; Kendrick, British Antiquity, pp. 41-44.

Polydore was attacked as a foreigner and a papist incapable of understanding the British history.[9] Nonetheless, other foreigners and natives alike spoke of the legends with increasing disrespect. George Buchanan, for instance, who drew Milton's notice on this matter, followed his compatriot John Mair in rejecting the British history. In completing his Rerum Scoticarum Historia (1582), he provided a chauvinistic riposte to Lhuyd's similarly narrow attack on Buchanan's Scottish legendary prehistory. Buchanan's opinions agreed with those of some of his English audience. Sidney and Languet joked about the founding myths and Lhuyd's passion for them; Spenser himself, in the 1590s, considered them unhistorical.[10] At the same time as the Elizabethan fashion for Arthur and the British history was finding more general expression, educated opinion dislodged the legends from their place in the chronicles and, exposing them to debate, prepared them for relegation to less authoritative chronicles in the seventeenth century.

Geoffrey's story, therefore, had its doubters well before Anglo-Saxon studies provided an alternative basis for early English history. The decline of the British history

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9 Kendrick, British Antiquity, pp. 85-95; Levy, Tudor Historical Thought, pp. 63-68.

10 Kendrick, British Antiquity, pp. 78-79, 84-85; I. D. McFarlane, Buchanan (1981), pp. 419-420, 427; J. E. Phillips, 'George Buchanan and the Sidney Circle,' Huntingdon Library Quarterly, XII (1948-1949), pp. 23-55; C. B. Millican, Spenser and the Table Round (Cambridge, Mass.: 1932), pp. 74-75; Philip Sidney, Complete Works (Cambridge: 1912), III. p. 85; Edmund Spenser, Variorum Works, ed. E. Greenlaw (Baltimore: 1932-1957), IX. pp. 82n, 86n, 309-310n.

was largely free from specific political implications, although nationalism played an important part in the legends' preservation. The historians who undermined the traditional prehistory were not anti-Tudor in their devaluation of Brutus and Arthur, whatever the other ramification of their new scholarly techniques. This change of historical paradigm involved much more than the simple substitution of one historical period for another. Nor did this change accompany any systematic revision of history on political grounds. There is little continuity between the celebratory invocations of British myth and the more forensic use of Saxon history[11] Furthermore, sixteenth-century research into Saxon history advanced largely because of ecclesiastical, and ultimately patriotic, impetus. At first, Bale's and Foxe's defence of the prestige of the nation and its church was a greater spur to historical scholarship than constitutional prerogatives. Parker's

11 In any case, advocates of the fundamental law may have had more use for the legends than did defenders of royal supremacy. Coke, for instance, found proofs of the immemorial antiquity of the common-law and popular representation in the British history. Since 'the law was immemorial and there was no legislator,' Coke delved into the earliest and mythical records of legislation in order to determine, in myth as well as in history, that the law had no ascertainable beginning. Thus Brutus, Molmutius, and other legendary lawgivers were named to prove the immemorial autonomy of the English in law as well as in kingship. But Coke seldom referred to the legends. The myth just provided an acceptable allusion to the prehistory of the realm. When 'the idea of the immemorial. . . took on an absolute colouring' a powerful interest in prehistory, for which this myth seemed to supply the only narrative, jostled with the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century historians' rejection of the myths. See Pocock, Ancient Constitution, pp. 37-41, 57.

group pioneered the study of the Saxons in order to establish the autonomy of the original English church. The eventual influence of these studies on constitutional studies was unforeseen when Burghley supported Nowell and Lambarde's work. The diminishing historical status of the British history and the Arthurian legend cannot without reservation be said to have 'played its part in the growth of anti-absolutist sentiment in England.'[12] Nor can these earlier Saxon studies be construed as a parliamentary revision of the history of the Conquest. This political focus is missing in Tudor times and does not in itself account for the diminishing authority of the founding and Arthurian legends.

The role of patriotism rather than partisanship in the myth's changing fortunes shows even in Camden's influential dismissal of the legends. His rejection of the British history unpolitically followed the critical and antiquarian interests underlying his historical investigations. At the same time, he almost obscured his position through his regard for the patriotic motives for such myths. Authoritative but gentle, he denied their historical truth, but to soften the blow he invoked the popular excuse that to honour one's origins displayed a love of virtue. He further defused objections by professing his indulgence for these fictional national origins:

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12 Christopher Hill, 'The Norman Yoke,' in Puritanism and Revolution (1958), p. 60.

> For mine owne part, let Brutus be taken for the father, and founder of the British nation; I will not be of a contrarie minde. . . Let Antiquitie heerein be pardoned, if by entermingling falsities and truthes, humane matters and divine together, it make the first beginnings of nations and cities more noble, sacred, and of greater majestie: seeing that, as Plinie writeth, Even falsely to claime and challenge descents from famous personages, implieth in some sort a love of virtue.[13]

Even in rejecting them, Camden explained that the myths testified to the good character of the English. He was evidently confident, however, that his views involved no threat to royal pretensions, Tudor or Stuart. Speed too adopted a conciliatory tone in his refusal to accept the myth, and lengthily summarized the debate over the first Britons before rejecting the legends. As in Camden, there is no sign that such views were inappropriate to a history dedicated to the king. Similarly, Selden was concerned still to protect the legend as an 'Advocate for the Muse' when he spoke against its historical authority.[14] None of this was a blow to royal prestige.

Daniel, although he wrote for the queen, omitted the legends entirely with the least of apologies for their absence. He announced that 'finding no authentical warrant how they came there' he had been unable to write from 'the

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13 William Camden, Britain, trans. Philemon Holland (1610), pp. 8-9.
14 John Speed, The Historie of Great Britaine, (3rd ed., 1632), pp. 11-20; Michael Drayton, PolyOlbion, with notes by Selden (1622), sig. A2^{r}.

beginning of the first Brittish Kings.' He protested that knowledge about the first Britons

> could not adde to our vertue, and peradventure little to our reputation. . . howsoever fabulous writers (to glorifie their nations) strive to abuse the credulitie of after ages with heroycall, or miraculous beginnings.[15]

This position was consistent with the increasingly prevalent view at court that the legends were less than glorious. Jonson's similar dislike of genealogical myths testifies to the disfavour the British material suffered. Daniel's omission of the legends may reflect his general dislike of early Jacobean pretensions, but Jonson was a driving force behind many of the great royal displays. Daniel's allegiance to Prince Henry was at cross purposes with Jonson's service to the king, yet both maintained that the myths were unhistorical and unedifying. Scholarly opinion was setting against Geoffrey's 'fabulous and Trojan originall.' Roman sources were deemed the only trustworthy ones, and

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15 Samuel Daniel, The Collection of the Historie of England (1617), p. 1. Daniel's Tethys Festival questioned James's and Jonson's excesses in entertainments. On the other hand, Jonson included Drayton among the many of his contemporaries for whom he expressed his dislike, see Anne Barton, Ben Jonson, dramatist (Cambridge: 1984), p. 288.

> the Brittish originall was so obscure in Caesars time that he affirmeth the Inland inhabitants were Aborigines.[16]

It was increasingly plain that the first reliable narrative of British history began with the Roman invasion, and that pre-Roman history would have to depend on archaeology. Similarly, the consensus of historians found the shadowy Arthur a valiant British king, but one about whom little might be known for certain.

Despite this loss of standing among scholars, the founding history and Arthurian legends still had widespread popular support. A generation before Milton wrote-- in the decade between James's succession and Prince Henry's death-- the myths had a large following. Whatever Camden and others' warnings about their historical status, the myths answered the demand for a narrative history of pre-Roman Britain. Furthermore, Arthur's victories enlivened the history of the fifth century which otherwise seemed a dark period of misrule and Saxon invasion. Many popular chronicles and general histories included the myth with only slight reservations. Although Stow later reduced the bulk of legends in his Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles (1565),

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16 Thomas Browne, Pseudodoxia Epidemica, ed. R. Robbins (Oxford: 1981), p. 481. Similarly Hakewill identified this as a type of 'vulgar error that scholars had exposed but not demolished,' Herschel Baker, The Race of Time (Ann Arbor: 1967), p. 95. This had been Polydore's opinion more than a century before, The English History, p. 26.

the continuation of this work by Edmund Howes supplied much the same material with little hesitation.[17]

The myths also remained popular because of their part in English imperial pretensions. They were of little precise significance but assisted claims to immemorial insular autonomy and promised the recovery of Britain's ancient prestige. Supporting the future Henry VII, the Welsh had explained how the British history prefigured the union of Wales and England in the Tudor coronation. They emphasized Britain's Trojan origins and heritage from Arthur and Cadwallader. The trappings of the new monarch reflected this background: pageants referred to Brutus and the first legendary kings, the Prince of Wales was named Arthur, and the red lion of Cadwallader was incorporated into Tudor heraldry.[18] Under Henry VII, the recollection of early British triumphs heightened the royal image and raised expectations about the figurative return of Arthur. Under Henry VIII, such references to the British history persisted. When Constantine emerged as Henry's early English hero, a descent was traced between the reputedly

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17 John Stow, A Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles (1565), ff. 9^{r}-18^{v}; Stow and Edmund Howes, The Abridgement of the English Chronicle (1618), pp. 7-13.

18 Millican, Spenser, pp. 7-21; E. Greenlaw, Studies in Spenser's Historical Allegory (Baltimore: 1932), pp. 1-58. Sydney Anglo has sought to show that the British history was less frequently invoked and that the lineal descent from the first British kings was not a feature of early Tudor propaganda, but fails to refute Millican and Greenlaw's position authoritatively, 'The British History in Early Tudor Propaganda,' Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XLIV (1961-1962), pp. 17-48; Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy (Oxford: 1969).

British Roman emperor and the victorious British king.[19] Under Elizabeth, the early Tudor use of the myths flourished. Beginning with her coronation, the British legends were used to describe her reign in terms of transcendent historical myths. As with Henry VII, the British history helped in the legitimization of an indirect succession to the throne. Now, furthermore, the direct ancestry of the Tudors from the mythical kings was emphasized. A genealogy connecting the present sovereign to the remotest founding dynasty honoured her claims to hereditary sovereignty. The legends testified to the great antiquity of this royal descent and to the farflung realms to which the monarch had rights. Increasingly exaggerated genealogical charts matched these imperial claims.[20]

With James, descriptions of the illustrious race of kings were refurbished with a view to Stuart claims to the throne. Supported by a full roster of James's royal ancestors, those who heralded his union of England, Scotland and Wales extolled his double or triple bloodlines from the ancient kings. Thus his lineage was emblematic of his reunion of the divided British realm, a division long held to have originated in the legendary Brutus's initial partition of the island among his three sons.[21] The Stuart

19 Millican, Spenser, pp. 21-31; R. Koebner, '"The Imperial Crown of this Realm": Henry VIII, Constantine the Great, and Polydore Vergil,' Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, XXVI (1953), p. 31.
20 Millican, Spenser, pp. 37-51; Arthur's voyages were held to entitle the English to much of northern Europe.
21 Brinkley, Arthurian Legend, pp. 6-22; Drayton, PolyOlbion, pp. 83-84.

succession, and the additional ancestry of the old Scottish kings, prompted much investigation along such lines of descent. Jonson's audience may have sighed with relief when his loyal Welshmen, saluting their prince, volunteered not 'to tell long pedegree of Prince Camber,/ whose linage would fill aull this Chamber.'[22] Despite great advances in historical scholarship, the myths still flourished whenever royal supporters wished to embellish the new monarch's claims to the throne. In the first years of James's reign, the founding and Arthurian legends had deep associations with the celebration of royal prestige.

In part, however, such celebration followed Elizabethan conventions, and therefore began to founder when confronted with Jacobean policy. Arthurianism featured in the growing nostalgia for Elizabeth. Around Prince Henry, for instance, the British history enjoyed something of a vogue. Arthurian myth was adopted for his celebrations, just as the founding myths had been used for his father. James himself seems to have had misgivings about Arthurianism, and he disliked the attack on his mother in the Arthurian Faerie Queene.[23] For those frustrated by James's pacifist inaction Prince Henry's apparent promise of a more militant Protestantism made him a type of Arthur. This 'opposition' use of British myth is conspicuous in Drayton and in a number of Spenserian writers in Henry's coterie. Henry seems to have revelled in such

22 Ben Jonson, eds. C. H. Herford, P. and E. Simpson (Oxford: 1925-1952), VII. For the Honour of Wales, ll. 219-220.
23 Millican, Spenser, p. 72.

British panegyric and he actively sponsored Arthurian pageantry.[24] With his death, the myth lost its role-playing hero. It was not revived for Charles.[25] This divergent tradition of Protestant and Spenserian poetic idiom plays an important part in Milton's early epic plans.

The tension arising from James's antipathy to Prince Henry's Arthurianism shows in Jonson's Speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers (1610). In keeping with the display of Arthurian chivalry which Henry had arranged, Jonson used the British myth as the basis for his celebration of the prince. In extolling Henry's more than Arthurian virtues, however, Jonson twisted his hyperbole to urge the prince's deference to the king's pacifism. Prudent restraint is praised above martial ardor. Jonson asked Henry to transcend the Arthurian role he had chosen for himself. To this end, he subordinated the British legend to classical myths.[26] The devaluation of the myth after Henry's death shows in For the Honour of Wales, the extra anti-masque with which Jonson redeemed Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue after its initial failure. Here the superiority of classical to native myth provided a fund of amusement for the court, as when loyal Jenkin asserts that there 'is a thousand place in Wales as

24 Drayton was more concerned with the perceived loss of aristocratic prerogatives than with Protestant foreign policy, David Norbrook, 'The Panegyric of the Monarch and Its Social Context,' Oxford: D.Phil. (1978), pp. 250-252.
25 It seems to have been revived at Charles I's expense in the 1630s, when , for instance, there was a martial masque at Richmond which used 'Spenserian echoes to evoke and hold up for imitation the ancient British military past.' Martin Butler, Theatre and Crisis (Cambridge: 1984), pp. 33-34.
26 Ben Jonson, VII. pp. 323-336.

finely places as the Esperides every crum of him.'[27] Here the belief in 'Brut, from whence the Welse do's take his root' is merely characteristic of Welsh credulity as is their faith in Arthurian anagrams.[28] For Prince Henry, Jonson had accepted Arthur despite his own preference for classical material. For Charles, he lampooned old-fashioned or provincial uses of both the founding and Arthurian myths. No longer did he attempt to suspend scholarly or classicist disbelief in order to enjoy the lustre that native myth might add to native history. The mixture of classical and British myth largely disappeared as the British myth lost court favour. In late Jacobean and in Caroline pageantry the taste for classicism and Neoplatonism predominated.

A biased 'Tudorism'-- a self-conscious effort to hark back to simpler Elizabethan glories-- developed, expressing dissatisfaction with the king's conduct and his court, as Bacon observed, 'a froward retention of custom is as turbulent a thing as an innovation.'[29] The Spenserian idiom of Protestant chivalry had a currency around Prince Henry which it lacked around James, who ultimately preferred a more Jonsonian classicism. A Spenserian vision of myth in history often combined with a nostalgia for Elizabethan virtues, for Ralegh's defence of Protestant interests

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27 Ben Jonson, VII. For the Honour of Wales, ll. 365-366. Similarly, l. 189, 'what need of Ercules, when Cadwallader. . .' For the success of this extra anti-masque, Ben Jonson, II. pp. 304-310; X. pp. 573-577.
28 Ben Jonson, VII. For the Honour of Wales, ll. 216-217, 372-378.
29 Bacon, Works, VI. p. 433.

against Spain, and for the promise apparent in Prince Henry.[30] Those disillusioned with the Jacobean court could have recourse to this alternative tradition which had old connections with the evolving Puritan cause. Although the native British myths were outmoded in the court, especially after Prince Henry's death, they kept their popularity among many who backed a more militant English protestantism. Fears of foreign subversion raised Arthur's prestige as a valiant defender of the island. By virtue of its Elizabethan background, therefore, the British myth could be invoked with anti-Stuart and anti-absolutist associations, whatever its previous part in royal celebrations.

An analogous change in the use of the British myth developed in the traditional celebration of London as New Troy. Troynovant on the Thames figured in many city chronicles and municipal pageants. The historians of the city, Stow and his successor Munday, both subscribed to the prehistory which claimed that London began as a Trojan settlement. The Livian excuse for such claims remained

30 Such recollection of Elizabethan days continued into the Interregnum. This theme has been explored by E. C. Wilson, Prince Henry and English Literature (Ithaca: 1946), pp. 9-10, 114, 141, 149; J. E. Neale, 'November 17,' in his Essays in Elizabethan History (1958), pp. 14-15; H. R. Trevor-Roper, Religion, the Reformation and Social Change (1967), pp. 240, 246, 260, 261, 280, 299, 345-391; K. Sharpe,'The Earl of Arundel, His Circle and the Opposition to the Duke of Buckingham,' 1618-1628, in Faction and Parliament, ed. K. Sharpe (Oxford: 1978), p. 209-244; Thomas, Perception of the Past, pp. 21-22. For its relation to Jacobean writers, especially Jonson and the Spenserians see A. Barton, Ben Jonson, Dramatist (Cambridge: 1984), pp. 300-320; D. Norbrook, Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance, (1984), pp. 207-213, 217-223, 232-234.

popular. Stow's A Survay of London (1598) began with the standard encomium which readily acknowledges the motivation behind such legends:

> As Rome, the chiefe Citie of the world to glorifie it selfe, drew her originall from the Gods, Goddesses, and demy Gods, by the Troian progeny. So this famous Citie of London, for greater glorie, and in emulation of Rome, deriveth it selfe from the very same originall. For (as Jeffery of Monmoth, the Welche Historian reporteth [)] Brute descended from the demy god Eneas . . .builded a Citie neare unto a river now called Thames, and named it Troynovant.[31]

The city celebrations reveal a similar fondness for British myth. In the first decade of James's reign, Anthony Munday's chief civic pageant, The Triumphs of ReUnited Britannia, addressed this popular historical theme.[32] More narrowly, Dekker's many references to Troynovant honoured both the city and the crown.[33] By the time of Webster's Monuments of Honour (1624), however, this civic tradition reflected a political sense of urban independence. Written for the Merchant Taylors' mayoral celebrations, the Monument features a pyramid of Puritan worthies at the apex of which Prince Henry reigns as if a patron saint of London-Troynovant. King James and Prince Charles go unmentioned

31 John Stow, A Survay of London (1598), p. 1; Stow and A. Munday, The Survey of London (1633), p. 1.
32 D. M. Bergeron, English Civic Pageantry (1971), p. 141; John Nichols, The Progresses of King James the First (1828), I. pp. 572, 576.
33 Thomas Dekker, Dramatic Works, ed. F. Bowers (Cambridge: 1953-1961), II. p. 255, III. pp. 225, 236, IV. p. 82; Plague Pamphlets, ed. F. P. Wilson (Oxford: 1925), pp. vi, 33, 90; Nondramatic Works, ed. A. Grosart (1884-1886), II. pp. 75-76, IV. p. 12.

while the state of England is deplored.[34] Thomas Heywood retailed the legend similarly, knowing his city audience.[35] Once again, the British legends recall an independent civic heritage, or a Tudor legacy, and so counter Jacobean claims.

Milton's early references to the British myth also give it increasing political significance. At first, in his Latin verse, he merely follows convention in classicizing native allusions. In both In Obitum Praesulis Eliensis and In Quintum Novembris, he characterizes Britain as Neptune's land with reference to the Albion myth. Similarly, he uses the myth of the Trojan settlement to allude to Britain in In Quintum Novembris and to London in Elegia Prima.[36] In A Vacation Exercise, Milton's references to Sabrina and Humber indicate an amused recollection of Spenser and Drayton rather than any conspicuous interest in Geoffrey's history which he may well have not yet read.37 In the Fifth

34 John Webster, The Complete Works, ed. F. L. Lucas (1927), III. Monuments of Honor, ll. 95-104, 306-374. This has been called 'the culmination of his theatrical ventures: a politically daring climax providing his final judgement upon the government of the day,' M. C. Bradbrook, John Webster, Citizen and Dramatist (1980), pp. 6, 180-181.

35 Heywood this came to employ the myth for his city audience, having earlier used it for Jacobean panegyric in Troia Britannica (1609). In a similar spirit he styled the London mayors as keepers of kings better than 'the Spartan Ephori, the Athenian Areopagitae, with Romes purple Optimates,' Dramatic Works (1874), V. p. 360, see also IV. pp. 305-306.

36 In Obitum Praesulis Eliensis, l. 10; In Quintum Novembris, ll. 27-29, 2; Elegia Prima ad Carolum Diodatum, l. 73.

37 At a Vacation Exercise, ll. 96-99; J. H. Hanford, 'The Chronology of Milton's Private Studies,' PMLA, XXXVI (1921), p. 265; Hanford does not explain his dating Milton's reading of Geoffrey in the Horton period, but it is clear that he refers to Milton's apparent recollection of Geoffrey, cf. CP, I. p. 369.

Prolusion, he believes in Brennus the Gaul rather than Brennus the Briton, Geoffrey's hero. Moreover, Milton's preference for classical culture makes him liken the triumph of Brennus only to the invidious sway of Error. In the Sixth Prolusion, his British reference is a Spenserian one: 'validissimi illi regis Arthuri pugiles' are those who overcame the terrors of the house of Busyrane.[38]

In the 1630s, however, he gives the British myth a more polemical bias. He patriotically weights the native legends with moral associations. Thus the local context is essential to his use of British myth in A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle. Milton adapts the Sabrina story to fit his naturalization of the classical Comus. This local emphasis was especially appropriate to the celebration of the Earl of Bridgewater's appointment as Lord President of Wales. Milton heightens the local and contemporary event by means of the mythical if still local history. He transports Comus, 'frolic of his full-grown age,' from a Mediterranean island to Shropshire; Sabrina 'goddess of the river,' returns from Geoffrey's myth to supply a local guardian spirit. The restrained tone of the masque is enhanced by this patriotic and regional note. Milton marries the contemporary fashion for Platonist drama to a more British, and Christian, world than that of Carew's Coelum Britannicum, Davenant's Britannia Triumphans, or other fashionable court pieces.[39]

38 CP, I. pp. 257-258; CW, XII. p. 230.
39 A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, ll. 59, 841.

British myth still had Spenserian associations for the poet of the 'sage and serious doctrine of virginity,' and the Egerton connection with Spenser may have further encouraged this kind of mythography. In Geoffrey's history, Sabrina's death had nothing to do with her refusal to lose her virginity. Milton modifies Geoffrey's story to suit his own message: Sabrina is now rewarded because she 'commended her fair innocence to the flood' when it was endangered. Milton makes her a propitiatory figure for destroyed innocence, and thus invests the Lady's adamant self-defence with some dramatic potential. His mention of this British martyr also testifies to the sufficiency of native myth.

In this connection, Milton stresses the continuity between classical and British myth. At the triumphant moment of the Lady's release, the Attendant Spirit recalls Sabrina's Trojan heritage-- 'Virgin, daughter of Locrine,/ Sprung of old Anchises' line'-- as if this ancestry were essential to her solvent power. The classical background leads as far as the doorstep of Ludlow Castle. Fleeing from Comus after Sabrina's intervention on the Lady's behalf, the children find that the classical, the British, and their own worlds are safely connected: 'not many furlongs thence/ Is your father's residence.'[40] On Spenser's example, Milton could find a native tradition of virtue and heroic exploits, and he could therefore appropriate the British material for the local needs of his masque. In a similarly inventive

40 Masque, ll. 921-922, 945-946.

vein, in Lycidas he derives a 'fable of Bellerus old' from the name Bellerium, which Ortelius gave Land's End. More importantly, he makes Lycidas himself into a contemporary British myth and invests him with the office of 'genius of the shore.'[41] In Comus and Lycidas, Milton seems to accept British myths among the traditional mainstays of English Protestant poetry. This literary life preserves the myth from a more critical historical review.

In the late 1630s, Milton's high regard for the British legends remains untroubled. After his tour of Italy, he repeatedly voices his intention to write an extended British historical poem, apparently within the mythical tradition. In writing to Mansus (January, 1639), he explains that as a poet he especially hopes to glorify Arthur and his victories over the Saxons.[42] In Epitaphium Damonis (autumn, 1639), however, he confesses that he recently had failed in an attempt to write an epic on British legends from the Trojans through to Arthur. He promises that his poetic ambitions could only be fulfilled if he succeeded with such a British subject, and indicates that his commitment to the patriotic poem remains unweakened by this first setback.[43] Although Arthur is missing from the Outlines for British Tragedies, this absence may well reflect his superior poetical status, or simply Milton's familiarity with his story. The plots in

41 Lycidas, ll. 160, 183. In association with the patron saint Michael, the introduction of Bellerus emphasizes the native opposition to the tyranny of 'Namancos and Bayona's hold.'
42 Mansus, ll. 80-84.
43 Epitaphium Damonis, ll. 155-178.

the Outlines are strictly historical and avoid the ancient Britons altogether; on this evidence Milton seems already to accept the historian's skepticism about the historicity of the British legends, Trojan or Arthurian. His tragedies' reliance on English history does not, however, diminish the epic status of the British myth.[44] In The Reason of Church-Government (1641), Milton similarly distinguished the epic above the tragedy and once more the epic seems less bound to historical accuracy and therefore better suited to the British subject.[45]

Only the note in the Outlines on the potential for 'a Heroicall Poem' on Alfred, 'whose actions are wel like those of Ulysses,' indicates that Arthur may no longer be Milton's only, if still a most obvious, epic subject.[46] Nonetheless, Milton's reference to Alfred seems like one idea among many others.[47] Furthermore, the adventure story is Homeric rather than Virgilian, and perhaps therefore not a replacement for the British subject.

In The Reason of Church-Government, a British subject seems to preoccupy Milton's deliberations about 'what K. or Knight before the conquest might be chosen, in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian Heroe.' His uncertainty about

44 CP, VIII. pp. 569-572.
45 CP, I. pp. 813-815. Milton here describes the epic as being 'of highest hope and hardest attempting' and gives it precedence among the literary forms he describes.
46 CP, VIII. p. 571.
47 Perhaps as late 1644, Milton took a Spenserian interest in evidence from Hardyng's Chronicle that 'the office of Knighthood' under Arthur had been to supply extra-legal redress for those whom the law failed to protect, CP, I. p. 495.

his epic subject may indicate Arthur's loss of status or Milton's wish to unburden his work of Spenser's Arthurian example. Nonetheless, he pointedly restricts his subject to 'our own ancient stories.' With Protestant and literary ambitions, he resolves to compensate for England's having had 'her noble atchievments made small by the unskilfull handling of monks and mechanicks.'[48] Given the emphasis on 'ancient,' the unspecific mention of 'king or knight' still reflects a British theme, since knights before the Conquest are chiefly an anachronistic feature of Arthurian literature. Moreover, the subject was probably Arthur, since Milton also sought an ideal 'Christian hero.' Milton still believes that history before the Conquest is best for poetry. He prefers the legendary exploits of distant heroes and thus forgoes any more recent, better-documented history.

In his pamphlets, Milton's epic ambitions often display his patriotic and Protestant commitment. In Of Reformation, earlier in 1641, he had professed his vaulting ambitions as the national historical poet. There too his patriotism and his religious conviction had expressed themselves in his desire to celebrate English history as a special manifestation of providence:

> Then amidst the Hymns, and Halleluiahs of Saints some one may perhaps bee heard offering at high strains in new and lofty Measures to sing and celebrate thy divine Mercies, and marvelous Judgements in this Land throughout all AGES.[49]

48 CP, I. pp. 812-814.
49 CP, I. p. 616.

Later in his career, Milton makes similar promises and voices similar hopes. They display his commitment to the national and the religious cause through an implicit invocation of the glorious national past. His praise of providence, of course, came in the end to lose all reference to English history.

ii. The History of Britain, Book One.

> 'Yet graunteth he the thing with such difficultie, and strainings and telleth the storie with so manie hems and haws, ifs and ands, interpretations and restrictions, as a man may see how greatlie it greeveth him.'[50]

In sharp contrast to his earlier pride in England's pre-Conquest history, Milton's History of Britain reveals a deep ambivalence on this subject. In the late 1640s, he reacts against the uncritical reception of the British myths. The patriotism in secular and ecclesiastical matters which had found expression in his earlier prose largely disappears. The first book of the History seems like the backwash from Milton's epic plans. The Spenserian impetus to undertake a British subject, perhaps with anti-Stuart associations, dwindles to an unenthusiastic, humanist regard for texts concerning 'the first Traditional Beginning.'

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50 Quoted out of context from N. D. [Robert Parsons], A Treatise of Three Conversions of England from Paganisme to Christian Religion (1603), p. 78.

Milton yields to custom in his decision to provide a general summary of the legendary prehistory, but also appears reluctant entirely to give up the fruits of his earlier research on this subject. His former regard for the stories, however, has entirely changed to skeptical distrust. His dedication to a critical historical style seems to intensify as he becomes disillusioned with contemporary political and ecclesiastical reforms.

In the History, therefore, he repeatedly distances himself from the narrative he had not long before sought to glorify. In short, the first book of the History shows Milton trying to dissociate his authority as historian from the stories he recounts. His humanist regard for available texts led him to rely on Geoffrey's work, but he clearly came to have grave misgivings about many aspects of the text before him. Book One is characteristic of humanist attempts to rehabilitate obviously flawed sources; Milton's version of the British myths uses many of the historical techniques commonly directed at the compilation of such sources by Renaissance historians.[51]

Milton's first problem was the weak authority of the available narratives for pre-Roman Britain. Before beginning his own narrative, he openly declares his doubts about all these texts. His first words confess most historians' ignorance about their nations' origins. Invariably, except for sacred history, early history is

51 Cf. Trevor-Roper, 'Buchanan,' EHR, Supp. 3 (1966).

conjectural, 'either wholly unknown, or obscur'd and blemisht with Fables.' The English historian is especially handicapped since nothing substantial is known about Britain until the Roman invasion. All the legends Milton supplies in the first book of The History of Britain are qualified by his introductory statement:

> that of British affairs, from the first peopling of the Iland to the coming of Julius Caesar, nothing certain, either by Tradition, History, or Ancient Fame hath hitherto bin left us.[52]

This assertion agrees with contemporary scholarly dismissals of the ancient legends, but it departs from Milton's previous references to the British history. His new criterion of certainty reflects a critical spirit alien to his earlier designs for a poetic national history.

Nonetheless, having cautioned the reader, Milton proposes to narrate the British history anyway given the available texts. He clearly feels compelled to justify this course of action and adduces several reasons for it. First he observes the lack of any better information and maintains that the legends may somehow relate to prehistorical events. Some early myths-- 'as what we read in Poets of the Flood, and Giants'-- are surpisingly corroborated by 'undoubted witnesses' such as the Bible. The legends thus 'have bin after found to contain in them many footsteps, and reliques of somthing true.' Moreover, some historians have accepted

52 CP, V. pp. 1, 2.

as 'approved story' what others have rejected and therefore Milton preserves the traditional prehistory lest any potential evidence be lost. Finally, he repeatedly excuses sections of unhistorical narrative on literary grounds. The legends have literary possibilities and Milton hopes his history will prove useful to writers. Moreover, he fears that wrangling over their historical status would mar his historiography, which promises to exhibit a pleasing degree of literary discrimination. He maintains that, unlike less lettered historians, he will write

> with plain, and lightsom brevity, to relate well and orderly things worth the noting, so as may best instruct and benefit them that read.[53]

In this way Milton lifts himself above the narratives at hand. He now presents himself not as the national poet apparent, but as a magisterial historian able to contribute both to history and to literature.

Milton therefore admits the legends' literary value, even if this value needs some retrieving. Though the Trojan and the Arthurian legends are disqualified as history, they can be kept for the History because of their potential value for 'our English Poets, and Rhetoricians.' The British stories will serve those 'who by thir Art will know, how to use them judiciously.' This traditional stress on his readers' judgement assumes that the legends lack any

53 CP, V. pp. 3-4.

intrinsic authority. Milton is self-conscious about the contradiction in his position: in his opening pages the authority of his introduction ends with his refusal to impose his authority on the narrative that follows.

The historical judgement of Milton's readers can therefore accommodate a literary role for the British history. On one hand, the story may have its literary uses; on the other, literature has already removed the legends from any purely historical status, and has given them a currency which demands Milton's response. Historical truth needs separating, however, from literary popularity. Thus Milton interjects an historian's warning during the narrative of Brutus's settlement of the island, asking for 'leave bespoken to recite a grand Fable, though dignify'd by our best Poets.'[54]

The literary element in the first book further calls attention to itself in the visual impact of several passages of verse. Milton here allows poetic evidence to go on display. He also quotes, with reservations, from the Faerie Queene.[55] As in Of Reformation, he seems pleased to introduce blank verse translations into his work. Milton's appreciation of the Latin verse, and the epic tone of his translation, contrast with his scornful remark about Brutus making his request 'in Verse, as it seems the manner was.'

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54 CP, V. pp. 16-17.
55 CP, V. p. 20. Later in the History he provides a further couplet in connection with a later legend, CP, V. p. 252.

Milton's apparent expertise on the subject of medieval Latin verse exhibits his critical demeanour:

> the Latin Verses are much better, then for the Age of Geoffrey ap-Arthur, unless perhaps Joseph of Exeter, the only smooth Poet of those times, befreinded him.[56]

Once more his literary as well as his historical authority distance him from the narrative he provides. The literary reputation of Geoffrey's age gives rise to doubts about Geoffrey and his narrative.

Moreover, Milton seems unsure whether the legends are even good for the English. He justifies including them in his History with examples of famous historians who have done likewise-- Livy is named, with Polydore among others. Unlike Livy, however, he does not assert the value of such legends as patriotic celebrations. He is more like Polydore in his skepticism about the value of the story he tells.[57] His purpose remains more didactic than encomiastic. He writes not for the honour but for 'the good of the British nation.' His idea of the national 'good' presupposes a more critical view of his compatriots than the Livian ideal, or Milton's earlier hopes, would suggest. His professed aim is to write what will redound to God's, not necessarily

56 CP, V. pp. 14-15.
57 Selden, Opera Omnia, ed. Wilkins (1726), III. col. 1817, similarly invokes previous historians' practice for this purpose.

England's, glory.[58] That the two should seem so divided shows the change in Milton's views since the peroration to Of Reformation.

Given Milton's views on the relation of truth to eloquence these literary uncertainties about the British legends are not surprising. Despite his belief that the legendary history might include more substantial prehistorical information, Milton seldom points out any specific 'footsteps, and reliques.' Nor does he guess at the truths to which such remains might testify. Instead, the legends' shortcomings expose the shortcomings of prehistoric Britain. Milton implies that if there were any noteworthy early history it would have been recorded and preserved. Thus the poor quality of the prehistorical record is itself the principal British 'footstep.' It indicates the prehistoric Britons' primitive condition; the legends' lack of substance proves their lack of civil discipline. Milton's censure of the legends thus impugns prehistoric Britain itself, and rebukes the historians who had failed to show how untrustworthy the legends were as historical evidence.

Milton's conflicting regard for available texts and for historical truth lead him to his worst quandary as a historian at the outset of the History. No seventeenth-century history of England compares with Milton's in the

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58 'Imploring divine assistance, that it may redound to his glory, and to the good of the British nation, I now begin,' CP, V. pp. 3-4.

space it devotes to admittedly spurious material. He lingers over the narrative in a way that testifies to his earlier commitment to the national history, but he seems unwilling to suppress his acute misgivings about the truth of his narrative.

To overcome some of this awkwardness, Milton strongly condemns other legends of prehistory in order to make Geoffrey seem relatively plausible. He establishes at once that historians have largely dismissed the non-Geoffreyan legends.[59] In his rapid narration of the Samothean legends, Milton displays a critical animus compared with which his censure of Geoffrey seems mild. His interpolations immediately define him as historian of stern judgement, unwilling to indulge a nostalgia for a legendary past, and eager for a more difficult kind of patriotic historiography which instructs and censures as much as it praises and honours. Milton disdains the more trivial inventions and rejects any national pretence to glorious origins free from primitive incivility. The worst of the myths, in Milton's view, can be ignored as Welsh nonsense, 'a British fable.' His excess of critical emotion is peculiar among historians who include the myths.

His disproportionate emphasis on the shakiness of the Samothean legends contrasts with the deeper conflict in his version of Geoffrey's more truly controversial stories. His first waspish observations do allow some semi-historical

59 CP, V. p. 3.

status to the later material from the Historia Regum. Even so, Milton's critical interjections on Geoffrey's prehistory are frequent and emphatic until he settles into the catalogue of British kings.

Milton therefore establishes some order of authority among the prehistories which he collates. He uses several criteria to limit his narrative, in ways typical of earlier humanist histories. For instance, he stresses the plain implausibility of many alleged prehistorical events. Their unlikeliness reflects on the authority of these legendary histories as a whole: he asks 'if these Dreams give not just occasion to call in doubt the Book it self.'[60] He also draws attention to some of Geoffrey's less likely episodes and more glaring inaccuracies.[61] Much of Geoffrey he prefers to ignore.

Another kind of implausibility results when history proves too amenable to convenient interpretation, or too evidently a reconstruction of events, well after the fact. In his narration of the early myths, Milton exposes the facile invention of eponymous heroes and other etymologial explanations of contemporary names.[62] Camden and others' arguments against many traditional etymologies provided a basis for Milton's criticism of the frequent errors in such popular derivations, and for his corresponding disrespect for the histories which included them. As Milton remarks of

60 CP, V. p. 8.
61 E.g. CP, V. pp. 15-16.
62 E.g. CP, V. p. 7.

another case, Geoffrey's explanation of names is often 'too hastily suppos'd.'[63] Often too, several causes for suspicion converge, as when Milton speeds up his narration to mock Geoffrey's story of Brutus's arrival in Britain, noting some dubious etymology on the way.[64]

The credibility of historical sources also depends, in Milton's view, on their proximity to the events they describe. He usually considers how nearly contemporary the historian was to the events he records. The title-page of the History proclaims the work to have been 'Collected out of the Antientest and best Authors.' Milton criticizes historians who depend 'altogether upon late surmises,' although the oldest sources are not necessarily any better. Plausibility is still the most important criterion.[65] Moreover, the Berosus story, 'that which we have of oldest seeming,' is a forgery.[66] So many conflicting and uncertain reports make Milton deeply suspicious of all pre-Roman history.

Responding to these doubts, he persistently distances himself from his narrative. Sometimes jaunty, sometimes disrespectfully brief, Milton's narration largely discredits and abbreviates the most extravagantly mythical narrative of

63 Cf. CP, V. p. 12, where he notes that a putatively Greek city 'is certaine of no Greek name,' and CP, V. p. 21, 'Henault, and Brunchild, and Greenesheild, seeme newer names then for a Story pretended thus Antient.'
64 CP, V. p. 16.
65 Thus Milton criticizes the thousand year old Nennius when he remarks: 'incredible it may seem so sluggish a conceit should prove so ancient.' CP, V. pp. 6, 7.
66 CP, V. pp. 2-3, 5.

