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Remarks on Gibbon's Remarks on Voltaire

By Peter Schranz

Preface

With great freedom, Gibbon in his books of Rome discusses the traits of the innumerable authors from whose work he draws, for they too are subject to gaze of his analysis. In Chapter 26, Gibbon writes "It is not without the most sincere regret, that I must now take leave of an accurate and faithful guide, who has composed the history of his own times, without indulging the prejudices and passions, which usually affect the mind of a contemporary. Ammianus Marcellinus, who terminates his useful work with the defeat and death of Valens, recommends the more glorious subject of the ensuing reign to the youthful vigor and eloquence of the rising generation."

About the members of this rising generation Gibbon had no difficulty declaring his views, and he disclaims that "[c]onscious of these disadvantages, which will continue to involve a considerable portion of the decline and fall of the Roman empire, I shall proceed with doubtful and timorous steps."

Ammianus and the generation of annalists and chroniclers after him populated late antiquity, however. François-Marie "Voltaire" Arouet was this close to being Gibbon's contemporary, and at least one reference to him makes it into all six volumes of the history. This isn't especially surprising when we consider that Ammianus wrote only about his own time, while the temporal setting of Voltaire's voluminous writings spans basically every point in all history, if I may sacrifice exactitude for the sake of emphasis. However, the great variety of subjects which Voltaire discusses, and on which Gibbon peppers many incidental comments, allows us to glean from the Englishman an edifyingly three-dimensional portrait of the Frenchman.

I hasten to report on the thirteenth note of chapter 67, in which Gibbon declares that "[i]n his way, Voltaire was a bigot, an intolerant bigot." Only in its proper place will I comment on the matter which incites that bloodshed, but who among us would have the strength to avoid quoting it prematurely?

That such a compendious work as *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (DAFOTRE) should produce not only an intricate depiction of thirteen centuries of human events, but also an incidental sculpture of a writer living outside of those thirteen centuries' boundaries, might not be surprising, either, but producing this sculpture, without intending to, is as much a feat of thorough description as accidentally producing a sculpture of marble is of motor precision.

After his history's publication, Gibbon was famously accused of intense anti-Christianity, by such as Chelsum, Randolph, and Henry Davis, despite his incidental confessions of faith in his *Vindication of Some Passages* via deference to the criticisms of Watson (not to mention in his private letters, see that to Catherine Porten, February, 1755), and despite his exhausted sighs towards many of Voltaire's anti-Christian points. May this work succeed in partially distinguishing their viewpoints, in emphasizing that Gibbon's round impressions of Voltaire were what many of Gibbon's critics' impressions were of him. It's an appealing strategy to take refuge in a middle path, to say that Gibbon was right because we can place his religious views between the two extremes of those of his own critics and of Voltaire, but lest this work should wander into a lengthy and tedious treatment of religion and middle paths--in which I might find the temptation irresistible to digress enthusiastically upon Buddhism's practical placement between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, or the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism's philosophical placement between the extremes of essentialism and nihilism--I'll control myself (for a little while) and keep to the task of providing Gibbon's portrait of Voltaire through his numerous and dispersed comments, and merely suggest that this portrait reveals *something* about Gibbon which people who ignore his actual professions of faith might find more amenable.

The Next Preface

Shouldn't some biographer of Edward Gibbon know the reason he wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*? I mean the *real* reason: what psychological pressure did his six volume, 1.1 million-word, twenty-year-long extracurricular activity release? For indeed, Gibbon was a member of parliament between 1774-1784, so it's not as though the psychological pressure was "I need to write this because I need money," which in those days, very unlike today, was a problem that some people had.

Gibbon didn't have it, though, and so the mystery remains, an entire preface into this essay, why he would do this. As of this writing in 2020, we generally explain enormous feats like his by attributing mental illness onto the author. Whether it's Henry Darger's *Vivian Girls*, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, or Marguerite Young's *Miss Macintosh, My Darling,* we tend to see the labors as symptoms of their authors' profound psychic stress, even though what do *we* know about their authors, except that some were eccentric and some suffered from thoroughly documented psychic stress.

Gibbon unfortunately worked before we all began to look for unsupportable and embarrassing ulterior motives for every move everyone makes, such as that your personal sexuality, good reader, is nothing but a replacement for your childhood incontinence. What an incredible surprise it is to learn that Gibbon conceived his project in the very same period during which his relationship fell apart with Suzanne Curchod, the only woman he ever hoped to wed. Here I reproduce Gibbon's Capitoline Vision, after the millions who have done so before me:

"It was at Rome, on the fifteenth of October 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted fryars were singing Vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the City first started to my mind."

But what he *conveniently leaves out*, is that 1764 is the very same year he and Curchod finally parted for real. What an incredible coincidence that his love is thwarted, and then, instead of participating in several decades of marriage, he produces over a million words of narrative, analysis, and commentary on 1,300 years of humanity. And let's not forget that his work wasn't called *The Incline and Rise of the Roman Empire*, which, if Gibbon is in Heaven at the moment and can read these words or my mind, I would humbly BEG him to consider writing, if he hasn't already, but the *Decline and Fall* of the same. Thus, he wrote the volumes as an attempt to sublimate his frustration about bachelorhood and the decline and fall of his heart's satisfaction, either that or, we can be certain, 1: he was a closeted gay man, 2: the reason he didn't marry Curchod was his repulsion by the female person, 3: he was ashamed of his homosexuality, which I think I've pretty much established, 4: he pretended his failures in love were what he was sublimating into the DAFOTRE, when in reality what he was sublimating was the shame he felt about his sexuality.

If you blinked, you would have missed that I magically imagined I'd proven that DAFOTRE was a product of Gibbon's sublimation (which I didn't prove), that everybody *thinks* it was because of his frustrations with Suzanne Curchod (which I only just speculated about now), AND that everyone is wrong, because not only was Gibbon gay (which I don't know), and not only was he ashamed of himself (which I don't know), but his shame was the *reason* for his sublimation. I have formed several interlocking theories about why he would write this that have no power whatsoever to compel you to accept them, as they are all of them based on making things up, insisting that you believe them, and then telling you you're wrong, which is a sleight of hand I would like to warn you about as you read those authors less trustworthy than me: your sincere, humble, and concerned docent.

As it happens, Leslie Stephen, (Virginia Woolf's father) wrote the entry for Gibbon in Volume 21 of the *Dictionary of National Biography,* in 1890, and I have not found in the entry any mention at all of Gibbon's sexuality or his sublimation thereof. The study of the defense mechanism itself has a history which for the most part post-dates Stephen's writing, and I am enlightened by etymonline.com, which reveals that the denotation of the word 'sexuality' as 'sexual identity' only came about in 1980.

Here I quote from Stephen on a *seemingly* unrelated topic: "In 1774 [Gibbon] joined Johnson's famous club (founded in 1764). He was elected 'professor in ancient history' at the Royal Academy in succession to Goldsmith (d.1774). Boswell (Letters to Temple, pp. 233, 242) calls him an 'ugly, affected, disgusting fellow,' who 'poisons the literary club to me,' and classes him among 'infidel wasps and venomous insects.'"

This Boswell customer is James Boswell, biographer of Samuel Johnson, and correspondent of the *Reverend* William Johnson Temple, to whom in 1767 he boasted, "I got myself quite intoxicated, went to a Bawdy-house and past a whole night in the arms of a Whore. She indeed was a fine strong spirited Girl, a Whore worthy of Boswell if Boswell must have a whore." Why he would boast like this to a clergyman, or why he would confess in such a contritionless manner, is a mystery, but we can safely disregard all of his viewpoints on poor Gibbon as a result of his venereal pride.

I think right off the bat I'm not going to consider DAFOTRE anything other than sublimated frustration, the ONLY question is what in his heart he was trying to smelt into a socially acceptable product.

So Boswell didn't like him very much, and Stephen writes, "[t]he famous chapters upon the growth of Christianity produced, as Hume foretold--though Gibbon himself seems to have been unprepared for it--a series of attacks. He replied to Henry Edward Davies [sic], James Chelsum, and some others, in a 'Vindication' (January 1779)..."

Is it possible that Gibbon, suffering hatred both from prostitutors and from clergymen, might have sublimated the pressure from both ends of that spectrum into a work of art which not one of his critics could ever possibly equal? Could it be his victory, in *this unequallable work*, that he pours lasting disgrace upon the villains of his historical focus, and thorough reprimands upon those whose focus is his, too, but whose indictments on charges of anti-Christianity are a little more justifiable? Commentary on the above-mentioned member of this latter group, Voltaire, will consume the greater portion of this essay, starting right this second.

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Let's pause to consider a passage from the beginning of Voltaire's 1751 history, The Age of Louis XIV:

"Not only Germany but all the Christian states were still bleeding with the wounds of the many religious wars in which they had been engaged; a madness peculiar to Christians, and unknown to idolaters, and which was the fatal consequence of that dogmatic turn, which had for so long a time been introduced among all ranks of people. Almost every point of controversy occasioned a civil war; and foreign nations--nay perhaps our own posterity--will one day be at a loss to comprehend how their ancestors could have thus butchered one another, while they were preaching the doctrine of patience."

Criticism towards the factious tendencies of *some* Christians in *certain* contexts, specifically that of the uniqueness of religious war among Christians, and not among idolaters, might instantly take one or two insincere forms. The first of these which I can contrive is the argument that wars among Christians are always political in nature, and any religious aspect of the conflict is mere pretext. Anyone who might suggest that Christians could actually war against each other over doctrinal disputes is *knowingly* spreading *obvious* lies. The only thing we can be more sure about than that it has never happened, is that it will never, either.

The second form of criticism is to reference the millions of examples of *entirely apolitical,* one hundred percent religious wars between idolaters. We can at once exclude wars between groups of Muslims, unless we want to be extraordinarily stubborn and refuse to understand the vigorous stance of anti-idolatry in Islam.

This is not the place for a prolonged and intractable look at the history of religious wars, or how those between Christians are entirely political, and those between non-Christians are entirely religious, but in the annals of Buddhism my thoughts continue to turn to the events of the Council of Lhasa, which took place c. AD 793. Trisong Detsen, the emperor of Tibet, organized a debate to settle the matter of whether enlightenment can come suddenly, or only after numerous lives of intellectual and moral labor. The first view was held by the Chinese monk Heshang Moheyan, a Buddhist of the Chan tradition, which was transmitted to Japan, where it is known by the more famous name of Zen. The second view was held by the Indian monk Kamalasila, who followed the Madhyamaka tradition. Ultimately Kamalasila's view of gradual enlightenment was favored. Heshang Moheyan was expelled from Tibet, and works espousing sudden enlightenment were burned.

No physical violence was recorded in the aftermath of the debate, though there's no denying the intellectual violence of book-burning. On the subject of the Arian controversy, Gibbon writes that "[t]he Greek word, which was chosen to express this mysterious resemblance, bears so close an affinity to the orthodox symbol, that the profane of every age have derided the furious contests which the difference of a single diphthong excited between the Homoousians and the Homoiousians," that is, those holding the view that the Son is of the *same* substance as the Father, or whether, as in Arianism, that the Son is of *similar* substance to the Father.

Those with the former view won out at the Council of Nicaea, the Arian teachings were anathematized, and at the end of the council, after the establishment of the Nicene Creed, Constantine I, the emperor of Rome, promulgated an edict, part of which is here repeated: "...if any writing composed by Arius should be found, it should be handed over to the flames, so that not only will the wickedness of his teaching be obliterated, but nothing will be left even to remind anyone of him. And I hereby make a public order, that if someone should be discovered to have hidden a writing composed by Arius, and not to have immediately brought it forward and destroyed it by fire, his penalty shall be death. As soon as he is discovered in this offense, he shall be submitted for capital punishment."

