

WHERE DOES HISTORY BEGIN?: J. G. HERDER AND THE PROBLEM OF NEAR EASTERN CHRONOLOGY IN THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

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It is by now a well-worn, if little noted, convention that today's western and world civilization textbooks open with what is usually a non-chronological, cursory and confusing chapter on the great civilizations of the Orient, and only relax into a coherent, chronological narrative in the second chapter, invariably devoted to the Greeks. Why we do this is sometimes blamed on Hegel, but in this essay I would like to suggest that there is a deeper, richer, and more interesting means by which we might understand this conventional practice. In my view, our attempts to grapple with world chronology are the product of a very long debate, one that had its origins in antiquity itself and continued to rage through the early modern era, engaging English scientists and French philosophes, clergymen and libertines; although it centrally involved persons who called themselves "orientalists," it had little, if anything, to do with European colonization.¹ At the heart of the debate was a very old theological and (largely) iconoclastic question: what did Moses borrow from the other civilizations of the Near East? Although by no means resolved, this question took a critical turn in the debates of the late eighteenth century, in which the unorthodox Lutheran pastor J. G. Herder played a major role. The background to Herder's rarely-read essay "The Oldest Document of the Human Race" (1774) clarifies the problems that provoked Herder to write this Delphic text and illuminates how and why Herder's solution—both to include Near Eastern "prehistory" in our accounts of western civilization's origins, and to treat it as what he called "a ruined and vanished dream"—became the norm.

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EARLY MODERN WORLD CHRONOLOGIES

The study of chronology, Herder mused in 1774, is a “morass”²—and indeed, we must plunge into that morass if we are to understand at all how very powerful and persistent the question of how to date Near Eastern religions, arts, and sciences had been for “westerners” since Herodotus.³ Despite some Greeks’ insistence that non-Greek speakers were “barbarians,” the inhabitants of the Aegean were well aware that their gods, their luxury goods, and many of their ideas came from Asia; and Christians, by way of the Old Testament, knew very well that Abraham came from Ur, that the Babylonian, Persian and Egyptian Empires had been formidable, and that the Magi came from Persia. Hellenistic texts like Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris* described ancient Near Eastern religions, and in the fourth century, crucially, Eusebius compiled a defense of the gospels which included reports of an ancient Flood from an Assyrian priest, Berosos and a list of Egyptian kings stretching back into the deep mists of time drawn from the Egyptian historian Manetho. Eusebius also included excerpts from the later eastern Greek writers Philo (from Alexandria) and Porphyry (from Tyre), who described a subsequently lost treatise—based on the records of the ancient world—by the Phoenician scholar Sanchoniathon. Sanchoniathon was said to have lived about the time of Moses, before the Trojan wars, and to have translated this first of all world histories into Greek. As Eusebius reports, this scholar, reputedly a person endowed with a “love of truth,” had reliable information that it was a God from Byblos, Taautus (whom the Egyptians called Thoth and the Greeks Hermes), who invented letters and began writing records. Taautus/Thoth/Hermes was supposed to have written sacred books, and inspired the paganisms of the rest of the Near East.⁴ According to this hugely influential passage—still being cited by George Smith in 1847⁵—history, writing, and religion—if the wrong kind—began in the East.

On the whole, Christian writers like Eusebius liked to emphasize the differences between ancient paganism and Judaism and Christianity. But authors of late antiquity could not help but observe that many Christian practices and ideas resembled pagan practices and ideas; these resemblances had, from early on, given rise to alternative claims on the part of the world-be originators. While some Neoplatonists argued that Plato and the Greeks provided the origins of Christian ideas, Christian Euhemerists insisted that the Greeks had stolen their ideas from Moses. The church fathers had worked hard to root out those practices which were obviously pagan survivals and which they labeled heresies. They were fortunate that the ability to read hieroglyphics and cuneiform disappeared, and that those who could read Sanskrit, middle Persian, Chinese and even Greek were largely cut off from the West. For a long time, it sufficed to have the “true” faith and to label others as infidels or heretics; no one had much use for precise dates, nor the willingness to accept dates other than those conjured by their own coreligionists. But a great danger remained for Christian scholars: that someone might assert that the Old Testament, in which Jesus’s coming as the Messiah was foretold, had been borrowed or stolen from pagans, or that a culture other than the ancient Israelites could make an equal claim to have received God’s special revelation.

Both of these threats materialized in the late fifteenth century, with the discovery and translation of what seemed to be the actual writings of that original Egyptian sage, now known as Hermes Trismegistus, followed shortly thereafter by

a set of texts published by Anniius of Viterbo which claimed to be the actual works of Manetho, Berossos, and other ancient oriental authors. It is difficult to overstate the stir these works created: Marsillio Ficino's 1471 edition of the Hermetic texts was one of the first printed books, and went through sixteen editions before the end of the sixteenth century.⁶ The interest was understandable: here were oriental books *other* than the Old Testament which offered firsthand testimony about the deep antiquity of Near Eastern civilizations. They fired the imaginations in particular of iconoclasts like Giordano Bruno, who argued that the Jews had stolen everything from the Egyptians. Regrettably for Bruno, championing pagan Egyptian wisdom was still heresy even in Renaissance Italy, and he was burned at the stake in 1600. The champions of oriental wisdom suffered another major blow when, shortly thereafter, Joseph Scaliger and Isaac Casaubon demonstrated that Anniius's works were forgeries, and that the Hermetic texts dated to the post-apostolic era.⁷

Renaissance scholars had been far more interested in parallels and biographical figures than in what we might call "genetic" relationships or historical priority, but in the wake of the Reformation and the discovery of New World peoples, Christian humanists began to ask questions about the "true" faith which required historical explanations: which Christian ideas and doctrines were original to the faith, and unique to it? If, as Tertullian had claimed, truth always precedes lies, did that mean that one could explain Greek (and other pagan) gods and myths as derivatives of biblical figures?⁸ What was to be done with Hermes, or with the reports of Berossos and Manetho? What about the Hellenistic texts which claimed very deep dates for Egyptian oracles, or for Persian saviors (Pliny and Hermippus, for example, reported that Zoroaster lived 5,000 years before the Trojan war)? As Anthony Grafton has shown, Scaliger played a crucial role in creating a chronological scaffolding on which to erect a new kind of universal history; in his wake a kind of chronologizing fever seized the Republic of Letters, as scholars attempted to synthesize scripture, classical and Islamic chronologies, and astronomical calculations.⁹ Learned Christian Hebraists produced massive compendia, using careful readings of the Old Testament to establish a set of dates linking the high points of "world" history: Creation, the Flood, the Babylonian captivity, the birth of Christ, and refuting implicitly if not explicitly Epicurean claims that the world was eternal.¹⁰ For most of these writers—a large majority of whom were churchmen—the point of the endeavor was not to integrate the secular and the sacred, but to prove the truth of the scriptures.¹¹ In 1650, Bishop Ussher made his famous contribution to this effort, giving dates to every event in the Old Testament including Creation (God started, he argued, on a Sunday afternoon in 4004 BCE). But the learned theologians could not wipe out all of the readers of Eusebius or the Hermes fanciers—Athanasius Kircher, for example, remained a fan—or silence the iconoclasts—Rosicrucians and alchemists, Socinians and mystics—eager to find the "key to all wisdom," and seeking it in Near Eastern symbols, artifacts, and texts.

