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# John Pocock's Histories of Historiography

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## ABSTRACT

J. G. A. Pocock is well known as a historian of political thought, less appreciated as a historian of historiography. This article seeks to redress the balance by examining his writings as histories of historiography. The main focus is on his major works, but the article also covers relevant essays, and in particular the series of late essays addressed to 'the politics of historiography'. It is argued that while Pocock supposed from the first that historiography and political thought were connected, how he understood the connection shifted as his work developed. In *The Ancient Constitution* the focus was on the political implications of historiographic innovation; but in *The Machiavellian Moment*, the subject was a new understanding of the politics of historical time. *Barbarism and Religion* brought historical narratives to the fore, exploring the many different narratives which can be identified as Gibbon's 'contexts'. Narratives were likewise key to Pocock's late essays on the politics of historiography, but here the focus was on narratives which support sovereign statehood. This focus was tied to his fear that the dominant narratives of British and New Zealand history were under threat, the one from Europeanisation, the other from the claims of the Maori.

## KEYWORDS

J. G. A. Pocock;  
historiography; historicism;  
political thought; narrative

Not all of J. G. A. Pocock's achievements have been equally appreciated. He is of course well known as a historian of political thought; he stands with Quentin Skinner and John Dunn as an originator of Cambridge's international reputation in the field. He is also known as an innovator in British history, calling for an 'archipelagic' history of the three kingdoms, England, Scotland and Ireland, and extending this perspective to the British approach to empire. But he is less celebrated as a historian of historiography, remaining so even after the publication of his last major work, *Barbarism and Religion*, the six-volume study of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published between 1999 and 2015.<sup>1</sup> Historiography may be a lesser-esteemed branch of historical scholarship, at least in the anglophone world; but the scale and ambition of *Barbarism and Religion* might have been expected to shift the dial in its favour.

Pocock himself believed that his achievement as a historian of historiography had been underappreciated. He lamented the paucity of reviews of *Barbarism and Religion*, especially its later volumes, and the consequent absence of an overall assessment of their achievement. Neither complaint was entirely justified. There were reviews of the later volumes,<sup>2</sup> and within a year of publication of the last, Helena Rosenblatt organised a symposium on the work for publication in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 2016. Pocock's response to the contributions, however, could

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not hide his embarrassment at the levels of incomprehension they revealed.<sup>3</sup> While *Barbarism and Religion* was being written he had also published a series of lectures and papers on the relation between political thought and historiography, several of which were collected in *Political Thought and History* (2009), while others followed.<sup>4</sup> But these too have attracted less attention than writings concerned more obviously within the history of political thought. In an article published in 2019, ‘John Pocock’s histories of political thought’, I sought to show just how much history of political thought was embedded in historiography, both in *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (1957) and in *Barbarism and Religion*.<sup>5</sup> But as Pocock made clear in correspondence, this was still to miss the point: he was a historian of historiography *as well as* political thought.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this paper is therefore to address Pocock’s complaint, and focus attention on his ‘histories of historiography’. While tracing the development of Pocock’s thinking and scholarship through *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (1957) and *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975) as well as essays associated with them, I shall give most attention to *Barbarism and Religion*, and to the later essays on the politics of historiography. I shall argue that although Pocock was from the outset keen to establish connections between historiography and political thought, their nature changed as he moved between historiography in *The Ancient Constitution* and ‘historicism’ in *The Machiavellian Moment*. A return to historiography was evident in *Barbarism and Religion*, along with an increasing emphasis on the importance of ‘narrative’ that is also to be found in the politics of historiography. Despite this common ground, however, the late essays pursued a political agenda at some remove from the rich historiographic ambition of *Barbarism and Religion*.

Pocock’s commitment to historiography was expressed from the very beginning, in the opening statement of the ‘Prefatory Note’ to his Cambridge PhD thesis on ‘The controversy over the origins of the Commons, 1675–88’, begun in 1948 under the supervision of Herbert Butterfield, and completed and examined in 1952.

This is a thesis in the history of historiography, but within that field it is concerned with the history, not of scholarship or even of historians, but of a certain climate of historical thought. Nothing of note will be said about historians’ use of their sources, and little of the organisation of research; but the thesis attempts to demonstrate the existence in seventeenth-century England of what might be called a historical ideology: namely, an orthodox interpretation of history which was an integral part – no mere ornament – of contemporary political thinking. It further attempts to show that both the theoretical politics of the day and the progress of historical method in the minds of the great scholars must be seen against this background, and in intense connexion with one another, if we are to have a true picture of the constitutional and philosophical thought of the late Stuart period. The underlying theme of the work is that there existed, as an ‘intelligible field of study’, a system of ideas which might be called historico-political (though the term has in practice been avoided), at once a means of interpreting the past and the means by which a great many men of the time thought about the problem of the English constitution. These ideas, it is argued, possessed their own inner logic and their own development; and study of these processes of thought enables us to cast new light upon the ideas of lawyers, scholars, political theorists and pamphleteers and to enrich our knowledge of the contemporary English mind.<sup>7</sup>

What is immediately striking here is Pocock’s confidence in his ‘voice’ as a historian, a voice recognisable across seven decades. But what he writes is precise. This is to be a history of historiography, but not one concerned with the history of scholarship – of the sources and their use. Rather, it will seek to reconstruct ‘an historical ideology’, which was an integral, not merely ornamental, part of seventeenth-century political thinking. In short, the history of historiography, while the primary subject of the investigation, will also be the history of political thought.

The focus of the thesis was specifically the later seventeenth-century debate over the origins of the House of Commons, the major contribution to which was the Royalist historian Robert Brady’s demonstration that the Commons only began to be summoned, by fits and starts, in the thirteenth century. The context for this, Pocock argued, was the earlier undermining by the legal antiquarian Henry Spelman of the unhistorical claims of the Common Lawyers for the continuity of English Law and of the ‘ancient constitution’, including parliament, from well before the Norman Conquest. Spelman’s finding was that English Law had been transformed by the introduction into

England of feudal law, a process quickened, if not begun, by the Conquest; and it was under feudal law that first the barons then the commons had been summoned to parliament. For this finding, Pocock adjudged, Spelman could be regarded as ‘perhaps the most important single figure in the history of English historiography’.<sup>8</sup> Arguing thus, Pocock still hewed closely to claims Butterfield had made in *The Englishman and his History* (1944), but articulated them with a conceptual and rhetorical sophistication and a depth of textual engagement which were distinctively his own.<sup>9</sup>

The book of the thesis, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, written back in New Zealand and published in 1957, likewise put historiography first, explicitly so in its subtitle, *A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century*. Pocock now strengthened his historiographical argument with two chapters devoted to the historical approach to civil and feudal law pioneered by the French school of humanists, headed by Jacques Cujas and François Hotman, with whom he also associated the Scottish jurist Thomas Craig. The resulting comparative perspective provided context for the achievement of Spelman, which Pocock continued to celebrate as a major advance in the study of history. At the same time, however, Pocock reinforced his analysis of the political commitments of what he now termed ‘the Common Law Mind’, commitments expressed in the confident assumption that an ‘ancient constitution’ governed the crown’s relations to parliament. History and political thought likewise came together in another addition to the book, the chapter devoted to James Harrington’s strikingly original historical analysis in *Oceana* (1656) of the barons’ loss of the military power given by feudal relations of landownership. Made possible by Spelman’s (and still more, as Pocock later acknowledged, John Selden’s) accounts of the introduction of feudal law, Harrington’s analysis was framed in the political idiom of Machiavelli, and offered both an explanation of the breakdown into civil war and a blueprint for a new ‘Commonwealth’ of citizen ‘freeholders’.<sup>10</sup> As Pocock realised, Harrington’s ‘Machiavellian meditation upon feudalism’ pointed towards a form of historical-political thinking very different from that of ancient constitution and Common Law; one which would shortly provide him with a fruitful new line of research.