Compare these two disputes--which I am sure I have characterized unfairly and with the most *conscious and* *malevolent* intent--one resulted in the burning of books, and the other resulted in the burning of books and the threat of execution against any who might still endeavor to possess them. After all this, can it not be said that Gibbon and Voltaire were on the same team, as far as their disdain is concerned for the absurd forms taken by many religious disputes among Christians? Voltaire, if he was not aware of the Council of Lhasa, would not have been surprised to hear of its outcome, if we were to discuss its bearing on his remark about idolaters in the *Age of Louis XIV*. Gibbon was quite dismissive of Indian philosophy (in some cases, of Greek philosophy, too), and so perhaps would not have possessed the patience to reflect on the Council of Lhasa at all. In chapter 50, he writes, "[w]e should gratefully remember, that the mischances of time and accident have spared the classic works to which the suffrage of antiquity had adjudged the first place of genius and glory: the teachers of ancient knowledge, who are still extant, had perused and compared the writings of their predecessors; nor can it fairly be presumed that any important truth, any useful discovery in art or nature, has been snatched away from the curiosity of modern ages." In a note on this text, he adds, "the contempt of the Greeks for Barbaric science would scarcely admit the Indian or Aethiopic books into the library of Alexandria; nor is it proved that philosophy has sustained any real loss from their exclusion."

I should like to point out a rather stunning coincidence that proves the styles of Voltaire and Gibbon so similar that perhaps their conflict was one of too great similarity (consider that no public debate between the Homoousians and the Madhyamikas has ever been attempted.)

Recall Voltaire's remark that "foreign nations... will one day be at a loss to comprehend how their ancestors could have thus butchered one another, while they were *preaching the doctrine of patience*."

And now here is a passage from the thirty-eighth chapter of the DAFOTRE: "The clergy successfully *preached the doctrines of patience* and pusillanimity; the active virtues of society were discouraged; and the last remains of military spirit were buried in the cloister..."

"To preach the doctrine of patience" is not any sort of inter-lingual idiom that I have ever heard, and so I must supposed that Gibbon lifted it from Voltaire. I'll not go as far as to accuse him of plagiarism, as Mr. Davis might have, because the tweaks to the syntax and the fact of Voltaire's text being a translation weaken the charge, but can we not also say that even in *style* the two men are *mind-bogglingly similar*?

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Allow me to refer to the sentence in Book 1, chapter XV of Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV*: "In the year 1667, at the attack on the counterscarp of Lille, [Nicolas Catinat] performed an action in the presence of the king, which required both understanding and courage."

Discussion of counterscarps must have been *de rigueur* in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, otherwise, whence would come Sterne's ten thousand references in *Tristram Shandy*? of which I reproduce only a few here:

"...one of the most memorable attacks in that siege, was that which was made by the English and Dutch upon the point of the advanced counterscarp, between the gate of St. Nicolas, which inclosed the great sluice or water-stop, where the English were terribly exposed to the shot of the counter-guard and demi-bastion of St. Roch..." (1.XXVI)

"What confusion in greater Theatres from words of little meaning, and as indeterminate a sense! when thou considerest this, thou wilt not wonder at my uncle Toby's perplexities,--thou wilt drop a tear of pity upon his scarp and his counterscarp;--his glacis and his covered way;--his ravelin and his half-moon: 'Twas not by ideas,--by Heaven; his life was put in jeopardy by words." (1.XXVII)

"...my uncle Toby was warmly engaged at that time in carrying on the siege of Dendermond, parallel with the allies, who pressed theirs on so vigorously, that they scarce allowed him time to get his dinner--that nevertheless he gave up Dendermond, though he had already made a lodgment upon the counterscarp;--and bent his whole thoughts towards the private distresses at the inn..." (3.LI)

Let's not be detained by the forest of other discussions of the term, but only receive amusement from the fact that the word "counterscarp" does not compose even a single one of the 1.1 million words of Gibbon's history. Sterne taught him not to use it, I advance, and for generations the word was forgotten. Don't suppose that Gibbon couldn't have found a purpose for the word, due to the antique subject of his book, and the counterscarp's more recent invention, because this error confuses the word for its referent: the counterscarp as a tool of fortification is no newer than the Iron Age, when the hillforts of Old Sarum, in Salisbury, England, were built.

No, we can only conclude that Gibbon was embarrassed to use the word, can't we? Are you telling me that in the 1,300 years covered in his work, the author couldn't find one instance, not in the acts of the Huns, the Germans, the Mongols, or the Turks, where the mention of a counterscarp might have been natural? Gibbon certainly doesn't withhold mention of ditches, see *innumerable references* to defensive ditches in *all six volumes*.

Nor ought you let your pacific virtue fall from you, good reader, by considering whether Laurence Sterne has digressed me from beyond the grave: let's not at all forget the date of publication of these two English works, Sterne's between 1759-67, Gibbon's, 1776-89. Voltaire died in 1778, and so, whatever it could mean, he ceased referring to counterscarps no later than that year.

Oh, and by the way, "counterscarp" entered English circa 1575, and came from *Italian*, *contrascarpa*, so the option of suggesting it was some French word Voltaire knew, and Sterne, too, but not Gibbon, is closed to any who are not willing to be, to paraphrase Abbot Santaraksita, teacher of that fabled debate-winner Kamalasila, "subject to the derision of all good people."

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From Chapter 1:

"The western parts of Africa are intersected by the branches of Mount Atlas, a name so idly celebrated by the fancy of poets; but which is now diffused over the immense ocean that rolls between the ancient and the new continent."

87 [ M. de Voltaire, tom. xiv. p. 297, unsupported by either fact or probability, has generously bestowed the Canary Islands on the Roman empire.]

It appears here that Gibbon is referring in his note to chapter 140 of Voltaire's *Ancient and Modern History*:

"The Canary Islands had already been discovered, without the help of the compass, about the end of the fourteenth century. These islands, which in Ptolemy’s and Pliny’s time were called the Fortunate Islands -- *Insulæ Fortunatæ* -- were well known to the Romans, after they became masters of Africa Tingitana, from which they were not far distant. But the fall of the Roman Empire having destroyed all communication between the western nations, who now became strangers to one another, these islands were lost to us."

There Gibbon might have liked to consider whether Voltaire suggested in any of remarks that the islands were a part of the Roman Empire. That they were well known to the Romans, which is all I have yet found in Voltaire towards the accusation in Gibbon's note, is beyond the mercy of doubt, for we read of a reference to the islands in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, book six, chapter 37.

Might we suspect that Pliny's detailed overview of the islands convinced Voltaire that no one could have such intimate knowledge of a place without also being in possession of it? The ancient author lists numerous islands:

"The first [island] is called Ombrios, and that it presents no traces of buildings whatever; that among the mountains there is a lake, and some trees, which bear a strong resemblance to giant fennel, and from which water is extracted; that drawn from those that are black is of a bitter taste, but that produced by the white ones is agreeable and good for drinking. A second island has the name of Junonia, but...it contains nothing beyond a small temple of stone: ...in its vicinity there is another, but smaller, island of the same name, and then another called Capraria, which is infested by multitudes of huge lizards. According to the same author, in sight of these islands is Ninguaria, which has received that name from its perpetual snows; this island abounds also in fogs. The one next to it is Canaria; it contains vast multitudes of dogs of very large size."

A modern error, indeed, would be my oversight of Voltaire's explicit contention that the Canary Islands belonged to Rome. I have read only the slimmest crescent of Voltaire, and have depended upon entering terms like "Voltaire," "Canary Islands," "Îsles Canaries," etc. into a search engine to determine where the author erred in the way Gibbon asserts. Tome xiv. of Voltaire does not appear to be any sort of particular set of texts, though again, how modernly would I have erred if my conclusion here, a result of finding no such thing via search terms, had simply missed what Gibbon could find merely by the power of reading everything.

For safety's sake, if we visit that lonely temple of Junonia, and lay on it the garlands of charity for Gibbon's pronouncement, then we can at once dig away at any charity owed to the object of his scrutiny. Why might Voltaire have added the Canary Islands to the Roman Empire? Perhaps to add another 2,900 square miles to the extent of its area? After all, Voltaire was more Roman than Gibbon, given their nations of origin. This is all of course the most speculative libel ever, to suggest such a ridiculous and petty reason for this addition to the Rome flowing from Voltaire's pen.

Not to bring up Sterne again, but he, in *Tristram Shandy* I.XX, castigating his reader for inattention, writes that "[t]he mind should be accustomed to make wise reflections, and draw curious conclusions as it goes along; the habitude of which made Pliny the Younger affirm, 'That he never read a book so bad, but he drew some profit from it.'"

And yet Pliny the younger was speaking of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, in a letter to Baebius Macer, "For he never read without taking extracts, and used to say that there never was a book so bad that it was not good in some passage or another," which means that *someone* was reading Pliny the Younger inattentively, though I won't say who.

What has this to do with Voltaire's irreligion? Even more alarming a question: what has this to do with Gibbon's textual statue of Voltaire?

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From Chapter 19:

"The persons despatched to secure the provinces which he left behind, passed him with cold salutations, or affected disdain; and the troops, whose station lay along the public road, were studiously removed on his approach, lest they might be tempted to offer their swords for the service of a civil war."

23 [The Thebaean legions, which were then quartered at Hadrianople, sent a deputation to Gallus, with a tender of their services. Ammian. l. xiv. c. 11. The Notitia (s. 6, 20, 38, edit. Labb.) mentions three several legions which bore the name of Thebaean. The zeal of M. de Voltaire to destroy a despicable though celebrated legend, has tempted him on the slightest grounds to deny the existence of a Thebaean legion in the Roman armies. See Oeuvres de Voltaire, tom. xv. p. 414, quarto edition.]

In the note here Gibbon is referring to a passage in the ninth chapter of Voltaire's 1763 *Treatise on Tolerance*, regarding the early martyrs of Christianity, towards which subject the philosopher takes an attitude of skepticism. This position culminates eventually in his denial, not only that the Thebaean (or Theban) Legion was not entirely converted and martyred, but that it did not ever exist to begin with.

The soldiers of a legion, called the Martyrs of Agaunum, are said to have been put to death en masse in AD 286 for refusing to sacrifice to Emperor Maximian. It is beyond my scope to investigate the historicity of this tertiary matter, except to remark upon Voltaire's lack of conviction there. I record an ample quote from the close of that chapter:

'...we may perceive the absurdity of that fabulous story of the Theban legion, said to have been all massacred for their religion. Can anything be more ridiculous than to make this legion be brought from Asia by the great St. Bernard? It is altogether impossible that this legion should have been sent for from Asia to quiet a tumult in Gaul, a year after that tumult was suppressed, and not less so that six thousand foot and seven hundred horse should have suffered themselves to be all murdered in a place where two hundred men only might have kept off a whole army. The account of this pretended butchery is introduced with all the marks of imposture: "When the earth groaned under the tyranny of Diocletian, heaven was peopled with martyrs." Now, this event, such as it is related, is supposed to have happened in 286, the very time in which Diocletian most favored the Christians, and that the Roman Empire was in a state of the greatest tranquility. But to cut short this matter at once, no such legion as the Theban ever existed; the Romans were too haughty and too wise to form a corps of those Egyptians, who served only as slaves in Rome, *Vernæ Canopi*; we may as well suppose them to have had a Jewish legion. We have the names of two and thirty legions that formed the principal military force of the Roman Empire, and it is very certain the Theban legion is not to be found among them. In a word, we may rank this story with the acrostic verses of the Sibyls, which are said to have foretold the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ, and with many other like spurious productions, which false zeal has trumped up to impose upon credulity.'

What Gibbon finds despicable about this legend is not at once apparent, nor can it be determined from Ammianus, whose only reference to any Theban legion I place here:

"Therefore after a long journey through the level country, when he had reached Hadrianopolis, a city in the district of Mount Hæmus, which had been formerly called Uscudama, where he stayed twelve days to recover from his fatigue, he found that the Theban legions, who were in winter quarters in the neighbouring towns of those parts, had sent some of their comrades to exhort him by trustworthy and sure promises to remain there relying upon them, since they were posted in great force among the neighbouring stations; but those about him watched him with such diligent care that he could get no opportunity of seeing them, or of hearing their message."

