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William Jones's Ancient Theology

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William Jones's
Ancient Theology

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Swiss National Science Foundation

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	III
PREFACE	VI
1. JONES'S MISSIONS	1
2. JONES, ANQUETIL-DUPERRON, AND BRYANT	6
3. PRIMEVAL RELIGION	11
4. MĀYĀ	16
5. LAFITAU'S SYSTEM	23
6. RAMSAY AND THE FIGURISTS	29
7. JONES'S PROJECT	40
8. BAILLY'S VISION	47
9. GIORGI'S TWO BUDDHAS	53
10. DABISTAN AND DESATIR	60
11. VESTIGES OF PARADISE	66
12. ANCIENT THEOLOGY	71
APPENDIXES	78
1. Jones's Discourse on the Hindus	78
2. Jones's Discourse on the Persians	90
3. Jones's Discourse on the Origin and Families of Nations	107
BIBLIOGRAPHY	118

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1:	William Jones, 1746–1794 (by unknown artist; 1799)	iv
Fig. 2:	Jones’s pamphlet against Anquetil-Duperron (1771)	5
Fig. 3:	Illustration to Jones’s Essay on the Gods of Greece, Italy and India (<i>Asiatick Researches</i> vol. 1, p. 249)	10
Fig. 4:	Title page of Bishop Huët’s <i>Treatise on the Location of Paradise</i> (1691)	15
Fig. 5:	Frontispiece of Lafitau’s <i>Moeurs des Sauvages Ameriquains</i> , 1724.	22
Fig. 6:	Part of Lafitau’s illustrations about the origin and progress of idolatry. (Lafitau 1724:131).	28
Fig. 7:	Title page of vol. 1 of Ramsay’s <i>Voyages de Cyrus</i> , 1728	34
Fig. 8:	Jones’s translation of the <i>Manava Dharma Shastra</i> (1796)	39
Fig. 9:	Title page of Bailly’s <i>Letters on the Origin of the Sciences and of the Peoples of Asia</i> (1777)	46
Fig. 10:	Title page of Giorgi’s <i>Alphabetum Tibetanum</i> (1762)	55
Fig. 11:	Priest of the ancient Persian fire cult from Hyde’s <i>Historia religionis veterum persarum</i> (1700:374)	59

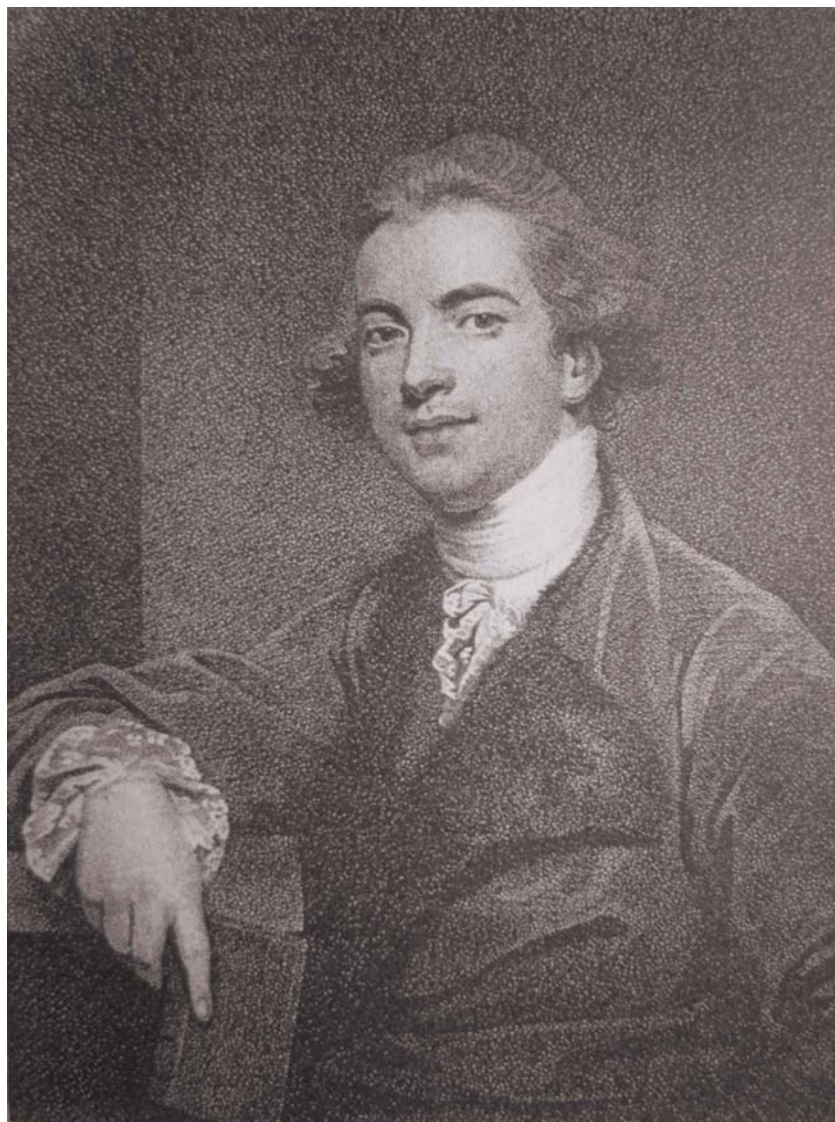


Fig. 1: William Jones, 1746–1794 (by unknown artist; 1799)

To my brother Markus,
fellow traveller

PREFACE

This book was born as the eighth chapter of my forthcoming *The Birth of Orientalism* (University of Pennsylvania Press). My work on Jones, one of the early sources of Schopenhauer, was supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF; grant 101511-116443). Because the original manuscript of *The Birth of Orientalism* was far too voluminous even without the originally planned appendixes (the sixth and ninth discourses of Jones), I decided, prodded by Victor Mair's kind offer, to publish the section on William Jones separately as a *Sino-Platonic Paper*. This allowed me to include not only the sixth and ninth discourse of Jones, which formed part of the original manuscript before submission, but also the very interesting and pertinent third discourse. Furthermore, I added in the form of footnotes the French and Latin texts on which my translations are based.

William JONES (1746–1794) is an excellent example for one of the arguments of my *Birth of Orientalism*, namely, that modern orientalism is not the product of a sudden transition from the absence of orientalism before the colonial period to its appearance through the political and commercial "colonialist" involvement with "the Orient." Rather, modern orientalism endured a painful birth process that lasted several centuries. Long before colonialist ideology and greed set in, this process began in 16th-century Japan where European missionaries for the first time engaged in serious research of non-Abrahamic religions, acquired the linguistic expertise to handle related primary source materials, and were forced to confront "sects" or "laws" that featured monasteries, monks and nuns, rosaries and even heaven and hell yet seemed to lack any notion of a creator God and familiar biblical features such as Adam and Eve in paradise, the fall, the deluge, the tower of Babel, etc.

In the 17th century, the main stage of Europe's confrontation with non-Abrahamic Asian religions moved from Japan to China, and in the 18th century from China to India. At the time of William Jones's birth in 1746 this encounter was thus already two centuries old and about to enter a critical phase. While the Jesuit order was on the fast track to its 1773 dissolution,

traditional European orientalism began to gradually free itself of its servitude to Christian theology. Before that time, academic as well as missionary orientalism was essentially a handmaiden of theology and the term "orientalist" was often used for students and teachers of languages such as Syriac, Hebrew, or Arabic. Their knowledge formed, as the career of the Frenchman A.-H. ANQUETIL-DUPERRON (1731–1805) shows in exemplary fashion, part of an enhanced theology that used the knowledge of oriental languages and sources to deepen the understanding and interpretation of the Bible and serve the Christian mission. In the 1750s, Anquetil was one of the pioneers who decided—under the influence of Chevalier Andrew RAMSAY (1686–1753), the Jesuit figurists in China, and France's early crop of secular sinologists including Joseph DE GUIGNES (1720–1800)—to explore ancient texts of non-Abrahamic Asian religions. This endeavor necessitated the study of ancient languages such as ancient Chinese (the Jesuit figurists and de Guignes), ancient Iranian (Anquetil-Duperron), and Sanskrit (missionaries such as François PONS and Gaston-Laurent COEURDOUX). However, the case studies of *The Birth of Orientalism* show that such orientalist endeavors were inextricably linked to the promotion, defense, and reform of Christianity and its world-view. This is also true of early British colonial administrators like John Zephaniah HOLWELL (1711–1798) and Alexander DOW (1730s–1779) who surprised Europe in the late 1760s by translations of Indian texts that purportedly were much older than the Bible. Though they foreshadow a new kind of orientalism less enslaved to biblical studies, men like Holwell and Dow appear to have been less interested in the dispassionate study of Asian sacred literature than in the reform of Christianity through a kind of oriental shock therapy.¹

The emancipation of oriental studies from the long-time status as *ancilla theologiae* (handmaiden of theology) was a very gradual process that lasted well into the 19th century.² A crucial turning point was the creation of the Asiatick Society in Calcutta by William Jones (1784). The central goal of the society's organ, the *Asiatick Researches*, was the dispassionate, objective

¹ For the case of Holwell see Chapter 6 of my forthcoming *The Birth of Orientalism*.

² See the recent studies of 19th century German orientalism by Mangold (2004), Polaschegg (2005), and Rabault-Feuerhahn (2008).

study and presentation of data about Asia including Asian antiquities and religions. But the example of William Jones shows that the shackles of the traditional Judeo-Christian worldview and of Eurocentrism were not easily and suddenly shed. Late 18th-century figures like Jones and Anquetil-Duperron mark, each in his own way, the gradual transition from Bible-centered premodern orientalism to a more modern and secular orientalism.

I wish to thank Victor Mair, whose seminars were an inspiration during my student days in Philadelphia in the early 1980s, for accepting this book in his *Sino-Platonic Papers* series, and to my friend Steven Antinoff who brought me there. I am also immeasurably grateful to my wife Monica Esposito who so enthusiastically accompanied this book's gestation that she can pass as its mother, and to my brother Pius App whose generosity has helped Monica and me over the years to pursue our far-flung interests. I dedicate this book to another of my four brothers, Markus, with whom I discovered India in 1973. While I left the subcontinent with a feeling of profound ignorance and a thirst for knowledge that has led to books such as the present one, my fellow *indicopleustes* Markus became enamored of Indian herbs and spices and has ever since been a good-humored and generous host as well as a gifted cook for his expatriate brother, his wife, and countless friends and acquaintances.

1. JONES'S MISSIONS

Edward Said has described A.-H. ANQUETIL-DUPERRON (1731–1805) as an “eccentric theoretician of egalitarianism ... who traveled to Asia in order to prove the actual primitive existence of a Chosen People and of the Biblical genealogies” but instead “overshot his early goal” and ended up translating Zoroastrian texts and thus “for the first time” revealed to Europe the Orient “in the materiality of its texts, languages, and civilizations” (Said 1994:76–77). In contrast to the French pioneer hero whose Oriental labors “opened large vistas,” Anquetil’s contemporary William JONES (1746–1794) “closed them down, codifying, tabulating, comparing” (p. 77). Jones thus figures as one of the major villains in Said’s *Orientalism* where he is portrayed as the quintessential orientalist:

To rule and to learn, then to compare Orient with Occident: these were Jones’s goals, which, with an irresistible impulse always to codify, to subdue the infinite variety of the Orient to a “complete digest” of laws, figures, customs, and works, he is believed to have achieved. (Said 1994:78)

As proof of this impulse Said adduced the list of “Objects of Enquiry during my residence in Asia” which Jones wrote down on July 12, 1783 while sailing to India:

He enumerated among the topics of his investigation “the Laws of the Hindus and Mohammedans, Modern Politics and Geography of Hindustan, Best Mode of Governing Bengal, Arithmetic and Geometry, and Mixed Sciences of the Asiaticks, Medicine, Chemistry, Surgery, and Anatomy of the Indians, Natural Productions of India, Poetry, Rhetoric and Morality of Asia, Music of the Eastern Nations, Trade, Manufacture, Agriculture, and Commerce of India,” and so forth. (Said 1994:78)

Lincoln (1999:84) has pointed out that what in Said looks like a continuous quoted passage is in reality an edited list. It exemplifies, I think, Said's own irresistible impulse to subdue variety. Jones' list indeed begins with the laws of the Hindus and Mohammedans, but the next three items were apparently not compatible with Said's vision of the colonialist orientalist Jones. Jones' full list reads:

Objects of Enquiry during my residence in Asia.

1. The Laws of the Hindus and Mohammedans.
2. The History of the Ancient World.
3. Proofs and Illustrations of Scripture.
4. Traditions concerning the Deluge, &c.
5. Modern Politics and Geography of Hindustan.
6. Best Mode of governing Bengal.
7. Arithmetic and Geometry, and mixed Sciences of the Asiatics.
8. Medicine, Chemistry, Surgery, and Anatomy of the Indians.
9. Natural Productions of India.
10. Poetry, Rhetoric, and Morality of Asia.
11. Music of the Eastern Nations.
12. The Shi-King, or 300 Chinese Odes.
13. The best accounts of Tibet and Cashmir.
14. Trade, Manufactures, Agriculture, and Commerce of India.
15. Mogul Constitution, contained in the Defteri Alemghiri, and Ayein Acbari.
16. Mahratta Constitution. (Jones 1993:2.3–4)

While traditionally much weight was given to the portrayal of Jones as a pioneer of comparative linguistics and as the father of the Indo-European hypothesis (Olender 2002:6), research by Aarsleff (1967), Trautmann (1997) and Lincoln (1999) focused on some of the missing items in Said's list and stressed the ethnological character of Jones's anniversary discourses. Trautmann summarizes his view as follows:

It is my argument that Jones's proposal of the Indo-European language family is better understood when we recognize that the character of Jones's project was primarily ethnological, not linguistic; that his ethnology is of a kind that we may call Mosaic, that is, an ethnology whose frame is supplied by the story of the descent of Noah in the book of Genesis, attributed to Moses, in the Bible; that his proximate sources were the ethnological writings of Jacob Bryant and Sir Isaac Newton; and that Jones and the new Orientalism of the Calcutta Sanskritists need to be included in the narrative of the history of ethnology. (Trautmann 1997:40–1)

From this perspective, the creation of the Indo-European concept and Jones's role in this venture appear not as a proto-Nazi endeavor—the "Aryan" Jones—but rather as one of numerous efforts to recover "the lost language of Noah and Adam" (Trautmann 1997:52). According to Trautmann, Jones' famous yearly discourses are set in a "Biblical frame" which, though not explicitly discussed until the ninth discourse, is "present at the very outset in the aspiration to determine whether the origin of the Asian nations is that which we generally ascribe to them" (p. 42). Jones' goal, in this view, is a reactionary one:

It becomes clear in the ninth discourse that the entire project is one of forming a rational defense of the Bible out of the materials collected in Oriental scholarship, more specifically a defense of the Mosaic account of human history in its earliest times. (Trautmann 1997:42)

In Trautmann's wake Bruce Lincoln came to almost the same conclusion. He also saw the Bible, Newton, and Jacob Bryant as Jones's main inspirations, and though he detected a "contradictory" attitude toward the Hebrew Bible he maintained that Jones had "since childhood been convinced of the inspired, inerrant nature of Scripture" and that "the ultimate goal toward which he organized his lectures was 'scientific' validation of the Genesis account" (Lincoln 1999:91).

To support their arguments, both Trautmann and Lincoln focus on the postdiluvian phase of the Genesis narrative, that is, the association of the world's languages and peoples with the

three sons of Noah. This certainly was one major outcome of Jones's inquiry, as the content of his ninth discourse ("On the Origins of Nations;" see Appendix 3) illustrates. But the second item of Jones's list of objects of enquiry and, as we will see, many of his arguments in the yearly discourses point to a broader interest in the history of the pre-diluvian, "ancient" world. Some of Europe's brightest minds in various fields (for example Newton, Leibniz, Voltaire, Kant, P.S. Pallas, and Buffon) had a pronounced interest in this elusive earliest phase of human history. The study of fossils, geological features, racial characteristics, languages, myths, and religions all formed part of a giant research project which boils down to the simple question: where do we come from? It is only natural that the Old Testament's creation story played a prominent role in this Europe-wide quest for origins. In its course the Genesis narrative, which had been a solid basis for so many centuries, slowly crumbled under the massive weight of accumulating evidence. When during the 17th and 18th centuries the center of historical gravity gradually shifted from the Eastern Mediterranean towards Asia, a number of prominent fingers began to point towards India, Kashmir, and Tibet as the possible cradle of humanity (App 2008). Jones's items 2, 3, 4, and 13 show that in this regard Jones was a man of his times. If some of his listed topics seem to indicate a stake in reconciling secular and sacred history and in proving that the Bible was right, the first lines of his publication plans just underneath strengthen this impression:

To print and publish the *Gospel* of St. Luke in Arabic.

To publish Law Tracts in Persian or Arabic.

To print and publish the *Psalms* of *David* in Persian Verse. (Jones 1993:2.4)

Was Jones, deep in his heart, on a Christian mission? Was he—like Newton, Whiston and so many other Englishmen—using science to prop up the crumbling biblical narrative? Was his oriental research in general, and the course of his annual discourses in particular, driven by a pious urge to defend Moses and to validate the Bible? And did his long sojourn in India and his study of Persian and Indian sources trigger any substantial changes in his outlook?

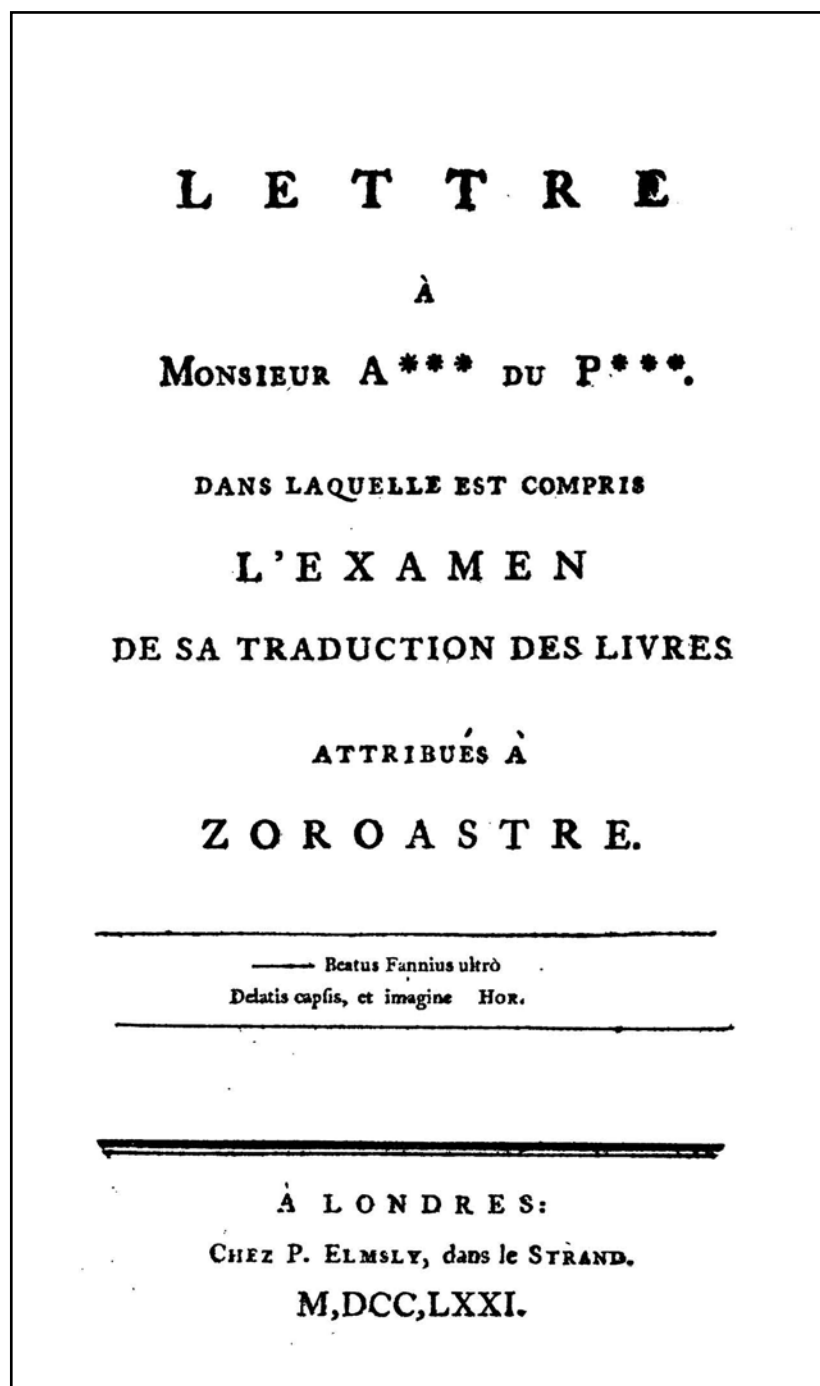


Fig. 2: Jones's pamphlet against Anquetil-Duperron (1771)

2. JONES, ANQUETIL-DUPERRON, AND BRYANT

Thirteen years before his India voyage, in an anonymous attack pamphlet directed at Anquetil-Duperron and his *Zend Avesta* of 1771, the 25-year-old Jones had in impeccable French expressed his indignation that someone would seek a "new" religion while delegating the care of the true religion to others (Jones 1771:3). To "discover false religions" (p. 3) was, in the eyes of young Jones, a totally unnecessary effort:

Even if one were to suppose for a moment that this collection of baloney really contains the laws and the religion of the ancient Persians: was it worth travelling so far to instruct us about them? Believe me, Monsieur, it would have been better to stick to your feudal laws and your Roman catholicism which apparently you cherish. You would have made a great lawyer if you speak as well as you write, or an excellent schoolmaster, with a little bit more pride (p. 9).³

Duperron's *Zend-Avesta*, Jones needled, was so worthless that even people like Voltaire in search of materials to undermine biblical authority were disappointed:

If such opinions [of critics] are not entirely unfounded, it follows that your goal was neither beautiful nor important; that enlightened Europe had no need whatsoever of your *Zend Avesta*; that you have translated it entirely in vain and

³ "Mais supposons, pour un moment, que ce recueil de galimatias contienne réellement les loix et la religion des anciens Perses; était-ce la peine d'aller si loin pour nous en instruire? Croyez-nous, Monsieur, vous auriez mieux fait de vous en tenir à vos belles loix féodales, et à votre religion Romaine, qu'apparemment vous chérissiez. Vous auriez pû être un grand Avocat, si vous parlez aussi bien que vous écrivez; ou un excellent scholastique, avec tant soit peu plus d'orgueil." (Jones 1771:9)

have uselessly wasted eighteen years that ought to have been precious to you (p. 410).⁴

Even the fact that Anquetil studied languages which no European had hitherto mastered was worthy of reproach:

You might say: "I wanted to learn two ancient languages that no European knew before me." How small is the glory of knowing! However, nobody intends to deprive you of this glory: nobody wants it (p. 410).⁵

Compiling "useless junk" such as Avestan texts and "falling in love with Indian fables" (p. 18) was, from Jones' perspective in 1771, entirely unworthy of "a man living in our century" and sure to trigger little more than the yawns and ennui of the intelligent public. The sacred scriptures of the Brahmans make no exception, as Jones's advice to Anquetil shows:

You have insinuated that you have some plan to return to India in order to translate the sacred scriptures of the Brahmans. Oh! for the love of yourself and your public, abandon this thought once and for all. Your description of the lingam worshippers does not convey an advantageous idea of the Indian philosophers.

⁴ "Si ces raisonnemens, Monsieur, ne portent pas absolument à faux, il en résulte que votre objet n'était ni *beau*, ni *important*; que l'Europe éclairée n'avait nul besoin de votre Zende Vasta (sic); que vous l'avez traduit à pure perte; et que vous avez prodigué inutilement pendant dix-huit ans un tems qui devait vous être précieux." (Jones 1771:11)

⁵ "Mais direz-vous, 'j'ai voulu apprendre deux langues anciennes, qu'aucun Européen n'a su avant moi.' Quelle petite gloire que de savoir! on ne veut pas cependant vous priver de cette gloire: personne ne vous la disputera" (Jones 1771:11). In Lord Teignmouth's 1807 edition of Jones's works the sentence beginning with "Quelle petite gloire" is more aggressive. It reads: "Quelle petite gloire que de savoir ce que personne ne sait, et n'a que faire de savoir!" (A small glory indeed to know what no one knows and no one needs to know!). Did Lord Teignmouth make this change based on Jones's correction or because he did not want to burden Jones with such a general statement unworthy of man known for his erudition?

Besides: has the translation of the Zendavesta not been plenty for you? Honestly, I advise you to make better use of your time [...] (p. 50).⁶

One of the things that irked Jones was the disrespect that Anquetil had exhibited in describing the appearance of "the famous researcher of antiquity," Jacob BRYANT (1715–1804), whose work in history and antiquity had met "universal acclaim"(p. 23). At that time, the fame of Bryant was still due to his *Observations and Inquiries relating to various parts of Ancient History* of 1767. But in 1774, three years after Jones' attack on Anquetil, the first volume of Bryant's *magnum opus* appeared. The book's title and subtitle merit being quoted in full:

A New System, or, an Analysis of Antient Mythology: Wherein an Attempt is made to divest Tradition of Fable; and to reduce the Truth to its Original Purity. In this Work is given an History of the Babylonians, Chaldaeans, Egyptians, Canaanites, Helladians, Ionians, Leleges, Dorians, Pelasgi; also of the Scythae, Indoscythae, Ethiopians, Phoenecians, The Whole contains an Account of the principal Events in the first Ages, from the Deluge to the Dispersion: Also of the various Migrations, which ensued, and the Settlements made afterwards in different Parts; Circumstances of great Consequence, which were subsequent to the Gentile History of Moses.

In this three-volume work published between 1774 and 1776, Bryant attempted to reconstruct the early history of mankind along lines that reconciled secular and mythical history with its sacred counterpart. Jones' deep interest in Bryant's work and its underlying questions is evident from the fact that in 1777 he spent two days with the author and gushed: "I love the man and am wonderfully diverted by his book" (Cannon 1970, 1: 242).⁷ As his title indicates, Bryant

⁶ "Vous insinuez que vous avez quelque dessein de retourner à l'Inde pour y traduire les livres sacrés des Brahmanes. Oh! pour l'amour de vous-même, et pour celui du public, ne songez plus à ce projet. Votre description des *Linganistes* ne nous donne pas une idée trop avantageuse des philosophes Indiens. D'ailleurs, n'est-ce pas assez d'avoir traduit le Zendavasta (sic)? Croyez-nous, Monsieur, employez mieux votre tems [...]" (Jones 1771:50)

⁷ Letter to Viscount Althorp of September 23, 1777.

had focused on the period between the deluge and mankind's dispersion. Facets of Bryant's Bible-inspired post-deluge ethnology and its partial adoption by Jones have been discussed by Trautmann (1997: 43–61) and Lincoln (1999: 85–100). Here the focus will be on Jones's view of what Bryant in the title of his *magnum opus* calls "Original Purity," namely, humanity's primeval religion *before* the deluge. My argument can be summarized in the following points:

1. Jones' project, outlined in his yearly discourses as President of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, was not primarily linguistic or ethnological but theological. It stands in the hallowed tradition of *prisca theologia*, ancient theology, or (to employ the term I use in *The Birth of Orientalism*) Ur-tradition.
2. The project's basis, Jones's view of mankind's primeval religion before Noah and the deluge, gradually evolved during Jones's sojourn in India.
3. While Jones defended some features of the Old Testament narrative such as chronology, he used Oriental sources to develop a new perspective on antediluvial religion.
4. The most important sources for Jones's ancient theology were not only the Old Testament's book of Genesis and Bryant's work but also texts which have so far received little if any attention: the *Dabistan*, a 17th-century Indian book of illuminist background; the Persian translation of the *Upanishads* and a book on the convergence of Sufism and Hinduism by Prince Dara Shikoh; Sufi poems; Indian sources such as the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* and the *Bhagavadgītā*; Ramsay's *Voyages de Cyrus*; Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum*; and Bailly's *Histoire de l'astronomie ancienne*.
5. Contrary to Said's portrayal, Jones's and Anquetil's projects were of similar inspiration, had an analogous theological and historical outlook, shared crucial sources, and came to similar conclusions with regard to biblical authority and India's ancient theology.



Fig. 3: Illustration to Jones's Essay on the Gods of Greece, Italy and India (*Asiatick Researches* vol. 1, p. 249)

3. PRIMEVAL RELIGION

Jones's essay "On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India," written in 1784 but revised before publication in the first volume of the *Asiatick Researches*,⁸ has often been criticized for the utter baselessness of its comparisons and identifications. F. Max MÜLLER (1823–1900), for instance, dealt with this in an essay entitled "On False Analogies in Comparative Theology" (1895, 4:204–210). Here our eye is on the overall thrust of Jones's essay. It deals with "features of resemblance, too strong to have been accidental" between "different systems of polytheism" (AR1:221). It is in the "popular worship" of the old Greeks, Italians, and Hindus that Jones found "great similarity," and this similarity also existed "between their strange religions and that of *Egypt, China, Persia, Phrygia, Phoenicia, Syria*; to which, perhaps, we may safely add some of the southern kingdoms and even islands of *America*" (AR1:221). Since the "*Gothic* system" of Northern Europe was "almost the same in another dress," Jones inferred a "general union or affinity between the most distinguished inhabitants of the primitive world" (pp. 221–2). This general union of polytheistic cults, however, was not the original religion of primeval mankind; rather, it was a "deviation" of an earlier religion which consisted of "the rational adoration of the only true GOD" (p. 222). Jones's primeval religion was thus a pure monotheism which had "too early" (p. 222) degenerated into a root polytheism whose branches can be found all over the globe.

