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Abstract

The object of the present thesis is to examine aspects of the historiography of Henry de Boulainviller. Rather than concentrate on the various themes and ideas to be discovered in Boulainviller's historical writings, this work will analyse procedures and modes of presentation which support the particular attitudes and prejudices discernible as well as examine elements of his general methodology (source material, explanation, narrative, etc.).

Part One explores the ways in which Boulainviller manipulates notions of 'fact', 'right', and law to argue that the old nobility of France were the true rulers of France and that the development of royal absolutism represented an aberration of the original constitution. Boulainviller's peculiar position is revealed by comparing his 'philosophy' with the political philosophies of Hobbes and Locke, and his utterly partial understanding of French history is shown to underlie his fussy attention to protocol and his choice of the happy moments of French history. It is concluded that 'feudal reactionary' is an obvious but erroneous label to affix to Boulainviller the historian of France.

Boulainviller's partisan attitude exhibits itself particularly in his critical and moralizing remarks. Part Two examines this aspect of his work and suggests too that the moral duty of the ancient historian was to keep history safe from the ravages of pyrrhonism.

Part Three explores Boulainviller's treatment of the ideas of Providence and Destiny. It is argued that he became more sceptical of an intervening Providence as he became increasingly influenced by Spinoza's doctrines denying contingency in the universe or its creator.

Part Four discusses Boulainviller's methodology and examines his use of source material, chronology, and etymology; his modes of explanation; and the composition of his historical narratives.

The thesis concludes by re-appraising Boulainviller's theoretical remarks about history writing in the context of his own practice.

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The Historiography of Henry de Boulainviller

by Robin Price B.A.

A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

at the University of Durham

1982

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conducted in the Department of French
at the University of Durham.



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Abbreviations

<u>AC</u>	Boulainviller, <u>Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France</u> (La Haye, 1733)
<u>AS</u>	Boulainviller, <u>Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil</u> (B.N. fonds français 9126)
B.N.	Bibliothèque nationale
Devyver	André Devyver, <u>Le Sang épuré</u> (Bruxelles, 1973)
<u>EF</u>	Boulainviller, <u>État de la France</u> (London, 1737)
<u>HAG</u>	Boulainviller, <u>Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France avec quatorze lettres historiques sur les parlemens ou états-généraux</u> (La Haye et Amsterdam, 1727)
<u>HU</u>	Boulainviller, <u>Abrégé de l'histoire universelle</u> (B.N. fonds français 6363-6364)
Lassaigne	Jean-Dominique Lassaigne, <u>Les Assemblées de la noblesse de France aux 17^e et 18^e siècles</u> (Paris, 1965)
<u>MH</u>	Boulainviller, <u>Mémoires historiques sur l'ancien gouvernement de cette monarchie jusqu'à Hugues Capet</u> (vol. I of <u>EF</u>)
<u>Memoires</u>	Boulainviller, <u>Mémoires présentés à Monseigneur le duc d'Orléans régent de France</u> (La Haye et Amsterdam, 1727)
<u>OP</u>	Boulainviller, <u>Oeuvres philosophiques</u> , edited by R. Simon (La Haye, 1973)
<u>VM</u>	Boulainviller, <u>La Vie de Mahomed</u> (Amsterdam, 1731)

Introduction

The title of Renée Simon's useful book, Henry de Boulainviller, Historien, politique, philosophe, astrologue (Paris, 1941), is an excellent indication of the scope of Boulainviller's scholarly interests. Whereas at court he was sought after most for his talents as astrologer (a mixed blessing, according to his younger friend Fréret),¹ and though he dabbled in the physical sciences, it is in respect of his writings on history, philosophy, and economics that he is principally remembered and discussed. In all three fields he was in the van of intellectual debate. He was among those arguing at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries for a change in French fiscal and economic policy;² he was instrumental in the dissemination in France of the controversial ideas of Spinoza;³ and it was he who began to talk again of 'les grands sujets' in French history.⁴ Although the present work will refer to ideas Boulainviller entertained in the domains of philosophy, economics, and even astrology, it is with Boulainviller the historian that it will chiefly concern itself.

Boulainviller's historical writings can be divided broadly into two classes. Firstly, there are those numerous works which discuss the history

1. Fréret wrote: 'cette science [astrology] était son inclination dominante; on ne le connaissait que par là dans le monde, et tandis qu'elle le déshonorait dans l'esprit du peuple des philosophes ... elle l'approchait ... des grands et des princes qui, à la honte de la Cour, ne le regardaient ni comme un homme de condition ... ni comme un homme habile et sensé, mais simplement comme un astrologue. Il avait assez de confiance en moi pour ne pas craindre d'en gémir quelquefois avec moi'. See M. H. Guérin's 'Deux amis. Nicolas Fréret (1688-1749). Henry de Boulainviller (1658-1722)', in Dix-septième siècle, 7-8 (1950), p. 203.
2. Henri Sée, Les Idées politiques en France au XVIIe siècle (Paris, 1923), pp. 271-85.
3. Paul Vernière, Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution, 2 vols (Paris, 1954), I, 322.
4. J. H. Brumfitt, 'Historical Pyrrhonism and Enlightenment Historiography in France', in Literature and History in the Age of Ideas. Essays on the French Enlightenment Presented to George R. Havens, edited by Charles G. S. Williams (Columbus, 1975), pp. 15-28.



of France, and particularly of her nobility, among which the principal texts are the Mémoires historiques,¹ L'Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France avec quatorze lettres historiques sur les parlements ou États-Généraux (The Hague and Amsterdam, 1727), and the Dissertation sur la noblesse.² Secondly, there are Boulainviller's works which examine ancient and religious history, the principal texts being La Vie de Mahomed (Amsterdam, 1730 - reference will be made to the second edition of 1731), the Abrégé de l'histoire universelle (B.N., fonds français, 6363 and 6364), and the Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil (B.N., fonds français, 9126). Although this last work is much more concerned to establish and prove Boulainviller's astrological discoveries than to provide a properly historical treatment of world history, it is nevertheless an important work and one to which our discussions will need to refer.

It is of course necessary for any discussion of an historian's work to consider his historical ideas and interpretations, but for the present work these will be of only secondary importance. What Boulainviller has to say about the 'content' of French, ancient, and religious history has been, for the most part, adequately described by Renée Simon (Henry de Boulainviller). Rather than to provide another descriptive account of Boulainviller's historical work, the object of the present thesis is to examine how Boulainviller's historical points of view are presented and supported, the tension such support may produce within his narratives, and

1. These comprise the first volume of the six volume edition of Boulainviller's État de la France (London, 1737).
2. This 'dissertation' was published in the Continuation des Mémoires de Littérature (Paris, 1730), IX, 3-106, and again, with other material by different authors, as the Essais sur la noblesse (Amsterdam, 1732). The present work, however, will refer to the text as established by André Devyver in his Le Sang épuré, les préjugés de race chez les gentilshommes français de l'Ancien Régime (1560-1720) (Brussels, 1973). Referring to both manuscript and printed copies of the work, Devyver has produced the most convenient and reliable edition of the text (Devyver, pp. 498-548).

in general to discover what in practice Boulainviller conceives history to be and how he goes about his task of historian. It is in this respect that the present work may be considered as original for although Boulainviller's historiography has been examined already (very thoroughly in the cases of R. Simon and A. Devyver) a detailed analysis of Boulainviller's historical methods and arguments, rather than of his historically based political and racial theories, has not been attempted before. A brief presentation of the structure and content of this thesis may help the reader to appreciate the general approach towards Boulainviller's historiography that has been adopted within these pages.

In order to concentrate on the methods of argument which Boulainviller employs to persuade his reader of the fairness of his interpretation of French history, it has been assumed that his general attitude towards this history has been adequately established by critics and scholars since the eighteenth century, and indeed is sufficiently clear in the texts themselves, not to require further demonstration.¹ Briefly, one might say that Boulainviller's constant effort is to provide historical justification for the political power which was held by the nobles of France prior to the administrations of Richelieu, Mazarin, and Louis XIV, and which justice, to some degree at least, would restore to them. The 'heroic' nobility of France is generally seen by Boulainviller to have been the victim not only of its own unfortunate lack of care to maintain its rights, privileges, and political power, but more especially of the scheming, cunning, and ambition of kings, clergy, and rising Third Estate. Developing an established idea of the racial superiority of the French nobility (concluding that it is they who because of their tradition of virtue should be

1. It would not be helpful to list here all the many discussions, descriptions, and criticisms of Boulainviller's historical and historically based political ideas that have appeared since the early eighteenth century, but a concise yet intelligently nuanced summary of these ideas can be found in E. Carcasonne's Montesquieu et le problème de la constitution française (Paris, 1927), pp. 18-25.

the governors of France under the king, rather than the self-seeking, upstart intendants, 'maîtres des requêtes', etc.), and basing his account on the fiction of the Frankish conquest of Gaul, Boulainviller erects an ideal constitution of the nascent French state in terms of which the great bulk of subsequent French history is most often seen by him as a degeneration of virtue, honour, and happiness.

It is, therefore, the arguments and methods used by Boulainviller in the defence of his views and theories of French history, rather than these views and theories themselves, which are the subject of discussion in Part One of this thesis. The first chapter in this section examines Boulainviller's arguments from 'fact' and from 'right', that is to say how at times he will gladly accept and defend the historicity and, less comfortably, the morality of certain historical events (whatever was, was right), and yet at others will deny if not the historicity of events, then certainly any morality or justice that may be claimed for them. The examination of this problem is necessarily somewhat involved for rather than being simply inconsistent and contradictory, Boulainviller's changing attitudes to historical events (as well as to the power of positive law) are governed by a pragmatic and guardedly optimistic desire to effect some amelioration of the old nobility's power and standing in the government of France, and it is the twists and turns of this pragmatism that chapter one tries to pursue.

Chapter two explores two further modes of argument which Boulainviller employs in his desire to defend the distinction and former power of the old nobility. These arguments are firstly, an almost obsessive attention to the outward, visible marks of noble distinction and a concern to indicate any unlawful usurpation or manipulation of these signs; and secondly, the elaboration and even the creation of myth. Myth is used firstly to establish and then to revive a romantically conceived constitution of the French state

in which all of its members are free and essentially equal, and obey a chosen leader in order that all may prosper. These myths - the Frankish conquest of Gaul and the reign of Charlemagne - soon reveal themselves to be indefensible historically, morally, and logically.

Part One concludes with a discussion dedicated to providing what it is hoped will seem a reasonable answer to the question why Boulainviller chose to write of the history of France in such a transparently partisan and apparently inconsistent manner. It is suggested that the purposes served by Boulainviller's writings on France (measures for reform as well as historical narrative and analysis) were not homogeneous, but several and varied and indeed conflicting. Boulainviller's historiography is thus seen to have human as well as intellectual value and it is pointed out that only by denying one or more of these purposes, or planes of discourse, have critics and scholars in the past been able to make their partial and at times unsympathetic appreciations of Boulainviller's work.¹

Part Two, 'The Morality of History', examines a dimension of Boulainviller's historiography which is felt to be particularly significant, that is the moral one. Boulainviller considered it history's duty to instruct by past example but, more importantly, the moral duty of the historian to apportion praise and blame is, we may observe, a task ideally suited to a disillusioned man wishing to point out to posterity and his contemporaries those responsible for the sad chronicle of greed, ambition, and injustice that constitutes in his eyes the history of France. These agents of degeneration include of course all those who have striven to demean the glory of the old 'noblesse d'épée', but the principal culprits are seen to be the kings and their ambitious servants, the clergy and Third Estate.

1. The main points of this first section ('fact', 'right', myth, and conclusion) are to be found in the author's article entitled 'Boulainviller and the Myth of the Frankish Conquest of Gaul', in Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 199 (1981), 155-85.

Chapter four thus represents a continuation of the discussions of Part One, particularly as Boulainviller's espousal of the 'heroic' morality of his valiant and 'just' Franks produces considerable moral and political tension within his narrative.

But 'The Morality of History' is much broader than a particular, though important, reflection on Boulainviller's historiography of France. 'The Morality of History' concerns all areas of our author's historiographical endeavour, French, ancient, and religious. Indeed, the moral comments made in La Vie de Mahomed are shown to function in a way very similar to those made in Boulainviller's histories of France (that is, in support of a thesis) and even to include the same sort of conflict of interests. And yet the interest of morality is even broader, for it is argued that historiography itself, certainly as regards the history of the ancient world, has for Boulainviller a duty to preserve and defend the traditionally accepted events of history without which knowledge of what happened in past millenia would be impossible. These questions are considered in chapter six, once the principal 'non-historical' interests of Boulainviller's ancient and religious histories (attack on superstition, discussion of the proper beliefs and practices to be associated with worship of the Supreme Being) have been illustrated and examined in chapter five.

An important problem of the 'morality of history' in Boulainviller's historical writings is that of his ideas concerning the direction of the process of history itself. Although examined at the end of chapter four with regard to specifically French history, this question is treated more fully in Part Three, 'Providence and Destiny'. From his moral as well as his political point of view Boulainviller sees the direction of French history to be one of degeneration, yet references in his histories of France to Providence and destiny, when more than simply conventional, are not dictated by a sincere belief in such controlling forces but are rather additional weapons the historian may wield in his critical narration of

his country's history.

Boulainviller's narration of ancient history, however, has to take the notion of Providence much more seriously for Providence is, at least for the vast majority of his contemporaries, part of the very fabric of this history. Boulainviller's attitude is an intriguing one, for although he accepts the principle of divine intervention in the history of the world he limits its effective intrusions to a handful of major events: the Creation, the Flood, the destruction of Sodom, and the passage of the Israelites across the Red Sea. Miracles and prophecy are explained in human, psychological terms. Yet even when Providence is allowed to be active in history its role in these few events is simply the passive one of being disposed towards the events' occurrence. Indeed, the only occasion on which Boulainviller seems to welcome the active power of Providence is in his consideration of the creation of life on earth, for whereas physical events such as the forming of the globe, the Flood, and the parting of the Red Sea can be explained satisfactorily by references to physical causes alone, the creation of life involved a creation ex nihilo to explain which physics is powerless.

In his Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil Boulainviller exhibits what he believes to be an incontrovertible explanation of the progress of world history since the Creation. This is his own system of astrology. The notion of Providence is still present in this later text but now its existence as a significant idea is more or less denied, for all that has happened is seen to have quite clear astrological causes and astrology itself is presented, one or two modest disclaimers from Boulainviller notwithstanding, as a complete explanation of past events and the reliable prognosticator of those to come. This perception of development in Boulainviller's attitude towards Providence is corroborated by brief discussions of his developing metaphysical conception of the Deity, from the passionate defence of God's complete freedom to the complete denial of contingency in

creature or Creator. And yet although Boulainviller might finally reach a philosophical position from which all is seen as necessary, including the Deity itself, the acquiescence in the idea of providential control, however remote, over the progress of history is significant, for as well as allowing an explanation of portentous events this idea defends the moral core of history against the advances of an amoral determinist materialism.

The central discussion of Part Three is that of the moral meaning of history. However, this discussion necessarily includes consideration of more technical points such as Biblical criticism and principles of explanation. It is to a fuller examination of similar elements in Boulainviller's historiography, aspects of his general methodology, that the fourth part of this thesis is devoted. Among the major topics to be discussed are Boulainviller's attitudes towards historical explanation and chronology, and his use of sources and evidence.

The subject of this thesis is essentially Boulainviller's practice of history. Occasionally, however, Boulainviller wrote about the historian's task itself and established the primary rules which historiography, if it was to be at all significant, should follow. Much has been made of Boulainviller's theoretical programme for historiography and Renée Simon has gone so far as to propose that the title of 'father of modern historiography' should be taken from Voltaire and presented to Boulainviller (Henry de Boulainviller, p. 61). In defence of Voltaire, however, one might point out, as Isaiah Berlin has done,¹ that although keen to lay down the principles of historiography, theoreticians and historians of the early eighteenth century were not in general very assiduous in adapting their practice to their theory. Consequently, in order to reflect on Boulainviller's practice of history as presented in this thesis, and to

1. 'The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities' in Against the Current, essays edited by Henry Hardy (London, 1979), p. 87.

be able to reach a satisfactory conclusion, it will be helpful to ponder the relation between the historical theory of our author and his historical practice. Indeed, we will need to consider whether a historiography so partial as Boulainviller's deserves the name of history at all.

Finally, although comparisons between Boulainviller and more or less contemporary writers will have been made several times throughout the thesis, there will be a brief discussion of the place one may allot to Boulainviller in the history of eighteenth century French historiography. During the eighteenth century itself historians and political theorists of many persuasions were inspired to write about the history of France, and in particular about her constitutional history, as a direct result of the theories propounded by Boulainviller. It has been established what these were; let us now examine how they were presented.

PART ONE

THE HISTORY OF FRANCE

Introduction

Boulainviller's writings on the history of France present at first sight a baffling array of contradictory arguments, statements, ideas and aspirations. There is, however, one supple but unbreakable thread running throughout this confusing patchwork of historical narration and argument: whenever Boulainviller writes on the subject of French history, whether in narrative works or in political pamphlets, it is always from the same fundamental point of view; this is the affirmation of the right of the nobility, by which Boulainviller means the whole of the 'noblesse d'épée', to share in the government of France as the nation's true representatives and as the protectors of its rights and freedoms.¹

Such an interpretation of French history, of course, immediately brings Boulainviller into conflict with the historical fact of the long evolution of royal absolutism in France, which found its perfection in the government of Louis XIV. This evolution, Boulainviller maintained, was aided and abetted to a great degree by the clergy, lawyers, and the slowly rising bourgeoisie who saw in the monarch and his service a sure pathway to power and to the protection of their property and freedom against the sovereign rights of the nobility. But Boulainviller's insistence on the rights and unity of the nobility not only opposes him to the monarch, clergy and Third Estate, it also leads him to condemn the pretensions of 'les Grands' (the 'Ducs et Pairs' and the 'Princes du sang') to greater power and social

1. Although Boulainviller's use of the word 'nation' may at times be a little ambiguous, it is clear from the section of the Mémoires historiques entitled 'État de la nation françoise' that 'nation' refers principally to the Frankish conquerors of Gaul and their descendants. Boulainviller writes: 'On ne considere ordinairement la Conquête de la Gaule, faite par les François, que par raport au chef de l'Entreprise, à la prudence et à la valeur duquel on veut qu'elle soit dûë ... mais on oublie la Nation entiere, on ne s'embarasse plus de son sort ...' (MH, p. 127); and later: 'Honorons dans la personne des Rois tout l'éclat et la grandeur qui appartiennent aux Chefs d'une Nation si belliqueuse; mais examinons et faisons voir, selon les règles de la vérité de l'histoire; les droits et les avantages que cette même Nation, a acquis et conservé sous la conduite et la protection de ces mêmes Rois' (MH, pp. 127-28).

pre-eminence than that enjoyed by the rest of the second order.

In fact, in his defence of what he considers to be the rights and privileges of the nobility Boulainviller opposes himself and his fellow nobles to all the rest of French society. Small wonder then that as Boulainviller turns to deal with each of his opponents (scarcely in any very methodical way) we should see him adapt his arguments to suit the particular case before him and consequently give up any claim to rigorous logic.

The main line of Boulainviller's 'historical' argument (and here we touch upon his essential logical flaw) is the justification and defence of his vision of the fundamental constitution of the French nation by arguments from 'fact' and from 'right'. The constitution of France, Boulainviller declares, is based, as well as on the customs of the Franks themselves, upon their conquest of Gaul. This brute fact is turned, by time, into a natural law and becomes the origin of all the rights of the French nobility that Boulainviller will defend throughout the rest of French history against the encroachment and usurpation made by the king, the clergy, the Third Estate, and 'les Grands'.

The conquest of Gaul for Boulainviller is absolute and needs to be so for our author is protecting the vanishing privileges of the descendants of the conquering Franks who were all masters of Gaul even though (as Boulainviller's theories of ubiquitous nobility demand) the social structure of the Franks was itself hierarchical.¹ Boulainviller recognizes that the Franks had kings but insists that with regard to the Gauls all the Franks shared a fundamental equality as their conquerors. Boulainviller's racist theories thus save from unintelligibility his later historical arguments against the Carolingian and Capetian usurpations of royal power (although his methodological flaw remains, of course) because

1. Dissertation sur la noblesse, reproduced in André Devyver's Le Sang épuré, pp. 502-06 and 508-09.

whereas the conquest of Gaul was a usurpation (never called so by Boulainviller) of one people's power by another, the assumption of power by Charles Martel and Pepin and then by Hugues Capet represented an infringement of rights within one class of people or race, the conquerors of Gaul.

The criticism of the development of royal absolutism throughout French history as well as using moral arguments (below, pp. 130-33) relies a great deal on Boulainviller's denying this development any constitutional justification (for it is not in keeping with the fundamental constitution of France as he interprets it) and also on the complementary notion that innovation of any sort is undesirable. Thus French history is viewed critically by Boulainviller when he is considering the growth of absolutism and yet approvingly when he is recording the survival of noble power and privilege.

Occasionally, however, criticism of a particular monarch may be muted because although he may have contributed to the weakening of the nobility's grip on what is rightfully theirs (a share in political power), he may too have acted unfavourably towards one of the nobility's many classes of opponents. This expedient approach to the history of France manifests itself particularly in Boulainviller's political pamphlets and memoirs. In these he argues against attempts, especially those of the 'Ducs et Pairs', to create or sustain divisions within the body of the nobility, and occasionally produces arguments which are directly contrary to those expressed in his Mémoires historiques or his Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France. These arguments still rely on the notion of 'right', yet betray at times a readiness to accept and use historical fact whenever this suits his cause.

A striking feature of Boulainviller's discussions of French history is his almost obsessive concern with rank and precedence. Boulainviller pays particular attention to the physical manifestations of these qualities,

especially (and quite naturally, considering his insistence on the essential unity of all the members of the second order) the ways that rank and precedence were, quite literally at times, 'stage-managed' into being. Boulainviller's long descriptions of the proceedings of various States General have been criticized,¹ but they are perhaps unique in allowing us to appreciate the mind and preoccupations of this unusual man.

Another method Boulainviller employs to justify his vision of French history is the use and creation of myths, in particular those of the Frankish conquest of Gaul and of Charlemagne (Boulainviller's sympathetic treatment of Charles VII, inspired by the same reasons which lead him to adulate Charlemagne, manages to remain this side of myth). The extravagant claims Boulainviller makes for these periods of French history, together with the glaring contrast they consequently make with the rest of Boulainviller's narrative of monarchical ascendancy, bourgeois ambition, and noble inattention, are evidence of the unhistorical and mythical way that Boulainviller, looking for support for his historical interpretations, conceives of these events.

Finally, it will be necessary to consider why it was that Boulainviller wrote of the history of France in just the way he did or, put more pragmatically, what he hoped to gain from the expression of such opinions. This question arises because Boulainviller not only wrote of France's past but also of her future, and when he looks in this new direction a transformation, apparently, occurs: 'the Feudal Reactionary disappears and we find ourselves looking at the incipient Socialist'.² Scholars' interpretations of Boulainviller have differed widely because of the differing contexts in which their discussions of him have been placed. The thoughts of

1. R. Simon, Henry de Boulainviller, p. 183. Mme. Simon does understand, however, why Boulainviller provides such a wealth of detail.

2. Vincent Buranelli, 'The Historical and Political Thought of Boulainvilliers', in the Journal of the History of Ideas, 18 (1957), p. 401.

Boulainviller on the historical development of his native land and on what would be the desirable direction for her to follow in the future can easily be called illogical and inconsistent,¹ and strictly speaking they no doubt are, but if one approaches them with a desire to understand their apparent contradictoriness,² and certain at least that Boulainviller's foremost consideration was to protect as much as possible the dignity of the nobility and its right to a place in government, then his arguments, although inconsistent, can be seen to have been appropriate to his needs.

Let us now examine all these points in detail.

1. Ibid., p. 494.

2. What Russell calls 'the inevitable obscurantism of those who attempt to preserve ancient systems when they have lost their vitality'. History of Western Philosophy, 2nd edition (London, 1971), p. 622.

Chapter One

Philosophical Arguments in Boulainviller's Historiography of France : Fact, Right, and Law

- I Boulainviller's arguments of custom and conquest ('fact') : Boulainviller accepts certain historical events

The point of departure for Boulainviller's interpretation of the history of France is the Frankish conquest of Gaul. He sees it as a momentous event and explains why:

La Conquête des Gaules méritoit bien que je m'étendisse à son occasion, non-seulement à cause de la dignité du sujet, qui est l'un des plus illustres que la Mémoire ait conservé, ou à cause de l'intérêt que nous y devons prendre, puisque c'est le fondement de l'Etat François dans lequel nous vivons; mais principalement parce que c'est à cette Epoque que nous devons rapporter l'ordre politique, suivi depuis par la Nation, et le droit essentiel et primordial de tous ses Ministres; ce qui doit faire le principal sujet des réflexions auxquelles cet Ouvrage est destiné. (MH, pp. 126-27)

The conquest marks an epoch, a fresh beginning which Boulainviller jealously guards. Speaking of the Franks' adoption of the administrative machinery of the Romans (apparently, at least), Boulainviller maintains that 'ils prétendirent s'acquérir l'esprit des peuples en retenant l'ordre extérieur de leur [des Romains] police et les noms des magistrats auxquels on estoit accoutumé, sans rien perdre néanmoins du droit de leurs conquestes, puisqu'ils ne faisoient exercer ces charges que par des seigneurs de leur nation' (Dissertation sur la noblesse, Devyver, p. 509).

This new beginning, the foundation of the French state, establishes the rights and customs which should be (or which should have been) the basis for the historical development of the nation. These rights and customs are, briefly, the absolute division between the conquering Franks and the conquered Gauls (seen in later French history as that between nobles and commoners); the freedom of each individual Frank and his essential equality with every other Frank; the right of each Frank to take part in the government of the nation (the general assemblies); and the power of the king as deserving and demanding respect and even obedience but

limited by the nation when assembled as a whole and unable to prejudice the rights of any individual Frank.¹ These rights, the essential elements of French society after the conquest of Gaul, are in turn based upon the customs of the Franks before they invaded Gaul and their inalienable rights as conquerors.

Boulainviller's interpretation of the internal relations between the Franks themselves and with their leaders is based largely upon their social and political customs before becoming conquerors as described by Tacitus. The argumentative nature of this principle of custom is clearly seen in the preface to Boulainviller's Mémoires historiques when he is discussing 'la Magistrature des Intendants' and how this new administration is ruining the ancient economy of the state. Observing that present experience is of little value in such a discussion because each party, absolutist or aristocratic, uses it to support its own case,² Boulainviller turns to history to show the constitutional structures which have supported the monarchy for thirteen centuries and which, he claims, only blind stupidity would discard for new ones. Not all customs suit all nations, Boulainviller affirms; however, this is not the enlightened principle of historiography that it would seem for Boulainviller concludes from this that the best thing to do in government is simply to follow the practices of the past (and this, of course, would mean a return to an aristocratic, or at least a non-absolutist, form of government; MH, pp. 77-78). Custom is, however, unable to justify the new dimension of Frankish society, their mastery of

1. These points are examined more closely below (p. 71) in the discussion of Boulainviller and the myth of the Frankish conquest of Gaul.
2. Damiens de Gomicourt, a supporter of absolute monarchy and a critic of Boulainviller's historical thesis, writes in a refutation of Boulainviller's arguments: 'indépendamment des discussions historiques qui sont sujettes à des répliques infinies, il suffit de considérer l'économie politique actuelle du Royaume, et tout homme de bonne foi conviendra que la machine entière est mue par un ressort général dont tous les autres sont ... dépendans'. See his Dissertation historique et critique, pour servir à l'histoire des premiers temps de la monarchie française in Mélanges historiques et critiques contenant diverses pièces relatives à l'histoire de France, 2 vols (Amsterdam and Paris, 1768), I, 16-17.

the Gauls. This violent and decisive change can only be justified by the principle of conquest.

Conquest (or force) is the most brutish of historical facts and the most pragmatic of historical arguments to justify any given situation.

Boulainviller recognizes this:

Il est certain que dans le droit commun tous les hommes sont nez égaux; la violence a establi les distinctions de la liberté et de l'esclavage, de la noblesse et de la roture. Mais quoyque cette origine soit vicieuse, il y a si longtemps que l'usage en est establi dans le monde qu'il a acquis la force d'une loy naturelle. (Dissertation sur la noblesse, Devyver, p. 502)

Yet Boulainviller has no choice but to use the argument of conquest if he hopes to defend the exclusive rights of the French nobility against the abuses of 'la vénalité des charges' and the ennobling of rich bourgeois parvenus because it is the conquest of Gaul which decisively cast the inhabitants of France into two quite distinct categories: conquerors and conquered, nobles and commoners. Boulainviller puts his position quite succinctly:

De penser que les Gaulois soumis fussent les vrais Nobles, parce qu'en effet les Francs étoient les Etrangers inconnus et barbares, à qui la violence ne pouvoit procurer une vraye Noblesse; cela est sans aparence: il suffisoit qu'ils fussent vainqueurs; l'antiquité de l'origine céda pour lors à la force majeure d'une Conquête, avec raison. En un mot, les Gaulois devinrent sujets pendant que les autres étoient maîtres et indépendans. (MH, p. 134)²

1. Towards the end of the eighteenth century Louis Nicolas Henri Chérin wrote much the same thing: 'Dans l'ordre de la nature, les hommes naissent égaux et libres. L'esclavage, né de la force, ne put former d'abord une inégalité réelle dans l'espece humaine, par la raison que le pouvoir n'étant point alors légitimé par une convention sociale, étoit nécessairement nul et périssable, par les changemens divers que devoit éprouver la cause qui l'avoit fait naître. Ce ne fut donc que lorsque, dans le progrès des choses, le droit positif succéda à la violence, que l'établissement des loix et de la propriété fixa pour toujours l'inégalité des conditions'; see Chérin's preliminary Discours sur l'origine de la noblesse ... (p. ix) in his Abrégé chronologique d'édits, déclarations, réglemens, arrêts et lettres-patentes des rois de France de la troisième race ... (Paris, 1788). It is interesting to note that for Chérin it is positive law which legitimizes (for ever) a formerly 'violent' and illegitimate inequality (the text's date of publication gives this proposition a certain irony), whereas Boulainviller, sacrificing logic for polemic (below, pp.46-47), sees this eventual legitimacy in terms of 'une loy naturelle'.
2. The primacy of the fact, rather than the right, of force is implied a little earlier when Boulainviller asserts that the Gauls became the

This philosophical position is then supported by historical arguments such as the Gauls' subservience, their exclusion from military and administrative service, and the greater judicial penalties they were obliged to suffer. The rights won by the Franks by the conquest of Gaul 'sont demeurez attachez au sang des conquérants, c'est à dire à la naissance françoise' and are by no means attributable to 'la libéralité ou à la faveur des princes' (Dissertation sur la noblesse, Devyver, p. 510).

As mentioned above (p.11) it is Boulainviller's racist theories, the complete distinction between the Franks and the Gauls and their respective descendants, which give intelligibility if not logicity to his later condemnations of Carolingian and Capetian usurpation of royal authority. These denunciations are not logical because they condemn as unjust the principle of force which had been admitted in Boulainviller's earlier arguments in favour of the Frankish conquest of Gaul. Yet they are perfectly intelligible as criticisms of historical developments prejudicial to the privileged position of the French nobility at those times. Before we examine Boulainviller's discussions of these and similar usurpations, however, it will be useful to delineate at least the problems arising from his arguments concerning the right of conquest.

As we have seen (above, p.17) Boulainviller's attitude towards the principle of conquest is not a simple and unreflective one. The dubious morality of conquest is recognized more explicitly by Boulainviller when he is discussing the establishment of the Frankish supremacy over the Gauls. He remarks: 'Noblesse odieuse, si l'on veut, parce que son commencement ne s'est fait connoistre et sentir que par une effroyable violence qui a désolé la terre, et fait ses esclaves d'un peuple libre qui vivoit en repos et qui ne les presumably the Franks avoit point provoquez' (Mémoire sur la noblesse, Devyver, p. 510). Immoral though it be, however, the principle

subjects of the Franks 'tant au droit de leur conquête, que par la nécessité de l'obéissance toujours due au plus fort' (MH, p. 132).

of conquest is a justifiable one. Boulainviller continues, 'cependant, il faut reconnoistre aussy que s'estant mal deffendus, ils ont justement suby la loy du vainqueur, et qu'il n'y a point réellement de plus véritable noblesse que celle qui est acquise par droit de conquête, comme il n'y a point de plus grande distinction entre les hommes que celle qui naist de la soumission du vaincu' (Ibid). Why, we may ask, since Boulainviller needs a principle of conquest, does he point out its immorality? An examination of other instances where he talks of conquest may suggest an answer.

En 753, Pepin fit la guerre en Saxe, ayant été obligé de passer le Rhin sur la nouvelle d'une révolte totale de ce païs; mais ces Peuples ne tarderent pas à reconnoitre leur faute, et à se soumettre à de plus grands impôts que ceux du passé, de sorte que Pepin revint tranquillement en France. (MH, p. 342)

Here we see Boulainviller recognizing as just the dominion of one people over another, foreign, people. In another campaign, this time against the Lombards, Pepin, allied with the Church of Rome, gives to it 'la Ville de Ravenne /et/ la Pentapole avec tout l'Exarchat, d'où les Lombards avoient chassé tous les Grecs et c'étoit le fondement du droit qu'ils y avoient' (MH, p. 346). Again conquest of a foreign people is seen as just. Similarly, Boulainviller accepts and even welcomes the dominion of the French over the rest of western Europe: 'On sçait ... avec quelle gloire pour la nation françoise, Pépin et Charlesmagne se rendirent les maistres de l'Europe occidentale et firent revivre le nom d'Empire romain'.¹

Conquest, of a foreign people at least, would seem then to be perfectly acceptable.² However, there are several occasions when Boulainviller either denies the right of conquest or refuses to use it as a justification when

1. Dissertation sur la noblesse, Devyver, p. 518. And in the Mémoire sur la noblesse Boulainviller talks of 'la Normandie et ... la Bretagne qui sont des conquestes postérieures à celles des François et proprement faites sur eux par des peuples qui estoient leurs ennemys'; Devyver, p. 521.
2. This is the conclusion reached in Boulainviller's Histoire universelle with the difference, however, that it is there seen in a more general context and becomes the evidence for a pessimistic philosophy of history (see below, pp.237-38).

something better is available. Discussing the division of Cerdagne into two halves, French and Spanish, by treaty, Boulainviller narrates that the French took it over completely against Catalan rebels 'par droit de conquête' and kept it until 1707 when it was given back to 'son légitime Souverain' (État de la France, V, 264). Discussing the history of Arles, Boulainviller writes that it was recognized as a republic until Charles I, count of Provence, 'la soumit entierement et fortifia son droit en 1257, par la cession qu'il se fit faire par Raimond de Beaux, fils de Guillaume, prince d'Orange, de tous les droits que l'empereur Frederic II, lui avoit donné sur le royaume d'Arles par une charte de 1214' (Ibid., VI, 132-33). Conquest may be sufficient but one's right to possession of land is made firmer if one has legal support. A notable example of this position is to be seen in Boulainviller's defence of the rights of the French nobility to the secure enjoyment of their own property against the unjust pretensions of royal absolutism. Boulainviller asks,

qu'il me soit permis d'en apporter pour preuve l'exemple de la vigne de Naboth, puisque le droit des Israelites sur leurs propres biens, après la conquête et le partage de la Terre promise, n'étoit pas différent de celui que nous avons sur les nôtres, si nous remontons aux premiers tems; et toutefois ce n'est pas-là notre meilleur titre, puisque celui de la féodalité, qui a la convention pour principe, et la foi réciproque des parties pour sûreté, oblige les Rois à notre égard, comme il nous oblige envers eux. (MH, p. 533)

But perhaps the most striking denial Boulainviller makes of his own principle of conquest occurs when he is criticizing the nobility for their general lack of attention and care in preserving their privileges, for he attacks the very foundations on which these privileges stand. 'Si ... la Noblesse ne se fût pas pendant longtemps piquée d'ignorance jusqu'au point de se croire dégradée par l'étude, elle auroit vraisemblablement fondé ses droits sur des principes moins odieux que ceux de la violence, de la fierté, et de l'exemption des tailles; et, après avoir fixé avec équité ceux qui ne pouvoient lui être contestez, elle auroit veillé à en conserver la mémoire et l'exercice' (HAG, I, 179-80). The whole problem of Boulainviller's

conflicting moral attitudes in his narratives of French history is discussed below (pp.134-44), but this last example may help to provide a tentative explanation of the present problem, Boulainviller's uneasy awareness of the immorality of the principle of conquest. The conquests made by peoples (for example, the French) of foreign nations are historical facts which one can accept. But the conquest of Gaul by the Franks has had as its ultimate consequence, Boulainviller's racial theories notwithstanding, the creation of a single nation the idea of which our author's absolute (and possibly simply theoretical) principle tends to destroy. Hence his apologetic defence of the conquest of Gaul as just. This delicate problem will be examined again when we come to discuss the veracity of Boulainviller's racial theories and his histories of France (below, pp.117-19); however, let us now move on to examine more closely those instances where Boulainviller sees the principle of force as unjust.

II The argument from 'right'.

In the preface to his Mémoires historiques Boulainviller says that he will examine the history of France to discover 'les principes du Droit commun de la Nation, et d'examiner avec ordre ce que l'on y a changé dans la suite des années' and in particular to discuss 'la justice ou l'injustice de ce changement' (MH, p. 78). 'Les principes du Droit commun de la Nation' are established by the Frankish conquest of Gaul and we have seen what these essential points of French social and political organisation are (above, pp. 15-16). Henceforth Boulainviller challenges the justice of any development in French history which is prejudicial to the rights and interests of the Franks and their descendants, the French nobility, as founded by that decisive event, and in particular any step forward in the evolution of royal absolutism. But the two events in French history which highlight Boulainviller's concern with the justice of historical change are the establishment of the second and third races of French kings, the Carolingians

and the Capetians.

The Carolingian dynasty was established by Pepin, Mayor of the Palace, under the last Merovingian king, Childeric III. Although this, Boulainviller claims, was through his own efforts, the challenge to Merovingian authority had almost been made complete under Charles Martel, Pepin's father. The criticisms Boulainviller voices against the cruel and violent wars Charles conducted to protect his interests in Austrasia and against his cavalier management of the institutions of the French state clearly show his attitude to these harsh historical facts: they are morally and constitutionally unjust: 'Quels que fussent le succès et la valeur de Charles, ses entreprises et son gouvernement étoient si contraires aux loix communes de la Nation, qu'il étoit impossible qu'il n'eut une infinité d'ennemis' (MH, p. 298). Charles's recipe for success was to cease holding general assemblies which would surely have been against him and to lead an army made up of foreign barbarians and 'marginal' Franks to whom the state and its laws meant nothing. Reflecting on such a military stratagem Boulainviller writes, 'l'on ne sauroit douter qu'eu égard à la seule force, Charles Martel n'eut raison d'en user ainsi; mais aussi il choquoit visiblement par cette conduite tous les principes de l'équité naturelle' (MH, p. 339). Charles's government took its authority neither from the old laws of the Franks nor from the customs introduced with the conquest and so, as it was so opposed to the ways and spirit of the nation, it was 'naturally' short-lived; 'le seul Droit de Conquête' cannot prevail against 'le Droit du Peuple François ... si bien établi dans l'idée commune' (HAG, I, 216).

To become recognized as king, Pepin found it necessary to re-establish the parlements, or general assemblies. Force, Boulainviller explains, was seen to be insufficient. However, he did not establish them in their earlier powers, for many of the activities of government formerly carried out by the parlements were kept by Pepin as part of his own authority.

But the particularly significant feature of these parlements held by Pepin was the predominance of the clergy, for it was through the clergy, Boulainviller remarks, that Pepin persuaded the French of his right to be king and that he justified his usurpation of the crown. Pepin became king and was ritually anointed in a way no Merovingian had ever been: 'Ainsi, ce qui a été criminel dans son principe, devient en sa faveur une action juste et sainte par le consentement des Prélats et de toute la Nation' (HAG, I, 68).

The change in ruling house from Carolingian to Capetian was brought about by Hugues Capet. As with the change under Charles Martel and Pepin, Boulainviller considers Capet's coming to the throne as usurpation pure and simple. Boulainviller refutes all arguments which try to establish some link, however tenuous, between Capet and the family of Charlemagne (MH, pp. 520-21) and sees proof of Capet's usurpation in his refusal to wear the crown or royal vestments at any time after his coronation. Indeed to avoid having to do so he had his own son Robert crowned only six months after he himself had been crowned. Boulainviller dismisses the facile argument put forward by some historians (especially Mézeray) that this was done in order to squeeze in an extra generation before Capet's house, as it was prophesied, would have to vacate the throne. He argues instead that Capet passed on the crown to Robert to appease his guilty conscience and to dissemble somewhat 'le vice de son Usurpation' (MH, p. 519). Capet was not given the crown, Boulainviller argues, by the general consent of the nation, for from the death of Louis V on 22nd June 987 to 3rd July, the date of Capet's coronation, there was insufficient time to assemble a parlement with authority to invest Capet with the crown of France. Mézeray's opinion that Capet had already made his preparations at the parlement held in May, overlooks, Boulainviller points out, the fact that this accuses Capet of a plot against the king's life or at least 'd'avoir contre toutes sortes de loix conjuré de son vivant sur la succession à la Couronne, où

il n'avoit par lui-même aucun droit' (MH, p. 522). Besides, Boulainviller uses contemporary evidence, a letter from the future Pope Sylvester II to the Bishop of Metz, to show that far from using this May parlement at Noyon to plan his imminent coup, Capet, with his army, disbanded it instead.

Boulainviller's examinations of the essential injustice of the foundations of the Carolingian and Capetian dynasties of French kings are the most important of several instances where he denies the principle of force any power to justify historical change. However, it is not necessary that force should be employed for Boulainviller to see fit to criticize an action as unjust. His position is succinctly put in his criticisms of the histories of le Père Daniel. Commenting upon Daniel's reluctance to pronounce judgement upon the occasionally hostile relations between the court of Rome and the kings of France because of the opportunism of both parties, Boulainviller declares, 'Cependant il s'agit par raport à nous, non de ce qu'ils ont fait, mais du droit qu'ils ont eu de le faire' (HAG, I, 206-07). With regard to the history of France, of course, rightful action is that which contributes to the maintenance of the rights of the French nobility established, ultimately, by the conquest of Gaul. The contrary approach adopted by le Père Daniel (that is, that it is the present 'modus operandi' which gives value, just or unjust, to past actions) can only merit Boulainviller's scorn:

En effet que juger de sa méthode de réduire en toutes ocasions les Loix et les pratiques les plus anciennes aux idées et aux usages de notre siècle, sans aucune attention à la différence de quatre ou cinq cens ans, et quelquefois davantage? C'est sur ce fondement qu'il charge sans exception tous ceux qui ont eu le malheur d'avoir des différends avec les Rois, des noms de rebelles, de séditions etc. à moins que le succès de leurs entreprises ne les ait justifiés: car alors les plus injustes et plus criminels deviennent dans son stile des victorieux, d'habiles et de grands Politiques. (HAG, I, 203-04)

The same criticism is made of Sieur Péan, one of the authors involved in the writing of the Journal de Saint Louis which had been commissioned by Colbert.¹ 'Le principe favori du sieur Péan, de la singularité duquel il

1. There is a manuscript copy of the Journal du règne de Saint Louis, roy

espérait tirer quelque profit, était qu'un roi de France ne pouvait jamais avoir tort ni dans le fait, ni dans le droit, et que ceux qui agissaient en son nom partageaient aussi ce beau privilège.'¹ From this principle Péan establishes, among other things, 'la qualité de rebelles et de séditieux pour ceux qui ne croyaient pas que l'on dût ni que l'on pût changer les coutumes du royaume' and 'l'impossibilité que ces coutumes fussent telles que les prétendus rebelles les supposaient'.² Like le Père Daniel, le Sieur Péan denies the customs and rights that Boulainviller describes as existing at the time of Saint Louis not because they were not 'équitables et conformes aux moeurs du temps, mais parce qu'elles conviennent mal à celles qui se pratiquent aujourd'hui'.³

It is upon this jurisprudential and, of course, conservative position of 'right' that Boulainviller bases his numerous criticisms of events, major and minor, throughout the history of France. Criticizing the widely held opinion that the ownership of fiefs was instituted by Hugues Capet (whereas Boulainviller wants to show that this right of property had already been firmly established) our author remarks

A l'égard de la Normandie et de la Bretagne, nous avons vu de quelle maniere elles avoient été cédées solennellement aux Normands, l'une à titre de propriété et l'autre à titre d'hommage dès l'année 712, sous obligation de la foi; car encore que les Rois y aient souvent manqué dès qu'ils en ont eu l'occasion, le droit n'en est pas moins évident par raport à la convention et à la Religion des sermens donnez de part et d'autre. (MH, pp. 533-34)

Earlier in the same work, discussing the original servitude of the conquered Gauls, Boulainviller writes, 'le tiers Etat n'a commencé de faire corps, que lors qu'après avoir été affranchi par les Seigneurs, il est entré sous la protection des Rois et a prétendu se faire le sujet immédiat: entreprise dans laquelle il a été soutenu contre le droit évident des Propriétaires

de France, ix^e du nom with notes by Boulainviller, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français, 6596, folios 1-606.

1. Henry de Boulainviller, Préface critique au journal de Saint Louis, printed in R. Simon's Un Révolté du grand siècle: Henry de Boulainviller (Garches, 1948), p. 97.
2. Ibid., pp. 97-98.
3. Ibid., p. 120.

des terres, et contre la Loi fondamentale du Gouvernement' (MH, p. 132). Such criticisms are particularly abundant in Boulainviller's letters discussing the evolution of the French parlements for the main subject of this history is the growth of royal absolutism at the expense of noble power and privilege.

Indeed, Boulainviller's insistence on right leads him occasionally to support, at least by implication, some extravagant positions. Discussing Charles V's breaking of his treaty with England (in which he willfully broke the terms of the agreement by receiving at the States General of 1369 'la cause des Barons de Guienne', which appeal the treaty expressly forbade), Boulainviller talks of its consequences and remarks:

En effet les Anglois entrèrent presque aussitôt en France; et, comme leurs ravages dans la Picardie commencerent à faire crier le Peuple, on lui donna pour le consoler le spectacle des processions et des prieres publiques, qui jointes à la conclusion des Etats, faisoient penser qu'il n'y auroit rien de si juste que cette guerre et que les Anglois étoient presque des demons de demander l'exécution d'un Traité juré et promis solennellement par les François. (HAG, II, 305)

The higher cause of right over patriotism is given the highest sanction in Boulainviller's narration of the fall of the house of Armagnac following its contest with its new master, the king of France.

Et ceci est un exemple singulier de la rétribution que la Providence maintient dans l'ordre des événemens; puisque cette Maison d'Armagnac, qui périt de la manière du monde la plus désastreuse sitôt que les François furent maitres de la Guyenne, est celle qui avoit le plus travaillé pour en chasser les Anglois ses anciens et légitimes maitres, dès le tems de Charle V. (HAG, III, 101)

More puzzling, however, is Boulainviller's examination of the reasons why the Dauphin did not immediately assume the regency once his father, King John, had been captured by the English (HAG, II, 276-82). True, Boulainviller does gain by showing that it would be the States General, and not the parlement, that would decide who was to be regent.¹ But Boulainviller's

1. The distinction Boulainviller makes here between States General and parlement is that between 'parlement' as originally understood (the general assemblies of the first race, rejuvenated by Charlemagne) and 'parlement' in its later, more restricted sense of court of law. The change in nature of the parlements was brought about, Boulainviller believes, during the pious reign of St. Louis (HAG, II, 30-31).

demonstration is concerned much more with establishing and defending 'le droit naturel' of king and Dauphin and his conclusion, for a man normally so intent on illustrating the rights of the States General, is most curious: 'Toutefois à mon sens, le droit constant et certain, tel que celui du Duc de Normandie dont nous parlons, n'avoit pas besoin de la reconnoissance de ceux qui par leur condition de Sujets, sont censez y devoir être soumis' (HAG, II, 282).

In his État de la France (III, 115) Boulainviller remarks 'que les Princes ne connoissent pas de droit plus certain que leur intérêt, pour le soutient duquel les raisons et les prétextes ne manquent jamais, et c'est la cause necessaire des contradictions qui regnent dans toute la suite de l'histoire du droit François'. These 'contradictions' (the word is revealing) spring from the success of usurpation and innovation and the complementary decline of 'l'ancien usage' or 'la ruine des droits de la Noblesse'. Innovation is seen as undesirable because, whatever the motives behind them, new laws without the support of tradition are much easier to break and abuse (HAG, II, 88). Boulainviller recognizes that in the case of Saint Louis his innovations were nobly conceived but he concludes nevertheless:

Je ne saurois après cela /his sad recital of the pitiable state of France/ m'empêcher de répéter ce que je puis déjà avoir écrit, que l'ancien Gouvernement François, tel qu'il étoit pratiqué avant St. Louis, valoit mieux devant Dieu et devant les hommes, que celui qu'il introduisit sur le pié d'établir et d'assurer sa justice. (HAG, II, 193-94)

Even the measures taken by Charles VII, one of Boulainviller's few heroes, to ameliorate the deplorable state of France are, though welcomed at first by our author, finally condemned:

Voila quels ont été ces Réglemens célèbres de la Gendarmerie, de la Taille générale, et des Francs Archers; lesquels, quoique bons en eux mêmes, et si convenables au tems où ils ont été faits, que l'on peut dire que le recouvrement ou le salut de l'Etat semble leur être dû, peuvent néanmoins être regardez comme le principe effectif de la corruption de tout le Gouvernement François; non seulement parcequ'ils ont

été donnez sans précaution contre les abus qui en pouvoient naitre, soit en favorisant le despotisme et l'autorité arbitraire, soit en livrant les biens de tous les Particuliers à la discrétion des Rois et aux caprices de leurs Ministres, mais particulièrement en ce qu'ils ont servi à confondre presque sans ressource tous les Ordres du Royaume. En effet l'Ordonnance des Francs Archers, en leur atribuant l'exemption de la Taille, les a tellement confondus avec l'ancienne Noblesse, qu'elle n'a presque plus aucuns moyens de distinguer leur origine, sans une aplication et une étude qui sont à la portée de peu de Gens,
(HAG, III, 112-13)

Boulainviller's criticism of innovation and the unjust change it produces in the balance of power between kings and nobility uses, as we saw above, the idea of pretext. This is well illustrated in Boulainviller's discussion of the 'nouvelle Ordonnance' introduced during the reign of King John and which forbade the carrying of arms. Boulainviller recognizes the necessity of such a regulation ('c'étoit véritablement le seul moyen d'arêter les désordres et les pillages'; HAG, II, 295) and that the nobility did not think perhaps that it concerned them, but he concludes that 'on n' /a/ pas manqué de la lui apliquer dans la suite, lorsqu'après la fin de la guerre qui n'est arrivée que cent ans depuis, l'on a trouvé les Ordonnances écrites et les droits anciens negligez et oubliez: pretexte par le moyen duquel Louis XI se rendit le maitre absolu de la Noblesse comme du Peuple' (HAG, II, 295-96).²

A similar but more radical notion employed by Boulainviller in his critical analysis of French history is the notion that changing historical circumstances prejudicial to 'l'ancien usage', even if they lead to firmly

1. In the same text Boulainviller writes that the right of the nobility 'ne /peut/ être contesté qu'en conséquence des idées nouvelles, par lesquelles on veut égaler tous les Ordres, et détruire les avantages naturels de la Noblesse' (HAG, II, 178).
2. It is interesting to note here Boulainviller's recognition of the power of writing, a power which he sees too (HAG, II, 328-30) as contributing to the ascendancy of the clergy, and which could have preserved some of the lesser nobility's independence from their 'seigneurs' by recording that their homages had been made voluntarily and not 'de droit' (Dissertation sur la noblesse, Devyver, p. 523). More than two hundred years later Claude Lévi-Strauss was to write: 'Si mon hypothèse est exacte, il faut admettre que la fonction primaire de la communication écrite est de faciliter l'asservissement. L'emploi de l'écriture à des fins désintéressées, en vue de tirer des satisfactions intellectuelles et esthétiques, est un résultat secondaire, si même il ne se réduit pas le plus souvent à un moyen pour renforcer, justifier ou dissimuler l'autre'. Tristes Tropiques (Paris, 1955), p. 344.

established practices, are not to be considered as proper developments of that history but are instead to be seen as merely 'accidental', the results of chance, or at best simply as necessary expedients. The death of Louis VIII, Boulainviller explains, 'donnait une bonne occasion aux barons de regagner le rang et l'autorité dont ils s'étaient laissé déplacer'. Their attempts to regain power, however, failed, 'et comme les idées dont les enfants se laissent prévenir durent ordinairement toute leur vie' (a reference here to Louis XIV's memories of the Fronde, perhaps),

il arriva que Saint Louis n'imagina jamais ce qui s'était fait contre sa mère que comme des attentats de félonie qui attaquaient sa propre personne et dont la grâce de Dieu l'avait préservé comme par miracle. Ce sentiment d'un grand Saint n'a pas manqué d'être adopté par ses successeurs, sinon dans la partie du miracle du moins dans celle qui s'est trouvé favorable à la possession d'une autorité illimitée. C'est ainsi que les maximes qui ont passé pour inviolables dans notre ancien gouvernement ont souvent été détruites par le jeu d'un pur hasard et que ce qu'on a cru le plus utile pour les faire revivre n'a servi qu'à les rendre criminelles dans l'esprit de la postérité.

Concluding his brief examination of the history of the French nobility in his Dissertation sur la noblesse, and lamenting the present courtly decadence of many of his order, Boulainviller writes, 'on s'accoutume, à la suite des princes, à plus estimer leur faveur que ses propres avantages. L'obéissance intéressé qui s'y pratique, l'adulation, les intrigues qui conduisent à la fortune, attachent ceux qui y parviennent plustost à la grandeur accidentelle dont ils se croient les ouvriers qu'à celle qu'ils pourroient tirer de leur naissance' (Devvyer, p. 540). Finally, in the same text, immediately after having established that 'les François ne connoissoient point de princes parmi eux et que la parenté des roys ne donnoit aucun rang, non pas mesme à ceux qui en descendoient en ligne masculine', Boulainviller has to recognize that during the reigns of Charles VI and Charles VII 'on appella au conseil du roy les seigneurs de son sang'. However, he robs this 'fact' of any innovatory value by remarking that 'cet usage

1. Préface critique au journal de Saint Louis in R. Simon's Un Révolté du grand siècle : Henry de Boulainviller, pp. 106-107.

se forma moins par le droit que par la nécessité du gouvernement' (Devvyver, pp. 536-37).¹

These views of 'pretext' and 'chance', as well as Boulainviller's more frequent arguments from 'right', all serve to underline for our author the essential illegitimacy of any historical change not in conformity with the principles of French government as established by the conquest of Gaul. The attitude towards history which such arguments and ideas betray is a most curious one, for although Boulainviller accepts the historicity of the events and developments of French history (as he must if he is to comment upon them) his criticism of many of them, not only from the 'jurisprudential' but also from the 'moral' point of view, is tantamount to a rejection of them (Boulainviller's attitude to 'morally rejected' history is discussed below, p. 148). This bifocal attitude towards the past of France is evident in Boulainviller's criticism of Louis XIV:

L'idée aparente sous laquelle on peut représenter l'opinion qu'il a eue de sa propre Monarchie, doit exclure formellement toute connoissance d'histoire et d'exemples précédens, de toutes les Loix du Royaume: il n'a reconnu que celle de l'autorité, et à l'aide des Flateurs il l'a rendu despotique sur les biens et sur la liberté des Sujets sans distinction d'aucune Condition. (HAG, III, 206)

But surely Louis could point (as Boulainviller does constantly, to criticize them) to many historical precedents for his political behaviour? Boulainviller's rejection here of 'unjust' history has become absolute.

1. Emphasizing the contingency of historical events, certainly of those which serve as evidence against one's own interpretation of the past, is an attractive polemical expedient. Arguing for the existence under the Merovingians and Carolingians of a body of citizens identical in essence to the post-feudal Third Estate, Gautier de Sibert, one of Boulainviller's eighteenth-century critics, is, however, forced to recognize that by the end of the tenth century society in France knew only lords and serfs; but, he remarks, 'cette servitude n'était pas aussi ancienne que la monarchie. Elle était l'effet d'un concours de circonstances et d'événements ...'. See his Mémoire dans lequel on examine s'il y a eu, sous les deux premières races de nos rois, un ordre de citoyens à qui on puisse appliquer le nom de tiers-état, in Collection des meilleurs dissertations ..., edited by J. M. C. Leber, 20 vols (Paris, 1826-38), V, 135. Similarly, in his approving remarks on Charlemagne's 'democratic' solution to France's state of anarchy ('il apprit aux Francois à obéir aux loix, en les rendant eux-mêmes leurs propres législateurs') Mably considers any good coming from an absolutist alternative to anarchy to be a mere 'bien passager', based on fear and force, and to be against 'les règles' (Observations sur l'histoire de France, 2 vols (Geneva, 1765), I, 130-32).

Yet although Boulainviller's use of arguments from 'right' may be idiosyncratic, we should not suppose that he was the only one to employ them. D'Argenson, one of Boulainviller's later political opponents whose historical methodology nonetheless is often very similar to Boulainviller's) when writing of French feudalism chose to say: 'Telle est la véritable origine des fiefs et de tous les Droits qui en dépendent, usurpation par-tout, tolérance forcée de la part de nos Rois, puis tolérance de convenance jusqu'à présent pour les Droits qui en sont restés et qui ne nuisent qu'au Public'.¹ Ironically, however, d'Argenson is led by his anti-aristocratic and pro-royalist arguments into the same sort of dilemma that confronted Boulainviller when the approved basis of the state was historically founded. He asserts that 'le Droit Féodal n'est à tous égards qu'une usurpation sur la Royauté' and he asserts too that 'la Royauté vient toujours d'un Contract entre le Roi et le Peuple'. And yet he writes,

il est vrai que dans l'origine des choses presque tout pouvoir est usurpation si l'on veut l'examiner avec rigueur ... le laps de tems a achevé de canoniser l'autorité Monarchique telle que nous la voyons dans la plupart des Souverainetés du monde, le tems et la prescription, sans lesquels tout ne seroit que disputes et confusion, ont fait le reste: ainsi n'examinons plus l'autorité Souveraine par les plus anciens faits, tenons-nous-en aux établissemens que nous trouvons et respectons ce que nous pères viennent de respecter.²

This last injunction is identical in aim to Boulainviller's remark following his recognition of the 'odious' but 'just' establishment of Frankish supremacy over the Gauls (above, p. 19): 'Mais quoy qu'il en soit du droit de noblesse et de la justice de son origine, il est certain que par rapport à la France, elle existe dans ce royaume depuis le commencement de la monarchie, et que, jusques au règne de Philippe le Bel et à l'an 1300, on n'y en a connu d'autre que celle qui estoit issue de la postérité des conquérants' (Devyver, p. 510). Both authors recognize the weaknesses

1. D'Argenson, Considérations sur le gouvernement ancien et présent de la France (Amsterdam, 1765), p. 119.
2. Ibid., pp. 124-25.

(philosophical or moral) of their respective arguments but can do no more, finally, than simply urge us to accept them. This 'agreement' between men of such different political persuasions is really only to be expected when from a partisan conception of 'right' criticism is made of 'les raisonnemens qui confondent le Droit avec le fait et prennent l'effet pour la cause'.¹

Before we move on to consider further Boulainviller's involved attitude towards the history of France, let us summarize what our analysis has so far revealed. Aware of the dubious moral nature of the principle of conquest, Boulainviller nevertheless adopts it in order to argue for the justice of the Frankish conquest of Gaul. This conquest establishes, by reason of conquest itself and the customs already in use among the Franks, the fundamental principles of the French state. These principles (in particular, the complete mastery of the nobles over the commoners and the essential equality with each other shared by all the nobility including the king) serve in turn to evaluate the later development of French history and to categorize events as just or unjust. Not only is might not right, neither is anything prejudicial to the rights, privileges and power of the nobility as guaranteed by 'l'ancien usage'. Such an insistence on right, as well as leading occasionally to bizarre points of view and conclusions, is an indication that from a higher perspective than merely the historical, that is the moral, Boulainviller essentially rejects the events he is discussing whenever these events point away from aristocratic participation in government and towards the rule of monarchical absolutism.

1. Considérations, pp. 128-29. D'Argenson criticizes Boulainviller, just as Boulainviller criticizes le Père Daniel and le Sieur Péan. We may note too that Voltaire uses the argument of right, as well as a 'philosophical' (i.e. rather disparaging) recognition of the force of prescription, to comment upon the extension of the spiritual and, especially, temporal power of the see of Rome in his Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations, Œuvres complètes, 52 vols (Paris, 1877-85), XI, 247-53.

III Boulainviller's manipulation of arguments from 'right' and from 'fact'.

Reject as he would, however, morally and constitutionally, all the events that have lead to the decadence and impotence of the old nobility, Boulainviller, face to face with centuries of post-conquest French history, finds such an attitude difficult at times to sustain. It is at such moments that Boulainviller, reluctantly no doubt, accepts the fact of force as unavoidable. The emotional tone of this acceptance can vary from resignation (melancholy or contemptuous) to quite straightforward, apparently objective acknowledgement. Discussing the nature of feudal rights, and especially their reciprocity, Boulainviller notes dourly that whereas kings went more or less unpunished for crimes against their vassals, 'au contraire les parlements ont souvent condamné les vassaux à la privation de leurs fiefs pour des fautes désavouées ou trop légèrement imputées à des malheureux parce qu'alors comme à présent les lois avaient bien de la peine à prévaloir contre la force et l'autorité' (Préface critique au journal de Saint Louis, Simon, pp. 115-16). Elsewhere, discussing an intendant's difficulty in supposing that the title of baron was formerly attached to birth and not to land and had no need of princely sanction, Boulainviller, choosing as an example the first counts of the area under examination (Provence) continues:

comme si par exemple les premiers comtes de Provence avoient eu un autre droit pour se rendre tels, pour se mettre en possession de la baronnie de Castelane, dont ils furent néanmoins dépouillés par les premiers [Les Princes], non par une consequence d'un droit primordial, mais par celui du plus fort qui ne manque jamais de raisons plausibles lorsqu'il veut et peut agir. (État de la France, VI, 173)

However, narrating the assembly of the States General of 1420 and the complete lack of opposition to the new taxes Charles VI was planning to impose upon his nation, Boulainviller makes no comment other than to note 'tant la crainte et la force sont efficaces' (HAG, III, 36). Similarly, writing of the nobles' opposition to Lotaire II's conferring of the duchies of France, Aquitaine, and Burgundy upon his cousins and of their insistence

upon their territorial rights, Boulainviller simply remarks that 'il n'y avoit que la force qui en pût décider, et c'est pourquoi le Roi Lotaire, en donnant le Poitou à Hugues, depuis surnommé Capet, se remit à lui du soin de s'y faire connoître' (MH, p. 511).

But Boulainviller's acceptance of the fact of force (and, one might say, the force of fact) can, politically, be much more positive. This pragmatic attitude of Boulainviller's to the illegitimacy of change is no doubt best illustrated in his discussion of the rights of the Capetian dynasty to the throne of France.

As far as 'le droit primordial' is concerned neither the Carolingians nor the Capetians had any right to the throne for both houses were established by usurpation (above, pp.22-24). But Boulainviller is not out to antagonize the ruling house of France. He notes that although Capet usurped the throne of France, the posterity of Charlemagne hardly survived this usurpation, and, to show his (albeit ambiguous) generosity towards the Capetians, Boulainviller adds, 'd'ailleurs la Providence a des secrets impénétrables dans l'ordre et l'arrangement des événemens, et ... elle sçait tirer, des crimes les plus contraires à la Société, les avantages de la Société même (MH, p. 518). Despite the Capetians' lack of primordial right to the throne they are worthy of respect, says Boulainviller, because of 'l'obéissance constante qui leur a été renduë par nos peres et par nous-mêmes' (MH, p. 529). Boulainviller goes on to show that ultimately all rights to succession are relative and depend upon historical events and the will of Providence (below, pp.213-15). His conclusion explains why he makes this apparently bizarre assertion, so contrary to the general tenor of his discussion of French history. The seven hundred years during which the Capetian dynasty has enjoyed the possession of the throne of France are justification enough, he says, of their position. But if their right to the throne is beyond doubt then so is that of the 'people', that is the nobility, to their own goods and property. Boulainviller is in

effect trying to strike a bargain with royal absolutism: he will ignore the essential illegality of the Capetian possession of the throne in return for recognition of the nobility's natural right to independent and free ownership of goods and property:

je conclus qu'autant qu'il y auroit de noirceur et d'injustice à calomnier le droit de la Maison régnante, parce qu'elle ne sort pas originellement de Charlemagne, autant il y a de bassesse, d'indigne adulation, de mauvais coeur à n'oser dire que les biens des Peuples leur appartiennent de droit naturel, sans qu'il soit nécessaire de faire intervenir la grace ou la concession des Rois, pour en autoriser la possession. (MH, p. 532)

Boulainviller's willingness to sacrifice his principle of the illegitimacy of historical change on the altar of political expediency has as its motive the very basis of his martyred principle, namely his deep concern to preserve as best he might the fading (or faded) political power of the second order. In his defence of noble power and privilege, beleaguered on all sides (by kings, peers, clergy and Third Estate), Boulainviller is led not infrequently to adapt his arguments to the circumstances as they arise, as we have just seen him do with peculiar ingenuity and wit in the case of the Capetian usurpation of the throne of France. Let us now examine some further examples of this procedure.

As main conspirators in the plot against the second order, kings, clergy, and Third Estate are rarely seen in a favourable light (below, pp.130-33). There are occasions, however, when Boulainviller's usual attitude to these groups is modified in order to sharpen his attack against one of them in particular. During Boulainviller's discussion of the measures taken by Pepin to legalize his unlawful usurpation of royal power, our author considers Pepin's representations to Pope Zacharius enquiring whether it was right that a powerless ruler (this would be Childeric III) should continue to bear the title of king, and concludes by describing the Pope's negative reply as inequitable and unchristian and by seriously doubting whether the Pope had 'l'autorité de faire^{faire}/justice aux véritables Rois de France' (i.e.

the about to be deposed Merovingians; MH, p. 336). And yet, narrating Philippe I's debasement of the French currency and the 'profit immense' this was giving to him, Boulainviller can write, 'partant l'on peut dire que ce n'étoit pas sans raison et sans justice, que l'le Pape prétendoit que son administration devoit être corrigée' (HAG, II, 80). Similarly, in his condemnation of the wife of Louis II and her encouragement of Louis's unjust behaviour towards the children of his first marriage, Boulainviller is grateful for the support of 'les plus saints et les plus capables d'entre les Prélats' of the time, including the bishop of Rome (HAG, I, 85-86). And referring to le Père Daniel's comment that Rome today would disown Pope Gregory VII's most immoderate reproaches of Philippe I's appropriation of Church property,¹ Boulainviller boldly asserts 'que l'énorme conduite du Prince, prête à causer une défection générale, n'exigeoit pas moins de son zèle' (État de la France, III, 102).

Such opportunism can, of course, work the other way as when Boulainviller mutes his criticisms of Philippe V of France. Boulainviller relates Philip's accession to the throne in a way which brings to mind the usurpation of his predecessor, Hugues Capet (HAG, II, 144-45). However, Boulainviller forbears criticizing this event because of Philip's subsequent conduct: 'il forma un Conseil secret des plus grands Seigneurs, et ne mit dans son Parlement que les plus honnêtes Gens qu'il connut parmi les Hommes de Loi. Il dispensa les Evêques de l'assistance qu'ils y devoient auparavant, par le scrupule d'interrompre leur résidence' (HAG, II, 146). Indeed, in spite of Philip's efforts to strengthen royal authority, at the expense of the 'natural rights' of the nobility, Boulainviller tempers his reflections on this king's reign in view of his 'soin d'humilier les orgueilleux Financiers et Ministres des regnes passez, les Flotte, les Duplessis, les Machaut, Nogaret, et autres' (HAG, II, 157).

1. Gabriel Daniel, Histoire de France, 7 vols (Paris, 1722), II, 475.

These examples of Boulainviller's historical expediency, interesting though they may be, represent little more than tactical point scoring. More important are those occasions when, to argue, as always, in favour of his conception of the status, nature, and power of the nobility, Boulainviller is prepared to make large concessions to royal authority or make significant modifications in his historical arguments or ideas concerning noble virtue and rank.

A remarkable example of the concessions and modifications Boulainviller is prepared to make is his Mémoire touchant l'affaire de Mrs. les Princes du sang.¹ The object of Boulainviller's enquiry is to demonstrate that the objections of 'les Princes du sang' against Louis XIV's edicts granting to his natural sons, the 'Duc du Maine' and the 'Comte de Toulouse', all the rights and privileges enjoyed by the princes of the blood, including the right to succeed to the throne, are insubstantial. Boulainviller's hostile attitude to the 'Princes du sang' is particularly evident in the first part of his treatise entitled De la qualité de Baron, de celle de Prince, de l'invention des armes et du surnom.² In this text Boulainviller shows that originally the titles of 'baron' and 'prince' were more or less interchangeable and given 'a tous les Ducs, Comtes et Seigneurs, Pairs de France et sujets immediats de la Couronne'.³ Boulainviller insists on the essential unity that formerly existed within the nobility,⁴ and quotes several examples to show that the quality of 'prince' was not always so highly thought of and did not invariably settle in their favour disputes over precedence. It is with considerable bitterness that Boulainviller discusses the degenerate quality of 'prince', 'autrefois ... refusé a tous

1. This the fourth of his collected Mémoires présentés à Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans, Régent de France (The Hague and Amsterdam, 1727), 2 vols in 1 (hereafter referred to as Mémoires).

2. Bibliothèque municipale de Nantes, MS no. 1822, pp. 91-130.

3. Ibid., p. 91.

4. See too the fourth memoir itself; Mémoires, I, 149-50.

ceux dont la puissance et la dignité devenoient caduques, mais presentement attachée au sang en sorte qu'un dernier Cadet des Cadets sans terres sans dignités conserve l'honneur les prerogatives, et le titre de Prince'.¹

To argue against the pretensions and historical principles put forward by the princes of the blood, Boulainviller accepts and conducts his debate from the position of historical fact. An important argument of the princes is that Louis's edict granting the 'princes légitimés' the right to the succession to the throne represents a 'préjudice fait à la nation, en lui ravissant le droit de se choisir des Maîtres légitimes' once a ruling house has become extinct (Mémoires, I, 117). Boulainviller examines the facts of the matter to show that not since Charles Martel has France enjoyed the power of choosing its own masters. He concludes:

Il est donc parfaitement évident, par cette discussion abrégée de notre Histoire ... qu'il n'est aucun tems dans la Monarchie, où l'on puisse dire qu'il ait été libre à la nation de se choisir des Rois, et où on ait usé de ce droit dont Mrs. les Princes veulent aujourd'hui la gratifier; et partant il est pareillement évident que la nation n'a aucun intérêt réel, ni prétexte à s'opposer à la grace que Louis XIV a faite aux Princes, ses enfans légitimés.
(Mémoires, I, 135)

Nowhere in this discussion does Boulainviller insist on the illegitimacy of France's changes of dynasty, and his emphatic denial of any vestige of the nation's right to elect her kings contrasts strongly with his painstaking efforts in the Préface critique au journal de Saint Louis to show this right of election at work, in principle at least, until the accession of Louis VII.²

Together with this appreciable change in his treatment of aspects of French history, there is in Boulainviller's memoir a marked difference in attitude towards royal authority. Rather than criticize the increasing independence and power of this authority (this criticism being one of the principal features of his historical writings, especially in the

1. Nantes, MS no 1822, p. 94.

2. R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle, pp. 101-04.

Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France), Boulainviller accepts and uses this historical development to argue against the claims of the 'Princes du sang' that Louis's edicts in favour of 'les princes légitimés' represent an abuse of the sovereign's power. Boulainviller presents the argument of the princes in the following manner:

Le principe d'où part cette conclusion, est qu'en general un Monarque ne peut rien contre les loix fondamentales de son Etat, et que si l'excès de son autorité oblige quelquefois les Sujets à se soumettre à ses ordres contre la règle, il est nécessaire que son successeur révoque au plutôt les Ordonnances qu'il auroit pu faire, sans que l'on puisse dire que la Minorité et le défaut de connoissance y soient un obstacle; d'autant, disent-ils, que les loix de l'Etat sont le fondement de son autorité, et que, quand il s'y conforme, il est inutile de demander à quel âge il l'a fait, la sagesse de ceux que la loi rend dépositaires de son autorité, suppléant à ce qui peut manquer à son âge. (Mémoires, I, 136)

We may note that the insistence here on the fundamental laws of the state is, in other contexts (for example, his narration of Charles Martel's usurpation of royal power), the very principle upon which Boulainviller bases his own evaluation of the 'justice' of events in French history, in particular the unjust growth in monarchical absolutism. Here Boulainviller shrewdly infers that the argument of 'les Princes du sang' against the legitimacy of Louis's 'princes légitimés' constitutes a fundamental questioning of the absolutist conception of the relationship between the king of France and the country he rules, and thus almost accuses these pretentious nobles, who would destroy the unity of the second order, of 'lèse-majesté' (Mémoires, I, 136-37).

Boulainviller refers to Charlemagne, Louis le Débonnaire, Charles le Chauve, Charles le Gros, Louis IV, Philippe I, and Philippe Auguste as historical examples of monarchs deciding on their own succession (Mémoires, I, 138-41). He admits that perhaps 'ces exemples sont trop anciens, et que l'usage des derniers siècles n'y a pas été conforme' (Mémoires, I, 141-42) but argues that this later restriction of royal power was freely accepted by the kings of France. However, with regard to Louis XIV's use of his absolute authority the examples of kings

since Philippe Auguste hold no sway for 'le principe de cette autorité demesurée remonte jusqu'à Louis XIII et Henry IV'. Boulainviller's justification of royal power is here as complete as elsewhere his denial of it is heartfelt:

Ainsi il y a déjà une possession plus que certaine, qui prescrit contre la foiblesse des règnes antérieurs, avec d'autant plus de force que l'usage des derniers tems se rejoint à celui des tems plus anciens, dont les preuves sont évidentes. (Mémoires, I, 142)

Boulainviller concludes this memoir by extolling the advantages of monarchical absolutism and exhorting the Regent 'de ne jamais alterer la constitution d'un Gouvernement, qui a fait et fera toujours la tranquillité de cette Monarchie au dedans, sa grandeur et sa réputation chez l'Etranger' (Mémoires, I, 157-58), but not before contradicting another of his cherished principles in order to put the princes of the blood firmly in their place. At the end of his brief discussion of the historical status of the French princes, Boulainviller asserts that it was only under Henri III that, for their own protection against the house of Guise, 'les Princes du sang' were raised 'au dessus de tous les Pairs, des grands Officiers des Princes étrangers, et de toutes les espèces de dignités' (Mémoires, I, 151-52). He concludes:

Le rang est donc une grace, une faveur des Rois, une distinction nouvelle, à laquelle les Comtes de Vendosme n'avoient aparemment jamais prétendu. Comment peut-on donc aujourd'hui soutenir, qu'elle est incommunicable par les loix fondamentales de la Monarchie? (Mémoires, I, 152).

And yet, of course, this is just what Boulainviller does claim in respect of the 'erections de duche et pairies en confusion et en faveur de diverses familles populaires' and the 'ennoblissements bursaux' (Dissertation sur la noblesse, Devyver, p. 543), all dependent solely on the king's pleasure. Boulainviller may be prepared to acknowledge virtue in an individual member of the Third Estate (in a magistrate or a minister), but such virtue, even though it may grant him a personal distinction above that of the old nobility, has no guarantee that it

will be inherited by his progeny. Consequently,

il est juste que ceux-là aient toujours le privilège du rang à qui une longue suite d'ayeux, illustres par leurs alliances, par les services qu'ils ont rendus à la patrie, a assuré le tiltre d'une vraie et ancienne noblesse. Tiltre qui donne un droit absolument hors de commerce, que la faveur des princes ne peut donner ny communiquer avec les richesses et les employs, puisqu'il est attaché au sang qui nous fait naistre. (Devyver, p. 506)

The extent to which Boulainviller is prepared in this memoir to modify, even to contradict, his normal attitudes and methods of argument with regard to the history of France is perhaps surprising, but his arguments against the second category of 'les Grands', the 'Ducs et Pairs', show a similar desire to discard consistency in favour of the political advantage of the old nobility.

Boulainviller's concern for the position and status of the old French nobility vis-à-vis the new order of 'Ducs et Pairs', a concern shared by many of the nobles in the early years of the Regency, found expression in his Requête de la noblesse contre les fausses prétentions de Messieurs les Ducs et Pairs¹ which the 'assemblée de la noblesse', meeting in March 1716, addressed to the young Louis XV.² This 'requête', however, failed to have any effect and a second 'requete' of 1717 was accompanied by Boulainviller's Mémoire pour la noblesse de France contre les Ducs et Pairs (Paris, 1717) in which, analysing the history of France with great skill and judgement and more deeply than in his Requête de la noblesse, Boulainviller shows the claims and pretensions of the 'Ducs et Pairs' to social and political pre-eminence over the rest of the nobility to have no historical justification.

As in his Mémoire touchant l'affaire de Mrs. les Princes du sang,

1. Paris, 1716, reproduced in Jean-Dominique Lassaigne's Les Assemblées de la noblesse de France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles (Paris, 1965), pp. 230-43.
2. For a discussion of the nobles' assemblies of 1716 and 1717, the last to take place in France, see Lassaigne, pp. 130 ff.

Boulainviller's main polemical principle both in his Requête de la noblesse and in his Mémoire pour la noblesse is the 'Puissance Divine' of French kings (Lassaigne, p. 233). Boulainviller perceives that the 'Ducs et Pairs' want to be considered as separate from the 'illustrious' body of the nobility but as essential in some way to the functioning of royal authority. He remarks,

cette idée, car on ne peut donner le nom de prétention à un pareil discours, attaque ouvertement l'autorité Royale; personne dans le Royaume ne peut se dire associé à la Présidence Royale, en quelque lieu qu'elle place son Trône, il n'y a que le choix et la volonté des Rois qui puissent y donner accès et y admettre ses sujets, non pour faire partie de la Présidence, mais pour leur donner conseil; non pour décider mais pour donner leurs avis. (Mémoire pour la noblesse, pp. 50-51)

Throughout this memoir Boulainviller insists on and defends the absolute and inalienable sovereign power of the French monarch, and in order to emphasize the subversive tendencies of the claims made by the 'Ducs et Pairs' he most adroitly effects a 'rapprochement' between the king and his faithful nobles (the support of 'la gloire de la Nation' whose 'diminution ... est l'affoiblissement de l'Etat'; p. 7) as the dual targets of these unlawful pretensions. Boulainviller asserts that it was never in the mind of the French kings, and certainly not in their interests, 'de laisser prendre aux Pairs un essor si prodigieux', and he concludes the memoir by cementing the highly advantageous 'alliance' between the king and his nobility: 'la noblesse, qui ne s'est jamais séparée de ces intérêts sacrez, s'y joint et s'y unit plus fortement que jamais; ainsi parlant pour elle, elle a l'avantage de parler pour son Roi, pour les Princes de sa maison, pour l'Etat entier' (p. 108).

It is interesting to note with regard to Boulainviller's present defence of absolutism, however, that when he discusses the ducal claims to a share in royal power in his Réflexions sur le mémoire des formalités nécessaires pour valider la renonciation du Roy d'Espagne,¹ although he

1. Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français, nouvelle acquisition, 7808, folios 186-201, but paginated separately (pp. 1-31).

reaches the same conclusions concerning these claims, Boulainviller is much more circumspect about the approbation his arguments seem to accord the king's absolute power.¹ Indeed, he asks himself whether he means to establish despotic authority, 'moi qui tant de fois en ai montré l'abus et les inconveniens, aussi bien que la disproportion avec les moeurs Françaises' (p. 5). Boulainviller writes that royal power, although uncontested for four centuries, does not date from 'la première institution' but was granted only 'par usage et par l'inattention de nos peres', and he concludes: 'je ne saurois entrer dans un système qui tend à les en depouiller' (p. 6).

As well as generally summoning the help of threatened monarchical absolutism to assist him in his denial of the pretensions and claims of the 'Ducs et Pairs', Boulainviller also strives to exhibit the injustice of some of the rights which they feel have become exclusively theirs during their history. Such an 'unjust' right is their power to choose the regent. Boulainviller examines the historical foundation of the present claims to this right (the conflict between the houses of Orleans and Burgundy) and concludes, 'tels sont les titres que les Pairs choisissent pour fonder leurs droits, ils puisent leurs faits dans le sein de la rebellion' (Mémoire pour la noblesse, p. 82). More interesting, however, is Boulainviller's insistence that the creation and development of the rights and effective power of the 'Ducs et Pairs' are based largely (if not wholly) upon usurpation of royal land and jurisdiction

1. Boulainviller's Réflexions were inspired by Saint-Simon's treatise, Mémoire succinct sur les formalités desquelles nécessairement la renonciation du roy d'Espagne tant pour luy que pour sa postérité doit estre revestue en France pour y estre justement et stablement validée (in Écrits inédits de Saint-Simon, edited by M.P. Faugère, 8 vols (Paris, 1880-93), I, 131-408) where Saint-Simon's hierarchical and divisive conception of the French nobility, favouring the pretensions of the 'Ducs et Pairs' and quite inimical to Boulainviller's unified vision, seeks support not only in France's later history but even in its infancy and in the very institution Boulainviller sees as the foundation of constitutional equality amongst the 'French': the annual assemblies of the 'champs de mars' (see Saint-Simon, op. cit., pp. 190-09).

(Mémoire pour la noblesse, pp. 20-37). The genesis of this usurped power was the decline in royal authority under the later Merovingians. The provincial governors of these kings, the counts and dukes, began to assume for themselves and their progeny 'tous les droits Royaux' which they had formerly exercised in the king's name only. These 'usurpations' included the sovereign right of justice in their domains, the right to wage war and make peace, to strike money and to exact homage from their vassals (Lassaigne, p. 234). And yet it is just these 'usurped' rights which Boulainviller refers to in his Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France as evidence of the independence of the French nobility, and 'Ducs et Pairs', from the control of the crown (HAG, I, 332-36).

Boulainviller's opportunism is better displayed, however, in the attitude he adopts in his Requête de la noblesse and Mémoire pour la noblesse towards 'les Princes du sang'. Boulainviller's lack of deference towards these princes has been noted already (above, pp. 37-38), yet in his campaign against the 'Ducs et Pairs' recognition of the distinct status of the royal princes is a useful expedient: 'Les Pairs regardent les Princes comme mêlez et confondus dans leur prétendu College; quand ils parlent des Pairs, les Princes sont sous-entendus. N'est-ce pas attaquer directement la Maison Royale, que de s'expliquer ainsi?' (Mémoire pour la noblesse, p. 79).

Boulainviller goes on to examine the peers' claims to two honours in particular, the 'entrée en carosse au Louvre' and the right to the 'fauteuil'. Boulainviller's attitude regarding the 'entrée au Louvre' is that it was granted by Henri IV to one peer in particular (le duc d'Epemon when he was ill) who kept this privilege until the king's death. This right had formerly been the prerogative solely of the princes, and the peers' encroachment upon and possession of the same right, after the death of Henri IV, is termed by Boulainviller 'de pure usurpation pendant un temps de minorité' (Requête de la noblesse, Lassaigne, p. 240). With

regard to the 'fauteuil', Boulainviller's conclusion can be seen to contradict explicitly the principle of unity among all the members of the second order (which includes the princes) that he had pronounced in his Mémoire touchant l'affaire de Mrs. les Princes du sang. The granting of this princely right to the peers by Henri II was simply an effect of this king's 'politesse naturelle', yet Henry 's'ecartoit à titre d'alliance, par inclination, et sans tirer à consequence, des regles de distinction établies de tous tems entre les Princes et la Noblesse' (Mémoire pour la noblesse, p. 87). In the Requête de la noblesse Boulainviller proudly proclaims that 'la noblesse une fois reconnuë n'admet point en elle de distinction, un Gentilhomme n'est pas plus Gentilhomme qu'un autre, ce qui est de caractère n'admet point le plus ou le moins' (Lassaigne, p. 242). However, Boulainviller's polemical interests against the 'Ducs et Pairs' will allow an important distinction: La noblesse ... renferme dans son sein ce qu'il y a de plus grand dans le Royaume après les Princes du sang ...' (Lassaigne, p. 241).

But although Boulainviller can react energetically, even violently at times, to the separatist pretensions of the 'Ducs et Pairs' (to the extent that he asserts 'que ceux qui s'en [de la noblesse] veulent distinguer par des préséances autrefois inconnües, des tiltres fictices et inventez par les adulateurs du pouvoir absolu, sont ses plus véritables ennemys'),¹ he recognizes in calmer moments, but still no doubt regretfully, that it is now only the power of the 'Ducs et Pairs' that can protect the second order from the increasing influence of the Third Estate. Flattering the peers by announcing that 'les Pairies nouvelles doivent jouir des mêmes droits, honneurs, et prérogatives que les anciennes' (HAG, III, 126),² Boulainviller defends the practice of royal

1. Mémoire sur la noblesse, Devyver, p. 543.

2. The last part of Boulainviller's Mémoire pour la noblesse is devoted to a refutation of this very idea (pp. 83-101).

creation of new peerages as a just way of granting to a section of the nobility at least 'le rang et la prééminence dont elle jouissoit autrefois' (HAG, III, 127). The reluctance and misgivings Boulainviller feels in making this concession are evident, yet if the privileges and distinction of the second order are to survive there is little alternative:

J'avoue néanmoins que cette distinction parmi des Personnes de même Ordre et même dignité naturelle peut être désagréable à ceux qu'elle ne favorise pas; mais, puisque pour en combattre l'usage il faudroit attaquer ou plutôt nier la plénitude de la puissance royale qui confère les dignitez et crée les nouvelles Pairies, ne vaut il pas mieux se consoler de cette distinction par la considération qu'il n'y a plus réellement que les Pairs qui puissent maintenir, à la faveur de leurs privilèges, la dignité de la Noblesse contre les entreprises des Hommes de Loi, revêtus aujourd'hui des titres de Chevaliers, Comtes, et Marquis, pendant que l'ancien Noble n'ose qu'à grand péril prendre la qualité d'Ecuyer sans le congé de l'Intendant de la Province? Il auroit été véritablement à désirer que dans le grand nombre des nouveaux Pairs il se trouvât plus d'égalité dans l'illustration de leur origine, et qu'il y eût plus de choix et de connoissance dans les Monarques qui ont voulu les élever au dessus des autres. Mais enfin dans notre usage tout dépend aujourd'hui de la volonté du Souverain. Ainsi l'on doit se borner à souhaiter qu'il se conserve parmi ceux qui sont honnrez d'une si haute dignité, dans les uns plus de mémoire de leur première qualité qui est celle de Gentilhomme et d'ancien Noble, dépouillée des chimères nouvelles de principauté, et de rang distinctif pour leurs Familles que leurs Pères ont méprisé pendant tant de siècles, et dans les autres plus de modestie et de bonne foi; afin que, ne présumant pas que les avantages de la faveur et de la fortune soient égaux ou supérieurs à ceux de la naissance, ils soient plus disposés à respecter ces derniers en ceux qui ne les possèdent que de la grace de Dieu et de l'ordre de la Nature, sans aucuns bénéfices étrangers. (HAG, III, 127-29)

Let us conclude this examination of Boulainviller's attitudes towards arguments from conquest, right and fact - in turn idealistic and pragmatic - by looking at his manipulation of the notion of law.

- IV Boulainviller's attitudes towards law (natural and positive) and a comparison between his political position and those of Hobbes and Locke.

We saw earlier (p.15) that the conquest of Gaul is for Boulainviller the foundation of the French state and its fundamental laws 'les Loix immuables qui ont pris naissance avec le Gouvernement' (Mémoire pour la noblesse, p. 11). It is this basis of government formed by conquest and

Frankish custom that supports the Franks', and later the French nobility's, rights to participate in government, to be tried by their peers and to be exempt from all burdens except military service. These rights are claimed by Boulainviller to be natural rights. In his Dissertation sur la noblesse he speaks of the nobles' 'droit naturel et foncier sur leurs sujets' and refers to their right to wage personal wars as part of the 'droit naturel de la noblesse' (Devyver, pp. 531 and 536). Property too is a natural right (above, p.20). But just as a position of superiority between different peoples, the Franks and the Gauls, cannot be justified by custom and needs instead the support of conquest, so natural rights should be based on natural law rather than social conventions. Conquest thus has to be seen as a natural law and this is just what Boulainviller (conscious, however, of the morally dubious nature of the assertion) claims to be the case (above, p.17).¹ Logically dubious too, however, is Boulainviller's pronouncement that conquest is a natural law, for how can such a law (by definition eternal) become so in time?

This appeal to prescription is evidence that Boulainviller's describing the rights of the French nobility as 'natural rights' is simply another method of argument in favour of the maintenance of noble privilege. This is made clear by Boulainviller's remark, which effectively denies prescription any justificative value whatsoever, that the basic equality amongst the Franks remained as long as benefices were for life only but that when 'le droit des fiefs' became established 'les choses ont necessairement changé de forme exterieure quoique le Droit foncier et

1. Discussing the usurpation of royal lands by the 'seigneurs bénéficiers' (one of the origins of the fiefs), Boulainviller writes that 'parce que tous les plus forts concoururent à la fois au mesme sentiment de propriété et d'indépendance, l'usurpation acquit bientôt la force d'une loy'. This cause of the establishment of the fiefs is described as 'naturelle' (Devyver, pp. 519-20). The resignation with which Boulainviller here accords force the status of a natural law is a symptom of his highly ambivalent attitude towards 'les Grands' which we have just been studying, although one might say that the 'naturalness' of this law comes not so much from the recognition of its absolute and just status as from simply the recognition of its prescriptive power.

essentiel ne soit perdu que par laps de tems'.¹ The point is confirmed when we remember that some of the 'natural rights' which Boulainviller is defending were established not by conquest but by pre-conquest Frankish custom. These 'natural rights' (such as attendance at the parlements, sharing in the power of the sovereign and the waging of personal wars) are, then nothing more than particular social and political conventions which only tradition (prescription) can support and which natural law cannot defend. Moreover, in another, broader context Boulainviller seems to doubt altogether the existence of any 'maximes de droit et d'équité fixes et invariables pour elles mêmes' and to suggest that justice only has meaning relative to particular systems of social and legal conventions (below, p. 238).

Tradition, seen as the 'right', is indeed the measure to which Boulainviller turns for an evaluation of the justice of any change or development in French history. Boulainviller's indictment of Charles Martel's tyrannical government is that it drew its authority 'ni des Loix anciennes, ni des usages introduits depuis la conquête' (MH, pp. 337-38); feudalism, 'le chef-d'oeuvre de l'esprit humain', is the result of 'un usage public' (MH, p. 532); the creation of new nobles and new peers is 'contre l'ancien usage' (HAG, II, 162-63); and the criticized seigneurial rights of the seventeenth-century nobility are defended by Boulainviller, who writes: 'pour en dire mon sentiment, ils paroissent d'une nature à être long tems tolerés, puisque les uns ^{sont} fondés sur les moeurs communes et les autres sur l'usage et les loix reçues' (État de la France, IV, 287).

It is this method of prescriptive argument which no doubt prompted Antoine Adam to write of Boulainviller's attitude to law that 'il n'y voyait qu'un ensemble de situations concrètes, rendues légitimes par

1. Réflexions sur le mémoire des formalités nécessaires pour valider la renonciation du Roy d'Espagne, p. 13.

leur durée'.¹ This is true of course when the 'situations concrètes' are favourable to noble independence and privilege, yet customs and 'usages' tending to weaken these things are, not surprisingly, criticized or at least, if only implicitly, denied any real justificatory value. Thus in his discussion of the hierarchical categories into which he proposes to put all the present noble families of France,² Boulainviller defends his placing, in the third category only, of 'les Maisons Estrangeres, sorties de veritables souverains' (p. 536) against the criticism that 'l'usage est contraire à cette Idée, veu le Rang, que les Maisons de Lorraine, et de Savoye ont occupé en France depuis deux siecles' (p. 536) by saying (and in effect denying the principle of custom itself) 'qu'à l'égard du Rang, accordé à ces Princes, on ne le peut regarder que comme un effet de la volonté absolüe des Roys, ou comme une des plus miserables consequences de l'Inattention Françoisse' (p. 537). Similarly, in his examination of the principle of 'l'exclusion des Filles de la succession à la Couronne' Boulainviller denies that it is based upon the Salic Law, 'qui n'en parle pas et qui n'est ni connue ni suivie depuis sept cens ans', but asserts rather 'que c'est l'effet d'un simple usage' started by Philippe V and continued, when it suited them, by his successors purely to serve 'les plus grands intérêts et la passion des Monarques' (HAG, II, 170-71). This custom 'a depuis passé en Loi fondamentale et incontestable,

1. Le mouvement philosophique dans la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle, (Paris, 1967), p. 145. In his essay entitled On the Original Contract, David Hume, arguing that Louis XIV's edits in favour of his natural sons had constitutional power in spite of the objections made by the princes of the blood that this contravened the nation's right, established with the succession of Hugues Capet, to choose a new king once an existing line of monarchs had disappeared, refers to Boulainviller's 'ridiculing' the notion of an original contract, especially when applied to the conquering usurper Hugues Capet, and notes that 'the Comte de Boulainvilliers ... being a man of learning, and very conversant in history, ... knew the people were never almost consulted in these revolutions and new establishments, and that time alone bestowed right and authority on what was commonly at first founded on force and violence'. David Hume, Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects, 2 vols (London, 1767), I, 509-10. Boulainviller's reasons for holding such a point of view have been discussed above, (pp.37-8).
2. Mémoire sur la noblesse, Bibliotheque municipale d'Angouleme, MS no 23, pp. 535-44.

d'autant mieux qu'ayant été contesté cent ans durant par les Rois d'Angleterre, ils ont à la fin perdu leur cause, du moins par l'événement' (HAG, II, 171). We may note, however, that Boulainviller's 'du moins par l'événement' is of course a subtle contestation of this 'Loi fondamentale et incontestable'. The ambiguous jurisprudential nature of custom is perfectly expressed, in the Réflexions sur le mémoire des formalités nécessaires pour valider la renonciation du Roy d'Espagne, in Boulainviller's comment on the power and the role of the parlement: 'il est certain que dans la regle il ne devoit pas participer au pouvoir legislatif. Toutefois il faut reconnoître que la Coutume suivie depuis tant de regnes, d'y faire enregistrer les Ordonnances fait beaucoup en sa faveur' (p. 20).

The ambiguity and opportunism evident in Boulainviller's use of custom as a means of criticising or justifying events of French history is apparent too in his attitude towards positive law. In his Requête de la noblesse Boulainviller is helped greatly in his campaign 'contre les fausses prétentions de Messieurs les Ducs et Pairs' not only by history but also by Louis XIV's edict of 1711. Discussing the new peers' practice of accumulating evidence of the rights and functions of the old peerage and of claiming that these rights and functions should now belong to them in spite, says Boulainviller amazed, of the all too evident difference in their respective status, our author remarks:

mais il ne faut point remonter si loin pour en connoître la différence: il semble que le feu Roy Louis XIV, voulant arrêter le progrès que cette équivoque dangereuse à l'Etat, insupportable à la vérité, pourroit avoir dans les Règles suivants, a pris soin par Son Edit de 1711 de décider et de régler toutes les prérogatives des nouveaux Pairs; il les a réduites dans leurs justes bornes et leur a imposé des Lois bien différentes et bien éloignées des vues imaginaires que la minorité de Vostre Majesté et la patience du Prince Régent leur ont donné occasion de renouveler. (Lassaigne, p. 232)

It is by the terms laid down in the edict of 1711 that Boulainviller wishes to circumscribe the powers and privileges of the new 'Ducs et Pairs'.

The same method of insisting on the terms of positive law (indeed, it is one of his main lines of argument), is used by Boulainviller in his Mémoire touchant l'affaire de Mrs. les Princes du sang. In this text Boulainviller discusses the criticisms of Louis XIV's edicts legitimizing his natural sons made by 'les Princes du Sang', the first of which is that these edicts represent 'une ... violation des loix fondamentales de la Monarchie' (Mémoires, I, 117). Boulainviller examines the matter and concludes:

il resulte de la consideration de ces differens exemples, et des usages de la nation Françoise dans tous les tems, que s'il n'y a point de loix positives, ou usuelles, qui favorisent les Princes, il ne s'en trouve certainement aucune, ni d'aucune espèce, qui s'oppose à la Déclaration et à l'édit que Louis XIV a donné en leur faveur, de sorte qu'il est absolument impossible de justifier dans aucuns termes la proposition qui pose que les édits et cette Déclaration renversent les loix fondamentales de la Monarchie. (Mémoires, I, 127)

Besides, Boulainviller asserts that 'l'avilissement de la dignité des Princes du sang, par la communication que Louis XIV en a faite à ses enfans naturels, ne ... paroît pas un motif ... raisonnable, pour faire révoquer une loi autentique, consacrée par l'acceptation de tous les peuples, et l'enregistrement de tous les Tribunaux' (Mémoires, I, 115).

However, in his Réflexions sur le mémoire des formalités nécessaires pour valider la renonciation du Roy d'Espagne Boulainviller's attitude towards positive law is significantly different. At the end of these reflections Boulainviller surveys the history of France to help him decide whether the king must necessarily choose his eldest son as his successor or whether he is free to choose whom he likes. Boulainviller agrees that the custom of choosing the eldest male heir was 'une habitude' that eventually became law but he maintains that 'en remontant au principe je ne pense pas que l'on puisse douter que la volonté paternelle et royale ... prevenue par une libre renonciation de l'heritier habile à succeder n'investisse avec tout le droit possible celui qui vient après lui dans l'ordre de la succession' (p. 28). Positive law is thus subservient to the principle

of royal authority. Boulainviller advocates this principle here not simply because a great deal of historical evidence, as he shows, supports it, but because (as was the case with the recognition of Charles VII's right to the throne of France rather than the king of England's) Louis XIV's declaration can only properly receive sanction and confirmation from an assembly of the States General; and a meeting of the States General is essential, Boulainviller maintains elsewhere, if France is to remedy her present ills.¹

Finally, we may note the considerable irony in Boulainviller's conception of the function of law. Seeing the good sense of the English to have obliged their sovereigns 'de leur donner des titres exacts et précis, et dont la notoriété fût incontestable, lorsqu'il s'est agi dans leur Gouvernement d'assurer la liberté des Hommes et la jouissance tranquille et assurée de leurs biens' (HAG, II, 127), Boulainviller writes:

ces objets sont si considérables dans la Société, que toute police, qui rend l'un et l'autre incertains doit moins être regardée comme une Loi civile que comme un brigandage qui expose nécessairement les plus foibles, les plus doux, et les plus pacifiques à devenir la victime des plus forts, des plus violens, et des plus méchans, s'ils ne veulent se rendre leurs flateurs ou leurs esclaves. (HAG, II, 128)

Whereas the Franks justly enjoyed all the fruits of their conquest including, and especially, their absolute domination of the Gauls, their descendants, the French nobility (for as Boulainviller's discussion makes clear, 'la liberté des Hommes et la jouissance tranquille et assurée de leurs biens' refers above all to the French nobility; HAG, II, 125-29) have become so vulnerable to the manipulations of the king and his ministers that they now need the support of law.

It would be appropriate here, in order to deepen our understanding of the nature of Boulainviller's political and historical arguments, to compare the position held by him with the political positions adopted by

1. Mémoire sur la convocation d'une assemblée d'États Généraux; Mémoires, I, 1-14.

Hobbes and Locke. Hobbes and Locke may be taken as examples of anti-theoretical political and constitutional doctrines,¹ and André Devyver mentions both philosophers in his examination of the political opinions of Boulainviller (pp. 360-62 and 367, n. 51). He sees Boulainviller as standing 'dans la lignée de Hobbes', and thus as opposed to Locke's contractual position, with regard to the nature of the basis of political power. Naturally, this view can be (and is) supported by documentary evidence, but a closer examination of the problem will reveal, as one might expect, that Boulainviller's relations to these two philosophers are somewhat more involved.

Whereas Locke believes that 'conquest is as far from setting up any Government, as demolishing an House is from building a new one in the place',² Hobbes and Boulainviller are agreed that conquest and subjugation form an adequate and defensible foundation of the state.³ Yet apart from this principle of conquest there is hardly anything to unite these last two authors.⁴ The source of their disagreement is their very differing views concerning the nature and power of the sovereign. For Hobbes the power of the sovereign is absolute (p. 107), above the law (p. 141) and indivisible (p. 173). With regard to the two races living in post-conquest Gaul Boulainviller would of course agree, as long as the sovereign was understood to be, finally, all of the Frankish nation. But as well as recognizing that even within the conquering Franks some 'magistrat supérieur' was necessary (MH, p. 130), it is not long (although it is

1. The relation of Locke's political philosophy with that of Hobbes is examined by Peter Laslett in the introduction to his edition of Locke's Two Treatises on Government (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 67-91.

2. Ibid., p. 403.

3. For Boulainviller see above, p. 17, and for Hobbes see Leviathan, Everyman edition, first published 1914, reprinted 1973 (London), p. 87.

4. Hobbes lends support to Boulainviller's discussion of the practice and principle of choosing royal successors (above, pp. 51-52) in that he says 'it is manifest, that by the Institution of monarchy, the disposing of the Successor, is always left to the Judgement and Will of the present Possessor' (Leviathan, p. 102). We did note, however, that Boulainviller's debate was not without its practical point.

difficult to be precise because he very rarely uses the term) before Boulainviller is understanding the word 'sovereign' to refer more specifically to the rulers of the Franks. Certainly by the time Boulainviller is considering Charlemagne, it is the king who is felt to be sovereign. And it is during his discussion of Charlemagne and his reign that Boulainviller gives us his essential views concerning the sovereign, which contrast fundamentally with those of Hobbes:

En effet il en faut revenir à la maxime que tout Souverain qui gouverne sans ménagement pour les droits de ses Sujets, sans attention à leur caractère, sans considération pour le bonheur public, sans prévoyance pour ceux qui lui doivent succéder, et sans desir de fonder sa gloire sur la justice de son gouvernement, ce Prince, dis-je, loin de mériter le titre d'un bon Souverain, ne peut jamais être regardé par la Postérité que comme un opresseur, c'est-à-dire, que comme un Prince qui a abusé de son pouvoir, qui, se livrant à ses passions, et n'étant bon que pour lui même, s'est séparé du Corps de la Société, pour jouir seul des avantages qui ne peuvent cesser d'être communs sans détruire politiquement cette même Société. Par conséquent il résulte que ce qui fait le caractère d'un excellent Prince, est la communication de son autorité, et d'admettre ses Sujets au partage de sa puissance. (HAG, I, 228-29)

Furthermore, Hobbes shows a great predilection for monarchical government rather than government by assembly (Leviathan, pp. 98 - 100), and he insists that 'is annexed to the Sovereignty, the whole power of prescribing the Rules, whereby every man may know, what Goods he may enjoy' (p. 93). There are many similar occasions when Hobbes's principles run directly counter to those of Boulainviller, but perhaps the most remarkable is the Englishman's discussion of the counsellors the monarch should choose.

