

Revisiting David Hume's Review of the Rev. Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain*: Illuminating Hume on Religion, Politics, and Modernity¹

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I. Introduction

In 1773, David Hume (1711-76) wrote a review of Volume Two of the Rev. Robert Henry's (1718-90) *The History of Great Britain, from the Invasion of it by the Romans under Julius Caesar. Written on a New Plan* (1774). Hume's piece—worked up from a pre-publication copy of Henry's book—was intended for the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, but it was not published during Hume's lifetime. We know what Hume wrote in his review only because pre-publication proof sheets have survived. These are now held in the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, in Los Angeles, California.² Hume's review of Henry was quite substantial—some ten pages, about 4,250 words in length. Several pages of the proofs are revised in Hume's hand, including a concluding paragraph that Hume added.

In some ways, there's little surprise to be found in Hume's writing a review of Henry's *History*. After all, by 1773, Hume was the best-known historian of the Scottish Enlightenment. For today's scholars, it is often Hume the philosopher who gets the most attention. But in the late

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 - 2) MS.1927.002. I thank the Clark Library's staff for their generous and professional assistance, and for providing me with digital images of the manuscript proof sheets they keep.

eighteenth century, Hume was known foremost to a general reading audience as “Hume the historian,” especially for his multi-volume *History of England*. Or, to give that work its full title in its finished form, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688*.

It is important to remember, however, that the work we know as Hume’s *History of England* was first published piecemeal, as individual volumes. Only gradually did Hume’s entire project take its finished form. Hume’s separate histories and sets had come out, as six volumes, during a seven-year period, from 1754 to 1761. Hume began his historical collection with two volumes on the seventeenth-century Stuart monarchs, then turned his attention backwards to the sixteenth-century Tudors, and finally, back even further, to England’s earliest times. So, only in 1762 do we have Hume’s “complete” *History of England*. And even then it wasn’t really *complete*. Hume continued to change the *History* with each new edition that came out, right through until the end of his life. In 1778, an eight-volume posthumous edition, incorporating Hume’s final revisions, was published as “*A New Edition, with the Author’s last Corrections and Improvements*.” We will want to circle back to the topic of Hume’s revisions to his *History*. But first, there is additional context to layout. We have sketched a bit of context for Hume’s intended review for the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* and for Hume’s own *History of England*, but what about the book that Hume was reviewing?

Volume Two of Robert Henry’s *History of Great Britain* dealt with events from the arrival of the Saxons in 449 to the landing of William, Duke of Normandy, in 1066. Like Henry’s Volume One, the second volume was also self-published; it was, the titlepage recorded, “Printed for the Author.” Another point worth noting here is that Henry claimed his *History* was “Written on a New Plan.” He had spelled out the details of that “New Plan” in “The General Preface” to his first volume.

Henry’s whole project was to have ten books. Each of the books was to be divided into seven chapters. Each of the chapters was to run parallel, one with the others, “presenting the reader,” Henry wrote, “with the history of one particular object.” The topics of those seven, parallel chapters on particular objects in each of the ten books were: 1) “civil and military

history"; 2) "history of religion, or the ecclesiastical history"; 3) "history of our constitution, government, laws and courts of justice"; 4) "history of learning, of learned men, and of the chief seminaries of learning"; 5) "arts, both useful and ornamental, necessary and pleasing"; 6) "history of commerce, of shipping, of money and coin, and of prices of commodities"; and 7) "manners, virtues, vices, remarkable customs, language, dress, diet, and diversions."³⁾

II

It is worth pausing here to show that Hume would have been keenly interested in Henry's concerted efforts to approach England's history through an innovatively expansive lens. After all, in writing his own *History of England*, Hume—as Henry later would—had grappled with the best way to approach an historical field with broadened dimensions, one taking in more than only war and politics. We could turn to Hume's first published *History*, for instance. There, in 1754, in his account of James I (1566-1625)—the first monarch whose reign he sketched—Hume wrote:

It may not be improper, at this period, to make a pause; and, departing a little from the historical style, take a survey of the state of the kingdom, with regard to government, manners, finances, arms, trade, learning. Where a just notion is not formed of these particulars, history can be little instructive, and often will not be intelligible.⁴⁾

But incorporating such material without interrupting the narrative thread was not easy. Hume at times waffling back-and-forth about the best way. Sometimes his solution was—as he signaled above—to imbed these discussions in his text, as summary surveys. Other times he carved off these

3) See Robert Henry, *The History of Great Britain, from the First Invasion of it by the Romans under Julius Caesar* (London, 1771), "The General Preface," pp. iii-xiii.

4) David Hume, *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I. Containing the Reigns of James I and Charles I* (Edinburgh, 1754), p. 116.

materials, depositing them in endnotes or appendices, both of which he offered as asides to his main story. It is useful to consider a concrete example of how that played out.

In the first edition of the first volume of Hume's *History of Great Britain* (1754), quoted above, Hume's "survey of the state of the kingdom" was labeled "Chapter VI" in Hume's account of James I. But, in 1759, with the second, corrected edition it became instead Hume's "APPENDIX to the Reign of James I."⁵ In other words, what we today know as Hume's "Appendix" to James's reign was not an appendix at all to begin with, but just another chapter; part of Hume's main text. In short, decades before he encountered Henry's "New Plan," Hume had been experimenting with how best to incorporate into his own *History* what we now know as social and cultural topics.

Pursuing this example a little further, we find that Hume would also go on to make a telling revision to his opening line of what had in 1759 become his "Appendix." In editions from 1762 onwards he deleted the words *departing a little from the historical style*.⁶ Why that deletion? One suspects by 1762 Hume saw the historical style was catching up with him. For instance, when Hume's friend Professor Hugh Blair (1718-1800) lectured on "Historical Writing" at the University of Edinburgh in 1760, he identified a trend to which Hume's *History* belonged. Blair professed to his students:

I cannot conclude the subject of history, without taking notice of a very great improvement which has, of late years, begun to be introduced into historical composition; I mean, a more particular attention than was formerly given to laws, customs, commerce, religion, literature, and every other thing that tends to show the spirit and genius of nations. It is now understood to be the business of an able historian

5) Compare *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I. Containing the Reigns of James I and Charles I* (Edinburgh, 1754), p. 116, with *The History of Great Britain. Vol. I. Containing the Reigns of James I and Charles I* (London, 1759), p. 106.