Obviously such a view presupposes a monogenetic origin and a divine revelation as proclaimed in the Old Testament. Though Jones insisted that he had "no system of my own to maintain" (p. 225) and that rather than "the truth of our national religion" he had "truth itself" at heart (p. 225), he felt that his "disquisitions concerning the manners and conduct of our species in early times" were "of solid importance in an age when some intelligent and virtuous persons are inclined to doubt the authenticity of the accounts, delivered by *Moses*, concerning the primitive world" (pp. 224–5). Such doubts could lead to grave consequences:

⁸ The title *Asiatick Researches* will henceforth be abbreviated in references as AR followed by the volume number.

Either the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*, all due allowances being made for a figurative Eastern style, are true, or the whole fabric of our national religion is false; a conclusion which none of us, I trust, would wish to be drawn. I, who cannot help believing the divinity of the *Messiah*, from the undisputed antiquity and manifest completion of many prophecies, especially those of *Isaiah*, in the only person recorded in history, to whom they are applicable, am obliged of course to believe the sanctity of the venerable books to which that sacred person refers as genuine. (AR1:225)

The earliest essay by Jones on Indian religion thus begins with a seemingly unequivocal endorsement of revelationism, Old Testament prophecy, and Christianity as legitimate heir of Old Testament religion. However, there is an undertone of doubt in this proclamation, and Jones wisely left the door open for divine revelations that might have preceded that of Moses:

If any cool unbiased reasoner will clearly convince me, that *Moses* drew his narrative through *Egyptian* conduits from the primeval fountains of *Indian* literature, I shall esteem him as a friend for having weaned my mind from a capital error, and promise to stand among the foremost in assisting to circulate the truth, which he has ascertained. (p. 225)

As one would guess in the light of this remark, the determination of the age of sources and chronology in general were among Jones's major interests. In this early essay some of the main issues already raise their heads: the question of "a primeval tradition in this country [India] of the *universal deluge* described by Moses" and thus the "*time* when the genuine *Hindu* chronology really begins" (p. 234), and "the four *Yug's*" (yugas, world ages) of India and their relationship to the Greek and Roman world ages (gold, silver, copper, and earthen) as well as to possible biblical equivalents: the *Diluvian* or purest; *Patriarchal* or pure; *Mosaick* or less pure; and *prophetical* or impure (pp. 236–7). Of course the age of the reputedly oldest scriptures of India was also of concern. Though they might be "far older than other *Sanscrit* compositions," Jones recognized some limits:

I am sensible how much these remarks will offend the warm advocates for *Indian* antiquity; but we must not sacrifice truth to a base fear of giving offence. That the *Védas* were actually written before the flood, I shall never believe. (p. 238)

Nevertheless, for Jones some Indian sources were indisputably among the oldest extant testaments of ancient humanity; in fact they appeared to him so old that he was "persuaded, that, by means of the *Puránas*, we shall in time discover all the learning of the *Egyptians* without decyphering their hieroglyphicks" (p. 254). At this stage Jones was strongly inclined "to believe that *Egyptian* priests have actually come from the *Nile* to the *Gangà* and *Yamunà*;" but like the philosophers of ancient Greece, these Egyptians had "visited the *Sarmans* of *India* ... rather to acquire than to impart knowledge" (p. 271). This axis of exchange between Egypt as "the grand source of knowledge for the *western*, and *India* for the more *eastern*, parts of the globe," though only supported by "circumstantial evidence," (p. 268) appeared to point to a common origin of all polytheism and idolatry:

Whatever colonies may have come from the *Nile* to the *Ganges*, we shall, perhaps, agree at last with Mr. *Bryant*, that *Egyptians*, *Indians*, *Greeks*, and *Italians*, proceeded originally from one central place, and that the same people carried their religion and sciences into *China* and *Japan*: may we not add, even to *Mexico* and *Peru*? (p. 268)

The bible-conform insistence on humanity's origin from one place—ultimately the spot where Noah's ark stranded—formed the bottom line for Bryant, Jones, and most other Europeans.⁹ Though Jones seemed to have doubts about some of his own evidence for the identities of the gods of Greece, Italy, and India, he believed in a pre-mosaic unity of idolatry.

Be all this as it may, I am persuaded that a connection subsisted between the old idolatrous nations of *Egypt*, *India*, *Greece*, and *Italy*, long before they emigrated

⁹ However, there were notable exceptions, for example Voltaire (see Chapter 1 of my forthcoming *Birth of Orientalism*).

to their several settlements, and consequently before the birth of *Moses*: but the proof of this proposition will in no degree affect the truth and sanctity of the *Mosaick* History, which, if confirmation were necessary, it would rather tend to confirm (AR1:271).

Such confirmation of course depended on Jones' conviction that pre-mosaic united idolatry was only a degenerated form of the pure monotheistic Ur-religion that preceded it. Rather than the dating of Moses, the originality and revelatory basis of his account was at stake:

There is no shadow then of a foundation for an opinion, that *Moses* borrowed the first nine or ten chapters of *Genesis* from the literature of *Egypt*: still less can the adamantine pillars of our *Christian* faith be moved by the result of any debates on the comparative antiquity of the *Hindus* and *Egyptians*, or of any inquiries into the *Indian* theology (p. 272).

Since Jones's earliest essay on Indian religion focused on establishing a common origin of idolatry and polytheism, the question of mankind's earliest religion was barely touched. But it was this question that brought a common theme to Jones's yearly discourses after the opening discourse of 1784.

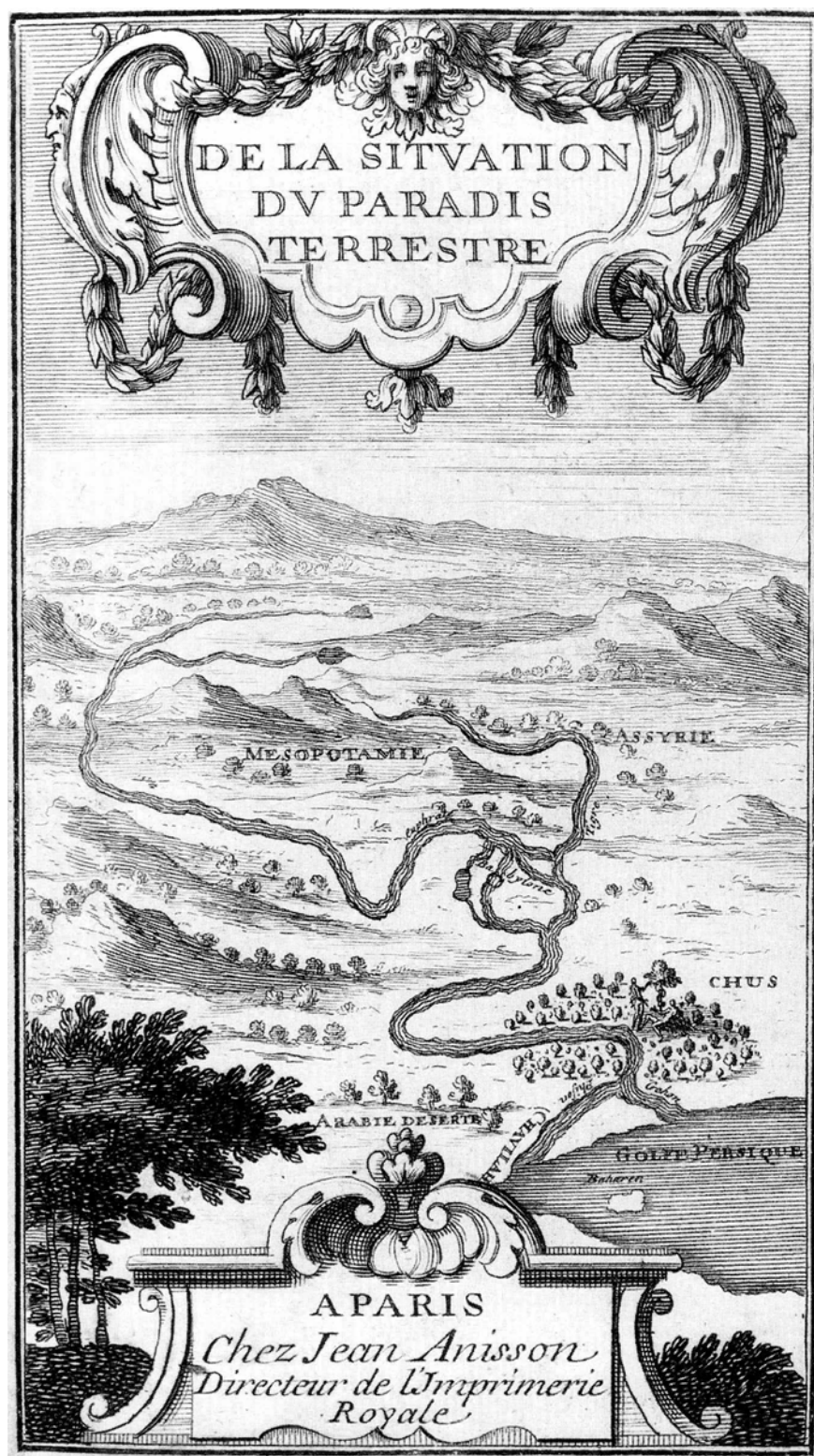


Fig.4: Title page of Bishop Huët's Treatise on the Location of Paradise (1691)

4. MĀYĀ

Half a year after his arrival in India Jones did not yet think of learning Sanskrit. In his letter of 24 April 1784 he wrote to Charles WILKINS (1749–1836), the first Englishman with solid knowledge of Sanskrit:

Happy should I be to follow you in the same track; but life is too short and my necessary business too long for me to think at my age of acquiring a new language, when those which I have already learned contain such a mine of curious and agreeable information (Cannon 1970:2.646).

Such “curious information” had just come to his attention through a Persian translation of an old Sanskrit text, the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*. Jones’s friend Nathaniel Brassey HALHED (1751–1830) had, in his introduction to *A Code of Gentoo Laws* of 1776, described Vāsiṣṭha as “Bisesht Mahāmoonee, or the most Wise, a great Writer and Prophet, who is said to have lived in the Sutte Jogue, or first Age of the World” and as author of “one of the most ancient and most orthodox” commentaries of the Vedas (Halhed 1776:xxxii). No wonder then that Jones marveled at his stunning discovery:

A version of the *Jōg Bashest* [*Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*] was brought to me the other day, in which I discovered much of the Platonick metaphysics and morality; nor can I help believing, that Plato drew many of his notions (through Egypt, where he resided for some time) from the sages of Hindustan (Cannon 1970:2.646).

Whether the Persian version of the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* studied by Jones was the translation commissioned by Prince Dārā¹⁰ or an earlier one that the prince had thought inadequate

¹⁰ Crown prince Dārā Shukoh (1615–1659) was the eldest son of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and empress Mumtaz Mahal (whose grave site is the famous Taj Mahal). As the patron of translations of various Indian texts into Persian he exerted considerable influence on the early stages of modern orientalism. Of particular importance is the

(Qanungo 1952:103; Hasrat 1982:42): this book clearly had a major impact on Jones. Could it be that the manifold branches of ancient philosophy, just like those of idolatrous cults, also originated from a single common root? This version of the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* may well have been Jones’s first taste of Indian philosophy through Persian sources, and though he was aware that “Persian translations from the Shanscrit [sic] are so defective” (Cannon 1970:2.646) he was immediately thirsty for more. One month later, on May 14 of 1784, the extremely well-read intellectual raved about another translation from a Sanskrit text, the *Śrīmad Bhagwatam*:¹¹

I am inexpressibly amused by a Persian translation of an old Sanscrit book, called Siry Bhāgwat, which comprizes almost the whole of the *Hindu* religion, and contains the life and achievements of *Crishen*; it is by far the most entertaining book, on account of its novelty and wildness, that I ever read (Cannon 1970:2,649).¹²

The effect of such studies became evident in the *Hymn to Nārāyena* (Jones 1993, 13:302–9) which Jones wrote in the spring of 1785, still before he began to learn Sanskrit. When sending the unfinished hymn to Wilkins with a request for more names of the deity, Jones asserted that the subject of his hymn “is the sublimest that the human mind can conceive” (Cannon 1970: 2.669) and explained:

The doctrine is that of Parmenides and Plato, whom our *Berkley* [sic] follows, and I am strongly inclined to consider their philosophy as the only means of removing

Persian translation of 50 Upanishads which Anquetil-Duperron rendered into Latin and published in 1801/1802 under the title of *Oupnek’hat*.

¹¹ This refers to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (also known as *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*), one of the great texts of Sanskrit Hindu devotional literature. The first translation of this text into a European language (by Maridas Pillai into French) was based on a Tamil version and published in 1788 by Foucher d’Obsonville.

¹² A partial manuscript translation of this text by Halhed was published with some changes by Thomas Maurice in his *History of Hindostan*.

the difficulties which attend the common opinions concerning the *Material* world (pp. 669–70).

An Indian deity whose sublime doctrine corresponds to that of Parmenides, Plato, and the English empiricist George Berkeley (1685–1753), author of the famous *Treatise of the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710)? What doctrine was Jones thinking of? In the "Argument" introducing Jones's hymn the circle was drawn even wider:

A complete introduction to the following Ode would be no less than a full comment on the VAYDS and PURÁNS of the HINDUS, the remains of *Egyptian* and *Persian* Theology, and the tenets of the *Ionick* and *Italick* Schools (Jones 1993: 13.302).¹³

Jones declined to provide such full comment but hinted that he was thinking of a philosophy that overcomes "the inextricable difficulties attending the *vulgar notion of material substances*" (p. 302). Jones apparently thought of a kind of idealist theosophy in which "the Infinite Being, who is present at all times in all places, exhibits to the minds of his creatures a set of perceptions" (p. 302). While in Plato's cave metaphor, man only perceives the shadows of things as they really are, and in Berkeley's philosophy objects "exist only as far they are *perceived*" (p. 302), the Hindu philosophers keep speaking of *māyā*:

This *illusive operation* of the Deity the *Hindu* philosophers call, MĀYĀ, or *Deception*; and the word occurs in this sense more than once in the commentary on the *Rig Vayd*, by the great VASISHTHA, of which Mr. HALHED has given us an admirable specimen (p. 303).

Jones here referred to Halhed's introduction to *A Code of Gentoo Laws* of 1776 which cited the following praise of "the mighty Lord:"

¹³ "Vayds" refers to the Vedas and "Puráns" to the Indian literary genre of Purāṇas.

He is single, and than him there is Nothing greater. Brehm (the Spirit of God) is absorbed in Self-Contemplation: the same is the mighty Lord, who is present in every Part of Space, whose Omniscience, as expressed in the Reig Beid,¹⁴ I shall now explain. — Brehm is one, and to him there is no Second; such truly is Brehm. His Omniscience is self-inspired (or self-intelligent) and its Comprehension includes every possible Species (Halhed 1776:xxxv).

According to Halhed's translation adduced by Jones, this *Brehm* forms the core of all powers of intellect, powers of will, and powers of action; it is that which lets us hear, feel, perceive visible objects, etc. It is *Brehm* that "causes the Creation or the Annihilation of the Universe" and is called "the Lord of all" (p. xxxvi). Jones gave such thoughts poetic wings in the sixth stanza of his *Hymn to Náráyena* (1993, 13: 308):

Omniscient Spirit, whose all-ruling pow'r
Bids from each sense bright emanations beam;
Glow in the rainbow, sparkles in the stream,
Smiles in the bud, and glistens in the flow'r
That crowns each vernal bow'r;
Sighs in the gale, and warbles in the throat
Of ev'ry bird, that hails the bloomy spring,
Or tells his love in many a liquid note,
Whilst envious artists touch the rival string,
Till rocks and forests ring;
Breathes in rich fragrance from the sandal grove,
Or where the precious musk-deer playful rove;
In dulcet juice from clust'ring fruit distills,
And burns salubrious in the tasteful clove:
Soft banks and verd'rous hills
Thy present influence fills;

¹⁴ The *Rig Veda* is the oldest of the four Vedas.

In air, in floods, in caverns, woods, and plains;
Thy will inspirits all, thy sov'reign MAYA reigns.

Clearly the Persian translation of the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* studied by Jones had been of great help in gaining an understanding of the Indian concept of *māyā*. Like Anquetil in his roughly contemporaneous first *Oupnek'hat* translations (1787),¹⁵ Jones links *māyā* to the will and all-pervading creative power of the Godhead. Whereas Jones's first stanza of the hymn to Nārāyena "represents the sublimest attributes of the Supreme Being, and the three forms, in which they most clearly appear to us, *Power*, *Wisdom*, and *Goodness*, or, in the language of ORPHEUS and his disciples, *Love*," the second stanza "comprises the *Indian* and *Egyptian* doctrine of the Divine Essence and Archetypal *Ideas*" (Jones 1993, 13:303; cf. Ramsay 2002:180). Here *Māyā* triggers the transition from the formless unity of the godhead to the diversity of the world:

Wrapt in eternal solitary shade,
Th' impenetrable gloom of light intense,
Impervious, inaccessible, immense,
Ere spirits were infus'd or forms display'd,
BREHM his own Mind survey'd,
As mortal eyes (thus finite we compare
With infinite) in smoothest mirrors gaze:
Swift, at his look, a shape supremely fair
Leap'd into being with a boundless blaze,
That fifty suns might daze.
Primeval Maya was the Goddess nam'd,
Who to her sire, with Love divine inflam'd,
A casket gave with rich Ideas fill'd,
From which this gorgeous Universe he fram'd;

¹⁵ Anquetil finished his manuscript French translation of the *Oupnek'hat* in early 1787 (extant in Bibliothèque Nationale Paris, Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises NAF 8857) and revised it until the summer of 1787 (Anquetil 1787a). He then published four Upanishads in French translation (Anquetil-Duperron 1787b).

For when th' Almighty will'd,
Unnumber'd worlds to build,
From Unity diversified he sprang,
While gay Creation laugh'd, and procreant Nature rang.

At the end Jones's hymn once more evokes the delusive images of *māyā* and coats the end of such illusion and the return to One in a stanza that could almost stem from a Sufi mystic:

Delusive Pictures! unsubstantial shows!
My soul absorb'd One only Being knows,
Of all perceptions One abundant source,
Whence ev'ry object ev'ry moment flows:
Suns hence derive their force.
Hence planets learn their course;
But suns and fading worlds I view no more:
GOD only I perceive; GOD only I adore.

The theology which Jones expressed in this hymn, in his view, "induced many of the wisest among the Ancients, and some of the most enlightened among the Moderns, to believe, that the whole Creation was rather *energy* than a *work*, by which the Infinite Being, who is present at all times and in all places, exhibits to the minds of his creatures a set of perceptions" (p. 302). It is a doctrine of original uncreated oneness, of *māyā* as the fall into deception and multiplicity, and of a return to oneness where only God is perceived. For the conclusion of his ode, Jones explained (p. 303), he had taken a hint from a work which had also inspired his conception of "the Divine Essence and Archetypal *Ideas*": Michael Andrew RAMSAY's (1686–1743) *Voyages de Cyrus*.



Fig. 5: Frontispiece of Lafitau's *Moeurs des Sauvages Ameriquains*, 1724.¹⁶

¹⁶ Father Lafitau explains that his custom-made frontispiece represents a person comparing monuments of antiquity: pyramids, obelisks, figures of divinities, maps, old books, travel accounts, and other curiosities. Two genies help her find connections between objects. Time, which will eventually reveal everything, points toward the common origin linking all these objects and data: God's revelation to our first fathers after the fall (Lafitau 1724, 1: Explication des Planches et Figures).

5. LAFITAU'S SYSTEM

In the introductory argument to his *Hymn to Náráyena*, Jones referred the reader to Ramsay's "fine explanation" of a passage on Platonic ideas in the sixth book of Plato's *Republic* (Jones 1993:13.303). Ramsay's explanation is actually not found in the *Voyages de Cyrus* itself but in an appendix which certainly was of deep interest to any reader of Bryant: Ramsay's *Discours sur la mythologie*.

But before discussing Ramsay's conceptions that influenced Jones, a few words are in place about a book that appeared in 1724, three years before Ramsay's *Cyrus*, and was one of its major inspirations: Joseph-François LAFITAU's (1681–1746) *Moeurs des sauvages Américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (Customs of savage Americans compared to the customs of the earliest times). The frontispiece of the first volume of this massive work would wonderfully fit Jones's series of anniversary discourses, and Lafitau's introduction shows that his "search for the vestiges of the most remote antiquity" (Lafitau 1724:3) shared the perspective inherent in Jones's project. One target of Lafitau were the atheists and skeptics who questioned the "universal consensus" of humanity's recognition of a higher being by asserting that there were people on our globe who knew neither religion nor God.

It is not just that the peoples that are called barbarians have a religion: but this religion shows connections of such great conformity with that of the most ancient times ... that one feels due to this similarity that everywhere the same principles and the same fundamentals are present (p. 7).¹⁷

¹⁷ "Non seulement les Peuples qu'on appelle Barbares, ont une Religion; mais cette Religion a des rapports d'une si grande conformité avec celle des premiers temps, avec ce qu'on appelloit dans l'Antiquité les Orgyes de Bacchus & de la Mere (sic) des Dieux, les mysteres d'Isis & d'Osiris, qu'on sent d'abord à cette ressemblance que ce sont partout & les mêmes principes & le même fonds." (Lafitau 1724:7)

According to Lafitau the sources about the first people on this globe and about primeval religion are compromised by the fact that they all stem from far later times when religion was already corrupt. Nevertheless they may contain vestiges of the earliest period:

This corruption though, however enormous it may have been, was not so general that at the bottom of this corrupted religion principles could not be found that are opposed to corruption, principles of strict morality demanding austere virtue, the enemy of disorder, and which presuppose a sacred Religion at its origin (pp. 8–9).¹⁸

According to Lafitau such traces of the pure religion of primeval humanity can only be explained by an original divine revelation, and they point both back to the most remote past and forward to the present:

This religion of primeval humanity shows such a striking similarity with several tenets that [our Christian] faith teaches and that presuppose a revelation, and such a conformity in its cult with that of the true religion, that it seems that almost everything essential was taken from the same basis (Lafitau 1724:9).¹⁹

Lafitau was acutely aware that our scant knowledge of the first centuries of humanity stems primarily from the Old Testament and that all "sources of profane antiquity" are "posterior to the books of Moses" (p. 10). But to conclude, in the manner of bishop Huët, that all pagan creeds had plagiarized Moses and had modeled their gods on Moses (along with his wife

¹⁸ "Cette corruption cependant, quelque énorme qu'elle soit, n'est pas si generale, qu'on ne trouve dans le fonds de cette Religion corrompuë des principes contradictoirement opposez à la corruption, des principes d'une morale étroite qui demandent une vertu austere, ennemie du desordre, & qui supposent une Religion sainte dans son origine" [...]. (Lafitau 1724:8–9)

¹⁹ "Il se trouve outre cela dans cette Religion de la premiere Gentilité une si grande ressemblance entre plusieurs points de créance que la foy nous enseigne, & qui supposent une revélation (sic); une telle conformité dans le culte avec celui de la Religion véritable, qu'il semble que presque tout l'essentiel a été pris dans le même fonds." (Lafitau 1724:9)

Sephora) cannot be justified because that would mean that "before Moses all pagans had been without religion and gods" (p. 11). Such an opinion is contradicted by Moses himself since he mentions older idolatrous cults. Lafitau concluded that religion had to be far older than Moses and that this religion was "altered" by various nations (p. 12).

Lafitau's new system was based on his conviction that not Moses and his wife but rather the earliest human forefathers had furnished the models for ancient paganism. This signified that even the most ancient pagan customs and divinities were already a corruption of an earlier pure religion that could not have been the work of man, as atheists claimed, but had to be the result of divine revelation.

In this system one sees a pure and holy religion in itself and in its principle: a religion that emanated from God who gave it to our first forefathers. In effect there could only be one religion, and since that religion was for man, it must have begun simultaneously with humans and must be as old as them. This is what faith teaches us and what reason proclaims (p. 14).²⁰

Lafitau thus proposed that from the time of God's creation of the first humans there was an Ur-religion, "a formed and public cult consisting of many traditions, principles of virtue, observances, and legal ceremonies" (p. 14). In the course of its transmission this religion eventually was corrupted:

In this system it is easy to imagine how this religion that had been given to our first forefathers must have been transmitted from generation to generation, like a sort of heritage common to all, and spread everywhere.... It is easy to imagine in this system that this religion, pure and simple at the outset, could be altered and corrupted in the course of time; ignorance and passion are the sources which

²⁰ "Dans ce système, on voit une Religion pure & sainte en elle-même & dans sons principe: une Religion émanée de Dieu qui la donnât à nos premiers Peres. Il ne peut y avoir en effet qu'une Religion, & cette Religion étant pour les hommes, doit avoir commencé avec eux, & doit subsister autant qu'eux. C'est ce que la Foy nous enseigne, & que la raison nous dicte." (Lafitau 1724:14)

poison the best things and infallibly give birth to inordinateness and disorder. We have a current example of this in the religions of the Indies (pp. 14–15).²¹

To Lafitau, the scenario of an early universal transmission of god-given religion seemed the most probable cause for the universality of basic religious teachings throughout the world.

It is easy to explain in this system how this religion, which was given to our first fathers, must have been transmitted from generation to generation like a kind of heritage common to all, and how it thus spread everywhere" (Lafitau 1724:14).²²

A later transmission originating from an ancient civilization such as Egypt, on the other hand, seemed extremely improbable to Lafitau:

By contrast, one can persuade oneself only with great difficulty that a religion born a few centuries after the deluge—a religion invented by a particular people like the Egyptians—could have been transmitted to all nations without exception after their separation from each other when they were, like nowadays, divided in terms of interest and inclination, and more inclined to cause harm to each other than to communicate whatever goods they have." (Lafitau 1724:14–15)²³

²¹ "Dans ce système, on voit dès la création de l'homme une Religion & un culte formé & public, consistant en beaucoup de traditions, de principes de vertu, d'observances & de cérémonies légales, ainsi que le comporte avec soi l'idée même de Religion & de la condition des hommes. [...] Il est facile de concevoir dans ce système, comment cette Religion pure & simple dans son origine, a pu s'altérer & se corrompre par la suite des temps; l'ignorance & les passions étant des sources qui empoisonnent les meilleures choses, & d'où naissent infailliblement le déreglement & le désordre. Nous en avons un exemple subsistant dans les Religions des Indes." (Lafitau 1724:14–15)

²² "Il est facile dans ce système de concevoir comment cette Religion ayant été donnée à nos premiers Peres, doit avoir passé de générations en générations comme une espece d'héritage commun à tous, & s'être répandue par-tout" [...] (Lafitau 1724:14).

²³ "[...] au lieu qu'on ne peut se persuader qu'avec beaucoup de peine, qu'une Religion qui seroit née quelques siècles après le Déluge, & dont on devoit l'invention à un Peuple particulier, tel que seroient les Egyptiens, eut pu

But under Lafitau's hands the savages of the Indies turned into pathfinders to primeval civilization, and their religions revealed themselves as encoded memory banks of God's original revelation waiting to be decoded by a man of insight. Of course Lafitau's system was not all new; in fact some of its central assumptions had long been advocated by some of his Jesuit colleagues in the China mission. Since the times of Matteo RICCI (1552–1610) at the beginning of the 17th century, many Jesuit missionaries had been convinced that the ancient Chinese had been quite pure monotheists; and toward the close of that century the so-called figurists among them (Collani 1981) were feverishly searching for traces of mankind's primeval religion in the oldest texts of China—texts that to some of them appeared to be of pre-diluvian origin. The major points which the accusers of the Jesuits in the famous controversy about Chinese rites urged the Sorbonne to condemn in 1700 clearly show that the issue of primeval religion was central:

1. China had knowledge of the true God more than two thousand years before Jesus Christ.
2. China had the honor of sacrificing to God in the most ancient temple in the world.
3. China has honored God in a manner that can serve as an example even to Christians.
4. China has practiced a morality as pure as its religion.
5. China had the faith, humility, the interior and exterior cult, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the saintliness, the miracles, the spirit of God, and the purest charity, which is the characteristic and the perfection of the genuine religion.
6. Of all the nations of the world, China has been the most constantly favored by the graces of God (Pinot 1971:98; Rossi 1987:141).

passer chez toutes les Nations, sans en excepter aucune, après que ces Nations auroient été séparées les unes des autres, comme elles le sont aujourd'hui, divisées d'intérêt & d'inclination, plus portées à se faire du mal, qu'à se communiquer ce qu'elles pourroient avoir eu de bon." (Lafitau 1724:14–15)

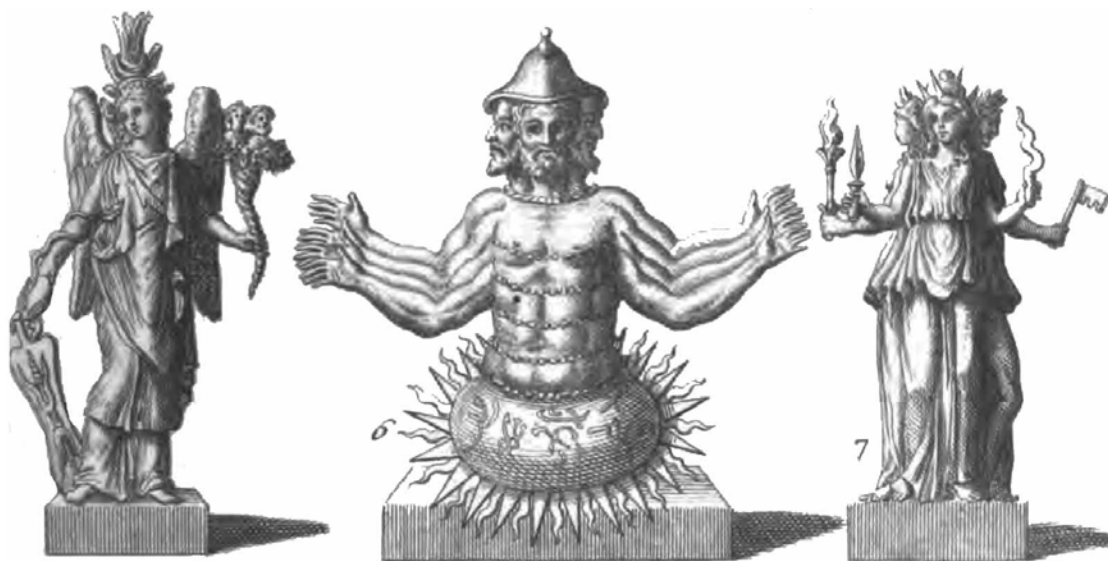


Fig. 6: Part of Lafitau's illustrations about the origin and progress of idolatry. Corrupted forms of the trinity: Diana triformis (right) and the "Idol of the Indies and Japan" from Kircher (center). On the left young Isis with the horn of abundance from which Osiris and the old Isis emerge.