Those who could read oriental languages, or said they could read oriental languages—a category that ranged from serious Hebraists to crackpots—contributed much to this debate; whatever their "oriental" specialty, all were eager to use their erudition to explore the Old Testament, the universally-recognized "key" to Christianity, and the source for so much rich and puzzling testimony about the ancient world. In the process, as numerous scholars have shown, the Bible lost some

of its symbolic power, but took on new historical significance. Scholars like John Selden began, in the words of Guy Stroumsa, to seek the origins of all of the Orient's religions, and "to read the Bible in a new way, as one of the oldest documents of the past. Read in this manner, this single document was found to contain not only God's revelation to Israel but also, through the early history of that people, the description of ancient polytheistic religions, subsumed under the generic term of idolatry."¹² Selden's *De Diis Syris Syntagmata* (1617) used the Old Testament as well as Arabic, patristic, and rabbinic sources to explore the polytheistic world into which Moses came as a reformer, adding to the pagan mixture a brief account of Phoenician mythology; here Selden relied on Eusebius's reporting of the words of Sanchoniathan, which claimed an Egyptian origin for the arts and sciences. Over the course of the seventeenth century, Arabists and Hebrew scholars made many more Islamic and Jewish medieval works available; although these did not offer firsthand testimony about ancient (for example, Gnostic) ideas, they did complicate Christian chronologies, and set in motion a wide-ranging debate about the relationship between the religion of Moses and those of his contemporary "idolaters." Worryingly, some of those "idolaters" turned out to have views uncomfortably close to those of the Hebrew prophets and patriarchs. To take just one example of such scholarship, the *Sad dar* [*One Hundred Gates*], a Persian text testifying to Zoroaster's original monotheism, was critical to Thomas Hyde's sympathetic presentation of Iranian religion in his *Historia religionis veterum Persarum* [*History of the Religions of Ancient Persia*] in Latin in 1700.¹³

Hyde was also a close reader of Maimonides, and from him borrowed the term "Sabians" for Near Eastern worshippers of the planets and the sun; this was the religion that swamped early Persian monotheism, and from which Zoroaster had to redeem his people. Hyde considered Zoroaster a follower of Abraham, and accounted for the similarities between Zoroastrianism and Judaism by suggesting that the young Iranian might have been an apprentice to a Hebrew prophet.¹⁴ But this was not enough for Daniel Huet, the learned French bishop, who proclaimed Zoroaster a mythological figure. Huet was even more vigorous in his attacks on William Warburton, the iconoclastic English apologist who used Acts 7:22 (which said that Moses was "well versed" in "all the wisdom of Egypt") to open the door to the claim that Moses had pilfered his wisdom from the Egyptians. Inverting the chronology, Huet insisted that the Egyptians had plagiarized Moses.¹⁵

But as the eighteenth century opened, confidence in Mosaic priority began to crumble. Jesuit missionaries brought back accounts of the great age of Chinese culture; polymaths like Leibniz began to worry about what the fossil evidence suggested about the history of the earth. Between 1692 and 1720, the French iconoclast Benoit de Maillet constructed a history of the earth which estimated its age to be two billion years old. The text—supposedly written by an oriental sage, privy to Egyptian wisdom—circulated privately, but the author did not dare to publish *Telliamed* ("de Maillet" backward) until 1748.¹⁶ Spinoza's claims that the Bible was itself a fiction and that the world was eternal began to spread through radical circles, as Jonathan Israel has shown, and by 1711, the *Treatise of the Three Imposters* essentially claimed that all religions were Sabian and all clerics were conspiratorial deceivers. It was against this background that a warmer and fuzzier version of Renaissance Neoplatonism which D. P. Walker calls "the ancient

theology” spread among enlightened, but non-radical, scholars; according to this view, there might have been one rather weak and general universal revelation of God preceding His special and particular revelation to the Jews. This pleased Jesuit missionaries, who felt they could perhaps tap into the older revelation to lay the foundation for converting Chinese mandarins or Indian Brahmins to the more recent one.¹⁷ A strong inducement to take on this view lay in the need to combat more radical interpretations abreast at the time, from Warburton’s championing of Egyptian secret wisdom to Spinoza’s insistence that the world was eternal. Acknowledging the possibility of a universal, primeval revelation made space for other cultures whose religious texts might indeed predate those of the Jews without taking away the possibility that a second revelation, to Moses alone, was the one in which God commanded humans to live and believe properly. But the expanding space between Creation and the Revelation to the Jews, at a moment of what amounts to a revolution in oriental philology, exposed Christian orthodoxy to chronological issues that threatened to undo the specialness not only of the Old Testament, but of the gospels as well. Given the importance of the Old Testament to the writing of universal history, this debate also threatened to delegitimize the writing of ancient history itself.

The eighteenth century, despite its reputation as a forward-looking age, still took questions of ur-origination and of chronology very seriously—the issue of how to date and construe Creation and Revelation remained absolutely vital. One of the things that absorbed Sir Isaac Newton from at least the 1690s until the last decade of his life was chronology: the resulting book, published in 1735 after his death, confirmed Ussher’s view that Creation had occurred around 4,000 BCE—a claim intended to contradict Spinoza’s (and Aristotle’s) insistence that material was eternal. Newton, as Frank Manuel showed many years ago, claimed to be sticking to “reliable” evidence: histories written by authors who reported on events or documents they themselves had seen, and astronomical evidence, based on the correlation of events with the precession of the equinoxes. He refused to credit oral traditions or accounts that purported to be older than 1100 BCE, the date he set for the invention of writing. Newton trusted the Old Testament, as its transmission from antiquity was unbroken—but he did not trust Manetho, Berosus, Ctesias, or any of the later Greeks. “What were the genuine records of Egypt, Chaldaea, & Persia before the Assyrians invaded them is unknown,” the great scientist wrote. “Herodotus, Megasthenes, Berosus & Manetho were the oldest historians of the Greeks[,] Persians[,] Chaldaeans & Egyptians & what they say of those nations before the beginning of the Olympiads is confused & obscure.”¹⁸ But, as Manuel noted, and Jed Buchwald and Mordechai Feingold have now demonstrated in detail, Newton himself drew on some problematical Greek sources, and relied heavily on Daniel’s prophecies to frame a chronology which—among other things—credited a centaur with the discovery of astronomy and dated the sailing of the Argonauts to the very late date of 936 BCE.¹⁹ When a slim draft of Newton’s work reached the public (without his consent) in the 1720s, huge controversies broke out in England and in France: even the great scientist could not solve the puzzle of ancient chronology. Newton’s was a powerful voice against Graecophile libertines and Orientophiles, but by no means did his attempt to reduce chronology to the “facts” settle the argument.

