

WAR AND PEACE IN ANGLO-SCOTTISH HISTORIOGRAPHIC TRADITION OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to the examination of David Hume, William Robertson, and Edward Gibbon's views on the issues of war and peace. The author pays primary attention to the fundamental works of Britain's "historical triumvirate" and argues that the trends in further development of peace studies cannot be understood adequately without considering the importance to study historiographic tradition.

1 Introduction

In historiography of the second half of the 18th century, one can identify a line of historical writings, which exerted a strong influence on the formation of the perceptions about war and peace among the generations that survived the epoch of the Napoleonic wars and directly participated either in the processes leading to war or showed the route to peace. Here, a special place should be awarded to the works of David Hume, William Robertson, and Edward Gibbon, rightfully called the Britain's "historical triumvirate" by their contemporaries (Karamzin 1984, original 1790-92: 369). These three historians got the Enlightenment's value scale over to the readers through their amplitudinous, very ably written works indicative of the growing determination to uncrown war and to strip her romantic halo.

Besides, historians of Anglo-Scottish school regarded history as science that is not only "a valuable part of knowledge, but opens the door to many other parts, and affords materials to most of the sciences" (Hume 1965c, original 1740: 819). Consequently, Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon left us an extremely precious material that helps to form our opinion about the realities of war and peace in the past as well as to know the reaction to internal and external wars of people during the Age of Enlightenment. The disclosure of historiographic and philosophical predetermination and of the common and the specific in the approach of triumvirate's historians is the major objective of this paper.

2 French Forerunners of Anglo-Scottish Historiographic School

As G. Shpet argued, the formation of Anglo-Scottish historiographic tradition took place under a “reversed influence of the French Enlightenment”(Shpet 1916: 76). Therefore, there is a need to identify the specific characteristics of this “genetic predetermination”.

In historical and philosophical works, writings on current affairs during the Age of Enlightenment, there is a clear presumption of a new character of war in the 18th century. This idea penetrated deeply in the minds of scholars representing Anglo-Scottish historiographic school as well. For example, speaking of the war for Spanish Succession (1700-1714), Henry Bolingbroke noted that battles, sieges, sudden turns of the fortune that happened during this war do not have analogies in any other period of history (see Bolingbroke 1978, original 1752: 242). Voltaire expressed similar ideas repeatedly (see Voltaire 1809, original 1746: 9, 187-188); possibly, under the influence of Bolingbroke, whom he called a brilliant mind and the best orator of the century (see Voltaire no date, original 1731: 244). It is likely that a strong vision of the novelty of the age from the military perspective determined the mighty interest of French enlighteners to history. Already in the 1730s-40s, they created a whole line of works that touched upon the issues of war and peace. For instance, Charles Montesquieu devoted a good bit of pages to a discourse of “the causes of the greatness and the downfall of the Romans” (Montesquieu 1955, original 1734). Almost all the characters portrayed by Voltaire are his bellicose contemporaries like Charles XII and Peter the Great, Louis XIV and Louis XV.

In the note XLIV closing Chapter ‘Proofs and Illustrations’ at the end of the first volume of *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, William Robertson acknowledges the importance of Voltaire’s historical writings for Scottish author’s own studies. At the same time, Robertson felt it was necessary to explain the absence of references to Voltaire’s work, which covers the same historical period as *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*. According to Robertson, “[Voltaire] seldom imitates the example of modern historians in citing the authors from whom [he] derived [his] information”. However, the Scottish historian then underlines that he respects the works of this extraordinary man, i.e. Voltaire: “I have often followed him as my guide in these researchers, and he has not only pointed out the facts with respect to which it

was of importance to inquire, but the conclusions which it was proper to draw from them” (Robertson 1839, original 1769: 345-346). From Robertson’s point of view, if [Voltaire] had, at the same time, mentioned the books which [were used in his research]... many of his readers, who know consider him only as an entertaining and lively writer, would find that he is a learned and well-informed historian” (Ibid.) On the other hand, Robertson often mentioned Montesquieu as the author whose studies stand apart because of his “usual fastidiousness and solidity” (Ibid.: 208, 320-321).