The most able Counsellors, are they that have least hope of benefit by giving evill Counsell, and most knowledge of those things that conduce to the Peace, and Defence of the Common-wealth ... Good Counsell comes not by Lot, nor by Inheritance; and therefore there is no more reason to expect good Advice from the rich, or noble, in matter of State, than in delineating the dimensions of a fortresse ... Whereas in these parts of Europe, it hath been taken for a Right of certain persons, to have place in the highest Councell of State by Inheritance; it is derived from the Conquests of the antient Germans; wherein many absolute Lords joyning together to conquer other Nations, would not enter in to the Confederacy, without such Privileges, as might be marks of difference in time following, between their Posterity, and the Posterity of their Subjects; which Privileges being inconsistent with the Sovereign Power, by the favour of the Sovereign, they may seem to keep; but contending for them as their Right, they must needs by degrees let them go, and have at last no further honour, than adhaereth naturally to their abilities. (Leviathan, pp. 187-88)

It would seem that the only real agreement to be found between Boulainviller and Hobbes is an acceptance of the just nature of conquest. Conversely, it could be said that the respective views of Locke and Boulainviller on the subject of conquest constitute almost their only point of difference, although even here Locke is, partially at least, a considerable ally. As we have seen (above, p.53), Locke denies conquest the power to set up civil government, and indeed he denies unjust conquest any rights at all (Laslett, p. 404). Similarly, he is careful to circumscribe to a great degree the power a lawful conqueror may claim to have over the conquered (pp. 405-15). These conditions indicate a profound difference between Locke's view of the rights established by conquest and the absolute, unconditional view of Boulainviller.¹ And yet during his discussion of conquest in his Second Treatise of Government Locke, one or two details notwithstanding,² provides Boulainviller with a thorough vindication of his interpretation of the Franks' relationship with their leaders after the conquest of Gaul (i.e. a fundamental equality). Locke writes:

supposing Victory favours the right side, let us consider a Conqueror in a lawful War, and see what power he gets, and over whom.

First, 'Tis plain he gets no power by his Conquest over those that Conquered with him. They that fought on his side cannot suffer by the Conquest, but must at least be as much Freeman as they were before. And most commonly they serve upon Terms, and on Condition to share with their Leader, and enjoy a part of the Spoil, and other Advantages that attend the Conquering Sword: or at least have a part of the subdued Country bestowed upon them ... They that found Absolute Monarchy upon the Title of the Sword, make their Heroes, who are the Founders of such Monarchies, arrant Draw-can-Sirs, and forget they had any Officers and Soldiers that fought on their side in the Battles they won, or assisted them in the subduing, or shared in possessing the Countries they Master'd. (Laslett, pp. 404-5)

1. 'Ces hommes /Les serfs/ étoient non-seulement censez de condition ignoble et servile, mais ils étoient incapables de porter témoignage en justice, et rejettez du bénéfice de toutes les Loix, assujettis d'ailleurs à une obéissance exacte, et punis avec la dernière sévérité des moindres fautes'. (MH, p. 168)
2. Locke is speaking of lawful conquest (although Boulainviller's acceptance of the justice of conquest denies, of course, any distinction between lawful and unlawful conquest) and argues against the idea that the conquered may rightfully become the slaves of the conquerors.

Further comparison between Locke and Boulainvillier would show that on many points their political views are quite similar. Indeed, but for Boulainvillier's racist bias in favour of France's second order and the insistence on the right of conquest which this bias necessarily obliges him to adopt, the political thought of both men (to judge, at least from many of the comments made by our author in his histories of France) would seem almost identical. Thus like Locke, he sees the end of government as the protection of property (HAG, II, 128).¹ Locke understands property not simply as material possessions but much more generally as 'Lives, Liberties and Estates, which I call by the general name, Property' (Laslett, p. 368). Similarly, Boulainvillier claims that 'le rang et la préséance dûs à la Noblesse sur tous les Ordres de l'Etat' are the property of the second order (HAG, III, 202). The difference between the two men, however (although considering Locke's de facto examples, this difference could be seen simply as one of emphasis; Laslett, p. 307), is that property for Locke becomes so through labour (Laslett, p. 306), whereas for Boulainvillier it is a consequence of conquest (HAG, III, 202). Both men agree, however, that property belongs to the individual and is thus, without his consent, immune from the sovereign power (MH, p. 37, and Laslett, p. 378). Indeed, both Boulainvillier and Locke, given the difference in tone one might naturally expect, express themselves in a similar manner on this point:

mais que la Nation ait renoncé, ou même qu'elle ait pû renoncer à son droit sur les Terres qu'elle s'est acquise, et qu'elle a partagées dans la seule idée de donner à ce Roi /Capet/, ou à ses Successeurs, un pouvoir illimité, dont il ne lui reviendrait d'autre avantage que la gloire d'obéir, c'est non-seulement ce qui n'a pas été fait; mais qu'il étoit impossible de faire, ou d'imaginer. (MH, pp. 531-32)

It cannot be supposed that they should intend, had they a power so to do, to give to any one, or more, an absolute Arbitrary Power over their Persons and Estates, and put a force into the Magistrates hand

1. Locke declares: 'The great and chief end therefore, of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their Property' (Laslett, pp. 368-69).

to execute his unlimited Will arbitrarily upon them: This were to put themselves into a worse condition than the state of Nature, wherein they had a Liberty to defend their Right against the Injuries of others, and were upon equal terms of force to maintain it. (Laslett, p. 377)

Boulainviller and Locke are thus quite opposed to Hobbes's view of property which for him not only 'belongeth in all kinds of Common-wealth to the Sovereign Power', but indeed cannot be said to exist until a sovereign power has been created (Leviathan, pp. 130-31).

Moreover, as well as agreeing (with the exception of conquest) on the main points of political doctrine such as property, the limited authority of the monarch, and the social contract, these two authors share comparable views on more particular topics. Thus Locke's principle that the size of a man's property depended upon his being able to use it and enjoy its fruits to the full, although it contradicts Boulainviller's view that the Franks possessed all of Gaul as theirs by right of conquest, nevertheless supports our author in his recognition that for practical reasons the Franks were right to let the Gauls continue to use the land as theirs wherever there were insufficient Franks to take over (Laslett, p. 310, and MH, p. 144). Again, Locke's distinction between absolute power and arbitrary power is illustrated in the 'common practice of Martial Discipline'. The power of the general is absolute, as it needs to be, yet although he may condemn a soldier 'to Death for deserting his Post, or for not obeying the most desperate Orders', he cannot 'with all his absolute Power of Life and Death, dispose of one Farthing of that Soldiers Estate, or seize one jot of his Goods' (Laslett, pp. 379-80). Although Boulainviller will be careful to distinguish in Clovis the two distinct functions of king and general, Locke's argument is essentially his own when he discusses the episode of 'le vase de Soissons' (below, p. 74). Finally, we may note that Locke, selecting ambition, luxury, and flattery as the causes of the increase in monarchical power (teaching 'Princes to have distinct and separate interests from their People'; Laslett, p. 361), chooses

from among the principal factors which Boulainviller perceives as fostering the growth of absolutism in France with its attendant consequence, the decline of the second order.¹

This comparison between Boulainviller and the two English political theoreticians, Hobbes and Locke, may serve to illumine and summarize Boulainviller's unusual political position. Although both Hobbes and Locke base their theories upon natural law, their attitudes to the rights of the individual are quite distinct. For Hobbes, force precedes justice:

before the names of Just, and Unjust can have place, there must be some coercive Power, to compell men equally to the performance of their Covenants, by the terrour of some punishment, greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their Covenant ... and such power there is none before the erection of a Common-wealth.

(Leviathan, p. 74)

Locke, on the contrary, believes that right precedes force:

The Conquerour, 'tis true, usually, by the Force he has over them, compels them, with a Sword at their Breasts, to stoop to his Conditions, and submit to such a Government as he pleases to afford them; but the enquiry is, What right he has to do so? If it be said, they submit by their own consent; then this allows their own consent to be necessary to give the Conquerour a Title to rule over them. It remains only to be considered, whether Promises, extorted by Force, without Right, can be thought Consent, and how far they bind. To which I shall say, they bind not at all: because whatsoever another gets from me by force, I still retain the Right of, and he is obliged presently to restore.

(Laslett, pp. 410-11)

That Boulainviller should agree with Hobbes on the principle of justifiable force alone, but with Locke on practically all other points of political doctrine, is thus a succinct indication of the utter partiality of his historical arguments. These arguments, such as Boulainviller's clever and opportunist manipulations of the theses from right and from fact, together with the notion of law, are profoundly contradictory, but

1. The absolutist ambition of French kings and the flattery given to them (especially to Louis XIV) by, amongst others, historians, ministers, and 'intendants' are dominant themes throughout Boulainviller's major writings on French history (MH, EF, HAG). The pernicious influence that luxury and court society wrought upon the fortunes of the French nobility is discussed by Boulainviller in his Dissertation sur la noblesse française and Mémoire sur la noblesse (Devvyer, pp. 541 and 547-48; below, pp. 360-61), in HAG (II, 209), and in the Préface critique au journal de Saint Louis (R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle: Henry de Boulainviller, p. 91).

however illogical they may be they all have the same goal, and this goal is to protect the power, status, and privilege of the 'ancienne noblesse' as much as Boulainviller, single-handedly but ever inventively, possibly can. It is this care to make visible the dignity and rank of the nobility, and any steps taken to dispute or eclipse them, that involves Boulainviller in the often minute cataloguing of the details of the physical manifestations of this rank and precedence, which is such a striking feature in his work on French history. It is this aspect of Boulainviller's historiography, together with his cultivation of myth and legend, that will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Two Further Arguments Boulainviller Uses in Support of His Vision of French History: Noble Distinction and Myth

I Boulainviller's attention to the marks of rank and precedence

Boulainviller's careful descriptions of the marks of rank and precedence can be divided broadly into three categories. Firstly, there are his reasonably objective descriptions and analyses of such things as coats of arms, banners, and the genealogies of the noble families of all the French provinces. Secondly, Boulainviller's attention to these marks of rank and privilege is a distinctive feature of his attack upon the false pretensions of both the princes of the blood and the 'Ducs et Pairs'. Finally, Boulainviller observes the increasing manipulation of the formal proceedings of the States General and other assemblies as an expression (and sometimes the cause) of increasing royal and bourgeois power, and of the consequent decline in the influence of the nobility.

The importance which Boulainviller attached to the signs of noble distinction is readily apparent in the titles of some of his writings: De la qualité de baron, de celle de prince, de l'invention des armes et du surnom; Remarque troisième sur les armes, et sur ce que l'épée signifie en simbole; Traité sur l'origine de l'épée;¹ and finally, his Mémoire pour la construction d'un nobiliaire général.² In particular, one is struck by the great attention Boulainviller pays to the detail of the seals and charters he is describing and discussing.³ Together with this great attention to detail, there is in Boulainviller a highly critical view of those who through lack of knowledge and research falsely attribute arms and other distinguishing features to families who never possessed them. Boulainviller remarks on such a fault in André Duchesne's genealogy

1. All three treatises are to be found in the Bibliothèque municipale de Nantes, MS no. 1822.

2. Bibliothèque municipale d'Angoulême, MS no. 23, pp. 611-31.

3. As, for example, in De la qualité de baron ..., Nantes MS no. 1822, pp. 116-21.

of the house of Dreux and notes the cause: it was done 'dans la veüe de complaire au Cardinal de Richelieu qui en sortoit par les femmes'.¹

It is because such things as banners and coats of arms are the outward marks of noble distinction that Boulainviller guards them so jealously and wants to retain their exclusivity. The principal concern of Boulainviller in his Mémoire pour la construction d'un nobiliaire général is to distinguish between old and true nobility and later 'annoblis' (or, 'la noblesse de droit' and 'celle de privilège').² One of the ways Boulainviller proposes to effect and maintain such a distinction is to

faire deffences à toutes Personnes de prendre dans les Actes, ou Monuments publics aucun Tiltre, Qualité, Denomination, Qualification, Armes, Ornaments d'Armoiries, Blasons, cimiers, supports, cris de guerre, Livrée, et generally aucune des Attributions de Dignité, et de Noblesse que celles, qui seront portées dans leur propre Enregistrement. Le tout à peine de deux mille Livres d'Amande contre les contrevenans, laquelle ne pourra estre remise, ny modérée, conformément aux anciennes ordonnances. (p. 617)

It is not to be supposed that Boulainviller's attitude to such matters was extravagant for his day, for genealogy and heraldry were at that time important areas of scholarly research.³ The desire to keep the hierarchical structure of society, with the nobility securely at the top, is forcefully (and no less extravagantly) expressed in Fénelon's Télémaque. Mentor tells Idoménée: 'Réglez les conditions par la naissance. Mettez au premier rang ceux qui ont une noblesse plus ancienne et plus éclatante. Ceux qui auront le mérite et l'autorité des emplois seront assez contents de venir après ces anciennes et illustres familles, qui sont dans une si longue possession des premiers honneurs'.⁴ The way to maintain this hierarchical structure is to make a distinction in the external marks of rank:

Les personnes du premier rang après vous seront vêtues de blanc, avec une frange d'or au bas de leurs habits. Ils auront au doigt un anneau

1. Ibid., p. 126.

2. Angoulême, MS no. 23, p. 613.

3. Nathan Edelman, Attitudes of Seventeenth Century France towards the Middle Ages (New York, 1946), pp. 49-55.

4. Oeuvres de Fénelon, 3 vols (Paris, 1861), III, 72.

d'or, et au cou une médaille d'or avec votre portrait. Ceux du second rang seront vêtus de bleu; ils porteront une frange d'argent, avec l'anneau, et point de médaille; les troisièmes, de vert, sans anneau et sans frange, mais avec la médaille d'argent; les quatrièmes, d'un jaune d'aurore; les cinquièmes, d'un rouge pâle ou de rose; les sixièmes, de gris-de-lin; et les septièmes, qui seront les derniers du peuple, d'une couleur mêlée de jaune et de blanc. Voilà les habits de sept conditions différentes pour les hommes libres. Tous les esclaves seront vêtus de gris-brun.

The detail to be found in Boulainviller's writings on the nobility can at times become almost obsessive. This can be appreciated in several passages of his État de la France, as well as in his Recherches générales de la noblesse en France,² where Boulainviller is discussing the noble families of the different 'généralités'. Not infrequently Boulainviller's descriptions turn into long and involved lists of names and genealogical connections, with no apparent reason for inclusion in the text other than a desire for completeness. Such passages provoke the thought that by merely listing as many French noble houses as he can, Boulainviller is hoping to save the majority of them (poor and powerless) from total and irremediable neglect.³

A corollary of Boulainviller's jealous safeguarding of the marks of distinction belonging to the 'ancienne noblesse' is his criticism of the abusive pretensions to special marks of distinction and respect made by the 'Princes du Sang' and, particularly, the 'Ducs et Pairs'. The nobility, we have noted, is for Boulainviller an indivisible and unified body:

La noblesse est une Republique soumise à son Roi, où tous les membres qui la composent se dépouillent de tous les titres, ne s'honorant que de celui de Gentil-homme, où, au milieu des differens avantages que donnent la haute naissance, les dignitez, les alliances, et la fortune, l'égalité a toujours régné; elle en est la loi fondamentale et le lien indissoluble. (Mémoire pour la noblesse, p. 60)

1. Ibid.
2. École de Médecine de Montpellier, MS. no. 193.
3. Giving his reasons for writing his Dissertation sur la noblesse Boulainviller says: 'Enfin j'espère remédier à l'oubly où les familles tombent insensiblement, surtout dans les temps malheureux tels que ceux où j'ay vescu' (Devyver, p. 502).

'La puissance usurpée' of the 'Ducs et Pairs' naturally, therefore, incites Boulainviller to criticism, but it is fascinating to see in what order he arranges his list of the false ducal pretensions:

C'est ainsi que l'idée de participer à la Souveraineté si hautement déclarée va soumettre à l'aristocratie des Pairs, La Noblesse, tous les Etats du Royaume, Votre Majesté même et les Princes de Son Sang.

Frappez de ces illusions, ils vouloient entrer à la Bastille avec leur épée, et la voir oter aux Gentilshommes.

Ils ne veulent plus recevoir la lettre d'un gentilhomme qui ne leur donnera point le titre de Monseigneur.

Les Ducs ne doivent pas donner la main chez eux à la noblesse non titrée.

Ils ne doivent donner que des chaises à dos, et se conserver les fauteuils.

Les femmes non titrées, de quelque naissance qu'elles soient, doivent céder leurs places en tous lieux aux Duchesses.

Les filles des Ducs doivent avoir partout le pas et la place d'honneur.

Les charges de la Couronne et les grands Gouvernements leur appartiennent de droit: les charges de Capitaines des Gardes de Votre Majesté seroient avilies, si un autre qu'un Duc ou Pair les possédoit.

Il ne doit y avoir dans les Conseils d'autres chefs et d'autres Présidents que les Ducs et Pairs.

Enfin s'il survient une querelle à un Duc, c'est à l'Etat à le vanger, les querelles des Rois et Ducs seront les mêmes; et l'Etat s'armera pour vanger un Duc.

The position and abundance in this list of the points solely concerned with the peers' affected marks of social distinction (pushing firmly into second place any consideration of their usurped administrative and constitutional power) provide an excellent indication of the relative importance such matters held for Boulainviller.

It is from the same point, a concern to deny as much as possible the claims made by the princes and peers to absolute pre-eminence, that Boulainviller notes those occasions in French history when, although pre-eminent, the status of the princes and peers was accorded no special recognition. Thus, reflecting on the States General held before 1356, Boulainviller makes a number of observations

dont la première regarde le rang que les Princes du Sang Royal, tels que Philippe d'Orléans, frère du Roi Jean, et les Pairs de France, du moins les Ecclesiastiques y occupèrent. Sur quoi on peut remarquer

1. Requête de la noblesse; see Lassaigue, p. 231.

que quoique leur prééminence fut tout-à-fait établie, surtout depuis le commencement du XIV siècle, ils faisoient néanmoins Corps non seulement avec La Noblesse, mais avec les autres Deputez, qu'ils déliberoient avec eux, et qu'ils étoient chargez de la parole sans distinction particuliere, et même qu'ils s'en faisoient honneur. (HAG, II, 285)

Similarly, describing the States General held under Charles V, Boulainviller notes that in both sittings 'l'on n'y a eu presque aucun égard à la dignité de la Pairie' (HAG, II, 308). Again, examining the procedure and conclusion of the 'assemblée de notables' of 1380, Boulainviller provides a list of those present and points out such advantageous things as 'la préséance des Barons sur les Prélats' and 'la préséance de quatre Gentilshommes sur le Fils du Roi de Navarre, héritier d'une Couronne, et Chef d'une Branche de la Maison de France' (HAG, III, 10). Indeed, it is in his descriptions of the sittings of the various assemblies (usually of the States General) that Boulainviller exhibits most graphically his understanding of the practical importance of paying attention to the outward signs of rank and precedence.

Frequently during his narration of the history of the French parlements, Boulainviller indulges in the apparently intrusive practice of giving detailed lists of those who were present at these assemblies and in what order they signed any documents or declarations issuing forth from these sessions.¹ Our author recognizes the danger of tedium such a practice might bring to his narrative but nonetheless he sees his lists as perfectly defensible:

On pourra s'ennuyer de ce que je répète perpétuellement l'ordre des séances à toute occasion; cependant je le crois d'autant plus nécessaire, que sans cela on ne sauroit prendre une juste idée du rang dû à chacun des Membres de l'Etat. Il paroît même évident que d'une part la confusion qui regne aujourd'hui, et de l'autre l'usurpation que la Magistrature a faite de précéder la Noblesse, ne vient que de la négligence que l'on a eue de faire assez peu d'attention aux exemples passez. (HAG, III, 17)

1. HAG, II, 29-30, 35-36, 58, 67.

He continues: 'Or il est certain que l'on ne trouve aucun ancien Lit de Justice, où les rangs soyent si exactement exprimez et si justement distribuez qu'en celui ci [of December 1407], et qu'il n'y a par conséquent aucun qui dût plus convenablement servir de règle' (Ibid.) There follow Boulainviller's observations, in particular 'que les Princes et la haute Noblesse y ~~tiennent~~^{tiennent} leur rang naturel au dessus du Clergé'; that 'les Chambellans du Roi, qui ont proprement été la pépinière des Favoris, les Chevaliers, et la Noblesse du second Ordre' all held the same rank (below that of the princes, high nobility, clergy and presidents of the Parlement, but above that of 'les Conseillers de tous les diférens Tribunaux'); and that 'nous ne voyons pas ici de rang pour les Annoblis, quoiqu'il y en eût dès-lors une infinité qui avoient acheté le privilège à prix d'argent'. We may note here the advantage Boulainviller obtains from recognizing an effective split in the ranks of the nobility, in spite of his protestations 'que le second Ordre ne signifie pas ici une infériorité de naissance, mais bien celle des richesses, des possessions, ou des emplois, qui ont de tout tems distingué les Hommes' (HAG, III, 17-19).

Boulainviller's choosing the Lit de Justice of 1407 as an acceptable rule with which to compare later assemblies is significant because it is precisely the lack of rule or system (which, in his Réflexions sur le mémoire des formalités nécessaires pour valider la renonciation du Roy d'Espagne, p. 19, Boulainviller noted as the gravest of injustices and the root cause of the nobility's sorry plight) that allows such people as 'les Gens de robe' to profit from any favourable circumstances at the expense, of course, of the nobility (HAG, III, 132-33). The profit won is that of precedence, of occupying a more favoured seat. The advantages to be gained from mere position are not inconsiderable, as Boulainviller's narration of the States General of 1440, held at Orleans, amply exemplifies: 'L'Assemblée s'étant formée dans un lieu particulier de la ville ... et

les Princes ayant été introduits dans une salle disposée pour la séance, le Roi y vint prendre sa place. Les Princes demeurèrent près de sa personne; ce qui, observé ici pour la première fois, semble être le fondement du rang distingué qu'ils se sont depuis attribué' (HAG, III, 87). It is Boulainviller's preoccupation with who sits where (and, moreover, on what sort of chair) that gives to some of his descriptions of the various assemblies what one might call a theatrical quality. Indeed, in his comments on the provincial Estates of Brittany he goes so far as to call the chamber where they meet 'un théâtre' (État de la France, IV, 141).¹

The most remarkable example of Boulainviller's attention to 'theatrical' detail in his descriptions of the sittings of assemblies is his narration of the States General held during the reign of Louis XI at Tours in 1467. Basing his account on Du Tillet,² Boulainviller writes:

on connoit que l'étendue de la salle fut divisée en trois espaces séparés par des cloisons de bois de demie hauteur revêtues de tapis, selon la dignité du lieu: que le premier espace plus élevé que le reste, et où l'on montoit par trois degrés qui répondoient au second parquet, fut occupé par le Roi qui y entra du dehors par une porte faite exprès pour ne point traverser la salle: qu'il y étoit assis dans un fauteuil de velours élevé de trois degrés, et sous un dais de même étoffe brodée de Fleurs de Lis d'or, ayant un manteau fourré des plus belles zibelines avec un chapeau de velours noir relevé d'une plume d'or de Chipre: et qu'à sa droite et à sa gauche à la distance de sept à huit piez il y avoit deux chaises couvertes de drap d'or, dont celle de la droite étoit remplie par le Cardinal Balue à la grande honte du Roi et de la Nation; et que celle de la gauche fut occupée par le Roi de Sicile, à qui son âge, et sa dignité Royale, et sa proximité de la Couronne étant Oncle du Roi, auroient sans doute donné le premier rang sous un autre Maître. A côté de la chaise du Roi étoient debout, à la droite le Prince de Navarre Comte de Foix, et à la gauche les Comtes de Nevers et

1. Consider too the following, 'la Ceremonie de la seance des Etats est qu'en la salle ou elle se tient y a un Teatre haut élevé auquel on monte par un degré ou le Roy est assis ... a l'entrée de ce Theatre les quatre secretares d'Etat. En l'espace bien au dessus [sic] du Theatre les Deputez des trois ordres ez Bancs et sieges qui leur sont assignez par le maitre des ceremonies ...'; in Boulainviller's Origine des parlements de France et des états généraux, justifiée par ordre des temps depuis la première et seconde races de nos roys, et jusqu'où s'étend leur pouvoir, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS no. 2888, p. 70.
2. Jean Du Tillet, Recueil des roys de France (Paris, 1580), pp. 412-15.

d'Eu. Aux piez du Roi et sur l'un des gradins de son Trône du côté droit étoit assis le Prince de Piémont encore jeune; et enfin derrière le Roi de Sicile sur un tabouret fort bas fut porté le Comte de Dunois Grand-Chambellan à cause de ses goutes ... (HAG, III, 188-90)

Boulainviller continues in like vein for another seven pages.

The detail and length of this description are not intended simply to give colour and interest to Boulainviller's often very technical discussions of French constitutional history. The 'staging' of these particular States General represents a milestone in the history of French monarchical absolutism. Louis XIII and Louis XIV may have been much more emphatic in their denial of others' rights and privileges, 'mais, comme Louis XI ne faisoit encore qu'entamer le grand ouvrage du Despotisme, il ne pouvoit aller que pié à pié: c'est ce qui doit faire regarder le succès de cette Assemblée des Etats du Royaume comme l'un des plus remarquables traits de sa politique' (HAG, III, 199). Profiting from the ever present 'légèreté des esprits ausquels il avoit affaire', the king proposed a meeting of the States General saying that he required their advice and assistance in certain matters, especially the collection of taxation. And he added,

que, pour éviter tout embarras, on négligeroit le cérémonial, hors ce qui regardoit la dignité Royale, qui devoit paroître avec tout son éclat dans une telle Assemblée: que les Princes et les Grands Officiers y tiendroient les rangs dus à leur naissance et à leurs Charges: et que, pour faire connoître à la Noblesse l'estime et l'amitié qu'il avoit pour elle, il l'aprocheroit aussi près de son Trône que les Princes mêmes et que les Grands Officiers. (HAG, III, 200-01)

Boulainviller's full description of the staging of Louis's States General can now be appreciated as the necessary preliminary to his reflections on how the king manipulated, or 'stage-managed', them to his own advantage, for following on from this presentation of Louis XI's plans concerning the formal arrangement of the Estates Boulainviller writes:

C'est en effet ce qu'il exécuta par le moyen et par la disposition des parquets, dont Pierre d'Oriole fut l'inventeur. Mais il ne disoit pas alors qu'il y placeroit des Députés des Villes avec sa Noblesse; ou qu'il feroit occuper l'espace vide derrière le Conétable et le Chancelier par l'égout de la Magistrature du Royaume dont il avoit composé son Conseil; ni pareillement qu'il aimeroit mieux voir remplir le plat-fond d'entre les bancs des Seigneurs du Sang et des Evêques, par les Secrétaires

du Roi quoiqu'ils n'eussent encore d'autres privilèges que l'exemption de la Taille, que par ces Nobles et braves Guerriers qui n'avoient reconquis la France et chassé les Anglois depuis vingt ans, que pour lui préparer le Trône où il brilloit avec tant de grandeur, et dont il aprochoit par préférence ceux qui l'avoient pensé renverser par l'iniquité de leurs Conseils et les ruses de leur chicane.

(HAG, III, 201-02)

The detailed information with which Boulainviller provides his readers concerning those who were present at certain assemblies, where they sat, and in what order they may have been signatories to state documents can be seen, therefore, as a sensitive barometer which registers all the small steps in the fall of the nobility's influence and standing. The broad sweep of this development is indicated, again with reference to Louis XI.

Louis XI a prétendu ... distinguer la Noblesse en la traitant plus mal que le Roi d'Angleterre en Conquéran irrité ne l'avoit fait aux Etats convoquez à Paris en 1420 et 1421 ... On sépara d'abord les Seigneurs du Sang, qui sous Philippe-le-Bel et sous Charle-le-Sage s'étoient tenus honnorez non seulement d'une séance égale, mais de se trouver chargez de la députation du Corps; il la fit ensuite précéder par son Conseil; et enfin lui joignit dans le même parquet les Députez du Tiers Etat.

(HAG, III, 207)

As with the more personal marks of noble distinction, we should not suppose that Boulainviller's preoccupation with the staging of assemblies was unique to him. Nathan Edelman cites the interesting case of the 'assemblée des notables' held at Rouen in 1617, where

the worthy magistrates argued that they had the right to be seated behind the clergy, in front of the nobility: they had sovereign jurisdiction over the latter, they maintained. The nobility was as furious as might be expected, but de Luynes, who felt that he had better be cautious, satisfied the magistrates by placing them next to the clergy; the nobles, whom he tried to placate by placing them behind the others but on both sides of the king, made sure to protest that such an arrangement was exceptional and would not hold at official meetings of the States General.

Another weapon in Boulainviller's armoury of arguments to defend the fading glory of the second order, and which again was the common property of all those writing in support of the aristocratic cause, was the myth

1. Edelman, op. cit., p. 51.

of the Frankish conquest of Gaul.¹ We have referred to this conquest already in our examination of Boulainviller's use of and attitude towards conquest as a justifiable foundation of civil society. It would be profitable now to explore more fully Boulainviller's presentation of the Frankish conquest of Gaul and to examine other instances of his mythologizing certain periods or characters in French history.

II The myth of the Frankish conquest of Gaul

To help him in his ideological struggle against all those who would challenge the position and power of the nobility as a united ruling class (the Third Estate, the 'Ducs et Pairs', and of course the king), Boulainviller makes full use of the fiction of the Frankish conquest of Gaul. Briefly, according to this legend, Gaul was invaded by the Franks who completely subjugated all its inhabitants and reigned over them as their noble masters. Although the king was recognized as the 'magistrat supérieur', the form of government of France under the Franks was collective and aristocratic. It was only right therefore, claimed the supporters of the myth from the late sixteenth century onwards, that the French 'noblesse d'épée', who were of course the descendants of these valiant Franks, should play an active and full part in the government of their country.

The historical problem in arguing in favour of the Frankish conquest of Gaul is this: to maintain such an interested view of things, 'il importe ... que la période où se déroulent les événements cruciaux demeure enfouie dans un passé nébuleux, un trop grand éclairage ne pouvant que dissiper l'illusion bénéfique' (Devyver, p. 112). And yet, precisely because knowledge of the events is so vague, contrary interpretations are given room to flourish. As a critical yet biased historian, Boulainviller was only

1. For a discussion of the myth of the Germanic origins of the French, its rise and development and the replies it provoked, see Devyver, pp. 109-54.

too aware of the difficulty, and writes: 'quoique nous nous propositions tous la vérité de l'Histoire et la même matière, nos vues sont si différentes que nous nous rencontrerons rarement dans la manière de peindre les mêmes faits; leur réalité n'empêchant pas qu'ils ne soient susceptibles de coloris et de positions aussi différentes que les fins que nous nous proposons' (MH, p. 72). Devyver thinks that

l'insistance de Boulainvilliers sur ce point prouve que son germanisme fut, au début, un système parfaitement construit, dû à un homme qui, connaissant fort bien l'histoire de son pays, avait choisi de la voir sous l'angle particulier du destin de la noblesse ... nous pensons qu'avec les années, Boulainvilliers se laissa prendre à l'illusion que ses théories avaient suscitée. Il fut trop désireux de rendre la fierté de ses origines à son ordre, de trouver quelque chose qui distinguât inmanquablement ce dernier d'une bourgeoisie en pleine ascension, pour ne pas finir par croire lui-même que les choses s'étaient passées comme il les décrivait. (p. 114)

Devyver's interpretation may be correct but it does ignore the important tensions and contradictions within Boulainviller's historical argument concerning the Frankish conquest of Gaul. Boulainviller needed and used the myth of the conquest of Gaul as the basis for his whole interpretation of the subsequent history of France but for such a skilful historian, whose methodology to a large degree consisted in subtle re-interpretation of accepted historical fact and evidence, there are clearly too many instances where fact conflicts with theory (and where the barbarous nature of the Franks offends even his sympathy towards them) for our author to come to believe in the reality of his historical system.

The inadequacy for Boulainviller of the myth of the Frankish conquest of Gaul as a successful justification of his view of French history may be perceived in the fact that in certain circumstances Boulainviller turns for support to another, more edifying myth, the myth of Charlemagne. It is interesting to note that whereas Devyver sees the historical work of Boulainviller as the fruit of a developing ideology, M. Duméril, in his treatment of the attitude of eighteenth-century writers towards Charlemagne,¹

1. M. Duméril, 'La légende politique de Charlemagne au XVIII^e siècle', in Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences (Toulouse, 1878), pp. 145-77.

sees Boulainviller as 'le premier auteur dans l'ordre des dates de la légende politique de Charlemagne' (p. 149). It is not the warrior hero of medieval poetry who figures in these later myths, but Charlemagne the legislator of France, interpreted according to the political vision of each writer. Although for Boulainviller the myth of Charlemagne is, finally, as fragile as his myth of the Frankish conquest of Gaul, it raises fewer historical and moral problems and, unlike the myth of conquest, fits the logic of his argument concerning the development of French history.

Let us now consider these myths in the work of Boulainviller in more detail.

The importance of the Frankish conquest of Gaul to the whole of Boulainviller's interpretation of the history of France has been discussed above (pp. 15-18). The three things Boulainviller particularly desires to establish, using the fiction of the Frankish conquest, are firstly the absolute nature of the distinction between conquerors and conquered, secondly the fundamental freedom and equality that existed amongst the Franks themselves, and finally the position of the kings with regard to the rest of the Franks.

The absolute distinction that Boulainviller makes between the Gauls and their conquerors, the Franks, has already been noted and examined in our discussion of Boulainviller's attitudes towards the idea of conquest as a justifiable foundation of government (above, p.18).

As regards the fundamental freedom and equality amongst the Franks and their relations with their king, these are really the same thing viewed from two different but complementary points of view. Boulainviller wishes us to understand that although the Franks did have rulers (and he points out that some form of 'magistrat supérieur' is absolutely necessary in all societies) these rulers did not enjoy arbitrary or

despotic powers, and could not because they were elected. Boulainviller makes this quite clear:

Dans l'origine, les Francois étoient tous libres et parfaitement égaux et indépendans, soit en général, soit en particulier. Il est évident qu'ils n'ont combattu si long-tems contre les Romains et contre les Barbares qu'ils attaquoient, que pour s'assurer cette liberté, le plus cher de tous les biens. C'est ainsi que tous les Historiens et tous les autres en parlent, et cela n'est contredit d'aucun. Ils avoient cependant des Rois: mais si notre idée présente nous en fait regarder la dignité et la puissance comme incompatibles avec la liberté des particuliers, il n'en étoit pas de même pour lors; les Rois François n'étoient à proprement parler que des Magistrats Civils, choisis et nommez par Cantons pour juger les différens des particuliers: de sorte qu'encore qu'il y ait lieu de soutenir que l'Emploi en étoit successif, ou du moins attaché à une certaine famille, on ne laisse pas de voir par les exemples de Merouée et de Childeric son Fils, que le peuple jouissoit d'une liberté effective dans le choix personnel de ses Rois. (MH, p. 128)

Moreover, as befits a people whose genius, Boulainviller declares, was entirely military and who were constantly waging war, the Mayor of the Palace or the General of the Army, an office distinct from that of king, was seen to be the more important function in the political organisation of the Franks. This distinction between king and mayor was kept right until the end of the Merovingian dynasty. Boulainviller insists that the kings of the Franks enjoyed no despotic powers and that the Franks themselves were completely free (MH, pp. 129-30). He supports this conclusion by asserting, rather than by proving historically, that in spite of the respect and obedience which all the Franks properly owed the king as head of state, they had such a degree of control over their own persons and property that even the Gauls living on their land were their subjects and not the subjects of the king. Although the king, of course, possessed the Gauls living on his own estates as his personal subjects, all the rest were attached to the state only in as much as their Frankish masters were members of it.¹

But the clearest mark of the freedom of the Franks was their right

1. In his Dissertation sur la noblesse, however, Boulainviller grants the king a greater authority than this over the serfs of other Franks; Devyver, p. 514.

to be tried for their crimes by their peers. Lest insistence on this freedom incline one to consider the state of Gaul after the conquest as a state of anarchy, Boulainviller emphasizes that the Franks did submit to the authority of the nation assembled as a whole, the superior power 'sans laquelle', he asserts, 'nulle police extérieure ou intérieure ne sauroit subsister' (MH, p. 151). Boulainviller underlines the importance of these assemblies by remarking that of all the customs of the Franks 'celui qui contribua le plus à maintenir la Liberté publique, fut celui des Assemblées générales, et ce qui est singulier pour confondre la fausse politique, qui rejette absolument le concours de la Noblesse dans l'administration de notre Monarchie, c'est que rien n'a porté si haut la gloire et la puissance des Rois que l'usage des Assemblées' (MH, p. 151).

An absolute racial, social, and political distinction between Gauls and Franks; each Frank essentially free; the necessary but limited authority of the Frankish kings: this, fundamentally, is the myth as Boulainviller presents it. But in presenting this myth of the Frankish conquest of Gaul Boulainviller encounters many problems, historical, moral, and logical, which expose its a priori basis and which would no doubt prevent him from eventually coming to believe in it as historical fact.

The most important problems Boulainviller encounters in setting up the myth as the basis for his French state are historical. The essence of this historical problem can be seen in the figure of Clovis. In the Mémoires historiques Boulainviller bemoans the fact that historians see the conquest of Gaul as the act of only one man, Clovis, and forget that this enterprise was undertaken by the Franks as a whole who had elected Clovis as the general of their army for this specific purpose (MH, p. 127).

Having shown the original freedom of the Franks and that it was they who by conquest were the only true nobles in Gaul, Boulainviller turns to

discuss the equal division of booty and land amongst them as another example of their essential equality with one another. However, Boulainviller comes up against an ultimately indigestible historical fact, the vase of Soissons. Clovis wanted this vase above his portion of booty in order to give it to a bishop as a means of winning his political support. A soldier refused to allow Clovis this extra share and Clovis, some time later, had him killed. Boulainviller is only too conscious of his dilemma: 'si d'une part on y trouve un exemple de l'ancienne liberté des Francs et de l'étendue de leur crédit, puisque l'opposition d'un seul mettoit obstacle à la volonté du Roi, on y trouve aussi-tôt après une entreprise contre le droit de cette liberté' (MH, p. 141). Boulainviller wriggles out of this trap by stressing the two capacities which had been united in Clovis: king and general. As king, that is supreme magistrate, Clovis had to acquiesce to the soldier's refusal because it was based on the right of equal sharing. But as general he could not forget this insult to his authority and had the man killed on another occasion.

However, Boulainviller tells us that, basing himself on the report of this incident given in Gregory of Tours, the Abbé de Valois insists that Clovis did exercise a despotic authority,¹ or that if he did not, at least he was thought to have done so by the people of Gregory's day. This, the abbé contends, shows that by the sixth century it was thought that kings could enjoy absolute power. Boulainviller argues against this opinion by saying that the soldier's rude behaviour towards Clovis proves that no such idea of the king's absolute power existed amongst the Franks and that if Clovis had been an absolute ruler it is absurd to think he would have deferred to a simple soldier. As for what Gregory and his contemporaries thought, Boulainviller maintains that Gregory's account is full of the violence of the Frankish kings who broke 'les règles du Gouvernement'

1. Adrien de Valois, Gesta veterum Francorum, 3 vols (Paris, 1646 and 1658), I, 241 and 316, and Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks, translated by Lewis Thorpe (Penguin Books, 1974), p. 140.

whenever they could. Clovis's deference to the soldier in this case only proves that the soldier was in the right (HAG, I, 51-54).

Having bravely defended his position, however, Boulainviller succumbs to the pressure of facts when he is discussing the Frankish system of justice, and admits that Clovis acted despotically with regard to the 'Salien de Soissons' and to the other 'kings' of the Franks whom he destroyed in order to govern alone. Indeed, had his reign continued, the Franks would have been as subservient to Clovis as were the Gauls. The Franks were only saved by Clovis's timely death and by a succession of weak, imbecilic, or young kings, unable to challenge 'le droit commun'.¹

There are several other occasions when historical fact threatens to upset Boulainviller's mythical and idyllic picture of the free and independent Franks, such as his recognition of the natural penchant of the Frankish kings for increasing their authority at the expense of their 'inferiors', and his reproach of the Franks' docility and inattention to matters of government as they scrambled after the offices of Duke and Count, heedless of the change this was bringing to 'l'ancienne Discipline' (below, p.143).² But perhaps the more interesting examples of the a priori nature of his argument are those occasions when Boulainviller is discussing institutions and customs which are very important to the support of his vision of Frankish society but which have left little or no evidence. This is certainly the case in his description of the general assemblies at the Champ de Mars. His search for evidence has proved almost fruitless and

1. This submission to the weight of historical fact is noted too by one of Boulainviller's critics, Damiens de Gomicourt, in his work refuting Boulainviller's portrayal of the Merovingian constitution, entitled Dissertation historique et critique pour servir à l'histoire du premier temps de la monarchie française. He writes: 'Au reste, je ne vois pas pourquoi M. de Boulainvilliers a voulu contester l'autorité de Clovis à l'occasion du Vase de Soissons, puisque dans un autre endroit il convient qu'elle fut si grande, que sans sa mort il auroit réduit tous les Francs à une espèce de servitude, ainsi que les Gaulois'; see his Mélanges historiques et critiques contenant diverses pièces relatives à l'histoire de France, 2 vols. (Amsterdam and Paris, 1768), I, 43.
2. We may note too that in De l'Esprit des lois Montesquieu says that Boulainviller had not proved that the Franks had completely conquered and subjugated Gaul and its inhabitants (Œuvres complètes, edited by A. Masson, 3 vols (Paris, 1950-55), I (part 2), 302).

yet it is indispensable for Boulainviller's whole argument that his reader should understand that these assemblies were attended by all the Franks, not just their representatives, and that all voted as they saw fit. He decides to base his account on what little evidence there is and on his own description of the Franks' social and political organisation (MH, p. 198). Similarly, when discussing the nature of the 'assessors' at their trials, Boulainviller realizes that there is practically no evidence concerning this at all. However, he states that each party chose its own assessor and that a third was chosen by the magistrate. Apart from arguing that this would have been the most convenient and least contentious practice, Boulainviller reasons that had the two parties not chosen their own assessor they would have been no better off than the subservient Gauls because, like them, they would have received their justice from a sovereign master (MH, p. 189).

The Franks themselves do not always give Boulainviller the support he would have wished for in maintaining his picture of their society and in justifying its basis. The cause of this tension is their behaviour which contrasts so markedly not only with Boulainviller's contemporaries' ideas of suitable conduct but also at times with his own.¹ This is particularly true in the area of judicial practice where the Franks punished murder by fines, theft by death, and gave no right of appeal. Boulainviller feels acutely the condemnation this apparent barbarousness may bring upon the Franks but he defends them as best he can by arguing, quite correctly, that in this society different conditions and attitudes prevailed and that judging their practices from a modern point of view is therefore incorrect. The Franks' practice of waging war amongst themselves

1. Discussing Boulainviller's État de la France in 1729, the Journal littéraire (vol. XIV, pp. 1-35) remarks: 'l'Histoire des Descendants de Clovis qui suit cet Etat de la Nation Française est si sèche, si embarrassée, et si rebutante par l'horrible caractère de presque tous ceux qu'elle nous dépeint, Rois, Grands, et Saints canonisés même, que nous renvoyons avec plaisir au Livre même ceux qui voudront voir de quelle manière Mr. de Boulainvilliers l'a traitée'.

is a similar instance of their savage customs upsetting modern sensibility, and Boulainviller recognizes that, whatever he may say in praise of their political and social systems, nothing can take away the horror one may feel at the inhumanity witnessed in their personal wars (MH, p. 196).¹

The problem of the moral status of the Franks and their behaviour and the need Boulainviller feels to try and justify their violence lead him into logical difficulties involving his principle of the right of conquest or force. If violence is a legitimate albeit regrettable principle, as Boulainviller accepts it to be, then it needs no further justification and any attempt to justify what is founded on violence by arguments based on more humanitarian interests naturally tends to weaken violence as a sufficient reason. But this is just what happens when Boulainviller, using comparison between the Roman and the Frankish administrations of Gaul to glorify the latter, maintains that despite the wretched condition of the serfs under the Franks they were better off than under the Romans (MH, p. 168). Similarly, when Boulainviller exhibits the flexible nature of the Franks who allowed the Gauls to pay their taxes as was most convenient to them, the debtors, he says: 'Le tribut pécuniaire que levoient les François étoit une commutation du tribut réel; et dans le fond n'étoit-il pas juste que le débiteur se pût soulager de la manière qui lui convenoit le mieux? Les François faisoient-ils tort à leurs sujets de leur accorder le droit de choisir la nature du payement qu'ils étoient obligés de leur faire?' (MH, p. 184). Indeed Frankish domination, Boulainviller argues, was so different from the Roman and so much more lenient that their neighbours rushed to submit themselves to their government 'se trouvant plus heureux dans cet esclavage nouveau, qu'/ils/ n'avoient été dans la jouissance de la fausse liberté dont les Romains les avoient flattez' (MH, p.139).

Boulainviller, however, is not unaware of the logical inconsistency of

1. Boulainviller's attitudes towards the manners and customs of the Franks are touched on later in chapter three (p.111) and are examined more fully in chapter four (pp.134-41).

trying to soften the harsh principle of violence. In his Justification de la naissance légitime de Bernard Roy d'Italie, Petit-fils de Charlemagne of 1717 (place of publication not indicated), Boulainviller shows that the modern opinion of Bernard's illegitimacy rests on the authority of only one contemporary author, Thegan, who was Louis the Pious's chaplain, and Louis it was who had Bernard's eyes put out for rebelling against him. Thegan was out to turn Louis into a saint and for this needed to show that Bernard's act of rebellion was that of an ungrateful bastard. Apart from refuting Thegan by amassing overwhelming contemporary opinion and evidence against him, Boulainviller says that Thegan's attempt to reduce the horror of Louis's punishment of Bernard is already saying too much, 'puisque si veritablement Bernard n'eut point esté legitime, il [Louis] auroit eü tort de le pleurer et d'expier sa mort après l'avoir justement puny' (p. 8).¹

Once Boulainviller has set up his myth of the Frankish conquest of Gaul then, indeed, in the very act of establishing it, he encounters problems of fact and logic which show up the essentially unhistorical, a priori nature of his whole method and to say the least incline one to doubt the historicity of the events as he presents them. However, a later period of French history, the reign of Charlemagne, will enable Boulainviller, in the right circumstances, to fashion another, more glorious and edifying myth to prove his theories of the equality amongst the French nobility, their independence, and their right to take part in the government of France.

III The legends of Charlemagne and Charles VII

The mythical representations of the reign of Charlemagne as the new

1. Apart from the logical difficulties Boulainviller introduces into his argument of conquest by his awareness that it is an unsavoury principle to accept as the basis of the French state, and in particular of the French nobility, we have seen that the argument from force is itself, in principle as well as practice, discordant with Boulainviller's whole scheme of the history of France (pp. 21-6).

golden age of French history are to be found in Boulainviller's reflections on the history of France at the end of his Mémoires historiques and especially in his second of fourteen letters discussing the development of the French parlements. The uniqueness of Charlemagne is immediately apparent. His reign, according to Boulainviller, is the only period of French history when king and people have been equally happy and when all have submitted their personal interest to that of the state. And Charlemagne, a truly ambitious and warlike leader, is the exception to the rule that warlike and ambitious monarchs rarely concern themselves with the strict observance of justice. Boulainviller recounts the impression that France under Charlemagne produced upon foreign ambassadors, 'They saw the French as a nation of kings obeyed by all the other nations of Europe and who in turn obeyed their own leader, the king of kings. Yet the French and their king were all free and all desired the same thing, sacrificing their own interests to the commonwealth (HAG, I, 220-21).

Such general praise is all to the good but Boulainviller reveals his particular interest in Charlemagne when he assures his reader that the real praise of Charlemagne is to be found in the history of France, 'ou plutot dans ce qu'il a fait pour rétablir la Nation Françoisse dans ses véritables, premiers, et légitimes Droits' (HAG, I, 221). Charlemagne is important to Boulainviller because, knowing 'le caractère et la portée de sa Nation' and acting out of paternal love for his subjects (HAG, I, 116), he re-established the general assemblies, or parlements, with all their former powers and thus restored the French nobility to their rightful and original function of sharing in the government of the nation.

After demonstrating the new vigour accorded the parlements by restoring them to their former powers, in particular control over justice, finance, and defence, Boulainviller emphasizes that these powers were not something new bestowed upon the parlements by Charlemagne merely out of 'generosity' or a feeling of gratitude to the French for services rendered. On the

contrary, they represented 'la restitution d'un droit naturel et incontestable violemment usurpé par ses Prédécesseurs' (HAG, I, 226). Boulainviller explains this more fully, pointing out that Charlemagne's political reform was just because it was founded on the old customs and rights of the French nobility:

Il considéra premièrement, ce qu'aucun de nos Rois depuis lui n'a jamais bien voulu comprendre, que les François étoient originairement un Peuple libre, autant par son caractère naturel, que par son droit primitif qu'il avoit de choisir ses Princes, et de concourir avec eux dans l'administration du gouvernement: concours, qui servoit nécessairement de conseil aux Rois, et de motif à la Nation entière pour faire réussir les entreprises résolues d'un commun consentement. Ainsi ce grand Prince conçut que le gouvernement despotique et arbitraire, tel que son Ayeul Charle-Martel avoit voulu l'établir, étant absolument contraire au génie de la Nation et à son droit certain et évident, il étoit impossible qu'il fût durable: ce qui le détermina à faire aux François la justice qui leur étoit due, en remettant sur pié l'ancienne forme du gouvernement. (HAG, I, 221-22)

In this way Charlemagne reaffirms the justice of the constitution of Frankish Gaul, established at the time of the conquest, and highlights the illegitimacy of any development away from this original constitution, especially in the form of royal despotism.

Such an interested examination of Charlemagne's re-establishment of the parlements would naturally lead one to treat Boulainviller's account with considerable circumspection. However, in his treatments of Charlemagne at the end of the Mémoires historiques and in his Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France Boulainviller seems deliberately to leave the realm of the historical and to indulge in the creation of a mythical golden age in French history in order to vindicate his conception of the proper nature of the French state.

The most striking evidence of Boulainviller's indulgence in myth is the exaggerated way he describes the reign and the character of Charlemagne. Indeed the whole of his second letter on the parlements, some forty pages long, rarely falls below the intensity of a sustained panegyric.¹

1. Consider the following: 'Il est vrai que Charlemagne ignoroit l'art de regner par la division, par la force, et par la violence, et qu'il ne

Boulainviller portrays the idyllic nature of French society under Charlemagne when he considers the misgivings the French may have had with regard to Charlemagne's constant warring against his neighbours:

Ils avoient lieu cependant de former quelques soupçons au sujet des nouvelles conquêtes qu'il faisoit chaque année: l'exemple de son Ayeul qui s'étoit rendu formidable par ses conquêtes, et qui s'étoit servi de son extrême puissance pour violer impunément toutes les Loix du Royaume, cet exemple, dis-je, pouvoit les inquiéter; mais remplis de confiance et d'estime pour la vertu de leur Souverain, ils ne craignirent rien de sa part, comme réciproquement il n'appréhenda rien de la leur. Ce fut cette connoissance de la fidélité des François pour leur Roi et de l'affection singulière qu'ils avoient pour sa personne, qui déterminâ ce grand Prince à rendre aux Assemblées de la Nation tout le pouvoir légitime qui leur appartenoit. (HAG, I, 219)

It is interesting in this respect to compare Boulainviller's praise of Charlemagne at the end of his Mémoires historiques with that found in the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France. In the former work Boulainviller describes the magnificence and justice of Charlemagne and his love for his people but remains sufficiently detached to see that Charlemagne's bloody crusades against the Saxons must be accepted as unfortunate mistakes, the result of his stubborn prejudice. In the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France, however, this reservation disappears, indeed the Saxons by name are not mentioned, and Boulainviller confidently asserts that Charlemagne's conquests served both Religion and 'le bonheur des Peuples', the newly conquered seeking to please their conquerors and the French sharing in the glory and fruits of these conquests.

savoit point ravir les biens de ses Sujets, ni tenir leurs coeurs et leurs esprits dans la crainte et l'assujétissement, pour regner avec plus de faste et de hauteur. Il est vrai encore qu'il fondeoit sa gloire sur une réputation justement méritée, et non pas sur l'incommensurable superbe, qui depuis lui a fait toute la grandeur de quelques Rois. Il pensoit de plus qu'un Souverain ne pouvoit pas être véritablement grand, ni remplir ses devoirs, sans connoissance et sans instruction; et, dans cette idée, quoiqu'il fût un des plus savans hommes de son siècle, il passoit la plus grande partie des nuits à lire et à étudier après avoir donné les deux tiers du jour aux travaux de la guerre ou du gouvernement' (HAG, pp. 230-01).

However, the mythical representation of Charlemagne as seen especially in Boulainviller's Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France is as unconvincing as the myth of the Frankish conquest of Gaul. Not only does the 'purple prose' fail to deceive us with regard to Boulainviller's real intentions but also it provides a marked contrast with his treatment of Charlemagne in some of his other historical works. This picture of the idyllic state of France under Charlemagne is also inconsistent with the subsequent historical development of France and with one or two of Boulainviller's own biased attitudes.

This last point is well illustrated in Boulainviller's discussion of the 'Missi Dominici', or peripatetic magistrates. This office was revived by Charlemagne and was accorded greater authority and dignity than it had ever known. The magistrates were chosen from the clergy and the nobility. With regard to the latter Boulainviller takes the opportunity to add enhancing detail to his idyllic vision of French society under Charlemagne. Speaking of the lay magistrates, he says that they were always chosen from amongst the 'plus Grands Seigneurs, qui ne trouvoient point leurs fonctions au-dessous de leur condition ni de leur dignité, et qui s'en acquittoient avec d'autant plus de zèle, que tout le monde étoit persuadé que l'ordre, la règle et la manutention des loix étoient attachées à cette discipline' (MH, pp. 476-77). Fine words, which, however, contrast strongly with what Boulainviller says elsewhere about 'les Grands'. Discussing the degeneration of 'la Discipline Française' during the civil wars of Charles Martel, he says that 'à l'égard des Grands, ils n'avoient presque plus aucun principe que leur ambition et leur férocité naturelle; de sorte que quand la balance étoit égale entr'eux, il n'en résultoit aucun avantage public, que celui d'empêcher les diverses factions de se déchirer davantage' (MH, p. 301). And, of course, the whole of his Mémoire pour la noblesse de France contre les Ducs et Pairs is a skillfully conducted historical argument to show that any pretensions the 'Ducs et Pairs' may have to

pre-eminence in the government of France are completely unfounded and that their only authority is that enjoyed by the rest of the nobility of France and only when assembled with them.

History itself serves to undo Boulainviller's myth of Charlemagne when he comes to consider the fate of Charlemagne's administrative reforms after his death. Such a perfect form of social and political administration, so suited to the genius of the nation and resting on the customs and conventions of the Franks themselves, is nevertheless unable to survive its founder. This early feudalism and in particular the parlements are seen by Boulainviller to degenerate as soon as the guiding hand of Charlemagne is absent. Boulainviller attributes this change entirely to the character of Charlemagne's successors, and especially to their excessive subservience to the will of the clergy. Such personal blame allows Boulainviller to isolate the cause of the degeneration of his mythical ideal and ingeniously to exculpate the noble and faithful French from their own corruption; 'les Parlemens', he writes 'ne pouvant s'écarter de la justice et de la vérité, toutes les fois qu'ils avoient la liberté de juger suivant leur conscience; à la fin ils devinrent aussi pervers que les Maîtres ... parce qu'il est moralement impossible de résister à l'exemple des Rois' (MH, p. 470). Indeed, the parlements under Louis le Débonnaire cause Boulainviller acute discomfort. He naturally wants to show them as functioning with real power for as long as possible and yet the decisions they come to, and for which they alone must be seen to be responsible, are not decisions he would care to defend.¹

The biased and mythical nature of Boulainviller's picture of Charlemagne and his reign can also be appreciated when one compares what Boulainviller says here with what he says elsewhere concerning the conduct and character of Charlemagne. The reservations Boulainviller expressed at the end of

1. The peculiar problem that the 'corrupt autonomy' of the parlements under Louis le Débonnaire poses for Boulainviller is discussed below, pp. 142-43.

his Mémoires historiques concerning Charlemagne's overzealous treatment of the Saxons struck a more sombre note in his laudatory summary of that king's reign. Understandably the criticism was very muted. Earlier on in the same work, however, when he is narrating the events of Charlemagne's reign which comprise principally his foreign wars, Boulainviller, less able in his chronological narrative than in his more reflective and biased summary to avoid or extenuate the violence done to the Saxons, is more disturbed by it. This unease is expressed by ambiguity. Discussing Charlemagne's revenge on the Saxons for their slaughtering of the pathetic magistrates he had established in their land, Boulainviller remarks:

si l'on ignoroit ce que la réduction de la Saxe coutoit à la patience du Prince et à l'Etat, on seroit surpris que l'on eut imaginé une Magistrature dont l'unique fonction étoit de se porter indifféremment dans tous les lieux du territoire, et d'y faire mourir sans formalité tel nombre d'hommes et telles personnes qu'il lui plaisoit; mais Charles se persuada ne pouvoir jamais venir à bout de ces Peuples sans une sévérité qui n'a jamais eu d'exemple qu'en cette occasion.
(MH, p. 368)

In his Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France Boulainviller saw Charlemagne as the exception to the rule that nearly all ambitious and warlike leaders care little for justice because, feeling more intensely than calm and moderate men the intractability of events and the reversals of fortune, they naturally consider violence as their most hopeful means to success. However, in the Mémoires historiques Charlemagne himself, although not accused of injustice, is seen as a conqueror and Boulainviller remarks, 'qui dit un Conquérant, dit un Prince né pour l'agitation et l'inquiétude' (MH, p. 358).

If one turns to Boulainviller's Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France, published in three volumes at the Hague in 1733, this uneasy ambiguity disappears. In keeping with the narrative style of this work Boulainviller recounts the events of Charlemagne's reign with great economy and with little pause for reflection or explanation. This has the effect of making the character and actions of Charlemagne seem exactly like those

of his violent predecessors. Pure self-interest is the order of the day expressing itself in spiteful wars and considerable cruelty. The objective tone of Boulainviller's narrative exposes the injustice of Charlemagne's treatment of the Saxons: 'En 775 Charles fut obligé de passer en Saxe; il prit le château de Sigebourg, rebâtit celui d'Eresbourg; passa le Vesper, porta le fer et le feu dans tout le païs, et obligea les Peuples de lui donner des ôtages' (vol. I, p. 110). A few pages later Boulainviller remarks that 'Charles ... entra en Saxe, et fit tuer presque de sang froid plus de trente mille hommes de ceux qui portoient les armes' (vol. I. p. 120).

However, it is not simply the objective tone of this work that exposes Charlemagne's actions to more severe criticism. Boulainviller himself criticizes Charlemagne's missionary zeal in a particularly appropriate and striking way by showing the future unhappiness of the French at the hands of the Normans to be God's punishment of Charlemagne's cruelty. Concluding his appreciation of Charlemagne's character, his vices and his virtues, Boulainviller declares that 'Dieu pour marquer à la posterité qu'il n'approuvoit point ce zele indiscret et cruel, permit aux Normands de prendre dans la suite la revanche au centuple des maux qu'avoient soufferts les Saxons' (vol. I, p. 136).¹ What is even more striking, however, than this perhaps understandably exaggerated criticism of Charlemagne's missionary zeal, is Boulainviller's criticism of Charlemagne's handling of the parlements, the very area where, in L'Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France, Boulainviller sees the true praiseworthiness of Charlemagne to lie. The cause of Boulainviller's criticism is Charlemagne's attending to both civil and religious affairs in the same assembly. He writes: 'L'on a déjà remarqué combien l'usurpation de Pepin par la faction des Ecclésiastiques, et l'autorité des Papes haussa le crédit des

1. In his examination of the nature of Boulainviller's racism, André Devyver points out that his fundamental preoccupation was with Germanic blood as a whole (which included Normans, Lombards, Bretons and Saxons) and not just with the pure blood of the Franks; Devyver, p. 373.

Prélats. Charlemagne avoit pris la coutume de traiter des affaires civiles, politiques et ecclésiastiques dans les memes assemblées, suivant en cela l'exemple odieux des Wisigoths, et rejetant l'usage perpétuel de la Nation Françoisse' (Abrégé, vol. I, p. 272).

This last criticism of Boulainviller's may indeed provide an answer to the problem of why it is that Boulainviller's attitude towards Charlemagne differs so markedly from work to work. Despite the apparently objective narrative style of the Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France Boulainviller's major theme, the defence of the rights and privileges of the nobility and the decrying of the rise of absolutism, an increasingly important theme in general during the later years of Louis XIV's reign, is ever present subtly biasing his appreciation of historical events and generating criticism not only of royal tyranny but also of the increasing power of the clergy. For in Boulainviller's mind the rise of absolutism and the growth of clerical influence in government are not merely coincidental. The king and the Church allied with one another to increase their own power at the expense, of course, of the nobility. And so it is that Boulainviller takes every opportunity to criticize the clergy and royal depotism, and in this perspective Charlemagne is seen simply as one more tyrannical monarch.

On the other hand in his Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France Boulainviller is considering the history of an institution dear to his heart and is writing for the Duc de Bourgogne, heir to the throne. He is writing about the past of France with eyes directed hopefully towards a rosier future. It is of course vital to his cause that the general assemblies, together with the king, be shown to be the true body of government in France. In this perspective the reign of Charlemagne is seen to be the golden age when the French nobility fully exercised its constitutional rights. He presents an idyllic picture of society under Charlemagne to show how responsible and faithful the French nobles can be once they take

up their rightful functions in government.

Such a dichotomy of view is perhaps only to be expected when history is used, as by Boulainviller, as a basis for political and social arguments which are not always in complete harmony. Political motives force Boulainviller to exaggerate the generosity of Charlemagne vis-à-vis the parlements: 'autrement, il n'eût été qu'un Louis XIV plus puissant et un peu meilleur que celui dont notre écrivain détestait au fond la mémoire'.¹ But Boulainviller's Germanic and anti-clerical blood boils to see Charlemagne slaughtering so many valiant Saxons and giving to religious affairs the same importance he did to matters of state.

A similar tension between the historical and the 'mythical' Charlemagne can be seen in other writers of the eighteenth century, and in particular in Montesquieu, Voltaire and Mably.

Montesquieu praises Charlemagne, for in him the partisan of tempered monarchy sees an exceptional capacity to harmonize conflicting interests and to establish the highly desirable balance of power. The portrait Montesquieu paints of Charlemagne and of his administration is no less idyllic, in its own terms, than that of Boulainviller. In De l'Esprit des lois Montesquieu writes:

et / Charlemagne songea à tenir le pouvoir de la noblesse dans ses limites, et à empêcher l'oppression du clergé et des hommes libres. Il mit un tel tempérament dans les ordres de l'État, qu'ils furent contrebalancés, et qu'il resta le maître. Tout fut uni par la force de son génie. Il mena continuellement la noblesse d'expédition en expédition; il ne lui laissa pas le temps de former des desseins, et l'occupa tout entière à suivre les siens. L'empire se maintint par la grandeur du chef: le prince était grand, l'homme l'était davantage. Les rois ses enfants furent ses premiers sujets, les instruments de son pouvoir, et les modèles de l'obéissance. Il fit d'admirables réglemens; il fit plus, il les fit exécuter. Son génie se répandit sur toutes les parties de l'empire. On voit, dans les lois de ce prince, un esprit de prévoyance qui comprend tout, et une certaine force qui entraîne tout. Les prétextes pour éluder les devoirs sont ôtés; les négligences corrigées, les abus réformés ou prévenus. Il savait punir; il savait encore mieux pardonner.

1. Duméril, p. 152.

2. Montesquieu, Œuvres complètes, edited by A. Masson, vol. I (part2), p. 397.

What criticism Montesquieu does voice is trivial and soon accounted for:

'Il fut peut-être trop sensible au plaisir des femmes; mais un prince qui gouverna toujours par lui-même, et qui passa sa vie dans les travaux, peut mériter plus d'excuses'.¹ But, as Duméril points out, Montesquieu can only pay such an impressive tribute to this shining example of the constitutional sovereign by neglecting certain aspects of the history of Charlemagne's reign. Speaking of these, Duméril says:

Il [Charlemagne] apportait des palliatifs aux maux de l'empire; les maux restaient. L'anarchie ne paraissait plus à la surface; au fond, elle se développait; car les comtes et les autres officiers impériaux, qui obéissaient à Charlemagne un mois dans l'année, passaient les onze autres à détruire le bon effet des sages capitulaires auxquels ils avaient souscrit. Montesquieu ne s'est pas assez préoccupé des plaies cachées qui rongeaient sourdement l'Empire.²

Voltaire's conception of Charlemagne was far from reverential. On the contrary, in the Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations Charlemagne is portrayed as nothing more than the ambitious and cruel leader of a callous, crude, and ignorant race of barbarians. Gone is the image of a great and wise man, full of love for his people, justly and properly re-establishing the true, aristocratic, administration of France, or that of the gifted monarch carefully balancing the powers of antagonistic parties in his realm all to the common good. For Voltaire, Charlemagne is the despotic son of a usurper, and a usurper in his turn. Political expediency forced him to listen to his nobles, but this attention to their rights was in no way inspired by a sense of justice or wise statesmanship. Voltaire's simplicity speaks volumes: 'Ses ancêtres se réduisaient à son père, qui avait envahi le royaume: lui-même avait usurpé le partage de son frère, et avait dépouillé ses neveux. Il flattait les seigneurs en parlement; mais, le parlement dissous, malheur à quiconque eût bravé ses volontés!'.³ However, it is for his fanatical missionary zeal, and in particular his atrocious persecution of the Saxons, that Voltaire is most critical of Charlemagne, especially

1. Ibid., p. 398.

2. Duméril, p. 156.

3. Voltaire, Œuvres complètes, 52 vols (Paris, 1877-85), XI, 272.

as this costly attachment to Christianity is less strong than Charlemagne's personal ambition to extend his empire and his consequent espousal of 'raison d'État'. Narrating Charlemagne's exploits in Muslim Spain and his alliance with the Emir of Sarragossa, Voltaire remarks: 'Le prince français prit le parti de ce musulman; mais il se donna bien garde de le faire chrétien. D'autres intérêts, d'autres soins' (XI, 261).

And yet as with Boulainviller, but of course in a very different context, Voltaire's rather unhistorical attitude to the past cannot deal so neatly with Charlemagne. Weighed in the scales of enlightenment Charlemagne is found to be one of its enemies. But not completely. Lamenting the loss of civilization in the West under the new barbarian governments, Voltaire sees one glimmer of light: 'Le règne seul de Charlemagne eut une lueur de politesse qui fut probablement le fruit du voyage de Rome, ou plutôt de son génie' (XI, 268). Unable to write, Charlemagne nonetheless 'conçut, par la force de son génie, combien les belles-lettres étaient nécessaires', and sent to Rome for scholars to teach grammar and arithmetic (XI, 277).

Finally, turning to Mably's Observations sur l'histoire de France, published in two volumes in Geneva in 1765, we see Charlemagne portrayed as a philanthropic democrat, teaching both the Frankish nobles and the people they liberated from Roman oppression how to obey their own laws by making them their own legislators. Mably presents this democratic image of Charlemagne, unsurprisingly, in an emphatic manner. Speaking of Charlemagne's organisation of the assemblies at the Champ de Mai, Mably says that he 'ne crut pas qu'il suffît d'y appeller les Grands, quelque humilié que fût le Peuple depuis l'établissement des Seigneuries et d'une Noblesse héréditaire, il en connoissoit les droits imprescriptibles, et avoit pour lui cette compassion mêlée de respect avec laquelle les hommes ordinaires voyent un Prince fugitif et dépouillé de ses Etats'.¹ Indeed,

1. Mably, Observations, vol. I, pp. 131-32. By 'le Peuple' Mably understands, as he points out in his 'Remarques et Preuves' at the end of volume I

in his concern to present Charlemagne as the model of the democratic ruler ('Ce Prince ne commande jamais, il propose, il conseille, il insinue'; vol. I, p. 140), Mably is led to some decidedly odd narration: 'Enfin Charlemagne fut heureux pour que les Grands consentissent à laisser entrer le Peuple dans le Champ de Mai, qui par-là redevint véritablement l'Assemblée de la nation' (vol. I, p. 132).

It is interesting to observe that the mythical visions of both Boulainviller and Mably, feudal reactionary and popular democrat, suffer from the same irony.¹ Both interpretations seek, for their very different purposes, to undermine the arbitrary power of royal absolutism. And yet both, in their insistence upon the power and influence of the heroic and magnificent figure of Charlemagne, found their idyllic alternative forms of government upon the arbitrary act of a despot; for if Charlemagne was free to act as he did, he was free not to do so.

Let us conclude our discussion of Boulainviller's mythologizing certain episodes in French history by considering his treatment of Charles VII of France. Boulainviller's favourable disposition towards Charles is evident from the start of his discussion of this king's reign. Our author turns away with distaste from any further consideration of the 'odieux Traité de Troye' and proposes instead 'de passer au Regne de Charle VII, pour vous montrer à la suite d'un si déplorable tableau, le modele du gouvernement le plus accompli en la personne d'un Roi à qui l'on rend communément fort peu de justice' (HAG, III, 40). Boulainviller spends the rest of this letter, the twelfth, writing in praise of Charles VII, noting his apparent failings but justifying them by remarking on the circumstances of the

(pp. 380-84), the whole of the Third Estate and not simply, as does Boulainviller, the rest of the nobles not included amongst 'les Grands'.

1. A study of the similarities and differences to be seen in the historico-political philosophies of Mably and Boulainviller has been made by F. Furet and M. Ozouf, entitled 'Deux légitimations historiques de la société française au 18^e siècle: Mably et Boulainvilliers', *Annales*, 34, no. 1 (1979), 438-50.

time, and defending his reputation from, particularly, the historical account of le Père Daniel (HAG, III, 41-50).¹ The high esteem in which Boulainviller holds Charles is clearly visible in his conclusion to this letter.

Voila quelques traits, que j'ai cru devoir à la justification de celui de nos Rois, à qui la Monarchie doit davantage, selon le glorieux témoignage qui lui fut rendu, quand la France, délivrée de la tyrannie de son Fils, eut la liberté de s'en expliquer au milieu de l'assemblée des Etats tenue à Tours en 1483. Car non seulement la gloire de ses conquêtes y fut portée jusqu'au Ciel, mais la justice et la sagesse de son administration y furent proposées comme le plus digne modèle que sa Postérité pût suivre, et comme l'objet nécessaire des desirs de tous ceux qui aimoient véritablement la Patrie dans l'avenir.

(HAG, III, 50-51)

The reason for Boulainviller's highly favourable attitude towards Charles - and for his defending the harsh measures (including new forms of taxation) introduced by this king in order to reorganize his army and make it more efficient against the English (HAG, III, 90-94 and 105-08) - is that, like Charlemagne, this monarch was concerned as much as possible to conserve rather than innovate and had a healthy respect for the States General. After noting Charles's successes against the Dauphin as well as against the English, Boulainviller writes:

Cependant, comme la prospérité des armes ne lui faisoit jamais oublier les soins de la paix et de la règle, il assembla les Etats du Pays de Languedoc à Toulouse en 1442. Il y fit moins de Réglemens, qu'il ne s'appliqua à maintenir ceux qui étoient déjà faits, suivant le principe général de conduite qu'il s'étoit proposé de ne point introduire de nouveautés sans une évidente nécessité, et de ne jamais laisser inquiéter les Peuples sous le spécieux prétexte de la réformation des abus, que l'on ne propose que trop communément aux Princes, moins pour l'avantage public que pour l'intérêt particulier. (HAG, III, 100)

Again like Charlemagne, Charles VII also provides Boulainviller with a convenient model of the just sovereign (above, p.54). Thus during the truce of 1444 to 1448 Charles used this time not to 'engloutir les biens de

1. Boulainviller is concerned that, in spite of contemporary evidence to the contrary, le Père Daniel 'affecte de lui [à Charles VII] laisser la tache de la débauche (HAG, III, 44), and 'traite ... de foiblesse et même de dérangement de cerveau...le caprice auquel on attribue communément la cause de sa mort, savoir, une crainte démesurée d'être empoisonné, en conséquence de quoi il se priva de la nourriture pendant plusieurs jours; desorte que la nature afoiblie ne put reprendre ses alimens (HAG, III, 48-49). Le Père Daniel, it is true, does dwell on these matters (op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 562-63) but concludes his remarks on Charles VII by saying:

ses Sujets, en imposant des Tailles arbitraires sans les indemniser de quelqu'autre façon' (HAG, III, 116) but rather to reform the currency and restore it to a proper, commercial value. Similarly, bringing the troublesome Dauphin to trial in 1458, Charles 'scrupuleux observa toutes les règles, et voulut auparavant consulter le Parlement séant à Paris, pour avoir son avis sur les formalitez nécessaires à observer' (HAG, III, 121). Boulainviller examines the parlement's replies and then concludes: 'voilà quelles furent les réponses du Parlement à la consultation d'un Prince lequel, quoiqu'irrité quoiqu'absolu parceque le Royaume entier étoit proprement sa conquête [won from the English], ne vouloit la punition d'un Criminel odieux que dans les règles et conformément à l'usage le plus étroit de la Justice' (HAG, III, 124). The vision here of Charles as an all conquering, absolute monarch expresses Boulainviller's belief that whatever their power, all such monarchs (i.e. Louis XIV) must obey the rules of justice if they are not to behave as despots.

Yet in spite of the personal qualities of Charles VII and his just and moderate behaviour as king, the history of his reign is ultimately a disappointment to Boulainviller. Indeed, this disappointment is voiced right at the start of his narration of Charles's reign. 'Quoique nous lui soyons redevables de l'institution des premières Loix qui ont fixé la police du Royaume, rendu certaine la condition des Sujets, et assuré la subsistance des Troupes nécessaires à la sûreté commune', Boulainviller remarks, Charles 'auroit joint la reconnoissance de toute la Postérité à celle de ses Contemporains, s'il avoit pris les mesures convenables pour empêcher que l'on n'abusât dans l'avenir de ces mêmes Loix, comme il arriva dès qu'il eut les yeux fermés' (HAG, III, 52). As with Charlemagne, the splendid measures instituted by Charles VII were unable to survive his death. It is true that Boulainviller tries to exculpate Charles and sees

'c'est faire injustice à Charles VII que de ne le pas regarder comme un des grands Princes qui aient porté la Couronne de France (ibid., p. 565).

his successor, Louis XI, as the king responsible for the subsequent abuses of Charles's legislation. To this end Boulainviller remarks on the spirit of Charles's reign, 'où la simplicité et la bonne foi n'étoient pas encore totalement corrompues' (HAG, III, 114), and cites examples of 'francs archers' who refrained from claiming a nobility they did not possess. Yet, necessary as they were, Charles's new measures were innovations and were introduced with insufficient care to guard against their possible misapplication (HAG, III, 64-67 and 112-13, and above, p.27).

Sombre reflection is occasioned too by Boulainviller's consideration of Charles's behaviour towards the wealthy merchant Jacques Coeur.¹ Suspecting him of collaborating with the English and, what was more, of being responsible for the death of Charles's mistress, Agnès Sorel, the king brought Coeur to trial. The judges could not find him guilty but banished him nevertheless from the realm (l'occasion', says Boulainviller, 'd'une seconde fortune, dont il jouit jusqu'à la mort sans avoir voulu revenir en France, outré de l'ingratitude qu'il y avoit éprouvée'; HAG, III, 119-20). Boulainviller presents the excuse that Charles's grief at the loss of Agnès was so great that it overwhelmed his recollection of the signal services performed in the past by Coeur, yet our author concludes: 'cet événement ... forme d'ailleurs un terrible préjugé contre la reconnaissance et la justice des meilleurs Princes' (HAG, III, 120). The sentiment expressed here, muted appropriately to suit this particular context, may remind us of Fénelon's ambiguous remark concerning the office of king:

Les plus longs et les meilleurs règnes sont trop courts et trop imparfaits, pour réparer à la fin ce qu'on a gâté, sans le vouloir, dans les commencements. La royauté porte avec elle toutes ces misères: l'impuissance humaine succombe sous un fardeau si accablant. Il faut plaindre les rois et les excuser. Ne sont-ils pas à plaindre d'avoir

1. Earlier in his narration Boulainviller had written of Coeur's proposal to lend money to Charles in order to fight the English. Boulainviller takes the opportunity to say, 'mais ce Prince, toujours sage et précautionné, ne s'abandonnoit point à des promesses que l'on pouvoit regarder comme indiscrettes; et il aima mieux assurer sa ressource dans les revenus de son Etat' (HAG, III, 109-10).

à gouverner tant d'hommes, dont les besoins sont infinis, et qui donnent tant de peines à ceux qui veulent les bien gouverner? Pour parler franchement, les hommes sont fort à plaindre d'avoir à être gouvernés par un roi, qui n'est qu'homme semblable à eux; car il faudrait des dieux pour redresser les hommes.

Boulainviller's enthusiasm for, but final disappointment in, Charles VII and his administration remind one very much of his appreciation and presentation of Charlemagne. Yet, whereas our author creates his own myth of the legendary Carolingian, his treatment of Charles VII and his reign never reaches the same degree of enthusiasm and fervour. Charles's government may have been exemplary, but finally his lack of attention to secure the correct functioning of his new fiscal and military policies is too fundamental a mistake to be glossed over. Under Charlemagne France, if only for a short time, knew an idyllic happiness; under Charles VII she could have known the same:

Charles VII ... regna trente neuf ans avec des disgraces et une prospérité toutes singulières; mais surtout avec une conduite si nette, si exacte, et si ménagée, que l'on peut dire que, si le bonheur des Peuples pouvoit dépendre de l'intention de leur Roi, celui de la France auroit été assuré pour plusieurs siècles. Il prévint toujours avec douleur les changemens prochains que son Successeur feroit dans l'administration, mais sans avoir néanmoins la force d'y mettre les empêchemens nécessaires, qu'il auroit pu former par une délibération d'Etats-Généraux, soutenue de toutes les formalitez pour en rendre l'exécution certaine et inviolable. Et ce fut ainsi que le gouvernement le plus économe et le plus méthodique fit place au regne le plus arbitraire et le plus contraire aux Loix, que la France eût encore essuyé. (HAG, III, 133-34)

In this discussion of the ideas and arguments Boulainviller calls into service to help him present his interpretation of France's history, we have seen that none, with the exception of his jealous regard for the marks of the status of true nobility, is presented in a constant way. The argument from conquest, though necessary, is felt to be amoral; the arguments of 'right' and of 'fact' can be modified and reinterpreted to suit and take advantage of a particular circumstance; disparate and contradictory notions in political philosophy are joined together by Boulainviller in order to defend the 'natural' rights of only a minority of men; and finally,

1. Œuvres de Fénelon, 3 vols (Paris, 1861), III, 70.

attempts to mythologize favourable periods of French history succumb, as they must, to the weight of historical reality. Boulainviller's failure to support his political opinions by reference to France's past is, then, only too clear. In that case, we may ask, why did Boulainviller go about his task in the very idiosyncratic manner he did? It is this question which must now be discussed.

Chapter Three

An Examination of the Inconsistencies to be Seen in Boulainviller's Historiography of France

I Boulainviller and feudalism

An answer to the question why did Boulainviller write about the history of France in such a clearly personal manner, will most naturally arise from a discussion of the relationship between his narration of this history and his proposals for the political, economic, and social reform of France. It is this relation that has been examined by Vincent Buranelli in 'The Historical and Political Thought of Boulainvilliers'. As regards his work as an historian, Buranelli calls Boulainviller a 'Feudal Reactionary',¹ and having seen the many and inventive ways employed by our author to protect the formerly healthy rights and privileges of the old nobility, such an appellation might seem quite appropriate. But this easy, one-dimensional categorization of Boulainviller is denied us when we remember that Boulainviller was responsible too for the collection of Mémoires présentés à Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans, Régent de France. It will be profitable to examine briefly the content of these memoirs.

We saw above (pp.37-41) that in the fourth of these memoirs (Touchant l'affaire de Mrs. les Prince du Sang) Boulainviller readily defended, in spite of his profound criticism of royal absolutism, the sovereign power of the king of France as a means to protect the unity of the second order. Similarly, in calling for an assembly of the States General as the most efficient way of achieving much needed financial and economic reform, Boulainviller assures the Regent that such an assembly would in no manner constitute an attempt to compromise the power of the throne, and he writes, 'la forme et deliberation d'une telle assemblée ne doivent causer aucun embarras. S.A.R. y sera la maitresse absolue' (Mémoires, I, 14).

1. Buranelli, op. cit., Journal of the History of Ideas, 8 (1957), p. 490.

Just as striking as these political concessions, however, are Boulainviller's proposals for more particular economic and social reforms. Boulainviller swallows his aristocratic pride and advocates that nobles should be allowed to trade 'en gros', 'sans déroger à leurs noblesse et privilèges' (Mémoires, I, 22) and thus make themselves useful to the state for, as he says, 'tout le monde n'est pas né pour être Soldat ou Laboureur' (Mémoires, I, 20). More noteworthy still is Boulainviller's concern for the physical and basic intellectual well-being of the ordinary men and women of France. To this end he proposes a more equitable system of tax distribution and collection (third and fifth memoirs), and the establishment of provincial 'bourses de commerce', one of the principal benefits of which will be to 'empêcher qu'aucun pauvre ne mandie, soit faute d'ouvrage, ou par vieillesse, caducité et maux extraordinaires, et pourvoir à l'éducation des enfans des ouvriers journaliers et autres artisans, et soulager les uns et les autres dans leurs maladies' (Mémoires, I, 62).

It is because of ideas such as these that Buranelli can call Boulainviller, as well as a 'Feudal Reactionary', an 'incipient Socialist'. But rather than try to discover why both epithets can be seen to suit Boulainviller, Buranelli is content to conclude with rather easy criticism:

The Feudal Reactionary looks back into the murky darkness of the Merovingian period to find "the fundamental law of the French state". How, then, can the incipient Socialist justify a scheme of reform that was never practised, or even known, before? History cannot be used to validate the introduction of a system de novo, rather does it undermine such a system right at the start. Boulainvilliers wanted both, and clung to both, but that merely makes the dichotomy in his mind the more obvious. He could have been logical in defending the rights of the nobility - if he had abandoned his philosophy. He could have been logical in pressing for a completely remodelled social system - if he had abandoned his history. But he would do neither. Instead he transmogrifies an "either-or" proposition into a "both-and" - a logical absurdity. (p. 494)

Henry Sée manages to present a more unified picture of Boulainviller by ignoring the 'feudal reactionary'. He concludes his brief examination of Boulainviller's major works on French history by emphasizing his anti-absolutist position and his concern for the rights of the king's subjects.

'Boulainvilliers est donc un libéral. Beaucoup plus qu'aucun théoricien de son époque, il se préoccupe des droits de l'individu, il veut les sauvegarder, et il considère les intérêts des sujets comme tout aussi respectables que ceux du prince.'¹ Sée agrees that Boulainviller wanted to see a change in government, a return to 'l'ancienne tradition' (p. 279), but he does not describe this as reaction. Indeed, he is much more interested in Boulainviller's plans for fiscal and social reform (pp. 279-85). Sée states: 'Comme Vauban, Boulainvilliers porte le plus grand intérêt aux classes populaires, au "menu peuple", et il montre combien les travailleurs manuels sont utiles à la société, "plus utiles que les riches"' (p. 283). He sees Boulainviller animated by an 'esprit démocratique' (p. 284), and concludes his discussion of our author by reaffirming his scientific, his rational attitude to the study of government. 'A ce point de vue-là encore, Boulainvilliers est un précurseur des philosophes du XVIII^e siècle; comme eux, il se préoccupe avant tout des intérêts des individus et il regarde l'Etat comme l'ensemble des "particuliers". Il est déjà l'un des tenants de la doctrine libérale, qui s'affirmera avec Montesquieu et Voltaire' (p. 285).

It is this last point which André Devyver explicitly denies² for he sees Boulainviller as nothing but a feudal reactionary inspired and supported by a cogent theory of the racial superiority of the French nobles over the rest of the French populace (pp. 360-61). And whereas Henri Sée perceives in Boulainviller a genuine interest in the lot of the common people and a desire to improve it,³ Devyver denies even a modicum of compassion in our author (p. 313). His stance is based particularly upon what Boulainviller says of the crusading pilgrims: 'si la mode des Pèlerinages d'Outremer n'eût entraîné en Orient des millions des plus inquiets pendant tout le douzième siècle, on auroit été obligé d'exterminer le plus

1. Henri Sée, Les Idées politiques en France au XVII^e siècle (Paris, 1923), p. 278.

2. André Devyver, Le Sang épuré (pp. 351 and 362).

3. As does R. Simon, Henry de Boulainviller, pp. 211, 215 and 216.

grand nombre de ces nouveaux Afranchis, comme des bêtes féroces' (HAG, I, 344).¹ Devyver is aware that the liberal interpretation of Boulainviller's plans for fiscal and social reforms does exist, but he continues to hold that 'tout bien pesé, le système apparaît comme purement utilitaire et destiné à favoriser les couches déjà privilégiées du pays ... "le menu peuple est plus utile à l'Etat que les riches, puisque c'est lui qui fait tous les ouvrages pénibles." C'est uniquement pour ce motif qu'on veillera à sa santé et à sa sécurité! ... Un bétail humain sain et bien nourri, dont il est permis d'escompter de gros profits, voilà à quoi se ramènent, pour ce qui est du sort à réserver aux neuf dixièmes de la population française, les doctrines des auteurs nobles en ce début de siècle! (p. 314).

Devyver's interpretation of Boulainviller's attitude towards the common people supports, or is perhaps supported by, his belief that Boulainviller was the complete feudal reactionary, that is, that he was not, as Henri Sée supposes, pressing simply for a return to some sort of mixed government in France, but that he wanted to re-establish the nobility to its full feudal rights.² To arrive at a synthesis of the antithetical views of Boulainviller that we see in Henri Sée and André Devyver (and one that will avoid the superficiality of Buranelli's conclusion) we will need to attempt to define what Boulainviller's position was with regard to practicable reform. It will be useful in this examination of our 'evidence' to remember the words of G. R. Elton concerning the historian's scepticism in respect of his evidence.

However wise it may be to question motive at all times, and however capable of deliberate perversion all men may be, it remains a fact of experience³ that simplicity, straightforwardness and transparency also exist ... To achieve as secure a judgement as possible, the historian

1. Devyver, pp. 277 and 382, n. 109. Boulainviller does, however, recognize that some advantages accrued from 'l'affranchissements des serfs' (HAG, I, 343).
2. Devyver, pp. 292, 307, 363 and 382.
3. Saint-Simon (as Devyver notes, p. 363) describes Boulainviller thus: 'C'était un homme simple, doux, humble même par nature quoiqu'il se sentît fort, très éloigné de se targuer de rien, qui expliquait volontiers ce qu'il savait sans chercher à rien montrer, et dont la modestie était rare en tout genre'; Mémoires, edited by Boislile (Paris, 1888-1928), XXVI, p. 246.

here requires his most rare and almost most dangerous gift: an all-embracing sympathy which enables him, chameleon-like, to stand with each man in turn to look upon the situation. The gift is dangerous because it may in the end bring him to a total inability to judge or even to make up his mind; it need not do so but it often does.

The essence of the problem may be stated quite simply: what was Boulainviller's attitude towards feudalism? It is in providing a sufficiently complete answer to this question that we will begin to understand, it is to be hoped, the value for Boulainviller of his apparently bizarre historiographical procedures.

Near the beginning of his fifth letter on the parlements Boulainviller gives a succinct description of the essential characteristics of French feudal government:

J'ai dit ci dessus, (et c'est un fait d'Histoire qui ne sauroit être contesté) que les François naturels étoient les seuls et uniques Nobles, reconnus dans le Royaume; parcequ'ils en étoient les Conquérens. J'ai dit aussi que les Droits, dont ils jouissoient à ce titre sous l'obligation de la fidélité et du service à l'Etat et au Roi, Chef du Gouvernement, étoient l'indépendance de toutes Charges pécuniaires, l'exercice de la Justice, la Liberté d'attaquer et de se défendre, enfin la jouissance des biens réservés au profit public, qui leur étoient réservés suivant certaine règle que j'ai marquée. (HAG, I, 323-24)

He describes this government as 'si magnifique et si judicieusement établi' (HAG, I, 324) and indeed remarks that 'quoiqu'il fut inconnu aux Philosophes Grecs il peut estre regardé comme le Chef d'oeuvre de l'Esprit humain en ce Genre'.² Originally inaugurated by Charlemagne (although not arbitrarily imposed by him, for this would have been to violate the principles 'du droit commun' of the French nobility; HAG, I, 110), feudalism is seen by Boulainviller to be perfectly adapted to human needs:

1. G. R. Elton, The Practice of History (Sydney, 1967), pp. 79-80. Elton continues: 'In practice, too many historians here allow bias to intervene'. It is interesting to note in this respect that Devyver is writing the history of a movement of aristocratic reaction, lacking system until Boulainviller, and Henry Sée, in the second half of his book, is considering Boulainviller's contribution to 'la réaction contre l'absolutisme'.
2. Boulainviller, Lettres sur les états généraux du royaume, B.N., fonds français, 10882, 'Table des matières' (folios 391-600, no pagination), under 'Feodal'.

En effet, si l'on considère la disposition des usages et des affaires de ce tems là, si l'on regarde même la chose abstraitement, rien n'est si beau que l'ordre des Fiefs, ni rien de plus commode, lequel établit un revenu fixe et toutefois sujet aux augmentations nécessaires, un service effectif de troupes et toujours prêt dans les occasions, qui peut pareillement être augmenté quant au nombre, à proportion des besoins. Deplus cet ordre, rendant les Hommes propriétaires de leurs biens, les intéresse à la conservation du tout, et emploie pour cette fin les passions les plus vives qui soient dans la nature, telles que l'amour de soi même et de son bien être, et l'amour de ses Enfans et de ses Proches. (HAG, I, 108-09)

As well as guaranteeing the right of the French (that is, of the nobles) to their property (above, p.20), the feudal order also acts as a check on monarchical absolutism.

En cet état, loin que les Princes et les Seigneurs, qui possédoient des Fiefs mouvans de la Couronne, fussent exclus de la conduite des affaires publiques, on sait que le Roi n'étoit pas même en droit d'en disposer seul, et qu'il ne pouvoit pas entreprendre une guerre générale sans leur consentement: quoiqu'il soit certain qu'il la pouvoit faire seul, en qualité de Prince particulier; auquel cas les premiers n'étoient pas tenus de l'y servir. (HAG, I, 293. See too HAG, III, 185-86)

It is this favourable attitude towards feudalism (together, of course, with the theory of the two distinct races which inhabit France) that inspires the frequent reactionary comments to be found in Boulainviller's writings. Thus our author criticizes an intendant's proposal to change the centuries old feudal system of justice operating in Artois all because it is felt 'qu'il n'est point convenable à la majesté des Sieges Royaux d'avoir d'autres Officiers que ceux qui ont des fonctions déterminées et réglées par les ordinaires du Roi' (État de la France, II, 231). Similarly at Strasbourg, Boulainviller notes with pleasure, 'tous les Jugements y sont rendus conformément à l'ancien usage' (EF, III, 380). In the same work Boulainviller shows that feudalism, considered now more generally as a fiscal and social organisation, is preferred by the people who live under it (where it still exists) to direct dependence on the king (EF, IV, 330-31 and V, 69).

Such reaction can be seen too, occasionally, in Boulainviller's 'progressive' plans for reform. In his fifth memoir to the Regent (containing his proposals for a thorough ^{change} in France's system of tax collection) Boulainviller lists the functions that could be performed by those who would find themselves



unemployed as a consequence of his proposed measures; he concludes: 'en tout cas la plupart iront au village labourer la terre, comme faisoient leurs peres, et deviendront au moins utiles à l'Etat, au lieu de l'affoiblir comme ils font, s'engraissant du sang du peuple de jour en jour' (Mémoires, II, 19). Furthermore, in the same memoir Boulainviller is pleased to show how his plans would relieve so many people of their onerous tax burden, although some of the 'taille' (one third) would still remain, 'car il seroit bon d'en laisser au moins un tiers, pour distinguer la populace d'avec la Noblesse' (p. 27).

Given this evidence of Boulainviller's reactionary attitudes and of his predilection for feudalism (as well as for government by assembly; HAG, I, 251-54), it is hardly surprising that he should be thought to have wanted a return to a feudal system. However, although Boulainviller's desire to temper the absolute monarchy of his time cannot be doubted, that he saw a revival of feudalism as the best way to achieve this is much less certain.

During his discussion of the 'généralité de Bourges', Boulainviller gives the reasons for the 'nonchalance' of its inhabitants:

la cause en est, d'un côté le défaut de commerce qui fait que les habitants des villes se trouvent sans occupation, et de l'autre la servitude dans laquelle languit le laboureur par un usage que l'on ne sauroit regarder que comme très ancien et relatif, ou bien au génie des colonies qui ont été conduites en ce pays après l'extinction des premiers habitants, ou bien à la manière dont les peuples y ont été gouvernés pendant que les droits des Seigneurs du pays ont subsisté dans leur étendue naturelle. (EF, V, 4)

And in the last of his letters on the parlements, written at the end of his life after the disappointing failure of the noble assemblies of 1716 and 1717,¹ Boulainviller sees the time for arrogant noble claims to pre-eminence, although these may be justifiable, nonetheless to be over:

Il n'est donc plus tems de rapporter cette favorable distinction de la Noblesse aux Parlemens de la première Race sous les Rois Gontran et Clotaire second, où le Clergé, sans cesser d'être respecté, loin d'affecter la préséance se trouvoit honoré du second rang. Il seroit aussi mal convenable de reprocher perpétuellement au Tiers Etat et

1. R. Simon, A la Recherche d'un homme et d'un auteur (Paris, 1941), p. 19.

à la Magistrature leur première condition: les avantages que l'Etat entier tire du commerce, et l'habitude d'honorer les Juges qui décident tous les jours de nos fortunes, sont de puissans motifs pour ramener l'égalité et pour la faire goûter à la Noblesse, la plus intéressée dans la perte de son premier rang.

Mais que dis je? Malheureusement pour cette Noblesse il n'est plus même question d'égalité; elle est tombée au dernier rang en telle manière que, si on ne voyoit dans la roture une passion démesurée pour se mettre à sa place par des Lettres du Prince ou par l'achat des Charges privilégiées, on ne pourroit croire qu'elle existât ...

... Toutefois chaque siècle a tellement ses avantages et ses disgrâces qui se compensent mutuellement, qu'après tout il n'y a point d'Homme raisonnable qui ne reconnoisse que la Société totale de la Nation et de toutes les Conditions ne soit plus avantageuse à la Noblesse même, que ce rang supérieur et incommunicable dont elle a joui si longtems pendant les siècles d'ignorance et de grossièreté. (HAG, III, 204-05)

These two passages constitute what one might call pragmatic reasons for denying that Boulainviller seriously contemplated a return to feudalism as practicable or even desirable. However, there is at least one 'ideal' reason for making the same denial, that is to say that on closer examination we may find that as a model for government feudalism is seen by Boulainviller to have had an important imperfection.

The imperfection in feudalism from Boulainviller's ideal point of view (the one established upon the myth of the Frankish conquest of Gaul) is the change this system of government wrought upon the nature of the hierarchy within the French nobility. Although a social hierarchy already existed amongst the Franks when they became masters of Gaul, Boulainviller was intent to point out that fundamentally, with regard to their new domain, all the Franks were equal with each other because all were conquerors (Dissertation sur la noblesse, Devyver, pp. 509-10). However, abuses of this original political system became apparent, one of which

fut que les églises d'une part, les favoris, les maires et autres personnes puissantes d'autre part, profitant de la jeunesse ou de la foiblesse des princes, se firent donner ou mesme usurpèrent les domaines de l'Etat, au préjudice des gens de guerre, qui furent dépouillés d'une grande partie de leur subsistance, et au grand dommage de la dignité royale, parce que ces princes dépouillés de leurs biens ne purent plus soutenir la dépense ordinaire, ce qui les fit bientôt tomber dans le mépris. (Devyver, p. 515)

Indeed, usurpation of royal domains by 'les seigneurs bénéficiers' is seen as the origin of the establishment of the fiefs (Devyver, pp. 519-20), a process

which Boulainviller calls 'la corruption du gouvernement primitif' (Devyver, p. 528). Similarly, discussing the opinion of Le Laboureur that 'la Dignité des Fiefs donnoit le Rang aux personnes, independamment de leur Naissance',¹ Boulainviller replies that 'la noblesse excède en origine la possession des fiefs : Elle vient réellement de la nation françoise comme de la Nation conquérante de la Gaule; nulle distinction de classe entre cette première Noblesse toute en général qualifiée du nom de Leuth; Il est vrai que dans le 2^d temps il y a eû de la distinction dans le Corps de la Noblesse par rapport à la féodalité; mais c'est une corruption évidente du 1^{er} Etat'.² The result of this 'corruption' was violent and inhuman anarchy (Devyver, p. 529) particularly on the part of the 'seigneurs particuliers'.³

One of the distinguishing features of feudalism was the hereditary succession to possession of a fief. It is this principle that Boulainviller defends against the opinion that it was Hugues Capet who distributed the fiefs among his supporters once he had been recognized as king, by demonstrating that feudalism was well established before Capet's accession to the throne (HAG, I, 297-98). The necessity of making such assertions in order to protect noble rights and to argue against monarchical despotism is clear; however, in his Réflexions sur le mémoire des formalités nécessaires pour valider la rénonciation du Roy d'Espagne Boulainviller states that it was when 'le Droit des Fiefs' was introduced, that is when benefices were no longer simply held for life, that the nature of the social relations between the Franks began to change (although, of course, Boulainviller argues that it was a long time before 'le Droit foncier et essentiel' of

1. Le Laboureur, Histoire de la pairie de France et du parlement de Paris ... (London, 1740), p. 64.
2. Extrait d'un manuscrit de Mr. l'abbé Le Laboureur intitulé : de l'origine de la pairie de France, B.N. fonds français, no. 7504, pp. 21-22.
3. Discussing the extinction of the 'loix anciennes de la Pairie' in his Mémoire pour la noblesse contre les ducs et pairs, Boulainviller, no friend of the peers, argues that not only could the kings not have continued these laws ('parce que les Pairies nouvelles ne sont que des fiefs ordinaires'), but also that it was not in their interest to do so 'puisque'il n'étoit question que de réunir des fiefs distraits de la couronne par des Sujets revoltez' (p. 97).

each Frank was forgotten.¹ It would seem therefore that André Devyver is mistaken when he states that Boulainviller saw the conquest of Gaul immediately followed by the establishment of feudalism (p. 385). Devyver maintains that despite the distinction he makes between non-hereditary benefices and hereditary fiefs Boulainviller nevertheless considered the social system of the Franks in Gaul as feudal and based on their exclusive possession of the land they had conquered. It is true that Boulainviller saw the sharing of land amongst the Franks as relative to their internal social structure and as the origin of the much later system of vassalage, but he saw this sharing too as perfectly compatible with each Frank's essential liberty, and indeed as an enhancement of it (MH, p. 149). It is this liberty which the establishment of the fiefs (feudalism), based as it was on usurpation, was destroying. The 'gouvernement primitif' (under which, we might note, the Franks possessed by right all the land they had conquered but nevertheless left the Gauls in possession of those lands they could not use; MH, p. 144 and Devyver, pp. 513-14) therefore pre-dates the development of feudalism and does so by a number of centuries, for it was only towards the end of the Carolingian dynasty, Boulainviller writes, that feudalism became established 'sous la domination françoise' (Devyver, p. 519).

We have seen that from a number of points of view (economic, political and - most importantly - social), Boulainviller has good reason to find fault with feudalism and to consider it a less than ideal form of government. Moreover, as we have seen, in his Mémoires présentés à Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans, Régent de France (as well as in other works which we have discussed) Boulainviller displays a strong pragmatic bent when he is advocating

1. Earlier in the same text Boulainviller, emphasizing again that Charlemagne only planted the seeds of feudalism in France itself, writes that these seeds which the emperor had sown 'dans la suite ont contre son intention porté quantité de fruits amers parmi les bons: parce que cette Feodalité s'establit sans methode, faute par les Rois de ce tems là d'entendre leur plus grand interest' (p. 6).

feasible measures of reform. This pragmatism consists largely in a basic acceptance of the monarchical status quo which Boulainviller does not wish to dismantle but simply modify. His proposals to let nobles trade 'en gros' are also evidence of Boulainviller's readiness to think appropriately about concrete situations.

It cannot be denied, however, that even in his measures for reform Boulainviller does display a certain reaction (above, p.101). Such reaction is quite apparent in Boulainviller's Mémoire pour la construction d'un nobiliaire général, although when we consider the motives lying behind the proposals contained in this text - the defence and illustration of the old nobility - this is hardly surprising. Boulainviller proposes that all those families claiming rights to nobility should be registered in the four strictly classified volumes of his 'nobiliaire'. These four volumes correspond to Boulainviller's hierarchical division of all French nobility, ranging from the king at the top to, finally, 'tous les Annoblis par Lettres, ou Possessions d'offices depuis l'An mil six cents, comme pareillement tous les Annoblissements qui se feront à l'avenir'.¹ This is significant for although Boulainviller's motives are evidently reactionary he does nevertheless recognize the existence of recent, and future, 'annoblis'. Indeed, he even recognizes that virtue (elsewhere seen as more or less the exclusive possession of the old nobility)² may exist amongst the Third Estate and he admits that one of the ways the nobility of France can enhance its dignity is to keep open 'à la vertu aussy bien qu'à la finance quelque voye pour parvenir à la Noblesse'.³ Similarly in his Mémoire sur la noblesse

1. Bibliothèque municipale d'Angoulême, MS no 23, pp. 619-620.

2. Dissertation sur la noblesse, Devyver, pp. 505-06.

3. Angoulême, MS no 23, p. 615. In his book Homo Ludens (English translation in Paladin Books, 1971) J. Huizinga states: 'That nobility is based on virtue is implicit from the very beginning of both concepts and right through their evolution, only the meaning changes as civilisation unfolds' (pp. 84-85). Virtue thus signified originally strength or quality (compare the Chinese 'te' and the Greek 'arete') and only later evolved to include ethical and religious precepts. Boulainviller's understanding of noble 'virtue' is clearly more akin to the primary meaning of the word; for him such virtue is the 'force d'âme' of, for example, Corneille's

Boulainviller sees that certain services to the state should be rewarded by the distinction of nobility (although this applies only to offices 'qui sont purement Militaires'), 'parce que les services importants d'un seul sujet ont droit de distinguer sa Posterité'. Thus 'il seroit mal convenable à la gloire de la Nation, que l'a postérité du Marechal Faber [sic] (s'il avoit laissé une Posterité Masculine) retournast à la Profession de l'Imprimerie'.¹

Despite this derogation of his racist theories of the French nobility, however, we might still say that Boulainviller's softer attitude to certain sections of the Third Estate is fundamentally reactionary, for it is inspired by a desire to keep in existence, and as distinct, just this privileged order of nobility. This is no doubt true, but even so is insufficient justification for Devyver's cynical appreciation of Boulainviller's plans to improve the lot of the ordinary Frenchman (above, pp. 98-99). Rather, the reaction to be seen in Boulainviller's Mémoires (especially in the first, third and fifth) is against the officers of the crown, such as the intendants, the tax collectors ('partisans'), the 'commis', 'traitants', and ministers, who abuse their positions of power in order to feather their own nests regardless of the impoverishment this brings to the nation and the suffering inflicted upon peasants, farmers, and artisans.

If we conclude, however, that as far as the present and future of France

Don Diègue which Rodrigue points out to Don Gomès:

Sais-tu que ce vieillard fut la même vertu,

La vaillance et l'honneur de son temps? le sais-tu?

(Le Cid, II, 2., lines 399-400)

1. Ibid., p. 540. Le maréchal Fabert, the son and grandson of printers, became 'maréchal de France' in 1654 (according to the Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne, edited by Michaud, vol. 13, pp. 257-58; Voltaire, in the Siècle de Louis XIV (edited by Antoine Adam, 2 vols (Paris, 1966), II, 175), says 1658) and earned this position through his candour, probity and military success. Boulainviller does point out however, that such personal distinction is different in kind from the tradition of virtue, glory, honour etc. possessed 'dans une longue suite de Races' by 'la grande et haute Noblesse' (Angoulême, MS. 23. p. 615).

are concerned, Boulainviller, reactionary in as much as he wanted to protect the distinction of the old nobility (against 'Duc et Pair' as well as 'annobli') and see its return to some power in government through the States General, nonetheless displayed a degree of enlightened sympathy towards the impoverished masses of France and accepted as a working principle the sovereign power of the monarch, what are we to make of the praise he lavishes on feudalism which we have already examined and the many other instances of, sometimes excessive, reactionary sentiment to be seen in his histories of France?

