Chapter 3
British Indomania

By 1875, when Sir Henry Maine gave the Rede Lecture on "The effects of observation of India upon European thought," the dullness of Indian subjects to Britons had become proverbial and the greater enthusiasm for India on the European Continent had long since been evident. It is surely a paradox that British imperial rule should have rendered India dull to those back home, while European enthusiasm for India raged. How did this strange state of affairs come about—or need we even trouble ourselves to ask?

It may be thought that the differences between Britons and Indians are so great that British Indophobia (at worst) or indifference (at best) was inevitable and in some sense natural, and that there is no mystery here that is in need of explaining. Indeed, the great gulf of difference separating the two "races," the rulers and the ruled, is a staple of the historical literature whose implicit thesis is that the nonmeeting of minds between them was determined from long before their encounter (e.g., Spear 1963:chap. 8). But, as I shall show in this chapter, in the decades following the conquest of Bengal there was a significant sector of British opinion that, entertaining quite the opposite opinion, found in Indian culture "a deep and appealing wisdom, [and] argued that the Indian people had a way of life that was valid for them, however different it might be from western civilization" (Embree 1962:14-8). This is a capital fact, which goes to show that the proverbial dullness of Indian subjects for the British of whom Sir Henry speaks was not a permanent condition arising from the nature of things but has a history that we

must try to capture. More than that, the early British enthusiasm for India goes to show that there are both differences and likenesses between any two peoples and that what signifies is the determination to magnify one and minimize the other. There is always an interpretative choice to be made, and we must observe the direction and seek out the causes of those choices.

Taking a different tack, one perhaps might wish to say that an enthusiasm for India was a predictable feature of early colonial rule, when everything Indian had the aspect of novelty, and that Indophobia, equally, is the predictable face of late colonialism. There is something in this view: The mere fact of conquest pressed more heavily with the passage of time, and as it appeared to become a permanent and immovable fact it bred contempt for Indians and their civilization. But this datum is too crude; it explains nothing of the actual content either of British enthusiasm for India or opposition to it.

I am going to argue in the next chapter that British Indophobia was made, not born. To persuade readers of this, and to show that there is a problem here that wants solving, I shall develop in this chapter the evidence for the existence of a British enthusiasm for India, beginning, say, in the 1760s (shortly after the conquest of Bengal) and continuing into the early nineteenth century. British Indophobia was above all a deliberate attack upon the built-up structure of a prior Indomania; it was devised to oppose it.

In making the case for British Indomania I do not wish to make the phenomenon appear larger than it really was. Indomania was not like Beatlemania—it was not a mass phenomenon or in any sense a popular movement. It was an enthusiasm for India that was entertained by a few very well educated Britons, most of them male, and although the high visibility of its proponents gave Indomania a certain resonance among the elite in Britain, it was not able to send down roots deeply into the other strata of the British social system. The circumscription as to class and gender on the subject side had an answering circumscription on the side of the Indian object: It was the learning of male brahmins in Sanskrit, the sister dialect of the Latin and Greek that educated English gentlemen studied as the object of their enthusiasm, not the culture of Indians generally. Indomania, moreover, was directed toward the Hindus and not the Muslims of India, even though the Persian language played a large role in the recovery of this object. It was concerned more especially with Indian civilization in most ancient times, prior to the coming of the Muslims. It sought out the Hindus in the belief that

here, in the layer of the Indian population that lay under the Mughal imperial structure, was a living reservoir of ancient paganism and ancient wisdom.

As to the intellectual content of Indomania, its fundamental postulate was the great antiquity of civilization in India, and enthusiasts drew upon some subset of the following propositions: that India's arts and sciences came from Egypt, or that India had colonized Egypt in ancient times and planted its civilization there; that India's civilization, in relation to that of Greece, was original and older; that in its religion was to be found not only the living representative of a unitary ancient paganism (more especially the living cousin of the paganism of Greece and Rome), but the primitive truths of natural religion from which that paganism was a departure; and that its scriptures, being very old and independent of the Bible, either supplemented or confirmed its authority.

The enthusiasm for India, then, was above all an enthusiasm for Hinduism. I shall examine this new phenomenon and its relation to Christianity at some length in the writings of the pre-Joneseans (or, more accurately, those early characterizations of Hinduism by writers who had not acquired a working knowledge of Sanskrit), and in those of Jones himself. Thereafter I shall take up some of the ramifications of Indomania: enthusiasm for the Sanskrit language, for Indian astronomy, for ancient Indian geographical knowledge of Egypt and the British Isles, and for an Indian connection with Celtomania.

Hinduism

What P. J. Marshall (1970) calls "the British discovery of Hinduism" had a sudden onset in the second half of the eighteenth century. British merchants had been trading with India for the better part of two centuries before the Battle of Plassey turned them into territorial rulers, but the new Orientalism perceived itself in terms of a sharp discontinuity with the past. In the accounts of the 1760s—Luke Scrafton's *Reflections on the government . . . of Indostan* (1761), Holwell's *Interesting historical events, relative to the provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan* (1765-71), and Dow's introduction to his translation of Firishtah's *History of Hindostan* (1768)—is a breathless sense of having just come upon the literature of a vast and ancient religion that had been vaguely known and thoroughly distorted by all the Europeans who came before. To these accounts we can add the somewhat later

work of Quentin Craufurd, *Sketches chiefly relating to the history, religion, learning, and manners, of the Hindoos* (1790) and of course the greatest of the pre-Joneseans, Halhed (whose translation of the *Code of Gentoo laws* [1776] and *Grammar of the Bengal language* [1778] I have already introduced), plus various works of non-India hands, above all the Rev. William Robertson (*An historical disquisition concerning the knowledge which the ancients had of India*, 1812; first edition, 1791). Taken together with the *Asiatic Researches* these form the core texts of British Indomania.

The portrait of the Hinduism that is discovered in these publications is highly favorable; indeed it consistently shows a disposition to put the most favorable construction upon the information the writers have managed to acquire of Hindu religion and history. The main features, which are more or less the same in all the renderings, are two: that Hinduism is basically monotheisric, and that the benevolence of its religion and laws made India a prosperous and peaceful country before foreign conquest.

Hinduism is Monotheistic

Hinduism's evident use of images, so offensive to Protestant Christianity, is explained as a lapse or a secondary formation of priestcraft, not the essence of the religion. According to Scrafton, for example, the brahmins are taught to believe in one Supreme Being who has created a regular gradation of beings, some of them superior and others inferior to humans, in the immortality of the soul, and in a future state of rewards and punishments, which takes the form of transmigration into different bodies according to the lives they have previously led. But, believing that "sensible objects were necessary to make this intelligible to the vulgar, their doctrines have been taught in allegory" by the use of images (Scrafton 1761:5). We find similar sentiments elsewhere. In short, we have in this and the other texts a fundamental distinction between the monotheism of the brahmins (good) and the popular religion of images (not so good), together with a disposition to put the most favorable interpretation on the meaning and significance of images. Craufurd, for example, says that if we abstract our minds from the abuses of the Hindu religion and inquire into the spirit, we find "that it inculcates the belief in one God only, without beginning and without end" (1790:139). The result is not surprising; it follows from the initial determination to abstract the mind from "abuses" and to inquire into the "spirit" that prefigures it. The disposition to read

Hinduism as Christianity is evident both in the emphasis on common ground and the very language of description. The twofold character of Hinduism develops over time: Monotheism comes first; imagery is its later translation into a popular idiom. Thus the study of Hinduism is deflected from the present to the ancient past.

The Religion and Laws of Hinduism Made India Prosperous

The moral worth of Hindu religion and the benevolence of its system of government and laws are inferred from the size and prosperity of the Indian population prior to its subjugation by foreigners. The eastern countries were the first to be inhabited, and the civilization of India—its cultivation of the arts and sciences—is taken for granted and reckoned to be the work of ages. The Indian climate and landscape are highly favorable to human habitation and agriculture. We need no greater proof, according to Scrafton, of the goodness of the government than the immense revenue of India, "many of the Gentoo provinces yielding a revenue in proportion of the extent of country equal to our richest countries in Europe" (Scrafton 1761:13). This Indian prosperity, however, tends to get located somewhere in the past, before foreign conquest. In Scrafton and Craufurd the prosperity and well-being of India is more especially illustrated by the condition of South India before the war of the English and French (Scrafton 1761:13; Craufurd 1790:89), and Scrafton considers the contemporary Hindu Maratha rulers to have "vastly deviated from the true Gentoo character" (1761:15). More generally the ills of contemporary India tend to be attributed to Muslim conquest rather than being interpreted as evidence contrary to the thesis of Indian prosperity as an outcome of the benevolence of Hindu religion and government. Here again, the discovery of Hinduism tends to displace its object into the past, even a remote past. Robertson's treatment of India is a sustained attempt to lay open to view "the ancient and high civilization of the inhabitants of India" (1812:197), the benevolent-religion-and-government theme that describes the times before Alexander.

The Discovery of Hinduism—or Its Invention?

