CRAFTING THE IDENTITY OF A HISTORIAN IN THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS:

PAUL RAPIN THOYRAS’ (1661-1725) SELF-FASHIONING BETWEEN INNOVATION AND TRADITION

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Between the late seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century “historical facts and information become […] a prominent form of cultural currency within the social agora […] and history the dominant literary genre”1. The *Histoire d’Angleterre* (The Hague, 1724)2 was in fact a best-seller, at least up to the 1750s, and in this paper I reconstruct the self-fashioning act of which it was the result, examining its significance and indebtedness to the Republic of Letters. It shall be demonstrated that the choice of writing history was not fortuitous, but rather a conscious strategy, as the author presented himself as a “new historian”, a valid and meaningful identity he crafted to be acknowledged as an active member within the Republic of Letters. This choice derived from the interaction of a variety of factors, which I shall ascribe to the communication networks the Republic rested on. The self-fashioning was, in fact, an individual act, but only possible thanks to a network, which involved publishers, translators, and more over commentators on literary gazettes3.

The Republic of Letters was a virtual community encompassing all men of letters, loosely defined as whoever contributed to the advancement of learning and knowledge4. It rested on very concrete and capillary communication networks based on exchange: of letters, of books, of periodicals, of individuals (professors, pupils, migrants, booksellers, translators). Such a Republic had an informal nature, because it was voluntary and self-proclaimed: it only existed in the minds of its own members, who conceived it as a transnational and egalitarian community5. Its boundaries were porous and the requisites to be acknowledged as an *homme des lettres* were not fixed, as the membership was relational, i.e. was the result of both mutual recognition and self-identification. A map of this virtual Republic would resemble a web with multiple *foci* based on interconnectedness, shifting according to the point of view of each of its citizens6. An *homme des lettres*, for instance, was for and foremost a practitioner of sociability, as his identity could only be fulfilled in relation to other men of letters and never

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1 D.R. Woolf, From Hystories to the Historical: Five Transitions in Thinking about the Past, 1500-1700, in Huntington Library Quarterly, vol. 68, 2005. This working paper is based on the author’s ongoing Ph.D. Research Project.
2 Hereafter “*Histoire*”. In this paper I always refer to the first edition: P. Rapin de Thoyras, *Histoire d’Angleterre*, A. de Rogissart, 1724. All translations from the original French text are mine, unless otherwise stated.
3 For the importance of relations and collaborative efforts in the Republic of Letters, see D. Griffin, Authorship in the Long Eighteenth Century, University of Delaware Press, 2013.
4 My concept of the Republic of Letters mostly relies on A. Goldgar, Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750, Yale University Press, 1995. She posited the Republic as a reflexive event where relationships were the most important binding element.
on its own⁷. Hence, every member kept in touch with others according to an etiquette which contradicted the programmatic egalitarianism: ideally, all members were equal, but some were more equal than others⁸. In fact, the Republic was informally hierarchized in concentric circles, and those recognized as “princes” attracted correspondents, visitors during *peregrinationes academicae*, and were the protagonists of biographies and collections of anecdotes.⁹

Paul Rapin Thoyras (1661-1725)¹⁰, author of the *Histoire*, never reached the highest rank of the Republic, but secured for himself a place in it as a “judicious historian”¹¹. A Huguenot from the provincial nobility of Castres, Rapin completed his education at the Protestant academies of Puylaurens and Saumur. He left France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and thereafter lived in England, the United Provinces, and Prussia. He did not immediately pursue a career as an *homme des lettres*: I argue that his life can be divided into phases in order to see how he consciously strove to gain access to the Republic, through implementing his social network, approaching the editorial world and working at his *Histoire*. His self-fashioning culminated with the publication of the *Histoire*, which sealed a long-lasting attempt to craft his identity. The success of this work can be traced by looking at its

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⁷ Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc offered an archetypal example of sociability, as his Biography (the first dedicated to a scholar in the Early Modern) described him as the “Procurer de la Republique des Lettres”. He was acknowledged for facilitating other scholars’ endeavours. See P.N. Miller, The “Man of Learning” Defended: Seventeenth-Century Biographies of Scholars and an Early Modern Ideal of Excellence, in P. Coleman, J. Lewis, J. Kowalik (eds.), Representations of the Self from the Renaissance to Romanticism, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

⁸ A boundary ran, for instance, along religious lines. This division between a “Protestant” and a “Catholic” Republic of Letters was, nonetheless, porous and contested in practice, for example through epistolary exchange. Or again, scientific investigation was conceived as aconfessional. See H. Jaumann, Herbert (ed.), Die Europäische Gelehrtenrepublik Im Zeitalter Des Konfessionalismus, Harrassowitz, 2001; Gab es eine katholische “Respublica litteraria”?: zum problematischen Konzept der Gelehrtenrepublik in der Frühen Neuzeit in Kaspar Schoppe (1576 – 1649), Philologe im Dienste der Gegenreformation..., Klostermann, 1998, pp. 361-379; J. Landsheer, H. J. M. Nellen (eds.), Between Scylla and Charybdis: Learned Letter Writers Navigating the Reefs of Religious and Political Controversy in Early Modern Europe, BRILL, 2010. The equality within the Republic has been compared to aristocratic republicanism, with intellectual property serving as landed property. See A.J.L. Vopa, Conceiving a Public: Ideas and Society in Eighteenth-Century Europe, in The Journal of Modern History, vol. 64, nr. 1, 1992, pp. 79–116.

⁹ Willelm Frijhoff distinguishes four “cercles”, two of passive, inactive members and two of active members, comprising the “golden middle” of all *hommes de lettres* who published, and the superior ranking of internationally renowned scholars. See W. Frijhoff, La circulation des hommes de savoir: pôles, institutions, flux, volumes in H. Bots, F. Waquet (eds.), Commercium Litterarium, 1600-1750: la communication dans la République Des Lettres: conférences des colloques tenus à Paris 1992 et à Nimègue 1993, APA-Holland University Press, 1994. The term “princes” applied to most renowned scholars see, for instance, the polemics against Le Clerc, see infra.


¹¹ As discussed in this article, Rapin was soon called “judicious” and among others, by Voltaire, for instance see his Mélanges historiques, Perronneau, 1818, p.563.
long series of continuations and translations, as well as at the reviews it received on gazettes. It circulated both as in-folio on scholarly bookshelves and in weekly series in coffee houses, and not even its detractors could overlook the milestone it set. The Histoire was the masterpiece of one author, nonetheless only possible thanks to the contacts Rapin maintained throughout his life. Before giving his work to the press, Rapin had woven friendship to other hommes des lettres, and after the publication he continued to do so, attentive to the public response he gained. The Histoire consecrated him as the historian “unsway’d by Parties, and to Freedom just”, and the periodical press disseminated the persona of the impartial historian long after Rapin had died. Rapin presented himself as a historian, negotiating the characteristics of this identity between a gentlemanly and an erudite historian. He offers a valid case-study because he combined both some patterns common to his specific time and social milieu, and the peculiar choice of history as the discipline to gain recognition as an active member of the Republic of Letters. His self-fashioning was the self-aware attempt to present himself as a legitimate homme des lettres, accomplished through the pages of the Histoire and by monitoring the public response to it through the periodical press.

Why did Rapin choose to self-fashion himself a historian to enter the Republic of Letters? Ever since the Renaissance, history was undergoing a vivid debate on its methods and purposes, and this long-lasting debate found new momentum at the end of the seventeenth century. The discipline was far from being unanimously codified, and it oscillated between being assigned to rhetoric, being dismissed as mere fiction, or rehabilitated as a plausible science. In fact, “no single discipline showed the interplay of tradition and in innovation more clearly than history”, as the copious number of Artes Historicae suggests. What was clear, was that historical knowledge relied on transmission

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14 My understanding of self-fashioning is based on Greenblatt’s seminal work: Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare, University of Chicago Press, 2012; and influenced by R. Kirwan (ed.), Scholarly Self-Fashioning and Community in the Early Modern University, Ashgate, 2013. This collection of essays explores self-fashioning of “more pedestrian” scholars, positing a degree of agency, which nonetheless aimed at conforming with the self-representation of the scholarly group.
and testimony, rather than evident intuition, and thus could not measure up to the yardstick Cartesianism had set for sciences. The so called Pyrrhonists dismissed history as fiction, because personal bias distorted all reconstructions of the past. At the same time, others aimed at rehabilitating history on a new basis, claiming it could attain plausibility if not certainty. Among the most vocal advocates of a new epistemology for history was the eclectic scholar Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736). He attempted to codify history as a science of probability, and his thought circulated in a variety of forms: in Latin traits as well as French collections and gazette articles, and he put forward new ideas as well as summarized what previous scholars had written. Le Clerc did not dismiss the validity of testimony and called for a study of sources and the application of rational judgement in order to achieve a realistic reconstruction of the past. He intended to restore the fides historica by means of “reasonable doubt”, making probability the yardstick of history. And it was Le Clerc who first singled out Rapin as the most apt collaborator to abridge some freshly published historical sources for his periodicals.