6) See, for instance, Hume, *History of England* (1778), "Appendix to the Reign of James I," vol. 6, p. 157.

to exhibit manners, as well as facts and events; and assuredly, whatever displays the state and life of mankind, in different periods, and illustrates the progress of the human mind, is more useful and interesting than the details of sieges and battles.⁷⁾

But Hume's own struggles with deciding how best to incorporate discussions of "government, manners, finances, arms, trade, [and] learning" into his narrative did not end with the writing of his Stuart volumes. They persisted through to the composition of his final histories, those on England's earliest times, the very period with which Henry's Volume Two dealt.

Those continuing struggles come through in manuscript volumes for that part of Hume's *History* that have survived and are held in the National Library of Scotland.⁸⁾ If we turn in those manuscripts to Hume's concluding survey of the government and manners of the Anglo-Saxons, we find that he was indecisive about what title to give that discussion. It looks as though he first called it "Appendix" — so, something separate from the main text — the title he used as a heading at the center of the top of his manuscript page. But, at some point, he crossed out "Appendix" and relabeled the section, to the right of his deletion at the top of the page, "Chapter 4." So, not an appendix, but a chapter within the main text. And that was not the end of it. Hume next crossed out "Chapter 4" and reinstated "Appendix," at the far left top of the page, settling on his title for what would become "Appendix I: The Anglo-Saxon Government and Manners."

There is every reason to think that Hume would have been intrigued by Henry's "New Plan." And we don't need to *speculate* that Hume found real merit in this aspect of Henry's project. Before he wrote his review of

7) I draw here, for my quotation and its context, on Roger L. Emerson, "Hume's Histories," in his *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment: "Industry, Knowledge and Humanity"* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 127-54, passage quoted at p. 128.

8) See NLS manuscripts, "History of England from the conquest of Julius Caesar to the accession of Henry VII"; MSS.23160-23161.

Henry's Volume Two, Henry's "New Plan" had been a topic in Hume's correspondence with Hume's publisher, William Strahan (1715-85). From those letters, we also learn that Henry had asked Hume to approach Strahan to enquire about the possibility of Strahan's publishing Henry's *History*. In the summer of 1770, Hume wrote to Strahan:

You will very soon be visited by one, who carries with him a Work, that has really Merit: It is Dr Henry, the Author of the History of England, writ on a new Plan. He has given to the World a Sheet or two, containing his Idea, which he will probably communicate to you.⁹⁾

So, to highlight my main point here—when it came to dealing innovatively with the expanding subject matter of history—Hume and Henry occupied some shared ground and Hume saw real merit in Henry's "New Plan." As Hume put it in the first paragraph of his review of Henry: "we cannot resist the inclination we have of communicating to the public the sentiments we entertain concerning that work in general; the perusing of performances of uncommon merit, and the recommending of them to the attention and particular favour of the world, being the most agreeable part of the office of Reviewers."¹⁰⁾

III

In 1942, more than 80 years ago, Hume scholar Ernest C. Mossner (1907-86) published an essay entitled "Hume as Literary Patron: A Suppressed Review of Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain, 1773*" in which he also argued that Hume was amendable to Henry's "New Plan."¹¹⁾ There, a

9) Hume to Strahan, summer of 1770, in J.Y.T. Greig, ed., *The Letters of David Hume* (Oxford University Press, 1932), vol. 2, p. 230.

10) When quoting from Hume's review of Henry, here and elsewhere I do so from the manuscript version for reasons discussed below.

11) See E. C. Mossner, "Hume as Literary Patron: A Suppressed Review of Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain, 1773*," *Modern Philology*, vol. 39, no. 4 (May 1942), pp. 361-82.

young Mossner—who had found the page proofs of Hume's review of Henry, which he reprinted¹²)—recounted that Hume had composed for the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* an assessment of Henry's *History*. Mossner in his account made much of Hume's correspondence with Strahan—including the lines quoted above—in his effort to paint Hume as being entirely supportive of everything about Henry and his *History*.

But, I want to argue that Hume's general attraction to Henry's "New Plan" is a *long way* from being the entire story of Hume's review of Henry's book. For starters, Mossner overlooked or downplayed most of Hume's negative and cautionary comments about Henry's *History* that Hume made in his letters to Strahan. Those passages give us the first hints of Hume's skepticism about Henry's *History*.

In his first letter to Strahan about Henry's *History*— in which Hume praised Henry's "New Plan"— Hume also said this about Henry's project:

The only discouraging Circumstance is its Size: This Specimen contains two Quartos, and yet gives us only the History of Great Britain from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to that of the Saxons: One is apt to think that the whole, spun out to the same Length, must contain at least a hundred Volumes: And unhappily, the beginning of the Work will be for a long time very uninteresting, which may not prepossess the World in its favour.¹³

That two-sided message permeates Hume's letters to Strahan about Henry's

12) Mossner's was the first of two twentieth-century printings of Hume's review. See Mossner, "Hume as Literary Patron," pp. 374-82, and David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin, eds, *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. 377-88. Both texts were based on the typescript page proofs held in the Clark Library, cited above. But neither reprinting is an accurate transcription of the original. The two reprintings vary in several ways, both from one another and from their original. The author is preparing a new transcription of Hume's review of Henry which will be published, he hopes, as part of a larger study of Hume as book reviewer.

13) Hume to Strahan, summer 1770; Greig, *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 230-31.

project. On one hand, Hume thinks Henry's "New Plan" has merit and the author is deserving of recognition; on the other hand, Hume sees Henry's historical project as a long, drawn-out affair that is not very interesting. To quote another Hume letter to Strahan:

Dr Henry's History is undoubtedly liable to the Objection you mention. It will be of enormous Size; and he himself, tho' a laborious Man, never expects to finish it. I think also the Price he demanded exorbitant. It is however writ with Perspicuity and Propriety of Style, as I told you; but neither sprightly nor elegant; and it is judicious, but not curious: There is danger of its appearing prolix to ordinary Readers: The Subject of his next Volume [that is the volume that Hume would review] will be still more uninteresting than that of the first.¹⁴⁾

And, in a final letter on the subject, Hume wrote: "I maintaind and still maintain that Henry's History has merit; tho' I own'd and still own, that the Length of the Undertaking is a great Objection to its Success; perhaps an insuperable one."¹⁵⁾

Mossner, in his account, may have dismissed Hume's negative statements about Henry's project; but William Strahan didn't. With Hume's input about Henry's over-priced, exceedingly long, and uninteresting manuscript, that was neither sprightly nor elegant nor curious, Strahan decided against publishing Henry's *History*. Therein lies the explanation for why the *History* was "Printed for the Author."

