

*An Account  
of Denmark*



Robert Molesworth

THE THOMAS HOLLIS LIBRARY  
David Womersley, General Editor



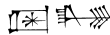
*An Account  
of Denmark*

With *Francogallia* and *Some  
Considerations for the Promoting of  
Agriculture and Employing the Poor*

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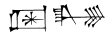


Edited and with an Introduction  
by Justin Champion



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The cuneiform inscription that serves as our logo and as the design motif for our endpapers is the earliest-known written appearance of the word “freedom” (*amagi*), or “liberty.” It is taken from a clay document written about 2300 B.C. in the Sumerian city-state of Lagash.

Introduction, editorial additions, and index

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Frontispiece: The Right Honourable Robert Lord Viscount Molesworth.

Mezzotint after Thomas Gibson; print made by Peter Pelham, 1721.

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## CONTENTS



The Thomas Hollis Library, by David Womersley	vii
Introduction, by Justin Champion	ix
Editorial Apparatus	xli
Bibliographical Descriptions: Editions, Translations, and Extracts, 1694–1789	xliii
British Editions	xliii
European Editions	xliv
Textual Policy	xlix
List of Sources	li
Further Reading	liii
Acknowledgments	lvii
<i>An Account of Denmark</i>	i
<i>Francogallia, Or an Account of the Ancient Free State of France</i>	163
<i>Some Considerations for the Promoting of Agriculture and Employing the Poor</i>	325
Appendix 1: Selected Sources Cited in <i>Francogallia</i>	353
Appendix 2: <i>Ordonnance pour les Rangs du Royaume de Danemarck</i>	361
Index	367

## THE THOMAS HOLLIS LIBRARY



Thomas Hollis (1720–74) was an eighteenth-century Englishman who devoted his energies, his fortune, and his life to the cause of liberty. Hollis was trained for a business career, but a series of inheritances allowed him to pursue instead a career of public service. He believed that citizenship demanded activity and that it was incumbent on citizens to put themselves in a position, by reflection and reading, in which they could hold their governments to account. To that end for many years he distributed books that he believed explained the nature of liberty and revealed how liberty might best be defended and promoted.

A particular beneficiary of Hollis's generosity was Harvard College. In the years preceding the Declaration of Independence, Hollis was assiduous in sending over to America boxes of books, many of which he had had specially printed and bound, to encourage the colonists in their struggle against Great Britain. At the same time, he took pains to explain the colonists' grievances and concerns to his fellow Englishmen.

The Thomas Hollis Library makes freshly available a selection of titles that, because of their intellectual power, or the influence they exerted on the public life of their own time, or the distinctiveness of their approach to the topic of liberty, constitute the cream of the books distributed by Hollis. Many of these works have been either out of print since the eigh-

teenth century or available only in very expensive and scarce editions. The highest standards of scholarship and production ensure that these classic texts can be as salutary and influential today as they were two hundred and fifty years ago.

David Womersley

## INTRODUCTION



### Robert Molesworth and Gothic Liberty

Robert Molesworth (1656–1725) famously diagnosed the causes of a disordered commonwealth in the much reprinted and translated *An Account of Denmark* (1694).<sup>1</sup> His works connected the three ages of revolution between 1649 and 1776.<sup>2</sup> According to his insights, manners and customs were shaped by the experience of the institutions and laws of a nation: liberty was cultivated by the land. Through his writing, his parliamentary career, and his stewardship of his own country estates in England and Ireland, Molesworth embodied republican ideals of the industrious and independent gentleman, stalwart in defense of public liberty, hostile to tyranny, yet dynamic in nurturing improvement.