(Lafitau 1724:131)

6. RAMSAY AND THE FIGURISTS

Among the figurists supporting such hazardous views was Father Prémare who after his return from China had personally influenced both Lafitau and Ramsay (Pinot 1971:358). Another figurist, Jean-François Foucquet, had met Ramsay in Rome in 1724, the very year Lafitau's work was published. Ramsay had heard rumours that Foucquet regarded the pre-diluvian Enoch as the author of some ancient Chinese books and that he thought such books were more authentic and explicit than those of Moses (Witek 1982:310).

Like Foucquet and Lafitau, Ramsay held that God had revealed genuine religion to the first humans and that this pure primeval monotheism had in the course of time degenerated. The *Discours sur la mythologie*²⁴ which William Jones cited lays out Ramsay's views in concise form. It is divided into two parts whose content the author describes as follows:

In the first [part] I will show that the philosophers of all times and of all countries had the conception of a supreme divinity, distinct and separate from matter. The second will serve to show that the vestiges of the principal dogmas of revealed religion about the three ages of the world are found in the theology of all nations (Ramsay 2002:177).²⁵

The first part exudes, like the whole *Travels of Cyrus*, the heavy perfume of Cambridge Platonism and in particular of Ralph CUDWORTH's (1617–1688) *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678). In a very learned *tour de force*, Cudworth had attempted to prove that all

²⁴ In Ramsay's 1728 edition of *Voyages de Cyrus* this *Discours* is included in the first volume with a pagination which starts again at page 1. In the following, both this and the recent edition in Ramsay 2002:177–218 are referred to.

²⁵ "Dans la premiere, je montrerai que les Philosophes de tous les temps, & de tous les païs, ont eu l'idée d'une Divinité suprême, *distincte & séparée de la matiere*. La seconde servira à faire voir que les vestiges des principaux dogmes de la Religion revelée, sur les *trois états du monde*, se rencontrent dans la Théologie de toutes les Nations" (Ramsay 1728:1–2 of mythology part).

ancient religions and philosophies, even atheist systems, showed symptoms of an original monotheism that had morphed in various ways. Ramsay's *Discours sur la mythologie* has a similar agenda and emphasizes like Cudworth the importance of distinguishing between a "vulgar and literal" and a "sacred and symbolic" signification (Ramsay 2002:180). In support of his view Ramsay quotes Origen:

In Egypt the philosophers have a sublime and hidden science about the nature of God which to the common people they only show under the envelope of fables and allegories [...]. All oriental nations, he added, the Persians, Indians, Syrians, hide their secret mysteries in their religious tales. The sage of all of these religions penetrates their meaning, while the vulgar only sees the exterior symbol and the bark (p. 181).²⁶

As explained in *The Birth of Orientalism*, this distinction between esoteric and exoteric knowledge, the trunk and the bark, the inner essence and the outer appearance, had long been used in classifying religions and philosophies. Ramsay thought that when "the Greek philosophers went to study wisdom in Asia and in Egypt" where "Thales, Pythagoras, and Plato drew their greatest insights" (p. 183), they of course were taught the esoteric essence of Egyptian religion which happened to be pure monotheism. This essence, the first part of Ramsay's *Discours sur la mythologie* argues, consists in the acceptance of a single supreme divinity:

It is thus evident through the testimony of profane poets, heathen philosophers, and church fathers that the pagans recognized a single supreme divinity. The

²⁶ "En Egypte les Philosophes ont une science sublime & cachée sur la Nature divine, qu'ils ne montrent au peuple que sous l'enveloppe de fables & d'allégories. [...] Toutes les Nations Orientales, *ajoute-t-il*, les Perses, les Indiens, les Syriens cachent des mysteres secrets sous leurs fables religieuses. Le Sage de toutes ces Religions en pénètre le sens, tandis que le vulgaire n'en voit que le symbole extérieur & l'écorce." (Ramsay 1728:18 of mythology part)

Orientals, the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans and all nations universally taught this truth (p. 198).²⁷

In Greece and Rome the monotheistic "doctrine of the ancients" got challenged by a number of materialist philosophers:

Around the fiftieth Olympiad, six hundred years before the Christian era, the Greeks had lost the traditional sciences of the Orientals, neglected the doctrine of the ancients, and began to reason about divine nature through the prejudices of the senses and of imagination (p. 198).²⁸

According to Ramsay, Anaximander (c. 610–546 BCE) was "the first who wanted to ban from the universe the sentiment of a sovereign intelligence to reduce everything to the action of blind matter which necessarily takes on all sorts of forms" (p. 198). In contrast to Anaximander and philosophers like Democritus of Abdera (460–370 BCE), Epicurus (c. 341–271 BCE), Lucretius (c. 99– c. 55 BCE) and the whole school of atomists there was a tradition of famous Greeks who "rose against this impious doctrine and tried to reestablish the ancient theology of the Orientals" (p. 198).²⁹

It is exactly this kind of ancient "oriental" theology that Jones appeared to be interested in. According to Ramsay, its most famous representatives were Pythagoras (fl. 530 BCE), Anaxagoras (c. 500–428 BCE), Socrates (469–399 BCE), Plato (427–347 BCE), and Aristotle (384–322 BCE). Ramsay especially valued Plato's view as expressed in the sixth book of his *Republic*, and it was the following explanation by Ramsay that William Jones was inspired by:

²⁷ "Il est donc évident par le témoignage des Poètes profanes, des Philosophes Gentils, & des Peres de l'Eglise, que les Payens reconnoissent une seule Divinité suprême. Les Orientaux, les Egyptiens, les Grecs, les Romains & toutes les Nations enseignoient universellement cette vérité." (Ramsay 1728:78 of mythology part).

²⁸ "Vers la cinquantième Olympiade, six cens ans avant l'Ere Chrétienne, les Grecs ayant perdu les sciences *traditionnelles* des Orientaux, négligèrent la doctrine des Anciens, & commencerent à raisonner sur la nature divine par les préjugés des sens & de l'imagination." (Ramsay 1728:78 of mythology part)

²⁹ Ramsay 1728:78 of mythology part.

He [Plato] considers the divinity in its eternal solitude before the production of finite beings. He follows the Egyptians in saying that this first source of the divinity is surrounded by thick darkness that no mortal can penetrate and that one must adore this hidden God only in silence. It is this first principle that in several places he calls Being, Unity, and Sovereign Good (p. 192).³⁰

At the end of his *Hymn to Nārāyena*, Jones used a solar metaphor similar to that employed by Ramsay for Plato's creator God and the emanation from unity to the multiplicity of the universe. Ramsay had explained:

This philosopher [Plato] then portrays the first Being as leaving his unity in order to consider all the different ways through which he can depict himself outside. Thus the intelligible world containing the ideas of all things is formed in the divine understanding, along with the resulting truths. Plato always distinguishes between the supreme Good and this wisdom which is but its emanation. [...] As the light is not the sun but rather its emanation, truth is not the first principle but its emanation. As the sun not only throws light on bodies and makes them visible but furthermore contributes to their generation and growth, the supreme Good not only provides knowledge of creatures but also gives them their being and existence (pp. 192–3).³¹

³⁰ "Il considere la Divinité dans sa solitude éternelle avant la production des Etres finis. Il dit souvent après les Egyptiens 'que cette premiere source de la Divinité est environnée de tenebres épaisses; que nul mortel ne peut les pénétrer & qu'il ne faut adorer ce Dieu caché que par le silence. C'est ce premier principe qu'il appelle en plusieurs endroits *l'Etre, l'unité, le bien souverain* [...]" (Ramsay 1728:56 of mythology part)

³¹ "Ce Philosophe nous représente ensuit le premier Etre comme sortant de son unité pour considérer toutes les differentes manieres par lesquelles il se peut dépeindre au dehors. Par là se forme dans l'entendement divin, le monde intelligible contenant les idées de toutes choses, & les vérités qui en resultent. Platon distingue toujours entre le bien suprême, & cette sagesse qui n'en est que l'émanation. [...] Comme le Soleil non seulement éclaire les corps, & les rend visibles, mais encore qu'il contribue à leur generation, & à leur accroissement, de même le bien suprême

But for Ramsay such attempts to "reestablish the ancient theology of the Orientals" (p. 198) were not only prominent in ancient Greece; rather, he saw them as part of a long tradition that also had quite modern representatives.

Descartes, Father Malebranche, Leibniz, Bentley, Dr. Clarke, and several metaphysicians of equally subtle and profound genius attempted to refute such errors [of Spinozists, skeptics, and other crypto-atheists] and to confirm through their reasoning the ancient theology. [...] The history of past times resembles that of our days. The human spirit takes on quite similar forms in the different centuries and tends to get lost along the same paths. There are universal errors, just as there are unchanging truths (pp. 199–200).³²

fait non seulement connoître les créatures, mais il leur donne aussi leur être & leur existence." (Ramsay 1728:57–8 of mythology part)

³² "Descartes, le Pere Malebranche, Leibnitz, Bentley, le Dr. Clarke, & plusieurs Metaphysiciens d'un génie également subtil & profond tâchent de réfuter ces erreurs, & de confirmer par leur raisonnement l'ancienne Théologie. [...] L'histoire des temps passés est semblable à celle de nos jours. L'esprit humain prend à peu près les mêmes formes dans les différens siècles. Il s'égare dans les mêmes routes. Il y a des erreurs universelles, comme des vérités immuables." (Ramsay 1728:82–3 of mythology part)

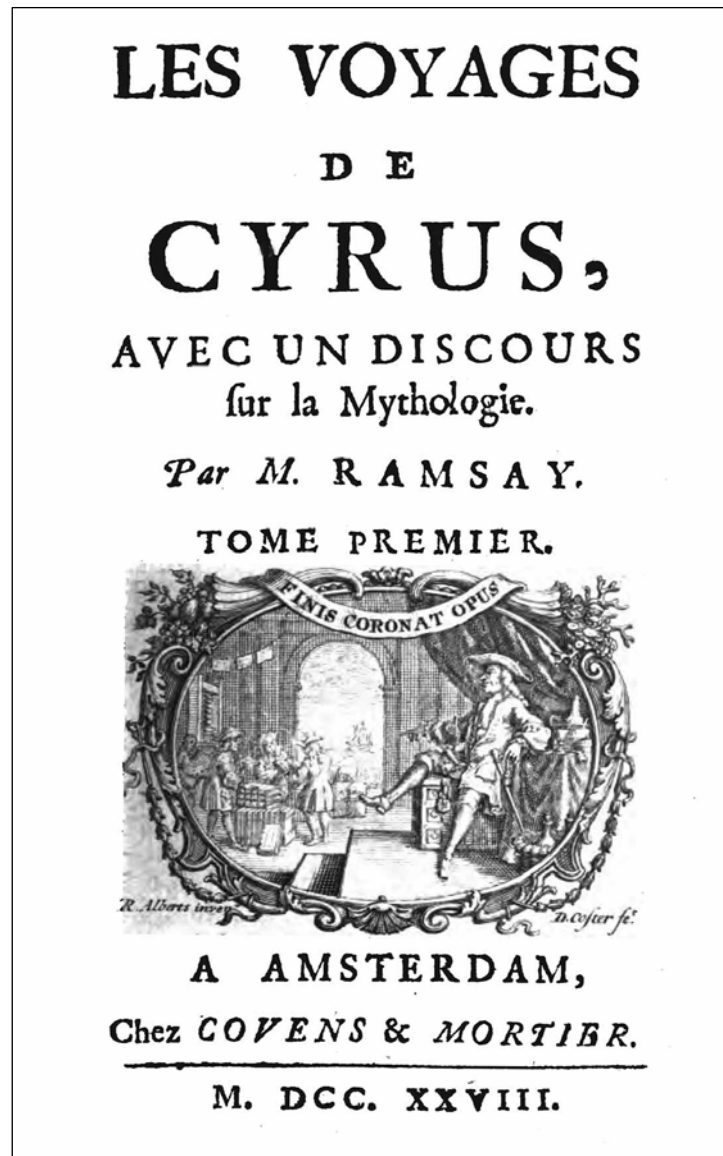


Fig. 7: Title page of vol. 1 of Ramsay's *Voyages de Cyrus*, 1728

The second part of Ramsay's treatise on mythology is dedicated to the presentation of the perpetual truths of ancient theology in the myths and religions of all nations (p. 177). Taking a page from the Jesuit figurists and from Lafitau, who all form part of the "ancient theology" tradition, Ramsay detected everywhere a similar pattern of a "golden age" when pure

monotheism reigned, an age of degeneration when polytheism and idolatry became dominant, and a third age in which "the golden age is restored" (p. 200).³³

With regard to the first age which is of particular interest in the context of Jones's vision of ancient theology, Ramsay again adduced Plato who "was the source from which Plotinus and the Platonists of the third century drew their principal ideas" (p. 201). Plato is said to have described the primeval stage of history as one where "God was the prince and the common father of all," the "guardian and pastor" of mankind. In this golden age "there was neither furor nor cruelty on earth," "wars and seditions were unknown," and "neither magistrates nor politics" existed (p. 203).

In these happy times, humans sprung from the bosom of the earth that produced them by itself, like flowers and trees. Fertile land furnished fruit and crops without agricultural labor; humans did not cover their body because inclement seasons were not yet present; and they rested on the bed of evergreen lawns (pp. 203–4).³⁴

Pythagoras, like Plato, "drew the same doctrine from the Egyptians" (p. 205) whose mythology is "the source of that of the Greeks" (p. 206).

Egyptian mythology, Plutarch said, has two meanings: one is sacred and sublime, and the other sensory and tangible. This is why the Egyptians put Sphinxes at the door of their temples. They want to convey to us that their theology contains the secrets of Wisdom, hidden in enigmatic words. This is also the meaning of the

³³ As de Lubac has shown in his excellent study of the posterity of da Fiore (1979) such three-step views of history have deep roots in the past and are not only connected to Jones's period and the roots of romanticism but also to more recent utopias such as the "Third Reich" and communism. See also Chapter 5 of my forthcoming *The Birth of Orientalism*.

³⁴ "Dans ces heureux tems, les hommes sortoient du sein de la terre qui les produisoit d'elle-même, comme les fleurs & les arbres. Les campagnes fertiles fournissoient des fruits & des bleds sans les travaux de l'agriculture. Les hommes ne couvroient point leur corps, parce qu'on ne sentoient point encore l'inclemence des saisons. Ils prenoient leur repos sur des lits de gazons toujours verts." (Ramsay 1728:96–7 of mythology part)

inscription that one can read at Saïs on a statue of Pallas or Isis: *I am all there is, has been, and will be, and no mortal has lifted the veil covering me* (p. 207).³⁵

The transmission of the ancient theology and its monotheistic creed among the select few who realized its importance and true meaning was thus set against the religion of the masses with its tendency to take symbols literally and to get stuck in a morass of misunderstandings: the powers of the one God were misunderstood as multiple gods, leading to polytheism, and created persons and things came to be worshipped as idols and divinities. But oriental mythology preserved the vestiges of ancient theology, and "the closer one gets to the first origin of nations, the more purified their theology gets" (p. 210). Since Persia and India are extremely old nations we can expect their theology to be rather pure. But what sources did Ramsay have at his disposal to verify this? He explained that "we have lost the ancient books of the first Persians" and thus need to consult "present-day orientals to judge their mythology." Modern disciples of Zoroaster show "some traces of the ancient doctrine of their master" which prove that the first magi of Persia were not dualists (p. 211) but rather "admitted only one single eternal principle" (p. 178). But Ramsay considered Indian theology to be even more ancient:

Since the teaching of the Persian magi followed the doctrine of the Brachmans of the Indies one needs to consult one to clarify the other. Few traces remain of the ancient theology of the gymnosophists [naked sages] (p. 211).³⁶

Based on the information by Abraham ROGER (1651) and Athanasius Kircher (1667), Ramsay believed that the ancient religion of India was found in the Vedas:

³⁵ "La Mythologie Egyptienne, dit Plutarque, a deux sens; l'un sacré & sublime, l'autre sensible & palpable. C'est pour cela que les Egyptiens mettent des Sphinx à la porte de leurs Temples. Ils veulent nous faire entendre que leur Théologie contient les secrets de la Sagesse, sous des paroles énigmatiques. C'est aussi le sens de l'inscription qu'on lit à Saïs sur une statue de Pallas ou d'Isis. *Je suis tout ce qui est, qui a été, & qui sera, & jamais mortel n'a levé le voile qui me couvre.*" (Ramsay 1728:108–9 of mythology part)

³⁶ "Comme la doctrine des Mages Persans est une suite de la doctrine des Brachmanes des Indes, il faut consulte l'une pour éclaircir l'autre. Il nous reste peu de traces de l'ancienne Philosophie des Gymnosophistes" [...] (Ramsay 1728:125 of mythology part)

To judge the doctrine of the ancient gymnosophists I consulted what has been translated of the Vedam which is the sacred book of today's Bramines. Even though its age is possibly not as great as has been claimed, one cannot deny that it contains the ancient traditions of these people and of their philosophers (pp. 211–2).³⁷

In Ramsay's eyes the core teachings of the Indians were not only identical with those of Persia, Egypt, and Greece but also with the tenets of ancient China (pp. 213–4) and Judaea. They consist of four major doctrines: 1. An absolutely good creator God and a golden age of total purity; 2. A fall from this initial purity; 3. A restoration of initial purity through a savior figure; and 4. A universal tradition of these truths and their transmission since the deluge (p. 217).³⁸

This primeval tradition reflects the mother of all religions before the deluge. While authors like Huët (1678) held that the Old Testament was the sole record of pristine tradition and that all ancient peoples had therefore drawn their teachings from it, Ramsay realized that this was impossible:

It is usually believed that all the traces that one sees in natural and revealed religion and in heathen poets and philosophers must come from reading the books of Moses. However, it is impossible to respond to the objections which non-believers raise against this opinion. The Jews and their books were too long hidden in a corner of the earth to become the original light of the nations. One must go back further to the great flood (Ramsay 2002:217–8).³⁹

³⁷ "Pour juger de la doctrine des anciens Gymnosophistes, j'ai consulté ce qui a été traduit du *Vedam*, qui est le livre sacré des Bramines d'aujourd'hui. Quoique son antiquité ne soit pas peut-être aussi grance qu'on la dit, on ne peut nier cependant qu'il contienne les anciennes traditions de ces Peuples & de leurs Philosophes." (Ramsay 1728:127 of mythology part)

³⁸ Ramsay 1728:145–6 of mythology part.

³⁹ "On croit ordinairement que toutes les traces qu'on voit de la Religion naturelle, & relevée [U.A.: misprint for révélée], dans les Poètes & les Philosophes Payens, se doivent originairement à la lecture des Livres de Moyse. Mais

This shows that at the beginning of the 18th century the idea was taking hold that heathen texts (such as those of China and India) might contain older accounts than the Old Testament. For Ramsay and the Jesuit figurists such texts of older and greater nations posed no threat to the Old Testament. On the contrary: their content was said to confirm the purity and truth of the biblical teachings. Ramsay thus found it "surprising that those who believe in the authenticity of the sacred books have not taken advantage of this idea to support the truth of the Mosaic history of the origin of the world, the universal deluge, and the restoration of the human race by Noah" (p. 218).⁴⁰ Instead of disputing the age and authority of non-biblical traditions and scriptures, Ramsay argued, one ought to recognize that these traditions as well as that of the Old Testament show unmistakable symptoms of a common origin. While the Old Testament preserved teachings of the mother of all religions in a "pure" form (p. 174), other traditions were also bound to exhibit some traits of the common parent. The inquiry of William Jones's yearly discourses is rooted in a very similar conception. Jones, too, was searching for humanity's primeval religion; but compared to Ramsay who was obliged to draw much of his knowledge from missionary accounts,⁴¹ Jones had new textual, geographical, and historical data at his disposal.

il est impossible de répondre aux objections que les Incrédules font contre cette opinion. Les Juifs & leurs Livres furent trop long-tems cachés dans un coin de la terre pour devenir la lumière primitive des Nations. Il faut remonter plus haut jusques au déluge même." (Ramsay 1728:146–7 of the mythology part)

⁴⁰ "Il est étonnant que ceux qui sont persuadés de l'autenticité des Livres sacrés, n'aient pas profité de cette idée pour faire sentir la vérité de l'histoire Mosaïque sur l'origine du monde, le déluge universel, & le rétablissement de la race humaine par Noé." (Ramsay 1728:147 of the mythology part)

⁴¹ For more information on this see Chapter 5 of my forthcoming *The Birth of Orientalism*.

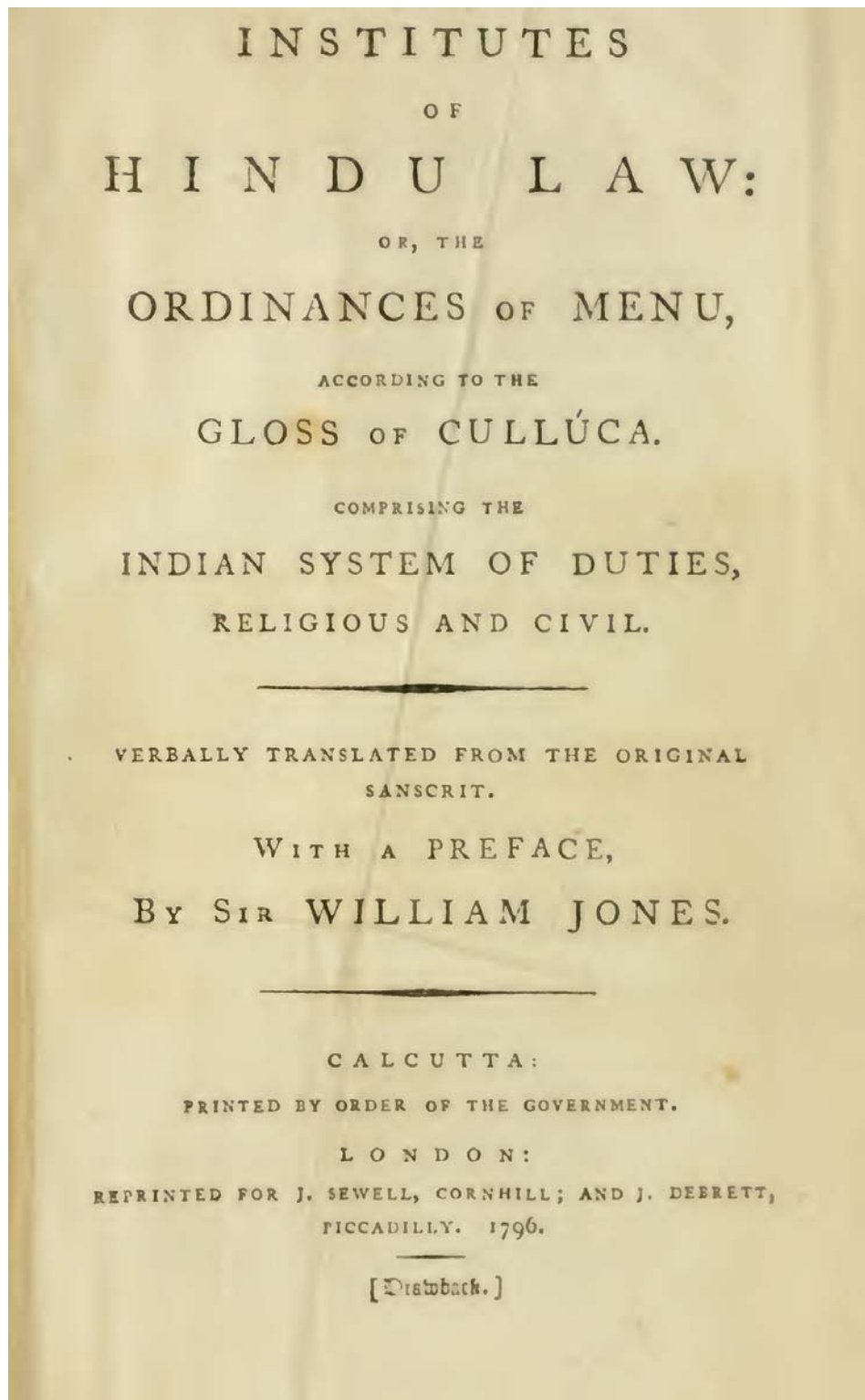


Fig. 8: Jones's translation of the *Manava Dharma Shastra* (1796)

7. JONES’S PROJECT

Already Jones’s *Hymn to Nārāyena*—for which Halhed and Ramsay were cited as inspirations (Jones 1993:13.303)—clearly shows his growing interest in the ancient theology of the Indians. But, unlike Ramsay, he was a famous orientalist who could put his broad knowledge of Asian languages to use in sieving gold nuggets from the dross of antiquity. He had excellent command of Persian, and while he was with the help of Indian teachers struggling to acquire a working knowledge of Sanskrit, he kept studying Persian books. Being helped by natives was not a new experience for him; already in his Oxford days when writing his Persian grammar he had been assisted by Mirza I’tisam al-Din, an Indian who stayed in England between 1766 and 1769 (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001:24–5). But now the scale of such help had expanded as he was in a position to get as much native expert assistance as needed. He thus employed a growing team of *pandits* that furnished invaluable information and brought various hitherto unknown texts to Jones’s attention.

On March 1 of 1785, shortly after his second annual discourse, Ali Ibrahim Khan sent Jones a Sanskrit book from Benares which was to occupy the English judge for the entire last decade of his life: the *Institutes of Manu*. In this text (which was also his major motivation for commencing systematic study of Sanskrit from 1785) Jones discovered some verses that “contain the purest Theology and, I think, sound Philosophy” (Cannon 1970, 2:665). But some of the most crucial materials pertaining to Jones’s ancient theology happened to be written in Persian. They exerted their greatest influence exactly during the time when Jones’s knowledge of Sanskrit was still weak.

Apart from Charles Wilkins’s translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* (published in 1785) which influenced Jones’s *Hymn to Indra* (Cannon 1970, 2:671), the major theological inspiration of this pivotal phase appears to have been the Persian translation of the Upanishads by Prince Dara. Jones first mentioned it toward the end of his third annual discourse (read on February 2 of 1786), and interestingly it is exactly in this third discourse that Jones first defined the scope and

direction of his project.⁴² His annual discourses would henceforth, Jones explained, all tend "to a common point of no small importance in the pursuit of interesting truths" (AR1:415). This common point is "the History of the Ancient World, and *the population of this habitable globe*" (pp. 415–6). Jones was critical of Jacob Bryant's reliance on the shaky method of etymology (p. 416) and the habit of building seemingly firm arguments on the quicksand of imperfectly discerned facts (p. 417).

The project proposed by Jones concerned the "*five principal nations who have in different ages divided among themselves, as a kind of inheritance, the vast continent of Asia*": "the *Indians, the Chinese, the Tartars, the Arabs, and the Persians*" (AR1:417). He was particularly interested in their origin ("*whence and when they came*") and promised to solve in the last of five discourses the "great problem, whether they had *any* common origin, and whether that origin was *the same* which we generally ascribe to them" (pp. 417–8). The hypothesis of a common origin of the major peoples of Asia and the question of congruence with the traditional biblical account was thus at the center of Jones's series of discourses. In contrast to Ramsay and Bryant, Jones was in a position to consult not only traditional texts such as the Bible but also oriental sources that possibly constituted "the earliest authentic records of the human species" (p. 418).

Jones thus proposed an examination over five years of the five major people of Asia, the "cradle of humanity." The first concerned "the Hindus," and Jones's introduction shows in a nutshell the golden age / degeneration model that forms his point of departure. "How degenerate and abased so ever the *Hindus* now appear," Jones argued, we cannot reasonably doubt that "in some early age they were splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge" (p. 421). In order to see underneath the varnish of recent times, Jones proposed to structure his inquiry into the origins of each people according to the following model:

We seem to possess only *four* general media of satisfying our curiosity concerning it; namely, first, their *Languages* and *Letters*; secondly, their *Philosophy* and *Religion*; thirdly, the actual remains of their old *Sculpture* and

⁴² See Appendix 1.

Architecture; and fourthly, the written memorials of their *Sciences and Arts*” (AR1:421).