Hinduism is a loosely knit assemblage of systems of belief and ritual whose unity was only vaguely evident to the British. With

the growing appreciation that there existed a large and ancient literature in Sanskrit which, they came to believe, was the historical source of all the non-Muslim religious systems of India, Hinduism took shape in British minds as the religion of the native Indians, or the Gentoos, or the Hindoos, in distinction from the Muslims; Muslims were regarded as foreign conquerors. In Scrafton, for example, the Muslim population consists of foreign conquerors as opposed to native Indians, and it is broken down into Arabs, Pathans, Afghans, Mongol Tartars, and Persians, plus slaves. There is no recognition of indigenous Muslims other than "slaves," and the numbers are hugely underrated: The Moors are not "the hundredth part of the natives" (Scrafton 1761:20). Rural Bengal's millions of Muslims are not yet visible. Hostility to Muslim religion and rulership of India is very pronounced in Scrafton, and it is a leitmotif of much of this literature. Most of the evils of India are attributed to Muslim conquest and despotic rule, and the virtues of Hindu laws and customs are contrasted favorably, as if to say that Indian civilization will spring up once the overburden of Muslim rule is pulled back. Consistent with that view, the Orientalist element of British government in India that begins with Warren Hastings tends to represent that government as enfranchising the Hindus, as Rosane Rocher (1993) has recently shown. One of the characteristic effects of the subsequent Indophobia of the anti-Orientalists was to invert this relative valuation of Hinduism and Islam (as we shall see in the next chapter).

Nevertheless, there are a number of good reasons to be wary of saying that the British invented Hinduism. Many of the elements of the way in which Hinduism is construed by the British in the period of Indomania derive from Indians and Indian sources. It cannot be an accident that the superior value of ancient times and sources in British discussion of Hinduism is so strikingly consistent with the "degenerationist" character of brahmin views of the historical process, involving among other things a decline in virtue and religion as the golden age of the Krta *yuga* recedes and the present age of iron (the Kali *yuga*), in which it is our misfortune to live, lengthens. Moreover, the view of Muslims as having come from outside India and the Hindus as natives, and the contrast of religion between the two, is very likely to have been gotten from Indians themselves, especially from Indian Muslims and Persian-language histories of India. The very (Persian) word *Hindu* for an inhabitant of India and follower of a certain religion shows that the conception predated British contacts with India. In any case the British conception of Hinduism as the religion of the natives of India is well along in its development in the seventeenth century, when Henry Lord

wrote an account of what we would recognize as Hinduism, calling it the sect of the Banians—the merchant caste with whom the English trades were most familiar—whom he calls "the ancient natives of India" (Lord 1630). To adopt the view that the British had no conception of Hinduism before the new Orientalism we are reviewing here would be to fall in with the propaganda of its own authority claims.

To convey a fuller sense of the content of early British Indomania I should like to examine some of the writers in greater detail, namely Holwell, Dow, and Halhed, with a brief return to Jones. I begin with John Zephaniah Holwell because he is one of the earliest exponents of British enthusiasm for the Hindu religion and because his is, in some ways, the era's most extreme example. Holwell came to believe, and publicly declared, that the Hindu scriptures completed the Biblical revelation and supplied its hitherto hidden meaning.[1]

Holwell's account of Hinduism is somewhat. baffling because, although the description beats a family resemblance to the thing described, the texts to which he refers are—how shall I put it?—not otherwise known, before or since. There are three sets of writing that comprise what he called the Shastah (Sastra) or Hindu scriptures. The details of his account are confusing, but it is important to try to disentangle them. According to Howell, the first and earliest text is the *Chartah Bhade Shastah* of Bramah, meaning (according to Holwell) "four scriptures of divine words of the mighty spirit" (i.e., Brahma). This would be something like *Catur Veda Sastra* in Sanskrit, an odd title since it combines two classes of Sanskrit literature that are distinct, Veda and Sastra. It is a confused reference, one supposes, to the four Vedas. The second text, a paraphrase of the first, was composed a thousand years later and called the *Chatah Bhade* of Bramah, or the six (Skt. *sas* cf. *sastha*, "sixth") scriptures of the mighty spirit, whose referent (the six Vedangas or Vedic sciences? the six Darsanas or philosophies?) is entirely obscure. Finally, five hundred years later the Goseyns and Battezaaz brahmins published the third text, a commentary on the latter, in eighteen books, the *Aughtorrah Bhade Shastah*, or the eighteen (Skt. *astadasa*) books of divine words; this, from the number, should be the eighteen major

[1]. Holwell's exposition of Hinduism is found in the second volume of his *Interesting historical events, relative to the provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan* (1765-71), published in 1767, especially chapter 4, "The religious tenets of the Gentoos, followers of the Shastah of Bramah," upon which I draw for the matter in the next two paragraphs. His more speculative constructions of the bearing of Hindu doctrine on the interpretation of Christianity come in the third volume, published four years later.

Puranas. Of these three texts, the first contains the primitive truth, pure and unadulterated; the second contains the beginning of polytheism; and in the third, the original teaching is covered over in ritualism and myth. This last caused a schism between North and South India, the south following, rather, the Viedam (= Veda!), based upon the second text, but in fact further corrupted; Holwell does not seem to understand that his *Bhade* is the same word as his *Viedam*, the one under a Bengali pronunciation, the other a Tamil one. The original pure teaching is utterly lost except to three or four Goseyn families, he says, who expound it from the Sanskrit. Holwell claims to have owned two copies of the Shastah (which, exactly?), and although the originals and translations were lost in war in 1756, Holwell, in ways not made clear, re-did translations of parts of the text and published them in his book, recovering from it the fundamental doctrines of the brahmins.[2] It is all rather murky and more than a little suspicious. It is a little more helpful when Holwell tells us that he took help from informants of the scribal (Kayasth) caste.

The fundamental doctrine of the brahmins from these imprecisely specified sources is, in brief, as follows: God, the Eternal One, created angelic beings: first Birmah, Bistnoo, and Sieb (Brahma, Visnu, Siva), then Maisasoor (Mahisasura), then all the Debtah-Logue (*devataloka*). Led by Maisasoor, many of the Debtah rebelled against God, who condemned them to perpetual punishment, but, at the intercession of Bistnoo, God tempered the punishment with the possibility of earning a return to grace. The rebellious angels were to pass through a series of rebirths as different beings in a series of fifteen boboon (*bhuvana*) or worlds of punishment and perfection, arriving at length at human form on earth, with the possibility of achieving their salvation. All humans, then, and all animals too, are fallen angels seeking to regain paradise. Hinduism, in Holwell, reads like Milton with transmigration.

Having stated the Hindu doctrine as he understands it, Holwell ventures to "launch out into the ocean of hypothesis and speculation upon

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[2]. Howell writes: "It is well known that at the capture of *Calcutta*, A.D. 1756, I lost many curious *Gentoo* manuscripts, and among them two very correct and valuable copies of the *Gentoo Shastah*. .. [and] a translation I made of a considerable part of the *Shastah*, which had cost me eighteen months hard labor" (Holwell 1765-71, 2:3). He continues, at a later point, "I resumed my researches with tolerable success; which, joined to some manuscripts recovered by an unforseen and extraordinary event (that possibly I may hereafter recite) enables me to undertake the task I now assign myself" (1765-71, 2:4). Elsewhere he claims to have given what is "almost a litteral translation from the *Chartah Bhade of Bramah*" (1765-71, 2:60).

our own bottom" in the last and boldest of his three volumes (1765-71, 3:1). All religions, he argues, whether of Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, have many points of doctrine in common however much they differ in the exterior modes of worship. These fundamental points of religion are the primitive truth, which indelibly impressed itself upon humankind at the period of its creation (1765-71, 3:4) and which it will never wholly be able to efface although it has deviated from it owing to the taint of original sin. But it is only in Hinduism that we find the primitive truths fully articulated, even though the Hindus have subsequently raised an idolatrous superstructure upon them. Moses's version of the creation and fall of man is "clogged with too many incomprehensible difficulties to gain our belief" (1765-71, 3:9), but it is made intelligible by the Hindu doctrine that mankind are fallen angels. As to the Egyptians, various proofs show that they and the Greeks received the doctrine of metempsychosis or transmigration—which is central to the full articulation of the primitive truth—from the Indians, among whom alone it is not a secret or sectarian truth but a belief widely held, and for whom therefore it must be original. The key to all scripture is found in Hinduism.

Thus Holwell's admiration is such that he is led to class the Hindu scriptures with the scriptures of Moses and of Christ, the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible, as the three divine scriptures, of which only the Hindu revelation expounds the full scheme of the angelic fall and human redemption, articulated by transmigration. Transmigration accounts for the problem of original sin in the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians: All mankind stands accused for the guilt and disobedience of one man and one woman, a detail that is unintelligible without an understanding of transmigration. In fact, says Holwell, the fall of man occurred in heaven long before Adam and Eve, who were fallen angels incarnate as are all humans and, indeed, the entire animal kingdom. This goes to show that the Bible is incomplete in itself and can be finally understood only in the light of the Hindu scriptures revealed by the new Orientalism. "The mission of *Moses* may without offense be considered as a very imperfect one, so designated by God himself; not only for that it was limited to one tribe of beings favoured of God, but also as it is totally silent upon all the *primitive truths* but one, *viz., the unity of the Godhead*" (1765-71, 3:108). In relation to contemporary Christian belief Holwell identifies himself as a Christian deist. Consistent with the transmigration doctrine and his enthusiasm for the primitive truth as found in Hinduism, he became a strong advocate of

vegetarianism and opposed the Cartesian doctrine that animals are machines without souls.

By the end of his book Holwell has completely rewritten Christianity with the help of Hinduism or, at any rate, some rough approximation of it. The following articles summarize his newly found beliefs, "proved beyond the power of refutation," as he thought (1765-71, 3:206):

1. Original sin began in heaven and not with the transgressions of Adam and Eve.

2. Man and beast are animated by fallen angels, and their existence can only be accounted for by the (Hindu) doctrine of transmit gration.