Gibbon does not appear skeptical of the existence of the legion; indeed, he alleges three references in Ammianus, who himself refers to more than one here. Yet again Gibbon takes the middle path between Voltaire--who believed neither in the martyrdom nor even existence of any Theban Legion -- and, say, Mr. Davis, the author of *An Examination...*, who I should not doubt believed in both.

Perhaps what is so despicable about the legend to Gibbon is its lack of historicity, while the historicity of the legion itself he accepts, despite a very antique typo which I have used to divide several editions into two categories, thanks to the immense availability of the varieties of Gibbon's work.

The passage currently under inspection reads, in the following editions, "The zeal of M. de Voltaire to destroy a despicable though celebrated *legend*, has tempted him on the slightest grounds to deny the existence of a Thebaean legion in the Roman armies."

Tourneisen; Basel, 1789

Robinson, Baynes; London, Liverpool; 1830

Bohn; London; 1854

Murray; London; 1854

Collier; New York; 1900

Frowde; London; 1907

And the editions are as follows where the passage reads, confusingly, "The zeal of M. de Voltaire to destroy a despicable though celebrated *legion*, has tempted him on the slightest grounds to deny the existence of a Thebaean legion in the Roman armies."

Claxton, Remsen, and Haffelfinger; Philadelphia; 1875

Harper; New York; 1879

American Book Exchange; New York, 1880

Collier; New York; 1899

Delmarva; 2013

Delphi; 2015

Musaicum; 2017

Perhaps you, most benevolent reader, might more easily excuse this digression by considering the difference between what Gibbon would have meant under each circumstance. A *legend*, as remarked above, might be despicable for its unjustified ambitions to the rank of history, but a despicable *legion*, if it is one full of martyrs, would demonstrate Gibbon's partiality to--what? The deification of the Roman Emperors? While the critics of Gibbon's religion might not find this extraordinarily surprising, it is only because they paid so little attention to the passage in a chapter which they claim to have so thoroughly examined, namely sixteen: "Among the Christians who were brought before the tribunal of the emperor, or, as it seems more probable, before that of the procurator of Judaea, two persons are said to have appeared, distinguished by their extraction, which was more truly noble than that of the greatest monarchs. These were the grandsons of St. Jude the apostle, who himself was the brother of Jesus Christ," to which is appended the note, "This appellation was at first understood in the most obvious sense, and it was supposed, that the brothers of Jesus were the lawful issue of Joseph and Mary. A devout respect for the virginity of the mother of God suggested to the Gnostics, and afterwards to the orthodox Greeks, the expedient of bestowing a second wife on Joseph. The Latins (from the time of Jerome) improved on that hint, asserted the perpetual celibacy of Joseph, and justified by many similar examples the new interpretation that Jude, as well as Simon and James, who were styled the brothers of Jesus Christ, were only his first cousins." Which I'm sure Gibbon's critics would shout down as incorrect, and the result of intentional, evil falsehood, *and* the result of unintentional, stupid oversight.

Let's not even consider the stylistic error of using the word "legion" in the sentence as if we forgot what the author was talking about fourteen words ago. Let's accept that he meant "legend," and quit printing new editions *to this day* with a typo whose *earliest instance was no later than 1875 for God's sake*.

#

Before moving on to the reference to Voltaire in chapter 47, let me bring more detail to the controversy between Gibbon and Davis, with Gibbon's *vile and irreligious* assertion freshly in mind, that the heritage of the grandsons of St. Jude the Apostle was "more truly noble than that of the greatest monarchs."

It is impossible to translate the minuteness of the squabble between Gibbon and his young adversary, but if I offer a core sample of one specific passage from the history and all its following commentary, I might offer some notion of the whole thing. In note 73 of the fifteenth chapter, Gibbon writes, 'In order to ascertain the degree of authority which the zealous African (Tertullian) had acquired, it may be sufficient to allege the testimony of Cyprian, the doctor and guide of all the western churches. (See Prudent. Hym. xiii. 100.) As often as he applied himself to his daily study of the writings of Tertullian, he was accustomed to say, "Da mihi magistrum, Give me my master." (Hieronym. de Viris Illustribus, c. 53.'

On which Davis commented, '[H]is... reference in this note is false, as the words which he quotes are in Hieronym. de Viris Illustribus, c. 63.--- επιδος τον *διδασκαλον*, "*da magistrum.*"

'Mr. G. therefore, would have done better not to have added this note, as he has only accumulated his inaccuracies.'

On which Gibbon commented, 'As a collateral justification of my frequent appeals to this African Presbyter, I had introduced, in the third edition of my History, two passages of Jerom and Prudentius, which prove that Tertullian was the master of Cyprian, and that Cyprian was the master of the Latin Church. Mr. Davis assures me, however, that I should have done better not to have "added this note, as I have only accumulated my inaccuracies." One inaccuracy he has indeed detected, an error of the press, Hieronym. de Viris Illustribus, c. 53 for 63, but this advantage is dearly purchased by Mr. Davis. *E*πιδος τον *διδασκαλον*, which he produces as the original words of Cyprian, has a braver and more learned sound, than *Da magistrum*; but the quoting in Greek a sentence which was pronounced, and is recorded in Latin, seems to bear the mark of the most ridiculous pedantry; unless Mr. Davis, consulting for the first time the Works of Jerom, mistook the Version of Sophronius, which is printed in the opposite column, for the Text of his original Author.'

I personally can't find an edition of Gibbon where the misprint indicating chapter 63 of de Viris Illustribus (regarding Julius Africanus) appears. The only place where I have found it is in the examination by Davis, speaking of whom, he comments on Gibbon's response: 'In the passage from *Jerome* I undoubtedly inserted the Greek translation of the Latin words "*da magistrum*." But how does it appear from thence that I had quoted them as the *original words of Cyprian?* I must therefore beg some better proof than Mr. Gibbon's bare assertion, that I was guilty of this *ridiculous pedantry*.'

If Davis didn't quote them as the original words of Cyprian, he either quoted Sophronius's Greek translation of de Viris Illustribus unintentionally, as Gibbon suggested, and failed to understand that Cyprian spoke, and Jerome wrote, in Latin, or Davis quoted Sophronius *intentionally*, and *without crediting him* (Davis considered Gibbon's close translations into English of some of his cited authors to be plagiarism. What did Davis consider *other people's* translations that he himself used without references?) Worse, if Davis quoted Sophronius intentionally, why was his *intent* not to quote the original words of Cyprian? Why did he, in choosing between the original Latin, and the Greek translation, decide on the latter, if not to show off his knowledge of Greek, by way of ridiculous pedantry?

It is demonstrated above how microscopic these arguments became, and how easily I was drawn into producing my two cents, if indeed my comments on the subject are worth even that much. One aspect of the arguments that this otherwise pretty representative sample does not illuminate, is the theological bent to Davis's criticism -- indeed, his entire purpose in bringing up the note in the fifteenth chapter was to point out the 53-for-63 typo, which is of zero religious significance. Let the readers decide then, whether I am leaving them with a *false* sense that the religious critiques of Gibbon's thought, at least by Davis, were less numerous than the number of pages in his *Examination* and *Reply* might at first suggest.

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From Chapter 47:

"The royal convert was indulged in the use of a portable altar; but he despatched an embassy to the patriarch, to inquire how, in the season of Lent, he should abstain from animal food, and how he might celebrate the Eucharist in a desert that produced neither corn nor wine. In their progress by sea and land, the Nestorians entered China by the port of Canton and the northern residence of Sigan. Unlike the senators of Rome, who assumed with a smile the characters of priests and augurs, the mandarins, who affect in public the reason of philosophers, are devoted in private to every mode of popular superstition. They cherished and they confounded the gods of Palestine and of India; but the propagation of Christianity awakened the jealousy of the state, and, after a short vicissitude of favor and persecution, the foreign sect expired in ignorance and oblivion."

118 [ The Christianity of China, between the seventh and the thirteenth century, is invincibly proved by the consent of Chinese, Arabian, Syriac, and Latin evidence, (Assemanni, Biblioth. Orient. tom. iv. p. 502—552. Mem. de l'Academie des Inscript. tom. xxx. p. 802—819.) The inscription of Siganfu which describes the fortunes of the Nestorian church, from the first mission, A.D. 636, to the current year 781, is accused of forgery by La Croze, Voltaire, &c., who become the dupes of their own cunning, while they are afraid of a Jesuitical fraud.]

The Nestorian Stele, now housed in the Beilin Museum in Xi'an, China, was the subject of skepticism by many Europeans, but Voltaire has a reputation for disliking Jesuits. His remarks on the subject of the stele are from the first volume and second chapter of *An Essay On Universal History...*, "Of the Religion of China," which I quote, from Nugent's 1759 translation:

"Some pretend that the Christian religion was known in China towards the eighth century, in the time of Charlemaign. It is affirmed that our missionaries have found in the province of Kingtching, an inscription in Syriac and Chinese characters: this monument, which the reader may see at length in Kircher, mentions that a holy man named Olopuen conducted by blue clouds, and observing the direction of the winds, came from Tacin to China in the year 1092 of the aera of the Seleucidæ, which answers to the year 636 of Jesus Christ ; that as soon as he arrived in the suburbs of the imperial city, the emperor sent a *colao* to attend him, and built a Christian church for his use, &c.

"It is evident by the very inscription itself, that this is one of those pious frauds, which have not been looked upon in so bad a light as they deserve. This the learned Navaretta allows. This country of Tacin, this aera of the Seleucidæ, this name of Olopuen, which, they say, is Chinese, and resembles a Spanish name, these blue clouds, which serve as guides, this Christian church built all of a sudden at Pekin for a priest of Palestine, who could not set foot in China without running the risk of his life; all shew the story to be ridiculous. Those who endeavour to defend it, do not reflect, that the priests whose names are mentioned in this pretended monument, were Nestorians, and consequently that they are only contending for heretics."

(How the year 1092 of the Selucidae (whose empire was founded in 312 BC) answers to the year 636 of Christ escapes me. That 1,092 years after 312 BC is AD 781, the year of the stele's creation, seems to indicate that Voltaire was confused here.)

Briefly, the Nestorians are members of a Christian sect which teaches the doctrines of Nestorius (386-450), doctrines condemned as heretical in the first Council of Ephesus in 431. Nestorius held that Christ bears two natures (or "hypostases"), the human and divine, which was rejected by the council for the doctrine of Hypostatic union, which teaches that Christ bears a single nature which is both human and divine. I have difficulty imagining the confidence needed to feel that one has satisfactorily identified one "nature," let alone any other number of them, though it is all too easy to ridicule such arcane and inapplicable-*seeming* controversies.

The Church of the East did not accept the articles of the first Council of Ephesus, and to this day there remain Nestorians (as members of the Assyrian Church of the East) spread primarily throughout the Middle East and to a lesser extent in Russia, Europe, and North America. However during the Middle Ages the Nestorian church thrived even as far as China, and this is attested by a grievous torrent of facts which perhaps M. Voltaire could not possibly have accessed, such as possibly the history of the reign of the Emperor Wuzong (840-846) of the Tang Dynasty: during this period the devoutly Taoist emperor sought to rid China of foreign religious influences, such as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Nestorian Christianity. There is no reason to rid a country of foreign influence it doesn't possess. More broadly, there is no reason to rid anything of anything it doesn't possess. Shall I rid my basement of Martians?

One thing Voltaire probably could have accessed if he felt like it was the travels of Marco Polo, who notes on endless occasions in his survey of China the presence of Nestorian Christians (see his chapter on the city of Zhenjiang (by him called Chin-kiang fu), among basically all other Chinese chapters.)

Voltaire didn't trust the Jesuits, that's why he didn't think there were Nestorians in China at the time the stele purports. It's true, it was rediscovered in the 1620's, during a period of great activity by the Jesuits in China. Voltaire's essay in his 1764 *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, "Jesuits; or Pride" expresses his distrust for the group most tangibly. All I know for sure is that Voltaire distrusted the Jesuits and there were in fact Christians in China between the seventh and thirteenth centuries, if you can even call those people Christians, who do not detect the Hypostatic union in Christ, or more likely, *do detect it*, and then lie and say they don't.

