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COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE GRECO-ROMAN CLASSICS
RESITUATING THE LEGACY OF SIR WILLIAM JONES IN A HUMANIST CONTEXT

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> *gentibus est aliis tellus data limite certo:*
> *Romanae spatium est Urbis et orbis idem.*
>
> Land is given to other nations with a fixed border:
> The extent of the city of Rome is the same as the world's.
> —Ovid, *Fasti* 2.683-4

The intellectual outlook of Sir William Jones and his scholarly contemporaries in late eighteenth-century British Indian administration had more in common with the practices and assumptions of the textual critics of the Renaissance than with those of many colonial scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[1] It has long been acknowledged that the techniques of the discipline which has come to be known as Oriental Studies emerged from Renaissance antecedents. Edward Said's *Orientalism*, while overturning many other intellectual paradigms, is content to affirm this. Said writes that European interest in Middle Eastern and South Asian knowledge was "a later transposition eastwards of a similar enthusiasm in Europe for Greek and Latin antiquity during the High Renaissance" (1979: 51). But what does it mean to say that Orientalism was derived from the Renaissance?

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[1] Following Oskar Paul Kristeller, a great scholar of Renaissance studies of the last century, I shall arbitrarily define the Renaissance as the period in Western history from 1300 to 1600 so that we can move on to more interesting questions (1961: 3). This essay argues that cultural practices associated with that period have continued (with more and less influence at different times) long after 1600. The term Early Modern, which I shall address below, is another, similarly problematic approach to slicing up the last few centuries of Western history.

I argue that Said has made a conceptual error that makes it impossible to consider the intellectual life of the Orientalists of the eighteenth century comprehensively.[2] His work anachronistically projects late twentieth-century intellectual standards of what knowledge is valuable (and valued) onto previous periods in history, with a particularly distorting outcome for any analysis of the eighteenth century. He has failed to address questions concerning the differences between modern and pre-modern intellectual practices, and so cannot account for the fact that eighteenth century studies of the non-European world formed a bridge between the (pre-modern) intellectual systems of Renaissance humanism and the (modern) human sciences. Failing to consider this point elides one of the most interesting aspects of early Orientalism, namely that the British were studying India as they had studied ancient Greece and Rome, civilizations for which they had tremendous respect. If we consider the Western classical tradition as relevant to the question at hand then the relationship between Eastern and Western knowledge is more complicated than a straightforward hegemony of Western over Eastern.

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[2] In fairness, it must be said that Said barely mentions India in *Orientalism* because he is, of course, concerned primarily with the Middle East. However, Sir William Jones makes a brief appearance in Orientalism as the man who first intellectually conquered South Asia for the British Empire (1979: 51, 78ff).

The distinction I wish to draw here separates *pre-modern* tendencies from *modern* ones. This reductive but workable demarcation sets in opposition the practices of Renaissance (and post-Renaissance) humanism, in which the production of knowledge was based on clarifying and emending the classifications offered by ancient authors, and the positivistic tendencies of the human sciences, whose classification of things (at least theoretically) was independent of the imprimatur of the great minds of Antiquity.[3] If we look at the late eighteenth century through a pre-modern lens, we see an intellectual economy in which ancient Indian texts could co-exist with (and in some cases even excel) Greek and Latin sources. Under pre-modern intellectual conditions, Greek and Latin learning maintained their timelessness and universality, which allowed contemporary knowledge and ancient knowledge to co-exist. The same assumptions and techniques of textual emendation that had been used to rediscover ancient Greek culture were applied to the very different circumstances of Persian and Sanskrit. This has usually been read as a failure — the knowledge produced by these techniques was often "wrong" by modern standards — and yet this sort of engagement produced a vibrant encounter, whose achievements

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[3] No one says this more concisely than Foucault: "The threshold between Classicism and modernity (though the terms themselves have no importance — let us say between our prehistory and what is still contemporary) had been definitively crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things" (1994: 304).

should be addressed. We can also choose to view the eighteenth century through a modern lens, noticing nascent tendencies that would become dominant in the nineteenth century: Greek and Latin texts began to be read differently in the sense that they could no longer directly serve as the primary basis for knowledge. They were still respected and important, to be sure, but were historicized, such that there was a fully-realized ontological gulf between the modern reader and the ancient writer. Indian culture was judged historically retarded by this new ontology, whether under the cold eye of the colonial administrator or through the enthusiasm of the Romantic poet, or even by the benevolent but judgmental gaze of someone like the mid-nineteenth century philologist Max Müller.[4] Texts in Latin and Greek, because of their long-standing prestige in Western society, were not subjected to the same re-evaluation as Indian literature.[5] As a reservoir of symbols the Classics remained universal — thus the British could take up the resonant motif of a new Roman Empire to

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[4] For example, see Müller's argument that "Greece and India are, indeed, the two opposite poles in the development of the Aryan man. To the Greek, existence is full of life and reality; to the Hindu it is a dream, an illusion" (Müller 1968: 16). This clearly combines pre-modern sense of common origins with a willingness to fault India for failing to develop capitalist Modernity.

[5] Sudipta Kaviraj argues that colonial scholarship "treated … traditional beliefs as deserving of something *more* than ordinary refutation" (2005: 133). In contrast, the Western Classical world was killed off in the nineteenth century by irrelevance more than any active attempt on the part of scholars in the nineteenth century to show it to be illogical. By the eighteenth century, using the Classics for information about the natural sciences (as represented in Aristotle's *Physics*, for example) had already been abandoned by scholars (Kristeller 1961: 44, 88).

legitimate their rule — but as a matter of using the Classics as the basis for knowledge, to quote the immortal phrase of Alexis de Tocqueville, "the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future" (qtd Koselleck 2004: 31).[6] The Classics, far from being a reflection of a universal world order, had become in the process of being historicized something that only the West could possess, and since the rest of the world did not have this basic marker of civilization, the non-West was *ipso facto* uncivilized. Thus by the nineteenth century, the pre-modern and modern conceptions of knowledge had merged into the "positional superiority" of Western over Eastern that Said observes, correctly in my view, to be the hallmark of Orientalist hegemony (1979: 7).

The eighteenth century is bewildering for us. We encounter nascent techniques of modern comparative linguistics and sociology, and then on further reading discover that these were employed primarily in attempts (which very few people today would see as anything but misguided) to prove Biblical chronology correct. Historians have tended to sympathize either with the incipient modernity of the period's scholarship or with its delightfully bizarre pre-modern assumptions. Thus, articles and books that discuss Jones categorize him either as the first Modern scholar ("the Father of Linguistics," etc.) or as the

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[6] Rather than repeating the phrase "Western Classics," this essay shall assume that "Classics" without a modifier refers to the Greek and Latin (and in some cases Hebraic) classical tradition.

last European scholar of language and culture to have only classical intellectual tools at his disposal.[7] Consider the gulf in attitudes between an article by Garland Cannon which concludes by stating that Jones was a modern linguist *avant la lettre* since "Jones' Persian work… played a role in the movement that culminated in the development of the IPA [the International Phonetic Alphabet]" and one by another scholar who argues that "Sir William Jones used essentially medieval criteria in evaluating culture."[8] It is the intellectual historian's responsibility to reconcile these two competing visions of Jones, and in doing so to question the existing paradigms used to explain the significance of eighteenth-century British research in India. The results of such a study, as I present here, somewhat discredit Said's methodology and yet offer a surprising vindication of his intellectual goals.

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[7] A quick note on Sir William Jones studies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: After A.J. Arberry's rediscovery of Jones's significance in the 1940s, Garland Cannon has made a career of sifting through his life's work, including editing all the known letters in two volumes (Cannon 1970; see also Cannon and Brine 1995; Cannon 1957, 1958, 1990; Arberry 1946). Cannon and Arberry have brought to light the methodological faults in Lord Teignmouth's early biography of Jones and the need to go back to original sources (Shore 1806). Rosane Rocher has also written extensively about Jones and his contemporary Nathaniel Halhed, especially trying to bring to light British interaction with their Sanskrit informants (1980, 1989; 1995). Two Jones readers with extensive prefatory material came out during the 1990s (Pachori 1993; Franklin 1995). Jones's complete works, which were published after his death by his wife Anna Maria, are now helpfully available online (Jones 1799).

[8] Cannon 1958: 273; Bearce 1961: 22. Another example concerns the question of whether a Jesuit named Père Gaston Coeurdoux mentioned Indo-European theory in a letter written some twenty years before Jones explained his famous insight in the Third Anniversary Discourse. A writer who disagrees with this proposition points out in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* that Père Coeurdoux's work is "pre-scientific" and depends explicitly on Biblical genealogy (Arlotto 1969; cf Olender 1994: 20). The problem with that argument is, of course, that Jones's own work also took for granted the same Biblical genealogies.

Said is very clear about his political and ethical motivation for writing *Orientalism*. The West, he argues, has not seriously considered how it produces knowledge about the East, and the only antidote is humanistic self-reflection (Said 1979: xxi-xxix). Said writes that "humanism is the only, and I would go as far as to say, the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history" (ibid xxi-xxix). Orientalism, he argues, represents a deep-seated hypocrisy, in which a "purportedly liberal culture" maintains the fiction of its intellectual fairness as it dominates and denigrates others (ibid 254). But if a society can consider itself fair yet perpetrate intellectual violence then where does that leave present-day scholars, who also consider themselves fair? Said's work has itself reduced the West to an unchanging engine of intellectual domination, and he is therefore guilty of the same sin as those who reduce the Orient into a silent, unchanging discourse (cf Ahmad 1991). Let us assume that the West does change — this is self-evident — then it might be fruitful to look within our scholarly tradition for a model encounter between East and West. I propose therefore that, for a brief period in the eighteenth century, Jones and other humanists elevated India's literature to the most prestigious level of discourse in the West, namely the Classics. This is not to say that this interaction was perfect by any moral or intellectual standard, but it perhaps

comes closer to achieving a vision of a unified understanding of the world's knowledge than anything that has come after. Of course, the eighteenth-century British study of India rested on entirely different assumptions than we can make today — how could we go back to assuming that the world is 6,000 years old or that Aristotle was right except for a few niggling details? — but we must try to learn from it because it comes close to the humanistic ethos for which Said and others make a compelling case.[9]

This essay is divided into three parts. The first addresses historiography, particularly through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Quentin Skinner and Michel Foucault. It considers how, living in the twenty-first century, it is possible for us to reconstruct the thoughts and motivations of the eighteenth century in a meaningful way. Our task is complicated by the fact that Western historical theories are based on synchronic analysis of particular traditions, which rests on the proposition that traditions maintain a recognizable continuity. On the contrary, in the time and place that concerns us, Calcutta in the latter part of the eighteenth century, British intellectual experience was formed by the confluence of at least three different traditions: the Anglo-European meeting the two forks of

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[9] This is not unlike Kristeller's argument for the study of the Classics. Knowing the Classics, he writes, helps us to "overcome the limits of our parochial outlook in time" (Kristeller 1961: 89).

