Edward Gibbon and Francis Haverfield: the Traditions of Imperial Decline

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the influence of Edward Gibbon’s monumental work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* on theories of empire and decline. It concentrates especially on the dominance of decline in social thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the work of the hugely influential Roman historian and archaeologist Francis Haverfield. As part of the complex genealogy of imperialism, the paper emphasizes Gibbon’s impact upon conceptions of the imperial present at this time. Gibbon not only influenced later ideas of imperialism and decline within and beyond Roman studies but was also inevitably influenced by the political and social context in which he was writing (in turn this also drew on ideas from classical antiquity). The work was published in six volumes between 1776 and 1788 and follows the history of the Roman Empire from the decline of the West up to the fall of Constantinople. There has been much written on Edward Gibbon and his publications including studies on his life and his writing style but here we wish to explore the intellectual context of Gibbon’s work and its impact upon his contemporaries and especially later writers, thinkers, and politicians.

Initially, the paper will address briefly Edward Gibbon’s character with an examination of his social and political background which encouraged an interest in empire, civilization, and power. The way in which he described the decline of the Roman Empire will then be examined, especially relating to his interest in classical architecture which is particularly relevant for its impact on later archaeological approaches and interpretations. The paper then moves on to address the way in which Gibbon’s language and writing style was used to
represent his views on empire and decline; a writing style that contributed towards the popularity of the work and its impact on social thought and opinion. Gibbon also examined Britain before the Roman conquest and developed viewpoints that mirrored the British attitude towards the conquered areas of its empire; Gibbon’s complex and monumental text continued to influence successive generations. Once the context and nature of Gibbon’s work has been established, the paper moves on to a specific case study examining the impact of his work on Victorian and Edwardian England, when his perspectives were adopted and adapted as part of British imperial discourse – decline became a dominant theme in imperial thought at this time. This was also the time in which Romano-British archaeology was developing as a discipline that we would recognize today; the impact of the social attitude towards imperialism and decline on this development will be examined through the hugely influential writings of Francis Haverfield who drew heavily upon Gibbon. Drawing on ideas that derive from Roman imperialism, Gibbon had a significant impact on the formation of theories of decline during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The British drew upon the classical past through an interactive mutual relationship between classical texts, scholarship, and politics; through this approach they developed intellectual discourses about both cultural superiority and decline.

**Gibbon’s writings on civilization and decline**

**Gibbon and empire**

There are many accounts of Gibbon’s life, including his childhood, not least from his own *Memoirs*¹ and it is not the purpose of this paper to explore this topic in any detail.² In this

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section we intend to explore briefly how some aspects of Gibbon’s character and outlook may have influenced his interest in imperialism and empire as well as the writing of his *The Decline and Fall*. Through the wealth of his father, Gibbon’s privileged upbringing encouraged him to value and appreciate the British aristocratic system and he believed in the importance of birth and standing and the validity of empire that brought civilization and order.³ Through his belief in the ‘superior prerogative of birth’⁴ he supported the rights of the minority aristocratic elite and believed in the benefits that so-called more advanced nations could bring to conquered areas through colonialism. With his interest in politics he also became a Member of Parliament in the 1770s and 1780s.⁵ His support for the endeavours of the British Empire inevitably led to comparisons with the Roman Empire and fears that it would be lost; he remarked to his friend Deyverdun: ‘la decadence de Deux Empires, le Romain et le Britannique, s’avancent à pas égaux’.⁶ This upbringing and political viewpoint was a major factor in the formation of his attitude towards the Roman Empire and changes in

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² Accounts include Burrow (1985), Dawson (1934), Low (1937), Porter (1988), and Quennell (1945). Some more recent analyses of Gibbon and his life and work include Bowersock (2009); Pocock (1999a; 1999b; 2003; 2005), Winkler (2009), and Womersley (2002).

³ Momigliano (1966: 48); Quennell (1945: 76).

⁴ The references from *The Decline and Fall* are taken from the 1994 edited version of the work by David Womersley, published by Penguin in three volumes each containing two of Gibbon’s volumes. The volume and page numbers in the text refer to the way in which Gibbon’s six volumes appear in this edition.

⁵ Gibbon (1966: 155-6).

the later Roman period. Comparisons of imperial decline were already being made by Gibbon’s time but the use of the analogy intensified during the nineteenth century.  