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"The haughty Abu Sophian presented the keys of the city, admired the variety of arms and ensigns that passed before him in review; observed that the son of Abdallah had acquired a mighty kingdom, and confessed, under the cimeter of Omar, that he was the apostle of the true God. The return of Marius and Scylla was stained with the blood of the Romans: the revenge of Mahomet was stimulated by religious zeal, and his injured followers were eager to execute or to prevent the order of a massacre. Instead of indulging their passions and his own, the victorious exile forgave the guilt, and united the factions, of Mecca."

139 [After the conquest of Mecca, the Mahomet of Voltaire imagines and perpetuates the most horrid crimes. The poet confesses, that he is not supported by the truth of history, and can only allege, que celui qui fait la guerre a sa patrie au nom de Dieu, est capable de tout, (Oeuvres de Voltaire, tom. xv. p. 282.) The maxim is neither charitable nor philosophic; and some reverence is surely due to the fame of heroes and the religion of nations. I am informed that a Turkish ambassador at Paris was much scandalized at the representation of this tragedy.]

Voltaire writes the line quoted by Gibbon in his dedication in 1742 of his play *Mahomet* to King Frederick of Prussia. It is translated by William F. Fleming, as "What is not that man capable of, who, in the name of God, makes war against his country?"

Voltaire writes to the King, "It may perhaps be objected to me, that, out of my too abundant zeal, I have made Mahomet in this tragedy guilty of a crime which in reality he was not capable of committing," and goes on to suggest more or less that, while he did not commit the crime, he was *capable of it*.

Those who criticize Gibbon of bad-quality Christianity, or none, might like to seize his comments on Voltaire's play as evidence of his preference for Islam, if these chapters had been published at the time of those critics' highest activity. One can hardly blame the man for professing his preference for truth over falsehood, and since the time of this note's publication, only too many examples are available now of good people waging war against their country in the name of God. If charity is virtuous, let me then forget any such examples from *before* Voltaire composed his dedication of the play.

And what of Gibbon's numerous references to Muhammad as an "impostor?" Even at the end of the forty-ninth chapter, he claims "At the conclusion of the life of Mahomet, it may perhaps be expected, that I should balance his faults and virtues, that I should decide whether the title of enthusiast or impostor more properly belongs to that extraordinary man," which he never actually does. He wrote about Muhammad what he read. If he were against Voltaire on this subject because of some sort of a blind, pro-Islam bias, what then is he so undecided about here? Points where Gibbon more or less yells at Voltaire for being too lenient to Islam and too harsh on Christianity are to follow.

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From Chapter 52

"The loss of Sicily was occasioned by an act of superstitious rigor. An amorous youth, who had stolen a nun from her cloister, was sentenced by the emperor to the amputation of his tongue. Euphemius appealed to the reason and policy of the Saracens of Africa; and soon returned with the Imperial purple, a fleet of one hundred ships, and an army of seven hundred horse and ten thousand foot. They landed at Mazara near the ruins of the ancient Selinus; but after some partial victories, Syracuse was delivered by the Greeks, the apostate was slain before her walls, and his African friends were reduced to the necessity of feeding on the flesh of their own horses."

83 [The splendid and interesting tragedy of *Tancrede* would adapt itself much better to this epoch, than to the date (A.D. 1005) which Voltaire himself has chosen. But I must gently reproach the poet for infusing into the Greek subjects the spirit of modern knights and ancient republicans.]

It is difficult to comprehend how a play of someone like Voltaire could have gone untranslated into English for 258 years, as of this writing, but we must only be satisfied that this bizarre oversight is true, rather than how it came to pass. All the same, as I cannot myself translate French, nor read it any better than a four year old French person, I can only imagine that the contents of the play are of that famous anachronistic bent which has been so heavily considered by scholars of William "The clock hath stricken three" Shakespeare. It is reminiscent even of the habits of many Medieval painters of Biblical scenes, who dressed the figures peopling the scenes with clothing worn at the time of the paintings' compositions. I think most warmly to van der Weyden's 1435 *Deposition*, where wimples and kirtles are unhidden, letters from the Roman alphabet adorn the belt of Mary Magdalene, and the ornate cloth of the figures' garments is suspiciously reminiscent of that which one might find in medieval Flanders.

A.D. 1005, however, is between the age of ancient republicans and "modern knights" (1788 knights), and thus is some sort of an inter-anachronism, taking overly-archaic elements as well as elements not yet existent. Alexander Vasiliev, whoever that is, dated the landing at Mazara to the fourteenth of June, A.D. 827, which to my inexpert chronology does not seem massively different, culturally, from 1005. Neither date, then, would have allowed for the anachronistic spirits of *Tancrede*. Indeed, 100 B.C., a year full of ancient republicans would not have allowed for the spirit of modern knights, and A.D. 1788 would not have allowed for that of ancient republicans, and thus the contents of Tancrede was doomed to be set in a period with a historically impossible spirit. This is the price of doing business with inter-anachronisms.

I deem Gibbon's "gentle reproach" to be just. Voltaire certainly seemed willing to be considered a historian by us, and so slight shame on him for disregarding the years and spirit of history. Yet *Tancrede* is not a work of history, but historical drama, hence Gibbon's lack of severity on the point. Could Voltaire have sacrificed accuracy in his non-scholarly work for the sake of dramatic effect? "Unlike me," Gibbon is thinking, "Sometimes Voltaire isn't interested in the purely historical past, but also in 'splendid,' imaginary ones." This says as much about Gibbon as Voltaire.

And lest we suppose that only those in the middle ages resorted to horse-eating, let us turn our attention to the Jewish Virtual Library's biography of General Friedrich Paulus, who led the forces of Nazi Germany in the disastrous battle of Stalingrad in 1942-43. According to the article, the strength of his advance towards the city in the summer of 1942 included 25,000 horse. They entered the city, and over the course of the autumn their situation became increasingly grim, with Paulus's army running low on food. According to the library, "[t]hroughout December the Luftwaffe dropped an average of 70 tons of supplies a day. The encircled German Army needed a minimum of 300 tons a day. The soldiers were put on one-third rations and began to kill and eat their horses. By December 7, the 6th Army were living on one loaf of bread for every five men."

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"Their distress appeared to receive some aggravation from the death of their spiritual and temporal chief; but the pressing emergency superseded the forms and intrigues of an election; and the unanimous choice of Pope Leo the Fourth was the safety of the church and city. This pontiff was born a Roman; the courage of the first ages of the republic glowed in his breast; and, amidst the ruins of his country, he stood erect, like one of the firm and lofty columns that rear their heads above the fragments of the Roman forum. The first days of his reign were consecrated to the purification and removal of relics, to prayers and processions, and to all the solemn offices of religion, which served at least to heal the imagination, and restore the hopes, of the multitude. The public defence had been long neglected, not from the presumption of peace, but from the distress and poverty of the times. As far as the scantiness of his means and the shortness of his leisure would allow, the ancient walls were repaired by the command of Leo; fifteen towers, in the most accessible stations, were built or renewed; two of these commanded on either side of the Tyber; and an iron chain was drawn across the stream to impede the ascent of a hostile navy."

87 [Voltaire (Hist. Generale, tom. ii. c. 38, p. 124) appears to be remarkably struck with the character of Pope Leo IV. I have borrowed his general expression, but the sight of the forum has furnished me with a more distinct and lively image.]

The context of this passage is the Arab raids on Rome in AD 846, much of the damage caused by which Leo IV repaired when he ascended the next year. It is to this construction that people generally attribute the victory over another Arab raid at the Battle of Ostia in 849.

Here is Voltaire's reaction to Leo IV's character: "In this critical conjuncture Pope Leo IV, assuming an authority, which the emperor Lotharius's generals seemed to abandon, shewed himself in defending Rome, worthy of being its sovereign. He employed the treasures of the church in repairing the walls, raising towers, and stretching iron chains cross the Tiber. He armed the militia at his own expence, engaged the inhabitants of Naples and Gaieta to come and defend the coasts and port of Ostia, without neglecting the prudent precaution of taking hostages of them, knowing perfectly well that those who have sufficient strength to assist, are frequently powerful enough to hurt. He visited every post himself, and received the Saracens at their descent, not in a military equipage, as Goslin, bishop of Paris, had done on a more pressing occasion, but as a pontiff that exhorted a Christian people, and as a king that watched over the security of his subjects. He was a Roman by birth; and the courage of the early ages of the republic, seemed to be revived in him, at a time of cowardice and corruption, like one of the beautiful monuments of antient Rome, which are sometimes found in the ruins of the modern city."

History might not end up judging which of their descriptions is more distinct and lively, because history has had centuries of opportunities to do so and has not taken any of them. If only I were an observant enough stylist to recognize how the 'sight of the forum' influenced Gibbon's image of Pope Leo IV, but I can say for certain that Gibbon has a conflict of interest in determining whose image is more distinct and lively, since he wants both 1) to tell the truth and 2) to be the winner of the contest, which aims do not necessarily pull in the same direction.

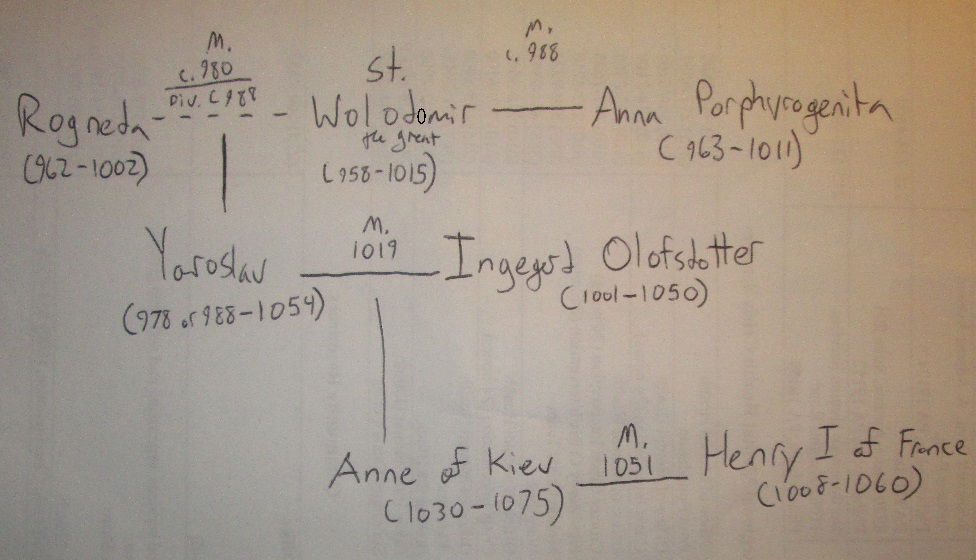
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From Chapter 53

"A Pagan of the North, Wolodomir, great prince of Russia, aspired to a daughter of the Roman purple; and his claim was enforced by the threats of war, the promise of conversion, and the offer of a powerful succor against a domestic rebel. A victim of her religion and country, the Grecian princess [Anna Porphyrogenita] was torn from the palace of her fathers, and condemned to a savage reign, and a hopeless exile on the banks of the Borysthenes, or in the neighborhood of the Polar circle. Yet the marriage of Anne [sic] was fortunate and fruitful: the daughter of her grandson Joroslaus was recommended by her Imperial descent; and the king of France, Henry I., sought a wife on the last borders of Europe and Christendom."

66 [Henricus primus duxit uxorem Scythicam, Russam, filiam regis Jeroslai. An embassy of bishops was sent into Russia, and the father gratanter filiam cum multis donis misit. This event happened in the year 1051. See the passages of the original chronicles in Bouquet's Historians of France, (tom. xi. p. 29, 159, 161, 319, 384, 481.) Voltaire might wonder at this alliance; but he should not have owned his ignorance of the country, religion, &c., of Jeroslaus--a name so conspicuous in the Russian annals.]