It is under the first rubric that Jones advanced his famous hypothesis that “both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*” and that “the old *Persian* might be added to the same family” (p. 423). Jones was, in other words, proposing that the Sanscrit language with its “wonderful structure, more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either” (p. 422) was itself a remnant of a language that could be the mother of all languages. This scheme of an unknown ultimate origin is repeated in the other spheres that Jones proposed for his inquiry. Thus Indian philosophy, just like its Greek counterpart, was also a vestige of a—still unknown—primeval philosophy:

The *six* philosophical schools, whose principles are explained in the *Dersana Sástra*, comprise all the metaphysicks of the old *Academy*, the *Stoa*, the *Lyceum*; nor is it possible to read the *Vedánta*, or the many fine compositions in illustration of it, without believing that *Pythagoras* and *Plato* derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of *India* (AR1:425).

What this “same fountain” consisted of was not yet explained by Jones; instead he adduced additional evidence from the field of mythology that also appeared to point to a common origin.

The *Scythian* and *Hyperborean* doctrines and mythology may also be traced in every part of these eastern regions; nor can we doubt that *Wod*, or *Oden*, whose religion, as the northern historians admit, was introduced into *Scandinavia* by a foreign race, was the same with *Buddh*, whose rites were probably imported into *India* nearly at the same time, though received much later by the *Chinese*, who soften his name into FO’ (AR1:424–5).

The figure of Buddha (which Jones at this point still regarded as identical with Oden=Wotan) was of particular interest to Jones because it appeared possible to date it with some degree of certainty; but in the context of Jones's third discourse his "rites" (presumably imported from an unknown region somewhere to the north of India, west of China, and east of Scandinavia), as expected, pointed to "a single great spring and fountain of all idolatry" (p. 426). In the sphere of architecture and sculpture Jones made equally adventurous claims of similarity between the Egyptian Hermes Canis and Vishnu as a boar, the excavations of Canárah and Buddhist temples, etc. (p. 427). Such "indubitable facts," in Jones's eyes, supported the view that "Ethiopia and Hindustàn were peopled or colonized by the same extraordinary race" (p. 427). In the sphere of sciences, arts, and commerce, too, Jones's mysterious mother race seems to have had access to advanced knowledge:

That the *Hindus* were in early ages a *commercial* people, we have many reasons to believe; and in the first of their sacred law-tracts, which they suppose to have been revealed by *Menu* many *millions* of years ago, we find a curious passage on the legal *interest* of money, and the limited rate of it in different cases, with an exception in regard to *adventures at sea*; an exception which the sense of mankind approves, and which commerce absolutely requires; though it was not before the reign of *Charles I.* that our own jurisprudence fully admitted it in respect to maritime contracts (AR1:428).

No wonder that we are told "by the *Grecian* writers that the *Indians* were the wisest of nations" (p. 429)! Their invention of the apologues ("the *Hitópadesa*, or *Amicable Instruction*"), the decimal scale, the game of chess, and numerous works of "Grammar, Logick, Rhetorick, Musick" amply demonstrate that the Indians' reputation of "a fertile and inventive genius" is justified (p. 429). Furthermore, Jones adduced the Upanishads as proof of India's ancient theology:

Their *Purána's* comprise a series of mythological Histories, in blank verse, from the *Creation* to the supposed incarnation of *Buddha*: and their *Védas*, as far as we

can judge from that compendium of them which is called *Upanishat*, abound with noble speculations in metaphysics, and fine discourses on the being and attributes of *God* (AR1:429).

The fact that Jones called the Upanishads a "compendium" of the Vedas containing "fine discourses on the being and attributes of *God*" suggests that in February of 1786 Jones had already studied Prince Dara's Persian Upanishad translation known as *Sirr-i akbar* (The Great Secret). Its Latin translation is known as *Oupnek'hat*, published by Anquetil-Duperron in 1801/2. The *Sirr-i akbar* is an extremely interesting translation and interpretation of fifty Upanishads and Prince Dara's preface emphasizes exactly what Jones asserted: that the Upanishads present the essence of the Vedas and ancient theology. By contrast, in Halhed's introduction to *The Code of Gentoo Laws* the same "extremely scarce" work was described as "Dārul Shekūh's famous Persian Translation of some Commentaries upon the Four Beids, or original Scriptures of Hindostan" (Halhed 1776:xviii). At that time Halhed had only a small fragment of the work at hand, and even that was procured "by mere Accident" (p. xviii). Jones, on the other hand, seems to have examined the whole work, and we know where he got it from. In an undated manuscript fragment found among his papers Jones clearly states that he had procured "a complete copy" of Prince Dara's book "with the assistance of Colonel *Polier*" (Jones 1993:13.366), the very man who in the course of 1786 also lent Jones the four Vedas that he had purchased with so much difficulty (Cannon 1970, 2:731–2).⁴³ Jones's remark about the *Upanishad* preface suggests that he got his copy in 1785 or early 1786, i.e., about a decade after Anquetil-Duperron. While the Englishman got a taste of this exquisite ancient theology, his French rival was already preparing the French translation of four Upanishads from this very book for publication (Anquetil-

⁴³ The catalogue of William Jones's library (Evans 1831) lists Prince Dara's Persian Upanishad translation as no. 436; see Mukherjee 1968:173. For Polier's account of his search for the Vedas see Polier 1986:21–25.

Duperron 1787b:2.297–344).⁴⁴ Both authors were interested in ancient theology and appreciated the *Oupnek'hat* and Prince Dara's preface.

But Jones's project went beyond the boundaries of theology; had he not written in his wish list of wanting to find out more about the "History of the Ancient World" (Jones 1993, 2:3)? In the course of Jones's inquiries prediluvial history gradually began to reveal some features. At the end of Jones's third discourse a primeval people (which Germans would call an *Urvolk*) and its homeland rise from the mists of antiquity:

Of these cursory observations on the *Hindus*, which would require volumes to expand and illustrate, this is the result: that they had an immemorial affinity with the old *Persians*, *Ethiopians*, and *Egyptians*; the *Phenicians*, *Greeks*, and *Tuscans*; the *Scythians* or *Goths*, and *Celts*; the *Chinese*, *Japanese*, and *Peruvians*; whence, as no reason appears for believing that they were a colony from any one of those nations, or any of those nations from them, we may fairly conclude that they all proceeded from some *central* country, to investigate which will be the object of my future Discourses (AR1:430–1).

The entire thrust of Jones's third discourse is thus directed toward a primeval homeland of humanity, a motherland with an ur-race speaking an ur-language, confessing an ur-religion, performing ur-science, and enjoying ur-art. In view of this broad and startling argument it is hardly surprising that no one, Jones included, paid much attention to the sphere of linguistics where Jones' considerable knowledge of languages led to a more limited claim of an unknown parent language of Sanskrit, Persian, and some European idioms. In fact this idea—which had a number of linguists canonize Jones as the father of comparative linguistics—forms only a small part of the project that Jones pursued in his subsequent yearly discourses, and others realized and

⁴⁴ Around the same time Halhed was at work on his English translation which was finished in May of 1787 but was never published. It remains in manuscript form (as well as a more legible transcription) at the British Museum; see Rosane Rocher 1978, and 1983: 137.

communicated such insights before him.⁴⁵ Jones's objective was indeed, as he had stated at the outset of the third discourse, nothing less than a "History of the Ancient World" (pp. 415–6); and the fact that the last of the projected discourses of the series was slated to be on the subject of Persia shows that he already had an idea of its general direction.

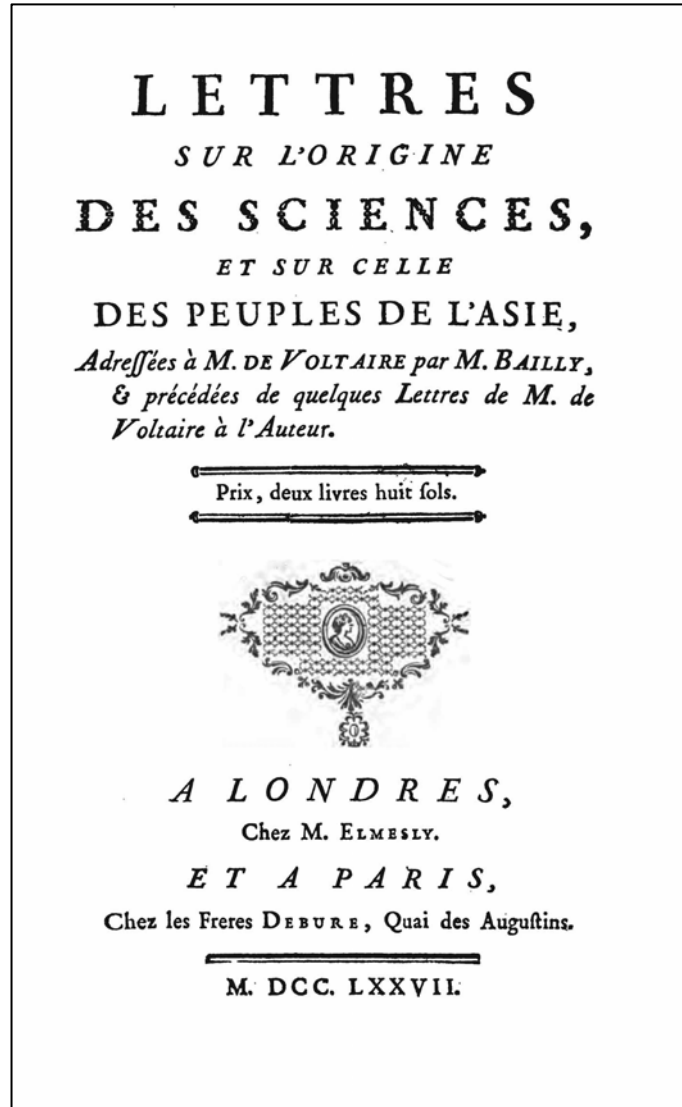


Fig. 9: Title page of Bailly's Letters on the Origin of the Sciences and of the Peoples of Asia, addressed to Voltaire (1777)

⁴⁵ Already Sassetti in the 16th century, Schulze in 1725, and Coeurdoux in 1767 had pointed out the affinities between Sanskrit and various European languages. See Halbfass 1990:63 and Glasenapp 1954.

8. BAILLY'S VISION

The importance of chronology for Jones's argument is very apparent in his third annual discourse. The enormous numbers of years of the Indian world ages could be portrayed as imaginary, but they could not simply be ignored and had to be related to other chronologies. Already in the 16th century the apparent antiquity of Egypt had threatened to burst the tight confines of biblical chronology, and in the 17th century the discovery of Asian chronologies—particularly the Chinese historical records that supposedly went back further than Noah—threw traditional schemes into turmoil (Collani 2000). William Jones's father, the mathematician, had assisted Newton in his attempt "to make chronology suit with the course of nature, with astronomy, with sacred history, with Herodotus the father of history, and with itself" (Newton 1785:7).⁴⁶ But Newton's project to introduce mathematical and astronomical certainty into a field so dominated by myth and sacred fiction was doomed.

However, the idea of using astronomical events such as solar eclipses to nail down dates in the dawn of history was compelling enough to provide the foundation for Jean-Sylvain BAILLY's (1736–1793) *Histoire de l'astronomie ancienne* of 1775. In this groundbreaking work Bailly advanced his famous hypothesis of a wise primeval "instructor people" ("people instituteur")—a hypothesis that he went on to elaborate and concretize in two volumes of letters (1777 & 1779) that appeared some years before Jones's departure for Asia.

Later on, when investigating astronomical matters in 1790, Jones was to express reservations about Bailly's speculations regarding Indian and oriental astronomy (Bailly 1787; Cannon 1970:2.859). But Bailly was the first to formulate the idea of a wise Urvolk or "people instituteur" (Petri 1990:120), and it is clear that this idea was seminal for Jones's project. In the introduction to his 1775 *Histoire* Bailly wrote:

We have seen that with all peoples, ancient times that are marked by fables and prodigious numbers of years can be reduced to the interval separating two

⁴⁶ William Jones possessed Newton's *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended* of 1728; see Cannon 1970, 2:858.

memorable epochs: that of creation and that of the deluge. On that basis the conclusion is justified that humans issued from the same stock, spread from a common center in Asia, and carried with them the memory of earliest times (Bailly 1781:17–18).⁴⁷

Bailly kept emphasizing known humanity's common origin from an unnamed but sophisticated "peuple antérieur":

The existence of this earlier people is proven by the image of the peoples of Asia; an image which offers only ruins, forgotten astronomy, philosophy mixed with absurdities, physics degenerated into fables, and pure religion hidden under gross idolatry (Bailly 1777: 203).⁴⁸

In his letters to Voltaire, who favored the idea of India as humanity's cradle and Indians as its first instructors, Bailly pointed out—like Jones after him—that the Indians must have inherited their wisdom from a more enlightened primeval people:

This glimpse should suffice for a philosopher like you, Monsieur, to prove the existence of this people that instructed all others. By the way, I do not see anything strange in this idea. Seeing the present generation I conclude that it follows an earlier one; and it seems no less natural that one people follows

⁴⁷ "Nous avons vu que chez tous les peuples, les tems anciens, marqués par des fables & par des nombres prodigieux d'années, peuvent se réduire à l'intervalle qui sépare deux époques mémorables, celle de la création & celle du déluge. On est en droit d'en conclure que des hommes, issus de la même souche, partis d'un centre commun placé dans l'Asie, ont emporté avec eux la mémoire de ces premiers tems [...]."

⁴⁸ "L'existence de ce peuple antérieur est prouvée par le tableau des nations de l'Asie; tableau qui n'offre que des débris, astronomie oubliée, philosophie mêlée à des absurdités, physique dégénérée en fables, religion épurée, mais cachée sous une idolatrie grossiere."

another and that the Indians, your friends, are the heirs of a more powerful and enlightened nation (Bailly 1777:204).⁴⁹

This enlightened primeval people or *Urvolk* was of course also "the author of all philosophical ideas that have enlightened the world" and possessed "a wise and sublime philosophy" (p. 205).

Sublime because, according to this philosophy, God is unique and present everywhere, has created everything, animates everything, and is alone eternal and unchanging. [Sublime also] because it [this philosophy] has distinguished the three most remarkable acts of divine power: the acts of creating the world, of preserving it, and of destroying it. Wise because it simultaneously teaches that God is ineffable and reminds us not to plumb the profundities of his essence (p. 208).⁵⁰

Bailly's formulation suggests that he was inspired by the writings of Voltaire and Holwell.⁵¹ Such supposed vestiges of ancient Indian religion furnished crucial building blocks for Bailly's edifice of a primeval religion. Exactly like Jones who, in the remarks introducing his *Hymn of Nārāyena*, proclaimed that ancient Indian philosophy and its idea of *māyā* are an antidote to mistaken ideas of materialism, Bailly had some years earlier appreciated its value and timelessness:

⁴⁹ "Ce coup d'oeil suffirait à un Philosophe comme vous, Monsieur, pour lui démontrer l'existence de ce peuple instituteur de tous les autres; & je ne conçois pas, d'ailleurs, ce que cette idée pourrait avoir d'étrange. En voyant la génération présente, je conclus qu'elle suit une génération passée: il me paraît aussi naturel qu'un peuple ait succédé à un autre, & que les Indiens, vos amis, soient les héritiers d'une nation plus puissante & plus éclairée."

⁵⁰ "Sublime, parce que, selon cette philosophie, Dieu est unique, présent partout, il a tout créé; il anime tout, il est seul éternel & immuable; parce qu'elle a distingué les trois actes les plus remarquables de la puissance divine; les actes de créer le monde, de le conserver & de le détruire; sage, parce qu'elle enseigne en même tems, que Dieu est ineffable, parce qu'elle nous avertit de ne point sonder les profondeurs de son essence."

⁵¹ For Voltaire see Chapter 1 and for Holwell Chapter 6 of my forthcoming *The Birth of Orientalism*.

Seeing Malebranche, the distinguished philosopher of the past century, teach that we see everything in God, and [seeing him] reach by metaphysical speculation the very idea of the Indians who say that the world is but an illusion and that in everything that appears to our eyes only one real unique thing is present, namely, the existence of God: [seeing this I realise] that without any doubt these ideas in themselves are but visions. But in their profundity and eloquence Plato is prefigured, and Malebranche unfolds their wealth of *esprit* and imagination. And where I see Plato and Malebranche united I cannot but locate profundity, subtlety, and genius (p. 209).⁵²

Like Jones after him, Bailly thought that humanity's initial pure monotheism and enlightened philosophy had soon degenerated into materialism (p. 210) and gross cults; and like Jones he was convinced that the vestiges of the golden age, and in particular those of India, permitted reconstructing the outline of the "grand edifice" (p. 214) of humanity's *Urvolk*. Moreover, both Bailly and Jones, while declining to identify this *Urvolk* with any known people, made a great effort to position it at a suitable spot in their chronological and geographical framework. To this end they deployed the full arsenal at their disposal: etymology and theology, linguistics and geology, philosophy and astronomy....

Jones's fourth anniversary discourse (read on February 15, 1787) was dedicated to the Arabs and began with a reminder of his intention to find the common root of the five principal nations of Asia and to define "the central region from which they appear to have proceeded" (AR2: 1). The Arabs were of little help in this endeavor though their "old religion," which was "entirely *Sabian*," seemed to have been "for the poets at least" a "pure Theism" (p. 8). Jones weaved in some speculation about the Buddha (*Sacya*) "whom some suppose to be *Woden*" and

⁵² "Quand je verrai Malebranche, philosophe distingué dans le dernier siècle, enseigner que nous voyons tout en Dieu, & parvenir, à force de métaphysique, à l'idée des Indiens, qui disent que le monde n'est qu'une illusion, n'offrant, dans tout ce qui paraît à nos yeux, qu'une chose réelle, mais unique, l'existence de Dieu: sans doute ces idées elles-mêmes ne sont que des visions; mais enfin Platon s'annonce par la profondeur & par l'éloquence; Malebranche déploie les richesses de l'esprit & de l'imagination. Là où je verrai Platon & Malebranche réunis, je ne pourrai m'empêcher de placer la profondeur, la subtilité & le génie."

who may in fact be identical to "such a conqueror or legislator as the great *Sesac*, who is said to have raised pillars in *Yemen* as well as at the mouth of the *Ganges*" (p. 9); but such speculation of Jones was dependent on his wobbling chronology and his will to nail down the date of Buddha in order to fix a date for the beginning of the last of the four Indian *yugas*. Hypotheses about an Ethiopian origin of the curly-haired Buddha were nothing new, and neither was Jones's distinction of a monotheistic elite and an idolatrous mass:

We may safely pronounce that before the *Mohammedan* revolution, the noble and learned *Arabs* were Theists, but that a stupid idolatry prevailed among the lower orders of the people (AR2:9).

At any rate, the fact that "the only monuments of old Arabian history are collections of poetical pieces and the commentaries on them" (p. 14) prevented Jones from drawing any important conclusions with regard to humanity's earliest ages.

In February of 1788 Jones read two interrelated papers to the Asiatick Society in Calcutta. The first was entitled "On the Chronology of the Hindus," written in January and read on February 7, and the second was the fifth anniversary discourse on the Tartars read on February 21. Both were thus authored before Jones in November of 1789 received Bailly's latest work, the *Traité de l'astronomie indienne et orientale* (*Treatise of Indian and Oriental Astronomy*) of 1787 (Cannon 1970:2.852). However, the influence of Bailly's earlier works is palpable. Bailly had argued that the Indians' incredible numbers of years for the first three world ages were simply "fabulous" (1782:14) and that only the last world age was based on solar years and could be taken seriously. Bailly set the beginning of this age at 3101 BCE (p. 14) and held that the period around 3000 BCE also marked a "renaissance" of astronomy in other ancient cultures such as those of the Persians (p. 13), the Chinese (pp. 14–15), and the Tartars (p. 16).

There is thus, if I may put it in this way, a kind of level among these peoples, Egyptians, Chaldeans or Persians, Indians, Chinese, and Scythians or Tartars; none of them goes farther back into antiquity than the others, and this remarkable period of 3000 years [BCE] is about the same for all. It is the date when such

knowledge has reached us. But one must keep in mind that this is the epoch of the renaissance of astronomy, not its origin (p. 16).⁵³

The data of ancient astronomy are thus "ruins rather than elements of a science" (p. 18) and are only a faint echo of the wisdom of Bailly's *Urvolk*. Bailly's speculations led him to find its home in Siberia, supposedly the first habitable region when our hot globe cooled (1777), or even on the fabulous continent of Atlantis near the North Pole (1779); but William Jones was not ready to follow him so far north.

⁵³ "Il y a donc, pour ainsi dire, une espece de niveau entre ces peuples, Egyptiens, Chaldéens ou Perses, Indiens, Chinois, Scythes ou Tartares, ils ne s'élevent pas plus les uns que les autres dans l'antiquité, & cette époque remarquable de 3000 ans est à peu-près la même pour tous. Elle est la date des connoissances qui sont parvenues jusqu'à nous. Mais il faut bien observer que c'est l'époque de la renaissance de l'Astronomie, & non pas de son origine."

9. GIORGI'S TWO BUDDHAS

Detailed information about Tibet had been an item on Jones' wish list before he reached India, and it is fair to assume that Bailly's speculations about the origin of the human race in Siberia were in part responsible for this. Bailly had pointed to the "Caucasus" (which in those days included what we today call the Himalayas) and in particular to Western Tibet where the Ganges had its source as the place where the Urvolk had found refuge from the great flood. Trying to convince Voltaire that the cradle of humanity was not in India but to the north of it, Bailly wrote:

Not only must we seek around these mountains the origin of the Persians; but we must equally, though with less positive proofs, locate there the origin of the Indians and Chinese. Has not the Sanscrit language shown, Monsieur, that the Brahmans [Brames] are strangers to India? Has Mr. Gentil not told you that they had come from the north? (Bailly 1779:222)⁵⁴

If the Brahmans came from the Himalayas it was only logical that their religion also had its origin in the country "where the great Lama resides" (p. 223).

Could the essential cult of Tibet thus be identical with the essential cult of India? The Lamas are then Brahmans [Brames], and since they are spread toward the north until Selinginskoi at 50 degrees of latitude, we thus have a probability that the Brahmans followed this route before arriving in India; and this probability is

⁵⁴ "Non seulement nous devons chercher vers ces montagnes l'origine des Persans; mais nous y devons trouver également, quoique par des preuves moins positives, celle des Indiens & des Chinois. La langue du Hanscrit ne vous a-t-elle pas démontré, Monsieur, que les Brames sont étrangers à l'Inde? M. le Gentil ne vous a-t-il pas dit qu'ils étaient venus du Nord?"

confirmed by the pilgrimages that Indians, driven by their devotion, make to these parts of Siberia (pp. 223–4).⁵⁵

While it is unlikely that Jones believed all of this, it certainly piqued his interest and pertained to the core argument of his project. Thus it is hardly surprising that when setting out on a long journey in the spring of 1786 he took along a huge two-volume work on Tibet and read it cover to cover. He wrote to John Macpherson, his main informant about Tibet:

Your communications about the Lama will be truly interesting. I have read since I left Calcutta 800 pages in quarto concerning the Mythology and History, both civil and natural, of Tibet. The work was printed with every advantage of new types and curious engravings, at Rome, about ten years ago, and was compiled from the papers of an Italian father, named Orazio,⁵⁶ who had lived thirty years in that country and Napal [sic], where he died (Cannon 1970:2.698).

⁵⁵ "Le culte essentiel du Thibet est donc le même que le culte essentiel de l'Inde? Les Lamas sont donc des Brame; & comme ils remontent vers le Nord jusqu'au 50° degré de latitude, jusqu'à Selinginskoi, nous aurons une probabilité que les Brame ont tenu cette route pour arriver dans l'Inde; & cette probabilité sera confirmée par les pèlerinages que la dévotion fait faire aux Indiens dans cette partie de la Sibérie."

⁵⁶ The Franciscan missionary Orazio della Penna (1680–1745) travelled to Tibet in 1707 and later spent sixteen years (1716–1732) in Tibet. He and his fellow missionary, the Jesuit Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733), were pioneers of the study of the Tibetan language and of Tibetan Buddhism.

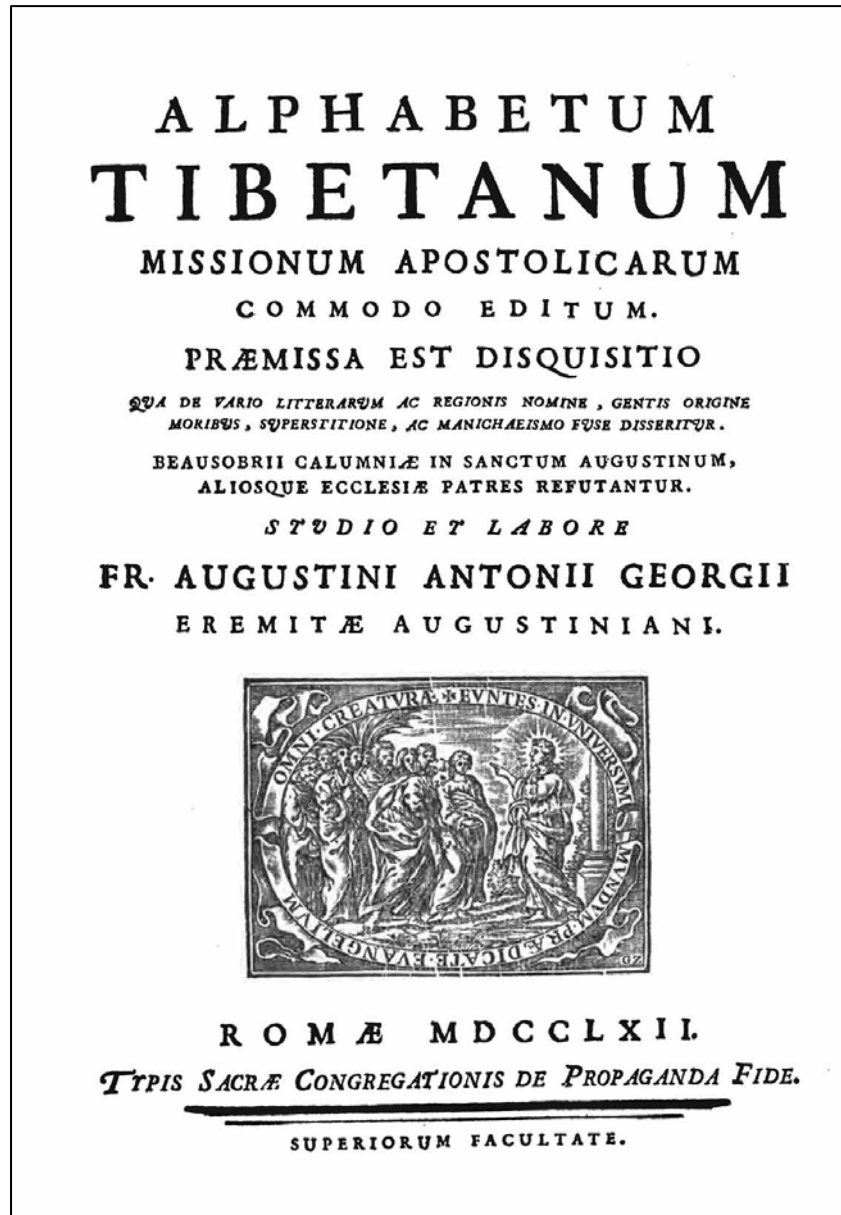


Fig. 10: Title page of Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum* (1762)

The book in question was Agostino Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, a work published in 1762 that was as rich in contorted etymological arguments as Bryant's and is another immortal monument to erudition gone haywire. While it inspired Jones to come up with his scheme for romanized transliteration of Asian languages (p. 698) and appears to have deepened his insight

into (and rage about) the use of etymology in historical arguments, a poison pill found its way into Jones’ work: Giorgi’s two-Buddha theory (AR1:123–4).

When struggling with the discrepancy between Asian sources—which held that Shakyamuni Buddha lived six or even ten centuries before Christ’s birth—and the views of de Guignes which regarded even the reputedly most fundamental text of Buddhism, the *Forty-two Sections Sutra*, as a concoction of early Christian times (de Guignes 1756–8:2.233–4), Father Giorgi had “established the thesis that there are two Buttas or Xacas and that the Tibetans mixed up the first with the second” (Giorgi 2001:xxvi). Giorgi’s thesis was probably also inspired by a Engelbert Kaempfer’s attempt to reconcile differences between the Sino-Japanese and Thai dating of the Buddha’s birth which had also made him favor an older and younger Buddha.⁵⁷ In addition, Giorgi’s two-Buddha theory was a courageous attempt to shore up the centrality of the Mediterranean cradle because his “old” Buddha or Xaca is linked, mostly by hilarious etymological contortions, to a mythological figure born of a virgin mother:

We come to the conclusion that [the old] *Xaca*, that God *But-Iid*, was in fact based on the *Only Begotten One* engendered by Zeus and a virgin mother whose *male form* was identical with *Osiris*, *Bacchus*, and the Indian *Sun*. (p. xxiv)⁵⁸

Giorgi’s “younger” Buddha, by contrast, is a distorted image of Jesus Christ:

The second *Xaca* is the monster who around the year 60 of the first century of our church began to be known by the Indians and Chinese. Almost simultaneously his name and fame reached the Tibetans. Soon afterwards images reached Lhasa by way of India and China. The conspicuous nature of this period in the annals of the Indians, Chinese, and Tibetans, if one firmly grasps it, irrefutably proves that the

⁵⁷ See App 2008:9 and 18–20.