Speculation about world chronology continued, in England and in France. William Whiston and Nicholas Fréret both attacked Newton's dates—but both, too, wrote scathingly about “fabulous” oriental dates. In 1735, the year Newton's final publication appeared, a multi-authored English universal history, immediately translated into other languages, offered a huge table of other dates for Creation, ranging from 6984 BCE, calculated by Alphonsius, King of Castile, to 3760 BCE, from the Jewish common reckoning.²⁰ The editor of the German translation of this universal history, the important Protestant theologian S. J. Baumgarten, also noted that if one were to trust Manetho's list of Egyptian kings, one would reach even higher dates, putting King Menes on the throne in 5300, far before Ussher's conventional date for the creation.²¹ Baumgarten was clearly worried about these conflicting reports, for his long introduction to the translation, written in 1744, openly agonized about how reliable a field ancient history—and Christian theology—would be thought to be, when it was unable to even get its dates straight. The volume sought to save its credibility by throwing out the oriental accounts and depending on the Old Testament, insisting that Moses is “the only reliable historical writer on the question of what happened before the Flood, and for many centuries thereafter.”²²

Thus, by the mid-eighteenth century, there were already signs of anxiety, but the situation was about to become worse. In 1749, G. L. de Buffon diminished de Maillet's earth chronology to a mere 75,000 years—still enough to warrant the intervention of the censors, who forced Buffon to recant.²³ Paul Ernest Jablonski, a theologian and Coptic scholar at the University of Frankfurt an der Oder, began to publish books which asserted heavy Egyptian influence on the Old Testament, based on Coptic manuscripts as well as Hellenistic texts. Antiquarians, including Bernard de Montfaucon and the Comte de Caylus, produced huge volumes of images of ancient monuments. Reports of the Jesuits in China streamed in with reports of the great age of Chinese dynasties—though some, like Joseph de Guignes, professor of Syriac at the Collège Royal, continued to claim that Chinese culture had originated in Egypt. In 1760, Voltaire, who had long tweaked Christian readers with the greater antiquity of other civilizations, received a copy of a supposedly pre-Alexandrian Veda; Voltaire found in it testimony to the existence of a Brahmanic morality superior to that of the Christians and perhaps anterior to that of the Egyptians and Jews. He deposited his copy in the Royal Library in Paris, and began corresponding with the astronomer Jean-Sylvain Bailly, was interested in another purported ancient civilization: the Atlantans, whom he placed on the island of Spitzbergen.²⁴

Voltaire's views seemed ratified when the first of England's Indiaphiles began to report on the great age of the Vedas. In 1765–71, J. Z. Holwell claimed that, having learned Persian and Sanskrit, he could now depart from derogatory and false reports about the “Gentoos” of “Indostan.” According to Holwell, the Gentoos had resided in northern India, without mixing with others, from the period of the first peopling of the earth and had kept Brahma's truths sacred for a thousand years before the time of the Babylonian captivity. They had not borrowed from the Egyptians (much less the Jews); instead, the Egyptians had stolen from them the ideas of metempsychosis, Providence, unity of the Godhead, and rewards and punishments in the afterlife.²⁵ Presumably the Jews had stolen these

from the Egyptians. Holwell offered a highly favorable account of the Gentoo's beliefs and customs, based on translations from an ancient text he called the *Chartah Bhade Shastah* (but which he had lost during the Seven Years' War). This original text demonstrated that there had been a primeval revelation, of which Hinduism preserved truths in their most authentic and pure form, while the Hebrew version was "clogged with too many incomprehensible difficulties to gain our belief."²⁶

But perhaps the biggest bombshell was the one the French traveler Hyacinthe Anquetil Duperron lobbed into the debate. Some years earlier, Anquetil had gone to India to seek Sanskrit scriptures, but had been unable to convince Brahmanic priests to teach him the language. He had more success with the Parsees and came home to find that there was a Persian text of interest in the Royal Library, which he set about translating, using his Persian to penetrate the odd language we now know as Avestan. In 1771, he published a Latin version of the holy scriptures of the ancient Persians, the *Zend Avesta*. Anquetil's intent had been to demonstrate the truth of Christian revelation, but he seems not to have recognized the deep danger a very ancient Persian text might pose to the Old Testament; he was not, after all, a chronologer. Here, finally, was an ur-ancient document, in the newly-deciphered original Persian, equivalent to Moses's Pentateuch or perhaps even to the gospels themselves. This could not be dismissed as Greek (or Islamic) hearsay, or as a fragment of dubious date (and perhaps dubious authenticity) preserved in Eusebius. The material in it seemed to corroborate the work of Hyde, demonstrating the monotheistic aspects of Zoroaster's teachings, and was made even more plausible by recent travelogues testifying to Persia's past and present greatness.²⁷

Thus evidence of the sort enlightenment scholars demanded was mounting, making it more and more difficult to save the Old Testament's unique status as the "oldest document of humankind." As colonial officials, traders, and travelers poured into India and the Levant, the steady stream of "oriental" documents coursing westward became a flood. New cultural and conjectural histories abounded, seeking to map the prehistory of previously ignored or little-known nations.²⁸ It seemed only a matter of time before hieroglyphics were deciphered, or a new Veda emerged. As oriental texts and pagan religions became less mythical and more plausible, the opposite was happening to the Old Testament: in the 1750s and 60s, many leading critics began to treat it as a species of sacred poetry or collection of folksongs. What was to become of this "document," scholars now wondered: was it really no more authentic or divine than the rest?

HERDER'S "OLDEST DOCUMENT"

These questions surrounding the Old Testament were at the heart of Herder's essay of 1774, the title of which should now resonate: "Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlecht" [The Oldest Document of the Human Race]. At the time he wrote it, Herder was at something of a crossroads. In the 1760s, he had already departed from the full-on doctrine of inspiration, acknowledging that the Old Testament was a manmade artifact, and one that was chiefly a species of folk poetry. In this decade, Herder had also become a freemason, and had written a prize essay on the (mostly) naturalistic origins of language—though his essay hints that God must awaken man's inherent powers of reflection. He had delved deeply into the most radical French, English, and German biblical criticism, orientalist

scholarship, and mechanist philosophy. Herder was thoroughly acquainted with the sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century literature, vast as it was, on world chronology. He knew the work of Selden, the Hebraist Johannes Buxdorf (and his son, Johannes), Hyde, and Newton. He read the work of Christian apologists such as Daniel Huet and iconoclasts such as Isaac de Beausobre (who wrote on Manicheans) and Richard Simon. And he read the radicals: Spinoza, Voltaire, and Nicolas Boulanger (who tried to “unveil” Christianity). He read the Church fathers and the classical sources as well. He read Anquetil’s *Zend Avesta* as soon as it came out; it would be his copy of the text that Daniel Kleuker used to make the German translation of 1775. But in the early 1770s, Herder was also jettisoning some of his earlier rationalism in favour of a more mystical and aesthetic attachment to the scriptures—and it is usually in this context that “Urkunde” is read. Herder’s idiosyncratic take on what kind of “document” the Pentateuch represented was indeed an aestheticizing move in the direction of a new means of establishing what we might call the culture-historical or historio-anthropological importance of the scriptures (as a reflection of the *mentality* of the ancient Israelites, rather than as a true account of what happened). But the essay can also tell us something more about the high-stakes debate in this period about Near Eastern chronology, and about the drive unleashed to scour the Orient for the “right” kind of documents.

