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## “DEEP ERUDITION INGENIOUSLY APPLIED”

### REVOLUTIONS OF THE LATER EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

It is no wonder that James Harris interested himself in idiosyncrasies of various languages. By his day there were a lot of new tongues to pay attention to, especially if you were British; for in the later eighteenth century the British Empire reached a high-water mark. British soldiers and administrators roamed North America and the Indian subcontinent, and the Royal Navy roved the watery world. In January 1771, HM Bark *Endeavour* was sailing homeward from its voyage of discovery in the South Pacific (where it had run across Australia). On board the young natural historian Joseph Banks puzzled over resemblances among Tahitian, Javanese and Malay vocabularies. And he wondered about their odd overlap with words he had just picked up in Batavia from a Madagascar-born slave.<sup>1</sup>

Such musings pointed toward one of several seismic shifts within philology to be discussed in this chapter—new ways of understanding languages, new methods of studying them, new approaches to history, new conceptions of the Bible and of classical antiquity, new modes of treating the literature and language of England itself. The age-old Christian framework of learning became, as one result, too narrow to contain all new erudition; non-Christian cultures and post-Christian methods became the topic not of a book here and there but of systematic exploration by generations of scholars. Sources of change were many and varied. But three stand out. One was fallout from Britain's development: its political integration, its colonizing, its imperial ventures. Another was cross-fertilization between sundry innovations within philology, none of which arose in isolation from all others. The third was a renaissance in Germany—a renaissance at first not closely watched by English-speaking philologists but which demands coverage here because its longer-term impact was transformative.

## ORIENTALIST ERUDITION AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

In 1767 Benjamin Kennicott took time off from Hebrew research to promote a professorship of Persian language in Oxford. His first sentence pointed out that knowledge of Persian had become “an object of national concern” owing to “the interests which this country has lately acquired in the political, as well as the commercial affairs” of India. (Persian supplied the language of diplomacy and commerce there.) Without facility in Persian, how could “the servants of the [East India] company” properly do their jobs as “magistrates and legislators” over their subject peoples?<sup>2</sup>

Less hard-boiled motives stirred Kennicott, too. “Every nation has,” he added, “besides the mere difference of Language, an Idiom, and even a mode of Sentiment peculiar to itself.” Study of language opened the road to understanding national character and to uncovering “the traces” of a people’s “primitive manners and original forms of government.” The human mind being everywhere essentially the same and yet differently cultivated in various regions of the globe, “every branch of knowledge” would benefit “from an acquaintance with the manners, customs, and practice of the most remote nations.” From “the Asiaticks,” though degenerated today, “we derive the first seeds of all the knowledge which we have carried to so much higher a degree of perfection.” This lineage alone would “justify our search after the remains of that Wisdom” that “once reigned amongst them.” Further, the comparative method familiar to Kennicott from biblical philology, if applied to ancient records of sundry nations, could clear up “many doubtful facts” that “length of time, and the want of collateral evidence, have contributed to render obscure.” In his boldest claim for comparison, Kennicott argued that exploring parallel customs, analogous religious practices, and “even the similitude of words” among “distinct and remote people” might lead scholars back “to the first source from which the whole race of mankind derive their origin.”<sup>3</sup>

The changes Kennicott rang on the promise of linguistic study were unoriginal: his tract repeated themes becoming common in his generation. If the unique historical development of each *people*, *nation*, or *race*—terms then interchangeable—shaped its language, then language became key to unlocking mysteries of cultural evolution and national character.

Yet when Kennicott issued his plea, the only nonbiblical Asian languages really accessible in Europe were three used in commerce, diplomacy, and Christian missions: Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. This would soon change.<sup>4</sup>

In 1755 a French student of Middle Eastern languages sailed to India. He bore the fragrant name of Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron and wandered from Pondicherry in the southeast to Surat in the northwest. In Surat he studied with Parsi (Zoroastrian) priests. By the time he returned to Europe in 1761, he had picked up a working knowledge of Sanskrit, modern Persian, and its ancient ancestors Avestan and Middle Persian—plus scores of manuscripts

in all these tongues. In 1771 Anquetil-Duperron published three volumes of selections from Zoroastrian writings, under the title *Zend-Avesta, ouvrage de Zoroastre* (*Zend-Avesta, Book of Zoroaster*). This translation introduced Europe to sacred Parsi texts. Anquetil-Duperron became the first European to decipher an ancient language of Asia no longer in use, to decode its alien alphabet—cracking open a window that would vastly widen Europe’s view of the past. His sometimes shaky rendering also gave Europe its first look at an early Asian text neither biblical nor classical in its associations. Yet it had little immediate resonance.<sup>5</sup>