II The three planes of discourse

Apart from his ideas of establishing a 'compagnie générale de commerce' together with provincial 'bourses de commerce' (above, p. 98), Henri Sée considers Boulainviller's plans for reform as not particularly original: 'il ne propose pas, en effet, une réorganisation bien profonde, ni bien nette du régime politique' (p. 279). Rather for Sée, 'l'oeuvre de Boulainvilliers est ... avant tout une oeuvre de critique' (ibid.). Seen in this light, Boulainviller's praise of feudalism, for the reasons we have already discussed (above, p. 100), is an important weapon in his criticism of absolutism. Indeed, 'history as criticism' is a suitable categorisation of much of what Boulainviller writes in his works on French history.¹

The atmosphere of such critical history is readily apparent in Boulainviller's Préface critique au journal de Saint Louis. We have seen (above, pp. 24-25) that Boulainviller criticizes le Sieur Péan, one of the authors of the 'journal', for treating as seditious those rebels 'qui ne croyaient pas que l'on dût ni que l'on pût changer les coutumes du royaume', for claiming that the king 'ne pouvait jamais avoir tort ni dans le fait, ni dans le droit', and for anachronistically judging past customs by the rule

1. A discussion of the explicit criticism to be seen in Boulainviller's histories of France will be found in the following chapter, pp. 121-50.

of present 'usages'. The point of this criticism becomes clear when Boulainviller reflects on the changes introduced into French society and government by Saint Louis. Boulainviller does not deny the noble motives behind these innovations,

Mais il ne s'ensuit pas que ces nouveautés dussent être acceptées sans répugnance par les seigneurs français, ni que ceux qui s'y opposèrent doivent être regardés par la postérité comme des rebelles et des séditionnaires, surtout par rapport à une régente, laquelle, loin d'avoir droit de faire de telles ordonnances, ne devait pas même se mêler du gouvernement. Ainsi, nous pouvons finir cet article en assurant que les fausses vues du sieur Péan lui ayant représenté les objets de ce temps-là sous la forme de ceux que nous voyons aujourd'hui, il n'a pu éviter de se tromper, chose peu importante par rapport à lui, mais qui le devient considérablement quand on considère les progrès malheureux où un faux système d'histoire peut conduire les rois, les ministres et les peuples. (R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle, p. 127)

It is because the 'noble past' of France is seen so often by modern historians from the point of view of the 'absolutist present' that Boulainviller is so scathing of their history writing (below, pp.132-34).

'History as criticism', then, sets out to vindicate the now defunct, but once very active, non-absolutist practices of government in France, as well as to emphasize the role still played at that time by the ordinary nobility. That the history of France in this respect has precious little to do with the present form of the administration of the country could be considered as an irrelevant matter for Boulainviller: as long as a point (no matter how 'academic') can be scored against monarchical absolutism and division amongst the nobility, the facts are worth recording. This attitude towards history is exemplified, indeed almost caricaturized, in a passage in Boulainviller's Dissertation sur la noblesse. Recognizing the rise in status of 'les Princes du sang' under Charles VI and Charles VII, Boulainviller nevertheless writes:

si cette remarque prouve que la proximité et l'alliance du roy élevoit alors indifféremment les personnes et leur donnoit un rang plus considérable que les charges de la couronne, cela prouve aussy que sans quitter l'estat le plus simple de la noblesse et sans tiltre de principauté, les gentilshommes pouvoient occuper le plus haut rang par le seul droit de leur naissance. (Devyver, pp. 537-38)

Having then emphasized the great importance of these 'hautes charges' to the administration of the realm, Boulainviller continues

Dans la suite, les roys se trouvant trop bridez par cette barrière, abaissèrent l'autorité des charges et en supprimèrent quelques unes, en sorte que la haute noblesse cessa de considérer ceux qui en estoient revestus comme officiers de l'Estat, dont il arriva que les plus riches et les plus autorisez par leurs alliances ne feignirent point de les regarder comme des inférieurs, particulièrement ceux dont l'autorité ne s'estendoit pas sur les armes - car la guerre a toujours distingué avantageusement ceux là. Dans la suite, la puissance des roys s'estant accrüe, ils ont relevé la dignité des charges pour relever l'importance de leurs bienfaits et pour s'acquérir d'avantage les nobles à qui ils les partageoient. (p. 538)

Boulainviller cannot stop the historical progress of monarchical absolutism or the distinction of the blood royal, but at least history can show a time when these phenomena were not so well developed.

Boulainviller's arguments from 'right', his minute attention to the marks of rank and precedence, his contractual philosophy of the relation between kings and their subjects, his emphasis on the natural right of personal property, and, to a point, his mythologizing of particular periods of French history can all be subsumed under the category of 'history as criticism'. On the other hand, Boulainviller's inventive, occasionally ironic, manipulation of 'fact' and 'right' (extending at times to include contradiction of one or two of his most cherished principles), together with his more concrete proposals for political, economic, and social reform, can be seen as his attempts, more or less hopeful, to moderate the rigours of absolutism.¹ These two categories, 'criticism' and 'reform', are, however, not exhaustive. Neither can explain, for example, the exaggerated (almost lyrical) way in which Boulainviller talks of Charlemagne, or his more extreme (and morally dubious) expressions of reactionary sentiment. Another category is needed and has been supplied, if only sketchily, by

1. What results Boulainviller expected his writings to achieve is a matter for debate. In his Mémoire pour la noblesse de France contre les ducs et pairs he clearly expects his text to disabuse the peers so that they will give up their unjust claims (p. 89). However, in the same work he laments: 'on juge aisément que leurs prétensions ne diminuëront pas, dans un tems favorable à leurs idées chimériques, et contraire au bien de l'Estat' (p. 106).

Friedrich Meinecke.

Referring to Boulainviller's aforementioned principle that in matters of government 'nous ne pouvons, ce semble, choisir de règle plus sûre et plus convenable à nos mœurs, que l'exemple de ce qui s'est pratiqué parmi nous' (MH, p. 78), Meinecke proposes that 'der eigenen schlechten^h Zeit, sah er deshalb wohl mit Herzeleid ... ins Angesicht'. He continues: 'Es kam so etwas wie ein heroisches Schicksalsgefühl, das den unvermeidlichen Untergang des Herrlichen kommen sieht, über ihn'.¹ As a member of the now powerless old military aristocracy, sharing in its plight but conscious of its former glories, Boulainviller is most sensitive to its gradual decline from early vigour, through later irresponsibility and moral decadence to complete senility. This colours Boulainviller's whole conception of the direction of history.² From perfect beginnings all things necessarily degenerate; Boulainviller looks back to the perfect beginnings of French society with nostalgia. 'There are shifts of power from time to time in the governing class of any nation, and those who lost tend to romanticize the past in order to compensate themselves for what they no longer enjoy, often at the same time denouncing the decadence, the corruption of the times in which they have to live.'³ The sense of the tragic, heroic destiny of his own class leads Boulainviller to identify with his vigorous forefathers and to despise the effeminacy of his own times. Examples of this 'heroic moralism' abound in Boulainviller's histories of France, especially in his discussion of the judicial practices of the Franks, practices which, as Boulainviller well knows, shock the sensibility of his contemporaries.⁴

The range of emotional atmosphere attached to Boulainviller's heroic

1. Meinecke, Die Entstehung des Historismus, 2 vols (Munich and Berlin, 1936), I, 182.
2. Boulainviller's appreciation of the direction of French history (decline) is discussed below, pp. 144-50.
3. J. H. Plumb, The Death of the Past (London, 1969), p. 48.
4. Boulainviller's treatment of the Franks and their customs is discussed below, pp. 134-41.

moralism is considerable (below, pp.146-8). But its function, whatever the mood (even critical), remains the same. This, as Plumb suggests, is to provide a degree of compensation, of consolation, for lost power and honour. Like 'history as criticism', 'history as consolation' is everywhere apparent in Boulainviller's histories of France, but nowhere better displayed perhaps than in his 'Lettres sur les parlements'. Discussing in letter nine 'la juridiction effective des Etats', Boulainviller writes:

L'occasion des Etats de l'année 1355 est favorable à mon dessein; puisque le Roi Jean rendit sur leurs remontrances une Déclaration, qui fixe irrévocablement le droit des assemblées, et qui pourroit par cette raison être justement comparée à la grande Charte accordée aux Anglois par un Prince du même nom que le nôtre, s'il n'étoit pas malheureusement trop véritable qu'elle est demeurée oubliée depuis plus de deux cent ans, jusque là qu'il n'en reste aucun monument public autre qu'une copie conservée dans la Bibliothèque du Roi. (HAG, II, 202)

We have indeed met with this 'if only' approach already in the discussion of Boulainviller's treatment of Charles VII (above, p.94; and HAG, III, 158-59), and it is to be seen too in our author's evaluation of Charles V's ordinance of March 1356 (HAG, II, 266-67). Yet it is in his narration of the reign of Louis XI that Boulainviller's consoling 'if only' posture particularly reveals the acute sadness and frustration which underlie it. Before dealing specifically with Louis XI's government, however, Boulainviller gives a 'résumé' of, and 'quelques réflexions morales et politiques sur le sort de la Couronne de France pendant onze siècles qui l'ont précédé' (HAG, III, 136). The pain this doleful story causes Boulainviller is only too evident, for apart from the reigns of Charlemagne and Charles VII the principal characteristics of the history of France have been monarchical self-interest and the nobility's self-neglect (HAG, III, 136-59). Just as we noted the ironic twist in Boulainviller's conception of law (above, p. 52), so here we can appreciate the bitter irony of the Franks' becoming 'la conquête d'un de leurs Compatriotes' (Charles Martel) and of Louis XI's resolution 'de traiter la France comme un Pays de conquête' (HAG, III, 137 and 166).

Turning to Louis XI's struggle with 'la conjuration du Bien Public', Boulainviller has eventually of course to record the nobles' failure to triumph over their king, and yet during his narration of this contest Boulainviller shows how dearly he would love to be able to record a different verdict. Louis's enemies are all gathered together outside Paris to give battle to their sovereign. 'Il eut cependant le bonheur de combattre ses Ennemis séparément: et, comme la victoire fut incertaine, on peut juger que, s'ils eussent été unis, il auroit eu bien de la peine d'échapper à leur ressentiment' (HAG, III, 174). 'Plus jaloux de son autorité que de sa gloire' Louis XI then issued an ordinance revoking most of the existing taxation in France, and 'passa condamnation sur toute sa conduite précédente' (HAG, III, 175). Boulainviller continues:

Les Princes de leur côté laissèrent languir leurs nombreuses troupes sans les employer à l'attaque de Paris, qu'ils auroient pu forcer aisément: ils s'imaginèrent d'abord qu'ils le pouvoient afamer; puis, étant entrez en négociation dans l'absence du Roi, peu s'en fallut qu'ils ne fussent reçus dans la ville sans coup férir. Le retour inopiné du Roi fit avorter ce grand dessein sur le point de son exécution et contre son atente; car il étoit résolu, s'il avoit trouvé les Confédérez dans la ville, de se retirer en Italie dans les Etats du Duc de Milan son bon ami, qui ne lui donna qu'un seul conseil dans cette ocasion, savoir, d'acorder à chacun des Confédérez tout ce qu'ils demanderoient pour leurs avantages particuliers, parceque c'étoit l'unique moyen de les dèsunir et de les diviser. (HAG, III, 175-76)

This is exactly what Louis did, 'mais avec cette attention singulière du Roi de ne donner rien de convenable à chacun, et seulement ce qui pouvoit faire une raison de querelle ou de contestation entre les meilleurs amis' (HAG, III, 177).¹

Louis's victory over 'la conjuration' is thus complete and Boulainviller's wishing to undo it is otiose. But if he cannot change historical fact, Boulainviller can perhaps soften the finality of the nobles' defeat by re-evaluating the character of their opponent. In his concluding remarks on

1. Throughout his narration of these events Boulainviller's attitude seems to be that Louis only managed to win by rather unsporting means: gamesmanship and 'good' luck.

this episode Boulainviller writes:

C'est ainsi qu'un grand Politique, qui ne laisse pas d'être quelquefois surpris par ses passions, sait en pliant à la nécessité remédier aux désordres qu'il a lui même causez: mais il est bien rare d'en trouver d'aussi sages dans l'ocasion, que le fut alors notre Roi Louis XI, duquel on peut assurer que s'il eût eu autant de probité dans le coeur que d'étendue et de force dans le génie et de pénétration pour juger du caractère des Hommes et de leurs divers intérêts, il seroit justement placé au rang de nos plus dignes Monarques. (HAG, III, 178)

It is hardly with surprise that we see Boulainviller, a few pages later, ask us to consider Louis XI's government 'comme l'origine du despotisme exercé sans ménagement et sans bonnefoi à la ruine totale des Sujets grands et petits' (HAG, III, 186-187). However, earlier in his narration he had written à propos of Philippe VI, 'ce Prince avoit d'ailleurs tant de qualitez incompatibles avec le bonheur des Sujets, qu'il ne faut pas s'étonner que l'on regarde aujourd'hui son administration comme l'origine et la cause des malheurs de la France' (HAG, II, 180-81). Again, in the Préface critique au journal de Saint Louis it is the innovations of Saint Louis which are seen to be the causes of all the succeeding changes in French government (R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle, p. 126). In his Mémoires historiques, moreover, Boulainviller sees the decline in French government (dependent on the increase in 'l'intérêt particulier') as beginning shortly after the conquest of Gaul itself (MH, pp. 302-03). And yet, to return to the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France and Boulainviller's roll call of despotic French kings, we see our author maintain 'que, pour atteindre efficacement ce but [de rendre leur autorité despotique], l'administration du Cardinal de Richelieu et le regne de Louis XIV ont plus fait en 30 ans, que toutes les entreprises des Rois précédens n'avoient pu gagner en 1200 ans' (III, 136). From the critical point of view, irreversible decadence can be detected, it seems, at any moment in French history; but if history is to provide consolation and some, even slight, hope for the future, then serious perversion of traditional French government must be made to appear as a recent innovation lacking its own tradition and thus susceptible to

correction. It is because Henri IV showed a concern to protect the status of the old nobility that Boulainviller calls his reign 'une espèce de siècle d'or' despite its short duration (Dissertation sur la noblesse, Devyver, p. 543; see too the Requête de la noblesse contre les fausses prétentions de Messieurs les Ducs et Pairs, Lassaigue, p. 242).

It is in this light too that the full importance of Boulainviller's mythical representation of the reign of Charlemagne can be appreciated. Charlemagne not only vindicates the original constitution of the Franks but he also defers the moment when this original constitution finally begins to disintegrate. This explains why Boulainviller saw the corrupt and excessive power of the parlements after Charlemagne not as their responsibility but as the king's. Boulainviller cleverly asserts the authority and influence of the monarch so that he, rather than the pure and just constitution of France, can take the blame for an abuse of constitutional power. The myth of Charlemagne cannot deny the historical realities of the rise of absolutism and the decline of the old nobility but it presents these phenomena as more recent than they would have been without it and it provides a greater degree of consolation for lost status than the myth of the conquest of Gaul for it rests completely legitimately upon the customs and constitution of the Franks, needs no support from the dubious principle of conquest, and is centred upon an heroic figure. Similarly, the praise accorded Charles VII and his government is a way of trying to ensure that the absolutism of Louis X^I_V be seen as the fruit of specifically seventeenth-century political developments and not as the natural conclusion of centuries of French feudal history.

'History as consolation', broadly speaking, has three distinct and opposing tendencies running through it. At times Boulainviller, 'préoccupé de regrets',¹ seems completely overwhelmed by the tragedy of the death of

1. Augustin Thierry, Récits des temps mérovingiens précédés de considérations sur l'histoire de France, 2 vols (Paris, 1840), p. 52.

French noble virtue. This tendency can be particularly appreciated in Boulainviller's lamenting the catastrophic damage the French inflicted upon themselves at the battle of Fontenay (below, p. 147, HAG, I, 275). Occasionally, however, Boulainviller, accepting the past as past, glorifies and revels in its moments of splendour. These moments are, of course, the Frankish conquest of Gaul and the reign of Charlemagne. Yet there are times when Boulainviller seems to have hopes that the nobility will one day rise again to a position of prominence. When he is in this more hopeful mood Boulainviller's remarks can be defiant or restrained.

Hope in its defiant aspect can be seen, quite appropriately, in Boulainviller's Dissertation sur la noblesse. Boulainviller recognizes that 'les beaux jours de la noblesse sont passez' and, indeed, as 'le monde est le jouet d'une succession continuelle' that such an eclipse of noble glory is only to be expected. Lionel Gossman would consider this sentiment of Boulainviller's to be a reasonably detached reflection upon the historicity of law and custom, and the inevitability of change.¹ However, Boulainviller continues, in a manner that argues against any real 'objectivity' in his first remark, by writing: 'Il arrivera peut estre, et quant à moy je l'espère, que du nombre de nos enfans quelqu'un percera cette obscurité où nous vivons, pour rendre à nostre nom son ancien éclat, et alors, nous ne nous plaindrons plus de la vicissitude qui nous relèvera après nous avoir abaissés' (^[sic] Devyver, p. 540). Concluding his text with reflections on 'les jeux de la fortune' and the rising new nobility's displacing of the old, Boulainviller, conscious of his noble heritage, declares:

Mais malgré cela, si le malheur du siècle, si les besoins de l'Estat favorisent leur ambition pendant un certain temps, ces mesmes causes les dépouillent peu après et les replongent dans l'obscurité dont elles estoient sorties. La vraye et l'incommunicable noblesse subsiste toujours et ne peut manquer de se relever avec distinction sous des princes aussy instruits et aussy équitables que les nostres, lorsque le lustre

1. L. Gossman, Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment. The World and Work of La Curne de Sainte-Palaye (Baltimore, 1968), pp. 110-11.

de la naissance sera soutenu par un véritable mérite. (Devyver, p. 548)¹

In a more restrained mood, Boulainviller's hope seems to be for a less resplendent return of the nobility to a position of distinction, and the power he would be satisfied for the second order to have is little more than notional. Discussing the perfect balance between the respective power of the sovereign and parlement under Charlemagne's administration, Boulainviller writes: 'Car, quelque chose que notre siècle en puisse penser, il sera toujours vrai de dire qu'il y a une grande différence entre l'obéissance forcée, qui sent l'oppression, et celle qui, quoique nécessaire, étant libre, est moins rendue à la crainte qu'à la Raison, à la justice, et à l'amour des Peuples pour le Souverain' (HAG, I, 244). Indeed, it is because Louis XI was so underhand and devious in his mistreatment of the nobility that he is seen as more reprehensible than even Louis XIV, who, although only interested in establishing his own despotic authority, 'au moins l' tenu une route sur laquelle on a pu compter; les maximes de son gouvernement n'ont point été ambiguës' (HAG, III, 206-07). As long as the quality of nobility and the nobles' right to a voice are at least recognized, Boulainviller, one infers, would be content (although elsewhere, while still recognizing 'la puissance souveraine du Monarque', Boulainviller demands more than 'une obéissance purement passive, ou tout au plus l' droit de conseiller et de supplier souvent très inutilement'; HAG, II, 202).

The two aspects of hope in Boulainviller's histories of France, defiant and restrained, bring us back to the most difficult problem in any assessment of our author: reactionary or liberal, and if not exclusively one or the other then what are the proportions of either in the strange brew of

1. It seems unnecessary, in order to explain the evident psychological and spiritual comfort such remarks would afford Boulainviller, to see, as André Devyver does, an astrological significance behind them or to assume that Boulainviller believed noble blood to be 'doté de vertus magiques' (Devyver, pp. 283-84 and 374-75).

assertions and hopes, persuasion and lamentation that constitute his writings on France, its past and its future? Ultimately the solution, if one there be, seems of necessity to depend on the temperament of the critic and the context into which he puts his study of Boulainviller. Henri Sée, for reasons already noted (above pp.97-98 and 100 n.3), and Renée Simon, out of a desire to rescue the memory of Boulainviller from complete neglect, see him essentially as a liberal and a precursor of the 'philosophes' of the Enlightenment. André Devyver, writing the history of noble reaction under the 'Ancien Régime', sees Boulainviller as an utter reactionary. M. Duméril, perceiving Boulainviller to be the first to create a political myth of Charlemagne, speaks of his 'âme presque républicaine' (p. 151). And Vincent Buranelli is happy simply to point out Boulainviller's inconsistencies.

The present examination has tried to accept both interpretations of Boulainviller, liberal and reactionary (or perhaps, rather, conservative), by suggesting that they represent not simply two sides of one coin but quite different intentions and planes of discussion ('reform', 'criticism', and 'consolation'). It is Buranelli's failure to perceive these differences that renders his conclusion less than satisfactory. Devyver, however, might still object that 'history as criticism' and 'history as consolation' do not explain sufficiently well such extreme statements and reactionary sentiments as Boulainviller's remark concerning the crusading pilgrims (above, p.98), nor indeed his racist theories of the supremacy of the French nobility. One might reply, if one is to avoid the danger of an inability to judge as outlined by Elton (above, p.100), that just as the myths of the Frankish conquest of Gaul and of Charlemagne were fictions consciously used by Boulainviller to support his theories of the political system he would like to see established in France, so his racist theories of noble and commoner, susceptible to modification (above, p.106) and resting on the morally dubious foundation of conquest, are simply fictions

employed in the defence of present noble privilege. Indeed, the idea of a distinction continuing between the two nations and peoples, Franks and Gauls, once the Gauls had been allowed into the army, is shown as false in Boulainviller's own Dissertation sur la noblesse. Referring to this acceptance of the Gauls into the Frankish army, Boulainviller writes:

Ce dernier abus fut celui qui, dans le progrez des années, avança le plus le meslange des deux nations, car bien qu'elles fussent jointes ensemble par la société d'une mesme demeure, quoyque les François prissent des femmes gauloises et qu'ils donnassent leurs filles réciproquement à des Gaulois, c'estoit toujours sans confusion du rang et du droit de la nation conquérante, jusques à ce que la société dans les armées, et dans les charges et les emplois, les égala toutes deux: d'abord imperceptiblement, ensuite par un meslange entier qui se consumma pendant les desordres et les divisions des successeurs de Charles-magne et les courses des Normands. En sorte qu'à l'avènement de Hugues Capet, les deux peuples se trouvoient confondus sous un mesme droit, quoyque la distinction des terres saliques fût plus grande que jamais et que l'esclavage des habitans de la campagne ait encore longtemps subsisté par rapport aux droits des seigneuries, mais non par rapport à la difference des nations. (Devyver, p. 515)

Similarly, one might say that Boulainviller's attitude to the pilgrims of the crusade, although certainly distasteful, is an easy one to adopt in such a purely historical context, and is really little more than consoling bluster. And so, to return to the moral problem of conquest, we see that André Devyver writes: 'ce fut pénible pour [Boulainviller] de prendre conscience de ce que [l'ancienne grandeur de la noblesse] avait supposé à l'origine: l'asservissement de l'immense majorité des hommes et des femmes qui composaient la France ... Comment une telle injustice avait-elle pu se muer en fondement de la légalité sociale, devenir la condition de l'harmonie sociale (du moins à ce qu'il croyait)?' (p. 363). He continues: 'Longtemps il dut s'interroger avec angoisse sur cette réalité presque insoutenable' (ibid.). If, however, one agrees that a theory of racial supremacy, of dominance of one people over another, can only be 'justified' by the principle of conquest, then there is no need to suppose that Boulainviller was particularly troubled in adopting it, for it certainly has no real place in his political philosophy (above, pp. 53-58), and indeed its only function would seem to be to support the myth of the Frankish conquest of Gaul.

These may be worthwhile objections to make to Devyver's heavy insistence that 'feudal reactionary' is a completely appropriate description of Boulainviller and his ideas. And yet as an examination of Boulainviller's explicit criticisms of French history and historical characters will show, 'feudal reactionary' does seem a compelling and convenient label to affix to him. To rest content with this description, however, is to ignore not only the roles such feudal reaction plays in his histories of France (criticism and consolation), but also the compromises he is prepared to make with his conservative social and political principles in order to argue for a return to power, in some way, of the second order, and the precise plans he puts forward for the economic and political reform of France. These points should be borne in mind as we turn to enquire more deeply into the moral aspect of Boulainviller's historiography.

PART TWO

THE MORALITY OF HISTORY

Introduction

The traditional humanist view of historiography placed great weight upon the morality of history. This is an attitude shared by Boulainviller but it is for him no simple following of form. Indeed, the moral aspect of history for Boulainviller leaves the purely pragmatic and perhaps platitudinous level of mere moral instruction and becomes fundamental to his whole conception of history. Such a moral attitude towards history prevails a long time after Boulainviller, of course, and can be readily seen in the works of Montesquieu and Voltaire. However, whereas the moral preoccupations of Voltaire, in particular, are generally inspired by a 'progressive' desire to 'écraser l'infâme' and to discover truth,¹ a certain pessimism notwithstanding,² the moral attitude of Boulainviller is for the most part highly conservative and sombre.

The moral aspect of Boulainviller's historiography can be examined at three levels. However, these are far from independent of each other and indeed it is usual for a comment made at one level to have meaning at another or at all three.³ These levels are firstly, particular moral appraisals and reflections; secondly, moral attitudes clearly influenced by the more general concerns of Boulainviller's particular histories, especially his histories of France; and finally, comments giving an impression of Boulainviller's more philosophical attitude towards history. In order to appreciate the intricacy of Boulainviller's moral complexion, that is to say how these 'levels' are interrelated, it will be helpful to look firstly at the moral aspect of Boulainviller's histories of France and then at that of his other histories.

1. See Brumfitt's Voltaire: historian, pp. 96-97.
2. See Henry Vyverberg's Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment, Harvard University Press, 1958, pp. 170-188.
3. The division of Boulainviller's moral comments into three categories is a mere expedient to assist analysis. It should not be thought that Boulainviller actively thought in terms of such a division.

Chapter Four

The Moral Dimension of Boulainviller's Historiography of France

I History's task : to judge and to instruct

Individual moral appraisals and reflections (i.e. moral comments of the first type,) are to be seen throughout Boulainviller's histories of France. At their simplest they take the form of bald, rather unreflective apportionments of praise and blame. Speaking of the judgement on Chilperic by Gregoire de Tours, Boulainviller says:

Au reste, quoiqu'il ne lui refuse pas les louanges dûes à son érudition et à sa magnificence pour les spectacles publics, il blâme avec justice sa poésie Latine rimée, et absolument irrégulière par l'ignorance de la quantité . . . mais sur tout il l'accuse d'aveuglement et d'une complaisance indigne pour la plus méchante femme du siècle, pendant qu'il étoit à l'égard du monde le plus dur et le plus impitoyable de tous les tyrans. (MH, p. 229)

Boulainviller's highly moral tone is very evident here and this practice of drawing up the balance sheet at the end of particular reigns is readily seen throughout his narration of the first two races of French kings.

Boulainviller's own summing up of Childeric III will serve as an example; for our author Childeric was

un Prince qui semble avoir été le seul, dans la postérité de Clotaire II capable de relever la dignité de la couronne; il étoit né avec de la fierté et de l'honneur, mais gâté par l'adulation des Courtisans et par la licence de tout faire, il éprouva dans sa jeunesse ce que la Providence garde quelquefois pour le dernier âge, je veux dire les funestes conséquences d'un pouvoir trop absolu.

(MH, p. 272)¹

1. Deaths ordained by Providence have an obvious moral meaning : those thus afflicted deserved their deaths. The death of Clovis, which Boulainviller would prefer to see as the work of Providence (MH, p. 126; below, p. 136) is a good example of the interrelation of the different levels of moral comment to be found in Boulainviller's texts; in it we may see moral pragmatism (first level), politically interested morality (second level), and, ostensibly at least, the general moral meaning of historical events (third level). Boulainviller's attitude towards Providence is the subject of Part Three.

The desire at least to appear fair and objective is evident too in Boulainviller's final comments on King Pepin who died in 852:

Telle fut la fin d'un Prince né avec un grand courage, une beauté singulière de visage, et divers talens qui toutefois ne purent fléchir la fortune: la corruption de ses moeurs lui suscita beaucoup d'ennemis, mais il ne fut pas moins aimé que haï, en sorte que sa prison, ni sa mort, n'éteignirent point si absolument son parti, que les restes n'ayent fait beaucoup de peine à Charles et à sa Postérité.

(MH, pp. 414-15)

Elsewhere Boulainviller follows the same procedure for Charles Martel, Charles le Chauve, Louis IV and Archbishop Brunon (MH, pp. 325, 447, 509 and 513).

Judging, praising and blaming are thus important functions of history for Boulainviller. In his discussion of the qualities necessary to the historian Boulainviller shows this faculty of judging correctly and impartially to be particularly relevant to his task:

Enfin il importe surtout qu'il eût cette finesse et cette droiture de jugement qui fait qu'on aperçoit et qu'on saisit d'abord la vérité, et qu'après l'avoir connue il eût la fermeté de la dire et de donner à la vertu et au vice la louange et le blâme qui leur appartiennent. Fermeté pourtant, qui, en le rendant inaccessible à l'intérêt ou à la passion, ne doit jamais être indiscrete, mais tempérée par cette espèce de sagesse supérieure, qui sait toujours mettre le bien dans son plus beau jour et peindre le mal avec des couleurs qui le font hair, sans que cette haine tombe directement sur ceux qui l'ont commis.

(HAG, I, 190)

The question of Boulainviller's own impartiality when ascribing praise and blame will be dealt with more fully in a moment, but the quoted example of his summary of Childeric's moral worth (above, p.122) shows how a straightforward moral judgement can reveal political bias.

Whatever political bias this 'balance sheet' history may have, however, it does possess for Boulainviller a genuinely educative function, and history unworthy to be written is omitted:

Après la mort de Clovis, la France fut partagée entre ses quatre enfans, Thierry, Clodomir, Childebert, et Clotaire . . . Je m'arrêterai peu à discuter l'histoire de ces quatre freres, aussi bien que de leurs Successeurs, dont les actions sont si anciennes, le mérite si peu connu, et la barbarie si évidente, que la postérité n'en a pu faire presque aucun profit: c'est pourquoi je me contenterai de remarquer les événemens principaux selon l'ordre des années.

(MH, pp. 207-8)

History has a duty to provide models for emulation and condemnation and to draw out the lessons of a particular narration. In his instructions to his son Boulainviller says: 'Lisez l'histoire et méditez-la; voyez-y les leçons de morale'.¹ Occasionally these lessons, pragmatic in the extreme, are quite straightforward and reveal a certain practical wisdom in Boulainviller. After a battle between Thierry and Pepin in which the latter had been victorious Boulainviller remarks: 'le tresor et la personne du Roi [i.e. Thierry] vinrent immédiatement après au pouvoir de Pepin, lequel usa de sa victoire avec tant de modération, qu'il gagna l'estime et l'affection de ceux qui lui avoient été le plus contraires' (MH, p. 286). Elsewhere Boulainviller makes the point that moderation in the exercise of authority is essential for civil harmony and peace: 'tant il est vrai que les peuples se portent plus naturellement à jouir du repos qu'à tout autre objet et que les révoltes obstinées sont plutôt l'effet d'une oppression trop violente que d'une trop grande liberté'.²

However, Boulainviller's moral reflections are usually of a more philosophical and sombre nature. Recounting the barbarous behaviour of the Duc Hunaud and his subsequent withdrawal into a monastery, he says: 'c'est ainsi que les hommes, peu d'accord avec eux-mêmes, sont à la fois capables des plus grand crimes et des meilleures actions' (MH, p. 333). His more general view of man shows a similar recognition of the poles of human action, with man helpless in the middle: 'le coeur de l'homme a ce défaut commun de ne pouvoir être ni bon ni méchant, et de n'être jamais d'accord avec lui-même dans le choix d'un terme à sa conduite' (MH, p. 403). Despite recognition of the good to be found in some of those who have held power in history it is, rather, Boulainviller's pessimism which is normally felt, as in the case of 'Conrad, surnommé le Pacifique' where the rarity of virtue only emphasizes its almost complete lack in the rest of

1. Idée d'un système général d'éducation in Oeuvres philosophiques, II, 142.
2. EF, III, 105. Essentially the same point is made later on too, in vol IV, p. 350.

French history, 'rare exemple de ce que pourroient les Princes, si connoissans eux-mêmes ils vouloient faire justice aux autres' (EF, III, 307).

This is, of course, hardly an instance of that perfect impartiality which Boulainviller would demand from any serious historian, for his pre-occupation with the wickedness of French kings, from a political point of view, is clearly visible. Yet it would be wrong to consider that his moral pessimism comes solely from political disillusionment. Boulainviller's sombre attitude towards the actions of men seems more profound. Speaking of the German Emperors' desire to protect rather than usurp the political privileges of their subjects Boulainviller notes that the result of this individual freedom was civil strife, and he concludes: 'cela fait voir qu'il n'y a rien de si bon dans le principe, dont les hommes n'abusent, et qu'ils ne tournent à leur propre ruine' (EF, II, 378).

This is an attitude which a certain relish for the ironic and paradoxical only serves to underline. In 524

Clodomir entreprit de poursuivre seul cette guerre, où il s'engagea après avoir fait massacrer de sang froid le malheureux Sigismond, contre l'avis des gens de bien; mais il porta bientôt la peine de son inhumanité, ayant été tué à Vezerene en Dauphiné, après le gain d'une bataille laquelle lui auroit assujetti la Bourgogne, s'il avoit vécu. (MH, p. 211)

In writing to one of his sons Boulainviller points to the personal problems and life-long anxieties that may well have led to his jaundiced outlook:

Faites attention à l'état où m'a laissé votre grand père; j'avais sacrifié tout mon bien à sa fortune, je perdis tout à sa mort. Je me vis seul et sans appui; je n'avais d'amis que les siens, et j'ai éprouvé que peu de gens savent être amis des morts. Je trouvai mes ennemis dans ma propre famille. J'avais à soutenir contre¹ des personnes puissantes un procès qui décidait de ma fortune; je n'avais pour moi que la justice et mon courage, je l'ai gagné sans crédit et sans bassesse. Enfin, j'ai fait de ma mauvaise fortune tout ce qu'on en pouvait faire. (OP, II, 141)

1. Mme Simon describes Boulainviller's law suit against his father in considerable detail in her book Henry de Boulainviller, pp. 18-23.

This stoic acceptance of misfortune and the resolution to make of it what he could, coupled with his acute awareness of the loss in prestige and power of his own class, would seem to have produced in Boulainviller a highly moral and conservative attitude to behaviour and to his fellow men.¹ In his instructions to his daughters Boulainviller proposes a very noble but rather austere and difficult code of conduct:

Ne soyez pas jalouse des qualités d'autrui. Ne comptez point trop sur les hommes. Ne soyez pas hâtive dans vos jugements. Soyez juste et modérée dans vos jugements. Ne cherchez pas à dominer . . Regardez sans étonnement ni envie ce qui est au-dessus de vous . . Détruisez en vous la haine et la vengeance . . Gardez le silence, il convient à une jeune personne. Evitez de faire rire. Sachez écouter. Evitez de railler. Evitez l'air distrait. (OP, II, 139)

These admonitions, splendid as they are, are more suited to the sage than to young ladies and Boulainviller admits this:

Si par malheur, ma fille, vous ne suivez pas mes conseils, s'ils sont perdus pour vous, ils seront utiles pour moi. Par ces préceptes, je me forme de nouvelles obligations. Ces réflexions me sont de nouveaux engagements pour travailler à la vertu; je fortifie ma raison même contre moi, et me mets dans la nécessité de lui obéir, ou je me charge de la honte d'avoir su la connaître et de lui avoir été infidèle. (OP, II, 140)

As we shall see (below, pp. 144-50), stoicism and acute aristocratic sensitivity combine to influence greatly Boulainviller's general moral attitude towards the history of France.

As well as giving lessons of a general and pessimistic kind Boulainviller's history also teaches in a more precise and constructive way. The clearest exposition of this attitude is found in Boulainviller's letter to Mlle. Cousinot.² For Boulainviller history is a rich field ready to produce in abundance whatever one wishes as long as one's particular talents are brought to it properly and in earnest:

1. Speaking of Boulainviller's work as an astrologer Jean Ehrard writes : 'le naturalisme astrologique de Boulainvillier conduit ce grand seigneur à une sorte de stoïcisme aristocratique; si le cours des astres fixe irrévocablement celui de l'histoire, à quoi bon les 'vains projets de la politique'?' (L'Idée de la nature en France dans la première moitié du 18^e siècle, 2 vols (Paris, 1963), p. 739).
2. See R. Simon's Un Révolté du grand siècle, : Henry de Boulainviller pp. 71-81.

L'histoire est donc justement dans mon estime le vaste champ où, fouillant même légèrement la terre, l'on découvre les fondements de tout ce que la raison ou le caprice des hommes ont édifié. Les gens de guerre y apprennent les changements arrivés à leur profession et les motifs de ces changements qui sont autant de principes pour leur métier; les ecclésiastiques y trouvent les différentes contestations qui ont éclairci la vérité; un ministre habile y apprend la véritable finance, non pas celle qui égorge les peuples, mais celle qui soutient les Etats. Enfin, le particulier y apprend à vivre dans la soumission qui lui convient et à se dérober aux événements violents; il cultive par son secours ses talents naturels, il se nourrit des vertus et, s'avertit lui-même au sujet des vices dont il trouve la peinture.¹

So all may profit. But the student of law would seem to find the most promising material:

Un homme qui . . a bien étudié le droit, en peut tirer un grand fruit. Si, par exemple, après s'être fait un plan de justice simple et naturelle, il s'attache à suivre l'ordre des lois, distinguant celles que les besoins de la société ont obligé d'établir de celles que la seule cupidité des législateurs a introduites, il aura un plaisir infini de comparer l'état présent de la jurisprudence avec celui où elle était quand l'ordonnance de Moulins a été publiée; mais il en aura bien davantage s'il fait remonter sa recherche de siècle en siècle jusqu'aux premiers temps de la monarchie. S'il veut même parcourir une seconde fois le même espace et redescendre de ce premier temps de point en point à tous les âges suivants, il démêlera bien mieux et avec une satisfaction inexprimable les causes et les motifs de ce qui a maintenant force de loi parmi nous.

La même étude lui fera connaître l'origine des abus et réglera par ce moyen le degré d'estime qu'il doit aux différents âges.²

It will be noted that these expressions of the educative role of history are not without bias, both moral and political: history will teach the individual to accommodate himself to the violent world he inhabits, and it will reveal the 'unjust' political and constitutional machinations of increasingly powerful monarchs. Consideration of these political prejudices leads naturally to a discussion of the second level discernible in Boulainviller's moral attitude towards French history, namely moral comments obviously inspired by his political thesis (below, pp.130-44). But first it will be interesting to look at those comments generated, it would seem, both by his political concerns and by his more personal moral complexion.

Particular comments of this type may disclose more personal pessimism than political opinion but both elements are discernible:

1. Ibid., p. 79.

2. Ibid., pp. 77-78.

Aribert retourné dans son païs porta la guerre en Gascogne, et soumit généralement toute la Province à son obéissance, mais il mourut aussitôt après son fils Chilperic, tous deux, à ce que l'on crut, empoisonnez par Dagobert; mais comme il est rare de voir des Princes injustes qui ne soient encore timides sur le sujet de l'autre vie; pour compenser cette mauvaise action, il fit dans le même tems, la magnifique fondation de l'Abbaye de St Denys.

The suggestion of contempt for such timorous superstition is amplified a few lines later on:

En cette même année la réputation de la puissance de Dagobert et de la protection qu'il avoit accordée a Fismand, le mit sur le Trône d'Espagne; tant il est vrai que les Rois sont bien souvent plus grands de loin que de près. (MH, p. 254).

A similar attitude is displayed towards Hugues Capet and his political manoeuvring 'qui fut un chef-d'oeuvre d'adresse et de subtilité, plutot que de courage et de magnanimité' (HAG, I, 136).

Censure motivated equally by his personal code of moral conduct, his desire to instruct and his political allegiances is particularly noticeable in Boulainviller's criticism of Charles le Chauve:

Tout ce que l'on peut recueillir du regne de Charle-le-Chauve se réduit à faire déplorer les funestes conséquences de l'intérêt particulier; puisqu'il en est arrivé une désolation générale causée par les divisions intestines, par les ravages des Normans, et par l'avidité de ce Monarque. On ne trouve dans sa conduite qu'un amour démesuré de lui même, qui le rendit aveugle pour tout autre objet; nulle considération pour sa Postérité ni pour sa succession, comme les Actes du Parlement de Querci le témoignent. Ainsi on ne doit qu'à lui la corruption de l'ancienne discipline et des moeurs, qui s'introduisit de son tems par son exemple, le mépris et l'oubli du devoir et des engagements de la Société, source des usurpations qui démembrèrent la France incontinent après sa mort. (HAG, I, 280-281).

History's task to instruct has, it has been noted (above, p.124), a genuinely moral aim. However, this duty, particularly in the case of providing models for emulation or condemnation, is clearly suited to conveying political sentiments. Discussing this point in his letter to Mlle. Cousinot, Boulainviller exclaims:

Heureux ont été les Grecs de trouver dans leur histoire tant d'exemples de vertu, d'amour du devoir, des lois et de la patrie; heureux pareillement les Romains d'en trouver d'autres de fermeté, de force, de mépris pour les biens et la volupté! Mais les Français seront-ils nécessairement exclus des avantages qu'on peut tirer de l'histoire parce qu'ils ont toujours eu des rois et parce que le récit de la pluspart de leurs

vies ne nous fait connaître ni des héros, ni même des hommes sensés et raisonnables?

Boulainviller replies that, no, French history can instruct equally as well as Greek or Roman, but instead of providing examples for admiration, rather it furnishes us with examples for criticism and condemnation:

on y verra même plus qu'en aucune autre le cours et le succès des passions humaines, tantôt par rapport à la religion et au culte extérieur, tantôt par rapport à l'augmentation de la puissance des princes, tantôt par rapport à l'indolence, à la faiblesse et à la prostitution des grands, tantôt par rapport au désespoir des peuples, observant en général qu'à la différence des vieilles histoires celle-ci nous propose plus d'exemples à fuir et à détester qu'elle ne nous en montre à imiter.²

Praise and blame require, of course, a fixed moral norm, and Boulainviller is emphatic on this point:

je m'atacherai toujours à soutenir et à croire qu'il y a des règles de devoir certaines et connues pour toutes les conditions, soit des Papes ou des Rois, et que quiconque ose les violer est comptable à l'Histoire de la transgression: le mal ne pouvant jamais être appelé bien en qui que ce soit qui le commette, par un Historien fidèle, impartial, sincère, et juste estimateur de la vertu réelle. (HAG, I, 207)

This is very important for Boulainviller because he knows very well that his moral norm is not that of his contemporaries, but belongs rather to a past age. It is this which underlies the apparently objective, and historiographically important methodological principle enunciated in Boulainviller's Préface critique au journal de Saint Louis:

Je n'ai garde de disconvenir que les maximes du gouvernement n'aient été changées parmi nous, depuis le temps de Saint Louis; je ne prétends pas même que celles que nous avons prises ne doivent être préférées; il y a quantité de bonnes raisons en leur faveur, mais s'agissant ici de qualifier des faits d'histoire qui sont certains, il est évident que nous ne saurions les condamner ou les approuver sur le plan de nos maximes présentes et que, pour en juger équitablement, il faut connaître les idées de ce temps-là et se mettre en la place à ceux qui se sont conduits par ces mêmes idées.³

1. R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle : Henry de Boulainviller, pp. 74-75.
2. Ibid., p. 75.
3. Ibid., p. 114.

The political implications of this are drawn out immediately: 'Or, s'il est évident que l'on n'avait encore la moindre notion d'une monarchie despotique, tant s'en faut qu'elle fût pratiquée avant l'établissement des fiefs'.¹

Boulainviller's moral norm goes back to his idea of the conquering Franks of the dark ages; brave, independent and proud spirits for whom dependence of any kind would be worse than death. It is from this point of view that Boulainviller often sets forth to judge between the good and the bad, and to defend his beloved Franks and their institutions as he peruses the history of France.

II Politically inspired praise and blame and its attendant problems

Moral comments of the second kind, clearly generated by his political interests, are plentiful in Boulainviller's histories of France. However, they are not always unambiguous and sometimes they reveal a tension in Boulainviller's mind both with regard to the desirable ethics and with regard to the political purpose of his histories.

At their simplest, moral comments of this second category are usually criticisms of those forces which led away from the original constitution of the Franks, as Boulainviller describes it, and which led to the rise of monarchical absolutism. These forces are conceived of in a very personal and pragmatic way and are normally simply the 'immoral' political ambition of princes and clergy. Consequently Boulainviller's criticisms of particular kings and their administrations appear regularly. He criticizes Clotaire II for releasing the Lombards from their burden of tribute to the Franks, 'un terrible exemple de ce que peut l'avidité des Ministres et des conséquences de la trop grande facilité des Princes à cet égard' (MH, p. 249); he criticizes Pepin's conversion to Christianity as only a political expedient:

1. Ibid.

Je ne sçai s'il est utile de donner un article à la pieté de ce grand homme, puisque la soumission qu'il a marquée pour les Pasteurs de l'Eglise seroit, ce semble, plus digne de nos éloges, si elle n'avoit eu moins d'intérêt et de récompense mondaine, outre qu'il ne peut être loué de la maniere dont il a traité ses proches collatéraux; toutefois à sa mort il a marqué des sentimens très-Chrétiens, plus heureux si ç'eut été ceux du reste de sa vie. (MH, pp. 352-353).

Boulainviller's moral attack on certain kings can be vindictive in the extreme. When discussing the documents recording the proceedings of the Parlement of Quiercy-sur-Oise under Charles le Chauve, Boulainviller is delighted at the mental anguish of this unfortunate monarch:

l'on y reconnoit, à la justification de la Providence, l'inquiétude et les défiances dont le coeur de Charles étoit déchiré, tant du côté de la mort qu'il appréhendoit, que sur le sujet de son propre fils, dont il avoit néanmoins éprouvé depuis peu l'obéissance, en lui faisant répudier sa femme qu'il aimoit, pour le marier à une autre; sur le sujet des Grands et des Peuples qu'il avoit également mécontentez; c'est ainsi que la préoccupation de l'amour propre se dissipe à la fin, et que tous les Monarques qui ont été les plus passionnez pour leur intérêt personnel, voyent disparaître les fausses idées qui les avoient flatez, et naître à leur place les douloureux reproches d'une conscience effrayée par la terreur de tous les événemens qui ne dépendent point de leur volonté. (MH, pp. 441-442)

Boulainviller is pleased to quote from this document, not only to demonstrate Charles's anxiety but also to vaunt the respect with which the nobles treated this contemptible king.

Boulainviller is particularly critical of those superstitious kings who treated the clergy with too great a respect and deference. Discussing the influence of the clergy in the peace effected between the Emperor Lotaire and his brothers he complains:

Voilà donc cette Couronne que Charlemagne avoit fait prendre à son fils sur l'Autel pour marque de son indépendance, en la disposition des Prélats que Nitad dit avoir été des gens de rien; ou plutôt voilà quel fut le terme de cette dévotion basse et rampante, destituée de courage et d'honneur que Louis le Débonnaire avoit inspirée à ses enfans, après l'avoir pratiquée lui-même. (MH, pp. 409-410).

Boulainviller considers the ambition of the clergy to have been one of the principal reasons for the decline in authority of the nobility; in particular, their drawing up of legal documents in Latin, especially marriage contracts, which only they could understand made them essential to government (HAG, I, 324-28). That they should have written in Latin Boulainviller

considers 'singulier' but there is no explicit attempt to explain such a strange practice. His implicit criticism of their ambition is explanation enough for him.

This 'explanation' is an instance of the very pragmatic and highly moral mode of explanation which Boulainviller sees as largely sufficient to account for the degenerate trend of French history and which he calls 'la chicane'. Indeed, the whole development of jurisprudence, in which clergy and royalty had an equal interest, is nothing but the workings of 'chicane':

la nouvelle propriété des biens fit naitre parmi ces Gens là une infinité de contestations: et, comme l'usage des armes leur étoit absolument interdit, il en résultoit des procès qui donnèrent occasion à l'étude de la Jurisprudence, ou plutôt de la Chicane, qui en peu de tems inonda toute la France, sans excepter la Cour du Roi, que l'on peut même dire en avoir donné l'exemple aux autres. (HAG, I, 344)

It is by 'les subtilités de la chicane' that self-interest works away at 'le droit commun' and finally overcomes it.¹

The political bias behind the specifically educative function of Boulainviller's history of France is given clear expression in his discussion of the Franks' conquest of Gaul as an historical event:

La Conquête des Gaules méritoit bien que je m'étendisse à son occasion, non-seulement à cause de la dignité du sujet, qui est l'un des plus illustres que la Mémoire ait conservé, ou à cause de l'intérêt que nous y devons prendre, puisque c'est le fondement de L'Etat François dans lequel nous vivons; mais principalement parce que c'est à cette Epoque que nous devons rapporter l'ordre politique, suivi depuis par la Nation, et le droit essentiel et primordial de tous ses Ministres; ce qui doit faire le principal sujet des réflexions auxquelles cet Ouvrage est destiné. (MH, pp. 126-127).

Boulainviller continues by drawing out his main point namely that the Franks conquered Gaul as a free nation and that their success in this enterprise is attributable to their collective bravery and not simply to the particular capacity of their kings. It is because of their excessive attention to 'la dignité du Trône' and their neglect of the rest of 'la Nation' that Boulainviller is so critical of past French historians.² He

1. R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle : Henry de Boulainviller, p. 100.

2. Boulainviller too is concerned with 'la dignité du Trône, qui est la gloire et le soutien de la Nation' (HAG, I, 172) but he conceives of this in very different terms. See above, pp.37-42 .

is only too conscious of the necessity to argue against their interpretation and perhaps a note of supplication and desperation may be perceived in his deference to kingly authority and his awareness of the peculiar path he treads with only historical truth, which he believes he alone possesses, for his companion:

J'ai toujours été choqué de ce mécompte de nos Historiens, qui, sans en excepter aucun, ont manqué à cet égard d'exactitude et de fidélité dès le principe : et en effet, c'est à ce titre le plus abusif qui puisse être imaginé, qu'il faut rapporter l'idée commune qui fait regarder la Gaule, et à présent la France, comme le Patrimoine de Clovis et de ses Successeurs . . Remettons donc ces objets dans leur véritable jour. Honorons dans la personne des Rois tout l'éclat et la grandeur qui appartiennent aux Chefs d'une Nation si belliqueuse; mais examinons et faisons voir, selon les règles de la vérité et de l'histoire; les droits et les avantages que cette même Nation a acquis et conservé sous la conduite et la protection de ces mêmes Rois, principalement à l'occasion de la Conquête de la Gaule. (MH, pp. 127-128).

In his letter to Mlle. Cousinot Boulainviller's attitude to the kings of French history is much less restrained:

Les Rois qui, de leur vivant, ont dominé impérieusement sur la terre sont, par ce moyen [the study of history], placés au-dessous de nous, leur conduite est soumise à notre examen et l'histoire prise en cette manière, loin de se laisser éblouir par leur grandeur passée, les condamne ou comme des méchants, ou comme des poltrons, ou comme des tyrans, et les sangsues de leurs peuples. Quelquefois aussi elle les loue, car elle ne refuse pas son approbation à Charlemagne, à Charles V, encore moins à Louis XII; toutefois, il en faut convenir, ces sortes d'exemples sont les plus rares.

Such criticism of French historians preoccupies Boulainviller throughout the first of his fourteen letters on the history of the French parlements (HAG, I, 169-208). In particular, he is critical of their servile attitude to the present government and their fear of upsetting Louis XIV with honest and open discussion of the earlier history of France when kings lacked absolute power and ruled only with the consent of the rest of the Nation. It is for this reason that their histories are not only unbalanced but fundamentally untrue. His exasperation and utter contempt for such lack of scholarly courage is keenly felt at the end of his Préface critique

1. R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle : Henry de Boulainviller, p. 76.

au journal de Saint Louis : 'Misère extrême de nos jours, qui loin de se contenter de la sujétion ou nous vivons, aspire à porter l'esclavage jusques dans les temps où l'on n'en avait pas fixé l'idée!'¹

Boulainviller's attitude to the Franks then is extremely sympathetic and indeed, his examination of their society after the Conquest of Gaul is little less than a panegyric (MH, pp. 128-207). Boulainviller is keen to point out that as conquerors the Franks were much fairer to the native population of Gaul than were the Romans (MH, p. 139), and in general he strives hard to depict the Franks as favourably as possible in order to persuade the reader of the excellence of their government and way of life.

However, praise of these robust 'barbares' is not without its inconvenience and at moments Boulainviller is perceptibly embarrassed by some of the activity of his otherwise idyllic forefathers. The desire to rehabilitate the historical and political status of the Franks falters occasionally when Boulainviller's narration comes across the more civilized moral standards of his own age.²

At times Boulainviller easily overcomes this problem and deftly turns it to his own advantage. The Franks may have been violent and rash but they recognized their mistakes and were extremely repentant, and they were suitably punished. Recounting some barbarous behaviour of Clotaire I, Boulainviller remarks:

Tels étoient les barbares sentimens que les Princes François exerçoient dans leur colere; mais ce qui n'est pas moins surprenant, c'est que Clotaire n'eut pas plutôt commis cette horrible action, qu'il tomba dans des remords et des inquiétudes, dont il ne pût trouver le remède dans les plus bizarres dévotions qu'il s'avisa de pratiquer; de sorte qu'il mourut au bout de l'année (MH, pp. 221-222).

1. R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle : Henry de Boulainviller, p. 131
2. Paul Hazard records the changes in European ideal types - from 'héros', 'gentilhomme', to 'bourgeois' - that took place in the latter part of the seventeenth century and during the early eighteenth century in 'La Crise de la conscience européenne', 3 vols (Paris, 1935), II, 120-138.

The children of Louis I may have been wicked indeed to wage war against their father, but there were extenuating circumstances and Boulainviller eagerly grasps the opportunity to discredit Louis completely and to moralize on the conduct suitable for kings:

On est ordinairement attendri sur le sujet de ce Prince par la considération que ses malheurs ont été causez par les révoltes de ses propres enfans; toutefois à dire la vérité, quoiqu'en un sens ils soient inexcusables, il est certain qu'il avoit violé à leur égard les engagements les plus solennels et les sermens les plus religieux, outre que fasciné par une marâtre, il ne cherchoit plus que des prétextes pour les dépouiller et faire passer aux enfans du second lit tous les avantages acquis aux aînez par la Loi et par sa propre disposition; de plus cette marâtre étoit si peu innocente dans l'estime publique, que non-seulement les plus Grands de l'Etat invitèrent les enfans à venir vanger la honte et la foiblesse de leur pere, mais que les plus saints et les plus capables d'entre les Prélats, tels que le Pape Gregoire IX et le célèbre Wala, soutinrent leur parti avec une infinité d'autres. Enfin les suites de cette entreprise ne devinrent fatales à Louis que par l'entêtement qu'il eut de garder cette femme au préjudice des loix communes de l'Eglise et de son propre honneur, tant il est vrai que les caracteres mols et faciles sont aussi les plus sujets à la prévention et à l'opiniâtreté, comme aussi que les grandes disgraces de la fortune arrivent rarement sans que ceux qui les souffrent y aient donné occasion. (MH, pp. 399-400)

Elsewhere Boulainviller's embarrassment is not so easily dissolved. Boulainviller recognizes that politically a nation must be homogeneous if it is to survive and prosper and that a certain degree of hierarchy is necessary to make homogeneity practical.¹ This stability for the Franks was attained under Clovis. But Clovis is a thorn in Boulainviller's side, for although he had the political realism necessary to forge a strong state out of a disparate group of conquerors he was also despotic by nature and very nearly the end of Boulainviller's treasured Frankish liberty itself (above, pp.73-75). His way of creating a unified state was simply to have all his political rivals murdered. Boulainviller is perhaps right, given

1. In his Dissertation sur la noblesse française Boulainviller writes, in the section entitled 'De la noblesse en général': 'Les premières monarchies de l'Orient, Mèdes, Babiloniens et Perses estoient fondées sur la dignité de la noblesse dont l'employ estoit de gouverner les peuples inférieurs sous l'autorité du souverain. C'est à cette union des nobles et du prince que l'on doit attribuer la longue durée de ces dominations. Au contraire, les peuples chez qui l'ambition des particuliers n'estant point soumise à un corps supérieur qui lie et unit ensemble les divers membres d'un Estat sous un chef commun à tous, ont esté sujets à des révolutions continuelles' (Devyver, pp. 502-03).

the fiercely independent nature of the Franks which he goes to great lengths to demonstrate, in seeing this as the only way of establishing political cohesion. But morally it is, of course unacceptable: 'Il est vrai, que c'étoit le seul moyen de fonder solidement une grande Monarchie; mais une politique si sanguinaire n'a point encore trouvé d'aprobateurs' (MH, p. 126). The only way Boulainviller can accept this necessary part of French history is to sacrifice Clovis to the universal moral law: 'On peut même penser que si Clovis ne fut pas empoisonné, comme il y a de l'apparence, la Providence en voulut faire une punition, puisqu'il mourut presque aussitôt après, à la fleur de son âge' (MH, p. 126).

Another area of activity where the Franks' practice was discordant with contemporary notions was the judicial. The Franks as conquerors could not be punished by death but only by fines, confiscation and consequently loss of honour. The Gauls as conquered could be punished by death. Theft was the only capital crime and there was no right of appeal. Boulainviller is aware that more civilized and refined sensibilities would find this distasteful and immoral and so does his best to soothe any feelings of misgiving:

J'avoué que cet usage blesse nos idées, puisque la vie des humains est bien plus importante que leurs procès; mais si l'on considère le principe et la Loi dont il est tiré, on verra que cette Loi ne condamnoit à mort que pour un seul crime, qu'il étoit juste et nécessaire de punir rigoureusement, et à l'égard duquel la conviction du prévenu étoit aussi aisée, que le retardement de sa punition étoit de dangereuse conséquence. (MH, p. 194)

Nor is this ideal 'première institution' to be blamed for subsequent legal complication and corruption; men's perverseness and meddling legislators (an oblique reference to kings and clerics) are the culprits here. Indeed, conscious that it might be thought that the Franks as conquerors felt justified in acting in an arbitrary and immoral way, Boulainviller is careful to stress the tough measures laid down for theft. In particular, he argues that despite their immunity from the death penalty the Franks

were not at all lenient to themselves:

La honte devoit être plus cruelle que la mort pour un François des-honoré par un crime, privé de sa légitime nationale et paternelle, dénué par conséquent de tous biens et souvent réduit à l'esclavage, ou du moins à la pratique de quelque art mécanique pour en subsister, au lieu de la vie militaire dans laquelle il étoit élevé; et peut-on nier que dans de telles circonstances la vie ne fut un supplice rigoureux? (MH, p. 196)

However, the strain of such dissembling shows through and Boulainviller allows his sympathy for the Franks, his contempt for contemporary mores and his 'heroic' morality to surface:

On me répondra sans doute qu'il étoit encore plus nécessaire de punir l'homicide que le vol et que la Loi Salique n'en ayant ordonné d'autre punition qu'une amende, il étoit juste d'ajouter la peine de mort contre l'assassinat, le poison et tous les crimes par lesquels on détruit les hommes; j'en conviens, mais tirera-t'on pour juste conséquence de cet aveu, qu'un criminel de cette espece doive avoir l'avantage de chicaner contre la Loi dans cinq or six Jurisdictions différentes, et de rendre par ce moyen la justice onéreuse à celui qui est obligé de la demander? (MH, pp. 194-195)

A similar tension is felt in Boulainviller's handling of the Franks' practice of waging personal wars between themselves. This tension exists not in a single narrative but between two rather different ones. In his Mémoires historiques, Boulainviller recognizes the great difficulty in accommodating this violent practice to contemporary morality. Immediately after his brave attempt to save the reputation of his Franks with regard to their legal customs, Boulainviller complains:

Mais tout ce que je dis ici à la louange de la police Françoisse, loin de lever le scrupule qui reste touchant l'odieuse liberté qu'ils avoient de répandre le sang de leurs ennemis, n'adoucit pas même l'horreur qu'inspire la barbarie qu'ils exerçoient dans leurs guerres particulieres. (MH, p. 196)

Boulainviller has to satisfy himself with demonstrating that although the principle of self-defence, and thus personal war, existed, measures were taken nevertheless to restrict this practice as much as possible. But in recounting their custom of taking scalps 'comme le pratiquent aujourd'hui les sauvages du Canada' and exhibiting them as signs of revenge successfully taken, Boulainviller is at a loss to explain such barbarous behaviour and

his surprise, or dismay, that the Franks should have tolerated such conduct amounts almost to a disowning of them: 'mais ce qui me paroît de plus extraordinaire à cet égard, c'est que la Loi défendoit de déplacer ces tristes monumens et condamnoit à l'amende ceux qui le faisoient sans être intéressés à la cause' (MH, p. 197).

Fortunately Christianity did much to soften the Franks' barbarous manners in this respect and personal wars, at least between 'les particuliers', greatly decreased. However, no such amelioration took place 'à l'égard des Grands' and Boulainviller seems to save the day, but only just, by emphasizing the cruelty of the powerful, always open to ambition and injustice, and thus exculpating, at least implicitly, the majority of the Franks (MH, p. 301).¹

In his Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France, however, Boulainviller's attitude is much less apologetic and he attacks the problem, and the effeteness of his own age, with all the vigour of an old Frank. Again he begins by recognizing that private wars may at first seem repugnant to the modern mind. Indeed, in his defence of the Franks he is careful to flatter modern sensibilities and show that although these wars were perhaps unjustifiable, they were sanctioned by the clergy (they even took part) and brought to a halt as soon as a common foreign enemy was approaching. But now Boulainviller's main defence of this morally questionable practice of the Franks is not a shallow compromise with his contemporaries' finer feelings but forthright espousal of the formers' heroic valour and freedom as the only moral standard by which to judge them:

1. The moral ambivalence of the Mémoires historiques is, curiously, echoed in Boulainviller's Dissertation sur la noblesse françoise, a work intimately bound up with his racial, political, and historical theses, but which displays nonetheless considerable detachment and objectivity (below, pp. 358-61). In this work Boulainviller recognizes the importance of 'combats particuliers' (duels) as a symbol of the erstwhile political independence of the nobility, yet 'ne scauroit donner trop d'éloges à la piété du roy régnant qui en a aboly l'abus par des ordonnances pleines de sagesse et de prudence, quoyqu'elles coustent à la liberté et au droit naturel de la noblesse' (Devyver, pp. 535-36).

Cette grande étendue du Droit François fait naître d'abord un sentiment de répugnance, que l'on ne peut surmonter que par la réflexion. En effet il paroît incompatible avec l'autorité des Loix et le bon ordre d'un Etat, que les Particuliers puissent se faire justice eux mêmes dans un autre cas que celui de la défense de leur vie. Mais, si l'on considère que la Liberté et l'honneur étoient plus chers aux François de ce tems là que leur vie, il faudra étendre le Droit de la défense à ces deux chefs comme à l'autre: et, si à cette première considération on en ajoute une seconde sur les circonstances qui pouvoient intéresser la Liberté ou l'Honneur, il se trouvera des raisons pour justifier la défense dans toutes les circonstances où ils la pratiquoient. La protection des Loix est accordée au plus foible, on en convient: mais l'Honneur ne souffre-t-il rien à la rechercher? On reconnoît du moins sa foiblesse et son désavantage, et il est dur d'en convenir avec un Ennemi. (HAG, I, 61-62)

This is not an example of enlightened historical methodology, of the principle of moral relativism, for this heroic morality is now the standard by which Boulainviller judges his contemporaries. Speaking of the new legislation banning duelling, 'La dernière espèce de guerre et de défense qui se fût conservée chez la Nation', Boulainviller remarks solemnly:

j'ose dire que nos Neveux pourront mieux que nous comparer les différents âges, et juger si cette police, qui s'autorise de la justice, du Droit des Rois, et de la Religion, est à préférer à celle qui donnoit l'avantage à l'honneur et au courage, qui mettoit plus de vertus au jour, qui obligeoit plus de vices à se cacher, et qui garantissoit l'honnête Homme des insultes du lâche. (HAG, I, 65)

It is interesting to note here Montesquieu's approach to the problem of early French legal custom.¹ In keeping with the scientific method of his work Montesquieu's desire is to understand the origins of these customs. He has an opinion regarding such matters as judicial combat and lack of right of appeal but Montesquieu's concern is to explain such phenomena, not to criticize them.² However, in 'Manière de penser de nos pères' (bk. 28,

1. Montesquieu's discussion is to be found in book twenty-eight of De L'Esprit des lois, entitled 'De l'origine et des révolutions des lois civiles chez les français'; Ceuvres complètes, edited by A. Mason, 3 vols (Paris, 1950-55), I (part 2), 175-268.
2. Of judicial combat Montesquieu says: 'On aura peut-être de la curiosité à voir cet usage monstrueux du combat judiciaire réduit en principes, et à trouver le corps d'une jurisprudence si singulière. Les hommes, dans le fond raisonnables, mettent sous des règles leurs préjugés mêmes. Rien n'étoit plus contraire au bon sens que le combat judiciaire; mais ce point une fois posé, l'exécution s'en fit avec une certaine prudence, (Ibid., pp. 216-17). Concerning the lack of right of appeal he explains that 'La nature de la décision par le combat étant de terminer l'affaire

chap. 17) his explanation of the Franks' extraordinary legal procedures shows a great sympathy for these extremely independent peoples, a sympathy which, in its rather overstated expression, reminds one very much of Boulainviller.¹ Yet Montesquieu's 'justification' of these bizarre procedures is more convincing than Boulainviller's because there is no overt purpose behind it and because Montesquieu points to the natural connections between the Franks' way of life, their ideas of justice and their legal practices. Montesquieu thus gently defuses, by calmer analysis and sounder principles, the explosive moral problem that had caused Boulainviller so much discomfort:

Je dis donc que, dans les circonstances des temps où la preuve par le combat et la preuve par le fer chaud et l'eau bouillante furent en usage, il y eut un tel accord de ces lois avec les mœurs, que ces

pour toujours, et n'étant point compatible avec un nouveau jugement et de nouvelles poursuites, l'appel ... était inconnu en France. Une nation guerrière, uniquement gouvernée par le point d'honneur, ne connaissait pas cette forme de procéder' (Ibid., p. 224).

1. Consider Montesquieu's explanation of the Franks' trials by fire and water: 'Quant à la preuve par le feu, après que l'accusé avait mis la main sur un fer chaud, ou dans l'eau bouillante, on enveloppait la main dans un sac que l'on cachetait: si, trois jours après, il ne paraissait pas de marque de brûlure, on était déclaré innocent. Qui ne voit que, chez un peuple exercé à manier des armes, la peau rude et calleuse ne devait pas recevoir assez l'impression du fer chaud ou de l'eau bouillante pour qu'il y parût trois jours après? Et, s'il y paraissait, c'était une marque que celui qui faisait l'épreuve était un efféminé. Nos paysans, avec leurs mains calleuses, manient le fer chaud comme ils veulent. Et, quant aux femmes, les mains de celles qui travaillaient, pouvaient résister au fer chaud' (Ibid., p. 203). Voltaire's attitude towards these juridical procedures was, as one might expect, rather different. In the Essai sur les mœurs he calls the custom of trials by fire and boiling water 'une des plus déplorables folies de ce gouvernement barbare' (Œuvres complètes, edited by Moland, vol. XI, p. 291). His explanation of how this procedure worked says much about his 'philosophical' distaste for 'barbaric' times and reveals considerable ideological and methodological divergence from the 'chevalier de la Brède'; he writes: 'Il est certain qu'on a des secrets pour soutenir l'action d'un petit feu sans péril pendant quelques secondes: j'en ai vu des exemples. Ces secrets étaient alors d'autant plus communs qu'ils étaient plus nécessaires. Mais il n'en est point pour nous rendre absolument impassibles. Il y a grande apparence que, dans ces étranges jugements, on faisait subir l'épreuve d'une manière plus ou moins rigoureuse, selon qu'on voulait condamner ou absoudre' (Ibid., pp. 291-92).

lois produisirent moins d'injustices qu'elles ne furent injustes; que les effets furent plus innocents que les causes; qu'elles choquèrent plus l'équité qu'elles n'en violèrent les droits; qu'elles furent plus déraisonnables que tyranniques.

The marked difference with regard to the Franks' personal wars noted between Boulainviller's Mémoires historiques and his Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France may, in part at least, be attributable to their difference in form and purpose. The Mémoires historiques are simply a long and detailed narration of the first two races of French kings in which Boulainviller's various 'causes' are, however, much in evidence: defence of the Franks and their government and criticism of developing royal despotism and all those associated with it. The Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France is a much shorter narrative of more or less the same period of French history (in essence an abridged Mémoires historiques) which serves as an introduction to the meat of the work, the series of fourteen letters in which Boulainviller examines in great detail the development of the French parlements. Boulainviller's stance in this second work is much more argumentative and provocative, hence his greater sense of identity with the Franks.

Boulainviller's heroic morality may be the desired standard by which to measure the actions of the Franks, especially when Boulainviller is in a more argumentative and less conciliatory mood, but for a highly moral writer such as he is, it is not without paradox. Firstly, it can encourage a certain amoralism which runs directly against the trend of Boulainviller's own political arguments (namely that the development of royal absolutism in French history is 'wrong'). Taking Charles Martel, whose actions and whole method of government were 'si contraires aux loix communes de la Nation', as an example of resolute action and firm decision with which to compare and criticize the indecision of his contemporaries, Boulainviller

1. Ibid., p. 204.

remarks:

Charles Martel poursuivit son projet avec plus de bonne foi que les uns ni les autres; s'il ne prit point le titre de Roi, durant sa vie il s'en arrogea toute l'autorité, et l'a portée après sa mort, comme l'inscription de son tombeau le justifie; il exigea de tous la même obéissance, ruina les fortunes qui faisoient ombrage à la sienne, et disposa du Trône même aussi absolument que de son patrimoine. (MH, p. 300)

Boulainviller's penchant for vigorous and determined action has similarly dubious results in his discussion of the Emperor Lotaire's design to cheat his brothers of their share in the empire; an end, Boulainviller notes, which would have justified such immoral conduct, had the dignity and unity of the French empire been re-established as a result,

mais Lotaire naturellement plein de ruses et de finesses, se défiant de la soumission de ses freres, contesta leur Royauté, voulut contester l'étendue de leur partage, espéra de les tromper et de les détruire l'un après l'autre et par des motifs si peu convenables à sa Dignité et au courage qu'il devoit avoir, il acheva la ruine que son pere avoit commencée, ayant manqué comme lui de fermeté, soit pour se soumettre à la justice contre son inclination, soit pour faire triompher son injustice dans les occasions qu'il eut d'accabler ses freres et de les perdre sans ressource; c'est ainsi que tous les Princes ambitieux, et qui n'ont point d'ailleurs l'ame assez forte pour consommer le dessein que leur propre conscience condamne, causent à leurs Peuples des maux irréparables, et perdent le plus souvent ce qu'ils auroient pû conserver d'un consentement général. (MH, p. 402)

But besides resulting in such tactical errors Boulainviller's heroic morality, together with his political interests, can lead to conclusions which his more lenient, moderate, and humane moral attitude finds distressing. This is most noticeable in Boulainviller's discussion of Prince Bernard's short rebellion against his uncle, the Emperor Louis. Despite the recognition of his mistake and his desire to ask for forgiveness, Bernard and his supporters were sentenced to extreme punishment by the parlement of Thionville in 818:

C'est là un terrible exemple du droit et de la puissance d'un Parlement François, dont le jugement ne doit pas être tellement attribué à la volonté du Prince qui le fit rendre, que l'on n'y distingue aisément le droit d'avec le fait: le Débonaire, qui auroit été bien fâché pour lors qu'on eût pu l'accuser d'inhumanité, ou du moins de jalousie envers son Neveu, n'ayant paru s'en mêler que pour adoucir les peines infligées par le jugement. (HAG, I, 270-271)

Boulainviller's dilemma is clear: to demonstrate the power of the parlements, this decision against the rebels must be seen as their work and not that of the emperor; yet in showing this to be so, Boulainviller convicts his favourites of callousness and injustice.

It is in keeping with his Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France that Boulainviller makes no overt apology for the parlement's action. However, in the Mémoires historiques Boulainviller is prepared to offer some criticism of the power of the parlements, although he is careful to show that this 'corruption' is less a fault intrinsic to the parlements as an institution than a result of royal misconduct, 'parce qu'il est moralement impossible de résister à l'exemple des Rois'. Boulainviller states:

Au reste, les Parlemens parvinrent sous la postérité de Charlemagne à ce degré d'autorité que je ne puis m'empêcher de regarder comme un dérèglement, contraire à l'intention que ce Monarque avoit eue en les établissant; nous avons vu de quelle maniere ils condamnerent à la mort Bernard, Roi d'Italie, quoique aîné de la Maison Royale, comment ils priverent l'Empereur Lotaire de son partage en deçà des Monts, comment ils traitèrent la Postérité de Pepin, Roi d'Aquitaine; mais aussi faut-il reconnoître que ce sont moins des actes de Parlement que les effets de la passion de ce Prince qui les faisoit agir dans les occasions, et partant bien que l'on ne puisse disconvenir que les Dignitez Impériales et Royales n'ayent subi leur jugement, je crois que l'on peut assurer que jamais les Parlemens François n'ont prétendu au droit positif de juger les Princes sacrez et couronnez, quoiqu'ils aient eu celui de les choisir. (MH, p. 471)

As well as being problematic in the purely moral sphere, the Franks also provide Boulainviller with difficulties historically. The ambition of the clergy, it has been noted, and 'la chicane' in general were among the principal reasons for the decline of the old nobility (above, pp.131-32).

However, there is another cause of this regrettable and only too historical fact, that is the Franks themselves and their lack of concern about their own interests. In his discussion of the 'Origine des Dignitez parmi les François' (MH, pp. 170-179), Boulainviller relates how, contrary to what might have been expected, the Franks were only too willing to accept an hierarchical structure of local administration in pursuit of personal aggrandizement, and suffer the risk of loss of complete independence:

ce peuple donna dès-lors une preuve de sa docilité, ou plutôt de l'inattention que sa postérité pratique depuis tant de siècles, sur les matieres de gouvernement: chaque particulier se flatta vraisemblablement que ce changement de l'ancienne Discipline, lui seroit favorable, puisqu'à la place d'une Royauté héréditaire, dont il étoit naturellement exclus, on formoit les Dignitez destinées à tous les François qui auroient assez de talens pour les remplir, et qu'ainsi au lieu de la possession d'un héritage mediocre, à laquelle la Loi commune l'apelloit, il auroit droit de prétendre à celle de plusieurs Villes ou d'une Province entiere, s'il étoit aidé de la Fortune. Ces grands objets pûrent éblouir sans doute tous les François par ce principe, loin d'être contraires aux desseins de Clovis. Le succès nous montre qu'ils s'empresserent tous d'y concourir: de sorte, que nous pouvons dire que le principe de l'Union qui a fondé la Monarchie sur les ruines d'une espece d'Aristocratie qui avoit été son berceau, n'a été autre chose que l'ambition mal-entendue des particuliers. (MH, p. 171)

This lack of attention in the Franks is bemoaned by Boulainviller when he examines the development of the parlements and sees how they ceased to express the voice of the Franks as a whole. He asserts that

Une Nation bien attentive à ses privilèges et libertez, auroit sans doute dès-lors pris garde à la conservation d'un droit aussi essentiel que celui des délibérations communes; il n'auroit pas été difficile de suppléer à la présence des Centaines par les moyens de la députation, mais étant François, c'est-à-dire, mal-appliquez et toujours espérant de l'avenir et des occasions de la réparation des fautes présentes, ils négligèrent pour lors ce qui les intéressoit davantage et laissèrent passer aux hauts Magistrats, les Ducs, les Comtes et les Vicaires, le droit de la Nation entiere; de sorte que le commun n'eut plus d'autres fonctions dans les Assemblées réelles, que d'y paroître pour les acclamations que l'usage rendoit nécessaires. (MH, pp. 202-203)

The Franks then, as well as providing the moral ground from which Boulainviller normally ventures out to attribute moral worth to the events of French history, without, however, entirely avoiding conflict with certain higher moral norms which he shares with his contemporaries, are in their turn criticized by him for deserting the principles of their original institutions. This criticism is not casual but colours fundamentally Boulainviller's attitude to the development of French history as a whole. It is this attitude which may be described as Boulainviller's 'philosophy' of French history and which must now be considered.

III The direction of French history

Boulainviller's more general 'philosophical' attitude towards history

is seen best in his works on ancient history and will be discussed in Part Three. But although no systematic philosophy of history is presented in his histories of France, Boulainviller's moralizing, particularly with regard to the degeneration of the original government of the Franks, occasionally points to the existence of a deeper conception of the progress of history than do the pragmatic and individual moral comments, praise and blame, so far examined.

Individual comments examined already, however, have revealed a deep-seated pessimism in Boulainviller when he considers the follies of mankind as demonstrated in French history (above, pp. 124-25). This pessimism, it has been said, stems from both personal temperament and political belief. A long struggle to secure his inheritance, diminished family resources,¹ hatred of absolutism, and chagrin for the way the old nobility squandered its birthright all combine to rob Boulainviller of any reason for seeing the history of France in any other but a critical and pessimistic way.²

Moral solidarity with the Franks against the machinations of ambitious princes and clergy and against the effeminate morality of his contemporaries notwithstanding, Boulainviller's persistent pessimism leaves the clear impression that the history of France can only be understood in terms of degeneration and decline. This is so because, despite the obvious success of the practice and doctrine of absolutism and the rise from serfdom to riches of the Third Estate (and his more or less enthusiastic hope for some sort of aristocratic revival; above, pp. 116-17), Boulainviller identifies France with the Franks and in particular with their impoverished and disfranchized descendants, the old French nobility.

1. R. Simon, Henry de Boulainviller, pp. 16-23 and 32-35.
2. The 'optimism' noted in the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France, particularly with regard to Boulainviller's idolization of Charlemagne, has much less to do with his attitude to the progress of French history than with the therapeutic function such a narration has for our author; see above, pp. 111-17.

This view of French history is not, of course, the dispassionate conclusion of objective and scientific study. It is, rather, the bitter fruit of the painful realisation of an incontestable historical reality.¹ Meinecke, as we have seen (above, p.111), describes this as Boulainviller's tragic sense of the 'heroic destiny' of all virtue. Boulainviller gives clear expression to the nature of this heroic destiny of the Franks in his summary of the history of the first race of French kings:

Au fonds, ce n'est pas tant l'inobservation des Loix ou de la Police publique, qui a causé la ruine de la première race, que la lassitude des Peuples et le dégoût justement conçu de la conduite des Princes. En effet, si l'on résume leur histoire en peu de mots, on n'y trouvera qu'une seule grande action, qui a été celle de la première conquête, laquelle a été non-seulement entreprise avec magnanimité et exécutée avec un courage admirable, mais soutenuë avec prudence et sagesse, autant ou plus qu'aucune autre action pareille. A la suite on trouve cent années entières remplies de troubles et de divisions, où les Rois, quoique frères, n'ont pensé qu'à se piller et à se surprendre les uns les autres. Cette scène est terminée par les Régences des deux plus méchantes femmes dont l'histoire ait parlé, par lesquelles toutes les Loix divines et humaines ont été violées, et sous lesquelles l'intérêt particulier a commencé non-seulement à se répandre; mais à se mettre au-dessus de l'intérêt de l'Etat.

A ce gouvernement désespéré ont succédé deux règnes tranquilles, mais règnes de favoris, de licence et de débauches, qui ont infecté les mœurs publiques et accrédité les Moines et les Prêtres, sous prétexte de réparer par leurs prières et intercessions les méchantes actions que l'on commettoit habituellement. Une nouvelle Régence vint après, pendant laquelle on s'aperçoit de l'inconvénient d'un trop grand crédit des Ecclésiastiques; mais le plus méchant homme du monde que la fortune avoit alors élevé au Ministère, répare ce désordre par un scandale pire que le mal, exemple qui fait sentir le danger de l'intérêt personnel et combien aisément on lui sacrifie l'honneur et la gloire des Rois mêmes.

(MH, pp. 302-03)

The theme of decline is seen throughout Boulainviller's history of France, although the intensity of the 'heroic' emotion behind particular expressions of it varies. Occasionally Boulainviller just contents himself with a pointed aside as in his summary of Lotaire, 'perfide, comme tous ceux de son Siècle' (MH, p. 516), or in his noting the lack of virtue in the

1. In the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France Boulainviller does not so much contest the fact that the Franks lost the purity of their original government and finally all effective political power, than endeavour to push the moment when they did as far away as possible from the source of this power, the Conquest of Gaul; above, pp. 114-15.

leaders 'ausquels de si puissantes Nations obéissoient encore' (MH, p. 446). At times Boulainviller accepts the realities he is narrating with a superior and contemptuous resignation. Thus, speaking of Hugues Capet's usurpation of the throne of France, where Boulainviller denies that he was elected king by a general assembly, he says: 'Je ne crois pas qu'il soit besoin d'autres preuves pour montrer que dans l'état, où se trouvoient alors les affaires, l'assemblée d'un Parlement n'étoit rien moins que nécessaire aux desseins d'un Prince qui vouloit occuper le Trône' (MH, p. 523). Sometimes, however, his heroic emotion is influenced, reluctantly, by his more modern morality and the result is a peculiar petulance:

A entendre discourir les Hommes d'aujourd'hui, la Terre Françoise, disent ils, ne souffre point d'Esclaves, et la Liberté est l'apanage universel de tous ceux qui y habitent, et même des Etrangers que le hazard y conduit. Sur quoi il n'y a rien à dire, s'il est vrai que ce soit une Loi établie par Francois I, sinon qu'il n'en étoit pas ainsi au commencement, ni même trois cens ans après Hugues-Capet. (HAG, I, 309-10)

The principle of degeneration in the history of France is often merely implicit in the narrative and yet it can still infuse into it a dark and pensive quality, as when Boulainviller is recounting the history of Charles II:

Le desordre de la Monarchie étoit alors si grand, qu'à peine l'on connoissoit le nom du Roi, si ce n'est pour le détester: chaque Gouverneur se rendoit indépendant, et se rangeoit selon ses plus grands intérêts, tantôt d'un parti et tantôt d'un autre; car nous avons remarqué, que quoique le Trône fut occupé par Charles, non-seulement l'ancien Parti de Pepin subsistoit toujours en Aquitaine, mais qu'il s'étoit répandu dans la Neustrie avec un progrès si rapide, qu'il ne tint qu'au Germanique d'en demeurer maître deux fois consécutives; ainsi l'on voit que la Royauté ne demouroit à Charles, que faute d'autres sujets pour la remplir; peut-être aussi par la crainte des Ecclésiastiques, et la terreur de l'excommunication qui n'auroit pas manqué de fondre sur ceux qui auroient voulu envahir sa Couronne au préjudice de la consécration d'un Sacre solennel. (MH, pp. 426-427).

Elsewhere the full tragedy of this loss of virtue is written large for all to see:

Après la mort de ce second Empereur de la Race Carlienne, la guerre se déclara de toutes parts entre les Frères; et, la haine, la fureur, et la division, ayant succédé à l'affection, à la douceur, et à l'union, qui regnoient dans tous les esprits du tems de Charlemagne, ces Princes se livrèrent la sanglante bataille de Fontenai, dans laquelle périt un si grand nombre de François, que toute la vertu de la Nation y fut, pour ainsi dire, ensevelie avec leurs corps. Car, depuis cette fatale

époque, il ne parut plus dans les François cet amour de la gloire, cette fidélité constante, et ce courage invincible, qui jusqu'alors avoient été leur principal caractère. (HAG, I, 275)

The seriousness with which such an 'heroic' attitude should be seen as a proper interpretation of the development of French history is perhaps undermined by the obvious political use to which Boulainviller is putting it. However, as we have seen (pp.124-25), other remarks show that when considering French history in a less melodramatic way, Boulainviller's approach, though still pessimistic, can be more sober and objective.

It is interesting to see Boulainviller slide at times between these two points of view and allow his 'philosophical' stance to reveal its moral and emotional causes. This can be seen in some general reflections on the history of France before and during the time of Hugues Capet:

Ce Gouvernement, si magnifique et si judicieusement établi, tomba dans la décadence, suivant le cours de toutes les institutions humaines. . . Desorte qu'à l'avènement de Hugues-Capet au Trône, le monde parut sortir de sa première enfance, de même que s'il eût quitté nouvellement la pâture du gland et des feuilles; ce qui a été cause de l'ignorance et de la simplicité, où la Nation paroît avoir été plongée durant 400 ans. Mais cette simplicité n'avoit pas même l'apparence de la vertu: elle n'étoit ni moins ardente à procurer son intérêt, ni moins violente à opprimer le Foible et le Malheureux, ni moins artificieuse pour trahir et pour surprendre, que si elle eût été moins grossière. (HAG, I, 324-25)

Consider too the following:

Nous ne saurions suivre la Police Française sous le Règne du Débonnaire et de ses enfans, sans reconnoître et sans plaindre, avant toutes choses, le destin commun de toutes les Monarchies, qui les livre à la nécessité d'avoir des Maîtres d'un caractère si inégal, que l'on peut hardiment compter qu'à la suite d'un bon et grand Prince, il en viendra dix, ou malheureux, ou méchans, ou imbéciles, et quelquefois tous trois ensemble. (MH, p. 469)

Boulainviller's 'objective' attitude to the idea of decline in French history reveals itself as an acceptance of this decline. However, once accepted it is almost immediately rejected again, not because it is too painful to countenance but because it is now unworthy of history. In speaking of the time of baronial anarchy under Charles le Gros, Boulainviller says that 'ce tems d'Anarchie et de confusion mériteroit peu qu'on en fit le détail, s'il n'étoit nécessaire de faire connoître par quels moyens

et par quels coups de fortune la Postérité de Robert Marquis de France s'éleva au Trône, et chassa ses anciens Maitres et Bienfaiteurs, (MH, p. 457).

But there is still a lesson to be learnt even from unworthy and 'rejected' history:

En 581, il y eut quelques broüilleries entre Childebert et Guntchram, causez par quelques Seigneurs factieux que Fredegonde avoit gagnez pour les diviser. Je n'entrerais point dans le détail des querelles de ces Princes, non plus que de leurs pacifications, il est plus important de savoir que la vanité et l'ambition avoient tellement corrompu l'esprit et le coeur des François, que la dignité de Patrice, qui avoit été le principal titre du grand Clovis; étoit devenu à l'usage des Seigneurs particuliers. (MH, p. 227)

Boulainviller's Abrégé Chronologique de l'histoire de la France is very interesting in this respect. It is the least reflective of Boulainviller's writings on the history of France and although imbued with his political preoccupations is little more than a list of historical events. Certainly there is evident no systematic theory of decline and degeneration in French history. However, Boulainviller's narrative is so bare and compressed, with hardly any attempt at explanation, that the impression that emerges of the history of France, particularly during the first, heroic, race of French kings, is that it is merely the chronicle of ignorance, ambition, cruelty and stupidity. The Franks certainly do not seem to embody any virtuous ideal from which their successors have inexcusably deviated.

However, Boulainviller's attitude is usually more complex. A blend of myth, apology, criticism and reaction, it finds eloquent expression in his Preface au journal de Saint Louis:

la disproportion de nos idées fait que nous ne concevons que la moindre partie du bonheur de nos pères. Ils ne possédaient véritablement que leurs biens, sans aspirer à des richesses incroyables et disproportionnées, mais ils en jouissaient librement en leurs châteaux; ils ne faisaient leur cour à personne, les intrigues et les mouvements pour la fortune ne servaient de rien à leur avancement; leurs femmes vivaient chez elles, occupées des soins domestiques, sans jeux, sans effronteries, et sans autres amusements que celui de leur devoir. Un tel état aurait pu faire la félicité de leur siècle, sans les idées populaires de leur temps qui les assujettissaient à de méchants prêtres, leur faisaient entreprendre des voyages outre-mer ou faire la guerre à leurs compatriotes pour des prétextes d'hérésie. Un tel état, dis-je, nous ennuie aujourd'hui par la seule peinture, notre imagination est plus lente ou

plus corrompue, notre convoitise plus ardente et plus inquiète, notre nature plus affreuse; tout ce qui nous compose a besoin de mouvements plus vifs, l'agitation est devenue le principe de nos sentiments, l'idée de la bonne conduite s'est dissipée avec celle de la vertu qui devait lui servir de règle et l'on ne connaît plus de bien moral que ce qui amuse ou ce qui fait dominer arbitrairement sur ses pareils.

Boulainviller's moral view of French history is not uniform and consistent. Rather, it is a tissue made of many threads which pull Boulainviller's mind in a variety of directions. These threads are the educative function of history, the need to praise and blame, political interests, aristocratic sensibility, a stoic acceptance of misfortune, and a rigourously moral personal code of conduct. The result is a highly individual and rather loose patchwork of attitudes which reveals considerable historical pessimism, a noble intention to treat historical characters with fairness, and an interested, sometimes spiteful desire to defend and vindicate his idyllic Franks against the ambitions of princes and the ravages of history.

In his writings on ancient and religious history Boulainviller's preoccupations are not as particular as those discovered in his histories of France. Yet a similar tension exists between his interests and his desire to protect a moral norm. The nature of the tension in these histories, and their more general moral aspect, will be considered shortly, but first we must establish and examine the principal 'non-historical' interests to be found in such works as the Abrégé d'histoire universelle and La Vie de Mahomed.

Chapter Five

Boulainviller's Deism : An Important Element in His Histories of Religion, Mohammed, and The Ancient World

As well as to establish a reliable and accurate chronology of ancient events, a major purpose in Boulainviller's Histoire universelle is to examine the genesis of human religions, their development, their relations with secular authority, and the reasons for their decline into superstition.¹ Treating religions as human and historical phenomena naturally leads to the historically critical reading of what men in the past have claimed to be the revealed word of God or, at least, divinely inspired writings. It is such a critical attitude that Boulainviller brings to the study of the Koran in La Vie de Mahomed and, particularly, to Genesis in the Histoire universelle. However, it can be seen that such 'objective', historical criticism is accompanied by criticism of a more personal kind, based upon our author's conceptions of correct and incorrect, desirable and undesirable religious beliefs and practices. It is these religious conceptions which help to inspire much of the explicit criticism to be found in Boulainviller's ancient and religious histories.

Boulainviller's developing metaphysical thinking will be examined briefly in Part Three in order to throw light on his ambiguous attitude towards Providence. This thinking naturally follows a path close to his developing religious thought. Yet religion and metaphysics, although both very much concerned with God, are distinct in their approaches to and conceptions of the Deity. It is Boulainviller's religious, rather than his metaphysical, views and preferences which, like the political opinions in his histories of France, may be said to provide much of the non-historical

1. This is also the major theme of several other historical studies, for example La Vie de Mahomed, the Histoire des opinions des anciens sur la nature de l'âme (OP, I, 253-91), and the Histoire de la religion et de la philosophie ancienne, (OP, I, 307-13).

purpose of our author's religious studies and which will now be described.

The development in Boulainviller's religious thought has been traced in outline by Paul Vernière.¹ According to this scholar Boulainviller started from a position of traditionalist, Catholic reaction to the ideas of Spinoza as expressed in the Tractatus; passed through a 'christianisme épuré, rationnel, méfiant à l'égard du culte et des dogmes ... pas loin du déisme de Spinoza';² and became, finally, one of the Dutchman's disciples.³ This progression is visible in Boulainviller's philosophical works.

The Christian orthodoxy of Boulainviller's Extrait du Traité théologico-politique de Spinoza et la réfutation de quelques-uns de ses sentiments (OP, I, 10-82) is hardly to be doubted. Examining the first six chapters of Spinoza's Tractatus, Boulainviller refutes the Jew's heterodox opinions and reaffirms the divine nature of prophecy, the election of the Jewish people, the moral purpose of divine law, the worthwhile function served by religious ceremonies, the authority of scripture, and the possibility - indeed, the moral necessity - of miracles. In this text Boulainviller is the staunch defender of the Jewish and Christian Revelations; the Catholic doctrines of free will, grace, and faith; and the conception of God as the unchanging, severe yet merciful judge and lawgiver. This refutation of Spinoza dates from about 1695 (OP, I, 10).⁴

The Traité sur l'immortalité de l'âme of 1704,⁵ however, finds Boulainviller in less resoundingly Christian mood. The subject of our author's enquiry is the 'sophismes' contained in Socrates' arguments, as presented by Plato in his Phaedo, that souls are immortal. He prefaces

1. Paul Vernière, Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution, 2 vols (Paris, 1954), I, 306-22).

2. Ibid., p. 314.

3. Ibid., p. 321.

4. Boulainviller's Réflexions sur les principes de la religion chrétienne suivant la méthode de Saint Ignace of 1697 are similarly unhesitatingly orthodox; OP, II, x-xi and 64-101.

5. OP, I, 292.

his investigation with an 'apostolic bow':¹

La question de l'immortalité de l'âme serait la plus importante de celles que les hommes peuvent discuter s'il était possible de la décider par d'autres principes que ceux de la Religion; mais il me semble qu'autant que les lumières de la révélation exigent de notre part la foi et la soumission, autant il convient de se défier des raisons métaphysiques ou naturelles que l'on emploie trop officieusement pour soutenir une telle vérité . . . Si celles-ci [Boulainviller's conclusions against Socrates] prévalent, je n'en prétends tirer aucune induction contre la certitude de la Révélation à laquelle je tiens qu'il se faut soumettre aussi aveuglément qu'il est nécessaire d'employer de précautions avant d'acquiescer à des raisons purement humaines. (OP, I, 293)

After exposing the errors in Socrates' arguments Boulainviller proceeds to establish his own point of view. Starting from a Lockean, rather than a Cartesian epistemology, and from the principle that 'l'imagination est sans doute la plus étendue des facultés de l'homme .. elle remplit presque toutes les fonctions de l'âme' (OP, I, 305), Boulainviller moves on to discuss the problem of the relation of a spiritual imagination to the body. The simplest solution would be to allow that man's highest faculty is material rather than immaterial. Boulainviller discusses the objections one could make against this point of view and pursues the 'spiritualist' position until it concedes that the imagination may well be corporal but continues in the opinion that there is a 'maître intérieur' which orders and compares the data of the imagination. 'On veut', writes Boulainviller, 'que parce que l'oeil animé voit, et que l'imagination active pense organiquement, il y ait un être spirituel séparé essentiellement du corps et des organes, qui voit et qui pense par leur moyen' (OP, I, 306). Boulainviller reveals the absurdity of this position,

Cet être n'est point la vie, car il subsiste après elle, par la thèse; il n'est ni le corps ni les organes, ni les perceptions, ni les idées, car tout cela est corporel; qu'est-il donc? On est réduit à dire que c'est la puissance d'apercevoir, de sentir et de penser par les organes, puissance que l'on suppose en cet être spirituel dont on n'a

1. 'The "apostolic bow" so common to the eighteenth century became a systematic method with [Boulainviller].' Ira O. Wade, The Clandestine Organisation and Diffusion of Philosophical Ideas in France from 1700 to 1750 (Princeton University Press, 1938), p. 123.

aucune notion, mais aussi puissance qui s'anéantit dès que vous détruisez les organes; ainsi, si cet être subsiste après la mort, il ne peut avoir ni perception, ni facultés, ni idées, par conséquent ni sentir, ni connaître, ni penser. Donc. (OP, I, 306)

Boulainviller then points to the last objection made against the materialist conception of the human soul. This objection locates the soul in no organic faculty such as the memory or the imagination but 'dans le pur intellect, dont les facultés suréminentes indistinctes de lui-même sont la connaissance, la volonté et le jugement'. Boulainviller does not conclude but his position is made abundantly clear in his final sentence: 'ce serait une grande entreprise que vouloir débrouiller les idées platoniciennes' (OP, I, 306).

By the time of his Essai de métaphysique dans les principes de B ... de Sp ...,¹ Boulainviller's divorce from Christianity seems to be more or less complete. Descriptions of this work can be found in several studies,² and both Vernière and Spink note that in his presentation of Spinoza's ideas Boulainviller goes a considerable way beyond the letter of his text (see especially Vernière, p. 318). The irony of Boulainviller's 'apostolic bow' is thus made even more evident:

J'ai suivi à l'égard des œuvres posthumes [of Spinoza] la même conduite que j'avais tenue sur le Traité Théologo-politique, à l'exception de la réfutation, c'est-à-dire que j'ai fidèlement expliqué la doctrine qui doit faire le sujet de cette même réfutation. Et en effet, que servirait-il de diminuer la force des raisons que l'on nous oppose? Ne travaillons-nous pas pour la vérité? et peut-elle manquer d'évidence, de quelques couleurs que son contraire puisse être embelli? J'ai donc poussé le raisonnement de Spinoza aussi loin que j'ai pu le porter. Je n'ai point négligé d'orner ses pensées au-delà de ce qu'il a fait lui-même, et en général je n'ai rien appréhendé davantage que d'affaiblir ses démonstrations. J'ai même poussé la sincérité jusqu'à soutenir les sophismes évidents dont son livre contient un grand nombre, par les moyens les plus plausibles que j'ai pu découvrir dans la logique naturelle où je suis instruit. Toujours persuadé que rien ne peut nuire à la vérité, et que pour la faire briller dans tout l'éclat qui lui appartient, il est bon qu'on lui oppose quelquefois sinon d'épaisses ténèbres [sic] (car le contraste serait trop fort) du moins les fausses lumières d'un orage impétueux qui pour quelques moments semble devoir éblouir

1. This work dates from about 1712 (R. Simon, Henry de Boulainviller, p. 457, n. 2).
2. R. Simon, op. cit., pp. 494-516; Ira O. Wade, op. cit., pp. 117-23; P. Vernière, op. cit., pp. 316-19; J. S. Spink, French Free-Thought from Gassendi to Voltaire (London, 1960), pp. 267-72.

la raison et la nature. J'ai d'ailleurs cette confiance intime qu'il est impossible que la bonne cause soit abandonnée, et que la Providence puisse manquer de se susciter dans la multitude de ses vrais adorateurs quelque défenseur aussi judicieux que zélé, qui mettra ce faux système en poussière et fera triompher aussi réellement la vérité qu'elle¹ se trouve ici artificieusement attaquée. (OP, I, 85)

Reflecting on his metaphysical analysis of substance Boulainviller concludes,

Mais plus j'avance, plus je m'étonne. Car dans cet ordre de raisonnement je ne puis éviter de conclure que Dieu et l'universalité des choses sont le même. Il s'ensuit donc que tout ce que j'ai pensé de l'Etre [sic] souverain, de l'Etre parfait, d'un Dieu à qui je me suis cru devoir obéissance, amour, culte, religion, d'un Dieu créateur juge de mes actions, tout cela s'évanouit. (OP, I, 102)

And Boulainviller goes on to challenge the validity of Christian revelation and to undermine the Christian conception of morality, replacing it with a utilitarian ethic (Wade, op. cit., pp. 120-21).

It is no doubt arguments and conclusions such as these that prompt Colonna d'Istria to write of Boulainviller, 'ce qui semble être sa raison de penser et d'écrire, c'est la lutte contre les croyances religieuses. Il n'est peut-être pas un athée de système, mais il est à coup sur un athée de tempérament'.² However, this opinion would contradict the religious sentiment to be seen shortly after Boulainviller's quoted realisation that metaphysics dispels the traditional conceptions of the Deity:

Si je concluais ... que l'idée de Dieu comprise sous celle de l'infinité de l'univers me dispense de l'obéissance, de l'amour et du culte, je ferais... un... pernicieux usage de ma raison: car il m'est évident que les lois que j'ai reçues, non par le rapport ou l'entremise des autres hommes, mais immédiatement de lui, sont celles que la lumière naturelle me fait connaître pour véritables guides d'une conduite raisonnable. Si je manquais d'obéissance à cet égard, je pécherais non seulement contre le principe de mon être et contre la société de mes pareils, mais contre moi-même, en me privant du plus solide avantage de mon existence: mais il est vrai que cette obéissance ne m'engage qu'aux devoirs de mon état, et qu'elle me fait envisager tout le reste

1. Renée Simon, however, sees no irony in Boulainviller's method of helping to refute Spinoza (OP, I, 83), and remains convinced of our author's Christian orthodoxy (OP, I, xiv-xv).
2. See Colonna d'Istria's introduction to his edition of Boulainviller's translation of Spinoza's Ethics (Paris, 1907), p. xxxviii.

comme des pratiques frivoles, inventées superstitieusement, ou pour l'utilité de ceux qui les ont instituées.

A l'égard de l'amour de Dieu, loin que cette idée le puisse affaiblir, j'estime qu'aucune autre n'est plus propre à l'augmenter, puisqu'elle me fait connaître que Dieu est intime à mon être, qu'il me donne l'existence et toutes mes propriétés, mais qu'il me les donne libéralement, sans reproche, sans intérêt, sans m'assujettir à autre chose qu'à ma propre nature. Elle bannit la crainte, l'inquiétude, la défiance, et tous les défauts d'un amour vulgaire ou intéressé. Elle me fait sentir que c'est un bien, que je ne puis perdre, et que je possède d'autant mieux que je le connais et que je l'aime.

A l'égard du culte, quoiqu'elle m'attache à celui dans lequel je suis né, et qu'elle me le fasse préférer à tout autre, je sens bien qu'en me dépouillant du zèle inhumain, des sentiments de partialité et haine qui accompagnent la religion vulgaire, elle purifie la mienne et la rend digne d'être pratiquée par un esprit raisonnable, comme elle la rend plus propre à honorer l'Être suprême. (OP, I, 103)

Boulainviller does consider that as 'Dieu et l'universalité des êtres sont la même chose' ('en un mot il est tout et il n'est rien'), there seems to be nothing to oblige us to love Him. Yet even this difficulty is finally settled in favour of religious practice:

Il faut donc fixer mon idée à ce terme que la notion de la substance n'est point du ressort de l'imagination, qui ne s'instruit que par l'expérience, et qui n'en a jamais fait ni pu faire sur un tel sujet, et par là je demeurerai satisfait de savoir que Dieu existe sans le pouvoir déterminer autrement que par son infinité, sa nécessité, etc. Dans cette conviction, je m'exciterai à son amour, à son culte, à l'obéissance, persuadé toutefois que tout cela n'est rien par rapport à lui, mais que par rapport à moi c'est le bien essentiel qui convient à mon être. (OP, I, 107)

No doubt this religion is very different from orthodox Christianity, but to describe it as a sort of atheism seems excessive and unnecessary. Certainly in Boulainviller's historical treatments of religion, a sincere, though clearly non-Christian religious temperament is quite apparent, as a discussion of some of these texts will show.

1. It might be objected that Boulainviller is simply giving us here a paraphrased version of Spinoza's own religious sentiments. But these sentiments are to be found in the last section of the Ethics, a part which Boulainviller leaves out of his Essai (Vernière, op. cit., p. 317). Their inclusion here is thus an indication of the high esteem in which Boulainviller holds them.

The prevailing tone of Boulainviller's religious temperament may be seen in the opening pages of his Abrégé de l'histoire universelle: 'Dieu qui nous a donné la lumière naturelle n'est point offensé de l'usage que nous en faisons pour découvrir ce qu'^e notre curiosité dont il est le principe nous fait désirer de connoître' (HU, I, 21). Although the relationship in Boulainviller's mind between scientific inquiry and the authority of scripture and the developing nature of his metaphysical conception of Providence are problems which will need to be discussed, it may be asserted that even though our author was instrumental in furthering a rational and critical approach towards the study of the Bible (Wade, op. cit., p. 110) he was nevertheless concerned to maintain and defend fundamentally religious values and attitudes. Even in the Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil, frankly indifferent to the notion of a Christian providence, Boulainviller adheres rigidly to the idea that such events as the Creation and, especially, the Flood need to be seen as the results of both physical and moral causes (AS, p. 65).