Herder’s text is ultimately a defence of the divinity of the Old Testament against Deist radicalism; it primarily engages with older forms of criticism, such as that of the Egyptophiles (like Jablonski) and irreverent Frenchmen (like Voltaire), than with the newer forms of criticism which stemmed from the Vedas or deep earth histories. Still, his defence of biblical chronology has nothing in common with Ussher’s defence or with Baumgarten’s, and only a little with Newton’s. It demonstrates complete familiarity and even sympathy with the most challenging of biblical critics, from Richard Simon, the Catholic scholar whose study of the Old Testament had been put on the Index, to Jean Astruc, who had recently surmised that the Pentateuch was a composite of at least two sources. Herder has read Warburton, Voltaire, Whiston, Burnet and Spinoza—but counters them not with more reason or better exegesis but with poetry. Physics and metaphysics, Herder’s first examples of stultifying western armchair learning, have interfered with our ability to attend to the simple, free, deeply felt poetry of the Orient in which Moses composed his truths—and Herder declares himself dedicated here to speaking “orientally” (ÄU, 212, 256).²⁹ As he told Hamann in a letter enclosed with a copy of the first part of his “Urkunde,” Herder intended to defend the historicity of the Old Testament, but in a way he thought fellow scholars unlikely to accept, at least until Judgment Day:

Do you believe, my most beloved friend, that it will one day be the case that the revelation and religion of God, instead of being as it is now, subject to criticism and politics, will simply be the history and wisdom of our race? The scrawny Bible will swallow up all seven of the sciences of the ancients, and 1,000 of the new world, like the fatted calf of the Pharaoh—but the peril will only manifest itself when a day comes, when through facts and acts all is unsealed.³⁰

Herder’s style in the “Urkunde” is indeed odd—one friend called it “the most hideous book that was ever written.”³¹ The printer must have worn out his

entire stock of exclamation mark blocks in rendering Herder's staccato, exhortatory sentences. Kant found the text deeply puzzling; even Hamann called it a "monstrum horrendum."³² In invocations and exultations that stylistically remind one of Nietzsche, Herder insists on God's first revelation to man in the dawn, as reported in Genesis 1. Through the dawn and the darkness God teaches his children to understand Creation, Light, and the division of days into weeks of seven, with the last a day of rest. "7" itself is a hieroglyph, and a key (perhaps why Lavater said one shouldn't judge Herder's essay until one had read it seven times); it is a symbolic structure, expressed in poetic terms, which unlocks the wisdom of Egyptians, who were, in turn, translating from an ur-oriental language, one older than Hebrew, Egyptian, or even Phoenician. The ur-hieroglyph of Genesis 1 provides a sensual diagram, too, of the human body, and the starting point for all of the arts and sciences, as well as religious life properly speaking.³³ Herder does not think Genesis 1 is the oldest *text* produced by mankind; but the symbolic expression and function of this hieroglyph make it the oldest *document* of revelation.

Herder tried to prove his theories by reading Genesis as sacred poetry, as had Robert Lowth, and as he and his follower W.M.L. de Wette would do in years to come. But scholars have overlooked the degree to which Herder's essay also struggles with both new and old "orientalisms" and explores the extra-biblical world of the ancient Near East. Again and again, he reaches for the orientalisating texts of the Hellenistic and early Christian world, citing Philo, the Pythagoreans, Iamblichus, and Eusebius. By no means does he discount the recent or ancient literature on Egypt, which Christoph Meiners would do in a book-length denunciation of this literature published in 1775.³⁴ Herder felt powerfully what we might call the oriental undertow of these decades, and longed passionately for the moment when at last the Egyptian hieroglyphs could be read. When this is discovered, he claims, "what a world of questions, doubts, suppositions, denials, accusations, blasphemies and lies will at once disappear! A new door to antiquity, to the farthest holies, will open! A torch will be carried into the first, most important, most delightful formative years of the sweet, childlike human understanding!" (ÄU, 290). Again and again Herder expresses his frustration that he cannot read these hieroglyphs; though he knows there must have been many other books and many other writers in Moses's time, they are only known secondhand, as legends, or perhaps as lies told by rival peoples. How can one find the secret of the stones, the ur-source of similar laws, cosmologies, legends? "Perhaps no one has searched for the keys with such eagerness as I, and—found so little! Everyone argues! Makes things up! Guesses! Conjectures! They repeat empty slogans and lies, walk through the fragments of the most ancient world, as around a country where one remembers nothing" (ÄU, 400).³⁵

What Herder desperately wants are firsthand, datable oriental texts which will fill in the irksome gap between God's revelation in nature and God's revelation to Moses; he knows very well that there are hundreds of texts, old and new, testifying to what he calls the "pervasive primeval wisdom of the Orient," but he is too careful a scholar, and too acute a reader of the theological resistance of his day, to accept any of these testimonies without something that would pass philological muster. At great length, and demonstrating remarkable erudition, he reviews western knowledge about the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Persians, and

so many others. “But how do we know about these sects?” he asks, demonstrating that he has read the theological critics of the orientaling radicals, as well as those radicals themselves:

We don't have their own books; though many have argued that they are written in such a language, with such a form of writing. . . . but we must content ourselves with information from foreign peoples, and how many and how many different sorts of them there are! We know them through Arabs Jews, Persian, and partly Egyptians and Greeks, from different times and in different periods of their decline; everyone sees them through the medium only of his own religion and philosophy; and since our literati, that is, stubble-collectors, can do nothing other than collect stubble; we have now got a mish mash and a shouting match, so that finally no one really knows, what is the whole thing about? (ÄU, 448–49)

Those who have made claims about oriental priority have been building on sand, he argues, wasting their time with fables and unprovable theses. Instead, he urges his colleagues to look further for the actual “Sabaian” sources that might make it possible to understand the widespread religion against which both Moses and Zoroaster revolted, and which might unlock the origins of all the sciences and arts. One could not ascertain whether Persian monotheism gave birth to Sabaism or vice versa without a critical history of Sabaism (ÄU, 466, 467n1).