1. Forgive my terrible translations, that "Henry I. led a Scythian, Russian wife, a daughter of King Joroslaus," and the father "joyously sent his daughter with many gifts." Modern sources, in the shape of a noted online encyclopedia, gives this Jeroslaus gentleman the name Yaroslav the Wise, son of Saint Vladimir "Wolodomir," grand prince of Kiev. The Byzantine Princess Anna Porphyrogenita, that is, "Purple-born," to whom Vladimir was lastly wed, and whom Gibbon implied was Yaroslav's grandmother, was in fact not even his mother, but his step-mother. Yaroslav's mother was Rogneda (or Rogned) of Polotsk, Vladimir's former wife, who according to the *Primary Chronicle*, the Laurentian text of which I have consulted, was forcibly married by Vladimir, who in the same adventure killed her father and brothers. This man's subsequent conversion must certainly have been potent indeed, for he is now counted among the saints. I could not help but produce a crazy little genealogical chart because I myself am unclear about it:



2. I am tempted to question Mr. Gibbon for placing the Borysthenes, an archaic name for The Dnieper, "in the neighborhood of the Polar circle." Even at the river's most northern point, near Smolensk, it is 54 degrees north of the equator, while the Arctic circle is something like 66 degrees north. Twelve degrees of arc on earth are equal to 828 miles. To allow that Anna Porphyrogenita's exile would have taken place in Smolensk, however, and not Kiev, the city to whose grand prince she was married, is to carry charity beyond its rightful capacity. Kiev is over 1,100 miles from the nearest polar circle. I suppose "neighborhood" is a nebulous term, and these days one might travel that distance in a car in two days, or an aero-plane in a few hours, but as of Gibbon's writing, such a journey would certainly have taken a month or so, on a fleet and healthy horse. Difficult indeed it is to imagine how long it would take in the murky age of this Saint Wolodomir, who reigned in Kiev from A.D. 980 to 1015. But again 'neighborhood' can be defined in however many ways you please.

Besides these two questionable elements of the passage above, Gibbon's reference to Voltaire is from Volume I, Part I, chapter 21, of *The General History and State of Europe*, "The state of France in the tenth and eleventh centuries." I liberally quote the relevant passage here:

"It is pretty remarkable, that king Henry, Philip's father, was married to a Muscovite princess. The Muscovites or Russians began at that time to embrace Christianity; but they had no communication with the rest of Europe: they dwelt beyond Poland, which had yet scarce embraced Christianity. However, King Henry sent into Russia to demand the sovereign's daughter, to whom the other Europeans gave the title of *Duke*, as well as to the chief of Poland. The Russians called him in their language *Tzaar*, of which we have since formed the word *Czar*. It is pretended, that King Henry resolved on this marriage from the fear of being engaged in some ecclesiastical quarrel. Of all the superstitions of those times, this was not the least prejudicial to the welfare of states, that people were not permitted to marry a cousin of the seventh degree; for almost all the sovereigns in Europe were Henry's relations. However, Anne, daughter of Jaraslau, Czar of Muscovy, was Queen of France, and it is remarkable, that, after the death of her husband (1060), she did not enjoy the regency, nor even made the least pretence to it."

Where here does Voltaire own "his ignorance of the country, religion, &c., of Jeroslaus?" In the "&c." category, at least, it appears that in fact between 1060 and 1066, Anne of Kiev not only made the least pretence to the regency of France, but also enjoyed it, as co-regent with Count Baldwin V of Flanders. Why Voltaire put such a fine point on something false is unknowable. I imagine, if we offer the poor man a little leeway, and suggest that, because Baldwin V was co-regent, Anne was not, then we have a dilemma: we must ask how he could be a co-regent if he didn't have a partner in the regency, and if he did, how she could be a co-regent, but not a regent, which is the genus to which all co-regents belong, as the scholastic philosophers might phrase it?

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From Chapter 58

"In some oriental tale I have read the fable of a shepherd, who was ruined by the accomplishment of his own wishes: he had prayed for water; the Ganges was turned into his grounds, and his flock and cottage were swept away by the inundation. Such was the fortune, or at least the apprehension of the Greek emperor Alexius Comnenus, whose name has already appeared in this history, and whose conduct is so differently represented by his daughter Anne, and by the Latin writers."

65 [In their views of the character and conduct of Alexius, Maimbourg has favored the Catholic Franks, and Voltaire has been partial to the schismatic Greeks. The prejudice of a philosopher is less excusable than that of a Jesuit.]

Before I index this reference to Voltaire as characterizing his pronounced dislike for Jesuits, please let me indulge in setting some background. Alexius Comnenus was the Byzantine Emperor between 1081 and 1118, and who sent ambassadors to the Council of Piacenza, held in 1095. The ambassadors petitioned Pope Urban II to send some, presumably modest, military aid to assist in the emperor's struggle against the Seljuk Empire. Later that year, the pope, at the Council of Clermont, exhorted the Christians of western Europe to descend upon the Holy Land to wrest it from Muslim control, which exhortation resulted, of course, in the First Crusade primarily, and secondarily in Gibbon's recollection, many centuries later, of the tale of the shepherd who prayed for water and received the Ganges. Something like 35,000 Christian warriors took part in the First Crusade, and pillaged some of the very parts of the Byzantine Empire which Alexius had sought to save from the Seljuk Turks. I am confident that at least one of these not-necessarily-very-culturally-experienced crusaders mistook the dress and architecture of Eastern Orthodox Christianity for that of Islam.

I found the Jesuit historian Louis Maimbourg's *Englished* account of these events in the 1685 translation by John Nalson, early on in book I, page 7:

"Urban took this occasion to summon the Council of Placentia, that so the Church might triumph over her Enemies in the same place where they had exercised their most insolent Tyrannies. During which time he was extreamly solicited by Lyes from Alexis Comnenius the Greek Emperor, to procure for him powerful Succours, to assist him against the Turks and Sarasens, who made continual Inroads even as far as the City of Constantinople. The Pope believed that an Ambassage from this Prince Appearing to this great Assembly would extreamly advance his Design, by giving him a fair occasion to excite the Christians to take up Arms, and by this means insensibly to engage them in this Holy War, which was the most probable way to empeach the Progress of the Infidels, who by pushing on their Conquests seemed even to menace the Western Empire."

Maimbourg takes pains to remind us that Alexius deposed the previous emperor, and sums up his review of the man by suggesting "that this Alexis Comnenius was no other than an Usurper of the Empire of his Master and his Benefactor, who had given him the Command of General of all his Forces: He was a Prince who was dexterously Cunning, and a witty Dissembler, Covetous and Cruel, and one who easily made the Laws of Honour, Conscience, and Justice, comply with humane Policy, and whatever seemed to be his present Interest: And therefore it is most probable, in my judgment, that he having so earnestly requested of the Pope, to procure him the Assistance of the Latins against the Turks, who were now become Masters of the lesser Asia, and threatned the Imperial City, that it was his real Design to receive the Crusades, and to joyn his Forces with them, to Defeat those incroaching and dangerous Neighbours, and to recover those Provinces which his Predecessors had lost."

Voltaire's account of the actions of Emperor Alexius is found in chapter 44 of his *Universal History,* "Of the First Crusade and the taking of Jerusalem." Gibbon must have detected this implication by Voltaire that Urban II over-supplied the wishes of Alexius *on purpose*, because it gave the Latin Church reason to invade Eastern Orthodox territory. Below is a copious quote from page 348-349 of Nugent's 1759 translation:

"...Comnenus, the Grecian emperor, and father of that princess who wrote the history of her times, sent ambassadors to [Piacenzia], to demand some assistance against the Musselmen; but he had no room to expect it, either from the pope or the Italians. The Normans had then taken Naples and Sicily from the Greeks; and as the pope desired at least to be lord paramount of these kingdoms, and was moreover the rival of the Greek church, he necessarily became the declared enemy of the eastern emperors, as he was the private foe of the emperors of the west; consequently he was far from succouring the Greeks, that he desired to have all the East subject to the Latins."

Voltaire records that the Italians liked the idea of a military expedition to Palestine, but that they did not specifically want to do it themselves. He suggests that the reason for the Council of Clermont later that year was to find a more amenable audience in France, which "was peopled by a great number of new lords, who were restless, independent, fond of a life of war and dissipation, for the most part plunged in crimes that are the natural attendants of debauchery, and in an ignorance equal to their guilt: but the pope proposed to grant them the remission of all their sins, and to open to them the gates of heaven, only imposing on them as a penance, the gratification of their predominant passion for plunder."

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From Chapter 59

But Egypt soon afforded a new example of the danger of prætorian bands; and the rage of these ferocious animals, who had been let loose on the strangers, was provoked to devour their benefactor. In the pride of conquest, Touran Shaw, the last of his race, was murdered by his Mamalukes; and the most daring of the assassins entered the chamber of the captive king, with drawn cimeters, and their hands imbrued in the blood of their sultan. The firmness of Louis commanded their respect...

99 [The idea of the emirs to choose Louis for their sultan is seriously attested by Joinville, (p. 77, 78) and does not appear to me so absurd as to M. de Voltaire, (Hist. Générale, tom. ii. p. 386, 387.) The Mamalukes themselves were strangers, rebels, and equals: they had felt his valor, they hoped his conversion; and such a motion, which was not seconded, might be made, perhaps by a secret Christian in their tumultuous assembly.]

King Saint Louis IX led the Seventh Crusade between 1248 and 1254, a brief period of history during which there had not even yet been ten kings of France named Louis, though six crusades already had come and gone. Before this seventh, the crusaders were in the lead 2 to 3 (the Third Crusade resulted in a truce), and by the Ninth and last (I don't personally include those events such as the so-called "Spanish Crusade" of 1505-10) the results were 4 to 4, a draw which is a bizarre result when one considers that Christianity remains a profoundly minority religion in every nation once touched by the conflicts, and that among this miniscule group of Christians, the Latin Christianity of the Crusaders themselves is almost unheard of.

Let's take Egypt before I get anywhere near actually discussing Gibbon or Voltaire. The Seventh Crusade took place primarily in this land, which at the time was controlled by the Ayyubid sultans. A brief survey of various numbers has impressed a vague statistic on me that the population of Egypt today is 90% Muslim and 10% Christian. About 10% of the Christians belong to denominations other than Coptic Orthodox, i.e. denominations *not* *native to Egypt*. Using my mathematical and historical skill, I determine that if the Crusades were truly a four to four tie, then 50% of Egypt's population would belong to Islam, and 50% would belong to some form of western Christianity.

Louis IX led both the seventh and eighth Crusades, and lost them both, too. He fought in the seventh against Sultan Al-Muazzam Turanshah (written "Touran Shaw" by Gibbon et al.) and despite Turanshah's murder by his father's slaves (which slaves soon overthrew the Ayyubids and founded their own dynasty, the Bahri) Louis IX still didn't manage to clinch the Crusade, and no territorial changes resulted.

Gibbon refers to Jean de Joinville, who both took part in and chronicled the Seventh Crusade, and wrote a biography of Louis IX. We read in chapter XV, page 181, of Edith Wedgwood's 1906 English translation of the *Memoirs of the Lord of Joinville*, that "Directly the Sultan was dead, they had his musical instruments brought in front of the King's tent; and it was told the King that the Emirs had had a great debate about making him Sultan of Egypt. He asked me, whether I thought that he would have accepted the kingdom of Egypt, had it been offered. I told him that it would have been very foolish of him to do so, seeing that they had murdered their lord; and he told me, that he would most certainly not have refused it. And know, that there was only one thing that hindered it, and that was, that they said the King was the most determined Christian to be found anywhere. And they cited this as an instance: that whenever he quitted his quarters, he stretched himself cross-wise on the ground, and made the sign all over his body. And they said, that if Mahomet had allowed such disasters to befall them, they would never have believed in him. They said, too, that if this nation were to make him their Sultan, they would either have to turn Christians or he would put them all to death."