Mossner argued that—above all else—Hume wanted to promote Henry's *History* with what Mossner called Hume's "kindly intended review." But Mossner gave surprisingly little attention to what Hume actually *wrote* in his review. He maintained that the story behind Hume's review was much more interesting than the *content* of the review, to which Mossner gave only

14) Hume to Strahan, 21 January 1771; Greig, *Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 233-35 (passage quoted at p. 234).

15) Hume to Strahan, 11 March 1771; Greig, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 238.

a short, cursory comment. Mossner wrote:

As to the review itself ... it may suffice to say that in form it is a typical review of the eighteenth century. A general and descriptive opening, a critical evaluation by way of conclusion, and the long remainder is almost wholly given up to illustrative quotations from the original. The most interesting critical part is the statement on historiography in the penultimate paragraph, where Hume specifically subscribes to the distinction between the antiquarian and the historian, the researcher delving into the data of the past and the thinker discerning meaning in those data.¹⁶⁾

I hope to convince you that almost all of what Mossner asserted here is misguided or demonstrably wrong. Hume's review is *not* "a typical" eighteenth-century review. The body of the review is *not* a "long remainder"; but rather forms the core of Hume's critical assessment. And, Hume's opening and concluding remarks—which contain much irony, unappreciated by Mossner—can *only* be understood when read in a fuller context and against the developed message of the review as a whole.

Mossner's reading of Hume's review was clouded by his then-developing interpretation of Hume as *Le bon David*. The story of Hume's "kindly intended review" of Henry's *History* resurfaced in Mossner's book of 1943—referenced in his essay as forthcoming—*The Forgotten Hume: Le bon David*.¹⁷⁾ From there, the story found its way into Professor Mossner's co-edited *New Letters of David Hume*.¹⁸⁾ And, finally, into his long-reigning biography, *The Life of David Hume*—both its first edition of 1954, and its second edition of

16) Mossner, "Literary Patron," p. 373.

17) Published in New York by Columbia University Press in 1943; see Mossner, "Hume as Literary Patron," p. 377n28.

18) See Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner, eds, *New Letters of David Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 202, notes 1-6.

1980.¹⁹⁾

Mossner's account of Hume's "kindly intended review" has proved very influential; it has been quietly absorbed as the unchallenged record. Subsequent Hume scholars— including David Fate Norton (1937-2014) and Richard H. Popkin (1923-2005),²⁰⁾ Donald Livingston,²¹⁾ David R. Raynor,²²⁾ Mark Salber Phillips,²³⁾ Richard B. Sher,²⁴⁾ Claudia M. Schmidt (1962-2011),²⁵⁾

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- 19) That boiled-down version remained unchanged between *The Life of David Hume* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1954), pp. 583-84, and its second edition (Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 583-84.
- 20) Norton and Popkin, *David Hume: Philosophical Historian*, p. 377. Mossner's "fuller account" is cited in the headnote for their reprinting of the "Review."
- 21) Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984). Livingston's use is an involved case that I do not have space to delve into here. I intend to do so elsewhere.
- 22) David R. Raynor, "Hume and Robertson's *History of Scotland*," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 10, issue 1 (March 1987), pp. 59-63, at p. 60, where Mossner is cited and it is implied that Hume's review of Henry was favorable. Earlier, in "Hume's Abstract of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 22 (1984), pp. 51-79, Raynor wrote of Hume's "praise" of Henry when he "lauded" his *History* (p. 61).
- 23) Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton University Press, 2000). Phillips listed Mossner's *Hume* in his bibliography and wrote: "Hume wrote a favorable review of Henry's *History* intended for the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, but it was suppressed by the editor, Gilbert Stuart, who was hostile to Henry" (p. 8n6). See also Phillips's student, Dale Smith, "Present as Past: Forms of Contemporary History in Britain, 1750-1835" (PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2004), who described Hume's piece as "a very positive review" (p. 126).
- 24) Richard B. Sher, "The Book in the Scottish Enlightenment," in Paul Wood, ed. *The Culture of the Book in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Toronto: Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, 2000), pp. 40-60, where Mossner's "Literary Patron" essay is cited as the evidence for Hume's "favourable review" (p. 55).
- 25) Claudia M. Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in History* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), p. 320n10; pp. 411-12.

Roderick Graham,²⁶ and James Harris,²⁷ among others²⁸)—have all accepted and promoted the main lines of Mossner's rendition. But, when we read Hume's review more closely than Mossner and those who have followed him do, we find that Hume's assessment of Henry's *History* is much more intricate than they assumed. Unpacking Hume's intricacies, we find his review is far more playful and far less favourable than has been thought.

When Hume's review of Henry is read closely—and in the contexts of Henry's *History* as a whole, and Hume's own *History of England* and its revisions—we find reasons for thinking that Hume was quite critical of the core of Henry's account of England's ancient times. That informed reading also brings to light some of Hume's playful irony, we'll see. And all of this helps to illuminate Hume as the historian of the *History of England*, especially when it comes to the serious and intertangled topics of religion, politics, and modernity. Let's see if we might demonstrate some of this for you.

IV

Having introduced Henry's volume to his readers, Hume in his review proceeded to give attention to each of Henry's seven chapters. Some of Hume's playfulness comes out as early as his assessment of Henry's first

26) Roderick Graham, *The Great Infidel: A Life of David Hume* (East Lothian, UK: Tuckwell Press, 2004), pp. 335-36.

27) James A. Harris, *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 440.

28) Such as Davis D. McElroy, who in a volume that cited Mossner's account described Hume's review of Henry as "eulogistic"; see *Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Literary Clubs and Societies* (Washington State University Press, 1969), p. 77. Some even follow Mossner to places he did not go. Jia Wei, *Commerce and Politics in Hume's "History of England"* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), writes: "For a discussion of Hume's influence on his protégé, Robert Henry, see Ernest Campbell Mossner, 'Hume as Literary Patron'" (p. 174). But there is nothing in Mossner's essay about Hume's "influence" on Henry. Mossner did write that Hume was "[d]etermined to do something tangible for his new clerical protégé" (Mossner, "Hume as Literary Patron," p. 363), which, of course, is something much different.

chapter. Hume wrote:

Dr Henry hath employed several contrivances with the greatest success. He hath divided his long period into five parts ... By this delicate and well fancied method, the thread of the narration is preserved unbroken, and some degree of unity and order introduced into a portion of the history of Great Britain, which has perplexed the acuteness of our most philosophical and accomplished historians.

On a quick glance, all of that might strike one as straightforward praise. But is it?