Herder hopes that Persian sources might untangle the “mishmash;” he suggests that Anquetil's *Zend Avesta* in particular might open the way for a rewriting of the history of the arts and sciences, as well as a history of pre-Mosaic religious life. Herder's language shows us how immensely thrilling he finds Anquetil's publication, and his high hopes for its interpretation: “Hyde was a valuable compiler of information from foreign, recent sources, especially Arabic ones; we originally doubted these because they were not European; with him we stood, thus, outside the curtain and learned from hearsay—not excluding the late book *Sad dar*. Anquetil leads us, without pedantry, citations and rhetoric firmly by the hand behind the curtain and shows us an older, perhaps the oldest writings of the sect . . . [he] leads us into the holy of holies, and it is truly to be regretted that the blind enthusiasm of this man has been rewarded with Europe's cold shoulder” (ÄU, 492). It is unclear what exactly Herder believes the *Zend Avesta* documents, but he seems to believe it shows the existence of an ur-ancient, oriental form of Gnosis, which cannot be dated but which seems to have been pervasive in the ancient Near East. Not only does it seem to flow into Judaism, but in 1775 Herder would suggest that it expressed itself in the Hellenistic patois spoken by the apostles.³⁶ He would continue for the rest of his life to see Persia as a possible source of “documents” that would circumvent the need to tell civilization's history from exclusively a Greek or Hebrew point of view.³⁷

Herder concluded part one of “Urkunde” with a reiteration that at the present time, in any event, the history of the Near East needed to be decoded with “the holiest document of antiquity, in which the education of our race began” (ÄU, 501). As part two of the essay, published in 1775, would show, this “document” was still the Old Testament, but we should notice that Herder has subtly shifted its significance and redefined what a “document” might be; the Pentateuch was not now “the oldest document of mankind,” but “the holiest” and the most educational.

Part two retreats into something that seems rather more like apologetics, denouncing the “mutilations and errors” of the pre-Adamites and others, and insisting that the Pentateuch still forms a second pillar of Hercules “past which nothing goes farther! And from which all the history of the human race afterwards proceeds.” Despite all the efforts of the philosophical free-spirits, he continues, “And yet still, are you, beloved, oldest and eternal legend of my race, seed and germ of our most hidden history! Without you humankind . . . would be a book without a title, without its first pages and conclusion; with you our family receives its foundation stone, its trunk [Stamm] and its roots running back to God and Father Adam.”³⁸ Herder was both giving ground and taking it back; he was simultaneously desacralizing and canonizing the scriptures, both feeding and fending off iconoclasm, taking chronology and documentation enormously seriously and, at the same time, throwing both out the window in order to save the Old Testament’s significance for enlightened Europeans. But he was also acknowledging that the cultures of the ancient Near East had to be integrated into the story not just as antagonists or appendages to the story, but as contributors both to Europe’s religious and cultural foundations.

Kant, who received from Hamann a copy of part one of Herder’s essay immediately on its publication, insisted that he didn’t understand it, and asked Hamann—of all people—to explain the text to him “where possible, in the language of humans. For this poor son of the earth is simply not organized for the divine language of intuitive reason.”³⁹ But in his next letter to Hamann, Kant himself explained the significance of Herder’s symbolic explication of Moses’ history of creation: it was meant, he argued, to show that God had revealed himself to man, making his case neither on the basis of reason, nor that of scriptural testimony, but by using an ur-ancient, cross-cultural symbol. “Thus the Mosaic account would take on the character of an authentic and priceless document, a proof, fully decisive and above suspicion, which does not have to rest on the reverence of a single people, but rather (rests) on the agreement of sacred symbols, which one ancient people from the beginning of human knowledge has preserved in a way that allows the whole to be decoded.” The book of Genesis, then, is the one text that makes the ur-ancient symbol understandable, it is the only authentic and purest document which tells us about the beginning of the human race in a reliable way; “Moses alone shows us the document, the Egyptians had or showed only the emblem.”⁴⁰ But still, Kant believed, Herder had shown no more than that the book of Genesis was a Mosaic allegory; it would take a long time for philosophers to convince the religiously orthodox and even the older orientalist to buy his enlightened interpretation of oriental documents.⁴¹

As it turned out, Kant was right. Almost immediately on its publication in 1771, William Jones denounced Anquetil’s *Avesta* as a forgery; in the next few years, his criticisms were widely endorsed, opening a rather one-sided debate known as the “Avesta Quarrel.” It would not be until the 1830s that Anquetil’s *Avesta* was shown to be basically authentic and sound, if ineptly translated.⁴² Few except Herder came to Anquetil’s defense: the French dismissed him out of disappointment that his Zoroaster did not deliver oracular pronouncements, while the British haughtily championed their own scholars (ÄU, 493). In 1775, the highly respected cultural historian Christoph Meiners penned a devastating critique of Egyptian religions, with the obvious intention of delegitimizing the historically

unreliable texts of Hermes, Manetho, and the Hellenistic writers so beloved by the Masons and Rosicrucians; much of the work is polemic directed against the work of Jablonski and Ralph Cudworth. Meiners ended with a note remarking that he and Herder had—independently of one another—decided to treat basically the same subject, but with such different conclusions.⁴³ Meiners followed this book with another in which he claimed Anquetil's text was neither Zoroastrian nor ancient. In 1776, N. B. Halhed put forward a defense of Hindu world chronology, which suggested cycles of 4,320,000 years; this unleashed a huge controversy, as many sought to defend Biblical dates. Anquetil himself replied in 1786, suggesting that these deep dates were unknown to the ancients, and were probably produced by later scholars who turned Persian astronomical calculations of revolutions of the heavens into Indian mythical time.⁴⁴ In 1782, Voltaire's *Ezourvedam* was shown to be the work of a Jesuit missionary

By the mid-1780s, then, proponents of "oriental wisdom" were back to square one: they still did not have a reliable foundational text. Theological battles had moved elsewhere: the Germans were engaged in a more radical series of battles over Spinozism, known as the *Pantheismusstreit*, the British were dealing with James Hutton's proto-evolutionary account of earth history and Joseph Priestley's *Corruptions of Christianity* (1782), while the French censors had D'Alembert and La Mettrie to chase around. In France, Charles Francois Dupuis was conjoining the same "mishmash" of orientalia to form a highly influential account of "the origin of all the cults" (including Christianity) in priestly conspiracies designed to deceive and oppress the peoples first of the East, and then of the West.⁴⁵ Herder did not give up on "documenting" the history of revelation—nor did others: many other archaeologists and orientalists would set out eastward in the next decades to attempt to find such documents—but he was surely discouraged. It is worth reading his opening remarks in Book 13 of his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–85):

With the regret of a traveler, obliged to leave a country before he learned to know it as he wished, I take leave of Asia. How little we know of it! What we do know comes from such late periods and from such dubious authorities! The eastern part of Asia has become known to us only recently through religious or political parties, and in the hands of scholars in Europe has become so confused in parts that we still see great stretches of it as a fairytale land. In the Near East and in neighboring Egypt everything from all periods appears to us as a ruin or a vanished dream; what we know from written sources we know only from the mouths of passing Greeks, who were partly too young and partly of too foreign a way of thinking to understand the deep antiquity of these states; they were only able to grasp what interested them. The archives of Babylon, Phoenicia, and Carthage are no more: Egypt was in its decline, almost before a single Greek visited its interior. Everything has been shrunk down to a few faded pages, containing fables of fables, fragments of history, a dream of the prehistorical world.