Twelve years later, on September 25, 1783, the British frigate *Crocodile* anchored at Calcutta, delivering one of those imperial “magistrates” whose training Kennicott fretted over. He would not have worried about this one. Sir William Jones commanded eleven foreign languages, ancient and modern.\* He knew something of about fifteen others. He had won acclaim for a Persian grammar (1771) and for translations from Persian, Arabic, and Turkish. Lowth’s lectures on Hebrew poetry inspired him to write a similar Latin commentary on Asian poetry; this book (1774) treated Chinese as well as Persian, Turkish, and Arabic verse. “Persian” Jones and “Oriental” Jones became his universal nicknames. But fame did not bring cash, especially fame in a field with almost no paying jobs. So even before his Persian grammar hit the book-stalls, Oriental Jones turned to a career in law.<sup>6</sup>

In that role Jones arrived in Calcutta in 1783, as a judge of the Bengal Supreme Court. Nor did he come to India with an eye on mainly philology but, like the other Britons there, with an eye on the main chance. He wanted to make as much money as possible, as quickly as possible, then retire to a life of repose back home. Only two motives set Jones apart: he wanted to make his fortune honestly and to use his later leisure for learning. Before leaving England, Jones mentioned to Edward Gibbon his hope that the judgeship would leave time to keep pegging away at orientalist studies, and on shipboard he drew up a longish list of potential inquiries.<sup>7</sup>

He sailed toward well-prepared ground. Bengal’s governor-general, Warren Hastings, promoted scholarship as both tool of empire and contribution to knowledge—two projects not easily separated. (Hastings had proposed the Persian professorship urged by Kennicott.) Among the several young East India Company servants who responded to Hastings’s encouragement, Charles Wilkins already knew Persian and Bengali and became the first Briton really to command Sanskrit, the language of the ancient sacred and learned texts of India. In 1785 the company published in London Wilkins’s translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*. It circulated throughout Europe.<sup>8</sup>

\* Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and Hebrew. Jones was also a radical Whig, heavily involved in politics, as well as a pioneering legal scholar, aspects of his varied life necessarily passed over here.

Jones brought new focus and fame to scholarship on India. Not long after stepping ashore in Calcutta, Jones lobbied company employees who shared his philological bent to join in an association to foster Asian studies. Ill health—the nemesis of Europeans in India—forced Wilkins to Benares (and within a couple years back home). So he was absent on January 15, 1784, when the Asiatick Society of Bengal met in Calcutta to begin its inquiries “into the History, Civil and Natural, the Antiquities, Arts, Sciences, and Literature, of Asia.” Twenty-nine European males attended. Jones timidly broached admitting “learned natives,” unthinkable to most Britishers on the imperial periphery, however erudite. The Asiatick Society was the first organization in the world devoted to Asian studies. It continues today, under “learned native” leadership.<sup>9</sup>

The first obstacle to overcome was ignorance of Indian languages, which hobbled President Jones and most of the members. At first, Jones was reduced to presenting such secondhand materials as a speculative comparison of “the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India” and his rendering of an Italian translation of lines from an Indian legend. The August court recess of 1785 gave Jones—inspired by Wilkins—a chance to begin Sanskrit, near the ancient Hindu university in Nadia, under an Indian tutor, Rāmalocana. Jones continued lessons back in Calcutta when the new court term opened in the fall, rising at 4:00 a.m. to study.<sup>10</sup>

He was falling under the spell of ancient Indian culture, but its charms did not primarily prompt him to learn Sanskrit. Rather, mistrusting the competence of the Indian scholars (pandits) who advised British courts on Hindu law, he wished to make Indian laws available in English. (He later changed his mind about the pandits.) Once he had Sanskrit reasonably in hand, Jones began a digest of Hindu law governing contract and inheritance, completed after his death by Henry Colebrooke; Jones also supervised a parallel collection of Islamic law, for India’s largest religious minority. But the ancient Brahman rules governing personal behavior, attributed to the sage Manu and recorded in the oldest major Hindu law code, the *Manava-Dharmasastra*, specially fascinated him. Jones finished translating this book, as *Institutes of Hindu Law: or, the Ordinances of Menu* (his spelling of Manu), only weeks before his death in 1794. This volume launched the word *Aryan* on its fraught European career. More to the immediate point, it gave European readers their first nuanced insight into some Hindu practices.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, if law mandated Sanskrit for Jones, literature and science also profited. Even before he had a solid grip on Sanskrit, Jones was writing poems retelling Hindu tales and extolling Hindu gods. After he did get a hold of the language, he learned from the pandit Rādhākānta Sarman about the great poet Kālidāsa (around 400 CE?) and about his greatest play, *Śakuntalā*. In the summer recess of 1787, with Rāmalocana’s aid, Jones began to translate it into Latin. (He believed Latin’s similarity to Sanskrit made it fitter for a literal version than Eng-

lish.) The Latin translation he then turned into English, publishing it anonymously in Calcutta in 1789 as *Sacotalá, or the Fatal Ring*.<sup>\*</sup> The next year it appeared in London. The ‘Indian Shakespeare’ swept Europe. “Do you want heaven and earth comprehended in a single name?” asked Goethe in 1791, “I name you, Sakontala, and thus all is said.” Schubert turned the play into an opera. Lamartine burred that Kālidāsa combined the genius of Homer, Theocritus, and Tasso.<sup>12</sup>