By "they" in the last section of the passage, I think Joinville means the Emirs, however, I'm not sure precisely what disasters the author means befell the emirs, and if he means the disaster of stretching oneself cross-wise on the ground, etc. then he is using the word 'disasters' in an obscure and puzzling sense. If he means the disasters that befell Louis and his army, then by "disasters" he is referring to those deeds that resulted in his own enemies considering that he might make a good king over them.

Voltaire's account, as translated by Mr. Nugent, is found in chapter 46 of the *Universal History*. He writes that Louis's brother was killed and he himself was taken prisoner at the Battle of Al Mansurah. It is at that point that Turanshah was murdered, after which "the Egyptian council continued to treat with the king; and the sieur de Joinville asserts, that the emirs themselves proposed in one of their assemblies to chuse Lewis for their sultan.

"Joinville was prisoner with the king: and though what is related by a man of his character, has doubtless some weight; yet if we reflect how often in a camp, or in a house, we are misinformed of the particular facts that are performed in a neighboring camp, or in the next house; and how improbable it is, that the Musselmen should think of chusing for their king a Christian enemy, who was neither acquainted with their language nor their manners, who detested their religion, and could only be considered by them as the chief of a band of foreign robbers, we shall find that Joinville has only related a popular subject of discourse. A faithful relation of what we hear, is frequently nothing more than a repetition of what ought at least to be suspected. But we have not Joinville's genuine history; it is only an inaccurate translation, made in the reign of Francis I of a writing which at present would be extremely difficult to understand."

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From Chapter 61

"About the middle of the last age, an inveterate ulcer was touched and cured by a holy prickle of the holy crown: the prodigy is attested by the most pious and enlightened Christians of France; nor will the fact be easily disproved, except by those who are armed with a general antidote against religious credulity."

53 [It was performed A.D. 1656, March 24, on the niece of Pascal; and that superior genius, with Arnauld, Nicole, &c., were on the spot, to believe and attest a miracle which confounded the Jesuits, and saved Port Royal, (uvres de Racine, tom. vi. p. 176—187, in his eloquent History of Port Royal.)]

54 [Voltaire (Siécle de Louis XIV. c. 37, uvres, tom. ix. p. 178, 179) strives to invalidate the fact: but Hume, (Essays, vol. ii. p. 483, 484,) with more skill and success, seizes the battery, and turns the cannon against his enemies.]

Here is a passage of Gibbon's which we can safely and with confidence accuse of demonic influence. I think the reason no more clergymen continued their remarks to encompass the latter chapters of the history, might have something to do with the relative scarcity of faithless observations; Henry Davis himself had died in 1784, at the age of 27, five years prior to the publication of the volume of Gibbon's history in which chapter 61 appears. However, this specific passage is venomous with a certain skepticism which many of Gibbon's chiefly Anglican opponents might not have endured with very heavy distress, as it was after all towards a Catholic miracle. Voltaire writes that the ulcer was located on the niece's eye.

The context of Gibbon's passage is about the Latin Empire, which in the thirteenth century, as a result of the Crusades, was formed by the western Europeans out of territories (including Constantinople) previously held by that period's quite enfeebled Byzantine Empire. The crusaders sent back, from this new realm to their old ones, many of the holiest relics imaginable, including the crown of thorns, or some of it, anyway. Gibbon writes "the truth of such remote and ancient relics, which cannot be proved by any human testimony, must be admitted by those who believe in the miracles which they have performed." A piece of the crown ultimately made its way, apparently, onto the lips of Blaise Pascal's niece, and not -- as I imagined initially -- directly into her diseased eyeball. The philosopher looked on as the affliction was extinguished.

Gibbon elsewhere in his history gets mad at Voltaire for being "an intolerant bigot," but here he refuses to suggest that Voltaire had enough bigotry: he "strives to invalidate the fact," oh how hard he *strives*, but he lacks the "skill and success" of Hume. For the reader's benefit I have abundantly quoted both passages to which Gibbon refers. Voltaire's is found on page 366 of Griffith's translation of *The Age of Louis XIV,* volume II:

"Mademoiselle Perrier, a boarder in the Monastery of Port-Royal of Paris, and niece to the celebrated Paschal, was afflicted with a disorder in one of her eyes. At Port-Royal they had a ceremony of kissing one of the thorns of the crown which had been formerly put on the head of our Savior. This thorn had been a long time preserved at Port Royal. It would not be very easy to prove how it was preserved and transported from Jerusalem to the suburbs of St. James. The patient kissed the thorn, and appeared to be cured of her disorder, a short time afterwards. Upon this occasion, they did not fail to declare and affirm, that she had been cured in an instant of a dangerous fistula lachrymalis. This young woman died in the year 1728. Several persons who had lived a considerable time with her, assured me, that her cure had been very tedious; which is indeed very probable. But it is very unlikely, that God, who has not wrought any miracles to bring over to our religion the nineteen-twentieths of the earth who are either strangers to it, or hold it in abhorrence, should have interrupted the order of Nature, in favour of a young girl, in order to justify a dozen Nuns, who pretended that Cornelius Jansenius did not write ten or twelve lines which were ascribed to him, or that he wrote them with a different intention to that imputed to him.

"The miracle, however, made so great a noise, that the Jesuits wrote against it. One Father Annat, Confessor to Louis XIV. published 'The Disappointment of the Jansenists, on account of the miracle said to have been performed at Port Royal, *By a Catholic Doctor.*' --Now Annat was neither *Doctor* not *doctus*. He meant to demonstrate, that if a thorn had come from Judea to Paris, to cure the little Perrier, it was a sufficient proof that Christ had died for *all*, and not for *many*. Father Annat was laughed at."

I'm dangerously inclined to jump into a long thing about Jansenism to explore the context of Voltaire's reference to this miracle, but here is Hume's reference instead, from his *Inquiry on Human Understanding*, section 10, *Of Miracles*, subsection 96, footnote 24:

"No less a man, than the Duc de Chatillon, a duke and peer of France, of the highest rank and family, gives evidence of a miraculous cure, performed upon a servant of his, who had lived several years in his house with a visible and palpable infirmity. I shall conclude with observing, that no clergy are more celebrated for strictness of life and manners than the secular clergy of France, particularly the rectors or curés of Paris, who bear testimony to these impostures. The learning, genius, and probity of the gentlemen, and the austerity of the nuns of Port-Royal, have been much celebrated all over Europe. Yet they all give evidence for a miracle, wrought on the niece of the famous Pascal, whose sanctity of life, as well as extraordinary capacity, is well known. The famous Racine gives an account of this miracle in his famous history of Port-Royal, and fortifies it with all the proofs, which a multitude of nuns, priests, physicians, and men of the world, all of them of undoubted credit, could bestow upon it. Several men of letters, particularly the bishop of Tournay, thought this miracle so certain, as to employ it in the refutation of atheists and free-thinkers. The queen-regent of France, who was extremely prejudiced against the Port-Royal, sent her own physician to examine the miracle, who returned an absolute convert. In short, the supernatural cure was so uncontestable, that it saved, for a time, that famous monastery from the ruin with which it was threatened by the Jesuits. Had it been a cheat, it had certainly been detected by such sagacious and powerful antagonists, and must have hastened the ruin of the contrivers. Our divines, who can build up a formidable castle from such despicable materials; what a prodigious fabric could they have reared from these and many other circumstances, which I have not mentioned! How often would the great names of Pascal, Racine, Arnaud, Nicole, have resounded in our ears? But if they be wise, they had better adopt the miracle, as being more worth, a thousand times, than all the rest of the collection. Besides, it may serve very much to their purpose. For that miracle was really performed by the touch of an authentic holy prickle of the holy thorn, which composed the holy crown, which, &c."

I can't say personally I see too much battery-seizing or cannon-turning by Hume. I should think Gibbon meant that Hume used the very tools that the pro-thorn faction used to establish the miracle, to disestablish it! Frankly I see nothing of the kind, and I find Hume to have striven more in vain that Voltaire, who mentions "the nineteen-twentieths of the earth who are either strangers to [Christianity], or hold it in abhorrence." These days it's probably more like three-quarters, but the likelihood is low that we can trace this increase in proportion to the conversions resulting from miracles performed exclusively among Christians. Hume's invalidation is nearly too vague to follow, let alone robust enough to turn an entire cannon around.

#

"It was the wish of Zingis to establish a friendly and commercial intercourse with the most powerful of the Moslem princes: nor could he be tempted by the secret solicitations of the caliph of Bagdad, who sacrificed to his personal wrongs the safety of the church and state. A rash and inhuman deed provoked and justified the Tartar arms in the invasion of the southern Asia. A caravan of three ambassadors and one hundred and fifty merchants were arrested and murdered at Otrar, by the command of Mohammed; nor was it till after a demand and denial of justice, till he had prayed and fasted three nights on a mountain, that the Mogul emperor appealed to the judgment of God and his sword. Our European battles, says a philosophic writer, are petty skirmishes, if compared to the numbers that have fought and fallen in the fields of Asia."

20 [M. de Voltaire, Essai sur l'Histoire Générale, tom. iii. c. 60, p. 8. His account of Zingis and the Moguls contains, as usual, much general sense and truth, with some particular errors.]

Without even embarking upon the quest to determine what particular errors Voltaire's account of the Mongols contains, I can sense that I will detect none, and that whatever they are is the private secret of Gibbon.

We find ourselves now in the Persian sultanate of Khwarezmia in the year 1219, far from Rome in time and space, and yet circuitously related to the subject by the fact that, through conquest of Khwarezmia, eventually the Mongols would invade territories of the Byzantine Empire, which by the thirteenth century had grown decrepit indeed. No doubt the events described by Gibbon and Voltaire here assisted in the ultimate *Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire*. I for one recall hoping that the Mongols would show up somewhere in Gibbon's history, and fearing that their conquest didn't affect his theme enough to merit any remarks. However, when we marvel at the Mongols' travels in the thirteenth century, which included conquests or invasions of basically every inch of land between the European nation of Poland and the Pacific island of Java, we stop marveling at the fact that their history intersects with that of Rome.

I can detect one particular error in Voltaire here. It isn't a historical error, that I can tell, but an inferential one: "[Ghengis Khan] was at the time sixty years old: it seems he understood the art of government as well as the sword; and his life is a proof that there never was a great conqueror without being an able politician." Of course we can't conclude that *all* great conquerors are able politicians from just the premise that Ghengis Khan was both. First of all, another premise is required, and second, hey, maybe this was Gibbon's thought, since, no matter what that other premise is, the syllogism here is doomed to suffer from the fallacy of a general conclusion following from particular premises, just as this most diverting example: 1. Ghengis Khan was a man born in Mongolia 2. some premise or another 3. There never was a man who was not born in Mongolia.

In Voltaire's sentence there is also an error at the very least stylistic, but this I will magnanimously assume was the translator Nugent's error. For wouldn't the sentence much prefer itself to be "his life is a proof that there never was a great conqueror *who was not also* an able politician?"

#

From Chapter 65

"But in the battle of Angora, the main body itself was supported, on the flanks and in the rear, by the bravest squadrons of the reserve, commanded by the sons and grandsons of Timour. The conqueror of Hindostan ostentatiously showed a line of elephants, the trophies, rather than the instruments, of victory; the use of the Greek fire was familiar to the Moguls and Ottomans; but had they borrowed from Europe the recent invention of gunpowder and cannon, the artificial thunder, in the hands of either nation, must have turned the fortune of the day."

43 [the Greek fire, on Timour's side, is attested by Sherefeddin, (l. v. c. 47;) but Voltaire's strange suspicion, that some cannon, inscribed with strange characters, must have been sent by that monarch to Delhi, is refuted by the universal silence of contemporaries.]