In the meantime, however, Pocock’s attention turned to methodology. Inspired, it seems, by what he read and heard during another two years in Cambridge as a Research Fellow of St John’s between 1956 and 1958, he wrote two distinct methodological articles, both published in 1962. One (the better known) was explicitly devoted to ‘The history of political thought’, the other to outlining a new approach to historiography. The first characterised its subject’s methodology in terms of ‘languages’ and ‘traditions’. ‘Languages’ were cast in standard Wittgensteinian terms, as necessarily plural and cohering around their own criteria of validation. ‘Traditions’, meanwhile, were presented in Oakeshottian vein, as entailing that political thinking occurs in recurrent forms, which may be well below the level of philosophy. Though Pocock cautioned against the tendency to assume that political thought is best studied in philosophical form, the focus on ‘languages’ and their validation suggested nevertheless that conceptual content and the marshalling of words in argument should be the historian of political thought’s primary concern.<sup>11</sup>

The second article, ‘The origins of study of the past: a comparative approach’, was twice as long and more adversarial. It took aim at the assumption that historiography consisted in study of narratives on the model of the Greek and Roman historians, and then of their supersession after 1800 by ‘historicism’, the modern philosophy of history which claimed to have identified the laws governing history’s development.<sup>12</sup> Instead, Pocock wanted to get back to historiography’s origins in the human awareness that pasts are important to understanding presents. This, Pocock argued, was an inherent feature of human social existence. ‘Society’ was the conceptual prerequisite of ‘history’. Societies typically cohered through institutions: they have thus taken various forms, including churches or systems to judge and enforce law. But the most coherent form of society was a political community, whose institutions defined and defended it against other such communities. Pocock suggested that it was typically when the existence of such institutionalised societies was challenged that their members had recourse to writing their history to affirm their existence, utilising the documentary resources accumulated by their institutions to do so. Given this purpose, the importance of

narrative to the writing of history was diminished: what mattered was the deployment of documentary evidence to demonstrate that the society had existed in the past and continued to do so. The best such evidence, Pocock believed, had often been provided by jurists' accounts of the systems of law.<sup>13</sup>

These meta-conceptual propositions were then supported by a wide range of 'cases': not only the English law Pocock had written about in *The Ancient Constitution*, but legal-historical controversy in early modern France, Scotland, and Naples, where he instanced the works of both Pietro Giannone and Giambattista Vico. In each of these cases, histories of law had grounded the kingdoms' existence, and set the terms of political contestation. They contrasted with the cases of ancient Athens, whose origins were mythopoeic, and China, where authority was conveyed by ritual in preference to law, because law must be conveyed in language, which was inherently contestable. Particularly striking here was Pocock's appreciation of Vico as a jurist, precisely because he recognised how much more there is to history than narrative alone – how much it also relies on philology, the study of documents and their languages, in order to ascertain the past.

For all that 'The origins of study of the past' built upon *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, however, Pocock was now moving away from the focus on history as jurists had written it, towards a broader interest in conceptions of politics in historical time. The shift is apparent in his first collection of essays, *Politics, Language and Time. Essays on Political Thought and History* (1971). This collection did not reprint the two methodological essays of 1962, but moved beyond them, while exploring new and different historical cases. On the methodological front, there were essays likening language systems to Thomas Kuhn's 'paradigms' (an analogy which Pocock subsequently retracted), and a critical reflection on Oakeshott's idea of 'tradition', which Pocock found both under-conceptualised and unable to deal with disruptive conceptions of historical time such as the apocalyptic. Substantive examples of temporal-historical argument were explored in essays on ancient Chinese discussions of ritual, language and law, on Thomas Hobbes's engagement with radical Christian eschatology, and on Edmund Burke's sophisticated restatement of ancient constitutionalism.<sup>14</sup> But the main new focus of Pocock's interest was announced in the essays on 'Machiavelli, Harrington and English political ideologies in the eighteenth century' and 'Civic Humanism and its role in Anglo-American thought'. The former, avowedly indebted to the work of Caroline Robbins, outlined the way in which Harrington's adaptation of Machiavelli's concepts had shaped political debate in England over the following 150 years, while the latter identified 'civic humanism', as articulated by Machiavelli and Harrington, with a novel conception of historical time as a secular engagement with 'fortune', or contingency.<sup>15</sup> Broaching these new conceptual themes, Pocock was clearly moving away from a history of historiography which celebrated Spelman's 'disinterested scholarship';<sup>16</sup> now he was rethinking 'historicism', suggesting that this was a story to be traced from long before the nineteenth century.

The major work heralded in these essays was *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975). Neither history of historiography nor history of political thought written through history, this was a study of the temporalities of politics and their transformation between the Italian Renaissance and the American Revolution. Before the Renaissance, Pocock began by arguing, two understandings of historical time had been dominant. One was the customary, a way of thinking about time as embodied in law and its institutions: he now illustrated this from John Fortescue's *In Praise of the Laws of England* (written 1468–71). The other was the sacred, whose temporalities were most fully articulated by Augustine and Boethius. On their account, the one God of the Bible must be supposed to occupy a separate, time-free sphere, the *nunc-stans* or eternity, while his creation, humans, occupy the *saeculum*, secular time, which God continues to govern by providential intervention. What had disrupted these modes of understanding time was the advent of 'civic humanism', as articulated by a group of fifteenth-century Florentine men of letters seeking to defend their city's 'liberty' from Milan. Countering the acquiescent politics associated with the customary and the providential, civic humanism valued an active citizenship, which would take the initiative in the face of historical contingency.<sup>17</sup> Pocock's

adaptation of what had originally been Hans Baron's concept of 'civic humanism' was controversial, the subject of open disagreement with Quentin Skinner.<sup>18</sup> But the attraction of Baron's thesis to Pocock was obvious, since it posited the emergence of a new historical consciousness at a moment of existential institutional crisis for the Florentine republic – just as Pocock's model predicted. As announced in his subtitle, Pocock associated civic humanism with a 'republican' tradition. But rather than identifying 'republic' with a preferred form of government, as so much of the commentary assumes, Pocock used the term 'republic' instead of the more abstract 'state', to cover all forms of government as they existed in historical time.

Pocock proceeded to work out his argument in lengthy sections devoted first to the writings of Machiavelli and his contemporaries, then to the works of Harrington and his contemporaries and successors in England and colonial America in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In each case the focus was on political texts: he referred only glancingly to Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* and hardly at all to the histories of Guicciardini. When he reached Harrington's *Oceana*, it was in a new context: instead of the discovery of feudal law, Pocock's focus was now on the emergence of an 'English Machiavellianism' and the attempt to make constitutional sense of England's unplanned transformation into a 'republic'.<sup>19</sup> From Pocock's point of view, however, the real discovery of *The Machiavellian Moment* was the 'neo-Machiavellian' political thought and political economy developed by Harrington's successors in the decades around 1700. Faced with the crown's recourse to a standing army to secure its position at home and to frustrate French aspirations to universal monarchy, and then with its increasing recourse to public credit to pay for the army (and navy), Andrew Fletcher, Charles Davenant, Daniel Defoe and others had re-framed civic humanism to meet these new contingencies, Fletcher in particular equipping it with a more sophisticated historical perspective.<sup>20</sup> From there Pocock took the story forward as far as the founding of the American republic, a moment as contingent as any which had preceded it.<sup>21</sup> He was surprised to learn that this finding rendered *The Machiavellian Moment* controversial in the United States.