Edward Gibbon belongs to a different generation that had been growing up at the time when the novelty of French enlighteners was already less valued, and the originality of the French approach was overshadowed by the weakness of their argumentation. However, the greatest English historian could not make no mention of Montesquieu, since in the arena of Roman studies the French writer is in the line of Gibbon’s immediate forerunners. Yet, in most of the cases, the references to Montesquieu’s book are accompanied by unveiled irony and underlinings although Gibbon acknowledges “usual wit”, “rare clarity” and “living fantasy” of his predecessor (Gibbon 1997, original 1776-88, vol. I: 222, 271, 302, 384). We can judge Gibbon’s attitude towards the research methods of the author of *Thoughts on the Causes of the Greatness and the Downfall of the Romans* by the following expression: “One facetious philosopher discovered ... and took the liberty to claim...” (Gibbon 1997, vol. II: 139). At a lesser degree, Gibbon’s scholarly interests came across Voltaire. However, even in unoften references of the historian to the writings of the French philosopher, the former also expressed his dissatisfaction by “the most infirm evidences” found in latter’s book (Ibid.: 205).

The examination of philosophical and historical works by French enlighteners, of their correspondence clearly shows the ambivalence of the authors’ point of view: accented condemnation of war comes along with the recognition of her necessity. Sometimes, these scholars even called for war and gave their recommendations of how to conduct her. But the idea of the priority of creation over destruction is the leitmotiv of almost all writings during this period. Illustratively, Voltaire compares the Swedish King Charles XII to the Russian tsar Peter the Great in the following way. Before the Battle of Poltava, Charles XII was famous because of the “nine years of victories” whereas Peter the Great was known for his “nine years of labor”. Although Charles was

called “the Invincible”, this name could be lost at any moment. But the Russian tsar would keep the name of “the Great” in any case, since “people call him so not because of his military victories” (Voltaire no date: 146). .

In the book about Louis XIV, Voltaire defined the description of “what they (i.e. the French) were” as his primary task. The author promised not to preoccupy his readers with “the amplification of countless hostilities and sieges of the cities that were first taken and then captured back, transferred or returned as a result of peace” (Voltaire 1809: 9). Voltaire expected to be able to picture chiefly “the manners and customs of people, inscribe history of human mind, especially of sciences and arts”, trade and the laws (*The correspondence...* 1816: 103, 147-148). However, the war material eventually did capture Voltaire. The bellum scenes spanned page after page, although in a letter to the then Crown Prince Frederick, Voltaire bewails the fact that he “described only the horrors of sanguinary war” in the book dedicated to Charles XII (Ibid.: 33)

Despite of the obvious antiwar thrust of Voltaire’s works and his protest against “the art of extermination of the human race” (Voltaire 1809: 450), the French philosopher argued that “unfortunately, it seems that the politics and the arms are two bounden skills of humankind”(Ibid.: 33). Moreover, from Voltaire’s point of view, in comparison with all that looting by the accompanying the Grand Turk Tatars, which was due to the lack of salary (Ibid.: 180), European wars are “just wars”, notwithstanding the fact that often and often millions of people are sacrificed in the name of “acquiring a few border towns seldom remunerative of the outlay for their capture” (Ibid.: 32).

From 1767 on, the call for an active war with Turkey is the refrain of Voltaire’s letters to Ekaterina II (*Voltaire and Ekaterina II* 1882: 22-23, 28-29, 30-33, 38, 41--44, 49, 55, 62, 67, 69, 73, 81-83, 86, 90, 95 - 96, 101, 137, 148, 152, 193). “Peace is an eminent affair, and it would be the most appetent one for me, if not the capture of Constantinople”, Voltaire wrote to the Russian Empress on 16 May 1774 (*Letters of Voltaire* 1956: 254). On the part of Voltaire, there is no disposition to overestimate the peacefulness of nations either. For example, he noted the bellicosity phenomenon among many Englishmen: “the Queen Anne of England died on 10 August 1714 hated by a half of her people for concluding peace with so many nations” (Voltaire 1809: 245).