By then (1708), Rapin lived in Wesel, a small Prussian town, where he resented a certain stagnation of intellectual life, differently from what he had experienced before in the United Provinces. No direct correspondence between Le Clerc and Rapin survives, but

19 Le Clerc’s views on history can be found in his Ars Critica, 1698, and Parrhasiana ou pensées diverses, 1699. He also addressed the issue on the periodicals he edited. For an overview of his historiographical thought see: M.D. Garfagnini, Jean Le Clerc e gli spazi della ragione: percorsi di critica e di storia, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2004; M.C. Pitassi, Entre croire et savoir: le problème de la méthode critique chez Jean Le Clerc, BRILL, 1987.
20 The abridgements were published in the following numbers of Le Clerc’s Bibliothèque Choisie: vol. 1 (1714), vol. 3 (1715), vol. 5 (1716), vol. 8 (1717), vol. 9 (1718), vol. 10 (1718), vol. 11 (1719), vol. 16 (1721), vol. 17 (1722), vol. 18 (1722), vol. 19 (1723). The first abridgement (authored by Le Clerc) was published in the Bibliothèque Choisie, vol. 16, 1708. A complete edition of the abridgements followed: Abregé historique des actes publics d’Angleterre, Scheltus, 1724. The work was then translated into English.
21 See Rapin’s letters from Wesel: to Jean Rou, 21.06.1707 in Mémoires, vol. 2, pp. 262-264; to Jacob Le Ducat, May 1722 in Cazenove, p. XXV. In the letter Rapin writes: “je n’ai ici personne que je puisse consulter, ni qui soit capable de me donner de bons avis”. In a letter to Charles Le Vier in 1717, Rapin wrote “Je suis ici dans un endroit ou on n’a aucune nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres”, in MAR 2, Leiden University Archives.
23 Le Clerc’s correspondence has been published in M. Sina, Epistolario di Jean Le Clerc, L.S. Olschki, 1987. In the letters Rapin sent to Charles Le Vier (Mar 2, Leiden University Archives), Le Clerc is cited among those who get gift copies of Rapin’s works and more importantly as reading them „plume à la main“ to give
they shared common friends in the United Provinces. Rapin had shown interest in history during his previous activity as a tutor\textsuperscript{24}, and moreover had a good command of the English language, had lived in the country observing its politics and gained the reputation of a solid erudition. Thanks to his connections in England\textsuperscript{25}, Le Clerc secured volume after volume of the \textit{Fœdera}\textsuperscript{26}, an official collection of English state papers, and forwarded them to Rapin, who in turn abridged it. He did so anonymously (none of the abridgements bore his name), and according to his friend Jean Rou, he chose to do so because he was already working on his \textit{Histoire} and feared competition\textsuperscript{27}. When Le Clerc contacted him, Rapin only thought of writing the history of England up to the Normans\textsuperscript{28}, but he soon realized that the \textit{Fœdera} represented an “unexpected help” that no other historians had benefited from before him – as he made sure to emphasize\textsuperscript{29}. He probably knew that “there was no bookseller who was not trumpeting a new history of England”\textsuperscript{30}, either written by single authors or compiled by editors collating different histories of single reigns. The label ‘historian’ was surely one which could open the doors to being recognized as a member of the Republic of Letters, but what exactly qualified an author as a historian was a matter of heated discussion. Indeed, writing history was no simple work, and engaging with the English past was possibly even harder as the “rage of parties” threatened to undermine all efforts towards impartiality, the main goal of history. Rapin nonetheless accepted to go down into the arena, armed with unedited sources and Le Clerc’s theory. The \textit{Histoire} can, thus, be read with one eye kept on the overarching Quarrel of the Ancients against the Moderns and be considered a practical response to Pyrrhonism, a work which reflected the ongoing debate and was part of it. Said Quarrel was a pan-European debate, which discussed the relation between the modern learning and the ancient learning, arguing whether the Classics had attained an unparalleled level of perfection in various fields, or whether contemporaries had progressed beyond the example the Ancients had set. “History was the nub of the contest”, as the underlying dispute

\textsuperscript{24} See infra.

\textsuperscript{25} Information about this exchange can be gained from Le Clerc’s correspondence. The network involved: Lord Halifax (nobleman and promoter of the \textit{Fœdera}), Pierre Des Maizeaux (literary agent, correspondent, translator), George Guiguier (bookseller and Le Clerc’s brother-in-law).

\textsuperscript{26} T. Rymer, \textit{Fœdera: Conventiones, Litteræ Et Cujuscunque Generis Acta Publica Inter Reges Angliæ…}, 1704.

\textsuperscript{27} See Mémoires, vol. 2, p. 269. “La prière qu’il m’a faite de ne rien révéler a personne de tout ce qu’il me confioit la dessus, me faisant entendre que trop d’éclat sut ce projet ne pourroit lui être que nuisible”. Rapin recommended discretion also to Le Duchat, from whom he required some feedback on the parts of the \textit{Histoire} he sent him before publication. See Letter X in Cazenove.

\textsuperscript{28} As he declared in the Preface of the \textit{Histoire}. The letters published in Rapin’s biography confirm that he had thought to interrupt his work at different stages, but eventually continued it until 1689.

\textsuperscript{29} See the Preface of the \textit{Histoire}.

of the whole Quarrel “was always about the purposes of the past, about its usefulness and authority in the present”31. The Quarrel was a social battle rather than just a paper one: at stake was the nature of scholarship, in other words whether it was the result of training and erudition, or rather if it could be achieved by non-professionals and virtuosos. How scholarship was achieved, in turn, would impact on the inclusion terms at the very core of the Republic of Letters, as it was defined as a community of scholars. Rapin provided no theoretical response, but as a practitioner of history, he was aware of the conflicting identities a historian could take up. The widely read and discussed Histoire, therefore, was a contribution to the attempt of defining history as a discipline, and consequentially the characteristics required in a historian. As Le Clerc, Rapin followed a via media, and his legitimacy as a historian blended specific skills acquired through erudition with a knowledge derived from his common sense and direct experience of English politics.

For writing history, the crucial goal to pursue was impartiality, which was often flaunted by aspiring historians, but resulted in little more than a trope32. In the case of the histories of England, all responded to either a Whig or a Tory interpretation, both of which Rapin was familiar with. In 1717, in fact, the first book published under his name was a dissertation on English political parties33. Due to the pan-European success of the Dissertation and by the time he wrote the Histoire, Rapin was already known for his awareness of the flaws that political bias could cause to history. He clearly spelled out his agenda for impartiality in his preface, where he self-fashioned his persona as a historian as a hybrid: he was politically unbiased, but he exerted judgment; he gathered technical knowledge, but also employed his experience of the world.