As he engaged with American political concerns – he had moved from New Zealand to the History Department at Washington, St Louis in 1966 – Pocock encountered the work of Hannah Arendt, and in particular *The Human Condition* (1958), with its discussion of 'the rise of the social' in the eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup> In the penultimate chapter of *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock found himself considering an obvious manifestation of this rise, the Scottish discussion of commerce and of the 'progress of society' through a series of historical stages. As the Scots, notably David Hume and Adam Ferguson, had clearly realised, commerce and the proliferation of mobile forms of property, credit above all, presented a potentially fatal challenge to the integrity, the 'virtue' of the Machiavellian citizen.<sup>23</sup> Though Pocock did not say so, Arendt's thesis also carried implications for Pocock's earlier use of 'society' as a meta-concept to which could be attributed humans' interest in their pasts, for in that usage society was also political, whereas the 'social' which was on the rise in the eighteenth century was a space of human activity distinct and potentially independent of politics. For the moment, Pocock could treat the eighteenth-century Scots as almost an aside from his account of civic humanism as a response to historical contingency; but as we shall see, the threat presented by commerce to an historically informed politics would not go away.

Pocock's turn away from historiography in *The Machiavellian Moment* did not last long. Within a year of its publication, he was giving his first paper on Gibbon to the conference celebrating the bicentenary of the first volume of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in Rome in 1976. It was a disruptive contribution too, since Pocock insisted on treating the *Decline and Fall* as a subject for intellectual history, not merely an object of celebration. The paper's title suggested a seamless transition to his new subject: 'Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as civic humanist and philosophical historian'.<sup>24</sup> Later Pocock would describe this as 'a move from a historicism to a historiography', and even suggest that *Barbarism and Religion* was conceived as a 'prequel' to *The Machiavellian Moment*.<sup>25</sup> But at the time, it must soon have become clear to Pocock that

the scope of a properly historiographic study of Gibbon would have to be much larger, and extend to a thorough investigation of the historiographies of both 'barbarism' and 'religion'. In the event, a series of conference papers and essays preceded publication of the first two volumes of *Barbarism and Religion* in 1999.

A useful key to the way in which Pocock set up *Barbarism and Religion* as historiography is provided by his dedications, of Volume 1 to Arnaldo Momigliano, and Volume 2 to Franco Venturi. The dedication to Venturi was to a respected antagonist: he was the foremost proponent of one European Enlightenment, and he denied that England belonged to it.<sup>26</sup> In response, beginning with his contribution to Venturi's *Festschrift* in 1985, Pocock made his case for plural Enlightenments, with England's a distinctive instance of 'conservative Enlightenment'.<sup>27</sup> Given that Gibbon's Enlightenments were the subject of Volume I, it might more properly have been dedicated to Venturi. But the choice of Momigliano as first dedicatee was understandable, for he was Pocock's most important interlocutor. Momigliano had explained Gibbon's historiographic achievement as having three strands: narrative, erudition and 'philosophic history'. For Momigliano, Gibbon's narrative was still Tacitean, but to this he had added a novel combination of erudition, in his up-to-date use of antiquarian scholarship, and philosophic history, in uncovering the causes of social and political transformation in the Roman Empire.<sup>28</sup> Pocock identified the same three strands in the *Decline and Fall*; but gave them different emphases. Narratives, he would find, were the very fabric of the work, but they were far more varied in form than simply the Tacitean narrative of the *Decline and Fall*'s opening chapters. The narratives were indeed supported by erudition or, more precisely, 'philology', the critical assessment of the texts from which the narratives derived. But Pocock was less convinced than Momigliano of the significance of Enlightened 'philosophical history' for Gibbon's approach to historical explanation.<sup>29</sup> Instead, it is the range of narratives which Gibbon reconstructed and deployed as his own which is increasingly foregrounded as *Barbarism and Religion* proceeds.

There were two other students of historiography in the background here, whom Pocock viewed more adversarially: Giuseppe Giarrizzo and Hugh Trevor-Roper. Giarrizzo he respected as the author of the first serious historiographic study of Gibbon's achievement, but criticised for setting Gibbon within an Enlightenment dominated by French *philosophes*.<sup>30</sup> Trevor-Roper, by contrast, regarded historiography, and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* in particular, as at least as much an inspiration, a great tradition within which to frame one's own ambitions, as a subject for intellectual history. As such, historiography had a crucial pedagogic function, which Trevor-Roper had fostered both at Oxford, where undergraduates studying Modern History were encouraged to read the *Decline and Fall*'s first three volumes in their first term, and among a wider public.<sup>31</sup> For Pocock, however, the potential of historiography would only be realised if it was studied as a form of intellectual history, in which historical writing too was understood through close attention to its 'contexts'. In other words, Pocock applied the same basic approach to historiography as he did to the history of political thought. His task was to identify and reconstruct the extensive body of literature available to Gibbon in writing the *Decline and Fall*, and thus to reconstitute the contexts in which the work can be understood. The criterion of selection was that all the works identified as historiographical contexts for the *Decline and Fall* had to have been referred to by Gibbon – a criterion to which Pocock allowed himself only one exception.<sup>32</sup> But that 'limitation' was enough to enable Pocock to multiply the number of Gibbon's 'contexts' far beyond those discussed by all previous Gibbon scholars. Here I can do no more than outline how Pocock applied this approach over the six volumes of *Barbarism and Religion* – six volumes which covered only the first three of the *Decline and Fall*.<sup>33</sup>

Volume 1 of *Barbarism and Religion* was preliminary in that it was devoted to the contexts of Gibbon's intellectual formation and his exposure to different Enlightenments, rather than to historiographic contexts for the *Decline and Fall* itself.<sup>34</sup> Volume 2, however, addressed historiography directly, treating what Pocock represented as the primary form of historical writing in the eighteenth century, 'narratives of civil government'. These included the Giannone's *Storia civile del Regno di Napoli* (1723), Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751), Hume's *History of England* (1754–61), and William Robertson's *History of Scotland* (1759). All were narrative histories of established

European kingdoms, albeit in the Neapolitan case for the past two centuries a ‘provincial’ kingdom within a larger monarchy, and in the Scottish, a kingdom within a ‘Union of Crowns’ with England since 1603 and after 1707 subsumed within an ‘incorporating’ Union of crown and parliament. In each case the kingdoms were defined constitutionally by their inheritance of laws, and the narratives were in large measure accounts of the fluctuating balance of resilience and contestability given by those laws. In the Neapolitan case successive ‘foreign’ dynasties – Norman, Hohenstaufen, Angevin and Aragonese – had added fresh layers of customary and feudal law to a Roman Law foundation, in a process which Giannone nevertheless believed should constitute a foundation for renewed independence. In the English, by contrast, Hume might argue that the course of relations between crown and parliament since the Conquest revealed plenty of contingency, but he did not deny that legal and constitutional continuities had framed and set limits to political division, while ensuring that English institutions would displace their weaker Scottish counterparts (Scottish Private Law excepted) when the two kingdoms were united.<sup>35</sup>

For Pocock, these Histories were ‘civil’ in another equally crucial sense: they narrated the persistent efforts of kings and their magistrates to assert their jurisdiction over the Church and its clergy. In Catholic Naples, the civil lawyers, of whom Giannone was the boldest, would have their kingdom imitate the ‘Gallican’ policy of the French monarchy towards the Papacy. In Protestant England, Hume argued, the Royal Supremacy had made it possible to ensure that its clergy preached as civil law permitted, limiting the opportunities for expressions of religious ‘enthusiasm’, while Robertson simply avoided discussion of the claims of Scottish presbyterian clergy to dictate to the magistrate. ‘Civil governments’ in monarchies such as France and England did not necessarily seek peace with each other; but it was clear by 1700 that their wars would no longer be wars of religion. In demonstrating this conclusion, the ‘narratives of civil government’ constituted for Pocock not only a manifestly valuable expression of ‘Enlightenment’ – ‘the Enlightened narrative’ – but the primary ‘modern’ historiographic context for the *Decline and Fall*.<sup>36</sup> Not that Gibbon would write such a narrative himself; but the histories of Giannone, Hume, Robertson and even of Voltaire (for all that Gibbon ridiculed his scholarship), served Pocock to set off the very different ‘ancient’ political and ecclesiastical narratives with which Gibbon would write the story of the Roman Empire’s decline and fall.