'the first Traditional Beginning.' At the end of the Samothean material he himself declares: 'Hitherto the things themselves have giv'n us a warrantable dispatch to run them soon over.'[67]

Milton's approach to Geoffrey's narrative is similar. He makes more concessions to Geoffrey's British history, but remains relentlessly critical in his narration. As well as his outright denunciations of the material he supplies at such length, he undermines the intrinsic authority of the narrative with frequent editorial comment on and abbreviation of the source. Having demolished the most extravagant myths, his attacks on Geoffrey vary between outright scorn and more qualified insinuations. His interpolations leave Milton at one remove from his narrative. Sometimes he just reports events indirectly, as when something 'is said to have [been] done.'[68] Elsewhere Milton notes that Geoffrey cites Gildas wrongly, and that he simply cannot be trusted 'against the stream of History' on European matters.[69]

The Brutus myth itself Milton terms 'the whole Trojan pretence.' He points out that Geoffrey's eponymous Trojan hero is merely a more ancient substitute for Nennius' eponymous consul.[70] According to Milton, all these stories

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67 CP, V. p. 8. Similarly, he criticizes 'they of our own Writers, who thought they had don nothing, unless with all circumstance they tell us when, and who first set foot upon this Iland,' CP, V. p. 8.
68 CP, V. pp. 12, 21, 16.
69 CP, V. pp. 27, 30.
70 CP, V. p. 8.

are false and can be explained very easily as fictions supplied to promote a mythical national ancestor like those of other nations. Since Milton begins by declaring his doubts, Geoffrey too appears in the History without his sponsorship. His is always a doubtful tale. Like the earlier narrative, Geoffrey's story may include 'footsteps, and reliques of somthing true' but is never authoritative.

Moreover, Milton always cites Geoffrey within the text of the History itself: the legendary history is therefore irretrievably bound to his credibility. This results in the odd appearance of the first book of the History. The bare margins promptly establish a new and less historical status for 'The first Traditional Beginning' and its sources. Generally, the marginal notes to the History underline Milton's technique as an historian: the collation of narrative sources on a chronological basis. As a rule, his marginal notes give only sources and dates, unlike those in other histories which often supply summaries of the narrative or draw attention to especially important events. The clean uncluttered pages of the first book distinguish it among contemporary histories, and from the later books of Milton's History. Compared with other histories, and with the rest of Milton's History, this lack of annotation is glaring. In the first edition, Caesar is noted on the second page, Holinshed on the fifth, and Henry of Huntingdon and Matthew of Westminster on the seventh. Further marginalia only appear with Huntingdon's return on the

twenty-ninth page. No dates are given. The absence of marginal sources and dates gives the pre-Roman history an unhistorical appearance.[71]

Furthermore, despite providing much of the narrative in the first book, Geoffrey's myth is supplied in a way which discourages any further use of it. The legends support neither royal nor imperial prestige, nor do they testify to prehistoric legislators or constitutional origins with any authority. Many local references suffer in Milton's narration, among them London-Troynovant. Nor does Milton supply much material for 'Poets or Rhetoricians' to exploit since he omits most of the details in his sources. The narration instructs the reader to be skeptical; the narrative itself is quite uninstructive. He consistently disembarrasses himself from his debt to Geoffrey, and appears anxious to remain uninfluenced by the tradition of credulous support for 'the Monmouth Chronicle.' Milton is generally unwilling

> to argue and debate long who were the first Inhabitants, with what probabilities, what authorities each opinion hath bin upheld.[72]

More specifically, he intimates that he is familiar with the arguments surrounding Geoffrey's person, his vetustissimus

71 History of Britain (1671 [same edition as 1670]). The effect is similar in the folio 1694 edition included in A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton (Amsterdam [London]: 1698).

72 CP, V. p. 4.

liber, and his relation to the Welsh traditions. All these problems, Milton believes, 'will better stand in a Treatise by themselves.'[73]

Later, Milton explains that for the Roman period he only uses 'the British Author. . . when others are all silent.' When 'the Monmouth Writer' adds his supplement of legends to the Roman historians' exemplary reports, 'such like stuff, is too palpably untrue to be worth rehersing in the midst of Truth.'[74] Later still, Milton refers to 'Geffry Monmouth, whose weight we know' with marked disrespect and contrasts Geoffrey with more reliable sources for the Saxon period in English history.[75] 'Writers agree not,' he observes, and throughout the History Geoffrey appears as a maverick source, unsupported by independent authors and of slight importance in matters of dispute.

In short, critical and comparative historical study is wasted on these legends, in Milton's view, since national origins are inevitably obscure:

> to examin these things with diligence, were but to confute the Fables of Britan with the Fables of Greece or Italy; for of this Age, what we have to say, as well concerning most other Countries, as this Iland, is equally under Question. Be how it will. . .[76]

Nor does the 'computing, or collating years and Chronologies' repay the historian of this period. Milton

73 CP, V. p. 9.
74 CP, V. pp. 57, 67.
75 CP, V. p. 195.
76 CP, V. p. 11.

intends not to 'be vainly curious about the time and circumstance of things wherof the substance is so much in doubt.' The reasons for doubt are inescapable and reappear later in the History. Milton concludes by likening the British history to 'smooth or idle Dreams,' a narrative 'Wherto I neither oblige the beleif of other person, nor over-hastily subscribe mine own.'[77]

On the other hand, Geoffrey's influence on subsequent historians impresses Milton, whose debt to Geoffrey's narrative leaves him awkwardly placed to reject it altogether. He respects the large interest in the legends and defends his own use of them on the strength of their being 'deny'd utterly by few.' The tone of his concession to popular demand is ambiguous. His circumlocution-- 'that which hath receav'd approbation from so many, I have chos'n not to omitt'-- reveals the unresolved conflict in Milton's view of the British history. Having announced his incredulity, and having given full vent to his doubts during his narration of the Samothean myth, he cautiously accepts the intermediate authority of Geoffrey's narrative. To excuse his partial acquiescence to tradition, he explains the premises of his historical method in terms that absolve him of direct responsibility for the stories:

> Certain or uncertain, be that upon the credit of those whom I must follow; so far as keeps alooff from impossible and absurd, attested by ancient Writers from

77 CP, V. p. 37. For later similar doubts, see CP, V. pp. 58, 63, etc.

> Books more ancient I refuse not, as the due and proper subject of Story.[78]

Milton accepts that Geoffrey's vetustissimus liber had in fact existed, but he directs his readers to exercise their own judgements on the narrative itself. He temporarily abdicates the historical authority which he asserts elsewhere in the History. His declaration 'I refuse not' recalls his earlier 'I have chos'n not to omitt.' In each case Milton does not actively authorize the narrative.

Although 'too strict an incredulity' seems unreasonable to Milton, he is hard pressed to verify any specific details in Geoffrey. He only maintains that some of the reported pre-Roman royal descents and 'laws and exploits' are likely to be true. Milton cannot rely on the narrative from which he is unwilling to depart, since the legends 'have wrought no small impression [on the common beleif]: defended by many, deny'd utterly by few.'[79] Even if the British history 'cannot so easily be discharg'd,' however, Milton remains uncertain of its historical significance. Except for a few exemplary episodes, Geoffrey's story lacks any more truly instructive insights into the national history. Geoffrey's sententiousness influences Milton's style, but his occasional moralizations beyond Geoffrey are incidental, simple observations on stories of vice and virtue.[80]

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78 CP, V. p. 9; later, CP, V. p. 165, he seems to change his mind about Geoffrey's role as an author rather than a less culpable translator.
79 CP, V. p. 8.
80 CP, V. pp. 22, 24, 32, 24.

Given the sharp contrast between the first and the second books of the History, Geoffrey's narrative seems especially improbable in retrospect. Completing his simile about the dream-like world of pre-Roman British history, Milton shows his fondness for the record preserved in the classical historians:

> our History now arrivs on the Confines, where day-light and truth meet us with cleer dawn, representing to our view, though at a farr distance, true colours and shapes.[81]

The introduction to the second book further emphasizes the association of civility and letters which Milton had established in the introduction to the first book. Now, however, the quality of the Roman record testifies to their virtues where the shortcomings of the British record had testified to their faults. Geoffrey and Caesar's view of the British are difficult to reconcile: Geoffrey's prosperous Londoners and rather medieval British kings seem unrelated to the woad-stained amphibious warriors whom Caesar depicts as fighting naked in and out of their native fens and forests.[82] At the end of the first book, Milton's irritation with Geoffrey becomes obvious, as when he notes 'a foul pretermission in the Author of this, whether Story or Fable; himself wearie, as seems, of his own tedious Tale.' At the beginning of the second book, he maintains

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81 CP, V. p. 37.
82 CP, V. pp. 33-36, 55, 58-61. Milton concludes: 'Progenitors not be glori'd in.'

that working with the Roman historians makes his task a light one: 'so little seems to be requir'd above transcription' that his efforts are 'almost superfluous.'[83]

Notably, these sources also provide more certain evidence for the British national character: courageous and warlike, the early Britons suffer from a lack of civil and ecclesiastical discipline, and therefore must submit to the Roman invasion. Geoffrey's romantic view of pre-Roman Britain is lost on Milton, who prefers the conquerors:

> of the Romans we have cause not to say much worse, then that they beate us into some civilitie; likely else to have continu'd longer in a barbarous and savage manner of life.[84]

The truth concerning the original British character emerges from the Roman reports. With Gildas's bitter confirmation, Roman history describes the British as factious and devoid of civil virtue. The worst instance, in Milton's view, of their undisciplined mix of martial ardor and impolitic anarchy is Boadicea's disastrous leadership. He agrees with the Roman historians who 'brand us with the rankest note of Barbarism.' Geoffrey's historical view is forgotten when Milton concurs with the Romans' civilized judgement:

> the Britans never more plainly manifested themselves to be right Barbarians; no rule, no foresight, no

83 CP, V. pp. 35, 41.
84 CP, V. p. 61.

> forecast, experience or estimation, either of themselves or of thir Enemies.[85]

Nor does Milton's occasional praise for the Britons show Geoffrey's influence. Instead he still depends on the evidence from the Romans and on his own criteria for virtue. The rebellious spirit of the Britons often prompts them to rise in defence of their liberty. Milton also remarks on the Romans' long-standing respect for 'the native and the naked British valour defending their country.'[86] He is pleased to recall that the Britons 'hated servitude' and were long 'nurs'd up in thir native libertie.'[87] Their rough bravery later remains evident in their 'detestation of servitude and the Roman yoke.'[88] On the basis of Roman reports, and while applauding the Roman introduction of civility to Britain, Milton can still take pride in the frequent signs of independence in the national spirit under the Roman occupation. Classical historians provide the best testimony for the national historian, and their narrative bears little relation to the Geoffrey's history. The national character may have proven ultimately indomitable, but this was destructive when the civilizing foreign influence weakened or was removed. Milton shows his respect for Roman virtues and notes that, not least in Britain,

85 CP, V. pp. 79-80.
86 CP, V. p. 66.
87 CP, V. pp. 77, 82.
88 CP, V. p. 89.

'with the Empire fell also what before in this Western World was chiefly Roman.'[89]

An illustration of Milton's shifting perspective on the British may be found in the change of his views on the Druids. In Lycidas, the 'old bards, the famous Druids,' enrich the landscape with ancient associations evoking a native poetic inheritance.[90] They present a British element in an Apollonian tradition. In a self-conscious passage in Mansus, Milton further conceives of the Druids as proof of the British superiority over any climatic disadvantages to the national character. The native and Apollonian poetic talent has its ancient expression in the 'lectas Druidum de gente choreas.' Milton directly associates early Greek traditions with the British myth. In the hyperbolic style of Mansus, Milton may exaggerate his fascination with the Druids, but he clearly likes to see them as his ancient forerunners in the writing of a British national poem:

> Gens Druides antiqua sacris operata deorum,
> Heroum laudes imitandaque gesta canebant.[91]

Later, in the additional introduction to the 1644 edition of The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Milton seeks further to excite patriotic support by alluding to 'our ancient Druides, by whom this Island was the Cathedrall of

89 CP, V. p. 127.
90 Lycidas, ll. 50-55. See A. S. P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush, A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton, Vol. II (1972), pp. 655-656.
91 Mansus, ll. 26-48.

Philosophy to France.' At least for public purposes, he still associates the British with the spirit of reformation and ultimately with England as the elect nation.[92] This is especially so in Areopagitica where the Druids prove the ability of the English to excel in 'the highest that human capacity can soar to.' This long-standing eminence is directly attributed to the national election:

> why else was this Nation chos'n before any other, that out of her as out of Sion should be proclam'd and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all Europ.

For ancient testimony to the national character, Milton observes that some good authorities have maintained that both in Pythagorean and magical studies a British influence might be detected. He once more cites Agricola's remark on the British superiority to the French, although he now more carefully compares the native 'naturall wits' to the foreign 'labour'd studies.' Milton extols the native potential for virtue and knowledge if freed from misgovernment and censorship, and the British character is called upon in support of this confidence.[93]

In The History of Britain, however, the early Britons' lack of records indicates a corresponding lack of civil virtue. Milton at first refuses to believe that the Druids would have failed to write their history, especially if they

92 CP, II. p. 231.
93 CP, II. pp. 551-552.

were sufficiently advanced to introduce their learning to Gaul. Mystery surrounds the failure; Milton's introductory paragraph declares his agnosticism about the British as well as a belief that they would not 'be ever Children in the Knowledge of Times and Ages.'[94] Despite this original optimism, he later censures the native priests and never repeats his early mention of their high status as Greek-speaking, civilized teachers. In the second book of the History their reputation has declined further. Instead of being the educators of Gaul, they are now at best the students of Greek superstition:

> by thir abstaining from a Hen, a Hare, and a Goose, from Fish also. . . and thir opinion of the Soules passing after Death into other Bodies, they may be thought to have studied Pythagoras.

As if early exemplars of episcopal misrule, the Druids are 'men factious and ambitious' who could not restrain 'the people under them from a lew'd adulterous and incestuous life.' Thus if the Roman invasion proved beneficial, so too 'the Gospel, not long after preach't heer, abolish'd such impurities.'[95] Later, the Druids' shortcomings are further exposed in the battle at their home in Anglesey. The old local myth invoked for Lycidas has little in common with the priests 'uttering direfull praiers' who support 'gross bands of Men' backed by 'women like furies.' Milton evidently

94 CP, V. p. 2.
95 CP, V. pp. 60-61.

agrees with the Roman judgement on the 'barbarous and lunatic rout.' He now also notes the Druid custom of human sacrifice and how they 'by the entrails of men us'd divination.'[96] Until the History, Milton appears eager to celebrate the memorable aspects of the British history; in the History itself, he rejects the available stories as predominantly mythical, distrusts the celebratory motive, and believes the lack of reliable records itself the truest testimony to the lack of memorable pre-Roman history.

96 CP, V. pp. 75-76.

Chapter III

Milton and the history of the early church in Britain

Studying ecclesiastical history, Milton similarly decided that the English past was less glorious than had been commonly assumed. He again dismissed many patriotic legends as popular 'fables,' a strongly pejorative word in his vocabulary. Again, he discovered that English historical records were consistently poor and, associating eloquence and virtue, he related this directly to long-standing weaknesses in English civil virtue. Moreover, the history he questioned often contributed to justifications of contemporary institutions. Thus his revisionism also reflects his disenchantment with seventeenth-century ecclesiastical and civil government. In this connection, he again shows his growing preoccupation with the national character, as he finds patterns in English behaviour which continue to his own day.

Studies of Milton's historiography have suffered from a confusion of the ecclesiastical and the constitutional lines which run largely separate through it. In ecclesiastical history, he first believes in the original purity of the Christian church and emphasizes its only recent revival in

England and in Europe. His view of the church is characterized by a dynamic vision of change and progress, of institutional corruption and reformation. In constitutional history, he shows little interest in the origins and the development of political institutions, and prefers to dwell on the exemplary successes and failures of virtuous and unvirtuous governments. In political history, his approach is less forensic than in church history. He seldom relates the quality of government to its structure, and his historical references remain remarkably de casibus, conforming more to that of his classical and medieval sources. His sense of anachronism, of different conditions prevailing in different times, is much more refined in his ecclesiastical than in his political thought.

Milton's chief historical tool is his skepticism about glorifications of an unvirtuous nation. In the mid-1640s, he distrusts many contemporary institutions. This probably deters him from seeking historical precedents with which to justify either the given political order or the many plans for its amendment. In the historiography of his contemporaries, factional interests provided much impetus for historical research. Without such pressures to examine the growth and continuity of religious and political institutions, less partisan histories often kept to the purely exemplary function of history or followed antiquarian pursuits. As Milton lost interest in secular history as a store of exemplary characters he turned to the national

character as the proper subject for an historian. As he found himself unable to satisfy the old demand for national glorification, his historiography opened on a subtler investigation of historical progress. His more critical vision of church history combined with a new emphasis on national character in his civil history. This chapter reviews Milton's opinions on the early English church, in legend and history.

i. Lucius, first Christian king of England.

In church history as well, Milton casts a colder eye on England's past in the History than in his other works. Here, however, he was far more innovative than when he grudgingly recounted the British legends. The impetus of ecclesiastical controversy sharpened his skepticism about church history, even though he maintained that the History did not concern itself with these issues.

Thus in Of Reformation, he accepts the legend of Lucius, 'the first Christian King of this Iland,'[1] whereas in the later History he does not. In the former, he invokes the popular Lucius legends in order to attack the premise 'that the Church government must be conformable to the civill politie.'[2] This comes as part of his response to episcopal claims for wider secular powers. Milton immediately expresses his profound dislike for any such

1 CP, I. p. 574.
2 CP, I. p. 573.

confusion of ecclesiastical and political jurisdictions.[3] He argues that when religion conforms to political ends it enslaves a nation. He scorns episcopal ambitions 'to be counted statists.'[4] Within this attack on the secular aspirations of the incompletely reformed church, he cites the Lucius legend to support the independence of religious laws from state laws. He emphasizes the arbitrariness of state laws, and indicates that inasmuch as they conflict with true religion they may be disregarded. Eleutherius the 'Bishop of Rome' had advised Lucius to found his religious laws according to scriptural instructions. This provides Milton with a historical authority for British independence in religious matters. Whatever the imperial Roman control of civil government, the legislation and jurisdiction of church affairs had been entirely provincial. Milton cites the advice Eleutherius gave King Lucius:

> that he was Gods Vicar, and therefore to rule by Gods Laws, that the edicts of Caesar we may at all times disallow, but the Statutes of God for no reason we may reject.[5]

Arguing against episcopal claims, Milton uses the Lucius story to supplement his proofs from scripture. He disputes 'that the forms of Church Discipline must be minted, and

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3 CP, I. p. 573.
4 CP, I. p. 574.
5 CP, I. p. 574.

modell'd out to secular pretences,'[6] and indicates that no historical evidence supports the position of the prelates.

Although happy to accept Eleutherius's separation of church and state in legal matters, Milton in 1641 does not wish to extend the episcopal claims frequently made on the basis of the Lucius story. Soon, in Of Prelatical Episcopacy, he was to warn Bishop Ussher himself against presuming too far about early British episcopal practice.[7] He does not deny the purity of the early British church, but he stresses that the only certain fact about these first bishops is their poverty. He believes that the Britons originally kept ecclesiastical and civil matters separate.

Milton's application of the Lucius legend originates in Reformation polemic. The legend had been used chiefly to show that the British had had the first national church, and that this church remained independent of Rome until the time of Pope Gregory. On this basis, however, Lucius provided historical backing for a number of positions, and these point to Milton's differing versions of the story. First, there were discussions of Lucius with clear episcopal motives, such as those of Foxe, Archbishop Parker, and Bishop Jewel. All three maintained that Lucius was the first Christian king of Britain, but all emphasized the native Christian tradition which preceded both his coming to the throne and his sending to Rome first for political and then for religious laws with which to govern Britain. In

6 CP, I. p. 574.
7 CP, I. pp. 646-647.

Acts and Monuments, Foxe twice summarized his six main reasons for believing in British Christianity's pre-Lucian origins. He emphasized two points: Gildas had said, or so Foxe maintained, that Joseph of Arimathea was sent by Philip the Apostle in the time of Tiberius, and Eleutherius's letter to Lucius clearly shows that the faith predated the Eleutherian missions. Foxe also cites Tertullian's and Origen's reports of an earlier Christianity in Britain, the legend of Simon Zelotes's visit, and Bede's and other information on the British observation of eastern customs at Easter.[8] Foxe concludes 'that the Britons were taught first by the Grecians of the east church, rather than by the Romans,' but he adds that even if the faith had originated from Rome, it need not come from there still.[9]

Archbishop Parker supplied the chief establishmentarian redaction of the Lucius legend. Lucius's nationalization of the religion introduced by the apostolic Joseph of Arimathea, his letter from Eleutherius, and his changing the flamines to bishops all figure in Parker's account.[10] He found the early British church to be the type of the Church of England. Thus the Elizabethan church could be defended with reference to the church government Lucius had established with both divine and imperial approval.[11] Bishop Jewel made a similar point, and stressed that from

8 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. pp. 152, 305-308.
9 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. p. 307.
10 Matthew Parker, De Antiquitate Britannicae Ecclesiae (1572), pp. 2-5.
11 Parker, De Antiquitate, pp. 5-8.

the beginning Joseph of Arimathea had not been commissioned by Rome.[12] Lucius, in Jewel's opinion, had been a member of this long-standing native church well before he made his approach to Rome. Foxe, Parker, and Jewel emphasized the strength of the native church in part to rescue Lucius for their defence of the episcopal association of church and state. All three needed to make sure that Lucius's letters to and from Rome could not contribute to Catholic polemics such as that of Harding. Seeking to justify an independent but episcopal English church, they found Lucius a valuable historical proof of both, with the added attraction that Lucius proves that Britain had had the first national church. As well as its patriotic value, the last point refuted Catholic claims-- answering the vexed question 'where was your church when. . .'-- as well as proving English ecclesiastical primacy for some Protestant disputes.[13]

Contemporaries of Foxe, Parker, and Jewel made similar uses of the legend. Bishop Pilkington used the Lucius story in order to emphasize the authority of kings in spiritual affairs. At the same time, he sought to establish the independence of the British church from Rome. He therefore gave evidence that Christianity in Britain predated Lucius and was of non-Roman origin: the Britons 'had received the gospel afore he [Eleutherius] was born,' either from Joseph

12 John Jewel, Works, ed. J. Ayre (Cambridge: 1845-1850), I. pp. 162, 280, 305, 306.
13 Kendrick, British Antiquity, pp. 111-113.

of Arimathea or someone else.[14] Bishop Calfhill invoked Lucius to stress the church's independent duty to Scripture rather than to intermediate Roman law. Calfhill, however, also supported the supremacy of kings in ecclesiastical matters. Like other defenders of episcopacy, he cited Lucius to assert the precedence of God's law over 'all men's devices.' but restrained himself from searching for any more radical implications in this position.[15] When controversy swung from recusants to Puritans, Archbishop Whitgift used Lucius to show that princes have supremacy in ecclesiastical causes.[16] The growing skepticism about Eleutherius's letter did not prevent its being recalled as evidence of early episcopalism while being denied as a proof of Roman authority for the British church. Episcopal self-justification drew on the belief that Lucius converted archflamines and flamines into archbishops and bishops. Foxe, Pilkington, Whitgift, and Hooker, among others, supported this explanation of the origin of the British episcopacy, and used it to refute anti-episcopal arguments.[17] Later, Selden reiterated these versions of

14 James Pilkington, Works, ed. J. Scholefield (Cambridge: 1842), p. 511.
15 James Calfhill, An Answer to John Martiall's Treatise of the Cross, ed. R. Gibbings (Cambridge: 1846), pp. 52-54.
16 John Whitgift, Works, ed. J. Ayre (Cambridge: 1851-1853) III. p. 592.
17 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. p. 309; Pilkington, Works, p. 597; Whitgift, Works, II. pp. 128-129; and Richard Hooker, Works, ed. J. Keble (Oxford: 1888), III. p. 143-144.

both the Lucius legend and the Joseph of Arimathea legends.[18]

Milton was of course opposed to the royal interference in religious matters for which Lucius provided such a popular example. But Bale himself had named Lucius among the godly preachers who promoted the great cause of the Christian imperium. Commenting on Revelation 21: 24-27-- 'they shall bring the glory and honour of the heathen into the same city'-- Bale defines 'honour' as the princes' 'power, possessions, and magnificence,' and maintains that Lucius contributed to this transfer of pagan might.[19] On this basis, Jewel could assert that

> Touching the right that we say belongeth unto all christian princes, it hath been invested and planted in them from the beginning. For, to leave other authorities of the scriptures, pope Eleutherius himself wrote thus unto Lucius, sometime king of this realm of England: Vos estis vicarius Dei in regno.[20]

Such a combination of secular and religious power made Lucius a useful figure for Anglican apologists.

In reply to Jewel's position, Thomas Cartwright provided the chief Presbyterian-Puritan argument against the promoters of the Lucius legend. In The Second Replie (1575), Cartwright anticipated modern historical opinion by

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18 Selden, Opera, II. cols. 895-896, 986-987; III. cols. 11-12, 45-46, 1204-1205; and his commentary on Michael Drayton's Poly Olbion (1622), pp. 54, 129.
19 John Bale, Select Works, ed. H. Christmas (Cambridge: 1849), p. 614.
20 Jewel, Works, IV. p. 974.

dismissing almost all of the Lucius legend. Cartwright's accurate skepticism derived from his dislike of episcopal pretensions that drew on the Lucius legend for support. Noting that Whitgift sought authority for episcopacy in the archflamines introduced by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Cartwright declared that the authority for the archflamines is 'not ecclesiasticall, but papisticall.' Cartwright's reading of Acts and Monuments pointed out that Foxe himself had reservations about the legend. The bishops had largely ignored such problems:

> M. Fox disputeth against this opinion, and useth divers reasons which confute flatly this fable, off the conversion off England by Eleutherius Embassadours: and setteth downe that sentence by way off concession, rather caried agaynst his will by certein stories in this untruth, then led by his owne Judgemente.[21]

Furthermore, Geoffrey's authority alone supported the story that there were twenty-eight flamines and three archflamines before Lucius converted them into an equal number of bishops and archbishops. Cartwright argued that Lucius's Christian influence could have been this powerful only if he ruled Britain singly. History told him, however, that the Britons had not one king but many, that they were given to faction, and that the government of Britain tended to be democratic anyway. Lucius could not have ruled alone, even had he not been 'under the Romane deputie.'

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21 Thomas Cartwright, The Second Replie (1575), p. 472.

Furthermore, Cartwright urged that the culture of Lucius's Britons be considered. Such primitives could never have had 'a generall, and open Christian church'; 'they were far from any litle tast off Christ.' It is unlikely that a society in which women were held in common and both sexes went naked was in any way a Christian one. Cartwright further doubted the historicity of Lucius's conversion because of the problems in dating, the lateness of the record, and Gildas's silence concerning events so near his own day. Geoffrey he considered a dubious source, and all historians of Lucius had followed Geoffrey for Lucius's changing the flamines into bishops. No other corroboration of such early episcopalism existed. It was much likelier that Gildas's story was true, that some Britons received the faith in Tiberius's time, and that they kept it privately and 'not publikely nor universally by autoritie off Prince.' Prompted by his polemical needs, Cartwright offered a more sophisticated historical analysis at the same time as he found a proto-Presbyterianism in the early British church.[22]

Cartwright's skepticism apart, the Lucius legend suffered chiefly because of growing doubts about the legends of the apostolic church in Britain. These in turn put pressure on Lucius's correspondence with Rome, which Ussher, and especially Spelman, were reluctant to accept.[23] Speed's vehement defence of the letter argues some lowering in its

22 Cartwright, Second Replie, pp. 473-476.
23 James Ussher, Britannicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates (Dublin: 1639), sig. A1^{v}, pp. 12-30; Henry Spelman, Concilia (1639), pp. 1-36, 44-56.

standing.[24] Despite his doubts regarding the letter, however, Spelman's dedication to Charles begins with the age-old formula, 'Dei Vicarius. . .,' a reminder of Eleutherius's reputed support of Lucius's ecclesiastical authority.[25] Spelman seems eager to prevent any question of his loyalty to the king that his attack on the Eleutherius letter might invite. By the late 1640s, Spelman's repeated designation of Charles as God's vicar, combined with an emphasis on Lucius's ecclesiastical role if not on the letter from Rome, might have exacerbated Milton's dislike for the Lucius legend. Milton certainly resented Spelman's related defence of tithes.[26]

During the 1640s, therefore, Milton's exasperation with the confusion of church and state would have increased his dislike for the Lucius legend and for the letter to Rome in particular. At a time when the Joseph of Arimathea legend was under increasing attack,[27] and had been dismissed by Milton himself, the weakening evidence for any earlier tradition of British Christianity made Lucius's connections with Rome all the more regrettable.

There also was still a point to be made in revising historical assumptions about an early episcopacy. In The History of Britain, Milton dismisses claims that the primitive church in Britain was pure, even before Gregory's missionary Augustine brought the English church under the

24 Speed, Historie, pp. 102-104.
25 Spelman, Concilia, sig. *3^{r-v}.
26 CP, VII, pp. 294, 299.
27 Kendrick, British Antiquity, 111-112.

Roman dominion from which it suffered until the Reformation. In the History, Milton hedges on the very existence of Lucius. He attacks the legend with the reservations earlier expressed by Cartwright, whom he may well have read by this time.[28] He remarks the confusion and error in different stories about the early British king, and notes the problems about the influence of Lucius's power and about the dating of his reign. The status of the letter from Eleutherius remains uncertain in Milton's view. Other questions arise concerning early British church history. Like Cartwright, Milton contrasts the reputed religious virtue of the Britons with their proven lack of the civil virtue necessary for provincial independence. On this point, given his close association of eloquence and virtue, the lack of good testimony to the early British church is especially damning. Furthermore, given his association of religious and civil liberty, the political problems that plagued these Britons belie the ecclesiastical legends about the first Christian king in Europe. Milton maintains that even if Lucius were theologically elect, the people seem not to have lived up to this election. The nation probably never truly chose to follow him.

Milton uses a highly critical style of historiography to deal with the Lucius legend. Again he uses the common techniques of humanist scholarship but with better effect owing to his inclination to doubt the story. Perhaps he

28 He had read Cartwright by January, 1649, when he refers to the Second Replie in the Tenure, CP, III. p. 248.

benefited too from Cartwright's criticisms of the myth. His attack on the sources for the story qualifies his acceptance of its hero. His authorial interpolations question the truth of the entire episode. Thus Milton begins the tale of Lucius with three deep reservations:

> as among so many different accounts may seem most probable, Lucius a suppos'd King in some part of Britain, the first of any King in Europe, that we read of, receav'd the Christian Faith.[29]

As Milton distances himself from the narrative, the emphasis is on the doubtfulness of the story in hand. Lucius 'is made' to be one thing and 'is said' to have done another; other events 'are said' to have happened as well.[30] Once more, Milton's association of eloquence and virtue gives further significance to the shortcomings of the historical records in question. Had Lucius truly done the things claimed for him, the increase of civility should show in better historical records from his time. Milton uses the disappearance of records as a cultural measuring-stick; the extent to which they have broken down corroborates his historical judgement of national virtue. He therefore condemns this period of British history more widely when he dismisses some legends surrounding Lucius with a final 'these things have no foundation.'[31]

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29 CP, V. p. 96.
30 CP, V. pp. 97-98.
31 CP, V. p. 97.

In doubting the Lucius legend, Milton first points to the long-standing confusion about its date. Foxe had stumbled on this problem, and it was never successfully resolved. Milton suggests the most probable of the varying dates given for Lucius, and leaves the specific time open. He also points out that the nature of early British kingship argues against Lucius's quick and complete conversion of the island. The legendary sway of this king meant that he needed a modern sovereign's control over the nation, whereas Milton, like Cartwright, understands that the island had been divided into many minor kingdoms. Milton's 'a suppos'd king in some part of Britain' recalls previous controversy over Lucius's nationalization of the faith. Under such close examination of its anachronisms, the legend is found wanting.

The History therefore omits the letter from Eleutherius to Lucius, a much more recent invention than Bede's and Geoffrey's Lucius legends. Milton questions whether Lucius even sent that 'improbable letter' to Eleutherius in the first place. He is especially concerned that an early British king might have sought Roman authority for ecclesiastical legislation and jurisdiction. Instead of seeing the letter of Eleutherius as a support for his distinction between civil and religious matters, as he had done in Of Reformation, Milton now found it unacceptable that even an early pope should be cited as an authority for the temporal government of spiritual concerns. Earlier he

had viewed the letter as support for provincial independence in religious matters. Now he questioned that the king might be 'God's Vicar' in his land. He rejects all secular interference, even at a provincial level in 'matters of religion.' He also doubts the many other legends proliferating around the first British church. The church history of the English in the period before Lucius had become especially uncertain under recent attacks, and Milton gives such history little credence:

> But of these matters, variously written and believ'd, Ecclesiastic Historians can best determin: as the best of them do, with little credit giv'n to the particulars of such uncertain relations.[32]

Once more the variety of sources, and the contradictions in their stories, supply Milton not only with a reason for discounting them, but also for impugning the civil and religious virtue of the British in this period.

Most importantly, however, Milton examines the difference between Lucius's supposed accession of faith and true national religious progress. Here he shows an obvious interest in his subject, and his strictures are a harbinger of his jeremiad in Book Three of the History. He exposes the falseness of religion accepted under coercion or for temporal gain. He maintains that a ruler who enforces such persuasions to religion only confounds any chance of real conversion and faith. Accepting Lucius's legend with deep

32 CP, V. p. 98.

reservations, he argues that there is nothing to be proud of in Britain's being the first nation 'by publick Authority' to have professed Christianity. Instead, this civil influence in religious matters sullies the autonomy of the early British church. Milton suggests that this advent of faith was only:

> a high and singular grace from above, if sinceritie and perseverance went along, otherwise an empty boast and to be fear'd the verifying of that true sentence, the first shall be last.[33]

He indicates that only a complete independence from civil power could have made the early British church an exemplary one. He stresses that Lucius's reign constituted an election-- 'a high and singular grace from above'-- only if attended by zeal on a national level. He makes the national commitment to the church the measure of national election. At the same time he believes that this church is unworthy of the work to which the nation is elect. Thus in the early history of the church, Milton looks for examples of zeal rather than for institutional models which support the present ecclesiastical order. We should once more remember his association of eloquence and virtue when he concludes that this early history may well be just 'an empty boast.'

Milton's concern about the emptiness of this boast reflects his preoccupation with the national character. He already sees a lack of religious zeal in the British

33 CP, V. pp. 96-97.

population at large. He insists that the praise can only belong to Lucius rather than to the nation as a whole, and even then he strongly qualifies his acceptance of Lucius. His revision of early church history is anti-institutional; he consistently upholds the privacy of faith and rejects conformism. Milton sees little cause for celebration when the people accept an institutional church at a national level. He cannot glorify the early Britons

> whose first professing by publick Authority was no real commendation of their true faith; which had appear'd more sincere and praise-worthy, whether in this or other Nation, first profess'd without publick Authority or against it, might else have bin but outward conformity.[34]

In his changed view of Lucius and of the elect nation, Milton shows his concern with religious freedom. The change alerts us to the significance of his revisions in the History. Here, as elsewhere in the History, he finds that the inhabitants of England, British or Saxon, tend to lack any enduring religious conviction. His pessimism about their backsliding dominates the History, a far cry from his optimism about the English in the early 1640s.

Therefore Milton emphatically contrasts the weakened national condition after Lucius's reign with Britain's legendary religious prosperity at the time. The 'commotion' that follows Lucius's death also reflects on the supposed ecclesiastical developments in his time; his kingship

34 CP, V. p. 97.

provided no lasting peace. Milton supports the sources that say England at that time suffered the greatest disturbances in the Roman Empire. He denies Britain any worthy provincial independence under Lucius. 'By truer testimony,'[35] the British are saved by a virtuous Roman since the Romans are supreme in secular affairs. Likewise, it requires 'the last heer of Roman stock' to lead the godly revolt against the Saxon invasions.[36] The British dependence on the Roman Empire betrays all the historian's efforts to find a golden age of early British religion to which the modern elect nation can refer for historical signs of justification. Focussing on religious liberty, rather than on ecclesiastical institutions, Milton's revisions reveal a Puritan skepticism of institutions that betray the work to which the nation is elect. At the same time, his developing vision of the national character is difficult to reconcile with Puritan assumptions about the national election. Unlike the jeremiads which, in their excoriation of national faults, proclaimed the special status of the nation, Milton's critical view discourages any sense that the English were privileged sinners or sufferers.

35 CP, V. pp. 98-99.
36 CP, V. pp. 154-155. Milton is eager to clear this Roman from all legendary 'fables' which make him a son of the reputedly English Constantine.

ii. Emperor Constantine and his Donation.

Milton's many references to Constantine the Great provide a more complicated example of his inconsistent use of history. His attitude to the first Christian emperor varies depending on when, and sometimes on where, he expresses it. At different times he invokes Constantine for almost opposite purposes. Usually he attacks him in order to explain or to illustrate the problems caused by the failure to separate church and state. He criticizes the emperor for his alleged transfer of imperial riches and prerogative to the Roman pope and episcopacy, a transfer he identifies with the forged Donation of Constantine. This subordination of secular to ecclesiastical power marked the end of the primitive church; the emphasis of early ministers on simplicity and poverty could not survive Constantine's infusions of wealth, and churchmen left their originally modest but independent livings. In other references, however, Milton claims Constantine for support, sometimes approving his efforts on behalf of domestic and civil liberty.

A number of legends about Constantine had acquired especial significance for Englishmen. In the early sixteenth century, Roman praise for the emperor met with increased, if still traditional, opposition from an anti-imperial standpoint. The praise soon evolved to satisfy Anglican needs as well, however, and Constantine's name was

duly restored as the reestablished church prospered. In particular, some of the Roman legends were revised to bolster historical evidence of Protestant election. In the English attack on Rome, therefore, the elect nation could salvage 'that Emperour whom no religion would lose'[37] for its history of the Reformation. Thus Constantine, in Foxe's representative scheme, had first brought the persecutions of the early church to an end and then established episcopal power over secular as well as ecclesiastical matters. Thus too, however, in the later attack on the established church in England, the elect within the nation came to impugn Constantine for having first raised the church to imperial status.

Hence Milton begins his examination of historical authority-- as opposed to scriptural authority or that of reason-- with a 'root and branch' rejection of Foxe's myth. In Of Reformation, he recalls previous anti-papal attacks on Constantine and fits them into his own eschatology. He turns the Puritan logic in argument against.the emperor, and specifies his reign as the beginning of the full corruption of spiritual government. Only the completion of the present reformation would overcome this destructive precedent.

In his anti-prelatical pamphlets, Milton declares his allegiance to the medieval tradition of anti-papal complaint. He cites examples from some of his more noteworthy literary predecessors: Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto,

37 John Donne, The Sermons, eds. G. Potter and E. Simpson (Berkeley: 1953-1962), IX. p. 220.

Chaucer, and Gower all condemn the Donation and some the donor.[38] Early in the sixteenth century, reformers had persisted with attacks similar to these. In England, the tradition of Lollard complaint found a new exponent in John Bale. Bale's martyrology showed little respect for the church since Constantine: 'Before that time all the bishops of Rome were martyrs in a manner; and since that time we read of very few.' More importantly, Bale slightly changed the old legend of a voice in the air decrying the Donation to make it an explicitly divine voice.[39] This adds apocalyptic significance to the tale, and allowed Reformation historians to view the event as a crucial milestone for their eschatological schedules. The early church declined, therefore, because of the temporal power Constantine gave to the clergy. The unadorned poverty of the earlier bishops, and their matching diligence as preachers, were used by Bale to support his eschatological reading of ecclesiastical history, a reading he could direct against Roman claims for spiritual authority. Bale's criticism of the Roman church, and the vision of history it presupposed, are analogous to Milton's anti-prelatical polemic and to his initial view of history in Of Reformation.

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38 The Plowman's Tale, an anti-clerical work, was held to have been 'made no doubt by Chaucer,' Chaucer, Workes, ed. T. Speght (1598), ff. 90^{r}-97^{v}.

39 Bale, Select Works, p. 35; Katharine Firth, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645 (Oxford: 1979), p. 48.