South Asian culture, the Islamicate and the Sanskritic.[10] How can we analyze such encounters between traditions when Western historical theory is itself so Eurocentric? The second part tries to reconstruct the semantics of British studies of India. How was the intellectual exchange between India and the West represented? Basically, symbols of Indian culture were treated as interchangeable with those in Western classical culture because both were seen as closer to an ancient universal whose influence was thought to be still detectable in the contemporary world but in an opaque way. This section is a case study in how the intellectual assumptions of the pre-modern enabled a particularly sympathetic engagement with India. The third part briefly considers the use to which the Classics were put in the nineteenth century, arguing that classical antiquity ceased to be a tool for writing universal history. Instead the Classics became a metonym for the West, which is to say that Greece and Rome were used as symbols proving that the West was uniquely benevolent among world cultures and therefore had a moral right (or even an obligation) to rule nations overseas. Specific historical analogy between India and the West was now only invoked to support the claim that India had not progressed in centuries, which is of course where Said's *Orientalism* picks up the thread of the argument.

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[10] Since I am problematizing the notion of historical tradition, now is not the right opportunity to define these categories or address their validity.

I.   Writing History at the Edge of Modernity

The first objection to an exercise in history such as this essay is a simple *why bother?* After all, we certainly will not discover any as yet unknown truth about Indian culture through a study of the eighteenth century British sources. At least one modern critic is dubious that anything of intellectual value was accomplished by the British during that time at all, since they managed only "to achieve a limited and frequently erroneous understanding of Indian civilization through a synthesis of European and Oriental learning" (Steadman 1977: 465). Within this complaint about accuracy, there is also the implicit criticism that Eastern and Western ideas were uncritically mixed together in some great colonial hodgepodge. But this is unfair, because as I will show, there were particular methods by which the fusion was accomplished and the process of creating this knowledge, however faulty it may have been, is a worthwhile object of study in itself. There is a danger in assuming that we who inhabit the present are right and the denizens of the past are wrong, so we should turn instead to a hermeneutic method by which we can position our own intellectual assumptions vis-à-vis those of the time we hope to better understand.

This section is an extended justification for reevaluating our understanding of the intellectual categories available to colonial scholars in the late eighteenth century. My contention here is that engagement with the Classics was conceived as a basis for universal knowledge in the late eighteenth century, which allowed for a cross-cultural comparative project whose parameters are not much different from some strains of multicultural thinking today.[11] Such a sweeping claim must be backed up by a philosophically sound means of extracting truth from history. The key obstacle is that our interest in examining history is of course based in the present; namely it concerns what we can learn about ourselves from the eighteenth century, which partially obstructs the imperative of judging the eighteenth century on its *own terms*. I agree with Quentin Skinner's contention that, "It will never be possible simply to study what any writer has said (especially in an alien culture) without bringing to bear our own expectations and pre-judgments about what they must be saying" (2002: 58). The problem is compounded since, as Peter van der Veer has argued, "history's conceptual site is

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[11] However, at the same time it is important not to overstretch the analogy to modern multiculturalism because cosmopolitanism in the Ancient World — and by extension in the eighteenth century — did not necessarily imply the respect for Otherness and the ambition for social equality we now associate with it (Pagden 2001: 5). For example, Athenian cosmopolitanism assumed that anyone who professed Athenian culture was equal but abhorred those who could not or would not be assimilated, designating them barbarians.

modernity" and here we are concerned with the Early Modern period. [12] Our one recourse, it seems, is to let the texts speak for themselves so that we can try to use the categories people from the period used to classify their own knowledge but how, practically speaking, do we accomplish that?

Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of historical horizons is a good starting point for reconstructing the past but the metaphor fails in one important respect: The historical subject cannot see equally well in all directions. I am not referring to the fact that we are trapped in time — it is self-evident that our relationship to our past is different from that with our future or our present — but rather arguing that there are moments in history when separate intellectual traditions flow together. Thus from the same vantage point the historical subject is bounded by multiple horizons and instead of looking out over one grand plain of knowledge, his vision is fractured by the horizons' intersections and the

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[12] Van der Veer 1998: 285. The problem with the term "Early Modern" is largely in the "modern," which implies an ineluctable teleology from pre-modernity to a particular kind of modernity. If we are scrupulous in avoiding the temptation of privileging analyses that purport to show how we became modern (or failed to become modern) then it is a convenient term denoting a particular period in history, say 1500-1800. John F. Richards makes a good case for why we should use it in social history but his reasoning applies to intellectual history as well (1997: 197; pace Goldstone 1998). On the other side of the argument is Randolph Starn, who thinks that "Early Modern" is obfuscatory because it "seems to diminish the liabilities of periodization while maximizing the benefits" (Starn 2002: 302). So what? If an "Early Modern" period can help us to explain how previously dominant forms of intellectual inquiry were replaced by other forms then there seems to be no problem in broadly naming the period in which this occurs. Whether those who use the term early modern are "amateurish" or not, which is a large part of Starn's argument, hardly seems to matter.

interstices between them. Late eighteenth century British India is a particularly difficult example of the complex texture of historical intellectual horizons. Sir William Jones and the other early Orientalists came to India with a European horizon but they also entered into Indian knowledge systems in a sustained and meaningful way. It is therefore unsatisfying to locate their interaction with Indian sources as merely an extension of the contemporary European context because clearly their relationship with Indian knowledge was different from the relationship they had with, say, Cicero or Voltaire or Locke.[13] On the other hand attempting to understand the traditions in isolation also fails because at this point in history they were in contact and so together constituted the historical moment of interest to us.

What is required, therefore, is a model for understanding how different historical horizons, both those which are familiar and less familiar to the subject in question, intersect at a particular moment in history. I propose that we should understand the knowledge production at the intersection of historical horizons as a hermeneutic project analogous to our own historical project. This reflects the fact that any attempt to deal with the unfamiliar involves a hermeneutic

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[13] Edward Said and many others who apply his methodology to the South Asian context of course consider South Asian knowledge adopted by Europeans to be European knowledge, since the Orientalist "is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says" (Said 1979: 21).

operation, as Gadamer recognizes, since he writes that he uses "the term 'hermeneutics' (which the early Heidegger used) not in the sense of methodology but as a theory of the real experience that thinking is" (2006: xxxii). Although we might mistake reconstructing intellectual horizons for an abstract philosophical problem, it is the central practical question in writing intellectual history about colonialism. Many studies have tried to build a satisfactory model of how native informants interacted with British scholars, but here I will take a slightly different tack by considering not the knowledge produced or the social mechanics of producing it but, as it were, the containers into which it could be placed after being produced.[14] In other words, we are looking for patterns of thinking that shape discourse. The discourse of eighteenth century research was framed by categories derived from the Classical world and these were flexible enough to elide discontinuities between the West and India. In other words, the first step of the hermeneutic process of figuring out what Indian knowledge was involved certain assumptions that East and West were in some way fundamentally the same, a crucial point which we shall take up a little later.

Before attempting to complicate the idea of the historical horizon, I should summarize my understanding of it. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer makes

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[14] I am thinking, of course, of works like Bayly 1996 and Hatcher 2005.

reference to it repeatedly in slightly different terms but the most simple (and therefore to my mind definitive) description is that "the horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (2006: 301). This seems to imply that when a historical subject is at a particular moment in time and place, he or she has a limited range of consciousness, which we can call a horizon. But lest we try to consider a horizon something with definite boundaries, Gadamer makes it clear that since "understanding is the fusion of those horizons supposedly existing by themselves" it is not possible to comprehend horizons independent of each other (2006: 305, cf 303). Horizons are "always in motion" rather than being a static frame of reference (2006: 303). Furthermore, Gadamer muses about whether there is a difference between the horizon in which a person lives and his or her historical horizon (2006: 303). There is no definitive answer but he implies that the question itself is false because horizons are fluid anyway. A horizon should be seen as a continuum rather than as a boundary because "a person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small" (2006: 301-2).

My distillation of Gadamer's idea of the horizon brings to light an obvious problem: What is the relationship of the historical subject to his or her horizon?

The metaphor of the horizon is intimately tied to vision and therefore to a subject's personal gaze, but nowhere does Gadamer clearly state how the individual's position determines his or her historical horizon. Like Foucault, Gadamer suggests that an individual's historical agency is limited because "the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being."[15] But if the subject is trapped by a horizon then how does his or her experience determine a horizon? Furthermore, does this mean that even contemporaneous people living in the same place can have different horizons? Gadamer dismisses several formulations that seem similar to horizons, notably the idea that, according to Schleiermacher and Steinthal (quoted below),

> The philologist understands the speaker and the poet better than he understands himself and better than his contemporaries understood him, for he brings clearly into the consciousness what was actually, but only unconsciously, present in the other (qtd Gadamer 2006: 192).

In this outmoded, nineteenth century hermeneutics there was a sense that the historian had access to a concept of something like a Zeitgeist, which could be used as the backdrop against which to view historical subjects. But Gadamer implies that it is not so simple, that somehow individuals do determine their own

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[15] 2006: 278. Gadamer uses the term "prejudice" in a technical sense which is not unlike Foucault's sense of how a discourse ineluctably shapes a person's writing and speech (Gadamer 2006: 273; Foucault 1994: xx).

horizons. The solution is to be found in an alarmingly vague concept we might call "scholarly enthusiasm," in other words that one's intellectual horizon is partially shaped by what one seeks to know and what one is uninterested in pursuing. If possible, we should consider how this enthusiasm manifests itself against a discourse. In the case of Jones, many documents, including nearly 600 letters and a list of what he hoped to study in India, detail what he was interested in learning and why, so we have them as a tool for reconstructing his horizon.

Although Foucault and Gadamer have very different approaches to historiography, a key issue in both of their thought is the interpretative possibility raised by historical discontinuity. Foucault writes that "the notion of discontinuity is a paradoxical one: because it is both an instrument and an object of research" (1972: 9). Gadamer likewise argues that historical hermeneutics is only possible because of historical distance between the subject of research and the researcher (2006: 269, 297). Specifically, he points out that "hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness" (2006: 295). The danger is, as Quentin Skinner points out, that it is our primarily our "cognitive discomfort" with an idea from the past that causes us to determine whether a particular statement should be taken literally or figuratively (2002: 41). Thus we need to introduce Foucault to

understand what to do with the distinction among strands of tradition within the discourses of the time.[16] We cannot simply gloss over these internal distinctions contained within a historical horizon.