Jones and his colleagues in the Asiatick Society recovered other artifacts of ancient Indian civilization for Europeans, including smaller-scale Sanskrit works—in effect, reprocessing Indian culture, in more or less inventive ways, as Europeans had long done with Greece and Rome. Jones himself, under the tutelage of Rādhākānta and other pandits (including his Sanskrit teacher Rāmālocana), began the mammoth effort of working out from Sanskrit documents a chronology of Indian history—in effect, trying to add another column to those old comparative, Scaligerian chronologies that started with Adam. (He utterly failed.) This project, in turn, led Jones to bully his friend Samuel Davis into investigating ancient Indian astronomical calculations. Jones himself dabbled in astronomy and became the first European scholar to study Indian music. All this information, along with reports on Asian culture and natural history, appeared in the Asiatick Society’s irregularly published journal, *Asiatick Researches*. Although printed in Calcutta, hundreds of copies sailed to Europe. Reprints soon appeared in London. The Massachusetts Historical Society elected Jones a member; Harvard College begged him to send Indian manuscripts for its library. Abandoned by her lover in 1806, the Romantic poet Karoline von Günderode left a suicide note in Sanskrit. By 1812, the breathlessness over Sanskrit had spread so widely that E.T.A. Hoffmann could use it in satire.<sup>13</sup>

This sudden rage for ancient Indian culture had long-term consequences. *Asiatick Researches*, Wilkins’s *Bhagavad Gita*, Jones’s *Ordinances of Menu* and *Sacotalá*, and a few other publications from his Calcutta circle created, over the span of little more than a decade, a new field of philologically oriented European scholarship—now called Indology. The Calcutta scholars’ achievement paralleled in form that of the Anglo-Saxonists around the beginning of the century—and had much stronger impact. Missionary reports had provided blurry glimpses of nonbiblical civilizations, notably in China; Anquetil-Duperron had opened a small window onto Zoroastrianism. But Indology offered the first wide-ranging, systematic studies by Europeans of an ancient literate culture outside the orbit of the three familiar ‘religions of the book.’ It set the stage for—not yet produced—a post-Christian frame of erudition. (For just this reason anti-Christian deists valued it, but Jones himself still thought

<sup>\*</sup> *Fatal Ring* because the plot turns on a ring that allows King Dushyanta to recognize the heroine Sakuntalā. Kālidāsa’s play is based on an episode in the *Mahābhārata*.

within biblical categories.) For the moment, the new field remained stunted by the fact that only in India could Europeans learn Sanskrit. This barrier fell at the beginning of the next century. In 1804, 1805, and 1808, three different Sanskrit grammars appeared in English. The last was by Jones's early guide in Sanskrit, Charles Wilkins, for students in a college started by the East India Company to prepare Britons for its service. Ironically, Wilkins's and Jones's fellow countrymen did little to advance the field these two had largely invented. A younger East India Company employee, the hyperactive Sanskrit scholar Henry T. Colebrooke, on retiring to Britain rallied other ex-Company hands to found, in 1823, the Royal Asiatic Society. But it and Colebrooke were soon eclipsed by continental Europeans, French and German, who came to dominate Indology. Until after 1800, though, Calcutta remained the center of European Indic studies.<sup>14</sup>

There Jones put flabby flesh on Kennicott's speculation that parallels among religions might lead scholars back to a common source of the human race. The first volume of *Asiatick Researches* included a revision of Jones's paper to the Asiatick Society on likenesses between Greek, Roman, and Hindu gods. These similarities extended, he now suggested, to gods of Egypt, China, Persia, Syria, and other lands, including old northern Europe and "some of the southern kingdoms, and even islands, of *America*." Such affinities, he argued, pointed to a common origin of all these religions in a single primitive people. He detailed parallel attributes of gods and made much of superficial verbal congruencies.

I leave etymologists, who decide every thing, to decide whether the word MENU ['author' of the laws of Manu], or, in the nominative case, MENUS, has any connection with MINOS, the lawgiver, and supposed son of JOVE. The *Cretans*, according to DIODORUS of *Sicily*, used to feign, that most of the great men, who had been deified in return for the benefits which they had conferred on mankind, were born in their island; and hence a doubt may be raised, whether MINOS was really a *Cretan*. The *Indian* legislator was the first, not the seventh, MENU, or SATYAVRATA, whom I suppose to be the SATURN of *Italy*: part of SATURN's character, indeed, was that of a great lawgiver; . . .