A consistent defender of “civil rights,” Molesworth conceived his political career as defending the continuing liberty first manifest in the “ancient free state.” He hoped “that my friends, relations and children, with their posterity, will inherit their share of this inestimable blessing, and that I have contributed my part to it.”<sup>3</sup> A defense of this vision was the

1. See the list of editions detailed in *Bibliographical Descriptions*, pp. xliii–xlvi.

2. See the arguments of J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

3. Molesworth, “Preface to the Reader,” *Franco-gallia* (1711), p. 173.



consistent pattern of his post-1689 life. The edition of the radical Calvinist writer François Hotman's *Francogallia* (1574) executed in 1705, first published in 1711 and republished in 1721, is testimony to this durability of political commitment and indeed to Molesworth's political imagination in reconfiguring Hotman for an eighteenth-century readership.

John Cannon has dismissed Molesworth's legacy as one of "bookish radicals with antiquarian tastes" whose "scale of operations was small, their impact on important politicians slight, and their influence on the public at large negligible."<sup>4</sup> This volume aims to provide evidence to the contrary.

Unlike many modern historians, Molesworth perceived no discontinuity between the commonwealth ideologies of the 1640s and the 1700s: the core principle of this ideology was that "the Good of the Whole is taken care of by the Whole."<sup>5</sup> Importantly, this made the question of whether a monarchy existed constitutionally irrelevant; as he put it, "the having a King or Queen at the Head of it, alters not the Case."<sup>6</sup> Such a political community, committed to universal liberty, and independent of religious confession, would encourage each to use their "Body, Estate, and Understanding, for the publick Good."<sup>7</sup> The end of such a community was to provide the grounding for improvement so that each could "securely and peaceably enjoy Property and Liberty both of Mind and Body."<sup>8</sup> By such provision both individuals and the entire community benefited: as he clarified, "the thriving of any one single Person by honest Means, is the thriving of the Commonwealth wherein he resides."<sup>9</sup> Molesworth's conception of the purpose of political society was to enable a flourishing and industrious civic life.

Molesworth's political reputation as "the patriot brave and sage" was shaped by the reception and afterlife of his first and most infamous work, *An account of Denmark as it was in the year 1692* (1694), a republi-

4. J. Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform 1640–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 45.

5. Molesworth, "Translator's Preface," *Francogallia* (1721), p. 175.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

can counterblast to modern tyranny.<sup>10</sup> Combined with his defense of the Glorious Revolution of 1689, his translation of François Hotman's *Franco-gallia* (1574), and the evidence of a parliamentary career (in England and Ireland) that spanned three decades, Molesworth has been recognized as the last of the "Real Whigs." Understood through the historiographical prism of Caroline Robbins's *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*, Molesworth and his friends exercised a powerful influence over the "Republican fringe" of eighteenth-century Whiggism. It is worth citing her conclusions at length:

The Whiggish malcontents or Commonwealthmen in varying ways provided a deterrent to complacency, and reminders of the need for improvement and the continual adaptation of even good governments to economic and political changes. . . . In an age when Englishmen stressed the sovereignty, not of a divinely appointed king but of a triumphant parliament, the Real Whigs reminded them of the rights of electors and of the unenfranchised, of the virtues of rotation in office and of the necessity of constant vigilance against the corruptions of power whether wielded by king, ministers or estates. Molesworth and his friends admonished their countrymen about present dangers. They called attention to the lessons of history and the possibilities of the future.<sup>11</sup>

This account of the powerful and persisting legacy of Molesworth's republican critique of monarchy and public power is worth reassessing in the light of more contemporary historical writing, which characterizes the eighteenth century as an age of *ancien régime* institutions and cultural values.

The rallying call of what Thomas Hollis admiringly referred to as Molesworth's "golden prefaces" continued, decades later, to exercise an enchanting authority over oppositional ideologies, most notably mobiliz-

10. See the black-framed commemoration, M.B., *An elegy on the universally lamented death of the Right honourable Robert Lord Vis. Molesworth* (1725); see also M. Browne, *The throne of justice; a pindaric ode; humbly dedicated to the Right Honorable the Lord Viscount Molesworth* (London, 1721).

11. Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 133.

ing support around John Wilkes in the 1760s and those defending colonial independence in the 1770s.<sup>12</sup> The longer works, which presented a neo-Tacitean account of the mechanics of modern tyranny, meshed with the writings of Trenchard and Gordon to provide a standard source for the analysis of political corruption. Unlike Locke, Molesworth provided insight into processes of corruption rather than simply a set of prescriptive juristic values. In the *Account of Denmark* especially, Molesworth established how tyranny worked, identifying the contaminating ideologies and institutions. *De jure divino* claims to authority—the “designs of priestcraft”—especially from the Church, lay at the root of all perfidy.<sup>13</sup>

Molesworth’s works, reprinted throughout the eighteenth century, were read in the British Islands, continental Europe, and North America—where Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison, and James Logan all owned copies. The *Elegy* printed upon his death celebrated Molesworth’s deeds, not just as a defender of the Revolution but as “the labourers friend.” Just as his political and diplomatic acts saved the kingdom from “a proud oppressing slave,” so his improving economics “found work for one hundred-thousand hands.”<sup>14</sup>

## The Life

For Molesworth, associated as he was with many of the leading political figures of the period, his political career promised more than it achieved. Concerned with principle as much as place, Molesworth was never cautious about advancing either his own opinions or abilities, or (later) those of his sons, to the ministers and even kings of the day.

Outspoken against political and religious corruption, Molesworth was rewarded with a measure of recognition after 1714 by the Hanoverian regime, only (as he saw it) to be thrust into opposition by corrupt men after the debacle of the South Sea Bubble. It is a measure of his charisma

12. The phrase is used in annotations by Hollis on the initial blank page of Mary Monck’s *Marinda: Poems and Translations upon several occasions* (1716) [Harvard call mark \*EC75.H.7267.Zz716m].

13. Robbins, *Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*, p. 95.

14. M.B., *Elegy on the universally lamented*.

and vitality of commitment that as a man in his late sixties he was considered by others, and indeed considered himself, a suitable candidate for contesting the parliamentary seat of Westminster in 1722.

Molesworth was not a lone commonwealthman but gathered a circle of like-minded men into his milieu. The most notorious of these was John Toland, with whom he had been acquainted since the early 1700s.<sup>15</sup> Like many of his relationships, this connection, although driven primarily by political ambition, also had literary dimensions. While Molesworth hoped to persuade his friend to collaborate on a “history of the late wars,” Toland had certainly seen a now lost work of Molesworth’s resembling “so nearly Cicero’s *de respublica*.”<sup>16</sup>

Molesworth moved freely in circles of political influence and sociability in Dublin, London, and Yorkshire. His surviving correspondence with men like Shaftesbury, Godolphin, and William King allows a detailed reconstruction of this political life. Molesworth’s correspondence also gives an intimate and at times touching account of his family life and political connections.<sup>17</sup> His involvement with diplomatic and political circles is manifest, while his continual disappointment at the conduct of leading ministers, the missed opportunities for personal advancement, and the cost of promoting himself and his sons are persistent themes. At times all these themes merged, as he noted in November 1695: “My election, if I carry it, will cost me sauce, so that we must endeavour to make it up by good husbandry.”<sup>18</sup>

Insight into his self-esteem and political commitments is unparalleled. As he wrote to Mrs. Molesworth in September 1712, he managed to combine a reflection on the death of his friend Godolphin with remarks about his own continual disappointment not to be called to great office: “My dear Lord Godolphin is dead! The greatest man in the whole world for honesty, capacity, courage, friendship, generosity, is gone: my best friend

15. The manuscript letters are in British Library Additional Mss 4465, Collection of Letters and Papers of John Toland, folios 19, 21, 23, 27, 29, 36, 37.

16. J. Toland, *Collections* (1726), vol. 2, pp. 461, 487, 491.

17. Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections*, vol. 8 (Hereford, 1913) [hereafter *HMC*], p. 319.