In the final part of Volume 2, Pocock switched the focus from ‘civil government’ to ‘the progress of civil society’, returning to the Scottish engagement with ‘the rise of the social’ which had caught his attention in the penultimate chapter of *The Machiavellian Moment*. It is clear, however, that the apparent complementarity of the categories of ‘civil government’ and ‘civil society’ is deceptive. For the history of civil society as the Scots constructed it was not a narrative like those of civil government: cast instead as an account of society’s development in ‘stages’, it was ‘theoretical history’, natural or conjectural, and at best might be thought of as a ‘meta-’ or possibly a ‘macronarrative’.<sup>37</sup> In these terms, Pocock was confirming his earlier suggestion that the Scottish account of the progress of society was closer to philosophy than to history, a ‘historicism’ rather than a ‘historiography’. As ‘philosophy’, the history of ‘civil society’ and its ‘progress’ may still have provided one of Gibbon’s ‘contexts’, but it was much less important to the construction of the *Decline and Fall* than Momigliano or Trevor-Roper had supposed.

Volume 3, *The First Decline and Fall*, is the longest of the series, and arguably its pivot.<sup>38</sup> Here Pocock identifies and examines the narratives which had hitherto recounted Rome’s greatness, decline and fall. These begin with the narratives of Tacitus and Appian, recounting the Republic’s collapse into civil war and recovery of stability as an empire. The Tacitean was a story of senatorial corruption and court intrigue; the Appianic – of which Gibbon might have made more – of the failure to find a way of relating military service to the distribution of property. The outcome of both was the dependence of imperial authority on the Roman armies, distributed *alibi quam Romae*.<sup>39</sup> The advent of Christian Empire had brought two quite different, sacred narratives into play, one, the Augustinian, in which the fate of the Empire became an ‘anti-history’ at the mercy of divine providence; the other, more positive, of Eusebius, in which the Empire allied itself with the Church to secure a future for both.<sup>40</sup> No narrative, however, had made sense of the collapse of the Empire in

the West: the *translatio imperii* by which ‘the Empire’ was supposed to have passed eventually to the Franks was, in Pocock’s terms, a metahistorical concept, not a narrative.<sup>41</sup> A viable new narrative would not be available until the Florentine humanists, Bruni and then Machiavelli, constructed the narrative of ‘decline and fall’. At this point Pocock reached the ground he had covered in *The Machiavellian Moment*, the struggle between virtue and corruption inherent in a republic’s expansion to the extent of becoming an empire, and the recurring necessity of institutional and moral renewal in the face of contingency. What he would show now was that this theme had been embedded in early modern historical narrative as well as in Machiavellian political analysis. Dialogue ensued with other narratives, such as that of the Spanish historian Pedro Mexía, of extended empire or universal monarchy, and those of Lipsius and Harrington, which took up the Appianic problem of the relation between arms-holding and the distribution of property. In due course these narratives created the historiographical conditions for the eighteenth-century ‘narratives of civil government’ which Pocock had described in Volume 2.<sup>42</sup> ‘The Enlightened narrative’ was thus the culmination of the narratives of the western Empire’s fragmentation into the several kingdoms, lesser principalities and surviving republics of early modern Europe, the narrative that had made possible Gibbon’s famous remark in his ‘General Observations’ that Europe had come to form ‘one great republic’, from which the spectre of universal monarchy had finally been banished.

Narratives of Roman decline and fall, however, were but one side of the story. Another, to which Pocock devoted part of Volume 4, was provided by narratives explaining how nomadic barbarians from the East had come to invade and over-run the Empire. These he found in works by Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, Antoine-Yves Goguet, Thomas Carte, and, the most important, Joseph de Guignes’ *Histoire Générale des Huns, des Turcs, et des Mogols* (1756–8). The last was a story of the dispersal eastwards of the sons of Japhet after the Biblical Flood, some to become pastoralists on the Steppe, others agriculturalists in China, before the ambitions of Chinese and Mongol dynasties unleashed a reverse migration westwards, culminating in the Huns’ invasions of the Empire.<sup>43</sup> If ‘barbarian’ was an ‘ancient’ category, there was another which was closely related in the eighteenth-century mind, but which was, by contrast, a ‘modern’ coinage: that of the ‘savage’. Pocock accordingly now took the opportunity to address the treatment of ‘savages’ by eighteenth-century historians, even though this was not a problem that Gibbon had to face. Pocock’s point, however, was that this historiography, which included Robertson’s *History of America* (1777), should be recognised as an indirect context for the *Decline and Fall*. Again, what interested him was less the speculative reconstruction of savage ‘society’ than the role accorded to supposedly savage peoples in the inception – and justification – of the modern European form of ‘empire’, in which commerce was the partner of conquest. This was the narrative given critical voice in Raynal’s – and Diderot’s – *Histoire des deux Indes* (1770, expanded and revised in 1774 and 1780), a work of which Gibbon was aware, and which Pocock treated as the modern counterpart to the *Decline and Fall*.<sup>44</sup>

Another form of history which Momigliano thought Gibbon incapable of writing, and which Trevor-Roper supposed he meant positively to subvert, but which Pocock argued was integral to Gibbon’s project, was sacred and ecclesiastical history. This further context was the subject of Volume 5, *Religion. The First Triumph*. Sacred history Pocock defined as the history of a monotheist God’s interactions with his people. Initially that people had been the Hebrews of the Old Testament, but following the mission of Jesus Christ, Christianity extended the scope of sacred history potentially to all subjects of Creation, gentiles as well as Christians. Sacred history became ecclesiastical history when, within a century of Jesus’s death, the Church established itself as the institutional embodiment of the yet-to-return Christ.<sup>45</sup> It is in this historiographic context that Pocock made the most striking of all his claims in *Barbarism and Religion*. He argues that Gibbon, having initially, in Chapter 15 of Volume I of the *Decline and Fall*, provoked his readers with an account of the spread of Christianity without reference to providence, realised as he began writing Volume II that he must engage with what Christians believed if he was properly to explain the Church’s contribution to the Empire and its decline.<sup>46</sup> To appreciate what Gibbon proceeded to do, Pocock devoted Volume 5 to the works which informed Gibbon’s treatment of ecclesiastical history,

beginning with Eusebius before covering both the Catholic documentary scholarship of Tillemont and the histories and source criticism of the Protestants Beausobre, Mosheim and Le Clerc. Set in this context, it becomes apparent that for Gibbon ecclesiastical history was not to be reduced, as it had been by Paolo Sarpi and his imitators, to a power struggle between Bishops, Popes, Patriarchs and secular rulers. Rather, it was to be narrated through its contested theology, which made it possible to understand why its leading figures had taken the positions they did. In the case of the Trinity, Gibbon's narrative in chapter 21 of the *Decline and Fall* might be almost explicit in siding with Athanasius against Arius when the former insisted on the necessity of upholding an orthodoxy if the Church was to remain united.<sup>47</sup> But the underlying perspective, Pocock argued, was that of the liberal Protestant, perhaps Socinian Jean le Clerc, for whom the humanity of Christ entailed that theology was not absolute truth, but a history of debate over the meaning of that humanity.<sup>48</sup> Here Pocock broke completely with Trevor-Roper. For all that Trevor-Roper had identified Socinianism with 'the religious origins of the Enlightenment', Pocock's Gibbon was the very opposite of Trevor-Roper's, taking doctrine seriously rather than disparaging it.<sup>49</sup>