This fantastic essay got much attention in Europe. It may also have set Jones to thinking along lines that led to a more consequential comparison.<sup>15</sup>

Comparative speculation was not new to Jones. He knew Adam Ferguson and had read and reread that conjectural historian's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), which claimed to unify the experiences of all peoples in a common pattern of social evolution. Jones's boss Warren Hastings had argued that collating "the cultures and languages of different nations will uncover analogies and similarities," which "in turn will lead us to the origin of humanity" ("Culture" was coming into use about this time to mean the whole of a people's arts, sciences, religion, mores, and so forth. The coinage suggested a new way of thinking needing a new word or, in this case, redefining

an old one. Usage like Hastings's would evolve into the modern anthropological sense of 'culture'; but at this point stress fell on articulated ideas, and English speakers were more likely to say 'civilization.' German speakers imported *Kultur* around 1780 to meet the same need.) Jones himself, wearing his lawyer hat, had written a book comparing Roman, Greek, Hindu, Mosaic, Islamic, and Visigothic laws. He had puzzled, with a Polish correspondent, over why Persian and European languages had a lot of similar words. He gave a paper to the Asiatick Society proposing a link between Hebrew and Devanāgarī (modern Sanskrit) alphabets. When he sat down to master Sanskrit, he almost automatically compared this latest tongue to languages he already knew.<sup>16</sup>

After studying Sanskrit for six months, he made a striking observation; and what he observed changed fundamentally the study of language. On February 2, 1786, the Asiatick Society met to hear its president deliver his third "anniversary discourse." Jones devoted this lecture to a survey of Indian culture—inevitably a superficial one. In bouncing from philosophy to physiognomy, chess to chronology, Jones paused to comment on the ancient sacred language. Here is the paragraph in full:

The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*,\* and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists: there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*; and the old *Persian* might be added to the same family, if this were the place for discussing any question concerning the antiquities of *Persia*.

This passage is arresting—and not only for ranking a language of a darker-skinned, colonized people above the revered classical languages of European palefaces. It offered a new view of the relationships among languages, implying a new program for studying them.<sup>17</sup>

Jones's contribution to philology needs specification. He himself took less interest in purely linguistic affinities than in genealogical relations among peoples that he believed these links showed. He wanted to place India on the biblical family tree, where all peoples descended from Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japhet. Jones neither began nor, unfortunately, ended projects of tracing race through language. (Equating movement of languages with

\* *Copious* and *perfect* were conventional terms for rating languages, the former referring to vocabulary, the latter to grammatical structure.

migrations of human beings haunted philology for generations, climaxing tragically in the Nazis' 'Aryan race.') Nor was Jones first to notice similarities between Sanskrit and European languages; missionaries and merchants had observed them as early as the 1580s; one or two scholars even teetered on the edge of something like a family, including some of the languages Jones mentioned. Charles Wilkins's friend and mentor, Nathaniel Halhed, dabbled in Sanskrit and published a comparison with Greek; Jones's acquaintance and correspondent Lord Monboddo noted the same connection.<sup>18</sup>

Jones's distinction was to articulate clearly the hypothesis of a common lost ancestral language, to specify a broad range of supposed daughter languages, and to attract widespread attention to the idea. In 1779 he had speculated that an "almost primæval" language ancestral to Persian, Greek, Latin, and the Celtic tongues might explain apparent cognates in all these languages. Now, when he saw how Sanskrit resembled ancient languages of Europe and Persia, he postulated an unknown language ancestral to all. Jones was right. Every tongue he named evolved from a single language that "no longer exists," later named Proto-Indo-European. Of the daughters, Jones omitted most notably the Slavic languages, largely outside his ken and grouped by him with Central Asian tongues. He was also wrong, later, to add Egyptian and Ethiopian to the ancestry, probably influenced by his biblical theory of descent from Noah. Yet this extended family, whose genealogy was to be deduced by comparing languages, supplied what Thomas Trautmann called "the necessary elements for imagining the Indo-European language family and Indo-European speaking peoples." As we have seen, in the sixteenth century scholars already recognized connected groups of languages—and believed, without details, that all European tongues descended from Japhet. But the idea that languages formed families *as a result of branching descent from a common ancestor* gave a new basis for systematic research into languages. Thanks to Jones, the comparative, historical, and genealogical method central to textual philology had found a remarkable new use.<sup>19</sup>

This bombshell lay buried in one paragraph in a rambling lecture first printed on the far side of the world from Europe. (Jones did develop considerably the notion of language families in his "Eighth Anniversary Discourse" in 1791.) Had someone else uttered these words, they might have eluded notice outside Calcutta. But the speaker was Oriental Jones, known all over Europe: "the incomparable Jones," Goethe called him. Especially amid the craze ignited by his *Sacotalá*, nothing Jones said about Sanskrit would go unheard. But, as with the Indology he pioneered, the ears that perked up mostly grew on heads in Germany and France.<sup>20</sup>