On remembering his student days at Oxford, Gibbon was moved to mention that he was attracted by the ‘size and beauty of the public edifices’ and that ‘the adjacent walks, had they been frequented by Plato’s disciples, might have been compared to the Attic shade on the banks of the Ilissus’. For Gibbon, the British elite lifestyle was comparable to that of ancient Greece and Rome and he greatly valued external markers of class as he also admired the buildings of Oxford and those of Rome itself. Gibbon considered his society, and its empire, to be the height of social achievement, comparable with, but better than, the Roman Empire before it fell into decline. He felt that it was only in his own time that people were able to appreciate the remains fully in a manner comparable to the Romans. In medieval Rome ‘the forms of ancient architecture were disregarded by a people insensible of their use and beauty (because of their barbarism)’, he also wrote that ‘the resurrection [of statues and other remains] was fortunately delayed till a safer and more enlightened age’. That the surviving Roman structures in Rome were important to Gibbon in shaping his ideas, is reflected both in his Memoirs and in The Decline and Fall: ‘I can never forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the eternal

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7 E.g. Bell (2006; 2007). Bell, however, considers decline and fall as being a rather vague trope and ‘the combination of analytical ambiguity, narrative simplicity, and evocative employment helps to explain its wide resonance’ (Bell 2007: 218). Also, see Bradley this volume, Introduction, pp. ???


9 Dawson (1934: 164).

10 Gibbon (vol. VI: 1072).

11 Gibbon (vol. VI: 1082).
Gibbon records at the end of his work that ‘it was among the ruins of the Capitol, that I first conceived the idea’ of writing *The Decline and Fall*. He did not devote himself entirely to the classical sources, or other historical documents, as most historians do today. Indeed, Gibbon himself notes that his initial intention was not to write about the Roman Empire as a whole but simply the ‘decay of the City’. Clearly, the standing ruins of a past empire and civilization were of great interest to Gibbon at a time in Britain where the wealth and power gained from its own empire encouraged the construction of civic and aristocratic buildings in the Classical style.

Gibbon was writing at a time when there was a great interest in Rome and especially Roman remains. The study of remains in Britain, and the rest of Europe, attracted the aristocracy and cultural elite and this influenced the antiquarian work that took place, the way in which remains were interpreted, and Gibbon’s interest in the remains. The British were hugely interested in the physical monuments of an imperial past which reflected their own empire and civilization in the present. Aristocrats associated themselves with the Roman past, perhaps in order to justify their position and power in the present.

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13 Gibbon (vol. VI: 1085).
17 Hingley (2000; 2008); Todd (2004); for the context see Ayres (1997).
18 Ayres (1997: 165); Hingley (2001: 149). During excavations of the villa at Cotterstock in the eighteenth century, for example, the fourth earl of Cardigan placed an uncovered mosaic on the floor of a summerhouse in the garden of the house in his nearby estate associating his concept of the estate with that of the Roman period (Upex 2001). The country houses of the
Gibbon’s writing style was an important part of the success of his work, but he did not entirely devise his own style, since he was influenced by the many classical texts that he read. Pocock has shown, for example, how Gibbon’s description of barbarian invasions mirrors the drama of the writings of Tacitus, whom he greatly admired, on the same subject. Bradley’s paper on Tacitus’ Agricola (this volume) demonstrates that this author had a complex attitude to empire representing the conquered British as noble savages – he developed these arguments as part of a highly-charged narrative advocating the assertion of power over others and the importance of imperialism (pp. ???). Gibbon absorbed these views, shaping his own imperial rhetoric, but always with an emphasis on the advantages offered by empire.

The catalogue of Gibbon’s library provides an indication of the number of classical sources to which he had access. Gibbon possessed the speeches of Aristides, an orator who spoke about the wonders of the empire in the age of the Antonines: the ‘cities shine with radiance and grace’ and ‘the whole world has been adorned like a pleasure garden’. Other Classical authors Gibbon knew well whose work helped to inform his approach to empire include Virgil (the Aeneid) and Thucydides (the History of the Peloponnesian War) (see Bradley this volume pp. ???). Having the knowledge of both Latin and Greek, Gibbon believed that he possessed the ‘keys to two valuable chests’. The notion of empire was central to Gibbon’s

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21 Keynes ed. (1950); see also Bowersock (2009: 33-42).
22 Aristides, Orationes 26.99.
education, background and worldview. These works were influential in the formation of attitudes to empire in his writings and also his approach to decline and fall. These influences in turn had an impact on the reception of Gibbon’s work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when empire retained considerable significance.

Gibbon on decline

Gibbon’s interest in the structural decay of Rome and in Roman remains can be seen in much of the reading that he undertook in preparation for writing *The Decline and Fall*. In his *Memoirs* he records how he began to ‘collect the substance of my Roman decay’.\(^{24}\) His adoption of classical tropes meant that his writings were willingly used by his contemporaries and by later scholars. The instant success and popularity of *The Decline and Fall* meant that it was very influential in communicating images of empire and decline to contemporaries. The first printing of one thousand copies of the volume I, for example, was sold out within a few weeks and led quickly to second and third editions.\(^{25}\) These images of empire and its decline influenced antiquarian and early archaeological works on Roman Britain. Gibbon’s use of language throughout the text emphasized the physical decline of the empire – an image that could be translated through the study of the archaeological remains that were being uncovered in Britain during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gibbon also

\(^{24}\) Gibbon (1966: 146). In Lausanne in 1763, for instance, he read the fourth volume of Graevius’ *Thesaurus antiquitatum Romanorum* (1694-9) in which was Nardini’s *Roma Antica* (1666) which describes all the Roman remains in Rome (Ghosh 1997: 281). Gibbon also read the works on the English antiquarians such as Whitaker, Gale, Stukeley, Camden, Dugdale and Horsley (Womersley 1994: xii); he drew upon and commented on many of their writings.