As a theist whose essential principles were rationality (the use of our God-given intelligence) and morality (one is worthy of God 'par la pratique de la vertu et de la justice', HU, I, 156), Boulainviller was particularly concerned in his ancient histories to criticize all manifestations of gross superstition, for superstition is both irrational and immoral: 'le peu de discernement avec [lequel] les premiers hébreux jugeoient du vice ou de la vertu, les rendoit nécessairement fort superstitieux' (HU, I, 151). A natural corollary of such a view was Boulainviller's insight into the human and historical nature of established religions. In his Lettre d'Hippocrate à Damagète,¹ Boulainviller maintains that 'le premier

1. Although this text is present in Renée Simon's collection of Boulainviller's Œuvres philosophiques, the present author recognizes that its attribution to Boulainviller is not beyond dispute. For varying opinions on the matter see OP, I, 314-15; A Thomson's critical review of the Œuvres philosophiques in Dix-huitième siècle, 7 (1975), 364-65; and Ira O. Wade, op. cit., p. 104. Reference has been made to the text because none of the

fondement de religion est dans notre coeur. Notre raison l'y trouve, et bien loin de débaucher ce premier instinct ... elle le perfectionne' (OP, I, 323). Once established, however, it is 'les politiques' who develop, and pervert, these religious instincts for civil ends, as means of social control (OP, I, 324). Elsewhere, in more emphatic vein, Boulainviller writes: 'ne cherchons donc point ailleurs que ... dans le secrèt de l'astrologie les causes de tout ce que les hommes ont inventé sur le prétexte de la religion soit pratiques penibles à la nature, soit sacrifices sanglants et cruelles persécutions, guerres suscitées à son occasion, mais singulièrement ce mélange continuel de fictions par lequel ils ont dezhonoré l'idée naturelle de la religion' (AS, p. 55).

Boulainviller's rationally and morally critical deism leads him to deplore perverted religion. In his discussion of the degeneration of ancient Egyptian religion into vulgar superstition Boulainviller is shocked to see that such authorities as Diodorus and Plutarch 'ayent pû dire que dans la religion des Peuples d'Egipte, on ne trouvoit rien de contraire à la religion' (HU, I, 254-55). Boulainviller continues, 'C'est ainsy que les plus grands génies se laissent surprendre en fait de religion par apparence mystérieuse; comme si la vérité qui est l'objèt naturel de nos connoissances n'étoit pas essentielle à la religion, ou qu'elle eût besoin de ces voiles énigmatiques pour attirer la vénération des hommes supposés judicieux et raisonnables' (HU, I, 255). And yet on several occasions it is social utility rather than absolute truth that serves as Boulainviller's criterion for acceptable religious practice. This attitude is expressed particularly well in Boulainviller's Histoire de la religion et de la philosophie ancienne:

C'est par la religion que leurs /m̄en's/ espérances s'animent, que leurs passions s'adoucissent, que leur fierté souffre d'être désarmée; c'est

sentiments or ideas expressed there is likely to misrepresent Boulainviller's own views and because it is a convenient statement of ideas to be found in several other of his historical and philosophical works.

la religion qui a formé les liens de la société; c'est elle qui a défendu l'homicide chez toutes les nations, et qui par ce moyen a conservé l'espèce humaine, conjurée pour sa propre ruine. C'est elle enfin qui, soumettant les hommes aux Dieux, a mis des bornes aux excès de leur cupidité.

Nous avons vu que dans l'Egypte elle a procuré la police et le règlement parfait de l'Etat, la découverte et l'avancement de tous les arts; qu'elle y a fait élever de magnifiques monuments pour assurer la croyance de l'immortalité des âmes, lors même que Moïse l'a ignorée, ou du moins lorsqu'il n'a pas jugé devoir en instruire les peuples qu'il conduisait.

Dans la Grèce, nous avons vu les effets de la religion pour unir les intérêts des Nations les plus opposées, pour procurer le labourage, la récolte des moissons, la culture de la vigne, pour exciter la jeunesse à la valeur dans la guerre, à l'adresse dans les spectacles publics, à la fermeté dans la conduite de toute la vie. C'est dans une religion très absurde que les Grecs et les Latins ont puisé leurs lois dont nous admirons la sagesse; c'est par cette religion qu'ils se sont accoutumés à les respecter avant d'en connaître l'utilité. C'est d'elle que sont nées les douceurs de la société conjugale, la distinction des familles, la propriété des biens, l'amour de la patrie, les honneurs des funérailles, le désir de l'immortalité, de la gloire et de la réputation; enfin pour tout dire, c'est elle qui a enfanté la philosophie, parce qu'elle a appliqué les hommes à se connaître eux-mêmes et à sonder la nature.

(OP, I, 309)

It is this conciliatory attitude towards men's misguided attempts to worship the 'Être supreme' (as well, no doubt, as his own penchant for astrology) that inclines Boulainviller to look sympathetically upon sun and star worship. To worship the sun for its life-giving warmth and its beauty is far more 'vraisemblable' and excusable than, for example, the Greek practice 'd'avoir divinisé de fort méchants hommes par le seul titre de la terreur qu'ils avoient inspirée à ceux de leur âge' (HU, I, 140-41). Yet lenient as he may be towards the variety of human religious practice, Boulainviller has harsh things to say about the revealed religion of the Hebrews. Concluding in his Histoire de la religion et de la philosophie ancienne his historical survey of ancient religions, all of which, although perhaps bizarre and monstrous, 'ont été ordonnées de Dieu, par rapport à leur utilité et ont été salutaires et avantageuses aux hommes' (OP, I, 309), Boulainviller considers the special case of the Jewish revelation. He gives overwhelming evidence that Revelation has been scarcely anything for the Jews but a constant source of misery, its benefits being few and limited:

'la subsistance dans le désert par le moyen de la manne et des cailles, nourriture commune du pays, et la possession de la Palestine, terre heureuse en comparaison de l'Arabie' (OP, I, 311). Indeed, it is from the standpoint of usefulness and progress that Boulainviller surveys the Jewish revelation and finds it wanting: 'voilà le fruit qu'ils ont tiré de la Révélation: vengeance, punitions célestes, accablement d'esprit et de courage, ignorance, présomption. Est-ce là ce qu'on pouvait attendre de la plus éclatante révélation qui fût jamais, Dieu parlant lui-même pour se faire connaître et pour prescrire sa volonté?' His comment that the Jews 'ont été les dépositaires de la vérité' and that they prepared the way for the second revelation only affirms in our minds, despite Boulainviller's denial of it, that Revelation 'est inférieure à celle qui résulte de la lumière naturelle soutenue par la philosophie' and that 'son utilité cède à celle des fausses religions que les Grecs ou les autres nations ont suivies' (OP, I, 312). The ignorance and isolation of the Jews are all the more reprehensible for 'si les Juifs eussent été sociables et philosophes, cette vérité qu'ils ont renfermée chez eux aurait fait bien d'autres progrès à l'avantage de toute l'espèce humaine' (OP, I, 312).

The two pillars of Boulainviller's deism, rationality and morality, are again clearly evident in his historical study of the important religious idea of the immortality of the individual soul.¹ At first, Boulainviller maintains, there was no idea of an immortal soul for there was no need for such a belief. The need arose with the Egyptians, 'le premier peuple policé de la terre' (OP, I, 264).

Il ne faut point s'étonner qu'une chose aussi utile au gouvernement que l'est l'opinion de l'immortalité de l'âme ait pris naissance chez eux, puisqu'ils étaient pour lors les seuls auxquels l'établissement de cette opinion pût être de quelque usage pour le bien de la société.

Si, comme disent Polybe et Strabon, une république pouvait n'être composée que d'hommes vertueux, toutes les inventions de politique ou

1. Histoire des opinions des anciens sur la nature de l'âme (OP, I, 253-91)

de religion seraient inutiles, mais comme les hommes sont d'ordinaire vicieux, il faut les tenir en bride par ce moyen . . . Les législateurs des Egyptiens ayant donc jugé très propre à contenir les peuples dans le devoir une opinion qui leur faisait craindre des châtements et espérer des récompenses après cette vie, ils l'ont établie avec soin, comme ont fait depuis Zamolxis et les Druides, par les mêmes raisons, chez les Thraces et chez les Gaulois. (OP, I, 265)

It was for this reason too ('contenir les peuples dans le devoir') that the doctrine of the resurrection was adopted by the Jews and early Christians who, unable to conceive of punishment or reward without the presence of a sensitive body, found in it 'une chose qui remédiait parfaitement à cette difficulté' (OP, I, 280). But it was not without a great deal of effort and philosophical debate that the Platonic conception of a spiritual soul finally became generally established.¹

There were, however, some who continued 'dans la première erreur', principally the legislators who used the conception of the soul's immortality as a means of restraining uncivil behaviour, and the historians who attributed the 'invention' of such a notion to these very legislators. Boulainviller then considers specific examples of philosophers (including Plato) who remained, or who became, unconvinced of the soul's immortality. In his conclusion we can appreciate the ironic criticism which is often present in his writings on religious topics:

Voilà des témoignages bien positifs d'une incrédulité consommée sur le chapitre de l'immortalité des âmes, mais je ne les saurais prendre dans toute leur force; j'y trouve de l'exagération. Comment en effet aurait-il pu arriver que l'on eût totalement rejeté une idée qu'on avait acceptée si favorablement durant quelques siècles,? et si l'on prétend que c'était le fruit de la philosophie, mieux entendue et devenue plus commune, n'est-il pas évident que quelqu'éclairé que soit un siècle, il reste toujours des esprits timides qui croient s'attacher au plus sûr parti en suivant le plus incroyable? On sait avec quelle avidité du peuple le christianisme fut reçu, dans Rome et dans les provinces, malgré toute la philosophie du temps, que St. Paul attaquait ouvertement, par le seul témoignage de ce qu'il disait avoir vu, opposé

1. Boulainviller's ironic narration of this 'progress', his obvious irony when discussing Platonic philosophy (OP, I, 272 and 276-77) and his own notions concerning the soul's immortality (above, pp.152-54) allow us to see into his own attitude towards the belief in the immortality of the soul.

à toute l'évidence de la raison. Mais quoiqu'il en soit, nous ne pouvons douter que les plus habiles et les plus polis des Romains ne fussent alors fort prévenus contre l'opinion de l'immortalité des âmes, et quoiqu'ils sussent bien que leurs pères l'avaient unanimement reçue, ils ne pouvaient s'empêcher de la regarder comme un fruit de leur ignorance et de leur stupidité. (OP, I, 290)

However, the importance of such a conclusion is not simply its attack on popular superstition but its criticism of the failure of 'spiritual' religion to help us lead our lives as virtuously as did the 'irreligious' ancients.

In a manner that may recall the Pensées diverses sur la comète of Pierre Bayle,¹ Boulainviller writes:

Au reste, il est nécessaire d'ajouter ici un fait digne d'une considération particulière, c'est que cette manière de penser, qui ne peut nous paraître qu'odieuse, et propre à corrompre les mœurs, ne rendit point alors les hommes plus méchants ni plus injustes. Au contraire, il semble que les vertus humaines n'ont jamais été si bien pratiquées que par Cicéron, Caton, Mécène, Pestus, Traseus, Tite, Trajan, Marc-Antoine, et tant d'autres, qui très certainement ne croyaient pas l'âme immortelle et n'attendaient après la mort ni récompenses, ni châtement. Leur histoire nous apprend que leur vie n'en a pas été moins pure, moins désintéressée, moins attachée à la justice, au bien public, aux devoirs de leur état. Véritablement on a tâché de nos jours de démontrer que toutes ces vertus, dénuées d'un motif qui nous paraît seul légitime - c'est celui de la connaissance de Dieu et de son véritable culte - n'étaient effectivement que de fausses vertus. Le fait n'est pas encore décidé, mais ne pourrait-on pas dire que, par un événement et une espérance contraires, il est fort probable que les doctrines spéciales à l'esprit influent fort peu sur la conduite et les mœurs des hommes, puisque nos sentiments sur l'immortalité de l'âme, et les puissants motifs que l'on nous inspire d'appréhender l'autre monde, ne nous rendent pas à beaucoup près si bons et si justes que les anciens Romains, mais qu'ils nous rendent bien plus coupables dans nos dérèglements et bien plus misérables, soit parce qu'ils ne nous laissent point d'excuses, soit parce qu'ils nous jettent dans une terreur de l'avenir et dans une inquiétude qui ne se peut calmer naturellement par aucune juste considération. (OP, I, 290)

The most important text for an appreciation of the nature of Boulainviller's religious temperament, one which presents his conception of the Deity and his

1. Pierre Bayle, Pensées diverses écrites à un docteur de Sorbonne à l'occasion de la comète qui parut au mois de décembre, 1658 especially chapter 172, 'Si une société d'athées se feroit des lois de bienséance et d'honneur' and chapter 176, 'Que l'homme ne règle pas sa vie sur ses opinions' (in Œuvres diverses de Mr Pierre Bayle,⁴ vols (La Haye, 1727), III, 109-10 and 113), and Continuation des pensées diverses, chapter 151, 'Si un athée peut s'imaginer qu'il y a naturellement et moralement de la différence entre la vertu et le vice' (Ibid., pp. 405-08).

attitudes to His worship, as well as his rational and moral critique of established religions, is La Vie de Mahomed. Our discussion of Boulainviller's religious views, views well suited to an historical and 'universal' study of religion either as its inspiration or its conclusions, will close with a description of the tenets of Boulainviller's deism as evident in La Vie de Mahomed.

In his treatment of Boulainviller's developing religious ideas Colonna d'Istria writes that 'on n'a pas assez fait ressortir l'inspiration anti-chrétienne de la Vie de Mahomet [sic]'.¹ This is no doubt due to Boulainviller's subtle, ironic, and ambiguous narrative and its gradual intensification of anti-Christian sentiment.² Yet it is the case that Boulainviller's deism often expresses itself in criticisms of Christianity. A corollary of this criticism is Boulainviller's praise of Islam (a cult seen by him as the marriage of religion and reason) although Islam and Mohammed in turn are criticized when they are seen to betray true religious feeling. Indeed, criticism of Arab religion, Mohammed, and Islam, although an infrequent occurrence, indicates that the purpose of La Vie de Mahomed is perhaps less to praise the Muslim faith than to attack the Christian for its ethnocentric belief in its own religious and cultural superiority, and consequently to demonstrate that 'l'idée d'un DIEU suprême, Créateur de l'Univers' has inspired many, apparently very different religions (VM, pp. 145-46). Hence Boulainviller's defence of sabaism as a misguided yet sincere and intelligible way of adoring God. Hence too his ironic and critical attitude towards the Hebrews (especially when compared with the more praiseworthy Arabs) and

1. Colonna d'Istria refers to Voltaire's letter to Frederick II of 20 December, 1740 in which he simply says that Boulainviller has tried to paint the false prophet as 'un grand homme', chosen by Providence to punish the Christians; see Voltaire's Correspondence, edited by T. Besterman, 107 vols (Genève, 1953-65), X, 344. It is no surprise therefore to see that in her discussion of Boulainviller's text R. Simon entertains no notion of its 'anti-Christian inspiration' (Henry de Boulainviller, pp. 336-50).
2. A short study of Boulainviller's narrative technique in La Vie de Mahomed can be found at the end of Part Four (pp. 387-93).

his denying the uniqueness of their religion by showing their customs and beliefs to be the common property of most of the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula and indeed beyond. (VM, pp. 30-38 and 158-60).

Comparison - between Arabs, Hebrews, Christians, Persians, and even the Chinese - and an epistemology which argues that although all human knowledge rests on a fundamentally identical experience of the world, differences in customs and beliefs are a necessary effect of difference in language (VM, p. 187), these are the twin tools Boulainviller uses to persuade his reader of the adequacy of many supposedly inferior forms of social organisation and religion. From such a relativist position Boulainviller deduces five principles of toleration:

1°. A respecter mutuellement les coutumes de chaque Contrée. 2°. A desirer l'instruction de ceux qui s'abusent de bonne-foi. 3°. A plaindre ceux sur qui le pouvoir du préjugé l'emporte sur la clarté des lumieres qu'ils pouvoient acquérir. 4°. A ne point imaginer de faux principes pour calomnier les événemens qui sont contraires à nos idées, et dont nous voudrions nier la vérité. 5°. A reconnoitre dans la personne de Mahomed lui-même, que tout homme qui projette d'aussi grandes choses, et qui les exécute avec tant de succès, dans la Religion comme dans la Politique, n'a jamais pu être un sujet méprisable par ses défauts naturels. (VM, pp. 192-93)

It is this relativism which points out the irrelevancy of Christian revelation as far as acceptable social and political structures are concerned. Boulainviller writes,

Ne soyons donc plus étonnez, nous qui recevons une Révélation surnaturelle pour règle de nos connoissances, de notre Foi, et de notre Justice; (Révélation proposée comme l'unique remede à la corruption de la Nature, et à l'ignorance où le Péché nous a plongez,) de trouver à l'autre bout du Monde, des Chinois; lesquels, privez de ce secours, ne connoissent que ce qu'ils voyent, et ne sachant raisonner que sur ce qui leur est sensible, donnent à la puissance de la Matiere tous les effets que nous attribuons à la Nature spirituelle, dont ils rejettent l'existence et la possibilité. Ils sont aveugles, et peut-etre opiniâtres: mais ils sont tels depuis 4 à 5 mille ans: et leur ignorance, ou entêtement, n'a privé leur Etat politique d'aucun de ces merveilleux avantages que l'homme raisonnable espere, et doit tirer naturellement de la Société; commoditez, abondance, pratique des Arts nécessaires, études, tranquillité, sûreté. (VM, p. 188)

Boulainviller's particular concern for social morality, evident in this extract, is apparent too in his praise of the Arabs' social virtues, 'vertus que les Arabes mettent au-dessus de la Contenance, du Jeûne, de la Discipline,

et les Pratiques des Monasteres, et pour l'interêt desquelles il semble que Dieu a sacrifié jusqu'à la reputation de son Prophete, par rapport au trop grand amour du sexe qu'on lui reproche' (VM, pp. 263-64). As we shall see (below, pp. 179-80) Mohammed's alleged promiscuity poses Boulainviller a difficult and finally intractable problem, yet the sexual morality established by the Prophet is preferred to the Christian, ironic deference to the latter notwithstanding, precisely because, although possibly more lax, it recognizes the corporeal nature of man and offers him a code of conduct which he can put into practice, whereas the too chaste Christian ethic goes unheeded (VM, p. 172).

Christian revelation is again shown to be superfluous in so far as the essence of religion is concerned, when Boulainviller writes, 'que sans la grace de la Révélation Chrétienne, qui nous éclaire bien au-delà de ce que Mahomed a voulu connoître et savoir, il n'y auroit système de Doctrine si plausible que le sien, si conforme aux lumieres de la Raison, si consolant pour les Justes, et si terribles aux Pécheurs volontaires ou inappliquez' (VM, p. 268). Boulainviller never loses sight of the essential principles of his religion, reason and morality, which must blend together to form a sincere practice. It is for this reason that doctrinal dispute, profitable at times, must be kept within reasonable limits. The point is made when Boulainviller is discussing (and, we may note, criticizing) the theological debate among Muslim scholars concerning the nature of the Koran, the word of God, agreed by them all to be eternal:

Mais ce sentiment n'en est pas demeuré à la simple spéculation. Comme les hommes se portent naturellement à renchérir sur la simplicité des opinions qui leur sont proposées, il est arrivé qu'^{au}-lieu de renfermer le respect dû à cette Loi, sous l'idée de Parole de Dieu, dans la nécessité absolue de sa pratique; on est venu à disputer sur la dignité de son origine, et à mettre en question, si elle étoit créée ou incréée. Mais pendant que l'on employoit les dernières violences pour l'une ou l'autre these, selon la portion du crédit ou de l'autorité de ceux qui les soutenoient, on a totalement négligé d'y conformer ses moeurs.
(VM, pp. 286-87)

We may conclude our investigation into the nature of Boulainviller's

religious persuasions by citing his summary of Mohammed's critique of Christianity and the religion he went on to found, in which the essence of our author's deism can be clearly seen:

C'est ainsi que n'ayant point imaginé que la Justice de DIEU pût imputer à personne le péché qu'il n'a point commis, Mahomed n'a point conçu que la Satisfaction de JESUS-CHRIST fût nécessaire pour purger le Genre-humain d'aucune tache originelle. Après cela, considérant que le principe du Culte dérèglé des Images ne pouvoit être autre que l'idée d'une Association des Saints à la Divinité; (c'est-à-dire, l'opinion d'une communication de la puissance de faire des miracles et des prodiges, qu'il a cru réservée à DIEU seul, répandue néanmoins sur de certains Morts réputés bien-heureux avant le Jugement final;) il a proscrit ce sentiment, et l'a condamné, non seulement comme une contradiction évidente, mais comme une injure faite à DIEU, qui ne peut avoir de Compagnon. De-là, portant sa vue sur le Dogme de l'Incarnation du VERBE, qui fait un DIEU d'un véritable Homme, par l'union ineffable de deux Natures incompatibles, telles que le fini et l'infini; il a voulu croire que l'on avoit abusé des expressions de JESUS-CHRIST même; et de ses Disciples; pour leur donner un sens qu'elles ne sauroient avoir, et qu'à l'exception des plus emportés, aucun n'avoit prétendu leur donner. Il ne fut pas moins choqué du Dogme qui sépare le même DIEU de son Esprit, pour en faire deux Personnes distinctes: et sans remonter au Platonisme, ni aux spéculations des Philosophes de cette Ecole, il s'est imaginé rendre à Dieu sa véritable gloire, et aux Peuples l'usage de la plus saine Raison, en abolissant toutes les idées confuses, équivoques, et disputables qui avoient jusques-là donné occasion à tant de querelles: et réduisant la Foi des Fidéles à la profession d'un seul DIEU infini, Créateur de l'Univers, juste Rémunérateur [sic] du bien et du mal, il a formé cette Loi principale qui condamne les Associations, avec tous ceux qui, méconnoissant la simplicité de l'Etre Divin, lui donnent un Fils et un Esprit autres qui lui-même.

VOILA de quelle maniere Mahomed a conçu le dessein et le système d'une Religion dépouillée de toutes controverses, et qui ne proposant aucun Mystere qui puisse forcer la Raison, réduit l'imagination des hommes à se contenter d'un Culte simple et invariable, malgré les emportemens et le zèle aveugle qui les tire si souvent hors d'eux-mêmes.

(VM, pp. 242-45)

The purpose of this chapter has been to establish that, certainly in his historical examinations of religion, Boulainviller was possessed of a strong and sincere, yet tolerant and subtle religious sentiment. Reason and morality were its complementary and essential characteristics; superstition and intolerance were its enemies. These are the fundamental religious (non-historical) interests of Boulainviller's ancient and religious histories which inspire many of the moral criticisms to be found there and which we may now pass on to examine.

Chapter Six

'La Vie de Mahomed' and Ancient History

I History as judge and teacher

The same structure of analysis used to examine the moral element in Boulainviller's histories of France will serve to discuss the moral comments and attitudes found in his ancient and religious histories. These histories comprise in the main the Abrégé de l'histoire universelle and La Vie de Mahomed.

At the first level of particular moral appraisals and reflections, Boulainviller's concerns and attitudes are similar to those encountered in his histories of France. These were seen to be a desire to give a moral structure to history by apportioning praise and blame, not always without obvious bias, by drawing out the educative function of history and by pausing to reflect and consider the moral lessons of history. The pervading tone of these reflections was one of pessimism.

Praise and blame inspired simply by Boulainviller's conception of right and wrong (that is, without any particular advantage being sought) are apparent in Boulainviller's 'general' histories. In La Vie de Mahomed, when discussing the first establishment^{of} kings among the Arabs in the Yemen, Boulainviller praises the stability found in this 'longue suite de Rois' whose peaceful government was

exempt des variations si fréquentes dans les autres Pays, où l'ambition des Souverains excite celle des Sujets, où la passion du luxe anime nécessairement celles de l'avarice et de la prodigalité; et dans lesquels, enfin, nul Particulier ne sauroit se résoudre à se contenter de la fortune qui auroit comblé l'ambition de son propre Pere.

(VM, p. 108-09)

Such praise is, however, infrequent and it is blame which usually presents itself in Boulainviller's histories. In his Abrégé de l'histoire universelle Boulainviller criticizes Minos's vengeance taken against innocent victims (HV, II, 174) and he condemns Atreus of whose government and character

'l'histoire nous a laissé une si affreuse peinture . . . qu'il est devenu l'objet de l'horreur et de la détestation de tous les hommes' (HU, II, 66). Ajax is treated no better, 'qui périt sur mer à son retour comme il le méritoit bien pour une barbarie et une brutalité indigne de tout homme raisonnable: car il viola la malheureuse Cassandre fille de Priam sur l'aûtel de Minerve' (HU, II, 315).

Boulainviller manifests the moral prejudices of his times in his critical attitude towards the 'démessurée' Greek passion for games (HU, II, 114), towards the 'impolitesse des premiers tems' (HU, II, 136), in criticizing Achilles' dishonourable treatment of the dead Hector and particularly in recounting the animal cults established in Egypt where he is scandalized by their practice of presenting women to 'boucs consacrés' (HU, I, 251). Scandalised he may be but at least he accepts the practice as historical. In relating equally scandalous practices in his Philosophie de l'histoire however, Voltaire is so incensed at the very idea of Babylonian religious prostitution (described by Herodotus) and Persian pederasty and incest (related by Strabo) that he denies their very historicity. He may have grounds for doubting the latter but, as his commentator points out,¹ this is much less a matter of historical method than of rigid refusal to accept as possible practices not in accord with one's own socially and historically determined moral views.

In his discussion of Ulysses (HU, II, 313-14) Boulainviller exhibits the worthy stoicism and noble personal morality that were notable characteristics of his history of France. Consistent with this attitude, Boulainviller feels compelled to criticize the Homeric hero, because his actions are dictated by skill and 'subtlety' rather than by truly virtuous prudence:

car je trouve dans toute la conduite de ce héros plus d'adresse que de prudence véritable et il me semble que comme celle cy met les hommes au dessus des événements qu'elle fait prévoir; Elle fournit aussy la constance: au lieu que la subtilité chicanne pour ainsi dire avec la destinée ou le courant de la nature: sans fournir la force nécessaire pour y résister ou pour la supporter: et je m'imagine qu'homère a voulu

1. Voltaire, La Philosophie de l'histoire, edited by J.H. Brumfitt in the Complete Works of Voltaire, vol. 59, p. 130.

marquer les inconvénients de cette fausse prudence en montrant par l'exemple d'Ulysse qu'il est le jouët de tous les vents ou pour mieux dire de l'ordre de la nature. (HU, II, 314)

The pessimism that was readily seen in the moral reflections of the Mémoires historiques is present, too, in Boulainviller's general histories. Considering the degeneration into superstition and empty ceremony of the practice of worshipping the Supreme Being which Cecrops had introduced to the Greeks, Boulainviller concludes 'soit qu'il les ait mal instruits ou que l'homme par lui même soit incapable de conserver un culte dans la simplicité de son institution (HU, II, 83). This point is made, too, in La Vie de Mahomed. Rooted, as he perceives it, in man's inability to keep to purely simple ideas of the Deity, Boulainviller traces the development of star worship from the first 'natural' movement of the head upwards to heaven to the belief in stellar control of the sublunar world (VM, pp. 148-50).¹

When discussing the religious practice of ritual purification, Boulainviller remarks rather dourly: 'Les hommes ont été de tout temps ainsy formés qu'autant qu'ils ont de facilité à mal faire, autant ils ont de crainte d'en être punis' (HU, II, 151). Hence the superstitious practices designed to placate those who punish man, for this is how 'les accidents les plus naturels' are interpreted when they result in misfortune. Referring to the Greeks, Boulainviller remarks:

Il est d'autant plus croyable que les anciens Grecs ont agy par ce principe dans l'establissement des lustrations que l'on voit mieux l'absurdité de leur religion et que l'on est assuré que leur cérémonies n'étoient aucunement capables de les purifier. (HU, II, 151-52)

Boulainviller's pessimism is seen at its most moralizing when he reflects upon the causes of 'les malheurs du monde' and it is here too that history's fundamental role as educator is pronounced.

Ainsy je crois pouvoir dire que les malheurs du monde ne sont causés ny par l'augmentation des lumieres de l'esprit, ny par la perte de la liberté, ny par l'usurpation des Roix, ny par le désordre de leur gouvernement, mais par le trop peu d'estime et d'usage que les hommes

1. However, Boulainviller is prepared to show some sympathy and tolerance to star-worshippers for he recognizes in their 'idolatry' a sincere response to the numinous; see below, pp. 183-84.

font du repos; si l'on tenoit école sur l'art de tranquilliser son coeur et son esprit; le public en tireroit plus d'utilité que de tout autre sçavoir, mais c'est le grand fruit qu'on doit attendre de l'histoire: car c'est elle qui nous mettant en vuë le cours d'un si grand nombre d'événements nous fait sentir que la prudence humaine n'en dispose point et que de toutes les conditions des hommes celles-là sont les plus heureuses qui par une fermeté tranquille donnent le moins de prise à la fortune. (HU, II, 231)

The stoic advice to keep a low profile is the same sentiment expressed in Boulainviller's Lettre à Mlle Cousinot: 'Enfin le particulier y /in history/ apprend à vivre dans la soumission qui lui convient et à se dérober aux événements violents'.²

It was noted above (p. 125) that a certain liking for the paradoxical only serves to underline Boulainviller's satisfaction at the unexpected, and perhaps deserved, changes of fortune in history. As a conclusion to the interview between 'le célèbre NOUSCHIRVAN, Roi de Perse' and the venerable 'Abdol-Motalleb', Mohammed's grandfather, Boulainviller reflects

Mais, qu'auroit /sic/ dit ou pensé, et le Prince, et le Vieillard, lorsqu'ils s'entretenoient des moyens d'établir la prospérité du Pays, si le Livre du Destin leur eût été présenté, et qu'ils eussent pu découvrir la fin si prochaine de l'Empire des Persans; qui alloit être détruit par le plus foible rejetton de ce vieux Arabe, duquel les jeunes Courtisans faisoient apparemment peu de cas? (VM, p. 199)

We have seen that the more general concerns of Boulainviller's histories of the ancient and Arab worlds include demonstration of the true religion and a desire to promote an idea of morality. Certain individual moral comments reflect these concerns.

Speaking of the early Greeks' polytheism, Boulainviller refers to the American Indians to show 'combien des Peuples grossiers et sans défenses sont peu éloignés de faire des Dieux de tout ce qui ^{les}étonne' (HU, II, 26). And Boulainviller regrets that the whole story of Joseph's rise to power in Egypt should centre upon the interpretation of dreams. This fact does not

1. Another lesson to be learnt from history is given in the Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil (p. 111) when Boulainviller reflects on the unstable position of powerful nations and the high price (i.e. revolution) they may have to pay for their dominance.
2. R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle : Henry de Boulainviller, p. 79.

diminish the trust we should have in the story itself but it illustrates all the same 'la foiblesse des hommes de ce temps-là ... bien grossiers bien superstitieux et bien incapables de concevoir les choses comme on les prendroit aujourd'hui' (HU, I, 409-10). Abraham's disguising his wife as his sister on reaching Egypt is an 'événement peu important', but Boulainviller feels the need to examine the question thoroughly to show that the patriarch was not guilty of gross deception unbecoming in one of the founders of western religion (HU, I, 354-6).

These comments indicate what have been shown to be Boulainviller's overriding preoccupations in ancient and Arab history namely the promotion of true, rational, and moral religion, and the censure of superstition. The moral attitudes generated by these and similar non-historical aims must now be considered.

II Partisan morality and its consequences in La Vie de Mahomed

Boulainviller's aims in writing La Vie de Mahomed have already been discussed (above pp.163-66). Briefly, his aims were to break down western prejudice against the Arabs and their religions and to show in particular that the religion established by the prophet Mohammed was a noble, rational, and fitting way to adore the supreme Creator. Islam, however, is not without its faults and although Boulainviller wished to show this religion to be completely the equal of Christianity, perhaps even its superior, his ultimate desire was to preach the tenets of the true religion of the supreme, equitable but merciful Creator. One of the main techniques employed in the service of this dual aim is an all-pervasive, discriminatory, moral tone, usually in favour of the Arabs and always in favour of Boulainviller's conception of true religion.

Boulainviller's sympathy for the Arabs is apparent from the start of La Vie de Mahomed and soon finds surprising, even extravagant, expression: 'Les grands exemples que l'Histoire Arabe nous propose ... nous peignent

des caracteres de générosité et de hauteur, dont il est rare que les Occidentaux ayent approché' (VM, p. 7). The discrimination evident here is the basis for most of Boulainviller's subsequent narrative, although Boulainviller uses much subtlety in his praise of the East and in his (usually implicit) criticism of the West. Irony, allusion, gentle mockery, and rhetoric are all used to help his argument.¹

Boulainviller's apologetic viewpoint is clearly illustrated in this pithy comparison between Islamic and Christian practice:

Il [the Muslim cult] ne consiste qu'en Lectures, en Prieres, et en Sermons, distribuez à certaines heures du jour et de la nuit. On n'y connoit ni les Macerations, ni les Jeûnes, ni les Fouets, ni les Disciplines: tout s'y passe dans un respect extérieur, le plus humble et le plus profond; et dans une propreté, peut-être trop scrupuleuse, du moins pour des Nations aussi inattentives que nous le sommes. (VM, p. 85)

More explicit criticism of Christian practice² is aroused by the 'imagination fort absurde' concerning the magnetic suspension of Mohammed's coffin inside his sepulchre. Boulainviller lays the blame for such nonsense squarely at the feet of Christian monks living in Palestine at the time of the Crusades.

une telle fiction a si peu d'apparence de réalité, et se rapporte si sensiblement à nos idées touchant les Saints et leurs miracles; d'ailleurs, elle découvre une si profonde ignorance des fondemens de la Religion Musulmane et de son oeconomie, qu'il est impossible de ne pas attribuer cette invention aux Moines ignorans qui vivoient dans la Palestine au temps des Croisades: temps auquel les Reliques et les Miracles particuliers étoient crus les points essentiels, ou pour ainsi dire les pivots du Christianisme. Marque bien évidente que l'on connoissoit aussi peu l'une des Religions que l'autre, quand on a forgé de telles chimeres. (VM, p. 103)

Following a most reasonable method for apologetics of such an obviously delicate kind, Boulainviller's forthright opinions assume bolder expression as the work develops. Ambiguity remains but is put into sharper, more penetrating, relief. Accordingly, Boulainviller's criticism of Christian practice becomes less allusive and more direct. In defending Islam against

1. See below, pp. 387-94, for a more detailed consideration of some of Boulainviller's narrative techniques in La Vie de Mahomed.
2. In La Vie de Mahomed Boulainviller is critical both of Christian practice, considering much of it merely superstitious, and of Christian theology, especially the doctrine of the Trinity; see above, pp. 163-66.

the charge that its success was immediately attributable to its promise of sensual pleasure Boulainviller retorts in scathing terms:

A la bonne heure, que l'on fasse consister aujour^ud'hui l'Héroïsme Chrétien dans l'abstinence des plaisirs, et même dans les incommodes du corps: à la bonne heure, que l'on n'établisse plus la Pénitence dans le changement de l'esprit et du coeur, mais dans la peine et l'affliction des membres d'un corps, qui ayant été créé sensible, desire nécessairement le plaisir par la même raison qui lui fait craindre la douleur: il sera toujours vrai de dire que la permission, ou l'esperance d'user à discretion de cette espece de plaisir, ne sont point, et n'ont jamais été des motifs suffisans pour causer un renversement général dans le Monde par principe de Religion. (VM, p. 182)

Boulainviller is also very critical of Christianity's secular concerns and of its doctrinal confusion. Although this criticism is presented as Mohammed's own attitude, Boulainviller's expression of it is most emphatic:

Il regardoit au contraire les Evêques, les Prêtres, et tout le Clergé séculier; premierement, comme un assemblage politique d'hommes réunis à ce point-ci, de faire servir la Religion à leurs passions, convoitise, avarice, faste, domination; et qui avoient trouvé le secret de persuader aux Peuples, que l'obeissance aveugle qu'ils en exigeoient est inséparable de celle qui est dûe à DIEU. De plus, il les regardoit comme les véritables auteurs d'une infinité de disputes qui divisoient alors le Christianisme; comme les inventeurs des superstitions du temps; enfin, comme des faux Docteurs, qui s'efforçoient de plonger tous les hommes dans l'erreur, selon les conditions, les rangs, les richesses, et la mesure de capacité de chacun d'eux. (VM, pp. 224-25)

Perhaps Christianity's most alarming fault in Boulainviller's eyes was its lack of power to control social behaviour.¹ Trading in Syria, Mohammed saw that corruption was rife.

Cependant, ces Peuples étoient des Chrétiens, qui, selon la premiere idée que Mahomed en avoit prise en Arabie, devoient être des hommes justes, desintéressés, fideles, compâtissans, et mortifiés. Il vit au contraire avec horreur, que ces Chrétiens, dans leur propre Pays, n'étoient que des gens vendus à toute iniquité, et dont la Religion ne se distinguoit du Paganisme que par l'atrocité des querelles et des divisions qu'elle causoit. (VM, p. 237)

The picture Boulainviller paints immediately afterwards of Mohammed and the religion he established provides a striking contrast with his treatment of Christianity. Having shown Islam to be a correct form of worship of the Supreme Creator, a simple marriage between religion and reason ('qui

1. Boulainviller saw that religion's most useful consequence, and ultimately its 'raison d'être' as an institution, was its control over social mores; above, pp.158-60 .

doit toujours éprouver ce qui est présenté au Jugement'), Boulainviller leads into a purple passage describing the sublime qualities of its founder:

On peut encore regarder ce Système comme l'ouvrage le plus étonnant auquel l'ambition ait jamais pu déterminer un homme de grand courage; puis qu'ayant compris la possibilité de la ruïne de deux Empires formidables au Genre-humain depuis tant de siècles, il n'a pas balancé à l'entreprendre; quoiqu'il ait d'abord reconnu que pour venir à bout d'un dessein si prodigieux, il ne falloit pas moins que changer le coeur et l'esprit de tous les hommes, les enlever à eux-mêmes, à leurs habitudes, à leurs préjugés, aux connoissances dans lesquelles ils avoient été nourris, et où ils avoient vieilli; qu'enfin ayant pu voir de sang-froid toutes les difficultez d'un semblable dessein, et les ayant longuement méditées, il a eu le courage de l'entreprendre, et la gloire d'y réussir ... ce n'est pas seulement à l'indignation excitée par un si grand nombre d'objets honteux dans la Religion, ou tyranniques dans le Gouvernement, qu'il faut rapporter une si haute entreprise: c'est encore à la compassion qu'il avoit pour tant de malheureux, soumis au caprice de méchans Princes et de leurs Ministres. L'idée de leur misere, comparée à la liberté dont on jouissoit en Arabie, quoique sans faste et sans trésors, attendrissoit tellement ce coeur, à qui l'on reproche aujourd'hui une férocité barbare, qu'en s'entretenant de ses voyages, et racontant ce qu'il avoit vu souffrir aux Peuples de la Syrie, il finissoit ordinairement son récit par ces expressions: Les Grecs sont pourtant des hommes. Ce qui monroit sa pitié, et le desir qu'il avoit de les soulager. (VM, pp. 245-47)

Boulainviller's attitude towards the Arabs, however, is not one of unqualified praise. Worthy though they may be as a race, particularly when their noble qualities are compared with the effete effeminacy of the West, the Arabs have their faults. But it is significant, given Boulainviller's aims in La Vie de Mahomed, that he tries hard to excuse these imperfections as much as possible and views them with great sympathy:

Je reviens volontiers à la louange de la solitude des Arabes, laquelle, ne leur permettant pas de connoître tous les dérèglemens de l'imagination des autres Peuples, les a exemptez de prendre part et à leurs crimes, et au plus grand nombre de leurs superstitions. Elle a conservé chez eux plus longtems, et avec moins de mélange, le sentiment naturel de la véritable Divinité; et si nous portons la réflexion jusques à examiner le principe des erreurs où ils sont tombez sur cette matiere, nous les trouverons plus excusables que tous les autres. (VM, pp. 147-48)

Boulainviller's obvious bias towards the Arabs, and his rather spiteful attitude towards the West, have an important function, which is to show that

1. It is true that Boulainviller's attitude towards Mohammed is not always so eulogistic, but his reservations about Mohammed's personal behaviour are no argument against the religion he founded.

the normal western attitude towards the Arab world is based on ignorance and credulity. Boulainviller's praise of the Arabs and criticism of Christians are attempts to break the stranglehold of prejudice which prevents the West from recognizing the good in foreign culture and the bad in its own. However, marvellous as they are, Boulainviller's Arabs cause him some embarrassment. This embarrassment is just like that which he suffers on account of his Franks, and this is so because the cause is the same in both cases: an apologetic end collides with contemporary moral norms (above, pp. 134-39).

The impasse which such a procedure creates is clearly seen when, after lauding the high spiritual and intellectual qualities of the Arabs (VM, pp. 37-43), Boulainviller has to account for them as victorious but cruel conquerors. His 'parti pris' renders him unable to explain in any satisfactorily historical way the hard fact of their brutality. All he has left is incomprehension:

Je ne parle pas des défauts qu l'on peut attribuer à la constitution universelle des hommes: l'Insolence dans la prospérité, l'Abus dans la fortune, la Cupidité, la division d'Interêt, l'Orgueil; mais je veux parler de cette dureté de coeur qu'on leur attribue: suite nécessaire de leur temperament, et de la vie solitaire où ils sont accoutumés dès leur plus tendre jeunesse. Je parle de ce mépris barbare pour tout ce que les autres Peuples avoient aimé ou estimé; de cette préférence donnée sans mesure et sans bornes à leurs opinions et à leurs usages; de cette cruauté qui les a portés à ôter au Monde la moitié de ses habitants, et à priver ce qu'ils en ont laissé, de toutes les connoissances que le Genre-humain s'étoit procurées par une longue expérience. Cette conduite revolte véritablement toutes nos puissances: on ne conçoit pas comment des Peuples polis, raisonnables, éloquens, connoisseurs délicats de la beauté et de la finesse, ont pu s'en rendre coupables: et on ne sauroit l'attribuer qu'à une barbarie ignorante et indomptée.
(VM, pp. 44-45)

Boulainviller tries bravely to attenuate this most unfortunate historical reality by explaining that such hardness of heart of the Arabs is a 'suite nécessaire de leur temperament, et de la vie solitaire où ils sont accoutumés dès leur plus tendre jeunesse'. He continues to show that the bellicose conduct of the Arabs was an inevitable consequence of their plans and was

quite justifiable for them 'qui ne connoissoient point les autres Pays de la Terre, et qui en méprisoient les habitans, leurs moeurs efféminées, leurs opinions discordantes, et dont la perfidie leur étoit justement suspecte' (VM, p. 45). Characteristically, Boulainviller changes the status of Arab cruelty from an unfortunate imperfection to a quality of true virtue. Once again, faced with an embarrassing moral problem, the consequence of his apologetic methodology, Boulainviller abandons dissembling and forthrightly espouses the 'heroic' morality of his favoured party.¹

The Arabs' 'dureté de coeur' is not cruelty but 'fermeté virile' and is rather less cruel than 'les passions vives et féminines, si communes dans nos climats' (VM, p. 47).

En effet, à combien de barbarie, l'Ambition, l'Amour, la Jalousie, la Politique n'ont-elles point porté les hommes de nos Contrées septentrionales? La Cruauté se joint même parmi nous à l'exercice de la Justice: au-lieu que les Arabes, accoutumés à considérer de sang-froid les objets et à ne ménager que rarement leurs vies, sacrifioient sans scrupule et sans inquiétude celle d'autrui à des vues et à des desseins qu'ils imaginoient être ceux de DIEU lui-même. Mais ils ne joignoient à cette violence ni les sentimens d'une basse vengeance, ni l'appareil des supplices, ni les tortures, plus cruelles mille fois que la mort: choses peut-être nécessaires pour l'exemple, mais qui indiquent, au moins de loin, un principe plus condamnable que la simple dureté de coeur.

(VM, pp. 47-8)

Boulainviller's cultural relativism stops short of amoralism. Tolerant as he may have been of variation in form of religious, political, and moral conduct,² there are still absolutes, of good and bad, which he refuses to abandon.³ However, the 'heroic' morality which Boulainviller finds so attractive would finally lead him to adopt an amoral position, not perhaps of complete indifference to moral qualities of any kind but of disregard for the virtues of compassion and selflessness, the traditional objects

1. Boulainviller adopts exactly the same approach in his treatment of the Franks; above, p.139.
2. See above p.164 for a discussion of Boulainviller's relativism and its moral implications.
3. See above, p.175 where Boulainviller, writing of the cruelties and vice peculiar to the Arabs, recognises nonetheless some 'défauts que l'on peut attribuer à la constitution universelle des hommes: l'Insolence dans la prospérité, l'Abus dans la fortune, la Cupidité, la division d'Interêt, l'Orgueil' (VM, p. 44).

of morality. Vigour, determination, belief in one's destiny - these would be the marks of such an heroic morality, together with ruthless adherence to traditional forms. This last can be seen in Boulainviller's attempt to explain the lack of pity in the Arab character. Lack of pity, he maintains, is demanded both by the constitution of the Arabs' government and by their religion. Both require a total and blind obedience, to the Prince and to God. The Prince is detested and his absolute power provokes revolt, mercilessly punished unless successful. Thus pity from the Prince is unthinkable (VM, pp. 48-9). Despite Boulainviller's courage in making such a startling analysis, however, the arbitrary and a priori quality of this analysis cannot be concealed. Lack of pity cannot be explained away, it must simply be accepted.

But insistence on this heroic morality is neither prudent nor seemly.¹ Boulainviller recognizes the value of compassion and is only too pleased to be able to show that, although hard, the Arab heart was not at all closed 'aux expressions d'une véritable générosité', (VM, p. 50). He illustrates this with a dramatic story of the reprieve of two condemned men who exhibit their loyal and independent spirit even in the face of death. The emotions aroused and the 'générosité' displayed in this piece would have been particularly appreciated by admirers of the theatre of Pierre Corneille. Boulainviller concludes appropriately:

Telle étoit donc l'espece de sévérité ou de dureté pratiquée par les premiers Arabes, non cruelle et dépouillée de tout sentiment de générosité et d'humanité, mais judicieuse et mesurée par la consideration de la justice et de la sûreté publique, qu'ils faisoient marcher devant toute autre: étant d'ailleurs persuadez qu'un regret, un soupir pour la vie, ne méritoient l'attention d'un Capitaine, que pour le condamner comme une offense contre la soumission due aux décrets et à la volonté de Dieu. (VM, p. 51)

But the balance of this conclusion immediately suffers a grave shock from the Arabs themselves. As sympathetic and heroic as he might be in

1. See above, pp.141-3, for a discussion of a similar tension, in his histories of France, between Boulainviller's enlightened morality and the temptation to amoralism which his heroic morality encourages.

his conciliatory approach to the moral status of the Arabs, the scholarly Boulainviller is mortified by their destruction of 'des Bibliothèques, et des monumens consacrez à la mémoire des actions des Grands-hommes' (VM, p. 52). In particular Boulainviller grieves over the loss of the library at Alexandria, containing 'le Trésor universel de toute l'Histoire du Monde, des opinions de tous les Philosophes, de toutes les recherches naturelles, et de toutes les connoissances où les hommes avoient pu s'avancer par l'étude et par l'expérience' (VM, p. 52). Boulainviller's pain and resentment¹ are no doubt aggravated by his discerning no cause for such an action other than the sheer caprice of Omar, the second Calif. Not even the heat of the moment, or revenge, can be invoked as an explanation. Boulainviller's sense of loss is given weighty expression: 'Perte irréparable! et qui coute au monde plus que les carnages qu'ont fait en divers tems tous les Barbares ensemble' (VM, p. 53). Again Boulainviller's 'parti pris' prevents him from observing the Arabs objectively and from trying to discern the causes, cultural, moral or ideological, of their actions. His great personal interest in their history makes it certain that any historical evidence which militates against his own vision of the Arabs and against his own moral standards will produce a personal, unhistorical reaction of appropriate proportions. Nevertheless, and this is vital to him, Boulainviller manages to exonerate the Arab nation as a whole:

Je ne sai point de justification contre le reproche que l'on fait aux Arabes à cette occasion, si ce n'est de dire qu'on ne doit pas imputer à la Nation entiere, la faute et l'erreur de jugement de son vieux Empereur; d'autant moins que cette même Nation a témoigné depuis autant et plus d'ardeur pour les Sciences, que les Grecs et les Romains eux-mêmes. (VM, p. 53)

The embarrassment the Arabs cause Boulainviller follows mainly from their physical behaviour, their 'inexplicable' cruelty and contempt for

1. 'On ne sauroit en effet penser sans douleur, et sans ressentiment contre la barbarie des Arabes, au funeste incendie de la fameuse Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie' (VM, p. 52).

non-koranic knowledge. Mohammed too provides Boulainviller with awkward moments but these are more concerned with his doctrinal views than with his personal conduct.

However, matters of Mohammed's personal conduct do occasionally provide Boulainviller with delicate situations which he must successfully resolve. This is particularly true with regard to Mohammed's sexual behaviour. What the West took to be nothing but outrageous promiscuity in Mohammed proves a stumbling block for Boulainviller to which he is all the more sensitive as it is largely against corrupt and biased Christian ideas of Mohammed's permissiveness being the attractive element in his religion that Boulainviller had to argue in order to present Mohammed as a genuine religious leader. He shows that polygamy was already an established custom among the Arabs by Mohammed's time and thus was not introduced by him as a means of gaining converts, and that Mohammed actually reduced the desirable maximum number of wives to four (VM, pp. 168 and 191). Boulainviller's concern is not whether such sexual indulgence is generally right or wrong but that in Mohammed's case his large number of wives and concubines (his, as Boulainviller is careful to point out, by Natural Right; VM, p. 259) must have been an obstacle to the directing of all his energies to his prophetic mission. And again this obstacle is conceived by Boulainviller not so much as a sexual drain of physical energy but rather as the discord that would be inevitably generated within such a large company of women and which would be detrimental to the peace necessary for the meditation of Mohammed's grand designs. Boulainviller concludes: 'Enfin il y a tant d'indécence à un homme public, parvenu à un âge de maturité, de laisser voir une foiblesse qui en suppose tant d'autres, que la conduite de Mahomed à cet égard paroît totalement inexcusable' (VM, p. 261).

However, Boulainviller manages to reply to these objections by referring to the four replies commonly made by Arab scholars. First, he remarks that God, by allowing Mohammed a large number of wives, was consoling him for

the disgrace that inevitably followed His true service; second, that God wanted to disabuse men of their absurd, useless, and socially harmful idea of continence; third, that in order to disabuse the world of the harmful Christian superstition of retreat and continence it was necessary that Mohammed practise an excess of licence and so bring people back to a suitable mean; and fourth, that the strength of the soul is relative to that of the body and as God gave Mohammed such an abundance of the former He could not deny him a suitable proportion of the latter.

These replies illustrate how reluctant Boulainviller is to concede the inexcusableness of Mohammed's sexual conduct. His second and third replies, which are really only one, are interesting and tenable, his first and last, however, are facile and their naive description of the ways of Providence would seem to postulate a Deity far too personal for the likings of deism and to be out of keeping with Boulainviller's normal procedure, exhibited in the Abrégé de l'histoire universelle and the Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil, of denying as often as possible any direct intervention into history by divine power (see chapters eight and nine).

Much of Boulainviller's discussion of Mohammed is concerned with cutting through the West's prejudice against him and with presenting a more reasonable and reasoned account of events. Thus Boulainviller shows that Mohammed's religious system was the fruit of long and deep meditation on spiritual matters and not the deception, disguising his physical faults as spiritual virtues, that it had traditionally been considered (VM, pp. 245-6). Thus too Boulainviller's long attempt to explain Mohammed's sexual behaviour and to show that in the context of his time and place it was at first remarkably restrained and that his later excesses (motivated by the desire to rid people of their false notion of celibacy) were not simply his immoral indulging in the pleasures his position as prophet could offer (VM, pp. 257-61). Yet, although Boulainviller works hard to rid the West of its critical idea that Mohammed was merely a rogue and an impostor, he finds viewing Mohammed

as an impostor most useful in promoting his qualities and in explaining as reasonable what would otherwise doubtlessly be considered irresponsible and immoral behaviour. When Boulainviller recounts Mohammed's replies to the three questions put to him to test his prophetic status he shows that his answers were complete fictions. In particular with regard to his reply to the question about the sleeping brothers Boulainviller comments:

Mahomed répondit, comme nous l'allons voir, affirmativement et hardiment à tous ces faits, [facts of the story which Boulainviller has shown to be most doubtful] sur lesquels il ne pouvoit être démenti: et l'on ne sauroit disconvenir que cette affronterie ne soit préjudiciable à l'estime que ses autres grandes qualitez pouvoient mériter. Mais il falloit être Prophete, ou passer pour tel à quelque prix que ce pût être, et surtout ne pas demeurer court dans une action publique telle que celle-ci.
(VM, pp. 342-43)

But Boulainviller finds the idea of Mohammed as an impostor most useful when it helps him to reveal the illogicality of the West's view of Mohammed and to use western prejudice against Mohammed as the proof of his extraordinary personal qualities which it has been Boulainviller's important task to defend and exhibit. Boulainviller writes:

s'il a été un Imposteur, il a dû posséder d'ailleurs tant de qualitez supérieures pour en imposer aux autres hommes, pour les entraîner dans ses sentiments, et pour les assujettir, que sa fraude a toujours eu les apparences d'une entiere vérité, du moins par rapport à ceux qu'il a séduits. Au-lieu qu'en le dépouillant arbitrairement des talens qui ~~peuvent~~ ^{peuvent} avoir favorisé ses succès, dans la seule vue de contenter un sentiment de haine, que tout Chrétien peut, à la vérité, justement concevoir contre le plus grand ennemi de sa Religion ... il faudra reconnoître que cette vengeance réduit notre raisonnement à l'absurde; puisque si la fortune de ce personnage s'est faite sans moyens naturels, le succès n'en peut être dû qu'à Dieu, que les Impies accuseront d'avoir induit en erreur une moitié du Monde, et détruit violemment sa propre Révélation. (VM, pp. 193-94)

Yet despite such a clever defence of Mohammed and despite painful attempts to rehabilitate the violent behaviour of his conquering Arabs, Boulainviller is quite prepared to criticize them all when their religious opinions are seen to be mistaken. Thus Boulainviller is critical of the Arabs' demanding miracles of Mohammed as proof of his mission, for such a demand is not only superstitious, it is also irrelevant: 'comme s'il eût été de l'essence d'un homme qui avoit entrepris d'instruire les autres, d'autoriser ses paroles,

plutôt par des prodiges que par des raisons' (VM, p. 274).¹ Boulainviller proves his point by referring to Christ. It was as proof of His divinity that Christ needed to perform miracles and not as guarantees of his moral teaching: 'tout le monde y a généralement applaudi; et on l'admire encore aujourd'hui, quoiqu'on la pratique si peu' (VM, p. 275). So, in preaching his own, but similar system of morality Mohammed had no need of miracles, for there was nothing miraculous to prove.

Boulainviller is critical too of Arab ignorance and credulity. After he has examined Mohammed's replies to three questions put to him by his political opponents (who were trying to expose his ignorance and so disband his growing following) and criticized his blatant lying to preserve appearances Boulainviller remarks:

Mais, quelque respect que les Musulmans conservent encore aujourd'hui pour le Chapitre où elles les réponses sont contenues, et quelque réputation qu'elles aient procurée à leur Auteur, on peut assurer avec certitude que c'est la partie la plus foible de l'Alcoran, et qu'il n'y a que la profonde ignorance où vivoient les Arabes qui puisse excuser la bizarre vénération qu'ils ont prise pour des Contes aussi frivoles que l'Histoire des Sept Dormans, ou que celle de la Muraille bâtie par Alexandre pour renfermer les Peuples chimeriques de Jujug et Magug. (VM, p. 353)

However, although Boulainviller is occasionally critical of some of the Arabs' religious notions and is not afraid to denounce them,² these false

1. Diderot expresses the same opinion in the forty-second of his Pensées philosophiques (Oeuvres philosophiques, edited by Paul Vernière (Paris, 1964), pp. 31-32): 'Lorsqu'on annonce au peuple un dogme qui contredit la religion dominante, ou quelque fait contraire à la tranquillité publique, justifiât-on sa mission par les miracles, le gouvernement a droit de sévir, et le peuple de s'écrier: Crucifige ... Un ange vînt-il à descendre des cieux, appuyât-il ses raisonnements par des miracles, s'il prêche contre la loi de Jésus-Christ, Paul veut qu'on lui dise anathème. Ce n'est donc pas par les miracles qu'il faut juger de la mission d'un homme, mais c'est par la conformité de sa doctrine avec celle du peuple auquel il se dit envoyé, surtout lorsque la doctrine de ce peuple est démontrée vraie'. The role of Mohammed as rejuvenator rather than innovator is constantly stressed in La Vie de Mahomed (pp. 183-84, 202, 340-41 ...), and we may note the appropriateness to Boulainviller's purpose in his text of Diderot's final remark.
2. Although Boulainviller wants to persuade us of the good in Arab customs and beliefs, occasional insistence on their mistaken ideas does explain why an apparently right-thinking religious community did not immediately accept Mohammed as its prophet and puts into greater relief the essential tenets of Boulainviller's deism.

views are sympathetically treated and are not allowed to detract from the fundamental truth of Arab religion. This is particularly noticeable in Boulainviller's description of Mohammed's interview with the Arab religious leaders where his presentation of the Arab's view of final judgement, following on from their dismissal of the doctrine of Resurrection as unintelligible, is especially noteworthy. The Arabs believed

que l'opinion d'un Jugement futur et général des actions de tous les hommes étoit plus propre à les intimider, qu'à les conduire: l'utilité commune, et le respect dû à la Société étant des motifs suffisans pour porter les Citoyens à remplir leurs devoirs, sans y joindre des fables et des inventions puisées chez des Nations étrangères, accablées de superstitions. (VM, p. 333)

Boulainviller's comment upon this attitude shows that really the Arabs' only error was insufficiency: their religion was commendable but lacked the spiritual dimension necessary to a complete worship of the Supreme Creator:

On voit . . . que la difficulté que se formoient alors les Arabes, n'a jamais regardé l'impossibilité d'un Jugement général des actions humaines, considérée par rapport à l'équité, à la connoissance, et au pouvoir de celui qui doit le faire; mais que n'ayant aucune notion de la spiritualité de l'Ame, ni de sa difference essentielle d'avec le Corps, ils ne concevoient pas que ce Jugement pût s'accomplir sans la restitution des Corps dans leur intégrité. (VM, pp. 334-35)

Despite his witty use of the prejudiced western view of Mohammed to undermine this very prejudice (above, p.181), Boulainviller's own, more personal, moral attitude to the Prophet is more problematic. Enthusiastic praise on the one hand is balanced by more dispassionate historical and political analysis on the other.

However, with regard to the star worship of the Persians Boulainviller shows Mohammed to have been in the wrong:

1. In his Abrégé de l'histoire universelle of 1700 Boulainviller sees the later conception of an immortal soul as evidence of progress in history, at least in the realm of philosophy and metaphysics (below, pp.240-1). We have seen above, however, (pp.152-4 and 162-3), that in his later writings on metaphysical and religious topics Boulainviller rejects the belief in an immortal soul and shows it to be irrelevant to moral conduct. His comment on the 'insufficiency' of Arab religion may well be, in this case, another instance of his utterly ambiguous and ironic attitude towards Christianity.

L'ignorance où l'on étoit du Dogme essentiel à cette Religion, a fait que les Chrétiens de ce tems-là les ont crus purement Idolâtres, ou du moins Adorateurs du Feu matériel, parce qu'ils en tenoient toujours dans leurs Temples. Mahomed lui-même n'en prit pas une autre idée; c'est pourquoi il les proscrivit avec sévérité, pendant qu'il témoigna beaucoup d'indulgence pour des opinions beaucoup moins spécieuses que les leurs. (VM, pp. 116-17)

In his analysis of star worship (VM, p. 148) Boulainviller is at pains to show how such an apparently idolatrous religion is in principle quite pure or is at least motivated by a sincere wish to adore the Supreme Creator in his most resplendent of works. Yet this aim of Boulainviller's, to exhibit the true worship of God as the basis of many diverse religious practices, now clashes with the equally important aim of rehabilitating the status of Mohammed in western eyes and of showing him to be a worthy representative of true religion. However, although Mohammed's proscription of star worship rested on ignorance, star worship itself must ultimately be condemned because it mistakes the effect for the cause:

C'est donc avec une juste raison que Mahomed, à l'exemple de tous les autres Prophetes, a condamné le Culte des Etoiles; non pas comme une prévarication consommée, relative à la corruption de la volonté, mais comme un abus dans la notion et dans l'idée commune: puisque l'ordre des choses naturelles n'est autre chose que l'exécution de la volonté du TOUT-PUISSANT: volonté qui n'est ni muable, ni occasionelle, mais déterminée par un Décret éternel, auquel le mouvement des premiers moteurs est aussi soumis que le dernier mouvement des choses mûes. C'est l'un des argumens que Mahomed employe pour confondre toute idée d'association, de concours de pouvoir, et de vertu étrangère dans la notion que l'on doit avoir d'un Etre supposé infini, et souverainement parfait. (VM, pp. 152-53)¹

But Mohammed's condemnation of star worship is too rigid. It rests on absolute, theological principle and is incapable of recognizing the human sincerity in an apparently idolatrous practice. Such a condemnation is

1. Voltaire criticizes the same religious practice in Zadig with rather more irony and force. Having failed by argument to disabuse his master, Sétoc, of his superstitious beliefs Zadig resorts to ruse: 'Le soir venu, Zadig alluma un grand nombre de flambeaux dans la tente où il devait souper avec Sétoc; et dès que son patron parut, il se jeta à genoux devant ces cires allumées, et leur dit: "Eternelles et brillantes clartés, soyez-moi toujours propices!" Ayant proféré ces paroles, il se mit à table sans regarder Sétoc. "Que faites-vous donc? lui dit Sétoc étonné. -Je fais comme vous, répondit Zadig; j'adore ces chandelles, et néglige leur maître et le mien." Sétoc comprit le sens profond de cet apologue. La sagesse de son esclave entra dans son âme; il ne prodigua plus son encens aux créatures, et adora l'Être éternel qui les a faites.' (Oeuvres complètes, edited by Moland, vol. XXI, p. 60)

completely unsympathetic to the cultural and religious relativism which is the historical principle used by Boulainviller to lead the preliminary part of his discussion and is all the more ironic coming from the beneficiary of Boulainviller's work. The tension created in having to choose between one or the other, star worship as a misguided but sincere adoration of the Supreme Being or Mohammed as His true representative, is only too obvious:

Les Mages Persans n'étoient pas sans prétextes pour affoiblir l'idée de l'Idolatrie dont Mahomed les crut coupables. Ils adoroient la lumière naturelle des Esprits dans sa plus vive image, qui est le Soleil; et sous le symbole le plus convenable, qui est le Feu matériel: qu'ils entretenoient avec les matieres les plus pures. D'ailleurs, l'innocence de leur vie, la simplicité de leurs moeurs auroient dû leur rendre favorable ce nouveau Docteur. Mais ils avoient aussi contre eux l'ancien préjugé, par lequel les Orientaux prétendent qu'Abraham, à leur occasion, ait été prêt de périr dans les flâmes, plutôt que d'embrasser leur Culte. A quoi, si l'on joint la superstition plus que barbare de leurs sepulchres; et cette pratique incroyable à toute Nation policée, qui permet chez eux aux parens de se servir de leurs propres Enfans pour en engendrer d'autres, il paroitra que le Prophete fut légitimement fondé à condamner leur Religion, et que l'accusation d'Idolatrie en fut un prétexte d'autant plus favorable à ses desseins, qu'il étoit moins sujet à être contredit. (VM, pp. 155-56)

Once the choice has been made, however, Boulainviller immediately sets about restoring a balance:

Mais les Sabiens trouverent encore une raison spécieuse pour se concilier la bienveillance de Mahomed: il voulut bien les croire dépositaires des Livres des plus anciens Prophetes, tels qu'Adam, Seth et Enoch; lesquels Livres ils se vantent encore aujourd'hui de posséder ...

Enfin, un Interprete de l'Alcoran, voulant pleinement justifier la tolerance que Mahomed accorda aux Sabiens, ne craint point de dire que toute la difference qui se trouve entre la Foi Musulmane et le Culte Sabien, ne consiste que dans une erreur de fait, d'autant plus excusable, qu'elle est incompatible avec l'orgueil et la vanité si naturelle aux hommes. "Ils croyent, dit-il, avoir besoin des Intelligences moyennes pour s'élever jusqu'à Dieu, et pour trouver accès devant son Trône: au lieu que la vérité découvre qu'il y a une telle liaison du Créateur à son ouvrage, que le neant et l'humilité de l'un attire nécessairement la misericorde de l'autre". (VM, pp. 156 and 157-58)

Boulainviller's history of the Arabs and of Mohammed in particular has much in common with his histories of France, and of the Franks. Both are a highly personal mixture of often very skilful historical scholarship and criticism and of more or less thinly disguised political and religious

prejudice. Perhaps the subject matter of La Vie de Mahomed and the time when it was written,¹ may explain the all-pervasive and often subtle use of irony in this later work but the moral climate and the problems of treatment of both historical subjects are strikingly similar. In both cases Boulainviller was using history to discuss particular problems and to convey certain messages, either directly or, especially through the medium of moral discrimination, indirectly. However, in his more general histories of the ancient world the moral dimension of history seems to have further significance. Not only do moral attitudes and statements convey messages of various kinds, but the writing of history itself seems to have become a profoundly moral act.

III The moral necessity of an intelligible history of the ancient world

We have already seen that on several levels history for Boulainviller has a moral significance, that in particular it provides the lessons for practical living and for more profound reflection (above pp. 124-7) and that more generally Boulainviller sees it as part of the historian's task to pass moral judgement on the events of the past (above p. 123). The moral responsibility of Boulainviller's histories of the ancient world, however, is much greater for it is the purpose of these histories, especially of the Abrégé de l'histoire universelle jusqu'à l'exode des Israélites,² to reconcile the authority and teachings of the Church with the discoveries and speculations of natural philosophy which seem antipathetical to Christian dogma:

Je tacheray de concilier les miracles et même ceux de la Création et du Déluge avec les idées que nous donne la Philosophie naturelle persuadé que c'est aider la vérité et le plus sûr moyen d'éloigner les doutes et les inquiétudes non que je ne reconnoisse les avantages de la parfaite soumission telle que nostre religion l'exige, mais parceque je sçais que tous les hommes n'en sont pas capables. (HU, I, 3)

1. Death prevented Boulainviller from finishing the work.

2. B.N. fonds français, 6363 and 6364.

Moreover, Boulainviller claims 'qu'on pourra reconnoître dans mon travail l'amour sincère que je porte à la vérité à la justice et à une morale droite et simple' (HU, I, 3). And these principles, truth, justice and morality, are invariable. Nothing must prevail over them 'même en la Personne ou la posterité des Patriarches toutes vénérables qu'elles soient selon nos idées' (HU, I, 3).

It is also important to realize that Boulainviller wrote the Histoire universelle for the benefit of his children's education and that his 'abrégé' was, according to our author, 'plus étendu et en meme temps plus concis que ceux qui sont en usage' (HU, I, 1).

To write such a history with such a purpose in mind, that is the reconciliation of God's miracles with modern scientific thought, demands a particularly subtle approach to scriptural authority in which neither 'la servitude de la lettre' or 'la licence des Libertins' (HU, I, 19) is fitting. Boulainviller defends the 'juste milieu'. Try as they may, the 'Libertins', in denying the biblical account of creation, cannot do without a First Cause: 'Lucrèce et Spinoza sont également absurdes dans tous les raisonnements qu'ils font pour la détruire et en un mot le bon sens et la droite raison concourent avec la conscience pour fournir la demonstration de son existence' (HU, I, 21). The traditionalists, on the other hand, though much harder to refute, especially as fear is one of their principal allies, are seen to demand too much of our credulity: 'Dieu qui nous a donné la lumiere naturelle n'est point offensé de l'usage que nous en faisons pour découvrir ce que notre curiosité dont il est le principe nous fait désirer de connoître' (HU, I, 21).

Boulainviller then is going to avoid extremes and show that both the authority of Scripture and the findings of natural philosophy can be assimilated in an account of ancient history which treats Moses' story of the creation as true but not definitive: 'elle ne contient pas ... un récit exact et littéral des moyens que la toute puissance a employez pour former l'univers qui oblige notre foy à se soumettre sans explication à toutes les circonstances

qui y sont décrites' (HU, I, 22). Boulainviller thus recognises that although divinely inspired in his writings Moses nonetheless was a human being writing for a particular people with its own individual customs, style, and limitations of knowledge and comprehension and who indeed shared to some extent in this common ignorance.¹

But although Boulainviller exercises a reasonable critical attitude towards the received word of Scripture, recognising its human and thus fallible origin, he leaves us in no doubt that as our means of communication with God and with the events of 'prehistory' (the creation of the world) and of very early history, it has unparalleled authority. This can be seen in Boulainviller's preliminary discussion of his theory of what happened during the Flood. Showing the overwhelming physical reasons why it was impossible for the Flood to have been universal Boulainviller replies that those who believe it was so, as well as 'natural reasons' of their own 'ont pour Eux l'autorité du texte et c'est beaucoup parmi nous' (HU, I, 56).²

Nor it is ever doubted that the world, all of creation, runs according to God's will. However, this control is not envisaged as despotic and passionate but detached and natural. Speaking of the cause of the Flood Boulainviller states:

Il est vray que le Déluge, c'est à dire la chute de cette premiere terre, n'est arrivé que par l'ordre exprès de la providence; mais aussy faut il reconnoître que le principal triomphe de la sagesse et de la puissance de Dieu du moins le plus est la juste proportion qui détermine les événements suivant les forces de la nature et les loix de la justice. (HU, I, 44)

1. Speaking of Moses' understanding of the formation of rain, Boulainviller suggests that he was ignorant too of the course of the sun 'car il a parlé du jour comme s'il ne restoit plus de nuit sur la terre et de la nuit comme s'il n'y avoit plus de jour' (HU, I, 30). Boulainviller remarks too on Moses' apparent ignorance of the Chinese, the peoples of Europe, the majority of the Africans, the Indians, and of course the New World (HU, I, 121-22); see below, pp. 310-11.
2. And in discussing le Père Pezron's opinion concerning the antiquity of the Kings of Babylon (see Pezron, L'Antiquité des tems, rétablie et défendue contre les Juifs et les nouveaux chronologistes (Paris, 1687), in particular the section entitled Canon Chronologique, pp. 3-5) Boulainviller refers to Genesis 14 where scripture says 'formally' that there was at the time of Abraham no kingdom of Babylon; 'cette autorité renverse absolument tout ce que l'on édifie sur des témoignages prophanes et d'ailleurs très incertains' (HU, I, 133). Boulainviller goes on to state that historical conjecture or other historical sources are valueless without the corroboration of Scripture's superior authority.

The parallelism of the moral and physical causes of the Flood, reminiscent of occasionalist metaphysics, is made quite clear:

Il est plus grand et plus noble de concevoir que les péchez des hommes se trouvent précisément montez au comble qui en devoit attirer la punition lorsque la vie des saints Patriarches fut terminée et que la nature étoit au dernier terme de sa force que de s'imaginer Dieu irrité, perdant le monde dans sa colère et le réparant ensuite sans le rendre meilleur.
(HU, I, 44)

But although God is not to be conceived of as an angry and jealous old man, a certain predisposition is assumed and indeed is essential if the Biblical history of the Israelites is to make sense. Fleeing from the Egyptians, the Hebrews arrive

dans un lieu serré de montagnes d'où il étoit moralement impossible qu'ils pussent échaper mais la nature secondant avec obeïssance les desseins favorables du Ciel leur ouvrit un passage par la mer à la faveur d'un vent du Nord tres violent et d'un reflux qui poussèrent les eaux: vers le midy: Moïse profita sagement et heureusement de ce passage inespéré. (HU, I, 330)

The unsatisfactory nature of Boulainviller's reconciling scripture with physics is evident here: the crossing of the Red Sea is made no less miraculous and the natural causes referred to are hardly sufficient to explain such a portentous event. The religious and scientific attitudes are trimmed to fit each other and meet in a hazy conception of a rather passive Providence.

The intention to show God's will as being as influential and important in the creation of the world as the effective physical forces leads Boulainviller to some odd reasoning, as when he determines that the rate of motion at the centre of the forming earth was necessarily slower than that at the circumference if the earth was not to have formed by itself rather than on the command of God's will (HU, I, 25). It leads Boulainviller too to espouse the system of Thomas Burnet as a proper and intelligible explanation of the creation of the world and of the necessity of the Flood.¹

1. Thomas Burnet, The Sacred Theory of the Earth (London, 1684). Burnet discusses the necessary constitution of the original, ante-diluvian world and how, by its very physical structure, it brought about the universal deluge, in the first book of his work, chapters five and six (pp. 55-77). The interplay of ordinary and extraordinary Providence (natural causes and divine will) is discussed in book one, chapter 8 (pp. 96-108).

Boulainviller's method of rational acceptance of the traditional story of the Bible can also lead him into some startling incongruity. Stating the reasons why he has chosen the Samaritan chronology of events rather than the Hebrew or that of the Septuagint, Boulainviller remarks that the Samaritan calculation keeps a better proportion: 'les hommes ont des enfants de meilleure heure à proportion que leur vie diminuë et les enfants survivent à leurs Peres dans la même proportion' (HU, I, 41). It seems to slip Boulainviller's notice for a moment that this discussion of 'proportion' concerns men credited to have lived six or seven hundred years. However, Boulainviller is not unaware of the difficulty of believing this to be true and so he attempts to prove it to be so not only by referring to 'les plus anciens monumens de tous les Peuples', but also by the agreeable physical environment of the first world as described by Thomas Burnet.¹ Yet it is with textual authority that Boulainviller concludes his argument, 'narration sufisamment autorisée par les mouvements des autres histoires' (HU, I, 46).

The tension that exists between the two elements of Boulainviller's compromise, the dogmatic and the scientific, can be better seen in his later work, the Apogée du soleil.² Again, following Burnet, Boulainviller states:

Je crois que la formation de notre globe s'est faite par l'ordre et la volonté de Dieu mais dans une longueur de siecle [sic] ... je veux bien même accorder à cette formation la durée d'une période entière, quoique ce soit beaucoup, mais à cet égard je pense qu'on ne sauroit se proposer aucun terme certain ... De fixer encore une datte à cette formation c'est cequime paroît impossible et même inutile tant parce qu'il ne reste aucune mémoire d'un temps si éloigné que parce que selon la disposition du même système il faut concevoir que la Terre étoit située tout diféremment de ce qu'elle est aujourd'hui. (AS, f. 33)

Boulainviller gives up the vain attempt to date the creation of the world but realises that simply setting a date for the beginning of 'our period' (that is the appearance of mankind on the earth) will lead people to think he supposes the world to be eternal. He replies to this potential

1. Thomas Burnet, op. cit. pp. 193-222.

2. B.N. fonds français, 9126.

criticism by showing that an attempt to date the creation of the world is 'infiniment indiscret' especially as the Latin Church ('à laquelle je suis soumis') will tolerate any chronology as long as the principle of creation is recognised. Boulainviller, therefore, has simply followed history as far back as he could:

... et par là je trouve un moment au delà duquel je ne puis étendre mon imagination par l'histoire sans sortir de la vraye-semblance; moment appuyé d'ailleurs par toutceque la raison peut découvrir de spécieux dans l'astrologie et duquel se tirent sans effort des conséquences qui ne peuvent être démenties ny par l'histoire ny par la morale ny par la Philosophie: mais qu'elles rendent au contraire plus certaines et plus évidentes à mesure qu'elles sont plus sévèrement examinées dans leurs différents principes. (AS, f. 80)

For Boulainviller, God let secondary causes create the world rather than act immediately,

... or ces causes secondes agissent lentement et par un progrès tellement imperceptible que pour produire ce qui se passe à nos yeux il n'a peut-être pas moins fallu qu'une infinité de siècles pendant lesquels s'est formée cette chaîne inconcevable de causes et d'effets liés nécessairement les unes aux autres. (AS, f. 80)

So on the one hand Boulainviller can imagine an immense and incalculable amount of time necessary for the creation of the world and yet he aims at the greatest precision, using both astronomical calculation and the authority of the Samaritan chronology, in his dating of the beginning of 'our period', which he puts at May 11th 4229 B.C. (AS, ff. 37-38).

It will be seen (chapter eight) that in important respects the Apogée du Soleil is a much more radical work than Boulainviller's Histoire universelle and that the compromise between religion and science is all but ready to split assunder.¹ The greater power that the traditional scriptural account

1. Discussing Boulainviller's work as an astrologer Jean Ehrard sees in this tension between religion and science 'une intention maligne et une pointe antichrétienne': L'Idée de la nature en France dans la première moitié du 18^e siècle, 2 vols (Paris, 1963), I, 44. It is not difficult to support such a view. Considering the scriptural hundred and fifty days as a grossly inadequate period of time for the formation of the post-diluvian world, Boulainviller writes that 'il est au contraire si naturel de penser que toute la terre n'a pu se briser à la fois que trouvant cette idée confirmée par la signification astrologique, il n'y reste de difficulté que dans sa conciliation avec le texte sacré' (AS, f. 65). And the immense amount of time Boulainviller would quite willingly allow before the beginning of our period, his 'premier midi', has, he assures us not without irony, 'un autre principe caché dans l'éternité de Dieu' (AS, f. 80).

of these first events of the world had over Boulainviller's mind at the time of the earlier work can be judged by the amount of time he is then prepared to give to the creation of the world. In the Apogée du Soleil we see that it is 'une infinité de siècles'. In his reading notes taken from Thomas Burnet's Sacred Theory of the Earth¹ Boulainviller sees the Biblical calculation of six days as much too short (although he recognizes it to be Moses' way of expressing the physical progress of creation) and suggests instead, using 'la vraysemblance' as his guide to interpretation, a period of six years. This is sufficient, he feels, to account for the long physical processes necessarily involved: 'En effet la Nature nous apprend que les precipitations se font lentement et peu a peu surtout lorsque les matieres sont agitées ou qu'elles circulent comme il s'est du faire dans le Cahos'.²

As well as by a growing radicalism in Boulainviller's religious and philosophical outlook, so ironically consummated in his Vie de Mahomed, the tension between rational science and religious authority revealed in Boulainviller's histories of the ancient world may be explained perhaps, at least in the case of his Histoire universelle, by the educative function of history which for Boulainviller was such an important part of it and which is essentially conservative. Briefly, Boulainviller, aware of and sympathetic towards the growing criticism of the Biblical account of Creation and of the early history of mankind, felt constrained to temper the influence of this rationalist critical approach if history as a body of moral knowledge and as a worthwhile intellectual pursuit were to survive. It is indicative that Boulainviller starts his Histoire universelle with the Genesis account

1. Presumably these reading notes must pre-date Boulainviller's Histoire universelle.
2. Extraits des lectures de Mr. le Comte de Boulainviller avec des réflexions, B.N., fonds français, n.a. 11075, ff. 31-32. In the Histoire universelle, however, Boulainviller argues that the formation of the earth (the first four days of the Genesis account) must have taken centuries; this position, he asserts, is still one concordant with scriptural authority (HU, I, 29).

of Creation and of the early history of man, commenting here and there to make it all the more probable and acceptable but staying close to its guideline.¹ Boulainviller is much closer here to Bossuet than to Voltaire. The Biblical account of early history must be accepted because there is nothing to replace it:

It was not because they believed in the divine inspiration of Genesis but because of the inadequacy of any other prehistory that learned men even well into the nineteenth century turned to the Genesis account of the Creation, the Fall, and the Flood to explain the origin of man and society.²

Boulainviller's dependence upon tradition and authority as the only sources for the early history of mankind is particularly evident in his discussion of the Greeks and the Romans. In the introduction to his Essai sur les moeurs, better known as La Philosophie de l'histoire, Voltaire discusses the history of these peoples to show what good deists they were and to show, following his pyrrhonist bent, that nothing of historical value can be known of their origins and early history. Of the Greeks he says

Je laisse à de plus savants que moi le soin de prouver que les trois enfants de Noé, qui étaient les seuls habitants du globe, le partagèrent tout entier; qu'ils allèrent chacun à deux ou trois mille lieues l'un de l'autre fonder partout de puissants empires, et que Javan, son petit-fils, peupla la Grèce en passant en Italie; que c'est là que les Grecs s'appelèrent Ioniens, parce que Ion envoya des colonies sur les côtes de L'Asie Mineure; que cet Ion est visiblement Javan, en changeant I en Ja, et on en van.³ On fait de ces contes aux enfants, et les enfants n'en croient rien.

1. It is interesting in this respect that, concerned as he was to present a rational and moral account of ancient history with evident deistic bias, Boulainviller, despite some distaste for their ignorant ways and criticism of their lack of spirituality and proper notion of morality (HU, I, 148-165), presents the Hebrews at first as fundamentally moral and devout men: 'Je ne saurois douter que Nôé n'ait connu le vrai Dieu et qu'il n'en ait établi le culte parmi ses Enfants' (HU, I, 172). However, after progressing in his narrative and talking about the history of Egypt, especially the enlightened government of Sesostris, and as he finishes his account of the Hebrews in Egypt, to be followed by the history of the more philosophically and spiritually inclined Greeks, Boulainviller's attitude to the Hebrews becomes distinctly less deferential; see below p.197.
2. Glyn Daniel, The Idea of Pre-history (Penguin books, 1971), p. 29.
3. Voltaire, Oeuvres complètes, edited by Moland, vol. XI, p. 70.

Boulainviller, however, starts his account of Greek history with a discussion of this same Javan and the reasons for his appearance in Greece (HU, II, 1-9). He pursues his discussion of the four principal colonies set up under the four sons of Javan basing himself 'sur l'autorité de l'Ecriture' and on the best of modern commentators of Genesis chapter 10: Bochart (HU, II, 3).¹ Yet Boulainviller is aware of the fabulous nature of much of Greek history as presented by the Greeks themselves who had 'une telle disposition à convertir en prodiges les plus simples événements que leur récit des histoires de ces premiers temps ne se peut regarder que comme un tissu de fables ingénieuses et divertissantes' (HU, II, 3).

But, as with his history of the Hebrews, Boulainviller bases himself upon the traditionally agreed facts of ancient Greece, refining points here, clearing up confusion there, and generally presenting as rationalist a picture of these legendary times as his sources would permit.² These sources necessarily include fables.³ Reflecting on the history of Sicily, Boulainviller states:

Mais comme pour decouvrir la vérité dans une antiquité si éloignée en suivant une route si peu battue on est obligé de faire une exacte attention à tout ce que l'on peut recueillir dans les anciens auteurs; il m'a semblé qu'on peut en cette occasion faire usage de la fable aussy bien que dans l'histoire de la Grece. (HU, II, 413-14)

However, when he can, Boulainviller will reject the fabulous and show the historical events upon which the fables have been elaborated. This is particularly striking in his discussion of Theseus (HU, II, 169-97) where Boulainviller refers to a number of authorities but relies especially upon Plutarch. But even here Boulainviller's attention to fables is ambiguous. Speaking of the love between Theseus and Ariadne, the daughter of

1. Samuel Bochart, in the Phaleg section of the Geographia sacra seu Phaleg et Canaan ..., in Opera omnia (Leyden and Utrecht, 1712), book 3, chapters 3-7, columns 153-71.
2. Speaking of Centaurs, Boulainviller explains that 'c'étoit des Pasteurs de troupeaux de Boeufs ou selon Palephate les habitants d'un lieu nommé Néphélé au pied du mont Pelion qui s'étoient accoutumés à monter à cheval dans un temps où cet exercice étoit peu connu' (HU, II, 190).
3. In De l'Origine des fables Fontenelle writes: 'il n'y a point d'autres histoires anciennes que les fables'; Oeuvres complètes, edited by G. B. Depping, 3 vols (Paris, 1818; reprinted Geneva, 1968), II, 388.

Minos, Boulainviller tells us that 'La fable a fait une fiction très agréable du filet dont cette princesse luy fit présent avec lequel il parvint à démêler les détours du labyrinthe après avoir tué le minotaure' (HU, II, 174).

What are we to make of the historicity of this event?

Boulainviller's attitude to oracles is similarly confusing. In his account of the story of Oedipus Boulainviller sticks to the legendary material, although he provides natural explanations of these events. Discussing Oedipus's resolution of the enigma and his becoming King of Thebes, Boulainviller remarks:

L'on peut ce semble expliquer cette histoire avec probabilité en disant que par la défaite de quelque Ennemy voisin de la ville de Thebe qui en troubloit le commerce et qui ruinoit la campagne Oedipe s'attira assez de Partisans pour se faire donner la couronne au préjudice de Créon qui d'ailleurs n'y avoit aucun droit. (HU, II, 238-39)

Boulainviller notes that this sequence of events also fulfilled the prophecy of the oracle. But immediately afterwards he denies any historical value whatsoever to such sources of information:

Je ne sçais s'il est besoin d'avertir que ces Oracles doivent toujours être pris pour des fictions de la superstition ou de la Poésie à l'égard de ces tems anciens ou des adresses de la Pythie ou des autres Prêtres dans les temps plus modernes. Vandale medecin hollandais a tellement prouvé l'un et l'autre qu'il ne reste rien à dire sur ce sujet.
(HU, II, 239)

As with his history of the Israelites Boulainviller's dilemma is clear: traditional sources of information are palpably insufficient and unsatisfactory yet 'rational' explanations, with no alternative support, seem merely gratuitous.¹

The essence of Boulainviller's approach to ancient history can be seen in his comments on the history of the fall of Troy. Boulainviller refers to critics, especially Dio Chrysostom, who deny the whole story of Troy² and

1. Nonetheless, 'rational' explanation and elucidation of the events of the ancient past as presented in fables, myths, and ancient and modern authorities will continue to be Boulainviller's favoured method of discussing ancient history; see below, chapter ten, especially pages 295 - 315.
2. In his eleventh discourse Dio Chrysostom maintains that Troy was not captured. See J.W. Cohoon's Greek and English five volume edition of Dio Chrysostom's works (London, 1949), volume one, pp. 446-565.

he remarks: 'tant il est vrai qu'il n'y a rien de si eclattant dans le monde qui ne devienne sujet à l'oubli on du moins à la contestation: les preuves des vérités passées s'evanounissent après quoy les faits les plus certains nous paroissent aussy obscurs que s'ils étoient encor à venir' (HU, II, 336). But Boulainviller sees we must assume and defend the historicity of the siege and fall of Troy 'autrement il faudroit accuser toute l'antiquité d'yvresse et d'extravagance de nous en avoir conservé l'histoire' (HU, II, 336). He concludes: 'Disons donc qu'il y a plus de singularité et d'entêtement que de raison dans les Modernes qui comme Hornius etc., nient une vérité si constante' (HU, II, 336).¹

Boulainviller, then, sticks to the traditional and authoritative framework of the historiography of the ancient world. But his own intellectual curiosity and desire to explain things in a rational manner constantly threaten to burst out of their subservient role as mere adapters of fables and challenge the accepted conception of Europe's past. Reflecting on the natural beauty, felicitous climate, and abundance of 'toute sorte de délices' of Italy, Boulainviller remarks 'qu'on ne pourroit trop s'étonner qu'elle ait si longtemps manqué d'habitants s'il n'étoit vrai que le monde ne s'est pû peupler que par degrés dans le progrès des générations et des années' (HU, II, 343).

The moral aspect of Boulainviller's historiography of the ancient world, in so far as the second category of our analysis is concerned ('moral attitudes clearly influenced by the more general concerns of Boulainviller's particular histories'), is then not bound up with any non-historical, didactic theme as was the case with his histories of France and of the Arabs but is concerned

1. Georgius Hornius, in his Accuratissima orbis delineatio, sive geographia vetus, sacra et prophana (Amsterdam, 1684), discusses Homer's account of the Trojan War and remarks upon the authority his works possessed in the matter of ancient geography. Hornius continues: 'Quamquam haec omnia ad Mythicum aevum spectent, et handquaquam ad Historiae, id est, veritatis legem, exigi possint, multum tamen ad antiquae Geographiae cognitionem faciunt' (p. 8).

with safeguarding the moral and intellectual status of history itself. Of course, moral comments of a clearly partisan nature are to be found in Boulainviller's histories of the ancient world. These are mainly concerned with Boulainviller's 'religious' preoccupations, in particular his attack upon superstition. We have already noted (above, p.193 n.1) that once other nations are seen to be essentially morally respectable the desire to present the Jews, necessarily the first people to be discussed in Boulainviller's history, as fundamentally moral and devout fades and a harsher critical edge appears in Boulainviller's later discussion of them. He criticizes their penchant for visions (HU, I, 400) and their predilection for prophecy (HU, I, 419) and is very scornful of the Hebrews' sacred name for God: 'comme si les sons pouvoient avoir une sainteté propre et que tous les noms qui font connoître l'Etre Suprême ne fussent pas également vénérables par rapport à l'idée qu'ils renferment' (HU, I, 438).

Boulainviller's concern to attack superstition also prompts his criticisms of Egyptian religion (HU, I, 255) and of the deceit fostered by the Greek mysteries (HU, II, 140).

Political concerns, at least from a more general and philosophical point of view, also inspire some sombre moral reflections. Concluding his discussion of Cain's murder of Abel Boulainviller remarks, in a manner most reminiscent of similar musings on the passing of French honour and virtue, 'Ainsi dez le commencement du monde, la vertu n'étoit pas un titre de bonne fortune' (HU, I, 35).

More pointed political comment is found in Boulainviller's discussion of the form of government adopted by early societies. He denies that large monarchies existed during man's infancy and argues instead that the many princes encountered in the narratives of ancient history suggest, as well they might to one so critical of the historical development of monarchy in his own land, that early political society, despite appearances, was fundamentally aristocratic in form (i.e. many small sovereigns) rather than monarchical. This

aristocratic form of government received the highest sanction for

cette disposition du monde n'étoit pas telle sans une direction particulière de la Souveraine Providence: car si d'une part les monarchies en unissant un plus grand nombre d'hommes en société ont procuré la perfection des arts et des sciences, elles ont aussy causé le dérèglement des moeurs, la mollesse ... la cruauté et tous les vices qui détruisent l'espèce humaine ou qui en empêchent la propagation. (HU, I, 124)¹

As in his histories of France and of the Arabs Boulainviller's interested moral and didactic attitudes can create friction with historical fact and with his more 'civilized' moral ideas.² When he first discusses Sesostris's method of keeping the Hebrews submissive by deciding to kill all their male children Boulainviller merely remarks that 'l'expédient étoit barbare et indigne d'un si grand Roy: cependant l'écriture nous apprend que cette ordonnance fut exécutée' (HU, I, 316). Later on, however, Boulainviller explains that Sesostris's 'prodige de tyrannie' has had its 'approbateurs' 'qui ont crû que le Prince ne pouvoit en bonne politique se dispenser d'afoiblir un Peuple qui croissoit si considérablement' (HU, I, 430). Boulainviller finds the presence of such 'Realpolitik' in the actions of one of the great monarchs of Egypt embarrassing and attempts to persuade us that it is more or less acceptable by referring to the Lacedaemonians who treated their slaves cruelly, by showing that at least killing children is better than killing adults and by showing that Plato himself advised not to trust slaves of different nationality or 'volonté' or who had no philosophical love of duty (HU, I, 431).

Moral attitudes of a partisan nature do occur then in Boulainviller's ancient histories but they are not concerned with the development of a constant argumentative theme as such attitudes have been shown to be in Boulainviller's histories of France and La Vie de Mahomed. It is rather that the whole methodological approach of Boulainviller's Abrégé de l'histoire

1. The same aristocratic criticism of the progress of arts and sciences is made at the end of Boulainviller's Dissertation sur la noblesse française; below, pp. 360-61.
2. See above, p. 142.

universelle, the compromise between the authority of Scripture and tradition and the critical rationalism of the individual historian, indicates a strong desire to conserve history from the ravages of historical pyrrhonism as a source of truth, as an important means of education, and as a ~~sanction~~ for moral behaviour.

Moral comments of the third type, that is giving an impression of Boulainviller's more philosophical attitude towards history, are of course present in his histories of the ancient and Arab worlds. However, whereas in his histories of France these were very much concerned with the particular direction of French history, the corresponding remarks in his ancient and religious histories are concerned with the larger problem of control and direction in history as a whole. It will be more helpful in that case to consider these remarks in a discussion of Boulainviller's attitude towards the moral and philosophical problem of supernatural, extra-historical, control over human history; in short Providence and destiny.

PART THREE

PROVIDENCE AND DESTINY

Introduction

Making references to Providence and destiny may be considered as two ways, 'theological' and 'secular', of providing an explanation of certain historical events. These explanations can be described as 'extra-historical' for the reason that they see history, however vaguely or implicitly, as a domain subservient to the dictates of forces which are not themselves involved in the development of history in the same interrelated and intimate way as are the more 'properly' historical forces, such as climate, geography, economics, religion and culture. The same may be said of chance.

J. B. Bury has pointed out that 'as the function of science is to explain phenomena, and explanation means the assignment of causes, it is clear that, if a phenomenon containing lawless elements may occur, scientific research is hopeless'.¹ This principle is compatible, he argues, with the view that history depends on accident or chance ('une, fatalité' rather than 'la fatalité') as long as we do not 'conceive chance as the intrusion of a lawless element'.² We will notice, however, that whenever Boulainviller refers to chance there is no attempt to ally it to any causal sequence. Chance is thus as extra-historical in Boulainviller's historical writings as are Providence and destiny.

Bury noted too, however, that a providential view of history can be compatible with a scientific exploration of history for 'cause and effect' can be regarded as the machinery by which Providence [or, we may say, destiny] executes its plan.³ As far as Providence is concerned though, Reinhold Niebuhr

1. J. B. Bury, 'Cleopatra's Nose', in Selected Essays, edited by Harold Temperley (Amsterdam, 1964, a reprint of the 1930 Cambridge edition), p. 60.
2. In his study The Nature of Historical Explanation (first published by the Clarendon Press in 1952 and reprinted by the Oxford U.P. in 1978), Patrick Gardiner illustrates how chance is not independent of all causal sequences: 'Was it by chance that Jones had indigestion after lunch on Thursday? It was, when by this it is meant that if, instead of parsnips, peas had been on the menu, Jones would not have had indigestion. But it is not by chance that he had indigestion, if by this it is meant that Jones's indigestion was not causally explicable ... an event may be 'chance' relative to one sequence, but not necessarily 'chance' relative to another sequence' (pp. 111-12).
3. J. B. Bury, 'Cleopatra's Nose', p. 60.

would seem to disagree, or at least express a different emphasis. He would argue that it is the ultimate unintelligibility of the providential design that completes history's meaning by preventing history from looking to things within itself as embodiments of its final meaning. 'Mystery does not annul meaning but enriches it. It prevents the realm of meaning from being reduced too simply to rational intelligibility and thereby being given a false centre of meaning in a relative or contingent historical force or end'.¹ Boulainviller's developing attitude to Providence can be conveniently defined within the terms used by Bury and Niebuhr for we shall see that as he approaches a more rational, less mysterious conception of the workings of Providence, Boulainviller in fact denies the reality of Providence as an intelligible idea.

It should be noted that in the discussion that follows Providence will be understood, again to quote Bury, simply as 'an external power guiding human societies and ordering human events according to a deliberate plan',² and not in the more particular sense of 'the agent of divine benevolence towards man'.³ The bulk of the discussion will centre upon the idea of Providence and the use Boulainviller makes of it, rather than ideas of destiny, for it is Providence which is the much more intriguing and problematic aspect of his referring to extra-historical causation.

1. Niebuhr, Faith and History (London, 1949), p. 116.

2. 'Cleopatra's Nose', p. 60.

3. Norman Hampson, The Enlightenment (Penguin Books, first published in 1968, reprinted in 1979), p. 81.

Chapter Seven

Providence and Destiny in The History of France

Reference to an extra-historical cause of events is made in two ways in Boulainviller's histories of France. There is the 'theological' mode, that is references made to Providence; and there is the 'secular' mode, that is references made to destiny or its equivalents ('le sort', 'la fortune', 'la fatalité'). Although the choice of mode is not merely arbitrary (indeed Boulainviller's use of providential explanation is often significant), both destiny and Providence have moral as well as explanatory value. Both are used to explain why certain events occurred (or, more rarely, why they did not), and both, although not always, are used as vehicles for judging particular historical characters or for more sombre reflexion on the lessons of history. These reflexions, however, do not imply any 'philosophy of history'; either they are merely conventional or they are the fruits of Boulainviller's own highly moral and stoic turn of mind and his keen sense of the decadence and the political impotence of his own class. The more interesting moral aspect of Boulainviller's use of extra-historical explanation is the first: judgement of historical personages. However, before we concentrate on the morality of Providence or destiny in Boulainviller's histories of France, let us examine their role as explanations of historical events.

Discussing the progress of the conquest of Gaul by the Franks, Boulainviller remarks that 'ils occupoient la Belgique et les Germanies entieres, la seconde et la troisième Lyonnaise, avec une partie de la Senonoise: nous avons vû par quels progrès ils étoient venus si avant'. He continues: 'mais la Fortune qui les y avoit conduits, les destinoit encore à de plus grandes possessions' (MH, p. 120). Introducing his comments on the reigns of Sigebert and Chilperic, Kings of Austrasia and Neustrasia respectively, Boulainviller reflects: 'Le Destin de L'Austrasie semble avoir été, d'être gouvernée par des Princes belliqueux, comme celui du Royaume de Soissons d'en avoir de cruels; Sigebert et Chilperic qui les possedoient, ont abondamment rempli l'histoire

de leur tems par ces deux mêmes caracteres' (MH, 223). Speaking of the need France had, after the long and arduous wars with England, of a strong and intelligent king, Boulainviller narrates: 'C'est ce qui se rencontra précisément dans la personne de Charle VII; mais il eut deplus la Fortune favorable, et il faut avouer que, sans sa protection, cette bonne volonté, quelque rare et précieuse qu'elle soit dans les Princes, eût été inutile à ses Sujets' (HAG, III, 53). And later, discussing the success of Charles VIII against the Normans in 1449, Boulainviller writes:

Mais la Fortune lui fit chèrement acheter ces avantages, par la douleur qu'il eut de voir mourir la belle Agnès d'un poison que l'on crut lui avoir été donné par l'ordre du Dauphin: ce Prince, qui s'étoit déjà emporté jusqu'à lui donner un soufflet, n'ayant pas cru la devoir laisser survivre à cette injure, depeur qu'elle ne s'en vangeat quelque jour.
(HAG, III, 117)

It is clear, despite the active qualities assigned to Fortune, that these references to an extra-historical cause of events imply no belief in the existence of such a guiding force but are simply ways of saying that what happened happened. Boulainviller's referring to Fortune or destiny is a conventional method of providing some sort of explanation of certain events for which either ignorance or lack of space or interest prevents him from finding a more properly historical reason. The conventional nature of Boulainviller's use of such 'explanations' can be appreciated if one looks briefly at other historical works of the period.

Narrating Childebert's campaign in Italy against the Lombards and their leader Autaris, Mézeray writes that 'le sort luy [Autaris] fut favorable dans une grande journée au passage de [sic] Alpes' and Childebert, beaten, was forced to withdraw.¹ The quatrain at the foot of Lotaire's portrait (quatrains and portraits introduce nearly all the kings of France in Mézeray's history and are often highly sententious) laments:

1. Mézeray, Abrégé chronologique de l'histoire de France, 6 vols (Amsterdam, 1673), I, 93.

On ne peut arrester le cours des destinées;
 J'étois religieux, brave, juste et prudent,
 Et ne pus éviter le tragique accident
 D'un boucon, dont ma femme accourcit mes années.¹

Even Bossuet, in his consideration of the history of 'les empires', although he concludes that ultimately all is governed by Providence, refers to destiny to 'explain' the constant rise and fall of different empires. He means nothing more by this than that empires simply do, as history shows, rise and fall. The conventionality of his references to destiny is revealed when Bossuet associates with it other causes of a different nature, providential or human:

Dieu a voulu ... que le cours des choses humaines eût sa suite et ses proportions: je veux dire que les hommes et les nations ont eu des qualités proportionnées à l'élévation à laquelle ils étaient destinés; et qu'à la réserve de certains coups extraordinaires, où Dieu voulait que sa main parût toute seule, il n'est point arrivé² de grand changement qui n'ait eu ses causes dans les siècles précédents.

And again, encouraging the Dauphin to 'rechercher les effets dans les causes les plus éloignées', Bossuet writes: 'Par là vous apprendrez ce qu'il est si nécessaire que vous sachiez: qu'encore qu'à ne regarder que les rencontres particulières, la fortune semble seule décider de l'établissement et de la ruine des empires; à tout prendre il en arrive à peu près comme dans le jeu, où le plus habile l'emporte à la longue'.³

Voltaire too made ample use of the convention of fortune or destiny. This is particularly noticeable in his Histoire de Charles XII, where emphasis on fortune is very suited to his narration of the extraordinary exploits of a most extraordinary man. Voltaire was concerned that historical narrative should be artfully constructed and should move the passions. Writing to the Marquis d'Argenson in 1740, Voltaire admits,

J'ai une drôle d'idée dans ma tête: c'est qu'il n'y a que des gens qui ont fait des tragédies qui puissent jeter quelque intérêt dans notre

1. Ibid., p. 433.

2. Discours sur l'histoire universelle, edited by Jacques Truchet (Paris, 1966), p. 354.

3. Ibid., p. 355.

histoire sèche et barbare. Mézerai et Daniel m'ennuient; c'est qu'ils ne savent ni peindre ni remuer les passions. Il faut dans une histoire comme dans une pièce de théâtre, exposition, noeud et dénouement.

Destiny, with its ironic twists, serves to keep our attention alive. Narrating the capture of the heir to Georgia (Russia), 'un grand exemple des révolutions de la fortune', Voltaire writes that Charles

ne put s'empêcher, en le voyant partir, de faire tout haut devant ses officiers une réflexion naturelle sur l'étrange destinée d'un prince asiatique, né au pied du mont Caucase, qui allait vivre captif parmi les glaces de la Suède. 'C'est, dit-il, comme si j'étais un jour prisonnier chez les Tartares de Crimée.' Ces paroles ne firent alors aucune impression; mais dans la suite on ne s'en souvint que trop, lorsque l'événement en eut fait une prédiction.²

Destiny also explains the psychology of Charles and thus, indirectly, his bellicose career. At the siege of Thorn Charles insists that one of his generals, too gaily apparelled not to attract the enemy's attention, stand behind him. Charles answers the general's considerate hesitation by simply moving in front of him; but

au même instant une volée de canon, qui venait en flanc, renverse le général mort sur la place même que le roi quittait à peine. La mort de cet homme, tué précisément au lieu de lui, et parce qu'il l'avait voulu sauver, ne contribua pas peu à l'affermir dans l'opinion où il fut toute sa vie d'une prédestination absolue, et lui fit croire que sa destinée, qui le conservait si singulièrement, le réservait à l'exécution des plus grandes choses. (XVI, 197)

These examples show Voltaire using the idea of destiny to good dramatic and psychological effect. However, at other times Voltaire talks of destiny and fortune in a less striking way and means nothing more by it than did Boulainvillier. 'La mauvaise fortune de Patkul l'emporta sur le soin qu'on prenait de le sauver' (and he was cruelly broken on the wheel; XVI, 220); 'alors [when Charles's troops are captured by the Russians and sent to Siberia] toutes les distinctions que la fortune met entre les hommes furent bannies' (XVI, 251); 'Charles ... avait tué plus de douze ennemis de sa main, sans avoir reçu une seule blessure, par ce bonheur inexprimable qui jusqu'alors l'avait accompagné partout' (XVI, 236). This last example illustrates the

1. Voltaire, Correspondence, edited by T. Besterman, vol. X, p. 26.

2. Voltaire, Œuvres complètes, edited by L. Moland, XVI, 176-77.

insufficiency of fortune as a manner of explanation (and perhaps too Voltaire's recognition of this) and underlines its conventional, literary nature.