It is in Volume 6, *Barbarism. Triumph in the West*, that Pocock finally focusses on Gibbon's construction of his own narratives. The volume is a chapter-by-chapter study of Volumes II and III of the *Decline and Fall*, covering the history of the Empire from the accession and conversion of Constantine to its collapse in the west. What Pocock shows is that Gibbon's conception of narrative was still 'early modern'. For the narratives Gibbon was writing in these volumes of the *Decline and Fall* were not so much his own (that is, a narrative independently composed by the historian out of the sources), as a re-writing of the narratives of his ancient sources, with source criticism applied to them in the footnotes. For as long as possible Gibbon adapted the narrative of Ammianus Marcellinus to recount the civil history of the Empire, supplemented when helpful with Zosimus. To explain the successive waves of barbarian invaders he could rely on De Guignes, but it was much harder to make sense of the actions of the warlords who led them into the Empire – Alaric, Genseric and Attila – since no contemporary narrative could provide a framework. Much richer, by contrast, were the sources for sacred and ecclesiastical history, as these had been compiled by Tillemont, and rendered as narratives by Fleury on the Catholic side, Beausobre, Godefroy and Mosheim on the Protestant. Finally, at the end of Volume III, for Chapter 38 on the establishment of the Frankish monarchy, Gibbon turned to the proponents of the rival French *thèses nobiliaire* and *royale*, Boulainvilliers and Dubos, with Montesquieu as the arbiter between them.<sup>50</sup> At this point one may observe (and Pocock was well aware) that the wheel had come almost full circle: he was back where he had started in *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, with the encounter between Roman and customary law, and the prehistory of the feudal law.

For Gibbon, however, Chapter 38 was the beginning of a move onto new historical ground, that of the Empire after its fall in the West, ground that in the remaining Volumes IV – VI of the *Decline and Fall* would require him to look East much more frequently than West. Even if these volumes were beyond his reach, Pocock realised that he had given himself the key to understanding them as a further series of narratives. Whence a pair of articles, 'Gibbon's second trilogy' (2017) and 'An overview of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*' (2018), along with a dictated and untitled typescript devoted chiefly to Gibbon's Volume IV (2019 or later), in which, while acknowledging that even he could no longer do the work himself, Pocock suggested where future scholars might look for the narratives informing Gibbon's final volumes.<sup>51</sup> The key to these volumes, he argued, is to recognise that there was no central narrative for the Byzantine Empire itself (though Procopius supplied one of court politics for a while in Volume IV, and Anna Comnena another similar for parts of Volumes V and VI). Instead, Gibbon had to tell the Empire's story through its appearances in the narratives generated by the more vital (and therefore historically conscious) peoples and empires with which it had to interact. The scholar who would complete *Barbarism and Religion* was thus recommended to look for narratives from Arabia, Asia, and the Danube lands. Even so, there was one major topic in Gibbon's Volume IV which seems to have defied even Pocock's ability to identify relevant contexts: the codification of Roman Law carried out under Justinian, and

examined in Gibbon's chapter 44.<sup>52</sup> This may reflect Gibbon's lack of interest in the historical possibilities of law rather than Pocock's; but it underlines the extent to which in *Barbarism and Religion* narratives have come to the fore at the expense of histories constructed from the records of institutions, legal institutions in particular.

*Barbarism and Religion*, it is clear, is history of historiography. This does not preclude it also being history of political thought, or from making a strong normative case for Enlightenment. All the major themes in Pocock's histories of political thought – the centrality of systems of law to all political communities, the historical contingency of forms of government (in the plural, rather than 'the state'), the 'rise of the social' and the threat it carried to the primacy of the political, the challenge of the sacred to political authority – are present in *Barbarism and Religion*.<sup>53</sup> In the case of Enlightenment, and plural as Pocock insisted Enlightenments were, the 'Enlightened narrative' that is foregrounded in *Barbarism and Religion* has a strong claim to be Enlightenment's most essential manifestation, since it explained why the appeal to divine inspiration has had to be subordinated to the authority of civil government. Nevertheless, the political and normative arguments which Pocock finds in Gibbon's work do not compromise the integrity of *Barbarism and Religion* as history – many histories – of historiography: an explanation of the writing of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in its multiple contexts. Gibbon is placed among his peers and his predecessors, and his achievement is shown to lie in the extent of his engagement with their texts. From the narratives that he re-composed and re-purposed, Pocock's Gibbon offered his readers (contemporary and subsequent) a richer sense of what it was to be a 'modern' and a European in the eighteenth century – and to be aware that there were other peoples in the world who had their own antiquities, and even, perhaps, their own apprehensions of what it was to be 'modern'.

For all that *Barbarism and Religion* was the climax of his scholarship, assessment of Pocock as a historian of historiography cannot end there. For there was still another front on which he engaged as a historian of historiography as well as of political thought: history as narratives of 'sovereign' statehood. He opened this front in 1973, when he gave the J. C. Beaglehole Memorial Lecture at Canterbury, in New Zealand, on 'British History: a plea for a new subject'.<sup>54</sup> At this point, he was still completing *The Machiavellian Moment*. He returned to and extended the new front in the 1990s, and continued to lecture and publish on the subject in the following two decades, while he was writing *Barbarism and Religion*. The argument, at its simplest, was straightforward: histories of their pasts were essential to affirming the existence of individual sovereign states, and to sustaining the identity of their subjects or citizens. It is through such histories that 'we' construct our independence and distinguish ourselves from 'others'.

As announced in 1973, the 'plea' for British History as a new subject had two contexts. One, about which Pocock was open, was political: the United Kingdom's negotiation to join the European Economic Community or 'Common Market'. Pocock believed that this would damage New Zealand by destroying the 'protein bridge' of trade in wool, mutton and butter which had sustained the close political relationship with the United Kingdom, and earned the latter New Zealand's support in two world wars.<sup>55</sup> The second context was intellectual and historiographic: the rise of 'revisionism' in English history, and in particular in the study of the seventeenth century. Led by Conrad Russell and John Morrill, the revisionists were making two main points: first, that the Civil Wars were wars of three kingdoms, involving Scotland and Ireland in the affairs of England, and second, that the wars were political, not social. The revisionists still acknowledged that the wars involved more than the political classes, and that those from lower in the social hierarchy who were affected by the conflicts fought back. But 'social' interpretations, Marxist or Weberian (or, in Trevor-Roper's case, contra-Weberian), could not explain the contingency of the political and military events of the period.

Pocock welcomed both of these points, and proceeded to reinforce them with an institutional initiative of his own, the Folger Center for the History of British Political Thought. Early seminars and the first volume to result from them concentrated on English political thought; but by the early

1990s there were seminars and volumes on the Anglo-Scottish unions of 1603 and 1707, both as seen primarily from Scottish viewpoints, and these were followed by a seminar and volume on Ireland.<sup>56</sup> Separately, Pocock responded directly to revisionism in a ‘Retrospect’ to the re-issue of *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* in 1987 and a ‘review’ of the contributions to *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, edited in his honour by Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner in 1993.<sup>57</sup> What appealed to Pocock was that ‘revisionism’ was ‘post-Whig’ rather than ‘anti-Whig’: it would revise but not repudiate the main line of English historical argument, that the crisis of the seventeenth century was a crisis of crown and parliament.<sup>58</sup>

Specifically, revisionism enabled Pocock to reinforce three points. First, it vindicated the primacy he accorded to intertextual analysis rather than imputed social explanation in his account of the constitutional debates of the 1640s and 1650s, and of Harrington’s distinctive contribution to them.<sup>59</sup> Second, it gave him an opportunity to add an important revision of his own: the centrality of the Church of England to the Crown-Parliament relation. Integral to what the English meant by ‘sovereignty’, he now argued, was the ‘Supremacy’ of the crown or of crown-in-parliament over the Church of England.<sup>60</sup> Third, it lent new strength to his claim that the political thought of seventeenth-century Englishmen was embedded in understandings of history, and far more typically and effectively expressed thus than in the language of ‘right’ preferred by political philosophy. Most explicitly against Richard Tuck, but also against Skinner and Judith Shklar (who had pointedly questioned the interest of Harrington for political theory), Pocock could re-affirm that the political thought of this era was inconceivable without history.<sup>61</sup>