The Histoire was, indeed, a blend of erudition and first-hand experience, the same qualities gazettes, translators and publishers later praised. On the one hand, biographical notes stressed that the fatigue of writing, which was Rapin’s “cause de mal” and equally his “plaisir”: “quoiqu’il faut d’une complexion fort robuste, l’ardeur & l’assiduité avec quoi il s’appliqua, pendant dix-sept ans à composer son Histoire, ruinent entièrement sa santé”34. On the other, they underlined that he held ”ni charge ni employ, ni pension, & n’a exercé

31 In J.M. Levine, Re-Enacting the Past: …, p.84.
32 Impartiality was salient for the debate on history in the 17th century. See K. Murphy, A. Traninger (eds.), The Emergence of Impartiality, BRILL, 2013.
33 P. Rapin de Thoyras, Dissertation sur les Whigs et les Torys, chez Charles Le Vier, 1717. The work was then translated into German, Dutch, Danish, Spanish, and English. Hereafter: “Dissertation”.
34 “See Histoire, vol. 10, p. 13. The biographical note was titled Lettre à M. …, concernant quelques particularités de la vie de M. de Rapin-Thoyras and was the starting point for all future biographical notes on the author. It was first published in Histoire, vol. 10, pp. 1-15. In Tindal’s translation (1757): “The work was the cause of his illness, and properly his sole delight”. “Though he was of a very strong constitution, yet seventeen years constant application to compose his History entirely ruined his health”. In Tindal’s English translation (hereafter: “Tindal”), the letter is in the first volume, pp. XX-XXII.
aucune profession qui puisse l’engager à être partial pour une Nation plutôt que pour l’autre.\textsuperscript{35} Rapin was not born a historian and had to acquire a specific knowledge through study: it took him seventeen years to write his work. He did little work himself on the primary sources – as mentioned, he drew mainly on collections – but carefully examined what antiquarians had found out on them.\textsuperscript{36} Other coeval historians looked down upon the bulky results achieved by erudition, whereas Rapin – in line with the “Moderns”, such as Le Clerc – regarded them as points of departure to construct his history. Through his contacts, Rapin accessed well-endowed libraries and asked for feedback on his work.\textsuperscript{37} The ensuing incorporation of sources resulted in more than just references in footnotes: Rapin compared them and examined the reasons behind different reconstructions of the past.\textsuperscript{38} The Anglo-Saxon charts, for instance, were dismissed as a valid proof for the existence of a lower chamber in the Wittena Gemot, as they had only been compiled during the reign of William the Conqueror, and were therefore not the originals.\textsuperscript{39} To come to this conclusion, Rapin thoroughly examined what had been written on the subject before him, and juxtaposed all assertions alongside their alleged evidence. Furthermore, just as Le Clerc had pointed out, not only testimony or sources, but also witnesses had to undergo a careful analysis in order to “découvrir le dessein de l’Auteur, et quelle occasion lui a fait prendre la plume”.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, the eighteenth century experienced a multiplication of historical accounts, either freshly written or reprints of previous works. Therefore, a historian was faced with a multitude of conflicting reports for the same time span or set of events, a fact which discouraged many and was wielded by Pyrrhonists as proof of the fictional character of history.\textsuperscript{41} Rapin rather profited from the abundance of these “raw materials”, cutting for himself the role of comparing, selecting, evaluating, and eventually combining them into a reconstruction, which aimed at being impartial. He knew that historical accounts were not neutral, and strove to reconstruct the circumstances and intentions behind the reports from which his own Histoire drew. This

\textsuperscript{35} See Histoire; vol. 1, in Avertissement du libraire, p. XXII.
\textsuperscript{36} For an overview of sources used in the Histoire, see M. Stace, The British Intelligencer, … by Whitmore and Penn, 1829.
\textsuperscript{38} Le Clerc also stressed the importance of referring to sources. See A. Grafton, The Footnote: a Curious History, Harvard University Press, 1999.
\textsuperscript{39} See the chapter on the government of Anglosaxons in Histoire, vol. 1. The main arguments against impinging the charts as valid sources for the Anglo-Saxon times were that they were posthumously written in Latin, whereas Anglo-Saxons sanctioned official decisions through the exchange of symbolic objects. Rapin also compared the Anglo-Saxon times to coeval French history.
\textsuperscript{40} “Unfold the plan of the Author and which circumstances made him hold his pen”. J. Le Clerc, Sentimens de quelques theologiens de Hollande sur l’Histoire critique du Vieux Testament…, H. Desbordes, 1685, p. 6.
process of selection was overtly discussed within the text of the *Histoire*. A case in point is, for instance, Rapin’s approach to the conflict between Mary of Scots and Elizabeth of England (*Histoire*, vol. 6): his main references were George Buchanan, William Camden, and James Melville. Rapin sketched their biographies in order to retrieve the intentions behind their reports, and was cautious in following either Buchanan or Camden, the first fiercely opposed to Mary, and the second to Elizabeth. He thought Melville’s memories were more reliable, as he intended them for a private use, namely for instructing his own descendants. Or again, the best example of Rapin’s review of available literature concerns the histories written for Charles I. The *Fœdera* could not help him in reconstructing the intricacies of this controversial reign, and volume 8 opens with a detailed examination of the main writers Rapin followed. He elucidated the political positions of all authors he consulted, and realized none wrote free of bias. For these reasons, he did not feel “obligé de suivre aveuglement l’un ou l’autre de deux systemes, mais j’en ai etabli un composé de tous les deux, en y ajoutant ce qui leur manque”. He compared all authors and pointed out discrepancies, and remarked that even collections of document could be biased, despite the lack of personal intervention of the collector. Rushworth, for example, began his collection with James I’s reign, thus indirectly suggesting his responsibility in later events. This concern for impartiality is evident also in his private correspondence, where Rapin often used the metaphor of having to steer his route equally distant from opposing points of view, in order to avoid bias, compared to a cliff, and therefore not to go adrift. To eschew the Rage of Parties, Rapin often repeated that “le Parlement & le Roi avoient beaucoup de tort l’un & l’autre, quoique non pas toujours & dans le même endroit”.

Erudition thus constituted the backbone of his reconstruction, but Rapin also knew that a thorough recourse to sources was not enough to claim the title of historian: he was required to write a narrative text in a gentlemanly manner. Recent literature has demonstrated that the boundaries between an erudite and a historian were blurred, and the two sometimes overlapped. Traditionally, history was regarded as a branch of rhetoric, thus a grand

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42 See *Histoire*, vol. 8, “Considerations sur les auteurs qui ont écrit l’Histoire du Règne de Charles I”. The sources discussed and compared were: Rushworth’s Historical Collections, the Eikon Basiliké, Nalson’s Impartial Collection and Clarendon’s History of the Rebellion. From *Tindal*, vol. 8, p.319: “I do not think myself obliged blindly to follow one or other of the two systems, but have established a third, composed of both, by supplying their defects”.

43 See *Histoire*; vol. 8, p. X.

44 See Rapin’s letter to Le Duchat, published in *Cazenove*.

45 In *Histoire*, vol. 8, p. X. See Rapin’s letter to Le Duchat, published in *Cazenove*. Or again *Histoire*, vol. 8, p. 65. In *Tindal*, vol.8, p.319. “The King and the Parliament were both very much in the wrong, though not always, and not on the same occasions”.

46 See, for example, A. Grafton, Bring Out Your Dead..., p. 115 “the marriage between history and antiquarianism proved hard to consummate at first, but it was eventually more fertile”. For a discussion of
narrative of political and military events, written by gentlemen for their own peers. Over the
seventeenth century, though, evidence derived from the examination of sources became
essential for aiming at historical truth. Again, the intellectual debate was at the same time a
social conflict, opposing antiquarians, mostly coming from the judicial professions, and
their lengthy compilations, chronologies and surveys of coins and medals, to noble virtuosi
who wrote history from their privileged position as its direct actors, once they retired from
public or military service. Rapin did not overlook the progresses of erudition, but strove to
keep a balance between the incorporation of sources and the narrative flow: not to weigh
down the text with too many digressions, in some cases he discussed some issues in depth in
separate chapters. This was true, for instance, for the history of religion, which he briefly
sketched at the end of each volume, unless its developments were crucial for the
understanding of the general history. Moreover, his history was “complete”: often erudite
works focused on a limited time frame or consisted in surveys of material culture, whereas
Rapin provided a narrative encompassing the foundations of English institutions and their
development to the recent past. The Histoire narrated the history of England from the Anglo-
Saxon times to the Glorious Revolution. The choice of beginning with the Anglo-Saxons cost
Rapin some thinking, as he found this period “rebutant” and compared it to a “vaste forêt où
l’on ne peut qu’avec peine trouver quelque route”. He was also afraid that the public would
be discouraged from further reading because the first volume was “dry”. He was,
nonetheless, convinced that here lied the roots of the English political system, which was the
chief focus of the Histoire. As for its conclusion, private letters disclose that the original