18. *HMC*, p. 217.

is gone! As if my friendship were fatal to all that ever take it up for me. So now there is another great article to be added to the misfortunes of my family this year, which indeed are insupportable. This great patriot could not survive the liberties of his country, whilst I like a wretch, am like to live a slave, and have reared up children to no better an end.”<sup>19</sup>

His letters deliver (among many other topics of the day) commentaries on the Peace of 1711, the South Sea Bubble, the conduct of the High Church faction in Convocation, and, interestingly, drafts of his position in regard to the issue of Irish independency in 1719.<sup>20</sup> Molesworth’s persistent parliamentary defense of liberty and the Hanoverian succession was associated with a formal political thought premised on the vindication of liberty and a profoundly anticlerical commitment to religious toleration. It shows that Molesworth was a man driven not just by political commitments and opportunities for agricultural improvement but also by the life of the mind. Although his collaborative reading with Toland is evidence enough of this, his archive also contains glimpses of a broader intellectual culture that saw Molesworth at the center of a community involved in the circulation of scribal works.<sup>21</sup>

After Toland’s death, when Molesworth withdrew from the mainstream of national politics, he became the focus of another circle of younger thinkers and writers. Unfortunately, no records of Molesworth’s library or book purchases survive, but there is some evidence to suggest that Molesworth encouraged reading and learning in his own household. His daughter Lettice noted that her child “Little Missy” was learning to spell as a precondition for reading: “I take all possible care of her eyes and hold her books as you desired.”<sup>22</sup>

That Molesworth had encouraged his daughters as well as sons into commerce with books and learning is clear from the life and work of his daughter Mary Monck (1677–1715), whose poems were posthumously published in 1716 and edited by her father. *Marinda: Poems and transla-*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 252, 283–84, 287, 312.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 258–59.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 272, October 1717, Lettice Molesworth to her mother, Lady Molesworth.

*tions upon several occasions* [by Mary Monck] was published in London by Jacob Tonson. The work was dedicated to Caroline, Princess of Wales, and included a long preface written by Molesworth underscoring his commitment to the education of women. This in itself is a significant elaboration of the position developed by Toland in his *Letters to Serena* (1704), dedicated to the Queen of Prussia. Molesworth made this connection explicit when he applauded Caroline's "frequent and intimate conversation with that incomparable princess, the late Electress Sophia, and your indefatigable Reading the best books in all the modern languages."<sup>23</sup>

Molesworth presented his deceased daughter's work to the new court as a product worthy of public emulation for its liberty, honor, and virtue. Mary's poems were the result of her reading in a "good library." Spending her leisure hours reading, this gentlewoman had acquired several languages and "the good morals and principles contain'd in those books, so as to put them in practice." Some of Mary's work was already in scribal circulation through the agency of the young Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, but this impressive volume (with parallel pages of the original text and an English translation) broadcast her learning to a wider audience, and, most important, was framed within the political languages of liberty and what Molesworth called "the Good Old English Customs."

The importance of good reading and a virtuous education in the principles of liberty and true religion (rather than bigotry and superstition) underlay much of Molesworth's political commitment to the reform of the universities after 1716. This commitment took an even more academic turn in late 1722, when Molesworth became involved in the affairs of the University of Glasgow, where he had been appointed Rector by popular assent of a clique of radical students. One correspondent, William Wishart, writing in October 1713, applauded Molesworth for his role in "the dawns of a revival of ancient virtue and the love of true liberty."<sup>24</sup> Holding up the model of Molesworth's preface to the *Account of Denmark*, which distinguished the educational principles of philosophy and priestcraft, Wishart bewailed the fact that "the abettors of savage zeal, fierce

23. M. Monck, *Marinda: Poems and translations upon several occasions* (1716), pp. 10–11.

24. *HMC*, p. 347.

bigotry and dire superstition have the advantages of those corrupt passions and inveterate prejudices of men's minds to favour their designs."<sup>25</sup>