In chapter 75, "of Tamerlane," (or "Timour" as Gibbon has it) in the Nugent translation, Voltaire writes of this battle, which took place in 1402 (some say 1397, some 1401, Wikipedia says 1402, which settles it for me), "Tamerlane declared war against [Bajazet], and immediately put his troops in motion. Bajazet raised the siege of Constantinople, and between Caesarea and Ancyra was fought that famous battle where the forces of the whole world seemed to have been assembled. Doubtless Tamerlane's troops were excellent, since after the most obstinate struggle, they defeated those who had overthrown the Greeks, the Hungarians, the Germans, the French, and so many warlike nations. It is certain that Tamerlane, who had hitherto fought with the scimitar and with arrows, made use of artillery against the Turks; and that it is he who sent some field pieces into the Mogul's country, where they are still to be seen with unknown characters engraved upon them." Gibbon's Angora and Voltaire's Ancyra are one and the same as Turkey's modern capital, Ankara.

What sort of unfeeling statue, after reading of these mystical cannons carved with strange symbols, could refrain from instantly Googling "tamerlane cannons india" to determine whether in fact these mysterious weapons existed despite Gibbon's protest? My paltry third-hand detective skills have turned up nothing, neither such cannons, nor any reference to them which Voltaire might himself have discovered. All this leads me to believe that he was imagining things, or had read some volume so arcane that even that most lettered Mr. Gibbon was unfamiliar with it.

#

"The iron cage in which Bajazet was imprisoned by Tamerlane, so long and so often repeated as a moral lesson, is now rejected as a fable by the modern writers, who smile at the vulgar credulity."

46 [The scepticism of Voltaire (Essai sur l'Histoire Générale, c. 88) is ready on this, as on every occasion, to reject a popular tale, and to diminish the magnitude of vice and virtue; and on most occasions his incredulity is reasonable.]

Gibbon seems briefly to change his mind about Voltaire here. How easy it is to picture him saying "Yet again, Voltaire predictably rejects a popular tale even though it's so obviously true." I freshly recall Gibbon writing that the "idea of the emirs to choose Louis for their sultan... does not appear to me so absurd as to M. de Voltaire," though perhaps I am imputing more eye-rolling on Gibbon's part than is justified.

Voltaire states his skepticism thus, in chapter 75, as it seems, of Nugent: "Of the Persian and Arabian who wrote the life of Tamerlane, not one takes notice of his shutting up Bajazet in an iron cage. But it is mentioned in the Turkish annals; perhaps in order to render Tamerlane odious; or rather because they copied it from Greek historians."

All the same, this business of the iron cage is without a doubt worthy of pausing over. Page 220-221 of the 1603 edition of Richard Knolles's *Generall Historie of the Turkes* has this much to say on the subject, which opens after the capture of Bajazet by Tamerlane:

"By this one daies event, is plainly to be seen the uncertaintie of worldly things, and what small assurance even the greatest have in them. Behold *Bajazet* the terrour of the world, and as hee thought, superiour to fortune, in an instant with his state in one battaile overthrowne into the bottome of miserie and dispaire: and that at such time as he thought least, even in the middest of his greatest strength. It was three daies (as they report) before he could be pacified, but as a desperate man, still seeking after death, and calling for it: neither did Tamerlane after he had once spoken with him, at all afterwards courteously use him, but as of a proud man caused small account to be made of him. And to manifest that he knew how to punish the haughtie, made him to be shackled in fetters and chaines of gold, and so to bee shut up in an iron cage made like a grate, in such sort, as that he might on every side be seen; and so caried him up and down as he passed through Asia, to be of his owne people scorned and derided. And to his farther disgrace, upon festivall daies used him for a footstoole to tread upon, when he mounted to horse: and at other times scornfully fed him like a dogge with crums fallen from his table.

"A rare example of the uncertaintie of worldly honour, that he unto whose ambitious mind, Asia and Europe, to great parts of the world were to little, should be now caried up and downe cooped up in a little iron cage, like some perillous wild beast. All which Tamerlane did, no so much for the hatred to the man, as to manifest the just judgment of God against the arrogant follie of the proud. It is reported that Tamerlane being requested by one of his noble men than might be bold to speak until him, to remit some part of his severitie against the person of so great a prince; answered, That he did not use that rigour against him as a king, but rather did punish him as a proud ambitious tirant..."

For some reason, in 1704, a new edition of the long-dead Knolles's history was published, so drastically revised by one Sir Paul Rycaut as to merit being considered a completely different book. If you disagree, do please peruse this passage in volume I, on pages 144-145 treating of the same events, namely of Bajazet's captivity by Tamerlane:

"Soon after Bajazet being brought before Tamerlane, he demanded of him, why he oppress'd the Christians, and endeavor'd to enslave so Noble a Prince as the Greek Emperor*:* He proudly answer'd, 'For the same reason that has made thee to Invade me, even the desire of Glory and Soveraignty.'

"'But,' quoth Tamerlane, 'What made you use so great Cruelty to those you conquer'd, without respect either to Age or Sex?

"'That I did,' replied the Tyrant, 'To give the greater Terror to my Enemies.'

"'And what would you have done with me,' quoth Tamerlane, 'had it been your good fortune to conquer me as I have you?'

"'I would,' said Bajazet, 'have put thee into an Iron Cage, and carried thee in triumph all over my Kingdom.'

"'Even the same,' reply'd Tamerlane, 'shall be done by thee;' and thereupon commanding such a Cage to be immediately made, he had Bajazet put therein, and so carried him about the Countries he had conquer'd; moreover, to mortifie his Pride if possible, he made him his Foot-stool when he mounted on Horseback, and scornfully fed him like a Dog, with Crums that had fallen from his Table."

Later the author, whoever it was, reports "that Bajazet having lain two years shut up in his Iron Cage, to end his miserable Life, knock'd out his Brains against the Gates, and so died in the year 1399, tho' some will have it that he died of an Ague, and others that he poison'd himself, but the Turks say he was set at liberty by Tamerlane, having been before poison'd by that Prince's Orders; yet which last opinion is by no means likely to be true."

Gibbon doesn't believe any of it, and sort of commends Voltaire for the same, although it is also easy to construe his remarks as sighing at that incorrigibly skeptical old French coot. Gibbon would sigh either way, is my point. If Voltaire believed it, he'd be accused of giving an unfair pass to the deeds of eastern princes (see my commentary on chapter 67 below.)

Most shocking to me is that here neither author even broaches the subject of Valerian, emperor of Rome from AD 253-260, the latter year being that when he was captured as a prisoner of war by Shapur I, King of Persia. Gibbon himself in chapter ten of his work states, "We are told that Valerian, in chains, but invested with the Imperial purple, was exposed to the multitude, a constant spectacle of fallen greatness; and that whenever the Persian monarch mounted on horseback, he placed his foot on the neck of a Roman emperor."

Gibbon seems incredulous about much of this himself, and perhaps he felt it sufficed to discuss the matter just once, but the fact that Voltaire makes no comparison between these two remarkable episodes, eleven and a half centuries apart, is astonishing, and if I were Gibbon, I would have accused Voltaire of being silent on the matter because he wanted to protect Valerian, a persecutor of Christians, from being remembered for his eventual defeat and humiliation, because Voltaire only ever sides with the enemies of Christians, is what I would say if I were Gibbon.

#

From Chapter 67

"But the most striking feature in the life and character of Amurath is the double abdication of the Turkish throne; and, were not his motives debased by an alloy of superstition, we must praise the royal philosopher, who at the age of forty could discern the vanity of human greatness."

[Voltaire (Essai sur l'Histoire Générale, c. 89, p. 283, 284) admires le Philosophe Turc: would he have bestowed the same praise on a Christian prince for retiring to a monastery? In his way, Voltaire was a bigot, an intolerant bigot.]

Now here finally we arrive at Gibbon's least nice comment about his historical forerunner Voltaire, whose relevant notions about Ottoman Emperor Amurath, (known on Wikipedia as Murad II), we find in chapter 76 of Nugent's translation, "Continuation of the history of the Turks." Here, he and Władysław (Ladislaus) III, king of Poland, Hungary, and Croatia, agreed to cease their warring, in the year 1444: "The Hungarians had lately chosen Ladislaus the young king of Poland for their sovereign. The sultan, having carried on the war for some years in Hungary, Thrace, and all the neighboring countries, with various success, concluded the most solemn peace that had been ever made between the Christians and the Turks. Amurath and Ladislaus both swore to it, one by the Koran, and the other by the Gospel."

Voltaire goes on to implicate one Cardinal Julian Cesarini in breaking that peace, choosing the time partially because "it was just the very time when Amurath II, on the faith of the abovementioned treaty, had consecrated his days to retirement, and resigned the empire to his son Mahomet, who was young and unexperienced." The cardinal succeeded in animating numerous forces once again against the Ottoman Empire, and Murad briefly resumed his title, slew the twenty-year-old Władysław at the Battle of Varna, and abdicated again until 1446; or as it is written, "what is most remarkable, Amurath after this victory returned to his solitude, abdicating the crown a second time, which a second time he was obliged to resume, in order to fight and conquer. At length he died at Adrianople, and left the empire to his son Mahomet II, who thought more of imitating the valour than the philosophy of his father."

This appears to be all Voltaire has to say about Murad's brief abdication. Gibbon is perturbed, I conjecture, by Voltaire's description of Murad's resignation as "consecrating his days to retirement," and describing an overarching characteristic of Murad's career as "philosophy," when Gibbon could see clearly that no doubt Voltaire would have scoffed at the capricious spinelessness of a Christian ruler who had behaved the same way. Compare Gibbon's annoyed remark here with basically any from Henry Edward Davis's *Examination* and *Reply*.

#

From Chapter 68

"The history and geography of the world were familiar to [son of Murad, Mehmed II's] memory: the lives of the heroes of the East, perhaps of the West, excited his emulation: his skill in astrology is excused by the folly of the times, and supposes some rudiments of mathematical science; and a profane taste for the arts is betrayed in his liberal invitation and reward of the painters of Italy."

[The famous Gentile Bellino, whom he had invited from Venice, was dismissed with a chain and collar of gold, and a purse of 3000 ducats. With Voltaire I laugh at the foolish story of a slave purposely beheaded to instruct the painter in the action of the muscles.]

Now the two men are friends again, sharing a laugh over a tale whose humor derives solely from its being false. Of course if this were true they wouldn't be laughing. Voltaire in chapter 78 writes that Mehmed II "was particularly find of painting, insomuch that he sent to Venice, as every lover of the arts must have heard, for the famous Gentili Bellino, and rewarded him, as Alexander rewarded Apelles, with presents, and with his friendship. He gave him a crown of gold, and a gold collar, besides three thousand ducats, and sent him back with honor. I cannot help reckoning among improbable stories, that of a slave, whom Mahomet is pretended to have beheaded, in order to shew Bellino the effect of the muscles, and of the skin, on a neck severed from the body. These barbarities which we exercise on animals, are never practiced by men upon their own species, except in the fury of their vengeance, and in what is commonly called the right of war. Mahomet II was oftentimes bloody and ferocious, as all conquerors are that have ravaged the world. But why should we charge him with such improbable cruelties? And to what purpose should we multiply these scenes of horror?"

Maybe I'm just being a killjoy, but I don't think that story is very funny even if it is farfetched. I'm sure Gibbon just meant he was now Voltaire's very good *combibo* since they finally had the same incredulous reaction to something. I would be remiss not to point out that the new friends disagree on whether Bellini (or Bellino as they stubbornly call him) returned to Venice with a crown of gold or a chain of gold, unless there is some obsolete usage of one of those words, in French or English, that would make them synonyms. Either way Gibbon is too drunk with friendship to impolitely point out this discrepancy.

#

"The generosity of the Christian princes was cold and tardy; but in the first apprehension of a siege, Constantine had negotiated, in the isles of the Archipelago, the Morea, and Sicily, the most indispensable supplies. As early as the beginning of April, five great ships, equipped for merchandise and war, would have sailed from the harbor of Chios, had not the wind blown obstinately from the north."