Milton too invoked the medieval anti-papal tradition in Of Reformation and in the Apology, and subscribed to something like Bale's eschatology in these tracts. He does not simply pick up the medieval polemic where Bale left off, however, nor does he forget the earlier exposure of the forged Donation. Instead, reacting to the episcopal provocations of the 1630s and 1640s, he takes issue with the tradition that styled Constantine a hero. In particular, he largely dismissed the English version of imperial myth that patriotic millenarian fervour had so powerfully reinforced.

Milton's onslaught against Constantine, however, came after an intervening reversal of Bale's position by sixteenth-century defenders of the newly established English church. Despite relying on Bale's vision of history, they discovered in the first Christian emperor the saviour of the early church and the chief agent in God's millenial binding of Satan. Where Bale had revived a medieval tradition of opposition to Constantine, they adopted the Roman position on the emperor.

This was possible because the exposure of the forgery by Valla and others[40] allowed the sixteenth-century defenders of the English church to accept Constantine as a benefactor of the clergy without needing to support papal claims. They could preserve the church's imperial status at the same time as they disabused Constantine's Roman admirers

40 Independently by 'Valla, Cusa, and Peacock-- more than two generations before Henry VIII.' W. Ullmann, '"This Realm of England is an Empire",' Journal of Ecclesiastical History XXX (1979), p. 193n.

of their myths about his slavish investiture of the pope with imperial power. Postponing the decline of the church until after Constantine's death, they gained a saintly emperor who had established the imperial Christian tradition. His reign became a crucial period in ecclesiastical histories: it signified either the climactic crowning of the early church, or the beginning of the end for primitive purity in spiritual matters. Triumph and corruption could be seen as almost coexistent. The problem centred on the historian's confidence in the church's ability to survive the change from private to public authority-- a crucial turning point which might be styled the Constantinean Moment-- with its spiritual integrity intact. Protestant debate returned to this historical question for more than a century.

Central to the dispute was the compromise, made in the time of Henry VIII, between an extreme reforming spirit and Henrician imperial aspirations, a compromise that led to the rehabilitation of Constantine as a symbol of Christian empire. In this compromise, Constantine's popularity was much enhanced by his reputedly English background. On one hand, he seemed an English reformer, much to the liking of patriots eager to defend the English church. On the other, he provided the exemplary English defender of church and state needed as an English archetype for Henry VIII. Since Valla's exposure of the Donation was becoming more widely known, Henry could now seize on Constantine's example as

historical justification for his imperial claims. The national historian, Polydore Vergil, duly supplied the story with medieval legends about Constantine's British origins writ large. The publication of his Anglica Historia (1534) was delayed until this emphasis on imperial independence outweighed his rejection of Arthurian myth, hitherto a staple of Tudor propaganda. This happened as the Donation's reputation declined and as Henry's affairs demanded a speedy separation of English from Roman ecclesiastical jurisdiction.[41] The imperial claims of the Act in Restraint of Appeals meant that the king's relationship to the English church matched that of Constantine to the primitive church. Hence the Tudor emphasis, incomprehensible to foreigners, on Constantine's English origins.[42] Hence also the revived support for Constantine's policies. The Tudor opinion of the Constantinean Moment was largely favourable. This English Augustus-- the type, and for some the direct ancestor, of Henry and his Protestant successors-- gained importance for English historians. A new relevance increased the popularity of Geoffrey of Monmouth's and Henry of Huntingdon's earlier support for a native imperial tradition. As in the study of Saxon institutions, the medieval writers who wrote before the time of increasing and encroaching papal claims appealed most to English historians in the Reformation. Imperialism took on a more patriotic

41 Koebner, '"The Imperial Crown of this Realm",' pp. 29-52.
42 Koebner, '"The Imperial Crown of this Realm",' pp. 40-42.

aspect and merged with the growing belief that England was a chosen nation. Constantine, especially a reputedly British Constantine, therefore featured prominently in English historiography. The triumphant return of the Christian emperor heralded by the Act in Restraint of Appeals perpetuated an apocalytic progress, the culmination of which many sixteenth-century English divines believed to be their reformed and increasingly national church.[43]

The highest praise for Constantine came in Foxe's Acts and Monuments. Foxe revised Bale's position on Constantine, at the same time depending on Bale's style of historiography and martyrology. He saw his task as the explanation of God's prophetic word in its relation to ecclesiastical history. According to Foxe, Constantine had rewarded the long-suffering elect. By overcoming his rival Licinius he ended the tenth persecution, and in this way God marked the beginning of a thousand years of relative peace, the millenial binding of Satan. Foxe contrasted the horrors of the persecutions with the comparative safety of the elect from the time of Constantine until Wycliffe. The millenium heralded by Constantine's reign had finished, of course, and the Reformation represented a later historical development toward the Second Coming. Foxe's institutional history of the elect was deeply eschatological, and had a dynamic view

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43 Jewel, Tyndale, Grindal, Bale, and Pilkington among others, W. Lamont, Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603-1660 (1969), p. 34.

of change through time. His example determined the style of much ecclesiastical history in the following century.[44]

In contrast to Foxe, the 'root and branch' and sectarian dismissal of Constantine saw the relation between the elect and the Holy Spirit in a less institutional light, and consequently in a less historical framework. When Milton shifted from the eschatological historical view to one with a diminished emphasis on change and progress, he also moved away from the establishmentarian position. From the Roman view of Constantine to that of Foxe to that of Milton, history first gains prophetic significance and then loses it, being finally reduced to a fund of exempla.

Constantine's name, however, still exercised enough influence to encourage Milton sometimes to yoke it for his purposes. Milton is ambivalent about earlier eschatological theories, but his vacillation may be more than a pragmatic reversal of position. This apparent contradiction shows a different hesitancy, typical of his Puritan thought. On one hand, he maintains that 'Custome without Truth is but agedness of Error';[45] on the other, he eagerly searches for some truth in 'custom.' He remains largely unwilling to endorse any Hobbes-like attack on the past as represented by Greece and Rome, although his position agrees with that of Hobbes on the damage to early Christian practice necessarily

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44 In the 1640s, Milton could still refer to him simply as 'the Author of our Church History.' CP, I. p. 604.
45 CP, I. p. 561.

resulting from any pagan influence.[46] Nonetheless, he is readier to attack ecclesiastical than classical history, and is usually skeptical of apocalyptic interpretations of history. He prefers instead to consider history as merely empirical confirmation of scriptural or rational precepts. His description of Constantine, therefore, introduces a comprehensive revision of Foxe's eschatological programme.

On the more specific question of church politics, Foxe had developed Polydore Vergil's answer to the English need for historical justification and sanctified Constantine as the new Protestant hero. The emperor was politically acceptable to otherwise less tractable reformers and was now free of the papist legends that had accumulated around that proven forgery the Donation. In his enthusiasm Foxe only once echoes Bale's distrust of the overly generous emperor.[47] In all other respects, 'godly Constantine, the meek and most Christian emperor,' is beyond reproach and remains

> a singular spectacle for all Christian princes to behold and imitate, and worthy of perpetual memory in all congregations of christian saints; whose fervent zeal, and piety in general, to all congregations and to all servants of Christ, was notable.[48]

In the first edition of the Acts and Monuments (1563), Foxe explicitly identified Elizabeth with Constantine, himself

46 Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford: 1946), pp. 73-76.
47 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I, p. 292.
48 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. p. 303.

with Eusebius.[49] Although his adulation of the emperor and his apocalyptic expectations soon carried him past this position, others, especially early in Elizabeth's reign, exploited the rich vein of imperial imagery and rhetoric which Elizabeth's succession, and the Foxeian popularization of apocalyptic history, made available.[50] Approval of the Christian emperor as God's elect instrument came more freely with the exposure of the Donation, formerly an important authority for Roman ecclesiastical dominion.[51]

This political and ecclesiological perspective gained patriotic currency owing to myths of Constantine's British origins. Foxe's emphasis on Constantine's English heritage and birth complements his imperial and anti-Donation history of the early church. He reiterates the popular tradition to which Polydore had lent credence:

> Constantius was sent over to Britain, to this our country of England, to recover the tribute, where he took to wife Helena the daughter of King Coel. . . of whom was born Constantine the Great.[52]

The great Christian emperor, the divinely chosen agent in the binding of Satan, was an Englishman. When he settled his imperial scores, he maintained England's historic lead in Christian progress; 'the godly beginning of good Constantine' brought an end 'to any open slaughter for a

49 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. p. vi*.
50 Frances Yates, Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century (1975), pp. 43-46.
51 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. pp. 301-303.
52 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. pp. 224, 293.

thousand years together' in the church.[53] The apocalyptic flavour of such English imperialism strengthened, especially after the Armada and the Gunpowder Plot. In Jacobean times, Thomas Brightman and his followers elaborated on England's role in prophetic history, and the curious association of Constantine and Wycliffe persisted. This nationalization of imperial theory was already underway, however, in Foxe's invocation of Constantine's British origins.[54] Even Milton could not always resist Constantine's attractions as an English proto-reformer, especially when he wished to rally patriotic pride.

Doubts about Foxe's identification of the millenium increased in the late sixteenth century. The period from Constantine to Wycliffe appeared too anti-Christian to be taken for the prescribed binding of Satan. Persecutions, Foxe's criterion for true anti-Christian interference, no longer seemed the only kind of Satanic mischief in the church. A subtler view of Antichrist combined with a more utopian view of the millenium and left Foxe's historical reading of Revelation an outmoded one, especially for more radical reformers. This change expressed itself in Thomas

53 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. p. 250.
54 Recent efforts to dismiss William Haller's view of the English sense of national election (Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation, 1963) largely ignore this kind of literary and historical patriotism: Paul Christianson, Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalypticism from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War (Toronto: 1978), p. 41; Richard Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse (Appleford: 1978), p. 235; K. Firth, Apocalyptic Tradition, pp. 106-109. Pocock maintains that the idea of England as elect nation is 'primarily a product of the Marian exile,' Machiavellian Moment, p. 342.

Brightman's explication of Revelation, in which Constantine's reputation was largely upheld but lost some of its millenial importance. In this revised apocalyptic, 'the Dragon [persecution] being cast out of heaven by Constantine, he substituted the Beast to be his Vicar there, which Beast is the Pope of Rome.'[55] Constantine had introduced the first millenial freedom from Satan but at the same time prepared the way for papal tyranny. Brightman postulated a second millenium in which the church would attain its perfection. Foxe had already implied a second millenium in his association of Elizabeth and Constantine, but retreated to stress the first millenium under Constantine and to hope for a more immediate than millenial reward for the contemporary elect. Brightman focussed on the modern church's millenial expectations and moved away from Foxe's preoccupation with Constantine. This tendency persisted in the work of Joseph Mede who chose further to demote Constantine. In Mede's reading of Revelation, the emperor's achievements now came under the sixth seal rather than the seventh. Mede hesitated to specify the time of the millenium but put it in the future. It had taken Theodosius to finish the work which Constantine had begun, 'for Constantine the great onely shut up the Temples of the [pagan] gods, he did not abolish them.'[56] Thus Mede's

55 Thomas Brightman, The Revelation of St. John Illustrated (1644), sig. B2^{r}.
56 Joseph Mede, The Key of the Revelation (1643), pp. 54, 121-125, 61.

popular historical analysis further reduced the apocalyptic significance of Constantine's reign.[57]

Constantine's status as God's agent in the binding of Antichrist diminished, therefore, although his imperial reputation remained largely intact. Millenarian enthusiasm gradually lost patience with the church before the Reformation and, increasingly, with the delays of the unreforming, or too slowly reforming, Tudor and Jacobean churches. As the godly prince lost prestige as a reformer, Constantine's reputation paid the price. By the 1630s, the opposition to Laud further damaged the standing of the Elizabethan bishops and Marian martyrs whom Foxe had eulogized. At this point, Brightman's vision gained importance. Alexander Leighton had already adopted Brightman's identification of the English church as the luke-warm Laodicea of Revelation, and in the 1630s both Burton and Overton followed him in their popular disparagement of the Established Church and the Laudian faction.[58] In Leighton's attacks, the martyr-bishops and Constantine fared poorly, and the Marprelate-Leighton tradition found its continuation in the 'root and branch' polemic of Milton and the disgruntled Prynne.[59] Moreover,

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57 Mede was a fellow at Christ's College during Milton's years there, but the nature of their association, if any, has proven elusive.

58 Christianson, Reformers and Babylon, pp. 118-119, 142, 189.

59 William Lamont, Marginal Prynne (1963), pp. 45-84; Godly Rule, pp. 28-52; P. Christianson, 'Reformers and the Church of England under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts,' Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XXXI (1980), p. 473.

at the same time as imperial sentiment nostalgically upheld Constantine, the Elizabethan church, and the martyr-bishops, as even Prynne had done at first, the Anglican Erastians in the early 1640s opposed them all.[60] Brightman's influence increased as he was given a more nationalist reading.[61] By 1641 when Milton wrote Of Reformation, any attack on Constantine had clear significance, both in the tradition of Leighton and against a swelling nostalgia for Foxe's version of church history. The idea that the luke-warm episcopal church had its inception in the bad judgement of an unreforming and not very godly prince had obvious contemporary implications.

Constantine therefore played a central role in English Reformation histories of the church. Establishmentarian apologists, whose views Foxe both reflected and did so much to develop, stressed Constantine's imperial precedent in protecting the church, dismissed the Donation, and made him a Briton. The emperor provided a far more important historical bulwark than Lucius did against Roman boasts of imperial rights extending from the early church. Moreover, Constantine's authority as the unifier of an episcopal church and state increased as anti-Roman polemic gave way to anti-Presbyterian arguments. His unification was seen as the prototype of the English national church and the Elizabethan Settlement. On one hand the English bishops'

60 Christianson, Reformers and Babylon, p. 184; Lamont, Godly Rule, p. 83.
61 Lamont, Marginal Prynne, pp. 60-62; Godly Rule, pp. 94-95.

glorification of Constantine opposed Roman claims at the same time as it approved royal benefactions to the episcopacy. The bishops drew attention to Constantine's regard for the honour of the church to which he owed so much and to his gift of 'great liberty to the bishops and ministers.'[62] Cranmer's praise shows the encomiastic style to which Milton would take such exception:

> Did not all the emperors before Constantine, being seduced by their bishops and priests, condemn christian religion as heretical, seditious, and traitorous, and for the same murdered many thousands of martyrs? When Constantine was christened, then was the true religion first set forth and openly preached by public authority.[63]

Bishop Jewel similarly repudiated Roman claims regarding Constantine's subservience to the pope: he inveighed against Harding's use of Roman legend and established that the pope's being named God in Constantine's day should only be taken as a term of respect.[64]

On the other hand, against Presbyterian or Puritan apologists, the bishops could contend that Constantine was a crucial figure not only for his generosity to the church but also for his respect for the episcopal need of secular power. Whitgift, for instance, cited Constantine as his authority for calling bishops 'the heads of their churches.'

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62 Thomas Becon, Works, ed. J. Ayre (Cambridge: 1843-1844), II. p. 333; Pilkington, Works, p. 8.
63 Thomas Cranmer, Works, ed. J. E. Cox (Cambridge: 1844-1846), II. p. 15.
64 Jewel, Works, IV. p. 690, I. p. 438.

He also extolled the Donation as an imperial guarantee to the clergy of temporal independence.[65] Hooker in turn agreed that the gifts to the church were admirable. He further sought to clear Wycliffe from the imputation of anti-Constantinean opinion, and so assembled a more consistent tradition leading up to the Reformation. He also applauded Constantine's efforts to hide the shortcomings of the clergy, to unite them despite their dissension, and to organize the first counsels of the church.[66] In opposition to Cartwright, Hooker emphasized the imperial sovereignty of the royal supremacy in which the episcopacy has an important supporting role. Constantine had proceeded judiciously in helping the clergy while keeping ultimate sovereignty.[67] For that matter, Constantine had used his due authority to rule over the bishops. Jewel too held that Constantine had begun the long-standing imperial supremacy of church and state that Elizabeth still exercised.[68] Such was Constantine's historical standing that even Cartwright believed that Constantine's peace had allowed supervised elections of ministers in a Presbyterian way, and thought that the emperor piously directed bishops to refer their questions to God rather than to seek any kind of head-bishop.[69] Eusebius had been describing ruling elders not

65 Whitgift, Works, II. p. 85, III. p. 454.
66 Hooker, Works, III. pp. 287-288, 312-313, 596.
67 Hooker, Works, III. pp. 441-442.
68 Jewel, Works, I. p. 405, II. p. 997, IV. 675.
69 Cartwright, Second Replie (1575), pp. 257, 562, 583-584.

ministers, according to Cartwright, and the early eldership had flourished in his day.[70]

Milton, however, was certain about the corrupting effect of public authority on spiritual matters, and in his mind this was irrevocably associated with Constantine. He therefore turns the medieval attack on Rome against the English established church. He rejects some invocations of early purity in the church and hesitates to accept any secular interference in church matters. He approves even less the episcopal ambition evident in invocations of Constantine's gift of secular as well as ecclesiastical authority to the prelates.

Entries in Milton's Commonplace Book reflect his changing views on the subject. In the 1630s, he peacefully accepts Constantine in a style reminiscent of Established Church references to the first Christian emperor. The first entries about Constantine are especially positive, deriving as they do from Eusebius's history and biography.[71] He approves of the emperor's judgement in preventing schism through the censorship of complex theology,[72] which indicates some respect for imperial authority in ecclesiastical discussions, an authority Milton soon rejected altogether. At the same time, this gives a harbinger of Milton's later emphasis on doctrinal

70 A. F. Scott Pearson, Thomas Cartwright and Elizabethan Puritanism (Cambridge: 1925), pp. 324-325.
71 Parker, Milton (1968), p. 146; Hanford, 'Chronology of Milton's Private Studies,' p. 261; CP, I. pp. 376-377.
72 CP, I. p. 380.

simplicity, an interest which prompted much of his suspicion of historical argument in his anti-prelatical tracts. In the mid-1630s, he also admires Constantine for his piety and modesty. He notes that 'Constantine the Great, writing to his subjects, calls them by no other name than "brothers",' and remarks that the emperor rightly saw himself as a bishop largely of secular matters.[73] In the 1650s Milton similarly found it exemplary that Constantine,

> when the Donatists asked him to assign judges in the controversies that had arisen between them and the bishop of Carthage, replied with great piety: 'You ask judgement of me in an age when I myself am awaiting the judgement of Christ.'[74]

Such laudable refusals to interfere in ecclesiastical matters complement another of the emperor's policies: 'the exemption of the clergy from civil duties.'[75] It seems that Milton reads this with approval and that, with his other entries from Eusebius, he approves this example of the separation of ecclesiastical and temporal offices.

Intervening entries in the Commonplace Book, however, show less certainty about Constantine's virtues.[76] Around the same time as Milton notes Tertullian's refusal to abuse the title Lord, he finds that some assert that Constantine

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73 CP, I. pp. 433, 430.
74 CP, I. p. 431.
75 CP, I. p. 420.
76 The earlier entries in question are from ca. 1635-1637, the later from ca. 1637-1638.

> was the first of the Romans to permit himself to be worshipped; whereas before him all the Roman emperors had been satisfied with the consular salute.[77]

Now too Milton first notes that Sulpicius Severus celebrates the poverty of the British bishops,[78] probably agreeing privately, as he later did publicly,[79] with Sulpicius's praise for these bishops and his censure of episcopal dependence on Constantine. The emperor's largesse had not yet corrupted these delegates to the Council of Ariminum. Around 1640, it seems, Milton begins to distrust Constantine. Earlier, he had noted imperial deeds which exemplified secular sovereignty and religious piety. Soon, however, he begins to hint at the dislike for Constantine to which he gives such firm expression in the early 1640s. As well as his growing polemical interest, Milton himself describes his disenchantment with his original course of study in which Eusebius and the Fathers made Constantine a paragon of imperial virtue. His own preference for the authority of scripture and reason soon asserts itself. His disillusionment with ecclesiastical history, which he later advertises in The History of Britain, seems to have set in early: of one author, for instance he remarks that he 'could not but love the Historian' who professed

> He was faine to intermixe affaires of State, for that it would be else an extreame annoyance to heare in a

77 CP, I. pp. 433, 437.
78 CP, I. p. 415.
79 CP, I. pp. 543, 646-647; V, pp. 115-116; VII. p. 311.

continu'd discourse the endlesse brabbles & counterplottings of the Bishops.[80]

Having studied the admirable stories of 'Greek and Roman exploits,' Milton was disappointed in his expectation of 'examples of wisdome and goodnesse among those who were formost in the Church.'[81] In 1641 he may have made use of his disillusionment if indeed the Smectymnuans called upon his historical research on episcopal shortcomings.[82] Then too he would endorse an apocalyptic view of history within which, in Of Reformation, he could argue against the authority of ecclesiastical history while making use of it.

The attack on Constantine provides the historical basis for much of Milton's argument in Of Reformation. He revises both early church history, to undermine the bishops' imperial claims, and modern church history, to deny the bishops any credit for what small reforms the English church had made. He accepts millenialism only to a limited degree, seeing special divine dispensations only in the immediate past, the present, and the future. For Milton, the millenium cannot be a medieval one; here he follows the bias of Brightman and Mede against Foxe's dating. He disagrees with Foxe's emphasis on the history of the early church, nor does he like similar, more recent invocations of primitive purity and Constantinean glory. He defines his position simply, therefore, by attacking Constantine, and at

80 CP, I. p. 944.
81 CP, I. pp. 943-944.
82 See Appendix A.

once weakens the emperor's reputation and condemns his precedent in giving the episcopacy temporal power. On one hand, Milton directs his contemporaries to put less store in ecclesiastical history or the opinions of the church fathers-- he believes these to have no prescriptive authority. On the other hand, his attack on Constantine memorably discovers that imperial support for the episcopacy greatly harmed primitive Christianity. Milton supplies an alternative history which questions the virtue of the early church. Even as he repudiates any excessive interest in historical authorities, he assembles a new set of authorities against Constantine and against both imperial interference in church matters and the secular ambitions of the clergy. Milton's chief historical concern in criticizing Constantine is to prove that in church history even 'the best times were spreadingly infected.'[83] He intends his violent revision of ecclesiastical history to shock his readers out of their nostalgia for the primitive church and its consumation in imperial glory.

Although Milton attacks ecclesiastical history chiefly to emphasize Sacred Writ, in Of Reformation his perception of the fundamental divison between the two is limited by their partial conflation in his apocalypticism. In Of Reformation, historical examples are cited chiefly to warn against historical authorities other writers had invoked, hence Milton's rejection of the 'ignominious bondage' of

83 CP, I. p. 549.

historical myths.[84] He is of course dismayed by some contemporary manifestations of the royal supremacy, but he worries about the whole backward-looking, and back-sliding, appeal to Constantine and the English martyr-bishops. He believes that such arguments reveal a deep estrangement from both Scripture and reason, an errant preoccupation with custom. 'Error and Superstition,' the chief objects of his scorn, have inflated the respect paid to Constantine as much as they had dominated his actions. His dramatic review of the Constantinean Moment thus reflects his deep dissatisfaction with episcopal church government.[85]

Given the need to refer to history, however, Milton undertakes to show that the shortcomings of the early church and of Constantine follow from their failure to separate church and state. Moving away from eschatological history, he will not recognize the objection 'that this was an unsetl'd state of the Church wanting the temporall Magistrate.' Instead, he deplores 'the temporall and spirituall power' when they 'close in one beleife, as under Constantine.' He refuses to consider 'the Church a Vine in this respect. . . clasping about the Elme of worldly strength.'[86] The church sinks under 'Constantines lavish Superstition,' which seems, in Milton's story, of a piece

84 CP, I. p. 535.
85 To see this only as an allusion to Charles mistakes the seriousness of Milton's attack, cf. Christopher Hill, Milton and the English Revolution (1977), p. 92; Christianson, Reformers and Babylon, p. 195.
86 CP, I. pp. 553-554.

with the emperor's murderous excesses.[87] The superstition that informs the older Constantine's misdeeds is consistent with that of the younger emperor. This combination of wealth and ignorance had only escaped much wider condemnation because the clergy would not give a more honest account of their benefactor's faults; instead, 'they extoll Constantine because he extol'd them.' This also holds for more recent episcopal defenders of the emperor. Milton's criticism of his sources anticipates his relative silence on Constantine in the History. He already finds that early writers applaud Constantine just 'as our homebred Monks in their Histories blanch the Kings their Benefactors, and brand those that went about to be their Correctors.'[88] Milton also applies this commonplace[89] to the reformers' praise of Constantine. Always associating bad times and bad records, he directs such criticism at the Constantine story:

> If he had curb'd the growing Pride, Avarice, and Luxury of the Clergie, then every Page of his Story should have swelld with his Faults, and that which Zozimus[90] the Heathen writes of him should have come in to boot.

The reference to Zozimus, who had been discovered by the humanists, introduces an authority deeply disliked by Roman and English churchmen alike. He had been vigorously attacked both by Cardinal Baronius, the counter-reformation

87 CP, I. pp. 576-577, 554-555.
88 CP, I. p. 554.
89 CP, I. p. 554n.
90 CP, I. p. 554.

apologist, and by the Cardinal's English opponent, Richard Crakanthorp, who considered James 'the Great Constantine of these latter Ages.'[91]

Milton wishes to publicize Constantine's role in the corruption of the early church. He now sees the independence the emperor had granted-- an independence he had accepted in the 1630s-- only as a regrettable gift of 'large Immunities to the Clergy.' Constantine is charged with the vices his admirers had deplored in his successors. Milton emphasizes that the problems of the imperial church derived from its inception: 'Thus you see Sir what Constantines doings in the Church brought forth, either in his own or in his Sons Reigne.'[92] In this vein, he impugns both Constantine's virtue and his piety. The emperor soon acquires almost symbolic function in Of Reformation. When Milton discusses tyranny in the primitive church, for example, the thought of Constantine immediately provokes his outburst against imperial wealth and ecclesiastical oppression. Eusebius's history of third-century tyranny prompts Milton to strike at Constantine as well as his predecessors. He gibes at the bishops' aspirations to a primitive 'purity' in their reformed church:

> Stay but a little, magnanimous Bishops, suppresse your aspiring thoughts, for there is nothing wanting but Constantine to reigne, and then Tyranny her selfe shall

91 Timothy Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius (Cambridge, Mass.: 1981), pp. 273-274; Richard Crakanthorp, The Defence of Constantine (1621), sig. A2^{v}.
92 CP, I. p. 558.

> give up all her cittadels into your hands, and count ye thence forward her trustiest agents.[93]

Constantine represents the fundamental ills that had ravaged the church. Milton here gives Foxe's view short shrift; he similarly rejects other reputed paragons of apostolic virtue. Finding a 'general contagion in their actions,' he insists that the history of the early church provides few examples of edifying virtue. To discourage such historical investigation altogether, he concludes his grim picture with the ironic rejoinder: 'Such were these that must be call'd the ancientest and most virgin times between Christ and Constantine.'[94]

Milton presses home his case with a more specific attack on the emperor's reputation. He indicates that the gifts to the clergy derive from the same man who killed a nephew, son, wife and friends, who made 'cruel exactions,' and who was unsound in religion. Constantine's religious shortcomings-- he was Arian, long unbaptized, and obsessed with relics-- complement the problems in his ecclesiastical policy. As if he wished to excuse his own use of historical authority, however, Milton adds that he only supplies these details 'since hee [Constantine] must needs bee the Load-starre of Reformation as some men clatter.'[95] Milton argues that such a man can in no way supply a precedent for reformers; it is precisely Constantine's wicked innovations

93 CP, I. p. 551.
94 CP, I. p. 551.
95 CP, I. p. 556.

from which the church has yet to recover fully, his precedent that must be escaped. Milton's view contradicts that of Foxe, but on this matter it preserves the Foxeian emphasis on the significance of the past which Milton otherwise tries to avoid. The modern episcopal abuses he deplores had their historical inception underwritten by imperial generosity.

Milton therefore still respects historical authority enough to revise it at length. Foxeian historiography has not been altogether left behind, even as Milton asks:

> How should then the dim Taper of this Emperours age that had such need of snuffing, extend any beame to our Times wherewith wee might hope to be better lighted, then by those Luminaries that God hath set up to shine to us far neerer hand.[96]

The language of English apocalyptic writing against Rome finds new life in such 'root and branch' demands for further reform. Milton shows his debt to apocalypticism in his description of the ecclesiastical corruption that set in with Constantine and persisted to his own day.[97] The disaster begins in the Constantinean Moment when church and state are brought together. In the tradition of the Established Church, the moment is one of triumph, although it is recognized that at various later points in history the imperial church had corrupted into the Antichristian realm

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96 CP, I. p. 556.
97 See for example his attack on the prelates, CP, I. p. 557.

of papal tyranny. But for Milton and the 'root and branch' reformers, even the early church seemed to lack zeal. In their apocalyptic historiography, this lack of zeal persisted in the English church which they identified, after Brightman, with the luke-warm, Laodicea. Milton repudiates the tradition of an ecclesiastical Golden Age without regret because of his emphasis on the authority of scripture and of natural reason, rather than that of secular or ecclesiastical history. Nonetheless, in seeking to destroy a tradition of historical authority, he temporarily creates another.

Milton is acutely self-conscious in taking such an extreme position on Constantine. After indicating his dislike of historical authorities in such matters, it seems almost contradictory that he should cite a number of literary authorities in the tract. It is a measure of his insecurity that he should have done so, an insecurity comprising polemical as well as literary fears. For both these anxieties, he found solace in medieval writers who disliked the Donation. They brought twofold weight to his arguments: he could defend both his position on Constantine and his new use of his literary talent by recalling these earlier examples. Despite his use of such authorities, however, he also needed to accommodate the Renaissance exposure of the Donation. Since Hutten's edition of Valla had first proven the forgery for English readers, and since Anglican defenders against Roman polemicists had frequently

denounced the false document,[98] the educated would have agreed with William Fulke's opinion that 'concerning the Donation of Constantine, it is too absurd for any wise man to defend, which hath been so long before disproved by Laurentius Valla.'[99] Bishop Jewel had regularly attacked Harding for even introducing the Donation in his arguments; the bishop maintained that 'this one vanity is the vainest,' the whole story a notorious falsehood, and the pope a forger.[100] Selden representatively concluded: 'The credit of that donation is so slight, that it makes not much matter how the words are or what they import.'[101] Moreover, as the defenders of the Established Church turned from anti-Roman to anti-Puritan polemic, the forged Donation no longer seemed an issue.

If it was 'too absurd for any wise man to defend,' the Donation could have been only slightly less absurd for any wise man to attack. Milton's citations of anti-Donation literature are not disingenuous, however, although he was aware of the long-standing proof that the document was a forgery. The Donation would not have had authority in his view anyway, but it could still represent the transfer of imperial power and wealth to the church during Constantine's

98 E.g. Nicholas Ridley, Works, ed. H. Christmas (Cambridge: 1841), p. 374; Calfhill, Answer to John Martiall, p. 193; Thomas Cooper, An Answer in Defence of the Truth (Cambridge: 1850), pp. 170-171.
99 Fulke, Answers, pp. 360-361.
100 Jewel, Works, IV. pp. 839-841, 678-679; I. pp. 357, 359, 403.
101 Selden, Opera, III. cols. 152, 946. Donne is of a similar opinion, Sermons, IX. p. 343; X. p. 42.

reign. Milton usually accepts the Donation conceptually as something like our 'Constantinean Moment,' even if he denies the Donation as historical fact. It was of course a proven forgery, and therefore had no binding force, but in Milton's view something comparable had taken place in the new secularism of the imperial church. Even in denying the Donation, Milton discovers an equivalent ecclesiastical usurpation of temporal power. As he points out after his attack on Constantine's integrity,

> Mark Sir how the Pope came by S. Peters Patrymony, as he feigns it, not the donation of Constantine, but idolatry and rebellion got it him.[102]

By accepting the forgery in this way, Milton could use the previous literary attacks on the Donation to seem less idiosyncratic in the violence of his opposition to the first Christian emperor. New from his more purely literary pursuits and from his Italian tour, Milton chooses a style of argument which partly contradicts his position against historical authorities, the quotation of literary authorities:

> Now lest it should bee thought that somthing else might ayle this Author thus to hamper the Bishops of those dayes; I will bring you the opinion of three the famousest men for wit and learning, that Italy at this day glories of, whereby it may be concluded for a receiv'd opinion even among men professing the Romish Faith, that Constantine marr'd all in the Church.[103]

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102 CP, I. p. 578.
103 CP, I. p. 558.

Jewel and many others had cited Dante and especially Petrarch against Rome;[104] Milton found that they could be used against Constantine and to condemn the papal empire. He could now put his long years of study to better use. In fluent blank verse, he translates snatches of Dante and of Petrarch, as well as two sections of Ariosto largely following Harrington's translation. He changes the second of the latter, or ignores Harrington altogether, to make it more critical of Constantine.[105] He also adds that Petrarch's reference to Constantine 'is wip't out by the Inquisitor in some Editions' since the poet speaks of 'the Roman Antichrist as meerely bred up by Constantine.'[106] Milton neglects Dante's reference to Constantine in Paradiso XX where the emperor is named among exemplary rulers.[107] Thus Milton reinforces his argument against Constantine by placing himself in the security of a literary tradition. He braces himself for his attack on ecclesiastical questions, and on historical learning, by citing his literary predecessors. These fragments in translation make Milton's conclusion seem an expression of received cultured opinion, rather than a private hobby-horse:

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104 Jewel, Works, III. p. 345, IV. pp. 628, 740, 744, 874, 928, 1115; John Philpot, The Examinations and Writings, ed. R. Eden (Cambridge: 1842), pp. 418, 423, 430; Crakanthorp, Defence of Constantine, pp. 138-139 (2nd pag., 'Of the Popes Temporall Monarchy'); Yates, Astraea, pp. 45-47.
105 CP, I. p. 559n.
106 CP, I. p. 559.
107 Cf. E. R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. W. Trask (Princeton: 1953), p. 372.

> There is just cause therefore that when the Prelates cry out Let the Church be reform'd according to Constantine, it should sound to a judicious eare no otherwise, then if they should say Make us rich, make us lofty, make us lawlesse.[108]

When Milton returns to his argument against Constantine later in Of Reformation, he again resorts to literary authority, here the Chaucerian Plowman's Tale. He had earlier named this Wycliffite piece as an authority when he had quoted the Italian poets. The pope's 'best Lord Constantine'-- here Milton notes the presumption of the title for which he had an explanation in his Commonplace Book-- exemplifies 'what a dangerous fallycie is this, when a spirituall man may snatch to himselfe any temporall Dignity, or Dominion under pretence of receiving it for the Churches use.'[109] Ultimately this endangers the monarchy itself, as 'Chaucer' had noticed long ago. In this anti-prelatical argument, Constantine's gift is seen to cause the eventual destruction of the temporal, as well as the ecclesiastical, order.

Thus Milton has buttressed his radical historical position with an unusually developed use of literary authorities. In this way he can put the millenarian bias against the Constantinean Moment in a more widely acceptable framework. He lets his erudition authorize his denunciation of the imperial climacteric of the early church. Inasmuch

108 CP, I. p. 560.
109 CP, I. p. 579.

as Constantine was held to have crowned the persistent virtues of the apostolic church, a largely untenable position in Milton's view, the gold in the crown had had an immediately destructive effect on the wearer, and the crown itself became a papal tiara. Through this cultured attack on the authority of history, Milton seeks better to establish his argument against the secular corruption of the national church.

After Of Reformation, Milton does not dwell overlong on his identification of Constantine as the symbol for the apostasy of early Christendom. Instead, he is content to deplore the endowment of the church without further impugning the emperor for more than misplaced zeal. Indeed, Constantine's sensitivity to the need for divorce wins Milton's praise. In the History, his brief reference to Constantine's British origins shows a dispassionate interest in correctly determining historical fact through patient source criticism. His animus against Constantine seems to have exhausted itself in his early onslaught. It has been suggested that such changing opinions show a 'sort of tactical moderation in the interests of strategic extremism.'[110] More simply, however, the excitement of this historical explanation dissipated as Milton found the prelatical problem a deeper one than the long-surviving legacy of a misguided fourth-century emperor. In Of Reformation, he had argued against the use of historical

110 Hill, Milton, p. 151.

authority at the same time as he succumbed to it in his description of Constantine's evil influence. After fighting Constantine's reputation in its own apocalyptic terms, however, Milton comes to believe that more compelling ecclesiological questions remained unanswered.

In subsequent anti-prelatical tracts Milton's references to Constantine already claim less against him. The emperor's gift comes to provide an example of a regrettable mistake, rather than a historical fact of continuing significance. Milton had already reduced the Donation to a symbol for the corruption of the church. Its legitimacy was immaterial since the document was irrelevant to matters of Reformation; it had no historically binding status. Again, Milton uses his historical research to deflate claims made on historical authority. In arguing that wealthy bishops have existed only since Constantine, for example, Milton implies that the historical evidence for any bishops in the primitive church is slight.[111] He also maintains that Constantine would have done better to have shown exemplary justice rather than unfair indulgence in dealing with the faults of the clergy: 'better had it beene for him that the heathen had heard the fame of his justice, than of his wilfull connivence and partiality.'[112] The emperor now provides an admonitory example for, rather than a direct influence on, the present. When Milton again names Constantine with regard to the secular corruption of the

111 CP, I. p. 697.
112 CP, I. p. 726.

church, there is little of the historical urgency of Of Reformation. Rather than introducing an apocalyptic note, the divine displeasure with the emperor's gift allows Milton a witty refutation of an opponent's appeal to authority. Milton's liking for literary authorities in Of Reformation now acquires an urbane and digressive note, as he quotes Gower on the heavenly voice which declared Constantine's gift a poison to the church. All this contributes only to Milton's example 'that great riches in the Church are the baits of pride & ambition.' 'To adde the more waight,' he shows that the literary tradition of protest proves that his 'is no new opinion.' Milton maintains that the condemnation of 'temporall that medleth with spirituall' accords with 'truth. . . ratify'd by long experience.'[113] Reason and perhaps a divine voice, supported by much historical example, confirm that the Donation was bad policy. The Donation is not, however, a historical fact with prescriptive influence for the Reformation. Indeed, Milton mocks Hall's search for such authority; the point is that prescriptive norms should not be sought in history.

Milton increasingly emphasizes parallels in church history rather than continuities. In Eikonoklastes, he further alludes to the legend in which a divine voice, upon Constantine's 'mischeivous donations,' calls superfluous wealth a poison to the church.[114] Again, Constantine's support of the early prelacy-- the poisoning of the church--

113 CP, I. p. 946.
114 CP, III. pp. 469, 514.

exemplifies an evil, but does not cause that evil through all time. Thus Constantine can also represent King Charles in his relations with a fawning clergy, but Milton is not drawing on any prevalent association of Charles and Constantine-- in another context he even uses Constantine to represent Parliament.[115]

Instead, Constantine stands for any secular authority overgenerous to the clergy, a temporal power the ministers gratify for reciprocal favours. Milton still believes, however, that the early church provides no golden example for the modern one:

> non esse tamen eos quorum authoritate niti debeamus, aut a quibus exempla petere slutariter possimus, quod superest, nunc docebo. Jam diu ante Constantinum populus Christianus multum de primaeva illa sanctimonia et sinceritate cum doctrinae tum morum deperdiderat.[116]

After Constantine's endowment of the church, 'statim omnia in praeceps ruere.' Constantine's gift had compounded a persistent lack of virtue in the primitive church, and the institution had suffered ever since. The early churchmen both exemplify error and change the history of the church.

Milton again refers to Constantine's type of excessive generosity to the church when, in the Second Defence, he rebuts arguments favouring the enrichment of the ministry:

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115 CP, III. p. 550, IV. p. 415.
116 CW, VII. p. 256.