The anticlericalism of this correspondence was profound: in a later letter George Turnbull condemned the "proud domineering pedantic priests, whose interest it is to train up the youth in a profound veneration to their sensible metaphysical creeds and catechisms."<sup>26</sup> Such tuition was not only bewildering but was also "admirably fitted . . . indeed to enslave young understandings and to beget an early antipathy against all free thought."<sup>27</sup> Both Wishart and James Arbuckle acknowledged that they had read Molesworth's work on Denmark and "Cato's letters," but they also made inquiry about suitable further reading.<sup>28</sup>

Molesworth not only recommended books but even sent copies of his own works. As George Turnbull wrote, "There is nothing I would be prouder of than to have your works in my library *ex dono* the worthy author."<sup>29</sup> Molesworth offered detailed directions toward further reading. William Wishart in passing his thanks to the older man explained what he had done with his "excellent instructions." He started by reading Buchanan's *De jure regni apud Scotos*, which gave him excellent notions "of the nature and design of government and the just boundaries of it," describing the beautiful lineaments of a good king and the ghastly picture of a tyrant. This was followed by reading Machiavelli on Livy, "by which I have received a great deal of light into the true principles of politics." The final books recommended by Molesworth were Harrington's works (edited by Toland, of course) and Confucius's morals, which the student had only "dipped into."<sup>30</sup>

Led by Molesworth's reading lists, these young men gathered as a literary club to discourse "upon matters of learning for their mutual improvement." The club attracted a reputation for heterodoxy, and its members were vilified as "a set of Latitudinarians, Free-thinkers, Non-subscribers,

25. *Ibid.*, p. 349.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 352.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 348, 351, 354-55.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 360-61, May 1723.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 366-67, November 1723.

and Bangorians, and in a word, Enemies to the jurisdictions, powers, and the divine authority of the clergy.”<sup>31</sup>

## The Ideas

There is little doubt that Molesworth, who had Toland design electoral propaganda representing himself as Cato, was a key figure in preserving the republican tradition into the eighteenth century (as well as founding a short-lived dynasty of Whig politicians). Ample testimony to this reputation is evident in Thomas Hollis’s admiration for the Irishman’s life and works. As Hollis recorded, he regarded Molesworth as the author who most neatly captured “My Faith.” Indeed, Hollis was very active in disseminating Molesworth’s writings (which were included in his list of “canonical books”). Blackburne recorded (in his edition of the *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis*) that Hollis had given away twenty copies of the *Account of Denmark*.<sup>32</sup> Hollis placed a high value on Molesworth’s contributions to the republican tradition, noting him as one of the “last of the English.”

This admiration took a variety of forms. The most public was the re-printing and distribution of Molesworth’s works, but Hollis also commissioned an engraved portrait of Molesworth from Thomas Snelling. A more intimate commemoration can be seen in the “invisible pantheon” inscribed into the landscape at Dorset. As Patrick Eyres has explained, a key signal of Hollis’s admiration for Molesworth’s contributions is embodied in his naming the highest fields on the downland ridge above his Urles farm after him (and his political intimate, Shaftesbury). So Molesworth was not only central to the Whig canon but also stands at the apex of Hollis’s Dorset pantheon.<sup>33</sup>

Hollis personally owned two volumes of Molesworth’s works and related pieces, which although evidently specially bound in red morocco,

31. See M. A. Stewart, “John Smith and the Molesworth Circle.” *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 2 (1987), pp. 89–102, at pp. 95–96.

32. F. Blackburne, *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis* (1780), vol. 1, p. 235.

33. See P. Eyres, ed., “The Invisible Pantheon: The plan of Thomas Hollis as Inscribed at Stowe and in Dorset.” *New Arcadian Journal* 55/56 (2003), pp. 45–120, at p. 86.



are not decorated with any of his commonplace characteristic symbols of liberty embossed in gilt on the spine or covers.<sup>34</sup> As many have noted, Hollis typically annotated his volumes with a record of his intellectual dispositions. So it was with copies of Molesworth's works. On the initial blank leaves of both volumes, there are scribal notes made by Hollis consisting of a quotation of six lines from the poet Mark Akenside's *Odes* and on the following blank page: "The Preface to the Account of Denmark, and the Translator's Preface to the Franco-Gallia, are justly esteemed two of the most manly, & noble Compositions, in their kind, in the English Language."