\(^{25}\) Jordan (1976: 6).
promoted the image of civilization and imperial greatness to compare with the barbarism of pre-Roman Western Europe and the later Roman period.

The language used to describe change in the empire and the fortunes of individuals, for example, is very much related to images of the structural decline of the buildings that Gibbon had himself witnessed in Rome. The words ‘decay’ and ‘ruin’ appear frequently; for example, in the phrases, the ‘ruin of pagan religion’,26 and the ‘decay of taste and genius’.27 For Gibbon, public buildings were one of the most important features of a Roman city and his language graphically describes their later histories: the ‘fairest forms of architecture were rudely defaced’,28 the ‘most exquisite works of art were roughly handled’ and the palaces were ‘rudely stripped of their splendid and costly furniture’.29 This contrasts dramatically with the language used by Gibbon to describe cities and public buildings in the early empire such as under Augustus and then the Antonines. Of the public buildings and other monuments, Gibbon declares that their ‘greatness alone, or their beauty, might deserve our attention’.30 Bathhouses had been constructed ‘with imperial magnificence’ and ‘elegance of design’31 whilst the ‘exquisite statues’ of the Forum ‘displayed the triumph of the arts’.32 This was matched by the ‘beauty’ of the circus at Constantinople,33 the ‘majestic dome of the

26 Gibbon (vol. III: 90).
27 Gibbon (vol. VI: 391).
29 Gibbon (vol. III: 204).
30 Gibbon (vol. I: 70).
31 Gibbon (vol. III: 184).
32 Gibbon (vol. III: 81).
33 Gibbon (vol. II: 597).
Pantheon in Rome and the aqueducts which were the ‘noblest monuments’. Across the British Empire at Gibbon’s time, civic buildings were constructed in the Classical style; the style used as a symbol of power and authority.

For Gibbon, the decline of cities came with the decay of buildings, the failure of city gates, and the admittance of barbarians and the outside uncivilized and unordered world; archaeologists studying cities from Haverfield onwards took a comparable approach to late Roman urbanism.

**Gibbon on pre-Roman Britain**

Gibbon’s depiction of the pre-Roman West also contrasts greatly with his image of the ‘Golden Age’. For Gibbon, it was clearly the Romans that brought civilization to Britain through its empire: ‘The spirit of improvement had passed the Alps, and had been felt even in the woods of Britain, which were gradually cleared away to open a free space for convenient and elegant habitations. York was the seat of government; London was already enriched by commerce; and Bath was celebrated for the salutary effects of the medicinal waters’. These comments clearly apply contemporary views regarding the fashionable waters of Bath and the view of the eighteenth century city onto the past, but it also significant that Bath and other cities such as York and Chichester had been imaginatively reconstructed with classical style

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34 Gibbon (vol. III: 80).
35 Gibbon (vol. I: 74).
36 E.g. Metcalf 1989; 1999; Volwahsen (2002); for a discussion on the context in India see Vasunia (2005).
37 Gibbon (vol. I: 75).
architecture during the eighteenth century in a manner that drew upon their classical mindset.\textsuperscript{38}

Gibbon’s attitude to Britain and Western Europe before the Roman conquest was very much influenced by classical writing, viewing lifestyles as primitive, barbaric, and in need of civilization. His view of the role of woodland and other natural places in the landscape, for example, drew upon both classical references and contemporary attitudes to civilization and empire. He writes, for example, that the ‘only temples in Germany were dark and ancient groves, consecrated by the reverence of succeeding generations’\textsuperscript{39} and ‘(T)he sacred wood, described with such sublime horror by Lucan, was in the neighbourhood of Marseilles; but there were many of the same kind in Germany’.\textsuperscript{40} The catalogue of Gibbon’s library shows that he held two copies of Lucan’s \textit{Pharsalia}.\textsuperscript{41} In Book III Lucan describes a sacred grove in the vicinity of Marseilles,\textsuperscript{42} and Gibbon appears to draw upon this source.