Montesquieu was convinced that no nation is more thorough in preparation of war and more courageous than the Romans were. Therefore, he wished to learn the lessons for contemporaries from the Roman military heritage: “These days, we note that our armies lose many people because soldiers are forced to work a lot...The cases of desertion are so frequent because soldiers are recruited from the scum of each of our societies” (Montesquieu 1955: 55-57). References to the modern days and a constant projection of the Roman military tradition on more recent events allows us to discern in Montesquieu’s book a still highly valued attempt to digest the facts of wars of his time. “[In our time] we often see the Monarchs capable of giving battles; but there are so few who are capable of conducting wars” (Ibid: 71).

For the French historian, the intrusion of winner’s laws and customs upon the other peoples is no less than insanity. According to Montesquieu, the basic rule of the Roman Republic was to wage unceasing warfare, whereas under the Emperors’ rule the goal was to maintain peace (Ibid.: 105). Perhaps, however, he does not view this contradistinction as something constant. In the major work of his life *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu underlines that “the spirit of monarchy is war and territorial expansion; the spirit of republic is peace and moderation” (Montesquieu 1955: 270). In the same book, the French author discussed the right of nations not only to a defensive war, but also to a preventive one. He devoted an entire chapter to a review of the right to conquest. As Montesquieu argues, this right derives from the right to war and can be linked to the act of acquisition. Therefore, this is not the right to destroy or to kill the losers. For him, the enthrallment is an “incidental consequence of the conquest” that can be considered rightful only if there is a clear perspective of the conversion of captives into homagers (Ibid.: 275-277). “This is the way our fathers, who conquest the Roman Empire, followed”, wrote Montesquieu, proud of his descendance from Germania’s tribes of conquerors (Kareev 1898, 14). The historian further argued that “the conqueror has great responsibilities, since the conquest may destroy baneful superstitions and give a better genius to people” (Ibid.: 278) For the nations of Europe, Montesquieu’s thesis seems to shadow forth the phenomenon of Napoleon.

3 The Issues of War and Peace in Writings of David Hume

Let us now turn to the issues of war and peace in the context of David Hume's history of England from the invasion of Julius Cesar to the mid-17th century. Ironically, to a certain degree, this historical work (Hume 1862, original 1754-1762) is a result of the fateful impact of war. According to *My Own Life* by the Scottish scholar, after the publication of the first volume of his history of England, he was "assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation" and Hume started thinking about "retiring to some provincial town of [France]". It is only because war between England and France broke out that the author decided to continue his studies (Hume 1955, original 1776: 39)

Addressing Hume's historiographic heritage, it is impossible to ignore his ideas expressed in the philosophical writings. For Hume, selfishness and ambition are perpetual causes of wars and contention, but war and peace have their own laws (Hume 1965d, original 1751: 253). In his view, it is natural to approve those deeds that aim at "the preservation of general peace" and reprobate those that aim at peace-breaking (Hume 1965a, original 1739-40: 728, 730). Therefore, according to Hume, "we may observe, that the ancient republics were almost in perpetual war, a natural effect of their martial spirit, their love of liberty, their mutual emulation, and that hatred which generally prevails among nations that live in close neighbourhood" (Hume 1806: 51).

Interestingly, Hume considers the citizenry vision of war, exemplified in particular by the English press of the time, the expression of the tradition to criticize any action of the government. As he argued, "[i]f the administration resolve upon war, it is affirmed, that, either willfully or ignorantly, they mistake the interests of the nation, and that peace, in the present situation of affairs, is infinitely preferable" (Hume 1965b, original 1740: 573). Accordingly, "[i]f the passion of the ministers lie towards peace, our political writers breathe nothing but war and devastation, and represent the pacific conduct of the government as mean and pusillanimous" (Ibid.). Following Hume, under the threat of horrible disasters and extensive conquests, the liberal forms of the governing are the most vulnerable ones. Therefore, "such a state ought to establish a fundamental law against conquests; yet republics have ambition as well as individuals, and present interest makes men forgetful of their posterity" (Hume 1965e, original 1752: 797).