In volume 2 of these works (which includes a copy of the 1721 printing of Hotman's *Francogallia*), Hollis has written on the title page "A most curious valuable Treatise." Above "The Translator's Preface" he commented, "Observe this Preface. The Translator's preface to the Franco-gallia, and the preface to the Acc. of Denmark are two of the NOBLEST prefaces in the English language."<sup>35</sup> These "Golden prefaces" were to remain a staple of the eighteenth-century-commonwealth outlook in Europe and North America.<sup>36</sup>

The high-water mark of Molesworth's reputation, prompted especially by the reception of the *Account of Denmark*, was achieved in the second half of the eighteenth century. On this subject he was, as Aylmer has noted, "much the most controversial writer of the whole century."<sup>37</sup> Molesworth had inside knowledge of the Danish context, having been chosen by William III in 1689 as envoy to counter Louis XIV's influence at that court. More specifically, his task was to organize the supply

34. Harvard Houghton Library, call mark Typ 705.38.579, vol. 1 and vol. 2. I owe these references to the kindness of David Womersley.

35. *Franco-Gallia* (1721), Harvard Houghton Library, call mark \*EC75.H7267.Zz721h (A). Similar notes are reproduced in *Account of Denmark* (1738), Houghton Library, \*EC75.H7267.Zz738m. Again, I am very grateful to David Womersley for providing transcripts of this material.

36. See Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965; repr., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998).

37. G. E. Aylmer, "English Perceptions," in *Europe and Scandinavia: Aspects of Integration in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. G. Rystad (Lund: Esselte Studium, 1983), pp. 181-99, at p. 190.

of Danish troops for William's campaigns. The difficulty of arranging the exchange of subsidy for arms—and the deceitful behavior of the French faction—set the tone for Molesworth's hostility to the Danish monarchy.<sup>38</sup> Molesworth, a convinced follower of Sidney's anticourt disposition, clearly held no deference for Danish regality, as William King, a hostile source, reported. Molesworth broke protocols of access and indeed poached the Danish king's hares without remorse. As one hostile account noted, "These Actions being represented to the King, his Majesty was extremely offended at them, and showed it by the cold Reception the Envoy afterwards met with at Court."<sup>39</sup> There was little surprise then that Molesworth, declared *persona non grata*, took pleasure in reproducing Sidney's notorious annotation of the ambassadorial commonplace book: *manus haec, inimica tyrannisi ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem*.<sup>40</sup>

Molesworth's account of the constitutional revolution of the *lex regia* in Denmark of 1660 (which saw Gothic liberty displaced by a formal legal hereditary absolutism) remained dominant for a century. His bold question, "How did the Danes lose their freedom?" was a persistently urgent one not only for those contemporaries in the British Isles, but for Frenchmen living under Louis XIV, and later for Middlesex citizens and Americans living under George III.

There is little doubt that Molesworth was a key player in the republican refurbishment of Whig ideology after 1689. As an active diplomat and politician in Westminster and Dublin, he both engaged in practical politics and developed an ideological account of republican traditions adapted to present circumstances. He was the backbone of the "true," "old," and "real" Whiggism, which as M. A. Goldie has put it, "remained consistently committed to a fundamental redistribution of constitutional power."<sup>41</sup> Molesworth's works—both the *Account of Denmark* and his edi-

38. M. Lane, "The Relations Between England and the Northern Powers, 1689–1697. Part I. Denmark." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5 (1911), pp. 157–91, at p. 161.

39. William King, *Animadversions on a pretended account of Denmark* (1694), preface, pp. 10–11.

40. "This hand, an enemy to tyrants, seeks with the sword calm peace in freedom."