In 1997 Pocock took the opportunity of an invitation to deliver the Isaiah Berlin Lectures in Oxford to present the relation between historical narrative and the affirmation of political sovereignty in a more general form. Although there was to be no book of the lectures, the third of the series was published separately as ‘The politics of history: the subaltern and the subversive’. If it is through historical narratives that we affirm our societies’ distinct existence, he argued, then it is likely that one narrative will be dominant, occupying the place taken by ‘Whig’ history in the case of England. But the dominant narrative does not exclude others; rather, the existence of variant or alternative narratives ‘toughens’ the main narrative. Pocock was thus at pains to allow space for ‘subaltern’ narratives, whether of smaller nations within a greater whole (the Scots, the Irish), or of the excluded (women, slaves, ‘barbarians’). Those whose narratives are subaltern should not think that their objective must be to subvert the main narrative, whether by re-placing it or by stepping away from politics altogether, and resorting to ‘micro-history’. Instead, they should remember that Shakespeare’s Caliban, who could only curse in the language of his oppressor, could still communicate with his mother; in the same way, the excluded could use their languages to construct their own narratives as a basis for negotiation with the dominant narrative. It was possible, Pocock conceded, that a dominant narrative might run up against a culture which was non-literate, and therefore did not have a documentary record from which to compose its own narrative. Such a people would be likely instead to have a ‘cosmogony’, or set of myths – as did the New Zealand Maori, the *tangata whenua* of those islands, who in Anglo-Australian are called ‘indigenous, aboriginal’. Pocock did not state explicitly how such a conflict between historical narrative and cosmogony was to be resolved. The implication, however, was that the *tangata whenua* should exchange their myths for construction of a narrative of their own. This might still be a subaltern narrative, but it would join a world of plural narratives, ‘each one of them potentially the means of defining a sovereignty’.<sup>62</sup>

Subsequent papers added to these contentions. There is, Pocock argued in the Creighton Lecture given at the University of London in 2003, a ‘politics of historiography’. To explain this, he sought to re-emphasise the role of institutions, including judicatures, in anchoring narratives to a documentary archive. Language too was an archive, making the rhetoric of past narratives a resource for new ones. (The opposition between narrative and history based on institutional documents, which had been the starting point of his first methodological article, ‘The origins of study of the past’, in 1962, had now been left behind.) At the same time, Pocock defended his conception of

‘narrative’ against the charge that it was full-blown postmodernism by denying that narratives are ‘fictions’. The historian knows that ‘the historical world appears to be one in which things happen without waiting for us to invent them’.<sup>63</sup> This does not make Pocock a positivist: rather, as Kenneth Sheppard argued, his view of how the historian proceeds was close to that of Paul Ricoeur. That is, the historian assembles the ‘traces’ left by the past – the traces of things that happened without waiting for historians to invent them – compiles them into an archive which constitutes them as facts, and then creatively arranges the facts into a narrative containing an interpretation.<sup>64</sup> In ‘Historiography as a form of political thought’ (2011), Pocock took the argument still further. A narrative, he argued, is always ‘open’; contingency and differences of contextualisation mean that there are always alternatives, making narratives inherently multiple and contestable. The implication was liberal: no state can determine the history in which it will act. But this did not mean that ‘we’ should give up the attempt to narrate histories which are ‘ours’. For ‘what happens if we give up that capacity?’<sup>65</sup>

For all the conviction Pocock put into these arguments, they were not without stress-points. Prominent within them were two concepts, ‘state’ and ‘sovereignty’, which were otherwise conspicuous by their rarity in *The Ancient Constitution*, *The Machiavellian Moment*, and *Barbarism and Religion*. Both are metaphysical, not historical, concepts; they have been Quentin Skinner’s preoccupation, not John Pocock’s. In the *Machiavellian Moment* in particular, Pocock had used the concept of the ‘republic’ instead of the ‘state’ to underline the contingency of all forms of government, their vulnerability to time, their existence within histories.<sup>66</sup> But he apparently saw no inconsistency in deploying the two concepts in this new context. If questioned about them, he might well have replied that his late usage of the terms was still in line with his initial account of ‘societies’ as the basic units of history, since he had always made it clear that a society was best exemplified by a political community. In this perspective, ‘state’ stands not for a structure above society, but is society’s political expression, while ‘sovereignty’ stands for the community’s autonomy rather than for infeasible authority. So understood, state and sovereignty are being deployed as rhetorical-conceptual enhancements of the original concept of society, the better to enhance the profile of historical narratives as the expression of a society’s autonomy and identity.

Further stresses derive from Pocock’s political commitments. By the 1990s, Pocock was arguing quite strenuously that the autonomy of a society-state is incompatible with openness to international market forces. Markets, not subaltern histories, are the nemesis of coherent societies, the subverters of narrative and the erasers of history itself. This was the claim of the 1992 article ‘History and sovereignty: the historiographical response to Europeanization in two British cultures’, which can be read as a tirade against the newly-reconstituted European Community (which in that year agreed to become the European Union by the Treaty of Maastricht).<sup>67</sup> The argument was repeated as late as 2018, in ‘Commerce, credit, and sovereignty: the nation-state as historical critique’, Pocock’s contribution to a volume in memory of István Hont.<sup>68</sup> To Pocock, the surrender of their sovereignty by individual states to the European Union was effectively surrender to the international market.<sup>69</sup> This was accompanied by historiographic surrender, as British history – that is English history, with Scottish and Irish history as its subaltern partners – allowed itself to be Europeanised. The threat here was not ‘European History’ as traditionally understood, consisting of independent French, German, and other national historiographies.<sup>70</sup> Rather, it was ‘global’ history, which Pocock believed inimical to the contextualisation essential to the construction of narratives and hence to identification with a political community or state that is ‘ours’.<sup>71</sup>

On that global stage, moreover, there was a specific issue which Pocock’s politics of historiography struggled to resolve: the status of the New Zealand Maori with their mythological anti-narrative of identity, and how in consequence to interpret the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) which was supposed to govern relations between the Maori and the British colonists. The struggle was apparent in the same 1992 article in which he lamented the Europeanisation of British History: while he could conceive of the Maori achieving ‘parity of esteem’, this was not the same as ‘an equal distribution of emphasis’.<sup>72</sup> This suggested that even were the Maori to construct an historical narrative to replace their cosmogony, it must remain subaltern.<sup>73</sup> For all the generosity with which Pocock contributed

to the debate among New Zealand historians over Waitangi, it seems that he feared a ‘confederal’ interpretation which might dilute the fledgling parliamentary sovereignty bequeathed by the British Empire, leaving a consequently un-sovereign New Zealand even more exposed than Europe to international market forces. In the face of that danger, the greater ‘emphasis’ must be on the settler narrative of New Zealand as distant islands of the British imperial archipelago, the politics of whose historiography were still those of parliamentary sovereignty.