When two contemporaneous traditions come into contact, they study each other hermeneutically (with more or less rigor depending on the circumstances), despite the fact that the intellectual distance between them is not caused by temporality. In the same way that a historian makes a pre-judgment and then refines that initial judgment hermeneutically, a scholar interested in another culture goes through the same process. As Skinner argues, "We must classify into order to understand, and we can only classify the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar" (2002: 58). It is fascinating then that one of Schleiermacher's definitions for Hermeneutics is that it is "the art of avoiding misunderstandings" (qtd Gadamer 2006: 185). The German word "Missverständnis" has the same valences as English "misunderstanding," i.e. either a cognitive error in interpretation or a failure for two people to communicate. Now here we must draw on Foucault's work on the relationship between power and discourse because when one

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[16] Foucault writes that "there is no statement in general, no free, neutral, independent statement; but a statement always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role among other statements, deriving support from them and distinguishing itself from them: it is always part of a network of statements, in which it has a role, however minimal it may be, to play." (1972: 99). Rorty has a similar view, namely that there is no such thing as rationality severed from the intellectual framework of a particular time (Skinner 2002: 38).

tradition reads another there is often not the calm equanimity of Gadamerian hermeneutics but a categorization based on power. Thinking through Foucault's work is necessary because it can help us answer the all-important question posed by Gadamer: "What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from the countless others which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome?" (2006: 278). The influence of power on intellectual formations often deforms truth because of the strong presuppositions power carries with it and the disincentive for questioning those presuppositions. Because of Foucault, and in a specifically Orientalist context because of Said, we are aware of how these presuppositions operate.

With these historiographical considerations in mind, let us build up a general description — to be refined in the next section — of what knowledge production in the eighteenth century meant. Its dominant form was Classicism, a term which I use not in the usual sense but rather to refer to the tendency to use ancient texts as authorities for structuring knowledge, even knowledge which was not known to the ancients. Implicit in the use of ancient texts for this purpose was the idea that by understanding them better, true information about the world could be learned because the ancients had access to some divine spark or afterglow of Creation, which is now lost to us. Thus, as Foucault observes, "the heritage of Antiquity, like nature itself, is a vast space requiring

interpretation" (Foucault 1994: 34). The interpretation of Antiquity was based on careful philological work, through which the corrupt state of the ancient texts was investigated and ultimately corrected (D'Amico 1988: 1). Ultimately the goal was to create a unified understanding of the world through text, which would be a restoration of some divinely ordained order.[17] To this end, a great deal of Renaissance scholarship was syncretic. The philosophical investigations of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463 – 1494) are notable because Pico used a great deal of Jewish and Islamic source material (Kristeller 1961: 60, 132)

Investigations based on the Classics were often a search for the hidden and the universal, and reached beyond Latin to Greek and other languages. This is especially clear in pre-modern research on language, which consistently sought the living language which was closest to the one supposedly spoken in the Garden of Eden (Tavoni 1994: 45, 163ff). On a less mystical level, scholars were concerned with polishing up ancient literature so that it could be valuable to the present. Classical texts had shown their moral and social worth over the centuries and therefore their relationship to contemporary life was assumed, if

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[17] "Knowledge therefore consisted in relating one form of language to another form of language; in restoring the great, unbroken plain of words and things; in making everything speak" (Foucault 1994: 40). Saint Augustine believed that the perfect language was the world because it was a vast text authored by God; this metaphor remained influential until the modern period (Eco 1995: 15).

only they could be properly edited and available.[18] The Renaissance emphasis on

reclaiming Antiquity starts with Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae* (written 1449, first

printed 1471), which attacked the complacency of the medieval grammatical

tradition and urged an intervention through with ancient knowledge could be

made useful for the present.[19] Furthermore, knowledge itself was intimately tied

to its expression: "The ancient texts as they stood proved, to the humanist, that

knowledge and eloquence were necessarily related" and the humanists

particularly appreciated the passage in Cicero's *Pro Archia* which made the point

that mastery of letters brought glory (Gray 1963: 502, 503). In addition to a new

emphasis on classical Latin, the Greek tradition, which had been largely lost

during the Middle Ages, began to be recovered. The core text of Christianity in

the Latin West, St. Jerome's Vulgate translation of the New Testament, was for the

first time edited against the original Greek text — and it turned out that Jerome's

Greek had not been particularly good (D'Amico 1988: 16; Kristeller 1961: 79). The

philological techniques by which St. Jerome's version was replaced by a

linguistically more authoritative text were influential in how other, less sacred

texts would be treated. Scholars sought out original Greek manuscripts across the

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[18] On a Renaissance public library scheme for manuscripts, see D'Amico 1988: 13ff.

[19] Valla's book is "presented as an advanced manual for the purpose of learning fully the wealth of communicative possibilities within classical and post-classical Latin, which modern people can bring back to life and even perfect" (Tavoni 1994: 4).

known world so that piecemeal Latin translations could be replaced by authoritative originals.[20]

It is also important to consider what such scholarship was not. Firstly, a reverence for ancient sources does not imply disbelief in rationality. Even though Jones and many of his contemporaries believed that the world was only a few thousand years old (and held many other views that strike us as quite silly), they were proud of their ability to use reason. Rationality is a mindset, whose meaning is bound to what people of the time in question thought it was (cf Skinner 2002: 37-8). Secondly, the Renaissance legacy was not seen as preventing innovation or freezing time, because as long as there was no need to criticize the ancient categories themselves then new knowledge could always be placed in them.[21] Indeed, the eighteenth century was a time of uneasy truce after the so-called Battle of the Books (or Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns) of the late seventeenth century, during which literary luminaries in France and Britain fought bitterly over whether ancient authors were better than modern authors or vice versa (DeJean 1997: esp 16). The question was not settled and so ancient texts

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[20] Petrarch was the first Westerner to actually own a manuscript of Plato in Greek. It had been sent to him by a Byzantine correspondent (Kristeller 1961: 58).

[21] "Beginning about the middle of the sixteenth century, scholars started to be more conscious of their originality, and to notice the progress made by their own time in comparison with classical antiquity" (Kristeller 1961: 88).

kept their central role in knowledge production until the nineteenth century. Lastly, Classicism does not uniformly represent a questioning of religious doctrine. Oskar Kristeller, for example, is

> convinced that humanism was in its core neither religious nor antireligious, but a literary and scholarly orientation that could be and, in many cases, was pursued without any explicit discourse on religious topics by individuals who might otherwise be fervent or nominal members of one of the Christian churches (1961: 74-5).

We see precisely this ambivalence in Jones and in many other classical scholars of his time, who were neither willing to abandon a Christian framework nor to strongly support the establishment church.

The status quo, in which Renaissance techniques for categorizing knowledge remained dominant, had been under threat for some time, and not just from writers taking the side of the Moderns in the Battle of the Books. Scientists working with data derived from observation had been questioning Aristotle's models of natural history since the sixteenth century, with the "decisive attack" coming with Galileo in the seventeenth (Kristeller 1961: 44). With the possible exception of natural scientists, many of whom were already far down the path of modernity, eighteenth century scholars tried to reconcile the old with the new. For example, how could contemporary nationalism be justified if, according to Genesis 11, nations had been split apart as punishment for man's effrontery in building the Tower of Babel? Abbé Pluche, a scholar of the time,

believed that nationalism was a good thing and argued on that basis that the

confusio linguarum (the post-Babelian loss of the universal language) was also a

good thing because without different languages there could be no nationalism

(Eco 1995: 339). British scholarship in the Indian context is exactly such a

negotiation between old concepts and new observations.

II.   Classics and Universal Knowledge in the Eighteenth Century

> "Poets that Lasting Marble seek,
> Must carve in Latin or in Greek;
> We write in Sand, our language grows,
> And, like the tide, our work o'erflows."
> – Edmund Waller, 1606-87 (qtd. in Vance 1997: 8)

The repeatability of history is an important concept for our understanding of how pre-modern scholars saw the world. From Thucydides into the eighteenth century, historians thought that the value in writing history lay in the fact that through knowledge of the past it was possible to determine where present-day people stood within historical cycles.[22] Overlaid on this cyclical model was a belief in the possibility of tracing human origins to a golden age or a point at which human society was unified, whether in the scholarly quest to identify the one language spoken before the destruction of the Tower of Babel or through the genealogies of the sons of Noah (Ham, Shem and Japheth). Neither the golden age model nor the cyclical model, evocative as they are, is available in unmodified form to us as twenty-first century scholars. Furthermore, our relationship with the Classics is fundamentally different because, unlike today, classical scholarship was a particularly influential public sphere in the eighteenth

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[22] "Within this experience was contained the repeatability of histories, or at least of their constellations, from which their exemplary and instructive nature could be deduced. This entire complex persists, as we know, into the eighteenth century" (Koselleck 2004: 96).

century.[23] It is nearly impossible for us to imagine how easily the eighteenth century conversed with the Ancients or what one writer calls the "pure pleasure" the scholars of the time took in such time-transcending conversations.[24] Even for those of us in the Internet Age who have studied Classics, Greece and Rome are distant, but it was not so for scholars of the eighteenth century whose early schooling consisted of slightly restructured Renaissance curricula (Clarke 1959: 5). Oxford, whose intellectual atmosphere enthralled Jones, maintained a more traditional curriculum than Cambridge, which had begun to add newer thinkers like Newton and Locke to the undergraduate course of study in the eighteenth century.[25]

Unlike much nineteenth century scholarship, Classicism tended to produce respect for Indian culture; we need to understand that this is because, broadly speaking, it emphasized what was the same rather than what was different. When the *Dictionary of National Biography* notes that Jones "felt none of the

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[23] Cf Wittrock 1998: 25. Indeed, Latin itself could play an important role in politics in the eighteenth century: When Jones was in the running for the parliamentary seat reserved for Oxford University, his opponents circulated a Latin ode naming him "Republicanus" and "Americanus." He reports that it was very damaging to his campaign (*Letters* 221).

[24] Gay 1966: 39, 31. Nathaniel Halhed, who will be formally introduced later in this section, described in a letter to Jones how he corresponded with his love interest, "Miss L.," in Latin. Even though he was writing to her in Latin, he admits that he still wrote rubbish. He warns Jones that, "You will see Latin suffer a man to be foolish, as well as English" (qtd Rocher 1983: 273).