First, remember for Hume “contrivances” were often unnatural, and things that were “fancied” signified what was unduly imagined. One way to read that passage is that Hume thinks Henry’s story is all a bit too neat for a period of England’s history that Hume in his *History* considered to be “broken and disjointed.” Hume remarked on the fragmented nature of England’s earliest history at several points in his telling of it. And there were insufficient trustworthy historical records from which to construct an ordered and detailed history of this inherently chaotic period, he argued. In the very first paragraph of his volume on England’s earliest times, Hume wrote: “The convulsions of a civilized state usually compose the most instructive and most interesting part of its history; but the sudden, violent, and unprepared revolutions, incident to Barbarians, are so much guided by caprice, and terminate so often in cruelty, that they disgust us by the uniformity of their appearance; and it is rather fortunate for letters that they are buried in silence and oblivion.”²⁹⁾ “It is impossible,” he remarked elsewhere,

and would be tedious, to relate particularly all the miseries to which the English were thenceforth [i.e. after Danish occupation] exposed.

29) David Hume, *The History of England, from The Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Accession of Henry VII* (London, 1762), vol. 1, p. 1.

We hear of nothing but the sacking and burning of towns; the devastations of the open country; the appearance of the enemy in every quarter of the kingdom; their cruel diligence in discovering any corner which had not been ransacked by their former violence.

“The broken and disjointed narration of the antient historians is here well adapted” to the nature of the times they wrote about, Hume concluded.³⁰ In other words, it would be a mistake for historians to create from these broken and disjointed times a smooth historical narrative by falsely applying too much system and connection to them.

Clearly also, there is playfulness in the fact that Hume counted *himself* as one of those perplexed historians, even a “philosophical and accomplished” one. But there’s more than that going on here too. As close readers of Henry’s *History* would appreciate—but what Mossner and other modern scholars have not—is that much of Hume’s *seeming* praise here was really just a repetition of Henry’s own words. Henry had written in his first chapter: “By this means, the thread of our narration will be preserved unbroken, and some degree of unity and order introduced into this most intricate and perplexing period of the history of Britain.”³¹ Obviously, seeing that Hume parroted Henry’s self-assessment takes much of the glitter out of his ostensible praise.³²

Also, perhaps Hume’s use of the word “hath” in the passage quoted at the top of this section has caught the reader’s attention? It’s used twice and in back-to-back sentences. (“Dr Henry hath employed several contrivances with the greatest success. He hath divided his long period into five parts...”) “Hath” is not a word Hume used often. In all else that he published during

30) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 102.

31) Henry, *History*, vol. 2, p. 17.

32) Some commentators have relied on this statement to interpret Hume without realizing that Hume here was speaking with Henry’s exact words; see, for instance, Erin Frykholm, “Narrative and History in Hume’s Moral Epistemology,” *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2016), pp. 21-50 (at p. 34; and p. 48n51).

his long life as a writer, one finds it only in cases where Hume is quoting or paraphrasing someone else or writing anonymously. So, nowhere in anything that he published under his own name does Hume use the word “hath” in print in his own voice. Yet, in his review of the Rev. Henry’s book, Hume used “hath” six times, including three times in his anonymous authorial voice. So, what’s going on?

I suspect Hume’s use of “hath” was an in-joke with fellow historian the Rev. William Robertson with whom Hume had earlier bantered in correspondence about his friend’s use of that somewhat-clerical term in his historical publications.³³ It is possible that Hume in his review used “hath” to jest Henry, as the Rev. Henry—like the Revs Robertson and Blair—used the word frequently, whether he was writing sermons or history.³⁴ Perhaps Hume even intended to veil his authorship by using such language? If nothing else, it ought to alert us to the potential for playfulness in Hume’s account of the Rev. Henry’s other chapters. Let’s now turn to Hume’s account of Henry’s second chapter, that on religion.

V

“The second chapter,” wrote Hume in his review, “contains the history of religion in each of the British nations.” Hume went on to explain that Henry provided “a very curious account of the priests, imaginary deities, sacrifices, and religious rites of the Saxons and Danes.” Henry had argued that “the religious principles” of those ancient peoples were “originally very pure and rational,” but “gradually” became “corrupted.”³⁵ Henry here built upon a narrative launched in his Volume One. There, he had traced the early and pure religion of the Britons, which, he claimed, had “descended to them ... from Gomer the eldest son of Japhet” and, therefore, the grandson of

33) See Greig, *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 194.

34) Reviewing the Rev. William Robertson’s *History of Scotland*, also anonymously, Hume similarly used the word “hath” often. Four times in his own anonymous voice.

35) Henry, *History*, vol. 2, p. 123. See also Henry, *History*, vol. 2, p. 180.

Noah.³⁶⁾

One imagines Hume being skeptical of such claims. Nowhere in anything that Hume wrote did he provide accounts of Gomer or Japhet or any of the progeny of Noah. Moreover, in the opening paragraph of his own *History of England*, Hume had dismissed all of that outright. He wrote:

The fables, which are commonly employed to supply the place of true history, ought entirely to be disregarded ... Neglecting, therefore, all traditions or rather tales concerning the more early history of Britain, we shall only consider the state of the inhabitants, as it appeared to the Romans on their invasion of this country.³⁷⁾

Hume would not follow Henry into what Hume considered to be the sublime tales of Noah.

Hume did, however, draw attention to the guiding theme in Henry's chapter on religion—the expanding superstition of the Christian Church in this period. Hume explained that “At the conclusion of each of [Henry's] sections [on Religion] is a brief delineation of the state of religion, and of the innovations which had been at that time introduced, of which the following instructive passage ... may serve as a proper specimen.” Hume concluded his account of Henry's chapter on religion with this long quotation from Henry's volume:

Ignorance and superstition increased greatly in the church of England, as well as in other parts of the Christian world, in the course of the eighth century. Pilgrimages to Rome became far more frequent, and were attended with worse effects than formerly;—the rage of retiring into monasteries became more violent in persons of all ranks, to the

36) Henry, *History*, vol. 1, p. 92. Nathaniel Wolloch, *History and Nature in the Enlightenment: Praise of the Mastery of Nature in Eighteenth-Century Historical Literature* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), aptly described Henry's method in this section of his *History* “a biblically-based postdiluvian historiography” (p. 28).

37) Hume, *History of England* (1778), vol. 1, p. 2.

ruin of military discipline, and of every useful art;—the clergy became more knavish and rapacious, and the laity more abject and stupid, than in any former period. Of this the trade of relics, which can never be carried on but between knaves and fools, is a sufficient evidence. The number of holidays, and of childish and trifling ceremonies, which are equally pernicious to honest industry and rational religion, were very much increased in the course of this dark age. As the Britons, Scots, and Picts had little or no intercourse with Rome in this period, it is probable that superstition had not made such rapid progress amongst them as amongst the English. But we know so little of the ecclesiastical history of these three nations in this century, that we can produce nothing of certainty and importance on that subject, unless the conversion of the Scots and Picts to the Roman rule in celebrating Easter, which happened in this century, can be called important.