> hanc novis latifundiis adauxisse luxuriam, idem prorsus fuisset, ac siquis novum venenum, (quam olim pestem sub Constanntino vox missa coelitus deflevit) in ecclesiam infudisset.[117]

The story of the warning voice from heaven has now become almost proverbial for Milton, a pure example devoid of any eschatological significance. He concerns himself with recurrent rather than continuous elements in history. The past does not control the present; instead, man's freedom is enhanced by the information available from historical examples.

Milton's use of Constantine as such an example finds its clearest expression in Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings from the Church (1659). The first example of the destructive influence of church endowments is the first Christian emperor. Constantine no longer provides an evil precedent to be followed but stands for misguided generosity to the church. Milton writes of 'hire':

> What harme the excess there of brought to the church, perhaps was not found by experience till the days of Constantine: who out of his zeal thinking he could be never too liberally a nursing father of the church, might be not unfitly said to have either overlaid it or choakd it in the nursing.[118]

Milton has moved from direct accusation of murderous corruption to a figurative description of a solicitous but

117 CW, VIII, p. 182.
118 CP, VII. p. 279.

clumsy father. This is the temperate dislike of Constantine's policy, rather than of the man, which characterizes the opinion of the Smectymnuans and of Roger Williams.[119] Constantine now provides an symbol of the evils inherent in ecclesiastical secularism. Milton again makes his now standard reference to 'ecclesiastical traditions' in which 'a voice heard from heaven' cries '<u>This day is poison pourd into the church</u>.'[120] Continuing to ignore the exposure of the Donation, Milton indicates that for him it still symbolizes Constantine's temporal interference in ecclesiastical matters.

Thus when Moses Wall, writing to Milton, sees the endowment of the clergy as part of the typology of the Fall, he underlines the message in Milton's later tracts. The Donation itself, to which Milton and Wall oppose themselves despite its being a proven forgery, has come to take on the wider conceptual significance of the Constantinean Moment:

> I have sometimes thought (concurring with yo^{r} Assertion of that storied voice that shold speak from heaven) when Ecclesiasticks were indowed with worldly preferments, Hodie venenum infunditur in Ecclesiam, for to use the speech of Gen. 4 ult, according to the Sense w^{ch} it hath in the Hebrew-- Then began men to corrupt the worship of God.[121]

119 Smectymnuus, <u>An Answer to a Book Entitled, An Humble Remonstrance</u> (1641), p. 45; Roger Williams, <u>The Bloudy Tenent</u> (1644), p. 95.
120 <u>CP</u>, VII. p. 279.
121 <u>CP</u>, VII. p. 512.

Wall understands Milton's position so well that he anticipates or suggests Milton's use of the Donation in Hirelings.[122] He also foreshadows Milton's return in his Restoration pamphlets to a more apocalyptic tone in attacking the Constantinean Moment.

Milton's wish to reject as illegitimate the greater part of traditional ecclesiastical history leaves him in an inconsistent position, sometimes seeking historical and sometimes extrahistorical justification. In Hirelings he seeks a proto-Protestant, non-episcopal tradition in the early church, and Constantine's historical importance reemerges. Now discovering considerable virtue in the early church, Milton notes that before Constantine there is no record of 'church-endowments and possessions.' Finally combining proverbial precept with apocalypticism, he declares:

> to endow churches is an evil thing. . . the church then fell off and turnd whore sitting on that beast in the Revelation, when under Pope Sylvester she receivd those temporal donations.[123]

In this history of corruption, Milton is pleased to align himself with Waldensian tradition, and he notes that these Urprotestants also used the story of the voice from heaven deploring the new wealth of the church. As in the earlier

122 Wall's letter asks for the second book, Hirelings, promised in A Treatise of Civil Power, and intimates that reform would soon follow if one 'take away ecclesiastical Dignities Preferments and Honors.' CP, VII, p. 512.
123 CP, VII. p. 306.

Defence, Milton now sees the Donation as a symbol for the entire problem of mixing temporal and spiritual realms. Apocalypticism also reasserts itself, however, behind the admonitory example. Since the church had always been prone to secular corruption, any example of such rot has lasting value as a warning. At the same time, the interference of the emperor in forming an imperial church did have an historically enduring effect which even the Reformation had not yet overcome.

Although Milton characteristically associates Constantine with ecclesiastical corruption, he does find a few aspects of his reign attractive. Two years after the onslaught in Of Reformation, he extols England's Constantine among England's historic succession of reformers in The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce. His opinion of both ancient Britons and the British emperor soon resumes its normal proportions in his History, but now, in his plea 'to the Parlament of England, with the Assembly,' Milton adopts a nationalist pride in Britons and in Constantine as if Of Reformation had not been written. His hortatory preface notes England's long-standing position in the vanguard of reform. Thus modern leadership in improving the church

> would not be the first, or second time, since our ancient Druides, by whom this Island was the Cathedrall of Philosophy to France, left off their pagan rites, that England hath had this honour vouchsaft from Heav'n, to give out reformation to the World. Who was

> it but our English Constantine that baptiz'd the Roman Empire?[124]

Constantine is named among the select company of Alcuin, Wycliffe, and the missionaries Willibrord and Winfrid. This about-face in Milton's relation to the Constantine legends clearly suits his rhetorical needs in addressing his new audience; it may have been included in the second edition of the Doctrine precisely as a token of his respectability. Nonetheless, this use of Constantine had a measure of conviction behind it since Milton had newly learned of the emperor's attractive policy on divorce. Selden had noted Constantine's liberal position on this issue,[125] and Milton values Selden highly in the Doctrine.[126] Furthermore, historically the distinction between spiritual and ecclesiastical matters had been central to Constantinean and late Roman constitutional practice, in which the prince was bound to organize all but the spiritual affairs of the church. In the time of Henry VIII, therefore, the papal jurisdiction could be especially restricted with regard to marriage since marriage had hitherto been a sacrament pertaining to ecclesiastical courts.[127] Milton's hostility to Constantine relents as he approaches this imperial anticipation of his own theory behind divorce. In

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124 CP, II. p. 231.
125 Selden, Opera, II. cols. 828-829, 850-851.
126 CP, II. p. 350; E. Owen, 'Milton and Selden on Divorce,' Studies in Philology, XLIII (1946), pp. 233-257.
127 Ullmann, '"This Realm",' JEH, XXX (1979), pp. 196, 181, 193.

Tetrachordon, a rhetorical acceptance of Constantine allows his invocation of imperial wisdom in matters of divorce. After citing the emperor's position, Milton observes noncommittally:

> This was an age of the Church both antient, and cry'd up still for the most flourishing in knowledge and pious government since the Apostles.[128]

How far 'cry'd up still' includes disguised disdain for such use of this authority is hard to tell. Nonetheless, Milton takes advantage of Constantine's good reputation when it serves his purpose.

Similarly, in the Defence Milton approves of Constantine's crushing the would-be tyrant Licinius. This was the end, in Foxe's history, of the ten persecutions of the primitive church.[129] With none of Foxe's apocalypticism, Milton here admires the example of Constantine, although he indicates that any tyranny of Constantine's would have deserved the same fate. He even wonders if Parliament should not compare itself to the now exemplary first Christian emperor. He only worries that Constantine's military election is less legitimate than Parliament's popular authority.[130] Even so, he has moved far from his long-standing identification of Constantine

128 CP, II. pp. 700-701.
129 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. p. 292.
130 CP, IV. p. 415. Elsewhere, Constantine's brief rule in tandem with Licinius even exemplifies the divisibility of the royal supremacy without the loss of unified sovereignty, CP, IV. p. 465.

with the shortcomings of the imperial church. Constantine is becoming a many-sided historical example. Milton's use of his authority is wilfully diverse. Such uses of Constantine proliferated: Erbery, Stubbes, Reeve, and others attacked him variously, as did Baxter who also upon occasion invoked the traditional defences, a new version of which developed in Hobbes who-- in arguing against Bellarmine-- upheld Constantine's superiority over Sylvester.[131]

In The History of Britain, Milton reserves judgement on the truth of those English claims to Constantine that he himself had made in The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce. While muting such claims, he also underplays the significance of Constantine and elaborates the shortcomings of his successors. Historians had persevered in believing Constantine to be a Briton, and thus followed Polydore's initiative and subsequent Tudor imperial historiography. Spenser, Herbert, and Dryden's assent testifies to the lasting popularity of the myth in celebrations of the imperial church.[132] The consensus is respected by Archbishop Ussher, who in support of the contention named

131 Hill, Milton, pp. 112-113; William Riley Parker, Milton's Contemporary Reputation (Columbus: 1940), pp. 97-98; William Lamont, Richard Baxter and the Millenium: Protestant Imperialism and the English Revolution (Totowa, N. J.: 1979), pp. 240-241, 247, 305; Hobbes, Leviathan, pp. 363, 375.

132 Edmund Spenser, Variorum Works, eds. Greenlaw, Osgood and Padelford (Baltimore: 1933), Faerie Queene, bk. II. x 59-60, 62; George Herbert, Works, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: 1941), 'The Church Militant' ll. 90-100 (p. 192); John Dryden, Poems, ed. J. Kinsley (Oxford: 1958), 'The Epilogue to Constantine the Great' ll. 1-8 (I. p. 362).

Polydore as a putatively hostile source.[133] Camden, Stow and Howes believed that Britain witnessed the making of a native Constantine into a Caesar.[134] Holinshed and Speed, the latter citing Camden, mentioned alternative stories but heavily emphasized their acceptance of the English one.[135] Selden dismissed all arguments against the emperor's British origins:

> Of this Helen. . . and of this Constantine her son, a mighty and religious emperor, (although I know him taxed for no small faults by ecclesiastick writers) that in this air received his first light and life, our Britons vaunt not unjustly.[136]

Nonetheless, these British origins always seem more claimed than taken for granted, and Milton explores the weaknesses in the historical evidence which led to this nagging need to reassert the myth.

Milton has many doubts about this period of British history. His description of the time comments both on the record itself and on the civil virtue of the early Britons:

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133 Ussher, De Primordiis, pp. 172-177.
134 Camden, Britain, p. 74; Stow and Howes, Abridgement of the English Chronicle, p. 16.
135 Raphael Holinshed, Chronicles (1577), pp. 88-92 (2nd pag., 'The Historie'); Speed, Historie, pp. 155-159.
136 Selden, Opera, III. col. 1792. He elsewhere reiterates that this 'tradition then acknowledged by his successors, preserved amongst us, and appearing in such monuments of antient times, cannot easily be impugned,' III. col. 941; II. col. 901-902.

> The Roman Empire declining apace, good Historians growing scarce, or lost, have left us little else but fragments for many years ensuing.[137]

And even as Milton mentions Constantine's British origins, he expresses his doubts about such claims. He notes the unlikeliness of Geoffrey's story which gives Lucius as Constantine's uncle, when the king is more than a century the emperor's senior. Milton's 'there goes a fame. . .', his remark that the 'ancientest' historians do not support it, and his recital of contradictory and incoherent tales about Constantine's British origins, all show those distancing and questioning techniques he had used to diminish Lucius' status. Having earlier praised the Roman historians,[138] Milton notes that they, the only respectable authorities for this period, make no clear reference to Constantine's British birth.[139] Likewise, having just reaffirmed his preference for the oldest authors, Milton maintains that 'others neerest to those times clear the doubt, and write him [Constantine] certainly born of Helena, a mean Woman at Naisus in Dardania.'[140] This completely contradicts Foxe's description of the 'daughter of King Coel, who was a maiden excelling in beauty, and no less famously brought up on the study of learning,' as well as

137 CP, V. p. 104.
138 CP, V. pp. 39-40.
139 CP, V. p. 113.
140 CP, V. p. 113.

popular traditions about the musical and visionary Helen.[141] Milton is unconvinced by English claims to Constantine and treats his reign in a perfunctory sentence.[142] Furthermore, the confusion in the empire after the emperor's death, like that in Britain after Lucius's death, argues against the godliness of his rule. If the 1698 revisions of the History are Milton's,[143] then Milton later added further evidence of Constantine's low breeding.[144] His studied appraisal of the emperor led him to the truth about Constantine after centuries of British self-deception on the subject. His respect for classical historians triumphed with the help of his dislike for the Constantine myth and its traditional uses. In his national history, Milton shows little apocalyptic consciousness or sense of England's mission. Instead he interests himself in traits in the national character. The shortness of Constantine's stays in Britain supply the most noteworthy fact about him for Milton's History; neither ecclesiastical reform nor corruption are noted in the empire or in Britain. Milton denies Constantine's importance by ignoring him.

Milton found that history revealed less progress than he had presupposed. It might appear that his weakening attacks on Constantine argue his softening of heart. The

141 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. p. 224; Spenser, Variorum, Faerie Queene II. x 59-60; William Shakespeare, Henry VI, Part One, ed. A. Cairncross (1967), I, ii 142 and note.
142 CP, V. p. 114.
143 CP, V. pp. 1, liii-liv.
144 CP, V. p. 113n.

attacks weakened, however, chiefly because he moved away from his originally hopeful, apocalyptic view of history. This partly reflects his moving from a dynamic paradigm in ecclesiastical historiography to the more static one in humanist historiography. It also reflects his new interest in the national character. The past gave a wealth of examples of this determinant of English history. The jeremiad lost its rehabilitative function when this imbalance developed between its claims against national transgressions and for national election. Later, Milton would find that the past merely illustrated types of human action freely chosen, and their consequences.

Milton's loss of apocalyptic hope did not, however, simply incline him to pessimism. In the opening to the De Doctrina Christiana Milton sees his work as a contribution to the recovery of true religion begun in the early sixteenth century. Through this revival of Christian principles, the church would further revive from its thirteen-hundred-year subjection to corruption. As he moves from a determinist position to an increasing emphasis on the freedom of the will, he still emphasizes the effects of the Fall. In the History, he uses the stepping-stone of the national character to explain the English failure to reform according to divine and rational prescription. In this way, Milton's History provides evidence for the growth of his 'impatience with human weakness and hardness of heart,' a growth spurred, it seems, by the bad reception of the

divorce tracts, the irresolution of the Westminster Assembly, and the host of ills besetting England during the decade of the Civil Wars.[145]

It has been said that Milton's sense of corruption 'depends, as the pamphlets made abundantly clear, on the complete acceptance of the harsh Calvinistic doctrine of the corruptions and powerlessness of man.'[146] This view of historical corruption, however, was mitigated for Puritans--and for the Milton of Of Reformation-- by millenarian expectations and a preoccupation with the recognizability of the elect. Corruption only awoke the greatest terrors when the progressive model of history and predestinarian certainties came into question, as they did for Milton in the mid-1640s. He first attempted to control these terrors by postulating a national character to explain England's history of frustration. By Samson Agonistes, however, he had turned fully to the consideration of the individual. He could then examine the responsibilities of free will and of natural reason in a fallen world.

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145 Arthur Barker, Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, 1641-1660 (Toronto: 1942), p. xiii indicates the need for such evidence. Further biographical reasons for Milton's change of heart can of course be adduced to explain his disillusionment with popular reform.

146 Barker, Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, p. 24.

iii. St. Augustine of Canterbury and the Saxon Church.

Finally, the History also hints at other long-standing flaws in the national church. Milton's views on the Saxon church are difficult to assess in full, however, as some crucial information in the History may well have been censored. According to Toland, it was Milton's hostile references to the Saxon church which provoked the censor of the History. Phillips merely identified the problem as 'Passages. . . thought too sharp against the Clergy.'[147] If the Postscript to the Smectymnuan Answer is in fact Milton's, the style of his calumny in the History may be inferred from his extreme view of the destruction caused by the Saxon acceptance of Roman interference in their church.[148] Given that the censor accepted Milton's version of Gildas on the Britons' apostasy, the History must have included some searing observations on the Saxon capitulation to papal dominion, no doubt with special reference to episcopal abuses. Lacking these, however, the evidence is restricted chiefly to that of the Postscript and what animus against the Saxon church remains in the History. In his fragmented response to the Saxon church and its legacy, the role of St. Augustine of Canterbury raises historical questions which had been of ongoing importance to apologists

147 Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 75.
148 See Appendix A.

for the Established Church and their Roman and Puritan opponents.

Augustine's mission to England under Pope Gregory led to the conversion of the Saxons to Christianity, and thus had featured prominently in Bede's history. As with Lucius and Constantine, the issue of the Saxon church and its founder often surfaced in the heated sixteenth-century discussions of early church history. Since this sixteenth-century controversy informs the circumstances of the production of Wheloc's edition of Bede, on which Milton relied, and as the points raised anticipate Milton's views, some brief explanation of this background is again in order.

Battle was joined when Thomas Stapleton published a translation of the Latin version of Bede's history prefaced with a list of many differences between the reformers' claims for the early church and Bede's description of that church.[149] Stapleton drew attention to the missionary Augustine's role in the conversion of the Saxons and the establishment of the Roman church in England. In Stapleton's Fortress Overthrown (1580), William Fulke answered Stapleton's use of Bede by questioning the value of Bede's report and by diminishing the missionary Augustine's importance to the English church. Fulke described Bede as 'a credulous man'[150] and noted the Saxon and British biases

149 Bede, The History of the Church of Englande, trans. Thomas Stapleton (Antwerp: 1565), sigs. **3^{v}-**6^{v}.
150 William Fulke, Answers to Stapleton, Martiall, and Sanders, ed. R. Gibbings (Cambridge: 1848), p. 6.

for and against Augustine, especially on the crucial question of the Saxon massacre of British monks:

> Concerning the cruel murder of the Monks of Bangor in Augustin's quarrel, Galfride, a Briton, imputeth no small part of the fault to Augustin: Bede, a Saxon, would have him clear of it.[151]

The problem lay in Augustine's hostility to the church he found in Britain, a flourishing institution according to some. Augustine's reputation for pride and superstition could be translated, by means of Geoffrey of Monmouth's evidence, into reasons for suspecting his entire mission. Moreover, his evident personal shortcomings, and his desire to subject the native and ancient British church to Roman authority, made Geoffrey's story of his role in the massacre of the monks at Bangor especially damaging. Thus Fulke reiterated that Augustine seemed responsible for the massacre since his threat against the Britons was so soon made good. Fulke therefore scorned Augustine's efforts to unify the church in Britain and instead styled them the result of 'antichristian ambition and tyranny.' Whatever his Christian message, his Roman ways had led to 'more hurt in corrupting true religion than good in planting any religion.'[152] Fulke exonerated the British bishops for any blame in refusing to preach to the Saxons; according to his logic, this only reflected their distrust of Augustine's irreligion.

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151 Fulke, Answers, p. 186.
152 Fulke, Answers, p. 186-187.

Other apologists for the English church further condemned Augustine. Calfhill, for example, maintained that Augustine had corrupted native religion and 'in place of Idolatry planted superstition.' He had no doubts about Augustine's role in the massacre, for which he accepted Geoffrey's word.[153] Pilkington too doubted that the missionary had planted true religion and, citing Geoffrey, the Polychronicon, and Fabian, asserted the religious independence of the Britons and interpreted the massacre as a further example of 'the old practice of papists, to shed blood cruelly, if their superiority be denied them.'[154] This martyrological slant to the story of the Bangor monks attracted a number of writers, despite continuing uncertainty about Augustine's precise role in the affair. John Bale, for example, had no doubts on the matter. He saw the slaughter, and then the historical neglect, of these British monks as a prime example of Roman oppression of true religion.[155] His successor Foxe, however, was to present a more balanced account of Augustine's career in England, duly noting both the missionary's shortcomings and the Britons fault in not preaching to the Saxons. He observed that some sources reported that Augustine died before the massacre but that others said he survived much longer, though he noted

153 Calfhill, Answer to Martiall, p. 306.
154 Pilkington, Works, pp. 515-516. The Polychronicon and Fabian depended heavily on Geoffrey of course.
155 Bale, Select Works, p. 189. He was equally damning on the later Saxon monks, M. McKisack, Medieval History in the Tudor Age (1971), p. 22.

that Monmouth's testimony was of uncertain value.[156] Holinshed too noted the conflicting reports and agreed with Foxe that it would be a mistake to judge such 'uncertaine things.'[157]

Foxe's position modifies that of Archbishop Parker himself, whose Antiquitates presented a more critical view of Augustine. The research encouraged by Parker discovered that the Anglo-Saxon translation of Bede, reputed to be King Alfred's, omitted the parenthetic note that excused Augustine of complicity in the massacre at Bangor. This provided grounds for diminishing Bede's authority and for renewing the attack on Augustine. Elsewhere, writing to Burghley, Parker indicated that Augustine had no special importance despite his role in the foundation of the Saxon church, and precisely which religion he had brought with him therefore did not matter much.[158] Of greater historical importance was the purity of the early British church for which as much historical proof as possible was assembled. Bede's monumental apology for the Saxon church at the expense of the British church therefore had its detractors.

Thus Jewel could attempt a definitive proof of Augustine's ungodliness by combining the usual evidence of his shortcomings with a strong argument for his having been alive well after the massacre. His immoderate pride was

156 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. pp. 338-340.
157 Holinshed, Chronicles, p. 154 (2nd pag., 'The Historie').
158 Matthew Parker, Correspondence, ed. J. Bruce (1853), pp. 425, 265-266.

easy to show; Jewel tried to prove his cruelty as well, given grounds by the Bangor massacre. Jewel boldly countered the traditional defence of Augustine which cited Bede to prove that Augustine had died well before the massacre:

> these last words of Beda, concerning the death of Augustine, are manifestly forged, and have been violently thrust into the text by a guileful parenthesis, by them that sithence have been ashamed of his cruelty, and were never written by the author, as by evident proofs it shall plainly appear.[159]

Alfred's translation of the Historiae Ecclesiasticae provided the basis for Jewel's claims, together with supplementary testimony from chronicles and charters.[160] Elsewhere, Jewel simply claimed that Augustine was 'an hypocrite, a superstitious man, cruel, bloody, and proud above measure. . .'[161]

In his Outlines for British Tragedies, Milton shows himself convinced of Augustine's guilt. Here he included the story of the massacre among the many subjects under consideration. He appears to have given the Bangor monks special thought as their story receives slightly fuller consideration. The outline suggests a tale of British resistance to Roman rites, and Milton specifies that the

159 Jewel, Works, IV. p. 779.
160 Jewel, Works, IV. pp. 778-782.
161 Jewel, Works, I. p. 300.

tragedy 'must begin' with the dispute over 'superfluous points' of religion.[162]

Likewise, if Milton wrote the roughly contemporary 'Postcript' to the Smectymnuan Answer, his dislike for the Saxon church was already finding fuller expression. There he shows hostility to the Saxon-- as opposed to British-- church. The 'Postscript' attacks the missionary Augustine, reputed founder of the Saxon church, as an ignorant, proud, and vicious man, devoted to Roman ceremonies and destructive of the native British church. His successors, moreover, only sought further to establish Roman control. In the Smectymnuan view, Augustine was

> such to the English, as the Arrian Bishops were of old to the Goths, and the Jesuits now among the Indians, who of Pagans have made but Arrians and Papists.[163]

In any case, Milton was alert to Saxon support for the papacy; here he saw the implications of Bede very clearly. In Of Reformation, the conversion of the Saxons plainly begins the long and destructive tenure of the prelates in England, 'their comming to the See of Canterbury' has led to 'neere twelve hundred yeares' oppression.[164] Years later, arguing against tithes, he again scorns the missionary Augustine as 'the monk, who first brought the Romish religion into England from Gregory the Pope.'[165]

162 CP, VIII. p. 570.
163 CP, I. p. 966.
164 CP, I. p. 603.
165 CP, VII. p. 294.

The publication by Abraham Wheloc of the Old English version of Bede's History further clarified the polemical uses of this early history. Wheloc's multiple dedication of his work makes his purposes clear: he is determined to show the doctrine and practice of the early church and supplies an index for significant words.[166] In his notes on Bede, Wheloc tempers his evident dislike of Augustine, manifest in an earlier letter from him to Sir Simonds D'Ewes. There he had made it clear that Augustine's mission to England had proceeded from unworthy motives, although he acquits Augustine of Monmouth's charge of complicity in the massacre at Bangor. He indicates that Augustine's dire pronouncement against the British was a threatening prophecy, and one with wicked consequences. Despite his position in the letter to D'Ewes, his edition of Bede passes over the failure of the Old English translation to absolve Augustine of responsibility for the massacre, probably because Wheloc recognized the priority of the exonerating Latin passage in question. Nonetheless, he still leaves the missionary under some suspicion, although he closes with Foxe's view 'that this was suspicion rather than fact.'[167]

In the History, Milton still dislikes Augustine and resents the Roman influence on the Saxons, but he presents only a muted account of the shortcomings of the Saxon

166 This discussion of Wheloc's work derives in part from that of Michael Murphy in 'Abraham Wheloc's Edition of Bede's History in Old English,' Studia Neophilologica, XXXIX (1967), pp. 46-59.
167 Murphy, 'Wheloc's Bede,' pp. 53-55.

church. This derived in part because Bede and later medieval sources usually supported Roman interference. In following their narratives closely, Milton may have decided against too frequently interrupting the history with attacks on Rome. William of Malmesbury and others deplored the weakness of the Saxon church, this was a staple of Anglo-Norman court historiography, but not until the admired Matthew Paris did a source oppose Roman influence as well as royal overreaching.

Milton's quiet is uncharacteristic, especially given his earlier use of Gildas. He satirizes the Romans' gaudy approach to Ethelbert and observes to what 'rank superstition that Age was grown.'[168] He also notes how quickly the missionaries 'step't up into fellowship of pomp with Kings.'[169] Milton's report of Augustine's dealings with the Britons shows his reluctance to clear the missionary of complicity in the massacre. He introduces his version of these events with evident disdain for Roman church practice: 'Hitherto Austin laboured well amoong Infidels, but not with like commendation soon after among Christians.'[170] In the end, only his unwillingness to rely on Geoffrey's evidence seems to override a fuller condemnation of Augustine.[171] In the later books of the History, however, Milton is sparing in his remarks on the Saxon church.

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168 CP, V. pp. 188, 190.
169 CP, V. p. 190.
170 CP, V. p. 192.
171 CP, V. p. 194.

He may not have wished to be so accommodating, of course, if indeed the licenser suppressed some passsages critical of the clergy. The History itself shows that while Milton's attacks on the British church were allowed to stand, Milton's inevitable onslaught against the more recognizably episcopal Saxon church must have been largely suppressed. Milton himself would have preferred the reverse. He divided church history into the 'Primitive, Romish, or Protestant' ages, and in England only the British had practiced a primitive Christianity, independent of Rome.[172] Even his attack on the British church, however, suggests a deep-rooted suspicion on Milton's part directed against British and English failings in church discipline down through the ages. This attack, and Milton's peculiar adaptation of Gildas, provide the subject of the following chapter.

172 CP, III. p. 222.

Chapter IV

Milton and Gildas

The change in Milton's ideals for his national history becomes most apparent in the third book of the History. Here Milton reveals his disillusionment with the national history he had earlier intended to celebrate. He departs furthest from English historical tradition by depending heavily on Gildas's De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae, his oldest British source. He is more critical of his countrymen than previous native historians had been and censures both the ancient Britons and his contemporaries. In his view their failures in civil and ecclesiastical government spell a clear proof of the weaknesses ingrained in the national character. Milton cites Gildas's history, as well as his attacks on secular and religious corruption, to corroborate his conclusions about the British unwillingness to uphold their liberties. The British loss of all true freedom, he maintains, supplies crucial evidence about the national character. This evidence had especial importance for his own day since another such chance at freedom had arrived. In both cases,

> the gaining or loosing of libertie is the greatest change to better or to worse that may befall a nation under civil goverment, and so discovers, as nothing more, what degree of understanding, or capacitie, what disposition to justice and civilitie there is among them.[1]

On this basis, Milton describes the Saxon invasion of Britain as a natural consequence of British misrule. It was the result of ordinary providence or natural law rather than of any extraordinary, divine dispensation. The lesson of this period was that the national character partly predetermined the successes and failures of the nation. The time between the Roman departure from Britain and the eventual success of the Saxon invaders, therefore, bore no relation to the heroic era of Arthurian legend. The British myths had in fact obscured more important truths, and seemed to be the later inventions of blindly patriotic medieval historians. On the other hand, Gildas's De Excidio provided vital and almost contemporary testimony regarding this troubled period of British independence. Moreover it did so in terms that Milton could adopt for his similar denuciation of his contemporaries.

i. The De Excidio in the English Renaissance.

Milton's use of Gildas contrasts with the general suspicion of the De Excidio among sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historians. Some remarked with simple

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1 CP, V. p. 441.

patriotism that Gildas's hostile narrative did not serve their interest in the period. His hectoring tone-- and his infamous proverb 'Britanni nec in bello fortes sint, nec in pace fideles'-- repelled defenders of British and Arthurian glory.[2] Furthermore, Gildas's failure to mention Arthur, who should have been almost his contemporary, at first weighed more against Gildas than against Arthur. Comment on the De Excidio sometimes focussed on possible reasons for this omission of the British hero. The proliferating British myths were not to be reconciled with Gildas's history, nor with his testimony that no earlier records survived in his day. In this respect, the association of Gildas with Polydore Vergil further harmed the Briton's reputation. Polydore had been the first to edit Gildas and that edition had prepared the way for Polydore's onslaught against the popular British legends. Both its accusations and its silences therefore involved the De Excidio in the controversies which raged over Polydore's Anglicae Historiae.

The historical value of the De Excidio had been appreciated as early as Bede, whose History referred to Gildas and depended on his historical narrative. Milton's annotated copy of Gildas shows him comparing Gildas's story with Bede's, and he often cites Bede in addition to Gildas

2 This sentence appears in many forms, this version is from Gildas, The Ruin of Britain, and Other Works, ed. M. Winterbottom (Chichester: 1978), p. 91.

in the History.[3] Showing his stated preference for 'the antientest and best Authors,'[4] Milton emphasizes Gildas where others had depended on Bede. He indicates his respect for Gildas's authority, which contrasts with his distaste for Bede's fascination with miracles. Although Bede interpolated further material, his history of Britain's independence between the Roman and Saxon periods largely preserved Gildas's story. He quotes extensively from the De Excidio in his chapters on the fifth and sixth centuries. As well as surveying the period along Gildas's lines, Bede included in his history the few specific facts available from the De Excidio.[5] Moreover, he exploited Gildas's description of the confusion and apostasy of the Britons in order to support his own view that the later influence of the Roman church unified the English nation. He therefore disregarded Gildas's judgement on the Saxons, but believed that the sorry state of early Britain was indeed as 'historicus eorum Gildas flebili sermona describit.'[6]

Gildas proved a less convenient source for Geoffrey of Monmouth. Again, Milton's annotations in the De Excidio show him comparing these two.[7] Having doubted Geoffrey's legends of pre-Roman Britain, Milton is even more skeptical

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3 CW, XVIII, pp. 329-330. These marginalia were first discussed by J. Milton French, 'Milton's Annotated Copy of Gildas,' Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, XX (1938), pp. 75-80.
4 Title-page, History of Britain (1671), CP, V. p. [lxi].
5 Bede, Ecclesiastical History, eds. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: 1969), chaps. XIII-XVI, XXII.
6 Bede, chap. XXII [p. 68].
7 CW, XVIII, p. 328.

of Geoffrey's Arthurian history. He prefers Gildas's condemnation of British corruption to Geoffrey's chauvinist compilation. Gildas's history failed to support Geoffrey's claims for a triumphantly virtuous British kingdom. It had therefore been difficult for Geoffrey to reconcile the first British history with his own. Nonetheless, he attempted such a reconciliation. First, he often admired Gildas's style and cited him as an authority. In doing so, however, he named Gildas for several stories not found in the De Excidio.[8] Geoffrey's history of the fifth century also minimized Gildas's accusations against the Britons. Only after Arthur's time could Britain, in the Historia Regum Britanniae, fall into the corrupt decline that led to the civil wars and the Saxon conquest, and even then Geoffrey tempered Gildas's invective.

Geoffrey's inconsistency was soon exposed by William of Newburgh, whose history Milton would have known from the same Commelin collection in which he annotated the De Excidio. William vouched for Gildas's authority, in particular his authority in omitting Arthur from his history; on the other hand, he maintained that Geoffrey's celebration of earlier British achievements was unhistorical. He proposed that Gildas had had good cause to write critically:

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8 Although Geoffrey's Gildas included Nennius, some of his citations cannot be found in either source, J. S. P. Tatlock, The Legendary History of Britain (Berkeley: 1950), pp. 4, 235.

> nec veretur, ut rerum non taceat, Brito de Britonibus scribere, QUOD nec in bello fortes fuerint: nec in pace fideles.[9]

Gildas was preferable to Geoffrey who adapted or invented legends as he pleased. Hence the opposition of Geoffrey against Gildas had its origins early in medieval historiography.

Polydore Vergil published the first printed edition of the De Excidio with this opposition in view. Having been sponsored by Henry VII to write the national history, Polydore found that his doubts about the British legends jeopardized the publication of his Anglicae Historiae. He edited Gildas to support his skeptical position. His interest in the De Excidio had been prompted by the references to Gildas in Bede and William of Newburgh.[10] In the tradition of William, he saw Gildas as an authoritative source for early British history. His edition removed from the De Excidio corrupt passages that had obscured Gildas's testimony against Geoffrey. In the Anglicae Historiae he warned:

> There is allso an other booke (that I may in time admonishe the reader of wicked subtilitee) which is falselie entituled the Commentarie of Gildas, being made noe doubte of some craftie compasser to fortifie an erroneus fable of a certaine new writer.[11]

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9 Jerome Commelin, ed., Rerum Britannicarum (Heidelberg: 1587), p. 354.
10 Polydore Vergil, ed., De Excidio (1525), sig. [A1]^{v}.
11 Polydore Vergil, English History, ed H. Ellis, Camden Society, XXXVI (1846), p. 28.

Reiterating the epithet 'new author,' Polydore joined William of Newburgh in attacking Geoffrey's 'most impudent lyeing' and explained that the legends had been deceptively mixed with Gildas's British history.[12] For the Arthurian period, therefore, the Anglicae Historiae depended on Gildas and largely ignored the many claims made for Arthur by medieval and Tudor historians. In the narrative, Arthur was given a brief paragraph riddled with qualifications.[13] Polydore's edition of the De Excidio, therefore, came to be associated with his controversial stand against British legends.

Furthermore, expanding William of Newburgh's attack on the Arthurian stories, Polydore accepted William and Gildas's verdict on the Britons: 'thei were nether valiaunte in battaile nether true in leage.'[14] The tone of Polydore's history of this period is more critical than celebratory. Rather than providing the popular tales of an early British empire, Polydore followed Gildas in telling of the widespread misrule that led to the Saxon usurpation. His modest disclaimers only emphasized the authority of the De Excidio and his need to refer to it-- 'I have gathered butt fewe things, yet suche as are trewe and sincere.'[15] The De Excidio helped Polydore despite its lack of specific

12 Polydore, English History, p. 29.
13 It ends, for instance, with this aside on the legend of Arthur's burial at Glastonbury: 'in the dayse of Arthure this abbaye was not builded.' Polydore, English History, p. 122.
14 Polydore, English History, p. 29.
15 Polydore, English History, p. 28.

evidence. Beginning with the northern problem at the end of the Roman preoccupation, Polydore took Gildas's word on the fluctuating fortunes of the British. He compared their short-lived valour with the subsequent civil discord that cost them their liberty. He softened Gildas's picture of the decay of peace into luxury after the victory at Badon Hill, but despite tempering Gildas's accusations against the British kings Polydore could not restore much lustre to the history of post-Roman Britain.[16]

With the Reformation, however, Gildas suddenly gained a political application which compensated for his failure to support British imperial pretensions. As well as refurbishing Constantine the Great to prove the imperial prerogatives of English monarchs, Polydore's Anglicae Historiae used the De Excidio to establish that Britain

> even from the first springe and divulgation of the hollie Gospell did ernestlie embrace the loove and woorshipping of Christe, observinge surelie, and holding faste the same.[17]

Later in the history he reiterated:

> For Gildas witnesseth, that from the verie first divulgation of the holie ghospell, Brittaine most desieruslie embraced the same.[18]

In one of his more figurative passages, Gildas had described the advent of Christianity to Britain in terms which could suggest that this had happened in the days of Tiberius. His

16 Polydore, English History, p. 122.
17 Polydore, English History, p. 25.
18 Polydore, English History, p. 74.

ambiguity had only this construction for English church historians in the Reformation. Their misreading was reinforced by medieval legends about the early church. Gildas therefore appeared to confirm the independent origins and ancient autonomy of the British church. English readers seized this interpretation and, except for some doubts on the part of Catholic polemicists, did not question it until late in the seventeenth century.[19] In the 1530s, and long after, Polydore's influential reading of this passage in the De Excidio had a topical application. It suited Polydore's version of imperial myth, and his expansive admiration of contemporary English piety. Thus the De Excidio gained acceptance: although it disproved the Arthurian myths, which had previously played an important part in Tudor propaganda, it now provided evidence important for the historical defence of the original autonomy of the native church.

The reformers had already taken an interest in Gildas since they saw in him an early native counterpart.[20] Soon after Polydore's edition, Tyndale named Gildas as a British prophet. His view gained a wide currency. Gildas was cited

19 Edward Stillingfleet, Origines Britannicae (1685), pp. 4-5, observed that Gildas's mention of Tiberius only indicates, on Tertullian's authority, the beginnings of an unpersecuted spread of Christianity, and that the religion only reached Britain in later years. The Catholic 'N. D.' [Robert Parsons] had reached this conclusion eighty years before, A Treatise of Three Conversions of England from Paganisme to Christian Religion (1603), pp. 13-14.

20 This view appears as early as Wulfstan. See The Homilies of Wulfstan, ed. D. Bethurum (Oxford: 1953), pp. 274, 363-364n.

as a native preaching prophet, a successor to Noah, Lot, Moses and Aaron, and other Old Testament prophets. Tyndale's reference in The Obedience of a Christian Man is representative:

> Unto the old Britons also (which dwelled where our nation doth now) preached Gildas; and rebuked them of their wickedness, and prophesied both to the spiritual (as they will be called) and unto the lay-men also, what vengeance would follow, except they repented. But they waxed hard-hearted; and God sent his plagues and pestilences among them, and sent their enemies in upon them on every side, and destroyed them utterly.[21]

A few years later Tyndale repeated this point, extending the list of successive prophets to include Wycliffe and the risen Christ that was the reformed church.[22] Thomas Becon followed Tyndale closely when he invoked the example of the ancient Britons suffering for their apostasy. He compared Gildas to further prophets and added a fuller treatment of Wycliffe from this perspective.[23] On the continent, the Magdeburg Centuriators followed John Bale's description of Gildas as a wise, reforming Christian.[24] Most importantly, Foxe included Becon's encomium of Gildas in his influential version of early British history in his Acts and Monuments. He also cited Gildas for the sins which condemned the Britons to the Saxon invasions, for their hatred of truth,

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21 William Tyndale, Works, ed. H. Walter (Cambridge: 1848-1850), I. pp. 142-143; 1527 is suggested as the probable date for this work, Works, I. p. 129.
22 Tyndale, Works, I, p. 458.
23 Becon, Works, III. pp. 10-11.
24 Matthias Flacius Illyricus, et al., Ecclesiastica historia (Magdeburg: 1559-1574), IV. p. 779; John Bale, Illustrium Maioris Britanniae Scriptorum (1548), f. 33^{v}.

love of lies, and for the wickedness of their kings.[25] To the religious historian, Gildas's jeremiad against the unreforming British seemed far more significant than Arthurian legends. For Foxe and his contemporaries, prophecy had nothing in common with Merlin's visions, superstitious stuff for almanacs.[26] Gildas's prophecy, however, was seen as the revelation of God's will at work in the natural downfall of a sinning nation.