[25] Clarke 1959: 68. Jones dedicates his book on Oriental poetry to Oxford in the most high-flown terms: "Florentissimae Academiae Oxoniensi ... quae tamdiu academiarum omnium erat illustrissima, quamdiu omnium liberrima permanserit" [To the very flourishing University of Oxford... may she be the most illustrious of universities as long as she remains the most liberal] (Jones 1774).

contempt which his English contemporaries showed to the natives of India," it is projecting the dominant mores of late nineteenth century colonialism onto Jones's time.[26] (Though, of course, the mythology of Sir William Jones is amplified if he, playing the role of enlightened scholar, is portrayed struggling against a background of European racism.) Certainly there was some disdain on both sides — for the "subaltern" version of it we can point to a 1772 Persian letter that refers to the English as "people who have not yet learned to wash their bottoms" — but it was a minor feature of the intellectual climate rather than its guiding force as it often was in the nineteenth century.[27] Should we read Indian comments on European hygiene as Orientalism in reverse? What would that mean? We need to consider Gadamer's dictum that, "It is necessary to keep one's gaze fixed on the thing throughout all the constant distractions that originate in the interpreter himself" (2006: 269). For Jones and many of his contemporaries, cross-cultural similarities rather than differences were important; we cannot let

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[26] Qtd Gombrich 1978: 8. There is, however, one puzzling quote in Jones's letters that appears overtly racist. He writes to Sir John Macpherson that he was pleased that the Governor-General's Council had settled his debts because his financial situation had been such that he "was forced to borrow of a black man, and it was like touching a snake or a South American eel" (*Letters* 430). We cannot know if he took such a harsh tone because he was writing to Macpherson, or if this demonstrates some otherwise unexpressed prejudice. Jones happens to mention the American Eel in letter 145.

[27] Qtd Travers 2007: 22. According to the Portuguese traveler Sebastian Manrique, Shah Jahan was extremely disdainful of Portuguese cleanliness with regard to the above mentioned part of the body (Silva 1994: 302).

the fact that we know what happens later — namely, that in the nineteenth century Orientalist discourse has the single-minded purpose of proving India backward and immoral — overwhelm what Jones himself thought he was doing.

For Jones, there was a morality embedded in non-European cultures that could be extracted for the benefit of Europeans. He writes of the Persian poets Saʿdī and Ḥāfiẓ that

> They sing not all of streams and bowers,
> Or banquet scenes, or social hours…
> But Freedom's lofty notes sincere,
> And Virtue's moral law severe (qtd Franklin 1995: 18)

This passage is a plea to his fellow Europeans: Although it may seem to you that Persian poetry addresses shallow subjects, scratch the surface and you find a deeper meaning. Indeed, many in Jones's time saw this moral meaning as universal, because as one contemporary poet puts it (coincidentally in a pamphlet skewering the greed of the Nabobs, East India Company officers who had returned to England fantastically wealthy):

> All ethics spring from one internal ground;
> Had we no *Plato, Tully*,— they'd be found. (Clarke 1773: 12)

Thus, even without the specific contributions of Plato and Cicero (who was affectionately referred to in the eighteenth century as "Tully"), the same moral principles which they expounded upon would have been discovered by other means. India was thought to be a living tradition with access to these truths, and

the pandits in particular were seen as a repository of knowledge lost elsewhere

(Teltscher 1995: 201). Thus, first-hand observation in South Asia was very

important for eighteenth century scholars. Jones writes,

> In Europe you see India through a glass darkly: here, we are in a strong light; and a
> thousand little nuances are perceptible to us, which are not visible through your best
> telescopes, and which could not be explained without writing volumes (*Letters* 2: 749).

As I shall argue in the next section, this is a fascinating contrast to Orientalism in

the nineteenth century, when it was considered fruitless to view India firsthand

to learn anything that had value beyond the context of governing India.

Said's observation that "the tense [Western accounts of the East] employ is

the timeless eternal" is perspicacious and helpful in some ways but is ultimately

misleading without a historical context (1979: 72). It is not only research on India

in the eighteenth century that is written in the "timeless eternal" but a great deal

of Western research of the time. When knowledge began to be deeply

temporalized in the nineteenth century (that is, when the rhetoric of progress —

both technological and moral — drowned out almost all other forms of

understanding) then the significance of Orientalism's lack of tense differentiation

had shifted (as the next section describes). I largely agree with Said's

observations on nineteenth and twentieth century Orientalism, namely that the

West metaphorically froze the East in amber for its own purposes, but this

contention is laughable when applied to the early modern period. After all, this was a time when people were engaging with Cicero as if he were alive and were working with medical diagnoses derived from Galen and Hippocrates. Jones, for his part, was a committed Ciceronian (Arberry 1946: 679). He liked the way Cicero wrote and thought; consequently, his own Latin — and English — prose style is very Ciceronian.[28] He urges the second Earl Spencer, his young protégé, to follow the Roman orator's example (e.g. *Letters* 81). It should be noted that Cicero had been the most popular ancient author throughout the Renaissance as well so Jones is organically a part of the tradition that venerated Cicero (Kristeller 1961: 18).

I argue, *pace* Said and the many others who have followed his methodology, that when eighteenth century scholars juxtaposed Indian institutions and traditions against Western institutions, past and present, the Oriental institutions were often described in ways that unambiguously gave them equality or even the upper hand, especially when the issue at stake concerned philosophy. In other words, by drawing on the Classics, it was thought possible to start to understand and compare vastly different cultures. Thus, the French Orientalist Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Dupperon writes, "Let us study the Indians as we do the

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[28] Shore 1806: vol. 2, 507. Cf. Arberry 1946: 679; *Letters* 26 in which Jones compares himself to Cicero. His *Poeseos Asiatiae commentariorum libri sex [Six Books of Commentary on Asiatic Poetry]* is unmistakably Ciceronian (Jones 1774).

Greeks and the Romans; when we understand them well, it will be permissible

for us, if we are better than they, to criticize their course, but without arrogance,

without rancor, and without ridicule."[29] Anquetil-Duperron has laid out the

program for the eighteenth century study of India: If Europeans would study

India as carefully as they have studied Greece and Rome, then it would be

possible to assess India (cf Majeed 1992: 16). Indeed, he and Jones both had

tremendous faith in their ability to be the vehicle of this cultural comparison.

A key symbol, which appears repeatedly in Jones's letters, is that of

changing clothes. For example, in referring to his translation of Saʿdī's *Gulistān*,

he hopes to "bring the Persian epic poem to Europe in an English dress" (*Letters*

355, cf. 278, 298; Pachori 1993: 48). Intellectual history becomes like the costume

warehouse of a wonderful repertory theater company: The ancient world, the

contemporary West and the contemporary East all hang their costumes on the

same racks and the scholar merely has to change a literary work's clothes

depending on where the scene will be played.[30] This interchangeability

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[29] Qtd Schwab 1984: 160. Cf. "The comparison of different literatures was one of the functions that Jones's looking back on classical Greek and Roman antiquity served."(*Das einschätzen verschiedener Literaturen war eine der Funktionen, der Jones Rückgriffe auf die klassische griechische und römische Antike dienten.)* (Arnold 2001: 57).

[30] As Shantanu Phukan observes, the metaphor of changing clothes was also in use in eighteenth century Indo-Persian circles, such as when Ānand Rām 'Mu<u>kh</u>liṣ' adapts Jāyasī's *Padmāvat* (written in Awadhi Hindi) into Persian (2000: 4-5; 67). Must we treat this as coincidence or is there some deep connection not readily perceptible to us?

underpins Jones's attempt to revitalize European literary culture through Indian culture. Vivian de Sola Pinto observes that "in the last quarter of the eighteenth century many English writers thought the classical mythology and its associated themes, which had inspired English poets since the Renaissance, were now worn threadbare, and the need was felt for new types of imagery and subject matter" (Pinto 1946: 688). Jones makes that argument throughout his career, stating in the preface to his French translation of the *History of Nader Shah* (1770) that Eastern literature should be used to bring more themes into the clichéd literature of Europe, which, he argues, had been continually repeating the same themes from the Classics.[31]

Raymond Schwab, whose *Oriental Renaissance* (1950) was the first study of Orientalism's constitution as a field, incorrectly concludes that what Jones and Anquetil-Dupperon had attempted to do was to challenge "the primacy of Greco-Latin education" (Schwab 1984: 160; Kopf 1995: 152). Schwab's inference is incorrect because both scholars declare themselves deeply committed to the Classics and had no intention of dethroning Latin and Greek. Nonetheless his mistake points to an interesting observation: What Jones and Anquetil-Dupperon

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[31] "La poësie européene ait subsisté si longtemps avec la perpétuelle répétition des même images, & les continuelles allusions aux même fables" [European poetry has depended too long on the perpetual repetition of the same images and constant allusions to the same stories]. The same idea is expressed later in the "Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations" (qtd Pachori 1993: 144).

have done strikes us as modern (particularly their pioneering work in historical linguistics) but although they recognized the newness of their deep engagement with Indian materials, they saw themselves as contributing to existing knowledge. They were, in my reading, trying to reconcile their Classical intellectual traditions with first-hand observations and information painstakingly gathered in the East. Jones writes in the preface to his *Grammar of the Persian Language* that the Persians were "a nation equally distinguished in ancient history [i.e. to the Greeks and the Romans], are either wholly unknown to us, or considered as entirely destitute of taste and invention" (qtd in Pachori 1996: 158). Thus to understand the Persians is to rectify a gap in European knowledge of a civilization on par with Greece and Rome. Not only that, but India could be a means to better understand Greece and Rome because it was a living tradition. Thus Jones writes wistfully in the Third Anniversary Discourse that

> we now live among the adorers of those very deities, who were worshipped under different names in old Greece and Italy, and among the professors of those philosophical tenets, which the Ionick and Attick writers illustrated (qtd in Marshall 1970: 254).

The ancient Greeks had been "extreme travelers (*poluplanês*)" and Jones writes himself into that tradition (Pagden 2000: 4). In a letter to the second Earl Spencer, his friend and former student, he gushes

> Need I say what exquisite pleasure I receive from conversing easily with that class of men, who conversed with Pythagoras, Theles and Solon, but with this advantage over the Grecian travellers, that I have no need of an interpreter (*Letters* 464).

In this letter Jones proposes a thought experiment: What if ancient Greek were only known in modern Greece and the ancient gods were still worshipped there? What if an Englishman were sent there and started learning Greek? He writes, "Such am I in this country; substituting Sanscrit for Greek, the Brahmens, for the priests of Jupiter, and Vālmic, Vyāsa, Cālīdāsa, [Vālmīki, Vyāsa, Kālīdāsa] for Homer, Plato, Pindar" (ibid). This is a definitive statement of how Jones saw his own work and how he positioned Indian literary greats vis-à-vis the ancient Greek writers. Indeed, Jones sees himself as part of a long tradition of respecting India: The ancient Greeks, who were fond of labeling non-Greeks as barbarians, themselves had had a unique respect for India, which was noted by eighteenth century scholars.[32]

Jones's description of what it was like to study India is similar to circumstances in Europe towards the beginning of the Renaissance. Greek culture was known but only through echoes, such as references in Latin texts and badly executed Latin translations (some of them through Arabic) of a few works (Kristeller 1961: 53). It is not known how much contemporary scholarship in

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[32] For example, Nathaniel Halhed writes in a 1779 letter to his friend George Costard that "some of the first Grecian writers have mentioned the term Brachman [Brahman], and it is perhaps the only instance wherein the Greeks have faithfully copied the orthography and pronunciation of a barbarous word adopted into their own writings" (qtd Rocher 1983: 295). All extant ancient Greek accounts of India are collected (in translation) in Majumdar 1981.