41. M. A. Goldie, "The Roots of True Whiggism 1688–94." *History of Political Thought* 1 (1980): 197.

tion of *Francogallia*—combined to provide eighteenth-century British, European, and North American audiences with a robust and authoritative account of the institutional and historical origins of liberty in the West.

Building on traditions that drew from Tacitus's *Germania* and a variety of ancient constitutionalisms, Molesworth provided a comparative account of both the flourishing and the corruption of political liberty. The historical cast of the ancient freedoms of the Franks recorded in the edition of Hotman was balanced by the analysis of a contemporary sociology of liberty in the Danish example. Molesworth's project was not naively nostalgic, but sought to establish the existence of living traditions in modern institutions and to nurture such traditions where they already existed. As he explained, in translating the account of the "ancient free state" of Europe, he desired to instruct "the only Possessors of true Liberty in the World, what Right and Title they have to that Liberty."<sup>42</sup>

Many historians have engaged with the political uses of the past in the early modern period. Accounts of the complex historical relationships between the ancient constitution, the feudal law, the so-called Gothic bequest, and the Norman Conquest, all had contested consequences for contemporary political society.<sup>43</sup> As J. G. A. Pocock has underscored, "to understand the role of historical argument after 1688–89, we must understand that the Gothic liberties and the Norman Yoke, as well as the ancient constitution and the feudal law, persisted into the coming century."<sup>44</sup> Although not explored by Pocock, Molesworth's writings were the starting point for the continuation and repositioning of this earlier discourse. His encounter with the Gothic past operated in a more profound way than simply the invocation of perdurable historical precedent. Far from declining as a way of engaging with the present, the events of the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, and the 1701 Act of Settlement, prompted a renegotiation of past and present. These "Gothic" claims—articulated powerfully by writers like Nathaniel Bacon and Algernon Sidney—were

42. "Translator's Preface," *Francogallia*, p. 167.

43. See R. J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688–1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

44. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957, repr. 1987), p. 361.

distinct from the immemorialism of legal mindsets articulated earlier in the seventeenth century, which proclaimed the precedence of common law. A core value, and one fundamental to Molesworth's account, was that any crown was held conditionally by consent of the people. Molesworth's decision to redeploy the Gothic model described in *Francogallia* for eighteenth-century readers meant that those who encountered the text had to establish for themselves the pertinence of sixteenth-century arguments for their own contemporary contexts.<sup>45</sup>

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw very different (and competing) historical constructions of these "Gothic" traditions. Some recovered fundamental constitutions; others explored the history of the elective crown in Saxon history. Historical inquiries into the nature of the Norman Conquest, into the origins and authority of Parliament (or more specifically into the rights and privileges of the Commons), were frequently influenced by accounts of these continental "Gothic" experiences. Indeed, the permeability of this pan-European constitution implied that nationally specific experience was potentially comprehended from these broader traditions. Molesworth's writings are a classic expression of this. In the *Account* he delivered an analysis of Danish tyranny; in his edition of Hotman he presented the glories of Frankish liberty. Both of these works were regarded as having specific pertinence to the contemporary British experience, and British readers were expected to make sense of these nonindigenous traditions and apply them to their own circumstances.

The strength of Molesworth's writing was that, as Colin Kidd has noted, it delivered a "robust science of society," which resonated with a variety of powerful anti-absolutist discourses exploring the ethnic and institutional dimensions of liberty. After Molesworth, "in France as well as England, Denmark had become a byword for modern despotism."<sup>46</sup> More important, Molesworth's *Account* delivered a method as well as a mes-

45. See J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Dial, 1928), p. 310, who makes the same point about Hotman's original readers.

46. C. Kidd, "Northern Antiquity: The Ethnology of Liberty in Eighteenth-Century Europe," in *Northern Antiquities and National Identities*, ed. K. Haakonssen and H. Horstboll ([Copenhagen]: Royal Danish Academy, 2008), text pp. 19–40 at p. 29 and notes pp. 307–11.