3. Animals were not made for the use or domination by man.

4. Man, by murdering and eating the brute animals, violates the commands of his creator and of his own original nature.

5. The taking of animal life and of "intoxicating potations" is the cause of all early evil, physical and moral, producing a second defection from God, which offers Satan an open field for his diabolical purposes against the human species.

6. Man has no chance of putting Satan at defiance, subduing the universal depravity of the species and restoring piety and morals, except by putting a total stop to the three primary vices: murder, the taking of animal life, and intoxication. But, "cut off the root, and the branches will necessarily perish" (the same); in doing so the primitive age would be restored, and the reform in morals "would probably restore also the globe to its pristine beauty and natural fertility" (the same).

7. It rests upon the clergy of all nations to begin the general reform.

The clergy did not respond, and the pristine beauty and natural fertility of the globe have not been restored.

Alexander Dow (as we saw in the last chapter) attacked Holwell's account of Hinduism and gave his own in the preface to his translation of Firishtah, under the titles "A dissertation concerning the customs, manners, language, religion and philosophy of the Hindoos" and "A catalogue of the Gods of the Hindoos" (Firishtah 1768:xxi-lxxvi). Here is a fair sample of his tendency to put Hinduism in the most favorable light, reading it as a species of monotheism, as did Holwell:

> We find that the Brahmins, contrary to the ideas formed of them in the west, invariably believe in the unity, eternity, omniscience and omnipotence of God: that the polytheism of which they have been accused, is no more than a symbolical worship of the divine attributes, which they divide into three principle classes. Under the name of BRIMHA, they worship the wisdom and creative power of God; under the appellation of BISHEN, his providential and Preserving quality; and under that of SHIBAH, that attribute which tends to destroy. (Firishtah 1768:lxvii)

Holwell and Dow quickly appeared in French translation, and Voltaire was "lavish in his praise" (Marshall 1970:8). These, together with Scrafton's *Reflections on the government . . . of Indostan* (1761) plus a curious French text from India called the *Ezour Vedam*, were the main Indian materials with which Voltaire constructed the case for a pre-Mosaic deism against the claims of the Church. This last, as the admirable study by Ludo Rocher shows (*Ezour Vedam* 1984), had been composed by Jesuits to prepare Indians to receive the truths of Christianity, thereby giving a deist pre-Christian teaching a Hindu form: a Upanisad-like dialogue between Biach (Vyasa) and Chumantou (Sumantu). The tendency to minimize the differences separating Christianity and Hindu-ism operates here, too, but in another direction; instead of reading Hinduism through the lens of Christianity, a partial form of Christianity is read back to Hindus as Hindu scripture. It is ironic that it had the effect of giving Voltaire ammunition against Christianity.

Thus the first wave of the new Orientalism showed a tendency to test the limits of accepted opinion and proved of use to the critique of Christianity from the position of deism in both intramural (Holwell) and extramural (Voltaire) varieties.[3] We see these features also in the early Indian writings of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, which drew fire from the orthodox. The topic of his transgression was Indian time.

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[3]. P. J. Marshall (personal communication) has come upon a spectacular example of the unsettling effect of Hinduism upon Christian belief among the English in Calcutta in a notebook of Warren Hastings in the library of the University of Minnesota (Ames MS B.114). Marshall writes:
[Hastings] recognizes that in public he is taken to be Christian but then, he admits, in "hipocricy [*sic*]; . . . prudence or rather necessity imposed silence." But, "I am unable not unwilling to receive and understand. What my inability is founded on I cannot to a certainty determine." To me, though, it is very clear. He cannot see anything that distinguishes Christianity from the other religions about which he knows. "Is the incarnation of Christ more intelligible than . . . those of Bishen?" Europeans prevail over non-Europeans not because of the superiority of Christianity but for secular reasons: "a free government, cold climate and printing and navigation." Christianity does not make people "better." "Let those who know the lower uneducated class in England . . . say how much more rarely crimes are committed in England than in India."

All the major seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European writers had given some account of the Indian doctrine of the four *yugas* or world ages through which, in cycles of 4,320,000 years, the world passes repeatedly from a golden age through successive periods of decline and back to the starting point. Indian time, in the immensity of its ages and its cyclical form, functioned as the sign of the essentially Indian. It stood in opposition to Christian time as defined by St. Augustine, whose short span of some six thousand years was suspended as a bridge between two eternities, before the creation of the world and after its final dissolution.

Halhed was drawn to the claims of Indian time, proclaiming all the while his reliance upon the Mosaic chronology (as a cover, one feels): "The Hindoos as well as the Chinese have ever laid claim to an Antiquity infinitely more remote than is authorized by the Belief of the rest of Mankind"—authorized, that is, by the Bible (Halhed 1776:xxxvii). He finds the plausibility of Hindu accounts of remote ages and their complete confidence in the truth of them to be impressive. While, therefore, the Chinese and Indians furnish reasons to entertain the notion of a duration for history much longer than that of the Bible, science does so too. (Doubts about the Mosaic chronology are found in the Western world among the geological discussions of Giuseppe Recupero concerning Mount Etna, as reported in Brydone's *Tour through Sicily and Malta*, 1774.) Halhed argues that human reason can no more reconcile itself to the very long lives of the first patriarchs in the Bible than to the long human lifespan the Hindus attribute to the earlier world ages, but he points out that the Hindus allow for a human lifespan of a thousand years in the third world age; which corresponds nearly in length and chronology to that of the patriarchs in the opening chapters of Genesis. In the fourth world age, in which we now live, the lifespan contracts to a hundred years. This, in brief, is Halhed's argument, which concludes, after again professing an unshaken reliance upon Divine Revelation "before which every suspicion must subside," that "the World does not now contain Annals of more indisputable Antiquity than those delivered down by the ancient Bramins" (1776:xliii).

The whole intricate dance did not fool George Costard, clergyman and writer on the history of earliest times, who, although a family friend of Halhed, nevertheless blasted him in a pamphlet (see R. Rocher 1983:58-59, app. B). The drift of his critique is to show that Sanskrit and its literature are more recent than Moses and that only the Bible is a reliable guide to early history. (He also attacks Recupero's geological evidence for a long chronology.) Halhed's introduction and Costard's

pamphlet stirred up a considerable controversy in the reviews in Britain and in France over the claims of great antiquity for Sanskrit literature, creating between them a situation in which the new Orientalism was allied to skepticism and against orthodox belief.

There is a certain symmetry to the career of Halhed, for at the end of it he embraced an unorthodoxy that mirrored his admiring fascination with Indian time at its beginning. Having returned from India and having become a member of Parliament, he took up the causes of Richard Brothers, a messiah who calculated that the millennium would arrive 4 May 1795, and the prophet Joanna Southcott, whom he regarded as "Christ incarnated in a woman" (see K. Rocher 1983:195). A man of education, intelligence, and position, Halhed destroyed his reputation and made himself a laughingstock because of this obsession. Many thought he had gone mad. His declining years were those of a recluse, "scribbling page after page of computations and interpretations" that combined Hindu cosmology and myth with Biblical revelation and Greco-Roman mythology in "an intensely personal and passionate search for the hidden truth, for the grand scheme which God ordained for the world" (R. Rocher 1983:194).

Seen against the backdrop of the writings of these participants in the first wave of the new Orientalism, which gave it a reputation for testing the limits of reason in the construction of a favorable reading of Hinduism, Sir William Jones's taking up of the Mosaic ethnology appears as nothing less than a project to make the new Orientalism safe for Anglicans. Jones in effect showed that Sanskrit literature was not an enemy but an ally of the Bible, supplying independent corroboration of the Bible's version of history after the flood. In this reading some parts of Hinduism's testimony was magnified—the flood narrative of the Puranas above all—but one part had to be rejected: the long cycles of Indian time, so impossible to reconcile with Biblical time. The promising linkage Halhed proposed between an emergent long geological time in the West with Indian time, to breach the narrow bounds of the conventional British dating of the beginning of history (4004 B.C.), came to nothing. Jones effectively guaranteed that the new admiration for Hinduism would reinforce Christianity and would not work for its overthrow. In doing so he broke the frame of the Halhed-Costard controversy. Now the great antiquity of Sanskrit literature could be accepted, even welcomed, by the orthodox, because the content of that literature supported the Bible against the skeptics upon their own, rationalist, terms.

One might have expected that dispensation to hold for a very long

time. It was widely admired, and it supplied material for a whole scholarly career to Thomas Maurice who was, with William Robertson, the first of the non-India hands to write histories of ancient India without the benefit Of knowing Sanskrit. Maurice, an English cleric, was a thorough admirerer of Jones and paid him the compliment of foregoing the pleasures of original research by helping himself liberally to that of his hero. The result was impressive in extent if not quality. There is the seven-volume *Indian antiquities* (1793-1800), and *The history of Hindostan; its arts, its sciences, as connected with the history of the other great empires of Asia, during the most ancient periods of the world* (1795-98) and *The modern history of Hindostan* (1802-03), in two volumes each. The fourth and fifth volumes of the *Indian antiquities* proved popular enough to reissue as a separate volume, *A dissertation on the Oriental trinities* (1800). It showed that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity had been revealed to mankind in earliest times, and after the fall from grace polytheism erected itself on a muddled version of it, whence the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Visnu, and Siva. In addition, Maurice wrote a number of pamphlets and the beginnings of his memoirs, which were to have included "the history of the progress of Indian literature in Britain, during a period of thirty years" (1819:t.p., 1820). The whole structure and much of the substance of these works is from Jones, but without his genius. Maurice accepts the antiquity of Hinduism and its role as the key to ancient paganism and as independent proof of the Biblical narrative, but attacks those parts of it, especially the doctrine of the four ages of cyclical time, that conflict.