The reformers soon exploited Gildas's apparent testimony to the early autonomy of the British church. Eager to deny that 'our christian faith was first derived from Rome,' Foxe deduced the purity of the primitive church from Polydore's version of Gildas. He added related legends to his misreading of the Tiberius passage in the De Excidio and could therefore maintain that Gildas's

> history affirmeth plainly, that Britain received the gospel in the time of Tiberius the emperor, under whom Christ suffered; and saith moreover, that Joseph of Arimathea, after the dispersion of the early church by the Jews, was sent of Philip the apostle from France to Britain, about the year of our Lord 63, and here remained in this land all his time; and so, with his fellows, laid the first foundations of christian faith among the British people, whereupon other preachers and teachers coming afterward, confirmed the same and increased it.[27]

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25 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. pp. 93, 313-314.
26 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. p. 323. Cf. Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (1971), pp. 461-514 passim, on the increasing liberties taken with Arthur as his historical status diminished.
27 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. p. 306. That corrupt texts of Gildas contributed to this dramatic accretion of legendary details further shows the demands of Protestant and Tudor polemic on the text of the De Excidio.

Later defenders of the Elizabethan church often invoked Gildas as the authority for all this information. Jewel repeatedly cited Gildas on Joseph of Arimathea to confirm the autonomy of the primitive British church.[28] Encouraging this view, although not endorsing the legend of Joseph of Arimathea's mission to Britain, Archbishop Parker's Latin secretary John Josselyn edited the De Excidio.[29] Bishop Pilkington used Gildas to investigate primitive religious tradition which had been obscured by the later Roman influence on the Saxons. Pilkington believed that the British had fought this Roman influence as well as resisting the Saxons, and he combed through the De Excidio for signs of the original independent church.[30] When Pilkington's opponent dared to misquote Gildas for his own purposes, Pilkington authoritatively denied that Gildas ever said anything about the missionary Augustine.[31] Whitgift and Cartwright similarly found Gildas a bone of contention. Cartwright used the De Excidio to show that there had been no archflamines in the early British church and therefore no early archbishops; Whitgift on the other hand, interpreted Gildas differently to prove that the Elizabethan church resembled its primitive counterpart.[32] In these arguments, Gildas was especially in demand as the oldest native source,

28 Jewel, Works, I. p. 305; III. p. 163.
29 It was soon reprinted, Gildas, De Excidio, ed. Josselyn (1567 and 1568).
30 Pilkington, Works, pp. 510, 515-517, 584.
31 Pilkington, Works, pp. 618-619.
32 Whitgift, Works, II. p. 127.

who could further be cited for proof of the autonomy of the early native church.

In the 1580s then, William Fulke was repeating a received opinion when he maintained that the

> Christian religion came to us even from the Apostles, as witnesseth Gildas the Briton, being planted here in the reign of Tiberius the Emperor.[33]

This view prevailed in Milton's day when Ussher lent his authority to this misreading.[34] Gildas thus remained an important source for the English ecclesiastical historian. He was considered an eminent proto-reformer and his De Excidio was believed to provide definitive proof of the original religious independence of the ancient Britons. This allegiance to Gildas among ecclesiastical historians ignored the complaints of patriotic secular historians. Although Milton distinguishes himself from 'our Writers of Ecclesiastic story,'[35] his dependence on Gildas in the History is an extreme expression of the reformers' interest in the early days of the British church.

More traditional historians, however, were less ready to accept Gildas's new status. Protesting against Polydore's neglect of British and Arthurian heroics, these conservative patriots were quick to point out the shortcomings of depending on Gildas. The antiquary Leland showed the way when he denounced first Polydore and then

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33 Fulke, Answers, p. 186.
34 Ussher, Britannicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates (Dublin: 1639), pp. 3-5.
35 CP, V. p. 187.

Gildas, Polydore's chief British source. Leland rejected Polydore on three counts. First Gildas lived later than the period in question; second, only part of his works remained; and third, Gildas failed to mention some other important Britons. These reasons were secondary, however, to Leland's anger at Gildas's defamation of British history. Only a vile slanderer, in Leland's view, could propose that the Britons were 'nec in bello fortes, nec in pace fideles.' The Welsh poet and historian Thomas Price developed this attack by casting further aspersions on Gildas's authority. The Gildas who belittled his countrymen seemed inconsistent with the Gildas who extolled the Molmutine Laws and Aurelius Ambrosius. Price also thought that the author of the De Excidio showed scant knowledge of the British language, and yet Gildas was putatively British. Still less did this Gildas appear to understand British government, which the De Excidio distributed among five coexisting kings. To explain Gildas's omission of Arthur, Price elaborated tales of a medieval Vitae Gildae in which Arthur was supposed to have killed Gildas's brother, hence Gildas's vindictive silence. Another Welsh historian, Humphrey Lhuyd, simply questioned the significance of Gildas's censure:

> that I may at length stop Polydorus mouth, together with his Gildas: thus much I say, that if he sticks in any poynte unto him: he [Gildas] was no historiographer, but a Preist, and a Preacher. Whose custom is very sharply to inveigh against the faultes of their hearers. Wherfore, if we seeke authorities out of Sermons, as Polydorus Urbanus hath done, what Parish,

> what Towne, what nation, or kyngedom may escape infamie?[36]

These patriotic historians, therefore, saw Gildas in a different light than the ecclesiastical historians, and dismissed him even though he was increasingly cited as an authority elsewhere. Their old-fashioned patriotism would not accommodate the new demands on British history, and they were consequently repelled by the new emphasis on Gildas. At the same time, the interest in prophecy was undergoing a change, and the earlier reverence for Merlin's extraordinary predictions suffered as a result. His supernatural foretelling of events seemed simply superstition. Gildas's formulation of God's will, on the other hand, appeared a more informative exposition of providence. He merely foretold the natural consequences of sin, an ordinary working of cause and effect. On this basis Sidney, who mocked Lhuyd's old tales and recommended 'Polidore for Englande,' derided oracular predictions as well as, in the New Arcadia, adding many features from Gildas's British history to his description of the wickedness of old

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36 Quoted in Kendrick, British Antiquity (1950), pp. 93-94, on which this description of these opponents of Polydore and Gildas relies.

Macedon.[37] The future was essentially uncertain but history might show how providence punished the sinful.

Despite opposition to Polydore, therefore, historians secular and ecclesiastical increasingly followed his example in making more use of Gildas and less of Geoffrey for fifth and sixth-century British history. Stow for instance, whom Sidney supported, arrived at a compromise in which Gildas's emerging role is only obscured by some lingering confusion about the Gildas canon. Stow's suspicions about Arthur, whom he included among the early kings with Vortigern and Vortimer, were partly put to rest by a pseudo-Gildasian book of Arthur, probably some version of Nennius.[38] Two generations later, his continuator Edmund Howes was still purveying this version of fifth-century history.[39] As these histories often were structured around the succession of kings, Gildas's unspecific narrative was difficult to incorporate in the strict chronology that these historians desired. Holinshed used Gildas but also included some of the Arthurian stories despite their uncertain status. He also softened Gildas's condemnation of the five kings

37 Philip Sidney, Complete Works, ed. A. Feuillerat (Cambridge: 1912-1926), III. p. 85; James Osborn, Young Philip Sidney (New Haven: 1972), p. 539, for the letter to Denny in which Sidney recommends Polydore. For Sidney's position against oracles, The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, ed. J. Robertson (Oxford: 1973), pp. 5-7; New Arcadia, Feuillerat, I. pp. 24-26. See also Milton's Commonplace Book, CP, I. p. 463, for the passage in the New Arcadia which shows Sidney's interest in Gildas.

38 John Stow, The Chronicles of England (1575) , pp. 47-54.

39 John Stow and Edmund Howes, Annales, or A Generall Chronicle of England (1631), Preface, pp. 50-56.

reigning at the time of the De Excidio.[40] Samuel Daniel developed this line; he found the period after the Roman departure especially obscure and professed his misgivings about the course of events 'during their short possession of this Land' by the British. He disliked Gildas's emphasis on the shortcomings of the national character and noted the Briton's 'enigmaticall passions.' Daniel also believed that Arthur's deeds deserved a better record than the mass of legends that remained.[41] Speed too saw 'Gildas, the mournefull Historian' as an unattractive source, too given to invective. Although he quotes liberally from the De Excidio, Speed also regretted Gildas's omission of Arthur and, like Daniel, thought Arthur-- a worthy like Hercules or Caesar-- ill-served by historical records.[42] Stow, Holinshed, Daniel, and Speed all included details from Gildas, however, although these were often taken second-hand from Bede.

But historians more willing to jettison Arthur showed a corresponding readiness to value Gildas as the earliest native historian. Camden asserted Gildas's importance for the study of ancient Britain and established him as the essential, if problematic source for the little-known period between the Romans and the Saxons. After his masterly dismissal of the Arthurian question, Camden downplayed the

40 Holinshed, Chronicles (1577), I. pp. 101-102, 110-142 (2nd pag., 'The Historie).
41 Samuel Daniel, The Collection of the History of England (1617), pp. 6-7.
42 Speed, Historie, pp. 190-194, 209.

polemical tone of the De Excidio while using it to confute the British legends. Citing Gildas at great length, he maintained that the chauvinist reasons for disliking him were antiquated and irrelevant to true historians. He defended Gildas as the innocent bearer of bad tidings. The contemporary relevance of fifth and sixth-century history struck Camden in a way that anticipates Milton's more specific application of Gildas's strictures:

> Let us meditate and consider, both what they [the ancient Britons] were, and also what we ought to be: lest that for our sinnes likewise, the supreame Ruler of the world, either translate other nations hither, when wee are first rooted out, or incorporate them into us, after we are by them subdued.[43]

At the time of the Armada, Gildas's warnings seemed appropriate, and the status of the De Excidio increased on the strength of Camden's authority.

In the generation of Ussher and Selden, and then in Milton's day, Gildas's authority as a source increases but his popularity diminishes. Ussher's work on Nennius helped to clarify Gildas's standing but historians still baulked at his description of the wayward Britons. Selden cited him for the saying 'divinus honor a caeco populo cumulabatur,' the moral usually associated with the De Excidio.[44] Only late in the seventeenth century was Gildas more critically reviewed, when Bishop Stillingfleet and the antiquary Thomas

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43 William Camden, Britain, trans. Philemon Holland (1610), pp. 107-110. The original Britannia, which included this passage, was published in 1586.
44 Selden, Opera, II. col. 1582.

Gale revised the interpretation and the text of the De Excidio.[45]

Gildas's emerging status was also reflected in the antiquary Thomas Habington's translation of the De Excidio. Habington had worked on The Epistle of Gildas during his imprisonment in the Tower from 1586 to 1592, but it was not published until 1638. Although Habington had conspired against Elizabeth in preference for Mary Queen of Scots, the plot for which he was gaoled and his brother hanged, the Epistle does not seem a politically motivated translation, although conceivably directed by the Catholic Habingon against his apostate countrymen. In any event, the perhaps Caroline foreword, 'Of Gildas and the Translation,' deceptively emphasized Habington's Jacobean dedication rather than the Elizabethan origins of the book:

> The Translation was made neere the first entrance of the Scottish line upon the Throne of England. To the continuance of which the Preface concurres with most zealous wishes.[46]

Habington himself had been more frank about his earlier desire 'to deceive the tediousnesse of my lingring imprisonment.'[47] Chiefly, however, the Epistle was an antiquarian reponse to the need for translations of British historical sources. The foreword maintains that the antiquity of the De Excidio proves its value since

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45 Stillingfleet, Origines, pp. 4-5; Thomas Gale (ed.), Historiae Britannicae (1691), sig. $A2^{v}$.
46 Thomas Habington, The Epistle of Gildas (1638), sig. $*4^{r}$. For the biographical details see DNB.
47 Habington, Epistle, sig. $A4^{r}$.

> The age of bookes shows the strength of their composition; Weake or abortive births, perishing in the infancy, scarce numbred among the workes of Time.[48]

The subtitle, 'The most Ancient British Author', called attention to Gildas's undeniable value in this respect.

Perhaps unwisely, Habington submitted the Epistle as a historian's contribution to the celebration of James's union of England, Scotland, and Wales. Given Gildas's scathing views on the marauding Saxons, worm-like Picts, and fugitive Britons, the De Excidio resisted patriotic applications. Aware of his problem, Habington supplied a lengthy preface to support his dedication of the work 'TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE Island of Great BRITAINE, Unitie and Felicity.' He seems worried that Gildas would offend readers of the three nations unless suitably introduced. He therefore extols their glorious past in order to placate them in advance. 'Three rockes of exceeding danger' were to be navigated by his preface,

> the invectives (I meane) of Gildas, against some sorts of people most happily combined under his Majesties government, the first the Britanes, the most auncient inhabitantes of this Island, the other the Irish together with the Scottish, and Pictes who next possessed part of the Land, and last the Saxons and English who have very long enjoyed the most large and fruitful portion of the Country.[49]

Habington's concern about potential misconstructions of Gildas, as he saw them, shows how far the De Excidio might

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48 Habington, Epistle, sig. *3^{r}.
49 Habington, Epistle, sigs. A1^{r}, B2^{v}-B3^{r}.

trouble a patriotic historian interested in a heroic national past. The obvious lesson of the work, recognized in the foreword to the translation, is that

> impiety is the great destroyer of Empires; and that kingdome that remaynes most emmaculate from sinne, stands safest from ruine.[50]

Thus the Saxon invasions testified to national shortcomings, an awkward fact which Habington's introductory recollection of more patriotic legends could not disguise.

Habington faced a further difficulty: the De Excidio also seemed to invite an anti-monarchist interpretation. His hasty denial of such an interpretation makes plain how Gildas might supply historical evidence hostile to royal claims. Habington's moralizing bears noticeably little relation to the narrative he translates:

> But although mine Author Gildas discovereth the defects of Princes and Prelates, yet let no man thinke that any Subjects can for the deadly sinnes of their Superiours, either deprive or disobey them.[51]

Both Gildas's characterization of the Britons and his attacks on kingship and the clergy, therefore, had applications which Habington implied even as he strenuously sought to deny them. Habington's misgivings aside, this potential interpretation of the De Excidio attracted Milton in the late 1640s. Leading up to The Tenure of Kings and

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50 Habington, Epistle, sig. *4^{v}.
51 Habington, Epistle, sig. B1^{r}. He adduces a number of Old Testament examples to confirm his orthodoxy on the status of kings and clerics.

Magistrates, Milton's use of Gildas in The History of Britain is topical in exactly the ways that Habington sought to dismiss.

It is uncertain whether Milton knew Habington's translation, although 1638 has been suggested as the terminus a quo for his familiarity with the De Excidio on the strength of some tenuous connections between his History and the Epistle.[52] The external evidence for Milton's reading Gildas for the first time in the 1640s is more convincing. In the winter of 1637 he seems to have been studying chiefly ancient and medieval continental history. He explains to Diodati:

> Graecorum res continuata[m] lectionis deduximus usquequo illi Graeci esse sunt desiti: Italorum inobscura re diu versati sumus sub Longobardis, & Francis, & Germanis, ad illud tempus quo illis ab Rodolpho Germania Rege concessa libertas est; exinde quid quaeque Civitas suo Marte gesserit, separatim legere praestabit.[53]

Accordingly he asks Diodati to send a certain history of Venice. He indicates how he races through these histories when he promises to send the book back post haste if need be. He was to leave for Italy the following spring and probably left his reading of Gildas and other British

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52 In Life Records, I. p. 356, French admits his evidence is tenuous, but suggests Habington's influence nonetheless. He believes that Milton's spelling of the name Aetius may depend on Gildas's practice, but this form was common, see CP, V. p. 138n. Nor was 'Boadicea' a new spelling. Secondly, Milton's figure for the number of British casualties under Boadicea, which corresponds to Habington's number, simply reflects his reading of Tacitus and Dion.

53 CW, XII. p. 28.

histories until after his return to England in the summer of 1639. Even then he seems to have begun with the more general modern histories of Holinshed and Camden rather than their earliest sources. In the Commonplace Book, for instance, he refers to the Molmutine Laws on Holinshed's authority whereas in the History he rejects them because they are inconsistent with Gildas's testimony.[54] Similarly, reference to Gildas's views on some of the subjects in the Outlines for British Tragedies might be expected if Milton had already studied the De Excidio. There is no reference to Gildas, however, although Milton's first subjects centre on Vortigern and Vortimer.[55] At this early stage his historical reading seems to depend on later historians, especially on Malmesbury, Holinshed and Speed. He cites only Bede and Geoffrey of Monmouth among earlier sources, and these may be included simply because they are mentioned by Holinshed in connection with the Bangor massacre. He may moreover, just be noting Bede and Geoffrey for future reference as he briefly explores the potential drama in the massacre. Finally, the small number of British subjects in the Outlines may reflect Milton's lack of familiarity as yet with the earliest sources.

Milton's annotations in his copy of Gildas, in the Commelin edition (1587) of sources for British history, show him comparing Gildas with Dion and Tacitus, Geoffrey of

54 CP, I. pp. 387, 424-425; V. p. 27.
55 CP, VIII. pp. 569, 572. The Venutius and Cartismandua entry was a later addition.

Monmouth, Bede, Polydore, Saxon Grammaticus, and an 'old manuscript of the meanings of words.'[56] Like most of Milton's annotations, these marginalia concern textual or stylistic points and are therefore directed at literary details rather than at the wider relevance of the text to Milton's interests. In the Gildas annotations, he shows his close attention to the historical details available in the first section of the De Excidio. This close cross-referencing seems to belong to the research for the History in the mid-1640s. That the rest of Milton's Commelin is unmarked may indicate a late and special interest in Gildas.

Milton generally kept his broader observations on a text for his Commonplace Book. Here he refers to Gildas under various headings. He finds the De Excidio topical in his reflections on domestic liberty because of Gildas's observations on the ancient Britons' polygamy.[57] The natives of England had in ancient times fallen short of the necessary discipline for marriage, an aspect of the national character that found its contemporary expression in the refusal to reform divorce law. In another reference to Gildas, Milton remarks on the popular fallacy of jure divino kingship. Gildas testified that the people had elected their kings in earlier times and that the people had also

56 French, 'Milton's Annotated Copy of Gildas,' p. 77. Milton also notes in his Gildas that an old manuscript explains curucis as navis, which corresponds to Stillingfleet's later note in Origines, p. lxii, that 'in the old MSS. Glossaries in the Margin of Josselin's Gildas, Curuca is rendred by Navis, and not a little shapeless Boat.'

57 CP, I. p. 413.

deposed them at will. Habington had sensed that the De Excidio might be used in the attack on royal sovereignty, although his chief concern was Gildas's testimony to the early kings' wickedness. Milton uses Gildas as a witness to the original subordination of British sovereignty to popular consent. He compares this historical testimony to his contemporaries' misconceptions:

> De regibus Britannis inquit Gildas, ungebantur reges, non per deum. p. 119. contra quam nunc vulgus existamat, quoscunque scilicet reges dei unctos esse.[58]

If this entry is contemporary with the entry under marriage it indicates Milton's early interest in the status of kingship and Gildas's importance for the constitutional historian. The first British kings exemplified, if any example were needed, the limitations of sovereignty and the secular origins of kingship. In The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, Gildas's evidence assists Milton's historical argument against the iure divino publicists.

58 CW, XVIII. p. 196.

ii. The De Excidio in Milton's History.

For Anthony à Wood, a most memorable feature of the History's early reputation was its 'not abstaining from some lashes at the ignorance, or I know not what of those times.'[59] This must have been prompted by the History's unusual debt to the De Excidio. Milton elsewhere values Gildas because evidence from the De Excidio could be used to advantage in political and religious controversy. In the History, Gildas's report from the sixth century provided Milton with a deeper insight into the national character.

In the first books of the History, Milton's use of Gildas is conventional enough. He indicates his special regard for Gildas, however, by referring to him in the text when the De Excidio contributes to his narrative. Milton is unwilling to allow for the variety of Gildases some historians had proposed; he affirms the pre-eminence of the De Excidio. That work emerges with unusual authority among sources for the early period. Milton observes, for instance, that the British legends are especially questionable because 'Gildas affirms that of the Roman times noe Brittish Writer was in his daies extant.'[60] Earlier in the History, he had similarly used Gildas to diminish the standing of Geoffrey of Monmouth; Milton maintains with Gildas that the pre-Roman period is unknown: 'Gildas denies

59 Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 46.
60 CP, V. pp. 40-41.

to have known aught of the Britans before Caesar; much less knew Alfred.'[61]

In the second book of his History, however, there are harbingers of Milton's later application of Gildas to political and religious polemic. For instance, the De Excidio supplies him with Porphyry's statement 'that Britain was a soil fruitful of Tyrants,' a reference of topical interest that Milton pursues in the Second Defence.[62] Similarly, despite doubts about the murky origins of the British church, he seizes on Gildas's testimony that Christianity had taken root in Britain 'eev'n from the later daies of Tiberius.' His respect for Gildas overcomes his suspicions about this early dating, suspicions that surface in his reassurance 'as Gildas confidently affirms,' as well as in his subsequent remark that this early church history remains uncertain.[63] Milton only takes issue with Gildas on the subject of the British martyrs in days of Diocletian, especially as retold by Bede. In these, martyrdom was

> soil'd, and worse martyr'd with the fabling zeal of some idle fancies, more fond of Miracles, than apprehensive of Truth.[64]

Nonetheless, in accepting that these martyrs 'suffer'd gloriously,' Milton gives credit to Gildas's narrative

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61 CP, V. p. 27, he also disputes Geoffrey's assertion that Gildas translated the Molmutine Laws into Latin and that Alfred translated Gildas's version into Saxon.
62 CP, V. p. 105; IV. p. 552. For the explanation of this confusion of Jerome and Porphyry, see CP, V. p. 105n.
63 CP, V. p. 81, 98.
64 CP, V. p. 111.

despite his usual distrust of martyrology.[65] Most of all, he anticipates his later debt to Gildas when he quotes his criticism of the ancient Britons as if it were conclusive: 'a Land, saith Gildas, greedy of everything new, stedfast in nothing.'[66] Camden and others had referred to this passage in the De Excidio but in Milton it acquires unusual force owing to his growing preoccupation with the national character. This bluntness in retailing Gildas's condemnation of the Britons colours the third book of the History, and most remarkably the Digression on the Long Parliament and the Westminster Assembly.[67]

In the third book of the History, Milton primarily supports Gildas's views of fifth and sixth-century British history. More than previous secular historians, even than Polydore Vergil, he reiterates Gildas's censure of the Britons. He also takes much more from the De Excidio than the sparse details included in earlier histories. His debt shows first in his frequent marginal references to Gildas, which appear from the opening page of the third book. Where other historians had relied on Bede's history, Milton insists on citing Gildas wherever possible. Gildas's importance increases when Milton draws a parallel between the post-Roman period and the mid-seventeenth century. Since Milton says that the third book 'may deserve attention

65 E.g. CP, I. pp. 533-535.
66 CP, V. p. 115.
67 Milton's citing Gildas for Britain's weakness late in the Roman period is a more conventional use of the De Excidio. CP, V. pp. 120, 126.

more than common, and repay it with like benefit,'[68] the source on which he most depends for this narrative acquires especial significance. In this part of the History, Milton writes more as the Reformers had written, even though he distinguishes himself from 'Ecclesiastic Historians.'[69] In thus changing Milton's historical style, Gildas's influence outweighs that of any other source for the History.

The frequent mention of Gildas in the text gives him a special authority for the history of this period, comparable to that of Geoffrey for the legendary prehistory, except, of course, that Milton takes Gildas seriously. The early date of the De Excidio, established beyond doubt, drove Milton to seek more in it than just a few historical details. To communicate his view of Gildas's importance, he goes out of his way to establish what a singular source the De Excidio is. Contrasting British history with Scottish, for instance, he decries Buchanan's reliance on 'the Fables of his Predecessor Boethius,' similar to 'our Geofry of Monmouth when he varies most from authentick storie.' Against these Milton sets Gildas and Bede, 'Authors to whom the Scotch Writers have none to cite comparable in Antiquity';[70] nor, he implies, in veracity. Elsewhere, he dismisses a story by contrasting 'common opinion, but grounded cheifly on the British Fables' with 'the express words both of Gildas and Bede,' his 'surest Authors.'[71]

68 CP, V. p. 129.
69 CP, V. pp. 98, 187.
70 CP, V. pp. 133-134.
71 CP, V. pp. 155-156.

Again in Saxon records, the sources are so one-sided that the De Excidio provides crucial information otherwise unavailable:

> Yet that we may not rely altogether on Saxon relaters, Gildas, in Antiquity far before these, and every way more credible, speaks of these Wars in such a manner, though nothing conceited of the British valour, as declares the Saxons in his time and before to have bin foyl'd not seldomer than the Britans.[72]

As well as the early date of Gildas's work-- 'he tells. . . which they in thir oldest annals mention not at all'-- his lack of patriotic bias recommends the De Excidio in contrast to the Saxon histories.

Owing to this emphasis on Gildas, Milton criticizes the Britons more than other English historians; his sympathies clearly lie with the harsh judgement of the De Excidio. His introductory portrait of the Britons after the Roman departure derives directly from Gildas, and then from Bede, Malmesbury, and Camden. In particular, he chooses to characterize the Britons in the disparaging style of the De Excidio. Milton, however, superimposes his ideal of liberty on Gildas's version of the British apostasy:

> The Britans, thus as we heard being left without protection from the Empire, and the Land in a manner emptied of all her youth, consumed in Warrs abroad, or not caring to return home, themselves through long subjection, servile in mind, sloathful of body, and with the use of Arms unacquainted, sustain'd but ill for many years the violence of those barbarous Invaders, who now daily grew upon them.[73]

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72 CP, V. p. 163.
73 CP, V. p. 130.

Similarly, Gildas's description of the British in religious matters-- 'greedy of every thing new'-- becomes Milton's epithet for their failure to achieve true liberty:

> For although at first greedy of change, and to be thought the leading Nation to freedom from the Empire. . . they soon remitted thir heat, and shrunk more wretchedly under the burden of thir own libertie, than before under a foren yoke.[74]

Thus Gildas's views come to play a vital part in Milton's emerging conception of the national character and national liberty.

Milton therefore redirects the earlier jeremiad in order to emphasize the importance of discipline for liberty. Gildas's condemnation of the Britons, allied with Milton's regard for Gildas's authority, contributes to the position endorsed by the History on the lack of discipline endemic in the British national character. Although he acknowledges that Gildas was extreme in his denunciations-- he qualifies his version of Gildas's tirade with a cautionary 'if Gildas deserve belief'[75]-- he subscribes to many of the judgements in the De Excidio. When the Britons are finally vanquished by the Saxons, Picts, and Scots, Milton duly interrupts his narrative to include Gildas's opinion:

> of all which multitude [of slain Britons], so great was the sinfullness that brought this upon them, Gildas adds that few or none were likely to be other then lew'd and wicked persons.[76]

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74 CP, V. pp. 130-131.
75 CP, V. p. 139.
76 CP, V. pp. 148-149.

Milton turns to Gildas at greater length still in his history of the sixth century, and condenses long passages from the De Excidio into his own denunciation of the Britons. 'By ill using' their hard-won peace, the Britons had found it 'prov'd more destructive to them then War.' Gildas is the key witness to this drift into corruption. Milton emphasizes the authority of this source. Noting the apostasy of the Britons, he feels obliged to add 'som particulars out of Gildas.'[77] Gildas's authority increases: one story comes from 'the year that Gildas wrote'; in another, the king 'was when Gildas wrote grown old.' A further king was directly harangued by Gildas and yet another, 'if we mistake not Gildas,' committed incest with his daughter. The question has long ceased to be whether the De Excidio 'deserves belief'; instead it has become whether the source can be accurately understood. In sum, Milton finds that Gildas's views indelibly stain the history of this period, and maintains, at the end of the third book of the History, that he has narrated

> the utmost that can be learnt by truer story, of what past among the Britans from the time of useless Victory at Badon, to the time that Gildas wrote.[78]

The De Excidio provides the core of 'what with reason can be rely'd on for truth.'[79]

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77 CP, V. p. 174.
78 CP, V. pp. 176-178.
79 CP, V. p. 183.

Remarkably then, Milton has portrayed Gildas as an exemplary historian, not only for specific historical questions but also for his general observations on his fellow-Britons. He attributes a similar importance to Gildas's strictures on the national character. The religious fervour of the De Excidio gives added meaning to Milton's preference for the most ancient 'and best' sources. Not only had Gildas's jeremiad been justified but, as the eventual Saxon conquest emphasized, such prophetic intransigence when faced with a backsliding nation was desperately necessary. This was a role that Milton himself could undertake.

Crucial to this role was the description of the national character. The historian's chief duty, in Milton's view, lies in assessing this character. Without 'a knowledg of our selves both great and weighty,'[80] he believes, any national hopes or plans are likely to miscarry. The application of Gildas's insights to the upheavals of the 1640s especially interests Milton.[81] He makes clear that real significance of his history lies in

> judging hence what kind of men the Britans generally are in matters of so high enterprise, how by nature, industry, or custom fitted to attempt or undergoe matters of so main consequence.[82]

His shift to the present tense underlines his interest in 'Britans generally,' especially his English contemporaries.

80 CP, V. p. 130.
81 CP, V. pp. xxxviii-xxxix, 426-433.
82 CP, V. p. 130.

On the national character Milton prescribes his own views, unlike other questions of interpretation which are left to his reader's discretion.

Moreover, Milton lets the issue of national liberty predominate in his discussion of the national character. He conceives of this liberty as the freedom of the nation from foreign subjection and then the freedom of its individuals under civil and ecclesiastical government. Gildas and all subsequent historians had agreed that the British were weak at the time of the Roman departure. Milton supplies the conventional explanation that the national character had suffered from 'long subjection,' and that the British were therefore 'servile in mind, sloathful of body, and with the use of Arms unacquainted.'[83] Their lack of military discipline thus attracts frequent comment on his part. Like civil discipline, military discipline is an important aspect of Milton's idealization of general discipline. As early as 1641, he had stated his support for martial exercise as an aid to civil discipline, and the Commonplace Book testifies to his interest in military discipline throughout the 1640s.[84] In Of Education too, he considers martial exercise a powerful adjunct to civil virtue and moral courage.[85] In Eikonoklastes he reflects that 'if som fighting were not man-like, then either fortitude were no vertue, or no fortitude in fighting.'[86] Therefore he often expresses his

83 CP, V. p. 130.
84 CP, I. pp. 819, 491-496.
85 CP, II. p. 409.
86 CP, III. p. 520.

judgement on the British character at large when he narrates the historical consequences of their military failures. When they build an ineffective defensive wall, for example, his version of Gildas's story brings out their uncivilized lack of artifice: 'the material only being Turf, and by the rude multitude unartificially built up without better direction, avail'd them little.' Just as they failed to heed the Romans' military advice, the Britons also failed to adopt the Roman regard for liberty. Against 'thir own sloth and cowardise' the Britons, 'a faint-hearted audience,' were urged to 'find hands to grasp defensive Arms, rather than basely stretch them out to receave bonds.'[87] As well as betraying a lack of civil virtue, the British military failures reflect the bad state of their church. The moral of the Halleluiah victory becomes rather pointed in Milton's version: he elaborates Gildas's story of the Britons' success and gives them a reforming leader who persuades them to trust in divine assistance.[88] The lesson is plain--given good leadership, Britons can triumph with virtue. Milton indicates their need only to be well-led and better disciplined.

At the same time, the Britons were capable of sporadic military virtue and Milton thinks Vortigern's son Vortimer a figure symbolic of such flashes of resolution. Vortimer, perhaps invented by Nennius for this purpose, provides a

87 CP, V. pp 132-133.
88 CP, V. pp. 136-139. In this way he also brings Gildas's narrative closer to that of Constantius's story of Germanus.

heroic contrast to his corrupt father. Milton proposes that the national character includes some martial ardor but of an undisciplined, inconsistent variety. Thus Maglocune, the greatest of Gildas's five kings, can at once be 'a great Warrior' and also deeply wicked.[89] The Britons were intermittently stalwart even until their final display of courage against the last, overwhelming Saxon invasion.[90] Generally, however, their military history is marked by failure, and this, in Milton's view, has broad implications for the study of the national character.

From such views on military discipline, therefore, he moves to a wider consideration of Gildas's narrative. He makes fuller reference to the ambitious ideals of civil liberty at which he had hinted in the second book of the History. Emphasizing the prerequisites for good government, he contrasts 'the wisdom, the virtue, the labour, to use and maintain true libertie' with the Britons' 'stomach or the love of licence.'[91] For all their military shortcomings, the Britons' chief failing was their lack of civil virtue in times of peace. They repeatedly failed this ultimate test of government. After their infrequent triumphs in battle, they invariably proved unequal to the harder work of preserving virtue in peace. Milton has only slight misgivings about Gildas's vehemence in denouncing the Britons' apostasy:

89 CP, V. pp. 177-178.
90 CP, V. p. 181.
91 CP, V. p. 131.

> wantonness and luxury, the wonted companions of plenty, grow up as fast, and with them, if Gildas deserve belief, all other vices incident to human corruption.[92]

Despite his apparent reservations, however, Milton now launches himself into 'my Author' Gildas. He reiterates Gildas's denunciation of the Britons as if it were undisputed historical narrative. As he had done before, he accepts Gildas's characterization of the Britons-- 'non Britanni in bello fortes sint, nec in pace fideles'-- and tacitly subscribes to the opinion which previous historians had avoided:

> And this quality thir valour had, against a foren Enemy to be ever backward and heartless; to civil broils eager and prompt.[93]

Milton's language as a historian begins to resemble his language as a controversialist. He translates his vision of civil and intellectual virtue into Gildas's tirade. Compared to the original-- 'infirma, inqua[m], ad exeque[n]da pacis ac veritatis insignia, & fortis ad scelera & me[n]dacia'-- Milton's condemnation has its own resonance:

> in matters of Government, and the search of truth, weak and shallow, in falshood and wicked deeds pregnant and industrious.[94]

When he outdoes Gildas in his use of parallel constructions, Milton echoes his own controversial prose; the style of the

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92 CP, V. p. 139.
93 CP, V. p. 139.
94 CP, V. pp. 139-140.

third book often recalls the invective that animated his earlier tracts.

Milton clearly intends this polemical characterization of the British as an admonition to his contemporaries. In the sixth century, a lack of civil virtue had led to rapid corruption during times of peace. The lack of a national memory had aggravated the shortcomings in the national character:

> The next Age, unacquainted with past Evils, and only sensible of thir present ease and quiet, succeeded, strait follow'd the apparent subversion of all truth, and justice.[95]

Milton spells out the contemporary applications of this observation in the Digression. In the third book of the History as it remains, his tactics are similar. Since early sources focussed on successive kings, and since these kings were so evidently wicked, Milton sets out to explain how the royal character reflected that of the nation. Remarkably, he agrees to let the kings stand for the whole social order: when 'general corruption' spread 'through all ranks and degrees in the Land,'[96] the king's vices could therefore represent the entire nation's lack of virtue. On this basis, Milton unstintingly catalogues the vices which Gildas ascribed to the kings of his day. Again his translation of the De Excidio compresses and paraphrases, and his forceful

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95 CP, V. p. 174.
96 CP, V. p. 40.

reworking of the source gives the condemnation his own authority, corroborating that of Gildas:

> They avenge, saith he, and they protect; not the innocent, but the guilty: they swear oft, but perjure; they wage War, but civil and unjust War. . .[97]

The turbulent history of post-Roman Britain at large finds condensed expression in the shocking tyrannies to which Gildas had testified.

Furthermore, the De Excidio revealed that these kings had been elected and deposed by the people and Gildas himself indicated that these early tyrants accorded with the people's wickedness.[98] Hence the Britons' lack of religious and civil virtue was doubly obvious. With a view to determining the national character, Milton observes the disastrous consequences when an electorate is unfit to vote:

> Thus furnish'd with judgment, and for manners thus qualifi'd both Priest and Lay, they agree to chuse them several Kings of thir own; as neer as might be, likest themselves.[99]

Milton's interest in Vortigern, evident in the earlier Outlines for British Tragedies, increases with his reading the De Excidio. Vortigern suggests all the wickedness of the unreformed early national character. Milton therefore

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97 CP, V. pp. 174, 176-178.

98 This point took on further importance in view of differing interpretations of English constitutional history. The ancient constitution, from as early as the fifth century, could therefore be shown to prescribe rights of resistance. When Milton later took a greater interest in this prescriptive argument he made use of Gildas's evidence on this point. See below, Chapter 5.

99 CP, V. p. 140.

prefers Gildas's description of his tyranny to Geoffrey's milder view. Translating Gildas's epithet 'superbus faustus tyrannus,' he maintains that Vortigern:

> is decipher'd by truer stories a proud unfortunate Tyrant, and yet of the people much belov'd, because his vices sorted so well with theirs.[100]

Vortigern's story sheds light on the fifth-century Britons, whose history Milton advertises as being especially topical.

Moreover, the failings in the national character also showed in religious backsliding which in turn had aggravated secular corruption. Here too, Milton follows Gildas in associating the Briton's civil corruption with their ecclesiastical problems. Unable to resist false doctrine in the Arian and Pelagian controversies, the British church, according to Gildas, had succumbed to a corrupting worldliness. Milton translates and condenses Gildas's denunciation in an idiom again reminiscent of his anti-prelatical pamphlets:

> Nothing better were the Clergy, but at the same pass or rather worse, then when the Saxons came first in; Unlerned, Unapprehensive, yet impudent; suttle Prowlers, Pastors in Name, but indeed Wolves; intent upon all occasions, not to feed the Flock, but to pamper and well line themselves. . .[101]

The accusations Gildas heaped against the church of his day prove his status as a proto-reformer. Milton moves between Gildas's speech and his own narrative, and between indirect

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100 CP, V. p. 142.
101 CP, V. pp. 174-175.

and direct speech, with a fluency that emphasizes the continuity between the sixth- and the seventeenth-century jeremiads. This change from his earlier, more measured style puts Milton deep in the tradition of anti-Roman and disestablishmentarian polemic that drew on Gildas. He goes a step further, however, by refusing to endorse the Reformation myth of the apostolic purity of the primitive native church. The national character had never shown discipline in religion, even at an early stage. The rhetoric of the elect nation has no reverberations in the History, unless in the intensity of Milton's disappointment with the primitive church.

Gildas's example in the early struggle for reform therefore fires Milton anew and he transforms his original purpose, 'with plain and lightsom brevity, to relate well and orderly things worth the noting, so as may best instruct and benefit them that read.'[102] The didactic element in his historiography gains a new dimension in the third book of the History, an deeper impetus for reform evident in his conclusion:

> we have heard the many miseries and desolations, brought by divine hand on a perverse Nation; driv'n, when nothing else would reform them, out of a fair Country, into a Mountanous and Barren Corner, by Strangers and Pagans. So much more tolerable in the Eye of Heav'n is Infidelity profess't, then Christian Faith and Religion dishonoured by unchristian works.[103]

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102 CP, V. p. 4.
103 CP, V. p. 183.

That the failings in the national character were in due course punished confirms the role of providence. Milton's evident excitement in this book derives from the analogy he draws between the British experience and that of his contemporaries. This analogy matters to him because he expects consistency in the dispensations of ordinary providence, conforming as they should to natural laws.

At this point he finds himself unable to avoid the controversial implications of his historiography. The Digression voices the political issues of the third book in an extreme way. Milton has overcome his own misgivings about the confusion of historical and political writing.[104] It is this view of his contemporaries' failings, and his sense of the continuity in the national character, that leads Milton to reject the secular myth of Arthurian Britain and its ecclesiastical counterpart, the myth of the exemplary British church.