⁵⁸ “Concludimus tandem *Xacam* istum *But-Iid* Deum nempe *Unigenitum*, a Jove & virgine Matre primo natum, eundem in *masculo sexu* fuisse ac *osirim*, *Bacchum*, & *Solem* Indicum.”

fabrication of this new *Xaca* could only take place after Christ's death, and we will put the architects and fabricators of this artifice in the spotlight. (p. xxiv)⁵⁹

While the "old" Buddha was thus an outgrowth of the worst pagan mythology including the ridiculous idea of transmigration, the "younger" Buddha was an outrageous parody of the Son of God from Israel, word of whom had reached India and China "around 60 A.D." whereupon "his name and fame came to the ear of the Tibetans" who had "soon afterwards received images brought to Lhasa from both India and China" (p. xxxi). But why had the Asian image of Jesus been so distorted? For Giorgi the blame lay squarely with early Christian gnostics and especially with Mani, the founder of Manichaeism. In his view the Tibetans were seduced into embracing a "patchwork of superstition [superstitionum farrago], Christianity corrupted and besmirched by the Manichaeans" (p. xxxiv). Tibetan religion was thus portrayed as a diabolical concoction based on a confusion of the two Buddhas, a mix-up that had been facilitated by the old Egyptian belief in transmigration.

This theory wreaked havoc for more than half a century, and if Jones was seduced by it, he was in good company: in the 1820s luminaries like the philosopher Hegel, the geographer Carl Ritter, and the prolix Baron von Eckstein still fell for it. In the case of Jones, the effects of this theory were of importance because the year of Buddha's birth formed the pivot of his entire Indian chronology. Jones had read that the career of the Buddha began ten years before the close of the third world age. In this way, he thought, the beginning of the fourth world-age (which is the present one) could be determined. The "older" Buddha's birth date thus formed the sorely needed basis by which Indian history could be synchronized with both secular and sacred Western history. But Jones's Indian experts held widely diverging opinions about this date, provoking Jones's complaint:

⁵⁹ "Secundus *Xaca*, recens illud monstrum est, quod anno circiter LX. primi Ecclesiae seculi Indis, & Sinis innotescere coeperat: eodemque ferme tempore illius nomen ac fama ad aures tibetanorum pervenit. Paulo (sic) post geminum simulacrum ex India, & Sina in Urbem Lhassam evectum est. Hanc unam epocham in Indicis, Sinensibus, ac Tibetanis annalibus plane conspicuam, si firmam teneas, invictum habebis argumentum de nupero *Xaca*, qui nonnisi post CHRISTI mortem fabricari potuerit: Immo & lucem inde accipies uberrimam ad Operis architectos, & molitores penitissime cognoscendos."

We should be able to ascertain a very material point in the *Hindu* chronology; I mean the birth of the *Buddha*, concerning which the different *Pandits* whom I have consulted, and the same *Pandits* at different times, have expressed a strange diversity of opinion (AR1:121).

All questioned experts agreed that the Buddha was "the last considerable incarnation of the Deity," but astronomers in Benares placed him in the third world age while Jones's trusty informer Radhacant insisted "that he appeared after the *thousandth* year of the fourth" (p. 121). Some divergences could be handled by Giorgi's two-Buddha theory, but Jones was in dire need of a bomb-proof year for the beginning of the fourth world age. And here the *Dabistan*, a Persian work that Jones in the spring of 1787 had "read through twice with great attention" (Cannon 1970:2.739), came to the rescue.



Fig. 11: Priest of the ancient Persian fire cult (Hyde 1700: 374)

10. DABISTAN AND DESATIR

In his letter of June 24, 1787 to John Shore who had lent him the Persian *Dabistan*, Jones expressed his delight:

It contains more recondite learning, more entertaining history, more beautiful specimens of poetry, more ingenuity and wit, more indecency and blasphemy, than I ever saw collected in a single volume: the last two are not the author's, but are introduced in the chapters on the heretics and infidels of India. On the whole, it is the most amusing and instructive book I ever read in Persian (Cannon 1970, 2:739).

It was this book that Jones relied on in establishing the cornerstone of his chronological framework. Long convinced that "we can only reason satisfactorily from *written* evidence, and that our forensick rule must be invariably applied *to take the declarations of the Brahmans most strongly against themselves*" (AR1: 122), Jones was happy to trust the author of the *Dabistan*:

The learned and accurate author of the *Dabistan*, whose information concerning the *Hindus* is wonderfully correct, mentions an opinion of the *Pandits*, with whom he had conversed, that *Buddha* began his career *ten* years before the close of the third age (p. 122).

On this basis Jones decided "that, on the whole, we may safely place *Buddha just at the beginning of the present age*" (p. 122) and resorted to Giorgi's two-Buddha theory to bridge discrepancies (pp. 123–4). But the *Dabistan*, Jones's favorite Persian book, not only provided chronological data. In his commentary to Goverdhan Caul's essay "On the Literature of the Hindus" (AR2:344–55) Jones included the following observation:

Mohsani Fáni, the very candid and ingenious author of the *Dabistàn*, describes in his first chapter a race of old *Persian* sages, who appear from the whole of his

account to have been *Hindus*: and we cannot doubt that the book of *Mahábád*, or *Menu*, which was written, he says, *in a celestial dialect*, means the *Véda*; so that, as *Zerátusht* was only a reformer, we find in *India* the true source of the ancient *Persian* religion (AR2:349).

Jones's commentary to Caul's essay, read by Jones to the Asiatick Society in May of 1787 (Cannon 1970:2. 733), already indicates that the *Dabistan* was going to play a central role in Jones's project. But its true impact only became clear in Jones's sixth discourse which was delivered on February 19 of 1789 (see Appendix 2). Jones's announcement of his discovery of the *Dabistan* points to his deep interest in this book and its importance for his project:

A fortunate discovery, for which I was first indebted to *Mir Muhammed Husain*, one of the most intelligent *Muselmans* in *India*, has at once dissipated the cloud, and cast a gleam of it on the primeval history of *Iran* and of the human race, of which I had long despaired, and which could hardly have dawned from any other quarter (AR2:48).

In the *Dabistan* Jones found a genealogy of religions that began with an account of mankind's most ancient religion. Jones was delighted:

The rare and interesting tract *on twelve different religions*, entitled the *Dabistin* [sic], and composed by a *Mohammedan* traveller, a native of *Cashmir*, named *Mohsan*, but distinguished by the assumed surname of *Fani*, or *perishable*, begins with the wonderfully curious chapter on the religion of *Hushang*, which was long anterior to that of *Zeratusht*, but had continued to be secretly professed by many learned *Persians* even to the author's time (AR2:48).

At last Jones seemed to have found a source illuminating mankind's primeval religion! But, just as importantly, he learned that the ancient pure religion described in the *Dabistan* had survived. According to the anonymous author this religion had been secretly professed by learned Persian residents of India as recently as the 17th century! These learned men had

"compiled a number of books, now extremely scarce" that the author of the *Dabistan* "had perused, and with the authors of which, or with many of them, he had contracted a intimate friendship" (p. 48).

While he was probably unaware of most other texts originating with this group, Jones appears to have been rather well informed about Persian exiles in India. They were "dissenting in many points" from the traditional doctrines and had fled to India "persecuted by the ruling powers of their country" (p. 48). One of Jones's informers, "a learned follower of *Zeratusht*, named *Bahman*," lived with Jones for about three years "as a *Persian* reader" (pp. 50–1). Jones's increasing knowledge about ancient Persia and its languages enabled him to quietly correct some of the worst factual errors that he had committed in his anonymous attack on Anquetil-Duperron in 1771. But instead of apologizing for his earlier ignorance and rudeness, he repeated in his sixth discourse some of the old *ad hominem* complaints about the Frenchman's "immoderate vanity and virulence of temper" (AR2:53–4). Ironically, without either Jones's or Anquetil's knowledge, the projects of these two men showed ever more similarity. Both were drawn to Persian sources produced in Mughal India; both sought to use these sources to throw light on mankind's original and ideal religion; and both felt attracted by Sufi mysticism and Indo-Persian "ancient theology" movements. Furthermore, both were ignorant about the ideological background of their central source and the agenda of its authors, and both were surprisingly credulous regarding claims of antiquity and genuineness.

Unbeknownst to Jones, these rare books of the Persian exiles including the *Dabistan* were products of an illuminist movement founded by Adhar KAYVAN (1529/1533 – 1609/1618), a Persian "mystic, philosopher, ascetic, and ecstatic" (Stausberg 2002:413). Kayvan was greatly influenced by the illuminism (*ešrāq*) of the mystic, Sufi theologian, and Iranian Neoplatonist philosopher SUHRAVARDI (c. 1155–1191) who had famously claimed to have resuscitated primeval Iranian theosophy and "revived their noble wisdom of light" (Walbridge 2001:60). Kayvan had emigrated from his native Shiraz in Persia to Patna in Northern India, and his teaching fits the classic mold of ancient theology. He passed his movement off as the legitimate heir of the pure primeval religion conveyed by God to the first humans. To give this audacious venture the necessary authority and antique veneer, Kayvan and/or his disciples had fashioned a

fascinating narrative designed to prove their unbeatably ancient roots. It began with the pre-Adamite Mahabad who had supposedly initiated the cycle of human existence long before Adam (Tavakoli-Targhi 2001:28). This was of course a strategic move to relegate the Old Testament narrative, which the Muslim newcomers had adopted from their Jewish brethren, to secondary and derivative status. Someone in Kayvar's movement even went a significant step further and decided to actually write the movement's custom-made Old Testament that was to be the oldest of them all. Small wonder that this book, the *Desatir*, prefigures the teachings of Kayvan's movement to a T and thus legitimizes it as the genuine successor to the most ancient religion of mankind. Although Jones never got hold of this extraordinary forgery he knew that Mahabad, the *Dabistan's* Proto-Adam, was said to have received this sacred scripture straight from God:

They added, that he received from the Creator, and promulgated among men, *a sacred book in a heavenly language*, to which the *Muselman* author gives the *Arabic* title of *Desatir*, or Regulations, but the original name of which he has not mentioned (AR2:59)

Jones thought that the "heavenly language" referred to Sanskrit and that the *Desatir* corresponded to the *Institutes of Menu* (p. 59). This fact may help to explain why Jones suddenly decided to spend so much of his valuable time learning Sanskrit. He noted:

Now when we know that the *Hindus* believe in *fourteen Menus*, or celestial personages with similar functions, the *first* of whom left a book of *regulations*, or *divine ordinances*, which they hold equal to the *Veda*, and the language of which they believe to be that of the gods, we can hardly doubt that the first corruption of the purest and oldest religion was the system of *Indian* theology invented by the *Brahmans*, and prevalent in these territories, where the book of *Mahabad*, or *Menu*, is at this moment the standard of all religious and moral duties (AR2:59).

Of course the adherents of Kayvan's movement would have vehemently objected to such facile identification of their God-given oldest testament with an Indian lawbook that in their eyes was much younger; but the portrayal of the ancient theology of the Brahmanas as a corruption of

the purest and oldest religion on earth would certainly have met their approval. Indeed, the linkage of their illuminist restoration movement to the supposedly purest and oldest religion was naturally at the very top of the Kayvanite agenda. The fact that the *Desatir* was written in a "heavenly language" so ancient that nobody could read it was already proof of its antiquity; but luckily this "ur-text" in an unknown script had been translated into "pure" Persian by a certain "Sasan the Fifth" who had supposedly lived a millennium before Kayvan and was linked to him by an elaborate genealogy. After the *Desatir* was first published in 1809, researchers trying to analyze the unknown script and "Sasan's" translation realized with amazement that the mysterious script must have been invented in India (Erskine 1818, de Sacy 1821). Today the inventor is believed to be an overly creative member of Kayvan's movement (Corbin 1985; Mojtabai 1993). The only person in the world able to decipher the script, "Sasan the Fifth," was of course also conjured out of thin air. Other Kayvanite texts were supposedly also authored by very ancient personages; but their content betrays that the "translators" hailed from Kayvan's circle.

The central objective both of the *Dabistan* and the *Desatir* was the presentation of the world's oldest religion as Persian and the linkage of that supposedly pure primeval religion to the illuminist teachings of Kayvan's movement. The *Dabistan* presents Kayvan's mysticism under the heading of "Sipāsiyān," a totally rational ur-religion which was too pure for common consumption and therefore came to be wrapped in Zoroastrian symbolism (Walbridge 2001:93). Kayvan's religion was thus portrayed as the esoteric heir by direct transmission of pure primeval monotheism, whereas Zoroastrianism represented an exoteric repackaging for the common man. While the impact of Kayvan's movement on the Indian religious landscape appears to have been rather limited, the author of the *Dabistan* certainly succeeded in misleading Jones and other European orientalists such as Görres and Faber.⁶⁰ For his part, William Jones gladly turned

⁶⁰ Translations from the *Dabistan*'s first chapters were first made accessible to the European public in Gladwin's *New Asiatick Miscellany* (1789). A German translation of Gladwin's text by Baron von Dalberg appeared as a separate publication in 1817 under the title of *Scheik Mohammed Fani's Dabistan: oder von der Religion der ältesten Parsen* [Sheikh Mohammed Fani's Dabistan: or of the religion of the oldest Persians]. In 1843 David Shea and Anthony Troyer published their integral English translation in Paris and London (3 volumes), and in 1901 the

Persia into the homeland of mankind's pure primeval religion, regarded the Vedas and Brahman theology as the first "corruption of the purest and oldest religion" (AR2:59), and accepted esoteric teachings of Sufi tendency as the legitimate heirs of mankind's monotheistic Ur-religion.

American orientalist A.V.W. Jackson published a one-volume abridgment of Shea/Troyer's translation. An accurate translation and study of this work is an urgent desideratum.

11. VESTIGES OF PARADISE

From the sixth anniversary discourse onward, Jones's view of the world's "purest and oldest religion" and of its modern successors was very much in line with the *Dabistan*; but other ancient theologies such as that of Newton were seen as congruent.

The primeval religion of *Iran*, if we rely on the authorities adduced by *Mohsani Fani*, was that which Newton calls the oldest (and it may be justly called the noblest) of all religions: 'A firm belief that One Supreme God made the world by his power, and continually governed it by his providence; a pious fear, love, and adoration of him; a due reverence for parents and aged persons; a fraternal affection for the whole human species, and a compassionate tenderness even for the brute creation.' A system of devotion so pure and sublime could hardly, among mortals, be of long duration; and we learn from the *Dabistan*, that the popular worship of the *Iranians* under *Hushang*, was purely *Sabian* (AR2:58).

Jones's reference to Newton is of interest; indeed one can regard Jones as an orientalist heir of Newton's attempt to resuscitate Noah's religion.⁶¹ William STUKELEY (1687–1765) had pursued Newton's lead in his research on Avebury and Stonehenge and had even studied a little Chinese which he suspected to be "the only one [language] which has been spoken without interruption" (Haycock 2002:229); but ancient boulders were hard to interpret, and textual vestiges of prediluvial religion were out of Stukeley's reach. However, the conviction that ancient European and ancient Asian religions had a common ancient root was widespread; even James Macpherson, the creator of *The Poems of Ossian*—one of the world's most famous literary hoaxes—had stated in 1773 that "the ideas of the Druids concerning God were certainly the same with those of the Eastern Philosophers" (Macpherson 1773:233).

⁶¹ See Chapter 5 of my forthcoming *The Birth of Orientalism*.

The *Dabistan*'s detailed account not only of the pure ur-religion but also of its gradual degeneration seemed extremely pertinent for the investigation of such questions of origin. For Jones, "Sabian" referred to the adoration of "the *host of heaven*, or the *celestial bodies*" (AR2:59); but the author of the *Dabistan* insisted that this worship of heavenly bodies in Persia seemed "only a part of a far more complicated religion" (p. 59). Zoroaster had tried to repackage old monotheism "by the addition of genii, or angels," "new ceremonies in the veneration shown to fire," and above all "by establishing the actual adoration of one Supreme Being" (p. 60). But the *Dabistan* contained, apart from fascinating tales about primeval religion and its subsequent degradation, also accounts of the teachings which had inspired Kayvan and his followers in the first place to concoct that pure ur-religion whose legitimate heirs and restorers they claimed to be. Jones explained:

I will only detain you with a few remarks on that metaphysical theology which has been professed immemorially by a numerous sect of *Persians* and *Hindus*, was carried in part into *Greece*, and prevails even now among learned *Muselmans*, who sometimes avow it without reserve. The modern philosophers of this persuasion are called *Sufis*, either from the *Greek* word for a *sage*, or from the *woollen* mantle which they used to wear in some provinces of Persia (p. 62).

The *Dabistan*'s first and last chapters not only made fascinating reading for Jones but appear to have substantially shaped his views. The first chapter of the book is devoted to the point of departure, the earliest religion of mankind. The twelfth and last chapter, on the other hand, betrays the objective which the author and his Kayvanite movement pursued: the portrayal of the illuminationism of their Sufi-inspired esoteric movement as the heir of mankind's primeval religion. In accepting Sufism as a vestige of pure primitive religion, Jones adopted the sect's view in words that echo his Hymn to Náráyena:

Their [the Sufi's] fundamental tenets are, that nothing exists absolutely but *God*; that the human soul is an emanation from his essence, and though divided for a time from its heavenly source, will be finally reunited with it; that the highest

possible happiness will arise from its reunion; and that the chief good of mankind in this transitory world, consists in as perfect an *union* with the Eternal Spirit as the incumbrances of a mortal frame will allow; that for this purpose they should break all *connection* (or *taalluk*, as they call it) with extrinsic objects, and pass through life without *attachments*, as a swimmer in the ocean strikes freely without the impediment of clothes; and that they should be straight and free as the cypress, whose fruit is hardly perceptible.... (AR2:62)

Jones mentioned more characteristics of Sufi teaching such as its mystical conception of Beauty and Love and "extinction, as a disengagement from earthly trammels, and the means of returning to its Only Beloved" (pp. 62–3) and saw a connection between Sufism, mystic poetry, Vedanta, and the world's oldest religion:

Such in part (for I omit the minuter and more subtil metaphysics of the *Sufis*, which are mentioned in the *Dabistan*) is the wild and enthusiastick religion of the modern *Persian* poets, especially of the sweet *Hafiz* and the great *Maulavi*: such is the system of the *Vedanti* philosophers and best lyric poets of *India*; and, as it was a system of the highest antiquity in both nations, it may be added to the many other proofs of an immediate affinity between them (AR2:63).

Thus it happened that Jones used the wild sectarian fiction of origins concocted by Kayvan and his followers as "clear evidence" which supposedly proved that in very ancient times "a powerful monarchy was established in *Iran*" and had "subsisted many centuries" (p. 64). The language of the first Persian empire, according to Jones, was "the mother of the *Sanscrit*, and consequently of the *Zend* and *Parsi*, as well as of *Greek*, *Latin*, and *Gothic*" (p. 64). Add to that the languages of the Assyrians and Tartars, and Jones's quest for origins seemed to have reached its goal:

We discover, therefore in *Persia*, at the earliest dawn of history, the *three* distinct races of men, whom we described, on former occasions, as possessors of *India*, *Arabia*, *Tartary*.... The *three* races, therefore, whom we have already mentioned

(and more than three we have not yet found) migrated from *Iran* as from their common country.... We may therefore hold this proposition firmly established, that *Iran*, or *Persia* in its largest sense, was the true centre of population, of knowledge, of languages, and of arts (AR2:65).

The rest of Jones's discourses added little to the question of origins; Iran stayed firmly at the center since all three of Jones's trunks of the human race could be "traced to *Iran*, as to a common centre, from which it is highly probable that they diverged in various directions about four thousand years ago" (AR2:381). The reader notes once more the similarity to Bailly's scenario: all major civilizations radiate from an inspired Urvolk somewhere near Central Asia around 3000 BCE. Trautmann (1997) and Lincoln (1999) have shown how Jones followed Bryant's model in erecting his Mosaic ethnology; but the core argument of Jones was built on his conception of humanity's ur-religion. Despite his critique of Bryant's methods, Jones had faithfully carried out Bryant's directive to pursue "shattered fragments of original history" to devine their source:

Upon the whole, I think, it is manifest, that there are noble resources still remaining; if we but apply ourselves to diligent inquiry. As we have both in India and China, persons of science, and curiosity, it would be highly acceptable to the learned world, if they would pay a little more attention to the antiquities of the countries where they reside. (Bryant 1775–6, 3:600)

In his essay "On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus" (AR3:165–183; read in December of 1791) Jones once more wrote about this religion that had "prevailed from time immemorial in *Asia*; particularly among the *Persian* theists, both ancient *Húshangis* and modern *Súfis*" (p. 165). Jones knew little about the history of Sufism and had no idea how deeply Sufis and Persian illuminationists such as Suhrawardi—whose thought had influenced Kayvan and colored the *Dabistan*—were influenced by Arab transmissions of Neoplatonic ideas and texts (Walbridge 2000). Thus he explained the striking similarities between "that sublime, but poetical, theology, which, glows and sparkles in the writings of the old *Academicks*" and Sufism / Vedanta

by the assumption that "*Grecian* travellers learned among the sages of the east" (AR3:165). He also thought that Sufism, the religion of "most of the *Asiatick* poets" (p. 178), had borrowed "from the *Indian* philosophers of the *Vedánta* school" (p. 165). This certainly was the case in the one source on the "metaphysicks and theology" other than the *Dabistan* which Jones recommended for further reading: "the pleasing essay, called the *Junction of two Seas*, by that amiable and unfortunate prince, Dárá Shecúh" (p. 181).

12. ANCIENT THEOLOGY

In the introduction to *The Junction of Two Seas*, Prince Dara states that the book grew out of his thirst "to know the tenets of the religion of the Indian monotheists" (Mahfuz-ul-Haq 1929:38). His questioning of doctors and divines of Indian religion left the Sufi prince convinced that their "ocean" of teachings was identical to his own "Truth of truths", i.e., the "secrets and subtleties of the true religion of the Sufis" (p. 38).

Having had repeated intercourse and (continuous) discussion with the doctors and perfect divines of this (i.e. Indian) religion who had attained the highest pitch of perfection in religious exercises, comprehension (of God), intelligence and (religious) insight, he did not find any difference, except verbal, in the way in which they sought and comprehended Truth (p. 38).

The Prince's teachings also figured prominently in the Sufi section of the *Dabistan* where several pages are devoted to his sayings (chapter XII, section 3). The author of the *Dabistan* was a contemporary and admirer of Prince Dara. He was well informed about his ideas and the prince's teachers, several of whom are featured in the *Dabistan*; and his loyalty to Dara even after the prince's execution in 1659—and his desire to avoid the prince's terrible fate—may be the main reason why no author's name graces the *Dabistan*.

Having studied the *Dabistan*, *The Junction of Two Seas*, and the Prince's Persian translation of the Upanishads, Jones was quite familiar with Prince Dara's vision of religion. What Jones wrote about the similarity of Sufism and Vedanta, about their vision of the all-encompassing oneness of God, about creation as a labor of love, about the world as a seeming multiplicity that in reality is one, about the goal of realizing this divine oneness, etc., was manifestly inspired by Prince Dara's ideas and writings. The Mughal prince Dara, his translator Anquetil-Duperron, and Anquetil's harsh critic William Jones were all in search of God's original teachings; all three firmly believed in an initial divine revelation to mankind; all three were

unwittingly but strongly influenced by Neoplatonism and the mysticism it engendered in East and West; all were convinced that the core of primeval monotheism had been continuously transmitted and survived in extremely ancient texts; all thought that their own religion was the perfect heir of primeval monotheism; and all saw it in the mirror of what they held to be the world's oldest scriptures.

Jones insisted that all his historical researches "confirmed the Mosaic accounts of the primitive world" and that they did so independently of his admitted "interest in corroborating the multiplied evidences of revealed religion" (AR4:xiv). There was not the slightest doubt in his mind that the divine inspiration of Moses was supported by the exact conclusions that he had—with the help of his study of languages, the Bible, Newton, Bryant, Bailly, and the *Dabistan*—reached about the Iranian cradle of humanity:

Thus, on the preceding supposition, that the first eleven chapters of the book, which is thought proper to call *Genesis*, are merely a preface to the oldest civil history now extant, we see the truth of them confirmed by antecedent reasoning, and by evidence in part highly probable, and in part certain; but the *connection* of the *Mosaic* history with that of the Gospel by a chain of sublime predictions, unquestionably ancient, and apparently fulfilled, must induce us to think the *Hebrew* narrative more than human in its origin, and consequently true in every substantial part of it, though possibly expressed in a figurative language; as many learned and pious men have believed, and as the most pious may believe without injury, and perhaps with advantage, to the cause of revealed religion. If MOSES then was endued with supernatural knowledge, it is no longer probable only, but absolutely certain, that the whole race of man proceeded from *Iran*, as from a centre, whence they migrated at first in three great colonies; and that those three branches grew from a common stock, which had been miraculously preserved in a general convulsion and inundation of this globe (AR3:487).

While Jones was satisfied that he had corroborated the accounts of Moses and Bryant about a common cradle of the human race and that he had and located the fountainhead of its

postdiluvian dispersion in the old Iranian homeland, many questions regarding antediluvian history and especially religion remained unsolved. Like Newton, Bryant, and Ramsay, Jones regarded Noah rather than Moses as the pivotal figure. If the ark (whose landing spot marked the cradle of new humanity) bridged the gulf between the antediluvian and postdiluvian world, it was Noah who formed the link between the old world's Adamic religion with those of Moses and Christ. Jones's ethnology was, as Trautmann (1997:42 ff.) has shown, firmly "mosaic." His theology, on the other hand, was decidedly pre-mosaic: it was the *prisca theologia* (ancient theology) that God had first taught to Adam and transmitted to postdiluvian humanity via Noah. In his focus on Noah and his religion, Jones was very much in line with predecessors like Bryant and Newton. But while they had been forced to speculate about the excellency of antediluvian religion and science, he had the fortune to get direct access to supposedly very ancient Asian sources. Anquetil-Duperron had travelled to Asia in search of ancient sacred texts and ended up being mocked by the youthful Jones. Now, about two decades later, Jones pursued a very similar goal: finding ancient Asian sources that could supplement the sparse Old Testament account that he, in tune with tradition, still attributed to Moses. In the preface to his last major work, the *Institutes of Hindu Law: or, The Ordinances of Menu* of 1794, Jones asserted that the *Yajur Vēda* was written "1580 years before the birth of our Saviour" and noted that this "would make it older than the five books of Moses" (Jones 1799, 3:56). Jones even supported Prince Dara's opinion "that the first MENU of the *Bráhmens* could be no other person than the progenitor of mankind, to whom *Jews, Christians, and Muselmáns* unite in giving the name of ADAM" (p. 58).

In his preface to *The Ordinances of Menu* Jones also admonished his countrymen, who are "happily enlightened by sound philosophy and the only true revelation," that the "many millions of *Hindu* subjects" were not only ready to contribute their "well directed industry" to "add largely to the wealth of *Britain*" but possessed "a scheme of theology most obscurely figurative" that showed traces of ancient wisdom and was evident in ancient texts and prayers:

The many panegyrics on the *Gáyatrī*, the *Mother*, as it is called, of the *Vēda*, prove the author to have *adored* (not the visible material *sun*, but) *that divine and incomparably greater light*, to use the words of the most venerable text in the

Indian scripture, which illumines all, delights all, from which all proceed, to which all must return, and which alone can irradiate (not our visual organs merely, but our souls and (*our intellects*)). (p. 62)

After Jones's death in the year 1794, his friend Lord Teignmouth (John Shore) found among his papers a number of fragments pertaining to a "Dissertation '*On the Primitive Religion of the Hindus*'" by which Jones, according to Teignmouth, intended "*to remove the veil from the supposed mysteries of the primeval Indian Religion*" (Jones 1799:6.414). These fragments contain, among other things, the first English translation of an Upanishad from the original Sanskrit (pp. 423–5)⁶² and some explanations about the *Gayatri* that Jones regarded as a genuine expression of the "primitive religion of the Hindus." Jones thought that a Persian paraphrase of this prayer "deserves to be mentioned very particularly, namely, that by Prince Dara in the *Oupnek'hat*:

That amiable, but impolitic prince, who sacrificed his throne, and his life, to a premature declaration of his religious opinions, had employed six months, as he tells us, at *Banaras*, in translating, and explaining, fifty-one *Upanishads*, or secrets of the old Indian scripture; but he translated only the verbal interpretation of his Pandits, and blended the text of the *Veda*, with different glosses, and even with the conversation, I believe, of his living Hindu expositors, who are naturally so loquacious, that when they have began (sic) talking, they hardly know how to close their lips. (p. 415)

With the assistance of Colonel Polier, who had also procured him a version of the four Vedas, Jones had gotten hold of "a complete copy, corrected by a learned *Rájá*, named *Anandarám*;" but he decided to "postpone a regular perusal of it" until he could "compare it with the Sanscrit original" (p. 415). Jones was thus one of the illustrious Europeans who had managed to get hold of a copy of Prince Dara's Persian Upanishads whose Latin translation by Jones's

⁶² The French revolutionary orientalist Volney translated Jones's English rendering into French (de Fortia d'Urban 1807:309). On Volney see Chapter 8 of my forthcoming *The Birth of Orientalism*.

rival Anquetil-Duperron was to create such enormous waves at the beginning of the 19th century.⁶³ Though more cautious than Anquetil regarding the genuineness of the Persian Upanishads, Jones was convinced that the primeval religion of India had been a pure monotheism as expressed in "The Gayatri or holiest verse of the Vedas":

Let us adore the supremacy of *that* divine sun, the godhead who illuminates all, who recreates all, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we invoke to direct our understandings aright in our progress towards his holy seat. (p. 417)

Concerned that India's figurative veil, its "strange conceits in metaphysics," and its "idle superstitions" (Jones 1799:3.62) could obscure the ancient truth, Jones commented this holy verse in a manner that would have gained Prince Dara's hearty approval:

What the sun and light are to this visible world, that, are the *supreme good*, and *truth*, to the intellectual and invisible universe; and, as our corporeal eyes have a distinct perception of objects enlightened by the sun, thus our souls acquire certain knowledge, by meditating on the light of truth, which emanates from the Being of beings; *that* is the light by which alone our minds can be directed in the path to beatitude. (Jones 1799:6.417)

For Jones the monotheistic heart of primeval Indian religion—as found in the Vedas under layers upon layers of allegory—was most aptly expressed by his trusted *pandit* Radhacant:

Perfect truth; perfect happiness; without equal; immortal; absolute unity; whom neither speech can describe, nor mind comprehend; all-pervading; all-transcending; delighted with his own boundless intelligence, not limited by space, or time; without feet, moving swiftly; without hands, grasping all worlds; without

⁶³ At the time, four European scholars owned a total of seven manuscript copies of Prince Dara's Persian Upanishads which supposedly were so rare: Jones (one complete copy); Anquetil-Duperron (two complete copies); Halhed (one complete and one incomplete copy), and Boughton-Rouse (two complete copies).

eyes, all-surveying; without ears, all-hearing; without an intelligent guide, understanding all; without cause, the first of all causes; all-ruling; all-powerful; the creator, preserver, transformer, of all things; such is the Great One: this the Védas declare. (Jones 1799:6.418)

At the end of one of his extracts from the Vedas, Jones expressed his own view of the essence of primeval Indian religion and of its congruence with his own faith. Under the heading "*Veda*, and 1st Article of our Church" Jones wrote:

There is one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passion, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible. &c. &c. (Jones 1799:6.422)

Ancient Asian texts such as the Vedas thus appeared as rays of light from the antediluvian darkness and provided a glimpse into the unsullied monotheism of Noah and his predecessors. All major Asian descendants seemed to agree on one thing:

The general corollary, admitted by *Hindus*, *Arabs*, and *Tartars*, by *Persians*, and by *Chinese*, is the supremacy of an all-creating and all-preserving Spirit, infinitely wise, good, and powerful, but infinitely removed from the comprehension of his most exalted creatures (AR4:172).