In his description of the Suebi, Gibbon closely follows Tacitus’ \textit{Germania}: ‘In that part of Upper Saxony beyond the Elbe, which is at present called the Marquisate of Lusace, there existed, in ancient times, a sacred wood, the awful seat of the superstition of the Suebi’.\textsuperscript{43} Gibbon references Tacitus on this subject, who wrote that ‘at fixed seasons all tribes of the same name and blood gather through their delegations at a certain forest and after publicly

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Hingley (2008).
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Gibbon (vol. I: 245).
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Gibbon (vol. I footnote 63: 245).
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Keynes ed. (1950: 184). Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (A.D. 39-65) was a poet whose only surviving work is the ten volume \textit{Pharsalia} (The Civil War) describing the contest between Caesar and the Senate.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Lucan, \textit{Pharsalia} 3.399-432.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Gibbon (vol. I: 271).
\end{itemize}
offering up a human life, they celebrated the grim initiation of their barbarous worship’. Gibbon also refers to the Alamanni with their ‘native deities of the woods and rivers’. Drawing on Classical styles of portraying pre-conquest peoples illustrates the way that imperial discourse in the eighteenth century drew upon classical roots. There were clear divisions between the material culture of the conquered and the conquerors and this was used by Gibbon and others to emphasize the contrasts between the civilized and the barbaric. For German (‘barbaric’) settlements, Gibbon suggests that: ‘(W)e can only suppose them to have been rude fortifications, constructed in the centre of the woods, and designed to secure the women, children and cattle, whilst the warriors of the tribe marched out to repel a sudden invasion’. This idea had been explored in Julius Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico*, which often mentioned the significance of woodland for the indigenous peoples. Gibbon referred to ‘woods’ and ‘morasses’ to emphasize the barbarity of the indigenous peoples set against the civilization of the Romans. The clearance of the landscape by the Romans was considered to

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44 Tacitus, *Germania* 39.

45 Gibbon (vol. IV: 759-60).


47 Caesar writes, for example, that the Suebi sent ‘their children and all their stuff to the woods’ (*De Bello Gallico* 4.19) and the ‘Menapii had all hidden in their densest forests’ (4.38). On Caesar’s second invasion of Britain he mentions how Cassivellaunus ‘concealed himself in entangled positions among the woods’ (5.19) and that the stronghold of Cassivellaunus was ‘fenced by woods and marshes’ (5.21). Caesar goes on to write that ‘the Britons call it a stronghold when they have fortified a thick-set woodland with rampart and trench’ (*ibid.*).
represent social improvement. Comparable activities occurred again during the eighteenth century with such events as the drainage of the Fenland in Britain and wetlands across Europe. As Tacitus had portrayed the pre-Roman West in negative terms as a justification for war and conquest, Gibbon too emphasized the benefits of the encroaching Roman Empire. Again, the British drew upon these classical arguments when it was suggested that colonized peoples had gained civilization through settlement, civic amenities and infrastructure.

Economic exploitation of woods and marshland by Rome was viewed in a positive light as a precursor to the rationalization of landscape and the colonization and commoditization of land in the British Empire. In some cases, notably Ireland from an earlier date and North America, Africa, and Australia, civilization could be brought to these areas through drainage, land reclamation and the reorganization of land use. That Gibbon was aware of the changes brought to land in colonized areas is attested by a number of books and pamphlets in his library, such as W. Douglass’ *A Summary of the first planting, progressive improvements and present state of the British settlements in America* (1760). Gibbon’s views on British colonialism are also reflected in his comments in the ‘General Observations’ chapter of his work.

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48 In Germany the ‘immense woods have been gradually cleared’ and the ‘morasses have been drained’ (Gibbon vol. I: 232); this is ‘the happy consequence of the progress of arts and agriculture’ Gibbon (vol. III: 512).

49 See, for example, Dyson (2001) and Home (1997).

50 Beinart and Coates (1995: 5); Darby (1973: 345); McLeod (1999); Porter (2000: 296).

51 For Ireland see, for example, Andrews 1976; Hayes-McCoy 1976.

52 Evans (1997: 117). Johnson (2007: 185-92) has discussed how the British Empire imposed the Western concept and organization of land onto conquered areas of peoples that had vastly different ways of understanding the world in which they lived. See also Conzen ed. (1990) on America.
work, writing that America ‘must preserve the manners of Europe; and we may reflect with some pleasure, that the English language will probably be diffused over an immense and populous continent’.\footnote{Gibbon (vol. III: 514).} Regarding the colonization of Australia and New Zealand, Gibbon wrote:

five great voyages, successively undertaken by the command of his present Majesty, were inspired by the pure and generous love of science and of mankind.

The same prince, adapting his benefactions to the different stages of society, has founded his school of painting in his capital; and has introduced into the islands of the South Sea the vegetables and animals most useful to human life (Gibbon vol. III: 516).

The colonial aspirations of the eighteenth century clearly influenced the formation of Gibbon’s attitudes towards civilization and the Roman Empire.