the social background and implication of antiquarianism, see R. Sweet, Antiquaries: the Discovery of the
Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain, A&C Black, 2004. The author shows that collecting artefacts from the
national past and having a fair knowledge of it increasingly became part of the leisure activities of the
gentlemen. Furthermore, “antiquarianism […] provided a language within which people from very different
backgrounds could communicate and exchange information”, p. 60. In the same book, a particular branch of
antiquarianism (the Celtic revival) is said to have been open to contributions from women, too.
47 “The most active antiquaries came from the ranks of the lesser gentry and those who merged with the
professional classes […]. Amongst the members of the of the Society of Antiquaries there was a heavy
preponderance of gentlemen listed as belonging to one or other of the Inns of Court”. R. Sweet, Antiquaries:
…, p. 44.
48 These are the four separate chapters: “Mœurs, Coutumes, Loix, Gouvernement, Religion et Langue des
Anglo-Saxons” (vol. 1); “Sur la loi salique et le différend entre Philippe de Valois et Edouard Ille” (vol. 3);
“Sur la pucelle d’Orléans” (vol. 3); “Procès du Comte de Bristol” (vol. 7).
49 Taking the French historian Mézéray as an example, he discussed religion in separate chapters called “Etat
de l’Eglise”. He stopped doing so in the last volumes of the Histoire, as he made very clear that religion and
politics were too intertwined to explain them separately.
50 Histoire, vol. 1, p. I. In Tindal, vol. 1, p. V: “a vaste forest where the traveller, with great difficulty, finds a
few narrow paths to guide his wandering steps”. Interestingly, “rebutant” is translated with the milder
“discouraging”.
51 See Rapin’s letter to Mauclerc, 08.03.1723 in Cazenove, p. XXXI.
52 Rapin had initially hought of translating De Larrey’s Histoire d’Angleterre (1707-1712), instead of writing
his own from scratch, but eventually realized that it provided only a cursory overview of this crucial period.
publisher expected a continuation up to the reign of Anne, whereas Rapin initially thought of stopping with the reign of Charles I. The *Histoire* gave an account of the institutional development of England and its internal politics, also framing it within the larger European picture, resorting to comparisons with other European institutions. Politics was traditionally the grand theme of history, and Rapin made it the common thread of his work, warning the readers that in England, differently from most other countries, both the monarch and the Parliament played a central role for it.

Furthermore, Rapin knew that a historical reconstruction demanded the historian to judge, as opposed to the stereotypical role assigned to antiquarians, who only collected and collated. Rapin’s judgment was not merely technical, i.e. derived from his specific knowledge of sources, but also “judicious.” Recalling Le Clerc, he reverted to his own “bon sens”, thus referring to the other characteristic of his identity as a historian. Traditionally, historians were required to be men of the world, experienced in politics in order to be able to reveal the causes behind the events – eminent examples for English history were, for instance, Clarendon and Burnet. Rapin could claim no such background, but he did gather first-hand experience of English politics. In fact, from 1693 to 1702 he was a tutor to Henri Woodstock, son of the Earl of Portland, favourite of William of Orange. During this appointment, Rapin alternated between living England and the United Provinces, embarked on a continental journey (1701-1702), and made contacts with other scholars who revolved around Portland’s wide and powerful patronage. Tutoring often paved the way to possible access to the Republic of Letters, and indeed it represented an important turning point in Rapin’s self-fashioning. How Rapin came into the service of such an influent nobleman is unclear, but his experience in England always greatly contributed to his biographical portrait. The extent of Rapin’s closeness to Portland’s activities can only be speculated about, but because of his duty, Rapin could then claim hands-on knowledge of English politics, and equally

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53 See Rapin’s letter to Charles Le Vier, 30.05.1721, in MAR 2, Leiden University Archives.
54 A recurrent comparison in the *Histoire* was between the government of England and that of the United Provinces. Again, when surveying the different assumptions concerning the origins of Parliament in England, Rapin drew on the coeval history of France in order to uphold a Medieval establishment of the Lower Chamber.
55 This adjective is commonly used for Rapin during the 18th century. See, for instance, Voltaire, who called Rapin “exact et judicieux” in his Mélanges historiques, Perronneau, 1818, p.563.
56 Some were historians: Michel Le Vassor, who wrote a controversial Histoire de Louis XIII (1700), and the Swiss-born Guillaume Lamberty, author of Mémoires de la Révolution d’Angleterre (1702). See D. Onnekink, The Anglo-Dutch Favourite: the Career of Hans Willem Bentinck, 1st Earl of Portland (1649-1709), Ashgate, 2007. Huguenots in Portland’s service often held diplomatic or secretarial functions.
57 According to the biographical notes, Mémoires and Rapin’s biography, William of Orange summoned Rapin, by then quartered in Ireland, and appointed him. As a mediator, sources report Lord Galway, a very influential Huguenot soldier and diplomat (1648-1720), and Pierre Belcastel, another Huguenot lieutenant active in Ireland.
impartiality because he had held no office. Working for Bentinck (the “intermediary between the King and the political nation”58) exposed Rapin to the high circles of English politics, as the acquaintance with the Huguenot Jean Robethon and Tassin d’Allonne demonstrate59. In 1701-1702 Rapin accompanied his pupil on a Grand Tour across Europe, and reported on it to his patron, thus listing the eminent personalities he had the chance to encounter60. All curators of further editions of the Histoire underlined Rapin’s exposure to English politics: they always included, for instance, his Dissertation, which was a pioneering inquiry into the English parties. This work was, indeed, the best evidence of Rapin’s direct knowledge of the English political landscape, as Rapin “n’a pu pertinemment parler sur cette matière, sans revêtir l’esprit anglois”61. His work was the most accurate then available (and then translated into six languages)62, describing the moderate and radical factions of both parties and the role played by religion within them. The historical analysis was completed by Rapin’s own judgement, as he recognized that parties were a novel factor, with no precedent in English history, and ultimately defended the private interests of politicians63. Nonetheless, he deemed parties useful because their alternation kept the temperate monarchy in balance, and eventually even suggested possible implementation of the system, so to make it even more effective64. His interest for English politics never faded, even towards the end of his life, for example, he commented on it in his private letters65. The Dissertation itself, for instance, was initially conceived to circulate among Rapin’s friends in Wesel, with whom he often discussed English politics66. Biographical notes never failed to stress that Rapin had a

59 Jean Robethon acted as a secretary to Lord Portland, William III, and eventually George I. Abel Tassin d’Allone was secretary to Queen Anne.
61 See the Avvertissement in the Dissertation, p. 5. The English translation reads: “He could speak pertinently of this subject, without assuming an English Spirit”. In A dissertation on the two parties of the Whigs and Tories, Shewing their rise, progress, views, strength, interests and characters, 1736.
62 The only other work on the subject was the Histoire du Whiggisme et du Torisme (1718) by Emanuel De Cize.
63 “Pour moi, je croi que puisu’ils [les membres des Parties] sont tous hommes, l’interêt propre est le mobile de leurs Actions”. Dissertation, p. 100.
64 Rapin listed a series of “abuses” from page 156: the influence exerted by the Court in the elections, mostly through bribery, the disproportion of the territorial representation and the absence of an order of business prior to the summoning of the Parliament.
65 See Rapin’s letter to his former pupil, 14.02.1721 where he discusses the South Sea Bubble events. In PwB 68-70, Nottingham University Archive; Letter to Robethon, Stowe MS 230 in British Library.
66 The genesis of the Dissertation is, indeed, yet more evidence of the importance of polite conversation in the Republic of Letters. Rapin wrote the work for his friend, the governor of Cleves Marshal Lottum, with whom he engaged in political discussions. Upon visiting Rapin, the renowned English antiquarian Sir Fountaine (and by the time vice-chamberlain to the prince of Wales) had the chance to read it and convinced him to contact publishers. Three letters held in the Archive of the Leiden University (MAR 2)
knowledge of English politics gained “on the field”, and that, at the same time, he had never held any office and was therefore above suspicion of having any bias. Rapin’s self-fashioning was further complemented by his dismissal of classical historians: he claimed the right to employ his own “génie” and not follow their examples, because they provided “rien qui ne vienne naturellement dans l’esprit de tout homme de bon sens”67. The wording once more resonated Le Clerc, who called for a revision of history in the light of Reason. Together with the attention for the results of erudition, this assertion ascribes Rapin to the field of Modernists.