It is true that in this merely explanatory capacity of the extra-historical cause of events, Boulainviller refers much more to destiny or fortune (the 'secular' mode) than to Providence (the 'theological' mode). However, Providence is used occasionally by Boulainviller in a purely explanatory manner. The most evident example of this is to be found in his Etat de la France. Discussing the very different characters of plain-dwellers and mountain-dwellers and their unequal capacities for hard work, Boulainviller concludes that this difference is so great 'qu'on ne peut faire aucune comparaison de la force pecuniaire entre les uns et les autres, tant il est vrai que la Providence distribue les talens à proportion des besoins' (EF, VI, 6). No moral opinion is being expressed here, as can be appreciated if one compares this remark with what Boulainviller says, elsewhere, of the people of Languedoc. He sees these people as full of vivacity and enterprise, 'comme si la nature vouloit recompenser par les talens, dont elle leur est liberale, la perte qu'ils souffrent de l'infertilité de la terre' (EF, VI, 285). And later, still discussing Languedoc and its different areas, he remarks: 'On peut juger que ce pais /Gevaudan/ seroit peu habité, si pour suppléer au défaut des terres, la nature n'avoit inspiré aux naturels des lieux une inclination et un art tout particulier de travailler aux petites étoffes de laine, dont le débit est prodigieux' (EF, VI, 433). Providence in this case, synonymous with 'la nature', is merely a way of trying to explain a particular circumstance. Similarly, nothing more than a simple explanation is intended when Boulainviller writes that Providence did not 'permit' Philip V to give an audience to the deputies of Paris, for, dysentery exacerbating his 'fièvre quarte', he died before he could see them (HAG, II, 157).

It may be possible to perceive something of Boulainviller's attitude to this, admittedly minor, role of Providence as mere explanation in other references he makes to it. Concluding his assessment of the personal qualities

of Louis VII ('malheureux en la plupart de ses entreprises, qu'il commençoit avec temerité et passion, et continuoît sans précaution'), Boulainviller writes: 'Il semble qu'en ce tems-là on ne regardoit point les succès comme provenans de la prudence humaine, et que l'on s'en rapportoit au hazard, ou selon le langage du tems à la volonté de Dieu' (AC, I, 483). Again, narrating the bellicose relations between Clotaire and his brother Childebert (allied with his nephew Theodebert), Boulainviller tells us that battle was to decide between the two factions

si le Ciel ne l'avoit prévenu par un orage extraordinaire qui accabla l'Armée des Princes liguez pendant que celle de Clotaire, qui en étoit très-proche, ne ressentit aucun dommage; il n'en falloit pas d'avantage en ce tems-là pour décider une querelle, d'autant plus que l'on croyoit que c'étoit l'effet des prieres de Clotilde, mere commune des Rois, c'est pourquoi chacun se retira chez soi sans tenter plus avant la fortune.
(MH, 216)

Both these examples show Boulainviller using the idea of Providence in an indirect way: referring to Providence is not necessarily how he would explain these events (indeed he suggests a purely human, historical explanation for Louis VII's lack of success) but that is how contemporaries explained them.

Finally, writing of the defeat of the Saracens at Tours in 732 at the hands of Charles-Martel and Eudes, duke of Aquitaine, and having already given an historical reason for this defeat ('l'imprudence d'Abderam de s'être engagé dans un terrain qui ne lui permettoit pas d'user de son avantage, qui consistoit dans le nombre de ses troupes' (MH, 313)), Boulainviller remarks ironically:

c'est au sujet de cette bataille que Roderic Ximenès Archeveque de Toledé, qui a écrit cette histoire, dit que la même Providence, qui a forcé la mer à une certaine barrière de sable, avoit ordonné que les Conquêtes des Mahometans se terminassent au tombeau de Saint Martin. (MH, 314)

We may conclude that in so far as simply providing an explanation of certain events of the history of France is concerned, Boulainviller's referring to an extra-historical cause, whether it be Providence, destiny, or chance, is wholly conventional. Bossuet, admittedly in a rather special context, clearly saw why such references were generally made:

Ne parlons plus de hasard ni de fortune; ou parlons-en seulement comme d'un nom dont nous couvrons notre ignorance. Ce qui est hasard à l'égard de nos conseils incertains est un dessein concerté dans un conseil plus haut ... et c'est faute d'entendre, le tout, que nous trouvons du hasard ... dans les rencontres particulières.

However, if we turn to consider Boulainviller's use of Providence and destiny as means by which to reflect upon historical events and, more particularly, to exercise the judgement of history upon certain individuals or circumstances, we will see that Boulainviller's attitude here, especially in the latter case, is normally much more personal and committed.

Boulainviller makes very few disinterested moralising references to extra-historical causation. Those he does make are merely conventional and sententious. Discussing Philippe IV's hope that his campaign against Flanders would cost him nothing and that its expense would be borne by the nobility, Boulainviller states: 'Mais la perte de la bataille de Courtrai lui fit bientôt sentir que les événemens sont toujours indépendans des vues et des mesures de la politique la plus raffinée, parce qu'ils sont conduits par d'autres ressorts impenetrables à la prudence ordinaire des hommes' (HAG, II, 77). Similarly, in relating the insufficient care taken by Charles V to secure his state treasure for his son and heir against the grasping clutches of his brother, the duke of Anjou ('l'Homme du monde dont il se défioit davantage'), Boulainviller writes:

Mais comment peut on imaginer qu'un Prince sage comme celui ci, lequel s'est fait un principe de politique d'amasser un trésor pour le conserver à son Fils, puisse dans la suite le laisser à la disposition d'un Etranger qu'il a dû prévoir et qu'il a prévu en effet le devoir dissiper; se contentant de la seule précaution d'enterrer ce trésor? Mais ce sont de ces coups de la Destinée, qui font connoître l'insufisance de tout ce que l'on peut apeler prudence humaine. (HAG, III, 6)

Again, comparison with Voltaire will show up the conventional nature of

1. Bossuet, Discours sur l'histoire universelle, pp. 427-28. This understanding of 'hasard' and 'fortune' is clearly an illustration of what Bury described as an 'intrusion of lawlessness' (above, p.200), for although chance may be intelligible to God, it is shown by Bossuet, as it were by definition, to be unintelligible to men.

such a moral attitude towards the weakness of human designs. Speaking of the overwhelming defeat by the Swedes of the Saxon general Schulenburg, Voltaire writes: 'Jamais dérouté ne fut plus prompte, plus complète et plus honteuse; et cependant jamais général n'avait fait une si belle disposition que Schulenburg, de l'aveu de tous les officiers saxons et suédois, qui virent en cette journée combien la prudence humaine est peu maîtresse des événements' (XVI, 213). And later he narrates:

Comme on conduisait ainsi prisonnier et désarmé ce roi [Charles XII] qui, peu d'années auparavant, avait donné la loi à tant d'Etats, et qui s'était vu l'arbitre du Nord et la terreur de l'Europe, on vit au même endroit un autre exemple de la fragilité des grandeurs humaines.

Le roi Stanislas [n'étant plus soutenu par la main qui l'avait fait roi], i.e. Charles] avait été arrêté sur les terres des Turcs, et on l'amenait prisonnier à Bender, dans le temps même qu'on transférait Charles XII. (XVI, 304-05)

A more interesting example from Boulainviller of this conventional moral attitude to the frailty of things human, and one which bears much more the stamp of his own personality, is his reflection on the coincident facts of the success of Clotaire II's political machinations and the beginning of the decadence and political impotence of the Merovingians, the very dynasty to which Clotaire belonged. Boulainviller narrates the events leading to Clotaire's position of pre-eminence and then continues:

C'est ainsi que par une fortune rare et par une suite d'événemens, la plupart criminels, qui peut à peine être imaginée, Clotaire II le dernier Roi et le plus méprisé des Princes du sang du grand Clovis, réunit en sa personne et sous sa domination l'entière Monarchie Française ... mais ce qu'il y a de prodigieux et qui justifie bien que la dispensation des événemens est au-dessus de toutes les règles de la prudence humaine, c'est que selon la vérité de l'histoire et la remarque des plus habiles Critiques, il faut rapporter à cette Epoque même, le commencement de la décadence de la I. Race de nos Rois, soit qu'endormis sous la protection de la fortune, comme le furent Clotaire même et son fils après lui; soit que nez sans génie et sans courage, comme leur postérité, soit qu'accablés sous le joug pesant de leurs Maires, ils n'ayent pu faire paraître aucunes vertus; il est certain que l'histoire tire depuis ce tems-là moins de lumières de la suite de leur Règne que de la durée de l'administration de leurs ministres. (MH, 247)

It may be argued that Boulainviller's moralizing tone in this case is his way of criticising the immorality, cruelty and absolutism of Clotaire II.

This may well be true, but it seems rather that the generally sombre and stoic

nature of Boulainviller's moral complexion inclines him to dwell on an irony of history simply for its own sake.¹

But this example is exceptional. Normally Boulainviller's reflective references to destiny or Providence have a much more obvious and partial significance. His reflections on the reign of Charles VI illustrates this well:

Charle VI succéda à Charle V. Mais son gouvernement doit être regardé comme ceux des Rois Jean et de Philipe-de-Valois ses ayeux, qui, par le dérèglement de leur conduite et les fausses idées du pouvoir arbitraire et despotique au dessus de toute règle de justice et d'usage, et contre le droit naturel et la foi publique, ont attiré sur la malheureuse France l'orage de la guerre d'Angleterre ...

Tel est donc le sort commun des Monarchies héréditaires, qui fait naître cinquante mauvais Princes, inepts, fous, mal intentionnez, à la suite d'un bon esprit et d'un grand courage: ces deux qualitez étant le fondement essentiel, sans lequel il est absurde d'espérer qu'un Prince ait jamais aucunes vues solides et effectives pour le Bien Public. (HAG, III, 156-57)

Similarly in the Mémoires historiques, considering the development of 'la Police Françoisse' under Charlemagne's descendants, Boulainviller laments 'le destin commun de toutes les Monarchies, qui les livre à la nécessité d'avoir des Maîtres d'un caractere si inégal' and that 'l'on peut hardiment compter qu'à la suite d'un bon et grand Prince, il en viendra dix, ou malheureux, ou méchans, ou imbéciles, et quelquefois tous trois ensemble' (MH, p. 469).

Such references to 'le sort commun' or 'le destin commun' may be seen as nothing more than figures of speech, yet it is interesting that when he is reflecting upon the fact that fathers work hard only to leave the fruits of their labours (in general, as well as simply with regard to the throne of France) to the sons who are 'les moins propres à en faire un usage légitime', Boulainviller sees this as attributable to 'l'étrange bisarerie, qui regne dans la dispensation des événemens' (HAG, II, 87). Here the moralising tone is quite evident, although the sense of an inevitable and deservedly ill fate

1. Boulainviller's moral complexion and its 'delight' in paradox have been examined above, p. 125. Although Boulainviller's reflections on the insufficiency of 'la prudence humaine' to deter ill fortune have been described as conventional, it should not be thought that they are necessarily insincere. The example just given would not seem to support such a view, and the force of his conclusion that history, showing how little we can control events, should encourage us to seek 'conditions ... qui ... donnent le moins de prise à la fortune' (HU, II, 231), is not to be denied; see above, pp. 169-70.

is admittedly more or less absent. Destiny means more for Boulainviller when it is considered 'heroically' (above, p. 146). To explain why Charles V, 'l'un des plus sages et des mieux intentionnez de nos Princes', despite his legislation favourable to the liberty of his subjects and his 'proscription des mauvais Ministres', did not continue his just government of France, Boulainviller adduces personal reasons, reasons of state, and destiny:

oultre qu'il est impossible et sans exemple depuis Charlemagne qu'un Monarque ait volontairement renoncé au pouvoir arbitraire, quand il y est parvenu par son travail, son adresse, et son savoir-faire ... dans le fond il est évident que les Etats ont leur destinée aussi inévitable que celle des Particuliers; de façon que celui qui étant né libre, se trouve néanmoins conduit à la servitude par l'enchaînement de divers accidens de sa vie, est l'image naturelle d'un Peuple que les occasions, les événemens, les circonstances, les effets mêmes contraires entraînent dans l'esclavage, malgré la certitude de son droit primordial. (HAG, II, 267-68)¹

However, it is when Boulainviller refers to Providence or destiny not particularly to explain events or to reflect upon them but to judge them, that these references to extra-historical causation lose their air of mere conventionality and become much more significant. One or two examples will make this clear:

En 579, et 580, les trois enfans que Chilperic avoit eu de Fredegonde étant morts consecutivement, la mere fut touchée de cette perte, comme d'un châtement divin pour la violation des droits de tous les peuples. (MH, p. 226)

Philipe-le-Bel ... qui, en joignant la ruse à la violence et à l'autorité, ne respecta ni les anciens usages, ni la police commune, ni les droits publics et reconnus ... mourut ... à la fin de l'année 1314, laissant une nombreuse Postérité, qui s'éteignit néanmoins si proutement, que le Public en regarda la fin comme une vengeance céleste, propre à instruire les Rois qui abusent de leur pouvoir. (HAG, I, 314)²

These references to Providence are just like the second category of moral comments discussed above (pp. 130-33). They are clearly motivated by Boulainviller's political preoccupations: dislike of absolutist and despotic monarchs

1. And discussing the politically disastrous devoutness of Louis the Pious (disastrous because it put too much control of the state into the hands of the clergy), Boulainviller remarks sadly: 'c'est un grand malheur pour les Peuples à qui la Providence destine des Rois d'un tel caractere, fussent-ils les enfans du plus grand Monarque du Monde, comme celui-ci'. (MH, p. 401).
2. The providential condemnations of Clovis and Childeric III have been discussed above, pp. 136 and 122. The attribution to 'le public' of this

and protection of the distinction of true nobility. Boulainviller makes many similar references to Providence, especially in his Mémoires historiques, and it is significant, though quite understandable, that whereas in its explanatory capacity extra-historical causation is used principally in its secular mode (destiny), in its moral and moralising capacity it is the theological mode that predominates.

There are occasions, however, when Boulainviller's references to Providence seem at first to work against him. Commenting upon the new type of government set up by Pepin ('ce ne sont plus les François nez libres et indépendans, attachez à leurs loix anciennes plus qu'à leur propre vie ...'), Boulainviller dismisses attempts to show that Pepin and the dynasty he established were related to the Merovingians, the line of kings he replaced. 'Que les Généalogistes modernes nous démontrent tant qu'il leur plaira, que la seconde race de nos Rois sortoit de la premiere, il faudra qu'ils conviennent avec nous que c'est au plus une dispensation secrette de la Providence' (MH, pp. 350-51). Later, reflecting upon 'le Règne fatal' of Charles le Chauve (hated and scorned by all of France according to our author), and his ambition to reign over all of the old empire of Charlemagne, Boulainviller writes:

La Providence remplit en effet une partie de ses desirs, puisqu'il posséda, outre la France entiere, l'Empire, l'Italie et la Lorraine de ce tems-là; mais si l'on fait attention aux moyens honteux dont il se servit pour les acquérir, aux desordres de son Gouvernement à la déprédation générale de l'Etat, par laquelle il s'étoit épuisé lui-même, en épuisant tous les autres, on conviendra qu'il eut mieux valu pour les Peuples et pour lui-même, qu'il fut mort dans le berceau. (MH, p. 447)

And speaking of the despotism and cruelty of Clovis, Boulainviller warns us that 'tout est à craindre de la part d'un Prince violent et ambitieux, quand

providential interpretation of the sudden demise of Philip's successors should not encourage us to underestimate the political profit Boulainviller gains from this opinion nor the amount of personal feeling it reflects. Speaking again of the corruption Philip introduced into French government and society, Boulainviller writes: 'Plaindrons-nous ... ces Princes, auteurs de la misere par leur violence, et du dérèglement par leurs exemples, lorsque nous les voyons mourir de douleur, comme Philippe-le-Bel, ou que nous les voyons pénétrés de frayeurs, comme le furent ses Enfants à la vue d'une corruption si générale?' (HAG, II, 90).

il est d'ailleurs favorisé de la Fortune, et qu'il n'est point retenu par les règles sacrées et ordinaires de la justice'. (HAG, I, 56).¹

These remarks would suggest that rather than condemning the often cruel behaviour of these despots, Providence (or fortune) is arranging things to allow it to flourish. But if we consider these examples a little more closely, particularly those of Clovis and Pepin, we may discover the astute use Boulainviller is making of these ideas. Pepin and Clovis are two important kings in Boulainviller's interpretation of the history of France. Both represent high points in the progress of the country's government away from its original and legitimate aristocratic constitution towards unconstitutional monarchical absolutism. The idyllic society and government of post-conquest Gaul, so painstakingly established by Boulainviller (above, pp.71-73), are being threatened and changed by all too compelling, 'illegitimate' historical realities. References to Providence and fortune to explain these events (although, as we shall see, Boulainviller is perfectly capable of adducing properly historical reasons for the rise of absolutism in France) are thus ways of highlighting the singularity of their occurrence and of isolating them from the 'proper' story of the French nation. In his discussions of both Clovis and Pepin Boulainviller reminds us of the extraordinary nature of their 'achievements':

une mort prématurée ayant enlevé ce Prince [Clovis] incontinent après qu'il eut fondé l'Empire François, le partage de sa succession, qui se fit entre ses Enfants, remit en vigueur les Loix: chacun d'eux ayant été obligé dans la suite de les employer, et de s'en autoriser pour sa propre sûreté. (HAG, I, 56-57)

en effet, il [Pepin] n'a dû sa fortune qu'à sa propre conduite, puisque tous les exploits de son pere, qui sont certainement comparables à ceux des plus grands Capitaines, n'avoient pû lui en procurer autant. (MH, p. 351)

But perhaps the cleverest use Boulainviller makes of the idea of Providence is to be seen in his treatment of the career of Hugues Capet and in particular of the status of the change in dynasty he brought about. As we have seen

1. Although the reference here is to 'Fortune' rather than to Providence, there seems to be no qualitative difference in these instances between the two modes of reference to extra-historical causation.

(above, pp.34-35), Boulainviller's discussion of this change is most significant because, contrary to his normal method of condemning any infringement against 'le droit' (of either nobility or king, for in both cases it is 'l'ancienne discipline' which suffers and the development of absolutism which benefits), Boulainviller is prepared to accept (not without some artful criticism, however) the fact of Hugues Capet's usurpation. His purpose, we saw, in recognising the legitimacy of the Capetians is to strike a bargain with them: in return for his defence of their possessing the crown of France, he expects, following his contractual view of the relations between king and subjects, that the right of the individual to what is his own should also be respected and immune from despotic royal pretensions. Boulainviller excuses the wrongful behaviour of Capet towards his ancestors' benefactors, the Carolingians (and in a manner that heralds the 'business' he wants to transact with Capet's descendants), by sheer casuistry: 'si l'on considere dans le fond, la Postérité de Charlemagne n'a presque pas survécu à l'Usurpation, de sorte que son droit s'est réellement éteint, même du vivant de Hugues Capet' (MH, p. 518). And then, in a delightfully double-edged (and remarkably Hegelian) observation which affirms and yet excuses Capet's usurpation, Boulainviller concludes:

d'ailleurs la Providence a des secrets impénétrables dans l'ordre et l'arrangement des événemens, et ... elle sait tirer, des crimes les plus contraires à la Société, les avantages de la Société même. Il ne sera plus question, que des fautes personnelles de Hugues Capet et de ses Ancêtres, qu'il sera toujours juste de condamner par rapport à eux, mais qui n'influent pas sur leur Postérité. (MH, pp. 518-19)

Later, having considered how Capet effected the change in dynasty, Boulainviller, recognizing that technically this change must still be thought of as usurpation, establishes the 'droit essentiel de la troisième Race de

1. Again it is noticeable how Boulainviller, but for rather different reasons than we were considering a moment ago, stresses the individuality of Capet and of those of his descendants who deserve censure. Whether he wishes to flatter or condemn, to persuade absolute power to recognize others' rights or to keep his idyll pure for as long as possible, the 'bad' kings of France are always exceptional.

nos Rois' upon 'le fait', 'sçavoir l'obéissance constante qui leur a été renduë par nos peres et par nous-mêmes' (MH, p. 529). As it has been remarked already, the espousal of 'le fait' rather than 'le droit' represents a considerable departure from Boulainviller's normal way of arguing. But it should not be thought that Boulainviller gives in completely to amoral fact. He continues:

Dans le fait, les Rois et les Peuples errent également par l'imagination que les Couronnes sont Patrimoniales, et que le fils a un droit incontestable d'y succéder à son pere, ce qui sera vrai en effet s'il est reconnu par le plus grand nombre de ceux qui doivent obéissance; mais qui ne le sera pas, si ... la Providence en dispose autrement. St Paul nous dit expressément, que les Puissances sont ordonnées de Dieu, et que celui qui s'y oppose combat contre Dieu même. (MH, pp. 529-30)

Right to the throne depends upon the consent of those who must obey. But this consent, it is strongly suggested, can be withdrawn ('malheur aux Rois, s'ils ne s'acquittent pas de leurs devoirs envers nous', MH, p. 529). And such a reversal of the sovereign's fortune is the work of Providence.

In the light of the political hopes and attitudes that the idea of Providence is made to serve it would appear that Boulainviller's references to extra-historical causation in his discussions of French history are merely expedient. As explanations of historical events Providence and destiny are pure convention; as vehicles for moral reflection upon and judgement of events and people they provide the ultimate censure. Although Boulainviller comes to see the general history of France as one of decline (of virtue and of the old nobility, the two being synonymous), this decline, whatever grandiloquent ascriptions to destiny or Providence may be made, is understood in essentially human terms. The principal causes of the two-fold trend in French history (the degeneracy of the nobility and the rise of royal absolutism) are conceived by Boulainviller, as Meinecke has pointed out,¹ in terms of simple personal pragmatism: the wilful ignorance of the French nobility and their lack of care to maintain the basis of their privileges and superiority ('l'ancienne discipline'); and the opportunism of the kings, always looking

1. Die Entstehung des Historismus (Munich and Berlin, 1936), vol. I, p. 181.

for occasions to nibble away at the power of the nobles and to increase their own. 'L'ignorance a causé parmi nous la perte et la ruine de toutes les conditions, aussi bien des plus élevées que des mediocres; et ... les Rois ont toujours veillé par eux-mêmes, ou par leurs Ministres, à profiter des fautes, des meprises et de l'inaction de tous les Sujets' (HAG, II, 321).¹

It is this personal pragmatism, and not an extra-historical cause of events, which is for Boulainviller the real motor that drives the history of France. This is acknowledged by Boulainviller in his Etat de la France after a short narration of the history of the 'généralité' of Bordeaux:

Que si l'on repasse avec quelque réflexion sur cette ancienne histoire, dont un détail aussi abrégé que celui-ci ne peut donner qu'une idée très-imparfaite: à l'égard des evenemens, on en peut néanmoins retirer le fruit de connoître que les maximes de gouvernement, les raisons d'état, les loix auxquelles les peuples sont le plus accoutumé [sic], les grandeurs particulières les mieux reconnues et les plus autorisées, tout cela est le jouet de la fortune ou pour mieux dire du caprice de ceux qui deviennent les maitres. (Etat, V, 316)

If the particular history of France, then, is not seen to be under the guiding influence of some extra-historical force, what of the history of the world in general? In his narratives of ancient history and of the history of the Arabs and Mohammed, Boulainviller treats the idea of providential control of events much more seriously, or so, at least, it would at first appear. Let us now move on to consider more thoroughly the role of Providence and destiny in these historical works.

1. In the Dissertation sur la noblesse de France (Amsterdam, 1732), however, Boulainviller's conception of the causes responsible for the degeneracy of the old military aristocracy, although still heavily imbued with his heroic moralism, is much more refined and sensitive to the impersonal, sociological forces of historical change. But this will be discussed more fully when we consider Boulainviller's approach to historical explanation proper below. pp.358-61).

Chapter Eight

Providence in The 'Abrégé de l'histoire universelle'

Although the ideas of Providence and destiny in Boulainviller's histories of France present certain problems, it is relatively straightforward to understand the uses he makes of them in these works. To arrive at an appreciation of Boulainviller's attitude towards Providence and destiny in his Abrégé de l'histoire universelle, his Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil and his La Vie de Mahomed is, however, a more complicated task. This is so not only because the very subject matter of these works (the history of the world since the Creation, the history of civilizations and religions) puts references to extra-historical causation in a more serious context and demands that they be taken more literally and less figuratively or conventionally than similar references in the histories of France, but also because Boulainviller's own attitude to these ideas seems at times rather confused. We may arrive at an explanation of this ambivalence, at least in part, if we consider that these three works, being written at different times, no doubt correspond to different stages in Boulainviller's developing religious thinking and especially in his understanding of the nature of God. It will be helpful in this case to consider these three works separately in our attempt to unravel the ambiguities in Boulainviller's treatment of, and attitude towards, the concepts of providential intervention and explanation.¹

I Boulainviller's developing rationalist attitude towards Providence, miracles, and prophecy

The basic relationship that exists for Boulainviller between the history of the world and Providence has already been described (above, pp.188-89). Basing himself on the principle that faith and reason are complementary rather

1. As is appropriate in discussions of ancient history based in large part upon the Bible, Boulainviller's references to extra-historical causation nearly always assume the theological mode, although references to destiny are still made.

than mutually exclusive (above, p.187), Boulainviller sets out in his Histoire universelle to consider the history of the world in a manner that will satisfy both. Thus it is that although the will of Providence is still the First Cause and controls all events, its agents, and effective secondary causes, are the natural laws of matter and movement discovered by the physical sciences. The world is maintained by these secondary forces which are in turn supported, amplified, by God (HU, I, 29). A catastrophe like the Flood occurs not because God, angry at his creatures' violence and pride, spitefully avenges Himself, but because the physical structure of the first world collapsed, as it had to eventually owing to its inherent weakness, at the time when men's sins had reached their zenith (HU, I, 43-44). Both 'les forces de la nature et les loix de la justice' are necessary for the event to occur. Similarly, the destruction of Sodom is explained by the physical properties of the earth in that area (rich in deposits of sulphur and bitumen, always ready to ignite, and containing cavities) and the licentious behaviour of the town's inhabitants. Boulainviller admires 'l'accord continuël de la providence et de la nature qui fait que les habitans de Sodome se trouvent au comble de leurs désordres lorsque leur terre perd ses fondements et qu'elle s'abîme' (HU, I, 378-79).

The close marriage between Providence and its natural agents can be seen too in Boulainviller's discussion of the tower of Babel. The tower, for Boulainviller, represents its builders' attempt to protect themselves from further flooding. But the jealousies and rivalries that had sprung up between the 'families' involved in its construction proved to be too great, and so they parted. This parting was sufficient for the original language which they all spoke to develop into several different ones. 'Elles [these families] se sont formées des Dialectes, des moeurs et des usages tous différents sous la conduite et la disposition particulière d'une providence proportionnée aux forces de la nature' (HU, I, 73). Boulainviller denies that the separation of the families was caused by their different languages and that

these were inspired supernaturally, because this is a more complicated way of viewing things, and, Boulainviller maintains, God always works in the simplest way: the separation was all that was needed to cause the development of the different languages, and the jealousies and rivalries were sufficient to cause the separation of the various families. As for the sin involved in building the tower in the first place, Boulainviller remarks that 'il ne semble pas qu'il y eût un grand péché, dans cette entreprise si ce n'est qu'elle est contraire aux desseins de Dieu' (wanting the different peoples to spread out). Boulainviller concludes: 'Aussy l'Ecriture traite-t-Elle ironiquement cette entreprise; et la punition que Dieu en fit, est plutôt une faveur qu'un châtement' (HU, I, 82). We can see in this conclusion Boulainviller's concern to promote his understanding of Providence as rational and natural, quite different from the passionate deity of the Old Testament.

Boulainviller's desire to present providential explanation in as natural and 'unmiraculous' a way as possible is evident in his discussion of the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea. Boulainviller insists that the fleeing Hebrews did not pass 'à pied sec', 'car on ne doit pas concevoir les événements comme des prodiges purement surnaturels ny celui cy the Red Sea crossing comme un miracle qui ait séché la mer sans laisser une goutte d'eau sur le sable: il est même à mon sens bien plus noble et plus convenable de le considérer comme un effet singulier de la providence dans la direction des causes naturelles' (HU, I, 448-49). It is not surprising, Boulainviller remarks, that this event was seen as 'un prodige admirable', 'car en effet il n'y a jamais eû ou l'on puisse trouver une convenance si particulière entre les dispositions naturelles du Ciel de la mer et de la terre avec tous les besoins d'un Peuple qui ne se pouvoit sauver que par le seul moyen que la nature lui fournit en ce moment précis' (HU, I, 450). But the miraculousness of this event, Boulainviller asserts, should not be seen to be in its purely physical mechanism, rather it lies in 'la direction de la Providence' arranging so many different elements (the flight of the Israelites, the chase of the

Egyptians, the meteorological conditions) to occur in such a way at the same time that it appears that the saving of the Hebrews and the loss of the Egyptians depended on the favour and the displeasure of Providence respectively. We have already considered with regard to this event the rather inactive part that Providence plays in Boulainviller's interpretation of it (above, p.189); here the executive powers of the natural forces are so complete that Providence's role as orchestrator of the whole seems decidedly superfluous. Indeed in his earlier discussion of the destruction of the old world and the creation of the new one (the Flood), Boulainviller goes so far as to identify the will of God with its physical agents:

ainsy de cette ruine generale il s'est formé une disposition nouvelle de la terre ... c'est à dire que la terre a pris la forme que les loix du mouvement lui ont données par les différentes secousses qu'elle a souffertes dans la continuité parceque les loix naturelles et l'ordre de Dieu ne sont en effet qu'une même chose considérées sous diférens égards. (HU, I, 60)

It may be profitable at this juncture to consider for a moment the opinions Boulainviller expresses on these matters in an earlier work, his Extrait du Traité théologo-politique de Spinoza et la réfutation de quelques-uns de ses sentiments.¹ In this work, Boulainviller is concerned to defend orthodox Christian dogma from the attack upon it that he feels Spinoza's Theologo-political Treatise to be. He reaffirms, against Spinoza's reasoning, such central Catholic ideas as the divinity of Christ, the revelation of God to the Jews and the completion of this revelation in Christ, the free will of every individual, and the omnipotence of God 'qui dispose de tout comme il lui plaît, selon son pouvoir souverain' (OP, I, 22) and His perfect freedom (OP, I, 36-37). It is because God is perfectly free and omnipotent that miracles are possible. Boulainviller argues against Spinoza's identification of God and nature, which sees the constant, invariable order of nature, and not extraordinary miracles, as the real proof of God's immutability and omnipotence, by emphasizing the freedom of God and the separation between Him and

1. This work was begun in 1695 and is reproduced in his Œuvres philosophiques, edited by Renée Simon, 2 vols (The Hague, 1973-75), I, 10-82.

His creation:

Si Dieu et la nature sont la même chose, ou si l'ordre fixe du monde est une conséquence de l'Etre divin et non d'une dispensation libre de sa toute-puissance, Spinoza aura raison; mais au contraire il y a une différence réelle entre Dieu et la nature telle que nous la concevons, entre l'ouvrage et l'ouvrier ... l'ordre du monde dépend d'une puissance libre qui le détermine et non pas d'une nécessité de nature. (OP, I, 78)

Because nature is the creation of a sovereign God, miracles must be allowed to be possible. Boulainviller continues:

il [Spinoza] insiste en disant que l'ordre naturel étant déterminé par le décret de Dieu est invariable en lui-même, et dans la volonté divine qui ne peut changer, Dieu ne pouvant agir contre ses décrets sans se détruire. Mais qui a dit à Spinoza que l'ordre naturel est déterminé invariablement? ... pourquoi le miracle, pris dans sa plus ample signification, ne serait-il pas compris dans le décret divin, et s'il y est compris, comment n'existera-t-il pas selon sa détermination particulière, puisque l'ordre naturel et commun n'est réel que par l'efficacité de la volonté divine; l'un et l'autre auront la même origine, le même principe d'existence ... il n'y a nulle contradiction que la même puissance qui a déterminé un certain ordre ou suite d'actions l'ait réglé dans certaines mesures sous la condition de certaines interruptions comprises dans le décret de l'établissement; ... le miracle est possible ... puisqu'il peut faire partie de la loi naturelle dont l'homme par un aveu générale n'a qu'une connaissance sensible et superficielle. Mais de plus il [Spinoza] doit reconnaître que le miracle, pris sous l'acception d'un effet surnaturel, n'est ni contraire, ni au-dessus de la nature, car il n'est besoin que d'une direction ou impulsion de la matière différente de celle où nos sens sont accoutumés. Or, quelle est la preuve que Spinoza nous peut donner que le décret divin soit astreint à une seule espèce de direction de la matière, avec exclusion de toute autre modification? (OP, I, 79-80)

Boulainviller concludes: 'Il est donc évident, en réduisant cette dispute aux notions les plus simples, qu'il peut arriver dans le monde des événements contraires aux règles communes, soit qu'ils soient compris dans les lois générales dont nous ignorons l'étendue, soit qu'ils aient pour principe une dispensation particulière divine' (OP, I, 81).

Boulainviller recognizes at the end of his refutation that 'plusieurs bons esprits, nullement tachés d'athéisme ou de libertinage, ne peuvent allier la perfection de l'Etre divin avec les volontés particulières qu'il semble que les miracles ... doivent faire supposer' (OP, I, 82). He states that 'le système des causes occasionelles' would relieve them of this obstacle to acceptance of miracles. 'Mais parce que l'idée de ce système n'est fondée que sur la convenance et la probabilité, et que la révélation sur laquelle

nous devons principalement établir nos sentiments touchant les choses intellectuelles ne l'autorise pas, je lui préférerai toujours l'argument qui se tire de la souveraine liberté de Dieu' (OP, I, 82). In this respect the Histoire universelle represents a noticeable change from complete reliance on dogmatic assertions of the nature of Providence and an advance towards a more rational interpretation of the ways of God's intervention in history, for 'le système des causes occasionelles' is now the principal argument used to expound the nature of this intervention.

But development in Boulainviller's conception of providential involvement in history is more interestingly perceived when one considers that whereas in his Extrait du traité théologo-politique Boulainviller devotes much effort to defending the possibility of miracles, and the necessity of this possibility, in his Histoire universelle he neglects his former ratiocinations and strives rather, with a few notable exceptions, to dissuade his reader from accepting the usual miraculous interpretation of events in (mainly Judaic) ancient history. The principal instances of the manifestation of Providence, which involve significantly the whole world or at least an important section of its population, are accepted by Boulainviller and explained according to 'le système des causes occasionelles'. But 'miracles' involving a single individual are usually denied this name and are explained in almost completely human, psychological terms - a mode of explanation which could not possibly apply to collective and physical phenomena such as the Creation, the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and the tower of Babel. It is true that in his Extrait du traité théologo-politique Boulainviller, in concert with Spinoza, criticized the vulgar abuses that are made of the idea of Providence:

en effet tout esprit raisonnable sera indigné de l'opinion qui ferait consister la principale gloire ou puissance de la divinité dans le dérèglement des lois naturelles, ou de celle qui ferait de la nature un être singulier dont la conduite ou la prudence réglerait tous les accidents dont la matière est susceptible. On ne serait point choqué de la bassesse ou de la puérilité de ceux qui penseraient que la divinité est prête de subvenir à toutes leurs peines par des effets singuliers de la Providence,

ou qui s'en croiraient tellement l'objet qu'ils rapporteraient à leur seul avantage les effets communs et naturels pour avoir le plaisir de flatter leur présomption et l'amour-propre qui domine à leur raison. Ces pensées ne peuvent venir que par le défaut d'une juste idée ou par une prévention absurde. (OP, I, 80-81)

But some of the miracles which Boulainviller unemphatically denies in his Histoire universelle could hardly respectfully be called base and puerile and indeed figure among the most important events in Old Testament history.

Discussing Abraham's departure from Haran in his seventy-fifth year and the problem of how it was that God communicated His will to him, Boulainviller states: 'l'apparence est que ce fut en songe' (HU, I, 351). A vision is discounted because visions are rare and when they occur are invariably recorded in Scripture; 'd'ailleurs la voye des songes étoit si commun en ces temps-là que la science des interprétations faisoit une parti considerable de celle de leur religion' (HU, I, 351). Abraham's dream is not allowed by Boulainviller as an example of a divine 'volonté particulière' for he argues that it is sufficient for a person to be struck by the 'internal evidence' of his dream for him to be convinced that his dream is of divine origin. Abraham, suffering maltreatment at Haran, thinks of leaving 'et comme le sommeil represente ordinairement les idées les plus vives qui nous occupent le jour' (HU, I, 351), he believes God, interested in his cause, has ordered him through the medium of dream to find a new place to live. 'Dans le fond il n'y a aucun inconvénient à penser que [Les songes] n'étoient point [surnaturels]' (HU, I, 351). Boulainviller realizes that it may be objected that 'l'effet de ses [Abraham's dream] promesses est tellement surnaturel que jamais Abraham ne les auroit pû songer naturellement'. But Boulainviller, referring to the opinion of 'un sçavant auteur', argues that we now see the event differently, 'ce qui vient de la facilité que nous avons de les [Abraham's words] comparer dans une longue suite d'années avec les événements arrivez à sa postérité' (HU, I, 352), whereas all that Abraham wanted was a safe place for himself and his children.

Boulainviller's treatment of Abraham's dream at Haran reveals his method

of recognizing the peculiar qualities of certain events traditionally considered as miracles, but of gently substituting a more rational and less extraordinary reason to explain them by emphasizing the human and psychological aspect of 'miracles' and by refusing unnecessary intervention of the Deity. This method can be seen too, though perhaps a little problematically, in Boulainviller's narration of the call to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Boulainviller prefaces this narration with a consideration of the contemporary practice of sacrificing children to appease the gods to show that what Abraham was expected to do was not in itself extraordinary. Boulainviller sees God communicating with Abraham in a dream and says, 'ce songe étoit naturellement une suite des idées communes qui règnoient alors touchant l'immolation des Enfants' (HU, I, 385). But of the voice stopping Abraham from completing his appointed task Boulainviller remarks: 'rien n'empêche de la regarder comme surnaturelle puisqu'il est vray qu'elle se fit entendre hors du sommeil et dans l'occasion la plus pressante de secourir le pauvre Isaac' (HU, I, 385). The ambiguity here seems strongly to suggest that a providential explanation of this event can be allowed only because of the peculiar coincidence that has to be explained and because no natural explanation seems to be appropriate.

Turning to Moses' conversation with the burning bush, Boulainviller maintains, judging from the style of Moses' narrative (long, interrupted, repetitious), that Moses has joined together several visions occurring to him whilst he was in exile. The fact of these separate visions is seen by Boulainviller to have psychological confirmation in that Moses' reluctance to return to Egypt needed time to be overcome. Similarly, time was needed for Moses to wear down Egyptian resistance to the release of his people for, according to Boulainviller's interpretation, if all the plagues had occurred immediately one after the other the king would have been mad to resist and his subjects would have risen up against him and set the Hebrews free themselves. It is interesting to note that Boulainviller refers to the events leading up to the Exodus, which comprise principally the plagues, merely as 'toutes les négotia-

tions qui se passèrent en Egypte pour obtenir la liberté du Peuple d'Israël' (HU, I, 437).

Although Boulainviller does not explicitly deny the miracles performed by Moses, he tells us that the power of the Egyptian magicians was equal to the patriarch's. The reasons Boulainviller gives for this, although serving here only to refute the reality of the Egyptians' sorcery, could quite properly be adduced to argue against the authority of any event claimed to be miraculous. The essence of a miracle, says Boulainviller, is that it is an event not susceptible of explanation by reference to the laws of nature. It is therefore just as miraculous to create an inexplicable appearance as to create an inexplicable reality. 'Il est même vrai de dire que l'homme n'a que faire de la réalité: il lui suffit que son jugement puisse être établi sur l'évidence' (HU, I, 441). Earlier on too, Boulainviller had shown his scepticism concerning the power of the Egyptian magicians, arguing that there have always been clever and ingenious people, capable of duping all the rest - including kings and ministers of State. Indeed, he asserts that even Scripture's evidence of the existence of these magicians is insufficient proof that they actually communicated with angels, as they were reputed to have done, 'car pour justifier son expression, il suffit que ceux dont Elle parle l'aient cru et qu'ils se soient laissés prévenir de l'opinion qu'on peut avoir commerce avec les Anges les génies ou les démons' (HU, I, 164).¹ Boulainviller sees support for his conclusions in the warning, made by Moses and by Christ, against false

1. It may be interesting to note that, in a very different philosophical context and from perfectly sincere Christian motives, Bishop Berkeley's idealism suggests a similar analysis of miracles and thus raises the same religious problem as Boulainviller's account. Berkeley writes: 'But, it will be urged that Miracles do, at least, lose much of their stress and import by our principles. What must we think of Moses' rod? was it not really turned into a serpent, or was there only a change of ideas in the minds of the spectators?' Berkeley can, however, quite intelligibly counter such an objection and use it as yet another argument in favour of his own metaphysic. The Principles of Knowledge, section 84 (edited by G. J. Warnock (Fontana books, 1962; fifth impression, 1972), p. 106).

messiahs and prophets and the temptation of their miracles, even if 'the wonder came to pass' (Deuteronomy 13.2). Boulainviller concludes, not surprisingly, that miracles are a very ambiguous sign of God's mission.

Finally, in his discussion of the flight of the Shepherds from Egypt, Boulainviller is rather less deferential towards Scripture's penchant for the miraculous than is usual, although it is true that he had already criticized the Jews for their being 'tellement entêtés de visions et de prodiges, que la moindre rencontre imprévue les [jettait] dans la pensée que Dieu lui même et les Anges la faisoient naître' (HU, I, 400). He writes:

Pour moi j'attribuë le prodigieux de cet événement à la difficulté de faire un voyage par mer dans un si long trajet, lorsque l'on n'avoit encore que des barques ... et que l'art de la navigation étoit ignoré.
(HU, II, 441)

Boulainviller shows scepticism too with regard to the divine nature of prophecy. Prophecy as revelation had been strongly defended in Boulainviller's Extrait du Traité Théologo-politique: 'Dieu s'est servi tantôt de la bouche de certains hommes pour annoncer les événements futurs ... tantôt il s'est servi des événements mêmes pour représenter d'autres événements à venir' (OP, I, 20). It is not necessary always to refer to Divine omnipotence ('quoiqu'il n'arrive rien que par sa médiation') to explain all prophetic utterance for 'l'enchaînement et le rapport si nécessaire des images aux idées, des idées aux expressions et aux paroles, est tel que l'on peut dire qu'il n'y a rien de plus commun dans la nature' (OP, I, 21). But where 'la révélation ne s'est fait connaître que dans les enthousiasmes et les extases', Boulainviller sees 'qu'il est encore besoin en cette occasion de recourir à la Toute-puissance' (OP, I, 21). Although God may on occasion simply have used the temperament of the individual prophet (Boulainviller agrees in this much with Spinoza), 'la révélation n'en a pas été moins certaine, parce que les moyens ne sont rien sans la main de Dieu qui dispose de tout comme il lui plaît, selon son pouvoir souverain' (OP, I, 22).

Boulainviller strongly denies Spinoza's assertion that, because prophecy and prophets needed some sign as proof of the authenticity of the particular revelation, prophetic knowledge was therefore inferior to natural knowledge, 'which needs no sign, and in itself implies certitude'. Spinoza continues:

Moreover, Scripture warrants the statement that the certitude of the prophets was not mathematical, but moral. Moses lay down the punishment of death for the prophet who preaches new gods, even though he confirm his doctrine by signs and wonders (Duet. xiii) [sic].

In reply, as well as denying the power of human reason to reach certainty unaided, Boulainviller proclaims: 'il est certain que le prodige, en tant qu'il est l'effet d'une dispensation singulière de la Providence et toute-puissance divine a aussi un caractère d'authenticité particulier' (OP, I, 28).

In the Histoire universelle Boulainviller's attitude to prophecy seems more ambiguous. We have already seen him refer in this work to Deuteronomy 13 in order to question the certitude of miracles as signs of God's mission and it is interesting that Spinoza refers to the same text to point out the relative, moral certitude that is all he will attribute to prophecy. In the Extrait Boulainviller had written:

Quant aux voies que Dieu a employées pour se découvrir à certains hommes choisis ... je ne crois pas qu'il y ait rien qui blesse le respect que l'on doit à la revelation à dire que l'imagination du prophète recevait un mouvement extraordinaire, soit par la représentation de certaines images, soit par une augmentation de chaleur et de vivacité. (OP, I, 20)

In the Histoire universelle, however, prophetic enthusiasm is seen more naturally, less providentially, and is 'played down': 'on peut penser que ce n'étoit autre chose qu'une imagination échauffée par la considération de certaines dispositions qu'elle rencontroit dans les sujets' (HU, I, 426). Boulainviller demonstrates this conception of prophecy in connection with Jacob's promise to Joseph (Genesis 48.4). Reflecting upon Joseph's prosperity and his clemency towards his brothers, Jacob, full of tenderness for his son, extrapolated these qualities into the future and saw Joseph as the most

1. Benedict de Spinoza, A Theologo-Political Treatise, translated by R.H.M. Elwes (G. Bell and Son, 1883), republished by Dover Books (New York, 1951), p. 28.

suitable of his sons to enjoy the right of succession.

As well as seeing prophecy from a more human point of view in his Histoire universelle, Boulainviller also doubts its veracity. 'Le Prophète ... hors le cas d'une inspiration surnaturelle ... ne parloit pas toujours à coup sûr' (HU, I, 427) and was sometimes led to err; Boulainviller refers to Micah (3.5) as evidence of the fallibility of prophetic inspiration. The ambiguous 'stile figuré' of prophetic utterance (recognized in the Extrait but whose interpretation was there resoundingly proclaimed to belong only to the Church Fathers) also detracts from prophecy's certitude as divine revelation, for it is open to such diverse interpretations. However, Boulainviller does grant a divine element in prophecy although his concession is perhaps somewhat begrudging (consider the exception made for supernatural inspiration in the quotation immediately above). In conclusion Boulainviller writes that he does not doubt 'qu'il ne se passât quelque chose de surnaturel dans l'esprit du Prophète' (HU, I, 428), but he considers that the prophet was not always aware of its character or strength.

Although Boulainviller conceives rather naturalistically of the workings of Providence in the great events of world history and tends to discount a divine element in particular examples of miracle and prophecy, his Histoire universelle is, however, far from representing a systematic attack upon the notion of Providence. Indeed Boulainviller makes several references to a much more direct and personal intervention of the Deity in human affairs. Thus it is that God sends the Hebrews a liberator to lead them out of their Egyptian captivity (HU, I, 330), that Providence sends two cell-mates to the imprisoned Joseph (HU, I, 408), and that the Egyptian army, pursuing the fleeing Hebrews, perishes 'par la faute et l'imprudence de son Général, aussy bien que par la Vangeance du Seigneur' (HU, I, 450). These references to an extraordinary Providence are, however, made quite simply and seem to lack any real conviction. Moreover, there are occasions when a reference of

Boulainviller's to a particular intervention of Providence will reveal considerable tension between the necessity of this reference to Providence as a means of maintaining the morality of history, that is the possibility of a more or less continuous and rational narrative of ancient events as well as the sanction of moral behaviour, and Boulainviller's implicit recognition of the unscientific and expedient nature of such a procedure. To explain away the 'si peu de proportion' between Noah's great age of nine hundred and fifty years and the less prodigious ages of his father and his sons, Boulainviller can only claim 'qu'il faut avoir recours à la dispensation de la providence pour la justifier par le besoin que le monde avoit des instructions de Nôé pour la conservation des arts inventes avant le Déluge' (HU, I, 68). And discussing Abraham's communications with God in which he was told of the future of his descendants, Boulainviller argues that as the universe is infinite and that there has been 'une infinité d'êtres vivants et intelligents au dessus de nous [*i.e.* angels] ... il seroit absolument absurde de penser que Dieu ne pût employer la médiation de ces Etres pour faire connoître sa volonté quand il ne la veut pas faire connoître lui même' (HU, I, 366). Boulainviller recognizes that, as Spinoza has pointed out, according to 'le sens naturel' God has no need to make His will known because nothing can happen contrary to it (an argument that supports Boulainviller's rational interpretation of the workings of Providence and the identity of moral and natural causes), yet 'par raport aux actions et aux sentiments des hommes comme croire ou ne pas croire, agir ou ne pas agir: il faut bien qu'il y ait un sujet proposé et ce sujet est ce que nous entendons par le mot de volonté' (HU, I, 367).

Perhaps the only occasion on which Boulainviller does appear to refer to extraordinary Providence with real conviction is when he is pondering upon Moses' account of the creation of all the forms of life on earth. He has just determined that the mosaic chronology of the first four days of the Creation must be viewed figuratively, there being no reason why God should

intervene to hasten the effects of the necessarily slow secondary causes by the prolongation and amplification of which He maintains the world as it is. But such a 'natural' conclusion with regard to the last stages of the Creation is not possible for something more than a simple mechanistic process is involved. Boulainviller concludes that 'il faut connoître que comme la formation des espèces est l'effet d'une puissance absoluë et non du concours des causes naturelles il est impossible de juger du temps que Dieu a mis à les former' (HU, I, 31).

II The significance of non-providential modes of explanation in non-Jewish ancient history, and Boulainviller's 'philosophy of history'.

So far our discussion of Boulainviller's attitude to the manifestation of Providence in the history of the world has concentrated almost exclusively on Jewish history. This particular history is of course, at least traditionally, the stage set by God, until the advent of Christ, for the acting out of His own divine plan. It is only natural therefore that the bulk of Boulainviller's references to Providence should appear in this context. When Boulainviller comes to discuss the history of Egypt it is significant that he speaks of divine intervention only when this history becomes bound up with that of the Israelites (principally in discussing Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea). Otherwise Boulainviller explains events in Egyptian history, which for him is concerned mainly with the development of Egyptian religion, government and civilization, either by references to chance or fortune (as with the establishment of a new religious cult or the hostilities between the different royal houses of Egypt; HU, I, 247 and 336) or, more usually, in terms of the sort of personal pragmatism to be seen in his histories of France.

Boulainviller's most frequent method of explaining the introduction of new knowledge, laws and technical skills is, as can be seen from the example above of Noah and throughout his Histoire universelle, to attribute such

innovation to the extraordinary talents and generosity of individual legislators and rulers. So Menes, Isis, Athotis, Thosotrues all contributed their own discoveries (including writing, astronomy, medicine, architecture) for the good of the Egyptian people. But the more important aspect of Boulainviller's personal pragmatism, certainly in so far as the history of Egypt is concerned, is his principle that in this society where the spiritual authority had such a great power in the secular domain (indeed there was no real distinction between the two) it was the worldly ambition of the priesthood that was responsible for change in religious practice and the increase in popular superstition. Indeed, Boulainviller says he would find it hard to believe that a religion such as Egypt's, once so heartfelt and sincere and the result of a truly spiritual impulse, could have degenerated so quickly to become nothing but base superstition, 'si je ne concevois que ce changement a été le fruit du loisir et de l'adresse des Prêtres qui faisoient par leur institution un corps séparé du reste de la nation et dont l'intérêt sensible étoit de se rendre maîtres de la conscience des autres hommes' (HU, I, 255). Held in great respect as the only human beings privileged to communicate with the spirit-world, the priests had great influence over the superstitious people and, occasionally, their superstitious rulers. Amenophis, wishing for the birth of an Apis (a black calf with white star and moon shaped marks on its sides, considered to be a manifestation of Osiris) to bring favour upon his reign, did all the priests commanded him to do, especially dismissing from his service all 'impure' persons 'dont la conscience n'étoit pas assés soumise à leur conduite' (HU, I, 311). Changes in religion, not always decided upon by the priestly class as a whole as 'il ne faut souvent qu'un seul homme pour faire de tels changements; l'histoire en donne mil exemples' (HU, I, 246), served the priests well in their manipulation of the superstitious populace because, as Boulainviller points out, 'le zèle s'allume davantage par les nouvelles institutions que par les anciennes' (HU, I, 246).

In the second volume of the Histoire universelle, where he deals exclusively with secular history, Boulainviller hardly alludes to Providence at all. Reflecting on the genius of ancient Greece for establishing very necessary laws and religions Boulainviller remarks that these laws and religions would have been of little help had Providence not seen to it that there was a sufficient quantity of talented men capable of putting them to effective use (HU, II, 147). However, a little later Boulainviller writes that it is destiny 'qui fait naître les grands hommes pour les grands périls' (HU, II, 172). In like vein, the 'vengeance céleste' that pursues Atharnas is mythological not providential (HU, II, 210); destiny sets the trap into which Oedipus falls when he resolves the enigma (HU, II, 238); Alexandre's birth is 'malheureuse', and his 'voiage fatal' takes him to Greece 'pour son malheur' (HU, II, 307-08); and finally, it is 'le jeu ou plutôt le cours de la nature' which, bringing the ancients to Spain to look for gold, sends the modern Spaniards off to the new world looking for the same inert metal with the same greed and cruelty (HU, II, 462).

The idea that the miraculous could be involved with any of the events of secular ancient history is simply refuted. Boulainviller denies the possibility of pagan miracles

sur le principe qu'ils sont contraires à l'ordre de la nature et par conséquent incroyables puisque loin d'être appuyés de l'autorité de la vraie religion: ils la combattent en supposant que Dieu a donné à une piété fausse et absurde la même protection qu'à la véritable. (HU, II, 402)¹

Similarly the idea of impiety being 'divinely' punished is considered impossible, 'car comment concevoir que ce fût un crime de mépriser des Divinités imaginaires' (HU, II, 405).

As with his discussion of Egyptian history, Boulainviller prefers to

1. In his refutation of the various theories put forward to support the idea of pagan miracles (including St. Augustine's) Boulainviller is led to a re-affirmation of the reality of Providence: 'Il n'y a qu'une juste et sage philosophie qui nous apprenne à regarder les prodiges comme des effets naturels quand on peut les expliquer par les lois communes sans préjudice néanmoins de la distinction de la Providence qui les joint à certains événements, tel par exemple que le dessèchement de la Mer Rouge ... (HU, II, 404).

explain the events of secular ancient history by emphasizing the importance of the gifted and heroic individual (the legislator) or by some other historical, human reason. Trying to explain the arrival in Phoenicia of the Philistines, Boulainviller finds it 'difficile de donner une autre raison que celle d'une invasion subite faite par un autre Peuple chassé de son ancienne demeure' (HU, I, 341). Similarly, Boulainviller explains the setting up of new towns and colonies around the Mediterranean and the Syrians' settlements in Spain (similar, he maintains, to European settlements and colonies in the New World and East Indies) as the consequences of mercantile activity (HU, II, 450 and 457).

However, Boulainviller's neglect of providential explanation in non-Jewish ancient history, or his more frequent references to destiny and his use of properly historical modes of explanation, are not necessarily further signs of a growing scepticism in him towards the idea of Providence. A consideration of the third part of Bossuet's Discours sur l'histoire universelle, entitled 'les Empires', may prove fruitful in this respect.

Bossuet introduces and concludes the final section of his work, a narrative of secular ancient history, with unambiguous and forceful reaffirmations of the subservience of all that happens, and all that has happened, to the will of God. It is because of Providence that history is truly universal. 'Ces empires ont pour la plupart une liaison nécessaire avec l'histoire du peuple de Dieu ... c'est pourquoi ce même Dieu, qui a fait prédire à ses prophètes les divers états de son peuple, leur a fait prédire aussi la succession des empires'.¹ 'Dieu tient du plus haut des cieux les rênes de tous les royaumes; il a tous les coeurs en sa main: tantôt il retient les passions; tantôt il leur lâche la bride; et par là il remue tout le genre humain' (Discours, p. 427). But in spite of Bossuet's

1. Bossuet, Discours sur l'histoire universelle, edited by Jacques Truchet (Paris, 1966), pp. 349-51.

insistence on the ultimate sovereignty of Providence, 'les Empires', although still extremely moralizing, differs significantly from the other sections of the Discours in its lack of emphasis on providential explanation and in its correspondingly greater attention to historical and human causes of change. Indeed, despite reasserting the religious lesson to be learnt, Bossuet seems to recognize that some difference in treatment is unavoidable:

Dieu ne déclare pas tous les jours ses volontés par ses prophètes touchant les rois et les monarchies qu'il élève ou qu'il détruit. Mais l'ayant fait tant de fois dans ces grands empires dont nous venons de parler, il nous montre, par ces exemples fameux, ce qu'il fait dans tous les autres...

C'est ce qui doit tenir tous les princes dans une entière dépendance, et les rendre toujours attentifs aux ordres de Dieu, afin de prêter la main à ce qu'il médite pour sa gloire dans toutes les occasions qu'il leur en présente.

Mais cette suite des empires, même à la considérer plus humainement, a de grandes utilités, principalement pour les princes, puisque l'arrogance, compagne ordinaire d'une condition si éminente, est si fortement rabattue par ce spectacle. Car si les hommes apprennent à se modérer en voyant mourir les rois, combien plus seront-ils frappés en voyant mourir les royaumes mêmes ...? (Discours, p. 353)

Naturally references to Providence are still to be found in 'les Empires', but they are very occasional and only occur when secular history becomes involved with sacred. It is significant too that with his examination of secular history Bossuet begins to refer, as we have seen (above, p. 204), to destiny and fortune. But by far the most frequent method of explaining events in 'les Empires' is to refer to properly historical causative factors. The Persian armies, even with the encumbrance of all the trappings of luxurious courtly life that attended them, defeated 'les peuples qui ne savaient pas mieux la guerre qu'eux. Ceux mêmes qui la savaient se trouvèrent ou affaiblis par leurs propres divisions, ou accablés par la multitude de leurs ennemis: et c'est par là que l'Egypte, toute superbe qu'elle était et de son antiquité, et de ses sages institutions, et des conquêtes de son Sésostris, devint sujette des Perses' (Discours, p. 382). Bossuet explains very succinctly the relations between the various republics of Greece: 'Comme la crainte les tenait unis, la victoire et la confiance rompit l'union' (Discours, p. 386); and he goes on to examine the mechanism of these relations in terms of the

antagonism between liberal Athens and warlike Sparta.

The sufficiency of such historical explanations is implied by Bossuet's use of a hierarchy of causes to account for the decline of Greek hegemony after the death of Alexander.

Il n'est pas besoin que je vous raconte en détail ce qui fit périr les royaumes formés du débris de l'empire d'Alexandre ... La cause commune de leur ruine est qu'ils furent contraints de céder à une plus grande puissance, qui fut la puissance romaine. Si toutefois nous voulions considérer le dernier état de ces monarchies, nous trouverions aisément les causes immédiates de leur chute, et nous verrions, entre autres choses, que la plus puissante de toutes, c'est-à-dire celle de Syrie, après avoir été ébranlée par la mollesse et le luxe de la nation, reçut enfin le coup mortel par la division de ses princes. (Discours, p. 392)

Although the fall of Rome may have been the subject of prophecy and determined by almighty Providence (Discours, pp. 350-51), its rise to greatness is explained by Bossuet in purely personal terms. The Romans possessed all the virtues and sentiments necessary to make a state great, including the willingness to learn from others often to the latter's eventual disadvantage. It is in emphasizing the need for great men to fashion great nations, in a way similar to Boulainviller's, that Bossuet makes an interesting reference to nature where Boulainviller had talked of Providence:

C'est sans doute les grands hommes qui font la force d'un empire. La nature ne manque pas de faire naître dans tous les pays des esprits et des courages élevés, mais il faut lui aider à les former. Ce qui les forme, ce qui les achève, ce sont des sentiments forts et de nobles impressions qui se répandent dans tous les esprits, et passent insensiblement de l'un à l'autre ... Tous les Romains étaient nourris dans ces sentiments, et le peuple disputait avec la noblesse à qui agirait le plus par ces vigoureuses maximes. (Discours, pp. 404-05)

Personal pragmatism is Bossuet's most usual secular mode of explanation. Alexander's death is seen as the sole cause of the decline of the Greek empire. The Roman character and Rome's great men are the causes of her success. 'Les causes des divisions de la république, et finalement de sa chute' are to be found 'dans les jalousies de ses citoyens, et dans l'amour de la liberté, poussé jusqu'à un excès et une délicatesse insupportables' (Discours, p. 423). Bossuet is not unaware of the larger and more impersonal social and economic forces at play in Rome's decline, but, as he announces to the Dauphin,

je me suis attaché principalement à vous découvrir les causes universelles et la vraie racine du mal, c'est-à-dire cette jalousie entre les deux ordres /the patricians and plebians/, dont il vous était important de considérer toutes les suites. (Discours, p. 426)

It would be perverse to conclude from this examination of 'les Empires' that Bossuet's new emphasis on personal motives and on properly historical causes of events, and the temporary eclipse of providential explanation, suggest that this staunch defender of Providence was in fact attempting to refute the idea. Similarly, the paucity of references to Providence in Boulainviller's discussions of ancient secular history is not evidence that our author discounts the legitimacy of providential explanation. However, whereas in Bossuet's Discours the sense of the purpose behind Providence's intervention in history (i.e. the establishment and dissemination of Christianity) pervades the whole work, in the Histoire universelle Boulainviller seems to devote so much attention to demonstrating how as rational human beings we can still accept the idea of providential control of events that the reasons behind this control are barely discussed. Consequently there is in Boulainviller's work comparatively little sense of God's design becoming manifest in history. Nevertheless, some notion of direction in history can be perceived in Boulainviller's Histoire universelle, although his ideas are rather embryonic and are far from giving a consistent picture of what this direction might be.

The poles towards which Boulainviller is alternately attracted are these: universal history is one of decline; universal history gives evidence of human progress. This latter opinion is rarely ever made explicit whereas the former is on several occasions. Considering the early political organization of the ancient world as recorded in Genesis, Boulainviller concludes that there were none of the large Asian monarchies that arose later on, but that men belonged rather to many smaller aristocracies. This, Boulainviller tells us (the while revealing his familiar political prejudices), was 'une

direction particulière de la Souveraine Providence' for although monarchies may have united larger numbers of men and encouraged the perfection of the 'arts and sciences', 'elles ont aussy causé le dérèglement des mœurs, la mollesse ... la cruauté et tous les vices qui détruisent l'espèce humaine ou qui en empêchent la propagation' (HU, I, 124). This leads Boulainviller to endorse the conventional view of the four ages: the golden, silver, bronze and iron. The golden and silver ages were periods of peace although, man being man, this tranquility was doomed: Men's ignorance

étoit sans doute bien plus grande qu'elle n'est aujourd'hui et par conséquent ils avoient moins de désirs et beaucoup plus de repos. Mais comme les hommes n'ont jamais été sans passion, il n'est guères possible qu'ils n'aient été innocents surtout après la division des Peuples qui fit connoître à chacun l'usage des possessions particulières. (HU, I, 125)

The bronze and iron ages were the natural consequences. The iron age in particular, to last 'jusqu'à la fin des jours', sees the start of sovereignty, war, slavery, and political and religious laws.

Boulainviller's use of the myth of the four ages is intriguing. Vincent Buranelli quite rightly shows that Boulainviller's adoption of this myth is completely unhistorical,¹ and yet immediately after describing the development of history within the terms of this myth Boulainviller criticizes those who would discover the 'droit des Peuples' by deductive philosophy. Their efforts are bound to fail, he says, for 'n'ayant point cherché la vérité des faits dans l'histoire, ils ont pris et débité pour des réalités les fictions de leur esprit' (HU, I, 126). History, Boulainviller asserts, does not support the optimistic philosophies of human benevolence, but rather shows that societies and civilisations have developed from one fundamental cause: force.

La simple narration de l'État de l'ancien monde et de ce qui nous paroît dans les nouvelles découvertes des plus grandes nations fait sentir la vanité des raisonnements philosophiques sur l'établissement des sociétés et des loix: car il est si peu vrai que l'homme soit porté naturellement

1. Buranelli, 'The Historical and Political Thought of Boulainvillers', in Journal of the History of Ideas, 18 (1957), 475-94 (pp. 480-82).

à l'union avec ses pareils que la plupart des nations, même celles dont le gouvernement a été le plus estimé ont été contraintes par la force à embrasser cette union et à former une société publique, cela est justifié par l'histoire de la Grece en particulier ... Les mêmes moyens, ambition forces et ruze qui nous soumettent aujourd'hui les sauvages ont été dans les premiers temps les instruments qui ont fondé les Empires unissant les plus forts en société et réduisant les plus faibles en servitude. (HU, I, 129-30)¹

Although he does criticize the Europeans' 'adresse' and 'subtilité' in their exploitation of newly found primitive peoples, Boulainviller feels that attempting to discover 's'il y a en effet des maximes de droit et d'équité fixes et invariables par elles mêmes ou si elles ne sont justes que par rapport à nos moeurs' (HU, I, 130) is of little importance.²

The personal pragmatism that Boulainviller is so fond of also contributes at times to the pessimistic atmosphere of his historical narrative. Clever legislators use 'le temperament des Peuples et l'idée naturelle de la religion' (HU, I, 170), especially peoples's fears of what awaits them after death, to manipulate their subjects and to make them docile and submissive. Indeed, religion is a great help to 'legislators' precisely because of its capacity to control social behaviour. In his Lettre d'Hippocrate à Damagète, first published at Cologne in 1700, Boulainviller indicates how the golden and silver ages degenerated into the bronze and iron, and points out why religion was so necessary in this historical development:

Ce grand progrès de la disposition des hommes fit naître la nécessité de la religion et du culte des dieux. La politique manquait de motifs pour retinir avec empire les coeurs et les esprits dans les devoirs de la société. Il fallut recourir à la religion et mettre le ciel dans tous les engagements de la vie. La crainte de sa foudre, l'appât de ses promesses et la raison à lui rendre des devoirs pour attirer sa protection intéressèrent le commun des hommes, et l'excellence de ce grand moyen par rapport aux considérations de la politique attirèrent les autres et

1. Similarly, commenting on Janias's surrender to Sesostris Boulainviller writes: 'c'est ainsy que de tout temps le plus fort a fait la loy au plus foible et que les plus dures conditions d'une paix entre parties inégales ont été recuës comme des effets de clemence de la part de celui qui avoit le pouvoir d'en exiger de plus facheuses' (HU, I, 339-40).
2. Boulainviller's 'philosophy' is hardly systematic, however; in his discussion of Egyptian government he declares his preference for it, rather than for that established by Nimrod, precisely because it was founded upon natural law (HU, I, 177).

les retinrent dans le respect et le noeud de la religion. (OP, I, 336)¹

Fables and superstitions are seen as necessary imperfections in religion without which no civilized social behaviour would be possible:

le fable et l'erreur des religions aussi bien que leur diversité ont de puissantes raisons qui les justifient; l'idée de la Divinité est trop abstraite, elle a trop peu de rapport aux sens et à la raison ordinaire des hommes pour les rendre attentifs et les occuper. Il a fallu introduire des mystères, inventer des faits, proposer des doctrines, imposer les lois, établir une morale, tout cela pour remplir l'homme qui serait demeuré vide s'il n'avait eu que la Divinité pour objet, et ç'a été la nécessité de ses grands moyens qui a rendu nécessaires la fable et l'erreur, et qui les a mises à la tête de toutes les religions.

(OP, I, 337)²

Theseus, although finally succeeding, fails initially to convince the Athenians of his idea of civilized freedom in which as citizens, united together against common enemies, they would enjoy the protection of their own laws under their own magistrates. As Boulainviller narrates cheerlessly,

mais ce qui temoigne bien l'égalité du caractère des hommes de tous les temps et de tous les pays, parce qu'en effet ce caractère est fondé sur des passions qui sont communes à tous les âges; c'est que la plupart des Peuples de l'Attique prévenus par la force de l'habitude demeurèrent sourds à des conseils si désintéressés et si utiles en même temps.

(HU, II, 182)

Boulainviller's pessimism with regard to the progress of human history finally turns to scepticism:

A mesure que les Siecles s'avancent, nous voyons par la suite de l'histoire que les connoissances des hommes s'augmentent: et que leurs passions se développent et produisent des malheurs qu'on ne connoissoit point dans le temps d'ignorance; seroit-ce donc à l'augmentation des lumières de l'esprit qu'il faudroit attribuer le progrès des misères du monde? ... il vaut mieux dire que c'est l'abus de ces lumières, l'employ qu'on en fait pour donner de l'appuy et de la force aux passions qui corrompt l'ordre naturel des événements: mais si l'on recherche le principe de cet abus on reviendra aux passions avec lesquelles les hommes sont nez: ainsy le raisonnement sera circulaire et par conséquent ne nous instruira de rien. (HU, II, 226-27)

One cannot deny, then, a discernible pessimism in Boulainviller's narration of and reflection upon ancient history. However, this pessimism

1. Elsewhere Boulainviller writes that 'la religion est une souveraine médecine qui fait digérer les ordonnances les plus dures et qui plie avec facilité les esprits à leur observation' (HU, II, 147).
2. Substantially the same analysis is made by Boulainviller in his last work, La Vie de Mahomed, pp. 148-53.

can hardly be said to constitute a systematic philosophy of history. On the contrary, it is possible to see in Boulainviller's Histoire universelle a certain, although rather more implicit, affirmation of a measure of progress in human affairs with the passage of time.

However, it must be admitted that the scope of this progress is limited. In keeping with a major aspect of the Histoire universelle (the use and development of human religions), the idea of progress, although it is not given this name, is to be seen mainly in the realm of man's developing spirituality. Reflecting on man's earliest notions of the deity, Boulainviller refers to Moses and shows that although he understood the justice of God, Moses had no idea of His spiritual, eternal and infinite nature. He was thought of instead very much as a man (or, rather, as a number of angels) and as a competitor with the patron gods of neighbouring peoples. Boulainviller points out as well that the Hebrews thought of man as comprising a single substance, unaware as they were of his immortal spiritual nature. Other civilizations, however, and Boulainviller refers to the Egyptians, the Chinese and certain African peoples, did have some idea of man's life continuing after his physical death. But this conception was not like 'ours': 'c'est à la Philosophie [sic] que nous sommes redevables de cette belle idée' (HU, I, 161).

Here we can see in Boulainviller the implicit acceptance of a real progress in man's understanding both of his own nature and also of God's. When he is writing of the decline into superstition of the relatively pure religion of Egypt, Boulainviller notes that this is where the religion of the Greeks and Romans started from but that it progressed to a true conception of the Divinity through philosophy (HU, I, 154). And, as heir to that tradition of philosophy, Boulainviller looks upon the religions of early man, and in particular of the Hebrews, from a comparative point of view, seeing the differences between ancient and modern religious ideas as indictments of imperfection in the former.

It is from this modern point of view, confident in the truth of its superior beliefs and especially of its conception of the moral law, that Boulainviller criticizes the religious attitudes and practices of the past. He criticizes the greater degree of caprice than of reason that governed the Hebrews' ideas of what was pleasing and displeasing to the Deity, seeing certain faults remaining unpunished 'quoy que ce soit des fautes plus inexcusables dans les règles communes' than the faults that were punished (HU, I, 148-51).

Boulainviller is critical too of the early Israelites' practice of sacrifice in which scape-goats replaced 'la pratique de la vertu et de la justice' (HU, I, 156). Again the Hebrews' 'justice' is criticized for its capriciousness, for it was not based, says Boulainviller, on any 'règle certaine de morale'. He continues:

ce que les Rabbins ont imaginé des 7 preceptes que les Noachides c'est à dire les nations étoient obligées d'observer a en partie son fondement dans le droit et l'équité naturelle telles que nous les connoissons par raport à nos moeurs. (HU, I, 156)

The progress in man's spirituality is not seen, however, as a universal and simple movement. Philosophy helped the Greeks and Romans to refine and perfect their spiritual perceptions, and it is still a necessary element in modern man's religious attitude if this attitude is to remain balanced and true. In the fragment entitled Histoire de la religion et de la philosophie ancienne, Boulainviller concludes with these thoughts: 'La Religion la plus pure, sans philosophie, est dépourvue de ses principaux usages; la Philosophie est seule capable de discerner le faux ou le vrai, aussi bien dans le sens dogmatique que dans le moral; la Religion est seule capable de fixer et de déterminer les raisonnements philosophiques, et d'empêcher les égarements de la curiosité humaine' (OP, I, 313). But the Egyptians, starting from a true conception of religion, added to and altered their beliefs until nothing was left but mysticism and superstition. In Syria, Greece, Chaldea, and other Asian countries the advent of Sabaism led to a perversion

of true religion (HU, I, 152 and 155). Even the Chinese, convinced of the unity and spirituality of God, introduced into their religion what Boulainviller in this work describes as an atheistic tendency 'à confondre le Createur et la créature: Dieu infiny et l'infinité de l'univers' (HU, I, 153).

From a broader perspective than simply the development of man's spiritual knowledge, Boulainviller is led at one point at least to express the view that history does reveal a certain amelioration in human society. Following on from his recognition of the need for Providence to assist and make effective man's own efforts to regulate society (above, p. 232), Boulainviller writes:

il faut avouër que comme il y a des siècles stériles: il y en a d'autres très fécond [sic]: mais ne doit on pas admirer cette disposition fatale qui proportionne le secours aux besoins et qui pour tirer le monde de la barbarie a excité à la fois tant d'esprits diférents en des climats fort éloignés les uns des autres. (HU, II, 147)

Again, however, we see that progress is limited. Indeed there may be a suggestion here that rather than progressive the motion of history is one of rise and fall. This notion might also be inferred from what Boulainviller says of the relative situations of Europe and the East:

quoy que nous voyons fleurir les arts, les sciences, la politesse, la vraye religion; et que nous voyons l'Orient et l'Afrique devenus barbares; il ne faut pas ainsy juger du passé; nous donnerons de bonnes preuves cy après que les Régions occidentalles de notre Europe n'étoient alors peuplées que de sauvages; et nous allons voir comment les Orientaux ont commencé d'y apporter les connoissances qui étoient alors chez Eux en ce temps là. (HU, II, 489-90)

Perhaps it is not quite correct to say that Boulainviller seems occasionally to see history, in a rather vague way, as following an alternating rhythm because he does recognize the constant increase in knowledge that has been made since ancient times. Indeed, use of modern reason ('la philosophie naturelle') and of the discoveries of modern scholarship is Boulainviller's avowed methodological principle supporting his Histoire universelle. But this greater knowledge is not a guarantee of greater human felicity.¹

1. This is certainly the sentiment Boulainviller expresses at the end of the Dissertation sur la noblesse française, where we must recognize, however, his aristocratic and misanthropic bias (Devyver, pp. 547-48).

With regard to Boulainviller's ideas on the direction of history, then, it is difficult to conclude from the remarks made in the Histoire universelle other than that his attitude is inconsistent and not susceptible of easy categorisation. But one may well be justified in feeling that on the whole whenever Boulainviller pauses to reflect upon these matters his conception of history is generally pessimistic, the lighter moments coming not so much from any optimism with respect to the continuance of human development but from the necessary recognition of the historical growth of man's knowledge.

III Conclusion: Boulainviller's attitude towards Providence

Let us now summarize what our examination of the Abrégé de l'histoire universelle may allow us to conclude regarding Boulainviller's attitude in this text towards Providence and its workings. We have seen that Boulainviller spends a considerable time demonstrating the relation between Providence and its physical agents but conceives of this relation in such a natural way that Providence becomes almost synonymous with these physical forces and is usually denied the active intervention in human affairs, a few conventional and usually ambiguous instances notwithstanding, that is traditionally accredited to it. And a sense of the specifically Christian purpose behind universal history is significantly lacking. It would be reasonable to conclude therefore that as far as a purely Christian conception of Providence is concerned Boulainviller's Histoire universelle does not seek to confirm its reality. But it would be wrong to conclude that Boulainviller denies the value of all conceptions of Providence. Boulainviller's theory of the conjunction of providential and physical forces in such events as the Creation and the Flood is, we have seen (above, pp.189-90), taken from Thomas Burnet. Boulainviller's sincerity in adopting Burnet's theories, if not sufficiently evident in his Histoire universelle itself, is indicated by his continuing to use these theories in his later work, l'Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil, and by his defence of Burnet's ideas in his reading notes taken from John Woodward's Essay

toward a Natural History of the Earth ...¹ Woodward believes, unlike Burnet, that the earth before the Flood was much as it is now. Boulainviller criticizes this idea because it demands that the flood waters should have acted contrary to their nature and because it thus destroys the possibility of any natural explanation of the Flood, making all rest on 'une volonté fixe et déterminée de Dieu, d'autant plus nécessaire à la disposition du monde, que sans elle, il ne pouvoit subsister un seul moment et se resoudroit à une infinité d'atomes'.²

It would seem that the important aspect for Boulainviller of providential explanation lies in its insistence on a moral as well as a merely physical cause of historical events. A final example taken from the Histoire universelle may illustrate this point. In his treatment of the ancient history of Italy Boulainviller denies that Aremulus Sylvius, a descendant of Aeneas, was divinely punished for his impiety towards Italy's pagan gods, such an idea being inconceivable (above, p.232). He maintains instead that it is 'plus juste de penser que la fin désastreuse de quelques tyrans ou de quelques impies parmi les paiens étoit une suite nécessaire des circonstances de leurs vies et que la divinité n'y a pris d'autre part que celle qu'elle prend à la direction des événements quels qu'ils soient ...' (HU, II, 406). Providence here, instead of being the First Cause and ultimate arbiter of all that happens, is seen rather as the servant of the universal moral law. The supremacy of the moral law, superior to all religious conceptions of it, is affirmed too in Boulainviller's discussion of the government of France under Louis XI. Boulainviller narrates how Louis placated his troublesome nobles and then remarks:

C'est ainsi qu'un grand Politique ... sait en pliant à la nécessité remédier aux désordres qu'il a lui même causez: mais il est bien rare

1. John Woodward, London, 1695. An extract of this work, in French, was published in the March 1704 issue of Les Nouvelles de la république des lettres de Jacques Bernard (second edition, 56 vols (Amsterdam, 1715-20), XXXI, 287-321).
2. Extrait du livre de Jean Wordavard [sic], Bibliothèque de l'Ecole de Guerre, MS no. 25 (folios 304-15), f. 309.

d'en trouver d'aussi sages dans l'occasion, que le fut alors notre Roi Louis XI, duquel on peut assurer que, s'il eût eu autant de probité dans le coeur que d'étendue et de force dans le génie et de pénétration pour juger du caractère des Hommes et de leurs divers intérêts, il seroit justement placé au rang de nos plus dignes Monarques. Mais, par une fatalité qui a régné dans tous les événemens du monde, indépendamment de la Religion de chaque contrée et dont Louis XI ressentit particulièrement l'effet dans la conjuration du Bien Public, il n'a point été de Prince injuste qui n'ait été puni dans sa personne ou dans sa Postérité immédiate des désordres de son gouvernement. (HAG, III, 178-79)

We may perhaps conclude our examination of Boulainviller's attitude to Providence as exhibited in his Histoire universelle by saying that he conceived of it as an essential element in the complete explanations of certain momentous and extraordinary events and as the guarantee of the execution of the moral law. The acceptance of providential intervention in the history of the world is not viewed by him as a capitulation of reason but rather as its complement. It is this rational attitude towards Providence that causes the considerable tension we can see in Boulainviller with regard to the accomplishment of its designs. Boulainviller would argue with Burnet 'that it is no detracton from Divine Providence, that the course of Nature is exact and regular, and that even in its greatest changes and revolutions it should still conspire and be prepar'd to answer the ends and purposes of the Divine Will in reference to the Moral World'.¹ And generally speaking, one feels that Boulainviller would be quite satisfied if he could demonstrate that Providence always worked in this ordinary and natural manner. However, Burnet continues,

Besides the ordinary Providence of God in the ordinary course of Nature, there is doubtless an extraordinary Providence that doth attend the greater Scenes and the greater revolutions of Nature. This, methinks, besides all other proof from the Effects, is very rational and necessary in it self; for it would be a limitation of the Divine Power and Will so to be bound up to second causes, as never to use, upon occasion, an extraordinary influence or direction.²

And we have seen that Boulainviller does refer occasionally to extraordinary manifestations of Providence, although, with the exception of the creation

1. Thomas Burnet, The Sacred Theory of the Earth (London, 1684), Book one, chapter eight, p. 106.

2. Ibid.

of life on earth, the conventional and expedient air of these references at times might lead us to suspect their sincerity. We might conveniently categorize Boulainviller's ambivalent attitude towards Providence by comparing it with those of Bossuet and Voltaire. No longer can Boulainviller simply accept the absolutist view of God as seen in the Discours sur l'histoire universelle: 'Heureux, sage, tout-puissant, seul suffisant à lui-même, il agit sans nécessité comme il agit sans besoin; jamais contraint ni embarrassé par sa matière dont il fait ce qu'il veut, parce qu'il lui a donné par sa seule volonté le fond de son être. Par ce droit souverain, il la tourne, il la façonne, il la meut sans peine: tout dépend immédiatement de lui' (Discours pp. 152-53). Yet neither can he view Providence with the nonchalance of Voltaire: 'Ou le monde subsiste par sa propre nature, par ses lois physiques, ou un être suprême l'a formé selon ses lois suprêmes: dans l'un et l'autre cas, tout est nécessaire' (XVIII, 347). Let us now consider Boulainviller's treatment of the idea of Providence in his later work, the Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil.

Chapter Nine

Providence in The 'Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil' and 'La Vie de Mahomed'

I Boulainviller's system of astrology, its explanatory function and determinist nature, and its relation to a Christian Providence

The idea of providential intervention in the history of the world is an idea which, however reluctantly or apparently insincerely at times, Boulainviller accepted and defended in his Histoire universelle. The evident difficulty with which he managed to support both the claims of reason and those of scriptural authority is testimony to the importance which reason and belief in Providence held for him. These two principles of argument, reason and faith, appear again in Boulainviller's Apogée du soleil written in 1711. However, as the purpose of this work is to prove Boulainviller's own system of astrology, which he regards as a science based on reason and experience, the rational element of Boulainviller's discourse receives so much emphasis that divine intervention is all but excluded from his account.

The details of Boulainviller's astrological system have been adequately discussed by Renée Simon in her Henry de Boulainviller (pp. 631-671). Briefly, Boulainviller maintains that there exists an exact correspondence between the general movement of history, that is the successive rise and fall of different empires and civilizations and 'les changements arrivez dans les moeurs des hommes, le progrès de leurs connoissances et spécialement la découverte des terres nouvelles' (AS, f. 6), and the westerly movement of the sun's apogee (AS, f. 18). Boulainviller places the 'first midday' (or the time of the appearance of Adam on the completed earth and the beginning of the sun's apogee's westerly journey) in astrological space and Biblical time (11th May, 4229 B.C.). Using this position of 'le premier midy' Boulainviller works out the 'thème radical' (the related positions of the planets and stars) which, in conjunction with the particular 'thèmes' of the countries whose history Boulainviller will discuss and which are influenced by the position

of the 'premier midy', will be shown to have determined quite precisely the general movement of world history.

The test which Boulainviller's system must pass (and, needless to say, it succeeds in this completely) is whether it can account accurately for the discovery of the New World: if it cannot, then astrology disintegrates; if it can, then astrology is true for all other similar events 'quelque éloignés qu'ils puissent être dans l'avenir' (AS, f. 7). Those countries not receiving the sun's light at the moment of the 'premier midy', which include the Americas, stayed separate and barbarous, Boulainviller maintains, 'jusqu'à un tems déterminé pour les admettre à la société des premiers' (i.e. those countries enjoying in some measure the light of the world's first 'midy'; AS, f. 8). The westerly progress of the sun's apogee accounts for the discovery and conquest of South America by the Spanish at the time of their European ascendancy,

car si nous ottons 90 degrés de la longitude de l'Espagne cy devant donnée $\angle 12^{\circ}$ et sur laquelle j'ai supposé que l'apogée du soleil étoit parvenu en l'année 1500; il reste 282 degrés de longitude pour le commencement du jour: c'est à dire que la lumière se portoit pleinement jusqu'au delà de la Peninsule de Tucatan; et que la ville et l'empire du Mexique $\angle sic$ n'avoient encore d'éclat que par le crepuscule: raison pour laquelle ils ont été découverts et conquis les derniers.

(AS, ff. 8-9)

Boulainviller is all the more struck by the correspondence between his theory of astrological determinism and the facts of history, as the discovery of the New World, he maintains, would have been much easier for the Chinese or Japanese especially since these nations had enjoyed great technological knowledge for centuries before Spain, only recently freed from its past of ignorance and Moorish domination, made its conquests. But 'il falloit que la lumière suivît sa route naturelle; et comme on ne sauroit faire marcher les jours au rebours, il étoit impossible que ces nations si longtemps inconnues entrassent dans le commerce des autres hommes par une autre voye, que celle qui nous est découverte par l'événement' (AS, f. 9).

Boulainviller replies to the objection that history does not show us (as

it should according to Boulainviller's principles) that all countries under the apogee of the sun have been as powerful as Spain was in the sixteenth century by simply reaffirming his principle and then noting that each country has its own destiny (by which Boulainviller means nothing more than that which history shows us to have happened) and that these individual destinies affect the ascendancy of the nation enjoying the sun's apogee at any particular time. Thus Rome was unable to conquer the German nations because of their opposing destinies, yet Spain suffered no such check upon her power because nothing lay between her and the Americas but the Atlantic Ocean.

Without particularly wishing to attack or refute Boulainviller's astrological doctrines, one may still observe that both the circularity of his reasoning (of which there are numerous examples both in his Apogée du soleil and in his Pratique abrégée des jugements astrologiques sur les nativitez) and the unscientific nature of his method are sufficiently illustrated in this discussion of the Spanish discovery of America.¹ It was because astrology, to survive, had satisfactorily to explain Spanish dominion over the South Americans that Boulainviller, seeing the sun's apogee to be above the western part of Spain at the time of her European dominance, decided to put 'le premier midy', the basis of his whole system, at one hundred and six degrees longitude east. Once he has elaborated the 'thème radical' of the first 'midy' Boulainviller 'tests' it by referring (not exclusively, it must be admitted) to the American Indians. He recognizes their intellect but maintains that 'parce que ces bons aspects se passent dans les ténèbres, ils ont été condamnez à n'employer aucune de ces grandes qualites durant un grand nombre de siecles' (AS, f. 42). As soon as they began to enjoy a little of the influence of the sun's apogee, however, they fell into slavery 'en conséquence de l'impression accablante du soleil sur les planettes qui

1. Mme. Simon, however, would defend the scientific status of Boulainviller's astrological method; see her Henry de Boulainviller, pp. 651 and 655.

lui sont opposées' (AS, f. 42). Experience thus determines theory which looks for support to the experience upon which it is founded. But of course, no amount of reference to verifying experience can be said to prove any scientific theory, and certainly not theories which set out, as Boulainviller's do, to explain everything.¹ Indeed, in spite of his recognition that the science of astrology is still susceptible of perfection, Boulainviller's Pratique abrégée in particular provides such complex rules and felicitous examples of astrological procedure that all human passions, motives and careers could be explained by his theories.² The reality and totality of astrological determinism (and thus explanation) find striking expression in Boulainviller's calculation of the correct time and astrological situation of the birth of Luther: 'l'heure veritable nous donne une demonstration complete que les hommes sont reellement destinés a fournir certaine carriere dont leur volonte la plus positive ne les ecarte jamais' (Pratique abrégée, folio 69).³

1. 'A scientific theory is not one which explains everything that can possibly happen: on the contrary, it rules out most of what could possibly happen, and is therefore itself ruled out if what it rules out happens. So a genuinely scientific theory places itself permanently at risk ... Falsifiability is the criterion of demarcation between science and non-science. The central point is that if all possible states of affairs fit in with a theory then no actual state of affairs, no observations, no experimental results, can be claimed as supporting evidence for it. There is no observable difference between its being true and its being false. So it conveys no scientific information. Only if some imaginable observation would refute it is it testable. And only if it is testable is it scientific'; quoted from Popper by Bryan Magee, *Fontana Modern Masters*, 1973, p. 43. One might add that for Boulainviller astrology will not only explain the events of the past and why they had to happen, but it will also show what must happen in the future, 'car le point essentiel de cette recherche des événements généraux destinez à chaque Pays, est de pouvoir déterminer un ascendant propre à chacun, afin de juger par le passage des Cometes par les Eclipses et les grandes conjunctions qui y peuvent arriver de ce qu'ils doivent ou craindre ou esperer' (AS, f. 2).
2. We may note too that in the Apogée du soleil the nativity of Confucius even explains the cause of the sage's deafness in later life (AS, f. 98).
3. While not wishing to labour the point one might nevertheless remark that Boulainviller's considerations of the astrological rules concerning men in positions of great power, especially kings, are a remarkable example of the bizarre 'reasoning' he often employs. Speaking of the effectiveness of certain astrological conjunctions Boulainviller writes: 'En effet l'experience nous fait voir qu'il est rare, (au moins depuis que les Etats et les Royaumes ont été rendus successifs) de voir des hommes parvenir a la souveraineté par la seule force de leur etoille' (Pratique abrégée, f. 218).

The relation between the astrological cause of events and Providence is similar to that seen in the Histoire universelle between Providence and the laws of nature. The stars and planets are the secondary, physical causes of historical and natural events and are subservient to the divine will. This relation of causes is seen in Boulainviller's introduction to the astrological 'thème' he has worked out for the Flood: 'voicy enfin le thème de l'instant fatal auquel il faut rapporter comme à la cause seconde l'exécution du decret divin, par lequel le Tout puissant avoit résolu de perdre le monde et de le réparer en la maniere qui nous verrons après avoir jugé des significations contenuës dans cette disposition du Ciel' (AS, f. 61). However, although Boulainviller still uses Burnet's theory of a conjunction of divine and physical, moral and natural causes to explain the Creation and the Flood, the directing influence of Providence (rather theoretical but nevertheless discernible in the Histoire universelle), although still allowed in the Apogée du soleil, has now almost vanished.

We have already considered how, although he still maintains that the Creation was an effect of God's will, Boulainviller's description of the processes involved in this event is less bound by Christian dogma in the Apogée du soleil than in the Histoire universelle (above, pp.190-91). Similarly, although he continues to assert that the Flood is a divine punishment as well as a natural (and now, astrological) event (AS, f. 65), Boulainviller's treatment of the event in the Apogée du soleil renders providential influence simply notional. Boulainviller argues that emphasizing the divinely punitive cause of the Flood as an example of God's omnipotence is unnecessary, 'puisque cellecy nous est bien plus sensible dans l'ordre invariable qu'elle a prescrit à l'univers, que le récit dans cette histoire [*i.e. Scripture*]' (AS, f. 65). Furthermore, 'il est contradictoire de penser qu'il puisse

and later he writes: 'la succession étant établie en nostre Europe Occidentale, aussy bien par raport a la possession des Couronnes, que par raport a celle des biens particuliers, il ne faut plus chercher dans les natiuités des Princes la cause ou principe de leur elevation, mais bien les moyens qui doivent les distinguer dans leur condition naturelle, ceux qui doivent servir a maintenir leur puissance ...' (Pratique abrégée, f. 219).

arriver quelque chose dans le monde qui soit un motif nécessaire à la sagesse éternelle d'agir d'autre manière que par les voyes déterminées qu'elle a choisies dez le commencement' (AS, f. 65). Boulainviller warns us against thinking too humanly of God and against attributing His punishment of man to what we call His vengeance. And then, as he did in the Histoire universelle, Boulainviller goes on to explain the Flood in terms of the conjunction of the frailty of the earth's crust and the frailty of men's morality, both of which, he concludes with perhaps significant indecision, 'étoient ... également des conséquences soit de la nature soit de la préordination divine' (AS, f. 66).

But although Boulainviller considers it irrational to understand the Flood as the effect 'd'une volonté particulière de Dieu et de son pouvoir absolu', he is well aware of why such an erroneous belief should be condoned by authority. 'La question se réduit à savoir si Dieu est plus honoré par une opinion qui, quoiqu'apparemment fausse, nous porte à l'ordre et à la bonne vie par la frayeur que par un sentiment vrai qui peut produire le même effet par l'admiration, quoique le succès en soit plus incertain dans les dispositions communes des hommes' (AS, f. 66). The idea of providential intervention is thus seen as a useful, perhaps necessary fiction.

The Flood, although catastrophic, did not annihilate the earth or the life it supported. The 'thème du Déluge' has to take this into account:

Il falloit donc une révolution générale qui aidât la direction;¹ mais il la falloit telle qu'elle se voit icy si justement temperée par l'ordre de la providence qu'au milieu des châtimens et dans le fort de la ruine elle préparât une ressource à la terre en conservant une petite partie des hommes et des animaux qui la peuploient en abondance, c'est précisément ce que Jupiter placé à la pointe de la 8^e maison a opéré de la manière la plus conforme à l'événement et la plus convenable à sa signification. (AS, f. 62)

We may note in passing the absolute nature of Boulainviller's conception of astrological determinism, for he asserts that had Jupiter been positioned

1. 'Révolution' and 'direction' are astrological terms referring to certain influential features in the relations between planets and stars.

elsewhere a different event would have occurred. One wonders exactly what power Providence has left to wield.

Earlier on, Boulainviller had discussed the difficulties involved with the earth's regeneration after the Flood. Boulainviller states that the Flood was general. (Later Boulainviller modifies this and argues that it is no offense to Scripture to maintain that certain areas were less affected than others and that some places, for example Lybia, escaped the waters altogether. Moreover, he maintains that the Flood, although general, covered the areas of the globe successively - astrology proves it (AS, f. 68) - and it is here that Boulainviller refers to Burnet's theory as the best way to reconcile reason and Scripture; see AS, ff. 64-65). Despite the great destruction of the Flood animals were preserved, whether in the ark or not,

car on ne sauroit supposer que tous les animaux qui peuplent une infinité d'Isles inconnues au milieu de l'Océan y aient été portez par Noë, on ne sauroit dire aussy que Dieu ait fait une nouvelle création en leur faveur ny que la terre les y ait engendrés elle même et l'on voit de plus qu'ils n'y ont pas été aportés du continent. (AS, f. 36)

Boulainviller's reasoning rests upon 'the simplest of ideas' ('qui ne sauroit manquer d'être vraie') that 'outre la direction de la providence qui est la cause générale, il n'y a jamais de si grande ruine dans la nature qu'elle ne se réserve elle-même des ressources' (AS, f. 35). The 'force générative nécessaire au soutien de la nature' is determined astrologically by the relative positions in the 'thème radical de la terre' of Jupiter, Mars and Venus and guaranteed for both hemispheres by the two luminaries. The whole exquisite design is the work of 'la prévoyance de la nature' (AS, ff. 40-41).

The possibility of other human survivors of the Flood than simply those safely locked in the ark is shown by Boulainviller to be perfectly conceivable in a more pragmatic way too. 'Les astres n'operent rien visiblement par eux mêmes; ils ammenent les evenements par leurs causes médiatees et immédiates dont ils sont les moteurs invisibles' (AS, f. 63). The immediate cause of the Flood, the drying up and cracking of the earth's crust, was brought about by the heat of the sun. This procedure took time and so, as well as a

revelation, Noah had the evidence of his senses to tell him to take precautionary measures. But of course, so did other men. Consequently it is not at all impossible that creatures, human and animal, survived the Flood outside the ark, 'soit par un effet de la prudence humaine, soit par celui de la fatalité qui dirige les evenements' (AS, f. 63, my italics). Even in Noah's case, however, a human rather than a divine explanation is sufficient to save him from the Flood. As the time of the Flood approached its portents increased (for example, says Boulainviller, both the sun and moon were eclipsed the month before); 'ainsy quand Noé n'auroit pas été averty d'en haüt, la terreur de ces phénomènes l'auroit porté à se réfugier dans le vaisseau qu'il avoit bâti: et l'on doit présumer que tous les autres hommes étoient aussy dans la crainte et le tremblement' (AS, f. 64).

Boulainviller's astrological calculations determine that the Flood took twelve years in all before its physical effects were spent. During this time the earth was in constant travail. And yet, scriptural authority relates that Noah spent only one year in the ark. Boulainviller sees the need to protect the authority of Scripture and yet sees nothing illegitimate in making it accord with reason: 'soit qu'on considère la Geneze comme un livre divin soit qu'on la regarde comme la plus ancienne histoire qui reste parmi les hommes on ne peut pas raisonnablement nier les faits qui y sont exprimez quoyque l'on puisse les exprimer et les ajuster au système naturel que nous jugeons le plus aprochant de la vérité' (AS, f. 68). Boulainviller resolves the problem by writing that Noah's ark grounded on one of the earth's highest mountains, situated very far from the sea, where he was able to leave the ark a year after he had got into it and wait safely for another eleven years until all of the Flood had subsided. Although the 'thème de la sortie de l'Arche' shows that owing to an unfavourable astrological conjunction Noah's troubles did not end once he had landed on mount Ararat, Boulainviller demonstrates how 'la prévoyance de la nature' managed to temper its consequences (AS, f. 70). Boulainviller completes his discussion of the history

of the Flood by reasserting the absolute nature of astrological explanation:

Mais en voyla assez sur cette matiere puisqu'il suffit d'avoir fait connoître sensiblement l'effet absolu de la cause astrologique quoyqu'elle nous paroisse si peu liée avec les événements de nôtre terre et en même temps l'usage sûr et imaginable de ma méthode malgré la nouveauté qu'on luy peut objecter. (AS, f. 69)

The appreciable difference between Boulainviller's treatments of the Flood in the Histoire universelle and in the Apogée du soleil is the introduction of a new dual element in the second work: astrological explanation and determinism. This is obvious, but its consequence is important for now there is an all-powerful intermediary between God and His creation which accounts for all the important events of history so completely (and, when extended, all the minor ones too) that Providence, although still spoken of, would seem to have been made redundant. This is an inevitable consequence of Boulainviller's type of 'rational astrology'.

We can see the absolute nature of astrological explanation, that is its capacity to explain all historical phenomena completely independently of any other mode of explanation, expressed in several of Boulainviller's astrological discussions. 'La libration du globe' after the Flood only stopped once the physical causes had ceased, and these disappeared only when the celestial situation had altered appropriately to allow another 'constellation assez puissante pour déterminer le cours du mouvement de notre globe dans une certaine forme' to materialize (AS, f. 71). Again, when discussing the further catastrophes that await the earth (in A.D. 2225 and, finally, in A.D. 3615), Boulainviller shows how these future events are 'nécessairement infaillibles en conséquence de la détermination du premier thème et de la suite des mouvements celestes' (AS, f. 75). Finally, commenting on the concord between the 'thème radical' and the 'thème du rétablissement' (i.e. the astrological situation at the end of the Flood), Boulainviller notes that they are complementary

dans une proportion si exacte et dans des termes si justes que l'ordre de toute la nature et la suite des événements, en sont les conséquences nécessaires en sorte qu'il n'y pouvoit et n'en peut arriver autre chose que ce qui se fait actuellement sous nos yeux. Démonstration si sensible de la vérité de l'astrologie que je ne conçois pas comme il seroit possible de la contredire. (AS, f. 77)

However, an 'absolute' astrology does not preclude a guiding Providence for if the heavens determine natural events, Providence controls the heavens. This principle has been noted in our discussion of Boulainviller's narration of the Flood (above, p.251) and it is expressed too in Boulainviller's description of the downfall of Babylon, 'fatalité qui ne se peut rapporter qu'à la providence ou plus sensiblement aux mouvements du Ciel qui exécute ses ordres' (AS, f. 125). And yet (again as we noted when we considered Boulainviller's interpretation of the Flood) often it is 'la prévoyance de la nature' which is seen to control and modify the planetary determination of terrestrial events. 'La Nature' gave the New World to Spain, 'et le moyen dont elle s'est servy n'est autre que le passage de l'Apogée du Soleil sur leur [the Spaniards'] propre longitude' (AS, f. 9). The position of the fifth house vis-à-vis the 'thème radical' and its consequently favourable disposition towards the propagation of life on earth are described by Boulainviller as 'une admirable dispensation de la nature' (AS, f. 53). The middle of the sky from the first to the fifteenth degree of Aries is occupied, Boulainviller notes 'par les plus brillants constellations'. This, he explains, 'n'est pas arrivé sans une sage disposition de la Nature puisque la chaleur et la lumière étant pour ainsy dire l'ame du Monde, il semble qu'elle ait choisy un temps pour y en répandre une plus grande abondance par le concours de ces étoiles avec le Soleil' (AS, ff. 55-56).

Nature's power is not simply restricted to physical events, her domain includes the whole field of history. In his discussion of 'La Scythie ou Tartarie' (made up, amongst other nations, of Turkestan, Hungary, Bulgaria and Siberia) Boulainviller writes:

Il suffit d'avoir fait l'énumération de ces différents Peuples pour en pouvoir conclurre que si la nature paroît avoir placé sous la longitude

du signe du Belier les nations les plus féroces de nôtre continent ce sont aussy celles qu'elle paroît avoir choisyes pour dominer à la plus grande partie du monde et pour la destruction des Couronnes que le reste de la terre a cruës les mieux établyes. (AS, f. 106)

If nature is allowed such a degree of control over human destiny how can reference to Providence have meaning? One might say perhaps that Boulainviller is squeezing in another layer of cause between Providence and creation, which directs the astral motor of historical change but which is subservient to the will of God. Indeed, when he is discussing the ancient inhabitants of Assyria and Chaldea Boulainviller maintains that as a period of rest and peace was necessary for these peoples to become established 'dans une quantité proportionnée aux desseins de la providence, il étoit de l'ordre de la nature qui luy est soumise d'empêcher qu'il ne se formât de ces grandes dominations ...' (AS, f. 119). But surely we must be allowed to suspect the intelligibility of reference to a sovereign Providence twice removed from the creation it is supposed to control. It would seem rather that Nature and Providence have in practice become synonymous. This is made explicit when Boulainviller is reflecting upon the future perfection of his astrological system which will allow the destiny of the world to be read. Such knowledge may frighten the ignorant and superstitious but it will console the wise 'en leur faisant sentir que tout ce qui arrive est réellement l'exécution du projet d'une providence infinye et n'en est pas moins un éfèt nécessaire de la constitution de l'univers' (AS, f. 94).

It might be thought that the procedure Boulainviller adopts to demonstrate the truth of his new astrological system, that is checking its findings against Biblical history, despite the simply nominal powers that this system accords to Providence, is nonetheless evidence that in some way Boulainviller is taking the idea seriously. Boulainviller's astrological method begins and ends with Scripture (the Creation and the Apocalypse) and its principal milestones are scriptural too. But Boulainviller's attention to Scripture, and his concern to make sure his astrology corresponds to it, are determined

by his astrology itself, for it is Biblical chronology (or, at least, Samaritan) which is its very foundation. We have seen too that Boulainviller's attitude to Holy Writ is one of expediency and rather ambiguous deference (above, pp.254-55). Moreover, it would do Boulainviller little good in his ambition to establish the veracity, universality and comprehensiveness of his newly improved astrology if it did not agree with the major events of the world's history as the overwhelming majority of his contemporaries conceived of them. Moreover, the metaphysical implications of Boulainviller's understanding of astral determinism are profoundly anti-Christian. Let us examine the problem a little further.

The heavens determine events in both the physical and the human worlds; they bring about natural catastrophes such as the Flood and the moral imperfections (i.e. evil) in men. Discussing the moral qualities of men in the northern hemisphere Boulainviller writes, 'on trouve donc dans cette position des deux luminaires le fondement des desirs ambitieux qui agitent les hommes, de leur avidité pour l'argent, du crédit et de l'autorité des richesses et enfin de la passion si naturelle à tous les hommes de posséder propriétairement quelques fonds d'héritage et de le transmettre à ses Enfants' (AS, f. 44). The moral determinism of astrology is more emphatically expressed when Boulainviller is discussing the astrological explanation of particular national destinies and characters. It is important 'pour l'entiere justification de cette science de remontrer la rélation interne qui est entre l'espece de cause physique que je propose et la morale prise dans le sentiment commun des hommes' (AS, f. 78). Boulainviller explains:

les hommes sont déterminez à agir par deux causes ordinaires auxquelles toutes les autres sont relatives et ... ces causes sont physiquement Mars et Vénus moralement l'interêt et la force avec leurs motifs subordonnez; savoir à l'égard de Mars, le desir de la domination et l'impetuosité du coeur humain et à l'égard de Vénus; le plaisir et la persuasion; on ne sauroit en éffèt réflêchir sur ce qui s'est passé dans le monde depuis que l'histoire nous est connuë sans avouër que ce sont réellement les principes, de tout ce qui s'est fait; Les societez se sont toujours unyes par l'interêt: et l'interêt ne s'est rendu sensible que par le plaisir et la persuasion cependant cela seul n'auroit pas formé les Empires; il falloit le concours de Mars pour animer ces sentiments et leur donner une

force capable d'assujettir les autres hommes; Ainsy quand la violence a fait le premier effort la persuasion a consommé l'ouvrage. (AS, f. 78)

After demonstrating these principles with regard to the Roman monarchy and the Arab empire Boulainviller concludes,

Il etoit donc nécessaire que Mars, Vénus et les luminaires fussent unis dans l'une et l'autre constitution pour donner à la conduite des hommes les motifs et l'ordre que nous y voyons, ordre qui n'a toutefois rien de fixe puisqu'il n'est point de société durable et que les Empires les plus vastes et les plus redoutés sont sujets à se détruire par des moyens pareils à ceux qui les ont formez. (AS, f. 78)

History is thus shown not to be a chaotic but an orderly and motivated affair. But the human actors of the historical drama (elsewhere Boulainviller talks of 'le théâtre de notre continent'; AS, f. 100) turn out to be no more than the marionettes of Mars, Venus, the sun and the moon. What has happened to man's free will?