[It is singular that the Greeks should not agree in the number of these illustrious vessels; the five of Ducas, the four of Phranza and Leonardus, and the two of Chalcondyles, must be extended to the smaller, or confined to the larger, size. Voltaire, in giving one of these ships to Frederic III., confounds the emperors of the East and West.]

Their friendship does not last long. The passage referred to here is in chapter 78, page 239 of Nugent's 1759 translation, "Four Genoese ships, one of which belonged to the emperor Frederick III, were the only succour almost which the Christian world lent to Constantinople." Here the discussion begins of the attack by the Ottoman Empire on Constantinople.

Allow me to guess that the emperors Gibbon could have here been suggesting Voltaire confounded, regarding events occurring in 1453, were the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III and the Byzantine Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos. He certainly mustn't have meant the Ottoman Emperor Mehmed II, against whom the Byzantines were arrayed, nor the historically and geographically distant, yet contemporaneous, Ethiopian Emperor Zara Yaqob. Perhaps he meant the Jingtai Emperor of the Ming Dynasty, who wasn't even a member of Christendom?

If Gibbon is accurate here, then he read somewhere that Emperor Constantine supplied a ship for his own succor prior to the Ottoman attack, and numerous historians since then have characterized his preparation of the defense of his own city as some sort of a gift offered to him from another Christian Prince, which makes zero sense, and thus makes less sense than the interpretation that a Christian emperor, who was not Constantine, sent Constantine a ship. Though that interpretation, so worded, sounds like the beginning of a Smullyan-esque logic puzzle, one thing I can be sure of is this: any other interpretation would sound just as confounding, but would be more unsolvable.

During the period in question, there were only two Christian emperors, unless one includes the pope, whom no one calls an emperor except to scorn his secular interests. Moreover, in that case one would have to decide whether by "Emperor of the West" Gibbon meant the Holy Roman Emperor or the Pope, and more gravely, why no historian claims that Pope Nicholas V sent Emperor Constantine a ship. Hence the only way Voltaire could have "confounded the emperors of the East and West" is by somehow achieving confidence that Constantine gave himself a ship, and this ship was counted as succor from the princes of Christendom, but none of his other preparations were, such as the great iron chain which was hung at Constantinople's harbor to prevent enemy ships from entering. Why was this not a gift from the princes of Christendom? After all, it came from the city of Emperor Constantine himself! In this particular case I must side against Gibbon, who has briefly gone insane, I guess, though this does not necessarily mean I side *with* Voltaire, who may have confounded the emperor of the West with no one at all, considering the various numbers of ships (five, four, and two) cited by Gibbon.

#

"A double pay was promised to the victorious troops: "The city and the buildings," said Mahomet, "are mine; but I resign to your valor the captives and the spoil, the treasures of gold and beauty; be rich and be happy. Many are the provinces of my empire: the intrepid soldier who first ascends the walls of Constantinople shall be rewarded with the government of the fairest and most wealthy; and my gratitude shall accumulate his honors and fortunes above the measure of his own hopes." Such various and potent motives diffused among the Turks a general ardor, regardless of life and impatient for action: the camp reechoed with the Moslem shouts of "God is God: there is but one God, and Mahomet is the apostle of God;"

54 [Phranza quarrels with these Moslem acclamations, not for the name of God, but for that of the prophet: the pious zeal of Voltaire is excessive, and even ridiculous.]

These last few references to Voltaire in Gibbon's history relate fittingly to the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Emperor Mehmed II, to whom even the most stubborn historian will relinquish the Roman Empire. There is a place deep within my spirit insisting that the Roman Empire ended no later than AD 476, when the city of *Rome* was no longer the capital of an *empire*, but there are those with what I assume to be as little historical training as I have, who, in a song recorded in AD 1982, claimed that "the Roman Empire never died / Just changed into the Catholic Church." So there is a wide spectrum of views, and who can really say "when" anything happened, anyway.

I side in this single instance with Mr. Davis, about his charge on page ii of his Examination's introduction, that "the remarkable mode of quotation which Mr. Gibbon adopts must immediately strike every one who turns to his notes. He sometimes only mentions the author, perhaps the book; and often leaves the reader the toil of finding out, or rather guessing at the passage."

Davis and I part company at his next assertion, that "the policy, however, is not without its design and use. By endeavouring to deprive us of the means of comparing him with the authorities he cites, he flattered himself, no doubt, that he might safely have recourse to misrepresentation." I can't find a great amount of "pious zeal" in Voltaire's account of these events, and, yes, I can only guess at the passage Gibbon is even talking about, but if one accuses another of "misrepresentation" (*alias* "mischaracterization") one has the ability to look into another's soul, or the willingness to assume maliciously that another is a *sinner*, with intent, not a *fool*, without comprehension. And though one is worse than the other, "yet," so writes Stephen Runciman, *somewhere,* "such is human nature that a man will admit far more readily to being a sinner than a fool."

Perhaps naively, I assumed Gibbon was referring to something in chapter 78 of Voltaire's *Essay on Universal History,* that on "The taking of Constantinople by the Turks." Perhaps it's only because they both use the word "ridiculous" to describe something, but my best and most desperate guess is that Gibbon was referring to a passage where Voltaire defends the reputation of Mehmed II:

"In consequence of a grant made to a Greek architect, named Christobulus, the Christians still preserve a church, and an entire street in Constantinople. This architect had been employed by Mahomet II to build a mosque on the ruins of the church of the holy apostles, an ancient work of Theodora, wife of the emperor Justinian; and he succeeded in erecting an edifice not much inferior to St. Sophia in beauty. He built likewise, by Mahomet's orders, eight schools and eight hospitals dependent on this mosque; and it was to reward this service, that the Sultan granted him the street I mentioned, which still remains in his family. It is not a fact worthy of history, that a master-builder should have an estate in houses; but it is important to know that the Turks do not always treat the Christians as barbarously as we imagine. Whole nations are deceived by historical errors. A number of western writers pretend, that the Mahometans worshipped Venus, and denied providence. Even Grotius himself tells us more than once, that Mahomet, that great but false prophet, had taught a pigeon to fly towards his ear, and made people believe that the Divine Spirit instructed him under that form. A multitude of stories, all equally ridiculous, have been invented, to blacken the memory of Mahomet II."

If this is even the passage Gibbon was talking about--if there even *is* a passage he was talking about--then he's calling Voltaire's defense of the conqueror of Constantinople "pious zeal." Gibbon has in a few of his notes rolled his eyes at what he judges to be Voltaire's predictable favoring of the Muslim faction over the Christian one in matters setting them against each other. In this chapter, Voltaire does suggest that if the Christians weren't so distracted by their quarrels over liturgical matters, they wouldn't have been so easily vanquished: "There were two parties in Constantinople, both most virulently inflamed against each other, by the disputes about religion...the one was that of the emperors, who, from the vain hopes of receiving succours, consented to subject the Greek to the Latin church; the other that of the priests and of the people, who having the invasion of the crusaders still fresh in their memories, detested the re-union of the two churches. Thus they wasted their time in religious controversies, while the Turks were at the city gates."

Later he writes that Mehmed II "was twenty-two years of age, when he ascended the throne of the sultans; from that time he bent his mind on the conquest of Constantinople, while this unhappy city was rent into factions, disputing whether they should make use of leavened or unleavened bread in the sacrament, and whether it was best to pray in Greek or Latin."

Would that I could detect commentary by Voltaire on the liturgical disputes among Muslims. If Gibbon told me anything, he would insist that Voltaire would find all the disputes to be about extraordinarily significant subjects.

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"Encouraged by the ministers of the divan, who wished to elude the fanaticism of the sultan, the Christian advocates presumed to allege that this division had been an act, not of generosity, but of justice; not a concession, but a compact; and that if one half of the city had been taken by storm, the other moiety had surrendered on the faith of a sacred capitulation. The original grant had indeed been consumed by fire: but the loss was supplied by the testimony of three aged Janizaries who remembered the transaction; and their venal oaths are of more weight in the opinion of Cantemir, than the positive and unanimous consent of the history of the times."

84 [Cantemir (p. 101—105) insists on the unanimous consent of the Turkish historians, ancient as well as modern, and argues, that they would not have violated the truth to diminish their national glory, since it is esteemed more honorable to take a city by force than by composition. But, 1. I doubt this consent, since he quotes no particular historian, and the Turkish Annals of Leunclavius affirm, without exception, that Mahomet took Constantinople *per vim*, (p. 329.) 2. The same argument may be turned in favor of the Greeks of the times, who would not have forgotten this honorable and salutary treaty. Voltaire, as usual, prefers the Turks to the Christians.]

This Cantemir individual is followed by Voltaire in the view that Mehmed II took half of Constantinople forcefully, and the other half capitulated honorably, and here I will quote gluttonously from pages 240-241 of the second volume of Nugent's 1759 translation:

"In the Turkish annals, digested at Constantinople by the late Prince Demetrius Cantemir, it is related, that, after a forty-nine days siege, the Emperor Constantine was obliged to capitulate. He sent several Greeks to receive the law of the conqueror, and they agreed upon many articles. But just as the Greek deputies were returning back to the city, Mahomet recollecting some thing which he had still further to say, orders his people to ride after them. The besieged beholding, from the top of the ramparts, a body of Turks galloping after their deputies, imprudently fire at them. The Turks are soon joined by a great number. The Greek envoys are already entering by a postern, when the enemy enter pell-mell along with them, and make themselves masters of the upper town, which is separated from the lower. The emperor is killed in the crowd, and Mahomet immediately converts the palace of Constantine the Great into a seraglio, and St. Sophia into his principle mosque.

"The sultan having thus made himself master of one half of Constantinople, had the humanity, or the good policy, to grant the same capitulation to the other half, as he had offered to the whole city; and he religiously observed it. This is so far true, that all the Christian churches of the lower town were preserved till the reign of his grandson Selim, who ordered many of them to be demolished. They were called the *mosques of Issevi*, which is the Turkish name for *Jesus*. That of the Greek patriarch still subsists at Constantinople on the canal of the Black sea. The Turks have permitted an academy to be founded in this quarter, where there are professors to teach the ancient Greek, which is no longer a living language, as also Aristotle's philosophy, theology, and physic: this is the school that formed Constantine Ducas, Mauro Cordato, and Cantemir, whom the Turks made princes of Moldavia. I own that Demetrius Cantemir has related a great many idle fables, but he could not be mistaken in regard to the modern institutions which he saw himself, nor to the academy where he was educated."

I wish I could very passionately pick a side here, but my only purpose here is to point out Gibbon's annoyance at Voltaire for *predictably* adopting the viewpoint that reflects the most benevolence onto the Turkish powers. Recall the "intolerant bigot" quote by Gibbon which I can't stop bringing up, regarding the abdication of the Emperor Murad II, Mehmed's father, in 1444. Gibbon mystically looked into Voltaire's soul and determined that he wouldn't have so glowingly praised a Christian monarch for abdicating--we've already taken care of all that in the section on Chapter 67. Maybe this mention says more about Gibbon than Voltaire, after all, here we observe the former growing weary of a double-standard which he *felt* the latter *would have* expressed, given the right subject matter to comment on.

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Afterword

At this final juncture may I freely confess that my attempt to sculpt some sort of a marble statue of Voltaire from Gibbon's occasional references to the man, has resulted in failure. If I shouldn't worry about being eternally tormented for the most unjustifiable pride, I might ask the reader whether, as a result of my labor, Gibbon's characterization of Voltaire is a little bit closer figuratively to three dimensions, however I refuse not to be the very first to admit that there is no marble statue here.

As if I needed to throw in my two cents to begin with; as if Voltaire hasn't been characterized well enough: who can say how many biographies have been written about him, how many doctors of philosophy stroll about as I write these words, who have achieved their rank with a paper on the subject of Gibbon's Views On Voltaire, And How Both Men Were Called Infidels By Their Fellow Christians, If Indeed They Were Both Christians, And It's Pretty Plain That At Least Gibbon Was, And Also Probably Voltaire Was Too While We're At It.