Oriental prehistory has become a fable, one whose riddles Herder has almost given up trying to solve. He follows the passage above with a noteworthy announcement of the subject of his next chapter, and a change in tone: "With Greece," he writes, "the morning breaks, and we joyfully sail forth to meet it."⁴⁶

As this suggests, by the 1780s a Greek-centered narrative had taken shape, born from an early modern form of radical secularism. Philhellenism, a new sort of exclusionary love of Greek history, Greek art, Greek language, and Greek literature, was beginning to infiltrate British and German Protestant scholarly and literary circles in particular, owing to its usefulness as a counter-cultural *habitus* against French, Roman and Austrian courtly baroque. At first there were many ways in which study of the ancient Hebrews informed study of the Greeks: one studied the compositional manner of Homer as one had studied that of Moses, for example. But increasingly Graecophiles wanted to move away from theology—as iconoclastic orientalists had long desired—and wanted to make their studies scientific. The latter could best be done by putting aside all the hard questions Herder had asked about oriental origins, religious beliefs, and the meaning of symbols. The new model of the history of “civilization” could be one pioneered by Winckelmann and fleshed out by F. A. Wolf in his *Darstellung der Alterthumswissenschaft* (1807), in which oriental ancestry was acknowledged, but its contributions ignored because—as Herder had argued—there were no oriental books with sufficiently certain ancient dates to show that someone else had done or thought something before the Greeks. What was important was the direct written evidence, or, as Hegel would refine the argument, self-conscious reflection. In the 1810s, owing to the bracketing or delegitimizing of the Vedas and the *Zend Avesta*, there were still no “documents” older than Herodotus, Hesiod, and Homer for Graecophiles and the Old Testament for Christian theologians.

A similar assault was made by Joseph Priestley himself, in a fascinating text of 1799 entitled *Comparison of the Institutions of Moses with those of the Hindoos and other Ancient Nations, with Remarks on Mr. Dupuis’s Origins of All Religions*. . . . The book opens by invoking the language of “evidences,” the particular scientific refutation of Deism criticism invented by Priestley and William Paley in the 1780s. “It has long appeared to me,” Priestley writes, “that a fair comparison of the ancient heathen religions with the system of revelation would contribute in an eminent degree to establish the evidences of the latter. Its superiority in sentiment and practice to anything that the most enlightened of mankind have ever devised is so great that it cannot be rationally accounted for, but by supposing it to have had a truly divine origin.”⁴⁷ Priestley, accordingly, made it his purpose not to deny the deep antiquity of Near Eastern religions—in fact, he believed an Englishman was already in possession of an ur-Veda, which contained the ancient laws said to have come from the mouth of Brahma, and which probably predated the time of Moses by at least a century (C, 1, 9). He acknowledged the probable existence and deep antiquity of Zoroaster and the Buddha, and accepted the possibility that the Ezourvedam, Anquetil’s *Avesta*, and even Holwell’s *Shastah* were authentic. However, he concluded that the similarities between all these Near Eastern systems pointed to the existence of a common, primeval religion, shared by all before the dispersal of mankind—but one that was completely *unlike* the religion of the Jews. He dismissed the arguments about eastern wisdom advanced by atheists like the French Sanskritist Langlès, such as the suggestion that the Pentateuch was an abridgement of Egyptian books, the original of which could be found (though they had not yet been) in India. “Whether Moses was acquainted with this system or not, it will appear, contrary to the opinion of Mr. Langlès, that

he was far from deriving any advantage from it; and there is not in his writings any allusions to *books* pretended to be sacred, as the Veda's, but only to such *practices* as were common to the Hindoos and other heathen nations" (C, 24). Again we run up against the question of the non-existence of oriental books which could be dated to the period before Moses, which would constitute real evidence that the Jews borrowed from others; and again, Priestley insists that it is only unbelievers "with a view to disparag[ing] Christianity" who think that the institutions of the Jews are similar enough to those of the pagans to be thought to be derivative. On the contrary, Moses had so little opportunity to acquire superior knowledge that the origins of his ideas "cannot but be concluded to have been divine" (C, viii, 5).

Priestley's argument is even clearer when refuting C. F. Dupuis's *Origins du tous les cultes* (1795), which was a widely-read book despite its twelve volumes and its exceedingly heretical argument—namely, that the Old Testament was nothing but a copy of other eastern books and concealed an allegory and a scandalous history. According to Dupuis, the origin of all myths and religions lay in the worship of nature and the study of the heavens. Dupuis sought to use ethnographic material from travelers to document the universality of man's worship of the heavens ("Sabaism" in Herder's terminology), a tactic that would be used both for and against his thesis by Andrew Lang, J. G. Frazer, and Wilhelm Schmidt, among many others, in the century to come. For Dupuis—a deeply anti-clerical member of the Revolutionary Convention—Jesus too was merely a sun god, but Christian priests, like their Egyptian forefathers, had concealed the natural core of their faith beneath a host of enslaving superstitions in order to make themselves rich and powerful. Dupuis's books were massively influential on John Adams, Destutt de Tracy, Volney, and James George Frazer, and I suspect, for Feuerbach and Nietzsche as well. His arguments certainly distressed Priestley, whose leading defense was to claim that Dupuis had no *historical* evidence for his claims about origins; ignoring the ethnographic evidence—as so many philologists and theologians would continue to do for a century and more—Priestley simply focused on Dupuis' ancient history, and attacked his Near Eastern chronologies. It is mere astronomical and calendrical speculation, the English scientist claims, that the Zodiac arose in Egypt about 15,000 BCE; the ancient oriental sources Dupuis depends on—naturally, Berossos, Manetho, Sanchoniathon—are only known secondhand; and the ancient religion that looks most like Christianity, Zoroastrianism, "cannot with any certainty be traced higher than the reign of Darius Hystaspis" (which is to say, the sixth century BCE) and even then only because Herodotus and the Old Testament gave evidence on this point (C, 324, 345). If Moses copied from other texts, Priestley taunted, show us the originals; in the meantime, he claimed, Moses remains our earliest historian, and there is no reason—other than Dupuis' evident desire to damage "the fides of Judaism"—to trust anyone else (C, 323, 340).