A comparison of Milton on the early period with other historians of the day shows how abnormal his historiography has become. His characterization of the British, and his emphasis on Vortigern as the important figure in the period, contrast with previous narratives, and especially with the ongoing interest in the heroic achievements and imperial

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104 He later expresses these misgivings directly in one of his letters to Henry De Brass, 'Crebras etiam sententias. & judicia de rebus gestis interjecta prolixe nollem, ne, interrupta rerum serie, quod Politici Scriptoris munus est Historicus invadat; qui si in aut conjecturam, sed veritatem potissimum sequitur, suavam profecto partium satagit.' CW, XII. p. 94.

status of Britain under Arthur. Despite his earlier Arthurian interest, Milton omits Arthur from the History except for a cautious discussion and dismissal of the claims made for the British king. He concludes the third book with a pointed reference to his omission:

> Thus omitting Fables, we have the veiw of what with reason can be rely'd on for truth, don in Britain, since the Romans forsook it.[105]

Gildas and Milton's Britons cannot be reconciled with those of the Arthurian tradition. That the Britons failed in their efforts at independence was for Milton a historical fact of the greatest significance, not to be obscured by the Geoffreyan legacy or other legendary traditions. The third book of the History forbids any heroic interpretation of the Arthurian age. The Britons' final flight from the Saxons, Picts and Scots recalls their practice in Roman times of choosing either enslavement or a barbarous refuge in 'Rocks, Hills, and Woods inaccessible.'[106] Milton is unusually impatient with the patriotic myths. This part of the History especially declines any celebration of the national heritage. Instead, Milton appears as a reformer dedicated to the truer understanding of English history, with a historical perspective enhanced by his disillusioned view of his compatriots ancient and modern.

He therefore exposes the shortcomings of the Arthurian myths with particular care. He consistently dismisses the

105 CP, V. p. 183.
106 CP, V. p. 149.

British 'Fables' as subhistorical. He denies Arthur any certain role in the victory at Badon Hill and thus denies Malmesbury's compromise to which so many historians had subscribed.[107] His discussion of the Arthurian question begins with a skeptical disclaimer:

> But who Arthur was, and whether ever any such reign'd in Britain, hath bin doubted heertofore, and may again with good reason.[108]

Nennius appears as the obscure and unreliable authority for Arthur, on whose narrative later additions, notably Geoffrey's, had been based. Despite his respect for Malmesbury, Milton departs from even the De Gestis Regum Anglorum when it follows Nennius's narrative.[109] Milton shows no interest in Malmesbury's popular opinion that it was regrettable that no worthier record of Arthur remained. Instead, he concentrates on the shortcomings of Geoffrey of Monmouth's history, with the implication that Arthur himself can thus be discredited. Restating his preference for early sources, Milton again discounts Geoffrey's stories which were 'utterly unknown to the World, till more then 600 years after the dayes of Arthur,' stories which can be found in 'only that fabulous Book.'[110] The word 'fable' repeatedly carries the full weight of Milton's scorn. He adds a common observation that 'all other Histories were silent, both

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107 CP, V. p. 169.
108 CP, V. p. 164.
109 Malmesbury is among those 'whose credit hath sway'd most with the learneder sort,' CP, V. pp. 164-165.
110 CP, V. pp. 165-166.

Foren and Domestic' on the subject of Arthur's dominion over much of Europe. Wishful thinking, in Milton's view, vitiates the claims made for the British hero. He concludes that there is no place in a serious English history for such stories:

> he who can accept of Legends for good story, may quickly swell a volume with trash, and had need be furnish'd with two only necessaries, leasure, and beleif, whether it be the writer, or he that shall read.[111]

He further questions Arthurian genealogies and their discrepancies.

Milton therefore refutes the Arthurian legends more comprehensively than the less important myths of pre-Roman Britain. He questions the proposed identifications of Arthur's exploits, not the least the victory at Badon Hill. He maintains that 'as we doubted of his parentage, so may we also of his puissance,' and believes that the Saxon successes testify against Arthurian heroics.[112] He adds the traditional complaint that the dates suggested for various Arthurian victories do not fit into any plausible chronological sequence. This holds true for both Arthur's reputed victories in Britain and his alleged imperial exploits. Moreover, Gildas's evidence often exposes the failings of these myths; Milton repeatedly uses this long-standing negative proof. Gildas had not named Arthur as the leader at Badon Hill although he had identified Ambrose for

111 CP, V. p. 166.
112 CP, V. pp. 169-170.

his martial prowess.[113] His testimony that the Britons suffered unremitting internal strife further undermined legends of Arthur's imperial successes. With a vision of British history based on Gildas-- and then Bede and Malmesbury-- Milton satirizes the anachronistic legends:

> Surely Artur much better had made War in old Saxony, to repress thir flowing hither, then to have won kingdoms as far as Russia, scarce able heer to defend his own.[114]

The narrative of the De Excidio provides Milton with a story that 'with reason can be rely'd on for truth,' whereas at the end of his dicussion of Arthur he breaks off 'not furder to contest about such uncertainties.'[115]

Furthermore, Milton's emphasis on Gildas has intrinsically anti-Arthurian connotations, as he pits Gildas's testimony against Geoffrey's stories, the old strategy that Geoffrey himself had sought to preempt. Unlike the many earlier histories that sought to redeem post-Roman Britain from unrelieved depravity, Milton's History largely ignores Arthur and invokes Gildas's denunciation without reserve. Milton's peculiar narrative for the fifth and sixth centuries resulted from his belief in its contemporary significance, compared to which the dispute over Arthur was trivial. Gildas's evidence had supplied him with a perspective on the national character which had immediate applications. These found expression in

113 CP, V. p. 166.
114 CP, V. p. 170.
115 CP, V. pp. 183, 171.

the Digression, and soon after in the Tenure and Eikonoklastes.

In Milton's political development, the Digression points to his hopes for senatorial government by a supreme council.[116] In his artistic progress, his ambivalence about the national character has further implications. His relative diffidence about the natural cause behind the English shortcomings points to his having some misgivings on the subject. The tension between his disappearing sense of the predestined nation and his emerging interest in man's will partially resolves itself in his concept of the national character. A natural rather than a directly divine predestination directs the history of the nation; at the same time, although nature imposes on the will, the will is ultimately free. The idea of a flawed national character is central to Milton's response to the events of the 1640s. He becomes increasingly preoccupied with the elect within the nation, with true Christians, rather than with the elect nation he had proclaimed in Of Reformation and Areopagitica.

Milton's view of the national character also informs The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates. In the Tenure, he maintains that some of his contemporaries had acted 'with fortitude and Heroick vertue'[117] but that most conformed to a worse type, the type he explores in the Digression. The former, 'men of noblest temper,' had often been frustrated by the latter, whose 'sloth and inconstancie' and 'inbred

116 CP, VII. pp. 368-369.
117 CP, III. p. 191.

falshood and wickednes' subvert all efforts at true liberty. Milton has the English experience in mind when he denounces the weakness of the human character: 'most men are apt enough to civill Wars and commotions as a noveltie, and for a flash hot and active,' but are unable to sustain the discipline necessary for liberty. As in the Digression, where he observes 'that libertie sought out of season' is doomed to failure, in the Tenure Milton also reveals his pessimism about the English struggle in the 1640s. They fought for 'causes, whereof they in their rash undertakings were not capable.'[118]

In the Tenure, the example of the Britons has a further, specific importance for Milton's countrymen. The De Excidio had mentioned the deposition of the fifth-century British tyrants and Milton seizes on this as a prescriptive example for the fight against tyranny in his own day. Once more Gildas's antiquity gives his story special authority. Milton can invoke custom and precedent for the limitation of royal sovereignty. The people had been given the right to their land by the departing Romans and they had then elected kings whom they deposed as they saw fit. Since these were 'the first Christian Brittish Kings that ever raign'd heer, since the Romans,' Gildas's evidence could be marshalled against theorists who exalted the original rights of kings above the people. Milton here emphasizes the historical

118 CP, III. p. 192

basis for popular rights as much as their rational justification:

> This is the most fundamental and ancient tenure that any King of England can produce or pretend to; in comparison of which, all other titles and pleas are but of yesterday.[119]

Milton thus trumps the historical arguments of the royalists with the authority of Gildas. He prevents any misconstruction of Gildas's evidence by distinguishing the wickedness of the voters and of the leaders they elected from the fact of their having held elections. Appealing to the authority of 'those primitive Christian times,' Milton provides corresponding examples of Protestant actions against modern tyrants.[120] Years before, Milton had noted Gildas's testimony that kings were not anointed by God, and had contrasted this historical information with popular misconceptions.[121] In the Tenure he puts this reference to Gildas to use, as he would once more in Eikonoklastes where he maintains that it 'is most fals, that all Kings are the Lords Anointed.'[122] Since Milton argues that the tenure of kings and magistrates is irrevocably conditional, he takes advantage of this native historical testimony-- 'domestic and most ancient examples'-- which irrefutably establishes the preeminence of popular sovereignty. In Milton's view, Gildas's evidence settled the historical debate which

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119 CP, III. p. 221.
120 CP, III. pp. 222-227.
121 CP, I. p. 474.
122 CP, III. pp. 221, 586.

reflected the partisan controversy between the sovereign and the constitution. In the Defence, Milton reiterates this historical proof that the English had always had the ultimate sanction of popular rights. He cites Gildas in his arguments 'de jure populi in regem,' and the De Excidio helps him establish that law and ancestral custom determined the English procedure in putting Charles on trial. He notes Gildas's emphasis on due trial and insists that Gildas only condemned the lack of legal procedure-- 'non pro veri examinatione'-- in the Britons' deposition of their kings.[123]

In Eikonoklastes, Milton gives further expression to his opinion of the national character, although the context forbade his being too sweeping in his judgements. He had discovered some cases where the English, later in the Middle Ages, had shown their 'fortitude and love of Freedom' in resisting tyranny. He views contemporary failures in a different light and protests that this

> low dejection and debasement of mind in the people, I must confess I cannot willingly ascribe to the natural disposition of an Englishman.[124]

Although Milton's hopes for England rise after the execution of Charles, the optimism of the Preface to Eikonoklastes also seems a practical requirement for the public rebuttal of Eikon Basilike. Perhaps his very denial-- 'I must confess I cannot willingly ascribe'-- points to his

123 CW, VII. 434, 436.
124 CP, III. p. 344.

continuing interest in a 'natural disposition' among his countrymen. Polemical necessities force Milton to identify England's problems with the influence of particular groups of men: the Laudian churchmen with their Presbyterian successors and the king with his 'Court-vassals.' Emphasizing these sources of general oppression, he slightly alters the focus of the Digression while he preserves his earlier animus against ecclesiastical and civil corruption. Later in Eikonoklastes, and freer of the lenient patriotism needed for his Preface, Milton could afford to be more critical. Having pilloried the royal demands made by the Eikon Basilike, he indicates his lack of confidence in the people's fitness for any enduring liberty:

> after such a faire deliverance as this, with so much fortitude and valour shown against a Tyrant, that people that should seek a King, claiming what this Man claimes, would shew themselves to be by nature slaves.[125]

Perhaps his own fears as well as rhetorical necessity lead Milton thus to hypothesize and generalize. In his charges against church and state, he directly expresses a view he had developed in the History: 'wealth and plenty in a land where Justice raignes not, is no argument of a flourishing State, but of a neerness rather to ruin or commotion.'[126] In the Second Defence he cites Gildas's view that Britain had been 'tyrannorum terra ferax dicta olim,'[127] but

125 CP, III. p. 581.
126 CP, III. p. 438.
127 CW, VIII, p. 8.

contrasts ancient Britain with the present, reformed Britain that had heroically overcome a tyrannical subjection. In the early 1650s, it seemed to Milton that the national character was perhaps not so significant, given the ascendancy of a select cadre of governing men among whom he must have numbered himself.

This optimistic response to the execution of the king and to the new regime proved temporary, and in Milton's later life the pessimism expressed in the History has further manifestations. In particular, the shortcomings in the national character could not easily be reconciled with the heroic poem based on British history that Milton had proposed in the 1630s. For Milton, the political as well as the literary associations of the Spenserian tradition were attractive. He discovered, however, that the early history of Britain revealed some urgent problems that had been ignored, especially the issues raised by Gildas's narrative. The Arthurian legends seemed only to obscure the most important lesson of British history. In Milton's view, the 'natural disposition of an Englishman' should not be glorified as it had been in the patriotic legends. Nor could older heroic styles adequately forge the necessary civil and religious discipline. In Paradise Lost, the traditional paragons of 'mortal prowess' appear as weak analogues to the fallen angels, and there seems little distinction or true virtue in

> what resounds
> In fable or romance of Uther's son
> Begirt with British and Armoric knights.[128]

With reference to the Arthurian tradition, Milton scorns the military preoccupation of previous epics and declares himself 'Not sedulous by nature to indite/ Wars, hitherto the only argument/ Heroic deemed.' As in the History, 'fabled knights' and 'battles feigned' arouse Milton's particular dislike. The English did not need military encouragement. He explains that he prefers the largely untreated but 'better fortitude' of higher Christian virtues, 'of patience and heroic martyrdom.'[129] In Gildas's as much as in Milton's time, the British had failed the test of civil and religious discipline. They had only briefly resisted those who would 'force the spirit of grace itself, and bind/ His consort liberty.'[130]

Nor did Milton view the Saxons any more kindly. Here his views are more elusive, however, as he responded both to his own view of the national character and to applications of Saxon history and the Conquest to political debate in his time. It is to these that the argument now turns.

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128 Paradise Lost, I. 579-581.
129 Paradise Lost, IX. 27-33.
130 Paradise Lost, XII. 525-526.

Chapter V

Milton on the Saxons and the Norman Conquest

The final books of Milton's History cover the period from the Saxon invasions to the Norman Conquest. They sometimes contrast with Milton's other works in the view they present of the Saxons and the Conquest. The origin of this conflict in interpretation can be found in the wealth of works referring to Saxon times on which Milton drew. The history of the early period, with all its obscurities, played an important part in discussions of ecclesiastical and political issues in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was therefore exposed to intensive review, with results that were often merely tendentious but sometimes important in departing from traditional opinion. Even so, that recycling of historical narrative which so colours historiography in the early modern period led to a delay in the assimilation of new scholarship by general histories. The difference between special applications of historical scholarship and the genre of general history partly explains Milton's inconsistency on the Saxons and the Conquest. His political tracts show the intense pressures that contemporary politics made on historiography in this period, whereas the History itself resisted contemporary

revisions of the history of the Saxons and the Conquest. Deeper issues in his intellectual growth, however, lie behind his failure to resolve his views and to make his opinions on England's early history coherent.

The strain on Milton's consistency originated on the one hand in histories written in the preceding century, on the other in historical arguments prevalent in feudal and anti-feudal ideologies in his own day. Study of the Saxon period contributed historical backing for a number of political ideas, with especially vehement debates centring on the nature and significance of the Norman Conquest. Historians could not separate themselves from political issues in narrating the history of this period, even if they wished to avoid partisan bias. Even the 'naive' historians, however, who derived popular narratives from more serious histories, were often ideological in their slant, if unintentionally so.[1] Naive histories might well depend on less ingenuous works such as Daniel's Collection and therefore reflect a biased reading of the Saxon period and the Norman Conquest. Such influences were difficult to avoid. During the writing of the History, however, Milton's political thought was so radical in its disdain for historical justification that there is little political theory implicit in its handling of Saxon and Norman history.

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1 The expression is Professor Skinner's, who maintains that the Conquest 'continued to be written about uncontentiously, in a much more purely historical context,' out of 'an unembattled spirit of inquiry.' Skinner, 'History and Ideology,' p. 154.

Broader concerns, especially with the English national character throughout history, emerge in the History, but narrower political interests are largely missing. Before turning to the peculiarities of the History, however, a fuller description is necessary of the traditions in narratives of the Saxon history and the Norman Conquest, traditions from which Milton borrowed in his polemical tracts but sought to free himself in the History.

A brief review of Milton's studies in British history introduces many important authorities, among whose varying positions Milton developed his own. Milton first read widely in English history in the works of Bede, Malmesbury, Holinshed, Speed, and Stow.[2] These he appears to have studied at the same time. The Commonplace Book reveals that Holinshed especially impressed Milton: there are many references to the Chronicles and Milton often starts new subject headings with entries from that work.[3] Next came Speed, whom Milton appears to have read after Holinshed, and then Stow, to whom Milton seldom refers in later works. He seems to have read Holinshed before Speed, although his

2 Hanford, 'Chronology,' pp. 267-271. He had already read Bede but for the period which followed the Church History he relied on secondary sources, although as we saw above he used Malmesbury early on. After Bede and Malmesbury, Stow seems to be the first English historian Milton cites in the Commonplace Book. He did not long survive in Milton's esteem, however, as his simple moral purpose and stylistic shortcomings showed when read side by side with Holinshed, and especially Speed. The Outlines show Stow's already declining importance. Milton used the more up-to-date Howes edition (1615 or 1631), a black-letter folio, without illustrations or numismatic plates, a less imposing work than those of Holinshed and Speed.

3 Parker, Milton, pp. 841-842.

references to the two, in the Commonplace Book as well as in the Outlines for British Tragedies, indicate how closely they often match. Thus at an early stage Milton's understanding of Saxon history and the Conquest was determined in part by the historical assumptions of the Elizabethan Holinshed, and his Jacobean successor Speed. Holinshed had depended heavily on Polydore Vergil and, with Polydore, on Malmesbury for the history of this period. Of the early sources, which Milton may have read first, he too found William of Malmesbury attractive. Since Holinshed and Speed followed Malmesbury on many matters, the consensus Milton found in these three important narratives seems to have outweighed the conclusions of 'specialist' studies with which he was becoming familiar. Since Tudor times, constitutional questions discussed with reference to history had fuelled research on Saxon government and on the extent to which the Norman Conquest had provided new political structures at the expense of the old. The civil lawyer Sir Thomas Smith, from whose De Republica Anglorum Milton learned about constitutional matters, scarcely hinted at the Saxon basis of English institutions, to which the common lawyers ascribed such importance. But among the other historians he read at this time, Camden and Lambarde adduced a wealth of conflicting evidence about early English institutions and the effect of the Conquest. In the late 1630s and in the 1640s these conflicts were to acquire new importance in political controversy.

Even the earliest historians of the Conquest and the events leading up to that climax had provided reasons for the Norman invasion and discussed its influence on English life. In choosing William of Malmesbury as his chief source for the period Milton found a writer unusually balanced in his views on the old order and the new. Malmesbury's mixed parentage and upbringing, which Malmesbury himself invoked to explain his perspective,[4] led to a concern for many Saxon traditions, especially ecclesiastical ones, that coexists with a high regard for the Conqueror and Norman culture. William of Jumièges, used by Simeon of Durham and Henry of Huntingdon, provided a more anti-Saxon narrative, whereas the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Florence of Worcester tell the story in favour of the English. Perhaps influenced by Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis also combined these patriotic differences. He found the English virtuous in the distant past but, needing to commend the Conquest, also saw them in decline after the Danish incursions and in need of reform.[5] When constitutional questions highlighted contending claims for the Saxons and their Norman conquerors, these sources gained further significance.

In this respect William of Malmesbury also deeply influences Milton's History. William's contribution to the shaping of Milton's thought has been underestimated. In collecting his history 'out of the Antientest and best

4 William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum, in Savile, Rerum Anglicarum, p. 53.
5 Antonia Gransden, Historical Writing in England c.550-c.1307 (1974), pp. 92-97, 147, 153, 158-159.

Authors thereof,' Milton found William's the most important testimony outside of the largely contemporary narratives of Gildas, Bede, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. He used William more extensively than any of these sources. Relying on the narrative of the Gesta Regum, complemented by Bede and the chroniclers' narratives, and Simeon of Durham for the north, Milton wrote the history from the Saxon invasions to the Norman Conquest in a style not dissimilar from that of his five-century-old source.

Milton's work reflects the status of the Gesta during these centuries. Standing with Bede's History as the chief narrative history of England written during the Middle Ages, the Gesta further attracts Milton by its stylistic merits. In sorting through the welter of annals and chronologies available to the student of Saxon history through the Conquest, Milton finds William's lucid narrative an irresistible base from which chronological comparisons and references to other sources could be made without too much confusion. William is excepted from Milton's low opinion of medieval historians as a group. With Matthew of Paris, 'the best of our Historians,'[6] he strikes Milton as an unusually valuable source. Other 'monks and mechanicks' had unskilfully related the doings of their countrymen, dubious in both civil and ecclesiastical matters. William, however, shows by his style and his organization of his material that he was neither barbarous nor injudicious, thus satisfying

6 CP, III. p. 219.

Milton's chief criteria in following sources.[7] Moreover, his general history anticipated the need felt by sixteenth-century historians, and therefore provided them with a convenient platform for their narratives of early English history. Since sixteenth and early seventeenth-century historians so often recycled the same sources, and especially Malmesbury, his influence came to be much reinforced by repetition.

At the same time, however, history and politics were interacting with remarkable effects. While general histories contributed greatly to theories of church and state, apologists for specific causes greatly advanced historical scholarship in searching for evidence to support their arguments. A brief survey of this tradition, especially of influential sixteenth-century histories, indicates the religious and political pressures on the history of the Saxons and the Norman Conquest. For the purposes of this argument, two loose traditions may be distinguished among the relevant English Renaissance histories, both of which contribute to Milton's works. First there is that of Polydore Vergil, Holinshed, Speed, and others, which may be termed the conservative tradition with respect to sources, insofar as it shows only a passing interest in sixteenth-century advances in Saxon studies.[8] The second tradition may be loosely described as the

7 CP, V. 127-128; I. p. 812.
8 This is not to imply that these historians, especially Polydore who worked before the growth of Saxon studies, did not much advance the historiography of their day.

Saxonist one, and includes Lambarde, Verstegan, Camden, Selden and Spelman, the many proponents of the ancient constitution, and others who lauded the achievement and legacy of the Saxon period.

An obvious point of difference between the traditions was the degree to which earlier English customs survived the Norman Conquest. In the seventeenth century especially, the increasing popularity of the Saxons led to growing skepticism about the importance of the Conquest.[9] The chief antiquaries in the first half of the seventeenth century, such as Camden, Cotton, Spelman, and Selden, provide differing combinations of the traditions. At the same time, Daniel and a number of popular historians asserted, with varying degrees of ideological purpose, that the Conquest had put an end to Saxon institutions and society.

Given these general categories, Milton's History of Britain appears to be written from the 'conservative' position on sources, whereas his view of the Saxon period in the political tracts belongs to a more 'Saxonist' stance. This inconsistency underlines the divergence in Milton's political and historiographical ideals in the 1640s and 1650s. The historical contest between the two perspectives provides the basis of this chapter.

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9 The important work behind many recent studies is J. G. A. Pocock's The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law (Cambridge: 1957).

i. The historical and political background.

Among the general histories which made much use of Malmesbury, Polydore Vergil's Anglicae Historiae exercised a wide and long-lasting influence. Milton only refers to Polydore once in the History, but the notes in his Commelin edition of Gildas suggest that he had read Polydore closely.[10] As well as fostering the study of Gildas, Polydore had borrowed heavily from Malmesbury for his history of the Saxon period.[11] Milton must have found the Italian's work a helpful guide, perhaps too helpful to be fully acknowledged. Moreover, Polydore had further influence through Holinshed and Speed, who were crucial in Milton's early reading of English history. These historians often depended on the Anglicae Historiae, which was little acknowledged for its vital contribution.[12] They shared the ground which Polydore had broken in his use of classical sources; Speed especially shows that he understood the affairs of Roman better than those of Saxon Britain.[13] This small interest in the Saxons derived in part from the assumption that the Conquest spelt a beginning to English history proper, or at least to traditions of kingship that

10 He cites Polydore twice for readings of specific words, CW, XVIII. pp. 328-329.
11 D. Hay, Polydore Vergil (Oxford: 1952), pp. 86, 95-97.
12 D. Hay, Polydore Vergil, pp. 157-166.
13 Sharpe, Sir Robert Cotton (Oxford: 1979), p. 20; Edmund Bolton praised this feature of Speed's work in Hypercritica, Spingarn (ed.), Critical Essays, I. p. 98.

were held to have remained unbroken. Polydore believed that the Conquest led to a permanent change in English institutions: William established Chancery, for instance, and had the laws written in the Norman tongue. Polydore maintained that:

> illas leges ipsi etiam Normani reges parum iustas esse non negabant: nam quoties Gulielmus Rufus, item Henricus, huius Gulielmi filii, benevolentiam populi sibi conciliandam putabant, uti alibi planum faciemus, primum omnium pollicebantur paternis antiquatis legibus, se meliores laturos, restituroscue eas, quas divus Edouardus utendas decrevisset.[14]

The Norman legacy remained undisturbed in Polydore's view, and in that of Holinshed, and then of Milles and of Speed. On the question of the Conqueror's claim to sovereignty, they unhesitatingly affirmed that William ruled, not through Edward the Confessor's provision, but by 'the law of armes and plaine conquest, than the which (as he [William] supposed) there could be no better title.'[15] Magna Carta did not feature as any especially prominent event, and

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14 Polydore, Anglicae Historiae (Basel: 1557), p. 155. In Holinshed's Chronicles this becomes: 'the Norman kings themselves would confesse, that the lawes devised and made by the Conqueror were not verie equall; insomuch that William Rufus and Henrie the sonnes of the Conqueror would at all times, when they sought to purchase the peoples favor, promise to abolish the lawes ordeined by their father, establish other more equall, and restore those which were used in S. Edwards daies.' Holinshed, Chronicles (1807), II. pp. 13-14.

15 Holinshed, Chronicles, II. p. 24; Thomas Milles, The Catalogue of Honor (1610), pp. 56-57 (2nd pag.); John Speed, The Historie of Great Britaine (third ed. 1632), pp. 423-424.

certainly could not be seen as an interruption of the legacy of sovereignty.

Although Polydore could refer to a number of sources for this period, he usually compared them for chronological and narrative purposes rather than for a more analytic interpretation of the past. He made little effort, for instance, to describe Saxon political institutions, or of course to seek the Saxon legacy in Norman England. His successors agreed with his description of the Conquest as the end of Saxon society, as well as with his acceptance of the Normans' rights of conquest, primitive and absolute. Even the later Speed does not appear to have had any more specific political purpose in reiterating Polydore's views.[16] In these histories, a simpler view of the Conquest as a drastic change persisted, one in which the conqueror substituted Norman practice, especially feudal tenures, in place of ancient Saxon laws and institutions. The histories of Holinshed and Speed were often reprinted and enjoyed wide influence, as Milton's Commonplace Book shows.

After the Reformation, however, voices were raised against Polydore's history itself. Ecclesiastical writers denounced the work of the Italian, who already had excited the resentment of defenders of the British legends. John

16 Speed merely observes the constant alteration in human affairs. Cotton assisted Speed's work on The Historie of Great Britaine, H. Ellis (ed.), Original Letters of Eminent Literary Men, Camden Society, XXIII (1843), pp. 108-113, and Speed's 'simple' view of the Conquest may have been confirmed by Cotton's views on Norman innovations, qv. Sharpe, Cotton, pp. 23-24.

Bale led the reformers' assault, and inveighed against his ignomious treatment of the true Christian religion in England:

> [Polydore] hath in this point deformed his writings greatly, polluting our English Chronicles most shamefully with his Romish lies and other Italish beggarys. Battles hath he described there at large with no small discommendings of some princes which were godly; but the privy packing of prelates, and crafty conveyance of the spirituality, hath he in every place almost full properly passed over.[17]

The bishops' influence, in Bale's view, had vitiated their friend Polydore's history. Bale noted that Polydore had been a collector of Peter's Pence-- tribute the reformer considered a mark of bondage-- and much preferred Matthew of Paris, whom Parker later published.[18] In stark contrast to Polydore, Matthew had honestly described papal 'tyranny and treachery,' not least the 'intolerable sums of money the pope's ministers have carried out of this realm.'[19]

Antiquarian research further evolved from the reformers' need for a new perspective on the history of the English church and for a different hagiography. Bale, for instance, believed that given a revised version of the English chronicles-- as they stood they were 'blasphemous trifles'-- this native history would be 'next the sacred scripture of the Bible' as a text for general study.[20] In

17 Bale, Select Works, p. 8.
18 Bale, Select Works, pp. 8, 529. For Polydore's deputy collectorship see Hay, Polydore Vergil, pp. 2-12.
19 Jewel, Works, IV. p. 1079.
20 Bale, Select Works, p. 8.

swelling editions, John Foxe sought to answer the demand for a reformed church history. He too thought Polydore slandered Wycliffe, and he maintained that Polydore had burned many English chronicles.[21] Archbishop Parker mentioned this 'Italian trick' in a letter to Matthias Flacius Illyricus, chief of the Magdeburg Centuriators:

> when they were in possession of monuments of this kind, which undermined the greatest part of their doctrine, they committed some good authors to the flames, as if they envied the world the perusal of them.[22]

Thus the lamented 'dispersion and loss of books' at the Dissolution was said to have a wicked, papist counterpart in which Polydore assisted, and so 'this fantastic process of defamation' took its course.[23]

The churchmen themselves played a crucial role in fostering historical study of the Saxon period, and used their scholarship in the ecclesiastical controversies of the day. Leland mentions such work beginning under Henry VIII.[24] The program of research and publication under

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21 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, II. pp. 799-800, 918; V. p. 279.
22 H. Robinson (ed.), Zurich Letters (1842-1845), II. p. 80.
23 Hay, Polydore Vergil, pp. 159-160. Cf. Andrew Marvell, The Poems and Letters, ed. H. M. Margoliouth (Oxford: 3rd ed., 1971), I. p. 305.
24 Kendrick, British Antiquity, p. 115.

Archbishop Parker rapidly advanced Anglo-Saxon studies.[25] In Stuart times, Ussher's magisterial De Primordiis (1639) provided a milestone in the progress of such studies. Spelman too divided his studies between the ecclesiastical and the secular history of the early period. In endowing a Cambridge chair he specified that its occupant combine study of the Saxons with that of the primitive native church.[26] Milton himself, in Of Reformation, drew attention to what he perceived as an excess of antiquarian zeal on the part of the churchmen and of Camden, whom he considered their

25 E. N. Adams, Old English Scholarship in England from 1566-1800 (New Haven: 1917), pp. 11-23; E. C. Pearce, 'Matthew Parker,' The Library, 4th Series VI (1925), pp. 209-228; Robin Flower, 'Laurence Nowell and the Discovery of England in Tudor Times,' Proceedings of the British Academy, XXI (1935), pp. 47-73; J. A. W. Bennett, 'The History of Old English and Old Norse Studies in England from the Time of Francis Junius to the End of the Eighteenth Century,' Diss. Oxford 1938, pp. 1-31; C. E. Wright, 'The Dispersal of the Monastic Libraries and the Beginnings of Saxon Studies,' Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society, I (1951), pp. 208-237; John Bromwich, 'The First Book Printed in Anglo-Saxon Types,' Trans. Cam. Biblio. Soc., III (1959-1963), pp. 265-291; Bruce Dickins 'The Making of the Parker Library,' Trans. Cam. Biblio. Soc., VI (1972), pp. 19-34; R. E. Buckalew, 'Nowell, Lambarde, and Leland: The Significance of Laurence Nowell's Transcript of Aelfric's Grammar and Glossary,' in Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: The First Three Centuries, eds. C. T. Berkhout and M. McC. Gatch (Boston: 1982), pp. 19-50; T. H. Leinbaugh, 'Aelfric's Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Pascae: Anglican Polemic in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,' in Berkhout, Anglo-Saxon Scholarship, pp. 51-68.

26 Ellis, ed., Letters, pp. 154-155. A century later, George Hickes, like his fellow researchers Elstob and Fortescue-Aland, upheld this long-standing connection between the reformers' desire for historical justification and the duties of the Saxon scholar: 'I know not any work an antiquary can do more serviceable to the Church than this, which will show the faith and other chief doctrines of the English-Saxon Church to be the same as ours, and perfectly answer that never ending question: "Where was your church before Luther?"' D. C. Douglas, English Scholars, 1660-1730 (1951), p. 19.

servant.[27] Nonetheless, in his own historical writing he resorted to a preponderance of sources published under the sponsorship of Parker-- chiefly of prethirteenth-century writers who provided material untainted by later, more fully developed papal claims. The times of William Rufus and King John had occasioned fierce attacks on royal and papal prerogative; Malmesbury, Huntingdon, and Matthew Paris provided noteworthy histories that described an England originally free from imperial encroachment.[28] Editions of Bede, Gildas, and Asser helped establish that before the Conquest England had been a nation with significant religious traditions.

The example of the Saxons thus supplied a historical backdrop for arguments favouring the independence of the native church; Foxe, for example, took every opportunity to note that 'causes both temporal and spiritual appertained then to the king's right (the false pretended usurpation of the bishop of Rome notwithstanding).'[29] The reformers were also grateful to find early versions of the bible in the vernacular; Tyndale himself recalled 'how that King

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27 CP, I. p. 541.

28 The later Matthew Paris, following Roger of Wendover, provided outright attacks on papal and royal interference in monastic life. 'Matthew's panacea for the ills of his times was to limit royal and papal power.' A. Gransden, Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307 (1974), p. 371.

29 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, II. pp. 47, 38, 44, 84; also Bale, Select Works, p. 447. Hence the independence of William the Conqueror himself was asserted-- Foxe, among other, emphasized William's claim to be 'the vicar of the Highest King,' Acts and Monuments, II. p. 89.; it seemed especially important to concede as little as possible to Rome at this critical historical juncture.

Adelstone caused the holy scripture to be translated into the tongue that then was in England, and how the prelates exhorted him thereto.'[30] Foxe refined this idea, from the reformer's viewpoint, by maintaining that this translation had been made from the Hebrew. In this vein, Parker fostered the publication of editions of Aelfric, Alfred's translation of the Cura Pastoralis, and the Anglo-Saxon versions of the gospels and of the Psalter. Alfred especially emerged as a paragon of piety and learning-- Foxe thought he deserved some grander treatment[31]-- as the reformers seized on Malmesbury's acount of the Saxon king's translation of the Psalter and other religious works. Jewel cited Caedmon's translations and, among other such works, also mentioned Alfred's translations and Adelstan's commission of an English Bible. William Fulke believed that 'the English Saxons allowed the Scriptures to be read of the people in the Saxon tongue,' and that with the decay of Latin the Saxons had resorted to their vernacular for church practice.[32] And a generation later, William Whitaker still marshalled the array of historical examples Jewel had supplied in a chapter 'wherein the arguments of our adversaries against vernacular versions are refuted.'[33] This independence of the Saxon church was also evident in doctrinal matters such as transubstantiation. Foxe and

30 Tyndale, Works, p. 149.
31 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, II. p. 21.
32 Fulke, Answers, p. 22.
33 William Whitaker, A Disputation on Holy Scripture, ed. W. Fitzgerald (Cambridge: 1849), p. 211.

Fulke, for example were swift to point out that this corrupt doctrine had not besmirched the Saxons' faith.[34]

Crucially, then, the Norman Conquest therefore took on added significance as ecclesiastical historians looked to discover the origins of the Roman tyranny over the English church. From the outset, Tyndale had been alert to the rich vein of evidence in Matthew Paris attesting to papal designs on England. In particular, Tyndale observed that the Norman success owed much to the pope's support since 'pope Alexander sent duke William a banner, to go and conquer England, and clean remission unto whosoever would follow the banner, and go with king William.'[35] Tyndale saw this as Matthew Paris had seen it: the Conquest allowed increased papal influence, beginning England's descent to the depths reached under King John. Foxe also put all this on a fuller, more apocalyptic footing, and worked the Conquest into his eschatological schedule. He disliked the Saxons, and held that their violence against the Britons, especially the Bangor monks, had led to their later providential punishment.[36] Despite the religious zeal of many Saxon kings, ignorance and superstition, unchecked by the clergy, led to their downfall.[37] In all, this was 'the declining

34 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, II. p, 49; Fulke, Answers, pp. 20-21. See also Leinbaugh, 'Aelfric's Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Pascae,' in Berkhout, Anglo-Saxon Scholarship.
35 Tyndale, The Practice of Prelates, II. p. 294. He believed that the justification for Robert's exile had probably been suppressed in the Polychronicon.
36 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, II. p. 13.
37 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, II. pp. 52, 102.

time of the church, and of true religion; preparing the way to Antichrist, which not long after followed.'[38] The third age of the church, in this millenarian reckoning, began around 1000 A.D. when corruption entered the church and began to worsen. With Hildebrand's succession, the papacy took on a darker colour still. Foxe noted Pope Alexander's support for William.[39] In a passage added to the posthumous edition of 1596, the Conqueror was given charge of his church but the way was paved to future evils:

> Duke William (now king) having assumed unto himself the absolute authority royal endeavoured to establish a form of government both in the church and commonwealth answerable to his own mind. . .[40]

The Conquest was a decisive break: it 'altered the whole realm.' In particular, it transformed the church as Norman and foreign bishops and clergy supplanted their English counterparts. As the third age continued, this foreign interference proved destructive for English religion, and thus for religion at large. Holinshed and Speed repeated this report of papal aggression, Speed noting that the papal 'See was ever glad to interest it selfe in disposing of Crownes.'[41]

Thomas Fuller therefore expressed received opinion when he observed that the Conquest brought 'manifest Change of

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38 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, I. pp. 385-386.
39 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, II. p. 91.
40 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, II. pp. 106-108.
41 Holinshed, Chronicles (1577), p. 285 (2nd pag.); Speed, Historie (1623), p. 422.

Religion, from what formerly was publickly professed in England.' Despite some failings in the Saxon church, it had been fundamentally sound. The Conquest had been adorned with the papal banner, however, and the Conqueror further eased his success by using Roman authority 'to sweeten the rank savor of his coming in by the sword, in the nostrils of religious men.' Having lent support to William, the pope sought further advantages which William at least frustrated. Later English kings were weaker.[42]

Church historians, therefore, provided a widely read description of the Conquest as a calamitous event. Religious ends shaped their view, an important and largely unstudied pressure on secular historians, quite different from that often associated with sixteenth and seventeenth-century discussions of the Conquest. The richness and bulk of ecclesiastical history necessarily influenced other histories. Before later applications of the Conquest to political questions, the church histories provided a crucial and widely-held perception of the Saxons and the Normans. This was, moreover, available to a wider range of readers, especially readers with strong religious leanings, than many of the secular histories. Innocent perhaps of other implications of the Conquest for politics and law, the church histories were nonetheless crucial for attitudes to that climacteric event. In the sixteenth century, Foxe's

42 Thomas Fuller, The Church-History of Britain (1655), 3rd bk., pp. 2-3. I have seen a copy of Peter Heylyn, A Help to English History (1671 ed.), with seventeenth-century annotations on papal influence after the Conquest. Blackwell's Rare Books, Catalogue A 74 # 397.

reference to 'innovations in laws, coins, and possessions' seems unconcerned with the political implications of conquest theory.[43] By 1655, however, Fuller was quick to sidestep this contentious subject: 'what Impression the Norman Victories made on the State, let Politicians observe, what change it produced in the Laws, we leave to the Learned of that Faculty to prosecute.'[44]

At the same time, church-sponsored Saxon studies encouraged the search for continuities between the early and modern English church. As these studies matured, they covered further aspects of Saxon history. The early Germanic languages were now better understood and a number of scholars learned Anglo-Saxon. This interest in the Saxons slowly eclipsed the sixteenth-century preference for the mythic Britons.[45] It also eclipsed the study of Britain as a Roman province which had played such a predominant role in antiquarian research and in histories such as Polydore's. Among the works from this period which Milton read in his first burst of historical study, Lambarde's Archion provided a concise review of his early research into Anglo-Saxon law and institutions. Lambarde held that the Conquest had not affected the basic laws and customs of England, and observed that Polydore's 'Ignorance in the Saxon' disqualified him as

43 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, II. p. 107.
44 Fuller, Church-History, 2nd bk. p. 149. Fuller's introduction to 'the Popes first usurpation of the Crown of England' drew on Sir John Davies' Irish Reports.
45 Kendrick, British Antiquity, pp. 99-133.

an English historian.[46] In his Perambulation of Kent (1576), Lambarde avoided the antiquaries' preoccupation with Roman Britain, preferring instead to expound on England's Saxon heritage.[47] Lambarde had assisted with the publication of the Anglo-Saxon Laws in 1568, contributing to the prominence of these laws in later studies of the Saxon period.[48] Lambarde deserves treatment outside the common law tradition because of his wider interest in the Saxon world. It should be remembered that he also provided an alternative defence of Chancery by discovering its origins, along with those of other courts, in the Heptarchy.[49] He was deeply involved with Chancery and reforms instigated by Egerton.