A kind of Protestant canonization of Jones's work followed his untimely death in India, scarcely ten years after his arrival, although (for reasons that will become apparent in the next chapter) the process lost its momentum and did not complete itself under the attacks of Indo-phobes. That lay in the future. For the moment, Thomas Maurice memorialized the sad occasion with *An elegaic and historical poem, sacred to the memory and virtues of the honourable Sir William Jones* (Maurice 1795)—a poem, alas, whose beauties are known only to the few. Jones's protégé in Orientalism, John Shore, Lord Teignmouth, on the other hand, wrote a biography that was widely read and constituted a major step in the canonization of Jones. Its highest purpose was to enroll Jones in a catalog of the lay thinker-saints of British Protestantism in series with Bacon, Locke, Milton, and Newton, those exemplary intellectuals whose lives, it was argued, showed that Protestantism had a special affinity with political liberty, literature, and science and whose work showed that true science supported the Protestant truth while popery

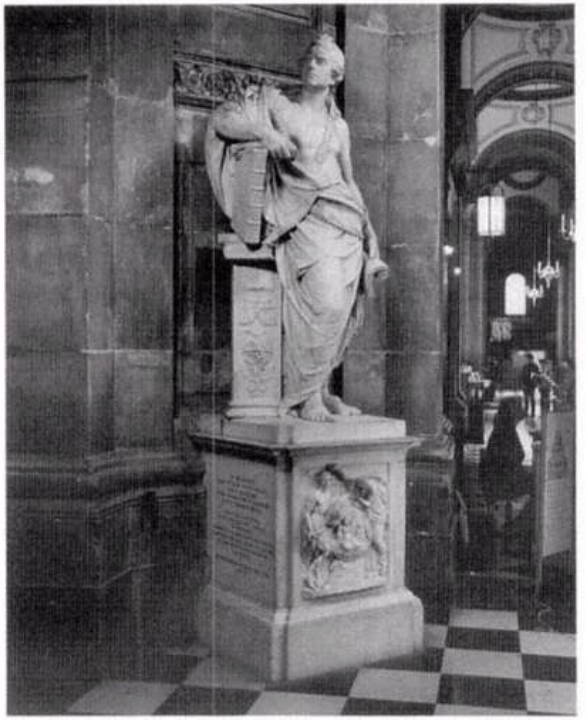

Figure 4.
Statue of Sir William Jones in St. Paul's Cathedral. (Photo courtesy
The Conway Library, Courtauld Institute.)

suppressed it (Shore 1805; Jones 1807, vols. 1-2). This had some play, but did not last.

Perhaps the most striking sign of the canonization of Jones is one that may be seen to this day in St. Paul's. Cathedral. It gives testimony to just how benevolent the British view of Hinduism could be under the Jonesean dispensation. A colossal statue of Jones, by John Bacon, was erected in his memory by the East India Company (figure 4); it is

Figure 5.
Detail showing the translation of Manu's "Institutes." (Photo by R. H. Barnes).

hard to miss, because it is one of the four large statues under the corners of the dome. Jones, in a toga, rests his hand on a book, which is his translation of Manu's "Institutes," the name Manu is in Nagari script on the spine (figure 5).[4] One might have thought it surprising that a Dharmasastra text of the Hindu law should be on display in the basilica of the Anglican church—but there are even greater surprises. On the front of the pedestal on which he stands there is a complex scene. Two allegorical figures (History? the new Orientalism?) stand to either side, drawing back a drape to reveal a display of Indian mythology, one of

[4]. The spelling is actually "Menu," a peculiarity of Jones's scheme of transliterating Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic in which Persian pronunciation of the first vowel influences the rendering into roman of all three languages. The matter is fully explained in Trautmann (n.d.), "The Lives of Sir William Jones."

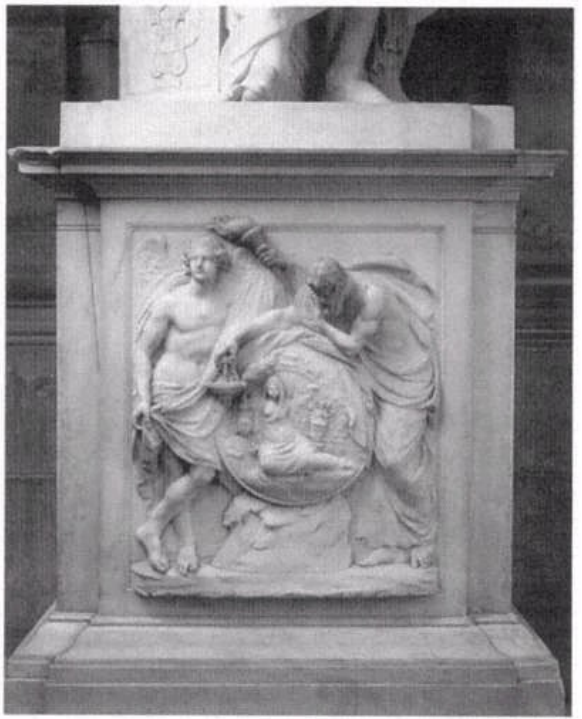

Figure 6.
Relief on the front of the pedestal. (Photo courtesy The Conway Library, Courtauld Institute.)

them illuminating it with a lamp, the other with a torch (figure 6). The display itself depicts, at the top, a section of the zodiac with the inscription above: "COURMA AVATAR," i.e., the tortoise (Kurma) avatar of Visnu. In the center a woman, dressed in a sari, holds in her right hand a tablet on which is carved a relief of the *devas* and *asuras* drawing on the snake to churn the milk ocean for its fourteen treasures, some of which are represented around the churning scene: the elephant of

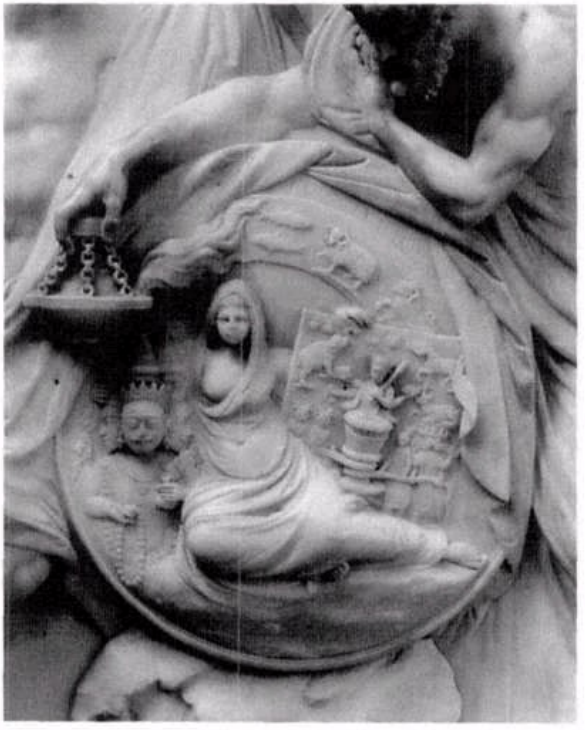

Figure 7.
Detail showing scene from Hindu scriptures. (Photo courtesy The Conway Library, Courtauld Institute.)

Indra, Airavata; pots containing poison (*visa*) and ambrosia (*amrta*); sun and moon; the horse that draws the chariot of the sun; the bull; and so forth. A four-armed figure of Visnu sits atop the churn, and the bottom of it rests upon the carapace of a tortoise, his Kurma avatar. In her left hand the central female figure holds a three-faced image (*trimurti*) of God in his three aspects (figure 7). It is all quite astonishing to find this scene from Hindu scriptures, not to speak of graven

images of Visnu and other gods, in a Christian church; I venture to say that it is unique.

To understand how it got there we have to decipher its meaning, not to Hindus but to the Anglicans of Jones's day. We can find the guidance we need in the writings of Jones's admirer Thomas Maurice. The significance of this scene from the Puranas is alluded to in a contemporary pamphlet he wrote called *Sanscreet fragments, or interesting extracts from the sacred books of the Brahmins, on subjects important to the British Isles* (1797:20 ff.): The rainbow that figures in the Bible at the end of the great flood, as God's promise to Noah that he would never again destroy the earth in a deluge, figures in Indian mythology as one of the treasures churned up by the Kurma or tortoise avatar of Visnu, whence Christianity receives proofs of its truth from Hindu scriptures. The scene as a whole, therefore, is presented not under the aspect of a depiction of pagan idolatry but as a benign, independent record of the truth of the Biblical story of the universal flood. The three-headed figure represents another of Thomas Maurice's preoccupations, on which he wrote a considerable amount: the so-called Hindu Trinity as, again, a testimony to the truth of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (1793-1800, 4-5: 1800). It is in this character as independent and scientifically elicited proof of the truth of Christianity that, for perhaps the first and the last time, figures of Hindu mythology were admitted to the sanctum of a Christian church. Such a depiction would have been unthinkable in an English church before Jones, and it became impossible later, as the nineteenth century progressed and Indophobia set in. It was Christian Indomania's brief moment.

Lord Monboddo on Sanskrit

Information about Sanskrit and its similarity to Greek reached James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, from the Calcutta Orientalists while he was in the midst of a vast scholarly project, and it fit the direction of his work so very well that he absorbed the new learning eagerly.