This is the sort of passage that Mossner considered to be only a “long remainder... wholly given up to illustrative quotations from the original.” But with this passage Hume is doing much more than offering an illustrative quotation from Henry to fill up space.

First, one envisions Hume having some fun in quoting, for public consumption, the Rev. Henry’s “instructive” account of the great increase in “ignorance and superstition” in the Church of England and repeating Henry’s assertion that the clergy “became more knavish and rapacious, and the laity more abject and stupid ... in this dark age.” After all, when Hume had made similar points in his own *History* he had often faced ridicule at the hands of pious readers and reviewers. And there was also something more intricate going on here. The only possibility of finding something that “can be called important” in “this dark age”—Henry had written and Hume had quoted to conclude his summary of the Reverend’s chapter on Anglo-Saxon religion—is “the conversion of the Scots and Picts to the Roman rule in celebrating Easter.” Henry’s chapter, relying heavily on the Venerable

Bede, had presented this event as what he called a "mighty controversy."³⁸⁾ It's worth asking, what would any close reader of David Hume's best-selling *History of England* make of Henry's "mighty controversy" about the importance of the rule for celebrating Easter? Evidence for the answer is not hard to find. For what Henry presents as a "mighty controversy," Hume's *History* had described much differently.

In what strikes me as one of his most entertaining passages *anywhere*, Hume wrote the following in his conclusion to Volume 1, Chapter I, of his *History of England*. The "abject superstition" of the times, he submitted, had produced "frivolous controversies in theology":

The disputes, excited in Britain, were of the most ridiculous kind, and entirely worthy of those ignorant and barbarous ages. There were some intricacies, observed by all the Christian churches, in adjusting the day of keeping Easter; which depended on a complicated consideration of the course of the sun and moon: And it happened that the missionaries, who had converted the Scots and Britons, had followed a different calendar from that which was observed at Rome, in the age when Augustine converted the Saxons. The priests also of all the Christian churches were accustomed to shave part of their head; but the form given to this tonsure, was different in the former from what was practised in the latter. The Scots and Britons pleaded the

38) Henry, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 144-46. Henry relayed how the kingdoms of Mercia and Northumberland "received the light of the gospel from preachers of the Scotch nation," while those in Kent and Wessex "were converted to and instructed in the Christian religion by missionaries from Rome and France." "All these different teachers established the rites and usages of the churches from whence they came, in those which they planted; which gave rise to many controversies between" them, "particularly about the time of keeping Easter, and the form of the ecclesiastical tonsure." "The Romish clergy in the south of England," Henry explained, "animated with the haughty intolerant spirit of the church from whence they came, were not contented with enjoying their own customs in peace, but labored with much violence to impose them upon the Britons, Scots, and northern English," which, in the end they did in a "sagacious declaration" that was "applauded by the whole assembly" gathered at the "famous council" called "to determine this mighty controversy."

antiquity of *their* usages: The Romans, and their disciples, the Saxons, insisted on the universality of *theirs*. That Easter must necessarily be kept by a rule, which comprehended both the day of the year and age of the moon, was agreed by all; that the tonsure of a priest could not be omitted without the utmost impiety, was a point undisputed: But the Romans and Saxons called their antagonists schismatics; because they celebrated Easter on the very day of the full moon in March, if that day fell on a Sunday, instead of waiting till the Sunday following; and because they shaved the fore-part of their head from ear to ear, instead of making that tonsure on the crown of the head, and in a circular form ... The dispute lasted more than a century; and was at last finished, not by men's discovering the folly of it, which would have been too great an effort for human reason to accomplish, but by the entire prevalence of the Romish ritual over the Scotch and British.³⁹⁾

So, in his telling of early English history, Hume did not think that the “quartodeciman schism” over the dating of Easter was important. Far from it. Rather than being Henry’s “mighty controversy,” for Hume it was nothing but a “ridiculous” and “frivolous controversy.”

So, why the long quotation from Henry’s book? Hume certainly did not agree with it. Partly, he was being playful by highlighting his fellow historian’s serious rendition of a religious past that Hume had long considered laughable: Hume here invited comparison with his own *History*. We know that Hume the historian regularly engaged with comparative historiography and that he thought about his *History* in comparison with histories that came after it. He wrote to Andrew Millar (1707-68) in 1758, for instance, about William Robertson’s *History of Scotland*, just before he reviewed that book: “Some part of his Subject is common with mine; but ... it will rather be an Amusement to the Reader to compare our Method of

39) Hume, *History of England* (1778), vol. 1, pp. 62-64.

treating the same Subject."⁴⁰)

Hume always expected close and diligent readers, and we should not expect anything different from him in his review of Henry. There would be amusement for readers who came to his review of Henry with a knowledge of the text of Hume's own *History of England*, or, perhaps, for those who were later inspired to make the comparison. And, of course, for any "in the know" about Hume's authorship of the review, Hume's quotation of Henry was dripping with irony.

The significance of this particular topic to Hume should not be understated and can be illustrated in another way—by returning to the manuscript version of Hume's history for this period. When we do so, the contrast between Henry's "mighty controversy" and Hume's "frivolous controversy" stands out even more glaringly. In his published *History*, Hume wrote, as we have seen:

The dispute lasted more than a century; and was at last finished, not by men's discovering the folly of it, which would have been too great an effort for human reason to accomplish, but by the entire prevalence of the Romish ritual over the Scotch and British.

Turning to Hume's manuscript, we find that same passage. But below it, there is another sentence. One which Hume, in the end, decided to strike out. Hume wrote, and then cancelled:

We shall not be more particular in our Narration of these Events, lest the Reader begins to forget that we are giving the History of rational Creatures, and imagines we are relating the Quarrels of some stupid Animals, cloathed in human Figure.

No doubt Hume was wise to strike out that passage, especially if he wished

40) Greig, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 273. See Raynor, "Hume and Robertson's *History of Scotland*," p. 59.

to live a quiet life in eighteenth-century Britain. But that he wrote the line at all helps us see how far he differed from the Rev. Henry's assessment of a "mighty controversy" about the rule for the dating of Easter.