Out of the marriage of European philology and Indian texts, then, came two new fields of knowledge: Indology and comparative philology (or comparative grammar). The first offered no new methods; earlier scholarship had forged the techniques there applied. Its novelty lay in opening to European

eyes a civilization previously obscure. Indology became the first field in which a self-perpetuating cohort of European scholars—not the odd missionary, merchant, or chronologer—worked systematically to uncover the riches of a non-European civilization across a wide front.\* In a narrow, academic projection, Indology foreshadowed area-studies programs in post-1945 universities. In a broad, cultural view, Indology immensely expanded European perspectives on the history and civilizations of the world.

Comparative philology or comparative grammar, in contrast, hardly transformed how Europeans saw the world; but its procedural originality deeply changed the study of language. Jones in effect invented a new *kind* of philology. The concept of language families formed by genealogical descent gave students of language a novel way to classify languages and track their development. This fresh approach retained philology's central dogma of historical comparison. But it radically changed what to compare and the kind of conclusions to be drawn from the comparison. Grammarians no longer analyzed only the histories of individual languages or closely related ones, seen in isolation; they now also began to contrast grammatical and lexical change over time in quite diverse languages believed to be related over vast spans of time and space. By doing so, philologists aspired to retrace the history of the languages and even to reconstruct tongues long vanished from the earth. Within a quarter century of Jones's discourse, Friedrich von Schlegel was using the term *comparative grammar* and sniffing around the regular consonant shifts between Latin and German. Less than a decade after Schlegel's book, Franz Bopp began rigorous comparison of Indo-European languages, starting with verb conjugations. Seventy-five years after Jones introduced the idea of a language family comprehending tongues from India to Ireland, August Schleicher partly reconstructed the mother of them all, Proto-Indo-European. Loose speculation about Adam's language became rigorous science.<sup>21</sup>

#### MAKING EUROPEAN SENSE OF AMERICAN LANGUAGES

'Rigorous science' only slowly came to describe research into other languages that European imperialism stumbled upon, but studies burgeoned. Missionaries needed to preach the Gospel to (they hoped) Christians-in-waiting; sailors needed to ask directions (if only to the nearest breadfruit); natural historians needed to sate their curiosity. Lists multiplied of newly heard words with their equivalents in a missionary's own language, as did less frequent stabs at grammar. When such stuff reached a critical mass—or when intellectual agenda shaped it—compilation could turn into something more coherent.

\*I count as European here the Mediterranean littoral, for centuries part of the Roman Empire; the world of the Bible and early Christianity can hardly be left out of 'Europe.'

Research into languages of North American Indians offer an example of this process. The first English-speaking Americans to carry out learned, European-style philological research were the students of these tongues. (Spanish-speaking scholars in the Americas beat them by a couple of centuries.)

The first Europeans to hear native North Americans strove to understand them for practical ends: trade, diplomacy, war, missions. The last produced by far the most recorded linguistic data. Jacques Cartier's first voyage of Canadian exploration (1534) yielded a short Algonquian-French word list. When French missionaries moved into Canada in the 1610s, they quickly wrote down basic dictionaries of several Indian languages. By 1632 a rather large dictionary of Huron and a catechism in that language had made their way into print in the mother country. By the 1640s many word lists, dictionaries, grammars, and similar aids circulated in manuscript among far-flung missionaries. Decade after decade, they struggled to transliterate into Roman characters Ojibwe and Huron sounds never uttered by French tongues, concocting some ingenious solutions.<sup>22</sup>

However smart their grappling with native languages was, French missionaries' efforts remained mostly descriptive, particular, utilitarian. They did argue about Indian eloquence—or its absence—based on European rhetorical ideas. But to classify, to compare, to theorize about the languages themselves lay beyond their horizon and their purposes. The same was true of their seventeenth-century, mostly English-speaking counterparts to the south. These were, if anything, more flatfooted in approach, fewer in number, less accurate. A Swedish Lutheran missionary to the Lenapes in present-day Delaware in the 1640s mistook a traders' pidgin for the Indians' language. He composed a catechism in it.<sup>23</sup>

Sometimes those struggling to learn these unfamiliar tongues *did* puzzle over larger questions. The Jesuit Sébastien Rasles (1657?–1724) was not the only missionary to notice that Indian languages seemed “entirely different from the spirit and form of European languages.” And, when taking ship for America, Europeans did not entirely leave behind debates about the language of Adam. A few bookish types asked from which earlier tongue the Indians' supposedly corrupted languages descended. Hebrew was the commonest answer. That Swedish Lutheran believed the Lenapes' pidgin debased Hebrew.<sup>24</sup>