Lord Monboddo was writing two six-volume works more or less simultaneously: *Of the origin and progress of language* (Burnett 1773-92) and *Antient metaphysics; or, the science of universals* (Burnett 1779-99), the first proving the divine origin of language and taking Greek as the

standard of linguistic perfection, the second promoting a Platonic, theistic position in criticism of the mechanical philosophy of Descartes and of Newton. The third volume of the second book, titled "History and philosophy of man," is a survey of the variety of the human species that gives Lord Monboddo a certain place in the history of anthropology; the inquiry continues in volume four, "The history of man" (1795), in which the new knowledge of Sanskrit appears. We will examine it presently, but in order to see how Monboddo's project predisposed him to a favorable reception of Sanskrit it will be useful to consider briefly what views he held before the new Orientalism of Calcutta came into his view. For this purpose we will examine chapter 12, "Of the antiquity of the Egyptians," of the first volume of the first book, published in 1773.

Egypt plays a premier role in Lord Monboddo's system: "Egypt was the parent-country, at least with respect to Europe and the western parts of Asia, of language, as well as of other arts." The Pelasgi of Greece got their language from Egypt; indeed they were Egyptian colonists, "Egyptian and Greek languages being originally the same." As to India, when the Greeks reached it under Alexander, they found (so says Strabo) monuments to Bacchus or Dionysus and Hercules. The Indians said that Bacchus came from the west and taught them agriculture, the use of wine, and other arts of civil and social life. This agrees with the Egyptian story that their Bacchus (that is, Osiris) overran the known world, civilizing men and teaching them the arts of life. In India, Osiris built cities such as Nysa and other monuments to himself (according to Diodorus Siculus). The Indian veneration of the cow and other customs are in common with those of the Egyptians. "And I am disposed to believe," Lord Monboddo says, "that the arts and sciences, of which it is certain the Indians have been in possession for many ages, have risen from seeds sown there by the Egyptians," citing Père Pons of the Jesuit *Lettres édifiantes* (Burnett 1773-92, 1:466-467).

The new Orientalism fell on the fertile soil of this argument about the unity of Egyptian, Greek, and Indian language, arts, and sciences, and germinated at once. In the 1795 text, the "History of man" section of *Antient metaphysics*, it bursts into flower. The "Shanscrit," Monboddo says, is the original language of India and all the other languages of India are dialects that are more or less corrupt; it is "the most perfect language that is, or, I believe, ever was, on this earth; for it is more perfect than the Greek" (Burnett 1779-99, 4:322), citing Sir William Jones. He discusses various features of Sanskrit from the description

given by Halhed in the introduction to the *Code of Gentoo laws*, which shows it to be a language of the greatest art (that is, civilized or polished rather than rude or barbaric) since it abounds in flexion, the greatest art of language.

Monboddo had made the acquaintance of Charles Wilkins after his return to Britain—Wilkins was of course the translator of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the European who had the best knowledge of Sanskrit at that time—and had received from him more information. Wilkins, Monboddo announces, has proved the resemblance between Sanskrit and Greek. "They must, therefore, be dialects of the same language: And that language could be no other than the language of Egypt, brought into India by Osiris, of which undoubtedly the Greek was a dialect" (1779-99, 4:323). Languages of course are subject to change, so that the Greek and the Sanskrit are not identical; but it is the Greek that has changed, and not the Sanskrit, which was preserved against change by the extreme conservatism of the brahmin priests. Thus Sanskrit is the pure, unchanged language of ancient Egypt, taken there by Osiris and transmitted without change by the most conservative priesthood known to history. But there is more. In the opening volume of his *Origin and progress of language*, Monboddo was cautious about extending the paternity of the Egyptian language beyond Europe and Asia; now, in his enthusiasm for his new learning about Sanskrit and the doctrine of the *Monde primitif* of A. Court de Gebelin (vol. 2, 1775) that all languages of the world were descended from a single, primitive language, he puts caution aside and asserts that all languages, including those of America, are descendants of the ancient Egyptian—of which Sanskrit is the living relic.

Such a doctrine could not, of course, survive Champollion's decipherment of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, which lay several decades ahead. With it came the recognition that the language of ancient Egypt bore no close relation either to Greek or to Sanskrit. But it is worth making the point that Monboddo's doctrine shows again that, prior to the great decipherment, Indomania and Egyptomania generally reinforced each other and that they ran together (quite contrary to Bernal's thesis in *Black Athena*, 1987, according to which they are opposed). The effect of the decipherment was, as it were, to let the air out of the obsession with the supposed connection of India and Egypt in ancient times.

In the meantime, however, the sponsorship of Lord Monboddo itself perhaps told against the enthusiasm for Sanskrit in Britain. Not because

of Monboddo's advocacy of vegetarian diet, or cold baths, or exposing one's naked body to the elements—these are eccentricities of which the British like to think they are tolerant. What made Lord Monboddo a laughingstock was an eccentricity that went too far: his belief in the existence of men with tails.

The evidence came from one Koeping, a Swedish sailor serving as lieutenant aboard a vessel of the Dutch East India Company a century previous, in 1647. In the Nicobar Islands of the Bay of Bengal, he relates, they saw "men with tails like those of cars, and which they moved in the same manner" (Burnett 1773-92, 1:234). These creatures came alongside in canoes and traded parrots for iron, thus showing by their knowledge of trade and the art of navigation, Monboddo believed, that they were indeed human—although perhaps they lacked language and were like those other speechless men, the Ouran Outangs (1773-92, 1:238). The encounter between the two varieties of man ended badly, however. The next day, after the Dutch sent a boat ashore with five men who did not return, a larger landing party was sent ashore. "When they landed, the men with the tails came about them in great numbers; but by firing their cannon they chased them away: but found only the bones of their companions, who had been devoured by the savages; and the boat in which they had landed they found taken to pieces, and the iron of it carried away" (1773-92, 1:235-236).

The story had good credentials. Monboddo came across a retelling of it in the sixth volume of Linnaeus's *Amoenitates academicae* (by one Hoppius, an associate), and, after corresponding with Linnaeus, he acquired a 1743 Stockholm reprint of Koeping's account, which a Swedish gentleman translated for him. Moreover,

> The author who relates this is, I am well informed, an author of very good credit. He writes in a simple plain manner, not like a man who intended to impose a lie upon the world, merely for the silly pleasure of making people stare; and if it be a lie (for it cannot be a mistake), it is the only lie in his book; for everything else that he has related of animals and vegetables has been found to be true. (1773-92, 1:236-237)

Much of Monboddo's writing, the aspect of it that gives him a place in histories of anthropological thought, consists in passing in review evidence of variation within the human species, of the various marginal cases whose existence is problematical for any determination of the limits of the human; whence the fascination for him of Wild Peter of Hanover and the wild girl of Auvergne as empirical cases of feral

humanity, and of the Ouran Outang of Angola which, although lacking language, was evidently human: "They are exactly of the human form; walking erect, not upon all-four, like the savages that have been found in Europe; they use sticks for weapons; they live in society; they make huts of branches of trees, and they carry off negroe girls, whom they make slaves of, and use both for work and pleasure" (1773-92, 1:174-175). He believed in the scale of being and the plenitude of natural forms, siding with Aristotle's maxim that "every thing which can exist does exist" (1779-99, 3:248). In short, his whole cast of mind disposed him to be receptive to reports of exotic forms of humanoids and to take them as varieties of a single species. He was convinced that we have not yet discovered all the variety of nature, not even in our own species. Monboddo's countrymen, however, were out of step. Such things could no longer be believed, no matter how trustworthy the empirical evidence was shown to be. In the end, Lord Monboddo's men with tails were done in by the gentlemen scholars of Calcutta. In 1792 the third volume of *Asiatic researches* published an account, "On the Nicobar Isles and the fruit of the mellori," by Nicolas Fontana, who made a point of determining the truth of Koeping's account:

> Linnaeus seems to have been too credulous, in believing this man's story, for in all my examinations, I could discover no sort of projection whatever on the *os coccygis* of either sex. What has given rise to this supposed tail, may have been the stripe of cloth hanging down from their posteriors; which, when viewed at a distance, might probably have been mistaken for a tail. (Fontana 1799:151)

John Playfair on Indian Astronomy

British enthusiasm for Indian astronomy began with a paper read by the mathematician John Playfair before the Royal Academy of Edinburgh on z March 1789, titled "Remarks on the astronomy of the brahmins" (1790).

The modernist sense of history, as a process of developmental and progressive change, depends greatly upon the history of science as a narrative of the cumulative growth of knowledge, and the narrative of the progress of astronomy forms its very core. To ask, therefore, what is the place of India in the history of astronomy (or astronomy and

mathematics, the two being closely associated) is to ask about its place in the history of civilization.

In Playfair's view the history of astronomy is a unitary story of progress from the Chaldeans to the Greeks, culminating in the *Syntaxis* of Ptolemy, whose system, without opposition or improvement, dominated the astronomy of Egypt, Italy, and Greece for five hundred years. It passed to the Arabs and Persians and from them to Tartary, and from the Arabs to Spain and to the northern nations "where, after exercising the genius of Copernicus, of Kepler, and of Newton, it has become the most perfect of all the sciences." Because the systems of astronomy of all these nations show their interconnectedness clearly, says Playfair, the unitary character of the history of astronomy inclines us to believe that the development of observation of the heavens and reasoning about them "is an experiment on the human race, which has been made but once" (1790:136).