In the Vedas, the *Dabistan*, the writings of Prince Dara, Sufi poetry, the commentaries of Shankara, and Indian philosophy—whose basis Jones saw in God's "omnipresence, wisdom, and goodness" (AR4:164)—this British pioneer of modern orientalism thus heard distinct echoes of mankind's first religion. They appeared to be vestiges of the kind of ancient theology that could inspire even deists and infrequent churchgoers like Jones:

Praise would not satisfy the boundless imagination of the *Vedānti* and *Sūfi* theologians, who, blending uncertain metaphysics with undoubted principles of religion, have presumed to reason confidently on the very nature and essence of the divine spirit, and asserted in a very remote age, what multitudes of *Hindus* and

Musselmans assert at this hour, that all spirit is homogenous; that the spirit of God is in *kind* the same with that of man, though differing from it infinitely in *degree*; and that, as material substance is mere illusion, there exists in this universe only one generic spiritual substance, the sole primary cause, efficient, substantial, and formal of all secondary causes and of all appearances whatever, but endued, in its highest degree, with a sublime providential wisdom, and proceeding in ways incomprehensible to the spirits which emanate [sic] from it (AR4:172–3).

Like Voltaire in the *Ezour-vedam*, Holwell in his *Shastah of Bramah*, and Anquetil-Duperron in his *Oupnek'hat*, Oriental Jones found in the distant Asian past a religion that seemed to confirm his own. However, his ninth yearly discourse ("On the Origin and Families of Nations;" see Appendix 3) as well as his ruminations about chronology (Jones 1790) show that he was considerably more attached to biblical authority than Voltaire, Holwell, and even Anquetil who all regarded their "Indian" texts as older than the Bible and invested them with as much (or even more) authority. By contrast, Jones clung firmly to the biblical account and traced the origin of all peoples in the world to a spot near the traditional landing place of Noah's ark. While the volumes of the *Asiatick Researches* stunned their European readership by their utterly secular and objective outlook on Asia and thus propagated a new kind of orientalism that was no more the hand-maiden of theology, Jones's yearly discourses show how even the erudite and cool-headed founder of the Asiatick Society remained chained to Europe's time-honored religious ideology with its peculiar vision of an extremely short history dominated by a God who kindly instructed his first creatures, drowned most of their descendants in the deluge, and had three sons of Noah populate the entire world in a couple of thousand years. While Jones's papers on a wide range of oriental subjects, his letters, and his editorship of the *Asiatick Researches* show him as a pivotal figure in the move toward orientalism's emancipation from theology, his yearly discourses demonstrate a surprisingly deep attachment to Bible-inspired chronology, sacred history, and ancient theology. Edward Said was right in stating that Jones was ideology-driven; but the nature of that ideology as well as its connection to European colonialism will have to be reevaluated.

APPENDIXES

1. JONES'S DISCOURSE ON THE HINDUS

The Third Anniversary Discourse

Delivered 2 February, 1786.⁶⁴

<415> In the former discourses, which I had the honor of addressing to you, Gentlemen, on the *institution* and *objects* of our Society, I confined myself purposely to general topicks; giving in the first a distant prospect of the vast career on which we were entering, and, in the second, exhibiting a more diffuse, but still superficial, sketch of the various discoveries in History, Science, and Art, which we might justly expect from our inquiries into the literature of *Asia*. I now propose to fill up that outline so comprehensively as to omit nothing essential, yet so concisely as to avoid being tedious; and, if the state of my health shall suffer me to continue long enough in this climate, it is my design, with your permission, to prepare for our annual meetings a series of short dissertations, unconnected in their titles and subjects, but all tending to a common point of no small importance in the pursuit of interesting truths.

Of all the works, which have been published in our own age, or, perhaps, in any other, on the History of the <416> Ancient World, and *the population of this habitable globe*, that of Mr. *Jacob Bryant*, whom I name with reverence and affection, has the best claim to the praise of deep erudition ingeniously applied, and new theories happily illustrated by an assemblage of numberless converging rays from a most extensive circumference: it falls, nevertheless, as every human work must fall, short of perfection; and the least satisfactory part of it seems to be that which relates to the derivation of words from *Asiatick* languages. Etymology has, no doubt, some

⁶⁴ The text is from the London reprint (1801) of the first volume of the *Asiatick Researches* (pp. 415–431). Numbers in angular brackets indicate the beginnings of pages. Jones's spelling and punctuation are reproduced without change.

use in historical researches; but it is a medium of proof so very fallacious, that, where it elucidates one fact, it obscures a thousand, and more frequently borders on the ridiculous, than leads to any solid conclusion. It rarely carries with it any *internal* power of conviction from a resemblance of sounds or similarity of letters; yet often, where it is wholly unassisted by those advantages, it may be indisputably proved by *extrinsic* evidence. We know *à posteriori*, that both *fitz* and *hijo*, by the nature of two several dialects, are derived from *filius*; that *uncle* comes from *avus*, and *stranger* from *extra*; that *jour* is deducible, through the Italian, from *dies*: and *rossignol* from *luscinia*, or the *singer in groves*; that *sciuro*, *écureuil*, and *squirrel* are compounded of two *Greek* words descriptive of the animal; which etymologies, though they could not have been demonstrated *à priori*, might serve to confirm, if any such confirmation were necessary, the proofs of a connection between the members of one great Empire; but, when we derive our *hanger*, or *short pendent sword*, from the *Persian*, because ignorant travellers thus mis-spell the word *khanjar*, which in truth means a different weapon, or *sandalwood* from the *Greek*, because we suppose, that *sandals* were sometimes made of it, we gain no ground in proving the affinity of nations, and only weaken arguments which might otherwise be firmly supported. That *Cús* then, or, as it certainly is written in one ancient dialect, *Cút* and in others, probably, *Cás*, enters into the <417> composition of many proper names, we may very reasonably believe; and that *Algeziras* takes its name from the *Arabick* word for an *island*, cannot be doubted; but, when we are told from *Europe*, that places and provinces in *India* were clearly denominated from those words, we cannot but observe, in the first instance, that the town in which we now are assembled, is properly written and pronounced *Calicátà*; that both *Cátà* and *Cút* unquestionably mean *places of strength*, or, in general, any *inclosures*; and that *Gujerát* is at least as remote from *Jezirah* in sound, as it is in situation.

Another exception (and a third could hardly be discovered by any candid criticism) to the *Analysis of Ancient Mythology*, is, that the *method* of reasoning, and arrangement of topics, adopted in that learned work are not quite agreeable to the title, but almost wholly *synthetical*; and, though *synthesis* may be the better mode in pure *science*, where the principles are undeniable, yet it seems less calculated to give complete satisfaction in *historical* disquisitions, where every postulatum will, perhaps, be refused, and every definition controverted. This may

seem a slight objection, but the subject is in itself so interesting, and the full conviction of all reasonable men so desirable, that it may not be lost labor to discuss the same or a similar theory in a method purely analytical, and, after beginning with facts of general notoriety or undisputed evidence, to investigate such truths as are at first unknown, or very imperfectly discerned.

The *five* principal nations, who have in different ages divided among themselves, as a kind of inheritance, the vast continent of *Asia*, with the many islands depending on it, are the *Indians*, the *Chinese*, the *Tartars*, the *Arabs*, and the *Persians*: *who* they severally were, *whence* and <418> *when* they came, *where* they now are settled, and *what advantage* a more perfect knowledge of them all may bring to our *European* world, will be shown, I trust, in *five* distinct essays; the last of which will demonstrate the connexion or diversity between them, and solve the great problem, whether they had *any* common origin, and whether that origin was *the same*, which we generally ascribe to them.

I begin with *India*, not because I find reason to believe it the true center of population or of knowledge, but because it is the country, which we now inhabit, and from which we may best survey the regions around us; as, in popular language, we speak of the *rising* sun, and of his *progress through the Zodiac*, although it had long ago been imagined, and is now demonstrated, that he is himself the center of our planetary system. Let me here premise, that, in all these inquiries concerning the history of *India*, I shall confine my researches downwards to the *Mohammedan* conquests at the beginning of the *eleventh* century, but extend them upwards, as high as possible, to the earliest authentic records of the human species.

India then, on its most enlarged scale, in which the ancients appear to have understood it, comprises an area of near *forty* degrees on each side, including a space almost as large as all *Europe*; being divided on the west from *Persia* by the *Arachosian* mountains, limited on the east by the *Chinese* part of the farther Peninsula, confined on the north by the wilds of *Tartary*, and extending to the south as far as the isles of *Java*. This trapezium, therefore, comprehends the stupendous hills of *Potyid* or *Tibet*, the beautiful valley of *Cashmír*, and all the domains of the old *Indoscythians*, the countries of *Népál* and *Butánt*, *Cámruò* or *Asàm*, together with *Siam*, *Ava*, <419> *Racan*, and the bordering kingdoms, as far as the *Chína* of the *Hindus*, or *Sín* of the *Arabian* Geographers; not to mention the whole Western Peninsula with the celebrated island of

Sinhala, or *Lion-like Men*, at its southern extremity. By *India*, in short, I mean that whole extent of country, in which the primitive religion and languages of the *Hindus* prevail at this day with more or less of their ancient purity, and in which the *Nágari* letters are still used with more or less deviation from their original form.

The *Hindus* themselves believe their own country, to which they give the vain epithets of *Medhyama* or *Central*, and *Punyabhūmi*, or the *Land of Virtues*, to have been the portion of *Bharat*, one of *nine* brothers, whose father had the dominion of the whole earth; and they represent the mountains of *Himálaya* as lying to the north, and, to the west, those of *Vindhya*, called also *Vindian* by the Greeks; beyond which the *Sindhu* runs in several branches to the sea, and meets it nearly opposite to the point of *Dwáracà*, the celebrated seat of their Shepherd God: in the *south-east* they place the great river *Saravatya*; by which they probably mean that of *Ava*, called also *Airávati* in parts of its course, and giving perhaps its ancient name to the gulf of *Sabara*. This domain of *Bharat* they consider as the middle of the *Jambudwípa*, which the *Tibetians* also call the Land of *Zambu*; and the appellation is extremely remarkable; for *Jambu* is the Sanskrit name of a delicate fruit called *Jáman* by the Muselmans, and by us *rose-apple*; but the largest and richest sort is named *Amrita*, or *Immortal*; and the Mythologists of Tibet apply the same word to a celestial tree bearing *ambrosial* fruit, and adjoining to *four* vast rocks, from which as many sacred rivers derive their several streams.

The inhabitants of this extensive tract are described by Mr. *Lord* with great exactness, and with a <420> picturesque elegance peculiar to our ancient language: "A people (says he) presented themselves to mine eyes, clothed in linen garments somewhat low descending, of a gesture and garb, as I may say, maidenly and well nigh effeminate, or a countenance shy and somewhat estranged, yet smiling out a glozed and bashful familiarity." Mr. *Orme*, the Historian of *India*, who unites an exquisite taste for every fine art with an accurate knowledge of *Asiatick* manners, observes, in his elegant preliminary Dissertation, that this "country has been inhabited from the earliest antiquity by a people, who have no resemblance, either in their figure or manners, with any of the nations contiguous to them;" and that, "although conquerors have established themselves at different times in different parts of *India*, yet the original inhabitants have lost very little of their original character." The ancients, in fact, give a description of them,

which our early travellers confirmed, and our own personal knowledge of them nearly verifies; as you will perceive from a passage in the Geographical Poem of *Dionysius*, which the Analyst of Ancient Mythology has translated with great spirit:

To th' east a lovely country wide extends,
India, whose borders the wide ocean bounds;
On this the sun, new rising from the main,
Smiles pleas'd, and sheds his early orient beam.
Th' inhabitants are swart, and in their locks
Betray the tints of the dark hyacinth.
Various their functions; some the rock explore,
And from the mine extract the latent gold;
Some labor at the woof with cunning skill,
And manufacture linen; others shape <421>
And polish iv'ry with the nicest care:
Many retire to rivers shoal, and plunge
To seek the beryl flaming in its bed,
Or glitt'ring diamond. Oft the jasper's sound
Green, but diaphanous; the topaz too
Of ray serene and pleasing; last of all
The lovely amethyst, in which combine
All the mild shades of purple. The rich soil,
Wash'd by a thousand rivers, from all sides
Pours on the natives wealth without controul.

Their sources of wealth are still abundant, even after so many revolutions and conquests: in their manufactures of cotton they still surpass all the world; and their features have, most probably, remained unaltered since the time of *Dionysius*; nor can we reasonably doubt, how degenerate and abased so ever the *Hindus* may now appear, that in some early age they were splendid in art and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various

knowledge: but since their civil history beyond the middle of the *nineteenth* century from the present time, is involved in a cloud of fables, we seem to possess only *four* general media of satisfying our curiosity concerning it; namely, first their *Languages* and *Letters*; secondly, their *Philosophy* and *Religion*; thirdly, the actual remains of their old *Sculpture* and *Architecture*; and fourthly, the written memorials of their *Sciences* and *Arts*.

I. It is much to be lamented, that neither the *Greeks*, who attended *Alexander* into *India*, nor those who were long connected with it under the *Bactrian* Princes, have left us any means of knowing with accuracy, what <422> vernacular languages they found on their arrival in this Empire. The *Mohammedans*, we know, heard the people of proper *Hindustan*, or *India* on a limited scale, speaking a *Bhášhá*, or living tongue of a very singular construction, the purest dialect of which was current in the districts round *Agrà*, and chiefly on the poetical ground of *Mat'hurà*; and this is commonly called the idiom of *Vraja*. Five words in six, perhaps, of this language were derived from the *Sanscrit*, in which books of religion and science were composed, and which appears to have been formed by an exquisite grammatical *arrangement*, as the name itself implies, from some unpolished idiom; but the basis of the *Hindustáni*, particularly the inflections and regimen of verbs, differed as widely from both those tongues, as *Arabick* differs from *Persian*, or *German* from *Greek*. Now the general effect of conquest is to leave the current language of the conquered people unchanged, or very little altered, in its ground-work, but to blend with it a considerable number of exotic names both for things and for actions; as it has happened in every country, that I can recollect, where the conquerors have not preserved their own tongue unmixed with that of the natives, like the *Turks* in *Greece*, and the *Saxons* in *Britain*; and this analogy might induce us to believe, that the pure *Hindì*, whether of *Tartarian* or *Chaldean* origin, was primeval in Upper *India*, into which the Sanskrit was introduced by conquerors from other kingdoms in some very remote age; for we cannot doubt that the language of the *Véda's* was used in the great extent of country, which has before been delineated, as long as the religion of *Brahmá* has prevailed in it.

The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar,

than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists: there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*; and the old *Persian* might be added to the same family, if this were the place for discussing any question concerning the antiquities of *Persia*.

The *characters*, in which the language of *India* were originally written, are called *Nágari*, from *Nagara*, a City, with the word *Déva* sometimes prefixed, because they are believed to have been taught by the Divinity himself, who prescribed the artificial order of them in a voice from heaven. These letters, with no greater variation in their form by the change of straight lines to curves, or conversely, than the *Cusick* alphabet has received in its way to *India*, are still adopted in more than twenty kingdoms and states, from the borders of *Cashgar* and *Khoten*, to *Ráma's* bridge, and from the *Sindhu* to the river of *Siam*, Nor can I help believing, although the polished and elegant *Dévanágari* may not be so ancient as the monumental characters in the caverns of *Jarasandha*, that the square *Chaldaick* letters, in which most *Hebrew* books are copied, were originally the same, or derived from the same prototype, both with the *Indian* and *Arabian* characters: that the *Phenician*, from which the Greek and Roman alphabets were formed by various changes and inversions, had a similar origin, there can be little doubt; and the inscriptions at *Canárah*, of which you now possess a most accurate copy, seem to be compounded of *Nágari* and *Ethiopic* letters, which bear a close relation to each <424> other, both in the mode of writing from the left hand, and in the singular manner of connecting the vowels with the consonants. These remarks may favor an opinion entertained by many, that all the symbols of *sound*, which at first, probably, were only rude outlines of the different organs of speech, had a common origin. The symbols of *ideas*, now used in *China* and *Japan*, and formerly, perhaps, in *Egypt* and *Mexico*, are quite of a distinct nature; but it is very remarkable, that the order of *sounds* in the *Chinese* grammars corresponds nearly with that observed in *Tibet*, and hardly differs from that, which the *Hindus* consider as the invention of their Gods.

II. Of the *Indian* Religion and Philosophy, I shall here say but little; because a full account of each would require a separate volume. It will be sufficient in this dissertation to

assume, what might be proved beyond controversy, that we now live among the adorers of those very deities, who were worshipped under different names in Old *Greece* and *Italy*; and among the professors of those philosophical tenets, which the *Ionick* and *Attick* writers illustrated with all the beauties of their melodious language. On one hand we see the trident of *Neptune*, the eagle of *Jupiter*, the satyrs of *Bacchus*, the bow of *Cupid*, and the chariot of the *Sun*; on another we hear the cymbals of *Rhea*, the songs of the *Muses*, and the pastoral tales of *Apollo Nomius*. In more retired scenes, in groves, and in seminaries of learning, we may perceive the *Bráhmans* and the *Sarmanes* mentioned by *Clemens*, disputing in the forms of *logick*, or discoursing on the vanity of human enjoyments, on the immortality of the soul, her emanation from the eternal mind, her debasement, wanderings, and final union with her source. The *six* philosophical schools, whose principles are explained in the *Dersana Sástra*, comprise all the metaphysicks <425> of the old *Academy*, the *Stoa*, the *Lyceum*; nor is it possible to read the *Védánta*, or the many fine compositions in illustration of it, without believing, that *Pythagoras* and *Plato* derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of *India*. The *Scythian* and *Hyperborean* doctrines and mythology may also be traced in every part of these eastern regions; nor can we doubt, that *Wod*, or *Oden*, whose religion, as the northern historians admit, was introduced into *Scandinavia* by a foreign race, was the same with *Buddh*, whose rites were probably imported into *India* nearly at the same time, though received much later by the *Chinese*, who soften his name into FÓ.

This may be a proper place to ascertain an important point in the Chronology of the *Hindus*; for the priests of *Buddha* left in *Tibet* and *China* the precise epoch of his appearance, real or imagined, in this Empire; and their information, which had been preserved in writing, was compared by the Christian missionaries and scholars with our own era. *Couplet*, *De Guignes*, *Giorgi*, and *Bailly*, differ a little in their accounts of this epoch, but that of *Couplet* seems the most correct. On taking, however, the medium of the four several dates, we may fix the time of *Buddha*, or the *ninth* great incarnation of *Vishnu*, in the year *one thousand and fourteen* before the birth of Christ, or *two thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine* years ago. Now the *Cáshmirians*, who boast of his descent in their kingdom, assert that he appeared on earth about *two* centuries after *Crishna* the *Indian Apollo*, who took so decided a part in the war of the

Mahábhárat; and, if an etymologist were to suppose that the *Athenians* had embellished their poetical history of *Pandion*'s expulsion and the restoration of *Ægeus* with the *Asiatick* tale of the *Pándus* and *Yudhishtir*, neither of which words they could have <426> articulated, I should not hastily deride his conjecture: certain it is, that *Pándumandel* is called by the *Greeks* the country of *Pandion*. We have, therefore, determined another interesting epoch, by fixing the age of *Crishna* near the *three thousandth* year from the present time; and, as the three first *Avatàrs*, or descents of *Vishnu*, relate no less clearly to an Universal Deluge, in which eight persons only were saved, than the *fourth* and the *fifth* do to the *punishment of impiety* and the *humiliation of the proud*, we may for the present assume, that the *second*, or *silver*, age of the *Hindus* was subsequent to the dispersion from *Babel*; so that we have only a dark interval of about a *thousand* years, which were employed in the settlement of nations, the foundation of states or empires, and the cultivation of civil society. The great incarnate Gods of this intermediate age are both named *Ráma* but with different epithets; one of whom bears a wonderful resemblance to the *Indian Bacchus*, and his wars are the subject of several heroick poems. He is represented as a descendent from *Súrya*, or the *Sun*, as the husband of *Sítá*, and the son of a princess named *Causelyá*: it is very remarkable, that the *Peruvians*, whose *Incas* boasted of the same descent, styled their greatest festival *Ramasitooa*; whence we may suppose, that *South America* was peopled by the same race, who imported into the farthest parts of *Asia* the rites and fabulous history of *Ráma*. These rites and this history are extremely curious; and, although I cannot believe, with *Newton*, that ancient mythology was nothing but historical truth in a poetical dress; nor, with *Bacon*, that it consisted solely of moral and metaphysical allegories; nor, with *Bryant*, that all the heathen Divinities are only different attributes and representations of the Sun or of deceased progenitors; but conceive that the whole system of religious fables rose, like the *Nile*, from several distinct sources; yet I cannot but agree that one great spring and fountain of all idolatry, in the four quarters of the globe, was the <427> veneration paid by men to the vast body of fire, which "looks from his sole dominion like the God of this world;" and another, the immoderate respect shewn to the memory of powerful or virtuous ancestors, especially the founders of kingdoms, legislators, and warriors, of whom the *Sun* or the *Moon* were wildly supposed to be the parents.

III. The remains of *Architecture* and *Sculpture* in *India*, which I mention here as mere monuments of antiquity, not as specimens of ancient art, seem to prove an early connection between this country and *Africa*. The pyramids of *Egypt*, the colossal statues described by *Pausanias* and others, the Sphinx, and the *Hermes Canis*, (which last bears a great resemblance to the *Varáhavatár*, or the incarnation of *Vishnu* in the form of a *Boar*,) indicate the style and mythology of the same indefatigable workmen who formed the vast excavations of *Cánarah*, the various temples and images of *Buddha*, and the idols which are continually dug up at *Gayá*, or in its vicinity. The letters, on many of those monuments appear, as I have before intimated, partly of Indian, and partly of *Abyssinian* or *Ethiopick*, origin; and all these indubitable facts may induce no ill-grounded opinion, that *Ethiopia* and *Hindustàn* were peopled or colonized by the same extraordinary race; in confirmation of which, it may be added, that the mountaineers of *Bengal* and *Bahàr* can hardly be distinguished in some of their features, particularly their lips and noses, from the modern *Abyssinians*, whom the *Arabs* call the children of *Cúsh*. And the ancient *Hindus*, according to *Strabo*, differed in nothing from the *Africans*, but in the straitness and smoothness of their hair, while that of the others was crisp or woolly; a difference proceeding chiefly, if not entirely, from the respective humidity or dryness of their atmospheres. Hence the people who received the first light of the rising <428> sun, according to the limited knowledge of the ancients, are said by *Apuleius* to be the *Arü* and *Ethiopians*, by which he clearly meant certain nations of *India*; where we frequently see figures of *Buddha* with curled hair apparently designed for a representation of it in its natural state.

IV. It is unfortunate, that the *Silpi Sástra*, or *Collection of Treatises on Arts and Manufactures*, which must have contained a treasure of useful information on *dying*, *painting*, and *metallurgy*, has been so long neglected, that few, if any, traces of it are to be found; but the labors of the *Indian* loom and needle have been universally celebrated; and *fine linen* is not improbably supposed to have been called *Sindon*, from the name of the river near which it was wrought in the highest perfection. The people of *Colchis* were also famed for this manufacture; and the *Egyptians* yet more, as we learn from several passages in scripture, and particularly from a beautiful chapter in *Ezekiel* containing the most authentic delineation of ancient commerce, of which *Tyre* had been the principal mart. Silk was fabricated immemorially by the *Indians*, though

commonly ascribed to the people of *Serica* or *Tancùt*, among whom probably the word *Sèr*, which the Greeks applied to the silkworm, signified *gold*; a sense, which it now bears in *Tibet*. That the *Hindus* were in early ages a *commercial* people, we have many reasons to believe; and in the first of their sacred law-tracts, which they suppose to have been revealed by *Menu* many *millions* of years ago, we find a curious passage on the legal *interest* of money, and the limited rate of it in different cases, with an exception in regard to *adventures at sea*; an exception which the sense of mankind approves, and which commerce absolutely requires, though it was not before the reign of *Charles I.* that our own jurisprudence fully admitted it in respect of maritime contracts.

<429> We are told by the *Grecian* writers, that the *Indians* were the wisest of nations; and in moral wisdom they were certainly eminent: their *Niti Sástra*, or *System of Ethicks*, is yet preserved, and the Fables of *Vishnuserman*, whom we ridiculously call *Pilpay*, are the most beautiful, if not the most ancient, collection of apologues in the world. They were first translated from the *Sanscrit*, in the *sixth* century, by the order of *Buzerchumihir*, or *Bright as the Sun*, the chief physician and afterwards *Vezír* of the great *Anúshireván*, and are extant under various names in more than twenty languages; but their original title is *Hitópádésa*, or *Amicable Instruction*: and, as the very existence of *Æsop*, whom the *Arabs* believe to have been an *Abyssinian*, appears rather doubtful, I am not disinclined to suppose, that the first *moral fables*, which appeared in *Europe*, were of *Indian* or *Ethiopian* origin.

The *Hindus* are said to have boasted of *three* inventions, all of which, indeed, are admirable; the method of instructing by *Apologues*; the *decimal Scale* adopted now by all civilized nations; and the game of *Chess*, on which they have some curious treatises: but, if their numerous works on Grammar, Logick, Rhetorick, Musick, all which are extant and accessible, were explained in some language generally known, it would be found, that they had yet higher pretensions to the praise of a fertile and inventive genius. Their lighter poems are lively and elegant; their epick, magnificent and sublime in the highest degree. Their *Purána's* comprise a series of mythological Histories, in blank verse, from the *Creation* to the supposed incarnation of *Buddha*: and their *Védas*, as far as we can judge from that compendium of them, which is called *Upanishat*, abound with noble speculations in metaphysics, and fine discourses on the being and

attributes of God. Their most ancient medical book, entitled *Chereca*, is believed to be <430> the work of *Siva*; for each of the divinities in their *Triad* has at least one *sacred* composition ascribed to him. But as to mere human works on *History* and *Geography*, though they are said to be extant in *Cashmír*, it has not been yet in my power to procure them. What their *astronomical* and *mathematical* writings contain, will not, I trust, remain long a secret: they are easily procured, and their importance cannot be doubted. The Philosopher, whose works are said to include a System of the Universe founded on the principle of *Attraction* and the *central* position of the sun, is named *Yavan Achárya*, because he had travelled, we are told, into *Ionia*. If this be true, he might have been one of those who conversed with *Pythagoras*. This at least is undeniable, that a book on astronomy in *Sanscrit* bears the title of *Yavana Jática*, which may signify the *Ionick Sect*. Nor is it improbable, that the names of the Planets and *Zodiacal* Stars, which the *Arabs* borrowed from the *Greeks*, but which we find in the oldest *Indian* records, were originally devised by the same ingenious and enterprising race, from whom both *Greece* and *India* were peopled; the race who, as *Dionysius* describes them,

... first assayed the deep,
And wafted merchandize to coasts unknown,
Those, who digested first the starry choir,
Their motions mark'd, and call'd them by their names.