The influences of the period in which Gibbon was writing his text can also be noted in his use of the imagery of woodland and wetlands to illustrate the ‘decline’ of the West after Rome to emphasize the contrast with the ‘Golden Age’: ‘Gaul was again overspread with woods’\footnote{Gibbon (vol. III: 481).} and in Britain ‘an ample space of wood and morass was resigned to the vague dominion of nature’ and areas returned to their primitive state of a ‘savage and solitary forest’\footnote{Gibbon (vol. III: 502-3).}.

Wetlands, of course, were also regarded as a source of disease, especially malaria,\footnote{Giblett (1996).} which was an important consideration in British imperial endeavours in the Tropics in the nineteenth century; Reisz (this volume) has demonstrated that this contributed to a theory of the role of malaria in the decline of the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD.
The time at which Gibbon’s work was published helps to explain its immediate success, since imperial developments during the early 1780s emphasised the contemporary significance of Gibbon’s work.\textsuperscript{57} Accounts claiming that Britain had improved on the territorial achievements of ancient Rome became common during the later eighteenth century, as Britain became a major world power.\textsuperscript{58} A number of publications appeared supporting Britain’s rights in the colonies, making comparisons with the past.\textsuperscript{59} In addition, a decrease in the flexibility of imperial governance after 1763 must have brought the Roman imperial analogy closer to mind, since imperial Rome was closely associated with ideas of despotic rule and lack of freedom, ideas from which the British usually wished to distance themselves.\textsuperscript{60} In 1783, Britain’s conflict with the American colonies, which had begun eight years before, ended in defeat\textsuperscript{61} and the thirteen American colonies were lost. Since 1756, the British territories abroad had expanded considerably but, in the light of the American defeat, concerns about the potential gradual disintegration of the empire began to be voiced.\textsuperscript{62} America on the other hand was beginning to see itself as the new modern equivalent to the Roman Empire to rival the British (see Malamud this volume). The problematic parallel with the despotic character of the Roman Empire, which had grown out of the Roman Republic that was so admired, was also developing as an area of discussion at this time, particularly in

\textsuperscript{57} For imperial concern in the 1780s, see Lenman (1998: 164-6) and Woodward (2002: 189).

\textsuperscript{58} Ayres (1997: 2, 14-5) and Bowen (1998: 3, 8); for British colonial possessions at this time, see Marshall (1998a: 2-4) and Mantena (this volume).

\textsuperscript{59} For Abercromby (1774) and Barron (1777) see Vlassopoulos this volume pp. ???.

\textsuperscript{60} Steele (1998: 121).

\textsuperscript{61} Shy (1998).

the context of increasing imperial instability and the British dictatorial control of India.  

Although the Roman Empire was used at first as a justification for their presence in India to ‘civilize’ the Indians, the link was later severed because of the way that the British handled India appeared to differ so widely from Roman methods (see Mantena this volume). Gibbon’s masterpiece reflected current ideas and re-projected them, focusing attention on the possibility of contemporary British decline and fall. Describing the ‘Golden Age’ emphasized the benefits of Romanization and the tragedy of decline and this approach was common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which saw the emergence of Roman archaeology as the discipline that we would recognize today. A key figure in this was Francis Haverfield whose publications, like Gibbon’s, were dominated by images of the influence of Roman imperialism and the decline of imperial power. Haverfield’s reception of Gibbon was heavily intertwined with the political and social context of his day, as Gibbon’s writings were influenced by his context.  

**Gibbon, Haverfield and British imperial discourse**

This section explores the impact of the *Decline and Fall* during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Haverfield was developing his influential opinion and approach to Roman Britain. The Royal Historical Society’s ‘Gibbon Commemoration’ marked the centenary of Gibbon’s death (1894). Between 1896 and 1900 a new edition of the work appeared edited by the historian and classicist J. B. Bury at Trinity College Dublin (later professor at Cambridge) and published by Methuen in London. In the introduction he wrote  


64 See Freeman (2007) for a detailed study of the life of Francis Haverfield and his role in the development of Romano-British Archaeology.  

that its ‘accuracy is amazing’; these comments indicate the value that Bury attached to the Decline and Fall as an historical work and its continued value in academic study.

Concerns over the stability and permanence of the British Empire were growing at this time, as communicated by a small pamphlet produced in 1894 by ‘Edwarda Gibbon’. Although nineteenth century historians, antiquarians and ancient historians were constantly aware of the analytical use of the historical parallel raised by Gibbon’s work, it was during Edwardian times that the idea of British decline and fall became a particular focus of attention.

Throughout the nineteenth century Britain had held a reasonably unchallenged position of international dominance but towards the end it came under increasing pressure as a result of the rise of Bismarck’s Germany. Concerns developed that Britain might be overstretching itself as a result of the scale of its global responsibilities, while the state of the economy also gave rise to concerns. Britain’s position of global dominance came under increased pressure with the rise of the ‘Cold War’ with Germany of the first fifteen years of the twentieth century.