During his narration of the downfall of Babylon, and in particular the disgrace of Nebuchadnezzar, Boulainviller reflects on 'la vanité des projets des hommes et la rigueur inflexible du destin' and the futility of human designs not in harmony with the sky (AS, f. 125). Perhaps apprehending the heterodoxy implicit in his pessimism Boulainviller denies that he is advocating 'la doctrine d'une inévitable fatalité' (AS, f. 125) and maintains that the prophecies sent from God, 'une des plus éloquentes et des plus touchantes parties de l'écriture' (AS, ff. 125-26), do not suppose such an idea. Concluding his reflection on the relation between astrological explanations and Christian doctrines Boulainviller writes that 'si les premières engagent notre raison par probabilité ou par démonstration les autres exigent notre foy par autorité; ainsy il n'y [a] de différence entre ces deux motifs de croire qu'en ce que la cause immédiate des événements demeure inconnue en cédant à la seule religion ou qu'elle est rendue évidente et sensible en la considérant dans le mécanisme de la nature' (AS, f. 126). Boulainviller has not so much reconciled the two principles of astrological determinism and man's free will, however, as given cogent reasons why we should prefer his mechanical explanations of events to unenlightening religious obscurity.

The pause for reflection has brought about no change of mind in Boulainviller for almost immediately afterwards, when he is narrating the building of Baghdad, he cites as its causes 'la nature de concert avec le destin' (AS, f. 127).

Boulainviller had recognised the problem that fatalism posed for astrology in his Essay de Justification de l'astrologie judiciaire of 1696. Written at a time when, as we have seen, Boulainviller's religious views seem to have been much more orthodox this defence of astrology strives to prove that astrology and Christianity are not only perfectly compatible but that 'la science des astres donne une plus grande idée de la divinité ... et ... fournit à la religion, dont on se sert pour la combattre, de puissants motifs pour assujettir les coeurs'.¹ In reply to objections that astrology preaches fatalism Boulainviller writes that if by this is understood a law such as that of cause and effect then, of course, it is true. If, however, fatalism means 'un hasard aveugle' then astrology is clear of this charge. Again, 'si l'on entend l'ordre d'une Providence surnaturelle, ou elle suit des règles, qu'elle-même a prescrit à tous les êtres, en ce cas, c'est la nature; ou elle agit par des voies extraordinaires, alors c'est le prodige et le miracle, dans lequel il n'y a plus de règle que celle de la volonté divine.'² But ultimately the method Boulainviller adopts to refute the charge of fatalism is simply to deny its significance:

Mais au fond, pourquoi se choquer de l'idée d'une espèce de fatalité dans les actions, puisqu'il y en a une nécessaire et uniforme dans les lois de la succession et du mouvement, quoique nous n'ayons pas toute la finesse et la suffisance requise pour en juger? Y a-t-il d'ailleurs, par rapport à Dieu, quelque inconvénient à donner à sa présience et à sa sagesse toute l'étendue qui convient aux attributs de l'Etre parfait? Or les mêmes raisons qui serviront à dénouer les difficultés que l'esprit humain imagine dans la convenance de la présience divine et de notre liberté serviront sans peine à accorder cette même liberté avec les lois de la matière, de la succession et du mouvement.³

1. Essay de justification, printed in R. Simon's Un Révolté du grand siècle : Henry de Boulainviller, p. 151.
2. Ibid. p. 171.
3. Ibid.

However, if we look at Boulainviller's attempt to reconcile God's prescience with man's free will, his Pensées sur l'accord de la liberté de l'homme avec la préscience de Dieu, we will discover that his reasons remain unconvincing. Towards the end of this small treatise Boulainviller summarizes the arguments which, he believes, show that man's activity is both predictable and free.

Il est donc évident que la préscience infaillible de Dieu ne détruit point la liberté de l'homme. Premièrement, celle qui lui convient, en tant que corporel, et [sic] soumis à l'ordre général de la matière, à savoir l'usage absolu de ses forces, de ses facultés, de ses vertus, parce que tous les événements des choses naturelles qui résultent de l'application des corps les uns aux autres, de leurs mouvements, de leurs altérations, sont nécessaires, et par conséquent prévisibles, non seulement à la science infinie de Dieu, mais encore à celle des intelligences subordonnées, qui peuvent naturellement juger de l'avenir autant qu'elles ont de pénétration et de connaissance des secrets mécaniques de la nature, laquelle n'est autre chose qu'une loi, ou enchaînement de causes et d'effets. (OP, I, 344-45)

Boulainviller foresees the objection one might make to his proofs and replies to it:

Mais l'on dira que l'homme n'est donc libre que appellativement, puisque ses actions, en tant que naturelles, sont nécessaires, et que les surnaturelles ne sont pas en sa puissance. Je réponds qu'il est vraiment libre de la liberté qui lui est propre, comme un être borné, corporel et intelligent tout ensemble. Il souffre des mouvements involontaires parce que les ressorts secrets de son corps l'agitent indépendamment de lui-même, ainsi que les êtres insensibles. Sa connaissance est entraînée par le sentiment, ainsi que les animaux, et malgré la lumière de son entendement. Il est évident que dans les deux genres d'actions il n'est libre qu'à la manière des corps, dans l'usage de ses forces; mais dans les actions propres à l'intelligence, il est libre d'une manière plus noble, puisqu'à l'aide des grâces communes, l'instruction, la vocation, la loi, il est en état de balancer et de faire choix de deux sortes d'objets, qui lui sont présentes par la Nature et par la Religion. Il est vrai que la volonté n'est déterminée que par un attrait plus sensible, de quelque côté qu'elle le trouve, et la grâce particulière fait pour le surnaturel ce que le sentiment fait en faveur de la nature; mais l'homme est toujours réputé libre, quand il agit par le choix de sa volonté, et suivant la conviction de son esprit. (OP, I, 345)

In spite of this final reaffirmation, however, Boulainviller's proposition still remains to be proved.

As well as denying man's freedom, physical and moral, the rigorous determinism of Boulainviller's astrology effectively negates the possibility of any direct intervention of Providence in the sublunar world or, more

briefly, miracles. We have already examined Boulainviller's rational explanation of why this should be so (above, pp. 251-52) and we saw too that this argument was one of the principal themes of the Histoire universelle. Indeed, in the even earlier Essay de justification, although he still agrees that God directs the world by His Providence (a point of view that a defence of astrology might oblige him to assume in any case), Boulainviller asserts that God leaves the execution of His will to intermediate natural causes, 'autrement l'on ne pourrait concilier la mutabilité des créatures avec cette suprême volonté, qui par sa perfection ne peut être sujette à aucun changement ... cette volonté toujours égale ne pourrait faire par elle-même une variété semblable si ces lois n'étoient imprimées dans les causes premières qui opèrent ensuite conformément aux natures particulières'.¹ With his Apogée du soleil in which, as we saw (above, p. 257), 'infinite Providence' is equated with the constitution of the universe, Boulainviller seems to have come to accept the metaphysics he had denied so vigorously sixteen years previously in his Extrait du traité théologo-politique de Spinoza. To appreciate this point more fully it may be useful to consider the development of Boulainviller's metaphysical thought as seen in texts written (as we know or may assume) after his Histoire universelle of 1700.

II Boulainviller and Spinozist metaphysics (the problem of a contingent or determined universe) and his 'philosophy of history'.

In the avertissement to his Essai de métaphysique dans les principes de B ... de Sp ... (OP, I, 83-212) Boulainviller tells us how he became involved with the metaphysical (rather than exegetical) ideas of the controversial Dutch philosopher (OP, I, 84). At the same time a refutation of Spinoza's philosophy had been published by one Pierre-Sylvain Régis and Boulainviller took up his pen to examine this refutation.² In the first

1. R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle, p. 162.
2. The 'Réfutation de l'opinion de Spinoza touchant l'existence, et la nature de Dieu' forms the last part of Régis's L'Usage de la raison et de la foy, ou l'accord de la foy et de la raison (Paris, 1704), pp. 481-500.

part, the Exposition du système de Benoit Spinoza et sa défense contre les objections de M. Régis (OP, I, 213-30), Boulainviller expounds Spinoza's metaphysical and ethical doctrine and its corollary that the first step towards virtue is to recognize 'que tous les mouvements des causes secondes sont déterminés, et qu'ainsi les hommes ne sont pas les maîtres de leurs actions, mais qu'ils agissent par une nécessité de nature' (OP, I, 229), a nature whose 'premier moteur' is an infinitely substantial God (OP, I, 218). Boulainviller concludes this small treatise by recognizing that from his principles Spinoza draws even more anti-Christian consequences such as the logical impossibilities of the Trinity, of a Creation ex nihilo, and of the Incarnation. But rather than simply fulminate against the atheistic Jew Boulainviller hopes to be able to reach a compromise with 'un homme qui en sa manière fait tout en son pouvoir pour prouver l'existence de Dieu' (OP, I, 230).

In the second part of his study, the Examen de la réfutation faite par M. Régis de l'opinion de Spinoza sur l'existence et la nature de Dieu (OP, I, 231-52), Boulainviller, to use the words of Renée Simon, 'reprend une à une les quinze propositions relevées par Régis dans Spinoza, et discute la manière dont Régis les entend; il en ressort que Régis n'a pas compris grand'chose, semble-t-il, à la pensée de Spinoza, et qu'il se perd dans des distinctions excessives ...' (OP, I, 213). Boulainviller consistently defends Spinoza against Régis's refutation, pointing out the latter's misunderstandings and 'excessive subtleties', but in the 'Examen des réflexions sur la septième définition' he joins issue with both parties on the topic of God's freedom. Boulainviller finds Régis's opinion that God is determined by His nature but free with regard to His will (the things proceeding from either being necessary intrinsically or extrinsically respectively) most unsatisfactory and nothing more than scholastic word play. Régis, he maintains, has done nothing to refute Spinoza's ideas that all is determined eternally by God and that He is bound by His own will (for any change in this will

would mean inconstancy in the Deity). These are the opinions that Régis should have destroyed, insists Boulainviller, 'comme étant opposées aux lois de notre morale, et particulièrement à la liberté qu'elles admettent dans l'homme' (OP, I, 235).

In the final section of the Examen de la réfutation faite par M. Régis Boulainviller examines Régis's proof of a supersubstantial God and considers it ill-founded (OP, I, 247-52). Boulainviller denies, as Régis proposes, that our sense of imperfection in body and mind necessarily implies the existence of a perfect Being through whom we are made aware of imperfection ('parce qu'on ne connaît les privations que par les réalités qui leur sont opposées'). He asserts firstly, that nature is not imperfect, that is unaccomplished, for as all beings conform to God's ideas of them, which are perfect, they too must be perfect; secondly, that as our ideas of perfection and imperfection are relative and finite, then our conception of a greater perfection will still fall short of what is absolute perfection; and thirdly, that not only can we not conceive properly of a perfect Being because He comprises 'une infinité d'attributs infinis qui nous sont impénétrables' (which thus denies Régis's proof of the existence of the perfect Being as the 'cause exemplaire' of the idea we have of Him), but also that we can only conceive of this Being as substantial 'puisque l'esprit humain ne peut avoir de perception que de ce qui est substance ou mode de substance' (OP, I, 251). Concluding his refutation of Régis's proof of a supersubstantial God Boulainviller thinks of him, and of all the others who would deny Spinoza's principles but who like Régis prove themselves unable to establish the existence of God, as 'des inconsiderés, en ce qu'ils combattent une preuve évidente que Spinoza fournit de l'existence d'un Dieu' (OP, I, 252). He continues:

Il est vrai que des principes de ce philosophe il résulte des conséquences qui ne s'accordent pas avec les dogmes de la Religion chrétienne, mais ne peut-on pas lui accorder ses principes et en éluder les conséquences qui nous sont contraires? (OP, I, 252)

This puts Boulainviller's objections to Spinoza's ideas of a rigorous determinism into a clearer perspective, for we see that it is not the principle which Boulainviller finds alarming so much as its consequences for human action.

Boulainviller concludes his text by arguing that as God may work in ways far beyond our comprehension, 'il n'y aurait pas lieu de réfuter les dogmes, les miracles et les mystères de la religion chrétienne, à cause que les philosophes ne les peuvent accorder avec les principes naturels qu'ils prétendent connaître, ni sous prétexte qu'il ne doit point avoir de contradiction en Dieu: comment juger de la contradiction d'effets dont nous ne connaissons pas les principes?' (OP, I, 252). Christianity is thus saved from the ravages of Spinoza's metaphysics not by the arguments of its own metaphysicians, rendered useless in the face of Spinozism's stricter logic, but by emphasis on reason's limited power (which, by encouraging the continued belief in miracles and Christian mystery in spite of the philosophical system Boulainviller has just been rationally defending, amounts to a complete denial of reason) and finally by an insistence on faith alone:

Aussi la Religion chrétienne est-elle donnée dans son établissement comme une religion divine, remplie de faits sur lesquels on ne nous propose pas de raisonner, mais de croire. (OP, I, 252)

The violence Boulainviller has had to do to his ideas of the complementary nature of faith and reason in order to bring about some sort of compromise between the doctrines of Spinoza and those of the Christian Church is an indication of the compelling influence that Spinoza was exercising on his metaphysical thinking.

The extent of this influence may be judged too by considering what Boulainviller says in his Jugements sur la nature de l'être et ses propriétés (OP, II, 42-63, no date). In his discussion of contingency and necessity, Boulainviller sees that human intelligence is the only area of activity with which we are acquainted that could be called contingent. Analysing the motors of this intelligent behaviour he finds that there are four:

'l'intellect', 'l'entendement', 'la sensation' and 'la volonté'. The first three work, he asserts, as mechanically as any purely corporal phenomenon, 'il n'y a donc aucune contingence' (OP, II, 55). As regards the will Boulainviller sees that opinion is divided as to whether its activity is contingent or necessary, naming Le Clerc and Spinoza respectively as examples of the opposed schools of thought. 'Au fond il n'y a que Spinoza qui démontre son hypothèse, et il le fait d'une manière qu'il n'est pas possible de réfuter, si l'on accorde son principe que l'homme n'a point les facultés dont on le doue libéralement' (OP, II, 56). Boulainviller's explanation of the nature of the will shows that he does:

En effet, la volonté prise abstraitement ne subsiste pas plus que l'humanité prise de même, et comme il serait absurde de dire que Pierre ou Paul fussent hommes par leur humanité, il est absurde de dire que l'on veut telle ou telle chose par volonté. On veut parce que l'on connaît ce qu'on désire, on désire parce que l'on est déterminé, donc l'on n'agit pas contingemment, encore que l'on ignore la cause de sa propre détermination. Il suffit de savoir qu'il n'y a point d'effet sans cause; que si l'on dit que cette cause est en l'homme et que c'est lui-même, Spinoza fait voir qu'on se trompe par la définition de la cause, nul n'étant cause de soi s'il n'existe nécessairement, ce qui ne convient point à l'homme. On conclura donc que l'homme ne fait aucune action que l'on puisse dire contingente, même dans les choses les plus volontaires, parce qu'il les fait à la vérité parce qu'il le veut, mais qu'il ne les veut que par spontanéité d'une part et détermination de l'autre; ainsi la volonté n'est qu'une manière de penser déterminée à certaine action quand on a la puissance de l'exécuter. (OP, II, 56)

Indeed the necessary nature of the universe extends far beyond the lowly condition of man:

Au-dessus de la nature de l'homme nous avons idée qu'il y a des intelligences incorporelles, mais nous ne les connaissons pas, si ce n'est par la commune nécessité où sont toutes les créatures de ne subsister qu'en autrui et par autrui. Il s'ensuit donc qu'elles sont déterminées à être et à agir par autrui, donc leurs actions ne sauraient être contingentes, puisqu'elles sont des effets d'une cause étrangère déterminée. Leurs actions, pour être volontaires, n'en sont pas moins nécessaires, c'est ce qu'il faut remarquer à l'égard de ce qui est intelligent.

Quant à Dieu, qui est la substance même puisque lui seul subsiste nécessairement et qu'il est sa propre cause, on ne peut douter qu'il ne soit libre suivant la définition de la cause libre, mais il ne s'ensuit pas que ses opérations soient contingentes, puisque son être est nécessaire. (OP, II, 56)

We may note here too the equation of God with (the one) substance, and that this Spinozist idea of the singularity and infinity of substance is adopted and defended by Boulainviller at the end of his text (OP, I, 61-63).

The notion of contingency is denied utterly in a small text entitled the Origine des estres et especes, described as the 'fruit d'une conversation retenüe imparfaitement'.¹ Its place is to be taken by a doctrine of material determinism. Boulainviller writes, 'tout ce qui est dit possible doit estre conceu comme existant ou ayant existé ou devant exister' (p. 3) and asserts that 'plus la connoissance de la mecanique augmentera plus la necessité d'une cause metaphisique diminuera et quand l'une sera parfaite l'autre sera zero c'est á dire nulle' (p. 4). He concludes by saying that 'on ne peut pas regarder le sentiment que les hommes ont de leurs actions comme un temoinage de leur liberté tout est déterminé dans l'ordre naturel, les hommes le sont avec sentiment ... et les estres inanimés le sont sans sentiment ny connoissance a raison de leur nature' (p. 5). Thus, for example, to explain the invention of the pendulum clock we need to consider firstly how technology made the invention possible and secondly why man should have found it necessary to invent it. 'Toutes les deux [parts of the explanation] sont également machinales et resultantes des loix du mouvement, mais la seconde estant accompagnie des sentiments d'une part, et des preceptes de l'autre paroist l'effet de la liberté a cause du canal par ou elle passe' (p. 5). The idea of man's free will is a fiction, merely a product of our own prejudice and religious dogma, and to speak of a miracle would be simply to admit our ignorance of the physical laws of nature.

We saw in the Histoire universelle that although Boulainviller's conception of Providence denied him a specifically Christian philosophy

1. In B.N. fonds français n. a. 11072 (pp. 1-5), the second volume of the Extraits des Lectures de Mr le Comte de Boulainviller avec des réflexions which provide Mme Simon with much of the material she has included in her edition of the philosophical works of Boulainviller. Is it significant that Mme Simon, staunch defender of Boulainviller's Christian orthodoxy and anti-spinozism (OP, I, x-xv) should have omitted this short but very interesting (although unfortunately undated) work?

of history, he did nonetheless, in a rather unclear way, express opinions as to the direction of history, opinions which, we noted, tended on the whole to see history's movement as one of decline (above pp.236-43). Somewhat paradoxically, in the Apogée du soleil, where Boulainviller effectively denies an intervening Providence (or indeed any Providence at all), we can see him adopt a Biblical philosophy of history. The reasons for the correspondence between Boulainviller's astrology and the Bible have already been discussed (above, p. 257), yet in spite of its expedient nature Boulainviller's espousal of the Biblical plan of history from the Creation to the Apocalypse seems to be more than simply convenient. The certainty of final destruction agrees both with Boulainviller's astrology and with his natural pessimism. Indeed Boulainviller's astrology foresees an intermediate 'ruine' between the Flood and the final 'embrasement' which although not bringing utter annihilation will probably leave less evidence of our existence than was left of those who lived before the Flood. 'Cette pensée fait bien sentir la vanité de nos travaux et sur tout celle de la gloire qu'on cherche si ardemment', notes Boulainviller not perhaps without a certain relish for the pessimism of his remark. Even the note of optimism he expresses with regard to the present time is only possible, we see, because of the long suffering men needs must endure as this next disaster approaches: 'hûreux donc le destin qui nous fait vivre en des temps qui quoyque fâcheux sont infiniment préférables à ceux-là' (AS, f. 76).

However, astrological calculation and a pessimistic world view notwithstanding, it may be that the 'embrasement' which Boulainviller foresees does not represent for him the complete and utter end of the world, for earlier on in the Apogée du soleil he had adopted the ancients' idea of a cycle of aeons. Boulainviller's astrological system needed a firm chronological point from which to begin and Boulainviller arrived at the date of 11th May 4229 B.C. This is not, however, the date of the creation of the earth but

simply the start of our period. Boulainviller cannot say whether there was a period before ours or not 'car je crois', he writes, 'qu'il est impossible d'en décider du moins par raport à la Terre'; he continues, 'je m'attache seulement à l'idée des Anciens Philosophes qui soutenoient que le rétablissement universel de toutes les choses naturelles se faisoit au commencement d'une certaine période' (AS, ff. 16-17).

III The role of Providence in the life of Mohammed

It may be objected against the interpretation put forward in this chapter of Boulainviller's attitude to divine intervention in world history that Boulainviller does at least refer to Providence as the active controller of historical events when he is discussing Arabia, Mohammed and the rise of Islam. Comparing Mohammed's nativity with the astrological situation of Mecca of the same time Boulainviller concludes: 'on ne peut s'empêcher de reconnoître qu'il devoit être l'instrument nécessaire et le moyen employé par la providence pour produire un si grand effet [the rise and spread of Islam]' (AS, f. 134). Boulainviller examines the 'thèmes' of other events in Mohammed's life which show 'en combien de manières il a plu à l'auteur de la nature de redoubler et de combiner les causes et les significations pour faire naître une certaine espèce de religion chez les arabes pour châtier les autres nations par leur moyen même aux dépens du Christianisme enfin pour les rendre maîtres du monde par la même voye' (AS, f. 136). However, Boulainviller's attitudes to Mohammed and to Islam's relation with Christianity are far from unambiguous and lacking in irony (below, pp.387-94) and it would be as well not to force any conclusions from these two references to an historically active Deity until we have considered Boulainviller's attitude to Providence in the last of our texts, La Vie de Mahomed.

Boulainviller's sympathetic attitude in La Vie de Mahomed to the Arabs, to Mohammed, and to Islam and the reason for such sympathy (deism) have already been noted (above, pp.163-66 and 171-75). It is important to keep in mind the arguments used by Boulainviller in his defence of the Arabs and of Mohammed against hostile Christian criticism, and in particular the subtlety and ambiguity of his procedure (below, pp.387-94), for many of the references he makes to Providence in this work are not simple, objective statements of his belief but rather contribute a great deal to the debunking of Christian notions of religious and cultural superiority and to the proposition that Mohammed and the religion he established, despite their imperfections, embody perfectly sincere and genuine approaches to the worship of the Supreme Being. Thus God is seen as responsible for the timely appearances of both Moses and Mohammed who were to lead their peoples back to simple worship of their Creator (VM, pp. 34-35). Similarly, Mecca and its temple, according to Arab tradition, were chosen by God, and Boulainviller examines the signs, supernatural or natural, of the sanctity and election of the temple in particular with great care and considerable sympathy for the Arabs' point of view (VM, pp. 57, 59, 63, and 88-96). Later on Mohammed is seen as the instrument God has chosen to bring about a momentous design: to punish wicked Christians and to destroy Roman hegemony in the East, to suppress the Persians and to teach the unity of God from India to Spain (VM, pp. 177-78). As a consequence of his election, the authenticity of which Boulainviller underlines by emphasizing the cosmic omnipotence of Him who chose Mohammed (VM, p. 177), the whole of his life prior to his vocation is seen as having been providentially guided. This is the case especially with the education he received whilst working as a merchant, namely physical endurance and knowledge of foreign countries (VM, pp. 217-19).

Such use of the idea of Providence is not without its irony. This can be appreciated in the exaggerated style Boulainviller occasionally employs. Concluding his enumeration of the great things Mohammed was destined to do,

Boulainviller proclaims enthusiastically: 'Effets prodigieux! et qui se rapportent mal à l'idée que l'on nous donne du même Mahomed; comme d'un Imposteur haïssable et malin, également rempli de défauts dans le corps et dans l'esprit' (VM, p. 178). In like vein Boulainviller talks of Providence calling the Arab nation 'à son tour, à gouverner l'Univers' (VM, p. 43) and of the 'dispositions que la Providence, ou la Nature avoient préparées pour le prodigieux changement qu'un seul homme, foible et dépourvu de moyens, a porté dans l'Univers' (VM, p. 105). These references to 'l'Univers' remind one very much of the emphatic style of Bossuet's Discours sur l'histoire universelle, which shows the title's epithet to be no mere figure of rhetoric.¹ Indeed the very opening of La Vie de Mahomed puts one in mind of the Bishop of Meaux:

La terre est un vaste théâtre, sur lequel il se passe de siècle en siècle quelque Tragédie singulière, sous la direction d'une Puissance supérieure qui partage à chaque Peuple des biens ou des maux, des châtimens et des recompenses, selon son bon-plaisir ou selon sa justice.² Mais si dans le nombre de ces divers spectacles il en est plusieurs que l'on peut dire particuliers, parce qu'ils ne sont représentés qu'à petit bruit et dans des lieux obscurs, ou qu'ils ne touchent que des Villes, des Contrées, des Royaumes séparez; il s'en voit aussi de si grands et de si généraux, qu'ils intéressent tous les hommes, et presque la Nature entière.
(VM, pp. 1-2)

But this is rather a device to impress upon western readers the importance for world history of Islam than a sincere expression of a belief in Providence.

For not all that happens is seen as the work of Providence. We saw a moment ago that it was Providence or Nature which prepared the way for the

1. 'Dieu tient du plus haut des cieux les rênes de tous les royaumes; il a tous les coeurs en sa main: tantôt il retient les passions; tantôt il leur lâche la bride; et par là il remue tout le genre humain' (Discours sur l'histoire universelle, edited by Jacques Truchet, p. 427). And in the 'avant-propos' to the same work, explaining to the Dauphin the utility of his 'universal map' of history, Bossuet writes: 'dans les cartes universelles vous apprenez à situer ces parties du monde dans leur tout; vous voyez ce que Paris ou l'Ile-de-France est dans le royaume, ce que le royaume est dans l'Europe, et ce que l'Europe est dans l'univers' (ibid., p. 40).
2. Compare the opening of Bossuet's Oraison funèbre de Henriette-Marie de France: 'Celui qui règne dans les cieux, et de qui relèvent tous les empires, à qui seul appartient la gloire, la majesté et l'indépendance, est aussi le seul qui se glorifie de faire la loi aux rois, et de leur donner, quand il lui plaît, de grandes et de terribles leçons' (Oraisons funèbres, edited by Jacques Truchet (Paris, 1961), p. 111).

great changes Mohammed was to introduce into the world. And in Boulainviller's discussions of the Arabs' and Mohammed's attitude to sex he tells us that Nature has destined this 'ouvrage' to be enjoyed by both man and woman and uses their pleasure rather 'pour son propre sentiment que pour l'avantage de ceux qui en jouissent' (VM, pp. 128 and 258). Destiny gives Mecca to Mohammed when he least expects it (yet this is seen as a sign of God's election of the place), and 'le Livre du Destin' tells of the imminent overthrow of the still powerful Persian empire (VM, pp. 175 and 199). Indeed the unfortunate Cosrou, king of Persia, is seen by the Easterners as 'l'un des plus rares exemples de la bizarrerie de la fortune' (VM, p. 369), having suffered greatly both at the beginning and end of his reign and yet having enjoyed great wealth and splendour.

At times, however, Boulainviller makes observations which argue rather more strongly than these generally conventional references to destiny and fortune against his acceptance of the Christian idea of Providence and in which we can perceive an attitude to the relation of God with His creation similar to those expressed in the Apogée du soleil. Such an observation is made in Boulainviller's criticism of star worship which, he says, mistakes the effect for the cause. Boulainviller does not deny that the stars 'seroient les causes réelles de tous les effets qu'on leur attribue' but he points out that they are simply the mechanical instruments 'subordonnés à la volonté de celui qui leur a donné le premier mouvement, dont tous les autres paroissent être les suites et les conséquences' (VM, p. 152). The stars, then, determine all events in the sublunar world yet receive their instructions from their Creator, but these 'instructions' are themselves neither free nor arbitrary for they depend upon 'la volonté du TOUT-PUISSANT: volonté qui n'est ni muable, ni occasionnelle, mais déterminée par un Décret éternel' (VM, p. 152).

The point is made again with regard to the spectacular success of Islam and its conquests. Boulainviller is discussing the lack of general approval

which Ockley had encountered in his attempt to establish a more sympathetic and a more historical interpretation of Mohammed and the rise of Islam: 'on retorquoit aussi-tôt contre lui l'idée d'une Imposture manifeste, tramée par un homme vil; soutenu par quelque heureux succès, malgré les défauts naturels de son Auteur, malgré son éducation dans la servitude, et malgré les attaques d'une épilipsie habituelle, capable toute seule d'abrutir l'homme le plus sensé et le plus courageux' (VM, p. 180).¹ Boulainviller continues:

Mr. OKLEY auroit certainement pu répondre à de telles objections: que supposant la vérité des faits, incontestez, et incontestables, selon l'espece de démonstration propre à l'Histoire, il s'ensuit; ou que les talens naturels des Auteurs d'une telle Imposture en ont facilité le succès; ou que la suprême Providence en a disposé par la voye des miracles. Conséquence si contraire à la conduite juste et sage que l'on doit supposer être essentielle à la Divinité, qu'il n'est point de conjoncture, ni disposition naturelle, propre à produire de tels événemens, qu'il ne faille plutôt accorder, que de recourir à la faveur des miracles. (VM, pp. 180-81)

It is true that these miracles are described as 'dispensez pour autoriser le mensonge' (and therefore it would not be surprising that Providence had no part to play in Islam's success) but the answers that Ockley, through Boulainviller, supplies to the questions of how it was possible that Islam should have been so victorious, and which had unleashed the crude, prejudiced reaction quoted above, allow us to perceive the irony behind the qualification. To explain the rapid spread of Islam Ockley points to 'les Faits historiques ... incontestables; ... [les] talens dont la Nature avoit comblé la personne de ce Mahomed; ... le courage et la capacité des Généraux et des Ministres qu'il avoit lui-même formez; ... [et] l'Enthousiasme et le Fanatisme dont la Nation entiere se trouvoit possédée au sujet d'une Religion qu'elle croyoit la plus simple, ou la plus intelligible, et qui étoit renouvelée dans un temps où le Christianisme n'étoit plus entendu de ceux

1. Boulainviller indicates that Ockley had voiced his disappointment in the preface to the second volume of his work. However, Ockley's disappointment here is confined to the criticisms of the 'fancifulness' of the history he was narrating. Simon Ockley, The Conquest of Syria, Persia and Ægypt by the Saracens, 2 vols (London, 1708 and 1718), vol. II, pp. vii - xix.

mêmes qui le professoient' (VM, p. 180).¹ The irony of 'le mensonge' immediately turns to bitter attack against the ignorant and prejudiced opinions of those, such as Prideaux,² who still see Mohammed and Islam in terms of imposture and complete sexual licence, and then against 'l'Héroïsme Chrétien' still intent on denying the body the pleasures to which it was destined (VM, pp. 181-82; and above, p.172).

The value of miracles is seriously questioned, if perhaps only implicitly, when Boulainviller, discussing the Arabs' demand for Mohammed to perform some miracle as proof of his prophetic status, points to the inappropriateness of this request (above, p. 181). Boulainviller argues that the precepts of morality, the essence of religion need no miraculous proof for they are self-evident. Similarly, 'l'Unité et la suprême Puissance de DIEU ... sont démonstratives par la simple Raison humaine' (VM, p. 275). Speaking of Christ Boulainviller remarks:

En effet, s'il a falu que le Messie opérât tant de merveilles, et se ressuscitât lui-même pour prouver sa Divinité, il n'a pas eu besoin de miracle pour faire recevoir sa Morale. Tout le monde y a généralement applaudi; et on l'admire encore aujourd'hui, quoiqu'on la pratique si peu. Ainsi Mahomed, en prêchant une semblable Morale, n'a eu d'ailleurs aucune vérité douteuse ou suspecte à persuader, si l'on en excepte le Dogme de la Résurrection, peu croyable aux hommes charnels.

(VM, pp. 274-75)³

The Arabs may be described here as 'hommes charnels' but if we remember the very high opinion of their culture, religion and learning that Boulainviller has expressed elsewhere in La Vie de Mahomed (and the complementary criticism of Christian superstitious belief and practice; above, pp.171-75) the Arab rejection of the doctrine of the Resurrection becomes much less damning for them than for it.

1. Ockley, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 13-14, 27-28, 38, 59-60, 68-69, 81-82, etc. We may note that Ockley sees Islam as a providential punishment of Christian decadence; *ibid.*, pp. 17-22.
2. Below, p.289 n. 2.
3. The same idea, that morality is the foundation of all established religion and that observance of social conventions and restraints is the way to please the Deity, is expressed by Montesquieu in the forty-sixth of the Lettres persanes; Usbek writes: 'dans quelque religion qu'on vive, l'observation des loix l'amour pour les hommes, la piété envers les parens, sont toujours les premiers actes de religion' (Œuvres complètes, edited by A. Masson, vol. 1 (part 3), p. 88).

Finally, if we turn to Boulainviller's discussion of the problem of the prophetic status of Mohammed and his mission, we shall find another instance of his arguing in favour of a natural and rational conception of the relation between God and His creation. Boulainviller's concern is to establish that Mohammed was a genuine prophet but equally to base this assertion on a natural, psychologically verisimilitudinous understanding of what prophecy is. Boulainviller exploits the distinction the Arabs make between prophecy as a 'lumière prophétique', that is 'un témoignage intérieur, qui rappelle constamment l'homme au plus parfait usage de sa Raison', and prophecy as 'un Don de Prophétie', which 'consiste proprement dans une Mission extraordinaire, pour annoncer aux hommes des vérités anciennes qu'ils ne connoissent plus, et qu'ils négligent' (VM, p. 202). In his discussion of the Hebrew prophets it is their extraordinary human qualities which are seen to constitute their being prophets rather than an unintelligible capacity accurately to foresee the events of the future: 'Ainsi nous reviendrons à croire avec les Arabes, que c'est bien moins la connoissance de l'avenir qui distingue et constitue le Prophete, que le talent de parler ou d'écrire avec une force capable de retirer les hommes de l'erreur, ou de les rappeler à l'attention qu'ils doivent particulièrement à la Vérité et à la Justice' (VM, pp. 273-74). This human and natural interpretation of what prophets do, corresponding to the Arab understanding of 'lumière prophétique', is sufficient to argue for the authenticity of Mohammed's prophetic status:

Il doit suffire qu'ils fassent voir que Mahomed a réellement possédé des talens extraordinaires pour le raisonnement, l'éloquence et la composition; et qu'il les ait employez à l'instruction des hommes, avec un si grand courage, qu'on a pu croire que Dieu en étoit l'auteur. Car c'est-là ce qui constitue le caractere de Prophete, bien plutôt que des prédictions de l'avenir, ordinairement si sujettes à n'être point entendues, ou à être si mal interprétées, que l'on n'en peut tirer de démonstration qu'après leur accomplissement, lequel n'arrive souvent que 7 ou 800 ans après la mort de ceux qui les ont prononcées. ... D'ailleurs, la résistance que l'on a longtemps apportée à son prétendu Ministère de Prophete, ne fait point de preuve contre lui, qui ne s'étende à tous ceux qui ont été appelés à une semblable fonction;

de qui les persecutions servent à présent de titre à leur Vocation, et convainquent leurs ennemis d'une malignité cruelle et opiniâtre, qui n'est plus contestée. (VM, pp. 276-77)

Furthermore, it is only in this human way that Mohammed is to be seen as a prophet, for Boulainviller denies him the rather more supernatural 'gift of prophecy'. The debate centres upon Mohammed's prophecy of the fall of the Persian empire, a debate which, as Boulainviller critically points out, has been marked on both sides, Arab and Christian, by prejudice and ignorance rather than by exact historical scholarship. Boulainviller conducts his own investigation and concludes that it would appear that Mohammed's prophecy did in fact come true. But he continues:

CEPENDANT, je suis bien éloigné d'accorder à Mahomed, en conséquence de cet aveu, un Don de Prophétie, qui puisse servir à autoriser sa prétendue Mission. Car premièrement, il ne s'agit ici que d'une expression hasardée, qui, n'étant point soutenue dans le même Livre par d'autres Prophéties de même nature, ne peut faire de preuve intégrale. Secondement, il n'est pas extraordinaire qu'une imagination très vive, capable de fournir des idées et des expressions toutes singulieres, étant encore échauffée par de puissans objets, et par l'interêt le plus sensible et le plus actif, atteigne quelquefois certaines vérités que le hazard semble lui présenter, plutôt que la réflexion.

Ainsi Mahomed, le plus grand et le plus beau parleur de son siècle, frappé d'un enthousiasme de Religion, a cru découvrir dans l'avenir un événement qui n'a en lui-même rien que de possible, puisque la fortune des armes est toujours journaliere. Il l'a ensuite annoncé avec une hardiesse, qui a été produite par sa persuasion fanatique. Mais la marque certaine qu'il n'a pas compté lui-même sur une telle Prophétie, c'est qu'après son accomplissement, il ne paroît pas qu'il en ait fait aucun usage, et qu'il ait laissé à ses Successeurs le soin de la faire valoir. Au reste, il ne faut pas oublier d'observer ici, que cette Prophétie est la seule expresse et formelle qui soit contenue dans l'Alcoran; parce que, encore que l'on en attribue quantité d'autres à Mahomed, elles ne se trouvent rapportées que dans les Recueils de ses actions et de ses paroles, qui ont été composez après sa mort, et qui n'ont pas la même autorité que le Livre de ses Révelations.

(VM, pp. 372-74)

Boulainviller is critical of the prejudice which blindly supports or denies Mohammed's claim to prophecy, and which simply accepts as literal truth the prophecies found in Scripture, for it keeps us in ignorance of 'le véritable usage que Dieu vouloit que les hommes fissent alors de la Prophétie: lequel tendoit peut-être moins à soutenir une Religion déjà formée par une Loi positive, et par une pratique de plusieurs siècles, qu'à corriger les moeurs contraires qui se glissoient dans la Société' (VM, p. 360).

IV Conclusion

Boulainviller's idea of where the real importance of prophecy lies may help us to come to an acceptable conclusion of this discussion of Boulainviller's attitudes towards Providence and its relation with the historical world. For what La Vie de Mahomed shows is that whereas Boulainviller may in effect deny the reality of an historically active Providence, he does not question the existence of the Supreme Being itself and on the contrary loudly proclaims it. Metaphysically and 'astrologically' God is for Boulainviller rather remote from His creation and is really denied the possibility of changing the nature of that creation or the course of historical events. But the God of true religion is still seen as the 'Créateur de l'Univers, juste Récompensateur du bien et du mal' (VM, p. 244), for as we saw above (pp.158-61), the great importance of religion for Boulainviller, as well as to expound a rational and clear understanding of the Deity, is to control and regulate social behaviour. Boulainviller's deism restores the balance which his astrology might have upset, for it may be that the attitudes we saw him adopt vis-à-vis Providence in his Apogée du soleil were distorted and pushed to extremes by his great enthusiasm to demonstrate as convincingly as he could the truth of his new astrological system.¹

1. Even if we discount the tempering quality of Boulainviller's deism, however, our discussion of the Histoire universelle and the Apogée du soleil has revealed that although Boulainviller interprets Biblical history in a boldly rationalistic manner there is still sufficient ambiguity in his narratives and reliance on traditional modes of thought to show that Colonna d'Istria's appreciation of Boulainviller's critical approach to ancient and Biblical history is perceptibly false. The critic writes: 'Ce qui s'oppose à l'idéal de l'historien comme au rêve de l'astrologue, c'est l'intervention divine mettant le miracle à la place de la loi, se substituant à l'action plus prochaine des influences cosmiques. Il faut montrer qu'il y a un enchaînement, un ordre éternel sur lesquels ne peut rien la puissance divine. Le dogme de la Création, tel qu'il est interprété par la tradition biblique, assigne à l'histoire dans un passé trop rapproché de nous une borne inadmissible. Il faut, à tout prix, renverser cette barrière qui empêche l'historien de rechercher les origines véritables de la nature et de l'humanité' (op. cit., p. xviii). It is significant that Colonna d'Istria's consideration of Boulainviller's developing critical attitude towards the doctrine of Providence starts with his Apogée du soleil and thus ignores the sincere

Paradoxically, however, it is this astrological system, with its practical denial of providential intervention, that makes Boulainviller's Apogée du soleil much more a work of universal history than his Histoire universelle which still supports, in a rather unorthodox manner, the idea of Providence. According to Niebuhr

the Biblical faith in a divine sovereignty which unifies history ... remains a permanently necessary basis for the idea of universal history.¹

The fact that the unity is not established empirically by tracing the interpenetration of cultures and civilizations with each other, prevents a false universalism in which the destiny of a particular nation or culture is made into a false centre of meaning for the whole story of mankind. While Israel does have a central place in the drama of history, it has no special security ... In the 'new covenant' or the 'New Testament' the triumph of Israel as the clue to the meaning of history is even more specifically denied. The revelation of Christ as the centre of, and clue to, history's meaning, is both the negation and the fulfilment of all partial meanings in history,² as they are embodied in national, imperial, and even world-wide cultures.

Bossuet's Discours sur l'histoire universelle, because of its emphatic Biblical and finally Christian understanding of Providence, is quite rightly called a universal history, but because Boulainviller's Histoire universelle lacks this resolutely Biblical and Christian conception of the will of God it also lacks any unifying theme. The Apogée du soleil, however, with its mechanistic understanding of the course of history, possesses a perfect unifying theme in the westerly progress of the apogee of the sun.

The importance of Boulainviller's astrology for this chapter has been its rigorous determinism of sublunar events and its relation with the idea of Providence. Its importance for Boulainviller was as a system of prediction and of historical explanation. Let us now turn to consider further Boulainviller's methods of explanation in his historical writings in the much wider context of a general discussion of his historiographical methodology.

and painful effort in Boulainviller's Histoire universelle to effect a reconciliation between science and traditional dogma.

1. Niebuhr, Faith and History (London, 1949), p. 127.
2. Ibid., pp. 120-21.

PART FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this final section is to examine in detail the principal methodological elements of Boulainviller's historical composition. These elements include use and criticism of historical authority and evidence, the interpretation of mythology, chronology, and narrative technique. In a more general sense method has been an important subject throughout the thesis. 'The History of France' was concerned not to establish Boulainviller's principles of political philosophy but to examine how these principles and prejudices were presented and defended; 'The Morality of History', although it discussed important matters to do with Boulainviller's whole conception of historiography, showed how 'parti-pris' could be expressed through the medium of moral discrimination; and in 'Providence and Destiny' (a subject naturally concerned with ideas of explanation and causality) we considered Boulainviller's criticisms and explanations of miraculous events and prophetic utterances recorded in the Old Testament. To conclude, therefore, what has in large part been a study of Boulainviller's general historiographical methodology, it will be profitable and necessary to examine his practices and techniques of writing history, paying especial attention to his sources of fact and to his principles of organizing the historical narrative.

What is quite apparent from even a casual study of Boulainviller's historical writings, and in particular of his Abrégé de l'histoire universelle, his Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil, and his Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France, is that history for Boulainviller is systematic.¹ Not only are political points to be defended (as one might expect) and consequently facts to be interpreted in particular ways,

1. As it was indeed for other historians: discussing a period in the chronology of early French history Boulainviller writes, 'ainsi nous avons un témoin oculaire de ce qui se passa depuis 428, jusqu'à 431, entre les Romains et les François: sur quoi on peut dire, qu'il y a lieu de s'étonner que les PP. Sirmond, Labbe et Petau, ayent pu rejeter l'expédition

but even the minutiae of historical dating and the vagaries of etymology are discussed by Boulainviller with a passion that is at times surprising. Directing the systematic elaboration of (particularly Biblical) chronology, the interpretation of myth and fable, the 'principles' of etymology, and indeed the composition (or perhaps the compilation) of the narrative itself, is an avowedly rationalist method the essential ingredients of which are 'vraisemblance', 'convenance', and criticism, liberally spiced with imagination and conjecture.

We may begin our examination of Boulainviller's methodology by discussing his procedures for collecting his raw material: the facts.

de Clodion sur Cambray et le reste de la Belgique jusqu'à l'année 445, contre des preuves si précises: mais selon leur système il falloit trouver place au règne de Pharamond, pour conserver l'autorité de Tiro Prosper (an authority which, as Boulainviller shows - MH, pp. 96-97, there is good reason to doubt), MH, p. 101.

Chapter Ten

The Sources of Historical Fact

I Primary sources

The principal sources of Boulainviller's historical material are, naturally enough, documentary evidence and the works of contemporary and later historians. Archaeological evidence plays no significant part in Boulainviller's histories of France whereas, such as it is, it is given great importance in his narration of ancient history. Boulainviller's most important source of information about the ancient past is, however, other historical narratives, in particular the Old Testament. Secondary material is of course extremely valuable to Boulainviller in the writing of French history too, but it is in this domain that documentary evidence, where available, is perhaps even more useful to him.

The high regard in which Boulainviller holds the consultation of documents is made quite clear in his Introduction à l'abrégé cronologique /sic/ de l'histoire des reynes de France depuis le commencement de la monarchie françoise jusqu'à Francois premier.¹ He writes,

Je me suis servi pour la Composition de cét abregé /des/ imprimés, des Manuscrits, des Inventaires, des Chartes du Tresor des registres des memes Chartes, des memoires de la Chambre des Comptes et des pieces que j'ay tirées de differentes Archives.

Je n'ay rien avancer /sic/ sans citer le lieu ou je l'ay pris et cela le plus fidellement que je l'ay pû. (p. 199)²

However, as one could imagine, the use Boulainviller makes of documentary evidence in his writings on French history is very often directed towards the support of his political thesis.

Yet on many occasions documents are used simply to establish historical fact. As Boulainviller writes in his Histoire universelle, 'l'histoire seroit peu de chose sans la connoissance des temps et des lieux dont elle raporte les événements' (HU, I, 10), and he often refers to charters and

1. Bibliothèque municipale de Nantes, MS no. 1822, pp. 195-233.

2. The 'abrégé' itself is missing and thus it is not possible to see whether this remark is true.

documents, especially in the rather chronicle-like Mémoires historiques, to ascertain the date of a ruler's birth, accession, or death, the founding of a monastery, or some such other 'fact' of history.¹ Usually the information recorded in documents is accepted by Boulainviller with little reflection, but he is by no means blind to the problems attendant upon the correct use of such evidence. Discussing the filiation of Robert, Marquis de France, Boulainviller writes:

Je trouve une impossibilité, sinon Physique, du moins Morale, que Robert eut été pourvu du Gouvernement de la Marche de France, en qualité d'un des meilleurs Capitaines de son tems, bien auparavant que son pere et son ayeul aient paru dans le Monde. Quand on propose des filiations, et qu'on prétend les rendre probables par le secours de quelques Titres, il ne faut pas tellement négliger la probabilité même, que l'on choque absolument le bon sens et la droite raison, contre lesquels les Titres ne sçauroient prévaloir; ainsi sans contester sur ce sujet des pièces qui prouvent que le Comte Eccard et son fils Nebelong ont tous deux vécu jusqu'en 885, il paroîtra incroyable à tous ceux qui y feront réflexion, que Robert, petit-fils d'Eccard, se trouve pourvu de la plus grande Dignité du Royaume en conséquence de son mérite, 24 ans avant la mort de son ayeul.

(MH, p. 486)

As well as making simply chronological and 'antiquarian' use of evidence,² Boulainviller does at times direct the information contained in documents to a more satisfyingly historical end, as, for example, in his concluding from the provision of greater penalties for the murder of royally appointed judges (article 56 of the Salic Law) that 'il n'étoit pas extraordinaire parmi les François de se vanger de la personne de sa Cause sur les Juges qui l'avoient décidée' (MH, p. 190). Similarly, the life of 'Sainte Salaberge' and other documents are used to argue for the minister Ebrouin's territorial ambition as the cause of war between Dagobert and Thierry in 677 (MH, p. 278).³ Boulainviller recognizes too the greater understanding

1. For example, MH, pp. 210, 222, 263-64, 277, 279-80, 285, 287, 288, etc.

2. See, for example, État de la France (Londres, 1737), II, 380; III, 352; and IV, 386.

3. It is curious that in the discussion of this war and its causes Boulainviller should go as far as to quote from evidence inimical to his main political thesis. He writes: 'A l'égard des titres particuliers, il y a une Charte de Childebart III fils de Thierry, qui adjuge à l'Abbaye de St. Denis une amende encouruë par un particulier pour n'avoir pas pris les armes lors du ban, fait à l'occasion de cette guerre: elle est rapportée dans la Diplomatique, num. 21, voici les termes ...' (and

documents bring to the historian of the 'usages' of the times he is studying. Thus the ordinance of Charles le Chauve's parlement held at Pissy sur la Seine in 864, 'une des plus considérables qui nous reste dans l'Antiquité', is particularly valuable for its information concerning the state of France's currency at the time and the measures, discussed in great detail by Boulainviller, taken by Charles to maintain its value (MH, pp. 420-25).¹ Moreover, documents are seen to be especially important for the study of France's constitutional history. Boulainviller writes:

Si par mes précédentes Lettres, on a connu ce que sont essentiellement les Etats du Royaume et les trois Ordres qui les composent, on n'a pas encore vu de quelle maniere ils ont formé leurs délibérations, non plus que l'étendue de leur jurisdiction; mais je n'ai pu et je ne pourai pas même l'expliquer, qu'à mesure que les faits se demeleront par le secours des anciens monumens qui nous en sont demeurez.

(HAG, II, 201)

It is in this area of historical debate, in particular the history of the parlements and the growth of royal absolutism, that we witness Boulainviller's most interesting and perhaps most characteristic use of documentary material.

Boulainviller is always ready to welcome documents that will support his historical campaign against increasing monarchical ambition and his vision of the old nobility as the 'généreux' guardians of the nation's liberties. An important moment in French history, certainly for the first of Boulainviller's aims, is the parlement held by Philippe Auguste at

Boulainviller cites the text; MH, p. 278). However, in his refutation of Boulainviller's portrayal of the primitive French constitution, in particular the limited power of the Merovingian kings, Damiens de Gomicourt refers to this very text as evidence of the strength of royal authority; Dissertation historique et critique, pour servir à l'histoire des premiers temps de la monarchie françoise, in Mélanges historiques et critiques contenant diverses pièces relatives à l'histoire de France, 2 vols (Amsterdam and Paris, 1768), I, 68.

1. It is interesting to note, however, that at the end of Boulainviller's discussion of the valuable administrative, and thus social, information to be found in this document, he should write: 'il y a différens autres articles, de la discution desquels on pourroit recueillir quantité d'anciens usages, mais comme cet Extrait n'est déjà que trop long, quoique je n'aye pas cru allonger vainement cet Ouvrage par le détail qu'il contient, je reviens à l'Histoire' (MH, p. 425).

Melun in 1216. The detailed history of the parlement, together with the events that preceded it and made it necessary, is Boulainviller's illustration of the opportunism and chicanery of the clerks and monarch which burgeoned as disputes arising from 'la nouvelle propriété des biens' provided opportunities for the king and his accomplices to extend their power and influence at the expense of the dispossessed nobles. It is a tale of injustice and deceit where each step noted by Boulainviller is supported by reference to a contemporary document (HAG, I, 345-50). He concludes:

Tous ces Actes, qui se trouvent au célèbre Cartulaire de Champagne, ont été imprimez dans le Recueil de Chantereau; et sont par conséquent si certains, que l'on ne peut former aucune difficulté à ce sujet, pour justifier la conduite de cette intrigue, ou la forme de la procédure, ni pour disculper la France du blâme de la chicane, qui a pénétré de si bonne heure jusqu'à la Cour des Rois, qui auroit dû être l'azile de la véritable justice, si elle avoit été bannie du reste du Royaume. Et ceci rendra sans doute plus croyable tout ce que j'ai à proposer dans la suite, pour faire connoître le progrès commun que l'ambition des Rois d'une part, et la finesse des Lettrez ou Juristes de l'autre, ont fait peu à peu, pour ruiner les prérogatives des Fiefs, après avoir détruit la gloire et la distinction du Sang François, en attribuant toute la Noblesse à la grandeur des titres et à la dignité des Fiefs; et ensuite pour ruiner les Fiefs mêmes, en procurant leur démembrement, et se jouant des Loix, pour en faire dépendre la possession de la volonté du Prince, nonobstant cette fidélité des Seigneurs et des Vassaux, qui devoit faire la sureté publique.¹
(HAG, I, 350-51)

On several occasions Boulainviller adduces documentary evidence of the self-seeking and machiavellian behaviour of France's kings,² resorting to hyperbole in the case of Louis XI - perhaps appropriately in view of his contempt for this monarch - to express the cruelties exercised by this prince upon certain of his prisoners, 'faits', declares Boulainviller, 'qui ne pouroient être crus ni même imaginez sans une preuve si constante' (a 'requête' of 1483 made by one of Louis's captives, the younger prince of Armagnac; (HAG, III, 226-27)). Such morally critical use of evidence

1. We may note here the disdainful tone, paradoxical in a discussion which is so dependent for its effect upon indisputable and accessible evidence, with which Boulainviller views the shift of nobility from the person to his 'title'. Boulainviller's attitude towards the authentication of claims to nobility will be examined shortly.

2. See, for example, HAG, II, 129-33, 148, 190-91, 193 and 198-99.

b/ is balanced by Boulainviller's using documents more constructively in order to show the parlements cooperating (especially financially) with the king, as they should, and to illustrate their efforts to control the developing power of the monarchy. Discussing the reign of Philippe IV, Boulainviller remarks:

Enfin ... la Noblesse, le Clergé, et le Peuple du Royaume, également oppressez et fatiguez par les entreprises réitérées de ce Prince, prirent la résolution d'un concert unanime de s'unir, pour repousser ses vexations continuelles, et pour obtenir la réparation de leurs griefs, Il [sic] reste au Trésor des Chartes, layette Ligue des Nobles, huit originaux de ces associations des Provinces, dans lesquels on voit le concours du Clergé, de la Noblesse, et du Tiers Etat, et quelle étoit l'extrémité où la conduite obstinée du Roi et l'inexécution de ses promesses les avoit réduits: mais on y voit en même tems qu'ils vouloient garder à la Couronne le respect et la fidélité qui lui étoient dus, au moyen de la justice qu'ils demandoient. Ce sont ici les derniers titres de notre liberté: ainsi il ne faut pas trouver mauvais que j'allonge cette lettre à leur sujet, je choisis entre ces huit Chartes, celle qui me paroît la plus courte, par laquelle on peut juger de toutes les autres. En voici les termes. (HAG, II, 91-92)

And Boulainviller goes on to give the text of the letter. The tone of this remark by Boulainviller, lamenting lost opportunity and the decline of heroic virtue, has been noted before in connexion with his 'consoling' reference to the documentary evidence which, but for its complete neglect, would have secured for France its own Magna Carta (HAG, II, 202, quoted above, p.112). Indeed, the purpose of Boulainviller's extensive analysis of the documents demonstrating Louis X's acquiescence in provincial and noble rights and privileges (HAG, II, 97-125) is to show that, contrary to what one might believe 'today', such independence did exist, 'puisque les Chartes raportent et confirment de la maniere la plus évidente les droits dont jouissoient nos peres, et dont ils craignoient dès-lors le futur anéantissement' (HAG, II, 126).

It is precisely because seventeenth-century society was so ignorant, Boulainviller believed, of the very different conditions that prevailed in former times that the wider dissemination, greater accessibility, and more responsible care of the sequestered charters and documents are so important. On several occasions Boulainviller complains about the lack

of evidence, a lack naturally prejudicial to his side of the political argument between king and noble subjects, or at least indicates that the necessary evidence is missing.¹ Boulainviller's great concern for a full and proper use of documents is readily seen in his Préface critique au journal de Saint Louis. While recognizing the need for its correction and improvement, Boulainviller nevertheless praises the work of seventeenth-century scholars, in particular André Duchesne and the Benedictines, who have begun the laborious but essential task of collecting, ordering, and publishing the documents without which French history 'était sèche et aride jusqu'au désagrément'.² Many documents, however, are still inaccessible, although an equally distressing obstacle to historical study in France is, Boulainviller feels, the frivolous taste of the public for whose historical reading matter 'l'espèce de poésie courante dans les chansons ou dans les pièces du théâtre, les historiottes et les romans suffisent'.³ The serious study of history is essential if a nation's rights and freedoms are to survive:

Les autres nations, plus portées à la réflexion que nous ne le sommes, et par conséquent plus tenaces de leurs coutumes et des droits qu'elles s'attribuent, ont fait aussi plus de cas de l'histoire et l'ont, pour ainsi dire, regardée comme la preuve la plus légitime qu'elles puissent donner, chacune à son égard, des libertés et propriétés dont elles jouissent. C'est ainsi que les Allemands prouvent leur possession constante des droits régaliens attachés à la propriété des grands fiefs ou des fiefs immédiats; c'est ainsi que les Anglais justifient les droits₄ de leur Parlement et la franchise de leurs personnes et de leurs biens.

It is for this reason that Boulainviller is so envious of England's good fortune, the great collection of manuscript material compiled by Thomas Rymer:

Le recueil de Rymer, qui contient de fidèles copies de tout ce qui est conservé aux archives de la Tour de Londres par rapport au gouvernement, sera un témoignage éternel de l'amour que cette nation a pour la vérité,

1. See, for example, MH, pp. 177-78, 198; HAG, I, 338; II, 20-21, 66-67, 77, and 307.
2. R. Simon, Un Révolté du grand siècle: Henry de Boulainviller, p. 85.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

malgré les intérêts qui la divisent et malgré les fréquentes révolutions que nous prétendons qui la déshonorent, et dont par cette raison elle aurait eu intérêt de déguiser les motifs; mais cela n'a point empêché ni les souverains, ni les grands, ni les peuples de contribuer unanimement à ce bel ouvrage, les uns par leurs bienfaits et les autres par les permissions et facilités données pour fouiller dans un lieu consacré depuis tant d'années aux secrets et aux mystères de l'Etat.

What a contrast this presents with Boulainviller's compatriots who, 'réduits à craindre la moindre apercevance de [leur] première liberté', leave their precious documents 'sous les voûtes de la Sainte-Chapelle et dans le magasin de la Chambre des Comptes' simply to decay or to be eaten away.²

To compensate for this loss Boulainviller not only turns to the compilations of Duchesne, the Benedictines, and others, but also to much secondary material, contemporary and modern. Indeed, as we shall see, the accounts of historians and the systems of chronologers are, as far as ancient history is concerned, indispensable. Boulainviller's complete dependence on secondary sources for his life of Mohammed too is quite openly admitted: 'Je ne sai point l'Arabe; et par conséquent je suis fort éloigné de pouvoir puiser dans les sources, faute d'une telle connoissance. Mais je suis néanmoins si touché des merveilles de cette Histoire, que je n'ai pu me refuser la satisfaction de ramasser en un Corps ce que j'en ai appris par les voyes les plus communes, et par des traductions de differens de ses morceaux détachez' (VM, p. 8).³ Although often content in all his historical narratives simply to refer to the authority of 'history' (or an impersonal 'on'), Boulainviller, particularly in the Mémoires historiques and the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France, is most assiduous in citing his sources.⁴

1. Ibid., p. 89.

2. Ibid., p. 90. This cowardly deference to absolutist sensitivity is very much the product of Louis XIV's administration - in particular, 'la trop fréquente ignorance des Ministres, que la vérité fait trembler mal à propos' - for even Cardinal Richelieu allowed the publication of Duchesne's compilation 'de tant de monumens de l'ancienne Liberté' (HAG, I, 194).

3. Boulainviller makes particular use of d'Herbelot, Ockley, and Prideaux.

4. Complete references are, however, the exception rather than the rule.

As with much of the documentary evidence adduced, many references are made to secondary material in order to establish historical 'facts' (dates, the details of wars and treaties, etc.). Such facts are obviously for Boulainviller an important part of historical narration, as we can see from the following example:

La foule des Auteurs éloigne extrêmement la naissance de Charlemagne, fils aîné de Pepin, qu'ils rejettent jusqu'à l'année 747, un Moderne prétend au contraire, que ce fut le premier événement de l'année 742, fondé sur ce que ce Prince est mort, suivant Eghinard, à l'âge de 72 ans, le 28 Juin 814: il prétend aussi que c'est par abus que l'on fait naître ce même Prince au Palais d'Ingelsheim, proche de Mayence, puis-que l'on a preuve que depuis l'an 741, jusqu'à la fin de 742, Pepin et Berthe sa femme ne quitterent point la Neustrie. Pour moi, je ne suis pas tout-à-fait de son opinion, parce que la Chronique d'Adelme, que quelques-uns attribuent au même Eghinard, dit expressément, sur l'an 814, que l'Empereur Charles mourut étant prêt d'achever sa 71 année; de sorte que suivant ce compte, il ne pouvoit être né au plutôt qu'au mois de Février 743. La Chronique de Saint Cibar d'Angoulême marque la même durée de la vie de ce Prince, et le tout est confirmé par son Epitaphe, qui porte qu'il mourut Septuagenaire. D'ailleurs, la France Occidentale étoit le partage de Pepin et non l'Austrasie, qui apartenoit à son frere, et l'on peut dire qu'il ne lui convenoit pas de mener sa femme faire ses couches en d'autres Etats que les siens, sans aucune cause raisonnable. (MH, pp. 329-30)

Among the many things Boulainviller finds to censure in the work of le Père Daniel is the refusal to enter into similar discussions of the minutiae of French history (HAG, I, 201-02).

Dependent as he is upon secondary sources, however, Boulainviller is not unaware of their shortcomings. He criticizes Gregory of Tours's narrative for its compression of time and its tendency to seek historical significance in extraordinary natural events (MH, p. 109).¹ Yet Boulainviller has reason enough to be grateful to the Merovingian bishop: 'toutefois nous devons reconnoître que c'est un monument inestimable par raport aux antiquitez de la Nation, desquelles nous n'aurions aucune connoissance sans son secours. Ainsi Fredegair, qui a continué les Annales Françoises d'une

1. This second of Boulainviller's criticisms is somewhat unfair, for Gregory's recording of the eclipse of the sun in 590 (a year of fighting between the French and the Bretons which resulted in 'un acte de soumission ... regardé comme un titre important pour justifier la souveraineté de nos Rois sur la Bretagne') is used by Boulainviller as corroboration of his chronology of French history (MH, p. 235).

maniere encore plus resserrée et plus obscure, nous servira de règle pour les événemens suivans' (MH, pp. 235-36). And sources which include fabulous, improbable, or fictitious details are more or less gently reproved.¹ But Boulainviller's more telling criticism of his secondary material is reserved for those occasions when rather than some picturesque historical detail, the subject under discussion is one much closer to his particular historical thesis, such as the nature of the Frankish and medieval French constitutions or the status of Mohammed's prophetic mission.²

The partisan attitude Boulainviller often adopts towards his sources is well illustrated in his emphatic use of them when discussing the Frankish conquest of Gaul and 'la liberté des François'. Critical of the generally held opinion that it was Clovis who subdued Gaul, as it were, single-handedly, Boulainviller writes: 'j'ai toujours été choqué de ce mécompte de nos Historiens, qui, sans en excepter aucun, ont manqué à cet égard de fidélité et d'exactitude dès le principe'. Immediately afterwards, however, Boulainviller enjoys his sources' full support: the Franks fought so long against the Romans only in order to ensure their perfect liberty, 'c'est ainsi que tous les Historiens et tous les Auteurs en parlent, sans qu'aucun y contredise' (HAG, I, 25 and 26-27; my italics). In like vein Boulainviller's

1. For example, VM, pp. 211 and 216; MH, pp. 96-97. 105, 237, 251 and 313; HAG, I, 16-17.
2. Although recognizing his debt to Prideaux, Boulainviller sees him as unable to shed his antipathetical, Christian views of the Prophet; VM, p. 181. In his work The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet (London, 1697) Humphrey Prideaux is free of the coarser Christian superstition and prejudice regarding Mohammed (e.g. ridiculous stories of the Koran's composition, and the Prophet's magnetic iron coffin; pp. 48-49 and 134) but he remains convinced of Mohammed's imposture as a 'thing of extraordinary Craft, carried on with all the Cunning and Caution imaginable' (p. 48). Indeed, believing the whole Islamic enterprise to be a providential punishment of the East-West schism of the Christian Church, Prideaux aims specifically to warn contemporary schismatics (Quakers and particularly Deists) of the possible retribution their religious divergence might bring (pp. xi-xvi). Prideaux is especially critical of what he sees as Mohammed's practice of restricting his adherents' carnal appetites whilst yet granting himself total licence, 'for it seems, the old Lecher feared his Lust should not be sufficiently provided for, if any thing less than the whole Sex were allowed him for the gratifying of it; and therefore would endure no restraint or limitation upon himself herein, how strictly soever he lay it upon others' (p. 152). It is this which triggers off Boulainviller's scathing criticism of Christian abstinence (above, p. 172).

political persuasions can be seen to inspire, for example, his criticism of the genealogy of ~~Hugues~~ Capet constructed by Guillaume de Nangis, a supporter of the Capetian dynasty (MH, p. 520), and his criticism of the opinion advanced by 'deux Historiens de réputation' that the Duke of Normandy was made Regent by the authority of the Parlement of Paris, an authority which, according to Boulainviller, belonged to the States General alone (HAG, II, 273, 277-78, and 280).

It is in such necessary scrutiny of accounts of French history that we can appreciate Boulainviller's great debt to the evidence. Referring to the 'Chartes et les Ordonnances' dating from the reign of Charlemagne, Boulainviller argues that the term 'vassal', used 'pour exprimer un Homme engagé au service d'un autre pour la possession de quelques terres', proves that feudalism was a Carolingian innovation and so accuses the falsity of Chantereau le Fèvre's 'system' which sees the origin of the fiefs as belonging solely to ~~Hugues~~ Capet's political manoeuvrings (HAG, I, 294-95). Again, discussing the opinion of some modern historians ('et le Père Daniel entr'autres') that those members of the old nobility who waged war against the king were traitors and rebels, Boulainviller refers to, and quotes from, 'l'Ordonnance de St. Louis, qui justifie non seulement que l'on n'étoit ni rebelle, ni séditieux, pour faire la guerre au Roi, mais qu'il étoit souvent du devoir et de l'honneur de la faire' (HAG, I, 333-34). Similarly, documents (including recently published English sources) support Boulainviller in his constant struggle to deflate the opinions of the 'Gens de la Loi' regarding their own constitutional importance (HAG, II, 174-78 and 309). The frustration Boulainviller feels when even indirect access to such essential documentation is denied him can be perceived in his outburst against the historians of Gregory's day: 'la négligence des Auteurs, nous laisse dans l'ignorance de la plupart des circonstances importantes: féconds et prolixes sur les affaires du Clergé ou sur les Miracles, ils ne touchent jamais qu'en passant la Discipline

Françoise et l'ordre du gouvernement' (MH, pp. 177-78). Boulainviller's understanding of why this should be so reveals an aristocratic disdain for his self-appointed task: 'aussi faut-il reconnoître qu'ils n'avoient garde de prévoir que les affaires publiques changeroient tellement de principe et de forme, que leurs neveux seroient obligez d'étudier les moindres formules, pour y trouver les traces de ce qui se pratiquoit alors' (MH, p. 178).

Yet Boulainviller is an imaginative and enterprising historian, not easily embarrassed by a mere lack of evidence. The paucity of information concerning important aspects of the Franks' 'ancienne discipline' is overcome, as we have seen (above pp. 75-6), by the authority of Boulainviller's own account and his a priori conception of Frankish liberty.¹ Admittedly, Boulainviller's vision of Frankish society is not pure imagination for he relies a great deal upon the Germania of Tacitus, yet for an historian who in other contexts is most critical of anachronism (above, pp. 24-25), his apparent heedlessness of the fact that the Roman historian was describing a situation in existence hundreds of years before the Franks conquered Gaul is indicative of his interest in accepting this 'evidence'.² The lack of evidence in a more particular historical debate - pretension to nobility - calls for great ingenuity from Boulainviller and involves him, as we shall see, in another compromise of historiographical principle.

1. 'By and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation'; E. H. Carr, What Is History? (Penguin Books, 1973; first published by Macmillan in 1961), p. 23.
2. Damiens de Gomicourt utters sharp criticism of Boulainviller's anachronistic use of the authority of Tacitus. He writes: 'sans aucune vraisemblance [il ne fait] aucune différence des Francs habitans la Germanie, et des Francs cultivateurs des Gaules; comme si le climat, l'étendue du pays, les richesses, le desir de la conquête et la conquête même, en causant des révolutions dans le caractere et dans les moeurs des peuples, n'en produisoient pas dans la forme du Gouvernement, qui est toujours une suite des moeurs'; Mélanges historiques et critiques, I, 17.

II The role of evidence in claims to noble lineage

Normally so insistent upon the correct and ample use of evidence,¹ Boulainviller effects a peculiar reversal when he comes to the delicate matter of determining the right procedure for investigating the authenticity of claims to centuries of nobility. The problem is clear: nobles of recent date (many of whom will have bought their 'nobility') will have documentary proof of their status, but houses with centuries of noble tradition behind them are not so fortunate: 'La Noblesse ancienne n'a aucun moyen d'assurer son Estat. Une partie a perdu ses Tiltres, et ses chartes par les Guerres Estrangeres, ou Intestines, et à l'Exception des Familles, dont les noms vivent dans l'Histoire, il ne reste aux autres que des Actes particuliers, sujets à perir par une Infinité d'accidents'.² It was in order to distinguish between old and recent nobility that Boulainviller established the strict hierarchy of noble categories to be found in his Mémoire pour la construction d'un nobiliaire général, which places the 'annoblis' of the seventeenth century firmly at the bottom. Any attempt to verify nobility solely by reference to documentary evidence, especially when 'les Traitants, moteurs principaux des Recherches de Noblesse, n'ont eu que des veües pecuniaires, ont pratiqué des vexations terribles envers les veritables Nobles, et ont favorisé ceux, qui ne l'estoient pas, quand ils en ont pu tirer de l'Argent',³ can only lead to the usurpation of noble distinctions of all kinds.⁴ Consequently, it is not surprising to find Boulainviller, in the construction of his 'nobiliaire', adopting an ambivalent attitude towards evidence. Not only would he withdraw the 'recherche de noblesse',

1. For example, in the État de la France Boulainviller argues that a deed attesting a territorial division is insufficient as proof of an historically acceptable claim unless it is accompanied by further documentary evidence or can be shown to have become fact (VI, 430).

2. Mémoire pour la construction d'un nobiliaire général, Bibliothèque municipale d'Angoulême, MS no. 23, p. 612.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 613.

but further he would

ordonner qu'il sera fait un catalogue, ou Description generale des Familles Nobles de France, auquel seront inscrits les Noms, Genealogies, et Tiltres de chacune selon, et en la forme, et maniere, qu'elles voudront s'en aider sans obliger Personne à produire au delà de ce qu'il peut, et veut justifier, et n'excluant aucuns moyens de justifier que ceux, qui seront repris de fausseté.

Si quelque Famille se trouve hors d'Estat de justifier parfaitement son Antiquité, et Illustration, et qu'à raison de ce deffaut elle soit inscrite hors du Rang, qu'elle croira luy appartenir, elle pourra revendiquer son Rang, et sa Denomination Noble toutes fois et quantes, quelle sera en Estat de les justifier, et l'Enregistrement ne sera fait qu'avec cette Reserve, parce que la fin, qu'on se propose est de conserver à chaque Famille ses veritables Droits.

Evidence produced will be closely examined, but lack of evidence will be treated with indulgence, for noble houses of centuries of standing have little real need of charters and documents, their support is simply tradition, or 'l'estime commune' in which they are held.²

The methodological principle to be used in the criticism of claims to noble antiquity is enunciated by Boulainviller in his considerations of the descent of the house of Rohan from former sovereigns of Brittany. This descent is difficult to prove beyond doubt because of Brittany's chequered history of violent dynastic change,

mais comme il est très possible qu'une race si noble et s^y ancienne ne soit pas perie, l'on peut croire que la maison de Rohan en est issue quoyqu'elle nait [sic] pas produit encore des preuves qui le justifient pleinement Neanmoins [sic] on ne peut les accuser d'avoir pris trop legerement la qualité de Princes, les regles du droit obligeant du [sic] juger toujours favorablement des pretensions qui ne sont destruites par aucun fait evident.³

The same principle of tradition replacing and transcending mere documentary proof can be seen too in Boulainviller's Dissertation sur la noblesse and in his later Mémoire sur la noblesse.⁴ An anonymous remark written at the end of the fourth letter in a manuscript copy of the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France testifies to the completely a priori nature of this deference to tradition:

1. Ibid., pp. 615-16.

2. État de la France, V, 275.

3. Bibliothèque municipale de Nantes, MS no. 1822, p. 189.

4. André Devyver, Le Sang épuré (Bruxelles, 1973), pp. 511 and 512.

Mr de Boulainvilliers ridiculement entesté de sa noblesse se brouille furieusement au sujet des familles originairement noble /sic/ a quel signe veut il que lon connoisse ceux qui sont descendus de ces fameux conquerans de la Gaule: n'y mesme de ceux qui aiderent a Charles Martel a fraÿer le chemin du Throne a Pepin son fils; y en a t il un seul qui /ne/ puisse, je ne dis pas legitiment, mais vraisemblablement se vanter dans /sic/ descendre. tel qui vit aujourdhuÿ dans la roture, descend peut etre en droite ligne de ces premiers françois, pendant que les nobles d'apresent sans en excepter aucun, pas mesme la famille royale, et luy tout le premier ne viennent peut etre que de ces Gaulois assujettis; puisqu'il n y a aucune maison en France qui puis se prouver par des titres authentiques au dela de l'an 900.

Yet Boulainviller himself at times is only too conscious of the fraudulent interests tradition is made to serve. In his Mémoire sur la généalogie de la famille de Boulainviller, ensemble des familles qui y sont alliées (B.N. fonds français, n.a. 4709, pp. 393-459) Boulainviller writes:

On peut ce me semble, comparer les antiquités particulieres des familles, à celles de l'Histoire profane, dans lesquelles on ne remonte pas bien haut sans toucher le têmes des Fables, c'est-à-dire celui de l'ignorance. La vanité à en tout têmes été une passion dominante parmi les hommes, et de tout têmes au défaut d'une origine bien certaine elle à fait imaginer des idées improbables de Généalogie ... les hommes de ce siecle pour peu qu'ils soient soutenus par les richesses, où par la faveur, font remonter l'origine de leurs familles à ce têmes obscur où le défaut de titres, et d'Histoire presente un champ fort vaste courbattu à plaisir des fictions...

L'elevation dont on se flate paroît d'autant plus grande que ce fondement en est reculé, mais très souvent on ne prend pas garde qu'en éloignant arbitrairement cette fondation on ruine toute la solidité de l'Edifice. Les preuves qui doivent le soutenir étant où frivoles, où incertaines le laissent bien-tôt tomber, quand les apuis de la faveur, et des richesses viennent à lui manquer. (pp. 409-10)

Boulainviller is convinced that the claims he will make for his own family's antiquity (extending, it would seem, as far back as Stephen IV of Hungary) are not of this order and can be substantiated if not by irrefutable documentary evidence then at least by the agreement of many venerable historians and 'une Tradition non suspecte d'ambition chimerique, puisqu'elle se trouve établie depuis plusieurs siècles dans l'esprit des Sçavans et des peuples' (pp. 410-12). However, in another, and very important historical context much of the information available to the historian is contained only in fabulous and mythological tales. The use Boulainviller makes

1. Extrait de l'histoire du gouvernement de la France depuis l'établissement de la monarchie, Bibliothèque municipale d'Aix-en-Provence, MSS nos. 400-06 (474-80).

of these and other sources in his narrative of ancient history will be our next subject for discussion.

III Myth and fable

Boulainviller's attitude towards the sources of ancient history - the Old Testament, myths, fables, and ancient historians - has been discussed in principle in chapter six (above, pp.187-96). It was argued that although conscious of their demands on the historian's credulity, Boulainviller was obliged to accept them, once they had been sufficiently rationalized to suit the scientific temper of the age, for no other source of information was available to him. It is Boulainviller's rationalization of his sources that we will now examine.

Myth and fable provided the eighteenth-century historian of the ancient world - writing without the help of modern archaeological and historical science - with much of the material that constituted the corpus of facts known about antiquity. Fable, we shall see, was very much a thorn in Boulainviller's side, but myth proved to be more amenable to historical interpretation. Boulainviller's method of interpreting myth was the standard one of the time: Euhemerism.¹

A frequent reason for the apotheosis of a king or 'legislator', to judge from Boulainviller's account in the Histoire universelle, is simply that of gratitude on the part of his subjects for the benefits he had introduced to them, such as technological innovations or civil and legal institutions. Thus Menes becomes Osiris because of the 'arts' he had discovered and had given to his people (HU, I, 209-10);² Athotis becomes

1. A most useful discussion of the use of this concept during the first half of the eighteenth century can be found in F. E. Manuel's The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 103-25.
2. We may note here the strength of Boulainviller's Euhemerism: speaking of the wife of Menes he admits that her name is unknown and that only her post-apotheosis name remains, Isis. She 'earned' her cult by her introducing to the Egyptians the arts of weaving, sowing and herbal medicine (HU, I, 210-11).

Anubis not only for having established civil and religious laws but also for having discovered the rules of poetry and music (HU, I, 221-32); Prometheus is remembered for his discovery of fire (HU, II, 10).

Another reason for the deification of men is fear. Near the beginning of his history of ancient Greece Boulainviller describes the fertility of the country and the barbarity of its indigenous population. In this state Greece was 'un Pays qui pût faire jalousie à ses voisins ou mériter qu'ils en fissent la conquête' (HU, II, 10). The invasions of the Phrygians and Scythians filled the ignorant Greeks with such fear that they considered the invaders' leaders to be more than mere mortals and thus recorded their names in their tradition as those of their principal deities (HU, II, 10-11). It is the unbroken genealogy of these 'Dieux prétendus' as well as their names '/qui/ sont la plupart étrangers à la langue grecque et tout à fait opposez à son génie', that convinces Boulainviller of the historicity of the men legend has immortalized (HU, II, 11-12). After a discussion of the various opinions on the matter of the gods' geographical origins, Boulainviller examines their family line. Uranus was the first king to be universally recognized by the Greeks (HU, II, 21). He begat the Titans, and Cronus, his heir and successor, begat Zeus, and so on (HU, II, 22-26). Boulainviller supports his opinion that these 'Rox divinisés' were of Scythian origin by remarking that they did not found any towns, fortresses, or laws, 's'étant contentés de vivre sans contraintes et sans demeure arrêtée comme ils auroient pû faire en Scythie', whereas the Egyptians settling in Greece, coming from a civilized country, did so (HU, II, 27-28).

Because the Greek gods and myths have an entirely human origin, natural explanations can be given of mythological details. The cyclopes who helped Proetus to fortify Tiryns with massive walls were called, according to Strabo, ' "Bellyhands" because they got their food from their handicraft' ¹

1. The Geography of Strabo (8.6.11.), with an English translation by H. L. Jones, 8 vols (London, 1917-32), IV, 169.

and Boulainviller remarks: 'ainsy c'étoit, à parler naturellement, des hommes à journée que l'Arcadie pays paûvre et rude fournissoit aux contrées plus cultivées et plus policées' (HU, II, 58). Cecrops is represented by fable as half man and half snake because he instituted marriage (which makes one being from two bodies) and because he was of foreign birth and thus spoke two languages and was versed in two cultures (HU, II, 84-85). Neptune lived on the coast and travelled on the sea, consequently, when deified, was given the sea as his domain. Yet during his life his kingdom was well known for its horses and so these too became part of his divine paraphernalia (HU, II, 89).

The Euhemerist interpretation of mythology, although of course not so designated, was well known to the initiated Greeks themselves. After five years' rigorous study and obliged to total secrecy, 'on aprenoit que toute cette idée de religion n'étoit qu'une tradition purement humaine et que les Dieux qu'on y adoroit avoient été des hommes' (HU, II, 142-43).

Mythology, unsurprisingly, is seen by Boulainviller to be the product of superstition, well-meaning perhaps but superstition nonetheless. Speaking of Menes he remarks that although little is known of this king, 'aucun cependant n'a donné un si beau champ à la mythologie parce qu'en effet c'est le premier homme que la superstition postérieure ait divinisé' (HU, I, 213). The force of this superstition seems to be Boulainviller's pragmatic explanation of Isis's mythical search for Osiris. Boulainviller had noted that Menes was fatally wounded when hunting one day (an activity he undertook 'pour le bien de son Pays'; HU, I, 211), and that the Egyptians were most upset about it and indeed were moved to tears. These tears in turn became part of the ceremony dedicated to the memory of their beloved king. Boulainviller continues:

On pouvoit croire que des raisons d'Etat obligèrent la veuve à feindre de chercher son mary et de supposer qu'elle l'avoit retrouvé après beaucoup de peine: car les fetes consacrées à sa mémoire qui commençoient par des pleurs de sa perte finissoient par des réjouissances de ce qu'il avoit recouvert la vie par une espèce de résurrection. (HU, I, 212)

And yet Boulainviller is conscious of a deeper meaning which may underlie mythology. The fraternal enmity between the mythological Osiris and Seth is to be explained by their respective philosophical interpretations: Osiris represents 'la puissance active de la nature' (the source of fortune, virtue, joy, etc.), and Seth 'le mauvais principe'. Similarly, Isis is 'la puissance passive', the feminine aspect of nature, the universal mother receiving 'toutes les formes possibles jusqu'aux plus opposées' which leave her again 'par l'opération d'Osiris'. But as Boulainviller explains, 'Je ne veux pas dire que tant de belles allégories aient été inventées dès les premiers temps: Je suis au contraire fort persuadé que les raisonnements philosophiques sont modernes pour [sic] comparaison à cette profonde antiquité' (HU, I, 216). This leads Boulainviller to examine the genesis and development of Egyptian religion which he sees as starting from the laudable gratitude of the people to their benefactor whose cult, however, the unquiet human mind later covered over with layers of superstition. Finally, with the attempts of philosophers and mystics to bring order and meaning to the confusion of religious rites, 'le souvenir de la première vérité s'est absolument perdu' (HU, I, 216-17). In a similar analysis of the development of pagan religion, Boulainviller reconciles the theses that pagan religions worshipped the same divinity under many names and that, on the contrary, pagan gods are simply heroes remembered. Again, the story of this development, as religion diffuses from East to West, is one of degeneration, lost simplicity, accretion of superstition and memory of the dead, and the emptying of meaning of religious emblems.¹ It is noteworthy in this respect that in Boulainviller's treatment of episodes in early Hebrew history every attempt is made to avoid miraculous or allegorical interpretations of unusual and apparently significant events. The refreshment offered to Abraham and his followers by the king of Jerusalem after they had defeated the

1. This analysis appears in Pagani in the Extraits des lectures de M. le C. de B. avec des réflexions, vol. 6, folios 161-65, B.N. n.a. 11076.

Persian army and given Melchizedek a tenth of the booty (Genesis 14. 17-18) has been understood to be figurative of the Holy Sacraments, for the king 'was the priest of the most high God'. However, in a manner similar to his interpretation of the rights of Clovis vis-à-vis 'le Salien de Soissons' (above, pp.73-74), Boulainviller argues that it was as king that Melchizedek offered the bread and wine and as priest that he accepted his share of the spoils (HU, I, 362-63). The form of oath taken by Abraham's servant commissioned to find Isaac a suitable wife, that is the placing of his hand under the patriarch's thigh, is dismissed by Boulainviller as an invocation of the Messiah 'qui devoit naître des reins d'Abraham' (HU, I, 386). Finally, Jacob, at the blessing of his children, is seen by Boulainviller simply as an old man lying 'sur son lit où la joye et la vivacité de l'action en parlant à Joseph l'avoit [sic] fait asseoir [et] comme il étoit foible et fatigué il reposa sa tête sur le chevèt'. Boulainviller continues:

Le Respect deû aux paroles de l'écriture ayant dégénéré depuis longtemps en une espece de curiosité superstitieux a fait que dans une action très-simple en elle même comme celle cy exprimée par des termes forts communs, on a néantmoins cherché et crû découvrir d'importans mistères dont la recherche publique et l'interprétation partagent depuis longtemps les commentateurs. (HU, I, 414-15)

And so Boulainviller criticizes allegorical interpretations of this event which see Jacob as worshipping God by bowing to the head of the bed, or as adoring the top of his staff as the Holy Ghost reveals to him in imagination the future passion of Jesus Christ, it being improbable that Jacob would have a staff in bed or that he would show it such reverence (HU, I, 414-16).¹ Allegorical interpretation then, whether applied to Scripture or to mythology, only succeeds in introducing error and confusion into the normally straight-forward task of taking the accounts of ancient events in

1. It seems strange that, as a reader of Spinoza, Boulainviller should have ignored the Dutchman's comments on this very passage which show the idea of Jacob bending towards the head of his bed to be the consequence of faulty modern 'pointing' of the original, vowel-less Hebrew text, and which thus support St. Paul's reading of the passage in which Jacob - perfectly appropriately for an old man - is simply 'leaning upon the top of his staff' (Hebrews 11. 21). A Theologico-Political Treatise (Dover publications, 1951), p. 110.

a literal and pragmatic way. As far as methods of interpretation are concerned, Scripture and mythology for the deist and Euhemerist Boulainviller are to be treated in the same 'unmysterious' manner.

Boulainviller's desire to get to the simple truth, however, is, in the case of the ancient Greeks and Romans, frustrated by perfidious fable - perfidious because although it contained a kernel of truth (to which it was at times the only witness) fable embroidered this truth with layers of fantasy.

As we have seen (p. 194), Boulainviller considers it perfectly legitimate to include fable amongst the sources of historical fact (HU, II, 413-14). Indeed, his division of ancient history into three periods - the first, unknown to us; the second, 'le temps des fables'; and the third, historical time (HU, I, 9-10) - confirms this legitimacy. But although Boulainviller may in principle be prepared to recognize the historical value of fable, the relationship for him between fable and history is normally one of antinomy. The story of Minos and his family is 'fort embrouïllée la Fable ayant déguisé tout ce qui les regarde, il est pourtant certain que ...' (HU, II, 124); the account given by Pausanias of the games established in honour of Zeus (apparently by Lycaon), although true, is obscured by the antiquity of the story and 'des ornements que la Fable luy a donnés comme à plusieurs autres' (HU, II, 157-58); the sons and daughters of beleaguered Athens, according to the fable, were given as sacrifices to the Minotaur, but Plutarch in his life of Theseus gives the truth which is that Minos, the city's conqueror, instituted games in honour of his dead son and used the Athenians' tribute as prizes (HU, II, 163-64); finally Zeus, according to fable, abducted Ganymedes for his servant and bedfellow, 'mais la vérité est que Tantale Roy de Lydie fit cet enlevement en vangeance duquel Ilus frère aîné de Ganimède luy fit

une guerre si sanglante qu'il l'obligea de quitter l'Asie' (HU, II, 304).

The constant need to refute the fictions of fable can lead to a degree of impatience. The death of Minos brings Boulainviller 'naturally' to Hercule's journey to Sicily, 'sur lequel nous trouvons tres-peu de chose qui puisse entrer dans l'histoire; le récit en étant très-fabuleux'. Boulainviller simply relates that as the Sicilian towns were so inaccessible, Hercules was restricted to ravaging live-stock and concludes: 'je ne m'attacherai point à réfuter les autres particularités dont la fable a défiguré cette histoire qui n'en mérite pas la peine' (HU, II, 426-27).

Boulainviller, it would seem, would be far happier if he could simply neglect fable altogether. Introducing his history of Lacedemonia he writes: 'nous sommes obligés de dire que ses premières années ont été si obscures que la Fable n'y a presque point trouvé de matière à s'exercer: mais aussi il en sera plus facile d'attraper la vérité si son histoire est moins brillante, elle en sera plus naturelle et plus vraie' (HU, II, 272-73). However, when Boulainviller comes to discuss the history of Leda and Tyndareus he complains: 'icy la fable commence à déguiser l'histoire de Lacedemone', particularly with its fiction of Zeus's coupling with Leda in the form of a swan modelled, Boulainviller asserts, on the story of Zeus and Alcmena (HU, II, 289-90).¹

Boulainviller may prefer to discuss ancient history which has been overlooked by fable but, to judge at least from his remarks concerning the early history of Lacedemonia, such a history has precious few facts to relate, the bulk of Boulainviller's account being taken up with etymological explorations into the origins of the Spartans, a Euhemerist discussion of nymphs, and the ancients' idea of the after-life (HU, II, 273-84). Fable, like myth, must be assimilated in some way into the fabric of the historian's narration, even if it is only by refutation, for to ignore it completely

1. Similarly in the history of Arcadia, limited by his exclusively Euhemerist approach to mythology, Boulainviller finds it impossible to say anything precise about Mercury and Apollo, 'tant la Fable a changé et déguisé toutes leurs actions' (HU, II, 298).

would seriously weaken ancient history's claim to record historical events. To accept fable completely and uncritically would not be possible, but neither is it possible, Boulainviller realizes, to discount it altogether. Having discussed the first ten of the labours of Hercules - in a rational and Euhemerist manner which explains away any fabulous details and which renders the performance of the tasks credible by emphasizing the hero's ingenuity and skill - Boulainviller roundly proclaims that 'l'on voit bien que tout cela est pour la plus part pure fiction'. Yet he sees that the idea of Hercules's travelling for commercial profit 'n'est pas sans apparence: en effet on peut s'assurer qu'il y a toujours quelque chose de vray qui sert de fondement aux fables et dans tous les temps les Auteurs les plus sérieux sont convenus qu'Hercule avoit exécuté de très-grandes choses' (HU, II, 253-54).¹

Here lies the frustration of fable's 'authority': much of it is 'pure fiction' and yet beneath the ornaments of fancy there is, so Boulainviller believes, historical truth. For example, Boulainviller talks of a lack of intelligence between the families of Japhet (father of Prometheus) and Chronos and says that 'cela est en quelque sorte prouvé par la fable qui fait une fiction desastreuse de Prométhée'; however, 'il seroit inutile de rechercher la cause de ces divisions domestiques dont l'antiquité et la fable nous dérobent également la connoissance' (HU, II, 86-87). Similarly, discussing the Trojan war Boulainviller writes that 'la Fable et les Poètes ont orné tous ces incidents d'une infinité d'autres aventures; mais le fond est certain' (HU, II, 200). The history of Thebes likewise suffers from the disfigurement and ornamentation of fable (HU, II, 209). The liberties taken with historical fact by the poets is, as just noted, another source of confusion but one which fails to submerge the events of history completely.

1. Discussing Cadmus's return to Greece from Phoenicia, however, Boulainviller only reluctantly grants that the reason may have been his father's command to find his sister, 'car il faut donner quelque chose à l'idée que la fable présente' (HU, II, 100).

The tragic story of Oedipus, writes Boulainviller, has been so altered by Greek and Latin tragedians 'qu'on ne peut guères en desmêler la vérité: Je pense touttefois qu'il y a quelque chose de vray dans le fond de ces aventures ... et sur cette vérité on peut juger que toutte la Grece estoit encore bien simple dans sa conduite et tous les hommes bien faciles à se tromper en même temps qu'il leur estoit aisé de tromper les autres' (HU, II, 240). And in his reflections on the war of Troy Boulainviller ponders the numerous incidents recorded by the poets and writes that 'il y a sans doute plusieurs fictions dans leurs récits; mais on juge bien qu'ils ne laissent pas de renfermer des sujets véritables'; and these 'sujets véritables', the 'grande matière' for the poets, are the impatience and barbarity of the Greeks, the general 'impolitesse de ces temps là' (HU, II, 332). The historical truth that Boulainviller would see lying therefore almost hidden beneath the embroidering of fable and poet is of a more general nature than the historical events recorded by mythology and ancient historians. The poets and the fables attest indirectly to the manners of the people and the general level of civilization.

But 'truthful' as fable may be at a general level, its details and stories must ever be closely scrutinized. Turning to the history of Thebes, and in particular to the career of Cadmus, Boulainviller writes: 'il semble qu'il ne seroit pas bien nécessaire de s'étendre sur toutes les fictions de la fable dont elle a déguisé la vie de Cadmus: si ce n'est qu'il faut rendre raison autant qu'on le peut des choses qui ont donné lieu à les former' (HU, II, 204), and this may be taken as representative of Boulainviller's rational attitude to fable in general. But although he may rationalize fable and the fabulous, they still have some authority. In his considerations of the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea Boulainviller admits that he would be inclined to doubt that the pursuing Egyptian army was accompanied by the Pharaoh himself, 'si je ne trouvois dans Hérodote',

he writes, 'un trait fabuleux qui semble marquer que Rhamses avoit couru un extrême péril' (HU, I, 331-32). Boulainviller goes on to give the story to be found in Herodotus of the visit to Hades of Rhampsinitus, and his returning thence with a golden coat, and interprets it as a reference to the danger the Egyptian ruler met at the Red Sea but which he survived, to live in prosperity for the rest of his life. It may be that in this instance Boulainviller's rationalism has got the better of him, for even Herodotus seems to consider the story apocryphal.¹ This is not so odd as it may at first appear, however, for as we examine Boulainviller's other sources of ancient historical fact, we will see that conjecture and reasoning do at times assume for him an authority of their own sufficient to guarantee the continuity of his historical narration.

IV Secondary sources and their authority

Mythology and fable are for Boulainviller important, if somewhat problematical, sources of ancient history. However, more important still - and usually more reliable - are secondary historical accounts, both ancient and modern. Indeed, Boulainviller recognizes that the task of writing ancient history without the aid of other authors would be a hopeless one, and in the introduction to his histories he lists the principal sources he has used - Marsham, Bochart, Selden, Le Clerc, Pezron, Herodotus, Strabo, Josephus, Pausanias - in order to anticipate ill conceived accusations of plagiarism (HU, I, 4-5). As well as a list of his main sources of fact, Boulainviller also provides his reader with a statement of the fundamental methodological principle which shall guide his use of them:

quoique je n'épouze en entier le sentiment d'aucun, je me propose néanmoins d'adopter de grandes parties de leurs ouvrages et de leurs

1. 'Anyone may believe these Egyptian tales, if he is sufficiently credulous; as for myself, I keep to the general plan of this book, which is to record the traditions of the various nations just as I heard them related to me.' Herodotus, The Histories, translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt (Penguin Books, 1954; reprinted in 1971), p. 150.

idées soit des uns soit des autres indifféremment pour le choix; mais toujours fidèlement par rapport à la vérité de laquelle le traité ne sera qu'une recherche continuelle. (HU, I, 6)¹

Boulainviller's dependence on his sources is frequently illustrated in the Histoire universelle: by remarking on the decorated columns he saw in Palestine Herodotus shows the victorious progress of Sesostris in Syria and beyond (HU, I, 318); Proetus and the Cyclopes fortified only the castle at Tiryns 'si toutefois nous donnons au témoignage de Strabon l'autorité qu'on ne peut lui refuser' (HU, II, 58); 'les autorités de Clément Alexandrin [sic] et de Tatien nous obligent de rapporter aux dernières années du règne d'Acrisius l'arrivée de Pelops dans la Grèce' (HU, II, 60); finally, we learn that Boulainviller would prefer to doubt the historicity of Eurotas's war with the Athenians - first, because 'the history of Athens' does not mention it and second, because there was no reason for such a war - 'cependant Plutarque l'a donnée comme certaine: Ainsy nous n'avons pas dû l'oublier' (HU, II, 280). The eclectic use Boulainviller makes of his sources (an important principle in his historical composition), influenced particularly by his own system of chronology and his conception of what is reasonable, normally managed to rescue from ever-threatening chaos an acceptable version of historical fact.² However, Boulainviller's reliance

1. The same eclecticism is counselled by Fréret in his Réflexions sur l'étude des anciennes histoires et sur le degré de certitude de leurs preuves (Œuvres complètes, edited by Septchènes, 20 vols (Paris, 1796), I, 84). He writes: 'Il faut examiner tout, peser les divers degrés de probabilité, rejeter le faux, et assigner à chaque fait le degré de vérité ou de vraisemblance qui lui appartient : les soupçons vagues et généraux ne doivent pas nous porter à rejeter tout indistinctement, mais seulement à ne pas recevoir tout indistinctement'.
2. The art of writing is the most important knowledge that Cadmus introduced to the barbarous and ignorant Greeks, for 'cet art ... fait le fondement de tout ce que les hommes ont de connaissance' and without it 'le passé ne seroit pour nous qu'un cahos ténébreux et inconnu' (HU, II, 106). The fragility of historical 'fact' for 'pre-archaeological' ancient historiography is shown in Boulainviller's discussion of the history of Athens, in particular the arrival of foreign peoples during the fourth part of the reign of Amphiction. The whole period is most uncertain 'parce que les marbres [the Arundel marbles, practically the only archaeological evidence Boulainviller refers to in his ancient histories] sont effacés en cet endroit et ne laissent lire que quatre lettres qui composent le mot UIXI lequel se peut rapporter à différents pays'. Boulainviller suggests

on his sources (which, as in the history of France, include the authority of 'history' and tradition as well as individual literary accounts) is poignantly demonstrated when disagreement between these authorities renders Boulainviller impotent to reach a conclusion. Such is the case with the journey of Hercules to Spain. Many authorities, reported by Bochart,¹ deny that Hercules ever reached Spain, as do Herodotus and Arrian 'sur la foy d'Hecatee historien très-autorisé'. And Boulainviller too is inclined towards this opinion. However, when he considers 'le consentement de toutes les nations chez lesquelles Hercule s'est fait connoître au retour d'Espagne' (existing in the form of monuments and traditions attesting to his passage) Boulainviller declares: 'j'avoué que je ne puis me rendre à un sentiment particulier' (HU, II, 476-78). The great value for the historian of traditionally received opinion - its being able to provide an acceptable account of the events of the ancient past - can be appreciated in Boulainviller's discussion of Aeneas's voyage after the sack of Troy. Boulainviller notes that the Trojan's landing and settling in Italy have been doubted by authors who would either leave him at Troy (enjoying the fruits of his treachery) or send him to Thrace or Arcadia. But Boulainviller considers these opinions as worthless 'puisque en effet la succession des Roys montre assez qu'ils étoient descendus des Troyens et de la famille d'Enée: il y avoit à Rome un nombre considérable de familles qui faisoient remonter leur filiation jusqu'aux Troyens et cela n'étoit pas contesté'. If to these proofs one adds those of the Roman feasts and ceremonies, the Sybil's books, and the Delphic oracles, 'il y auroit', Boulainviller concludes, 'de la témérité à faire revivre les opinions contraires d'autant plus qu'elles sont abandonnées depuis longtemps' (HU, II, 390-91).

which country and people might be intended by the incomplete inscription but concludes: 'cependant j'avoué que ma conjecture est si peu fondée que je suis prêt d'embrasser toute autre opinion plus probable' (HU, II, 111-12).

1. Samuel Bochart, Opera omnia (Leyden and Utrecht, 1712), section Phaleg, book 3, chapter 7, columns 166-67.

Yet although he is so dependent on his sources to provide a solid basis of historical fact (or at least a variety of more or less acceptable opinions about what may have happened) to the extent that respect for them demands at times the inclusion of frankly improbable material, Boulainviller recognizes that their testimony to the events of the ancient past can be very imperfect. This recognition is apparent in Boulainviller's introductory remarks to his history of Egypt. He notes that this history is difficult to discuss 'tant par le défaut de monuments auxquels on puisse ajouter foy et par l'artifice de ceux qui l'ont déguisée que par le caractère des auteurs qui en ont écrit' (HU, I, 180), and then proceeds to give a brief critical evaluation of the principal sources of Egyptian history pointing out their credulousness, their mistakes, their inconsistencies, and in the cases of Josephus and early Christian historians (for example, Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius) their obvious nationalist or ideological bias (HU, I, 180-82).¹ Indeed, reasonable criticism of source material is a necessary preliminary to the establishment of historical fact, but it must be a moderate criticism:

en effet les idées nouvelles choquent toujours deux sortes de personnes ceux qui sont déjà prévenus et ceux qui ne se rendent qu'à des démonstrations mathématiques, cependant il est certain qu'il y doit avoir un certain milieu parce que la curiosité ou plutôt la satisfaction que les hommes de tous les temps ont trouvée à connaître et à fixer leur opinion a engagé les Anciens comme elle nous y porte nous même/s/ à croire trop légèrement des relations et des descriptions infidèles ou peu correctes pendant que les Poètes de leur côté ont été trop libéraux de leurs fictions et d'aventures pour embellir l'histoire de leurs Héros, les grâces de leurs vers jointes à la force de leurs expressions ont augmenté la prévention. (HU, II, 395).²

In his discussion of the puzzling archaeological discoveries at Modena, where the ruins of a town had been found at least fifteen feet beneath the flat Lombardy plain, and in adducing his reasons both for our ignorance of this phenomenon as well as for our ignorance of the politics of ancient Italy, Boulainviller criticizes men's lack of scientific method in

1. Later Boulainviller will accuse Josephus of altering Manethon's text in order to make Joseph appear less responsible for the austerity endured by the Egyptians during his ministry (HU, I, 338).
2. Fréret too warned against the inappropriateness of applying the two-dimensional geometrical, mathematical method to the multi-dimensional studies of politics, jurisprudence, ethics, and history; Oeuvres complètes, I, 144.

substantially stronger terms:

il se faut consoler de l'ignorance où nous sommes condamnés à ces deux égards sur la considération que si la négligence et la barbarie des premiers hommes nous ont dérobé la connoissance de celui cy, la nature peut bien nous cacher le ressort des autres surtout dans la disposition où nous sommes de prendre pour des mirâcles tout ce qui nous paroît extraordinaire plutôt que de nous instruire et de rechercher la veritable étenduë des choses. (HU, II, 345-46)

Much of Boulainviller's particular criticism of literary sources, based principally upon 'convenance' and 'vraisemblance', is guided by his system of chronology and by etymological considerations. But historical reason extends beyond chronology and etymology. Discussing le Père Pezron's opinion (after Diodorus) that Uranus established the largest empire the world had ever seen,¹ Boulainviller rejoins: 'mais n'en déplaie au P. Pezron ce sentiment est si peu probable, il repugne même si fort à la raison que je ne puis concevoir qu'il ait pû l'embrasser sur le fondement de la simple autorité de Diodore qui en cet endroit n'a débité qu'une fable'; and when he has enumerated such things as the rudimentary means of transport that were available to these very early men (prohibiting the long journeys Uranus's 'empire' would have supposed) Boulainviller concludes: 'on ne sauroit jamais lever ces difficultés qui sont infiniment plus sensibles que l'autorité de Diodore et les autres convenances sur lesquelles le P. Pezron s'est appuyé' (HU, II, 20-21).²

But as robust as it may seem to be here, historical reasoning cannot always, or even very often, free the historian's mind from the grasp of historical authority. After dismissing le Père Pezron's opinions concerning the 'empire' of Uranus, Boulainviller continues his study of this king and his descendants and pauses to consider the identity of the Greek Cronus

1. le Père Pezron, L'Antiquité de la nation et de la langue des Celtes autrement appelez Gaulois (Paris, 1703), pp. 61-63.
2. Diodorus had been criticized earlier in Boulainviller's text for his improbable opinion that Sesostri's daughter (whom Boulainviller considers rather, judging from the king's youth, to be his sister) had been gifted, again at too early an age, in astrological divination and that she had predicted her brother's conquest of the 'world' (HU, I, 317).

and the Latin Saturn. He shows that chronologically there is no correspondence and that 'Apollodore qui a si soigneusement décrit la généalogie de ces Dieux prétendus et rapporté l'histoire de [Kronos] n'a point parlé de son voyage en Italie'. Yet in spite of these cogent reasons for denying the identity of the two pagan gods, Boulainviller contends that the link between Cronus and Saturn has been held to be true for so long 'qu'il y auroit une espèce de témérité à le combattre'. Rather weakly Boulainviller concludes: 'c'est assez d'avoir observé les difficultez dont il est accompagné' (HU, II, 24).