It is a matter of extreme curiosity, therefore, to find that the brahmins of India stand entirely outside this story. Their system of astronomical knowledge appears to be wholly separate from that unitary body of science "which has traversed, and enlightened the other countries of the earth" (the same). Indian astronomy is ancient and original, differing and therefore not derivable from that of the Greeks, the Arabs, the Persians, or the Tartars. The brahmins of today follow its rules without understanding its principles, Playfair says, and can give no account of its origin, "except that it lays claim to an antiquity far beyond the period, to which, with us, the history of the heroic ages is supposed to extend" (the same).

European enthusiasm for Indian astronomy was the creation not of the British but of the French, and Playfair was commenting as mathematician upon the Indian materials that they had published. Jean Dominique Cassini, director of the Paris observatory, had explicated astronomical tables from Siam (but based on a meridian near about Benares, and hence essentially part of the Indian system), which Simon de La Loubère had taken to England and presented in his *Description du royaume de Siam* (1691), subsequently reprinted in the memoirs of the Académie des Sciences. But it was G. Le Gentil and Jean-Sylvain Bailly, both of them leading astronomers, who were especially responsible for promoting the idea of the originality and antiquity of Indian astronomy. Le Gentil had gone to India in 1761 and 1769 to observe the transit of Venus, and came to know of Indian tables and rules of calculation from calendar makers in the vicinity of Pondichery. He published tables

given him by a learned brahmin of Tiruvalur in the memoirs of the Académie des Sciences in 1772, giving further force to a growing enthusiasm for India that followed the publication of a French translation of Holwell's "Shaster" in 1768—which was much beloved of Voltaire—and Anquetil's translation of the *Zend-Avesta* in 1771. Bailly's four-volume *Histoire de l'astronomie* (1775-82), opening with a chapter on antediluvian astronomy, argued that the first recorded astronomical observations of the ancient civilizations dated from around 3000 B.C. and presupposed a period of development at least 1,500 years long. India played a role in that history, but it is in the appendix volume, *Traité de l'astronomie indienne et orientale* (1787), that Bailly exhibits his mastery of the newly available Indian materials. Playfair's wonderfully clear exposition of the issue was wholly inspired by Le Gentil and Bailly and rested upon Indian tables supplied by them and Indian methods of calculation explained in their writings.

The argument directs itself to the tables, of which there were four: those of Siam and of Tiruvalur, mentioned above, and two others sent by missionaries, Patouillet (thought to be of Narsapur) and du Champ (of Krishnapuram). To establish the unity and identity of the Indian system Playfair describes features common to these tables but different from the Ptolemaic system and its successors. The nub of the argument has to do with the epoch of the tables, their observational starting point. To calculate the position of a celestial body one needs "the position of the body in some past instant of time, ascertained by observation" (1790:142), called the epoch of the tables, the mean rate of the body's motion, and the correction that adjusts for motion above or below the mean. Three of the tables have epochs that are not especially ancient—that of Siam (A.D. 638), that of Krishnapuram (A.D. 1491), and that of Narsapur (A.D. 1569)—but the Tiruvalur tables are set out from the beginning of the Kali *yuga*, in 3102 B.C. Is it real or fictitious? That is, Playfair asks, has the position of the heavenly bodies it posits for that epoch been determined by actual observation, or by calculation from the modern epochs of the other tables? If it is an imposture, the brahmins "have furnished us with means, almost infallible, of detecting" it (1790:152). Only astronomy in its most perfected state is able to go back forty-six centuries and ascertain by calculation the configuration of the heavenly bodies as a test of the supposed observation. Moreover, he adds, the calculations of modern European astronomy, with all the accuracy that the science derives from the telescope and the pendulum, "could not venture on so difficult a task, were it not assisted by

the theory of gravitation, and had not the integral calculus, after an hundred years of almost continual improvement, been able, at last, to determine the disturbances in our system, which arise from the action of the planets on one another" (the same).

Any system of astronomical tables, however accurate at the time of its making and however exactly it represents the position of the heavenly bodies at its epoch, Playfair continues, will become less accurate as one departs from the time of the epoch, both before and after that time, if the corrections for those gravitational effects are not taken into account, and the error will grow with time. Indeed, a cumulative error is inevitable, quite apart from the question of gravitational effects, from the inevitable small errors in determining the mean motions. These errors must accumulate with time and produce an effect that becomes larger with every day that one moves away from the instant of observation. For both reasons it is a general truth that, given a system of astronomical tables based on observations whose date is unknown, that date will be the time at which the tables "represent the celestial motions most exactly" (the same). Here, then, we have a method by which to judge the pretensions of Indian astronomy to so great an antiquity.

The burden of Playfair's argument is, then, to demonstrate that the positions of heavenly bodies at the commencement of the Kali *yuga* (i.e., 3102 B.C.) as given in the table are very accurate, by comparing them with modern computations whose accuracy has been refined by knowledge of the gravitational effects of such bodies on one another, which is necessarily more accurate than could be achieved by premodern means of computation, which rested on observation. This he proceeds to do, and stands astonished before the result:

> That observations made in India, when all Europe was barbarous or uninhabited, and investigations into the most subtle effects of gravitation made in Europe, near five thousand years afterwards, should thus come in mutual support of one another, is perhaps the most striking example of the progress and vicissitudes of science, which the history of mankind has yet exhibited. (1790:160)

One example of the detail of the argument must suffice by way of illustration. At the commencement of the Kali *yuga* (3102 B.C.), the beginning of the zodiac is 54° before the vernal equinox according to the Indian astronomers, and the star Aldebaran, the first star of the constellation Taurus, is 53°20' after the beginning of the zodiac, hence 40' before the equinox. Modern observation, and the present rate of

precession of the equinoxes (50 1/3", slightly less, it might be added, than the Indian value of 54") would place Aldebaran 1°32' before the equinox. But adding in the correction due to the variability of the precession discovered by La Grange and published only in 1782, in the amount of 1°45'22", the longitude of Aldebaran is 13' from the equinox at that time, agreeing, to within 53', with the determination of the Indians. The brahmins could not have fixed the position of Aldebaran at the beginning of the Kali *yuga* by calculating backward from a modern observation, for they make the precession of the equinox too great by more than 3" annually, so that they would have placed the fixed stars 4° or 5° further back at their ancient epoch than they in fact did (1790:153-I54). This argument alone, Playfair believes, makes it highly probable that the Indian zodiac is as old as the Kali *yuga*, that is, that the tables of Tiruvalur are based on observations made in 3102 B.C. The multiplicity of examples he gives raises the probability of the proofs such that "their being false were much more wonderful than their being true" (1790:192).

The question of Indian astronomy occupied some of the best scientific minds of Europe and figured largely in the work of the Calcutta Sanskritists. Jones corresponded with Playfair, and he wrote a few articles on astronomical matters himself. In "On the chronology of the Hindus" (1807, 4:1-46) he fended off the Hindu *yuga*-cycle of 4,320,000 years and fitted the events of Puranic history into the frame of the shorter Mosaic chronology; "On the antiquity of the Indian zodiack" (1807, 4:71-92) showed (rightly) that the Greek and Indian zodiacs were the same and argued (wrongly) that the Greek was derived from the Indian; and "The lunar year of the Hindus" (1807, 4:126-165) expounded the doctrine of lunar asterisms (*naksatras*). In astronomy Jones was no more than an amateur, and far better writings on the astronomy of the Indians were soon being produced by Samuel Davis and H. T. Colebrooke in the *Asiatic researches*. The enthusiasm of the pioneers was then checked by the skepticism of John Bentley, and controversy raged until the extremes of each gave way to soberer assessments.[5]

Indian astronomy continued for a time to be a central issue for British-Indian relations in ways that are still little explored, and which we cannot follow here even if we were able. It is important to be clear that, as in Playfair's argument, the question was never whether Indian as-

[5]. See Sen c.1985 for discussion and references.

tronomy had something new to offer Europe, but was, instead, an investigation into the antiquity of Indian astronomy using the modern astronomy of Europe as the standard and means of investigation. This continued to be the stance of the Calcutta Sanskritists as they delved deeper into the Sanskrit sources, and they shared it (as we shall see in the next chapter) with their later critics, the Indophobes. But, for the Orientalists, that by no means rendered the content of Indian astronomy a merely antiquarian issue. If Newtonian astronomy was to take root in Indian civilization, the Orientalist educational theory ran, it would have to be grafted on a native rootstock of the existing astronomical science of the Hindus. Hence the study of Sanskrit texts of astronomy had a larger purpose within the project of modernism.[6]

The early enthusiasm for Indian astronomy could not be sustained at its original level. The Marquis de Laplace wrote India out of the place Bailly had given it in the history of astronomy, and Maurice could cite Laplace in proof that the famous tables of Tiruvalur were utterly impossible and that the supposed conjunction of the planets in 3102 B.C. differed too greatly from modern tables to have been established by observation (Maurice 1812:7; Laplace 1809, 2:250).