In his review, Hume's quotation from Henry's *History* should not be read as praise for Henry's interpretation, nor should we see it as simple page-filler, a "long remainder" of "illustrative quotation," as Mossner wants us to. Hume quoted from Henry with a purpose. His purpose here was not to recommend Henry's interpretation. But, neither did an aged Hume wish to ridicule the Rev. Henry in any open way that would threaten to disturb Hume's peace or bring calmour to his life. Rather, Hume encouraged comparison as a way to highlight a central and distinctive passage in his own *History of England*, one which underscored how nonsensical the ancient English were when it came to their religion. Similar themes of explicit playfulness, invited comparison, and implied criticism are evident elsewhere in Hume's review, including in his treatment of Henry's third chapter, that on early English politics.

VI

Hume wrote of Henry's chapter on the history of the constitution, government, and laws of the Anglo-Saxons, that it "will be esteemed by many readers the most curious, important, and interesting part of the whole work." Hume here again mimicked Henry's self-assessment of his contribution that would, Henry wrote, bring to light "curious, important, and interesting" things.⁴¹⁾ And, Hume did not say that *he* was one of those many readers who esteemed Henry's chapter.

Indeed, any reader who compared Henry's account of England's early political developments with Hume's account would immediately note how opposed they were. Henry wrote, in his chapter's introduction:

The history of that political constitution and form of government, which was established in the best and greatest part of this island,

41) Henry, *History*, vol. 2, p. 212.

and of the laws which were enacted by the Anglo-Saxons in this period, is equally curious, important, and interesting. It is curious, as it . . . discovers the origin of many of our most ancient customs and institutions. It is important and interesting to the English nation, as that form of government, and those laws, were the work of their remote ancestors; the most valuable legacy which they left to their posterity, and the foundation of that most noble and beautiful superstructure,—their present free and happy constitution.⁴²⁾

By 1773, Hume had spent more than two decades writing, publishing, revising, polishing, and republishing a *History* that aimed to show—perhaps more than anything else—there *were no such superstructural foundations* evident in England's earliest times. Hume wrote in 1761 in a passage that remained unrevised until the end of his life:

Above all, a civilized nation, like the English, who have happily established the most perfect and most accurate system of liberty that was ever found compatible with government, ought to be cautious in appealing to the practice of their ancestors, or regarding the maxims of uncultivated ages as certain rules for their present conduct. An acquaintance with the ancient periods of their government is chiefly *useful* by instructing them to cherish their present constitution, from a comparison or contrast with the condition of those distant times. And it is also *curious*, by shewing them the remote, and commonly faint and disfigured originals of the most finished and most noble institutions, and by instructing them in the great mixture of accident, which commonly concurs with a small ingredient of wisdom and foresight, in erecting the complicated fabric of the most perfect government.⁴³⁾

Digging deeper, one might flesh out these opposed views in ways that help

42) Henry, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 216-17.

43) Hume, *History of England* (1778), vol. 3, p. 306.

shed additional light on Hume as historian.

A cornerstone of Henry's constitutional superstructure—outlined in the second section of his chapter—was the supposed growth in representation, importance, and legislative authority of the Wittenagemot, “this great assembly” as Henry called it. The Wittenagemot, or the Witan, was an Anglo-Saxon council which advised the king. Many eighteenth-century British historians, including Robert Henry, celebrated the Wittenagemot as an early popular assembly, the foundation of Britain's modern Parliament. What had Hume's *History* said about the Wittenagemot?

Famously, Hume had argued directly against those who interpreted things as Henry would. Hume's account of the Witan was bare-boned, owing to the lack of historical record. “It is confessed,” wrote Hume,

that our knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon history and antiquities is too imperfect to afford us means of determining with certainty all the prerogatives of the crown and privileges of the people, or of giving an exact delineation of that government. It is probable also, that the constitution might be somewhat different in the different kingdoms of the Heptarchy, and that it changed considerably during the course of six centuries, which elapsed from the first invasion of the Saxons till the Norman conquest. But most of these differences and changes, with their causes and effects, are unknown to us: It only appears, that, at all times, and in all the kingdoms, there was a national council, called a Wittenagemot or assembly of the wise men.⁴⁴⁾

But, wrote Hume, “who *these* [wise men] were, is not so clearly ascertained by the laws or the history of that period.”⁴⁵⁾ Such uncertainty had not stopped historians from drawing wishful conclusions, especially if they had partisan intentions. Hume wrote:

44) Hume, *History of England* (1778), vol. 1, pp. 200-1.

45) Hume, *History of England* (1778), vol. 1, p. 201.

The matter would probably be of difficult discussion, even were it examined impartially; but as our modern parties have chosen to divide on this point, the question has been disputed with greater obstinacy, and the arguments on both sides have become, on that account, the more captious and deceitful.⁴⁶⁾

In his review of Henry's *History*, Hume ignored all that Henry had to say about the supposed importance of the early Wittenagemot and instead turned his reader's attention to what Hume called Henry's "curious description of the great officers in the courts of the Anglo-Saxon and Welch kings." What would Henry's readers find there?

An exceedingly long list, spanning several pages of the "ranks, duties, privileges, and emolument" of the "great officers" of the court.⁴⁷⁾ Twenty-four, all described in minute detail with their ancient names. The "*penteu*, or mayor of the palace"; the "*penhebogydd*, or master of the hawks"; the "*judge of the household*" whose "indispensable qualifications ... were ... a learned education, and a long beard"; the *penguasdrawd*, or master of the horse; the *peneynyd*, or mast of the huntsman; etc.; etc., including the "the master of the lights," "who had the care of all the wax and tallow candles used in the palace" and who "was obliged to hold a taper in his hand near the dish out of which the King ate, and to carry one before him when he went into his bedchamber." "Besides the twenty-four officers above described," wrote Henry,

there was eleven others, of considerable value, in the courts of these ancient princes; the most remarkable of which was that of the King's feet-bearer. This was a young gentleman, whose duty it was to sit on the floor, with his back towards the fire, and hold the King's feet in his bosom all the time he sat at table, to keep them warm and comfortable.

46) Ibid.

47) For the quotations in this paragraph see Henry, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 270-75.

Henry's section-concluding line: "It is unnecessary, and would be tedious, to give a particular account of the other ten inferior offices." Recall Hume's repeated warnings to Strahan about how long and uninteresting Henry's drawn-out *History* would be!

To be clear, Hume's own *History of England* gave no antiquarian lists of this sort and provided no description of the King's feet-bearer. But, in his review he directed readers' attention to all of those antiquated details in Henry's *History* rather than to Henry's account of the Wittenagemot, the discussion that Henry intended to be the pillar of his entire chapter but with which Hume disagreed, fundamentally.