Following on from the disastrous Boer War (1888-1902), and under a growing German threat, there was a serious focus on the efficiency of the imperial economy, the fitness of the British to rule and the security of the frontiers, issues of relevance to the

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66 Bury (1896: xli); quoted in Ferrill (1986: 13).
67 This pamphlet, supposedly published in AD 2884 in Auckland and costing 6d, is stated as having been inspired by the author's experience of gazing on the grey sky through the ruined dome of St. Paul's (anon. 1884: 32).
71 Hynes (1991 [1968]).
survival of the empire. As we have seen, this focus on imperial decline was part of a continued debate on decline within society, drawing on Classical images, from Gibbon onwards.

In 1905, another anonymous pamphlet, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, was produced by a young Tory named Elliot Mills. This work of future history predicted the collapse of the British Empire during 1995. It drew directly upon Gibbon’s writings on the Roman Empire, projecting the earlier author’s observations directly into the context of Briton’s contemporary situation. Mills wrote ‘Had the English people, at the opening of the Twentieth Century, turned to Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, they might have found in it a not inaccurate description of themselves. This they failed to do, and we know the results’. Comparable ideas of imperial decline are evident in General Baden Powell’s *Scouting for Boys* published in 1908, which contains statements paralleling the decline of the two empires and a positive proposal for a way of stemming further British decline. Rudyard Kipling in the Roman sections of his popular novel *Puck of Pook’s Hill* which appeared in 1906 and Fletcher and Kipling, in their colonial document of 1911, which represented a school history book, drew on comparable ideas of British decline and fall which derived from Gibbon’s work. Imperial administrators, military men and officials such as Charles Lucas, Lord Bryce and Lord Curzon also drew on the Roman parallel.

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72 Hingley (2000: 30).

73 Mills (1905); see Hynes (1991 [1968]: 24-6); Hingley (2000: 31).

74 Mills (1905: iii-iv).

75 Baden Powell (1908: 163); see Hynes (1991 [1968]: 26-7); and Hingley (2000: 32-3).

76 Fletcher and Kipling (1911); see Hingley (2000: 33); Bradley (this volume).

77 Hingley (2000; 2007).
The influential work of Francis Haverfield was particularly important in communicating concerns about the stability and decline of the Roman Empire, and the contemporary relevance of these issues, to audiences during the early twentieth century. Haverfield (1860-1919) was the most powerful and prolific Roman scholar in Britain during the early twentieth century. A friend of Theodor Mommsen, Haverfield specialized in epigraphic and archaeological evidence. Haverfield’s work shows a considerable intellectual debt to Gibbon, which led him to follow much of the earlier writer’s views on Roman civilization and its decline and fall, re-emphasizing the relevance of the Roman Empire to the British at a time of considerable imperial concern. He effectively translated these political and popular writings into an academic form through his works on the Roman past of Britain, particularly his seminal work, *The Romanization of Roman Britain* (first edition, 1906; second edition, 1912; and third edition, 1915), which was the first modern account of Roman Britain (see also Bradley, this volume). For Haverfield, cities were an important part of the ‘civilized area’ of Roman Britain and they represented ‘much Romanized town-life in Britain’. ‘The most potent single factor in the Romanization was the town’. In the same way that Gibbon appreciated Roman and contemporary civic amenities, Haverfield describes how the cities possessed ‘the buildings proper to a Roman town – town hall, market-place, public baths, ‘chess-board’ street-plan, all of Roman fashion’. The importance he attached to

78 Hingley (2000; 2007).

79 Freeman 1996; Hingley 2000; 2007; see also Bradley (this volume) on Haverfield pp. ???.

80 Hingley (2008).

81 Haverfield (1915: 58).

82 Haverfield (1915: 62).

83 Haverfield (1915: 14).

84 Haverfield (1915: 62).
organization and town planning is also reflected in his 1913 publication *Ancient Town Planning*. His view of pre-conquest Britons was largely derogatory as reflected in his viewpoint of pre-Roman architecture:

Native elements succumbed to the conquering foreign influence. In regard to public buildings this is natural enough. Before the Claudian conquest the Britons can hardly have possessed large structures in stone, and the provision of them necessarily came with the Romans (Haverfield 1915: 38).

This relationship between Roman civilization and cities on the one hand and pre-Roman barbarism on the other was similar to Gibbon’s viewpoint and drew upon the more general image of imperialism during his own time. For Haverfield, for instance, ‘Roman and Briton were as distinct as modern Englishman and Indian’. In the same way as the ‘rule of civilized white man over uncivilized Africans’, ‘Rome found races that were not yet civilized, yet were capable of accepting her culture’. His work drew explicitly upon the explanatory framework that had been outlined by Gibbon, while updating understanding by drawing on the work of Theodor Mommsen and other nineteenth century writers. Haverfield proposed:

[W]e have come to understand, as not even Gibbon understood it, through the researches of Mommsen … the true achievements of the Empire. The old theory of an age of despotism and decay has been overthrown, and the believer in human nature can now feel confident that, whatever their limitations, the men of the

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85 Haverfield (1913: 123), for instance, wrote that ‘the regularity of the (town) plan is plainly the work of civilized man. When the Celts were brought to live in a Roman city, care was taken that it should be really Roman’.