Francis Wilford on Puranic Geography

Francis Wilford, officer in the army of the East India Company, devoted his leisure to the study of the geographical sections of the Puranas, looking for evidence of Indian knowledge of Egypt and other civilizations in ancient times. He had been born in Hanover and went, as lieutenant, with the Hanoverian troops sent by the British government to India in 1781. Following the Treaty of Mangalore (1784) he devoted himself to Indian antiquities. He became a member of the

6. Sen c.1985 is a fine summary of the scientific issues. For the larger cultural issues see Chris Bayly's article, "Colonial Star Wars" (n.d.), which is a suggestive probing of territory that is still largely unknown. One would like to know a good deal more about works written by British-Indian educators and by missionaries to graft Newtonian astronomy upon the base of Indian astronomy (in keeping with Orientalist educational policy) or, contrarily, to refute Indian astronomy by means of Newtonian astronomy. Two interesting relics of these colonial star wars that I have come across are James Ballantyne's *A synopsis of science, in Sanskrit and English, reconciled with the truths to be found in the Nyáya philosophy* (1856) and H. R: Hoisington's The *Oriental astronomer* (1848), in Tamil and English. These are examples of a largely lost literature of Orientalist modernization.

Asiatic Society and was regarded as one of its best Sanskritists, along with Wilkins and Colebrooke (Klaproth c.1865).

Wilford published many articles in the *Asiatic researches*, the most important of which are the longest ones, "On Egypt and other countries adjacent to the Cálí River, or Nile of Ethiopia, from the ancient books of the Hindus," in the third volume (1792), and "An essay on the sacred isles in the west" in volumes 8, 9, and 10 (1805). These writings attracted considerable attention, for the first gave a proof not only of a close and continuing intercourse between India and Egypt in ancient times but also of the substantial identity of their mythologies and that of ancient Greece—the unity-of-paganism theme upheld—and promised more to come. The second purported to show the wider range of geographical reference in the Puranas, including reference to Britain under the name Svetadvipa, "white island" (i.e., "Albion"), among the "sacred isles of the west" of the title. It was all quite astounding.

The argument of these writings depends on a series of identifications between Sanskrit place-names and those in other languages, very like the way in which Bryant's argument is built up, and it is equally difficult to convey a sense of the text in this short space. Let me leave it at this: According to Wilford, the Puranas speak of Egypt under the name Agupta or Guptasthan (Gr. "Ægyptos") or Misrasthana (Biblical "Misraim," Arabic "Misr") and Ethiopia under the name Kusasthana, "land of Kusa," that is, the Biblical Cush. One can see why Sir William Jones was ambivalent about Wilkins's work: On the one hand the argument was built entirely of etymologies, many of the loosest kind, for which he had lampooned Bryant; on the other, it gave new evidence for the exact etymologies that he had identified in the third anniversary discourse connecting Sanskrit *misra* and *kusa* with Egypt and the Cushites. He asked to see Wilkins's sources. In a note appended to Wilkins's article on Egypt in the third volume, Jones says that, having read the original Puranic and other Sanskrit passages, both alone and with a pandit, "I am happy in bearing testimony to his perfect good faith and general accuracy both in his extracts and in the translation of them" (Jones, in Wilford 1792:464), and adds two literal translations of supporting sources. One of these is a *Skanda Purana* passage in praise of the Nila River, supposedly the Nile of Egypt, which, Jones adds, all the brahmins allow to be in Kusadvipa, that is, the Biblical Cush. The second, from the *Padma Purana*, is truly amazing, for in nine Sanskrit verses it reprises the story of Noah, his three sons, and the curse of Ham. The passage says that to Satyavarman (whom Jones had elsewhere identified with Noah) were born three sons, Sarma, Kharma, and Jyapati (i.e.,

Shem, Ham or Cham, and Japhet), upon whom their father, the sovereign of the whole earth, devolved the kingship so that he could retire to a life of meditation. Jones's translation of the passage continues:

> One day by the act of destiny, the king, having drunk mead, became senseless, and lay asleep naked: then was he seen by Kharma, and by him were his two brothers called, to whom he said: "What has now befallen? In what state is this our fire?" By those two was he hidden with clothes and called to his senses again and again. Having recovered his intellect, and perfectly knowing what had passed, he cursed Kharma, saying: "Thou shalt be the servant of servants; and since thou wast a laugher in their presence, from laughter shalt though acquire a name." Then he gave to Sharma the wide domain on the south of the snowy mountain, and to Jyapati he gave all on the north of the snowy mountain; but he, by power of religious contemplation, attained supreme bliss. (Jones, in Wilford 1792:466; spelling and punctuation modernized).

The passage most clearly proves, Jones says, that Satyavrata or Satyavarman of the Puranas was Noah—an identification he had been the first to propose—which fixes the utmost limit of the Hindu chronology. And it gives no support to the view (of Voltaire) that Moses borrowed any part of his work from the Egyptians, but shows to the contrary that he wrote what he knew to be truth itself from the traditional remembrance of his people.

Some years after Jones's death, Wilford, now Captain Wilford, delivered himself of "On the sacred isles of the west" (1805), an even longer and more densely referenced treatise purporting to show that the White Island (*sveta-dvipa*) of the Puranic geographies is England and the sacred isles of which it is one refer to Britain. It is more misplaced learning in the manner of Bryant. However, the story lies not in the content of the article but in its introduction.

Wilford says that in preparing his essay for publication he compared his notes of Puranic passages with the originals, and soon found that wherever the word s*vetam* or *svetadvipa* occurred the writing was somewhat different and the paper of a different color, as if stained:

> Surprised at this strange appearance, I held the page to the light, and perceived immediately that there was an erasure, and that some size had been applied. Even the former word was not so much defaced, but that I could sometimes make it out plainly. I was thunderstruck. . . . When I reflected, that the discovery might have been made by others, either before or after my death, that in one case my situation would have been truly distressful; and that in the other my name would have passed with infamy to posterity, and increased the calendar of imposture, it brought on such paroxisms as

threatened the most serious consequences, in my then infirm state of health. (Wilford 1805:248)

When he began to study Sanskrit, Captain Wilford tells us, he quickly found that the geographical information he sought was intermixed with masses of mythological and historical information in exceedingly lengthy Puranas. So he made his pandit into what we would call a research assistant and directed him to read through the Puranas and make extracts of the information he sought. He gave him money to hire assistants and scribes and directed him to engage another pandit, giving him for his further encouragement a place in the college at Benares. Naturally Wilkins had to brief his pandit on what kind of information he wanted him to look for, and he further amused himself, he said, "with unfolding to him our ancient mythology, history and geography. This was absolutely necessary as a clue to guide him through so immense an undertaking, and I had full confidence in him" (1805:249-250).

You have guessed the rest. Having discovered the erasures, Wilford asked his pandit to supply more of the originals from which he had made extracts, and there followed a period during which, as we must imagine, the pandit worked night and day to supply his patron with what he wanted to see. He had to work, moreover, all alone, for he had pocketed the money for hiring assistants and scribes. One cannot but be impressed by the accomplishment of this obliging pandit, for Wilford states he composed no less than 12,000 brand new Puranic *slokas*— about half the length of the *Ramayana*!—and inserted them into manuscripts of the *Skanda* and *Brahmanda* Puranas, not to mention other phony verses he put into the *Padma Purana*. Wilford says that because many chapters of these works are lost they are called "the Puranas of thieves or impostors." His mortification deepened when he found that he was the unwitting instrument, in his earlier article on Egypt, of an imposture perpetrated on the late Sir William, and that the verses on Sarma, Kharma, and Jyapati were nowhere to be found in the *Padma Purana*.

Did the discovery that his pandit had been somewhat too helpful lead him to abandon the White Island thesis? Not at all. Wilford announced his relief at finding that the frauds were not so extensive as to vitiate his present or earlier work. Deeply committed to the Mosaic ethnology and to the natural religion frame of comparative analysis, he continued to make wide-ranging identifications of the features of Egyptian, Greek,

and Indian mythology, religion, and history on the basis of the Puranic geographies. Even more telling is the fact that the Asiatic Society published his work, and the French translated it into their own language (Wilford c.1846). Like any mastering framework, Mosaic ethnology provided both aids to new discoveries, and resistance to its own demise. It would take the decipherments of Champollion to kill off the Egypt-India theory and contain the European Indomania within bounds of reason. But the fraud of Wilford's pandit became a celebrated case and (as we shall see in the next chapter) it was a first-rate club with which its critics could beat the new Orientalism.

Charles Vallancey: Celtomania and Indomania

Charles Vallancey was an English military engineer (rising to the rank of general in 1803) who became interested in the language and antiquities of Ireland while he was posted there. He was a prolific writer of books and pamphlets on those subjects, not to speak of his works on fortification, stonecutting, inland navigation, and the tanning and currying of leather. The effect of his writing on Irish antiquities was considerable but perhaps not entirely salutary; indeed, the judgment of his memorialist in the *Dictionary of national biography* is severe: "Vallancey may be regarded as the founder of a school of writers who theorise on Irish history, language, and literature, without having read the original chronicles, acquired the language, or studied the literature, and who have had some influence in retarding real studies, but have added nothing to knowledge" (Moore 1899:82). For our purposes he is important for showing a connection between Celtomania and Indomania and the shaping influence of the Mosaic ethnology.