The problem of how to square an increasingly richly elaborated world of ancient oriental texts with the fides of Judaism was not one that would go away, and indeed it echoed through some of the great work of the Romantic era, Friedrich Schlegel's *Ueber die Sprache und Weiheit der Inder* (1808) and Friedrich Creuzer's *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker* (1810–12). Schlegel's text revolves around this problem and another: the problem of how to the story of civilization, whether as fundamentally religious, as for Herder and Priestley, or fundamentally

secular, as for Kant. Schlegel falls on the side of religious history here, as does Creuzer, whose *Symbolik* acknowledged the origin of all myths, and symbolic if not specific knowledge in the Orient. Creuzer, a student of Neoplatonism, looked first to Egypt and then to India and Persia for the sources of his diffusionary history of religious symbolism. In a way he was simply turning Dupuis upside down (again ignoring the ethnographic evidence), but his knowledge of the sources was better, and his status as a university professor of philology—rather than a member of the Convention—much higher. Perhaps that is why such a huge storm broke out over Creuzer's book in the 1820s, as the Graecophile rationalists sought to save a Greek-centered, document-based history of civilization from being sucked under by a half-mythical, chronologically uncertain, largely secondhand "history" of the birth of the arts and sciences from the deep and magical world of the Orient. The fight was passionate and its polemics bitter. Johann Voss accused Creuzer of being "an agent of the Jesuits" and Creuzer accused his antagonists of trying to throw onto the pyre "all others who think anything of the Orient, and of Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha and whatever else the liars are called. We are mystagogues and seducers of the young."⁴⁸ The Graecophiles won, and the new scientific philology of the post-1820 era would largely jettison the vexatious questions of oriental chronology in favor of focusing on what Herder himself referred to "a ruined and vanished dream."

CONCLUSION

I have written elsewhere about the Creuzer Streit,⁴⁹ but what I would like to point out here is that the Graecophiles had essentially won by the time hieroglyphics were securely deciphered, the Rig Veda was translated and accurately dated, Assyrian cuneiform could be read with ease, and last but not least, before Anquetil's *Zend Avesta* was shown to be essentially authentic though poorly rendered. The Graecophile trajectory dealt with the controversy over ancient Near Eastern wisdom by insisting that since there were no datable and authentic documents in hand, there was no use discussing it; most made the composition of histories even easier by treating the Old Testament, too, as unreliable "oriental" legend. History—real history—began only with the Greeks. Of course there were different versions of this assertion, ranging from Hegel's history of consciousness to Ranke's universal history of 1880, which explicitly left out the Orient because he claimed that firsthand testimony was missing. By the time Ranke made this claim, his information was entirely outdated and his claims offended numerous orientalists. But by this time too, a massive new series of controversies over oriental dating were underway—now primarily over accurately dating the Assyrians, Hittites and the ancient Persians (for Anquetil's *Zend Avesta* had proved, in parts, to be authentic)—though several generations of schoolboys had been convinced that Greece, not the East, was *the* source of the secular, civilized virtues Matthew Arnold called "sweetness and light."

Nevertheless, the Old Testament remained a central part of the (especially Protestant) European cultural experience. The questions of what Moses owed to eastern pagan wisdom and whether civilization was a product of religion or of the rational rejection of priestly superstitions did not go away, because Europe remained religious, despite industrialization and the secularization of many of its institutions.

Europe also remained home to many omnivorous scholars critical of orthodoxies, like Herder, and philosophical radicals eager to reform Christianity, like Priestley. The discovery, translation, and publication of oriental documents continued, and so did inquiries into the deep history of religions. Nineteenth-century theologians in fact took these challenges more seriously and spilt more ink in trying to address these challenges than in trying to refute Darwinism—perhaps it is enough to mention the work of Max Müller, J. J. Bachofen, William Robertson Smith and Denis Fustel de Coulanges in this context. The question of Moses’s debts to Gilgamesh or Christ’s similarities with Mithra, the Buddha, or Akhenaton have each had their place in the twentieth century as well, and their echoes resound in famous works of Freud, Joseph Campbell, Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, and a host of others.

If the Graecophile histories valorized enlightened European secularism, what did the orientalizing ones—which continued to be written—legitimize? There are at least two trajectories we can trace, one descendent from the orientalizers like Dupuis whose goal was to puncture the self-importance or the overweening aestheticism of the all too powerful classicists, or eliminate the specialness of the Jews in favor of a naturalistic interpretation of the origins of religion; we might see Martin Bernal or James Frazer in this light. Others tried to keep the ancient theology alive in order to demonstrate, as did Herder, the embeddedness of Jewish history in the ancient Orient at the same time as the Old Testament’s uniqueness was rescued as the *holiest* and most complete of ancient documents; a very wide swathe of Christian popular history retains this narrative. As Walter Burkert, one of the great modern scholars who has tried to bridge the Graecophile-orientalist gap, has recently noted, it remains very difficult to make a watertight case for Greece’s debts precisely because we still have none of the original oriental books from which Greek translations were made; our chronologies are still in dispute for many aspects of ancient Near Eastern history.⁵⁰ No wonder textbooks—the least daring and perhaps most telling of all modern scholarly publications—must include the Orient, but still treat it as, in Herder’s words, a “ruined or a vanished dream.” We may not believe any longer that the Old Testament is “the oldest document of mankind,” but we still are living with the suppositions made in the generation after Herder and Priestley about where and when real history begins.

NOTES

1. Cf., of course, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
2. Herder, “Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts. Erster Band” (1774), in *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, 33 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883), 6:375. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as “ÄU;” all references are to part 1.
3. I was first introduced to the highly significant—but also highly complex—issue of world chronology by the works of Anthony Grafton, including his *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983, 1993), and *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450-1800* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991), and most recently, Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, *Cartographies of Time* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010). Other landmark books on the subject include Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth and the History of Nations from Hooke to Vico* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), and for the natural sciences, Martin Rudwick, *Worlds Before Adam: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Reform* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008), and other titles. A recent, remarkably learned addition to the literature is Jed Z. Buchwald and Mordechai Feingold, *Newton and the Origins of Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2013).