Of these cursory observations on the *Hindus*, which it would require volumes to expand and illustrate, this is the result: that they had an immemorial affinity with the old *Persians*, *Ethiopians*, and *Egyptians*; the *Phenicians*, *Greeks*, and *Tuscans*; the *Scythians* or *Goths*, and *Celts*; the *Chinese*, *Japanese*, and *Peruvians*; whence, as no reason appears for believing that they were a <431> colony from any one of those nations, or any of those nations from them, we may fairly conclude that they all proceeded from some *central* country, to investigate which will be the object of my future Discourses; and I have a sanguine hope that your collections during the present year, will bring to light many useful discoveries; although the departure for *Europe* of a very ingenious member, who first opened the inestimable mine of *Sanscrit* literature, will often deprive us of accurate and solid information concerning the languages and antiquities of *India*.

2. JONES'S DISCOURSE ON THE PERSIANS

The Sixth Discourse: on the Persians.

Delivered 19 February, 1789.⁶⁵

<43> Gentlemen,

I turn with delight from the vast mountains and barren deserts of *Turan*, over which we travelled last year with no perfect knowledge of our course, and request you now to accompany me on a literary journey through one of the most celebrated and most beautiful countries in the world: a country, the history and languages of which, both ancient and modern, I have long attentively studied, and on which I may without arrogance promise you more positive information than I could possibly procure on a nation so disunited and so unlettered as the *Tartars*: I mean that, which *Europeans* improperly call *Persia*, the name of a single province being applied to the whole Empire of *Iran*, as it is correctly denominated by the present natives of it, and by all the learned *Muselmans* who reside in these *British* territories. To give you an idea of its largest boundaries, agreeably to my former mode of describing *India*, *Arabia*, and <44> *Tartary*, between which it lies, let us begin with the source of the great *Assyrian* stream *Euphrates*, (as the *Greeks*, according to their custom, were pleased to miscall the *Forat*) and thence descend to its mouth in the Green Sea, or Persian Gulf, including in our line some considerable districts and towns on both sides the river; then coasting *Persia*, properly so named, and other *Iranian* provinces, we come to the delta of the *Sindhu* or *Indus*; whence ascending to the mountains of *Cashghar*, we discover its fountains and those of the *Jaihun*, down which we are conducted to the *Caspian*, which formerly perhaps it entered, though it lose itself now in the sands and lakes of *Khwarezn*. We next are led from the Sea of *Khozar*, by the banks of the *Cur*, or *Cyrus*, and along the *Caucasean* ridges, to the shore of the *Euxine*, and thence by the several

⁶⁵ The text is from the London reprint (1801) of the second volume of the *Asiatick Researches* (pp. 43–66). Numbers in angular brackets indicate the beginnings of pages. Jones's spelling and punctuation are reproduced without change.

Grecian Seas, to the point whence we took our departure, at no considerable distance from the *Mediterranean*. We cannot but include the *Lower Asia* within this outline, because it was unquestionably a part of the *Persian*, if not of the old *Assyrian* Empire; for we know that it was under the dominion of *Caikhosrau*; and *Diodorus*, we find, asserts, that the kingdom of *Troas* was dependent on *Assyria*, since *Priam* implored and obtained succours from his Emperor *Teutames*, whose name approaches nearer to *Tahmuras* than to that of any other *Assyrian* monarch. Thus may we look on *Iran* as the noblest *island* (for so the *Greeks* and the *Arabs* would have called it) or at least as the noblest *peninsula* on this habitable globe; and if M. *Bailly* had fixed on it as the *Atlantis* of *Plato*, he might have supported his opinion with far stronger arguments than any that he has adduced in favour of *New Zembla*. If the account, indeed, of the *Atlantes* be not purely an *Egyptian*, or an *Utopian* fable, I should be more inclined to place them in *Iran* than in any region, with which I am acquainted.

<45> It may seem strange, that the ancient history of so distinguished an Empire should be yet so imperfectly known; but very satisfactory reasons may be assigned for our ignorance of it: the principal of them are the superficial knowledge of the *Greeks* and *Jews*, and the loss of *Persian* archives, or historical compositions. That the *Grecian* writers, before *Xenophon*, had no acquaintance with *Persia*, and that *all* their accounts of it are *wholly* fabulous, is a paradox too extravagant to be seriously maintained; but their connection with it in war or peace had indeed been generally confined to bordering kingdoms under feudatory princes; and the first *Persian* Emperor, whose life and character they seem to have known with tolerable accuracy, was the great *Cyrus*, whom I call, without fear of contradiction, *Caikhosrau*; for I shall then only doubt that the *Khosrau* of *Firdausti* was the *Cyrus* of the first *Greek* historian, and the hero of the oldest political and moral romance, when I doubt that *Louis Quatorze* and *Lewis the Fourteenth* were one and the same *French* King. It is utterly incredible, that two different princes of *Persia* should each have been born in a foreign and hostile territory; should each have been doomed to death in his infancy by his maternal grandfather, in consequence of portentous dreams, real or invented; should each have been saved by the remorse of his destined murderer; and should each, after a similar education among herdsmen, as the son of a herdsman, have found means to revisit his paternal kingdom; and having delivered it, after a long and triumphant war, from the tyrant

who had invaded it, should have restored it to the summit of power and magnificence! Whether so romantic a story, which is the subject of an epic poem as majestic and entire as the *Iliad*, be historically true, we may feel perhaps an inclination to doubt; but it cannot with reason be denied, that the outline of it related to a single hero, whom the *Asiatics*, <46> conversing with the father of *European* history, described according to their popular traditions by his true name, which the *Greek* alphabet could not express: nor will a difference of names affect the question, since the *Greeks* had little regard for truth, which they *sacrificed* willingly to the *graces* of their language, and the nicety of their ears; and if they could render foreign words melodious, they were never solicitous to make them exact; hence they probably formed *Cambyses* from *Cambakhsh*, or *granting desires*, a title rather than a name; and *Xerxes* from *Shiruyi*, a Prince and warrior in the *Shahnamah*, or from *Shirshah*, which might also have been a title; for the *Asiatic* Princes have constantly assumed new titles or epithets at different periods of their lives, or on different occasions: a custom which we have seen prevalent in our own times both in *Iran* and *Hindustan*, and which has been a source of great confusion even in the scriptural accounts of *Babylonian* occurrences. Both *Greeks* and *Jews* have in fact accommodated *Persian* names to their own articulation; and both seem to have disregarded the native literature of *Iran*, without which they could at most attain a general and imperfect knowledge of the country. As to the *Persians* themselves, who were contemporary with the *Jews* and *Greeks*, they must have been acquainted with the history of their own times, and with the traditional accounts of past ages; but for a reason, which will presently appear, they chose to consider *Cayumers* as the founder of the empire; and, in the numerous distraction which followed the overthrow of *Dara*, especially in the great revolution on the defeat of *Yezdegird*, their civil histories were lost, as those of *India* have unhappily been, from the solicitude of the priests, the only depositaries of their learning, to preserve their books of law and religion at the expense of all others. Hence it has happened, that nothing remains of genuine *Persian* history before the dynasty <47> of *Sasan*, except a few rustic traditions and fables, which furnished materials for the *Shahnamah*, and which are still supposed to exist in the *Pahlavi* language. The annals of the *Pishdadi*, or *Assyrian* race, must be considered as dark and fabulous; and those of the *Cayani* family, or the *Medes* and *Persians*, as heroic and poetical; though the lunar eclipses, said to be mentioned by *Ptolemy*, fix the time of

Gushtasp, the prince by whom *Zeratush* was protected, of the *Parthian* kings descended from *Arshac* or *Arsaces*, we know little more than the names; but the *Sasanis* had so long an intercourse with the Emperors of *Rome* and *Byzantium*, that the period of their dominion may be called an historical age. In attempting to ascertain the beginning of the *Assyrian* empire, we are deluded, as in a thousand instances, by names arbitrarily imposed. It had been settled by chronologers, that the first monarchy established in *Persia* was the *Assyrian*; and *Newton*, finding some of opinion that it rose in the first century after the Flood, but unable by his own calculations to extend it farther back than *seven hundred and ninety* years before *Christ*, rejected part of the old system and adopted the rest of it; concluding, that the *Assyrian* Monarchs began to reign about two hundred years after *Solomon*, and that, in all preceding ages, the government of *Iran* had been divided into several petty states and principalities. Of this opinion I confess myself to have been; when, disregarding the wild chronology of the *Muselmans* and *Gabrs*, I had allowed the utmost natural duration to the reigns of eleven *Pishdadi* kings, without being able to add more than a hundred years to *Newton's* computation. It seemed indeed unaccountably strange, that, although *Abraham* had found a regular monarchy in *Egypt*; although the kingdom of *Yemen* had just pretensions to very high antiquity; although the *Chinese*, in the twelfth century before our aera, had made approaches <48> at least to the present form of their extensive dominion; and although we can hardly suppose the first *Indian* monarchs to have reigned less than three thousand years ago, yet *Persia*, the most delightful, the most compact, the most desirable country of them all, should have remained for so many ages unsettled and disunited. A fortunate discovery, for which I was first indebted to *Mir Muhammed Husain*, one of the most intelligent *Muselmans* in *India*, has at once dissipated the cloud, and cast a gleam of it on the primeval history of *Iran* and of the human race, of which I had long despaired, and which could hardly have dawned from any other quarter.

The rare and interesting tract *on twelve different religions*, entitled the *Dabistin* [sic], and composed by a *Mohammedan* traveller, a native of *Cashmir*, named *Mohsan*, but distinguished by the assumed surname of *Fani*, or *perishable*, begins with a wonderfully curious chapter on the religion of *Hushang*, which was long anterior to that of *Zeratusht*, but had continued to be secretly professed by many learned *Persians* even to the author's time; and several of the most

eminent of them, dissenting in many points from the *Gabrs*, and persecuted by the ruling powers of their country, had retired to *India*; where they compiled a number of books, now extremely scarce, which *Mohsan* had perused, and with the writers of which, or with many of them, he had contracted an intimate friendship. From them he learned, that a powerful monarchy had been established for ages in *Iran* before the accession of *Cayumers*; that it was called the *Mahabadian* dynasty, for a reason which will soon be mentioned; and that many princes, of whom seven or eight only are named in the *Dabistan*, and among them *Mahbul*, or *Maha Beli*, had raised their empire to the zenith of human glory. If we <49> can rely on this evidence, which to me appears unexceptionable, the *Iranian* monarchy must have been the oldest in the world; but it will remain dubious, to which of the three stocks *Hindu*, *Arabian*, or *Tartar*, the first Kings of *Iran* belonged; or whether they sprang from a *fourth* race distinct from any of the others; and these are questions, which we shall be able, I imagine, to answer precisely, when we have carefully inquired into the *languages* and *letters*, *religion* and *philosophy*, and incidentally into the *arts* and *sciences*, of the ancient *Persians*.

I. In the new and important remarks which I am going to offer on the ancient *languages* and *characters* of *Iran*, I am sensible, that you must give me credit for many assertions, which on this occasion, it is impossible to prove; for I should ill deserve your indulgent attention, if I were to abuse it by repeating a dry list of detached words, and presenting you with a vocabulary instead of a dissertation; but, since I have no system to maintain, and have not suffered imagination to delude my judgement; since I have habituated myself to form opinions of men and things from *evidence*, which is the only solid basis of *civil*, as *experiment* is of *natural* knowledge; and since I have maturely considered the questions which I mean to discuss, you will not, I am persuaded, suspect my testimony, or think that I go too far, when I assure you, that I will assert nothing positively which I am not able satisfactorily to demonstrate. When *Muhammed* was born, and *Anushivaran*, whom he calls *the Just King*, sat on the throne of *Persia*, two languages appear to have been generally prevalent in the great empire of *Iran*; that of the *Court*, thence named *Deri*, which was only a refined and elegant dialect of the *Parsi*, so called from the province, of which *Shiraz* is now the capital, and that of the learned, in which most books were composed, and which had the <50> name of *Pahlavi*, either from the *heroes* who

spoke it in former times, or from *Pahlu*, a track of land, which included, we are told, some considerable cities of *Irak*. The ruder dialects of both were, and, I believe, still are spoken by the rustics in several provinces; and in many of them, as *Herat*, *Zabul*, *Sistan*, and others, distinct idioms were vernacular, as it happens in every kingdom of great extent. Besides the *Parsi* and *Pahlavi*, a very ancient and abstruse tongue was known to the priests and philosophers, called *the language of the Zend*, because a book on religious and moral duties, which they held sacred, and which bore that name, had been written in it; while the *Pazand*, or comment on that work, was composed in *Pahlavi*, as a more popular idiom; but a learned follower of *Zeratusht*, named *Bahman*, who lately died in *Calcutta*, where he had lived with me as a *Persian* reader about three years, assured me that the *letters* of his prophet's book were properly called *Zend*, and the *language Avesta*, as the words of the *Vedus* [sic] are *Sanscrit*, and the characters *Nagari*; or as the old *Sagas* and poems of *Iceland* were expressed in *Runic* letters. Let us however, in compliance with custom, give the name of *Zend* to the sacred language of *Persia*, until we can find, as we shall very soon, a fitter appellation for it. The *Zend* and the old *Pahlavi* are almost extinct in *Iran*; for among six or seven thousand *Gabrs*, who reside chiefly at *Yezd*, and in *Cirman*, there are very few who can read *Pahlavi*; and scarce any who even boast of knowing the *Zend*; while the *Parsi*, which remains almost pure in the *Shahnamah*, has now become by the intermixture of numberless *Arabic* words, and many imperceptible changes, a new language exquisitely polished by a series of fine writers in prose and verse, and analogous to the different idioms gradually formed in *Europe* after the subversion of the *Roman* empire: but with modern *Persian* we have no concern in our present <51> inquiry, which I confine to the ages, that preceded the *Mohammedan* conquest. Having twice read the works of *Firdausi* with great attention since I applied myself to the study of old *Indian* literature, I can assure you with confidence, that hundreds of *Parsi* nouns are pure *Sanscrit*, with no other change than such as may be observed in the numerous *bhashas*, or vernacular dialects of *India*; that very many *Persian* imperatives are the roots of *Sanscrit* verbs; and that even the moods and tenses of the *Persian* verb substantive, which is the model of all the rest, are deducible from the *Sanscrit* by an easy and clear analogy: we may hence conclude, that the *Parsi* was derived, like the various *Indian* dialects, from the language of the *Brahmans*; and I must add, that in the pure *Persian* I find no trace of any

Arabian tongue, except what proceeded from the known intercourse between the *Persians* and *Arabs*, especially in the time of *Bahram*, who was educated in *Arabia*, and whose *Arabic* verses are still extant, together with his heroic line in *Deri*, which many suppose to be the first attempt at *Persian* versification in *Arabian* metre; but, without having recourse to other arguments, *the composition of words*, in which the genius of the *Persian* delights, and which that of the *Arabic* abhors, is a decisive proof that the *Parsi* sprang from an *Indian*, and not from an *Arabian* stock. Considering languages as mere instruments of knowledge, and having strong reasons to doubt the existence of genuine books in *Zend* or *Pahlavi* (especially since the well-informed author of the *Dabistan* affirms the work of *Zeratusht* to have been lost, and its place supplied by a recent compilation) I had no inducement, though I had an opportunity, to learn what remains of those ancient languages; but I often conversed on them with my friend *Bahman*; and both of us were convinced after full consideration, that the *Zend* bore a strong resemblance to *Sanscrit*, and the *Pahlavi* to *Arabick*. He had at my request translated <52> into *Pahlavi* the fine inscription exhibited in the *Gulistan*, on the diadem of *Cyrus*; and I had the patience to read the list of words from the *Pazand* in the appendix to the *Farhangi Jehangiri*. This examination gave me perfect conviction that the *Pahlavi* was a dialect of the *Chaldaic*; and of this curious fact I will exhibit a short proof. By the nature of the *Chaldean* tongue most words ended in the first long vowel like *shemia*, heaven; and that very word, unaltered in a single letter, we find in the *Pazend*, together with *laila*, night; *meyd*, water; *nira*, fire; *matra*, rain; and a multitude of others, all *Arabick* or *Hebrew*, with a *Chaldean* termination: so *zamar*, by a beautiful metaphor, from *pruning trees*, means in *Hebrew* to *compose verses*, and thence, by an easy transition to *sing* them; and in *Pahlavi* we see the verb *zamruniten*, to *sing*, with its forms *zamrunemi*, I *sing*, and *zamrunid*, he *sang*; the verbal terminations of the *Persian* being added to the *Chaldaic* root. Now all those words are integral parts of the language, not adventitious to it like the *Arabick* nouns and verbals engrafted on modern *Persian*; and this distinction convinces me, that the dialect of the *Gabrs*, which they pretend to be that of *Zeratusht*, and of which *Bahman* gave me a variety of written specimens, is a late invention of their priests, or subsequent at least to the *Muselman* invasion; for, although it may be possible that a few of their sacred books were preserved, as he used to assert, in sheets of lead or copper, at the bottom of wells near *Yezd*, yet, as the conquerors had not

only a spiritual, but a political interest in persecuting a warlike, robust, and indignant race of irreconcilable conquered subjects, a long time must have elapsed, before the hidden scriptures could have been safely brought to light, and few, who could perfectly understand them, must then have remained; but, as they continued to profess among themselves the religion of their forefathers, it then became expedient for the *Mubeds* <53> to supply the lost or mutilated works of their legislator by new compositions, partly from their imperfect recollection, and partly from such moral and religious knowledge as they gleaned, most probably, among the *Christians*, with whom they had an intercourse. One rule we may fairly establish in deciding the question, whether the books of the modern *Gabrs* were anterior to the invasion of the *Arabs*? When an *Arabic* noun occurs in them, changed only by the spirit of the *Chaldean* idiom; as *werta* for *werd*, a rose; *daba* for *dhahab*, gold; or *deman* for *zeman*, time, we may allow it to have been ancient *Pahlavi*; but when we meet with verbal nouns or infinitives, evidently formed by the rules of *Arabian* grammar, we may be sure that the phrases in which they occur are comparatively modern; and not a single passage which *Bahman* produced from the books of his religion would abide this test.

We come now to the language of the *Zend*; and here I must impart a discovery which I lately made, and from which we may draw the most interesting consequences. M. *Anquetil*, who had the merit of undertaking a voyage to *India*, in his earliest youth, with no other view than to recover the writings of *Zeratusht*, and who would have acquired a brilliant reputation in *France*, if he had not sullied it by his immoderate vanity and virulence of temper, which alienated the good-will even of his own countrymen, has exhibited in his work, entitled *Zendavesta*, two vocabularies in *Zend* and *Pahlavi*, which he had found in an approved collection of *Rawayat*, or *Traditional Pieces*, in modern *Persian*. Of his *Pahlavi* no more need to be said than that it strongly confirms my opinion concerning the *Chaldaic* origin of that language; but, when I perused the *Zend* glossary, I was inexpressibly surprized to find that six or seven words in ten were pure *Sanscrit*, and even some of their inflexions <54> formed by the rules of the *Vyakaran*; as *yushmacam*, the genitive plural of *yushmad*. Now M. *Anquetil* most certainly, and the *Persian* compiler most probably, had no knowledge of *Sanscrit*; and could not, therefore, have invented a list of *Sanscrit* words: it is, therefore, an authentic list of *Zend* words which had been preserved

in books or by tradition: and it follows, that the language of the *Zend* was at least a dialect of the *Sanscrit*, approaching perhaps as nearly to it as the *Pracrit*, or other popular idioms, which we know to have been spoken in *India* two thousand years ago. From all these facts it is a necessary consequence, that the oldest discoverable languages of *Persia* were *Chaldaic* and *Sanscrit*; and that, when they had ceased to be vernacular, the *Pahlavi* and *Zend* were deduced from them respectively, and the *Parsi* either from the *Zend*, or immediately from the dialect of the *Brahmans*; but all had perhaps a mixture of *Tartarian*; for the best lexicographers assert, that numberless words in ancient *Persian* are taken from the language of the *Cimmerians*, or the *Tartars* of *Kipchak*; so that the three families, whose lineage we have examined in former discourses, had left visible traces of themselves in *Iran* long before the *Tartars* and *Arabs* had rushed from their deserts, and returned from that very country from which, in all probability, they originally proceeded, and which the *Hindus* had abandoned in an earlier age, with positive commands from their legislators to revisit it no more. I close this head with observing, that no supposition of a mere political or commercial intercourse between the different nations, will account for the *Sanscrit* and *Chaldaic* words, which we find in the old *Persian* tongues; because they are, in the first place, too numerous to have been introduced by such means; and secondly, are not the names of exotic animals, commodities, or arts, but those of material elements, parts of the body, natural objects <55> and relations, affections of the mind, and other ideas common to the whole race of man.

If a nation of *Hindus*, it may be urged, ever possessed and governed the country of *Iran*, we should find on the very ancient ruins of the temple or palace, now called *the Throne of Jemshid*, some inscriptions in *Devanagari*, or at least in the characters on the stones at *Elephanta*, where the sculpture is unquestionably *Indian*, or in those on the *staff of Firuz Shah*, which exist in the heart of *India*; and such inscriptions we probably should have found, if that edifice had not been erected after the migration of the *Brahmans* from *Iran*, and the violent schism in the *Persian* religion, of which we shall presently speak; for, although the popular name of the building at *Istakar*, or *Persepolis*, be no certain proof that it was raised in the time of *Jemshid*, yet such a fact might easily have been preserved by tradition, and we shall soon have abundant evidence that the temple was posterior to the reign of the *Hindu* monarchs. The *cypresses* indeed, which

are represented with the figures in procession, might induce a reader of the *Shahnamah* to believe, that the sculptures related to the new faith introduced by *Zeratusht*; but as a cypress is a beautiful ornament, and as many of the figures appear inconsistent with the reformed adoration of fire, we must have recourse to stronger proofs, that the *Takhti Jemshid* was erected after *Cayumers*. The building has lately been visited, and the characters on it examined, by Mr. *Francklin*; from whom we learn, that *Niebuhr* has delineated them with great accuracy: but without such testimony I should have suspected the correctness of the delineation, because the *Danish* traveller has exhibited two inscriptions in modern *Persian*, and one of them from the same place, which cannot have <56> been exactly transcribed: they are very elegant verses of *Nizami* and *Sadi*, on the instability of human greatness, but so ill engraved or so ill copied, that, if I had not had them nearly by heart, I should not have been able to read them; and M. *Rousseau* of *Isfahan*, who translated them with shameful inaccuracy, must have been deceived by the badness of the copy; or he never would have created a new king *Wakam*, by forming one word of *Jem* and the particle prefixed to it. Assuming, however, that we may reason as conclusively on the characters published by *Niebuhr* as we might on the monuments themselves, were they now before us, we may begin with observing, as *Chardin* had observed on the very spot, that they bear no resemblance whatever to the letters used by the *Gabrs* in their copies of the *Vendidad*. This I once urged, in an amicable debate with *Bahman*, as a proof that the *Zend* letters were a modern invention; but he seemed to hear me without surprise, and insisted that the letters to which I alluded, and which he had often seen, were monumental characters never used in books, and intended either to conceal some religious mysteries from the vulgar, or to display the art of the sculptor, like the embellished *Cusick* and *Nagari* on several *Arabian* and *Indian* monuments. He wondered, that any man could seriously doubt the antiquity of the *Pahlavi* letters; and in truth the inscription behind the horse of *Rustam*, which *Niebuhr* has also given us, is apparently *Pahlavi*, and might with some pains be decyphered; that character was extremely rude, and seems to have been written, like the *Roman* and the *Arabick*, in a variety of hands; for I remember to have examined a rare collection of old *Persian* coins in the Museum of the great Anatomist *William Hunter*; and, though I believed the legends to be *Pahlavi*, and had no doubt that they were coins of *Parthian* kings, yet I could not read the inscriptions <57> without

wasting more time than I had then at command, in comparing the letters and ascertaining the proportions, in which they severally occurred. The gross *Pahlavi* was improved by *Zeratusht* or his disciples into an elegant and perspicuous character, in which the *Zendavesta* was copied; and both were written from the right hand to the left like other *Chaldaic* alphabets, for they are manifestly both of *Chaldean* origin; but the *Zend* has the singular advantage of expressing all the long and short vowels by distinct marks in the body of each word, and all the words are distinguished by full points between them; so that, if modern *Persian* were unmixed with *Arabic*, it might be written in *Zend* with the greatest convenience, as any one may perceive, by copying in that character a few pages of the *Shahnamah*. As to the unknown inscriptions in the palace of *Jemshid*, it may reasonably be doubted whether they contain a system of letters, which any nation ever adopted: in *five* of them the letters, which are separated by points, may be reduced to forty, at least I can distinguish no more essentially different; and they all seem to be regular variations and compositions of a straight line and an angular figure like the head of a javelin, or a leaf (to use the language of botanists) *hearted and lanced*. Many of the *Runic* letters appear to have been formed of similar elements; and it has been observed, that the writing at *Persepolis* bears a strong resemblance to that which the *Irish* call *Ogham*. The word *Agam* in *Sanscrit* means *mysterious knowledge*; but I dare not affirm that the two words had a common origin; and only mean to suggest that, if the characters in question be really alphabetical, they were probably secret and sacerdotal, or a mere cypher perhaps, of which the priests only had the key. They might, I imagine, be decyphered if the language were certainly known; but, in all other inscriptions of the <58> same sort, the characters are too complex, and the variations of them too numerous, to admit an opinion, that they could be symbols of articulate sounds; for even the *Nagari* system, which has more distinct letters than any known alphabet, consists only of forty-nine simple characters, two of which are mere substitutions, and four of little use in *Sanscrit*, or in any other language; while the more complicated figures, exhibited by *Niebuhr*, must be as numerous at least as the Chinese keys, which are the signs of *ideas* only, and some of which resemble the old *Persian* letters at *Istakhr*. The *Danish* traveller was convinced from his own observation that they were written from the left hand, like all the characters used by *Hindu* nations; but I must leave this dark subject, which I cannot illuminate, with a remark formerly

made by myself, that the square *Chaldaic* letters, a few of which are found on the *Persian* ruins, appear to have been originally the same with the *Devanagari*, before the latter were enclosed, as we now see them, in angular frames.

II. The primeval religion of *Iran*, if we rely on the authorities adduced by *Mohsani Fani*, was that, which Newton calls the oldest (and it may justly be called the noblest) of all religions: "A firm belief that One Supreme God made the world by his power, and continually governed it by his providence; a pious fear, love, and adoration of him; a due reverence for parents and aged persons; a fraternal affection for the whole human species, and a compassionate tenderness even for the brute creation." A system of devotion so pure and sublime could hardly, among mortals, be of long duration; and we learn from the *Dabistan*, that the popular worship of the *Iranians* under *Hushang*, was purely *Sabian*; a word of which I cannot offer any certain etymology, but which has been deduced by grammarians from *Saba*, a *host*, <59> and particularly the *host of heaven*, or the *celestial bodies*, in the adoration of which the *Sabian* ritual is believed to have consisted. There is a description, in the learned work just mentioned, of the several *Persian* temples dedicated to the Sun and Planets, of the images adored in them, and of the magnificent processions to them on prescribed festivals; one of which is probably represented by sculpture in the ruined city of *Jemshid*. But the planetary worship in *Persia* seems only a part of a far more complicated religion, which we now find in these Indian provinces; for *Mohsan* assures us that, in the opinion of the best informed Persians, who professed the faith of *Hushang*, distinguished from that of *Zeratusht*, the first monarch of Iran, and of the whole earth, was *Mahabad* (a word apparently *Sanscrit*) who divided the people into four orders, the *religious*, the *military*, the *commercial*, and the *servile*, to which he assigned names unquestionably the same in their origin with those now applied to the four primary classes of the *Hindus*. They added, that he received from the creator, and promulgated among men, *a sacred book in a heavenly language*, to which the *Muselman* author gives the *Arabic* title of *Desatir*, or Regulations, but the original name of which he has not mentioned; and that *fourteen Mahabads* had appeared or would appear in human shapes for the government of this world. Now when we know that the *Hindus* believe in *fourteen Menus*, or celestial personages with similar functions, the *first* of whom left a book of *regulations*, or *divine ordinances*, which they hold equal to the *Veda*, and the language of which

they believe to be that of the gods, we can hardly doubt that the first corruption of the purest and oldest religion was the system of *Indian* theology, invented by the *Brahmans*, and prevalent in these territories, where the book of *Mahabad*, or *Menu*, is at this hour the standard of all religious and moral duties. The accession of <60> *Cayumers* to the throne of *Persia*, in the eighth or ninth century before *Christ*, seems to have been accompanied by a considerable revolution both in government and religion: he was most probably of a different race from the *Mahabadians* who preceded him, and began perhaps the new system of national faith which *Hushang*, whose name it bears, completed; but the reformation was partial; for, while they rejected the complex polytheism of their predecessors, they retained the laws of *Mahabad*, with a superstitious veneration for the sun, the planets, and fire; thus resembling the *Hindu* sects, called *Sauras* and *Sagnicas*, the second of which is very numerous at *Banares*, where many *agnihotras* are continually blazing, and where the *Sagnicas*, when they enter on their sacerdotal office, kindle, with two pieces of the hard wood *Semi*, a fire which they keep lighted through their lives for their nuptial ceremony, the performance of solemn sacrifices, the obsequies of departed ancestors, and their own funeral pile. This remarkable rite was continued by *Zeratusht*, who reformed the old religion by the addition of genii, or angels, presiding over months and days, of new ceremonies in the veneration shown to fire, of a new work which he pretended to have received from Heaven, and, above all, by establishing the actual adoration of one Supreme Being. He was born, according to *Mohsan*, in the district of *Rai*; and it was he (not, as *Ammianus* asserts, his protector *Gushtasb*) who travelled into *India*, that he might receive information from the *Brahmans* in theology and ethics. It is barely possible that *Pythagoras* knew him in the capital of *Irak*; but the *Grecian* sage must then have been far advanced in years; and we have no certain evidence of an intercourse between the two philosophers. The reformed religion of *Persia* continued in force, till that country was subdued by the *Muselmans*; and, without studying the *Zend*, we have ample information concerning <61> it in the modern Persian writings of several who professed it. *Bahman* always named *Zeratusht* with reverence; but he was in truth a pure Theist and strongly disclaimed any adoration of the *fire* or other elements: he denied that the doctrine of two coeval principles, supremely good and supremely bad, formed any part of his faith; and he often repeated with emphasis the verses of *Firdausi* on the *prostration* of *Cyrus* and

his paternal grandfather before the blazing altar: "Think not that they were adorers of fire; for that element was only an exalted object, on the lustre of which they fixed their eyes; they humbled themselves a whole week before *God*; and, if thy understanding be ever so little exerted, thou must acknowledge thy dependence on the Being supremely pure." In a story of *Sadi*, near the close of his beautiful *Bustan*, concerning the idol of *Somanath*, or *Mahadeva*, he confounds the religion of the *Hindus* with that of the *Gabrs*, calling the *Brahmans* not only *Moghs* (which might be justified by a passage in the *Mesnavi*) but even readers of the *Zend* and *Pazend*. Now, whether this confusion proceeded from real or pretended ignorance, I cannot decide, but am as firmly convinced that the doctrines of the *Zend* were distinct from those of the *Veda*, as I am that the religion of the *Brahmans*, with whom we converse every day, prevailed in *Persia* before the accession of *Cayumers*, whom the *Parsis*, from respect to his memory, consider as the first of men, although they believe in *an universal deluge* before his reign.