86 Haverfield (1915: 23).

87 Haverfield (1915: 13).
Empire wrought for the betterment and the happiness of the world (Haverfield 1912: 9-10).  

The sentiments of this section appear, despite Haverfield’s comments about the influence of Mommsen, to draw fairly directly on Gibbon’s earlier comments about the Golden Age of the Roman Empire, which witnessed ‘a revolution which will ever be remembered, and is still felt by the nations of the earth’.  

The first three chapters of Volume One of Gibbon’s work had assessed the reasons for the success and stability of the empire during the late first and early second centuries AD, providing an image of imperial greatness. Gibbon had commented that:

In the second century of the Christian Era, the empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valour. The gentle, but powerful, influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury (Gibbon vol. I: 31).

Gibbon proposed that: ‘If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus’. He argued that the considerate and civilized rule of four Roman emperors at this time had created a situation in which the virtues of the abandoned Republican system,

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88 For further comments on Mommsen’s contribution, see Haverfield (1911: xiv).

89 Gibbon (vol. I: 31).


91 Gibbon (vol. I: 103); see Porter (1988: 98, 137-8) for the context.
including a degree of liberty and freedom.\textsuperscript{92} A particular focus existed at this time on the idea of constitutional liberty; it could survive for a while under the rule of wise emperors before the problems inherent in this tyrannical system became fully apparent.

Gibbon addressed in some detail the ways that the empire was created and held together, stressing the self-interest of the various parties involved. He argued that a ‘nation of Romans’ was gradually formed in the provinces through the ‘double expedient’ of building colonies and the ‘admitting of the most faithful and deserving of the provincials to the freedom of Rome’.\textsuperscript{93} He noted that methods of admittance included the recruitment of provincials into the Roman armies. In the West of the empire, including Brittania, civility followed conquest, enabling ‘new impressions of knowledge and politeness’, including the language and writings of Virgil and Cicero,\textsuperscript{94} although he did allow for some ‘inevitable mixture of corruption’ in the provincial understanding of these writings. This led to the ‘vanquished nations’ blending into ‘one great people’, the Romans.\textsuperscript{95} This idea of a civilizing discourse, so powerful for the Romans themselves, continued to hold relevance for Gibbon and his contemporaries\textsuperscript{96} and was adopted and adapted by Haverfield, who drew upon an increasing knowledge of the available archaeological material, including inscriptions, coins and archaeological remains.\textsuperscript{97} Haverfield, in these terms, managed to give academic credence to a perspective that was shared by a number of military men and imperial thinkers at this significant time.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{92} Porter (1988: 96-9).

\textsuperscript{93} Gibbon (vol. I: 63).

\textsuperscript{94} Gibbon (vol. I: 37).

\textsuperscript{95} Gibbon (vol. I: 43).

\textsuperscript{96} Greene (1998: 219, 223).

\textsuperscript{97} Hingley (2008).

\textsuperscript{98} Hingley (2007).
Haverfield in *The Romanization of Roman Britain* took his comments (above) further. Much of his perspective on the Romanization of Britain appears to derive its logic from Gibbon’s writings. In one passage, for example, Haverfield wrote that the efforts of the Romans:

> took two forms, the organization of the frontier defences which repulsed the barbarians, and the development of the provinces within those defences. The first of these achievements was but for a time. In the end the Roman legionary went down before the Gothic horseman. But before that he had done his work. In the lands that he had sheltered, Roman civilization had taken strong root… It was this growth of internal civilization which formed the second and most lasting of the achievements of the Empire. Its long and peaceable government … gave time for the expansion of Roman speech and manners, for the extension of the political franchise, the establishment of city life, the assimilation of the provincial population in an orderly and coherent civilization (Haverfield 1912: 10-1).