The ambivalent nature of the relation between ancient historical authority and the critical yet dependent historian, which the two examples just given amply demonstrate and which was an important consideration in chapter six, is one of the most characteristic features of Boulainviller's treatment of ancient history. It is perhaps most strikingly apparent in Boulainviller's use of the authority of the Old Testament. As we have seen (above, pp.186-88), Boulainviller considers Scripture (i.e. Genesis) to be the product of a divinely inspired human - and thus imperfect and biased - mind, but nevertheless to be an unparalleled authority on the events of the very early history of the world to which all conjecture and historical and chronological systems must conform. This last point is clearly seen in Boulainviller's discussion of the method of chronology employed by Moses and how his own use of Scaliger's Julian period corresponds to it. Boulainviller decides that Moses would certainly have used the unreformed Egyptian calendar, now known to be inaccurate, but that despite its greater proficiency modern chronology must continue to treat this unique authority with indulgence:

ainsy en réduisant notre calcul comme nous l'avons fait à ce qui paroît convenir le mieux aux notions apparentes ou présumées de l'écrivain sacré: il semble que c'est s'approcher de la vérité autant qu'il est possible de le faire, et que cet effort doit suffire puisque Moyse est le seul auteur qui nous puisse instruire des premiers événements du monde et du temps où ils sont arrivez. (HU, I, 206-07)

Yet although Boulainviller takes Moses' account as authoritative, his often pragmatic attitude towards many of its details, whilst supporting it and defending it on the one hand, tends on the other to emphasize the human, even political purposes which inspired its composition. Noah's curse upon Canaan (the son of Noah's youngest son, Hem, who had seen his father lying naked) is not meant to be understood literally, argues Boulainviller, but points to the history of Canaan's accursed progeny. 'C'est pour cela et pour justifier l'invasion qu'il allait faire des terres de Canaan qu'il [Moses] fit un récit exact de la malédiction de Nôé contre son Petit fils plusieurs siècles auparavant quoiqu'il n'exprime point la faute de cet Enfant' (HU, I, 66). Returning to the Canaanites a little later in his work, Boulainviller confirms his earlier opinion of the motives behind Moses' text. These people, he remarks,

ne méritent pas d'être comptées au même rang que ces Peuples illustres dont la fortune a fait la destinée de toute la Terre; l'historien sacré n'en a fait le récit que par l'intérêt que sa nation devoit prendre à la conquête de leur Pays et par une raison approchante qui est celle de la bienveillance: il a eû la même exactitude dans le récit de l'origine des nations arabes qui vivoient dans le voisinage des Juifs. (HU, I, 113)

We may well imagine, judging from his histories of France, that Boulainviller was particularly qualified to discern the political motivation of Moses the historian. Indeed for Boulainviller, 'le livre de la Genèse ... est purement historique' (HU, I, 353), and, moreover, is a work with quite precise aims. The omissions Moses makes in his text (his apparent ignorance of most of the inhabitants of the globe; above, p.188, n.1) reveal this quite clearly:

il faut reconnoître que ces obmissions ne sont pas sans utilité quand bien même elles ne serviroient qu'à nous faire comprendre que son livre n'est pas destiné spécialement à nous instruire des choses naturelles et Philosophiques ny même des evenemens de l'histoire qui nont [sic] point une rélation essentielle avec son objet: qu'ainsy c'est par un grand abus que sous le prétexte d'honorer le Créateur dont il nous donne la connoissance tant de Gens veulent y chercher ou prétendent y découvrir toutes choses et même captiver les sentiments d'Autrui à toutes les inductions qu'ils tirent de ses paroles. (HU, I, 122-23)

The historical, rather than divinely revealed, nature of the Genesis account receives further emphasis from Boulainviller's somewhat disparaging

attitude towards its compiler. He denies that Moses was a particularly well educated man, seeing this opinion as a fiction propounded by Josephus and Philo of Alexandria 'pour rendre leur Législateur plus recommandable'; he remarks on his crude ideas of the divinity, his stuttering, his lack of talent for leadership (running away to the desert after his first abortive attempt); and finally concludes that Moses was but an ordinary, unexceptional Hebrew (HU, I, 432-33). Imperfections in Moses' method of compiling his historical narrative - disorder among the separate sheets on which his account was written - are responsible for the several improbabilities to be found in the sacred text (for example, Abimelech's attraction to Sarah, wife of Abraham, when according to the order of chapters of Genesis the elderly Sarah could no longer have excited such emotion; HU, I, 381-82). Indeed, but rather coyly, Boulainviller even suggests that Moses was not the writer of Genesis at all. Speaking of the place where Abraham defeated the Persians, Boulainviller notes that its name, Dan, post-dates Moses' death by several centuries, 'd'où l'on infère', he continues, 'aussy bien que de quelques autres passages que la Geneze n'est point la véritable ouvrage de ce Prophète: surquoy j'avouëray ingénûment que ces arguments seroient sans réplique s'il étoit certain qu'il n'y eût pas alors quelque autre endroit de même nom' (HU, I, 360).¹

1. In the preface (not paginated) of his Histoire critique du Vieux Testament (Paris, 1678) Richard Simon criticizes Spinoza's treatment of the problem of the Pentateuch's authorship, not because his analysis is wrong (Simon readily concedes that Moses did not write all of the first five books of the Bible) but because he infers that the additions to Moses' text are less authoritative and less 'prophetic' (i.e. divinely inspired) than the patriarch's own writings. Simon concludes: 'c'est en quoi Spinoza a fait paroître son ignorance ou plutôt sa malice en tâchant de décrier l'autorité du Pentateuque à cause de quelques Changemens ou Additions qu'on y trouve, sans avoir fait reflexion sur la qualité de ceux qui ont été [sic] les Auteurs de ces Changemens' (for the question of any possible influence of Spinoza upon Simon see Paul Auvray's article, 'Richard Simon et Spinoza', in Religion, érudition et critique à la fin du 17^e siècle et au début du 18^e siècle (Presses Universitaires, 1968). Boulainviller may be guilty of the same 'malice' in his comment on the Persian defeat at Dan. Simon writes that 'les noms de Hebron, de Dan, et quelques autres qui sont dans le Pentateuque, n'étoient point du temps de Moïse', but he is not afraid to recognize that Moses did not

In spite of these doubts, however, we have seen that Boulainviller does recognize the great historical authority of Scripture. This authority is used, for example, to support the somewhat improbable idea that the empire of Babylon was not established until the time of Nebuchadnezzar - improbable because the Egyptians had settled in Chaldea, according to Strabo and Diodorus Siculus, a thousand years before, but the Prophet, writes Boulainviller, refers to Babylon as the work of a modern Assyrian revolting against his legitimate king and this, Boulainviller feels, could only be Nebuchadnezzar (AS, f. 119). The authority of Scripture carries more conviction than historical reasoning in the criticism of the idea that Noah spent the last three hundred and fifty years of his life travelling round the world establishing small colonies wherever he went. Boulainviller remarks: 'la difficulté ne tombe pas sur la possibilité de cette supposition tout incroyable qu'elle est que sur le fait qui est expressément démenty par l'écriture' (HU, II, 516). Respect for Scripture, however, does not prevent Boulainviller from interpreting the early events recorded in Genesis, especially the stories of Adam and Eve and their children, in a quite rationalist manner which sees their names to be symbolic ('Cain', for example, meaning 'serviteur du laboureur'; 'Abel', 'chose perissable et caduque') and the evils befalling early man - death, lust, travail of childbirth - to be the consequences 'ou de leur formation ou de la mauvaise nourriture qu'ils avoient prise'. But Boulainviller refuses to allow any identification between the early men described in Genesis and the gods of the ancient Greeks, which identification, as F. E. Manuel has pointed out,¹ could have disastrous consequences for the privileged position of the Hebrew tradition. And despite the implications of his etymologies of the names of Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, Boulainviller still accepts these

write all of our present Pentateuch for he sees in this admission no argument against the integrity of the text's religious authority (pp. 38-39).

1. F. E. Manuel, The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, p. 114.

figures (more or less) as historical personages (HU, I, 32-36).¹ And yet again, at times, Boulainviller considers Scripture insufficient as an historical authority, especially with regard to the histories of those many peoples Moses, for reasons discussed, leaves out of his account and which are provided by profane authors (HU, I, 114-15). Even for those events of which it is the only record, such as the Flood, scriptural authority still needs, as we saw in chapters eight and nine, to be interpreted quite strictly according to what may be conceived as physically possible - to the extent that despite his lukewarm deference to the authority of Genesis in the Apogée du soleil, Boulainviller seems to consider the sacred text more of a hindrance than a help (AS, f. 68, quoted above, p. 254).

The tension between historical reason and criticism and necessary deference to profane and scriptural authority is never resolved, and indeed, in the Apogée du soleil, only increases. Free as it would be, the historian's reason must remain fettered to the contradictory, obscure, and occasionally improbable authorities without which ancient history and historiography could not exist. But this is not to deny that in Boulainviller's account of ancient history reason and imagination are important tools used to fashion that account and explain events. Discussing the ancients' idea of an after life, Boulainviller encourages us to 'imagine' how such an idea, together with ancestor worship, can turn to idolatry (HU, I, 161). Moreover, near the beginning of his history of Greece, Boulainviller frankly admits that many of the early details in this history, especially the identity of the foreign people who invaded the land and re-introduced the barbarous Greeks to the notions of gods and superior spiritual beings, have, as it were, to be guessed.² Again, reasoned

1. See below, pp. 343-44.

2. Boulainviller makes short work of deciding which opinion is the right one with regard to the identity of the invading nation by simply accepting all of them, 'parce qu'en effet elles sont toutes bien fondées et véritables' (HU, II, 14).

conjecture is Boulainviller's only method of arriving at some idea of the date of Hercules's death, 'car les Auteurs ne disent rien qui puisse porter tant soit peu de lumière sur un fait si éloigné de nous' (HU, II, 262). Similarly, it is now impossible, Boulainviller believes, to write a year by year account of the events of the Trojan war for no historian has narrated this campaign sufficiently clearly, and the poets have deliberately distorted their depictions. Nevertheless, it is probable, Boulainviller feels, that the Greeks spent their first year pillaging the countryside around Troy (HU, II, 323). Indeed, conjecture, regardless of its occasionally prosaic results, seems to fascinate Boulainviller. Complaining about modern anachronistic opinions that Cecrops won the sovereignty of Attica through marriage (Boulainviller insists on several occasions throughout the Histoire universelle that during the early epochs of man's history there were no such things as monarchs, empires, and hereditary sovereignty) he observes that the safest procedure is to restrict ourselves to 'une narration exacte et simple des événements'. And yet immediately afterwards he begs leave to conjecture that Cecrops came to Greece to escape the tyranny of the Shepherds (leaving before the Egyptians had defeated them) and was no doubt a native of Lower Egypt (HU, II, 75-76).

The role of reason, conjecture, and imagination in these examples is to attempt to provide continuity of historical narration, an important element in Boulainviller's method of composition. And of course, this creative use of historical imagination and reason is not merely arbitrary but follows and corroborates the principles and interpretations that provide the bases of the rest of Boulainviller's historical account.¹ Thus 'la bonne foy et le bon sens' (the mention of 'good faith' is significant when

1. The unwillingness to complete necessarily fragmentary knowledge of ancient history by judicious use of conjecture and hypothesis, based on 'vraisemblance' and 'liaison avec le reste de l'histoire', was one of the main faults Fréret discerned in the work of the 'savans du siècle passé' (Oeuvres complètes, I, 59).

we remember Boulainviller's criticism of those authors, like Dio Chrysostom, who would even deny the historicity of one of the most important events in world history - the fall of Troy; above, p. 195) favour the authority of Eratosthenes in the debate over the Theban king lists, 'puisque son calcul lie tellement les événements de cette histoire et les place avec tant de convenance qu'il n'est pas possible d'en méconnoître la vérité quand on l'examine par comparaison à ce que les autres ont écrit' (HU, I, 188-89). And the a priori nature of historical imagination is clearly exhibited in Boulainviller's discussion of the Gallic origins of the inhabitants of Spain. Bochart would seem to prefer a Phoenician origin¹ but several authorities contradict him on this point. However, Boulainviller goes on to write:

mais quand on manquerait de ces sortes de preuves il est aisé d'imaginer que cette belle partie de l'Europe qui non plus que les autres n'a pas produit ses propres habitants n'a pû les recevoir que de la Gaule et de l'Afrique en la manière que nous le marquerons icy. (HU, II, 454-55)

Among the principal methods which provide Boulainviller with what he considers to be firm support in the shifting sands of conflicting opinion about what happened in the distant and almost inaccessible times of the ancient past - methods culled from reference to authorities but which, once established, prove the test of those very authorities, and which also direct the imagination and reason of the historian - are chronology and etymology. These are as important to Boulainviller in his struggle to discern order in the apparent chaos of ancient history as rational, critical analysis of sources and interpretation of myth and fable. Indeed, examinations of chronology and etymology, as well as explanations of events, are the usual forms that such historical reasoning assumes in the Histoire universelle. The following chapter will consider these essential elements of Boulainviller's historical methodology more closely.

1. Samuel Bochart, Opera omnia, section Phaleg, columns 166-67 and 170.

Chapter Eleven

Chronology, Etymology, and Explanation

I Chronology

For the historians of the early eighteenth century, especially those involved in the study of the ancient world, chronology was of the ^tupmost importance. Even the genius of Sir Isaac Newton saw fit to spend years and years in study in order to compute, within the six thousand years allowed by the authority of Scripture, an acceptable and harmonious chronology of the events of ancient history, both sacred and profane.¹ What may now be regarded as a science auxiliary to the science of history itself,² was then a major subject of discussion and controversy among historians.³ Indeed, at times Boulainviller's Histoire universelle reads more like a dissertation on the establishment and proof of his particular system of ancient chronology than a narrative of, and reflection upon, the events which that chronology attempts to date. Chronology is the backbone of Boulainviller's ancient histories for not only does it provide a principle of order to apply to the apparent chaos of facts known about the ancient world, but also, not infrequently, more or less all the ancient historian knows about a given event is its date.

With a far greater wealth of primary sources at his disposal, the historian of France can feel less dependent on, and concerned about, the niceties of the chronology of the events he is narrating. In the preface to his État de la France, defending his abridgement and reorganisation of the voluminous but often unhelpful 'mémoires' of the intendants, Boulainviller writes:

c'est ainsi qu'en justifiant les changemens que je me suis crû obligé de faire aux Mémoires des Intendans, je justifie pareillement le dessein que j'ai pris de donner une Histoire raisonnée de la Monarchie Française,

1. See F. E. Manuel, Isaac Newton Historian (Cambridge University Press, 1963), especially chapters 1-5 (pp. 21-88).
2. E. H. Carr, What is History? (Penguin Books, 1973), p. 11.
3. F. E. Manuel, Newton, chapter 1.

laquelle tirera moins d'autorité de l'exactitude des dates, quoique j'aye lieu de croire qu'il s'y trouvera peu de fautes en ce genre, que de la juste peinture du caractère des Rois, dont elle raporte les actions et de celles des moeurs de leur tems. (MH, p. 79)

But although Boulainviller considers the care to provide an accurate chronology of French history as undeniably secondary to the task of representing as faithfully as possible all the different characters and epochs his history will discuss, a scholarly concern for exactness in detail can be seen to be one of his distinguishing characteristics as an historian. It is the evident inaccuracy in chronology and in other details of Mézeray's Histoire de France that makes Boulainviller consider this historian's later 'abrégé', based on greater experience and sounder scholarship, to be considerably more commendable (HAG, I, 197-98).

Boulainviller's great interest in chronology is well attested throughout his Mémoires historiques.¹ Examinations of the difficulties involved in reaching an exact dating of certain events, examinations which refer at times to a considerable number of primary and secondary authorities, are carried out with an obvious passion by Boulainviller regardless of whether any particular chronological discussion is important for the greater understanding of his historical narrative (for example, the dating of Charlemagne's birth and death, MH, pp. 329-30, quoted above, p.288). Although Boulainviller is willing to admit to the occasional uncertainties to be found in the chronology of French history,² dates are normally, once established, held to be beyond dispute, even at times a little dogmatically. Narrating the story of the Merovingian kings, in a somewhat chronicle-like fashion, Boulainviller arrives at the year 699; he writes:

sur l'année 699, il est nécessaire de faire une observation, de laquelle dépend en quelque sorte toute la Chronologie précédente, et même celle qui doit suivre: Il y a plusieurs siècles qu'il tomba à Scaliger le

1. Numerous discussions of the dates of early French history are also a striking feature of Boulainviller's Extrait de l'introduction à l'histoire de France de Mr. l'abbé de Longuerue, B. N., n.a. 11,077.
2. MH, pp. 264, 294; EF, III, 303, 353.

fils un manuscrit de la Chronique d'Eusebe, lequel avoit appartenu à Jaques Bongars si fameux parmi les gens de Lettres, à la tête duquel manuscrit il y avoit d'une main ancienne ces mots, In annum quintum Childeberti Regis Francorum Pepino jubente ad Adam sunt Anni V.M. Dcccc. Fuit Pascha X. Calend. Aprilis, Ascensio Domini fuit Kalendas Maias per Cyclum annorum Cxi, repetit à capite Cycli. Or, il est certain que tous les caracteres de cette Epoque se raportent à l'an 599 [sic], dont le nombre d'Or étant 16, joint dans l'ancien Calendrier au 8. de Mars et la Lettre Dominicale E, il s'ensuit que le jour de Pâques s'est rencontré cette année au 23. de Mars, 10. des Calendes d'Avril. Si donc il doit passer pour constant, selon cette note originale, que le 23. Mars 699, concouroit avec l'an 5. du Règne de Childeb- bert, Roi des François, par la disposition de Pepin; il s'ensuit incontestablement que la mort de son Prédécesseur est arrivé avant le 23. dudit mois, l'an 695. Cette démonstration ne souffre point de réplique. (MH, pp. 290-91)

The style and tone of this passage bring to mind the rather more elaborate and more erudite discussions of chronology to be found in the Histoire universelle. Their context investing them with considerable significance, these discussions are consequently more illuminating with regard to Boulainviller's understanding of the nature and functions of systems of chronology. Let us now move on to investigate Boulainviller's own system of the chronology of ancient history.

History for Boulainviller, as we have already noted (p.281), would practically cease to be without the knowledge of when the events it narrates took place. It is essential therefore that chronology be as exact as possible. This desire for accuracy will lead Boulainviller to adopt an attitude towards the authority of Scripture on matters chronological similar to the one he shows in his discussions of the mechanisms of God's intervening Providence. He writes:

j'établirai premièrement ma chronologie avec toute l'exactitude dont je suis capable, après avoir observé [que] néanmoins les fondements qu'on lui donne je veux dire les époques de la création et du déluge sont en quelque façon arbitraires et que dans la [fixation] qu'on en a faite on a toujours eût moins d'égard à la probabilité qu'à la convenance avec l'écriture sainte. (HU, I, 2)

We see suggested here the methodological principle which will support, and indeed create, Boulainviller's own system of chronology: the rational (or

perhaps, the reasonable) use of historical and chronological authorities. These authorities, of which Scripture will of necessity remain the most influential, will be employed reciprocally to examine their findings and will be scrutinized with regard to their 'convenience' not only with established historical fact but also with what Boulainviller considers to be likely and acceptable ('vraisemblable').

The importance of establishing a satisfactory chronology of the ancient world is shown by the fact that the first thing Boulainviller discusses in his Histoire universelle after his 'avertissement' is the date of the creation of the world and how he arrived at this figure (HU, I, 7-19). This preliminary discussion (dense, involved and really of only antiquarian value) reveals why an introductory consideration of chronology is necessary - it is necessary in order to clear away the confusion that has grown with time as a result of inaccurate methods of computing the calendar, imperfect attempts at calendar reform, and the casual attitude of ancient historians towards the recording of the exact dates of historical events. Boulainviller's way to dissolve the confusion is to espouse the Julian period of Julius Scaliger [sic] as appropriately modified by more accurate astronomical calculation.¹ At the end of this discussion Boulainviller determines a date for the creation of the world, the five hundred and fourteenth year of the Julian period, or rather the five hundred and thirteenth, 'mais suivant le terms sacré [la création] n'en occupe pas un grand espace puisque le premier jour de l'année 514 a dû être le samedi 7^e de la creation; ainsy il n'y a que six jours à prendre sur l'année précédente supposant toutefois que Moysse n'a pas écrit paraboliquement l'histoire de la création du monde' (HU, I, 19).²

1. Boulainviller's text names Julius Scaliger as the inventor of the Julian period (HU, I, 11), whereas it was in fact his son Joseph who invented it in 1582. He describes the workings of the Julian period in great detail in his De emendatione temporum (Geneva, 1629), pp. 359-61. He emphasizes the great convenience and even necessity of using a system of chronology which rationalizes the many different systems there have been in the Prolegomena to his work, pp. II and XLIX.
2. We have seen that Boulainviller does indeed, certainly in the Apogée du soleil, consider Moses to have written 'parabolically'; nevertheless,

The Julian period provides Boulainviller with the indispensable starting point for his system of chronology and a standard by which all the particular histories he is to narrate can be accurately placed on a common chronological scale. But other authorities are needed to provide the particular dates which the Julian period must organize. The most important of these is scriptural authority; however, the version of this authority which Boulainviller chooses is not beyond dispute. Of all the sacred chronologies available to him - those of the Hebrews, the Samaritans, the Vulgate, and the Septuagint - Boulainviller prefers and defends the Samaritan. In his discussion of the date of Noah's birth we can see in Boulainviller's defence of the Samaritan chronology the principles which guide him in accepting or criticizing authority. The Samaritan text keeps a better proportion in the time of life men beget their children, it agrees with Boulainviller's understanding of the physical mechanism that brought about the destruction of the ante-diluvian world, and 'le Peuple qui en est dépositaire ne se pique d'autre chose que de l'avoir conservé fidèlement sans altération ny du texte ny des caractères'; whereas the Hebrew text has been shown to be corrupt, it cannot reasonably accommodate the history of other nations after the Flood, and it is suspected of being a vehicle for Jewish pretensions to national self-aggrandizement (HU, I, 41-44). We may conclude that the things Boulainviller looks for in any opinion regarding chronology (and indeed regarding many other details of ancient history) are a degree of probability, conformity with undeniable historical facts and epochs, the status of the authority itself, and finally, but significantly, agreement with Boulainviller's own 'system' of explaining important historical events.

The Samaritan chronology receives further confirmation in Boulainviller's

even in this more radical text the amount of time allowed between the start of 'our period' (the time when the creation of the world was complete) and the birth of Jesus Christ is reckoned to be (with but slight modification) the normally accepted 4,200 years (above pp. 190-91).

discussion of Abraham's date of birth. This chronology allows a thousand years between the Flood and the start of Abraham's journeyings and 'cet espace de temps paroît bien plus convenable à l'état où l'Ecriture nous dépeint le monde' than the three hundred and sixty-six years (four hundred and twenty-six at the most) granted by the Hebrew text. Boulainviller gives other reasons why the Samaritan chronology is to be preferred - for example, by Abraham's time idolatry had become the normal religious practice (it needed nothing less than a divine revelation to make Abraham give up 'la voye commune de tous les hommes') and a good measure of time must be supposed for this to have occurred for it is difficult to see these cults developing in the time of Noah and the first Patriarchs 'qui devoient avoir une idée fort vive et fort sensible de la Divinité véritable'. To the objection that the Hebrew text better serves tradition Boulainviller rejoins: 'c'est une imagination que cette tradition si Elle n'a pu empêcher Nachor et Tharé Peres d'Abraham d'idolâtrer'; and replying to the opinion that the Samaritan calculation is as insufficient as the Hebrew to accommodate the claimed antiquity of other nations, Boulainviller writes: 'je réponds que s'il ne suffit pas pour arranger tout ce qu'on a dit d'incertain: il suffit au moins pour ce qui est établi par les monuments d'histoire les plus autorisez; et c'en est assez' (HU, I, 78-80). We have noticed a similar dogmatism in Boulainviller's treatment of the chronology of French history (above, pp. 317-18).

The most elaborate discussion of chronology to appear in the Histoire universelle is the one which introduces Boulainviller's history of Egypt, and which covers twenty-six folio pages of manuscript (HU, I, 183-208). The important points to establish are the dates of the reigns of Menes and Sesostris. Boulainviller examines the opinions of ancient historians and modern chronologers principally with a view to refuting the chronology established by Marsham,¹ normally a sincere man but who 's'est dépouillé à

1. John Marsham, Chronicus Canon Aegyptiacus, Ebraicus, Graecus, et Disquisitiones (London, 1672), pp. 18-19, 22 and 96.

cet égard de sa bonne foy pour favoriser son préjugé' (HU, I, 184).

Boulainviller pursues his investigation to show the errors that support Marsham's calculations (including the latter's use of a source he himself has concluded to be unsound in the domain of Egyptian history) and to restore the authority of Eratosthenes. Boulainviller points out the disadvantages of ignoring this authority which include Marsham's confusing the first king of Egypt (Menes) with his father (Cham).¹ Marsham has no scruples in doing this 'parce que cela', writes Boulainviller, 'n'est point opposé à l'écriture sainte', but he exclaims: 'comme si cela ne l'étoit pas au bon sens et que la geneze n'expliquât pas directement que Cham a été Pere de Mitzraim qui est Ménes' (HU, I, 189).

Boulainviller arrives at a date for the beginning of Menes' reign by relying on the date he has fixed for the first year of Sesostris's reign (1538 B.C.) and adding to it another thousand and forty years to account for the thirty-eight intermediate Theban kings to be found in Eratosthenes. He then goes on to adduce further support for his calculation. Boulainviller's first discussion centres upon the Israelites' captivity in Egypt during the time of Sesostris and his successors and includes a bravura display of intricate chronological arithmetic which, needless to say, confirms his original computations exactly (HU, I, 192-93). Boulainviller briefly examines a different opinion held by Manethon and Josephus but considers it to be too improbable, 'mais', he continues with confidence, 'ce calcul même tout exorbitant qu'il est serviroit merveilleusement à confirmer le notre s'il avoit besoin d'être appuyé de quelque autorité au delà de celle qu'il tire de sa conformité avec celui de l'écriture' (HU, I, 194). Boulainviller concludes: 'voilà donc une premiere preuve de notre chronologie apuïée sur le propre calcul de l'Ecriture prise dans un sens naturel et plausible' (HU, I, 195).

1. Ibid., pp. 23 and 30-33.

His second proof lies in a consideration of the ancient Egyptians' own methods of chronology. Boulainviller's preliminary assumption (appropriately enough for our chronologer) is that 'aucune société de Peuple ne se peut passer de la règle des années; l'histoire nous fait voir que le premier travail des premiers législateurs a été de donner une forme à la supputation du temps' (HU, I, 195). The Egyptians, apparently regulated their chronology by means of a 'cycle caniculaire' which was based on the observation of the regularity with which the Nile flooded its banks every year (always on our 17 June, notes Boulainviller after a very involved astronomical demonstration). 'Ce n'est point un effet nouveau de la nature: il y a près de 3000 ans que les auteurs parlent du débordement de ce fleuve: ainsy on ne peut s'empêcher de dire que de tous temps la chose a été pareille, même en l'âge [de Menes]' (HU, I, 198). However, ancient accounts of the Egyptians' cycle are inaccurate. The fault lies not with the Egyptians themselves, who are noted for the accuracy of their astronomical observations, but with the historians 'tant il est vray que les anciens étoient peu instruits des règles astronomiques les plus communes ou qu'ils les plioient arbitrairement selon leurs préjuges' (HU, I, 200-01). After correcting the mistaken accounts of Egyptian chronology and showing how to discover the start of the first cycle, Boulainviller moves closer to his conclusion. The 'inventor' of the cycle must be Cham 'puisque'il a survécu 61 ans à son établissement et que Menez n'étoit point alors en état de faire des loix'. All the historians agree that the cycle is the work 'du plus ancien législateur d'Egippte', Cham, who thus preceded Sesostris by only a thousand and one hundred and one years. If sixty-one years are deducted from this number, to account for the rest of Cham's life, one thousand and forty years will remain to account for his successors up to Sesostris, 'suivant le canon d'Eratosthènes, voila notre seconde démonstration' (HU, I, 202).¹ This demonstration is embellished by Boulainviller's remarking how, following Censorinus's faulty calculation

1. It is significant that Boulainviller's confidence grows as his computations fall in with his chronological principles - earlier on he felt unable to give an exact date of Cham's invention of the Egyptian cycle (HU, I, 180).

of the Egyptian cycle, one would arrive at the conclusion that the Egyptians were without this means of computing time for a thousand years. This is directly contrary to Boulainviller's first principle and he asks: 'seroit-il possible que l'Egypte se fût passé de l'invention d'un cycle pendant 1000 ans durant lesquels cet état étoit si florissant et si cultivé par les bonnes loix?' (HU, I, 203). Boulainviller concludes his remarks on Egyptian chronology by showing the relationship between scriptural chronology and that of the Julian period with the respect and deference to the authority of Moses that we have already noted (p.309). Having allowed for the differences between these two systems Boulainviller finally places the Flood, 'ce grand événement duquel dépend tout l'ordre de l'histoire sainte', at '2753 ans communs et putatifs après la création du monde'. Boulainviller is happy to welcome the corroboration of other authorities: whereas he had differed from them in his dating of the time of the patriarchs, 'il se trouve néanmoins une si juste convenance de notre première supputation avec celle des temps postérieurs que notre chronologie se réunit précisément à celle des meilleurs maîtres dans le temps de l'Exode' (HU, I, 208).

Scriptural authority and the Julian period provide the chronological system to be followed in the first volume of the Histoire universelle, but in the second volume Scripture's place is taken by a number of profane historians and chronologers and, in particular, by the unique archaeological evidence of the Arundel marbles.¹ These marbles had helped Boulainviller to date the reign of Sesostriis in his discussion of Egyptian chronology by showing that the time of Danaus's arrival at Argos in the seventy-second year of the Attic era and the twenty-seventh of Sesostriis's reign corresponds to the year 1511 B.C. Thus Sesostriis began to rule in 1538 B.C. or the

1. The Marmora Arundelliana was published by John Selden in London in 1628. This text was a description and reproduction of the inscriptions to be seen on some two hundred and fifty marbles in the possession of Thomas Howard, the second Earl of Arundel (1585-1646), a noted art collector of the period; see the Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 10, pp. 73-76.

Julian year 3227 (HU, I, 184-85). But when Boulainviller comes to narrate the history of Argos he meets with a problem: the system of chronology which had worked so well for Egyptian history when applied to Greek history produces an inaccuracy of between thirty-eight and forty years (HU, II, 33-34). The Arundel marbles put Danaus's flight to Argos twenty-two years before the Exodus of the Israelites whereas Egyptian chronology produces a figure of sixty years, 'ce qui est d'autant plus intolérable', Boulainviller writes, 'que pour fixer l'âge de Sesostris nous nous sommes servy de l'autorité des mêmes marbres qui à raison de leur antiquité et de leurs matieres nous paroissent le monument le plus certain qu'il y ait au monde' (HU, II, 34). Boulainviller solves the difficulty by pointing to the great irregularity of the Greek years and to the several changes that have taken place in the Greeks' computation of the length of the year. After most involved chronological calculation Boulainviller reduces the discrepancy to 'un terme qui est en effet le moindre espace qu'on puisse donner pour le voyage de Danaüs; depuis son départ d'Egipte en la 27^e année de Sesostris jusqu'à son arrivée à Argos et l'invasion qu'il fit de ce Royaume' (HU, II, 41-42). Indeed, Boulainviller remarks, there will always be some imperfection in this chronology (of the order of eighteen to twenty months) because in the calculation of the reigns of the Egyptian kings no allowance had been made for the time Danaus took to get to Argos. Boulainviller recognizes that mathematical precision must remain impossible 'veû l'obscurité qui envelope les temps des premiers événements de la Grece', yet if we bear in mind the accuracy evinced in his other chronological calculations this regret only points to the strength of Boulainviller's desire to attain to such precision.¹

1. Using the Arundel marbles and the authority of Denis of Halicarnassus Boulainviller manages to fix the date of the fall of Troy almost to the day: 'le 24^e jour du mois de Targelion 17 jours avant le solstice d'été ... ce jour répond au 16^e ou 17^e de juin de l'an 3478 de la période julienne' (HU, II, 200 and 331); and in his calculations of the 'premier midy' Boulainviller shows an important element to be the hour of the full moon at the Greenwich meridian, which he reckons to

Boulainviller gives further evidence of the importance which he considers the Arundel marbles to have for the chronology of ancient history in his introduction to the history of Athens. He begins by saying that the great antiquity of the town is established by the marbles and then adds, in a remark which reveals the sort of historiography Boulainviller's contemporaries must have been used to, that the former glory of the town is now such a thing of the past 'qu'il n'y a plus que l'intérêt de la vérité qui puisse nous porter à placer son origine dans un temps si éloigné et à concourir avec les marbres pour en faire la plus ancienne ville de la Grece après Argos' (HU, II, 70). Truth may be Boulainviller's avowed criterion but we may recognize here perhaps a subtle expression of the interest he himself has in concurring with one of the main guarantees of his ancient chronology. Although concerned principally with the history of Athens the marbles also include 'les plus célèbres époques des autres Peuples', and although its information is brief, perhaps too brief 'pour l'instruction d'une posterité aussi éloignée que nous nous le trouvons aujourd'hui', it is not difficult, Boulainviller feels, to supplement it with reference to other writers. Moreover, he adds, 'il faut reconnoître que la chronologie grecque qui jusqu'à présent n'avoit été appuyée que sur des conjectures incertaines y trouve un fondement pour les plus considérables événemens' (HU, II, 71).

Commentators on the Arundel marbles, such as Marsham, point out the discrepancy of thirty-six years between their chronology and that of Eusebius.¹ Marsham attributes this difference to the chronology of Apollodorus, used by Eusebius, but Boulainviller prefers to see the irregularity in the ancient Greek calendar (which he has already explained) as the

have been at either seven in the morning or seven in the evening: half a day's inaccuracy over a period of six thousand years, Boulainviller sees, is only to be expected 'parce qu'il est moralement impossible que l'exactitude des calculs astronomiques s'étende si loin' (AS, f. 37).

1. Marsham, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

reason for any discrepancy. Later on, however, Boulainviller will return to these troublesome thirty-six years. The long reign of Pandion is uncertainly recorded by the marbles because some of the inscription has been worn away, but, Boulainviller remarks, 'on peut se servir pour corriger le défaut du marbre de la chronologie d'Eusèbe' (HU, II, 122). He notes as before the difference of thirty-six years that separates the chronologies of Eusebius and the Arundel marbles but maintains that this difference 'ne touche proprement que les principes du calcul et non les événements particuliers. D'ailleurs notre méthode de rapporter les années grecques à celles de la période julienne rétablit entièrement cette différence' (HU, II, 122-23).

We may notice again here a characteristic of Boulainviller's chronology, which is its constant endeavour to make as many authorities and historical facts as possible combine in agreement with each other as well as with his methodological criteria of 'convenance' and 'vraisemblance'. For example, in his discussion of the erroneous opinion that the Assyrian monarchy was the oldest in the world and existed at the time of Abraham, Boulainviller refers to the authority of Scripture and the 'témoignages pris des meilleurs historiens' as well as to 'le bon sens et le discernement judicieux que l'on doit aux véritables matériaux de l'histoire' in order to refute the fictitious chronology of le Pere Pezron', established in the Canon chronologique, pp. 3-5, as well as in the text (pp. 129-30 and p. 148) of L'Antiquité des tems, rétablie et défendue ..., and he shows that both Herodotus and Appien agree in an alternative chronology which seems 'bien plus vraisemblable que ces supputations exorbitantes qui ne trouvent point de place dans une chronologie raisonnable' (HU, I, 131-37). This 'systematic' nature of Boulainviller's chronology is frequently evident for Boulainviller is always keen to show that his chronological calculations fit the facts (or the 'truth') of history as recorded in Scripture and the 'best historians'. The flexibility that Boulainviller

allows in chronology may also be a sign of this systematic nature. To refute the opinion that Abalus, one of the kings of Sparta, is the same as one of the early men recorded in Genesis 10 Boulainviller refers to Scaliger who has shown 'que le Hebal de l'Ecriture a précédé celui cy Abalus de 675 ans; il en auroit bien pû mettre davantage: mais c'est assés pour faire juger de l'absurdité de cette opinion' (HU, II, 287-88). Again, discussing the kingdom of Chaldea (the first area after the Flood to enjoy the apogee of the sun, this taking place according to Boulainviller in 2549 B.C., 'un temps tres-convenable pour placer l'entreprise que l'écriture attribué à Nemrod') Boulainviller points out that he does not deny the existence of kings before Abraham but argues that it is not necessary or apparent that they were established for a long time; four hundred and forty years is the length of time 'l'auteur de l'antiquité des temps' allows them, 'mais quand on luy donneroit encor davantage cette monarchie Chaldéen sic se seroit toujours éteinte avant la naissance d'Abraham' (AS, f. 118). Similarly, to avoid confusion and discrepancy in the chronology of the history of Argos, as well as conflict with established historical fact and with the only reliable source for the chronology of the kings of this town, Boulainviller remarks that 'les alliances des Héros de la Grece Proetus and Acrisius, allied through their children's marriage nous obligent de racourcir les temps autant que l'histoire et la vérité le peuvent souffrir' (HU, II, 59). We have already noted that in his defence of the rather heterodox tendencies of his opinions concerning the age of the world Boulainviller had claimed that the Church of Rome, to which he submits, will allow any chronology as long as the principle of creation is recognized (p.191). Somewhat ironically, Boulainviller receives support for this ambiguous principle from a bastion of the Church itself. Writing about the more reasonable amounts of time that Herodotus allows the apparently enormous antiquity of the Egyptians and the Assyrians Bossuet informs us that:

ceux qui, après tout cela, se trouvent trop resserrés dans la supputation ordinaire des années, pour y ranger à leur gré tous les événements et toutes les dates qu'ils croiront certaines, peuvent se mettre au large tant qu'il leur plaira dans la supputation des Septante, que l'Eglise leur laisse libre, pour y placer à leur aise tous les rois qu'on veut donner à Ninive, avec toutes les années qu'on attribue à leur règne; toutes les dynasties des Egyptiens, en quelque sorte qu'ils veulent arranger; et encore toute l'histoire de la¹ Chine, sans même attendre, s'ils veulent, qu'elle soit plus éclaircie.

But the opportunism that Boulainviller seems to show in his chronological discussions and calculations is no evidence for the relative lack of importance chronology has in the context of ancient history; on the contrary, it is a cogent argument for its being one of Boulainviller's most abiding pre-occupations. The constant logging of historical events, both in terms of the individual history being discussed (Hebrew, Egyptian, Greek) and of the Julian period or of the number of years past since the Creation, is perhaps the most enduring feature of Boulainviller's narration of ancient history. For example, Abraham dies a hundred years after the start of his wanderings, the hundred and seventy-fifth of his life, and in 'l'an du monde' 2423; Jacob receives Isaac's blessing when he is seventy-seven, Isaac a hundred and thirty-seven, in the hundred and sixty-second year of Abraham's wandering, 'l'an du monde' 2485; and he marries Rachel at the age of ninety-one, in the hundred and seventy-seventh year of the 'pérégrination', 'l'an du monde' 2499 (HU, I, 389-91). The importance of establishing a secure chronology can be seen in Boulainviller's discussion of the relative merits of the Hebrew and Samaritan chronologies, in which the dating of the leaving of Babylon for Palestine is seen as 'un point essentiel dans l'histoire des Juifs' (HU, I, 77); similarly, a discussion of the date of Argos's foundation 'ne sera point inutile puisqu' [elle] doit servir de règle à toute la chronologie de l'histoire occidentale' (HU, II, 33).

Two further examples may show the value Boulainviller places on a secure chronology. Discussing the date of Theseus's accession to the throne of

1. Bossuet, Discours sur l'histoire universelle, edited by Jacques Truchet (Paris, 1966), pp. 74-75.

Athens after the tragic death of his father, Boulainviller writes, 'cette époque concourt parfaitement avec les quarante huit années du règne de AEgée et toutes celles de ses Prédécesseurs mais elle n'est pas si bien d'accord avec les années du tribut imposé par Minos' (that is, if Plutarch is right and the Minotaur was killed by Theseus when the Athenians' tribute had fallen due for the third time; HU, II, 176). However, Boulainviller sees no particular difficulty in this and suggests three ways in which Plutarch could have been mistaken. He continues:

chacune de ces solutions peut dissiper l'embarras qui roule sur l'autorité de Plutarque; mais il n'y auroit pas la même facilité à altérer le nombre et l'ordre des années des Royx d'Athènes qui est tellement fixé qu'il se doit trouver 37⁴ ans attiques depuis la première année de Cecrops jusqu'à la 22^e de Ménéstée successeur de Thésée; le marbre ... ne souffre point qu'on change leurs années.
(HU, II, 177)

In this case chronology is absolute, it is the historian who must be 'accommodated'. In the history of Troy, however, historical 'fact' itself must adapt to the framework of chronology. Following the authority of Apollodorus, Boulainviller writes that Dardanus, the founder of Troy, left Attica after killing his brother Iasion in the year 317⁴ of the Julian period. But the difficulty of this date lies in the fact that it precedes Ceres' arrival in Attica by a hundred years. Therefore, Boulainviller concludes, either Iasion's crime against Ceres is untrue or Dardanus was not his brother: 'il est vrai que quand on nieroit l'un et l'autre, il n'y auroit pas grand inconvénient et que ce n'est pas là, la seule rencontre dans laquelle Apollodore a fait des anachronismes sensibles'. However, Boulainviller prefers to believe that Iasion's crime is a fiction 'puisque les temps ont si peu de rapport' and the year fixed for the foundation of Troy 'convient parfaitement à l'âge où des Enfants de Jupiter tels que Dardanus et Iasion ont pu vivre' (HU, II, 301-02).¹

1. Immediately following this discussion, however, Boulainviller goes against the evidence of the Marbles' chronology in deciding that the cult of Cybele was not introduced into Phrygia by Dardanus but was rather a cult indigenous to that area; 'cependant', he continues, 'je n'ay pas voulu soustraire en cet endroit une convenance chronologique qui peut soutenir avec probabilité le sentiment contraire' (HU, II, 303).

Notwithstanding the apparent evidence of the example just noted (p. 330, n.1) (which indeed only confirms rather than denies the great esteem Boulainviller felt for valuable chronological authority) the only authority powerful enough to supersede that of his system of chronology is, appropriately, his system of astrology. Relating his growing impatience with the uncertainty of the various chronologies he had been studying, Boulainviller tells that he used the principles of astrology to judge between them. This is, he feels, a perfectly legitimate use of astrology which he defends by referring to the Chinese annals. 'Les thèmes dressez pour les moments marqués par ces registres historiques sont si parfaitement conformes aux événements et si sensiblement relatifs aux progrès naturel/s/ des racines que ce seroit abuser de sa raison que de n'en pas conclurre que le mouvement des corps célestes a dirigé tout ce qui est arrivé dans cet état' (AS, f. 83). And in replies to objections made against his chronology in the Apogée du soleil,¹ Boulainviller supports his practice of altering chronology (in this case that of the Samaritan Pentateuch) by saying that he did not believe

que la verité astrologique dub etre contrainte par les determinations d'aucune chronologie que ce soit, du texte hebreu, des Septantes, des Samaritains, de l'historien Josephe ny a plus forte raison des Auteurs modernes; Quoyqu'en même tems je reconnoisse qu'il ne faut pas mepriser les conformités qu'elle peut avoir avec les uns et les autres, ny manquer de les faire observer aux connoisseurs, surtout quand ces conformités se soustiennent dans une longue² suite de siecles, comme il se voit dans la suputation des samaritains.

The slight difference between his calculations and those of the Samaritan chronology,³ Boulainviller feels to be of no real importance, 'surtout si l'on a quelque goût de cette verité superieur/e/ a toutes les autres dont la seule Astrologie peut faire la demonstration'.⁴ Boulainviller concludes

1. Another manuscript copy of the work, B.N. fonds français, 12,295, includes copies of anonymous letters critical of aspects of Boulainviller's astrological and chronological procedures as well as Boulainviller's replies to them (pp. 597-754).
2. Ibid. pp. 717 ff.
3. A difference of forty-nine years as far as the date of the Flood is concerned; we have already seen Boulainviller condemn as intolerable a discrepancy in chronology of thirty-eight years (p. 325).
4. B.N., fonds français 12,295, pp. 717 ff.

the defence of one of his chronological manoeuvres (extending the second age - from the Flood to Abraham - from four hundred years to a thousand and seventeen) with a remark which may be taken as revealing the essence of his attitude towards chronology:

Mais se pourroit on plaindre en bonne chronologie de ce que l'on augmente trop un espace sans lequel on est obligé de contredire toutes les autorités et tous les monuments d'histoire conservés chez les Nations les plus illustres et les plus anciennes? sans lequel les Dynasties Egyptiennes, les Chroniques Chinoises deviennent des Fables? Je ne scay ... s'il y a de la prevention dans mes idées Mais je m'imagine que la meilleure maniere d'assurer la Chronologie, est de concilier autant qu'il se peut les traditions originales de tous les peuples, en conservant neantmoins a l'Ecriture l'autorité qui luy appartient justement dans nôtre estime, comme au livre le plus ancien qui reste a present sur la terre.

The need to reconcile 'autant qu'il se peut les traditions originales de tous les peuples' is very much a symptom of the 'crisis' in the European mind so eloquently described by Paul Hazard. The necessity of establishing a coherent, accurate, and rational chronology of the events of ancient Hebrew, Greek, and European history had arisen from the recent acquaintance with civilizations, especially the Chinese, which possessed, if they were to be believed, accurate records of their antiquity which accorded ill with the traditionally accepted notions of Biblical chronology. Another challenge to this chronology, particularly noticeable in Boulainviller's writings, was the ever more daring speculations of natural philosophy. It is the dictates of scientific reason which, while allowing in principle the accepted chronology of the history of 'our world' to cover a mere six thousand years, eventually prompt Boulainviller to postulate 'une infinité de siècles' for the necessary physical mechanism of Creation to complete its course (above, p.191).

The infinity of this pre-historic time allows of no chronology and in its speculative nature can be made to effect little or no real injury to commonly accepted notions. Yet even within the chronology that Boulainviller

1. Ibid., pp. 734 ff.

arranges and examines so painstakingly and so astutely there are moments when one can perceive in Boulainviller's texts the primitive stirrings of geological and archeological time. Discussing the foundation of the Egyptian monarchy (its first king being Mizraim, the son of Cham) Boulainviller rightly argues that royalty necessarily supposes a sufficiently large number of inhabitants to form a nation, 'mais cette supposition', he declares, 'n'est pas gratuite; l'exemple des Israélites qui en 215 ans multiplièrent jusqu'à 600000 hommes sans compter les vieillards, les Femmes et les Enfants fait juger de celle des Enfants de Cham pendant 318 ans' (HU, I, 178).

Further, although not quite sure of its date, Boulainviller places the promulgation of the 'cycle égyptien' fifty-seven years before the reign of Mizraim (later, as we have seen, he will alter this figure to sixty-one years; p. 323). The existence of this cycle shows that Egyptian society was sufficiently developed to need a suitable method of calculating time, 'marque certain', writes Boulainviller, 'que l'arrivée de Cham [the inventor of the cycle] en ce Pays précédoit de beaucoup cette époque commune des Egyptiens' (HU, I, 180). Thus on the one hand Boulainviller realizes that society and its arts need considerable time to develop, yet on the other he is forced to squeeze this development into a period of only some three hundred years. Similarly, in his narration of the Exodus Boulainviller notes that the stations of the Israelites were not merely overnight stops but proper resting places, and thus he emphasizes the length of time their journey took in spite of the 'peu de tems que l'Ecriture l'a décrit en peu de paroles' (HU, I, 446). Finally, in his discussions of the archaeological finds made at Modena, fifteen to eighteen feet below the surface of the soil, Boulainviller prefers to admit to ignorance of how these ruins came to be buried so deep in the earth than to contemplate the enormous quantity of earth (and hence time) needed to cover the entire Lombardy plain,¹ even

1. 'comme toute la Lombardie est un pays également uny il faut supposer que cet accroissement n'a point été particulier au territoire de Modène' (HU, II, 345).

to a depth of sixty feet, the depth at which shells and the remains of leaves and fruit had been discovered (HU, II, 344-46).¹ Speaking of the ruins nearer the surface Boulainviller writes:

cependant on est obligé de dire que ces ruines n'ont pas une antiquité plus éloignée que la mémoire commune des hommes puisque l'on y trouve du fer mis en oeuvre pour former divers instruments mécaniques et que nous avons veû dans l'histoire de la Grece le temps précis de la découverte de ce métal qui est postérieure à l'exode de 23 ans.
(HU, II, 345)

Like Voltaire in the Philosophie de l'histoire,² Boulainviller refuses to follow chronological and scientific speculation where they would naturally tend to lead. Indeed, it will take the European mind at least another century to destroy irremediably the empire of Biblical chronology.³ Although not as forcibly, some of Boulainviller's etymological discussions can also be seen to raise doubts concerning the principles of his ancient historiography. Let us now turn to consider a little more fully Boulainviller's use of etymology in his historical writings.

II Etymology

Like chronology, but perhaps not quite so obviously, etymology is a permanent interest of Boulainviller the historian. Often this interest produces nothing more than picturesque detail. This is especially the case in his compendious study of all the 'généralités' of France, the État de la France. Frequently Boulainviller comments on the etymology of place names, the names of abbeys etc. (and at times in considerable detail) to reveal their relationship with the history of the people of the area, the nature of the surrounding terrain, and the languages formerly spoken there.⁴

1. Even Boulainviller's later supposition in the Apogée du soleil of an infinite amount of time before the completion of Creation could not explain these discoveries.
2. See J.H. Brumfitt's edition, in the Complete Works of Voltaire, no. 59 (University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 89-95.
3. Glyn Daniel, The Idea of Prehistory (Penguin Books, 1971; first published 1962), chapter 2 'The Beginnings of Archaeological Prehistory'.
4. EF, I, 303, 420; II, 42-43, 60-61, 169; III, 188 453-54; IV, 5, 35-36; V, 29, 232, 301; VI, 130, 131, 152.

Sometimes etymological detail can provide interesting historical material of a more general nature as, for example, when Boulainviller shows that the Gauls occupied at first a greater portion of Burgundy than hitherto had been thought (EF, III, 300).

Many of the etymological discussions, or rather comments, in La Vie de Mahomed are similarly 'picturesque'. This is not surprising when one considers that Boulainviller was writing of people and places, and using Arabic terms, no doubt unfamiliar to the bulk of his audience. These comments are thus little more than explanations of the meaning of Arab words and place names.¹ However, we are given at least a hint of the apologetic use to which etymology can be put at the end of Boulainviller's discussion of Arabian geography. He writes:

On pourroit porter cette division [of Arabia] et l'exactitude plus loin, en cherchant les habitations des premières Tribus Arabes, et celles des descendants d'Abraham, dont la plupart des noms se sont conservez jusqu'à présent dans le Pays, malgré le prodigieux intervalle qui se trouve entre leur siècle et le nôtre. Mais comme ce détail seroit inutile à l'Histoire que nous avons à traiter, il suffira de remarquer que les noms des Pays de Boulans, de Hadramant, de Scheba, de Disklam, d'Uzal, de Jarac des Sabéens, de Dedan et par corruption d'Aden, subsistent encore dans l'Yemen et dans son voisinage, pour confirmer le témoignage que Moïse en a rendu il y a plus de 4000 ans: dont il peut résulter une preuve très authentique de la vérité des autres Peuplades que le même Moïse a marquées dans la Genese, et sur laquelle les Interpretes de l'Ecriture ne paroissent pas avoir appuyé autant qu'elle le mérite. (VM, pp. 29-30)

Naturally, the argumentative nature of etymology can be better appreciated in Boulainviller's histories of France. Boulainviller begins the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France with a discussion of the origins of the Franks.² This discussion pays considerable attention to the etymology of the names of the various Germanic tribes which were to rule over much of western Europe after the collapse of the Roman empire. For example, to explain the Laeti in such names as Laeti Batavi, Laeti Nervii,

1. For example, VM, pp. 34 (the name of Islam itself), 99 (Medina) 129-30 (the meaning of 'oasis'), 131 (the names of the Gasswan princes), 137 (the name of the kingdom of 'Palmyre'), 254 (the name of the father of Mohammed's second wife), and 194 (the meaning of 'Mohammed' - 'désiré des Peuples').
2. See too the second preface to the Mémoires historiques, pp. 80-90.

Laeti Franci, and Laeti Suevi Boulainviller writes:

Pour deviner à présent ce que les Romains vouloient exprimer par le nom de Laeti, il faut savoir qu'ils employoient volontiers dans leurs troupes les Jeunes Gens, qu'ils tiroient de Germanie ou des Nations qui en étoient sorties, pour venir habiter dans les limites de l'Empire; et que, soit par raport à ce qu'ils étoient traitez comme volontaires, soit à cause de leur gayeté naturelle et de la liberté de leur humeur, ils leur donnoient à tous le nom de Laeti, joyeux. On peut toutefois dériver ce nom de Letes de l'ancien langage de Rome, dans lequel il signifioit une troupe. C'est donc sous cette apellation qu'on les trouve employez dans la Notice de l'Empire en douze troupes, commandées chacune par un Préfet. Mais, au lieu d'assurer que tous ces Letes ayent été François naturels, comme Mr. le Laboureur le pense, je reconnois que l'expression de la Notice y est contraire; puisque l'on en peut inférer qu'il n'y en avoit au plus que huit troupes portant le nom de Laeti Franci. (HAG, I, 5-6)

One might ask what is so 'argumentative' about such use of etymology, and indeed it is evident that in these preliminary considerations Boulainviller's etymological explanations are impartial. Moreover, almost at the very beginning of his history Boulainviller writes: 'le nom de Franc en François n'étoit point propre à un Peuple particulier, il s'étendoit à tous ceux qui habitoient entre le Rhin et le Vesper, et même jusqu'à l'Elbe, quoique divisez par des noms diférens, Sicambres, Chamaves, Cattéres, Bructéres, Ampsivariens, etc.', and thus he avoids the criticism which Freret will make, in his discourse upon the origins of the Franks, of those who consider the word 'Franc' to refer to a single people, so called because of their exemption from tribute.¹

However, in his discussion of the 'liberté des François' under the original constitution ('l'ancienne discipline') Boulainviller makes use of etymology to support his political thesis. Having declared most assert-

1. Rather than 'free', the word 'franc', Freret claimed, means proud, courageous, and cruel. See his De l'origine des François, et de leur établissement dans la Gaule in the Œuvres complètes, edited by Septchènes, 20 vols (Paris, 1796), V, 164 ff. It is interesting to note that Boulainviller does not use this erroneous etymology of 'franc' to argue for the Franks' exemption from all impositions other than that of carrying arms. He also agrees with Freret (ibid., pp. 157-58) - or perhaps we should say that Freret concurs with Boulainviller - in refuting the opinion that the Franks came originally from Phrygia, seeing it most probable 'que les Anciens ont confondu dans la prononciation les noms de Frise et Phrigie: (Frisia et Phrygia) erreur, qui à la longue a aisément passé dans l'écriture chez des Gens aussi peu Grammariens que l'étoient nos anciens Ecrivains' (HAG, I, 16).

ively that the Franks were essentially independent of their king, that they had no sovereign, Boulainviller writes:

Ils étoient tous compagnons, et c'est pour cela qu'ils furent apelez Leudes, du mot Alemand Leuch, dont ils usoient entr'eux, qui veut dire, Compatriotes, Gens de même société et condition: ce mot, traduit en Latin, s'exprimoit par le terme de Fidelis, et c'est pourquoi il est seul employé par les Rois dans les Adresses de leurs plus anciennes Ordonnances; (Omnibus Regni Fidelibus,) ou bien, (centenariis Regni Fidelibus.). (HAG, I, 29-30)

Furthermore, writes Boulainviller, 'l'on voit /dans les Chartes anciennes/ que la fidélité des Leudes n'est pas apliquée au Roi, mais à l'Etat, Regni Fidelibus, c'est-à-dire, Fidelles à la Nation et au Gouvernement François' (HAG, I, 32-33).

Lauréault de Foncemagne, an important eighteenth-century critic of Boulainviller, is pleased to detect an irreconcilable contradiction in his use of the term 'leudes' and its derivatives. He notes, as we have just done, the meaning of 'fidèles compagnons' that Boulainviller gives to the word 'leudes' and contrasts it with the meaning Boulainviller adopts in his Dissertation sur la noblesse. According to Foncemagne Boulainviller allows in this second work that the Franks left the Gauls in possession of their hereditary lands in their original state, only exacting a charge or tribute for this privilege; hence the word 'allodiaux', coming from the German 'leud', must in this case refer to lands belonging to 'un homme sujet' rather than 'un homme libre'. Unfortunately Foncemagne is right, but only because, one supposes, of very faulty editing of Boulainviller's text. The 1732 edition of the Dissertation¹ has the following:

/Les Francs/ se saisirent seulement des Domaines des Romains, soit ceux du fisc, soit ceux des particuliers, et ils laisserent aux naturels du païs leurs possessions hereditaires, dans l'état où ils les trouverent; en les chargeant néanmoins de certains tributs et de servitudes, dont ces sortes de biens furent nommez Allodiaux du mot Allemand Leuth qui signifie homme sujet, parce que ceux qui les possedoient étoient tenus du service réel qu'on leur imposa.²

However, the text, as established by André Devyver, reads:

1. Boulainviller, Essais sur la noblesse de France (Amsterdam, 1732).
2. Ibid., pp. 59-60.

[Les Francs] se saisirent seulement des domaines des Romains, soit ceux du fisc, soit ceux des particuliers, laissèrent aux naturels du pays presque toutes leurs possessions héréditaires dans l'état où ils les trouvèrent, en les chargeant néanmoins de certains tributs et de servitudes, d'où se forma la distinction de tous les biens du royaume en mas et mansions serviles qui estoient les héritages des Gaulois, en biens libres ou allodiaux qui estoient possédés héréditairement et franchement par les particuliers françois (qui, comme on l'a dit, se nommoient entre eux Leuth ou compagnons) et en biens fiscaux divisez en domaines royaux et en bénéfices. On comprenoit sous le nom général de terres saliques toutes celles qui appartenoient aux François.

Later in his analysis of the Frankish government in Gaul, Boulainviller considers the 'noblesse des François' and their undeniable superiority, thanks to conquest, over the Gauls. Among the several ways which Boulainviller feels are open to him to demonstrate his assertion that after their conquest of Gaul only the Franks were recognized as the country's nobility, he will choose 'celui qui fera connoître que les noms de Salique et de Noble étoient sinónimes, et qu'ils dénotoient proprement les Conquéran's de la Gaule, leur postérité, ou ce qui avoit un raport essentiel avec eux' (HAG, I, 36). Boulainviller's reason for this choice reveals his keen and historical awareness of the need for clarity in the discussion of old terms,² as

1. Devyver, Le Sang épuré, pp. 513-14. Devyver's reading is supported by a passage in Boulainviller's extracts from, and commentary upon, Le Laboureur's Histoire de la pairie de France et du parlement de Paris (London, 1740), in which he disagrees with Le Laboureur's conclusion that the terms 'Leudes' (German), 'Druds' (Gaul), and 'Fideles' (Latin) are synonymous and thus that 'alleu', deriving from 'Leudes', refers to those possessions bestowed upon 'les Grands' by the prince in return for their fidelity (Histoire de la pairie de France, chapter seven, pp. 52-64). Boulainviller insists that the term 'Leudes', under the 'ancienne discipline', referred to all the Franks as independent and sovereign men and allowed of no hierarchy with regard to their constitutional rights as conquerors; it follows that 'le mot d'Alleu exclut la dépendance et l'hommage et par conséquent l'obligation de fidélité' (B.N. fonds français, 7504, pp. 16-19). Furthermore, Fonce-magne declares that although Boulainviller states that the word 'fidelis' is the only term, according to the old ordinances, used by the kings to address their followers, he has found no trace of this word in any of the charters recorded by Baluze. Fonce-magne also disputes that the Franks were faithful to the state rather than the king; although 'regni fidelibus' is, very occasionally, found in the records, he argues, 'regis' is normally the word to be found. See Lauréault de Fonce-magne, Examen critique d'une opinion de Monsieur le comte de Boulainvilliers, sur l'ancien gouvernement de la France in Collections des meilleures dissertations ..., edited by J.M.C. Leber, 20 vols (Paris, 1826), V, 35-38.
2. It was precisely for his anachronistic and insensitive use of the terms and formulae that form much of the basis for discussion in the study of France's early history that Montesquieu was so critical of the Abbé Dubos; Œuvres complètes, edited by A. Masson, vol. I (part 2), pp. 308 and 314.

well as his discreet realization of the bias which etymology can convey.

He writes:

Ma raison dans ce choix est, qu'il convient à ce commencement d'Histoire de lever l'ambiguïté des termes, dont je serai souvent obligé de me servir dans la suite. (HAG, I, 36-37)

Although Boulainviller's use of etymology in the Histoire universelle is not so obviously 'interested' as it is in the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France and the Mémoires historiques, nonetheless, as we shall see, it plays an appreciable part in Boulainviller's assessment of historical fact and opinion and in the construction of his historical narrative.

The critical role etymology plays in Boulainviller's ancient histories is quite evident. It helps both to support accepted fact and opinion and question them. For example, discussing the etymology of the name 'Chanaam' Boulainviller remarks: 'son nom peut également dériver de deux racines dont le sens convient pareillement à ce que nous savons de ces Peuples /his descendants/7' (HU, I, 99). The first root goes back to Noah's curse; the second root means 'merchant': 'or Personne n'ignore combien les Phéniciens se sont appliquez au commerce et qu'ils ont été les premiers hommes qui l'ont mis en usage' (HU, I, 100). A little later Boulainviller reports Bochart's opinion that the Lud are ancestors of the Lydians 'de la petite Asie': the Hebrew word means tortuous, an allusion to the Meander river, and there is 'une analogie sensible' between the names 'Ludium' and 'Lidiens'.¹ However, Boulainviller notes that it is not at all certain that Sem's children went to 'basse-Asie' and that it would therefore be more appropriate to look for another place of origin near the Euphrates. Boulainviller finds a suitable place, where the Euphrates is 'sinewy', and concludes 'qu'on peut soutenir que les Lydiens Enfants de Sem habitoient une

1. Samuel Bochart, Opera omnia, section Phaleg, book 4, chapter 6, columns 264-65.

partie de l'Arménie' (HU, I, 117).¹

This function of etymology in the Histoire universelle is not unusual. Thus the 'fiction' (based on a passage in Saint Jerome) of Abraham's being thrown into a fire for his religious opinions is exposed when Boulainviller points out that the word 'Hur', fire, is also the name of the town where Abraham lived before his vocation (HU, I, 175). Etymology also serves to criticize the opinions of the Phoenician, Egyptian, or Persian origins of Cadmus and allows Boulainviller to retain his belief that he was originally a Greek (HU, II, 101-02). And discussing the ancient inhabitants of Sicily, the 'Ciclopes' and the 'Lestrigons', Boulainviller demonstrates how the Greeks, horrified by their barbarity and altering the pronunciation of their name, turned the 'Ciclopes' into fabulous, one-eyed monsters (HU, II, 411-12). Indeed, the fictions which the Greeks have introduced amongst the facts of ancient history through their corruptions of foreign languages is quite sharply criticized by Boulainviller. Having demonstrated the true meaning of the words 'Lacedaemonia', 'Sparta', etcetera, according to Bochart (see note 1 below), Boulainviller writes:

sur ce pied là tout ce qu'on dit des anciens Rois de ce pays, n'auroit aucun fondement que dans l'imagination des Grecs postérieurs qui avoient coutume de multiplier les Héros de leurs Pays et d'en feindre tout autant de fois qu'ils en avoient besoin pour justifier une étimologie ou pour appuyer quelque culte, ou quelque superstition nouvelle.
(HU, II, 274-75)²

However, perhaps Boulainviller's most patently critical use of etymology occurs in his discussion of the opinion that the prophecy given to Juda

1. Normally, however, Boulainviller is perfectly content to follow Bochart's etymological principles, indeed he is Boulainviller's most important authority in such matters. Examining the debate about the first king of Lacedaemonia, Lelex, Boulainviller states that Bochart's etymologies should always be followed 'lorsqu'il y a un fondement vraisemblable'; in this case (Samuel Bochart, Opera omnia, section Canaan, book 1, chapter 22, columns 456-60) they reveal that the words 'Lacedaemonia', 'Lelex', and 'Sparta' are Phoenician words to describe the nature of the country rather than any particular people (HU, II, 273-74).
2. The changes the Greeks wrought in the pronunciation of oriental words are also responsible for confusion, fortunately remediable, in the history of the division of Egypt between the four sons of Mizraim (HU, I, 219).

is a foretelling of the birth of the Messiah. The difficulty lies in the Hebrew word 'schilo', rendered as 'mittendus' in the Vulgate text, and which appears nowhere else in Scripture. Boulainviller refers to the roots of the word, as well as to other Semitic languages, and concludes that 'mittendus' is a possible translation of the word, but that this translation 'paroit tirée de trop loin: elle force trop sensiblement la vérité de l'histoire; ainsy l'on peut justement soupçonner qu'elle n'a été inventée que dans la vue de soutenir le préjugé des Chrétiens' (HU, I, 420-21).¹

An important section of the Histoire universelle, from our present point of view, is Boulainviller's long discussion of the peoples descended from the children of Noah (HU, I, 84-121). Occasionally, as we have seen (p.339), there is pause for reflection and disagreement, but normally the etymological information is given straight-forwardly as fact; for example:

Phut est le 3^e Peuple sorti de Cham; son nom signifie dans l'hébreu être vagabond; et répond tout à fait à celui des Numides que les Grecs et les Latins luy ont donné qui veut dire Errant; et encore à celui de Maures qu'on leur donne aujourd huy du mot Maur ou Moirin qui signifie changer. Bochard [sic] a ramassé plusieurs monuments du nom de Phut dans la Lybie et sur les bords de la Mer Phaleg, book 4, chapter 337 mais les Phutéens proprement dits ne s'eloignent pas tant de l'Egippte; Puisque Jérémie ch. 46 v. 9; Ezechiel ch. 30. v. 5. et Nahum ch. 3. v. 9. nous les représentent aux mains avec les Egiptiens. (HU, I, 99)

At the end of this discussion, where he quickly deals with the founders of 'peuples obscurs et de petite étendue', Boulainviller writes, with a

1. A similarly 'polemical', but more involved etymological discussion is to be found in the fifth volume of Boulainviller's reading notes. This discussion, entitled Lingua hebraica, refutes the rabbinical tradition that Hebrew is the world's first language and contends that, in common with Chaldean, Arabic, Syriac, and other 'oriental' languages, it is descended from a mother tongue as French, Italian, and Spanish are from Latin. Furthermore, Boulainviller denies Hebrew's status as a holy language, and argues that all languages (even the Galilean dialect, 'tout méprisable qu'il étoit parmy les juifs') can communicate the holy. Indeed, from the points of view of richness of vocabulary, clarity of expression, and politeness in discourse Hebrew shows itself to be particularly imperfect. As unflattering to Jewish presumption as this historical and etymological analysis of their beloved language might be, however, it should not be thought that Boulainviller's attitude is especially acrimonious; indeed the mood of his scholarship, although not without its ironic points, is serene enough to allow Moses the authorship of the Pentateuch. B.N. n.a. 11,075, folios 124-42.

curious inconsequentiality: 'Dicklam signifie proprement un Palmier ce qui rend fort incertain le lieu de son habitation parce que dans un pays si chaud où l'ombrage est si recherché il est fait souvent mention des endroits à qui ce nom peut convenir' (HU, I, 121).

It is not within the author's competence to criticize the principles which guided Boulainviller's etymological analyses, but F.E. Manuel has written that the early eighteenth-century practice of etymology was influenced by the rabbinical tradition of Biblical exegesis, which wove 'etymologies from the flimsiest of word similarities. (Etymological explanation of name-origins was of course standard procedure in the Bible itself)', and employed a phenomenology of error which allowed for all sorts of interpretations.¹ Something of this may be seen, for example, in Boulainviller's discussion, following Syncellus, of the division of Egypt between the four sons of Mizraim.² He demonstrates that the first son discussed by Syncellus, Athotis, is the king of Coptos 'car les Grecs le nomment ordinairement Thot ou Thaut: et la difference n'est pas considérable' (HU, I, 220). Similarly, Boulainviller contends that the Egyptian king Apophis did not exist and that his name is none other than Joseph's, the Hebrew Patriarch's, 'prononcé à l'Egyptienne' (HU, I, 292). Again, the adaptations of Egyptian words which the Greeks made 'en adoucissant les lettres aspirées dont les Egyptiens faisoient grand usage dans leur langue' provide a neat explanation of the presence of an extra dynasty of Egyptian kings Boulainviller strongly doubts ever existed. In this instance, however, he shows judicious circumspection and writes: 'cependant afin de ne pas donner une conjecture pour une réalité, nous mettrons dans la table générale des Rois d'Egipte les deux canons de Thebes et de Diospolis' (HU, I, 286).

We have noted (p.340 , n. 1) that 'vraisemblance' is an important element in Boulainviller's etymologies. So too is the other twin principle

1. F.E. Manuel, The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods, p. 115.

2. Georgius Syncellus, Chronographia (Paris, 1652), pp. 53-55.

of his ancient historiography: 'la convenance'. Boulainviller refers, for example, to the cauldron mentioned in Herodotus, book five, which bore, according to our author, the inscription: 'Amphitryon le Thebain m'a offerte'.¹ Herodotus notes that the inscription dates from about the time of Laius (great-grandson of Cadmus) and this, says Boulainviller, would make Amphitryon a generation too old. A more difficult problem, however, is why Amphitryon should have changed his name to 'Thélébéen'. Boulainviller suggests one or two explanations but sees his third as quite conclusive: 'Thélébéen' means 'he who is absent from home' and, as Boulainviller explains, 'c'est ce qui convenoit fort bien à Amphitryon exilé de Tyrinte dont le royaume devoit luy appartenir' (HU, II, 251-52). Thus 'la convenance' is satisfied, yet Boulainviller seems to overlook the first problem he mentioned, that of unsuitable chronology.²

At times, however, Boulainviller's etymological investigations imply a more serious threat to the fabric of his narration of ancient history than mere oversights in chronology. The threat, if threat it be, occurs, ironically, in Boulainviller's discussion of the globe's very first inhabitants. In his treatment of the names of Adam and Eve Boulainviller brings out their symbolic nature, as he does too with the names of Cain and Abel (above, p. 313). 'Adam' means 'espèce humaine' and, more particularly, is an allusion to 'Adamah' meaning earth, an interpretation rendered all the more compelling by Boulainviller's comparison with the Latin parallel of 'homo' and 'humo'. Eve is a partly 'historical' name and merely designates the first mother of men. Although neither is a 'nom appellatif' 'l'usage

1. Aubrey de Sélincourt, in his English translation, writes: 'Amphitryon dedicated me from the spoils of the Teleboae'; Herodotus, The Histories, p. 332.
2. A rare note of humour may be heard in Boulainviller's study of the name 'Espagne', coming from 'Spania' in turn derived from 'spani-jam', the Phoenician word for a rabbit warren. He refers to Pliny (book 8, chapter 29) to show the Spaniards sending to Augustus for help to catch some of the superabundant rabbits, and then writes: 'cette convenance est singulière quoyqu'elle déroge à la gravité des peuples du Pays' (HU, II, 470).

n'a pas laissé de les attacher à la personne de nos premiers Peres pour leur distinction apellative' (HU, I, 32). Similarly, 'Nimrod' has for its root, writes Boulainviller, the word 'Marad' which means 'être rebelle'; this is such an accurate description of Nimrod's character 'qu'on peut le [his name] regarder comme un nom historique plustôt que comme une appellation véritable' (HU, I, 102). Again, in his refutation of Hebrew's status as the world's oldest language, Boulainviller points out that the names 'Cain' and 'Noah' seem to be of Chaldean rather than Hebrew origin. He concludes that the ancient names in Scripture were not given at birth but later 'en consideration des evenemens singuliers arrivés durant leur vie ou du caractere particulier de leur conduite'.¹

A conclusion one might draw from the recognition of the 'historical' and 'symbolic' nature of the names of the early men of Genesis would be that the account itself is merely symbolic (a retrospective extrapolation of events) but was nonetheless essential to satisfy the early Hebrews' need to explain to themselves the creation of the world and their presence on it. This was not an interpretation that Boulainviller was at liberty to adopt, however, for what, as an ancient historian, would he have done without the Bible?² Besides, two distinctive features of his ancient historiography, rationalism and Euhemerism, establish and emphasize the historicity of mythological and legendary heroes rather than call it into question. Thus in his discussion of the invention of iron smelting and working Boulainviller notes that 'de tous les inventeurs du fer qui ont été en grande quantité les marbres n'ont conservé que le nom de Kelmis'. Boulainviller makes another suggestion: Hercules (although this is not the son of Alcmena).

1. B.N. n.a. 11,075. folio 128.
2. In his insistence on the (rather base) humanity of Moses, however, and on the human origins of Genesis (above, pp. 310-11), Boulainviller begins to approach this sort of interpretation. Explaining that the patriarch Heber's historical name means 'au delà du fleuve' (i.e. the Euphrates), Boulainviller notes that 'cet exemple fait juger seûrement que le livre de la genèze a été écrit dans les idées communes des Juifs et par un homme vivant au delà de l'Euphrate' (HU, I, 70).

Boulainviller shows that the name is originally a Phoenician word meaning merchant (the first to carry iron), and yet this does not prompt him to doubt that there was an individual called Hercules who discovered iron smelting^(HU, II, 128). A remark made in the État de la France may help us to appreciate the nature of Boulainviller's ancient histories and etymology's relation to them. He is discussing an intendant's opinions on the former name of Autun, a town in the duchy of Burgundy. The intendant's first remark, Boulainviller notes, is patently incorrect: his erudition is simply insufficient. His second, that the name was bestowed by Augustus, is likewise faulty, 'car quoique l'Etymologie soit véritable, on sçait que ce fut Constantin et ses Enfants qui donnerent le nom de ... [sic] et d'Augustodunum à l'ancienne Ville des Eudens [the people of the area]' (EF, III, 172-73). Thus in the study of more modern and better known history the facts may be used to correct an apparently faultless etymology, but in ancient history the 'known facts' are very often insubstantial until etymology has done its work and has turned names into people, places, or fictions.

The third and final aspect of Boulainviller's historical methodology to be treated in this chapter concerns his principles of explanation and causation. These do not carry any implicit challenge to the structure of his historical narratives as chronology and etymology at times may do, but they occasionally reveal on the one hand a striking lack of imagination and on the other a much more thoughtful and comprehensive understanding of what makes history move.

III Explanation

There have been several occasions already in this thesis where we have examined Boulainviller's methods of providing explanations of historical events; indeed much of Part Three was devoted to an appreciation of Boulainviller's use of the general explanatory concepts of Providence and

Destiny. More particularly within that section we saw how Boulainviller referred to alternative principles of causation to explain many of the important events of world history; physics for the creation of the earth and for the Flood; psychology for miracles and prophecies. In chapter eight we saw how Boulainviller, in common with Bossuet, provided pragmatic explanations of events and situations in ancient history (for example, the worldly ambition of the Egyptian priests), and in chapter nine it became apparent how utterly pervasive he felt the influence of astrology to be over all sublunar events. The present examination of what Boulainviller provides as explanations of historical events will begin by considering a little further the personal pragmatism that figures so largely in his explanatory methodology and will then go on to inquire into other factors Boulainviller adduces in his assessments of the causes of, and influences upon, historical change.

The personal pragmatism which Boulainviller prefers as an explanation of the development of ancient Egyptian society and religion and which is used to explain many details of ancient history in general (above, pp.230 , 231 and 233) is his most usual mode of historical explanation. The centuries of historical change which Boulainviller examines in the Mémoires historiques and in the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France and which, particularly in the later Capetian centuries, brought about the absolute rule of the French monarch, are to be explained, he often notes,¹ very much in terms of the nobility's 'inattention' and the ambition of the kings in collusion with the other 'enemies' of the nobility, namely the Church and the Third Estate. It is just this sort of attitude to the explanation of long periods of historical development that earns the censure of Friedrich Meinecke. In his brief but penetrating analysis of Boulainviller's historiography of France he writes:

1. See HAG, I, Preface, 282, 327-30, 337, 342; II, 262-65, 266; III, 61.

Ein gewaltiger säkularer Prozess, zuerst langsamer, zuletzt rascher sich abrollend, wurde hier durchaus als eine Einheit erfasst! ... die Kritieren echter historischer Entwicklung findet man in dem Vorgang, wie er ihn schilderte, nicht. Denn es fehlen die inneren sachlichen Triebkräfte, die Notwendigkeit und Freiheit vereinigend, von einem Zustande zum anderen hinüberführen. Es wird dafür geschildert ein idealer und musterhafter Urzustand - musterhaft wenigstens politisch, denn die Ignoranz und Barbarei seiner Träger wird durchaus zugegeben ... Und er wird umgestaltet durch die bewussten Akte herrschgieriger Monarchen, die gelingen konnten, weil der Adel selbst unaufmerksam und träge war ... Das ist echter personalistischer Pragmatismus.

Boulainviller's use of such pragmatism is no doubt to be explained by the historiographical practice of his time as well as by the perennial attraction which explanation in terms of individual plans, motives, passions, and foibles holds for the human mind. However, the 'consolation' Boulainviller receives from the nobles' lack of attention and the 'critical' superiority he wins from exposing the monarchical, clerical, and bourgeois conspiracy are the great political advantages Boulainviller gains from this personal pragmatism.

The personal ambitions, feuds, and plots of the Merovingian kings and their Mayors are seen as the propulsive motors of those early centuries of French history as portrayed in Boulainviller's Memoires historiques.

Although remaining essentially the same, the pragmatism Boulainviller employs to explain later periods of French history shows perhaps a degree of change: no longer are individuals (apart, of course, from the king) and factions the active elements in the development of France's constitution so much as the class interests and characteristics of the nobility, clergy, and rising bourgeoisie. The moral attitude towards the history of France which personal pragmatism strongly implies (and which in chapter four was shown to be an important influence upon the writing of that history) is thus made even more central to Boulainviller's vision of French history, for no longer do critical judgements simply affect the individual historical agent (whose personal character - apart from Charlemagne's - has a more or less accidental relationship with the history he helps to fashion) but

rather do they become established as general categories of historical causation. The sorry tale of the history of France is by and large explained by the morally conceived nature of the several groups of actors taking part: the 'chicane' and 'finesse' of the clerks and Third Estate, the ambition of the clergy, the monarch's war of attrition against noble power, wealth, and privilege, and of course the lamentable inattention of the nobility themselves (HAG, vols II and III). We shall see that in another work, the Dissertation sur la noblesse, Boulainviller conceives of the causes of the nobility's decadence in a much less individual and moral way which allows him to provide a considerably more credible and recognizably historical explanation. Indeed, at times, the insufficiency of the pragmatic explanation is almost confessed. Philippe Auguste, intent upon ruining the fiefs, draws up a new ordinance in which, inadvertently,

il associe à sa puissance royale les Seigneurs, qui rendent l'Ordonnance conjointement avec lui: ce qui auroit été d'une bien plus dangereuse conséquence pour son autorité que ne l'étoit la puissance des Fiefs, si l'inattention et l'ignorance des Seigneurs, dont ils donnoient pour-lors une étrange preuve contre leurs plus grands intérêts, ne l'eussent encore mieux servi qu'il n'eût pu le desirer. (HAG, I, 342)

Surely this 'étrange preuve', entertained by the historian in an attempt to preserve the efficacy as an explanation of the nobles' almost laudable neglect of their interests, amounts to no explanation at all but rather to an admission of bewilderment?

The frequent use of the individual and the pragmatic to provide explanations in ancient history is not governed by such a particularly partial aim as that evident in Boulainviller's histories of France. Yet although this mode of explanation is perhaps not politically or ideologically necessary in the Histoire universelle, historiographically it is.¹ Boulainviller's whole approach to the history of the ancient past, seeing it in rationalist, Euhemerist, non-allegorical terms, emphasizes the concrete and

1. As the example of the Egyptian priests demonstrates, however, pragmatism is a powerful weapon to wield against the 'infâme' (above, p. 231).

the individual. His sources allow him little alternative. If the gods of the ancient world were men then there must be very good reasons for their deification. These reasons are to be found in the benefits they brought to their fellows. The development of society, the increase in knowledge are thus dependent on the legislator, the inventor, the discoverer. Laws have authors even if these authors are unknown (HU, I, 257). Similarly, in describing the spread of the victorious Franks throughout the lands of Gaul, Boulainviller's unthinking use of the impersonal pronoun shows what a convenient mode of explanation the pragmatic is. It is thoroughly unsatisfactory but it appears at least to provide an explanation:

à l'égard de la Neustrie et de l'Aquitaine, comme les peuples s'étoient volontairement assujétis, et qu'il ne restoit qu'un petit nombre de François à pourvoir, on y en plaça fort peu; au lieu de quoi on y forma une infinité de Bénéfices, c'est-à-dire, qu'on les partagea en Magistratures, ausquelles on attribua, outre la juridiction, certaines terres proportionnément à la dignité et à la dépense nécessaire de ceux qui en étoient revêtus. On revint de-là sur la France Ancienne, et l'on y fit les mêmes établissemens: de sorte qu'un grand nombre de Francs se trouvèrent tout à coup élevez aux dignitez de Comte et de Duc dans les Provinces; sans compter les dignitez des Armées, ni celles des Palais des Rois, qui n'étoient pas les moins recherchées. (MH, p. 172)

And the deistic notion of the religious manipulator, a notion Boulainviller employs in the Histoire de la religion et de la philosophie ancienne and the Lettre d'Hippocrate à Damagète as well as in the Histoire universelle (I, 222-24, 255; II, 396) only exhibits its insufficiency, as we have seen (p. 231), when it conveniently manages to explain the almost inexplicable.

Although Boulainviller's use of personal pragmatism is much more a historiographical necessity than a polemical weapon in the Histoire universelle it may, paradoxically, produce an absolutist conception of the nature of the societies of ancient times. The emphasis which Boulainviller's methodology necessarily gives to the exploits and actions of the talented and powerful individuals of ancient history may well lead one to imagine these leaders of men as perfect despots. Such a notion is explicitly denied by Boulainviller during his narration of the adventurous life of Theseus, one of the outstanding characters of his histories, where he refers to

Thucydides (book two) to show that people governed themselves independently of tyrannical kings. However, he notes, the independence of the twelve territories of Athens was an obstacle to their greatness and thus it was that Theseus conceived the idea of unification. But, he warns, 'un coeur véritablement grand et élevé est toujours l'ennemy de l'oppression'; liberty for the king means liberty for his people, 'il n'est jamais tenté en aucune occasion de devenir le Tyran de ses Compatriotes'; the fortune and popularity of Theseus in no way imply the oppression of the inhabitants of Attica (HU, II, 180-81).

The mechanistic nature of Boulainviller's description of the developing administrative system of the Franks in Gaul (p.349) is a recognizable feature of his methods of explanation in general. It is apparent in the Histoire universelle in his discussions of the causes of population movement. Etymological 'evidence' allows Boulainviller to conclude that

sans sortir de la Grece on trouve les habitations de tous les Enfants de Javan dans le même continent, cequi convient beaucoup mieux à la maniere dont on peut s'imaginer que les Peuplades se faisoient alors sçavoir de proche en proche jusqu' à ce que les terres qui se sont trouvées surchargées d'habitans ont [sic] envoyé des colonies dans les Pays les plus éloignez. (HU, I, 96)

Similarly in his history of Spain Boulainviller shows that the incursion of the Israelites into Palestine made this land over-populated which thus forced the Syrians to move to Africa (HU, II, 473).

Further evidence of Boulainviller's mechanistic view of society can be seen in his history of Athens. Cecrops works hard to persuade his fellows of the advantages of civil society, especially as a means of defence against invaders from sea and land. A strong defence against attack needs a well organized and harmonious system of justice: 'cet avis fut si bien reçu que les Peuples établirent aussytôt des magistrats' (HU, II, 80-81). A similar mechanistic and pragmatic response to a people's appreciation of the need for change is described at the beginning of the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France. Discussing the character of the Franks,

Boulainviller writes:

Ces Peuples étoient extrêmement féconds, et avoient toujours grand nombre de Jeunes Gens incapables de s'arrêter aux occupations domestiques, mais remuans, impétueux, avides de gain et de nouveauté. Ils se joignoient ordinairement ensemble, et composoient une espèce de Milice, qui, après s'être choisi un Commandant et des Officiers, cherchoit fortune sur les terres voisines. Ils faisoient presque toujours la guerre aux Romains avec avantage. Mais celles, qu'ils se faisoient entr'eux, les afoiblissoient étrangement: desorte que, s'étant aperçus du préjudice que leur apportoient ces divisions intestines, ils se réunirent tous contre les premiers, qui de leur part les châtioient souvent, sans pouvoir néanmoins se garantir absolument de leurs incursions et de leurs pillages: parceque, bien qu'ils fussent tous à pié, ils marchaient tous avec tant de promptitude, qu'ils se présentoient toujours à l'improviste. (HAG, I, 2-3)

The mechanistic understanding of historical causation also affects Boulainviller's use of more general - and less personalized and purposive - causal factors. A popular explanation in the État de la France of the general characteristics of the inhabitants of the country's various 'généralités' is that they depend on the nature of the soil and climate of any particular area. It is true that very often this link is only implicit (a juxtaposition of ideas) but that Boulainviller saw climate and topography as important influences on people's lives and characters is difficult to deny.¹ The relationship of climate and soil with temperament is viewed in a distinctly, though far from completely, physical manner. In St. Maixent for example, 'le peuple y est pesant, grossier et paresseux, parce que le pays est gras et qu'il lui fournit aisément sa subsistance' (EF, IV, 249); in the 'élection des Sables d'Olonne' 'le peuple s'y ressent un peu du climat grossier et de l'air de la mer' (EF, IV, 259).

More influential than the physical determinism of geography and climate, however, would seem to be the effects of society and commerce. Writing in his État de la France Boulainviller observes that: 'les inclinations du peuple sont différentes selon les lieux qu'il habite, celui de la Rochelle et de Xaintes est assez poli et même dans les environs de ces deux villes,

1. Describing the climate of Champagne as 'assez doux', Boulainviller remarks that so is the temperament of the people 'qui en est ordinairement une conséquence' (EF, III, 1).

on s'aperçoit aisément que le commerce adoucit les esprits, mais sur la côte de la mer, au bord des rivières et dans les îles, ce sont presque tous gens de marine qui n'ont de société qu'entr'eux, et qui retiennent leur grossièreté naturelle' (EF, IV, 273). The greater influence trade has upon the manners of a people than their climatic environment is clearly expressed in Boulainviller's discussion of 'la Généralité de Bourbonnois'.

Here

le caractère des peuples tient beaucoup de cette température de l'air /celui du Bourbonnois est fort doux/, la douceur, la fainéantise et l'amour du plaisir sont les principales qualités qui le composent.

Le Nivernois est bien plus froid, aussi le peuple y est-il plus dur, plus fier et moins accommodant, si ce n'est dans les lieux de grand passage, où la fréquentation des étrangers les apprivoise. Mais la Marche est un pays affreux: les hyvers y sont rudes et longs, les neiges y couvrent toute la terre, et les habitants vivent entr'eux sans commerce, aussi sont ils noirs et livides et presque tous hideux. (EF, V, 48-49)

We may note too that Vichy 'est un lieu très-connu par ses eaux minérales ... le peuple y est poli par la fréquentation des personnes de qualité qui y viennent' (EF, V, 59). The importance of trade for Boulainviller as a means of disseminating people from the original centres of civilization was noted above (p.233).

The physical nature of the relationship between man's environment and his temperament is, however, more emphatically asserted in Boulainviller's astrological principles of the determining influences of the apogee of the sun and the arrangement of the heavens in general (the apotheosis, as it were, of the causal influence of climate). Explaining the successive 'vigour' of the Greeks, Italians, French, and Spanish (dependent on the westerly progress of the sun's apogee) Boulainviller considers why northern Europe and Africa were not similarly affected. Boulainviller's reason is 'la seule declivité du globe': the sun being too weak to energize the northern countries and too overpowering for the southern ones (AS, f. 11-12). Similarly, Boulainviller refers to the Dutch going out to Batavia when the apogee of the sun had already passed over this area, 'de façon que de

maniere ou d'autre il y étoit toujours nuit' (AS, f. 12). Again, noting the astrological position of the brightest constellations, Boulainviller sees this as the work of a beneficent nature 'puisque la chaleur et la lumiere étant pour ainsy dire l'ame du Monde, il semble qu'elle la nature ait choisy un temps pour y en répandre une plus grande abondance par le concours de ces étoiles avec le Soleil' (AS, f. 55).

The absolute determinism of Boulainviller's system of astrology - and thus its sufficiency as an explanation of historical events - was noted in our earlier discussion of the relationship between that astrology and the notion of Providence (above, pp.252 and 255-56). Relying on assumptions of the universality of human desires and characteristics, when indeed it takes these into account, this system effectively denies the possibility of properly historical explanations of past events. In establishing his system and demonstrating its truth Boulainviller was struck, we noted (above, pp.248 -49), by the fact that it was the Spanish who discovered the New World rather than the Chinese, a nation more favourably placed geographically and gifted technologically to make this discovery and to do so centuries before the Spanish. But this demonstration of the 'truth' of his astrological principles neglects completely to investigate the relative situations of both countries and the many historical reasons why the Spanish were, and the Chinese were not, drawn to seek out undiscovered lands. Similarly, astrology, it is claimed, can explain 'tout ce que les hommes ont inventé sur le prétexte de la religion soit pratiques penibles à la nature, soit sacrifices sanglants et cruelles persécutions ...' (AS, f. 55).

However, the great complexity of world history cannot be confined within the simple, mechanical system of astrological determinism. Turning to Persian history, Boulainviller finds that the oriental chronicles put the reign of Cyrus, traditionally seen as that country's first king, well before the date of the Flood. But Boulainviller will allow of no 'liaison

entre les événements arrivés à la Perse avant le Déluge et ceux du temps de Cyrus ou après luy'; he thus concludes 'que cette monarchie est encore du nombre de celles qui doivent leur commencement à des causes particulières et non à l'influence de l'apogée'. Further, with archaeological evidence to demonstrate that Cyrus was not Persia's first king, Boulainviller contemplates astrology's complete inability in this case to account for the rise of a powerful and world-famous monarch. Needless to say, however, Boulainviller manages to produce calculations which save the day, but again his explanations are completely unhistorical (AS, f. 113-14).

The utterly systematic nature of astrology's relations to historical events is exemplified in Boulainviller's dating of the 'foundation' of Mecca. His calculations produce the date of 630 A.D., exactly half-way between the start of the hegira (622 A.D.) and the Arabs' conquest of Persia (638 A.D.). Boulainviller concludes: 'ainsy d'une ou d'autre façon avançant ou reculant la direction des huit années il est visible qu'elle [la direction] a toujours eû son effet plein et entier' (AS, f. 133). Similarly, Boulainviller's 'thème de la Moscovie' puts the start of that region's ascendancy in the year 1325. The accuracy of Boulainviller's calculations combines with a purely pragmatic conception of the role of the individual in history to produce an apparently irrefutable demonstration of the truth of astrological determinism. Boulainviller writes:

on ne scauroit trop admirer la relation et la correspondance des mouvements secrets de la nature qui font convenir deux moments aussy éloignez que celui du premier midy de notre période et celui d'un thème qu'on pourroit regarder comme arbitraire puisque le Prince qui a fixé sa résidence à Moscow précisément en 1325 étoit le maître aparemment de la faire ou 2 ou 3 ans plus tôt ou plus tard. (AS, f. 141)

In the defence of his system of astrology Boulainviller discusses this relationship between particular and general astrological causes. Its similarity with Montesquieu's later treatment of particular and general historical causes is a striking accusation of the essentially anti-historical nature of Boulainviller's system of astrology and of the opportunist use

it makes of the history it ostensibly sets out to explain. Boulainviller writes:

j'ose m'assurer comme verité fondamentale qu'il n'est point d'événement ny par conséquent de succès favorables aux personnes publiques qui n'ait sa cause, ou dans le Destin particulier de celui qui est chargé de la conduite des affaires, ou dans le Destin general qui est toujours consequent des Dispositions de l'Apogée a l'égard de chaque Païs; Et comme il peut arriver souvent que ces deux sortes de Destins se combattent l'un l'autre, il en doit resulter des contradictions dans les evenemens qui ne sont pourtant jamais decisifs pour le principal.

and Boulainviller refers to the Romans' initial lack of success against Hannibal as proof of his contention. Later, in his Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur et de la décadence des Romains, Montesquieu will write:

Ce n'est pas la fortune qui domine le monde; on peut le demander aux Romains, qui eurent une suite continuelle de prospérités quand ils se gouvernèrent sur un certain plan, et une suite non interrompue de revers lorsqu'ils se conduisirent sur un autre. Il y a des causes générales, soit morales, soit physiques, qui agissent dans chaque monarchie, l'élèvent, la maintiennent, ou la précipitent; tous les accidens sont soumis à ces causes; et si le hasard d'une bataille, c'est-à-dire une cause particulière, a ruiné un Etat, il y avait une cause générale qui faisait que cet Etat devoit périr par une seule bataille. En un mot, l'allure principale entraîne avec elle tous les accidens particuliers.²

The Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil is a work of astrology, not of history. A neglect of historical causation cannot justly be considered a fault in such a context. However, in his historical works Boulainviller shows that he is more aware of the involved and often impersonal nature of historical causation than his admittedly frequent use of simple mechanistic and pragmatic ideas might suggest.

As well as perceiving that climate and geography have an undeniable influence upon human beings, Boulainviller recognizes several other important general influences upon human actions and behaviour. These include religion, custom, trade, society, and a people's general character or genius.³

1. B.N. fds, fr. 12,295, p. 702.

2. Montesquieu, Œuvres complètes, edited by A. Masson, vol. 1 (part 3), p. 482.

3. The influences of trade and society have been noted above, pp.351-52.

Moreover, Boulainviller is aware that historical events may need to be explained by a combination of such influences together, perhaps, with more individual causes. Reference to a combination of influences is often made in Boulainviller's État de la France. For example, discussing the large drop in population in the Paris area Boulainviller adduces a variety of causes: decline in trade, the billeting of troops, the high death rate (especially in 1692), the flight of the Huguenots, the drift away from the country to the towns, the 'milices forcées', and extraordinary taxation (EF, II, 75-76).¹ In the Histoire universelle a combination of somewhat pragmatic causes explains the war between the Shepherds and the Egyptians: mutual hatred, 'une antipatie de religion motif suffisant pour entreprendre une guerre', and the attraction for the Shepherds of more fertile agricultural land (HU, I, 280).

The powerful influence Boulainviller would grant religion upon the course of human affairs is one of the most significant causal factors to be seen in his Vie de Mahomed. Discussing the geography of the Arab lands Boulainviller describes the infertility of the general area which includes the towns of Mecca and Medina and which nonetheless is the most populous region of Arabia.

Mais si l'on recherche ce qui peut y avoir attiré ce grand nombre d'habitans, il sera difficile d'en découvrir d'autre raison, que la persuasion où l'on est depuis plus de XL. Siècles, que la Mecque a été le principal séjour du Prophète Ismaël pendant sa vie, et qu'il est le lieu de son repos depuis sa mort: Que le Temple qui se voit en cette Ville est honoré depuis la Création du Monde, comme un Lieu de bénédiction, choisi dans l'éternité, et consacré plus particulièrement par Abraham, qui y a bâti la Sainte Maison vers laquelle s'adressent les vœux de tous les Fidéles des extrémités du Monde: Que le Puits qui se voit dans le parvis de cet édifice, est la même Fontaine que l'Ange découvrit à Agar Mere d'Ismaël pour sauver la vie de son Fils. Ils croient enfin, que c'est une contrée préférée à toutes les autres dans l'élection de Dieu, parce que le dernier et le plus excellent de tous les Prophetes y devoit naître, et y faire connoître aux hommes la voye certaine du Salut. (VM, p. 24)

Similarly, the Arabs' 'dureté de coeur' and disregard for life are in large part to be explained by their steadfast belief that they were merely

1. Strictly speaking, these are causes adduced by the intendant whose 'mémoire' Boulainviller is abridging, but there is little doubt that they embody his own views.

carrying out God's will (VM, p. 47).¹

The tenacity of the Arabs' religious beliefs was something Mohammed's mission could not ignore. Thus when he was destroying the idols profaning the temple at Mecca 'la crainte du peuple' prevented him from laying hands on the 'pierre sainte'; instead Mohammed turned the idolatrous monument into a symbol of spiritual religion (VM, pp. 68-69). However, more important as influences upon the fashioning of his own religious doctrines and practices were the customs of the Arabs in general. Circumcision, for example, is a practice which goes back to Abraham: 'cette consideration l'auroit [Mahomed] déterminé toute seule à regarder la Circoncision comme un acte religieux, quand elle n'auroit pas été pratiquée par la Nation Arabe toute entière; à laquelle il auroit sans doute fait violence, s'il l'avoit obligée d'y renoncer' (VM, p. 160). Similarly, after enumerating the medical reasons which endorse Mohammed's prohibition of pork, Boulainviller writes:

Ainsi, le Législateur qui a autorisé la Coutume par une Loi, en défendant de manger d'une viande naturellement mauvaise et corrompue, mais à laquelle la nécessité pouvoit réduire les misérables, n'a fait autre chose qu'augmenter la précaution publique, et garantir, par motif de Religion, le même Peuple, chez qui l'usage et la Raison avoient déjà obtenu l'abstinence d'un aliment qui lui pouvoit être si préjudiciable. (VM, p. 162)

Indeed, Boulainviller sees Mohammed as the defender of Arab custom, protecting it against attempts by the Christian, Persian, Greek, and Jewish religions to overwhelm it altogether. Boulainviller asks whether Mohammed's

1. Two occasions may be noted where material and political considerations are shown to be more influential than purely religious motives: the Israelites residing in Palestine 'tant par l'abondance que par l'opinion de la destinée d'un Décret éternel qui l'avoit mise dans leurs mains' (VM, pp. 36-37); and the punishments they received for falling into idolatrous practices, 'châtiments, que l'on peut dire avoir plutôt été politiques et nationaux, que religieux, parce qu'ils s'appliquoient moins aux péchés des particuliers et au redressement de leur conscience, qu'à la destruction de la République, laquelle ne se relevoit de ses chûtes qu'en embrassant avec un zèle nouveau les Observations Légales' (VM, p. 151). The limitation in these instances of the power of religion over the affairs of men has, one feels, more to do with anti-Hebrew 'pointes' than the causal efficacy of religious sentiment.

success can be attributed to mere artifice and licence (his tolerance of polygamy) or whether his regulation of Arab sexual mores was not rather 'une conséquence de l'égard que tout Législateur raisonnable doit avoir pour les Coutumes particulieres et populaires, quand elles ne blessent pas le Droit naturel' (VM, p. 185).

This sentiment may remind us of Boulainviller's call to custom, noted above (p.16), in which he argued that a people's government should follow the customs which first established it. It was observed that this principle is hardly a dispassionate reflection on the abstract qualities of government in general but serves to further Boulainviller's political argument. Indeed the role of custom in Boulainviller's vision of French history is an interesting one. In his Histoire universelle Boulainviller's most popular way of explaining the institutions of government and justice is to point to the 'legislator' at the risk, as we noted (p.349), of encouraging the belief that man's early forms of government were despotic. In Boulainviller's histories of France, however, the legislator is conspicuous by his absence. Custom explains the origin of the Franks' rudimentary but estimable forms of government and justice. Similarly, Boulainviller is careful to point out that feudalism, 'le chef-d'oeuvre de l'esprit humain', although nurtured by the wise and good Charlemagne, was established by 'un usage public' (MH, p. 532).

Suitable as French history is for moral, pragmatic, and weighted explanations of political and institutional change, it is nonetheless in Boulainviller's history of the French nobility, the Dissertation sur la noblesse, that we may read perhaps his most sophisticated and sustained causal analysis of historical development. The causes of the nobility's decline may be briefly stated: 'Disons donc que la décadence où se trouve à présent l'ancienne noblesse est une conséquence nécessaire du changement qui s'est fait dans le gouvernement, dans la manière de faire la guerre, et de celui qui est arrivé dans les moeurs et dans les esprits' (Davyver, p. 541).

Boulainviller then examines each of these causes in more detail.

A l'égard du premier changement, ce que nous avons dit jusques icy en fait la preuve convaincante; quand les grands fiefs ont esté réunis à la couronne, on conçoit bien que la puissance des souverains particuliers, qui divisoient l'Estat, s'est réunie à la personne du roy. Plus cette puissance s'est augmentée, plus celle des seigneurs inférieurs a perdu de son éclat, quand ils s'en sont approchez. Il est vray que par une espèce de deffiance du succez, ces seigneurs ne fréquentoient pas d'abord le séjour des roys ny les grandes villes. Mais plusieurs amorces les y ont attirez. Premièrement, les plaisirs, les jeux, la galanterie; secondement, les emplois, les dignitez, les charges, enfin l'espérance ou de la faveur ou de la récompense de son attachement.

(Devvyver, p. 541)

This succinct description of the nature of the first cause is followed by Boulainviller's narration of the rise of the royal court under successive monarchs and of the developing practice of 'la vénalité des charges'. As we might imagine, Boulainviller still views these developments in a highly moralistic and pragmatic way and the notion of a plot against the Second Estate remains a firm conviction.

The second cause of noble decline, the changing methods of warfare, is no less important than the first. Boulainviller explains:

Le service des fiefs s'est aboly depuis que l'invention du canon, de la mousqueterie et des autres armes à feu a fait cesser l'usage des lances et de la gendarmerie couverte de fer. De sorte que l'obligation où les nobles estoient autrefois de marcher à l'armée en conséquence de leurs possessions féodales, a esté convertie en une obligation personnelle de servir à l'arrière ban pour la conservation du privilège de l'exemption des tailles, supposant une espèce de partage des charges onéreuses de l'Estat, par lequel l'ordre populaire s'est soumis à payer les taxes et les impositions, pendant que la noblesse est obligée de deffendre la patrie. (Devvyver, p. 544)

However, Boulainviller argues that this division is a mere fiction: the nobility is not exempted from paying taxes and the commoners are obliged to give military service. Again, Boulainviller traces the historical development - the introduction and increasing use of paid soldiers - which had led to the present deplorable confusion. The 'ancienne noblesse' is defenceless before the new 'cost-effective' mentality of the kings who see 'les nouveaux ennoblis' to be 'les plus riches et les plus en l'estat de se passer des secours que l'ancien noble attend de la libéralité du souverain'. Boulainviller concludes: 'l'abaissement des anciennes

familles qui ont manqué de biens et de sujets heureux, est donc une conséquence nécessaire du changement de la guerre, cause d'autant plus efficace qu'elle a été accompagnée d'une infinité de circonstances qui, toutes ensemble, ont concouru dans le mesme temps au mesme événement' (Devyver, p. 545).