Despite this strong declaration, Rapin spoke the lingua franca of the Republic: moderation, which Marshall has recently identified as an important characteristic of the self-presentation of hommes des lettres68. Ideally, the bonds among its members relied on communication, and dialogue had to be carried out politely. Every published text was embedded in a network, which included periodical press and private correspondence – even if this often generated heated quarrels rather than the desired dialogues69. Moderation was not just stylistic, and it was evident that Rapin systematically avoided taking clear sides, keeping away from politically biased interpretations. Furthermore, he was always cautious whenever formulating a judgement, eventually even allowing for doubt whenever an interpretation had no solid evidence to rest on. The historian was guiding the reader to understand the past, but he was not omniscient. One example is the case of the existence of the Lower Chamber of Parliament, a matter which had caused the spillage of much ink other than blood70. So Rapin: “the issue is very unclear, and I will not take upon myself to decide on it, but I do not deny that I side with those who think that Commons only joined the parliament for the first time in 1258”71. This was a crucial matter of dispute, but sources did not enable one to take a definite stance, therefore Rapin was very cautious in expressing his own opinion. After a lengthy discussion of the controversial issue of the birth of an heir to James II, Rapin could attain no undisputed reconstruction72. He concluded that “l’histoire est principalement destinée a bien

67 In Histoire, vol. 1, p. II. “Nothing that cannot naturally arise through common sense”.
établir les faits qui sont certains, à détruire ceux qui sont faux et à instruire les Lecteurs des raisons de douter, par rapport à ceux qui sont douteux.”

The same attempt to be moderate can be read in a letter Rapin wrote discussing his Dissertation, where he declared that both moderate Whigs and moderate Tories were the “true Englishmen”, and recommended his publisher to edit the work accordingly, so that his thought was evident to the reader. Complementing his agenda for impartiality, that for moderation reflected Rapin’s awareness of the questions debated in the Republic, as well as the Huguenot milieu he was active in. Le Clerc and others of his known acquaintances were all active advocates of religious tolerance, favouring moderate policies towards religious diversity, at least insofar as it could be comprised within the Protestant constellation. Rapin, in the Histoire, tended to avoid the open discussion of religious topics, even if he had repeatedly showed personal attachment to his faith: the references to the Huguenots’ plight, for example, were scarce, and so were those to their contribution to William of Orange’s intervention in England. Religious groupings were discussed only insofar as they were relevant for a better understanding of the political landscape, so Rapin made a distinction between the “puritains d’état” and the “puritains de religion”, pointing mainly at the first as dangerous for the maintenance of the English government.

Thanks to this complex self-fashioning, Rapin gained access into the Republic of Letters, although to little benefit for him as he passed away soon after the first volumes of his Histoire were published. Thereafter, his persona as a historian was further propagated by others, the so-called “Rapin assemblage”, comprised of translators, publishers, journalists; all coming from different backgrounds and interested in appropriating and divulging Rapin’s persona for diverse purposes. It was a blend of various characteristics, just as the Histoire aims chiefly at establishing facts which are certain, dismissing those which are false, and instructing Readers on reasons to doubt about those which are uncertain”. See Histoire, vol. 10, p. 96. The statement resonated Le Clerc’s view of the duty of a historian as “rien raconter de faux comme veritable, & de ne point assurer ce qui est incertain”, in his Parrhasiana, p. 198.

Le Clerc was by far the most influential advocate of it, but also the Basnage brothers have to be mentioned. See J. Marshall, Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture… This book shows that “advocates of toleration were crucial contributors to the development of the Republic of Letters”.

Not only did he serve as a soldier under William of Orange, but refused to convert to Catholicism during his first stay in London (1686-1688). Here his maternal uncle, Paul Pellisson (historiographe du roi after abandoning Protestantism), employed the ambassador Barillon in order to try and persuade Rapin to embrace Catholicism. See the biography and F.L. Marcou, Étude sur la vie et les oeuvres de Pellisson, Didier, 1859.

Interestingly, in the Dissertation Rapin was in favour of tolerance, as England, Ireland and Scotland all had different religious groups. He stated the same, but discussed whether or not this was politically convenient and doable given the political circumstances in a private letter to Jean Robethon. See Rapin’s letter, dated May 1717 to Robethon, in Stowe MS 230, British Library, ff. 117-121.

The definition is borrowed from M.G. Sullivan, Hume and the Identity of the Historian …
was a hybrid work, thus palatable for a series of readings. The qualities of Rapin the historian suited not only the expectations of the men of letters, but also those of a broader readership. Rapin well knew that the boundaries of the Republic were not just geographically fluid, but also socially: Le Clerc’s periodicals, for which Rapin wrote, addressed the so-called “demi-savants”, who were not producing knowledge, but consuming it. Readers were growing in numbers due to a more widespread literacy\(^80\), and books were increasingly becoming a commodity, so that a text had to be suitable for becoming a marketable product\(^81\). Greenblatt’s Renaissance writers did not face such an increase in readers and printed output, whereas those of the early 18\(^{th}\) century even feared an imminent collapse of the Republic of Letters because writing had become a mechanic trade for producing mass consumption commodities\(^82\). Rapin’s self-fashioning occurred amidst this self-reflection of the Republic, while its citizens could increasingly write free of institutions and noble patronage, relying on the press industry. Le Clerc, for instance, was perceived as a two-faced Janus: within the Republic he encountered both warm praise as an eminent scholar, and harsh critiques for being but a “mendacious journalist”\(^83\). Rapin sought acceptance within the sphere of active members of the Republic, those who produced respectable knowledge, but was aware that his \textit{Histoire} was also under scrutiny by an anonymous, broader range of readers\(^84\).

Indeed the “Lecteur” was always addressed throughout the \textit{Histoire} and encouraged to shape his own opinion\(^85\). This reference to the readers is yet another aspect of the quest for impartiality, and a useful device for Rapin to reinforce his moderation. The \textit{historia magistra vitae} spread its didactic aim beyond a restricted elite, and shifted from providing moral


\(^{83}\) This opposite reception of Le Clerc emerges through a comparison of the \textit{Eloge historique du feu Mr. Le Clerc} (1736) and \textit{Le gazettier menteur ou Mr. Le Clerc convaincu de mensonge & calomnie} (1710) by P.Burman. See F. Verhaart, “L’anglois a autant de Civilité que le hollandois”. Jean Le Clerc, Pieter Burman and the Strategic Use of Stereotypes in the Republic of Letters, in De Zeventiende Eeuw. Cultuur in de Nederlanden in Interdisciplinair Perspectief, vol. 29, nr 1, 2013, pp. 64–80.


examples to being instructive because it unfolded historical processes. Rapin’s goal was to inform and provide general knowledge, focusing mainly on the institutional history of England. In doing so, he aimed at responding to the general curiosity about the English way of government, mostly addressing foreign readers. The good reception of the Dissertation, as well as the limited success of coeval histories – which he judged either politically biased, inaccurate, or incomplete – persuaded Rapin that there was a lack of knowledge and he intended to fill the gap. This persuasion also gave him a negotiation power: he feared competition while writing, and furthermore in a letter dated 1721, he rejected the publication conditions offered by Thomas Johnson, and contacted other publishers. It was the audience’s expectations that prompted him into continuing his work beyond the reign of Charles I: his initial idea was not to venture into the controversial events of the Revolution and Restoration, for fear of being accused of partiality, as he repeatedly told his correspondents. The public had already appreciated his abridgements of the Faëdera and was informed of the forthcoming publication of the Histoire by “a worthy gentleman”. Rogissart, publisher of the first edition, urged Rapin to accomplish his work and even put out the first volumes earlier than agreed. Rapin was thus afraid that readers might be discouraged to read further, as the beginning of the Histoire was “obscure” and included difficult passages, due to the scarcity of extensive sources on the Anglo-Saxon times.