Byzantium was responsible for helping the West come to terms with Greek literary culture but certainly a wide ranging trade in manuscripts began in the fifteenth century. Furthermore, previously forgotten Latin authors also came to light as attention was paid to mining the tradition. Jones himself remained part of this tradition of seeking out texts and he was very excited when he heard the news that a new manuscript of Isaeus, an Athenian orator of the fourth century BCE, was discovered (*Letters* 259). Greek studies presented an opportunity to try out new textual approaches because since they had little connection to the existing medieval tradition, "the work of humanists appears much more novel when attention is focused on the Greek rather than the Latin classics" (Kristeller 1961: 15). India had the same effect on Jones and his contemporaries.

Eighteenth century scholarship on India was literally structured by the Classical environment in which these scholars worked. Jones translated the Sanskrit and Prakrit original of *Śakuntalā* into Latin before rendering it into English, claiming in the preface that Latin and Sanskrit are similar (he follows the same practice in letter 514). He did not, unfortunately for our understanding, elaborate on this point. Most of the materials which Jones used to learn languages and conduct research were written in Latin. For Persian, he used Greaves' *Elementa linguae Persicae* [Aspects of the Persian Language] (London,

1649) and Meninski's *Thesarus linguarum orientalium Turcicae, Arabicae, Persicae* [Dictionary of the Oriental Languages Turkish, Arabic and Persian] (Vienna 1680-7) (Cannon 1990: 10). He also checked his version of Saʿdī's *Gulistān* against Georgius Gentius' version (Amsterdam 1651), which had Latin notes. All of the grammatical terminology in Jones's highly influential Persian grammar is taken from Latin (Cannon 1958: 268).

Using Classical categories was an attempt to make Eastern literary practices comprehensible to Europeans but often the categories were themselves stretched in the process. For example, Jones's understanding of poetic meter is based on Latin and Greek, which leads to a remarkable fusing of the Arabic metrical system (which is carried over into Persian and later Urdu) with the traditional Western system (Jones 1774: 31ff). He offers a chart in which the Greek terms for metrical feet are offered alongside the Arabic system. Thus, for example, '*iambus*' [iamb = short syllable, long syllable] is equivalent to '*faʿil*' [also short then long].[33] Although he notes that Arabic has many more possible meters that either Greek or Latin does, he cleverly uses classical terminology to describe these.[34] Even though he carefully notes differences, such as that Greek tends to

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[33] My understanding of Arabic meter comes through Urdu, specifically through Pritchett 2003.

[34] "Magna est in poesi Asiaticâ metrorum varietas, in quâ ne Graecae quidem cedit" [There is a great variety of meters in Asiatic poetry, which not even Greek poetry has] (Jones 1774: 30) .

have more short syllables than Arabic does, he argues that classical meter and Arabic meter are fundamentally compatible. What I do not find here is any suggestion that Greek approaches to meter are better than Arabic, but rather a representation of Arabic meter that would be easily comprehensible to someone familiar with the Classics.

Besides providing technical categories, the Classics also served as a reservoir of literary tropes and symbols. One of the joys of Jones's literary style is his inability to restrain himself from flooding the page with poetic allusions. Everyone around him becomes a figure from history or mythology, and a precedent for every event is found in ancient literature or history. Reading through his letters, one notices that although his stock of allusions was Greco-Roman earlier in his career, eventually Jones replaces these with Indian ones. In one letter, he complains that he is so ill that formerly he was an Arjun or Bhima compared to now (*Letters* 395). In another letter he writes:

<div style="text-align: right">27 Nov 1787</div>

> My dear Sir,
> Durgà waits upon you: When we proposed also to attend you at Russa next Sunday, it did not occur to us, that we should have no moon on our return: we must therefore postpone that pleasure till the God, who bears a black antelope in his bosom, shall again enlighten us. I am, dear Sir,
> Yours ever faithfully,
> W. Jones[35]

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[35] To Richard Johnson, qtd Cannon 1990: 376.

He even reflects on the shift in his symbolic vocabulary, stating "that Jūgdishteīr, Arjen, Corno, [i.e. Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna and Karṇa] and the other warriors of the M'hab'harat appear greater in my eyes than Agamemnon, Ajax, and Achilles appeared when I first read the Iliad" (*Letters* 491). He asks for information about Indian poetic allegories, begging a colleague to provide him with "poetical names of places in India, where *Camdeo* [Kāmadeva] may be supposed to resort, like the *Cyprus* and *Paphos* of the Grecian and Roman deities" (*Letters* 373). He writes the "Hymn to Camdeo" soon after; the poem reads like a Greek or Roman erotic elegy and the preface identifies "Camdeo" as the Greek Eros (Jones 1799: vol 6, 313-316). In yet another letter, significantly the first in which he attempts to write Sanskrit in Devanagari rather than in the Perso-Arabic script that was more familiar to him, he writes:

> The powerful Surye [*Sūrya*, the sun god], whom I worship only that he may do me no harm, confines me to my house, as long as he appears in the heavens… (*Letters* 397).

In a related move, Jones repeatedly alludes to himself as an Indian. "You will henceforth consider me, as an Indian zemindar," he wrote jovially to the second Earl Spencer (*Letters* 494). What is remarkable is that not only have Indian allusions taken the place of Greco-Roman ones but Jones goes to great lengths to insert himself into Indian culture just as he had partaken of Greco-Roman culture. This contradicts *Orientalism* because the two intellectual systems, the

Western Classics and Hindu culture, are interchangeable rather than configured so that the Oriental system is subordinated.

Because of the assumption of a common origin for mankind, scholarship concerning India was seen as having the potential for European self-discovery. The first European translator of a Hindu law digest, Nathaniel Halhed, wrote that ancient Indian culture was so excellent that even if none of the laws translated as part of the digest he worked on, the *Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776), were actually adopted by the colonial government, "they will yet well deserve the consideration of the politician, the judge, the divine, and the philosopher, as they contain the genuine sentiments of a great and flourishing people" (qtd Marshall 1970: 181). According to Jones, the contributions of India to the world are the decimal system, chess and a body of texts on "grammar, logick, rhetoric, musick, all of which are extant and accessible" including the Vedas and Upanishads — though Jones probably knew them only through Dara Shikoh's seventeenth century Persian translation — which "abound with noble speculations in metaphysicks, and fine discourses on the beings and attributes of God" (ibid 259).

It was thought that Greek and Roman colonial practices in the Ancient Mediterranean could be used as a template for British colonialism in India, a

view which did not last into the nineteenth century. Halhed invokes this possibility when he writes in the preface to the *Code* that the Romans "not only allowed to their foreign subjects the free exercise of their own religion, and the administration of their own civil jurisdiction, but sometimes, by a policy still more flattering, even naturalized such part of the mythology of the conquered, as were in any respect compatible with their own system." As Halhed correctly points out, the Romans conquered other civilizations and allowed these subject peoples to follow their own traditions — this was understood in the eighteenth century essentially as it is today — but they also created defined mechanisms that allowed non-Romans to gain Roman citizenship (see Syme 1958). In particular citizenship was automatically granted to anyone who held a local magistracy and to his descendents. Most of all, the structure of Roman religion and of the polytheistic religions of the Mediterranean basin meant that gods could easily be added or subtracted or even merged. This really was a kind of divine commerce so that a temple to the deified Roman Emperor Augustus could be built in a small Spanish municipality, tying it politically to Rome, but at the same times numerous cults from around the empire (notably of Isis and Mithras) were making their way to Rome.

The eighteenth century equivalent to these practices was the widespread belief that Hinduism and Christianity shared certain fundamental truths. Two influential books made the case at length, although both have been treated as curiosities by later scholars rather than as attempts to apply a method to understand what was unknown about India.[36] John Zephaniah Holwell's three volume *Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan* appeared between 1767 and 1771. His purpose was to rehabilitate India in the eyes of the West and to undo what he saw as the damage done by Catholic missionaries. He writes, "the Popish authors hesitate not to stigmatize those most venerable sages the Bramins, as having instituted doctrines and worship, which if believed, would reduce them below the level of the brute creation."[37] Alexander Dow, whose *History of Hindostan* also appeared in three volumes (the first two in 1768 and the last in 1772), had a similar scope and purpose. He claims that "modern travelers have indulged their talent for fable…

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[36] E.g. Marshall 1970. There are many conclusions in Holwell that are quite funny from the perspective of modern history. For example, he writes: "At what period of time, *Indostan* was visited by *Zoroaster* and *Pythagoras*, is not clearly determined by the learned; we will suppose it, with the generality of writers, to have been about the time of *Romulus*" (1771: vol 1, 24). To us it seems that Holwell is substituting the date of someone who certainly did not exist for the unknown dates of two people who may or may not have existed.

[37] Qtd in Marshal 1970: 48; cf Trautmann 1998: 98. I cite several quotations from Dow and Holwell from Marshall 1970, which is a handy sourcebook containing selections of eighteenth century writing about India. Marshall has not excerpted the third volume of Holwell's book, which contains the account of metempsychosis, which I address below.

they have prejudiced Europe against the Bramins, and by a very unfair account, have thrown disgrace upon a system of religion and philosophy, which they did by no means investigate" (qtd Marshall 1970: 107-8). Dow and Holwell were doing something quite radical by applying to contemporary cultures the logic used to draw meaning from the Pagan Greco-Roman tradition into the Christian milieu of the Renaissance. It became possible to distinguish between true and false, divinely inspired and ridiculous. Thus, Dow writes that "the moral institutes… [of the Hindus] truly bore the stamp of the divine, but their system of theology, surely that of madness" (qtd in Marshall 1970: 64). Holwell argues that "men who have been conversant with foreign countries… will not despise or condemn the different ways by which they approach the Deity."[38] He in particular makes a compelling argument about the kernel of truth in all theologies, writing "God forbid we should, doubt or impeach the divine origin of any of them" (1771: 3). Thus, these authors believed that whatever its outward strangeness, Indian society was built on a substrate of rationality that it shared with Europe. Saint Augustine had made roughly the same argument more than a millennium before, claiming that the Old Testament, which he believed to be older

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[38] Qtd Marshall 1970: 49. This is in contrast to Edward Said's interpretation of the perception of Islam in the European Middle Ages: It was not considered a new intellectual field but rather a "fraudulent new version of some previous experience, in this case Christianity" (1979: 59).

than heathen culture and to be a repository of rhetorical tropes, proved that God had granted rhetoric to all mankind (Auerbach 1993: 46ff). Augustine's endorsement of Plato as a pre-Christian intellectual whose philosophy was amenable to Christianity was particularly important for the development of the intellectual tradition of the West (Kristeller 1961: 55).