Consideration of the third cause, 'le changement des moeurs et des esprits', leads Boulainviller to ask whether 'la simplicité de nos pères estoit un vice ou une vertu, l'effet de la droiture de leur coeur, ou celui d'une ignorance grossière qui les éloignoit également de la recherche des coutumes estrangères et du changement des leurs' (Devyver, p. 545). To provide an adequate answer Boulainviller glances back to the beginnings of French society only to speak unfavourably on what he sees as the poverty of Frankish culture; he then indicates the growth in importance of the Church, in particular the monasteries, not only for the education of the young nobility but also for the preservation of learning in general. However, Boulainviller has nothing but disdain both for monastic discipline and monkish learning. 'Heureux sont, en comparaison de ces temps là, les derniers siècles où les sciences ont esté remises à la portée de tous les esprits et de toutes les professions. C'est l'avantage que nous avons par dessus nos pères qui nous peut consoler de tous ceux dont ils jouïssent et que nous avons perdus' (Devyver, p. 547). In spite of this praise for the recent secularization of knowledge, however, Boulainviller's highly moral and 'heroic' pragmatism can only condemn the dissemination of learning and its insidious consequences. Concluding his examination of the third main cause of noble decline, Boulainviller writes:

Mais est-il bien réel cet avantage? Ne consiste-t-il pas plustost dans une satisfaction idéale que dans un bien effectif. La licence des esprits, l'abus des sciences et les fausses opinions, l'ambition, le luxe, le dérangement des conditions, l'instabilité des fortunes et des biens, ne sont-ils pas de plus grands maux que la simplicité et l'ignorance. Il semble aujourd'hui que le plus prompt effet des sciences, dont on instruit la jeunesse, soit d'exciter ses passions, particulièrement celle de l'ambition, et que l'usage des mesmes sciences

dans un âge plus avancé se réduit à former un masque de vertu pour couvrir l'iniquité et l'injustice; car on voit que chacun cherche, à l'aide des sciences et de la politesse qu'elles communiquent, à s'élever au dessus de sa condition naturelle, à supplanter son concurrent, à se fourrer dans les affaires ou dans les charges, et quand on y est parvenu, on prépare encore à ses enfans une plus haute fortune dont, pour l'ordinaire, tout l'édifice est fondé sur un déguisement à qui les sciences ont presté leurs couleurs, politesse, agrément, langage, et hardiesse. (Devyver, pp. 547-48)

No doubt it would be akin to demanding that Boulainviller change his whole perception of the world to expect from him a completely dispassionate discussion of a subject which caused him so much obvious distress. The breadth of historical perspective which his examination of the causes of noble decadence reveals is thus, its heroic moralism and personal pragmatism notwithstanding, eloquent testimony to Boulainviller's appreciation of the importance of the historian's task to provide considered explanations of historical change.

It cannot be denied, however, that by far the most common mode of explanation throughout Boulainviller's historiography is the pragmatic and mechanistic. In his discussion of the failure of French historians to rise to the challenge of recording historical truth for fear of royal or ministerial displeasure, Boulainviller recognizes that state secrets no doubt contribute greatly 'à afoiblir les narrations historiques, et à les rendre maigres et décharnées, en les réduisant presque toujours au simple récit des événemens'. He continues:

En quoi il faut convenir de bonne foi que le métier d'Historien est très difficile; puisque, s'il ne raporte que des faits connus, on le taxe de sécheresse dans ses narrations, et que, s'il se mêle de vouloir rendre raisons des événemens, on l'accuse de donner ses conjectures pour des vérités historiques. Il me semble pourtant qu'on peut garder un juste milieu en cela, et qu'un Auteur en sait toujours assez, s'il

1. Although this passage might put one in mind of a similar denunciation of arts and sciences, Rousseau's first Discours, it is important to note that Boulainviller's sentiments are inspired by an immediate sense of personal loss and frustration and are thus little more than rather crude, if trenchant, expressions of his 'reaction'; they lack the much wider temporal and geographical perspective evident in Rousseau's text, and the corresponding sublime invocation to Virtue, which would lend them an air of objectivity.

veut écrire, pour instruire et pour occuper agréablement un Lecteur; ou que du moins, s'il n'ose tout dire pendant la vie d'un Monarque redouté, il est rare de n'en avoir pas la liberté quand il n'est plus. D'ailleurs les caractères, les intentions, les passions, et les actions, soit des Souverains, soit de leurs Ministres, ou de leurs Favoris, sont indispensablement connues par leur conduite: et le beau de l'Histoire est de les mettre dans leur véritable jour. (HAG, I, 176-77)

Boulainviller certainly recognizes the desirability of explaining historical events, if only to provide the reader with a more entertaining work, but the nature of this explanation is completely pragmatic.

Rather an entertaining if shallow pragmatism, one might retort, than no explanation whatsoever, for indeed on several occasions Boulainviller's 'explanations' are either utterly empty or simply do not exist. Evaluating Mohammed's claim to be a prophet, an evaluation which involves a discussion of the bellicose relations between the Romans and the Persians, Boulainviller writes: 'l'Histoire nous apprend ... que les Romains ayant été continuellement battus par les Perses depuis l'an 615. de J.C. jusqu'à l'an 625. ils regagnerent alors leur première supériorité, et devinrent les Vainqueurs de leurs redoutables ennemis, par un coup tellement inespéré, que la mémoire des hommes n'en conserve point de pareil' (VM, p. 372).

'Une fortune rare et ... une suite d'événemens' 'explain' how Clotaire II, the most despised of the princes of Clovis's line, succeeds to the sovereignty of all of France (MH, p. 247). Recording the events of the year 850, Boulainviller writes no more than the following: 'En 850, plusieurs Seigneurs d'Aquitaine, qui haïssoient les mauvaises mœurs du Roi Pepin, appellèrent Charles [le Chauve], le reçurent dans Limoges et l'accompagnèrent au Siège de Toulouse, mais dès qu'il fut retourné en Neustrie, ils se raccommdèrent avec Pepin' (MH, p. 413). 'Les différentes nécessités arrivées dans la suite' is all the explanation Boulainviller gives of the necessary increase in the number of officials at the parlement of Bordeaux (EF, V, 333).

Such non-explanation does have its occasional advantages. The 'circumstances of the time' help Boulainviller to explain away criticisms of the

weakness of character of Charles VII, one of the few monarchs Boulainviller cares to defend (HAG, III, 47); they also provide Boulainviller with a measure of self-justification. In the introduction to the Dissertation sur la noblesse he writes: 'Je fais aussy entrer dans ce dessein la vüe d'une justification personnelle que je crois devoir à ma famille. La fortune m'a tellement éloigné des employs convenables à ma naissance qu'on auroit peine à ne m'en pas attribuer la faute si la connoissance des obstacles qui m'ont traversé ne faisoit juger que la fatalité l'emporte de bien loin sur les sentiments' (Devyver, p. 502). And yet Boulainviller is critical of the opinion of those who would explain the presence of trees in extremely salty areas of Flanders by reference to the Flood and who 'par ce moyen levent toutes les difficultez' - reference to such a universal cause can hardly explain satisfactorily such a particular phenomenon (EF, III, 438). Moreover, Boulainviller would prefer a frank admission of ignorance to 'explanations' (the crude fictions and legends which attribute the conversion of Poitou to the work of Saint Martial, for example; EF, IV, 192) which are improbable and which contradict historical knowledge of the period.

We may summarize this analysis of Boulainviller's various methods of explaining historical events by remarking that although he was obviously aware of the numerous general causes which underly these events, he preferred nevertheless to see the development of history in terms of individuals and parties and their often antagonistic interests, plans, and passions. Whether Boulainviller chose to see events in this way is perhaps debatable. Certainly the state of historical knowledge about the ancient world at the end of the seventeenth century would only allow for such a pragmatic interpretation. But it is evident that the moral pragmatism of Boulainviller's histories of France, a mode of explanation completely in harmony with its

context, is no mere coincidence. Indeed, we might note that even the general causes Boulainviller adduces to explain historical events seem to be inspired by their historiographical context: religion and custom in La Vie de Mahomed, a text devoted to exhibiting the adequacy and propriety of all religions and national or racial customs; trade and society in the État de la France, a work whose principal aim is the rejuvenation of France's economy and the relief of her suffering population; changes in government and warfare in the Dissertation sur la noblesse, traditionally the two principal areas of noble activity.

The congeniality of Boulainviller's modes of explanation with their particular historiographical context, certainly apparent in the Histoire universelle, La Vie de Mahomed, and the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France, suggests a degree of care in the writing of these works. It is with a consideration of the more noteworthy features in the composition of Boulainviller's narratives that this final section of the thesis will conclude.

Chapter Twelve

The Composition of the Historical Narrative

I Purpose, order, and method

One of the most striking features, it may be said, of Boulainviller's historiography is its sense of purpose. His historical works are not the fruit of casual dilettantism but the results of much study and were written not only to propound certain well-defined points of view, but also to provide essential historical and economic information, to debate particular historical topics, and, with the Histoire universelle, to furnish a useful account of ancient history for the benefit of his children. In the avertissement to this last work Boulainviller discusses the aims of his work and the methods he will employ in writing it. These include an accurate chronology, 'une attention particulière à faire connoître l'histoire des mœurs des opinions et des religions des différents Peuples de la Terre', 'l'origine des arts, des cérémonies et des usages chez toutes les Nations', the reconciliation of miracles and natural philosophy, as well as a list of his principal authorities and an avowal of his shortcomings, particularly in his knowledge of oriental languages (HU, I, 1-6). The preface of the État de la France comprises a similar but much more lengthy and critical discussion of the aims and methods of his work. The biased, slap-dash, and timorous 'mémoires' which the intendants had provided in response to the Duc de Bourgogne's call for a French Doomsday Book can only merit Boulainviller's strongest censure: his abridgement of these tedious tomes is destined to be of use, 'à réduire les faits en maximes de Gouvernement, à chercher dans la réalité de l'Histoire, des vérités expérimentales, qui puissent être appliquées à notre état présent; elles seront exposées sans adulation, sans intérêt personnel et même sans crainte de déplaire' (EF, I, 41).

In the second part of the preface Boulainviller refers to the Mémoires

historiques which relate the history of the first two dynasties of France, the Merovingians and the Carolingians, and which form the historical introduction to his reworking of the intendants' 'mémoires'. He writes:

Si c'est une entreprise hardie que d'avoir osé retoucher les Mémoires des Généralitez de ce Royaume, dressez par les Intendants des Provinces pour l'instruction et l'usage du Prince, qui doit un jour gouverner cette Monarchie, il n'est pas difficile de la justifier, quand il n'y auroit eu d'autre motif de le faire, que celui d'abrégé la lecture immense de ces Mémoires, qui remplissent en Original XLII. Volumes in-Folio.

Mais celle de former un nouveau Plan de notre Histoire, dans le tems que divers illustres Ecrivains s'efforcent de lui donner une plus exacte précision à l'égard de la Chronologie et de l'embellir de ces fleurs qui nous font admirer les Ouvrages des anciens Historiens Grecs et Latins, peut avec justice être regardée comme temeraire, par la difficulté de fournir ces deux mêmes parties à mon projet.

Cependant, comme dans la composition d'un Ouvrage chacun employe sa méthode et ses idées, qui en forment le caractere, en quelque sorte indépendant de la matiere et suivant lequel il peut être plus ou moins utile au Public; j'ai crû qu'une Histoire de France, qui proposeroit plutôt celle du génie des Princes et du gouvernement de la Nation, que celle des événemens la plupart déjà assez connus, auroit l'avantage de la singularité et celui de l'utilité, sur tout à la tête d'une Description générale du Royaume. (EF, I, 71-72)

A few paragraphs later Boulainviller returns to his Mémoires historiques and explains why they are a necessary introduction to his État de la France:

J'ai ... crû qu'une Histoire méthodique et abrégée de l'ancien Gouvernement de la Nation Française, précéderoit utilement le détail dont les Memoires des Provinces se trouvent remplis; tant parce que l'ordre commun exige cet arrangement, que parce qu'elle mettra devant les yeux du Prince un crayon de la conduite de ses Prédécesseurs, du génie des Rois et des Peuples de siècle en siècle, qui n'a point encore été assez vivement tracé par nos Historiens, lesquels se sont tous contentés de nous donner une succession de faits d'armes et guerres peu intéressantes dans nôtre présente situation, au lieu de nous montrer des règles de gouvernement propres à nous faire connoître quel a été le véritable soutien de l'Etat pendant un si long cours de générations, et quelles peuvent être nos ressources dans les disgraces qui nous accablent. (EF, I, 73-74)

A sense of purpose is equally apparent in the several smaller works which Boulainviller wrote on particular topics concerning French history. This is only to be expected when we consider that treatises such as the Réflexions sur le mémoire des formalitez nécessaires pour valider la renonciation du roy d'Espagne, the Mémoire pour la noblesse de France contre les ducs et pairs, and the Requête de la noblesse contre les fausses pré-

tentions de Messieurs les ducs et pairs were written in response to very particular circumstances. The political, economic, and social aims of the Mémoires presented to the Regent, Philippe d'Orléans are equally evident in spite of the ambiguities and changes of tack to be found there. Indeed, even the erudite considerations de la qualité de baron, de celle de prince, de l'invention des armes et du surnom and the remarks sur les armes, et sur ce que l'épée signifie en simbole do not fail to convey in sometimes trenchant words Boulainviller's political and social prejudices (above, pp.37-38).

Equally strong in Boulainviller is a desire for order and method. It is for the lack of these qualities in their 'mémoires' that he is particularly critical of the intendants. Frequently throughout the État de la France Boulainviller voices his displeasure at their unorganized accounts, or at least comments upon the arrangements they have chosen and their inappropriateness to a clear understanding of the material discussed. It is similarly in a desire to be understood and to avoid the possibility of perplexing his reader that, having observed in the Histoire universelle that 'l'Egypte est le plus ancien royaume de l'univers', Boulainviller notes his exclusion from this pronouncement of the 'royaumes du nord et de l'Orient et de l'Asie' (e.g. the Chinese) and states that their customs and laws are so different from those with which we are normally acquainted that at first it will be 'plus convenable de nous appliquer à débrouiller l'histoire d'Egypte' (HU, I, 147).

In writing his history of Greece Boulainviller is likewise conscious of a need for method. After considering several authoritative opinions concerning the origins of the ancient Greeks, Boulainviller writes:

Après avoir fait voir l'insuffisance et les inconvénients de ces méthodes pour decouvrir l'origine des Peuples grecs et pour éclaircir leur histoire, je crois qu'on n'en peut choisir de meilleure que celle d'examiner suivant l'ordre des temps, les fondations des principales villes et les généalogies de leurs héros: Par le 1er des moyens nous découvrirons peu à peu et l'augmentation des Peuples et les différents

noms qu'ils ont pris: et par le 2^d nous apprendrons a débrouïller les alliances, les règnes, les temps, les lieux et les autres circonstances de la vie des premiers Royx de ces mêmes villes. (HU, II, 9-10).

The conclusion to his history of Thebes again shows Boulainviller's concern to keep his reader informed of the methodological criteria guiding the construction of his narrative. He writes: 'voilà ce que nous avons pu recueillir en abrégé touchant l'histoire ancienne d'une des plus renommées villes de la Grece dans laquelle nous avons fait entrer les plus considérables événements de presque toutes les autres; parce qu'ils ont aussi presque tous un rapport très-naturel; nous avons suivi les meilleurs auteurs dans ce récit et particulièrement Apollodore' (HU, II, 271).

It is for the order and clarity, as well as for the important historical information, that certain of 'les plus considérables événements' bring to his narrative that Boulainviller considers them to be of particular value. This is true of the story of Hercules. Giving the reason why he has dwelt at such length on this particular history Boulainviller states firstly, 'qu'il [Hercules] a été tellement mêlé dans toutes les affaires de son temps qu'elle [his history] en éclaircit parfaitement l'histoire en sorte qu'il n'est plus besoin de faire d'autres articles pour les vies de ses contemporains'; secondly, 'qu'elle nous dépeint mieux que toute autre les moeurs et les usages communs de ce temps là'; and finally, 'que le récit suivi de ses actions sert à distinguer les fictions de la vérité qu'on a corrompue en luy voulant donner plus d'éclat qu'elle n'en avoit' (HU, II, 262-63). Similarly, the reign of Deucalion is a most important epoch 'en ce que l'on en peut faire usage pour déterminer le temps où les Dieux de la Grece [Ūranus, Kronos] et Zeus ont vécu: parce qu'il étoit leur Parent très-proche selon la chronologie d'Apollodore' (HU, II, 86).¹

Boulainviller's recognition of the importance of order and purpose in historical narration is indicated at times by his awareness of the

1. Historiographical convenience is of course not the only criterion for determining the value of any historical era; the discovery of iron smelting and working is itself intrinsically important as is the reign of Aegeus [le] temps le plus illustre de l'histoire fabuleuse' (HU, II, 126 and 159).

constraints which that order imposes on him. Material not seen as strictly relevant to Boulainviller's historical narration is left to one side so that his history can reach its conclusion. Indeed, in the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France Boulainviller begins by saying that 'il y a tant de variété dans les opinions des Auteurs, qui ont traité de l'origine des François, que ce point seul m'engageroit à une dissertation particulière, si je ne me faisois une loi de me renfermer dans mon sujet' (HAG, I, 1). Discussing Ulysses' journey as related by Homer, Boulainviller writes: 'il y auroit une infinité de choses à remarquer ou plutôt à expliquer sur tout cela: mais cet abrégé ne les peut souffrir et d'ailleurs ce sont des bagatelles qui n'ont rien d'important pour l'histoire si ce n'est qu'elles ont été consacrées par les vers du plus illustre des Poètes' (HU, II, 429). The Phoenician dominion over ancient Sicily (to which the names of that island's rivers and towns give sufficient testimony) is similarly 'trop peu important par rapport aux grands événements du reste du monde pour nous y arrêter davantage' (HU, II, 483). The need to abridge and cut out unnecessary repetition, and thus leave the reader the pleasure of reflection and inference, is felt too in Boulainviller's demonstration and explanation of his system of astrology (AS, folios 51, 58, and 70).

Necessary as abridgement may be, however, space is always available for the elaboration of important points and for the discussion of problematic topics and possible objections. This is ironically borne out (unconsciously, no doubt) in Boulainviller's discussion 'des Finances parmi les François'. To establish his views on the nature of the Franks' financial administration (a considerable improvement, he feels, on that of the Romans) Boulainviller refers to two incidents recorded in Gregory of Tours which, although not directly concerned with the Frankish system of finance, throw light upon its workings. After relating these two incidents Boulainviller writes:

La nécessité d'abrégé ces réflexions m'oblige de me renfermer dans ces deux exemples, quoique je pusse en produire plusieurs autres.

Mais je ne puis m'empêcher de prévenir une objection qui se peut faire naturellement contre cette Discipline des François, et contre les louanges que je leur ai ci-devant prodiguées, au sujet de l'abolition des impôts pécuniaires; car outre qu'en mettant la magistrature et la régie des impôts dans les mêmes mains, il semble que c'étoit livrer le peuple au pillage, et tomber dans le défaut que nous avons reproché à la politique Romaine; il est certain que l'on ne découvre pas d'abord la différence que j'ai vantée de l'administration des François d'avec celle des Romains, sur la Finance, quand il paroît que les uns et les autres tiroient également l'argent des peuples; voici ce que l'on peut répondre à la difficulté,

and Boulainviller continues by demonstrating the rationality, humanity, and impartiality of the Frankish manner of levying taxes (MH, 183-87).

The utilitarian nature of Boulainviller's historiography is an important influence on the selection of the material to be discussed and on the manner in which this discussion will be incorporated into his text. We have already seen how the idea of what is useful elevates Egyptian history above the 'foreign' history of the Orient (above, p.367). Later, discussing the Histoire ancienne de l'Afrique, des Isles de la mer méditerranée, et des parties de l'Europe qui confinent à l'Océan, Boulainviller recognizes that this particular history is a little 'out of order', its observations being based on 'l'histoire des Phéniciens que nous n'avons point encore traitée'. However, Boulainviller sees nothing particularly objectionable in his ordering of the subjects contained within his narrative, for 'la raison de l'intérêt que nous avons à connoître par préférence ceux dont il s'agit icy précipite en quelque façon ce que nous avons à dire à leur sujet', because the history of the Orient, he maintains, cannot be treated before its relations with Egypt have been explained and before the scriptural account of Syria has been examined; this, however, 'reculeroit trop loin le peu de remarques que nous avons à faire sur la manière dont l'Occident a été peuplé et découvert' (HU, II, 438-39).¹ Convenience and

1. To explain the 'discovery' of the West, Boulainviller immediately narrates, 'l'on n'a besoin que de la supposition de deux sortes de colonies qui ont peuplé l'Europe et celle des Scythes qui ont fourni les corps des nations et celle des Phéniciens qui les ont pour ainsy dire animés en leur procurant la connoissance des arts et en éclairant leurs esprits des lumières de plusieurs sciences' (HU, II, 439).

a European's understandable desire to discuss the origins of his own part of the globe thus determine the content and order of Boulainviller's histories.¹

The ancient history of Gaul is naturally, in the context of the Histoire universelle, amongst the most interesting. Boulainviller writes:

Nous voicy enfin parvenus à l'article qui nous regarde puisque les côtes de la Gaule suivent naturellement celles d'Espagne: l'intérêt que nous y devons prendre seroit un motif suffisant pour nous engager à le faire avec étendue si l'ignorance profonde où l'on est de tous les temps qui ont précédé le passage des Gaulois en Italie n'y mettoit un obstacle invincible; cependant en ramassant les nouvelles découvertes qu'on a faites par le moyen des rapports de l'ancienne langue gauloise avec le grec le latin le Phénicien etc; il semble qu'on peut se former une idée assez juste, sinon des événements, au moins de l'origine de la nation et des moeurs anciennes. (HU, II, 498)

Fortunately, the later history of France provides much more meat for discussion, although, as we have seen (above, p. 290), Boulainviller still feels the constraint of having insufficient evidence concerning the early Merovingian era and its social and political institutions. Here again, however, utility is an important criterion. Discussing the many parlements held during the reign of Charles le Chauve Boulainviller writes that 'il seroit véritablement inutile de faire le détail de tant de Parlemens, puisqu'il n'y en a que quatre ou cinq, dont on puisse tirer quelques instructions politiques' (HAG, I, 278-79).² The changes wrought by Hugues Capet render the study of the administration of France under the Merovingians and Carolingians somewhat otiose: 'il ne faut plus considérer la police du Royaume que sous la forme qu'elle a prise sous la troisième Race'. But, Boulainviller continues, 'avant d'entrer dans ce détail, il est bon d'observer deux grands événemens arrivez dans la Monarchie, lesquels, quoiqu'en apparence peu relatifs aux usages et aux maximes de notre tems,

1. In the introduction to his Histoire ancienne de Sardaigne Boulainviller states that before following the Phoenicians into western Europe he will complete his discussion of the Mediterranean islands, 'comme mon dessein est de ramasser en cet article toutes les antiquités communes des pays qui nous approchent' (HU, II, 479).
2. Nonetheless Boulainviller mentions at least eleven in the subsequent brief summary of the more interesting parlements (HAG, I, 278-80).

ne laissent pas d'y avoir disposé les esprits, en préparant des routes nouvelles, où les âges suivans sont entrez insensiblement', and these 'events' are the 'affranchissement des serfs' and the rise of the Third Estate (HAG, I, 309).

Boulainviller's sense of purpose may also be said to influence the form of his historical narratives. The chronicle style of the Mémoires historiques, suitable for the relation of mere events, is interrupted on occasion in order to study particular topics and periods in much closer detail. This is especially noticeable in the long and fascinating section of the work entitled État de la Nation françoise, some eighty pages in length, in which Boulainviller examines the society and political organisation of the French immediately after the Frankish conquest of Gaul, and again at the end of the text where Boulainviller discusses the important problem of the origin of the fiefs. Similarly, although La Vie de Mahomed was to include a history of Mohammed's successors, the two parts that were written show Boulainviller's considerable skill in soliciting sympathy firstly for the people the Prophet was to lead into the centre of the historical stage, and secondly for Mohammed himself and his simple, truthful, unmysterious way of worshipping the Supreme Being. However, the marriage between purpose and form is perhaps most readily appreciated in the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France. At the beginning of the first letter 'sur les parlements ou états généraux', Boulainviller discusses the reasons which have prevented him until now from writing his history of the parlements. He says:

Deux raisons principales ont autorisé mon refus jusqu'à présent. La première étoit la difficulté de réussir, sans traiter historiquement cette matière; c'est-à-dire, sans la considérer dans ses relations avec les divers événemens des siècles passez: raison qui vous a fait desirer la continuation de ce que j'ai déjà tracé sur l'histoire des deux premières familles de nos Rois. La seconde est le défaut d'exemples; puisqu'il est vrai de dire que personne ne s'est encore hasardé à écrire de ces Assemblées, soit à cause du danger que l'on s'est imaginé qu'il y auroit de parler avec liberté, soit que le génie des François, peu soucieux de ses plus précieux intérêts, ne soit point

porté de ce côté là.

A l'égard de la première de ces raisons, je ne puis plus m'en servir dès le moment que vous m'accordez la facilité de substituer des termes familiers à la composition d'un Ouvrage, qui, pour être régulièrement exécuté, exigeroit plusieurs années de travail, et dont la lecture pourroit d'ailleurs rebuter par l'abondance des autres matières qu'il contiendrait, fort étrangères pour la plupart au sujet sur lequel vous desirez être éclairci. Il me semble même que par le moyen de quelques Lettres, qui vous présenteront un tableau raccourci de la forme de notre premier gouvernement et des principaux événements de notre histoire sous la troisième Race de nos Rois, il ne sera pas difficile de vous faire connoître les véritables motifs aussi bien que les succès de toutes les Assemblées d'Etats, qui se sont tenues jusqu'à celle des années 1614. et 1615. que l'on compte pour la dernière, quoiqu'il y ait eu depuis quelques Assemblées de Notables. (HAG, I, 170-72)

The greater familiarity of the epistolary form will allow Boulainviller to fashion his account as interest and 'truth' dictate. The relationship between form and purpose is well expressed at the end of this letter when, concluding his remarks on the historiography of le Père Daniel, Boulainviller compares the Jesuit's aims and methods with his own:

Pour moi je m'efforce de tout approfondir et de tout découvrir: et le P. Daniel s'est piqué de ne rien voir et de ne rien dire au delà de la simple apparence. Mes raisons vont à la discussion du Droit, à l'évidence de la vérité, et à la conviction de l'utilité de la vertu et de la honte du vice: les siennes tendent à ménager tout le monde, à soumettre les esprits à l'autorité dominante, à disculper la Providence des prospérités des Méchants, et à plaire par l'observation des meilleures règles d'écrire l'Histoire. Je n'ai garde de ne point applaudir à des vues si pompeuses, si politiques, et si pieuses: mais je ne les suivrai jamais, et ne les prendrai point pour moi. Ainsi, renfermé dans la simplicité du style épistolaire, qui souffre le détail des minuties, qui néglige l'observation des grandes formalitez, et qui favorise l'expression de la vérité, je continuerai la carrière, où je suis entré, avec toute la bonne foi dont je fais profession.

(HAG, I, 207-08)

Purpose, order, method - these are important criteria for Boulainviller in the composition of his histories. Other criteria, equally important, especially in ancient history, are 'La convenance', 'la vraisemblance', and the conciliation of differing authorities. These elements have been noted before, but a closer examination of them would now be appropriate.

II 'Scissors-and-paste'

The fundamental principle which guides Boulainviller's composition of

the Histoire universelle has been succinctly described by R.G. Collingwood in his discussion of historical evidence. Collingwood writes:

There is a kind of history which depends altogether upon the testimony of authority ... The method by which it proceeds is first to decide what we want to know about, and then to go in search of statements about it, oral or written, purporting to be made by actors in the events concerned, or by eyewitnesses of them, or by persons repeating what actors or eyewitnesses have told them, or have told their informants, or those who informed their informants, and so on. Having found in such a statement something relevant to his purpose, the historian excerpts it and incorporates it, translated if necessary and recast into what he considers a suitable style, in his own history. As a rule, where he has many statements to draw upon, he will find that one of them tells him what another does not; so both or all of them will be incorporated. Sometimes he will find that one of them contradicts another; then, unless he can find a way of reconciling them, he must decide to leave one out; and this, if he is conscientious, will involve him in a critical consideration of the contradictory authorities' relative degree of trustworthiness.

Collingwood calls the excerpting and combining of the testimonies of different authorities 'scissors-and-paste history', and indeed does not consider it to be history at all. He continues by saying that the seventeenth century introduced a greater critical awareness of the need to assess an authority's credibility before accepting as true statements to be found there.² We have already noted Boulainviller's attention to the matter of assessing authorities' trustworthiness in the introduction to his history of Egypt (above, p.307). However, Collingwood states that as a result of greater critical awareness, 'the document hitherto called an authority now acquired a new status, properly described by calling it a "source", a word indicating simply that it contains the statement, without any implications as to its value'.³ But as we have seen (p.305), it is at times the authority of a statement which persuades Boulainviller to accept it into his narrative.

1. R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford University Press, 1973; first published by the Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 257.
2. In spite of this, the continuing practice of 'scissors-and-paste' historiography in seventeenth-century France, with its corollaries of the 'déjà vu' and the 'chasses aux mémoires', is discussed in M. Tyvaert's 'Érudition et synthèse: les sources utilisées par les histoires générales de la France au 17^e siècle', in Revue française d'histoire du livre, 8 (1974), 249-66.
3. Ibid., p. 259.

It is really only when writing of French history, with the great seventeenth-century compilations of source material and documentary evidence to refer to, that Boulainviller is in a position to treat authorities as sources.¹

One of the main characteristics of Boulainviller's composition of the Histoire universelle (and which is not insignificant in, for example, the Mémoires historiques) is discussion of the agreements and differences between the authorities used in order to decide which opinions are to be accepted, and to secure a reconciliation between as many of them as possible. The most obvious example of such reconciliation is Boulainviller's 'scientific' interpretations of the great events recorded in Genesis: the Creation and the Flood. We have noted too the debate Boulainviller conducts with his authorities on the subject of chronology, and in particular the chronology of Egyptian history (above, pp.321-24 and 327-28). The identity of Apophis and Joseph is another conclusion which reconciles historical events and authoritative opinion. This identity determines the length of Joseph's ministry in Egypt (information not recorded, Boulainviller tells us, in Scripture) and suggests a figure of sixty-one or eighty-one years. 'Le premier sentiment a d'autant plus de vraysemblance qu'il est plus probable que Joseph dans la foiblesse de l'âge centenaire se retira luy même des embarras du gouvernement.' Furthermore, 'la convenance qui se trouve entre Apophis même et Joseph me paroît un excellent moyen pour concilier plusieurs difficultés de l'histoire pour placer les événements dans un order naturel et convenable à la chronologie et enfin pour laisser aux autres Rois Pasteurs

1. There is another interesting indication of Boulainviller's historiography's being of the 'scissors-and-paste' variety. Speaking of the uncritical historian Collingwood writes: 'however much testimony he has, his zeal as an historian makes him want more. But if he has a large amount of testimony, it becomes so difficult to manipulate and work up into a convincing narrative that, speaking as a mere weak mortal, he wishes he had less' (p.279). Writing of the continental spread of the ancient Scythians, Boulainviller remarks that 'c'est ce qui fait que quand les mémoires de ces nations auroient été recueillies: il seroit très difficile de donner une suite à leur histoire: mais elles nous en ont épargné la peine par l'ignorance des lettres où elles ont vécu' (HU, II, 517-18).

toute l'étendue que Manethon et le Sincelle leur ont donné' (HU, I, 296-97).

The desire to make historical events fit together ('la convenance') is another influential element in Boulainviller's historical composition. The astronomical 'prodige' which frightened the Lybians into submission when fighting against the Egyptians during the reign of Chenerophes has been recorded by Pliny but, Boulainviller continues, the Chinese have recorded a similar 'prodige' 'sur l'an 36^e du 8^e cicle' which year corresponds to our 2277 B.C., or the Julian year of 2437, that is the eighteenth year of Chenerophes' reign: 'c'est une convenance digne de toute l'attention des sçavants' (HU, I, 260). Similarly, in his examination of the various dynasties of Egyptian kings, Boulainviller, in agreement with Marsham,¹ sees it as certain that the nineteenth to the twenty-second of the Theban kings are the same as the last four of the third dynasty of the Memphis kings, and he 'embrasse sans difficulté cette ... idée qui est un moyen certain de débrouiller la confusion des Dinasties ~~et~~ de lier ensemble des événements qui ont passé autrefois pour être fort éloignés' (HU, I, 268).² Finally, narrating the reign of Sesostris, Boulainviller mentions the earth works which protect Egyptian towns from the flood waters of the Nile. 'Les voyageurs' are convinced that these huge brick constructions could only have been carried out at the time when Scripture records that the Hebrews were employed in making bricks, for only then could a sufficient number of people have been available to complete the work. 'L'histoire prophane' shows these constructions to have been built under Sesostris and his successor; 'il en faut conclurre', writes Boulainviller, 'qu'il est probablement impossible d'en séparer la servitude des Hébreux du règne de ces deux Princes d'autant moins qu'il s'y rencontre une infinité

1. Marsham, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

2. However, working on the same principles of criticism, Boulainviller disagrees with Marsham's opinion concerning the dating of the dynasties of the two Heracleopolises, (op. cit., p. 29), arguing that 'la convenance et la liaison des événements forment une démonstration contraire' (HU, I, 280).

d'autres convenances historiques qui ne peuvent se trouver dans un autre système' (HU, I, 325-26).

The complement of 'la convenance' is 'la vraisemblance'. It is the ubiquitous test of all opinion regarding the events of ancient history. The contradictory views of ancient and modern authorities concerning the confusing history of the dynasties of Egyptian kings prompt Boulainviller to say quite simply: 'je conclus de ces contradictions qu'il faut s'atacher à la plus grande vraie semblance' (HU, I, 273). As Collingwood has remarked, however, this criterion can only distinguish the possible from the impossible, not the possible from the historical; also, inasmuch as we may believe an authority when what it says is possible or 'vraisemblable', this criterion is no help in a critical assessment of that authority.¹ It is difficult at times to see how Boulainviller arrives at his understanding of what is 'vraisemblable' in any instance. Chronological convenience is one determining influence, but frequently it appears as if reference to 'la vraisemblance' is nothing but a rather dogmatic preference for a particular authority's opinion.

The principles of 'la convenance' and 'la vraisemblance' lead Boulainviller to adopt an opportunist attitude towards his authorities which accepts their statements when they 'fit' (or when there is no alternative authoritative opinion) but which rejects them when they do not. An example illustrative of this procedure is Boulainviller's history of Theseus, the founder of Athens. Although he refers to several ancient writers for his information, Boulainviller's principal authority is Plutarch's 'life', which provides useful criticisms, says our author, of fabulous detail and suggests reasonable alternative interpretations. Yet, as we have seen above (pp.329-30), Boulainviller is quite prepared to doubt the truth of his authority when 'la convenance chronologique' is at stake. Again, in the

1. R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, p. 239.

Apogée du soleil Boulainviller considers the rise and development of the Assyrian monarchy and recognizes that he is arguing against the authority of 'l'opinion commune'; however, he supports his narrative (which, of course, fits his astrological system) by reference to Herodotus, book one (AS, folio 120). Yet, in his Histoire des opinions des anciens sur la nature de l'âme where he discusses the ancients' belief in metempsychosis, Boulainviller writes:

Hérodote attribue aux Egyptiens l'idée d'une espèce de métempsychose assez particulière. Ils prétendaient, selon lui, que l'âme parcourait successivement toutes les espèces d'animaux de la terre, de l'air et des eaux, après quoi elle retournait dans un corps humain, et ils ajoutaient qu'il fallait trois mille ans pour achever cette révolution. Les Egyptiens avaient un extrême respect pour un grand nombre d'animaux, qui étaient dans leurs idées les types de leurs premiers héros, et pourtant ils ne pouvaient regarder que comme un insigne bonheur de passer par exemple dans le corps d'un chien, d'un boeuf, d'un mouton, d'un chat, etc. Cependant comme Hérodote est le seul qui rapporte cela, et que les autres historiens leur attribuent seulement la métempsychose sans faire mention de cette singularité, il y a de l'apparence que ce n'était qu'un sentiment particulier de quelques-uns d'entre eux. On y remarque en effet un peu trop de subtilité et de raffinement pour qu'on puisse le croire avoir été l'opinion ancienne et générale de la nation.¹
(OP, I, 268)

Such a pragmatic attitude towards authority contravenes the methodological principle which Boulainviller's younger friend Fréret established in the first half of the eighteenth century. This is simply that testimony is indivisible.² It is not unfair to criticize Boulainviller for infringing a tenet of criticism which his younger colleague did not enunciate until after his death, for he himself was perfectly aware of it. In his Introduction à l'abrégé cronologique de l'histoire des reynes de France

1. We may note that Boulainviller's criterion for rejecting Herodotus's account is again that of 'la vraisemblance' and is similar in kind, though not degree, to Voltaire's denial of Babylonian ritual prostitution as recorded, once more, by Herodotus. Collingwood writes: 'that the Greeks and Romans exposed their new-born children in order to control the numbers of their population is no less true for being unlike anything that happens in the experience of contributors to the Cambridge Ancient History'; The Idea of History, p. 240.
2. N. Fréret, Réflexions sur l'étude des anciennes histoires, et sur le degré de certitude de leurs preuves in Œuvres complètes edited by Septchènes, 20 vols (Paris, 1796), I, 61-62.

depuis le commencement de la monarchie françoise jusqu'à François premier
 Boulainviller discusses the practice of the early French kings of repudiating their wives. Charlemagne, who married the daughter of Desiderius, king of the Longobards, repudiated his wife a year later because of her sterility. However, le Père le Cointe considers Einhard and the monk of St. Gall to be mistaken in this reason, and prefers instead to see Charlemagne's act as the result of his compliance with papal wishes (the Pope at this time being no friend of the Longobards).¹ Boulainviller, keen to detect clerical bias in this questioning of the two authorities, notes of le Père le Cointe that

il tache de fortifier son raisonnement par le temoignage du Moine de St. Gal qui dit que Charlemagne quitte sa femme par le Jugement des Eveques, si le Pere le Cointe veut que le moine de St. Gal se soit trompé disant que Charlemagne repudia la fille de Didier Roy des Lombards parce qu'elle étoit infirme et inhabile a la generation, pourquoy ne veut il pas qu'il se soit aussy trompé, ajoutant que ce fut par le jugement des Eveques pour moy je soutiens que ce moine ne s'est point trompé et que Charlemagne ne fut point obligé a ce divorce par les Eveques.²

The reason for Boulainviller's scientifically uncritical use of his authorities is no doubt largely due to his fundamental conception of the task of history and of ancient history in particular. 'There was a driving passion to frame one history for all mankind. The eighteenth century was still unaccustomed to a segmented historical world with inevitable lacunae; it demanded a continuum in which the generations of men succeeded one another with the orderly certainty of a chapter in Chronicles.'³ Boulainviller's desire to fill all the gaps is particularly evident in his discussion of the generations of Egyptian kings. Writing of the fourth son of Menes, Curudes, Boulainviller refers to Syncellus's list of his

1. Le Père le Cointe, Annales Ecclesiastici Francorum, 8 vols (Paris, 1665-83), V, 768-69. We should note that it is Notker the Stammerer, the monk of St. Gall, who adduces the reason of sterility, whereas Einhard confesses that no one knows why Charlemagne repudiated his wife. See Two Lives of Charlemagne, translations of Einhard's and Notker's texts by Lewis Thorpe (Penguin Books, 1974; first published in 1969), pp. 73 and 162.
2. Bibliothèque municipale de Nantes, MS no. 1822, pp. 220-21.
3. F.E. Manuel, The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 112.

successors¹ but sees it as imperfect, the names either having 'aucune analogie à la langue du Pays' or being 'manifestement pris des autres Dynasties'. 'Cependant', he continues, 'pour ne rien obmettre; nous en donnerons le canon avec la table des Roix d'Egipte' (HU, I, 237). Similarly, the historical importance of the successors to Athotis is not what they did but that they can be seen to have existed (HU, I, 242).

Later Boulainviller goes on to discuss the dynasties of Heracleopolis which, he asserts, succeeded Syncellus's fifteen generations of Egyptian kings. But Boulainviller sees that there were two Heracleopolises, one at Canopus and one at Pelusium. The first dynasty must belong to Canopus, 'd'autant plus qu'il y a nécessité de remplir le vuide qui se trouveroit après la fin des quinze générations du Sincelle'; and this first dynasty fits 'avec toute la vraisemblance possible': it finishes just in time for Pammus's conquest of all of Egypt. Moreover, this first dynasty includes the cruel Achtoes, the name, Boulainviller notes, of the tyrant who began the third dynasty at Memphis; 'on ne scauroit vû le raport des noms et des temps s'empêcher de juger que l'Achtoës d'Heraclée s'empara de Memphis injustement ...' and it was his successor who was chased out by Pammus. However, a difficulty remains: 'la grande et véritable Heraclée' must be sought elsewhere in Egypt, for the usurpation of Memphis seems 'plus à la portée des Princes de la grande Heraclée que d'un Roy de la Basse Egipte'. But this difficulty is not significant: 'dans le fond cela est assés indiférent pourveu que le vuide dont nous avons parlé ... se trouve remply par les Roys de l'une ou de l'autre Heraclée' (HU, I, 265-67). Again, Boulainviller notes a problem in the succession of Archles, the fourth king of the Shepherds: the canons of Manetho, Julius Africanus, Eusebius, and Syncellus do not agree. However, Boulainviller follows the authority of Julius Africanus 'par la raison qu'en ottant Apophis du nombre des Roix [for Apophis was none other than Joseph]: il faut remplir le vuide qu'il

1. Georgius Syncellus, Chronographia (Paris, 1652), p. 91.

laisse' (HU, I, 338). Finally, at the end of his history of Egypt, Boulainviller writes, with a measure of perhaps justifiable pride, 'je crois pouvoir dire après avoir leû attentivement tout ce qui a été proposé de nos jours sur cette matiere qu'on n'a point formé de sistème qui satisfasse mieux que celui cy par raport à des événements aussy obscurs et si éloignés de notre temps' (HU, I, 343).

Now that we have examined in some detail the most important criteria which guide Boulainviller in the composition of his historical narratives - purpose, order, method, combination of authorities, 'la convenance et la vraisemblance', in a word: system - it remains, to conclude our examination of Boulainviller's historiographical methodology, to spend a little time considering the quality of his narrative style itself.

III Narrative style

In general, as the many quotations taken from Boulainviller's work and presented in this thesis may show, there is nothing particularly arresting or pleasing in the narrative style of Boulainviller's historical works. There is not the continuity of zest or wit of a Voltaire, nor the urbane elegance of a Montesquieu. Indeed, the chronicle style of much of the Mémoires historiques, for example, can at times be extremely monotonous. Paradoxically, Boulainviller's aridity of style is most evident in one of his most interesting texts, the État de la France. No doubt this is due to the nature of the work itself - a complete inventory of the salient geographical, economic, financial, administrative, judicial, and social features of all the 'généralités' of France. Boulainviller's aim, to present as much useful information as possible in as compact and readily accessible a form as possible, leads the author at times to write in a strikingly dense style which, especially in his reviews of the noble families in any area, degenerates into long and involved lists of names

and connections. The following extract is a typical example of much of the narration of the État de la France:

Le premier Duc d'Orléans étant mort en 1383, Charles VI. donna le même titre d'apanage en 1392, à Louïs son frere unique, auparavant Duc de Touraine, le joignant à la Vicomté de Châteaudun, confisquée sous Pierre de Craon, à cause de l'attentat commis en la personne du Connétable de Clesson le Duc: Louïs ajouta à son appanage la Comté de Blois avec les Seigneuries de Romorantin, de Millanée, de Marche-noir, et de Fredval qu'il acheta la même année de Guy de Châtillon, second du nom, Comte de Blois, des deniers dotaux de Valentine de Milan son Epouse; outre ces grandes terres, le Roi son frere lui accorda encore les Comtez d'Angoumois, de Dreux et de Beaumont sur Oyse, mais il ne jouit guère des uns ni des autres, ayant été malheureusement assassiné par l'ordre de Jean, Duc de Bourgogne, en Novembre, 1407. Charles et Jean, ses enfans, partagerent sa Succession; l'aîné eut Orléans avec la Comté de Blois, Charles eut le malheur d'être pris prisonnier des Anglois à la bataille d'Azincourt, il resta 25 ans en Angleterre; pendant son absence les Anglois assiègerent Orléans en 1428, et le réduisirent à l'extrémité, lorsque Dieu parut susciter la Pucelle, Jeanne d'Ark, pour en faire lever le siège, ce qu'elle exécuta d'une maniere miraculeuse, secondée de Jean Bâtard d'Orléans, Comte du Dunois, fils du Duc Louïs: le Duc Charles étant mort, Louïs son fils et seul héritier lui succéda, et depuis, au Royaume de France après la mort de Charles VIII. en 1498, sous le nom de Louïs XII. au moyen dequoi la Duché d'Orléans fut une seconde fois réunie à la Couronne ...

(EF, II, 342-43)

However, there are occasions on which Boulainviller's narration of even an involved episode of French history can achieve a clarity and momentum which successfully engage the reader's attention and interest. Having discussed Charles VII's reorganisation of his army Boulainviller continues by narrating, at some length, the history of the king's stormy relation with the Dauphin:

Toutefois les Chefs des troupes étoient bien éloignés de ces sentimens /That Charles had done well to streamline his army/; la plupart prétendirent que leur autorité et leurs profits alloient être également retranchés par cette nouvelle police: ils disoient hautement que ce n'étoit pas là la récompense due à leurs services, et que la facilité du Monarque étoit si grande, que, si on lui laissoit davantage le gouvernement de l'Etat, il perdrait par son imprudence et par sa foiblesse les avantages remportés jusqu'à ce jour aux dépens de tant de sang répandu, et de tant d'argent tiré des Communes du Royaume. Le Duc d'Alençon, le plus séditieux et le plus brouillon des Seigneurs de son siècle, se trouvoit parein du Dauphin purlors âgé de 17. ans, mais déjà marié à la Princesse d'Ecosse, et reconnu pour un génie noir, malin, et souverainement ambitieux d'autorité: le Roi son Père, qui se défioit de son caractère, le tenoit éloigné de lui sous la conduite de Bernard d'Armagnac Comte de la Marche et de Pardiac, l'un des plus sages et des plus vaillans Seigneurs du tems, mais qui sans autre raison en étoit devenu tellement odieux et insupportable à son Pupile, que sa vengeance contre lui et toute sa Maison ne s'éteignit pas même par le sang de son Fils Jaque

Duc de Nemours, qu'il fit exécuter comme un scélérat en place de Gréve près de 40. ans après.

Le Duc d'Alençon se servit de cette disposition pour débaucher le Dauphin de l'obéissance du Roi son Père, en lui persuadant qu'il étoit aisé de le faire regner dès lors: il se servit, pour lui inspirer ses projets, de l'organe de Pierre d'Amboise Seigneur de Chaumont, de Jean Sanglier, et du jeune Boucicaut; mais, pendant qu'il travailloit de ce côté là, il ne négligeoit rien d'autre part pour attirer à ses vues les autres Seigneurs du Sang, et les vieux Capitaines qui étoient depuis longtemps au service du Roi. Son intrigue lui réussit à l'égard du Duc de Bourbon, des Comtes de Vendôme et de Dunois, du Seigneur de la Trimouille, du Bâtard de Bourbon depuis Amiral, et du Seigneur de Chabannes; tous rompirent à la fois l'Ordonnance du Roi, ramenant dans le plat Pays les Compagnies et abandonnant les frontières. Le Duc d'Alençon se rendit à Niort, où, s'étant emparé du Dauphin après avoir honteusement chassé le Comte de la Marche, il se crut assez fort pour faire des entreprises sur les places du voisinage. Le Roi employa de son côté la négociation pour désunir cette cabale; il y députa le Conétable et le Sire de Gaucourt et Culant qui s'étoient trouvez près de lui; mais, sur le refus que les Conjurez firent de traiter, il se résolut à tenter lui même la fortune. Il se rendit en diligence à Poitiers, où, tandis qu'il amassoit des troupes, il aprit que le Duc d'Alençon avoit surpris la ville de St. Maixant, mais que le Château et l'Abaye tenoient encore pour lui: il y courut d'abord, et les dégagea avec tant de valeur et de succès, que le Dauphin intimidé crut ne pouvoir trouver de sûreté qu'en Bourbonnois où il se retira en grande hâte. Mais le Roi le poursuivit chaudement; et l'Histoire remarque que l'ordre établi depuis peu parmi les Gens de guerre se trouva si bon dans cette première expérience, que le Roi se trouva fort de 800. Lances et de 2000. Hommes de trait, sans que les frontières fussent dégarnies, parcequ'il avoit remplacé avec une extrême diligence tous ceux qui avoient manqué à leur devoir. Le Dauphin avoit cru pouvoir se défendre à Moulins avec les forces que le Duc de Bourbon y avoit assemblées; mais l'approche du Roi l'obligea de se retirer à Desize, et il pensoit se jeter en Bourgogne, lorsqu'il fut averti que les villes indignées de sa mauvaise conduite se préparoient à lui fermer leurs portes. Cette nouvelle l'engagea à faire effort du côté de l'Auvergne; mais il y fut presque aussi mal reçu. Le Roi étant entré dans Clermont y convoqua les Etats de la Province pour leur faire connoître la véritable disposition des affaires, l'injustice et la mauvaise conduite de son Fils, et la déloyauté des Seigneurs qui l'avoient séduit pour lui mettre les armes à la main contre un Père et un Roi, qui, ne travaillant que pour le bien du Royaume, ne travailloit réellement que pour lui qui en étoit l'héritier présomptif. Ce fut l'Evêque du lieu qui porta la parole pour le Roi; et il fit tellement valoir ses raisons et son droit, que toute l'Assemblée se termina en ofrant avec zèle corps et biens pour l'aider à soumettre les Révoltez. (HAG, III, 94-98)

Such struggles between good and bad characters are ideally suited to an historian with an essentially individual and pragmatic view of historical causation and who is not unaware of the need for an entertaining style. In his Mémoire sur la généalogie de la famille de Boulainviller, ensemble des familles qui y sont alliées (B.N. fonds français, n.a. 4709) Boulainviller

writes:

Si la Methode d'un Livre, et l'arrangement de ses matieres en facilitent l'intelligence, la sêcheresse qui accompagne un ordre trop scrupuleux, cause le degout, et l'ennui qui en font abandonner la lecture, c'est pourquoi il est difficile de joindre ensemble les conditions qui rendent les livres utiles [sic], et agréables en même tēms, principalement quand ils sont destinés comme cellui-cy à traiter une matiere sterile telle qu'une Genèalogie particuliere. (p.432)

A few pages later, however, Boulainviller explains how fresh information about the House of Fecamp 'l'oblige a retoucher ce que l'a dit cy-dessus concernant cette famille la verite etant preferable dans un ouvrage pareil a cellui-cy a tous les agrements d'une narration suivie' (p.441). This sentiment is echoed in Boulainviller's Introduction à l'abgrégé cronologique de l'histoire des reynes de France ... in which, he writes,

je ne me suis point attaché a faire un discours poly et remply d'expressions magnifiques qu'il convient plustot a un Roman qu'a une histoire. J'ay affecté partout un stile historique simple et net, J'auray executé mon dessein si je me suis fait entendre. Je ne me suis point écarté de la verité quand je l'ay pû connoître, n'ayant rien en plus a coeur que de la suivre et de l'établir.

Nonetheless, the anecdotal and the picturesque are not uncommon features in Boulainviller's narrative style. A notable example is to be found in his picture of the despondent Charlemagne who, on observing a fleet of Norsemen pass along the coast, 'ne pût retenir ses larmes, prévoyant les malheurs que d'autres pareilles causeroient un jour à ses enfans et à leurs Etats' (MH, p.372). Still more striking perhaps is the figure of Henry III reflecting upon a recently discovered Spanish plot against his crown.

Boulainviller's vignette is quite touching:

le Roy fort pensif se mit a la fenetre dans sa chambre qui regardoit sur la Cour du Louvre, et apres avoir longuement considéré une multitude de noblesse, dont la Cour et les fenetres estoient pleines, se trouvant pour lors la suite du Roy fort grosse, tint ce propos. Mr d'Angenoust, vous voyez bien là du monde: dites moy, en qui puis-je me fier de tous ceux-là. Angenoust pour conforter l'esprit du Roy qu'il voyoit traversé de facherie, luy représenta comme Dieu protégeoit

1. Nantes, MS no. 1822, p. 199

les Rois et luy suscitoit au besoin de bons et fidels serviteurs et puisque par sa providence cette conspiration estoit decouverte il falloit croire que cette même bonté divine luy fourniroit des moyens de la rompre et dissiper.

As well as the picturesque and anecdotal, the 'novelistic', and the plain dull, Boulainviller's historical narratives employ several other recognizable registers, which have been amply represented in this thesis. One thinks of the confident assertiveness of much of the Histoire universelle and the Apogée du soleil; the bitter criticisms of Christianity and Christian practice in La Vie de Mahomed and of crown, 'haute noblesse', and Third Estate in Boulainviller's histories of France, particularly in the shorter works occasioned by the social and political pretensions of the 'Ducs et Pairs'; the complimentary but weighted flattery of the monarchy's views of its absolute power; and finally, the sententiousness of much of Boulainviller's moralizing and the pained, almost lyrical, expression of the distress he feels as he contemplates the tragic demise of French nobility and virtue.

Other important features of Boulainviller's style, which we have noted on occasion, are his subtlety and irony - useful tools for an historian with reactionary, heterodox, and critical opinions to convey. Indeed, irony is seen by Boulainviller as the most efficacious manner in which to oppose the distortions of fact and the ideas to be found in the 'mémoires' of the intendants. He writes:

Cette peinture des idées et des maximes qui régneront dans la conduite des Intendans, et qui paroissent dans leurs Mémoires, fait connoître combien il étoit nécessaire d'en refondre une partie, et de réfuter les autres avec quelques raisonnemens solides: c'est à quoi je me suis efforcé dans mes extraits, non toutefois d'une manière dogmatique, par la crainte d'allonger un Ouvrage déjà trop étendu; mais souvent par la voye d'ironie, et de la réduction du raisonnement à l'absurde; méthode plus facile et plus abrégée à l'égard des gens qui ont presque toujours écrit contre les notions les plus universellement reçues.

(EF, I, 59-60)

However, such irony is not aimed at the intendants alone: their patron too

1. Origine des parlements de France et des états généraux ..., vol. II, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS no. 2889, folios 346-47.

may serve as its target. In his description of the 'état des finances' of Champagne, Boulainviller considers the excessive burden of taxation this region has had to bear:

On peu douter que des impositions si violentes n'ayent infiniment affoibli cette Province, sur tout dans l'occurrence où la création d'une quantité de nouvelles Charges avoit multiplié les exemptions ou fixé les impositions, ainsi la Paix conclue avec tant de gloire a doublement mérité les acclamations des peuples et leurs ardentes prieres pour la personne de Sa Majesté, qui a si glorieusement terminé cette guerre, dans le seul dessein de soulager ses fidèles sujets. (EF, III, 65)

The polemical importance of even single words can be appreciated in Boulainviller's examination of Clovis's treatment of 'le Salien de Soissons'. The execution of the man who dared to say no to Clovis is a considerable problem for Boulainviller who wants to show the essential equality that existed between the Franks and their rulers. By pointing to the division in Clovis's authority between king and general Boulainviller effects a theoretical reply to those who would see in the king the beginnings and justification of monarchical absolutism. However, Boulainviller hopes to attenuate the despotism implicit in Clovis's behaviour by presenting the king as punishing 'un homme non coupable, mais odieux' (MH, p. 141). We may doubt whether Boulainviller succeeds in persuading his reader that Clovis's act was not that of a despot; however, his narration of the machinations of 'la reine Blanche', Louis VIII's widow, to become regent is much more convincing. The wily queen plans in particular to manipulate the luckless Count Thibaut of Champagne, passionately in love with her but bitterly upset at her refusal to let him attend her son's coronation. However,

Cette Princesse, très-habile et très-ambitieuse par elle même, étoit encore soutenue et conseillée par un Legat du Pape, aussi très-grand politique, et qui étoit estimé, et attaché à elle par des liens plus étroits que ceux de la justice ordinaire ou de la pitié due aux veuves affligées: ce fut par son conseil qu'elle mit son application à gagner les Officiers domestiques, les Sires de Montmorenci et de Courtenai, le Comte de Dreux, Imbert de Beaujeu, et quelques autres.

(HAG, II, 15)

The tone of this innuendo may recall what is perhaps Boulainviller's most pleasurable, ironic, and literary historical text, La Vie de Mahomed. In this work irony, subtlety, and ambiguity are no longer simply useful embellishments of argument but become, as it were, part of the very fabric of argument itself. We may conclude our examination of Boulainviller's narrative styles by looking for a moment at this the last of his historical narratives.

La Vie de Mahomed may be said to have two complementary aims: firstly, to solicit sympathy for Arabs, Islam, and its founder and to pillory Christianity; secondly, and more profoundly, to demonstrate that while all religious practices may profit from reform each is well suited to its cultural and geographical environment and should be accepted as an adequate way of worshipping the Supreme Being. Boulainviller's ironic stance in the work is thus a dual one: normally irony and criticism are indulged in at Christianity's expense, but at times we perceive that Boulainviller's attitude towards the scourge with which he punishes Christian dogma and practice is itself at times shot through with ambiguity.

Boulainviller's praise of the Arabs and criticism of Christians and their faith, examined in chapter six, are obvious indications of his more immediate aims in La Vie de Mahomed. However, a much more debilitating attack against a Christian sense of cultural and religious superiority is the ambiguity of much of Boulainviller's 'objective' narration of Arab religion and custom. This ambiguity arises from the uncertainty that exists with regard to Boulainviller's own attitude towards the facts he presents. Is he merely reporting Arab opinion (naturally erroneous) or does he consider it to be historical fact? Discussing the similarities between the Arabs and the Hebrews in language, government, custom, and even religion, Boulainviller notes that both peoples needed Heaven-sent prophets to rejuvenate and purify their degenerate religions:

desorte, disent les Musulans, qu'il a ^{eu} fau que Dieu suscitât Mahomed, à la fin des tems, pour rétablir ce Culte simple et émané de Dieu même, premierement en Arabie, et ensuite dans une grande partie du Monde.

(VM, p. 34)

il falut que Dieu suscitât un nouveau Prophete, qu'il revêtit de sa toute-puissance pour les Les Israélites tirer du joug des Egyptiens, leur faire traverser la Mer à pied sec, les conduire pendant quarante années dans les Deserts où leur incrédulité les retenoit.

(VM, p. 35)

A simple, almost parenthetical 'disent les Musulmans' is all that differentiates the obvious 'truth' about the author of the Pentateuch from the impiety of the Infidel. Similarly, Boulainviller's earlier description of the Koran presents it as

[Le] Livre où leur Religion est contenue, qu'ils disent être le plus sublime ouvrage de la sagesse de DIEU, parce qu'il contient les Vérités éternelles qu'il a voulu faire connoître aux hommes; non telles que l'imagination des créatures les plus excellentes les peut concevoir ou exprimer, mais telles qu'elles existent réellement, et que cette suprême SAGESSE a voulu les énoncer pour la conviction de tout Etre intelligent. C'est cette opinion qui a été le principe du mépris qu'ils ont fait des Sciences étrangères. (VM, p. 4)

Boulainviller's attention to the aim of the Koran to broadcast to all the simple eternal truths of religion (an aim in complete harmony with his conviction that religion should be both socially useful and credible) leads us to doubt whether this flattering portrayal of their holy book is all the work of the Arabs.¹

Often, however, Boulainviller discusses his subjects without any formal indication that he is only reporting Arab opinion: he employs a neutrality of style which simply does not question the truth of what he narrates. Boulainviller's remarks on the Kaaba, although somewhat highly coloured, illustrate this well:

C'est là ce bâtiment célèbre, préféré à tous les édifices que les Maitres du Monde ont élevé avec tant de travaux et de dépenses; l'humble maison d'Abraham l'ami de DIEU, construite dans le temps de ses persécutions, lorsqu'étant Pélerin et errant sur la Terre, DIEU lui revêla

1. It is true that the context of this remark is the relation of the destruction caused by the Arabs, fanatically inspired by the word of the Koran. However, any suggested criticism of their acts is soon counter-balanced and out-weighed by Boulainviller's recommendation of the noble character of the history of their rise to power (VM, p. 6)

qu'il avoit choisi ce Lieu, de toute éternité, pour y placer sa bénédiction, et y recevoir les vœux et les prières de ceux qui, rendant hommage à sa puissance et à la vérité de son ETRE, lui demanderoient les choses nécessaires pour le bonheur éternel. C'est le même bâtiment qu'Ismaël a reçu de son Père, comme son héritage et la portion due à son aïnesse; dans lequel il a habité jusqu'à sa mort, et près duquel il a voulu reposer jusqu'à la Résurrection; comme le témoigne son Sepulcre, qu'on y voit encore, sans aucun changement depuis tant de siècles. Enfin, c'est-là cette sainte Maison, connue sous le nom de KAABA ou de Maison quarrée, vers laquelle les Arabes adressent non seulement leurs vœux les plus ardens, mais vers laquelle toutes les Nations du Monde, qui reconnaissent la vérité et l'unité d'un DIEU, tournent leur visage au temps de la Prière, et dirigent leur intention en conséquence de ce choix éternel qu'en a fait la Divinité. (VM, pp. 63-64)

The ambiguity of Boulainviller's narration in La Vie de Mahomed reaches curious proportions in his treatment of the abduction of Mohammed when still a small boy and in the care of his nurse. Boulainviller starts by setting the scene in full accordance with the traditional story:

L'HISTOIRE de sa vie porte expressément, que dès qu'il put marcher, elle sa Nourrice l'envoyoit tout nud, avec les autres Enfants du Lieu, à la suite des Troupeaux communs du Village; portant avec lui le peu de nourriture dont il avoit besoin pour quelques jours. On infère justement de-là, qu'il couchoit et vivoit à l'air, comme les autres Enfants, sans aucune distinction, selon l'usage pratiqué en Arabie, où on les accoutume dès cet âge tendre à supporter la chaleur sur la terre, et à se contenter d'une très légère nourriture.
(VM, p. 212)

Boulainviller then goes on to report the fantastic story of Mohammed's being abducted by two angels, having his heart cut out and purified and being told the truth of the unity of God. Although Boulainviller does not quote any particular source, his reference to 'L'HISTOIRE' defends him against any criticism of pure invention and invites the reader to view the whole relation as perhaps symbolic, but certainly not literally true. However, Boulainviller does seem at the same time to be using the authority of history to encourage an acceptance of just such a literal interpretation of the story to which his own narration strives to give psychological realism or 'vraisemblance':

La Nourrice, extrêmement touchée d'un événement si singulier, et en appréhendant les suites, ramena peu après l'Enfant à sa Mère. Eminah ayant jugé nécessaire d'instruire Abdol-Motalleb de ce qui s'étoit passé au sujet du petit Mahomed, reçut de lui un commandement très exprès de ne jamais révéler ce secret à personne, et d'attendre avec

patience les exécutions des Décrets du TOUT-PUISSANT. C'étoit sans doute la conduite la plus sage, et la plus convenable; mais la vanité d'une Mere ne s'arrête pas toujours par de justes considerations. Eminah publia mal à propos cet événement, qui ne fut reçu par les Koreïshites que comme une extravagance, ou plutôt comme une tentative des Haschemites pour préparer les changemens qu'ils avoient envie de faire à la Religion commune. (VM, p. 215)

As well as suffering from the pervasive ambiguity of Boulainviller's narrative technique, Christianity loses its claims to pre-eminence in his text by being seen and presented in unflattering historical contexts which emphasize its human, fallible, and political nature. For example, Boulainviller would be suspicious of the Christians' involvement with the Abyssinians to chase the Persians out of the Yemen, 'eux qui, au milieu de l'Empire Romain, détestoient encore la Guerre, et rejettoient tout Emploi qu'ils croyoient opposé à l'esprit de la Religion', were it not that the Abyssinian invasion pre-dated Mohammed by only one hundred years and thus that 'on peut assurer qu'en ce tems-là les maximes des premiers Chrétiens n'étoient déjà plus d'usage; et comme ces derniers ne faisoient plus de scrupule d'aller à la Guerre, ils n'en faisoient point aussi d'entrer dans les intrigues, ni même de conjurer contre les Princes, et contre les Gouvernemens les mieux établis' (VM, p. 110). Similarly, in discussing the Yemeni's hatred of Christianity Boulainviller shows this hate to be part of their antipathy towards the Romans who used Christianity to foster 'leurs sentimens et leur [sic] préjugés' in other Christian countries, such that Christians would not respect the laws and customs of their own countries unless they conformed to 'les constitutions des Romains et avec leurs moeurs communes' (VM, p. 122).

This emphasis on Christianity's simply being one historical phenomenon and cause among many had been ironically developed a few pages earlier in a discussion of the reasons why Christianity had such trouble establishing itself in Persia. Boulainviller explains:

à peine avoit-il [le christianisme] commencé à s'y faire connoître, qu'il y fut confondu avec une Secte abominable, échappée des Manichéens,

et prêchée par un célèbre Imposteur, nomme Masdack; qui, sous le prétexte d'abolir les Guerres et les disputes entre les hommes, établissoit la communauté des biens, et même celle des femmes.
(VM, p. 117)

Boulainviller describes how this Masdack spread his errors at Court and 'se fit accorder la jouissance même de la Reine' (VM, p. 117); this led eventually to the proscription of Christianity in Persia.

The alliance between Christianity and Roman imperialism is one of the reasons why Mohammed, searching for a suitable religious form to unite the Arabs and to lead them into battle, rejected Christianity. Boulainviller writes:

il arriva malheureusement, qu'au lieu de choisir la Religion Chrétienne, laquelle, par les titres de sa vérité et de la rectitude de sa Morale méritoit une préférence évidente, Mahomed se revolta si violemment contre les abus qu'il y avoit reconnus dans la pratique, qu'il se porta plutôt à l'attaquer elle-même, qu'à reformer ce que les bons Chrétiens n'y supportoient qu'avec peine et douleur. D'ailleurs il se représenta, que la puissance et la Religion des Romains étoient si fortement unies, qu'on ne pouvoit les combattre séparément.
(VM, pp. 239-40)

Boulainviller's ironizing of the Christian religion in this extract is illustrative of the attitude he frequently adopts towards that faith throughout La Vie de Mahomed: his declaration of the evident superiority of Christian revelation, dogma, and morality is undermined by his comments on its practical abuses, its tendency towards superstition, its irrational dogma, and its failure to guide the life of its adherents.

Although Boulainviller may solicit his reader's sense of cultural superiority when describing the kind of works the Arabs have translated from the classical corpus (the useful rather than the agreeable) as a means of securing recognition of the great debt we owe them for having preserved books and texts the West had lost (VM, p. 53), it is just this sense of cultural and religious superiority which is so delightfully deflated in Boulainviller's principles of toleration (above, p. 164), for it is only from the point of view of deism, which sees all established religions as only relatively true, that these principles can be consistent. It is

the higher purpose of Boulainviller's text - the demonstration of the simplicity, morality, and rationality of true religion - that allows Boulainviller to criticize Mohammed as well as the Christians and to make such clever use of his being an impostor (above, pp. 180-81). This ambiguity is maintained throughout La Vie de Mahomed for even in his most generous appraisal of the Prophet, Boulainviller still refers to him as an impostor (VM, p. 268).

It is in the introduction to, and conclusion of, this very appraisal that we are given clear indication of Boulainviller's ironic, even playful attitude towards the composition of his work. He begins:

il est temps ... d'en venir à moi-même, et de me justifier devant le Lecteur, de l'impression que peut faire le style Oriental et Arabe que j'emploie dans ce récit. Je suis Chrétien comme lui, et j'en fais une profession aussi sincère; mais je suis opposé à deux principes, sur lesquels a roulé jusqu'à présent notre Controverse avec les Musulmans. Le premier est, Qu'il ne se trouve aucun motif raisonnable dans tout ce qu'ils croient ou pratiquent; en sorte qu'il faille renoncer au sens-commun pour s'y soumettre. Le second, que Mahomed ait été un Imposteur si grossier et si barbare, qu'il n'est point d'homme qui n'ait dû, et qui n'ait pu s'apercevoir de sa tromperie et de sa séduction. (VM, pp. 267-68)

Against these principles Boulainviller holds that but for the Christian revelation there would be no religion with an equal measure of the rationality and inspiration to do good which can be found within Islam (above, p.165); and as for Mohammed, he may be compared with the heroes of antiquity, only he is free of their excesses and is inspired by philanthropy rather than the desire to conquer. Boulainviller concludes these remarks by saying:

au-reste, comme le but de cet Ouvrage n'est que mon amusement particulier, après lequel je substitue celui d'un Lecteur équitable, je ne croi pas avoir besoin de justifier mon style, et les termes que j'emprunte des Livres Arabes. Un pareil Ouvrage, où nous ne pouvons prendre que peu d'intérêt du côté de l'instruction, et de la connoissance des vérités dogmatiques, doit au-moins essayer de plaire par la singularité des expressions. (VM, p. 269)

The 'style Oriental et Arabe' which Boulainviller likes to see himself employing in La Vie de Mahomed is understood by the abbé Gagnier not as the literary style of the work but as the 'expressions hardies, et ces saillies

d'imagination pleines d'enthousiasme, qui le font parler Arabe, c'est-à-dire, outrer la matière comme le plus entêté Musulman pourroit faire pour louer et son faux Prophète Mahomet, et sa Religion, ou plutôt sa folle et impie Superstition'.¹ Indeed, a brief note on Gagnier's work may provide a suitable postscript to our examination of Boulainviller's narrative style in La Vie de Mahomed, for here, in spite of Colonna d'Istria's remark to the contrary (above, p.163), we see a critic of Boulainviller perfectly aware of the anti-Christian inspiration of his text.² Gagnier is particularly critical of Mohammed's doctrine of the unity of God and is emphatic in asserting the truth of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.³ Gagnier is also a keen observer of the ambiguity and irony abounding in Boulainviller's work, and yet in perceiving and demonstrating these qualities, rather than discrediting Boulainviller's duplicity, he becomes its victim. Discussing Boulainviller's statement that all that Mohammed said was true, 'mais il n'a pas dit tout ce qui est vrai: et c'est en cela seul que notre Religion differe de la sienne' (VM, p. 267), Gagnier writes:

on en pourroit dire autant, et avec beaucoup plus de raison de ces fameux Législateurs de l'antiquité Confucius, Solon, Lycurge, Numa, et autres, qui nous ont donné des Systèmes de Loix aussi bons pour le moins, pour ne pas dire meilleurs ... et plus purs à tous égards que celui de notre Imposteur: on pourroit aussi ajouter qu'ils n'ont pas dit tout ce qui est vrai; puis qu'ils n'ont pas eu la connoissance des grandes vérités de la Révélation divine. Il ne leur manquoit que cela pour rendre leurs systèmes parfaits.

And, no doubt, but for the final sentiment, Boulainviller would hardly disagree (above, p. 162). Indeed, Gagnier is fully conscious of

1. Jean Gagnier, La Vie de Mahomet traduite et compilée de l'Alcoran, des traditions authentiques de la Sonna et des meilleurs auteurs arabes (Amsterdam, 1732). p. xi.
2. The reviewer of both Boulainviller's and Gagnier's accounts of the life of Mohammed also recognized the former's anti-Christian intentions. Commenting on Boulainviller's admission that his Vie de Mahomed was only 'une matière propre à l'amusement de sa Vieillesse', the reviewer writes: 'on y sent un peu le Vieillard en effet, qui moralise à perte de vuë, et qui s'épuise tellement en reflexions, qu'on voit bien que ce n'est pas tant la Vie de Mahomed qu'il a voulu écrire, que d'en prendre seulement occasion de faire une satyre du Christianisme, et l'Apologie de ce prétendu Prophete'. Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savans de l'Europe, 8 (1732), 380-408.
3. Ibid., pp. xv-xviii.
4. Ibid., p. xxvii.

Boulainviller's dismissive attitude towards Christian revelation: 'Après cela Mr le Comte a bonne grace de nous venir dire, que c'est en cela seul que notre Religion diffère de la sienne, comme si cette différence étoit si mince et si petite, telle que peut être une simple omission, qu'elle ne vaille pas la peine d'en parler.¹

To conclude, we may note the double irony of the defender of the faith hunting out the implicit criticisms in Boulainviller's text of Christianity and its founders, certain that to do so is to expose them to public censure, and yet only succeeding in arguing his adversary's case for him. Gagnier is examining Boulainviller's description of the means Mohammed employed to win his converts, in particular the Prophet's

don de persuasion qui étoit en lui: par lequel il est venu à bout, non pas d'amener des hommes grossiers [Gagnier: tels sans doute qu'étoient les Apôtres de J.C.] à une Doctrine mystérieuse, inexplorable, et néanmoins propre à toucher l'imagination [Gagnier: c'est-à-dire la doctrine de l'Evangile]; mais les plus sublimes Héros de leur siècle, en valeur, en générosité, en moderation, en sagesse.²

Gagnier asks: 'ne voilà-t-il pas un beau Parallèle entre les Apôtres de J.C. [sic] et les premiers Prosélytes de Mahomet, et entre la doctrine de l'Evangile, et celle de l'Alcoran?'.³ It may be, but who is making it?

These comments on Boulainviller's narrative style and technique in La Vie de Mahomed bring us to the end of our analysis of his historical methodology and thus to the end of the main body of the thesis. Before concluding with some general reflections on the value of Boulainviller's work as an historian, however, it may be of use to summarize briefly the main points put forward in this work with regard to Boulainviller's practice as an historian.

1. Ibid., p. xxviii.

2. VM, p. 144 and Gagnier, op. cit., pp. xiii-xiv.

3. Gagnier, op. cit., p. xiv.

IV Summary

The thesis began by looking at the work for which Boulainviller is principally remembered: his writings on the history of France. The 'thèse' which all these writings defend, the 'thèse nobiliaire' in a particularly virulent form, was assumed to be beyond dispute and attention was paid instead to the ways, occasionally expedient and devious, in which this 'thèse' was advanced and upheld. French history begins, for Boulainviller, with the Frankish conquest of Gaul. This regrettably violent and 'unjust' foundation of the French state has to be accepted for without it Boulainviller would not have even a pretence of a philosophical justification for his dearest cause, the distinction of the French nobility. The pure prejudice which such a 'philosophy' hopes to disguise is immediately revealed, however, when Boulainviller begins to condemn as unjust all those changes, dangerous innovations, which lead away from the 'ancienne discipline' of his valiant Franks and begin to introduce greater monarchical power as well as distinction within the ranks of the nobility. The pragmatism of his position is well illustrated by the various manipulations of the arguments from fact and from right which occur in his work: bargains are struck with the ruling house of France (recognition of its legitimacy in return for recognition of the right to private property) and Princes of the blood are set against 'Ducs et Pairs' in order to refute each others' pretensions to greater consideration in an attempt to restore the unity of the second order. His untenable position, as far as political philosophy goes, becomes clear in comparison with two English philosophers, and we see Boulainviller attempt to defend the natural rights of men (or rather, the second order) in a distinctly Lockean manner yet using as his starting point a Hobbesian conception of the justice of conquest.

As well as manipulating articles of political philosophy to support his 'thèse' Boulainviller keeps an ever attentive eye upon the distinguishing marks of the second order and indulges in the creation and elaboration

of myth. The importance of maintaining the correct marks of distinction and precedence is paramount for it is through inattention to, and the skilful jockeying with, the exact and fixed conventions governing the seating and placing of people at state assemblies, for example, that the influence and power of both the Third Estate and the king grow 'insensibly', the corollary of which is of course the diminution of the old nobles' constitutional importance. It is in a desire to enhance the faded glory of the second order that Boulainviller dwells on certain moments of French history where the nobility was, at least in his portrayal, the equal partner of the king and played to the full its constitutional role. The political and social structures of post-conquest Gaul naturally offer an ideal opportunity for the elaboration of a political mythology, but based as they are on conquest they present something of a moral problem. No such problem exists with Charlemagne, however, for his restoration of the French 'ancienne discipline' is now based on custom and it receives Boulainviller's most eulog^{stic} commendation. Both myths are ultimately in vain and are undone by the very process which they were designed to halt, history itself.

Boulainviller's keen eye for anomalies in the 'staging' of important state occasions and his passion for myth-making are significant pointers towards an appreciation one could make of the value which his writings on French history might have had for him. This value is a highly personal one for in his histories of France Boulainviller can be seen to be voicing different, and at times mutually exclusive, hopes, fears, and regrets. Lacking any precise logic or general consistency Boulainviller's historiography nevertheless possesses a unity of inspiration and an emotional cogency which one would need to overlook if, determined to fit Boulainviller into a pre-conceived analytical framework, one ignored any of the three 'planes of discourse' (criticism, reform, and consolation) which together flow from this inspiration and demonstrate this cogency.

Incomplete (and ultimately false) as it may be as a description of Boulainviller the historian of France, the term 'feudal reactionary' does, however, seem an appropriate one to apply to him when we analyse one of his most powerful historical weapons, moral criticism. As it was generally accepted at the time, history's principal tasks were to judge and to instruct, and Boulainviller's historiography of France is filled with criticism and condemnation of ambitious and unjust monarchs. To disparage the effeteness of his own times Boulainviller espouses a 'heroic' morality, no doubt quite suited to the Franks and their early descendants, which must sooner or later, however, become embarrassing to their eighteenth-century defender, not least because the idealized French nobility must itself be blamed for its inattention to its own self-interest. Such French 'légèreté', alas all too frequently apparent in their history, coupled with his own bitter experience of life, leads Boulainviller to view French history in terms of decline and degeneration and this sombre view penetrates much of his narration.

The embarrassment Boulainviller suffers with regard to the Franks by his adoption of their heroic morality recurs in La Vie de Mahomed and for the same reason: wishing to portray the Arabs in as favourable a way as possible (part of his anti-Christian polemic) Boulainviller is rendered powerless to explain or even to understand their effusions of barbarous cruelty and destruction. Usually, however, the Arabs behave properly and nobly as paragons of disciplined and manly virtue and thus expose time and again the decadence and effeminacy of the Christian West. The same generosity is extended to Mohammed whose 'faults' (in particular his sexual licence) are adroitly explained away by Boulainviller or shown to be of little consequence. However, both Mohammed and the Arabs receive their share of criticism when Boulainviller examines their religious beliefs and practices and finds them in some way superstitious or inappropriate.

The moral dimension of the Abrégé de l'histoire universelle is considerably broader than that found in Boulainviller's historiography of France, or even in La Vie de Mahomed, for the task of the historian now is to reconcile theology with natural philosophy. He manages to do this by employing Thomas Burnet's system of coincidence of natural and moral causes: physical events such as the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, or the Flood, have physical causes but are only fully explained when the moral cause, the pre-disposition of Providence towards the event's occurrence, has been examined. But this is an unholy alliance of religion and science, unsatisfactory from both points of view, and in the Histoire du mouvement de l'apogée du soleil, although nominally retained, it is all but ready to burst apart with 'science' (astrology) as the victor.

A more intriguing aspect of the 'morality' of ancient or universal history is the problem of the quality of its source material. Boulainviller uses the traditional sources, without which there would be little if any ancient history to relate, but tries to expunge the obviously fabulous and untrue. Yet although rational explanations of legendary and mythical details are seen as necessary this procedure must be kept in check and must not be allowed to become an all-consuming pyrrhonism: the evidence may be lost but the facts which tradition records are not thereby falsified.

The broadest level of morality in history is bound up with the discussion of the moral meaning or purpose of history itself - Providence and destiny. Mention of such concepts in Boulainviller's histories of France are either commonplaces with no pretence at genuine causal explanation, or more or less veiled criticism of villainous and greedy monarchs or of monarchy itself. The decline of the French nobility from idyllic self-determination to shameful dependency and penury needs no supernatural explanation for the human causes are all too clear: self-neglect and monarchical opportunism.

Providence, however, cannot be treated so casually or expediently in

a 'universal' context for the very beginning of man's history, of which Genesis is the only record, was entirely dependent upon the will of the Creator. Be that as it may, Boulainviller strives to contain any need for a more or less direct intervention of the Deity in the affairs of men to a handful of major world events and prefers to see 'individual' miracles and prophetic utterances as the consequences of purely human psychological and emotional states. Providential explanation is practically absent from the non-Jewish parts of the Histoire universelle, where its place is taken mainly by personal pragmatism; but, as comparison with the third part of Bossuet's Discours sur l'histoire universelle shows, this by itself is not evidence of growing scepticism in Boulainviller towards the idea of Providence. It would seem reasonable to conclude that, in the Histoire universelle at least, Boulainviller's naturalistic conception of Providence, although hardly Christian, is sincerely held but is ultimately an uneasy compromise.

This uneasy compromise disappears in the later Apogée du soleil for although the concept of Providence is still referred to (the Flood is still described as a divine punishment) Boulainviller's analysis of the mechanism of such providential intervention, now that astral determinism has to be taken into the account, empties the idea of providential control and influence of any real meaning at all. Furthermore, the absolute nature of astral determinism has profoundly anti-Christian implications and is much more akin to a Spinozist metaphysic than a Christian one.

The last section of the thesis turned its attention away from the philosophy of history in its speculative sense towards philosophy of history in its critical sense, away from Providence towards historical methodology.¹ Firstly, Boulainviller's use of evidence was examined and we noted how eager

1. A discussion of these meanings of the term 'philosophy of history' can be found in W.H. Walsh's An Introduction to Philosophy of History (first published in 1951; reprinted in a revised third edition for Hutchinson in 1970), pp. 11-29.

he is to devote attention to charters and documents which expose the machinations of his eternal enemies, ambitious kings and subtle jurists. Comparison with the evidence also reveals prejudice and untruth in the work of secondary authorities. However, evidence can be more of a hindrance than a help when it comes to ascertaining the legitimacy of claims to noble status for the simple and plausible reason that only 'nobility' of recent date would still have in their possession, as their most treasured article, documentary evidence of their elevation. Tradition in this case transcends mere proof.

With regard to ancient history, of course, tradition - myth, fable, legend - is largely all the historian has to hand. The way Boulainviller interprets these sources, in order to purify them of the superstitious excrescences of the herd or the fanciful imaginings of the poets, is the method normally employed at that time, namely Euhemerism - a methodology concordant with the 'unmysterious', deistic tone of the Histoire universelle and later writings.

Boulainviller is on less treacherous ground when he turns to secondary sources for his information about the events of ancient history. Dependent as he is upon them for his facts, he is not unaware of the need to keep as much critical distance from them as he can without going to the other, impossible extreme of demanding a 'mathematical' certainty. Nonetheless, the critical historian is still bound to historical authority, even when that authority appears at times improbable. This produces a noticeable ambiguity in the historian's attitude towards his sources nowhere more clear than when he is discussing Biblical history.

Two important instruments which help Boulainviller to sift conflicting authoritative opinion and criticize his sources are chronology and etymology. Chronology in particular may almost be considered the backbone of Boulainviller's Histoire universelle and, despite claims to the contrary, is one of the scholarly obsessions in his histories of France. The results of

Boulainviller's chronological computations depend upon probability, the quality of the source material, and his desire to bring together into reasonably harmonious agreement as many different authorities and facts as possible. Indeed, in the Histoire universelle chronology becomes, as it were, the supreme authority for which other sources and facts themselves have to be adapted whenever necessary and possible in order to fit. But as systematic as it would be, chronology cannot smooth over all the anomalies and occasionally in the Histoire universelle one may hear the distant rumble of the surge of archaeological and geological time which swept away the Julian era a century after Boulainviller.

Boulainviller as an historian is not afraid to be technical, one might say he revels in displays of erudition, and one of his favourite preoccupations is etymology. In French historiography etymology often serves an ideological purpose; in universal history it helps greatly to assess historical fact and opinion and to construct a suitable account. Occasionally Boulainviller's etymologies, particularly of the names of the earth's earliest inhabitants, might lead us to suppose that he may be on the brink of a radically new vision of the book of Genesis which would see it as myth rather than history. But this is not so. Boulainviller's rationalism, his Euhemerism establish and emphasize, rather than call into question, the historicity of mythological and legendary people, and such a critical appreciation of his major source of ancient history would necessarily reduce him to silence.

Boulainviller's Euhemerist understanding of myth and fable necessitates his most frequent category of historical explanation, personal pragmatism. In French historiography personal pragmatism is ideally suited as a means of historical explanation to an author with such a partisan and moral conception of the story of the French. Yet although this mode of explanation is clearly Boulainviller's most favoured, he is aware of other, less personal and purposive causative factors; these include the influences of climate,

geography, trade, society, religion, custom, developments in technology, and changes in administration.

In this last chapter we have examined the guiding tenets of Boulainviller's historical composition. These are principally purpose, method, and 'vrai-semblance'. Boulainviller is ever keen to write useful histories, based on intelligent use of source material, which try to draw as much fact and opinion together as possible. Such 'scissors-and-paste' history may by today's critical standards not be worthy of the name history at all; yet this would seem an unfair judgement to pass on the sincere efforts Boulainviller made in his Histoire universelle to fashion something cohesive and intelligible out of a chaos of conflicting fact and opinion. The judgement could not apply to Boulainviller's historiography of France for he founded these histories, as well as upon a political thesis, upon a wealth of erudition and consultation of primary sources. This leads in general to a rather heavy and dull narrative style but it was noted that on many occasions the tone may vary from the acerbic to the accommodating, the spiteful to the lyrical, the ironic to the dogmatic. Boulainviller's narrative triumph is La Vie de Mahomed, a text in which his ironic tone and playful ambiguity, even duplicity, while not perhaps converting his reader immediately to Islam, would make him reconsider Christianity in a fresh light.

Let us now conclude this study of Boulainviller by reflecting more generally on his historical 'oeuvre'.

Conclusion

We have had occasion during this examination of Boulainviller's practice as an historian to note his more reflective comments regarding the historian's task and the nature of his discipline. It is in this 'theoretical' treatment of the practice of history that Mme Simon sees much of Boulainviller's contribution to eighteenth-century historiography to reside. She notes Boulainviller's broader conception of the proper subject matter of history (to include social history and 'l'histoire des mœurs'); his attention to a critical use of historical facts and sources; his insistence on the moral and political instruction to be gained from the study of history; and his discussions of the experience, expertise, probity, and independence necessary in the historian himself.¹ She concludes that 'il ne paraît pas excessif de vouloir retirer à Voltaire la paternité de la conception moderne de l'histoire pour la rendre en toute équité à Henry de Boulainviller. Nous verrons d'ailleurs qu'il ne s'est pas contenté d'être un théoricien, et qu'il a justifié et appliqué ses principes en une oeuvre vaste, variée et vivante'.² Mme Simon bases this appreciation of Boulainviller's theory of history on a handful of texts: the Lettre à Mlle. Cousinot sur l'histoire de France et le choix des historiens, the Préface au journal de Saint Louis, and the first of the Lettres sur les parlements, the texts chosen too by Gian Carlo Corada in his examination of Boulainviller's conception of history.³ The exaggeration to be found in Mme Simon's account is also evident in Corada's: 'Boulainviller tra la fine del xvii secolo e l'inizio del successivo, tenta di fondare, a partire della storia, una nuova scienza del mondo umano, in cui ^{e universalismo} relativismo/ si fondino nel tentativo di individuare lo "specifico" all'interno di ben

1. Renée Simon, Henry de Boulainviller (Paris, 1941), pp. 46-61.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

3. G.C. Corada, 'La concezione della storia nel pensiero di Henry de Boulainviller', in Acme, sep - dec 1975, 311-33. Corada's article was inspired by the first appearance in print of Cousinot and the Préface in R. Simon's Un Révolté du grand siècle: Henry de Boulainviller.

precise leggi generali "socio-culturali".¹

The reason for this exaggeration is not difficult to discover: both authors are prepared to take Boulainviller's 'theoretical' pronouncements at face value without comparing them with his historiographical practice or considering their context. Of course, Corada is right to defend Boulainviller against the unsympathetic treatments and verdicts of Buranelli and Belliot,² but he overstates the value of Boulainviller's relativism when he writes:

In lui è vivissima la polemica contro il gius naturalismo, contro la dottrina cioè che poneva un fondamento naturale e razionale alla base delle leggi ... Egli non afferma più quindi l'adeguatezza della legge ad astratti "diritti" che non sono mai esistiti in alcun momento della storia umana, ma la "funzionalità" di essa rispetto agli scopi che ne hanno determinato la definizione e soprattutto la rispondenza alle "massime" che guidano la storia di quella nazione o di quel popolo.³

One might reply, to the contrary, that natural law - legitimately or not is beside the point - is a most important concept in Boulainviller's political argument (above, pp. 17, 46-48, and 52-58) and that he does in fact deny the legitimacy of laws and customs not in accordance with the natural rights of the nobility, which rights he presents as having once been the heritage of all French nobles. And as far as the relation between laws and particular nations' 'maxims' of government is concerned, Boulainviller's relativism in this case is certainly not objectively applied principle of historical method (above, 16).⁴

1. Corada, Op. cit., p. 323.
2. Buranelli, as we have seen (above, pp. 86, 87 and 118), is too easily dismissive of Boulainviller's logical inconsistencies, and G. Henri Belliot (whose thesis is examined and refuted by R. Simon, op. cit., pp. 62-67) is methodologically at fault in founding his condemnation of Boulainviller's politics masquerading as history upon too casual an acquaintance with the historian's texts (he considers, for example, the fourteen letters of the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France to be a different series of letters from the Lettres sur les parlements of 1753) and upon the transposition to the eighteenth century (in order to see who would do what) of the laws and institutions 'Boulainvilliers affecte d'admirer dans le VI^e siècle'; see Belliot, Boulainvilliers: étude de droit politique au 18^e siècle, a thesis presented to the Law Faculty at Caen in 1888 and which can be found in the Bibliothèque Cujas, Paris.
3. Corada, Op. cit., p. 332.
4. Corada does recognize the 'reactionary' use such relativism may be put to (p. 319) but does not emphasize this with regard to Boulainviller.

The principal fault in Mme Simon's and Corada's analyses of the Lettre à Mlle Cousinot and the Préface au journal de Saint Louis is that both authors omit to consider these texts in the wider context of Boulainviller's historiography of France, particularly from the point of view of his various 'planes of discourse', notably the critical and the 'heroic'. A brief re-examination of important points in Boulainviller's historical theory, as presented by Mme Simon, may help to restore a balanced view.

The first major topic Mme Simon discusses is Boulainviller's wider conception of the subject matter of history, and she quotes from the letter to Mlle Cousinot to show his dissatisfaction with the normal preoccupations among French historians, namely princes, their favourites, ministers, and mistresses, and spectacular 'faits d'armes'.¹ The proper subjects of their studies should be 'les hommes d'un étage inférieur' (the nobility) and the 'règles de gouvernement propres à nous faire connaître quel a été le véritable soutien de l'état pendant un si long cours de générations, et quelles peuvent être les ressources dans les disgraces qui nous accablent'.² Both these 'new' perspectives on the history of France, however, have more to do with aristocratic reaction than progressive historiography. This is not to deny that Boulainviller certainly does write history within wider limits and focuses his attention upon constitutional and social history; but social history for Boulainviller means the history of the nobility, especially discussion of their rights (see the Dissertation sur la noblesse française, for example), and constitutional history (the 'ancienne discipline' of the Franks in the Mémoires historiques and the development of the 'états généraux' in the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France) holds more than simply scholarly interest for him. Indeed, social history, the examination of former customs and 'usages', although recognized as an interesting area of study by Boulainviller, is

1. R. Simon, Henry de Boulainviller, pp. 48-49.

2. Ibid., p. 49.

neglected in favour of concentrating on the development of French political history, his essential subject (HAG, III, 27 and 66-67). Similarly, Boulainviller's programme for universal history ('j'aurai une attention particulière à faire connaître l'histoire des mœurs, des opinions et des religions des différents peuples de la terre. Je marquerai autant qu'il me sera possible l'origine des arts, des cérémonies et des usages chez toutes les nations')¹ promises more than it delivers and his text deals in no systematic way with the history of civilisation, but rather in an anecdotal and pragmatic manner; 'system' is reserved, for example, for discussions of the earth's creation, analyses of chronology, and the criticism of authorities.

Mme Simon's next main subject is Boulainviller's historical criticism. She quotes from the Préface to show his concern for the lack of documentary evidence available to the historian of France and the dire conditions in which state papers are kept. As we saw above (pp.285-87), this grievance is again no mere scholar's lament yet Mme Simon apparently sees no irony or interest in Boulainviller's contention that greater access to, and consultation of, documentary material 'sans être d'aucune conséquence nuisible au gouvernement présent pourraient peut-être donner une face toute nouvelle à l'histoire des derniers siècles'.² Neither does she consider that Boulainviller sees rather more than a simple 'moral advantage' in the publication of archival material such as England possessed in the Foedera of Thomas Rymer.³

Next Mme Simon reports Boulainviller's criticism of useless erudition. She quotes:

D'autres modernes font le capital de l'histoire de certaines minuties, qu'ils recherchent avec empressement dans les médailles et les vieux marbres; ceux-ci, ambitieux de découvertes, négligent la véritable utilité de l'histoire pour donner leur temps à déchiffrer des inscriptions, sur lesquelles ils ne proposent jamais que des conjectures,

1. R. Simon, op. cit., p. 49.

2. Ibid., p. 50.

3. Ibid., p. 54.

sans prendre garde que, quand ils réussiraient, ce qui arrive très rarement, ils n'orneraient les Académies pour lesquelles ils travaillent que de remarques infructueuses, sur des faits déjà connus, ou négligés pour leur peu d'utilité.

An unkind critic might consider this to be an accurate description of Boulainviller's own Histoire universelle, and as for his disregard of dry erudition we must accuse Boulainviller here of bad faith for his own historiography is full of such detail; moreover, what he considers to be an insufficiency of erudite discussion in le Père Daniel's history of France is strongly censured (HAG, I, 201-02).

Mme Simon continues: 'le véritable fruit de l'histoire ne réside donc pas dans l'accumulation des connaissances, mais dans les réflexions qu'elles suggèrent, et dans leur portée philosophique'.² Such 'reflecting' on French history will lead the student to a suitable judgement of French kings: 'leur conduite est soumise à notre examen, et l'histoire, prise en cette manière, loin de se laisser éblouir par leurs grandeurs passées, les condamne, ou comme des méchants, ou comme des poltrons ou comme des tyrans et des sangsues de leurs peuples'.³ It is interesting to reflect that Boulainviller frequently sees his historical writings as food for thought: the constitution of France (founded by the Frankish conquest of Gaul) is 'le principal sujet des réflexions auxquelles cet Ouvrage est destiné' (MH, p. 127), and reflection is indeed the aim in view which the Mémoires historiques are written to serve (MH, pp. 154-57); Boulainviller pauses at the end of Pepin's life to reflect, disapprovingly, on the changes he introduced into French government and society (MH, pp. 350-53) and later he interrupts his narrative with another 'reflection' on the changes that have taken place in France since Pepin and Charlemagne (MH, pp. 433-34); it is reflection which overcomes 'un sentiment de répugnance' one may feel at first with regard to the 'grande étendue du Droit François'

1. Ibid., p. 52.

2. Ibid., pp. 52-53.

3. Ibid., p. 53.

(HAG, I, 61), especially the practice of waging personal wars, and when Boulainviller writes that his 'intention n'est que de compiler des faits, d'où l'on puisse tirer quelque conclusion qui puisse nous faire connoître la pratique du tems passé' (HAG, I, 64) the disingenuousness of his remark is all too apparent; finally, the channels along which reflection is encouraged to run in La Vie de Mahomed can be seen in Boulainviller's explanation to the reader of the importance of providing background material to the Prophet's life: 'par là le Lecteur sera mieux en état de juger des différentes circonstances du temps où il a paru; des préjugés qui lui ont été ou favorables, ou contraires; des dispositions que la Providence, ou la Nature avoient préparées pour le prodigieux changement qu'un seul homme, foible et dépourvu de moyens, a porté dans l'Univers' (VM, p. 105).

In her discussion of the qualities Boulainviller saw as desirable in the historian Mme Simon points to the advantage he would have if he approached his subject with 'quelques connaissances antérieures', especially a knowledge of law. She quotes a long passage from Boulainviller's Lettre à Mlle. Cousinot which illustrates how a student of law can profitably study the development of French law throughout history and which concludes by saying: 'la même étude lui fera connaître l'origine des abus, et régler par ce moyen les degrés d'estime qu'il doit aux différents âges'.¹ The history of France cannot be seen by Boulainviller but from a critical and partisan point of view; it is his consciousness of his own, singular position which keeps him alert to bias and misrepresentation in other historical accounts (criticism of the anachronistic assumptions in le Sieur Péan's Journal de Saint Louis moves him to write the Préface; above, pp.24-5) and which prompts him to call for 'objectivity' and 'truth' in historiography. It is thus more than a little surprising to see Mme Simon apparently take

1. The same passage is quoted above, p.127.

Boulainviller's own impartiality and probity for granted in her reporting of his damning criticism of le Père Daniel who 'affects' a moral indifference with regard to the struggles between the kings of France and the court of Rome rather than condemn the offending party (Rome, naturally) as any historian should who is 'fidèle, impartial, sincère, et juste estimateur de la vertu réelle'.¹

It is evident that Boulainviller's 'theoretical' prescriptions must be judged in the light of his historical practice if a rather distorted picture of his standing as an historian is not to be drawn. Interesting as Boulainviller may be as a subject of study (especially, as André Devyver has shown, for the history of racism) his originality as an historian must not be overstated. 'Theoretically' Boulainviller was voicing a growing dissatisfaction with traditional historiography, a dissatisfaction also expressed, for example, by his contemporary Fénelon in his Lettre à l'Académie.² He was not the first to write an 'aristocratic' account of French history or record the Frankish conquest of Gaul.³ His moral conception of historiography was a commonplace. His Euhemerist analysis of ancient myth and fable followed the conventional method of the time. His understanding of the workings of Providence, certainly in the van of philosophical speculation, was inspired by his reading of Thomas Burnet. His main mode of historical explanation, personal pragmatism (rudely criticized by Friedrich Meinecke; above, pp. 346-47), was historiographically conservative.

However, Boulainviller's historical work has considerable value in a quite fundamental way. Biased and partisan as his histories of France doubtless are, they are evidence nevertheless of a deep and sympathetic feeling for the historical past, a recognition of - an insistence on - its

1. R. Simon, op. cit., pp. 56-57; above, p. 24.

2. Fénelon, Œuvres complètes, III, 230-33.

3. The aristocratic vision of French history which began to develop at the end of the sixteenth century, encouraged by the 'Germanism' of Pasquier and Hotman and to which Boulainviller was heir, is meticulously pursued by Devyver in the first part of Le Sang épuré, pp. 56-239.

'otherness'.¹ Critical as Meinecke may be of Boulainviller's historical methodology he concedes his sense of change, his relativism, and it is this which brings him within the compass of a history of the rise of historicism.² Indeed the majority of Boulainviller's historical 'oeuvre', his histories of France, is precisely a reaction to an acute recognition of change, of political and constitutional development, and, particularly in the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France, Boulainviller shows himself to be most adroit in plotting the gradations of this change. His recognition of change, of profound administrative, constitutional, and social change, had historiographical value too in that it fostered in him a sense of period, one might say of civilization.³ Marc Bloch noted that Boulainviller is probably the first historian to have written of feudalism in the modern sense of a 'state of society' and saw this as the introduction of a new category of historical classification, a significant moment in the progress of historiography.⁴

Yet we know that Boulainviller's historical relativism is not ideologically neutral; it is rather a defence of old values - by a man whose own class was, ideally at least, the embodiment of those values - against the new political and social order of royal absolutism and developing bourgeois ascendancy. Change is, for Boulainviller, rather decline and degeneration. The far greater sympathy Boulainviller felt for the early and feudal history of France than Voltaire may at first incline us to think of him as a more 'historical' historian; but it is clear that both attitudes are dictated by ideological rather than historical motives. The philosophical history which Voltaire was concerned to write cannot ultimately

1. The same cannot be said for Boulainviller's Histoire universelle which is far too contrived and systematic to allow for any human rapport with its subject.
2. Friedrich Meinecke, Die Entstehung des Historismus, I, 182.
3. As F. Furet and M. Ozouf have indicated, however, the term 'civilization' denotes a progressive understanding of history; 'nation' on the other hand is the preoccupation of a retrospective concern for rights. Boulainviller constantly refers to his history as that of 'la nation française'. See Furet and Ozouf, 'Deux légitimations historiques de la société française au 18^e siècle: Mably et Bouliandvilliers', in Annales, 34 (part 1) (1979) 438-50 (p. 438).
4. Marc Bloch, La Société féodale, 2 vols (Paris, 1939-40), I, 1-2.

allow into the properly historical realm historical epochs insufficiently developed to be described as rational and progressive; thus the Franks and their feudal descendants are denied admission into history whereas 'le siècle de Louis XIV' takes its privileged position there.¹ Boulainviller on the other hand is dismayed at the degeneracy of his fellow 'fin de siècle' noblemen and prefers to write of the times when they were in full - or only slightly fading - bloom. Boulainviller's perception of change therefore is paradoxical: it leads to historiographical insights of great importance, yet it leads immediately to myth and legend, to anti-history.² This is clear when we consider that the inspiration of all of Boulainviller's writings on French history is not a scholar's passion for objective truth but a partisan's vain attempt in some manner to undo the bulk of that history or at least to deny it any positive moral and constitutional value.

The influence which Boulainviller's political thesis exerted upon political debate throughout the eighteenth century in France was considerable and this was so because his political opinions went to the core of any political discussion: the origin and justification of power. But his status as an historian is much more difficult to assess. It would seem that for any positive or progressive value his histories may have one may point to traditional, superficial, and unhistorical elements in his work which undermine this value. He forsook 'histoire événementielle' in the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France to concentrate on constitutional history, and yet much of the Mémoires historiques and the État de la France is dry

1. Voltaire's practice of excluding from history periods and peoples unsuitable to take part in his rational historiography is examined and discussed by Suzanne Gearhart in her article 'Rationality and the text: a study of Voltaire's historiography', in Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 140 (1975), 21-43.
2. Lévi-Strauss uses this term in his discussion of the interrelations between the hierarchical 'domains' of history. He analyses how anti-histories, for example of the French revolution, can be logically generated once the historian's perspective has changed from a political and social one (annual and secular) to a cultural and anthropological one (millenarian). This process he calls the 'transformation de Boulainvilliers'. La Pensée sauvage (Paris, 1962), pp. 346-47.

narration of events and details of noble succession liberally spiced with curious facts and anecdotes; the grand aim of the Histoire universelle is to reconcile theology and science, yet much of his text is taken up with fussy quibbles over the minutiae of chronology or unconvincing displays of etymology; if he is most astute at detecting bias and incompetence in historians (see his crushing condemnation of le Père Daniel in HAG, III, 229-31), he is too hopelessly involved in his narrative to remain balanced and objective and his descents into 'heroic' melodrama can occasionally, as when he is discussing Louis XI's war against 'le Bien public' (HAG, III, 168-78), become almost puerile and ridiculous. But the wealth of his erudition is indisputable and Voltaire was no doubt right when he wrote in his 'Catalogue des écrivains français' at the end of Le Siècle de Louis XIV that Boulainviller was 'le plus capable d'écrire [l']histoire de France s'il n'avait pas été trop systématique'.¹

Unfavourable as a final judgement of Boulainviller the historian might be, however, this does not mean that his texts are devoid of all interest; on the contrary, they repay considerable attention, not particularly as works of history, it must be admitted, but as primary material for the history of history and the history of ideas. The political, pragmatic, religious, and moral concerns of Boulainviller's histories allow us to perceive the historiographical preoccupations of his time and of much of the century after him; his practice of using erudition to serve a synthetic end makes him both heir to the seventeenth-century 'érudits' and a forerunner of Enlightenment interest in more philosophical history; his discussion of constitutional and economic problems puts him in the midst of the reaction against absolutism which was taking place at the end of 'le grand siècle'. With regard to these areas of research texts such as the Histoire de l'ancien gouvernement de la France, the Mémoires historiques,

1. Voltaire, Le Siècle de Louis XIV, edited by Antoine Adam, 2 vols (Paris, 1966), II, 203.

the Dissertation sur la noblesse française, the Mémoires to Philippe d'Orléans, the various 'traités' on the nobility and the 'Ducs et Pairs', and of course La Vie de Mahomed are important and pleasurable texts to read. From several points of view - political, philosophical, religious, and historiographical - Boulainviller affords a fascinating perspective on an intriguing moment in European intellectual history, a perspective which scholars in this century are increasingly realizing that it would be a great pity to neglect.

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