Pocock’s insistence on the multiplicity, openness and contestability of narratives notwithstanding, his ‘politics of historiography’ seems the least satisfactory of all his engagements with historiography. With its addition of sovereignty and statehood to the attributes of a politically empowering narrative, it struggles to maintain equality among the narratives of peoples who share a territory or have historically been joined by unions or treaties or by the legacy of empire.<sup>74</sup> Subaltern narratives may ‘toughen’ their dominant counterpart by contesting and negotiating with it, but they are still subaltern. By contrast, the three earlier iterations of history of historiography in Pocock’s work may be seen to yield different, more positive indications. In *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* it is historical research itself which disrupts the autocratic narrative of the ancient constitution. The point here was not so much Spelman’s ‘disinterested scholarship’ (as Pocock put it in a whiggish moment), as the interpretative value of a comparative perspective, stepping outside the dominant English narrative to explore the common ground between French, Scottish and English Feudal Law.<sup>75</sup> In *The Machiavellian Moment* it is the importance of time which is brought to the fore, in politics and in history. Time, that is, understood not simply as synonymous with history, but as variously constructed in ‘historicisms’ to enable humans to respond to the circumstances in which they find themselves, and most effectively constructed by Machiavelli, his civic humanist predecessors and his later Anglo-American admirers in terms of the virtue requisite to act in the face of contingency. Richest of all were the historiographies explored in *Barbarism and Religion*, where Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is shown to have been written out of a plethora of narratives, civil, barbarian and sacred, and Pocock had to explain how it was that the initially dominant, presumptively ‘sovereign’ narrative of Roman virtue and greatness came to be at the mercy of ‘others’, barbarian, Christian and (though beyond Pocock’s reach) Islamic. Here at least the narratives that are at first ‘subaltern’ do not remain so, but join triumphantly together with that of Rome to form the multiple, entangled narratives by which the ‘ancient’ became ‘modern’.

## Notes

1. J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 6 vols, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999–2015); individual volumes will be referenced when discussed.
2. For example, the review by Colin Kidd of Vols 3 and 4, *London Review of Books*, 6 November 2008, 17–18; reviews by Brian Young of Vol 5, *English Historical Review*, 127, no. 528 (2012), 1238–40, and Vol 6, *English Historical Review*, 131, no. 551 (2016), 932–3; and the review by Tom Pye of Vol 6, *Cambridge Humanities Review*, 10 (2015), 21–3. The list is by no means exhaustive, but reviews of Volumes 1 and 2 were more numerous.
3. Symposium on J. G. A. Pocock’s, ‘Barbarism and Religion’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77, no. 1 (2016): 99–171, with contributions by Richard Wolin, Jonathan Israel, Pierre Force and Helena Rosenblatt, and Pocock’s ‘Response and commentary’ (at 157–71).
4. J. G. A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History. Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); again, individual essays will be referenced when discussed.
5. John Robertson, ‘John Pocock’s Histories of Political Thought’, *Storia della Storiografia – History of Historiography* 75, no. 1 (2019): 11–46.
6. Letters to the author, 27 March and 30 December 2019.
7. J. G. A. Pocock, ‘The Controversy Over the Origins of the Commons, 1675–88; A Chapter in the History of English Historical and Political Thought’ (University of Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation, 1952), in Cambridge University Library: ‘Prefatory Note’, 2.
8. Pocock, ‘Controversy over the Commons’, 53–73, quotation at 59.
9. On the debt to Butterfield, Samuel James, ‘J. G. A. Pocock and the Idea of the “Cambridge School” in the History of Political Thought’, *History of European Ideas* 45, no. 1 (2019): 83–98, esp. 87–90.

10. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law. A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); reissued with the addition of 'The Ancient Constitution revisited. A Retrospect from 1986' (1987). In this 'Retrospect', the absence of Selden from the original book was acknowledged to be 'a significant weakness' in its structure (p. 286). The phrase 'a Machiavellian meditation upon feudalism' is at p. 147 of the original and the reissue.
11. J. G. A. Pocock, 'The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry', in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, eds. P. Laslett and W. G. Runciman, 2nd series (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 183–202; reprinted in *Political Thought and History*, 3–19.
12. At this stage, Pocock's broad and vague conception of 'historicism' was indebted to Karl Popper's account of it, which he had heard as an undergraduate in lectures at the University of Canterbury. See J. G. A. Pocock, 'Working on Ideas in Time' (1971), reprinted in *Political Thought and History*, 20–32, at 22–3.
13. J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Origins of Study of the Past: A Comparative Approach', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 4, no. 2 (1962): 209–46; reprinted in *Political Thought and History*, 145–86, esp. 145–56.
14. J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time. Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York, 1971; London: Methuen, 1972). On method: 1. 'Languages and their implications', 8. 'On the non-revolutionary character of paradigms', and 7. 'Time, institutions and action' (the critical reflection on Oakeshott). Substantive examples: 2. 'Ritual, language and power: an essay on the apparent political meanings of ancient Chinese philosophy', 5. 'Time, history and eschatology in the thought of Thomas Hobbes', and 6. 'Burke and the ancient constitution'.
15. *Politics, Language and Time*, 4. 'Machiavelli, Harrington' and 3. 'Civic humanism', the essays first published respectively in 1965 and 1968. Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman. Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstances of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II to the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (1959, New York: Atheneum, 1968).
16. 'Origins of study of the past', *Political Thought and History*, 172.
17. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, twice reissued, in 2003 with an 'Afterword', and in 2016 with a new introduction by Richard Whatmore). Part I 'Particularity and time. The conceptual background'.
18. Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (1955, revised ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press with the Newberry Library, 1966). See Pocock's and Skinner's contrasting assessments of Baron in their contributions to Annabel Brett and James Tully, eds, with Holly Hamilton-Bleakley, *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41–2, 44 (Pocock), and 238–9 (Skinner), the latter registering his surprise at discovering that Pocock had not accepted his strictures.
19. *The Machiavellian Moment*, Parts Two, 'The Republic and its fortune. Florentine political thought from 1490 to 1530' and Three, 'Value and history in the pre-revolutionary Atlantic', chs X–XII.
20. *The Machiavellian Moment*, ch XIII; on the writing of which, Pocock's letters to Quentin Skinner at the time, quoted by Whatmore in his Introduction to the third edition, xvii–xx, with Skinner's commentary on them in 'J.G.A. Pocock: a life in letters', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 86, no. 1 (2025), 1–19, at 4–6.
21. *The Machiavellian Moment*, ch. XV.
22. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958, 2nd edition with a foreword by Danielle Allen, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 38–49. On Pocock's encounter with Arendt and its American academic and political context, the invaluable article by Mira L. Siegelberg, 'Things Fall Apart: J. G. A. Pocock, Hannah Arendt, and the Politics of Time', *Modern Intellectual History* 10, no. 1 (2013): 109–34. Pocock remained ambivalent about the extent of his debt to Arendt.
23. *The Machiavellian Moment*, ch XIV: 'The eighteenth-century debate. Virtue, passion and commerce'. On the Scots, 493–504.
24. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophic Historian', in *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, published as a volume of *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of the Arts and Sciences*, 105, no. 3 (1976): 153–69.
25. The first observation was made in 'Cambridge before Cambridge: political thought and history', a paper given to the Cambridge Political Thought and Intellectual History Research Seminar on 12 May 2008; the second in a late unpublished and untitled paper, in which Pocock outlined an interpretation of Volume IV of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, which he had not reached in *Barbarism and Religion*: see Part 1, opening paragraph of the paper. The paper was dictated to Anna Roberts, Pocock's last amanuensis, at some point after he had read Michael Kulikowski's, *The Tragedy of Empire* (Harvard, 2019), and is now in the St Andrews University Pocock archive; I am grateful to Richard Whatmore for making it available to me.
26. Franco Venturi, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), on England, contrasted with Scotland, 132–4.
27. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Clergy and commerce: the conservative Enlightenment in England', in *L'età dei lumi: studi storici sul Settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, eds. R. Ajello and others, 2 vols (Naples: Jovene, 1985), 523–62.