4. See for example the account in William Warburton, *The Works of the Right Reverend William Warburton*, 12 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1811), 4:122–23.
5. George Smith, *The Patriarchal Age* (London: Longmans, 1847), 52.
6. Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), 14.
7. See Grafton, *Defenders of the Text*.
8. Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010), 83–85.
9. See Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*.
10. Frank Manuel, *Isaac Newton, Historian* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), 38.
11. Buchwald and Feingold, *Newton*, 121.
12. Stroumsa, *A New Science*, 43.
13. *Ibid.*, 103–4.
14. *Ibid.*, 106–7.
15. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), 56–95.
16. Claudine Cohen, “Leibniz’s Protogaea: Patronage, Mining and Evidence for a History of the Earth,” in *Proof and Persuasion: Essays on Authority, Objectivity and Evidence*, ed. Suzanne Marchand and Elizabeth Lunbeck (Brussels: Brepols, 1996), 141.
17. D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1972).
18. Manuel, *Isaac Newton*, 51–60; quotation, 54.
19. See Manuel, *Isaac Newton*, 78–88; 166–93; Buchwald and Feingold, *Newton*, 307–422.
20. *Uebersetzung der Allgemeinen Welthistorie die in England durch eine Gesellschaft von Gelehrten ausgefertigt worden. . . .*, ed. Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten (Halle: Gebauer, 1744), 100–2.
21. Baumgarten, “Vorrede D. Baumgartens,” in *Uebersetzung der Allgemeinen Welthistorie*, 66–67. Baumgarten himself is an interesting figure. David Sorkin credits him with bringing to Germany the principle of accommodation, the idea that the Bible authors, while divinely inspired, spoke the language of their times and reflected the ideas of their milieu. Sorkin, *Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought: Orphans of Knowledge* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000), 69.
22. Baumgarten, “Vorrede,” 63.
23. James Repcheck, *The Man Who Found Time: James Hutton and the Discovery of the Earth’s Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA.: Perseus Books, 2003), 99–100.
24. Jed Z. Buchwald and Diane Greco Josefowicz, *The Zodiac of Paris: How an Improbable Controversy over an Ancient Egyptian Artifact Provoked a Modern Debate between Religion and Science* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), 28–31.
25. J. Z. Holwell, *Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces of Bengal*, 3 vols. (London: T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1771), 3:13–16.
26. Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 30–33, 70.
27. Most important of these was Carsten Niebuhr’s travelogue (1772), with its extensive description and drawings of ancient Persepolis and claims to be based on “my own observations and information I myself collected in the country.” Niebuhr, *Beschreibung von Arabien: Aus eigenen Beobachtungen und im Lande selbst gesammelte Nachrichten* (Kopenhagen: Nicolas Möller, 1772). For more on Niebuhr, see Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005).

28. See Michael C. Carhart, *The Science of Culture in Enlightenment Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), and Arnold Momigliano, "Eighteenth-Century Prelude to Mr. Gibbon," in Momigliano, *Sesto Contributo alla Storia degli Studia Classici* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia et Letteratura, 1980), 249–63.
29. See also Herder to Hamann, late Apr. 1768, where he expresses his desire to understand the Bible orientally, Jewishly, and not coldly, in northerly fashion. *Herders Briefe an Job. Georg Hamann*, ed. Otto Hoffmann (Berlin: R. Gaertner, 1889), 40–41.
30. Herder to Hamann, early May 1774, in *Herders Briefe*, 80–81.
31. Merck quoted in Robert T. Clark, Jr., *Herder: His Life and Thought* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1955), 171.
32. Hamann quoted in Clark, *Herder*, 170.
33. On the subtle ways in which Herder uses this hieroglyph, see Daniel Weidner, "Secularization, Scripture and the Theory of Reading: J. G. Herder and the Old Testament," in *New German Critique* 94 (2005): 188–89.
34. Christoph Meiners, *Versuch über die Religionsgeschichte der ältesten Völker insbesondere die Egyptier* (Göttingen: Johann Christian Dieterich, 1775).
35. Also note his frustration with attempts to find the origin of Greek ideas: "The history of every science also among the Greeks was without a head, or its head is hidden—where? Among the barbarians! Go there and seek. . . . The variations of the separate national legends come here and there notably close to a single text—but that is all! Where does the river with the seven tributaries rise?" (ÄU, 400).
36. Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 267n41.
37. See Herder's reflections on Persepolis, quoted in Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 208.
38. Herder, "Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts. Zweiter Band," in *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, 7:5.
39. Kant to Hamann, 6 Apr. 1774, in *Johann Friedrich Kleuker und Briefe seiner Freunde*, ed. H. Ratjen (Göttingen: Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1842), 207, 208.
40. Kant to Hamann, 8 Apr. 1774, in *Ibid.*, 209–210.
41. "When a religion is once challenged, to make critical knowledge of ancient languages and philological and antiquarian scholarship the foundations on which it much be built for all time and for all people. . . . thus [this challenge] drags the orthodox with it like children, kicking and screaming, taking them where it will; they are not permitted to resist, for they cannot compare that which comes through their own understandings with what the [new] methods of proof introduce, and watch timidly as a Michaelis recasts their very old treasures and gives them a wholly different stamp. If theological faculties over time should devote their attention to teaching their pupils to preserve this [ancient oriental] literature, which at least here [in Prussia] seems to be the case; if free-thinking philologists should finally master these weapons of Vulcan, then the prestige of all the demagogues is at an end, and they will in what they have to teach have to take instruction from the grammarians. [Yet] in mentioning this I fear very much for that the reconstructors of documents will have to endure for a long time their triumphs without victory, for standing against them is a thickly-populated phalanx of masters of oriental erudition who will not so easily allow such a bounty from their own soil to be introduced by the unannointed." Kant to Hamann, 8 Apr. 1774, in *Ibid.*, 211–12.
42. Raymond Schwab, *Vie d'Anquetil-Duperron* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1934), 90–103.
43. Meiners, *Versuch über die Religionsgeschichte*, 327.
44. Anquetil Duperron, *Description Historique et Geographique de l'Inde* (Berlin: Pierre Bourdeaux, 1786), xxiii. Regarding the new documents, Anquetil expressed a skepticism that would be typical of the moderate Christian reaction to Enlightened Orientalism in the next decades: "All nations have had, or could have had, their Annius of Viterbo," he wrote. "Thus, if one wants to put oneself in the position of understanding the monuments, the first thing is to verify their authenticity, and their age; to

not confound history with fables . . . mythological traits need to be distinguished from real facts, “ he continued. “It is necessary to have it deeply engraved upon the mind that two things can resemble one another without one having come from the other; that a simple etymology does not prove anything, and that never, in a matter of facts, should a possibility be given authority without positive testimonies” (ii).

45. On Dupuis, see Buchwald and Josefowicz, *Zodiac of Paris*, 47–66.
46. Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, in *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, 14:90.
47. Priestley, *Comparison of the Institutions of Moses with those of the Hindoos and other Ancient Nations, with Remarks on Mr. Dupuis’s Origins of All Religions* (Northumberland, PA.: A. Kennedy, 1799), vii; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as “C.”
48. Friedrich Creuzer, to Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, 3 Dec. 1821, in Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall, *Erinnerungen an meinem Leben, 1774–1852* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1940), 543.
49. See Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 66–74.
50. Walter Burkert, *Die Griechen und der Orient*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Beck Verlag, 2009); see also Suzanne Marchand, “What did the Greeks Owe to the Orient? The Question We Can’t Stop Asking (Even if We Can’t Answer It),” in *Archaeological Dialogues* 17, no. 1 (2010): 117–40.