Not surprisingly, little documentation survives that could give us a sense of how Christianity itself was questioned as a result of contact with Hinduism. P. J. Marshall has found one remarkable example among the papers of Warren Hastings of how India made Christians think about the claims of their own religion. Hastings writes, "Is the incarnation of Christ any more intelligible than … those of Bishen [Viṣṇu]?" (qtd Trautmann 2004: 72 fn). Jones himself had a relationship with religion not unlike that of the Renaissance humanists, namely apathetic participation. For example, annoyed at being asked to contribute to a fund to build a church in Calcutta, Jones writes "I believe I added that, as to myself, I should regularly pass my Sundays at my garden, and should only attend the publick service on Christmas day" (*Letters* 384). Famously Jones has also written,

> I am no Hindu; but I hold the doctrine of the Hindus concerning a future state to be incomparably more rational, more pious, and more likely to deter men from vice, than the horrid opinion inculcated by Christians on punishment *without end* (*Letters* 467).

He believes that a similar view was advocated by a Christian preacher named Price, and argues that if Price's work were translated into Persian and Sanskrit then the Muslims and Hindus, respectively, would find it familiar (ibid 464). This triangulation between heathen and Christian sources in order to derive correct interpretations of Christianity is precisely what scholars of the Renaissance engaged in.

The quest for the kernel of truth within a textually corrupted tradition was also at the heart of British application of the law in India in the eighteenth century. The legal translation project that became the *Gentoo Code* was an attempt to allow Indian tradition to speak for itself without compromising British involvement in the legal process.[39] When Jones and other colonial officials studied Indian law, they were attempting to codify materials forming a timeless standard — exactly equivalent to common law, which was thought to be a reflection of what was known as the ancient constitution — that would also fairly reflect the modern British ideal of the law: equivalent punishments for equivalent crimes as judged according to a written standard. Jones was clearly vexed by the fact that Brahmins attached to the court appeared to be making law

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[39] Jones was obsessed, as some half a dozen of his letters on the subject show, with finding suitable oaths for Hindus and for Muslims to swear when giving evidence in court. By finding oaths appropriate to each religion, it would be possible for Indians to give trustworthy evidence in court.

themselves (*Letters* 447). Although the Brahmins fit into a living tradition of jurisprudence, the British idealized them as having a reservoir of ancient material according to which they could decide cases — unless they were corrupt, in which case they would make things up. This is similar to Holwell's insistence that "the Gentoo doctrines, which through a succession of so many ages, have still remained unchanged, in their fundamental tenets" (qtd Marshall 1970: 65). For Islamic law under colonial rule, a similar approach was adopted. As Javed Majeed observes, "because of the concern for centralization the British had decided to choose the sharia as the point of reference for legality; that is, the point of reference was ideal, and not actual, practice" (1992: 27-8).

Halhed is careful to argue that the *Gentoo Code* is a completely indigenous production and therefore reflects the tradition fairly. He writes, "The English dialect in which it is here offered to the public, and that only, is not the performance of a Gentoo."[40] He argues that every person's religion is important to that person and so is not subject to the judgment of outsiders. Thus, "The faith of a Gentoo (misguided as it is, and groundless as it may be), is equally implicit with that of a Christian, and his allegiance to his own supposed revelations of the

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[40] Halhed 1776: xi. "Gentoo," according to the *Hobson-Jobson* approximates the modern term "Hindu" — it comes from Portuguese '*gentio*' meaning gentile, which was applied to non-Muslim inhabitants of India.

divine will altogether as firm" (xiv). Since religion is important to its practitioner (even if Halhed the Christian can personally call it "misguided"), customs should be respected. Indeed, Halhed notes in a letter to his friend George Costard "that a man may propose doubts as a philosopher, without being called to accounts for them as a Christian" (qtd Rocher 1983: 298). This accords with the argument of Dow and Holwell that Indian and Western systems are fundamentally compatible but outwardly different.

The assumption that there was a direct connection between East and West because of a shared origin meant that analogies were made with a precision that strikes us as laughable today. For example, Jones mapped different Hindu philosophical traditions exactly to ancient Greek philosophical schools. Thus Nyāyakas were Peripatetics (i.e. followers of Aristotle), Vaiśeṣikas were Ionians, Mimāṃśakas and Vedāntins were Platonic, followers of Sāṃkhya were Italic and followers of Patañjali were Stoics (Pachori 1994: 155). Particular people are also chosen as Indian equivalents of Greek figures; thus, Gautama is Aristotle. Nor was Jones the only one to make sure assertions. The Scottish historian William Robertson, for example, wrote in 1785 that the ancient Indians had been interested in the same philosophical speculations as the ancient Greeks (Dodson 2007: 65). (He also takes the opportunity to praise Indian astronomy and the

Mughal Emperor Akbar.) Although it is unlikely that we can derive factual information from such analogies, we can perform an operation of historical hermeneutics to better understand why these analogies were important. We can further understand why it was important for Jones to argue that Moses got Indian literature through Egypt or that according to Holwell, Pythagoras brought Indian culture to Greece (Marshall 1970: 200, 64).

Let us briefly consider the study of the ancient Greek Eleusinian Mysteries as it was applied to India, because the Mysteries were used to explain how a heathen people could have what was seen as sound philosophy in their culture while outwardly seeming partly irrational. Neither we nor eighteenth century scholars know much about the Mysteries, but despite the lack of concrete information they proved to be a powerful symbol, especially because both Hinduism and the Mysteries seemed to advocate metempsychosis as a central doctrine. In the preface to the *Code of Gentoo Laws*, Nathaniel Halhed explains the Mysteries as having been created "at a more advanced period of science" by people "ashamed literally to believe those tenets, which popular prejudice would not suffer them utterly to renounce" (xvi). This dichotomy also comes through in Charles Wilkins's preface to his translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* (1785), where he argues that Brahmins "comply with the prejudices of the vulgar" by performing

Vedic ceremonies but only pretending to believe in them (1785: 30). According to

A Companion to Greek Studies, an early twentieth-century textbook on all things

ancient Greek, "what is most striking is the moral effect on the mystae [i.e. the

participants in the Mysteries], attested by so many of the greatest and most

respected of the classical writers, who always speak with the utmost reverence of

the Mysteries though many of them are by no means slow to condemn what they

think unworthy in the popular religion."[41] Similarly, Holwell writes that,

> It is worthy of notice that metempsychosis, as well as the three grand principles taught in
> the Greater Eleusinian mysteries; namely the unity of Godhead, His general providence
> over all creation and a further state of rewards and punishments, were fundamental
> doctrines of Brahmah, Chartah Bade, Shastah and were preached by the Bramins from
> time immemorial to this day throughout Indostan: not as mysteries, but as religious
> tenets, publicly known and received: by every Gentoo, of the meanest capacity.[42]

Thus, having introduced the Eleusinian Mysteries as a template to understand

India, Holwell contradicts the analogy by saying that in fact the Hindus are not

like the ancient Greeks because all Hindus know what only a few ancient Greeks

knew. In other words, Hindus are more Greek than the Greeks.

We can end this section with an account of what Jones is best known for,

namely his pithy statement in the Third Anniversary Discourse at the Asiatic

Society of Bengal that

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[41] Whibley 1905: 345. Cf Cicero *De Legibus II, xiv, 36.*

[42] Qtd Marshall 1970: 63. Determining what Holwell means by some the "Hindu" terms he uses
— especially the mysterious "Chartah Bade" which is so critical to Holwell's argument (see
Trautmann 2004: 68) — would require me to write another thesis.

> The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source… (1799: vol 1, 26)

He had described what would become known as Indo-European hypothesis and in so doing had whet Europe's enthusiasm for historical linguistics. Despite what we imagine as the iconic moment on the second of February 1786, when Jones announced his findings to a record crowd — 35 people — at the Asiatic Society, similar ideas had been proposed a number of times since the sixteenth century (Raj 2007: 98). Notably, the English Jesuit Thomas Stevens was the first to note that Sanskrit was probably related to European languages, and the seventeenth century Dutch scholar Marcus Zeurius Boxhorn made an influential case for it long before Jones.[43] Jones's contemporary Nathaniel Halhed had also written on the subject before 1786; the appearance of the words "more copious" in both accounts led to the accusation by a third party that Jones had plagiarized Halhed's work.[44] None of this is evidence for malfeasance on Jones's part, but rather what it suggests, and what we should consider now, is that Jones's

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[43] Masica 1991: 2 and Olender 1994: 17. Additionally, see footnote 8 above concerning Père Coeurdoux.
[44] Rocher 1983: 78. In a 1779 letter to his friend George Costard, Halhed muses on the fact that Sanskrit and Greek share linguistic features, namely the middle voice and the dual number, which Latin lacks (ibid 308).

remarks are grounded in a particular Renaissance tradition: the search for the Original Language.

According to Genesis 11:1, "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" before God knocked down the Tower of Babel, and so there have been attempts to determine whether among the world's many present-day languages it was possible to find this language still used. Because Genesis 10 and 11 list the descendents of the three sons of Noah (Ham, Shem and Japheth) and the text explicitly states at that "by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood," it seemed possible to derive a taxonomy of languages and civilizations from this (10:32). Indeed, in the Ninth Anniversary Discourse, Jones argues that Ramaah, Noah's great-grandson, should be identified with Rāma, the avatar of Viṣṇu, and makes several other dubious etymological claims (cf Trautmann 1998: 106-7; Marshall 1970: 29). This is heart-breaking for anyone who wants to see Jones as the first of the Moderns.[45]

The most popular linguistic theory of the Renaissance was the Scythian hypothesis, which argued, long before modern historical linguistics had been

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[45] It is a bit odd that Jones depends on etymology since both he and Halhed detested a book by Jacob Bryant called *A New System, or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1775), whose fault was a dependence on what they saw as bad etymologies. Jones condemns the book by name in the Third Anniversary Discourse and Halhed mocks it in the letter to George Costard cited above. The difference between a good etymology and a bad one is unclear, but perhaps like good and bad emendations of texts, it depends on the perceived skill of the editor more than anything else.

developed, that similarities in languages could only be explained by positing that a certain people, the Scythians, had spoken a language from which other languages are descended (Olender 1994: 18). The Scythians were a pastoral people who ranged across modern day Iran and were known to the ancient Greeks, but Herodotus mentions them merely as distant barbarians known only by hearsay (ibid 17). However, in the Renaissance, the Scythian civilization became an abstract idea, which could incorporate both Greek and Biblical accounts of early humanity. Thus, for example, Holwell mentions the Scythians and claims that they were exceptionally ethical (1771: vol 1, 218-9). Jones endorses the Scythian theory but with modifications: He argues in the Sixth Anniversary Discourse that the ancient Iranian monarchy had formerly been referred to as "Scythian" but in actual fact should be considered a Hindu monarchy (Jones 1799: vol 1, 92). He argues that "the language of that first Persian empire was the mother of" what we now call the Indo-European languages. Thus Jones was working within a tradition that came to many of the same conclusions as modern linguistics but was inextricably linked to a mysticism derived from the Classics.