The patriotic element in such study of the Saxons is especially evident in Richard Verstegan's positive indifference to Roman Britain in his popular Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities concerning the most Noble and Renowned English Nation (1605). Verstegan's unbounded love for the Saxons led him to glorify James' Saxon lineage-- 'Your Majestie is descended of the chiefest

46 William Lambarde, Archion (1635 [but written in the previous century]), p. 9; R. M. Warnicke, William Lambarde: Elizabethan Antiquary 1536-1601 (1973), p. 27.
47 Lambarde's Perambulation (1576) begins with 'the exposition of this Map of the English Heptarchie' which faces the first page. He then provides only a one-page sketch of history up to the Saxons (pp. 1-2). His failure to be impressed with Stonehenge similarly reflects his indifference to the British part in England's past, see Warnicke, Lambarde, p. 27.
48 Milton probably knew these in the composite edition by Abraham Wheloc, Archaionomia (1644), sponsored by Spelman.
49 Warnicke, Lambarde, pp. 84-102.

blood royall of our ancient English-Saxon kings'-- much as Cotton had done.[50] This defence of the succession complemented more sophisticated claims to sovereignty, but superceded simpler celebrations of James' British origins. Such effusions reflect the growing admiration for the Saxons, an admiration which gloried in the English inheritance of Germanic virtues. With Protestant zeal, Verstegan stressed the contrast between virtuous, freedom-loving Saxons and corrupt, servile Romans. At the same time, he downplayed the Conquest lest the Norman invaders be seen to have reinstituted Latin culture, insisting that the Normans had contributed little to English stock, and that in any case the Normans too were originally of German stock.[51]

On this basis, a native northern tradition in religion and society could be proposed as the common force shaping the institutions of Reformed Europe. Camden too showed an unabashed pride in the Saxons in Remains Concerning Britain (1607), in which the genial patriotism of Britannia was given freer expression. In Remains, Camden exalted the German ancestry of the English much as Verstegan had done. Associating Saxon fortitude with contemporary German glory, he applauded the influence of these 'valiant' peoples, 'who by God's wonderfull providence were transplanted hither out of Germanie.' The providential aspect is explained by the

50 Richard Verstegan, A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence (1605), sig. *2[r]. Cotton's 'A Discourse of ye Descent of the K's Mty from the Saxons' led to his knighthood, Sharpe, Sir Robert Cotton, p. 115.
51 Verstegan, Restitution, p. 187.

English gift for piety; they made extraordinary 'progresse in the Christian profession both of faith and works,' and 'foure Englishmen have converted to Christianitie eight Nations of Europe.'[52] This change of emphasis is writ large in the successive enlargements of Camden's Britannia. These reflect his increasing esteem for Anglo-Saxon culture.[53]

This interest in the Saxons received much support from long-standing traditions in common law studies, which emphasized the continuity and immemorial origins of the common law. The common lawyers too found much cause to admire the Saxons and they believed the Conquest to have had little influence on basic English institutions. They therefore took a dim view of Polydore and others who saw a dramatic change in the laws at the Conquest. By denying the impact of the Conquest they defused the rival civil lawyers' claim that the common law had been a Norman imposition, and hence of modest antiquity and prestige. Their defence of the ancient constitution had important political repercussions. It gave political impetus to discussions of the Conquest, especially as the contest for jurisdiction

52 Camden, Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britaine (1605), pp. 9-11.

53 Camden added to each edition of the Britannia: 8° 1586, 1587 (adds Anglo-Saxon alphabet), 1590; 4° 1594, 1600 (adds numismatic plates); fo. 1607 (trans Philemon Holland, 1610). Camden also advocated more exact etymological methods, Sharpe, Cotton, pp. 21-23.

warmed and James's support for the civilians encouraged their reciprocal support of his absolutist claims.[54]

In the fifteenth century, Sir John Fortescue had sought to put the value of the common law beyond question, especially in contrast to imperial law as practised on the Continent. In his influential De Laudibus Legum Angliae, he esteemed the common law in part because of its ancient origin. He was convinced that despite repeated conquests, 'in all the times of these several nations & of their kings, this realme was stil ruled with the selfe same customes, that it is now governed withall.'[55] Fortescue did not dispute the right of conquest itself. Instead he played it down by making it serve the common law: English law had remained unchanged, and therefore had been authorized, by successive kings who 'by the sword, only possessing the realme of England, might by the like power & authority have extinguished the Lawes thereof.'[56] This historical argument contributed to Fortescue's larger theme, that the English king had a 'politic' sovereignty more restrained than the absolute power of his continental counterparts. The common law, however, which operated the restraint, should not be replaced by the king, despite its limitations on his sovereignty.[57] Fortescue's Prince also has to be taught

54 Qv. G. W. Thomas, 'James I, Equity and Lord Keeper John Williams,' English Historical Review XCI (1976), pp. 506-528, especially pp. 522-525 for royal animosity against common lawyers.
55 Sir John Fortescue, De Laudibus Legum Angliae, annotated by John Selden (1616), f.38^{v}.
56 Fortescue, De Laudibus, f. 39^{r}.
57 Fortescue, De Laudibus, ff. 25^{r}-27^{v}.

that the protection of property is crucial to proper kingship.[58] Here the limitations on the English monarch, as spelt out by the common law, safeguard property. On the other hand, absolutism, associated with civilian ideas of sovereignty, is seen to jeopardize the property of the subject. The anomalous feature, from the perspective of later common lawyers, is Fortescue's apparent concession to rights of conquest (which in his historical argument, buttress the supremacy of the common law). The later emphasis on the ancient constitution shied from any concessions to the Conqueror which might resurface in the feudal ideology of English absolutism. Any breach might have admitted arbitrary sovereignty, on which basis later kings could revoke what William and his successors had granted. The common lawyers therefore looked with a cold eye on suggestions that the conquest transformed English society.[59] The classic if extreme statement of the common law position came from Sir Edward Coke. He asserted that the Conquest was no conquest. Instead, he maintained, the Normans had fulfilled by trial of combat their valid claim to the succession. The common lawyers refused to accept that there had been any interruption in the law or in

58 Fortescue, De Laudibus, f. 34^{r}.

59 They left their professional fold on some occasions however: 'The most important and most drastic use of civil law principles is found in the assertion by Davies and other contemporary jurists of an English title to Ireland by right of conquest,' H. S. Pawlisch, 'Sir John Davies, the Ancient Constitution, and Civil Law,' Historical Journal, XXIII (1980), p. 696.

England's constitutional history.[60] Despite the Normans, English law remained untainted by civil and canon law, nor had the newcomers imposed any alien form of feudal law. Coke himself did not idealize the Saxons as beneficent lawgiving conquerors.[61] In his view, the Saxons, like the Normans, merely took over earlier natives' customary law. The common law had authority because it had lasted from time immemorial. The Conqueror's assent to it was unimportant.[62] The origins of the 'Whig' historians' dismissal of the Conquest lie in this defence of the unbroken survival of the immemorial common law.[63]

But the common law view could not remain isolated. Problems in the law and the movement for its reform led common as well as civil lawyers to broaden their interest and less parochially to have recourse to alternative discussions of the law. Not all common lawyers shared Coke's distaste for civil law, and even Coke referred to civilian texts, of which he had a good selction in his library. Likewise Sir John Davies, who has been cited as having an exemplary 'common law mind' used civil and canon

60 This view affected even the less partisan Spelman who investigated feudal tenures with such care, Pocock, Ancient Constitution, pp. 105, 112.
61 This and similar distinctions go unobserved in the otherwise useful list of references assembled by S. L. Kliger, The Goths in England (Cambridge, Mass.: 1952), qv. Pocock, Ancient Constitution, pp. 56, 67. Fortescue and Coke's tenuous claim on British prehistory was commonly ignored, however, and for most purposes the ancient meant the Saxon constitution (inconsistent as this may have seemed for arguments against the right of conquest).
62 Pocock, Ancient Constitution, p. 126.
63 Herbert Butterfield, The Englishman and His History, (Cambridge: 1944); Pocock, Ancient Constitution, pp. 30-69.

law in his administration of Ireland, not least the civilians' conquest theory. Davies found the Conquest a dividing line. He displayed a heterogenous interest in the combination of custom and equity, in which royal prerogative was given greater sway than in the traditional exposition of custom.[64]

Cotton also knew that the Conquest was the origin of feudal tenures. He nonetheless came to maintain, as the struggle for prerogative came to a head in the late 1620s, that the antiquity of parliament was part and parcel of its vital role in advising the king. In one tract, he traced the origin of parliament to Saxon and pre-Saxon times, and professed:

> The beginninge of wch manner of consultacon. . . how cann I derive it from any other then from that wch the Germaine and Englishe nation did sett their first foote in this land.[65]

Thus the Saxon inheritance underpinned the claims for parliamentary prestige of Sir John Eliot which led to 'the sad breaking of that Parliament.'[66]

John Selden's annotations on Fortescue, however, indicate how exposed this view of the Saxons remained. Much the longest of his annotations is his discussion of Fortescue's historical premises. Unimpressed by invocations

64 Pawlisch, 'Sir John Davies,' pp. 689-702.
65 Quoted in Sharpe, Cotton, 232n.
66 Milton, Sonnet X, 'To the Lady Margaret Ley,' l. 5.

of antiquity-- their origins in nature meant 'all laws in generall are originally equally ancient'-- Selden questioned the extreme position of Fortescue and Coke on the ancient laws. Selden believed it axiomatic that 'the Saxons made a mixture of the British customes with their own; the Danes with old British, the Saxon and their own; and the Normans the like.' He knew that the Conqueror, in accepting St. Edward's Laws, had mixed them with 'divers Norman customes.'[67] In his early works, Selden reveals his perception of 'the essentially discontinuous character of English history, and the absence of any "ancient constitution".'[68] His sense of the gradual development of English law shows the historical sophistication that the common lawyers had lacked, and that the French legal humanists provided for any English historian who adopted their techniques.[69] It also shows the threat that the

67 In their day too the Romans had of course imposed their laws on Britain, Fortescue, De Laudibus, pp. 7-10 (Selden's notes are separately paginated).

68 Richard Tuck, '"The Ancient Law of Freedom": John Selden and the Civil War,' in J. Morrill, ed., Reactions to the English Civil War: 1642-1649 (1982), p. 139. For a longer analysis, see P. Christianson, 'Young John Selden and the Ancient Constitution,' Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, CXXVIII (1981), 271-315.

69 Pocock, Ancient Constitution, remains the chief analysis of this transfer of historical method, see also J. H. M. Salmon, The French Religious Wars and English Political Thought (Oxford: 1959); J. H. Franklin, Jean Bodin and the Sixteenth-Century Revolution in the Methodology of Law and History (New York: 1963); D. R. Kelley, Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship (New York: 1970); G. Huppert, The Idea of Perfect History: Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France (Urbana: 1970); D. Woolf, 'Change and Continuity in English Historical Writing, ca. 1590-1640,' Diss. Oxford 1983.

common-law denial of the Conquest faced from the traditional account of that event.

At the same time, a strong current of opposed thought was establishing itself in legal and political history, based on civil law ideas of conquest and sovereignty. These derived in part from Polydore's description in civilian terms of the Conquest and feudal law. A critique of the ancient constitution more hostile than Selden's developed from these civilian ideas on the Conquest. In this connection, Polydore's work had further important consequences because of his humanist dislike for any vernacular harshness that might impede his Latin narrative.[70] In providing Latin substitutes for English terms, especially in applying the terms dominus and fructuarius to describe the feudal tenures between the Conqueror and his subjects, Polydore had opened the interpretation of the Conquest to some influential applications of civilian and humanistic legal distinctions.[71] The discussion of the feudal tenures in such terms encouraged some absolutist readings of English history by later political theorists such as Bodin and Craig.

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70 Hay, Polydore Vergil, pp. 123-128.

71 For the civilians' conquest theory, and that of the pamphlets in the 1640s, this chapter is much indebted to Martin Dzelzainis, 'The Ideological Background to Milton's History of Britain' Diss. Cambridge 1983. The author has generously equipped me with a copy of this work; his argument on seventeenth-century ideas of property and conquest is soon to appear as The Ideological Origins of the English Revolution (Cambridge).

Owing in part to his references to Polydore, Bodin deeply influenced English ideas about the Conquest and its political significance. His theory of sovereignty easily introduced itself to English historiography through his interpretation of the civilian terms for Conquest, which Polydore too had used. He found the origins of kingship in conquest rather than election and elevated royal sovereignty accordingly. Sovereignty in England, therefore, derived from William the Conqueror. It devolved to the people only secondarily in an arbitrary and retractable concession of royal dominion. His description of the Conquest recalls Polydore's narrative:

> we reade of England, which the Saxons conquered from the antient Brittains, who were expelled, and their enemies tooke possession. After the Saxons the Danes entred, who were lords of it for the most part: then William the Conqueror by the meanes of one only victorie became absolute lord and tooke possession thereof.[72]

On the historical side, Bodin saw William enjoying rights of conquest which were transmuted in the next generation to a hereditary right of succession. He saw these rights as an outcome of general consent 'that that which is gotten by just warre should bee the conquerours owne.'[73] Bodin's more complex idea of sovereignty, however, limited the

72 Jean Bodin, The Sixe Bookes of a Commonweale, trans. Richard Knolles (1606), pp. 600-601.
73 Bodin, Sixe Bookes, p. 203. This was also a commonplace in seventeenth-century civil law, D. Sutherland, 'Conquest and Law,' Studia Gratiana, XV (1972), p. 35.

'possession' enjoyed by the Conqueror. Distinguishing between dominium directum and dominium utile, Bodin allowed the subject rights to his property, despite the ultimate sovereignty of the monarch.[74] In a crucial passage for English historiography, Bodin explained:

> For albeit that William the Conquerour, having conquered the realme of England by force of armes, called himselfe not onely lord of that realme, but also caused it to be proclaimed, that the soveraigntie and proprietie of al his subjects goods, movable, and immovable unto him belonged: yet neverthelesse so it was, that he contented himselfe with the direct soveraigntie, fealtie and homage: the subject still enjoying their libertie, and full propertie of their goods.[75]

Thus Bodin adopted the English example for his discussion of the transition from lordly to royal monarch. His influence soon expressed itself in the work of English writers, especially through Camden, 'the vital intermediary' for this view of the Conquest.[76]

The English authority of Camden did much to further this view. Camden's debt to Bodin includes an almost direct translation of this passage describing the Conqueror's imposition of feudal tenures. Richard Knolles, whose translation of Bodin is cited above, also translated

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74 For the revival of the Bartolist distinction which permitted this anachronistic discussion of feudal tenures see Kelley, Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship, pp. 87-115, and his 'The Development and Context of Bodin's Method,' in Bodin, ed. H. Denzer (Munich: 1973), pp. 123-150.

75 Bodin, Sixe Bookes, p. 203.

76 Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' pp. 46-60.

Camden's Britannia in a version which shows the role of Bodin's dominium directum especially well:

> William nowe Conquerour as it were in trophie of his victorie, having for the most part abrogated the Englishe Lawes brought in the Custome of the Normans: and commaunded causes to be pleaded in French: and having thrust the English men out of their auntient inheritance [William] assigned their landes and possessions unto his own souldiers: yet so as that he still reserved unto him self the [chief and] direct lordshippe thereof, and bound the service due therefore unto him and his successours, by the right of homage, (that is to say,) that they all should hold of him in Fee, or fealtie.[77]

The authority of Camden's Britannia thus provided an additional bulwark emphasizing the break at the Conquest to those of the church historians and of Polydore and his successors. Moreover, Camden's use of Bodin's distinctions-- 'noane beside the king should be true lorde in deed, but rather lordes and possessors in ffee and trust'-- fell on fallow ground.

For political theorists who sought to defend royal sovereignty in feudal terms, such versions of the Conquest provided an important historical charter. Feudal ideology thus contributed to absolutist claims through such works as Sir Thomas Craig's Jus Feudale (1603). Dedicating his work to King James, this Scot viewed English feudalism as a Norman innovation, accepting Polydore Vergil's view of the change of laws at the Conquest. He was able, furthermore, to see that the Anglo-Saxon laws collected by Lambarde did

77 MS Ashmole 849, Camden, Britannia, trans. Richard Knolles, p. [155].

not reveal feudal structures.[78] He believed feudalism a strongly centralized system, inconsistent with the fluctuating governments of the Anglo-Saxons. The position of Craig recalls that of James himself. In his Trew Law of Free Monarchies the king held that the royal succession had its beginnings in conquest. He resented efforts to limit his prerogative, and viewed his feudal inheritance as the origin of, among other rights, the dominium directum which justified royal taxation.[79] A number of civilian defenders rallied to this position. The most notorious of these was John Cowell, the Regius Professor of Civil Law at Cambridge. In his controversial Interpreter, Cowell suggested a strongly absolutist thesis, in part with reference to Camden's authority on the Conquest. His civil-law assumptions about the rights of the conqueror and his successors proved especially inflammatory on subsidies for the king. The debate over impositions provoked many questions about the rights of the king over the people, in this case with direct reference to property. The civilian discussion of conquest therefore led to crucial arguments from the Conquest in constitutional matters such as taxation. Moreover, the late-Elizabethan dispute over the succession involved similar claims for sovereignty in defence against theories of popular resistance. Whenever

78 Pocock, Ancient Constitution, pp. 79-85.
79 Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' pp. 62-66.

the issue of sovereignty was raised, the Conquest featured in any historical arguments that ensued.[80]

The nuances in any history of the Saxons and the Conquest therefore came to have specific constitutional implications. This is plain in Sir John Hayward's The Lives of the Three Normans (1613). Hayward had a background in civil law and supported its claims. He wrote a treatise 'to refute the common lawyer's "opinion" that "the lawes of England were never changed since the time of Brutus. . . by any of the several conquerors thereof."'[81] Following the line of Polydore, he denied that the first Norman kings of England had confirmed earlier English laws. He maintained instead that great changes had been instituted with the Conquest, the most important of which were the feudal innovations imposed by William the Conqueror:

> In all those lands which hee gave to any man, he reserved Dominion in chiefe to himselfe: for acknowledgement whereof a yeerely rent was payd unto him, and likewise a fine whensoever the Tenant did alien or die. These were bound as clients unto him by oath of fidelitie and homage.[82]

In Hayward's history the civilian claims are tempered only by his desire to downplay the severity of the Conqueror's rule. He therefore adds that the Conqueror also gained acceptance owing to his 'pretence of title' and that 'hee

80 Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' pp. 20-93.
81 Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' p. 60.
82 John Hayward, The Lives of the III Normans (1613), p. 99.

was received for King by generall consent.'[83] Nonetheless, Hayward still emphasized that 'the right of Succession to the Crowne of England' was uncertain in those days until it 'was then newly possessed by the Normane, and that chiefly by the sword.'[84]

In this connection, Samuel Daniel provides a more interesting example still, especially for comparison with Milton. Daniel closely observes the view of the Conquest supported by the civil lawyers. He too was party to the contest between proponents of the common and of the civil law, and aligned himself with his friend and patron Egerton, and with the king himself. Daniel defended the prerogatives of equity. His defence included a rejection of common law claims to immemorial antiquity. He maintained that such claims were trivial: 'it is the equity, and not the Antiquity of lawes, that makes them venerable.'[85] At the same time, Daniel was eager to show that these claims were simply wrong and that the common law was a Norman import: the Conquest caused 'an alteration of Lawes, Customes, Fashion, manner of liuing, Language, Writing, Fortifications, Buildings. . . generally an innovation in most things.'[86] In particular, the feudal tenures basic to the common law arrived with William:

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83 Hayward, III Normans, pp. 123-124.
84 Hayward, III Normans, p. 146.
85 Quoted in Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Origins,' p. 31.
86 Daniel, Collection, p. 22.

> There followed a great innovation both in the lawes and government of England. . . The maine streame of our Common-law, with the practise thereof, flowed out of Normandie, not withstanding all objections can bee made to the contrary.[87]

Nor did Daniel indulge the myth of confirmations; he maintained instead that the apparent respect of the Norman line of kings for the laws of Edward was a sop to the people to disguise their loss of 'their auncient customes and liberties.'[88]

The history of the Saxons and the Norman Conquest, therefore, was almost inextricably bound with political issues. All sides made full use of this crucial period in England's past, producing different versions of this history, and sometimes finding opposite applications for the same version. A generation later such interpretation found renewed importance in the struggle for sovereignty in the Civil War. Although Milton may not have known the full details of his contemporaries' debates, the intensity with which varying arguments on the Saxons and the Conquest were made prepares us for his own inconsistency on the subject.

On the constitutional front, feudal and anti-feudal ideologies disputed the precise nature of the Saxon and the Norman legacy. In the debates which raged over Ship Money, earlier arguments for and against conquest theory featured prominently. These arguments found fuller ramifying expressions in Civil War debates on taxation. In 1642,

87 Daniel, Collection, p. 36.
88 Daniel, Collection, p. 36.

Parliament's isolation of Hull and later assessment revived long-standing questions about consitutional prerogative on both sides; in the words of a recent analysis, 'on the parliamentary side it led ultimately to the abandonment of Magna Carta, thereby providing a focus for later Leveller dissent, while the Royalists eventually found that the only solution to their ideological difficulties lay in a revival of conquest theory.'[89] At this point, in order to avoid the emotive issue of the king's right to his subject's property, the royalists modestly insisted only that feudal tenures allowed property-- dominium-- to be held mutually by subject and king. Parliament rejected this position, and strongly defended private property. Soon, however, Parliament needed to justify its own assessment against the Royalist charge that it was illegal. To reconcile the assessment to Magna Carta and the Petition of Right, parliamentary apologists began to downplay the importance of such statutes, and emphasized instead that all property was conditional.

In this vein, parliamentary pamphlets first came to question the Royalist idea of popular consent to the conqueror. They then shifted their position to deny that the Norman arrival was in fact a Conquest at all. Both the moderate Hunton and the more radical Henry Parker addressed the problem by stressing the limits of the Norman Conquest. They acknowledged William's claims to the succession and

89 These paragraphs depend on Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' chapters three to six. They touch upon only some salient features among the subtle windings of his argument.

maintained that he had been accepted by the people. Parker therefore renewed the arguments of common lawyers which emphasized that William's had been a personal dispute with Harold, that the English had never been fully subdued, and that, in fact, 'all our conquerours themselves did rather loose themselves, and their customes, and their Laws to us, then assimilate us to themselves.'[90] As a result of this position the reputed recovery of popular rights in Magna Carta could be discounted.

On the other flank, the Levellers had begun by seeing Magna Carta as the embodiment of pre-Conquest rights guaranteed by the ancient constitution. Even Walwyn's apparent anti-Normanism seems to have been directed at a pragmatic denial of history rather than a logical argument for or against history, a denial intended to lead Leveller thought away from a hopeless defence of Magna Carta from hostile parliamentary opinion. Thus Walwyn emphasized only the inalienable natural rights enshrined in Magna Carta. Lilburne, at this point, simply looked back further to the superior laws of Edward the Confessor, which had been abrogated at the Conquest. Only at a later stage did Levellers attempt to recover Magna Carta for their arguments, 'only after the first appeal to natural rights and reason had been made.'[91] At this point, Leveller theory assimilated some common-law thought on the Conquest and Magna Carta. Now defending the great charter, they held it

90 Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' p. 169.
91 Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' p. 187.

was irrevocable insofar as it reflected the immemorial common laws, which in turn were characterized in more simply rationalist terms than they had been in Coke. The rationalist element in Magna Carta was therefore its indisputable justification. Simply as a statute it was subject to repeal or alteration but where it expressed 'common reason or equity' it had abiding force.[92] Thus, latterly, the impetus behind the Leveller defence of Magna Carta lay not with its historical prescription but with its embodiment of natural rights.

Milton's anti-Normanism in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates has therefore been seen as a reaction to the increasing Leveller commitment to Magna Carta in 1648 and 1649. Radical independents appear to have deployed anti-Norman rhetoric against the Levellers at this stage; Henry Parker for instance published a strongly anti-Norman The True Portraiture of the Kings of England at this point.[93] But before establishing this aspect of Milton's political thought and its relation to his idea of the national character, Milton's anti-Normanism needs fuller examination.

92 Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' p. 199.
93 Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' p. 203.

ii. Milton, anti-Normanism and the Ancient Constitution.

Milton refers to the Norman Conquest and its results in a number of works as well as the History, the most important such references coming in the first Defence. Early in his writings he comments on law French, but these comments are less politically significant than has been suggested.[94] The long-standing complaint about law French has important implications in the 1640s, when the common law comes under renewed attack, but law French had long been criticized without any real grievance against its Norman originators, and usually without impugning the law itself. The common law myth held that the name but not the substance of Saxon institutions had been changed by the Normans; the lawyers did not worry about the origins of this 'Hotchpot French,' as one of them put it, 'stuffed up with such variety of borrowed words.' Despite the 'few hunting terms and peddlars French in the lousye law,' the patriot believed that 'the language and the customs bee Englyshe and Saxonyshe.'[95]

Milton's own concern about the language of thelaw therefore had many antecedents. Law reform attracted lawyers late in the sixteenth century and enjoyed continuing interest which declined only when the prerogatives of

94 Christopher Hill, Milton and the English Revolution (1977), pp. 100, 114 are especially misleading on this point.
95 Quoted in D. R. Kelley, 'History, English Law and the Renaissance,' Past and Present, LXV (1974), p. 29.

parliament became so closely associated with the defence of common law. Spelman, who persisted in noting the Norman origin of feudal tenures and of parliament itself, did not therefore express any radical position on the Norman legacy when he found the common law 'a foreign language, a barbarian dialect, an uncouth method.'[96] There were moderate views too in the movement for reform that emerged as part of the constitutional settlement sought by the Army in the late 1640s. Not only the Levellers, but Cromwell, Ireton, Ludlow and Marten all desired change. The lawyers themselves accepted some of the reforms under consideration. After the victory at Dunbar, Cromwell's portentous expression of the Army's desire for changes in the law was reflected in the Rump's enacting the conversion of legal proceedings to English. Other, more extensive law reform remained on the agenda, called for by the Council of Officers in the early 1650s and planned for by the short-lived Nominated Parliament.[97] Despite the radicals' belief in the Norman Yoke, common opinion held that the law itself was English whatever the imposition of Norman terms.

Milton's early remarks on law french do not of course reflect a radical anti-Normanism on his part. He was

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96 Kelley, 'History, English Law,' p. 47. Christopher Brooks and Kevin Sharpe, 'Debate: History, English Law and the Renaissance,' Past and Present, LXXII (1976), pp. 141-142.

97 D. Underdown, Pride's Purge: Politics in the Puritan Revolution (1971), pp. 5, 78, 275-280; A. B. Worden, The Rump Parliament, 1648-1653 (Cambridge: 1974), pp. 105-118; D. Veall, The Popular Movement for Law Reform 1640-1660 (Oxford: 1970).

familiar with literary satire at the expense of legal jargon from his student days.[98] Among the stock stage characters he describes to Charles Diodati he mentions:

> Sive decennali foecundus lite patronus
> Detonat inculto barbara verba foro.[99]

It may have been this character, as well as the commonplace criticisms of 'barbara verba,' that prompted Milton's invective against law French in the Seventh Prolusion. There is no evidence for his having first-hand experience of that 'sermo nescio quis, Americanus credo, aut ne humanus quidem.' Speaking at Cambridge, the humanist intended for the ministry adds,

> quo cum saepe Leguleios nostros clamitantes audiverim, dubitare, subiit quibus non esset humanum os & loquela, an & his ulli affectus humani adessent; vereor certe ut possit nos sancta Justitia respicere, vereor ut querelas ullo tempore nostras aut injurias intelligat, quorum lingua loqui nesciat.[100]

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98 Milton may have known, at least in some redaction, the 1615 Cambridge comedy Ignoramus in which the following riddle is posed about lawyers: 'Quid illud est. . . quod multa dicit & nihil, quod ioca serio, seria ioco; quod Anglice, Saxonice, Gallice, & Latine loquitur, neque tamen Anglice, neque Saxonice, neque Gallice, neque Latine loquitur.' G. Ruggle, Ignoramus, (1630), p. 66.

99 'Elegia Prima ad Carolum Diodatum,' 31-32. Cf. the satire on canon lawyers in Jonson's Epicoene, V. ii, in Ben Jonson, V.

100 CW XII. pp. 276-278. This was written before Christopher Milton began his studies at the Inner Temple: CP, I. p. 287; Parker, Milton, p. 119.

In Ad Patrem too, Milton specifies law French as an especially irksome feature of the law. He thanks his father:

> Nec rapis ad leges, male custoditaque gentis
> Iura, nec insulsis damnas clamoribus aures.[101]

Milton here adds his usual dislike for the language of English law to an Ovidian formula.[102] This reflex against law French shows in the Commonplace Book (ca. 1640), where, after noting that Stow says Alfred 'turn'd the old laws into english,' Milton maintains 'I would he liv'd now to rid us of this norman gibbrish.'[103] Likewise, in Of Education he finds law French proverbially 'ill a hearing.'[104]

Milton's remarks on law French do not, therefore, reflect any deep-rooted anti-Normanism, nor do they anticipate the deeper grievances read into history by the Levellers. Instead he shows a hesitant acceptance of the widely held interpretation, influentially formulated by Lambarde and Coke, of the Normans and the Saxon laws. Again, his view at this point simply reflects his recent reading of Lambarde's Archeion where he learned that Magna Carta might be considered 'the first Letters of Manumission of the people of this Realme, out of the Norman

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101 Ad Patrem, 71-72, and note. Perhaps his brother's experience had now given substance to his prejudice.
102 'Nec me verbosas leges ediscere. . .' Amores, I. xv. 5.
103 CP I. 424. Hill's use of this quotation is misleading, e.g. Milton, p. 100.
104 CP II. 383.

servitude.'[105] In Of Reformation, for instance, Milton invokes the common constitutional myth in which Magna Carta restored English rights after the Conquest. This allows him to emphasize the ongoing need to reform the prelates' abuses, which invade those secular liberties won long ago:

> these devout Prelates, spight of our great Charter, and the soules of our Progenitors that wrested their liberties out of the Norman gripe with their dearest blood and highest prowesse, for these many years have not ceas'd in their Pulpits wrinching, and spraining the text, to set at nought and trample under foot all the most sacred and life blood Lawes, Statutes, and Acts of Parliament.[106]

Milton turns the patriotic Saxon myth against episcopacy but avoids dwelling on the Saxons themselves. He does not produce the Saxons themselves as exemplary English Christians; nor was he eager to do so in his later works.

Some of the reasons for Milton's dislike of the Saxon church have been discussed above. Especially if Milton wrote or contributed to the 'Postcript' to the Smectymnuan Answer,[107] reason for this dislike of the Saxons is not far to seek. The History too shows his lack of enthusiasm for their episcopal church. This may have been muted, of course, because Bede and late medieval sources applauded episcopal privilege and the closeness between the English and the Roman church. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, William of Malmesbury and others had

105 Lambarde, Archion, p. 125.
106 CP, I. p. 592.
107 See Appendix A.

deplored the weakness of the Saxon church; this was a staple of Anglo-Norman court historiography. Malmesbury maintained that the Saxon love of religion and virtue, once noteworthy, had declined, and that this had led to national decay and defeat. At the same time he testified that ecclesiastical support for the Conqueror led to his easy success after Hastings, the hint at papal interference the reformers later embellished.[108] The much admired Matthew Paris also opposed Roman influence as well as royal overreaching in his Chronicle and Lives of the Abbots. As has been noted, Milton's quiet on the Saxon church is uncharacteristic, especially given his earlier use of Gildas, and may well reflect the censorship which Phillips and Toland report.

Perhaps Milton's residual doubts about the Saxon church surface in the telling silence on original Saxon laws in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates. When he again attacks the 'gibrish Lawes,' his view of English history takes on wider political implications. Against the Leveller support for Magna Carta outlined above, Milton now seems close to the radical parliamentarians' hostility to the statute. The belief voiced at Putney that 'the Norman laws were not slavery introduced upon us, but an augmentation of our slavery before'[109] provides the best gloss on Milton's charge that 'Vulgar and irrational men' are 'contesting for

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108 Malmesbury, Gesta Regum, in Rerum Anglicarum, ed. Savile, (Frankfurt: 1602), pp. 102-103.
109 A. S. P. Woodhouse, Puritanism and Liberty (1938), p. 196, quoted Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Origins,' p. 207.

. . . the badge of thir ancient slavery.'[110] His failure to consent to the exaggeration of Saxon laws and liberties further distinguishes his position from the Levellers' acceptance of this historical myth. The failings of positive law, Milton implies, could not just be traced to the Conquest. Despite an interest in Alfred, Milton in 1642 had been puzzled about what 'K. or Knight before the Conquest' might deserve grander literary treatment.[111] 'The badge of thir ancient slavery' here evokes more general misgivings about the English record whether during the British, Saxon, or Norman past.

In the History, which he interrupted when he turned to the Tenure, Milton also shows little interest in the crucial question whether the Normans accepted or abrogated Saxon laws and institutions. In the narrative through to the year 731, the point where he seems to have interrupted his work, Milton takes slight notice of Saxon or earlier legislation. The History shows none of the Levellers' faith that things had once been better; instead, the Saxons are barbarians who did little to improve their status during the troubled centuries of the Heptarchy. Both the Tenure and Eikonoklastes show a similar disinclination to glorify the Saxon period. In the Digression, Milton emphasizes that the shortcomings of the Britons led to the Saxon invasions, and then condemns the comparable shortcomings of his

110 Hill, Norman Yoke, p. 83, takes this as evidence for Milton's Leveller sympathies.
111 CP, I. p. 813.

contemporaries. The description of the Saxons in the Digression evokes the primitive world in which Gildas had voiced his jeremiad. The bleak view of early English life in the Digression is consistent with that in the History as a whole. Unlike the Levellers, Milton emphasizes the sad continuities in English history which reach back long before the Conquest. When he wrote the Tenure, Milton merely adapted this jeremiad and gave it more specific target. At the time of the Tenure, therefore, he did not seek historical justification for changing present institutions. The chief purpose of history was to show the alarming recidivism of the English, not to find a charter in the past for seizing the present, god-sent opportunity for national liberty.

Milton's pessimism about English history in all periods thus reinforces his emphasis on natural rather than positive law in the Tenure. In early times as well as his own the English had failed to take their chances at liberty. In the Digression, Milton asserts that 'they had armies, leaders and successes to thir wish; but to make use of so great advantages was not thir skill.'[112] In the Tenure, after 'God and a good cause give them Victory,' the task of reform falls

> to those Worthies which are the soule of that enterprize, to be swett and labour'd out amidst the throng and noises of Vulgar and irrational men. Some

112 CP, V. p. 443. Cf. also 445 where he testifies to hopes for the reform of at least some laws.

> contesting for privileges, customs, forms, and that old entanglement of Iniquity, thir gibrish Lawes, though the badge of thir ancient slavery. . .[113]

In the context of Milton's works as well as the Leveller defence of Magna Carta, this complaint has only the most general historical implications. Not until the later Defences did Milton adopt the myth of the virtuous Saxons for his needs as an apologist for the regicide.[114] Until then, the view of the Conquest implied in his works combines a dislike for the Norman influence with no evident liking of the Saxons. Preferring argument from natural law to a prescriptive interpretation of history, Milton does not at this point attempt a politically motivated reading of the past.[115]

Where Milton does argue historically he uses other sources than those on which he based the History. For example, in the Tenure and Eikonoklastes, and especially in the Defensio, he refers to a document which Coke and others had seized upon to prove the existence and privileges of Saxon parliaments: the spurious Miroir des Justices. He seems first to have heard of this work in reading John Sadler's Rights of the Kingdom. On the strength of Sadler's

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113 CP, III. pp. 192-193.
114 The theory of the ancient constitution had its origin in the Calvinist argument that inferior magistrates alone might resist the monarch; Milton's radical theory allows individual resistance-- no argument from the ancient constitution is yet necessary.
115 The exception is the Observations in which he applies conquest theory against Irish claims for liberty, CP, III. pp. 301-302.

reference to the Mirror, the Tenure and Eikonoklastes claim that 'our old Laws' gave the English 'a legal right to judge the king.' By using anachronistic terms to describe Saxon assemblies-- a commons formed of 'the Peers and Barons of England' for instance[116]-- the Mirror, Sadler, and Milton enhance the illusion of continuity between Saxon and later political institutions.

Only when Milton explains English laws in the Defence does he finally invoke the myth of Saxon liberties. His political direction in the year after the execution of the king shows in his revisions in new editions of first the Tenure and then Eikonoklastes. In the Tenure, Milton retreats from his originally extreme formulation of Calvinist resistance arguments. By appending more moderate authorities to the original Tenure he tempers the populism of the tract, apparently with a view to recovering the right of resistance for the inferior magistrate alone.[117] The less important revisions to Eikonoklastes reflect Milton's drift to the position on English history that he holds in the Defence, on which he was now working. He shows more confidence in the Mirror by emphasizing how the Triennial Act is small compensation for the 'Statutes of our

116 Milton admits that Sadlar is his source in Eikonoklastes; otherwise he simply says on this point that 'it is affirmed.' CP, III. pp. 219, 399. The Miroir was translated in 1646 by William Hughes; see Pocock, Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law, pp. 41, 43, 67-68 for its influence on Coke.

117 Ernest Sirluck, 'Milton's Political Thought: The First Cycle,' Modern Philology, LXI (1964), pp. 212-214; Dzelzainis, 'Ideological Background,' pp. 258-261.

Ancestors' which demanded parliaments twice-yearly. He turns a general reference to the English fight for liberty into a more specific reference to the Norman Yoke; 'thir old bondage' is now directly identified with the 'servitude' of 'thir copyholds' and 'thir true Norman villenage.'[118] The Saxons are beginning to emerge as the defenders of liberty described in the Defence, but Milton has not yet dismissed the permanence of the Norman Conquest. This is therefore Milton's fullest articulation of the Norman Yoke. His view of the Conquest was changing, however, and he was coming to hold a more favourable opinion of the Saxons and the survival of their legacy.

Just when the Levellers lose interest in arguments from history, Milton, retreating from his extreme position in the first edition of the Tenure, adopts the doctrine of the ancient constitution among the many arguments which jostle in the Defence. Here commending the Saxons directly, Milton now appears also to have read the Mirror and cites it for facts which, if he really believed them, must surely have appeared in the History. The Mirror, that 'perantiquus legum liber,' reported Saxon history in terms inconsistent with Milton's History. In the Defence, Milton claims that

> in quo traditur primos Saxones, post Britanniam subactam, cum reges crearent, ab iis jusjurandum exigere consuevisse, se, ut quemvis alium a populo,

118 CP, III. pp. 581, 631. Parker, p. 975 indicates that the second edition belongs to late 1650, probably about a year later than the first edition, which Thomason dated October 6, 1649 (November? Parker, Milton, p. 963).