With more space, other sections of Hume's review of Henry's *History* could be unpacked to further demonstrate Hume's critical approach to Henry's appraisal of the Anglo-Saxons. Whether that be Hume's ironic comments on Chapter Four, that Henry "produced a more satisfactory and entertaining account of the state of learning, in those dark ages, than could have been expected," or on Henry's Chapter Five, where the state of the arts was "delineated in a more particular and satisfactory manner than could have been expected, from the few monuments of those times which are now remaining." Elsewhere, Hume drew attention to sections of Henry's account of Alfred the Great, "too long to be transcribed," wrote Hume. And, to Henry's account "of the money and coins of the Anglo-Saxons" which Hume said was "clear [and] concise," but running to thirty pages of Henry's text was neither. Hume commented, tongue-in-cheek, "the results of the whole is formed into the following table," which he reproduced to make his point. For Henry's final chapter, on Manners, Hume skipped discussion of Henry's "many subjects" to repeat from the Rev. Henry a long-winded account of a pretended miracle, one which sat well with the short, illustrative specimens that populated Hume's own account of this period. By way of conclusion for this essay however, I want to return to the theme of Hume's revisions to his *History of England*. One wonders, do Hume's revisions shed light on his review of Robert Henry's *The History of Great Britain*?

VII: Conclusion

Frits van Holthoorn in his variorum edition of Hume's *History* has tabulated some 530 significant additions, excisions, and alterations to Hume's text over the course of its several editions that Hume oversaw.⁴⁸⁾ Amongst all of that revision, though, Hume's volume on England's most remote past—the period covered by Henry's Volume Two—stands out for having the fewest substantive revisions by far. For the *entire* Anglo-Saxon period, van Holthoorn found only *one* significant addition to Hume's text. The addition comes in Hume's discussion of the Wittenagomot in his "Appendix I: The Anglo-Saxon Government and Manners." The addition comes after this passage:

ON the whole, notwithstanding the seeming liberty or rather licentiousness of the Anglo-Saxons, the great body even of the free citizens, in those ages, really enjoyed much less true liberty, than where the execution of the laws is the most severe, and where subjects are reduced to the strictest subordination and dependence on the civil magistrate. The reason is derived from the excess itself of that liberty. Men must guard themselves at any price against insults and injuries; and where they receive not protection from the laws and magistrate, they will seek it by submission to superiors, and by herding in some private confederacy, which acts under the direction of a powerful leader. And thus all anarchy is the immediate cause of tyranny, if not over the state, at least over many of the individuals.⁴⁹⁾

To the 1778 edition which incorporated Hume's final set of revisions—and the only edition to come out after the publication of Robert Henry's Volume Two—Hume added one, short, stand-alone, single-sentence paragraph.

48) See Frits van Holthoorn, "An Historian at Work," introduction to his variorum edition of *David Hume: History of England* (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex, 2000), "Appendix III: A Survey of the Most Important Alterations, Additions and Excisions."

49) Hume, *History* (1778), vol. 1, pp. 207-8.

Here is the addition he made in volume 1 at page 208:

SECURITY was provided by the Saxon laws to all members of the Wittenagemot, both in going and returning, *except they were notorious thieves and robbers.*

It's a curious sentence. And Hume provided no reason for his conspicuous addition. Neither did he give a reference or provide a citation of any sort. But he might have.

Volume Two of the Rev. Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain* contained this passage in Henry's celebration of the Wittenagemot:

The members of the wittenagemots enjoyed several privileges, and special laws were made for securing the liberty and safety of their persons, in going to, attending at, and returning from those assemblies; but such of them as were notorious thieves were not intitled to the benefit of those laws. This exception may appear surprising; but it was not unnecessary: for in those times, too many, who by their rank and wealth were intitled to be members of the supreme council of the nation, were notorious thieves and robbers; and one of the best of our Anglo-Saxon Kings lost his life in extruding one of this character from his own table.⁵⁰⁾

In other words, Hume's only addition to his account of the Anglo-Saxons was a single sentence in which he summarized and cribbed silently a bit of data from Henry's *History*. It was a passage which had gone unquoted and unnoticed in Hume's review. But in his own *History*, Hume—a philosophical historian—put Henry's research to work for a much different purpose than Henry, the historical antiquarian, had intended ... by turning its meaning upside-down! Hume's play on Henry's words even employed emphatic italics to draw in one's attention to that fact.

50) Henry, *History*, vol. 2, p. 267.

Henry's passage was intended to highlight the high privileges of the Wittenagemots, a central theme of *his* chapter. Hume's passage was intended to highlight the guiding theme of *his History*—that the Anglo-Saxons were, as Hume wrote, “in general a rude, uncultivated people, ignorant of letters, unskilled in the mechanical arts, untamed to submission under law and government, addicted to intemperance, riot, and disorder.”⁵¹

One can't help but imagine that Hume smiled when he quietly made his Henry-inspired revision. And one wonders if Henry ever noticed the 25-word sentence his 620-page book had inspired in Hume's *History*. One take-away from this episode is that we always need to be careful in how we read Hume the historian. He was at times a master of subtlety, as our revisiting his review of Henry's *History* shows.

Hume's subtle critique of Henry's *History of Great Britain* has not been missed by all who have read Hume's review, though. When they read Hume's submission, the eighteenth-century editors of the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* were convinced that Hume's piece was meant as a burlesque upon Henry. And therein lies the explanation of why the review was cancelled. As William Smellie (1740-95) explained in his contemporary account of Hume's submission:

the Reviewers, in my presence, agreed that Mr Hume's account was meant as a burlesque upon the author. It was, therefore, committed to the farther consideration of one of their number, who ... raised the encomiums so high, that no person could mistake the supposed meaning of the writer. The types of the Manuscript, in this last form, were composed, and proof-sheets sent to Mr Hume for his perusal and corrections. To the astonishment of the Reviewers, Mr Hume wrote them an angry letter, complaining, in the highest terms, of the freedoms they had used with his manuscript, and declaring that in the account he had given of Dr Henry's History, he was perfectly sincere.

51) Hume, *History* (1778), vol. 1, p. 229.

“Upon which,” concluded Smellie, “Mr Hume’s review was cancelled, and another was written by a member of the Society.”⁵²⁾

The editor of Hume’s piece, Gilbert Stuart (1742-86), wasn’t nearly as delicate a reviewer as was Hume. When Stuart trumped up Hume’s critique, he converted it into a piece of unabashedly open ridicule, which the subtle Hume had not intended and would not allow to stand. Hume complained—with a letter that has survived with his review’s page proofs—and in the end his review of Henry was cancelled. But, that Hume in his review did not aim to ridicule is a long way from making his review one of straightforward praise for Henry’s project.