We can see this even more clearly in the work of Lord Monboddo, a Scottish philosopher who corresponded with Halhed and probably Jones as well. He was

interested in India because he thought it held the key to understanding ancient Egypt, which in turn held the key to understanding everything. He writes that by studying India he could "learn more of the antient Egyptian philosophy, which was brought to Greece by Pythagoras, and which I hold to be the only genuine philosophy, than is to be found in the Greek books" (qtd Rocher 1980: 13). As Rosane Rocher notes, the second volume of Monboddo's *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* mentions only Greek as a language suitable for philosophy but in volume four he has made room for Sanskrit as well (Rocher 1980: 13). Indeed, Sanskrit overtakes Greek as the perfect language: "the Shanscrit, the most perfect language that is, or, I believe, ever was, on this earth; for it is more perfect than the Greek" (ibid 14).

In *Orientalism*, Said makes a sweeping psychological observation about Orientalists, namely that they invented a grand past for the Orient in order to make "ameliorations in the present Orient" but this assumes a modern split between present and past.[46] Scholars of eighteenth century tended to believe that there had been a grand past *everywhere*. Furthermore, they had as their template the ancient Greek relationship with India: Zoroaster and Pythagoras came to

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[46] "Faced with the obvious decrepitude and political impotence of the modern Oriental, the European Orientalist found it his duty to rescue some portion of a lost, past classical Oriental grandeur in order to 'facilitate ameliorations' in the present Orient" (Said 1979: 79)

India "not to instruct, but, to be instructed" (Holwell 1771: vol 1, 24). India was seen not as something incompatible with European knowledge but rather holding the potential comprehensively explain the world by bringing to light what was occluded in the texts that Europeans then knew.

III.   Classics in the Nineteenth Century: Rome Reincarnated?

The death of Latin scholarship has been announced approximately once a generation since the eighteenth century. Jones observes in a letter (itself written in Latin) that there was no readership in England for Latin translations of Persian poetry, Max Müller complains in the mid-nineteenth century that the study of Latin and Greek had become an uninspired sifting of minutiae, nostalgic upper-class Britons living through the First World War viewed the decline of British public school culture as the harbinger of the end of Latin, and of course the generation of Erich Auerbach (1892 – 1957) and Ernst Robert Curtius (1886 – 1956) has recently been seen as the last gasp of humanist classicism, as Said notes in *Orientalism*.[47] However, the change that occurred during the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century is a more radical break in the tradition than the cyclical rise and fall of Latin's fortunes perceived by people who are passionate about Antiquity. It would be useful to give a full account of how classical scholarship was used in the colonial context as the emphasis on ancient

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[47] "Nam credible vix est quam pauci sint in Anglia viri nobiles qui Latine sciant" [I can scarcely believe that there should be so few good men in England who know Latin] (*Letters* 46). Dharwadker 1993: 175; Bolgar 1958: 1; Said 1979: xxv.
There is an almost theatrical quality to the way that Latin has been constantly eulogized and resurrected for centuries: Recently the *Times* (London) published an article describing how a hip-hop group will rap lyrics by Catullus (c.84 BCE – c.54 BCE) at the European Festival of Latin and Greek (Sage 2008).

authorities was replaced by a rhetoric of progress.

The late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century can be seen as "the real breakthrough to high modernity," namely a stronger rupture with the pre-modern past than at any time before (Wittrock 1998: 33). Although this can be observed in the purely European context, the change was more abrupt and total in the British Indian context because India could itself be denigrated and thus made to serve as a straw man in a larger argument about knowledge production. The vast changes in the East India Company's collective attitude towards India were both political and intellectual. The influence of East India Company officials like Warren Hastings and the Marquess Wellesley, both Indophiles whose outlooks on Indian culture were close to what I have described in the previous section, was replaced by the likes of Charles Grant, a deeply committed Evangelical Christian who became head of the Company's Court of Directors in 1805.[48] A few years later, James Mill wrote his *History of British India* (1817), which was significant, according to George Bearce, because "before Mill made his contribution, Liberal [i.e. Utilitarian] attitudes towards India were

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[48] The London-based Court of Directors would be called the "corporate board" of the East India Company in modern terms and Grant was its CEO. Grant's 1794 pamphlet *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain* was the most important eighteenth century plea for missionary work in India and the importance of Western-style education long before Macaulay and others would make the same case (Bearce 1961: 61; Dictionary of National Biography). By far the best account of Grant's influence is Trautmann 2004: 101ff.

basically inarticulate" (1961: 66). The *History* was the standard history text for the East India Company's school at Haileybury, and Mill was himself rewarded with influential positions in the Company (Majeed 1992: 128; Stokes 1980: 22). Thomas Babington Macaulay, famous for his *Minute on Education* (1835), which advocated English medium education for India, was a tireless advocate for implementing Mill's intellectual program. Besides writing the *Minute*, he was led the committee responsible for framing the Indian Penal Code, which was conceived of as a purely rational document not based on existing legal systems. It was to serve as a model for doing away with, once and for all, the Utilitarians' great bugaboo, common law. In each of these endeavors, which were supported by Utilitarian-leaning magazines like the *Edinburgh Review*, there was a claim to newness and a stated antipathy towards older systems of knowledge. The critical difference was that Utilitarians treaded carefully when it came to Western systems like British common law but held back none of their vitriol when it came to India.

It is instructive to compare two recent perspectives on modernity, each of which comes from different vantage points but substantiates the other's claims. The first is a general definition from Peter van der Veer and the second is a description by Michel Foucault of the shift in knowledge systems:

> Modernity celebrates freedom from localized, hierarchical bonds, progress in terms of scientific knowledge and economic welfare, and rejects the past in so far it does not fit the story of progress (Van der Veer 1998: 285).

> Within a few years (around 1800), the tradition of general grammar was replaced by an essentially historical philology; natural classifications were ordered according to the analyses of comparative anatomy; and a political economy was founded whose main themes were labor and production (Foucault 1994: xii).

Each of the intellectual disciplines that have become dominant by 1800, according to Foucault, is essentially the equivalent of an older discipline which has been converted by intellectual alchemy into a new discipline conforming to the characteristics set out by Van der Veer. The emergence of an "economic-rationalistic conception of agency," which had appeared by this time through the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment, seemingly demanded a re-evaluation of knowledge as it stood (Wittrock 1998: 35). Mill, for example, believes his own enterprise in writing history to be radically new. He writes in a footnote that "the concept of critical history is not very old" and traces it back to Isaac de Beausobre (1659 – 1738) in French and to Edward Gibbon (1737 – 1794) in English (1826: vol 1, v). He credits "the meritorious researches of the **modern** Europeans" (emphasis mine) with bringing to light, for the first time, a correct understanding of the Indian past (ibid vol 1, 147).

At this time there was a hardening of attitudes in religion as well. We are accustomed to thinking about an irreconcilable opposition between rationality

and religion, but while there were many individual points of contention between the religious establishment and secular scholars, no sweeping divide between the two was framed in the period in question (cf Shapin 1996: 135). Indeed, strong religious convictions and rationalism went hand in hand, as Macaulay's relationship with his Evangelical father's work and the careers of Edmund Burke and William Wilberforce demonstrate.[49] Furthermore, if we take Hegel to be representative of his time then historical thinking too became more rationalistic since the ancient authorities were replaced as a fount of historical truth by the abstract rationality of the *Geist* (Van der Veer 1998: 287). On this basis, Hegel classified Hinduism as a "natural religion" which was therefore incompatible with "religions of freedom" such as ancient Greek religion, Judaism and, of course, Christianity (Inden 1990: 93-4).

Modern knowledge claims to be based on positivistic proof but certain aspects of it were to be left unexamined. As we have seen, the Christian religion was never seriously questioned by any of the important figures in nineteenth

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[49] "It is also interesting to note how intimate the links are between the promotion of the utilitarian gospel of Thomas Babington Macaulay and the evangelical gospel of his father Zachary Macaulay" (Van der Veer 1998: 290; cf Majeed 1992: 141). The great triumph of William Wilberforce's political career, besides banning the Atlantic slave trade, was allowing missionaries into British India in 1813.

century colonial politics.[50] More importantly, Indian practices were considered irrational *a priori* and therefore required no testing as propositions. As studies in the history of science have suggested, it is important to consider what being wrong actually means. A statement can be false because it is unexamined or because it is proven false (cf Kaviraj 2005: 133-4). Without being tested and proved true or false, a proposition cannot really be part of modern scientific knowledge. Thus Indian knowledge, rather than potentially holding the key to self-understanding as it had during the eighteenth century, was literally considered nonsense.

In large part, Indian knowledge was irrelevant to the Utilitarian philosophical project because the critique of India was merely a stand-in for what was wrong with Britain, especially the invocation of common law in political theory.[51] As Javed Majeed has convincingly argued, Mill's

> *History of British India* was still unable to view India in terms other than as part of a strategy for attacking British society itself; India was important only in so far as it played a part in a larger political and epistemological venture whose purpose was to fashion a critique of the ruling British ideology of the time (1992: 198).

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[50] Not that this stopped Indians from voicing their opinions on Christianity: In the 1830s, for example, a Brahmin named Narayana Rao publicly debated the Scottish missionary John Wilson in Bombay. The Brahmin argued against the Bible in precisely the same terms that the missionaries used to condemn Hindu scripture, namely that the text was fantastical and logically inconsistent (Young 1981: 28).

[51] Cf Majeed 1992: 148. This is not to say that anyone thought that specific knowledge was unimportant for ruling India, it is rather a question of whether it had any use or value beyond that function (see Bayly 1996; Cohn 1996). For Mill and others, it did not.

Mill reveals his plan of attack most clearly in statements such as the following, in which he justifies writing about Indian philosophy:

> Because the legendary tales of the Hindus have hitherto, among European inquirers, been regarded with particular respect; … without a knowledge of them, much of what has been written in Europe concerning the people of India cannot be understood (1826: vol 1, 135).

This statement invokes a meta-conversation about how Western scholars study India: The Indian Classics have no relevance for history except that Western scholars have previously used them — to what Mill sees as bad effect. Mill condemns what he sees as Jones's "fond credulity" for India and continues by writing that Jones's erroneous thinking

> reminds the instructed reader of the disposition which has been manifested by some of the admirers of the Greek and Roman literature, and of these by one at least who had not a weak and credulous mind, to trace the discoveries of modern philosophy to the pages of the classics (1826: vol 2, 106-7)

Nowhere is there a clearer expression in Mill of his contempt for humanism and his belief that modern thought was in every way superior to ancient thought. The *Edinburgh Review*, which was highly supportive of Mill and Utilitarianism in general, attacked the idea of a classical education throughout the early nineteenth century (Stray 1998: 85). Kapil Raj makes an interesting observation, which is unfortunately outside the scope of this essay, that the East India Company tended to recruit Scots as its "specialized employees" (2007: 110ff). By the early nineteenth century, the Scottish education system promoted "practical

knowledge" while the English system still emphasized the classical curriculum. It seems likely that in the nineteenth century the Company deliberately recruited those who had had a modern rather than a classical education.