> legibus ac judiciis subjectos fore. . . ibidem ait us esse et aequum ut rex suos in Parlamento habeat pares, qui de injuriis quas vel rex vel regina, fecerit, cognoscerent; regnante Aluredo sancitum legibus fuisse, ut singulis annis Parlamentum bis Londini, vel eo saepius, si opus esset. . .[119]

None of these important points are included in the History; there seems to be little connection at this point between Milton's historical and political interpretations of English history. Milton was slow to look beyond narrative sources for history even when pressured by the demands of political writing. His belief that natural law always outweighed positive law made him hesitant to undertake the historical defence of his constitutional position. The Tenure and Eikonoklastes are unusually short on historical argument, especially from English history. In the Defence, however, he adds the assumption that the ancient constitution is normative for the present to his other arguments in defence of England. Nonetheless, his references there to constitutional history find no place in the later books of the History, where instead his humanist respect for historical texts reasserts itself.

The Defence provides a common version of the myth of the ancient constitution, a belief in which seems also to underlie references to English history in the later tracts. This historical argument in the Defence has been related to Milton's reading of Hotman's influential Francogallia, which

119 CW, VII. p. 438. He also cites the Mirror to prove that the courts respect the law above the king. CP, IV. pp. 482, 490, 494.

his earlier references indicate that he first read around 1650. In Hotman Milton found a compelling description of the ancient constitution in France-- a description he seems to have found applicable to English history, however little this shows in the History itself. In the Second Defence, Milton cites Hotman with the Vindiciae contra tyrannos as crucial texts for opponents of tyranny.[120] Hotman's Spartan ephors feature among the political bodies which enjoy a role like that of parliament in controlling the king. Hotman's use of law may have prompted Milton's own research into the legal evidence for popular sovereignty, an interest strengthened when Salmasius discussed English law. Milton himself disavows any specialist knowledge of the law. Instead his limited references were widely accessible documents, popular among defenders of the common law. The Mirror of Justices had been republished in 1642 and published in translation in 1646.[121] Milton also used the Modus Tenendi Parlamentum, Bracton and the Fleta, and other works to which the common lawyers had frequent recourse in their efforts to prove law and custom of Saxon origin and of

120 CP, IV. p. 659. For Hotman in this connection see Quentin Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought (Cambridge: 1978), II. pp. 309-318.
121 CP, IV, p. 482.

lasting authority.[122] These had featured prominently in John Bradshaw's speech in the king's trial.[123]

From Milton's Defence and the tracts he wrote just before the Restoration, therefore, a sketch of Saxon history quite foreign to Milton History can be traced. The traditional constitutional myth dominates these references to the English past. Saxon laws, especially those collected by Edward the Confessor, guaranteed popular rights and liberties; even William the Conqueror had been compelled to subscribe to these laws. Milton seems still to worry about the Saxons but largely conceals his doubts since he can so profitably invoke their laws. He therefore develops his argument saying: 'Ad Saxones jam veniamus; quorum jura cum reperiantur, facta praetermittam.'[124] This begs an awkward question given that the laws alone bear any relation to the constitutional myth. Gildas testified that the Britons had deposed their tyrants. Milton stretches the point to claim that Gildas disliked unjudicial proceedings against kings, and that this reflected the Britons' belief in formal depositions. The Saxons, however, were seldom seen to confirm their laws, real or apocryphal, in the way the British had done in Gildas's day or the French had with Chilperic. Omitting their deeds was therefore at least a

122 CP, IV. p. 489.
123 King Charls his Tryal: a Narrative of the whole Proceedings of the High Court [Thomason Tracts, E. 545. (4 and 5] (1649), passim. In 1657, as a favour to Emeric Bigot, Milton had Bigot's copy of the Modus cross-referenced with 'Codice Clarissimi Viri Domini Bradsciavi,' as well as a 'Codice Cottoniano.' CW, XII. p. 86.
124 CW, VII. p. 436.

private admission that they were inglorious. At another point Milton protests that Salmasius is vainly trying 'nobis obscuriorem aetatum tenebras offundere' but conscious of his own imputation, adds that 'non eo dici a me quisquam existimet, quasi ego de authoritate et prudentia majorum nostrorum detrahi quicquam velim.'[125] Even when Milton seeks justification from history, he subordinates history to the prior claims of natural law, producing an open-ended ancient constitution:

> quamvis leges raro non bonas irrogarent, ignorantiae tamen, et imbecillitatis humanae sibi conscii, hoc veluti fundamentum legum omnium posteris tradi voluerunt, quod ex nostri Jurisperiti omnes agnoscunt, ut si qua lex aut consuetudo legi divinae aut naturali, aut rationi denique repugnaret, ea ne pro lege sancita habeatur.[126]

Nonetheless, he contrasts the Saxons' 'legibus bonis ferendis' with their primitive 'ingenium et cultus,' and in emphasizing their prescient accommodation of future improvements in the law, underscores his own doubts about their culture. Given the severe criticism of the national character in the Digression, Milton's enthusiasm seems partly rhetorical when he professes:

> Neque possum hic non gratulari mihi de majoribus nostris, qui non minore prudentia ac libertate, quam Romani olim, aut Graecorum praestantissimi.[127]

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125 CW, VII. p. 426.
126 CW, VII. p. 426.
127 CW, VII. p. 450.

This belief in the wisdom of the Saxons was new-found and failed to register in the History, whether in the earlier or later composition of that work.

Milton prefers a Ciceronian evaluation of prehistory, rather than British or Saxon records, to vindicate England's primitive past.[128] Outside the History, he believes but does not dwell on the fact that the first natives were as Tacitus described them-- the vaunted dux bellorum-- and that they had changed their form of government as it suited them.[129] Milton's historical reasoning therefore begins not in the mythical world of British legend, but in the philosophers' idea of the prehistory when political institutions were first formed. This prehistory was deduced from premises about man's original equality and freedom. In the Tenure, Milton provided this story in a form derived ultimately from Aristotle.[130] In the Defence, he quotes Cicero on the origins of counsel in prehistory: 'Vides Parlamentum veram originem, illis Saxonicis archivis longe vetustiorem.'[131] This reflects his doubts about the Saxons, doubts which may give rise at this point to Milton's renewed efforts to outgo Salmasius as a humanist:

> Offendunt nunc limatulas, opinor, aures tuas nostrorum barbarae locutiones: cujus ego si vacaret, aut operae pretium esset, tot barbarismos hoc uno libro notare possum. . .[132]

128 CP, III. pp. 198-199.
129 CP, IV. p. 479.
130 CP, II. pp. 198-199.
131 CW, VII. pp. 424-426.
132 CW, VII. p. 434.

Milton himself, of course, had registered just such a complaint himself.[133] When Milton proceeds 'et sensus communis et latinitatis plane expers es' he hints at the connection between his worries about the Saxons and his concern about his own use of their example in the Defence. This linguistic issue seems to express some of his otherwise repressed doubts about the Saxons' fitness as examples to all of Europe. He would prefer to argue on the basis of reason alone.

The chief issues in the historical argument concern the ancient status of parliaments and the subordination of kings to the law, both of which might be proved from the Saxon laws. The two were of course closely related. Milton's position in his answer to Salmasius is traditional enough:

> Sub regibus ante Gulielmum, inquis, nulla Parlamenti mentio exstat. De vocabulo Gallicano altercari non libet: res semper fuit: et Saxonicis temporibus Concilium Sapientum vocari solitum concedis.[134]

Only later, in the tracts written at the end of the 1650s, does Milton imply that the Norman name 'parliament' may reflect that the institution itself had Norman origins. At this point he is proposing a reform of the institution, and thus wants a new name for the new institution he advocates. He now explains that 'the name of parlament is a Norman or

133 Now too Milton maintains that Salmasius is a fool for trying 'legum nostrarum loquelam ad puriorem semper latinitatem exigere,' CW, VII. p. 538.
134 CW, VII. p. 422.

French word, a monument of our Ancient Servitude.' The name suffers in his view from its associations with a government consisting 'of 3. Estates, King, Lords, & Commons.' Hence Milton proposes:

> It might be very agreeable with our freedome to [chang] the name of parliament (especially now having outlived its honour by soe many dissolucions) into the name of a Grand or Supreme Counsell: whose power may be in a manner the same with that of parlaments.[135]

This change of name becomes a favourite proposal for Milton. When he develops his plan to change parliament in the Readie and Easie Way, he again maintains that its present name should be abolished. For this purpose, he now indicates that William the Conqueror was cavalier about resorting to his Commons. Milton again drifts away from the common law myth: he now refers to 'the parlie of our Commons with thir Norman king when he pleasd to call them,' whereas his Proposalls did not hint at William's wilfulness. In the revised edition of the Readie and Easie Way the word 'parlament' is italicized in this sentence to emphasize its foreign origins.[136]

In the Defence, however, Milton stresses the continuities between the ancient councils and parliament. He maintains that these councils were of German origin and persisted in their original form to the time of Ethelbert.

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135 CP, VII. p. 337.
136 CP, VII. pp. 373, 444. Cf. also p. 394, '(as it will from henceforth be better called). . .' Worden, Rump Parliament, p. 156 notes a difference of opinion in 1648 regarding the name of the 'representative.'

The laws of Edwin, Ina , and Alfred all showed that councils had been used by the Saxon kings for legislation. For this reason, Milton is eager first to show and then reiterate that the Commons had consisted of commoners before the Conquest, for which he cites the Modus Tenendi Parlamentum.[137] He finds its description of Saxon constitutional matters useful for his argument. Again, he did not consider it fit for his History. Nor does he use feudal terms anachronistically in the History, which resists identifying Saxon with Norman institutions.

For his political purposes, however, he can assert that popular sovereignty has historical as well as rational foundations. Central to this argument are the laws of Edward the Confessor, to which Milton repeatedly refers. Spurious as they were, these laws provided a basis for describing Saxon institutions on the eve of the Conquest. The common lawyers found the laga Eadwardi helped them apply Hotman's position on the French constitution to the English constitution. The relation between the two was strengthened by the reference to the deposition of Chilperic in the laws of Edward; Chilperic had played an important part on Hotman's analysis of the ancient constitution. Drawing on Hotman, Milton too sees popular rights writ large in the deposition of Chilperic. After reviewing the Saxon tradition of legislation by council, he adds that the king must therefore respect his duties to parliament. The Saxon

137 CP, IV. pp. 484, 490-491, 493.

reference to Chilperic shows that their kings might be deposed if they failed to meet this obligation. Later he repeats the point to clarify what deposition means.[138]

From King Edward too come more explicit limitations on royal prerogative. Among these, the institution of the sword 'Curtana' provided a traditional symbol of parliamentary prerogative. Milton had already noted the early history of the sword in Holinshed and Matthew Paris[139] and clearly approved of this English version of Trajan's sword. King Edward's law had the inestimable advantage, in Milton's view, of upholding the priority of the natural law. Citing Bracton and the Fleta, Milton again draws attention to

> that truly royal law of Edward, that basic precept of our law. . . by which nothing contrary to the laws of God or to reason can be considered law.[140]

Moreover, on the subject of kings the law of St. Edward agreed with the more important law of nature.[141] From viewing King Edward's laws in this light, Milton continues with the common lawyers' assertion that the Conqueror had been forced to accept English laws as he found them. After the Conquest, William soon gave up 'ius omne belli, si quod in nos habuit' and ratified the ancient constitution, including the 'curtana' itself. Milton has his doubts about rights of conquest, but observes that the royalist position

138 CP, IV. pp. 491-492, 526.
139 CP, IV. p. 492; I. 447.
140 CP, IV. pp. 492-493.
141 CP, IV. p. 504.

of course suffers in another way if conquest theory is invoked. Later, Milton argued against the royalist use of conquest theory that royal claims 'by conquest' were invalid since 'that conquest we have now conquered.'[142] In the Defence, William is held to have confirmed his oath with another before the council at Verulam. Milton repeats this assertion later in the tract, each time emphasizing the importance of the popular will in compelling the conqueror to recognize popular sovereignty.[143] Milton therefore chooses to recall Parliament's struggle for ancient liberty and St. Edward's laws in the collection of arguments which lie side by side in the Defence[144] Thus he returns to the old view of the ancient constitution, regained by Magna Carta, when presenting England's case to Europe. He was to be far more cautious on this point in presenting England's history in less embattled circumstances.

In his political tracts from 1649 to 1655, therefore, Milton assents to the myth of the ancient constitution, at first quietly and then more openly in the Defence. On the eve of the Restoration this opinion still surfaces. He does not subscribe to the radical reading of history which held that present tyrannies originated in the Conquest.

142 Brief Notes upon a Late Sermon, CP, VII. p. 483. Cf. Samson Agonistes, ll. 1205-1207:

> My nation was subjected by your lords.
> It was the force of conquest; force with force
> Is well ejected when the conquered can.

143 CP, IV. pp. 501, 530.

144 CP, IV, p. 502.

His History, however, fails to support this constitutional myth, although Milton wrote the later books on the Saxons and the Conquest after the Tenure, Eikonoklastes, and the Defences had been written. The historical claims in the Defence are conventional enough. Nonetheless, they are so important that their omission from the History throws suspicion on their place in the political tract. The History itself suggests the reason for Milton's inconsistent use of conflicting historical traditions.

Epilogue

The later books of the History show no sign that Milton truly relented in his judgement on the Saxons. He reveals his skepticism about their religious and civil discipline in his response to the two high points in their history: Egbert's union of the disparate kingdoms and the reign of King Alfred. The reign of Egbert must have appeared parallel in some respects to that of Cromwell.[1] In each case, a leader had drawn the nation forward-- Egbert to a peaceful union, Cromwell to the Protectorate-- only for their successes to be endangered by a backsliding people. Egbert was 'one of the worthiest,' but from 'peace and plenty' came only 'Invasion, Spoil, Desolation, slaughter of many, slavery of the rest.'[2]

Milton goes beyond his sources in condemning the corruption of the Saxons. He surpasses Huntingdon, for instance, in refusing to acknowledge an earlier, putatively better age in the Saxon church.[3] The Saxons had lost whatever native discipline they originally possessed,

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1 This has been suggested as a reason for Milton's resumption of the History by Trevor-Roper, 'Elitist Politics of Milton,' p. 603.
2 CP, V. p. 257.
3 CP, V. p. 259. Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, The Chronicle, trans. T. Forester (1853), p. 148.

'laying aside the exercise of Arms, and the study of all vertuous knowledge.'[4] Henry had admiringly recalled an earlier time when 'kings and queens, nobles and bishops . . .resigned their dignities, and entered into the monastic life.'[5] Milton, however, sees this as only 'religious Idleness and Solitude, which brought forth nothing but vain and delusive visions.'[6] All their religious practice, it is 'easily perceav'd,' was corrupt, as evident from

> thir commanding of things, either not belonging to the Gospel, or utterly forbidden, Ceremonies, Reliques, Monasteries, Masses, Idols, add to these ostentation of Alms, got ofttimes by rapine and oppression. . .[7]

Milton emphasizes the Roman practices of the Saxon church; his bias is obvious. Nor does he suggest that things were ever much better in the Saxon church.

Later, Alfred provided a further example of the national need for great leaders. In those violent, godless times, Alfred still shone forth as 'the miror of Princes.'[8] The History treats his reign at length, dwelling especially on Alfred's commendable self-discipline.[9] Milton gives ample descriptions of Alfred's life, and thus refurbishes the old lives of Alfred for a new kind of advice to princes. He had had a special interest in Alfred over the years, as his Outlines for British Tragedies and Commonplace Book

4 CP, V. p. 259.
5 Henry of Huntingdon, Chronicle, p. 148.
6 CP, V. p. 259.
7 CP, V. p. 259.
8 CP, V. p. 292.
9 CP, V. pp. 276-292.

show.[10] Again, he dwells on the need for such reformation at the highest level.

At the same time, Milton's harsh moralizing about the Saxon failings under Egbert may indicate a falling-off in his hopes for modern England, comparable to that in the Digression. The punishment that follows a nation's failure cannot be escaped by any of the 'Estates of Government.' Once more the people had been found to be 'fitted by thir own vices for no condition but servile.'[11]

Like the Digression, the later History repeatedly reminds the reader of the responsibilities of the governing elite. The emphasis on leadership persists when Milton, adapting Malmesbury without acknowledgement, observes that

> Souldiers most commonly are as thir Commanders, without much odds of valour in one Nation or other, only as they are more or less wisely disciplin'd and conducted.[12]

Although Milton depends slightly less on Malmesbury in the final book, the medieval advice on leadership and moral reading of history are largely preserved.

In this regard, the final books of the History invite comparison with Milton's beliefs on collective punishment in the De Doctrina Christiana as well as with his address to Cromwell in the Second Defence.[13] Justifying the government

10 CP, VIII. p. 571; I. pp. 386-387, 424.
11 CP, V. p. 259.
12 CP, V. p. 337.
13 CP, VI. pp. 385-387; IV. pp. 666-669, 670-675

of the worthy few, Milton nonetheless reminds them of the high price of failure. The collective fate of a nation will not spare the 'some few of all sorts' who are better than 'the generality.' Milton again adopts Malmesbury's moral:

> And as the long suffering of God permits bad men to enjoy prosperous daies with the good, so his severity oft times exempts not good men from thir share in evil times with the bad.[14]

Milton's views accorded with Malmesbury's so closely that in the first edition his subsequent remarks are also mistakenly italicized, as if the History were with Malmesbury still.[15]

The final sentence of the History again insists on the topicality of the work, 'here in fit season.' Milton clearly finds some value in recalling 'our Ancestors' in misery and thraldom. England's security at the time of his writing also seems to Milton the likely cause of imminent decline. As a spur to 'amendment,' he raises a spectre from the past; he believes himself to be especially alert to the potential for the 'Revolution of like Calamities.'[16] He seeks to raise alarm about the recurring failures of religious and secular reformation in English history.

Once more too, Milton finds evidence of English shortcomings in the uncertainties which plague even the history of this later period. Enough has been said about

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14 CP, V. p. 403.
15 CP, V. lx.
16 The conclusion does therefore seem very much a document of the mid-1650s, pace Firth who dated it 1670 ('Milton as an Historian,' Essays, p. 102).

his ways of distancing himself from his narrative in the History; in the final books he again uses his critical style of narration, albeit less vigorously. Even when it comes to the Conquest, the single most dramatic event in the History, the conflicting reports lead Milton to doubt his sources. He therefore provides a variety of interpretations, before safely agreeing with Malmesbury on the obvious general moral of the Conquest.

Milton's sense of decorum here impinges on his services as an historian. His unwillingness to desert his texts for any fuller antiquarian research becomes increasingly apparent as he limits his research. He appears, moreover, to have gained his knowledge of Saxon history without ever learning Anglo-Saxon.[17] Limiting the scope of his learning is often dangerous, and, given his formidable achievements as a linguist, a cautious review of the unlikelihood of his knowing Saxon is necessary. Most of the evidence is negative. He never cites a work which would have demanded his knowledge of Anglo-Saxon. Nor does his use of English reveal much insight into its Germanic underpinnings, which a knowledge of Anglo-Saxon might have encouraged.

Milton's one surviving use of Old English script seems innocuous in this regard. In his annotations on Gildas, he notes the word 'nest' in the old characters, out of 'Saxo: li: de vocabulis.'[18] Milton was no doubt familiar with such

17 CP, V. p. xxxvii.
18 CW, XVIII. p. 329. The annotations are reproduced in French, 'Milton's Annotated Copy of Gildas.'

script from an early age, however, as his schoolmaster Alexander Gil favoured it for his description of the English language. His Logonomia Anglica (1619) is full of just such juxtapositions of English in Saxon or Gothic characters with Latin in roman or italic script. Milton also saw enough Anglo-Saxon script to have imitated it as he does here. Among books he is known to have read, Spelman's Concilia and especially the Wheloc editions of Bede and Lambarde would have provided him with an ample introduction to the language in their side by side columns of Latin and Anglo-Saxon. His unknown 'vet: M:S. de Interp: verborum' might have further have instructed him in this matter.[19]

His reliance on published sources and use of Latin translations for all medieval annals, histories and laws also argue his unfamiliarity with the language of some of their originals. This shows most clearly in his blinkered acceptance of Wheloc's readings at all points, and especially in his notorious criticisms of Henry of Huntingdon and of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, where he stumbled amongst the awkward Latin translations of more lyrical Saxon originals.[20] His response to these passages shows a failure to understand the reasons for this odd Latin.

Nor are these lapses on Milton's part surprising. He evidently associated the Saxons with the barbarian groups his classical sources impugned. Even when political

19 CW, XVIII. p. 328.
20 CP, V. pp. 300-301, 308, 309-310, 312, 315.

expedience causes him to relent, Milton's support for the Saxons never seems whole-hearted. The patrotic cult of northern, Gothic virtue espoused by his Alexander Gil seems to have had little effect on Milton use of the language.[21]

His lexical practice is very conservative in this respect, despite the recommendations of Gil. In his verse, the coinages of Germanic derivation primarily reflect a tradition of poetic diction derived from Spenser and his predecessors, both directly from Spenser and from the Spenserians, especially Fletcher. Milton's coinages here show their origins in his self-conscious relation to the Spenserian tradition. Archaism needs to be authorized by previous poetic example. Even coinages are conspicuously imitative of previous coinages rather than more directly imitative of early English examples.

Such diction is rare in his later verse and usually much inflected, in poetic terms. Hence such rapid sequences of Spenserianisms as in the introduction to Book Nine of Paradise Lost, or in the passage in Paradise Regained where Milton adopts an alliterative line, reinforced bythe Spenserianisms 'prowest' and 'paynim.'[22] In contrast, his Latinate neologizing increases late in his career. These coinages tend to have greater intrinsic meaning that his

21 R. F. Jones, Triumph of the English Language, pp. 232-236.
22 Paradise Regained, III. ll. 342-343.

Spenserian words, a more forensic purpose, and a different, less traditionalist role in Milton's poetic diction.[23]

Moreover, the publishing of Saxon texts was still in its infancy.[24] There is no sign of Milton's having sought to consult manuscripts for texts not yet in print. It was difficult to gain access to archives, not least to college libraries where many of the texts should have been available. Such a search would have been quite uncharacteristic on Milton's part in any case, given his view of 'importunat clients of Antiquity.'[25] The History as a a whole has none of the antiquarian flavour characteristic of some other seventeenth-century histories. Milton's work derives from works already made accessible and very much to hand; it is a distinctly literary recapitulation of the early narratives with only a few findings of other later scholarship consulted. It struck contemporary readers this way, as Anthony à Wood noted; there was little antiquarian zeal behind 'the putting of our old Authors neatly together in a connex'd story.'[26] Tyrrell's Whig dissatisfaction with the History also stemmed from its failure to provide information on Anglo-Saxon institutions, especially early

23 If there is an answer to the old question of Milton's knowledge of Caedmon, it may lie with William Lisle's reported translation of part of Genesis B [Henry Ellis (Camb. Univ. Add. MS 4479)]. Bennett, 'Old English and OldNorse Scholarship in England,' pp. 9, 312.
24 Adams, Old English Scholarship; Bennett, 'History of Old English and Old Norse Studies in England.'
25 CP, I. 568
26 Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 46.

English parliaments, which more diligent research would surely have brought to light.

A comparison of Milton with two of his near contemporaries, Sir William Dugdale (1605-1686) and Sir Simonds D'Ewes (1602-1650) indicates some of the reasons for his lack of antiquarian interest. When D'Ewes inherited a country estate, for instance, he promptly favoured his gathered tenants with a historical description of the tenures by which they were bound to him.[27] His correspondence shows a lively interest in family histories and genealogies, clearly encouraged by legal concerns.[28] Dugdale's Diary shows comparable country and episcopal church connections, he employs himself by supplying a pedigree, for instance, and checks inscriptions on tombs in advance of their feared destruction at Puritan hands.[29] Milton's correspondence reveals none of these traits. He had neither the legal training or preoccupations of a D'Ewes nor the reverence for religious monuments of a Dugdale. He sought an altogether different sort of charter from the past.

Milton introduces the third book of the History with special reference to its topicality. The essential similarity between the two periods he is comparing lies in

27 Sir Simonds D'Ewes. The Autobiography and Correspondence. ed. J. O. Halliwell, (1845), II. pp. 32-38.
28 D'Ewes, Autobiography and Correspondence, II. pp. 55-56, 222-223, 230.
29 William Dugdale, The Life, Diary, and Correspondence, ed. W. Hamper (1827), pp. 8-13, 14, 24-27, 105. His diary, pp. 46-149, is chiefly an itinerary, and his correspondence is overflowing with antiquarian enquiries.

their sudden changes of government, which leave the people to establish and maintain a new independent government. He does not suggest an exact parallel, except in his implicit view that the status of a tyrant is the same as that of a foreign invader.[30] There is, however, a strong similarity connecting 'that confused Anarchy with this intereign,' insofar as each leaves the people 'to the sway of thir own Councils.'[31] The 'two such remarkable turns of State,' as Milton styles the Roman departure and the struggles of the 1640s, lead to comparable liberations of the nation. The result of the former liberation was disaster, as Gildas had witnessed. The present liberation, in Milton's view, had yet to prove itself adventitious. He hopes that the nation will reform if it fully recognizes the threat of future tyranny, or the contemporary equivalent of that second invasion which overwhelmed the Britons. He sees his duty as a historian to lie in warning his country about the dangers it faced, dangers that the Britons' downfall so strikingly illustrated. With greater national self-knowledge, fostered by his description of the national character, the nation might yet save itself. When Milton included the Digression from the History, he perhaps believed that the national apostasy had repeated itself, that it was too late now for 'seasonable' advice and that his jeremiad was justified, even if it played into royalist hands. When he wrote, however, his concern and indignation at the misgovernment of

30 See, for instance, the Tenure, CP, III. pp. 213-215.
31 CP, V. p. 12.

the 1640s transformed his historiography into urgent complaint. Topical discussion of his own day seemed, not an exception to, but the essence of the national historian's duties.[32]

In the Digression, therefore, Milton departs from the detached and critical style of the second book of the History, in which he had emulated the gravity of his Roman models. He develops Gildas's rhetoric and, when freed from the De Excidio, further emphasizes liberty as the chief principle governing historical judgements. He indicates the basis for his response to Gildas's testimony:

> the gaining or loosing of libertie is the greatest change to better or to worse that may befall a nation under civil goverment, and so discovers, as nothing more, what degree of understanding, or capacitie, what disposition to justice and civilitie there is among them.[33]

In the Digression, Milton applies this principle to contemporary history. He draws pessimistic conclusions from the failures of the Long Parliament and the Westminster Assembly at a time when liberty seemed possible. In view of the ancient Britons' similar failure, Milton believes there may be a natural incapacity for true civil virtue among the inhabitants of Britain. Thus hopes for self-government rather than tyranny are repeatedly frustrated:

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32 See K. Thomas, Perception of the Past, pp. 1-3.
33 CP, V. p. 441.

> ffor stories teach us that libertie sought out of season in a corrupt and degenerate age brought Rome it self into further slaverie.[34]

The historian must foster national self-knowledge with special reference to the national aptitude for civil and ecclesiastical virtue. By comparing similar situations from different periods in the nation's history, he arrives at an empirically determined view of the national character. Without such a view, any attempt at true liberty will fail.

Having chosen this comparative method, Milton begins his argument with a dismissal of Gildas's claim that the Britons lacked martial ardour. He is eager, at the end of the 1640s, to emphasize civil and religious rather than military virtue. The nation's bravery, in his view, need not be questioned. He observes that the Romans respected the Britons' valour, that the Empire drafted Britons because of their hardiness, and that further evidence testifies to the strength of their warriors. In his own day, Milton notes, there are many examples of military skill. In each case, however, 'to make use of so great advantages was not thir skill.' England had never lacked liberty for 'want of force, or manlike warhood.'[35] Britons in the battlefield seldom interest Milton, whereas the Romans' virtuous discipline lends lustre to details of their military successes. It was enough to know that the English were courageous in battle; their problems had other origins.

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34 CP, V. p. 449.
35 CP, V. pp. 441, 443.

With this difference settled, Gildas could provide an important perspective on Milton's day. The old faults of 'ruler, priest, and people' still dogged the liberties for which the English were still fighting. Milton applies his interpretation of the ancient Britons' failures to the present: the lack of discipline in the national character led to the corruption of civil and ecclesiastical government, and to the loss of liberties that had been, and were once more, within reach. The reappearance of these faults exasperates Milton. Nature emerges to tyrannize over all efforts at national reformation, to expose as laughable all the turmoil of the 1640s. The shortcomings in the national character seem almost inescapable:

> as they brought those antient natives to miserie and ruin by libertie which rightly us'd might have made them happie, so brought they these of late after many labours, much bloodshed, & vast expence, to ridiculous frustration, in whom the like defects, the like miscarriages notoriouslie appear'd, with vices not less hatefull or inexcusable.[36]

Milton believes that another Gildas is needed, a contemporary reformer to denounce the vices of the age. It is uncertain whether he deems this the appropriate response out of hope for immediate reform or simply to stand as a witness against corruption. In any case, he feels obliged, as an historian, 'to revive those antient complaints of Gildas as deservedly on these lately as on those his times.'[37] The change in Milton's tone advertises his new

36 CP, V. p. 443.
37 CP, V. p. 443.

sense of mission. He revives the polemical style of his earlier pamphlets for this renewal of 'those antient complaints.' His zeal for reform has fallen and changed, however, to a less optimistic attack on his contemporaries. His longer, more fluent periods contrast with the restraint of his translation and paraphrase of the De Excidio in the third book of the History, where he is partially bound by Gildas's use of antithesis. More importantly, Milton's indignation soars above the Sallustian and Tacitean terseness of the previous book. His use of metaphors of disease and alimentary references increases, a common characteristic of his controversialist prose. Moreover, whereas in Of Reformation Milton had emphasized the recovery of the church from its metaphoric illnesses, he now stresses that the Britons ancient and modern failed to benefit from the medicine of a chance at liberty.[38]

Milton also structures his tirade along Gildas's lines. He moves from secular to ecclesiastical corruption and indicates the continuity between the two. The fatal subordination of public to private interest shows the lack of civil virtue among the Members of Parliament. In Milton's view, the Parliament refused to dissolve because it feared a public reckoning which would reveal its 'ruin of a whole nation.'[39] Similarly, the worldly corruption of churchmen frustrated any hopes of reform. Pluralities and the coercion of congregations, long associated with simony

38 CP, I. p. 519; V. p. 441.
39 CP, V. p. 447.

and greed,[40] provide Milton with traditional targets for reform. Like the ancient Britons, contemporary Englishmen suffered from the corruption of their politicians and churchmen. The national character was again confounding a rare opportunity for liberty. The leaders' lack of civil and religious virtue perverts all discipline:

> they who but of late were extolld as great deliverers, and had a people wholy at thir devotion, by so discharging thir trust as we see, did not onely weak'n and unfitt themselves to be dispencers of what libertie they pretented, but unfitted also the people, now growne worse & more disordinate, to receave or to digest any libertie at all.[41]

As in his remarks on the relation between eloquence and virtue, Milton associates the civil and religious discipline necessary for liberty with exalted harmonies. Once more he maintains that true discipline is true heroism. His contemporaries, and inhabitants of Britain throughout history, largely lacked the 'heroic wisdo[m]' necessary 'to know these exquisit proportions.'[42] Drawing a parallel between his views and those of Gildas, Milton sees his contemporaries as conforming to a historical pattern: like their predecessors, his contemporaries' 'strain and temper' proved inadequate to the responsibilities of liberty-- 'things too hard and generous.'[43] The causes that

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40 See, for instance, Spenser's Kirkrapine and Abessa, 'With whom he whoredome usd.' The Faerie Queene, I. 3. xvi-xx. M. R. Falls, 'Spenser's Kirkrapine and the Elizabethans,' Studies in Philology L (1953), pp. 457-475.
41 CP, V. p. 449.
42 CP, V. p. 451.
43 CP, V. p. 451.

determine 'thir strain and temper' therefore interest Milton as he sets out to remedy this natural weakness. He concludes the Digression by trying to formulate some generalizations about the national character, and by proposing some natural cause for its long domination in British and English affairs.

Milton therefore tries to specify what virtues and shortcomings are common to the ancient Britons and to his own contemporaries. He had already indicated his opinions on the national character in his descriptions of the Britons earlier in the History. He now professes himself eager to speak out on this issue which he believes too little understood. He proposes that Britain,

> as it is a land fruitful of men stout and couragious in warr, so it is naturallie not over fertil of men able to govern justlie and prudentlie in peace.[44]

Thus he tempers Gildas's more hostile dictum-- 'non Britanni sunt in bello fortes, nec in pace fideles'-- and again identifies the lack of discipline as the chief problem for the British in war and peace. Milton distinguishes an ardour for freedom from the civil and religious virtue necessary for an enduring liberty. Despite his constant emphasis on the division beteen church and state, he assumes that the discipline needed for either is much the same. Since weak discipline had hampered both religious and temporal progress in Britain, order in the civil realm needs

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44 CP, V. p. 451.

to be the aim of government, with the liberty thus provided supporting further religious reformation.

With the problem of the national character made plain, Milton speculates on the reasons for this troubling predetermination. Proposing a geographical cause, he explains that the latitude and climate of Britain adversely influence the national character.[45] He often refers to this problem but nowhere as disconsolately as in the Digression. Even there, however, he maintains that education can overcome the handicap that nature has imposed. He emphasizes the need for importing 'civilitie, prudence, love of the public' from nations where 'the sunn, which wee want[,] ripens witts as well as fruits.'[46] His satirical expression of this view does not weaken the importance of this theory for the History. Milton's involvement in contemporary educational theory would have confirmed his interest in climate theories and the remedial influence of education.[47] His Polybian description of manners in A Brief History of Moscovia points to this preoccupation of the day. Milton chooses Russia first of all in part because it is 'the most northern Region of Europe reputed civil,' or so he maintains, 'many years' after writing the Moscovia.[48] For

45 These have been studied in depth by Z. S. Fink, 'Milton and the Theory of Climatic Influence,' Modern Language Quarterly, II (1949), pp. 67-80; The Classical Republicans (Evanston: 1945), pp. , 91-94, 191-192.
46 CP, V. p. 451.
47 G. H. Turnbull, Hartlib, Dury, Comenius (1947), pp. 40-41.
48 CP, VIII. p. 474-475. The most recent editor of the Moscovia, George Parks, mistakenly maintains that this 'was not a very good reason for the work.' CP, VIII. p. 458.

the English, almost as far north, the Russian experience might be especially instructive. Milton's keen interest in geography, evident in the curriculum he had proposed in Of Education, including 'the use of the Globes' that Phillips noted for Aubrey's benefit, may have been fueled by his interest in the natural determination of national characters.[49] The ill effects of climate he attributes directly to the Fall, but, not least in this respect, the purpose of true 'Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents.'[50] In Of Education, he had proposed that true virtue 'being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.' There too he had criticized corrupt politicians for being 'unprincipl'd in vertue, and true generous breeding.'[51] In the Digression, he maintains that true virtue would 'grow not here but in minds well implanted with solid and elaborate breeding.'[52] The shortcomings of his contemporaries, despite their natural cause, could be overcome by education which, with divine assistance in the matter of faith, might allow man to achieve his 'highest perfection' despite the hindrance of nature. After all, although God governs 'in naturalibus, civilibus,' he determines chiefly 'adiaphoris, fortuitis, in quibusvis denique rebus versari potius quam in moralibus aut

49 CP, II. p. 389; Darbishire, Early Lives, p. 12.
50 Paradise Lost, X. 651-686; CP. II. p. 366-367. Milton's horoscope also shows his interest in the influence of nature on the individual man, CW. XVIII. pp. 348, 555-556.
51 CP, II. pp. 367, 375.
52 CP, V. p. 451.

religiosis debere intelligi.'[53] Although man had to contend with the consequences of the Fall, not least the reordering of the natural world which accompanied that act of the will, the will remained ultimately free.

Milton concludes, therefore, that British history teaches the need for 'forren writings & examples of best ages.' Having undertaken to remedy the 'want of self knowledge' that threatens English hopes, he suggests that British history only provides warnings of dangers to be overcome; by and large, more edifying examples should be sought elsewhere. This reveals a new response to those British subjects for tragedies and heroic poems he had earlier considered at length. Perhaps some creative disappointment sharpens the waspish tone that Milton uses in his description of the Britons ancient and modern. Britain truly provided no climate for a national epic. Milton's new idea of the heroic was not to be reconciled with a nation characteristically:

> headstrong and intractable to the industrie and vertue either of executing or understanding true civil goverment: Valiant indeed and prosperous to winn a field, but to know the end and reason of winning, unjudicious and unwise, in good or bad success alike unteachable.[54]

Samson was an aposite figure for Milton's final tragedy. The only way for civil and ecclesiastical reforms to succeed in the 1640s would be through the guidance of those whose

53 CW, XV. p. 214.
54 CP, V. p. 451.

public spirit had been nurtured by a classical education to a high level of civil virtue. This, in contrast, was the true heroic realm, where the protagonists were

> men more then vulgar, bred up, as few of them were, in the knowledge of Antient and illustrious deeds, invincible against money, and vaine titles, impartial to friendships and relations.[55]

Lacking such education, however, his countrymen were doomed to repeat 'what befel those antient inhabita[nts] whom they so much resembl'd.'

His relative diffidence about the natural cause behind the English shortcomings points to his having some misgivings on the subject. The tension between his disappearing sense of the predestined nation and his emerging interest in man's will partially resolves itself in his expressions of the concept of a national character. Moving from his loosely predestinarian position, he comes to accept a limited natural predestination rather than an absolute divine decree. Nature influences the history of the nation, and yet although nature imposes on the will, the will is ultimately free. The idea of a flawed national character is central to Milton's response to the events of the 1640s. He becomes increasingly preoccupied with the elect within the nation, with true Christians, rather than with the elect nation he had proclaimed in Of Reformation and Areopagitica. On this basis he could generalize on

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55 CP, V. p. 451.

human experience, and transcend the failings of unreforming England.

Appendix A

The question remains unsolved whether Milton wrote the 'Postscript' appended to the Smectymnuan Answer to a Booke entituled, An Humble Remonstrance (March, 1641). Masson first suggested Milton's authorship of this brief historical survey of English episcopacy.[1] Further arguments in favour of this identification have been advanced by Wolfe.[2] These centre on the strong similarities between the author and Milton, ranging from historical interests, to specific references and editions of sources used. Supporting evidence derives from the style and spelling of 'A Postscript.'[3] Against Milton's authorship is the reference in 'A Postscript' to Bucer's De Regno Christi, a work Milton appears first to have read in 1644.[4] A recent adjudication of the contest held that 'the question seems undecided and undecidable.'[5]

The reference to Bucer in the 'A Postscript' derives from page 83 of De Regno Christi. The question, then, is whether Milton read this much of the work, but remained

1 Masson, Life of John Milton, II. p. 238.
2 CP, I. pp. 961-965.
3 J. T. Shawcross, 'What We Can Learn from Milton's Spelling,' Huntingdon Library Quarterly, XXVI (1963), pp. 358-359, and 'The Authorship of "A Postscript",' Notes and Queries, XIII (1966), pp. 378-379.
4 He describes his delight in his late discovery of Bucer's position on divorce in The Judgement of Martin Bucer (1644), CP, II. p. 435. This inconsistency was first noted by G. W. Whiting, 'Milton and the "Postscript",' Modern Language Review, XXX (1935), pp. 506-508. See also Michael Fixler, Milton and the Kingdoms of God (Evanston 1964), p. 112.
5 Coleridge, Descriptive Catalogue of the Milton Collection, p. 330.

wholly ignorant of the section which soon follows--on pages 86 to 134-- treating marriage and divorce.[6] This seems unlikely, although someone may have provided him with this reference. Coleridge suggests another plausible explanation: that Milton 'may have provided the notes for the Smectymnuans to write' the 'Postscript,' thus allowing some interpolation of the Bucer reference.7 But the evidence to date for Milton's authorship of 'A Postscript' remains inconclusive.

6 Bucer, Scripta Anglicana, ed. C. Hubertus (Basle: 1577).
7 Coleridge, Descriptive Catalogue of the Milton Collection, p. 330.

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