The study of origins changed in the later eighteenth century. The Scottish Enlightenment brewed new theories of social and cultural development, and British North America had close ties to Scotland. As mentioned earlier, Thomas Blackwell's *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* had proposed in 1735 that human societies evolve through the same basic social orders—so-called stadial theory. Blackwell's fellow Scots Adam Ferguson, William Robertson, Adam Smith, and John Millar defined more clearly the steps of progressively complex social organization that all societies theoretically must pass

through.\* In Smith's version, hunter-gatherers evolved into nomadic herders, then herders into farmers, on their way to the highest phase, commerce—as seen in, well, Glasgow and Edinburgh. One might, these theorists averred, trace conjecturally the gradual advance of the human mind through such stages. Development of languages provided a key to such analysis. Indeed, throughout late-Enlightenment Europe, the origin of language became a hot topic, cast in just such broad terms. The decisive publications of Ferguson, Robertson, Smith, and Millar roughly coincided in time with the fight of the British mainland colonies south of Quebec for independence. Their books appeared, that is, when these Americans started to think of themselves as a distinct people. Significantly, Robertson worked out his version of stadial theory in a conjectural history of Native Americans.<sup>25</sup>

For white Americans in this time of ferment, the status of American Indians entwined with sensitive issues of nationality, manliness, and self-esteem. Thomas Jefferson sought to refute the Comte de Buffon's libel that animals, including human ones, degenerated in the New World: that the Indians, in particular, were cowardly, stupid, and undersexed. Like others, Jefferson believed that studies of Indian language could probe the origins and potentially the character of these original Americans.<sup>26</sup>

A key instrument for such comparison was the word list. A list giving equivalents in one language for words in another is a blindingly obvious device for anyone trying to learn a new language, like those French missionaries in Canada. The tool seems to have been formalized by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz shortly after 1700. Leibniz decided to collect and compare lists of basic words for common things, in all dialects of German, ancient and modern. He planned thus to track the migrations of Germanic peoples and evolution of their language. Then he got the idea of using the same instrument to trace the diffusion of European languages from the descendants of Japhet. With greater success William Jones used word lists to compare Sanskrit with other tongues. For Thomas Jefferson, word lists supplied a system for studying the interrelationships and evolution of Amerindian languages. His vocabulary collecting dovetailed with a late-Enlightenment flurry of surveys of languages. Best known is a comprehensive comparison of vocabularies that Peter Simon Pallas, a German naturalist, undertook in 1787 for Catherine the Great. Jefferson anticipated Pallas's idea in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781). It is no accident that projects like these engaged Russians and Americans. Both countries were expanding into vast hinterlands populated by speakers of many tongues and cultures. (Another German scholar exploring Siberia in Catherine's service coined the word *ethnography*.) Etymology, traditionally the study of the true

\* Scots did not invent the idea of different peoples passing through similar cultural stages—it is present, for example, in writings about American Indians by the sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta—but they developed it in unprecedented clarity, detail, and universality.

meanings of words, became in these undertakings the study of words changing over time.<sup>27</sup>

Like William Jones, Jefferson inquired into the origin of Indians' languages to learn where their speakers came from. Comparing word lists from different tribes would show linguistic relationships; these, in turn, were supposed eventually to reveal genealogy and migration. "A knowledge of their several languages would be," he wrote, "the most certain evidence of their derivation which could be produced." In June 1791 Jefferson squatted with another future president, James Madison, in a tiny Unquachog village on Long Island to make a word list. Only three "old women" remained, Jefferson reported, "who can speak its language." (The language, Quiripi, is long extinct.) The next year, as secretary of state, he ordered a form printed with some 280 English words next to blank spaces for Indian equivalents, to send to missionaries, soldiers, traders, Indian agents, explorers. (Convinced that no species can go extinct, Jefferson included the word *mammoth*. That space always turned up empty.) Jefferson kept changing his mind about the Indians' origin: maybe Asia; maybe autochthonous; maybe some even came from Wales like his own ancestors. The "infinite" number of "radically different" Indian tongues convinced him, at any rate, that the natives' presence on the continent was "of the most remote antiquity." "The time necessary for the generation of so many languages must be immense." His strategy of tracing linguistic affinities by comparing words in standardized lists long outlived Jefferson. The vocabularies he solicited landed at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, raw material for later investigators. Such American work never went on in isolation. In 1786 George Washington, at Lafayette's request, got federal agents to supply word lists for the vocabulary Pallas was compiling for Empress Catherine.<sup>28</sup>