With the religion of the old *Persians* their *philosophy* (or as much as we know of it) was intimately connected; for they were assiduous observers of the luminaries, which they adored and established, according to *Mohsan*, who confirms in some degree the fragments of *Berosus*, a number of <62> artificial cycles with distinct names, which seem to indicate a knowledge of the period in which the equinoxes appear to revolve. They are said also to have known the most wonderful powers of nature, and thence to have acquired the fame of magicians and enchanters: but I will only detain you with a few remarks on that metaphysical theology which has been professed immemorially by a numerous sect of *Persians* and *Hindus*, was carried in part into *Greece*, and prevails even now among the learned *Muselmans*, who sometimes avow it without reserve. The modern philosophers of this persuasion are called *Sufis*, either from the *Greek* word for a *sage*, or from the *woollen* mantle which they used to wear in some provinces of *Persia*: their fundamental tenets are, that nothing exists absolutely but *God*: that the human soul is an emanation from his essence, and though divided for a time from its heavenly source, will be finally reunited with it; that the highest possible happiness will arise from its reunion; and that the chief good of mankind in this transitory world, consists in as perfect an *union* with the Eternal Spirit as the incumbrances of a mortal frame will allow; that for this purpose they should break all *connection* (or *taalluk*, as they call it) with extrinsic objects, and pass through life

without *attachments*, as a swimmer in the ocean strikes freely without the impediment of clothes; that they should be straight and free as the cypress, whose fruit is hardly perceptible, and not sink under a load, like fruit-trees *attached* to a trellis; that, if mere earthly charms have power to influence the soul, the *idea* of celestial beauty must overwhelm it in extatic delight; that for want of apt words to express the divine perfections and the ardour of devotion, we must borrow such expressions as approach the nearest to our ideas, and speak of *Beauty* and *Love* in a transcendent and mystical sense; that, like a *reed* torn from its native <63> bank, like *wax* separated from its delicious honey, the soul of man bewails its disunion with *melancholy music*, and sheds burning tears, like the lighted taper waiting passionately for the moment of its extinction, as a disengagement from earthly trammels, and the means of returning to its Only Beloved. Such in part (for I omit the minuter and more subtil metaphysics of the *Sufis*, which are mentioned in the *Dabistan*) is the wild and enthusiastic religion of the modern *Persian* poets, especially of the sweet *Hafiz* and the great *Maulavi*: such is the system of the *Vedanti* philosophers and best lyric poets of *India*; and, as it was a system of the highest antiquity in both nations, it may be added to the many other proofs of an immemorial affinity between them.

III. On the ancient *monuments* of *Persian* sculpture and architecture we have already made such observations as were sufficient for our purpose; nor will you be surprized at the diversity between the figures at *Elephanta*, which are manifestly *Hindu*, and those at *Persepolis*, which are merely *Sabian*, if you concur with me in believing, that the *Takhti Jemshid* was erected after the time of *Cayumers*, when the *Brahmans* had migrated from *Iran*, and when their intricate mythology had been superseded by the simpler adoration of the planets and of fire.

IV. As to the *sciences* or *arts* of the old *Persians*, I have little to say; and no complete evidence of them seems to exist. *Mohsan* speaks more than once of ancient verses in the *Pahlavi* language; and *Bahman* assured me, that some scanty remains of them had been preserved: their music and painting, which *Nizami* celebrated, have irrecoverably perished; and in regard to *Mani*, the painter and impostor, whose book of drawings, called *Artang*, which he pretended to be <64> divine, is supposed to have been destroyed by the *Chinese*, in whose dominions he had sought refuge,—the whole tale is too modern to throw any light on the questions before us concerning the origin of nations and the inhabitants of the primitive world.

Thus has it been proved by clear evidence and plain reasoning, that a powerful monarchy was established in *Iran* long before the *Assyrian*, or *Pishdadi*, government: that it was in truth a *Hindu* monarchy, though, if any chuse to call it *Cusian*, *Casdean*, or *Scythian*, we shall not enter into a debate on mere names; that it subsisted many centuries, and that its history has been engrafted on that of the *Hindus*, who founded the monarchies of *Ayodhya* and *Indraprestha*; that the language of the first *Persian* empire was the mother of the *Sanscrit*, and consequently of the *Zend* and *Parsi*, as well as of *Greek*, *Latin*, and *Gothick*; that the language of the *Assyrians* was the parent of *Chaldaic* and *Pahlavi*, and that the primary *Tartarian* language also had been current in the same empire; although, as the *Tartars* had no books or even letters, we cannot with certainty trace their unpolished and variable idioms. We discover, therefore in *Persia*, at the earliest dawn of history, the *three* distinct races of men, whom we described on former occasions, as possessors of *India*, *Arabia*, *Tartary*; and, whether they were collected in *Iran* from distant regions, or diverged from it as from a common centre, we shall easily determine by the following considerations. Let us observe, in the first place, the central position of *Iran*, which is bounded by *Arabia*, by *Tartary*, and by *India*; whilst *Arabia* lies contiguous to *Iran* only, but is remote from *Tartary*, and divided even from the skirts of *India* by a considerable gulf; no country, therefore, but *Persia* seems likely to have <65> sent forth its colonies to all the kingdoms of *Asia*. The *Brahmans* could never have migrated from *India* to *Iran*, because they are expressly forbidden by their oldest existing laws to leave the region which they inhabit at this day; the *Arabs* have not even a tradition of an emigration into *Persia* before *Mohammed*, nor had they indeed any inducement to quit their beautiful and extensive domains; and as to the *Tartars*, we have no trace in history of their departure from their plains and forests till the invasion of the *Medes*, who, according to etymologists, were the sons of *Madai*; and even they were conducted by princes of an *Assyrian* family. The *three* races, therefore, whom we have already mentioned, (and more than three we have not yet found) migrated from *Iran* as from their common country; and thus the *Saxon* chronicle, I presume from good authority, brings the first inhabitants of *Britain* from *Armenia*; while a late very learned writer concludes, after all his laborious researches, that the *Goths* or *Scythians* came from *Persia*; and another contends with great force, that both the *Irish* and old *Britons* proceeded severally from the borders of the *Caspian*; a

coincidence of conclusions from different media by persons wholly unconnected, which could scarce have happened if they were not grounded on solid principles. We may therefore hold this proposition firmly established, that *Iran*, or *Persia* in its largest sense, was the true centre of population, of knowledge, of languages, and of arts; which, instead of travelling westward only, as it has been fancifully supposed, or eastward, as might with equal reason have been asserted, were expanded in all directions to all the regions of the world, in which the *Hindu* race had settled under various denominations: but whether *Asia* has not produced other races of men, distinct from the *Hindus*, the *Arabs*, or the *Tartars*, or whether any apparent diversity may not have sprung from an intermixture of those three <66> in different proportions, must be the subject of a future inquiry.

[U.A.: The last page of this discourse concerns internal matters of the Asiatic Society]

3. JONES'S DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN AND FAMILIES OF NATIONS

Discourse the Ninth.

On the Origin and Families of Nations

Delivered 23 February, 1792.⁶⁶

<418> You have attended, gentlemen, with so much indulgence to my discourses on the five *Asiatick* nations, and on the various tribes established along their several borders or interspersed over their mountains, that I cannot but flatter myself with an assurance of being heard with equal attention, while I trace to one centre the three great families, from which those nations appear to have proceeded, and then hazard a few conjectures on the different courses, which they may be supposed to have taken toward the countries, in which we find them settled at the dawn of all genuine history.

Let us begin with a short review of the propositions, to which we have gradually been led, and separate such as are morally certain, from such as are only probable: that the first race of *Persians* and *Indians*, to whom we may add the *Romans* and *Greeks*, the *Goths*, and the old *Egyptians* or *Ethiops*, <419> originally spoke the same language and professed the same popular faith, is capable, in my humble opinion, of incontestable proof; that the *Jews* and *Arabs*, the *Assyrians*, or second *Persian* race, the people who spoke *Syriack*, and a numerous tribe of *Abyssinians*, used one primitive dialect wholly distinct from the idiom just mentioned, is, I believe, undisputed, and, I am sure, indisputable; but that the settlers in *China* and *Japan* had a common origin with the *Hindus*, is no more than highly probable; and, that all the *Tartars*, as they are inaccurately called, were primarily of a third separate branch, totally differing from the two others in language, manners, and features, may indeed be plausibly conjectured; but cannot for the reasons alledged in a former essay, be perspicuously shown, and for the present, therefore,

⁶⁶ The text is from the London reprint (1796) of the third volume of the *Asiatick Researches* (pp. 418–435). Numbers in angular brackets indicate the beginnings of pages. Jones's spelling and punctuation are reproduced without change.

must be merely assumed. Could these facts be verified by the best attainable evidence, it would not, I presume, be doubted, that the whole earth was peopled by a variety of shoots from the *Indian*, *Arabian*, and *Tartarian* branches, or by such intermixtures of them, as, in a course of ages, might naturally have happened.

Now I admit without hesitation the aphorism of LYNNÆUS, that "in the beginning God created one pair only of every living species, which has a diversity of sex;" but, since that incomparable naturalist argues principally from the wonderful diffusion of vegetables, and from an hypothesis, that the water on this globe has been continually <420> subsiding, I venture to produce a shorter and closer argument in support of this doctrine. That *Nature*, of which simplicity appears a distinguishing attribute, *does nothing in vain*, is a maxim in philosophy; and against those, who deny maxims, we cannot dispute; but *it is vain* and superfluous *to do by many means what may be done by fewer*, and this is another axiom received into courts of judicature from the schools of philosophers: *we must not*, therefore, says our great NEWTON, *admit more causes of natural things, than those which are true, and sufficiently account for natural phenomena*; but it is true, that one pair, *at least*, of every living species must at first have been created; and that one human pair was sufficient for the population of our globe in a period of no considerable length (on the very moderate supposition of lawyers and political arithmeticians, that every pair of ancestors left, on an average, two children, and each of them two more), is evident from the rapid increase of numbers in geometrical progression, so well known to those, who have ever taken the trouble to sum a series of as many terms, as they suppose generations of men in two or three thousand years. It follows, that the Author of Nature (for all nature proclaims its divine author) created but one pair of our species; yet, had it not been (among other reasons) for the devastations, which history has recorded, of water and fire, wars, famine, and pestilence, this earth would not now have had room for its multiplied inhabitants. If the human race then be, as we <421> may confidently assume, of one natural species, they must all have proceeded from one pair; and if perfect justice be, as it is most indubitably, an essential attribute of GOD, that pair must have been gifted with sufficient wisdom and strength to be virtuous, and, as far as their nature admitted, happy, but intrusted with freedom of will to be vicious and consequently degraded: whatever might be their option, they must people in time the region where they first

were established, and their numerous descendants must necessarily seek new countries, as inclination might prompt, or accident lead, them; they would of course migrate in separate families and clans, which, forgetting by degrees the language of their common progenitor, would form new dialects to convey new ideas, both simple and compleat; natural affection would unite them at first, and a sense of reciprocal utility, the great and only cement of social union in the absence of publick honour and justice, for which in evil times it is a general substitute, would combine them at length in communities more or less regular; laws would be proposed by a part of each community, but enacted by the whole; and governments would be variously arranged for the happiness or misery of the governed, according to their own virtue and wisdom, or depravity and folly; so that, in less than three thousand years, the world would exhibit the same appearances, which we may actually observe on it in the age of the great *Arabian* impostor.

<422> On that part of it, to which our united researches are generally confined, we see *five* races of men peculiarly distinguished, in the time of MUHAMED, for their multitude and extent of dominion; but we have reduced them to *three*, because we can discover no more, that essentially differ in language, religion, manners, and other known characteristics: now those three races, how variously soever they may at present be dispersed and intermixed, must (if the preceding conclusions be justly drawn) have migrated originally from a central country, to find which is the problem proposed for solution. Suppose it solved; and give any arbitrary name to that centre: let it, if you please, be *Iran*. The three primitive languages, therefore, must at first have been concentrated in *Iran*, and there only in fact we see traces of them in the earliest historical age; but, for the sake of greater precision, conceive the whole empire of *Iran*, with all its mountains and valleys, plains and rivers, to be every way infinitely diminished; the first winding courses, therefore, of all the nations proceeding from it by land, and nearly at the same time, will be little right lines, but without intersections, because those courses could not have thwarted and crossed one another: if then you consider the seats of all the migrating nations as points in a surrounding figure, you will perceive, that the several rays, diverging from *Iran*, may be drawn to them without any intersection; but this will not happen, if you assume as a centre *Arabia*, or *Egypt*, *India*, *Tartary*, or <423> *China*: it follows, that *Iran*, or *Persia* (I contend for *the meaning, not the name*), was the central country which we sought. This mode of reasoning I

have adopted, not from any affectation (as you will do me the justice to believe) of a scientific diction, but for the sake of conciseness and variety, and from a wish to avoid repetitions; the substance of my argument having been detailed in a different form at the close of another discourse; nor does the argument in any form rise to demonstration, which the question by no means admits: it amounts, however, to such a proof, grounded on written evidence and credible testimony, as all mankind hold sufficient for decisions affecting property, freedom, and life.

Thus then have we proved, that the inhabitants of *Asia*, and consequently, as it might be proved, of the whole earth, sprang from three branches of one stem: and that those branches have shot into their present state of luxuriance in a period comparatively short, is apparent from a fact universally acknowledged, that we find no certain monument, or even probable tradition, of nations planted, empires and states raised, laws enacted, cities built, navigation improved, commerce encouraged, arts invented, or letters contrived, above twelve or at most fifteen or sixteen centuries before the birth of CHRIST, and from another fact, which cannot be controverted, that seven hundred or a thousand years would have been fully adequate to the <424> supposed propagation, diffusion and establishment of the human race.

The most ancient history of that race, and the oldest composition perhaps in the world, is a work in *Hebrew* which we may suppose at first, for the sake of our argument, to have no higher authority than any other work of equal antiquity, that the researches of the curious had accidentally brought to light: it is ascribed to MUSAH; for so he writes his own name, which, after the *Greeks* and *Romans*, we have changed into MOSES; and, though it was manifestly his object to give an historical account of a single family, he has introduced it with a short view of the primitive world, and his introduction has been divided, perhaps improperly, into *eleven* chapters. After describing with awful sublimity the creation of this universe, he asserts, that one pair of every animal species was called from nothing into existence; that the human pair were strong enough to be happy, but free to be miserable; that, from delusion and temerity, they disobeyed their supreme benefactor, whose goodness could not pardon them consistently with his justice; and that they received a punishment adequate to their disobedience, but softened by a mysterious promise to be accomplished in their descendants.

We cannot but believe, on the supposition just made of a history uninspired, that these facts were delivered by tradition from the first pair, and related by MOSES in a figurative style; not in that <425> sort of allegory, which rhetoricians describe as a mere assemblage of metaphors, but in the symbolical mode of writing adopted by eastern sages, to embellish and dignify historical truth; and, if this were a time for such illustrations, we might produce the same account of the *creation* and the *fall*, expressed by symbols very nearly similar, from the *Puránas* themselves, and even from the *Véda*, which appears to stand next in antiquity to the five books of MOSES.

The sketch of antediluvian history, in which we find many dark passages, is followed by the narrative of a *deluge*, which destroyed the whole race of man, except four pairs; an historical fact admitted as true by every nation, to whose literature we have access, and particularly by the ancient *Hindus*, who have allotted an entire *Purána* to the detail of that event, which they relate, as usual, in symbols or allegories. I concur more heartily with those, who insist, that, in proportion as any fact mentioned in history seems repugnant to the course of nature, or, in one word, miraculous, the stronger evidence is required to induce a rational belief of it; but we hear without incredulity, that cities have been overwhelmed by eruptions from burning mountains, territories laid waste by hurricanes, and whole islands depopulated by earthquakes: if then we look at the firmament sprinkled with innumerable stars; if we conclude by a fair analogy, that every star is a sun, attracting, like ours, a system of inhabited planets; and if our ardent fancy, soaring <426> hand in hand with sound reason, waft us beyond the visible sphere into regions of immensity, disclosing other celestial expanses and other systems of suns and worlds on all sides without number or end, we cannot but consider the submersion of our little spheroid as an infinitely less event in respect of the immeasurable universe, than the destruction of a city or an isle in respect of this habitable globe. Let a general flood, however, be supposed improbable in proportion to the magnitude of so ruinous an event, yet the concurrent evidences of it are completely adequate to the supposed improbability; but, as we cannot here expatiate on those proofs, we proceed to the fourth important fact recorded in the *Mosaick* history; I mean the first propagation and early dispersion of mankind *in separate families* to separate places of residence.

Three sons of the just and virtuous man, whose lineage was preserved from the general inundation, travelled, we are told, as they began to multiply, in *three* large divisions variously subdivided: the children of YA'FET seem, from the traces of *Sclavonian* names, and the mention of their being *enlarged*, to have spread themselves far and wide, and to have produced the race, which, for want of a correct appellation, we call *Tartarian*; the colonies, formed by the sons of HAM and SHEM, appear to have been nearly simultaneous; and, among those of the latter branch, we find so many names incontestably preserved at this hour in *Arabia*, that we cannot hesitate in pronouncing them the same <427> people, whom hitherto we have denominated *Arabs*; while the former branch, the most powerful and adventurous of whom were the progeny of CUSH, MISR, and RAMA (names remaining unchanged in *Sanscrit*, and highly revered by the *Hindus*), were, in all probability, the race, which I call *Indian*, and to which we may now give any other name, that may seem more proper and comprehensive.

The general introduction to the *Jewish* history closes with a very concise and obscure account of a presumptuous and mad attempt, by a particular colony, to build a splendid city and raise a fabrick of immense height, independently of the divine aid; and, it should seem, in defiance of the divine power; a project, which was baffled by means appearing, at first view, inadequate to the purpose, but ending in violent dissensions among the projectors, and in the ultimate separation of them: this event also seems to be recorded by the ancient *Hindus* in two of their *Puránas*; and it will be proved, I trust, on some future occasion, that *the lion bursting from a pillar to destroy a blaspheming giant*, and the *dwarf, who beguiled and held in derision the magnificent BELI*, are one and the same story related in a symbolical style.

Now these primeval events are described as having happened between the *Oxus* and *Euphrates*, the mountains of *Caucasus* and the borders of India, that is, within the limits of *Iran*; for, though most of the *Mosaick* names have been considerably altered, yet numbers of them remain unchanged: we <428> still find *Harrán* in *Mesopotamia*, and travellers appear unanimous in fixing the site of ancient *Babel*.

Thus, on the preceding supposition, that the first eleven chapters of the book, which it is thought proper to call *Genesis*, are merely a preface to the oldest civil history now extant, we see the truth of them confirmed by antecedent reasoning, and by evidence in part highly <487>

probable, and in fact certain; but the *connection* of the *Mosaick* history with that of the Gospel by a chain of sublime predictions unquestionably ancient, and apparently fulfilled, must induce us to think the *Hebrew* narrative more than human in its origin, and consequently true in every substantial part of it, though possibly expressed in figurative language; as many learned and pious men have believed, and as the most pious may believe without injury, and perhaps with advantage, to the cause of revealed religion. If MOSES then was endued with supernatural knowledge, it is no longer probable only, but absolutely certain, that the whole race of man proceeded from *Iran*, as from a centre, whence they migrated at first in three great colonies; and that those three branches grew from a common stock which had been miraculously preserved in a general convulsion and inundation of this globe.

Having arrived by a different path at the same conclusion with Mr. BRYANT as to one of those families, the most ingenious and enterprising of the three, but arrogant, cruel, and idolatrous, which we both conclude to be various shoots from the<429> *Hamian* or *Amonian* branch, I shall add but little to my former observations on this profound and agreeable work, which I have thrice perused with increased attention and pleasure, though not with perfect acquiescence in the other less important parts of his plausible system. The sum of this argument seems reducible to three heads. First; "if the deluge really happened at the time recorded by MOSES, those nations, whose monuments are preserved or whose writings are accessible, must have retained memorials of an event so stupendous and comparatively so recent; but in fact they have retained such memorials;" this reasoning seems just, and the fact is true beyond controversy: Secondly; "those memorials were expressed by the race of HAM, before the use of letters, in rude sculpture or painting, and mostly in <487> symbolical figures of the *Ark*; the eight persons concealed in it, and the birds, which first were dismissed from it: this fact is probable, but, I think, not sufficiently ascertained." Thirdly; "all ancient Mythology (except what was purely *Sabian*) had its primary source in those various symbols misunderstood; so that ancient mythology stands now in the place of symbolical sculpture or painting, and must be explained on the same principles, on which we should begin to decypher the originals, if they now existed:" this part of the system is, in my opinion, carried too far; nor can I persuade myself (to give one instance out of many) that the beautiful allegory of CUPID and PSYCHE had the <430> remotest allusion to the

deluge, or that HYMEN signified the *veil*, which covered the patriarch and his family. These propositions, however, are supported with great ingenuity and solid erudition, but unprofitably for the argument, and unfortunately, perhaps, for the fame of the work itself, recourse is had to etymological conjecture, than which no mode of reasoning is in general weaker or more delusive. He, who professes to derive the words of any one language from those of another, must expose himself to the danger of perpetual errors, unless he be perfectly acquainted with both; yet my respectable friend, though eminently skilled in the idioms of *Greece* and *Rome*, has no sort of acquaintance with any *Asiatick* dialect, except *Hebrew*; and he has consequently made mistakes, which every learner of *Arabick* and *Persian* must instantly detect. Among *fifty* radical words (*ma*, *taph*, and *ram* being included), *eighteen* are purely of *Arabian* origin, *twelve* merely *Indian*, and *seventeen* both *Sanscrit* and *Arabick*, but in senses totally different; while *two* are *Greek* only, and one *Egyptian*, or barbarous: if it be urged, that those *radicals* (which ought surely to have concluded, instead of preceding, an *analytical* inquiry) are precious traces of the primitive language, from which all others were derived, or to which at least they were subsequent, I can only declare my belief, that the language of NOAH is lost irretrievably, and assure you, that after a diligent search, I cannot find a single word used in common by the *Arabian*, *Indian*, and *Tartar* <431> families, before the intermixture of dialects occasioned by *Mahomedan* conquests. There are, indeed, very obvious traces of the *Hamian* language, and some hundreds of words might be produced, which were formerly used promiscuously by most nations of that race; but I beg leave, as a philologist, to enter my protest against conjectural etymology in historical researches, and principally against the licentiousness of etymologists in transposing and inserting letters, in substituting at pleasure [200] any consonant for another of the same order, and in totally disregarding the vowels: for such permutations few radical words would be more convenient than CUS or CUSH, since, dentals being changed for dentals, and palatials for palatials, it instantly becomes *coot*, *goose*, and, by transposition, *duck*, all water-birds, and evidently symbolical; it next is the *goat* worshipped in *Egypt*, and, by a metathesis, the *dog* adored as an emblem of SIRIUS, or, more obviously, a *cat*, not the domestick animal, but a sort of ship, and, the *Catos*, or great sea-fish, of the *Doriens*. It will hardly be imagined, that I mean by this irony to insult an author, whom I respect and esteem; but no consideration should induce me to assist by my

silence in the diffusion of error; and I contend, that almost any word or nation might be derived from any other, if such licences, as I am opposing, were permitted in etymological histories: when we find, indeed, the same words, letter for letter, and in a sense precisely the same, in different languages, we can scarce hesitate <432> in allowing them a common origin; and, not to depart from the example before us, when we see CUSH or CUS (for the *Sanscrit* name also is variously pronounced) among the sons of BRAHMÀ, that is, among the progenitors of the *Hindus*, and at the head of an ancient pedigree preserved in the *Rámáyán*; when we meet with his name again in the family of RÁMA; when we know, that the name is venerated in the highest degree, and given to a sacred grass described as a *Poa* by KOENIG, which is used with a thousand ceremonies in the oblations to fire, ordained by MENU to form the sacrificial zone of the *Brahmans*, and solemnly declared in the *Véda* to have sprung up soon after the *deluge*, whence the *Pauránicks* consider it as *the bristly hair of the boar which supported the globe*; when we add, that one of the seven *dwípas*, or great peninsulas of this earth, has the same appellation, we can hardly doubt that the CUSH of MOSES and VÁLMIC was the same personage and an ancestor of the *Indian* race.

From the testimonies adduced in the six last annual discourses, and from the additional proofs laid before you, or rather opened, on the present occasion, it seems to follow, that the only human family after the flood established themselves in the northern parts of *Iran*; that, as they multiplied, they were divided into three distinct branches, each retaining little at first, and losing the whole by degrees, of their common primary language; but agreeing severally on new expressions for new <433> ideas; that the branch of YÁFET was *enlarged* in many scattered shoots over the north of *Europe* and *Asia*, diffusing themselves as far as the western and eastern seas, and, at length in the infancy of navigation, beyond them both: that they cultivated no liberal arts, and had no use of letters, but formed a variety of dialects, as their tribes were variously ramified; that, secondly, the children of HAM, who founded in *Iran* itself the monarchy of the first *Chaldeans*, invented letters, observed and named the luminaries of the firmament, calculated the known *Indian* period of *four hundred and thirty two thousand years*, or an *hundred and twenty* repetitions of the *saros*, and contrived the old system of Mythology, partly allegorical, and partly grounded on idolatrous veneration for their sages and lawgivers; that they were dispersed

at various intervals and in various colonies over land and ocean; that the tribes of MISR, CUSH, and RAMA settled in *Africk* and *India*; while some of them, having improved the art of sailing, passed from *Egypt*, *Phenice*, and *Phrygia*, into *Italy* and *Greece*, which they found thinly peopled by former emigrants, of whom they supplanted some tribes, and united themselves with others; whilst a swarm from the same hive moved by a northerly course into *Scandinavia*, and another, by the head of the *Oxus*, and through the passes of *Imaus*, into *Cashghar* and *Eighúr*, *Khatá* and *Khoten*, as far as the territories of *Chín* and *Tancút*, where letters have been used and arts immemorially cultivated; nor is it unreasonable to believe, that <434> some of them found their way from the eastern isles into *Mexico* and *Peru*, where traces were discovered of rude literature and Mythology analogous to those of *Egypt* and *India*; that, thirdly, the old *Chaldean* empire being overthrown by the *Assyrians* under CAYÚMERS, other migrations took place, especially into *India*, while the rest of SHEM'S progeny, some of whom had before settled on the Red Sea, peopled the whole *Arabian* peninsula, pressing close on the nations of *Syria* and *Phenice*; that, lastly, from all the three families were detached many bold adventurers of an ardent spirit and a roving disposition, who disdained subordination and wandered in separate clans, till they settled in distant isles or in deserts and mountainous regions; that, on the whole, some colonies might have migrated before the death of their venerable progenitor, but that states and empires could scarce have assumed a regular form, till fifteen or sixteen hundred years before the *Christian* epoch, and that, for the first thousand years of that period, we have no history unmixed with fable, except that of the turbulent and variable, but eminently distinguished, nation descended from ABRAHAM.

My design, gentlemen, of tracing the origin and progress of the five principal nations, who have peopled *Asia*, and of whom there were considerable remains in their several countries a the time of MUHAMMED'S birth, is now accomplished; succinctly, from the nature of these essays; imperfectly, from the darkness of the subject and scantiness of <435> my materials, but clearly and comprehensively enough to form a basis for subsequent researches: you have seen as distinctly as I am able to show, *who* those nations originally were, *whence* and *when* they moved toward their final stations; and, in my future annual discourses, I propose to enlarge on the *particular advantages* to our country and to mankind, which may result from our sedulous and

united inquiries into the history, science, and arts of these *Asiatick* regions, especially of the *British* dominions in India, which we may consider as the centre (not of the human race, but) of our common exertions to promote its true interests; and we shall concur, I trust, in opinion, that the race of man, to advance whose manly happiness is our duty and will of course be our endeavour, cannot long be happy without virtue, nor actively virtuous without freedom, nor securely free without rational knowledge.

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