There is a certain degree of ambiguity in Hume's approach to the examination of various manifestations of war and peace policy. He was calm describing the Roman conquest of Britain (Hume 1862: 12-14) but quite emotional describing the horrors of Englishmen upon receiving the news of the Battle of Hastings (Ibid: 198). Yet, he was skeptical towards the show of "peacefulness" by the King James I, which Hume assumed the evidences of the weakness of the Monarch, inexperience in the world politics, and lack of political courage (Hume 2001: 102). The historian did pay a significant attention to internal conflicts as well. However, when it came to the struggle for power, Hume opted for rather laconic descriptions, as in the case with his narrative of Wars of the Roses. On the other hand, we find a different approach in the covering of those events that are considered by Hume related to "the great constitutional principles" (Hume 1862: 223). For instance, he describes in fulsome details the confrontation between Scotland and the English Crown. The Scottish historian regarded these events the most important episode during the reign of Edward I and his successors (Ibid: 158). Based on the data provided by Scottish authors, Hume emphasized that the entire Scottish nation opposed the English kings and thundered the terror of English authorities. The latter was weakened by the feeble leadership of Edward II, who, nevertheless, was capable to rally to the English colors the forces of Gaskony, Flanders, Ireland and Wales (Ibid: 166, 168-169)

In the volumes that had been written first but chronologically fall within the latest period of history described by Hume, i.e. *Of the Protestant Succession*, the author reconstructs history of the 17th century Revolution. The reign of James I, a representative of the Scottish dynasty at the English throne, is shown as some kind of a symbol of the centuries-old confrontation between the two "neighboring nations". Hume emphasized that James I was born in a foreign country and grown up among the hostile people. The King brought to the English court a great many Scotsmen, but did not take into account the fact that the memories of the past still cause human prejudices and maintain hatreds between the two nations. In "old times", these hatreds had reached extremes and could not be weaken so fast (see Hume 2001: 6, 7, 20-21). According to Hume, the King had a naïve faith in the support by his subjects of the idea to fully unify the parliament, the laws and privileges in order to sustain peace. From Hume's point of view, James I believed that his superlative diligence and zeal aimed at the union of the

two Kingdoms would not left lying idle. Rephrasing Hume, James rightfully considered the healing of a bloody quarrel of rival peoples and the unity of the island, relished from then on the internal sea and durably protected from any external invasion, the particular happiness of his reign (Hume 2001: 20). Hence, our above examination of the historical work by David Hume clearly shows the intrinsic synthesis of his philosophical and historical views.

4 War and Peace in William Robertson's *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*

In the next section of the paper, we will attempt to examine the approach to the issues of war and peace adapted by another Enlightenment historian, namely, William Robertson. In *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (Robertson 1839, original 1769), the scene of wars during the age of Charles V is set at an enormously ample geographical space. Not limiting the narrative by the borders of one country and not even by Europe, Robertson uncovered events that took place as far as in the expanding domains of the Grand Turk and Africa. For this historian, who narrowed his coverage by the 16th century, the space is that matters most, whereas the writings of Hume and Gibbon dealt with the processes unwrapping during thousands of years. Nevertheless, the extensive introductory part is great on dates and shows the specific characteristics of history of England like delayed development of trade because of invasions and internal and external wars during many centuries.

According to Robertson, for a long time, people were not able to recover after the sudden and complete turnaround in the issue of land property as a result of the Normannic conquest. Then, the State ardently and thoughtlessly interceded with the claims of the Kings for the French throne and the long attenuated state might by the futile attempts to conquer France. This was followed by the bloody wars between the House of York and the House of Lancaster that brought the Kingdom into “the most horrible of all troubles” (Robertson 1839, vol. I: 302-303). Several sentences sufficed the historian for presenting English medieval history as a convincing illustration to the thesis of the destructive impact of war.