Rapin had no reason to worry: the first in folio edition secured about 240 subscribers, who also comprised booksellers from across Europe, presumably interested in making a profit out of the purchase. From then on, the Histoire was reprinted and circulated, so to say “undercover”, in a variety of formats and forms. Immediate was the interest from the other side of the Channel, as Englishmen had long been waiting for an impartial, complete history of their country, and for a historian who could pacify both sides of the “Battle of the Books”:

86 In the Preface, Rapin discussed the necessity of writing his Histoire: the works available in French were mostly inaccurate, whereas a translation from an English work would carry too many details for a non-English reader, and moreover a biased interpretation. On page XVII, he wrote “j’ose assurer qu’il n’y a presque point de bonne Histoire de l’Angleterre, générale ou particulière, que je n’ai eue en mon pouvoir et je n’ai diligemment examinée”.
88 See Rapin’s Letters published as an appendix in Cazenove.
89 See Bibliothèque Choisie, vol. 16, 1708.
90 See Rapin’s letter to Mauclerc, 1723, nr. 10; and letter nr. 12 to his sister, 1723; both published in Cazenove.
91 See the Preface and letters to friends included in Cazenove.
92 The list is in Histoire, vol. 1. Here it is stated that “many did not want their name to be made public”.
93 See R.M. Wiles, Serial Publication in England…
in absence of a national historian, they eagerly turned to the *Histoire*. Two publishers commissioned translations, which soon rivalled each other. The concurrence went beyond the accuracy of the text and featured the innovative marketing strategy of serialization: the English versions of the *Histoire* circulated monthly and then weekly; and prices were lowered to an affordable 6 pence per number. Just as quickly, new editions continued the *Histoire* beyond the point Rapin had originally written it to keep up to date with historical events and public interest. Following the success of the full editions, abridged versions of the bulky ten volumes were soon made available in French, English and German, and reprints were in use well into the eighteenth century. The *Histoire* widely circulated – both geographically and chronologically – generating a constellation of works related to the original. Later curators obviously gave their own peculiar contribution to the ensuing edition, expanding the footnotes and possibly even partially altering the initial text. Tindal’s English translation featured a rich critical apparatus, which was eventually even translated back into French to integrate the first edition of the *Histoire*. A *History of England in Questions and Answers* – first published in 1729 and reprinted for the eighteenth time in 1811 – travelled the same way across the Channel, resulting in a bilingual edition (1736) and in a German translation (1749). As a common thread, though, all the works of the “*Histoire* constellation” characterized Rapin as the impartial and judicious historian, and his work as the inescapable starting point for the history of England. They all provided a short, but exhaustive biographical note – initially authored by a brother of Rapin – and a portrait of the author in his judge gown, evoking perhaps the role he fulfilled in the *Histoire* rather than the failed career he had never had the right to pursue in France. All reprints were duly advertised on periodical press, which arguably played the greatest role in multiplying the reach of the *Histoire*.

Literary gazettes were a relatively new medium in the Republic of Letters: they consisted of periodical magazines, which aimed at informing on the latest publications from different domains. They did so by means of advertising forthcoming works and by reviewing fresh publications. Some gazettes were the endeavour of mainly one editor with

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94 The first translation was by N. Tindall for the publisher Knapton. Tindall was even awarded a medal and a pension after the great success of his translation. The rivalling translation was by J. Kelly for the publisher Mechell.

95 An overview of the first abridgements: 1730 (French), 1747 (English), 1749 (German). For an example of late use of the *Histoire*, see N. Lenglet Du Fresnoy, Principes de l’histoire pour l’éducation de la jeunesse..., chez Markus, 1760. Both Chaudon in his *Nouvelle Bibliothèque d’un Homme de gout* (1777) and Formey in his *Conseils pour former une bibliothèque peu nombreuse, mais choisie* (1746) include the *Histoire*.

96 According to R.M. Wiles, *Serial Publication... the Histoire* was “mostly encountered” in newspaper ads.

occasional collaborators, others were directed by a stable editorial board; some targeted a Pan-European production, whereas others specialized in the literary production in a particular area or language. They were the privileged media of the Republic: written by, about and for men of letters, they integrated and expanded the private channel of epistolary communication, often also drawing from it to exchange information. Furthermore, their aim of digesting, selecting and summarizing the ever growing literary output facilitated the communication of the Republic towards those who were not necessarily recognized as its active members. Rapin had written for gazettes and read them himself, and so did the Huguenots from his social circles. After his death, three eulogies sealed his membership in the Republic and made public the biographical notes, which were later always integrated in reprints. Gazettes reviewed a very miscellaneous range of works, from theology to botany, and devoted increasing space to works of history, which is a further indicator of the popularity enjoyed by the genre. The Histoire was advertised and reviewed more than once, as a single work or in comparison with successive histories: the anonymous abridgements on Le Clerc’s periodicals, for example, were already hinting at a forthcoming history of England. Once the Histoire was made available, booksellers and journalists could count on a certain expectation on the side of the potential audience. On the pages of the gazettes, the porousness of the social boundaries of the Republic was particularly evident: their articles were authored both by affirmed scholars and less known literary agents, who made a living by acting as intermediaries between printers, booksellers, and writers. Moreover, they were chiefly addressed to demi-savants, but read also by active scholars, who discussed their content in their private correspondence as well as in letters to editorial boards. Rapin was clearly aware of the relevant role of the press in general, and of the periodical press in particular. To his

This was the case of Le Clerc’s periodicals: Bibliothèque universelle et historique (1686-1693), Bibliothèque choisie (1703-1713) and Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne.

This was the case of the Bibliothèque Germanique (1720-1759).

Le Clerc’s Bibliothèques all belonged to the first group. In the second: Bibliothèque Angloise (1717-1728); Bibliothèque Italique (1728-1734), Bibliothèque Française (1723-1746).


See D. Woolf, Reading History in Early Modern England… The following studies have focused on Le Clerc’s periodicals and showed the increased space dedicated to history: H. Bots, De “Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique” (1686-1693): een Periodiek als Trefpunt van Geletterd Europa, Studies van Het Instituut Voor Intellectuele Betrekkingen Tussen de Westeuropese Landen in de Zeventiende Eeuw, 1981; G.N.M. Wijngaards, De Bibliothèque Choisie van Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736): een Amsterdams geleerdentijdschrift uit de jaren 1703 tot 1713, APA Hollands Universiteits Pers, 1986.

The first edition of the Histoire was sold through subscription. An advertisement can be found in Le Mercure de France, January 1723, p. 116.

Pierre Coste and Pierre Des Maizeaux, for instance, both played a crucial role in connecting England (where they had moved) and the Continent: they translated works from English, wrote biographies and eulogies of scholars, facilitated the exchange of books, acted as correspondents for gazettes. See J. Marshall, Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture…
friend Jean Rou, he lamented that “bad books” crammed the bookshelves because of the incompetence of booksellers, who were “incapable of judging”\textsuperscript{105}. While still working at his 
*Histoire*, he entertained a direct correspondence with Mauclerc, the main editor of the *Bibliothèque Germanique*, which reviewed books published or authored within the German Empire\textsuperscript{106}, because he understood the vital multiplying role of this new media.