The two parts of Vallancey's Irish interests, namely language and antiquities, are bound together into a unified whole by the Mosaic ethnology, and the Mosaic ethnology is the governing paradigm of his writings even before the first results of the new Orientalism came his way and were eagerly absorbed into his project. Prior to the appearance in England of the first volumes of *Asiatic researches*, he had already published a great deal on Ireland: four of the six volumes of his *Collectanea de rebus hibernicis* (1770-1804); the *Essay on the antiquity of the Irish language* (1772), dedicated to Jacob Bryant; *A grammar of the Iberno-Celtic, or Irish language* (1773); and *A vindication of the ancient history*

of Ireland (1786). In this body of work it is his purpose to recuperate the reputation of the medieval manuscript histories of Ireland, showing that they are not monkish forgeries of the ninth and tenth centuries but genuine records of Ireland's most ancient history, according to which the Irish people descend in two lines from Magog of the Genesis narrative (Vallancey 1786:i-ii, 1). He wishes, further, to show that the Irish language is the language of an ancient civilized people, being "free from the anomalies, sterility, and heteroclite redundances, which mark the dialects of barbarous nations" and that, being rich and melodious, precise and copious, it "affords those elegant conversations which no other than a thinking and lettered people can use or require"; thus it is large of vocabulary and regular of grammar (Vallancey 1773:ii). More particularly, the Irish language is an amalgam of the Celtic and the Punic, Ireland having been colonized by Phoenicians, come hither to trade for the tin of Britain, at an early date. As against Sir William Temple, who argued that the Irish language was used nowhere else in the world but Ireland, the Scottish highlands, and the Isle of Man, Vallancey wishes to show that it is older than and ancestral to all the languages of Europe by virtue of its dual heritage, both Celtic and Phoenician being dialects of the Hebrew, the first language of mankind. Phoenician is the source of Greek and Latin, in Vallancey's view, and every nation in Europe looks to the Celtic as their mother tongue (Vallancey 1773:xii-xiv). There is also a Scythian element in the formation of the Irish language, hailing from Iran and Central Asia.

Indeed, the similarities Vallancey sees between Irish and other languages seem boundless, and as we read on we lose our sense of surprise and shock long before we encounter word lists comparing Irish with Japanese and Chinese. Judging, then, from the affinity of the Celtic language with almost every language of the known world, he says, "we might conclude with *Boullet*, that it was the primaeval language. There is not only a great affinity between the Iberno-Celtic and the Hebrew, Persian, and the other oriental dialects; but what is more remarkable, there is a surprising affinity also, between the old Iberno-Celtic, or *bearla feni*, with the dialects spoken on the vast continent of North America" (1773:iv-v). Of American Indian languages he specifies the Algonquin, as reported in the book of Baron Lahontan, who says they are the most ancient and noble tribe on the continent, as indeed their name in Irish indicates: *cine algan* or *algan cine*, the noble tribe. All this strengthens Vallancey's belief in the peopling of North American by Phoenicians. In the end the Celtic language covers the globe.

With a proclivity to see connections on the basis of the slightest similarities it is only to be expected that Vallancey would eagerly ingest whatever results of the new Orientalism might seem to be of service to the vindication of the Irish language and the antiquity of its people. Jones, whose earlier work in Persian Vallancey knew well, offered a crumb in the sixth anniversary discourse: a parallel between the ancient Irish writing called Ogham and the Sanskrit texts called Agamas, which Vallancey seized upon and proceeded to overinterpret (Jones 1807, 3:125-126). But it was Wilford whose researches provided the crucial material that resulted in Vallancey's pamphlet, *The ancient history of Ireland, proved from the Sanscrit books of the Bramins of India* (1797).

The gist of this new material is as follows. In the Puranas as the British Isles appear (according to Wilford) under the name Trikutacala, "the mountain with three peaks": "for the Pauranies consider all islands as so many mountains the lower parts of which are covered by the sea" (1797:9). The three peaks are the golden peak (Suvarnakuta), silver peak (Rajatakuta), and iron peak (Ayakuta); alternatively they are also called *dvipas* or islands. The Silver Island is more commonly called Svetadvipa or White Island, that is, Albion or England. The Golden Island (Suvarnadvipa) or Peak (Suvarnakuta) is synonymous with Sukuta or S'kuta, that is, Scotia or Scotland; other derivatives (Suvarneya or Svarneya) are the origin of Juvernia and Jvernia (Hibernia). This Suvarneya was regarded as the abode of the ancestors, Pitrsthana or Pitrikasthana, Pitrka being Patricius, the Apostle of Ireland (St. Patrick!). This is only the beginning of Vallancey's lucubrations on the amazing findings of Wilford, for in a passage from the *Brahmanda Purana* supplied by Wilford through another gentleman, Mr. Gore Ousley, then at Benares, Vallancey finds a proof that the Phoenicians colonized Ireland, a proof the details of which we will leave it to interested readers to find for themselves in the pages of this curious pamphlet. He also shows with reference to the *Indian antiquities* of Thomas Maurice that the superstitions of the druids of Britain contain many vestiges of the pure theology of the Biblical patriarchs, blended with the corruptions of Sabian idolatry and, more particularly, that various designations of the Buddha, who is equivalent to the Egyptian Hermes and the Mercury of the West, are represented in druid religion and "in many relics of their festivals and sports, still practised in Britain" (1797:28-29). Wilford's Puranic researches figure largely in Vallancey's subsequent writings: the remaining volumes of the *Collectanea*, the *Prospectus of a dictionary of the language of the Aire Coti, or, ancient Irish* (1802), and *An essay on the primi-*

tive inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland (1807), which today are the hardest and most unprofitable of reading matter.

But for all its learned foolishness, the conjuncture of Celtomania and Indomania in Vallancey's later writings rests on one item of fact beneath all the fancy, for Sanskrit and Irish *are* near kin as members of the Indo-European language family. It is not surprising therefore that Jones's relations with Vallancey were as ambivalent as were his relations with Bryant, whose conclusions he embraced and the looseness of whose methods he made sport of. Here are Jones's comments on Vallancey, appearing in letters he wrote on two consecutive days. On 11 September 1787 he wrote to Joseph Walker,

> When you see Colonel Vallancy, whose learned work I have read through twice with great pleasure, I request you to present him with my best remembrance. We shall soon I hope see faithful translations of Irish histories and poems. I shall be happy in comparing them with the Sanscrit, with which the ancient language of Ireland had certainly an affinity. (Jones 1970:770-771)

Just the previous day, however, he had written to his friend and former pupil the second Earl Spencer a much more candid appraisal:

> Have you met with a book lately published with the title of *a Vindication of the Ancient History of Ireland*? It was written by a friend of mine, Colonel Vallancey; but a word in your ear—it is very stupid. . . . *Vallancey* begins with stating a fact (which is the only curious part of the book) that the *Irish* have histories of their country, from the first population of it, *in their own language*; one of which histories he is translating. Then he insists with great warmth, that those histories could not be invented by modern priests: perhaps not; but what is his reason? Because those priests did not understand *Persian*, (which he calls *Southern Scythian*) and the ancient Irish were *Persians*, who having emigrated from the Caspian settled in *Ierne* or *Iran*, and brought with them the *old Persian* history, which *he* finds in the *Irish* manuscripts. I conceive this to be visionary; & am certain, that his derivations from the Persian, Arabic, & Sanscrit languages, are erroneous. (Jones 1970:768-769)

He Concludes: "Do you wish to laugh? Skim the book over. Do you wish to sleep? Read it regularly" (1970:769).

There is however one more word to be said. Besides providing another sorry chapter in the history of error, it seems to me that this examination of the Vindicator of Irish History suggests that Celtomania and Indomania run together at a rather profound level. For British ethnologies from General Vallancey onward seem to show that an open-

ness to the one tends to go with an openness toward the other, and that, contrarily, anti-Irish feeling on the part of the English and the Scots tends to go with hostility toward the Indians and, as well, toward the claims of language to show a relationship among them.

In sum, British Indomania was not a shapeless enthusiasm for things Indian, but a phenomenon with a structure, which is to say both an internal organization and boundaries. It was an enthusiasm for the Hindus or "native" Indians as distinct from, and even as opposed to, the Muslim "conquerors." It was an enthusiasm for the ancient writings in Sanskrit, conceived as repositories of the primitive experiences and religion of the human race and, as such, confirmatory of the truth of Christian scripture. It was an enthusiasm for ancient wisdom as distinct from future wisdom; it had, so to say, a Masonic character. And it was an enthusiasm for those Sanskrit writings as the key to the universal ethnological narrative.

British enthusiasts of India included Orientalists of great talent and genius, such as Jones and Colebrooke, and amateurs, such as Vallancey and Maurice, who knew no Indian languages. The discourse of Indo-mania, accordingly, was a mixture of pearls and dung. No sharp divide created by professional self-definition and closure yet separated "scientists" from "amateurs," or fostered the possibility of a scientific interest in India that was not also impelled by some strain of Indomania; that parting of ways would come much later. For the moment the better qualified and the less qualified were part of the same overall phenomenon.

But the case of Wilford shows that it was more than a question of discriminating the qualified from the unqualified, because Wilford was a very able Sanskritist. The judgment of the Sanskritist Julius von Klaproth, writing over a half-century later, shows how Orientalism itself divided over Wilford: "One cannot but deeply regret that the perfect knowledge of Sanskrit and other Indian languages that Wilford had acquired, the assiduous reading of the ancient books of the brahmins and his many laborious researches, should not only have been without benefit for the literary world but that they should in fact have rendered a disservice to the study of antiquities and mythology in Europe" (Klaproth C.1865:609). In spite of Wilford's obvious shortcomings the comparative mythologists of Germany still accept his supposed discoveries, Klaproth complains, and even improve upon the dreams of their compatriot. It is evident that the scandal of Wilford troubled Orientalists

for a very long time. It was a central issue for the internal politics of Orientalist knowledge, and it provided ammunition for those, such as Klaproth, who sought the exclusion of enthusiasm from Orientalist research in the interest of making it scientific. And it was a gift to the critics of Orientalism from without.