In the first volume of the book, dedicated to the examination of the “progress of society” in Europe, Robertson unconditionally rejected internecine feuds, or “private

hostilities broke out due to private discontents” (Ibid.: 44) According to the historian, these wars yield hideous ferociousness and implacable hatred that overpass any invasion of the fierce enemy by their devastation for the State and fatality for the people (Ibid.: 251). Robertson not only describes the major prescripts concerned with the right and the way to conduct private hostilities, but also points out the “variety of means” used to restrict or demolish this type of war (Ibid.: 252-261). In particular, he explains the exact meaning of “Peace of God” after 1032 and the amendments made during the rule of St. Louis after 1245 (Ibid., 254-255). It is precisely in relation with the measures aimed at restricting the pursuit of private warfare that Robertson pronounces the phrase so typical of enlighteners: “How slow is the progress of reason and of civil order!” He was wondering why the laws that seem to us so just, clear and simple require centuries of efforts by civil and church authorities to be put in practice (Ibid.: 257).

As for wars of the 16th century, Robertson prefers to build his narrative from a different angle. According to the historian, during this time, the personality factor starts to play an important role in the unleashing of wars. He argued that “strong and total peace” in Europe was eroded by the rivalry of two emperors resulted in wars unprecedented in modern times in terms of the duration and number of participants involved (Ibid., vol. II: 50). On the other hand, for Robertson, wars of the age of Charles V had a profound positive significance, because, as he argued, European states acquired internal might, discovered their own capabilities, tested their power and learnt to make this power fearsome for others.

Wars facilitated the overcoming of dissociation: “[t]his engage [the states] in such a series of enterprises and negotiations, that the affairs of all the considerable nations in Europe came to be insensibly interwoven with each other; and a great political system was gradually formed, which grew to be an object of universal attention” (Ibid., vol. IV: 235-236). Besides, at the time of Robertson’s writing, the states kept their places in the system without any crucial changes that could be expected after “such deedful centuries as the preceding two” (Ibid., vol. IV: 235-236). From Robertson’s point of view, the stability of the system was possible because the states acquired roughly equal potential, whereas extensive and swift conquest was possible only in the case of “the great disparity in the citizenry state of the peoples”, e.g., in the epoch of Alexander the Great, Genghis-Khan and Tamerlane (Ibid.: 233).

At the same time, Robertson was keen to the changes in England's attitude towards the "Powers on the firm-land", the renouncement of "passion for conquests" and of exhaustive "continuous and fruitless wars". He opines that these changes made impact on England's relations with Scotland as well. According to Robertson, for centuries, Scotland has been protected by "the nature and brave, courageous people" from a "dangerous, if not absolutely unfeasible, intention to conquest this country". It was the "poverty of Scotsmen and ferocious internal quarrels" along with the bribery of national leaders, ministers, and kings' favorites that enabled England to obtain such a strong influence in Scotland incomparable with the impact of any war (Ibid.: vol. IV: 245).

Hence, following the writings of Montesquieu, Robertson's *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* provided the supporters as well as the opponents of the realistic school with quite plausible arguments.

5 Edward Gibbon's Views on War and Peace

Unlike Robertson, Edward Gibbon consistently condemned any war. Renouncing those who romanticize war, he argued that as long as "the mankind shall continue to bestow more liberal applause on their destroyers than on their benefactors, the thirst of military glory will ever be the vice of the most exalted characters" (Gibbon 1997, original 1776-87, vol. I: 55). At the same time, Gibbon recognized the importance of historical material for philosophical generalizations. That is why this greatest English historian and philosopher of his time underlined the significance of wars in human history and emphasized that he could not withhold the events, which attract the attention of a philosopher to the history of bloodshed by their extreme importance (Ibid.: 124).