In 1797 the Philadelphia physician Benjamin Smith Barton compared word lists from a number of Indian tribes. He concluded that both North and South American languages "may, with confidence, be referred to one great stock, which I call the language of the Lenni-Lennape, or Delawares." (They of the pidgin that flummoxed the Swedish missionary.) Comparison with Asian languages then revealed that "the nations of America and those of Asia have a common origin"—a conclusion, Barton said, affirmed by the tribes' oral traditions and geographic distribution. A population transfer probably occurred when a land bridge connected North America to Asia. (William Robertson had said much the same twenty years earlier.) This last assertion might have come from a twentieth-century anthropologist; at other times, Barton sounds like Scottish conjectural historians. In fact, he stood betwixt and between: trying to find empirical ground—sparse ground, as knowledgeable contemporaries saw it—on which to build speculation about language typical of Enlightenment discourse. In this respect, a work like Barton's marked a shift in Americanist philology: toward a comparative study of languages *both* empirically grounded *and* theoretically reflective, like the revolution set in motion by

William Jones. More proficient scholars than Barton were needed to carry the effort forward.<sup>29</sup>

#### CLASSICAL RUINS AND ‘ARCHAEOLOGY’

Like the study of languages, the search for physical vestiges of classical antiquity started to change after 1750. The mutation is harder to specify than in the case of comparative philology. The vigorous curiosity of traditional antiquarians remained unabated. But among more of them the appetite for artifacts grew more specialized, the study of finds more exact. No word then existed to unambiguously label detailed, precise study of ancient sites. Until after 1800, ‘archaeology’ meant any research into the past or even the past itself. But the word’s meaning did narrow in the nineteenth century, for a reason. And the study that later monopolized ‘archaeology’—to replace the too-capacious ‘antiquarianism’—began to define itself in the late eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Scholarly innovation came from an unexpected quarter, from “some Gentlemen who had travelled in Italy,” as one of their number described them. These lovers of moldering ruins—and of well-liquored, ribald romps—wished to promote “*at home*, a Taste for those objects which had contributed so much to their entertainment *abroad*.” They meant the ruins. To this end in 1732 the gentlemen founded the Society of Dilettanti.\* Weakening of the Ottoman Empire and increased British presence in the Mediterranean—not least of the Royal Navy—now made accessible ruins beyond the traditional Italy of the grand tour. Richly furnished with peers as well as rakes (overlapping sets), the Dilettanti did not suffer fiscal cramping; and the society in the latter half of the century published magnificently illustrated archaeological folios. These made available for the first time accurate knowledge of the classical ruins of Athens and southwestern Asia Minor. Thus, to date classical archaeology in the English-speaking world from 1732 does not stretch credibility intolerably. But the question is complex.<sup>31</sup>

Robert Wood, author of *Original Genius and Writings of Homer*, took the first well-defined step toward new precision in studying classical ruins. Wood’s longing to see ancient sites ranged far beyond Homer’s supposed turf. He also had a knack for cultivating rich friends. Thus equipped, he journeyed in the eastern Mediterranean in the early 1740s, then again a decade later. Travelers before him had published sketches of ancient monuments or carted off pieces of them to adorn collections. But Wood’s careful observations of Roman-era buildings, his exact measurements, and his fine draftsmanship resulted in two impressive folios, *Ruins of Palmyra* (1753) and *Ruins of Balbec*

\* *Dilettante* did not have the connotation of superficiality and frivolity it now carries. Italians used it to mean simply an amateur of the arts. As yet unknown in English, the word underlined the Italian cachet of the Dilettanti. Kelly 2009, 11–12.

(1757). (Palmyra was an oasis city in Syria, on the caravan route to Mesopotamia. Baalbek—ancient Heliopolis—in present-day Lebanon was a religious center.) The Dilettanti elected Wood a member in 1763. His books impressed readers throughout Europe and quickly appeared in French. Wood’s meticulously measured, integrated surveys of entire ancient sites in Palmyra and Baalbek set a model.<sup>32</sup>

Two fellow aficionados of decayed Mediterranean cities, James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, clarify both the advent of something *like* ‘classical archaeology’ and why it was not. In 1751 Stuart (newly elected Dilettante) and Revett traveled from temporary residence in Italy to Athens, then a nasty, perilous town for Englishmen. They went in the spirit of the Dilettanti—more particularly the spirit of Wood, whose design to study Palmyra and Baalbek helped to propel them. They planned to survey the major monuments of ancient Athens. Two and a half years of careful labor led, slowly, to four volumes of *Antiquities of Athens* (1762–1816, finished by other hands). Their strict measurements—reminiscent of William Stukeley (surveyor of Stonehenge) as well as of Wood—look now like a contribution to ‘classical archaeology.’ Their more slapdash French rival Julien-David Le Roy did think of his work as historical recovery when he studied Athenian ‘ruins’ (as the title of his competing book called them). Stuart and Revett called the same piles “antiquities,” providing timelessly “the most perfect Models of what is excellent in Sculpture and Architecture.” The Englishmen meant their book to inform architectural taste, not historical understanding. ‘Athenian Stuart’ became a well-known architect, until his career foundered on the Dilettanti’s signature vice, booze. And the hugely influential *Antiquities of Athens* inspired not a wave of excavations but the Greek Revival in building.<sup>33</sup>