The framing of a new penal code for British India was proposed by James Mill, who recommended that Macaulay be in charge of the project (Bearce 1961: 159). As fierce an opponent of common law as Mill, Macaulay argues that the Code was intentionally not derived from any existing legal system, either Indian or European, except for the Civil Code of Louisiana, which was itself a project based on no particular precedent and having the same goal of rationality as the Indian Penal Code (1867: 321). Macaulay heaps scorn on existing British law, as well as decrying the state of India (ibid 343). Although a penal code seems outside the scope of this essay, it is important to keep in mind how the concept of universal law as represented by common law allowed for Jones and his contemporaries to have a "coherent worldview" (Travers 2007: 8). For eighteenth century scholars, the fact that different traditions held similar views was evidence of divine providence and a common origin, whereas for Mill whatever appears enlightened in non-Western cultures, such as Neoplatonists writing in Arabic, only existed because an inferior ancient civilization had cribbed from the Greeks at some point in history (1826: vol 2, 67).

It strikes someone living in the post-colonial era as ironic that while Jones

and his contemporaries, who were so obsessed with texts because of their

classicist backgrounds, noted the importance of physically being in India and

observing what was around them, for Mill precisely the opposite was the case.

He believed that distance, both geographical and intellectual, was the best way to

study another culture.[52] Nor was Mill alone in this contention. Sidney Owen, the

first Reader of Indian History at Oxford who took up his post in 1864, wrote a

book called *India on the Eve of British Colonialism*, in which declares that he used

no original sources (Symonds 1986: 112-3). Similarly, the Sanskritists Roth and

Boethlingk criticize H. H. Wilson, who was perhaps Jones's strongest supporter

in the mid nineteenth century, for depending too much on the Indian tradition in

his work (Rocher 1993: 240). Said also observes that "it is reported of some of the

early-nineteenth-century German Orientalists that their first view of an eight-

armed Indian statue cured them completely of their Orientalist taste" (1979: 52).

Unlike the researchers of the eighteenth century, who, like the Renaissance

humanists before them, sought to be as broad as possible in their investigations,

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[52] Mill writes that "As soon as a everything of importance is expressed in writing, a man who is duly qualified may obtain more knowledge of India in one year in his closet in England, than he could obtain during the course of longest life, by the use of his eyes and ears in India" (qtd Majeed 1992: 139).

nineteenth century Orientalists tended to value only source materials which Europeans had already worked through. This is just as Said describes it.

Despite Mill's aversion to the Classics, I am by no means arguing that the Classics ceased to be important in the nineteenth century, or indeed that they are no longer important now. It is rather a question of what we mean by "important." From the Greco-Roman imagery in Keats to the Corinthian columns of government buildings, some idea of the Classical clearly held sway in the nineteenth century but as Gadamer argues "the concept of the classical… had been reduced by historical thinking to a mere stylistic concept" (Gadamer 2006: 286). Thus, the Classics could be a powerful symbol of empire and of an abstract morality but they could no longer be used as a basis for new knowledge. When Macaulay chaired a committee to reform the East Indian Company's examinations, he declared that Latin and Greek, rather than representing necessary knowledge for young officers, instead served to demonstrate aptitude: "If, instead of learning Greek, we learned the Cherokee, the man who understood the Cherokee best… would generally be a superior man to him that was destitute of these accomplishments."[53]

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[53] Qtd Stray 1998: 53. The fact that Greek and Latin were so heavily weighted on the examinations made it exceptionally hard for Indian candidates to succeed. When standards were relaxed (and Sanskrit and Arabic weighted more heavily) an Indian candidate succeeded and afterwards the

Macaulay's reading of the Latin and Greek Classics while he was in India (and presumably trying to escape from there intellectually) is also instructive. The texts had become restricted to a particular canon — the tradition had ceased to be alive in the same way it had been in the eighteenth century — and thus Macaulay read ancient Greek and Roman works but would have nothing to do with neo-Latin writing, not deigning to touch even the most influential writers of the Renaissance, except a bit of Petrarch. This was typical for "gentlemen" of the mid-nineteenth century (Williams 1993: 207; cf Fynes 1998: 62). Furthermore, within this narrowed canon, what could be gleaned from the texts was also reduced: When it came Macaulay's reading of ancient philosophy, particularly the dialogues of Plato, "we find a remarkable combination of enthusiastic delight at the literary form with indifference to, or even contempt for, the philosophical content" (ibid). Although Macaulay appreciated the ancient authors for their imagination, he argues that "in the moral sciences they made scarcely any advance" (qtd ibid 211).

Thus, there existed a contradiction, in which Europe could be considered no longer answerable to the Classics because it had attained modernity, while India could be scorned for not living up to the historical standards of Antiquity. For

standards were raised again (Roy 1958: 102-3). Although Macaulay stated that he was personally in favor of admitting Indians to the ICS, the timing of the changes is suspicious.

example, the preface to H. M. Eliot's *History of India, as Told by its own Historians* (1866) cites Cicero and Dionysius (a historian of the first century BCE) as authorities on what writing must be in order to be worthy of the name "history" (1867: xix; cf Mill 1826: 60ff). He triumphantly declares that India has no texts that come even close and basically says that he has taken the time to compile Indian source texts in the present volume so that no one else need bother. Mill's discussion of the state of Indian literature has a similar thrust. He argues that the importance of poetry in Hindu society is a major fault because only primitive peoples like poetry, and Indians fall below even that standard because Indian poetry is more primitive than that not only of Homer but of Celtic bards (1826: vol 2, 54). Mill takes for his evidence what other Europeans have written and confidently makes this sweeping judgment, which is quite unlike how the Classics were used in the eighteenth century. Rather than attempting to find common ground between India and the West, as had formerly been possible, reference to the Classics became a means of demonstrating exactly how much better than India the West was. If India had not even attained the state of civilization that the Greeks and the Romans supposedly possessed then how infinitely worse it must be than the modern West.

As a complement to this use of the Classics to demote the intellectual accomplishments of the East, there developed an allegory of Britain as the new Roman Empire. It was not used seriously as a means for comparison, since for example, Bentham and Mill were dismissive of the idea that ancient Roman colonial practices could be used to explain the present (Majeed 1992: 123). Ultimately the danger of such a comparison, it seems to me, lies in the phrase "civis Romanus sum" [I am a Roman citizen], which is explained by Cicero to mean that the state's hegemonic power over its citizens is inherently limited (*In Verrem* II, V, 162). Paul of Tarsus famously declares his Roman citizenship in Acts 22:27 and the Roman bureaucrats who had arrested him are horrified that they had been mistreating him, a citizen, and therefore were liable for punishment themselves. Even though he was a Jew (and therefore considered morally inferior by the Romans), his Roman citizenship conferred rights; Indians could have argued the same by analogy and threatened the colonial system. Comparisons between Rome and the modern British Empire could in no way be seen to give Indians moral ammunition against their conquerors. This is not the place to give an account of the pageantry of Britain as Rome but it is fair to observe that it gave rise to self-congratulation rather than self-reflection.[54] Studies of Britain as Rome

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[54] Though one exceptional study of Caesar written in 1879 makes the point that in order to

continue into the twentieth century, and their purpose was showing that Britain was better than Rome (in scale and administration) but still linking the two empires morally via a shared military character (e.g. Bryce 1901).

survive the British Empire needed to become more democratic (cited Vance 1997: 228).

Conclusion

> "The fact that we no longer read … works in Greek or Latin, or that we read far fewer classical Greek or Latin works than students of premodern school systems, represents a real loss; but this loss must be reckoned as the price of the *integration* of these works into a modern curriculum" (Guillory 1993: 51).

The failure of Jones and his like-minded contemporaries was partly the result of shifting politics, but at the same time European knowledge systems were rapidly changing during his life.[55] Jones found himself on the losing side of modernity, and despite the fact that the representatives of modern thought depended on his work for their data, his contributions were marginalized. Colonialism projected Western dominance over the non-West and this apparently required certainty that the West was in fact the best, a certainty which the humanism of the eighteenth century, based as it was in a longer comparative tradition, was unable to provide.

We need to seriously consider Jones's legacy as we try to figure out what it means to be cosmopolitan and to live in a world with different cultural polarities battling for legitimacy. One recent account admits that

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[55] "Jones, in addition to being grouped with the losing orientalists, failed to produce a single, comprehensive account of India. So his essays, well-written and rhetorically persuasive as many of them were, hardly constituted a hegemonic text" (Inden 1990: 45).

We are not exactly certain what [cosmopolitanism] is, and figuring out why this is so and what cosmopolitanism may be raises difficult conceptual issues. As a practice, too, cosmopolitanism is yet to come, something awaiting realization" (Pollock et al. 2000: 577).

If cosmopolitanism is a potential rather than a defined object then surely we must be prepared to mine the past for instances when something that might be called cosmopolitan was taking place. Although it is possible to see eighteenth century colonial research as purely instrumental in cementing British power, the enthusiasm of Jones and his contemporaries indicates that it was an encounter which they believed had the potential to help them understand the world, much as some scientists today wax eloquent on the significance of scientific research (pace Viswanathan 1989: 46). We cannot of course share the assumptions of eighteenth century scholar but we can nonetheless learn from their ambition and consider what it means for us to be without either the anchor of the Classics or of unfettered belief in modernity.

The analysis I have presented here has one significant methodological fault, which is apparent from the tone I have used in different sections: Because of my personal experience and outlook, I look upon the work of men like Jones with more favor than upon that of the Mills and Macaulays of our story. It can of course be argued, as I have in this essay, that our post-modern sense of what cultural studies should be makes us conceptually more like Jones than the

Utilitarians, but here I need to take personal responsibility and not blame the discourse. I have, for example, not given much space to cataloguing and explaining the oppression that Latin (and to a lesser degree ancient Greek) hegemony has wrought throughout history.[56] I hope that I have made a convincing case that the intellectual distinction between classical and non-classical was not an East-West split in the eighteenth century and therefore the hegemony of the Classics was not relevant for a discussion of colonial research in that period. I take to heart Said's warning that "too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent" (1979: 27). However, we cannot be blind to the impact of a hugely important discourse, Renaissance humanism, which has transcended the political projects of many centuries.

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[56] For that, there is Waquet 2001: especially 42, 107, 243. A pertinent colonial example is that a sixteenth century lecture at the University of Salamanca argued that because the native inhabitants of the Americas had supposedly violated the universal laws of hospitality, as set down in ancient authors, the Spaniards had every right to brutally conquer them (Pagden 2001: 7).

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