The Roman history of Britain was made to serve a particular purpose and during Edwardian times Gibbon’s writing experienced a revival, due to its relevance as a cautionary tale for the British Empire. After his three chapters on the benefits of imperial rule, Gibbon had addressed the history and causes of decline and fall in great detail, establishing a model for later writers and this helped to establish a tradition which focused attention on ideas of imperial decline and fall and the vital role of Roman/British frontiers which had a deep impact on the development of Roman studies in Britain during the twentieth century.\(^99\) A variety of Edwardian military men and imperial officials shared Gibbon’s concerns about decline and fall as a potential imperial parallel and Haverfield wrote fairly extensively on this

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\(^{99}\) Hingley (2000).
topic.\textsuperscript{100} For example, in his 1911 opening address to the Roman Society, Haverfield stated that: ‘Even the forces which lay the Roman empire low concern the modern world very nearly, more nearly indeed than do the reasons for the downfall of any other empire about which we have full knowledge’.\textsuperscript{101} Later political figures, for example, Winston Churchill and Stanley Baldwin (cousin of Rudyard Kipling) continued to be deeply influenced by Gibbon.\textsuperscript{102} Churchill read \textit{The Decline and Fall} whilst he was a cavalry subaltern at Aldershot and when he was posted in Bangalore, India. His old headmaster at Harrow is purported to have said to him that ‘Gibbon is the greatest of historians, read him all through’ and Churchill’s own father, Lord Randolph, favoured Gibbon greatly and had memorized long passages when he was an undergraduate at Merton College, Oxford.\textsuperscript{103} The monumental impact of the image of Roman imperialism on Baldwin can be seen clearly in his 1926 speech to the Classical Association that the modern English nation had been forged on the anvil of ancient Rome.\textsuperscript{104}

\textbf{Conclusion}

This paper argues that the imperialist context in which Gibbon was writing, and his attitude towards it, played a major factor in influencing the nature of his work and its reception. Imperialist literature from the Roman period itself also had a significant role in the formation of Gibbon’s ideas. The work remained hugely successful but perhaps especially so in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the political context of the problems that faced Britain. Gibbon’s social outlook and dramatic use of language were also major factors in both

\textsuperscript{100}\textsuperscript{ }Hingley (2007).

\textsuperscript{101}\textsuperscript{ }Haverfield (1911, xix).

\textsuperscript{102}\textsuperscript{ }Churchill (1941); Quinault (1997).

\textsuperscript{103}\textsuperscript{ }Churchill (1941); Quinault (1997: 317-8).

\textsuperscript{104}\textsuperscript{ }Churchill (1941: 125); Osborn (2006: 112); Quinault (1997: 317-8).
the impact of his study and its continuing popular appeal. Winston Churchill, whilst reading
the work as a young man, for example, was ‘immediately dominated both by the story and the
style’.\textsuperscript{105} McKitterick and Quinault\textsuperscript{106} have noted that the committee of the 1894 Royal
Historical Society’s celebrations of Gibbon’s life not only had eminent historians of the day,
such as Theodor Mommsen, but also public figures such as the Prime Minister Lord
Rosebery, further indicating the importance of Gibbon’s work within society at this time. The
work also had an impact on modernist fiction with Evelyn Waugh’s \textit{Decline and Fall} (2003
[1928]) being an obvious example but Virginia Woolf’s \textit{The Voyage Out} (1992 [1915]) is
rather revealing in its satirical examination of class attitudes at this time: ‘D’you mean to tell
me you’ve reached the age of twenty-four without reading Gibbon?’\textsuperscript{107} This suggests that
knowledge of Gibbon’s work at this time was a marker of class and education but also that it
was sufficiently well known to be the subject of satire. Consequently, its influence extends to
the way in which the later Roman period has traditionally been studied within archaeology
where a notion of decline has been emphasized following a period of civilization that
replaced the barbarism of pre-conquest settlement. But Gibbon has also been influential in the
study of the ‘Golden Age’, Romanization and pre-Roman settlement in archaeology as can be
seen in the writings of Francis Haverfield and in this way Gibbon’s work has continued to
influence archaeology and political thought into the present.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{105} Churchill (1947: 125).
\textsuperscript{106} McKitterick and Quinault (1997: 9).
\textsuperscript{107} Woolf (1992 [1915]: 141).
\textsuperscript{108} See, for example, Ward-Perkins (2005); for recent discussions of change and decline in
the later Roman period see also Bowden \textit{et al.} (ed.) (2006), Lavan and Bowden (ed.) (2003),
Leone (2007), and Mattingly (2006).
This paper reveals more than the impact of Gibbon’s viewpoint and background on archaeology. Hugely important figures such as Gibbon formed part of the genealogy of imperial discourse and were influenced both by the social context in which they were living and also by concepts of imperialism from antiquity. The reception of these figures in later times, as shown here with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and Haverfield, demonstrates how the imperial discourse continued to have an impact on scholars, thinkers, politicians and other influential people. But they also drew on their own ideas of imperialism in what were new political circumstances with new motives for thinking about decline. This complex two-way dialogue on the subject of empire and imperialism between past and present is what makes the subject so worthwhile and valuable to study. This topic of empire and decline conversing between past and present is further tackled in the next paper by Reisz. She emphasizes how British imperial endeavours, whilst drawing heavily on thoughts on the antique past, influenced historical studies not only of the Roman Empire and its decline but also of Ancient Greece.

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