In *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon's major work finished in 1787, he traces the decline of not only of the Eternal City, but also of the entire Empire until the fall of the Byzantium. In other words, this is an immense study of that civilization, which made the expansion of a state the only non-forbidden high aspiration, if to follow the German historian of the next century Theodor Mommsen (1994, original 1854-56: 37)

Already on the first page of *The History...*, Gibbon distinguishes three the most important, from his point of view, causes of the success of the Roman conquests during

the Republic: politics of the Senate, stirring competition between consuls, and bellicose enthusiasm of the people (Ibid., vol. I: 51). The author aphoristically characterizes the essence of the transformations that took place in Rome in parallel with the territorial expansion: “the public freedom was lost in the extent of conquest” (Ibid., vol. I: 57). The crisis of the Republic and the rise of the Empire would change the value system: Augustus, the founder of the Empire, “bequeathed, as a valuable legacy to his successors, the advice of confining the empire within those limits, which Nature seemed to have placed as its permanent bulwarks and boundaries”. According to Gibbon, “fortunately for the calmness of the human race”, the modest system “advised by the wisdom of August” remained (Ibid., vol. I: 52-53). Thus, “if to exclude inessential military actions in order to train border legions”, the reigns of Adriano Publio and Antoninus Pius constitute a “pleasing picture of universal peace” (Ibid., vol. I: 57).

Edward Gibbon’s account of the capture of Constantinople by Crusaders reveals author’s negative attitude to wars in a most clear and distinctive way. He argues that as a grievous result of wars, the profit is never equable to the loss, and happiness is never equable to sorrow (see Ibid., vol. I: 55). Besides, one can often characterize Gibbon’s description of war as sarcasm and flout. For example, talking about the Roman conquest of Britain, the historian noted that war was started by the most foolish, continued by the most harlot, and ended by the most coward Emperor (see Ibid., vol. I: 53). And Gibbon compared Mongols and Tatars’ invasions to those “convulsions of nature” that once had been shaking the Earth and changed her exterior (see Ibid., vol. VII: 124)

6 Concluding Remarks

The views on the issues of war and peace expressed by the members of Britain’s “historical triumvirate” as well as their historical heritage at large challenged the frame of reference in European academic environment and led to a gradual transformation of public opinion. In Russia, from the publication in the beginning of the 1790s of Karamzin’s *Letters of a Russian traveler* at the latest, the works of David Hume, William Robertson, and Edward Gibbon had been widely regarded the master-pieces of historical writings (Karamzin 1984, 252). These historians exercised a manifold influence over the writings of Nikolay Karamzin, the greatest historian of the Age of Enlightenment in Russia. That is because Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State* was

crafted within the context of European academic environment and is no less the reflection of the influence of the overseas scholarly development than a result of the processes that took place in the Russian historical science (Rudkovskaya 2004). As concern the issues of war and peace, Karamzin's world-view turns out to be closely linked to many ideas expressed by British historians (Rudkovskaya 2006).

At the edge of the 17th century, Immanuel Kant argued that "a war of extermination, in which the process of annihilation would strike at both parties, and likewise at all Right at the same time, would reach Perpetual Peace only on the final Golgotha of the human race" (Kant 1966, original 1795: 263).

Like above Kant's statement, the ideas pertained to Anglo-Scottish historiographic tradition remain relevant today. More than two hundred years ago, in relation to Tamerlane's conquests, Edward Gibbon wrote that in jurisprudence of conquests, it is always easy to find some lawful motive for war, be that one's proper security or revenge, honor or religious zeal, or simply the right or the profit (see Gibbon 1886, vol. VII: 176-177). Unfortunately, this Gibbon's aphoristic formula has yet to lose its importance.

Today, peace studies deal with the entire complex of issues related to the classification of wars, examination of their cycles, and the causes of war and peace (see Matsuo 2005). At the same time, contemporary peace research can be unmistakably rooted in the accumulated scholarly experience of peace studies' forerunners. The list of predecessors should include the representatives of Anglo-Scottish historiographic school by any measure.

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