Rapin sent Mauclerc a copy of the *Histoire* and received, in turn, the numbers of the periodical which reviewed it as “the work the public was impatiently waiting for”\textsuperscript{107}. The *Bibliothèque* depicted Rapin with the adjectives then bequeathed as hallmark of his identity: “attentif”, “judicieux”, and “impartiel”. Later on, the same gazette published a letter by Rapin, in which he explained why not every single author used as a source was examined in depth: his work was a general history, therefore it required from him to keep some balance in the narrative text. His attentiveness to the audience’s response was made clear in his own words, as he asked “who would then read such a work?”\textsuperscript{108} Rapin’s death did not prevent the periodical press from keeping a close eye on the *Histoire* constellation. In fact, the response to the *Histoire* can be followed and assessed through magazines, which integrated the debate on history that took place through books and private correspondence\textsuperscript{109}. For instance, the lengthy defence of Rapin in the *Bibliothèque Britannique*\textsuperscript{110} against the charges of inaccuracy concerning some events during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The article dismissed the “Reflections Critiques”\textsuperscript{111} by referring to excerpts of the *Histoire* and explaining how Rapin went about the incorporation of sources. The same “Reflections” were then translated into English, and some local magazines also discussed the issue. The English translations of the *Histoire* were subject not only to a circular trajectory – from French into English and backwards – but also to a circular discussion on both French and English periodicals\textsuperscript{112}. Gazettes conveyed not only the enthusiasm aroused by the *Histoire*, but also critical

\textsuperscript{105}Letter from Rapin to Rou, 1707, in *Mémoires*, vol. 2, p. 267. The original French text reads: “foule de mauvais livres parce que les librairies ne sont pas capables de juger les livres”.
\textsuperscript{107}Vol. 7, art. II, 1724, pp.40-73.
\textsuperscript{108}See Letter nr. XIV to Mauclerc in *Cazenove*. Mauclerc became Rapin’s son in law. Rapin’s correspondent Le Duchat was also part of the editorial team of the Bibliothèque Germanique.
\textsuperscript{110}Vol. 8, 1736, pp. 188-205.
\textsuperscript{111}E. De Silhouette, *Lettre sur les transactions publiques du règne d’Elizabeth contenant …Reflexion critiques sur M. Rapin….*, Bernard, 1736.
responses, the harshest ones coming from England. If nowadays historiography assuredly labels Rapin as “the standard Whig historian”\textsuperscript{113}, in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century his reception was definitely more blurred across the political spectrum. Consequently, in England Rapin was also greatly featured in political journals, which either employed his \textit{Histoire} to substantiate their views; or refuted it because it contradicted their claims. In fact, Rapin’s systematic moderation enabled nuanced readings, and moreover English parties were not monolithic entities and faced developments. The Whigs and Tories Rapin had described as “the perpetual alternation”, which guaranteed the balance of power, had a different line up in the 1730s. To put it shortly, Walpole’s network (the “Court” party) tended to avoid the vision of an immemorial English freedom, which the Glorious Revolution had restored, and declared the Glorious Revolution itself as the most important turning point in English history to provide freedom in England. The Opposition – partly by Tories like Bolingbroke, partly by Whigs like Burlington or Lord Temple – rooted English freedom deep in history and blamed Walpole for betraying the ancient English values and establishing a despotic power. For Bolingbroke and his Country journal \textit{The Craftsman}, Rapin was an “evangelist” and the main historical reference; while Walpole called Rapin “the dullest of dull writers”\textsuperscript{114}. The work of the historian who strove for moderation and to avoid the “rage of parties” resulted thus in a contested reconstruction serving different political views. This appropriation involved also Rapin’s crafted identity. Both the Whig Oldmixon and the Jacobite Carte, for instance, debunked the concept of detachment derived from being a foreigner: the first lamented the ignorance of certain sources only available in England, whereas the other signed his own history as “an Englishman”, vehemently blaming Rapin for having dared to write the history of a country which was not his own. Oldmixon had already expressed his position on the \textit{Daily Gazetteer}\textsuperscript{115}, whereas Carte is supposed to be the anonymous writer of a pamphlet\textsuperscript{116} which coined the derogatory term “\textit{Rapiners}” to accuse those who made a “satire of kings”. Interestingly, both commentators recognized the great readership gained by the \textit{Histoire}. Oldmixon conceded such a popularity because, notwithstanding some mistakes, the author “made a conscience of what he said, and observed decency and discretion”\textsuperscript{117}. Carte, however, fully condemned Rapin as a hack writer, who composed his \textit{Histoire} based on

\textsuperscript{113} See “Our First Whig Historian”: Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, in H. Trevor-Roper, From Counter-Reformation to Glorious Revolution, Secker & Warburg, 1992, pp. 249-266.


\textsuperscript{117} In Daily Gazetteer, 25 May 1736.
It was not uncommon in the early modern era to concentrate attacks on the biography of an author in order to undermine his work, and detractors tried to deconstruct the qualities of a historian Rapin had built his own legitimacy on. However disputed, the *Histoire* could not be ignored, and it took the Scotsman Hume to challenge the Huguenot Rapin as the ultimate historian of England. The *Histoire* encountered, nonetheless, a longer-lasting primacy in France, with an enlarged edition in 1749 which featured all the critical apparatus that appeared in English and the abridgements of the *Fœdera*. It is arguably this version that informed French perception and understanding of English history and institutions during the Revolution.

To a modern reader, the *Histoire* has little to say, and the cosmopolitan Rapin appears less than a “moveable type” now that the knowledge is produced and consumed worldwide and at an incomparably quicker pace. Nonetheless, Rapin had a remarkable impact on his contemporaries and beyond. Writing history was, indeed, just one of the ways to contribute to the so-called “historical revolution”, which has been recently posited as a “slow change in taste and manners”. Rapin and his assemblage supported a vision of history, which blended various characteristics, both traditional (the first-hand experience, the production of a narrative text) and more innovative (the quest for impartiality, the use of sources) in an era when this was under continual revision. Rapin was somehow a man of his time, one of the many Huguenots found in the printing industry and in writing for the Republic of Letters; and yet he stands out for some peculiarities. Rapin, for instance, checked the legitimacy of an institution against its usefulness in the light of historical developments, rather than against its antiquity. This is evident in his understanding of the Glorious Revolution, presented as the triumph of moderate factions across parties. Parties were new actors on the stage of history, and yet essential to the government of England, as history had demonstrated. Historical change was therefore envisioned as a possibility, rather than a deviation from an original

118 In A Defence of English History, p. 122
119 Nonetheless, a new edition of the *Histoire* dates 1784, for the publisher Harrison.
120 By Hugues Lefebvre de Saint-Marc.
model. Again, he was one of the first “free writers”: he had no affiliation to universities nor was he appointed an official historiographer, and as contemporary literature has put it, he was but “a journalist”. Nonetheless, the journalistic activity (his abridgements of sources) and the attentiveness to the journalistic dissemination of his Histoire (his correspondence with Mauclerc) were part of his conscious self-fashioning strategy. Rapin willingly quit his job as a tutor ahead of time, informing Lord Portland, his employer, of a certain “affaire” which urged him back to the United Provinces. Whether this business was the collaboration with Le Clerc can only be a matter of speculation, but for sure once back in The Hague, Rapin worked at strengthening his social network within the Republic of Letters. As argued, sociability was essential and in this phase of his self-fashioning, Rapin exploited previous contacts he had made while tutoring. The best documented example is his friendship with Jean Rou (1638-1711), who devoted various pages of his Mémoires to Rapin. He described him according to the model of Ciceronian amicitia: he was always ready to give intellectual advice, and even practically helped when he could. Rapin, in fact, expressed his esteem for Rou’s knowledgeability and recruited him to teach history to his pupil Woodstock, particularly making use of the chronological tables he had developed. Rou reported that Rapin was the founder of the Académie de la Feauté, an informal circle which gathered various local scholars. They met on a regular basis at Rapin’s place and discussed different subjects (poetry, religion, history), as it was typical within the Republic of Letters. Remarkably, among the known participants were the Huguenot brothers Henri and Jacques Basnage de Beauval, renowned scholars who authored, among others, historical works. Furthermore, Henri founded and edited the periodical Histoire des ouvrages des savants, and both brothers were personally acquainted with Le Clerc, with whom they shared the engagement for toleration. In this phase of his life, Rapin shaped his image as a scholar through sociability, frequenting co-religionists who were active hommes des lettres and in the printing industry. Even after having to leave The Hague due to economic difficulties, Rapin

124 Rapin showed the same attitude when discussing the origins of the Low Chamber of the Parliament: he could not prove it had been present since the Anglosaxons times, and yet was in favor of it. See supra.