28. A. D. Momigliano, 'Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method', In *Studies in Historiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), 40–55.
29. For a summary of his debt to and differences from Momigliano, J. G. A. Pocock, 'An overview of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Gibbon*, eds. Karen O'Brien and Brian Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 20–40, at 20–21.
30. Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *Edward Gibbon e la cultura Europea del Settecento* (Naples: Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici, 1954).
31. H. R. Trevor-Roper, 'The idea of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*' (1967) and 'Gibbon and the publication of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*' (1976), both reprinted in Hugh Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment*, ed. John Robertson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 129–60.
32. The exception was Pedro Mexía, *Historia imperial y Cesarea* (Antwerp 1578), discussed in *Barbarism and Religion 3. The First Decline and Fall*, 239–57.
33. Further detail on the state of Gibbon scholarship when Pocock began work and fuller expositions of individual volumes are provided in my 'John Pocock's histories of political thought', 28–43 and notes.
34. *Barbarism and Religion 1. The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon* (1999).
35. *Barbarism and Religion 2. Narratives of Civil Government* (1999), Parts I – II.
36. *Barbarism and Religion 2*, esp. chapters 1–2 (Giannone), 9 (Voltaire), 13–14 (Hume) and 19 (Robertson).
37. *Barbarism and Religion 2*, 362–5.
38. *Barbarism and Religion 3. The First Decline and Fall* (2003). The volume had no dedicatee, but in the Acknowledgements there were special mentions of Hans Baron, 'who, whatever his overstatements, established Leonardo Bruni and Niccolò Machiavelli in the crucial roles I have continued to accord them', and of Ronald Syme for his interpretation of Tacitus.
39. *Barbarism and Religion 3*, Part I.
40. *Barbarism and Religion 3*, Part II. The inclusion of Eusebius rectified his omission from *The Machiavellian Moment*, an omission criticised at the time by Donald Weinstein in his reader's report – see Whatmore, 'Introduction to the new edition', xix.
41. *Barbarism and Religion 3*, chapter 7.
42. *Barbarism and Religion 3*, Parts III–V.
43. *Barbarism and Religion 4. Barbarians, Savages and Empires* (2005), with no dedicatee, Parts I – II.
44. *Barbarism and Religion 4*, Parts III–IV and Conclusion.
45. *Barbarism and Religion 5. Religion. The First Triumph* (2010), 1–3. This volume was dedicated to the memory of Richard H. Popkin and Joseph M. Levine, historians respectively of religious scepticism and English scholarship.
46. *Barbarism and Religion 5*, Parts III–IV.
47. Pocock was able to use David Womersley's new edition of *The Decline and Fall*, 6 vols in 3, (London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 1994), a marked improvement on its predecessors. Womersley also served as publisher's reader for *Barbarism and Religion*, along with Nicholas Phillipson.
48. *Barbarism and Religion 5*, Parts I–II.
49. As Pocock put it in a letter to the author on 3 May 2018, 'I could never understand why Trevor-Roper, after bringing to light the connection between Laudianism and enlightenment, refused to take religious doctrine seriously. The compulsions of wit, I suppose'. For Trevor-Roper's argument, 'The religious origins of the Enlightenment', in H. R. Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 193–236.
50. *Barbarism and Religion 6. Barbarism. Triumph in the West* (2015), dedicated to the ancient historian and Gibbon scholar Michel Baridon, *passim*. Gibbon's chapter 38 is the subject of Pocock's chapter 22.
51. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Gibbon's Second Trilogy: An Introductory Survey', *History of European Ideas* 43, no. 7 (2017): 701–31; 'An overview of *The Decline and Fall*'; and the dictated, untitled typescript containing his thoughts on understanding Volume IV, and its relation to Volumes V and VI, referred to in note 25 above.
52. Discussed in Part II, pp. 20–29 of the unpublished typescript on Gibbon's Volume 4.
53. See, at greater length, my 'John Pocock's histories of political thought', 43–6.
54. First published in the *New Zealand Journal of History* in 1974 and the *Journal of Modern History* in 1975, reprinted in J. G. A. Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands. Essays in British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24–43.
55. See Pocock's retrospective 'The antipodean perception' (2003), written for *The Discovery of Islands* and printed as its opening essay, 3–23.
56. J. G. A. Pocock, ed., with the assistance of G. J. Schochet and L. G. Schwoerer, *The Varieties of British Political Thought 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Roger A. Mason, ed., *Scots and Britons. Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); John Robertson, ed., *A Union for Empire. Political Thought and the Union of 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Jane H. Ohlmeyer, ed., *Political Thought in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

57. J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Ancient Constitution Revisited: A Retrospect From 1986', in the 1987 reissue of *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, 253–387; 'A Discourse of Sovereignty: Observations on the Work in Progress', in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, eds. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 377–428.
58. J. G. A. Pocock, 'History and Sovereignty: The Historiographical Response to Europeanization in Two British Cultures', *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (1992): 358–89, with the 'post-Whig' remark at 371. (The article was originally a lecture under the title, 'The ideology of revisionism'.)
59. 'The Ancient Constitution revisited', 323.
60. 'A discourse of sovereignty', 381: 'The Act in Restraint of Appeals (1533) formulates the English doctrine of sovereignty...'
61. 'A discourse of sovereignty', 393–407, esp. 394–5. Skinner had given his account of the role of history in seventeenth-century debate in 'History and Ideology in the English Revolution', *Historical Journal* 8, no. 2 (1965): 151–78, where he argued that 'the whig ideology amounted neither to genuine history nor to systematic political theory'. Shklar is not referred to in 'A discourse of sovereignty' or in the 'Retrospect', but her critique of Pocock's edition of *The Political Works of James Harrington* (1977), in *Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (November 1978): 558–61, was a provocation. For the reference and an account of its impact I am grateful to the late István Hont.
62. J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Politics of History: The Subaltern and the Subversive', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 6, no. 3 (1998): 219–34, reprinted in *Political Thought and History*, 239–56.
63. J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Politics of Historiography', *Historical Research* 78, no. 199 (2005), reprinted in *Political Thought and History*, 257–71; quotation at 263.
64. Kenneth Sheppard, 'Telling Contested Stories: J. G. A. Pocock and Paul Ricoeur', *History of European Ideas* 39, no. 6 (2013): 879–98.
65. J.G.A. Pocock, 'Historiography as a Form of Political Thought', *History of European Ideas* 37, no. 1 (2011): 1–6, quotation at 6.
66. In a letter to the author of 23 May 2016, Pocock commented 'I see "the republic" as a criticism of "the state" (*Machiavellian Moment*, at large).'
67. 'History and Sovereignty', 358–64.
68. J. G. A. Pocock, 'Commerce, Credit, and Sovereignty: The Nation State as Historical Critique', in *Markets, Morals, Politics. Jealousy of Trade and the History of Political Thought*, eds. Béla Kapossy et al (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2018), 265–84.
69. In detail he knew better, as when he observed that the Republic of Ireland's sovereignty, along with that of the United Kingdom, was essential to the negotiation of peace in Northern Ireland: *The Discovery of Islands*, 262–3. But in general he discounted the confederal character of EU decision-making.
70. 'History and sovereignty', 377–80.
71. J. G. A. Pocock, 'On the Unglobality of Contexts: Cambridge Methods and the History of Political Thought', *Global Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–14.
72. 'History and sovereignty', 380–89, in particular, 385.
73. Speaking at the Cambridge colloquium to mark Pocock's centenary, held on 15 March 2024, Emma Gattey observed in her paper, 'Historian of islands: Pocock and "archipelagic" British History?', that in his contributions to New Zealand history Pocock rarely cites Maori and other Pacific islander historians, although he knew their arguments. In this growing body of indigenous historiography, New Zealand belongs within 'a sea of islands', rather than being an isolated pair of islands in an ocean remote from the British archipelago. I am grateful to Emma Gattey for permission to cite her paper.
74. Perceptive on the inequalities in Pocock's conceptions of British and British imperial history: Richard Bourke, 'Pocock and the Presuppositions of the New British History', *Historical Journal* 53, no. 3 (2010): 747–70.
75. Mark Goldie, 'Retrospect: the Ancient Constitution and the Languages of Political Thought', *Historical Journal* 62, no. 1 (2019): 3–34, shows how a one-sided focus on the ancient constitution by historians following Pocock has missed the critical historiographical point he made by looking at the implications of scholarship on the feudal law.

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