How else are we to make sense of a concluding assessment in which Hume *seems* to praise Henry, but does so in words which—when slowly unpacked—can only be read to suggest that Henry had completely ignored the distinction between an antiquary and an historian. Hume wrote:

The object of an antiquary has been commonly distinguished from that of an historian: For though the latter should enter into the province of the former, it is thought that it should only be *quanto basta*, that is, as far as is necessary and entertaining, without comprehending all the minute disquisitions, which give such supreme pleasure to the mere antiquary. Our learned and penetrating author has fully reconciled these two characters.

And the result, says Hume:

His narration is as full as those remote times seem to demand; and at the same time, his inquiries of the antiquarian kind, which form four fifths of his work, omit nothing which can be an object, either of doubt or curiosity.

52) William Smellie, *Literary and Characteristical Lives of John Gregory, M. D.; Henry Home, Lord Kames; David Hume, Esq.; and Adam Smith, L.L.D.* (Edinburgh, 1800), pp. 203-4.

We are now able to read that line differently than would have been possible at the outset of this short study. That Hume assessed Henry's *History* as 80-percent antiquarian is a conclusion that Mossner conveniently ignored.

Elsewhere, I've argued that another anonymous book review written by Hume *was* published in the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review*. This is Hume's review of the Rev. Thomas Percy's *Household Book*, published in the same issue of the *Edinburgh Magazine* for which Hume's review of Henry was intended. Had Hume's two anonymous reviews been published together, I argued, they would have notably dovetailed. Reading them as a set would have underscored that both reviews were designed to encourage contemporaries to draw comparisons between antient and modern manners.⁵³ Indeed, pagination on the proof sheets of Hume's cancelled review of Henry shows the two pieces would have been printed back-to-back, one after the other, Hume's review of Henry followed by his review of Percy. In that context, Hume's critique of the manners of ancient times in his review of Henry's *History* would have been even more pronounced.

As was the case with Hume's review of Percy's *Household Book*, so too with his review of Henry's *History of Great Britain*, Hume's concern was as much to show that England's ancient times were not to be championed over modern times as it was to critique the modern authors with whom he dealt. This context too helps us understand Hume's conclusion to his review of Henry.

Along with all that is playful, even softly teasing at times, in Hume's review of Henry's *History*, revisiting it we have also found that Hume had serious-minded objectives. Hume wrote:

It is happy for the inhabitants of this metropolis, which has naturally a great influence on the country, that the same persons [Robertson and Blair], who can make such a figure in profane learning, are entrusted with the guidance of the people in their spiritual concerns, which

53) See Mark G. Spencer, "Hume's Last Book Review? A New Attribution," *Hume Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (April 2018) [published, April 2021], pp. 52-64.

are of such superior, and indeed of unspeakable importance! These illustrious examples, if any thing, must make the infidel abashed of his vain cavils, and put a stop to that torrent of vice, profaneness, and immorality, by which the age is so unhappily distinguished.

Hume implied that eighteenth-century Edinburgh—complete with its caviling unbelievers, such as he was considered by many to be—was an infinitely better place, because more educated and more virtuous and more peaceful, than was Anglo-Saxon England. That theme, too, is seen more clearly when read against Hume’s *History* as a whole.

Hume’s reference—in what he intended to be the concluding paragraph of his review but which, on his suggested revision to Stuart’s meddling, became the penultimate paragraph—to the “vice, profaneness, and immorality” of eighteenth-century Edinburgh is a play on Hume’s account in his *History of England* where in Anglo-Saxon times “vice, treachery, and immorality” reigned supreme. Hume put the comparison this way in his “Appendix I: The Anglo-Saxon Government and Manners”:

Whatever we may imagine concerning the usual truth and sincerity of men, who live in a rude and barbarous state, there is much more falsehood, and even perjury among them, than among civilized nations: Virtue, which is nothing but a more enlarged and more cultivated reason, never flourishes to any degree, nor is founded on steady principles of honour, except where a good education becomes general; and where men are taught the pernicious consequences of vice, treachery, and immorality.⁵⁴⁾

Hume’s revised conclusion to his review of Henry also illuminates Hume’s rapidity of mind:

This City can justly boast of other signal Characters of the same

54) Hume, *History of England* (1778), vol. 1, p. 222.

kind [as William Robertson]; whom Learning and Piety, Taste and Devotion, Philosophy and Faith, joined to the severest Morals and most irreproachable Conduct, concur to embellish. One in particular [Hugh Blair], with the same hand, by which he turns over the sublime Pages of Homer and Virgil, Demosthenes and Cicero, is not ashamed to open with Reverence the sacred Volumes. And with the same Voice by which, from the Pulpit, he strikes Vice with Consternation, he deigns to dictate to his Pupils the most useful Lessons of Rhetoric, Poetry and polite Literature.

Taken together, Hume's concluding paragraphs show he praised the Revs Robertson and Blair for their abilities in uniting sacred learning with polite learning. One suspects that his cancelled review of Robert Henry's *History* was intended to encourage the Rev. Henry in that same direction.⁵⁵⁾

55) For their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this work, the author thanks Roger L. Emerson and David R. Raynor.

Abstract

It has been more than eighty years since E.C. Mossner first brought to the attention of modern scholars the pre-publication proof sheets of David Hume's review of Volume Two of the Rev. Robert Henry's *The History of Great Britain, from the Invasion of it by the Romans under Julius Caesar. Written on a New Plan* (1774). Intended for the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, Hume's review was suppressed by the journal's editors. Why? Mossner speculated Hume's critique was more favourable than the editors wanted. His account of Hume's supposedly "kindly intended review" has been influential, being quietly absorbed as the unchallenged record. It's time to revisit Hume's review and to read it more closely than Mossner and those who have followed him did. Hume always expected diligent readers; in his review of Henry he provides them with an elaborate assessment. Unpacking Hume's intricacies, we find him ironically playful and less praising than has been thought. When Hume's review of Henry is read closely—in the contexts of Henry's *History* as a whole, Hume's own *History of England*, and Hume's telling final revisions to his *History*—we see he was quite critical of the core of Henry's antiquarian account of England's ancient times. And, all of this helps to illuminate Hume as the philosophical historian of the *History of England*, especially when it comes to the intertangled topics of religion, politics, and modernity. The essay concludes by fleshing out additional context offered by another anonymous Humean review, one which the author submits might usefully be seen as a companion piece to Hume's review of Henry.