125 “Rapin-Thoyras tried to construct, but he had no originality of mind, as he was essentially a journalist, not a thinker, he only interpreted and systematized the Huguenot history he had read in France and the Whig theories that he had heard in England”. See H. Trevor-Roper, “Our First Whig Historian: …

126 See the letter from Rapin to the Earl of Portland, 12.08.1702, Pw A 1066 in Nottingham University Library.

127 See Mémoires, vol. 2, pp. 225-306. As seen in this paper, Rou included some letters exchanged between him and Rapin, and a little biographical note.

maintained epistolary ties with his friends in the Netherlands, conscious that they could link him to the vibrant Dutch scholarly scene. As seen, Rapin’s publishing activity commenced while he was removed from the core of the Republic, and only letters kept him informed of its news. From the provincial Wesel, Rapin started collaborating with the great Le Clerc, and then published his *Dissertation* thanks to the mediation of a visiting English scholar, who put him in touch with a prolific, if controversial, publisher in the United Provinces\(^{129}\). As argued, the defining features of an intellectual in the Early Modern were complex and “nebulous”, but increasingly described scholars who operated with “a degree of autonomy from political and religious institutions”\(^{130}\). Approaching the printing network gave Rapin the raw materials from which he constructed the masterpiece which consecrated him within the Republic, and was the virtual place where he took position on history.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, history had no exclusive place to be practised and addressed as a discipline: clergymen could be reconstructing history in their sermons in a church; and professors in universities delivered speeches and held lessons on history. At the same time, retired gentlemen wrote memoirs from their cabinets for the sake of their peers, and erudite scholars compiled lengthy historical studies accessing the collections their societies made available. Rapin’s legitimacy as a historian could not rest entirely on only one of these social figures, but had to be constructed publicly by trying to straddle all envisaged requirements. His self-fashioning took place, in fact, while the fissure between gentlemanly historians and erudite antiquarians underwent decisive levelling in the practice of history writing, and at the same time experienced exacerbation in theoretical treatises. Rapin was a Modernist, but not the spider of Swift’s “Battle of the Books”: he judged both of the authenticity of sources and of the authoritativeness of previous historians, and consciously offered to the readers his specific expertise as well as his direct experience. The place of history within human learning – as well as the social spaces to produce history – were contested, and Rapin directly intervened in the dispute through the pages of his *Histoire*. Being a “journalist” was just one of the many facets of his *persona*, and indeed an essential one, as emerging free authors were claiming the periodical press as a new space to discuss history and submit it to a diversified audience. At the same time, the active role of the press in the self-fashioning Rapin as a trustworthy historian after his own death, reveals the importance of the collective representation practices. In fact, it was members of the Republic of Letters who enacted representations and perceived themselves as part of a community.

Self-fashioning as a historian was not the easiest choice Rapin could have made, but he

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129 See *supra*. The publisher was Charles Le Vier. For the controversial works he contributed to, see M. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, Cornerstone Book, 2006.

skilfully appropriated contradictory characteristics and combined them in his image. He came to history through the press, and the press consigned him to history as an accomplished historian. In the long run it was Rapin’s readership who sanctioned his identity as a historian, and eventually dismissed it as not up to date with the standards of his discipline. His persona had always been crafted as composite, and just as composite was the reception and use of his work: it was regarded as an inescapable reading, which should “be engraved on Every Englishman’s heart”\(^{131}\), but also held up as the symbol of cheap literature, which laypeople queued up to secure even if “their children wanted a bit of bread”\(^{132}\).

### Appendix 1: Overview of Paul Rapin Thoyras’ life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1661</td>
<td>Born in Castres, France. Local <em>noblesse de robe</em>. Studies at Protestant Academies (Puylaurens, Saumur) and then moves to Toulouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1686 - 1688</td>
<td>In London. Through his maternal uncle (Jean de Pellisson), he frequents the circle of the French ambassador Barillon, who tries to convert him to Catholicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1693 - 1704</td>
<td>Thanks to the mediation of Lord Galway, Huguenot lieutenant of Ireland: tutor to Viscount Woodstock, the son of Lord Portland (favourite of William III). Lives between The Hague and London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1698</td>
<td>Accompanies his pupil to an Embassy in Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>Marries Anne Testart, expatriate Huguenot, in The Hague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701 - 1702</td>
<td>Accompanies his pupil on a Grand Tour (Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Habsburg Empire, Italy). Acquires medals, coins and vases for his patron.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1707</td>
<td>Settles in Wesel, Prussia for economic difficulties (end of pension issued by William III)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1710</td>
<td>First (anonymous) abridgement on the <em>Bibliothèque Choisie</em>. (Last in 1723)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1717</td>
<td>Thanks to the intermediation of Sir Fountaine, chamberlain to the queen: publication of <em>Dissertation sur les Whigs et les Torys</em> (work translated in 6 languages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1724</td>
<td>Beginning of publication of the <em>Histoire</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1725</td>
<td>Dies in Wesel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix 2**: Overview of reprints and continuations of the *Histoire* (preliminary compilation, further results will be part of the on-going Ph.D. project).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1725</td>
<td><em>The History of England as Well Ecclesiastical as Civil</em></td>
<td>Tindal</td>
<td>Knapton</td>
<td>English translation, monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1729</td>
<td><em>Histoire d'Angleterre avec les Notes ajoutées par Mr. Tyndal</em></td>
<td>Roberts</td>
<td></td>
<td>English edition of the original French text + translation of Tindal’s notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1729</td>
<td><em>A new history of England, in English and French, by question and answer</em></td>
<td>Prevost &amp; Motte</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questions and Answers Parallel French and English texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730</td>
<td><em>Abregé de l'Histoire D'Angleterre</em></td>
<td>Failesau</td>
<td>De Rogissart, De Hondt</td>
<td>Abridged Version in French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1732</td>
<td><em>The History of England Continued ... to the Accession of King George II</em></td>
<td>Tindal</td>
<td>Knapton</td>
<td>English translation and continuation, weekly. Also sold with the Gentleman’s Magazine, nr.125, 1744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1732</td>
<td><em>The History of England continued to the Reign of Queen Anne</em></td>
<td>Kelly, Lediard</td>
<td>Mechell</td>
<td>English translation, weekly. Also sold with the Historical Journal, nr.12, 1732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1732</td>
<td><em>A New History of England by Questions and Answers</em></td>
<td>Lockman</td>
<td>Astley</td>
<td>Questions and Answers based on Rapin’s text. Reprints up to 1811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1734</td>
<td><em>A defence of English history against the misrepresentations of M. de Rapin Thoyras</em></td>
<td>Carte?</td>
<td>Wilford</td>
<td>Critique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1733</td>
<td><em>Remarques Historiques et Critiques sur l'Histoire d'Angleterre</em></td>
<td>Gosse, Neaulme</td>
<td></td>
<td>French translation of Tindal’s notes with reference to original French text of Histoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1733</td>
<td><em>Histoire d'Angleterre</em></td>
<td>De Hondt</td>
<td>Van Duren Van Lom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1734</td>
<td><em>The History of England</em></td>
<td>Templeman</td>
<td>Rider</td>
<td>English Translation with additional notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1735</td>
<td><em>The History of England... with Maps, Genealogical Tables, ... and Copper Plates</em></td>
<td>Tindal</td>
<td>Knapton</td>
<td>Second Edition, weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1736</td>
<td><em>The continuation of Mr. Rapin's History of England</em></td>
<td>Tindal</td>
<td>Knapton</td>
<td>English continuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740</td>
<td><em>Histoire d'Angleterre</em></td>
<td>Brandmüller</td>
<td></td>
<td>Swiss edition in French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1747</td>
<td><em>An Abridgement of the History of England</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Knapton</td>
<td>From Rapin and Tindal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1749</td>
<td><em>Kern der ganzen Historie von Engeland, in Frag und Antwort</em></td>
<td>Rothe</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questions and Answers in German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Publisher</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1755</td>
<td><em>Algemeine Geschichte von England</em></td>
<td>Baumgarten</td>
<td>Franke</td>
<td>German translation (with Tindal’s and St.Marc’s remarks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1768</td>
<td><em>Istoriya Aglinskaya</em></td>
<td>Reshetov</td>
<td>Russian Academy of Sciences</td>
<td>Russian Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td><em>Impartial History of England</em></td>
<td>Smollett</td>
<td>Harrison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td><em>The History of England from the Earliest Periods...to the present time</em></td>
<td>Robertson</td>
<td>Albion Press</td>
<td>Continued to the Reign of George III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>