Before leaving Italy for Athens, Stuart and Revett had visited a site that mattered far more in the eventual renovation of antiquarianism into archaeology. Local residents on the Gulf of Naples had always realized that ancient ruins lay underground. Statues kept turning up in their wells. In the eighteenth century these artifacts attracted attention from the Spanish Bourbons who ruled the Kingdom of Naples. Under their aegis in 1738 an engineer in the Spanish artillery began to excavate Herculaneum, buried by the volcano Vesuvius in 79 CE. Work eventually extended to other victims of that eruption, Pompeii and Stabiae: like Herculaneum, complete Roman towns preserved by lava and ash. Royal efforts to shoo foreigners away from this private Bourbon treasure could not keep out every curious visitor—nor squelch illustrated publications based on clandestine sketches. Finally, beginning in 1757, nine authorized volumes of *Le Antichità di Ercolano Esposte* (*The Antiquities of Herculaneum Displayed*) depicted dramatic discoveries in engravings that amazed Europe. (Gossip about some *undepicted* finds amazed and troubled. Everyday objects shaped as phalluses—amulets, oil lamps, and wind chimes—routinely turned up. What did these say about renowned Roman virtue?) At first the burrowers into the ancient cities mined them higgledy-piggledy for art objects to embellish the

Naples palace of the Bourbons. The more exacting antiquarians of Britain and France complained that the Neapolitans ripped artifacts out of context, then destroyed the context in their haste to find more loot. In 1750 Karl Jakob Weber, a Swiss military engineer in Bourbon service, was appointed to supervise the excavation. He tried to introduce regularity. This proved an uphill struggle since chain gangs of captured Barbary pirates did the digging. But Weber kept careful journals and drew up exact building plans, including detailed lists of objects found and marks showing where found. After he died in 1764, his successor followed his methods—but not his wish to publish the discoveries. More even than Robert Wood, Weber could have passed for an archaeologist, if the discipline had been there for him to inhabit.<sup>34</sup>

### THE RHETORICAL REVIVAL

Just as innovatory, oddly, was a reworking of old classical rhetoric, in which Scots took the lead. Closely allied with philology during antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, classical rhetoric had fallen into neglect thereafter, especially in Protestant lands and above all in Britain, in favor of Petrus Ramus's dialectic. French rhetoricians of the later seventeenth century turned back to ancient masters of rhetoric, applying classical canons to their own vernacular prose, poetry, and preaching.<sup>35</sup> This neoclassical rhetoric soon seeped into England; but it thrived especially, a little later, in Scotland, a country that flowered intellectually in the eighteenth century.

Both flowering and rhetoric stemmed in great part from one political event: in 1707 the Parliaments of England and Scotland voted to merge the two kingdoms into a new Kingdom of Great Britain. The Acts of Union, opening English financial centers and English overseas ventures to Scots, sparked economic growth in the Scottish Lowlands. Sleepy Glasgow leap-frogged into a booming port by capturing the Virginia tobacco trade; the East India Company kept its headquarters in London, but Scots lopsidedly staffed its ranks and ruled noncompany trade with India. A southward trickle of ambitious Scots had already begun in 1603 when James VI of Scotland ascended the English throne as James I; the dribble swelled into a flood after 1707. The Lowland Scots language, though closely related to English, baffled hearers south of the border.\* And the Acts of Union made English official in Scotland. All these changes spawned demand among aspiring Scots to learn 'correct' (i.e., London) English, while new prosperity bolstered the universities where the demand might sate itself.<sup>36</sup>

\* Lowland Scots descends from the version of Old English spoken in what became northern England, with Scandinavian influence from the Danish conquest of that area. During the later Middle Ages, the language gradually pushed Gaelic (the original Scottish language) out of the Lowlands, leaving Gaelic the tongue only of the highlands and islands.

So it came to pass that Scottish university teachers revised the classical rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian—to the end of polishing English rather than Latin, in a project of cultural assimilation. Already in 1720 the University of St. Andrews pondered a ‘chair of eloquence.’ Medicine seemed more urgent to the faculty at the time, but three decades later St. Andrews added rhetoric to the duties of the professor of logic and metaphysics. By then, rhetoric had become as near to a fad as Scottish academia could work up. John Stevenson, professor of logic and metaphysics at Edinburgh from 1730–77, added rhetoric to his remit. Adam Smith gave public lectures on the subject in Edinburgh between 1748 and 1751; when in the latter year he moved to Glasgow, he continued to teach it. In 1760 Hugh Blair (having copped Smith’s lecture notes) took up at Edinburgh a professorship specifically in rhetoric; two years later, his chair became a regius professorship (endowed by the Crown) of rhetoric and *belles lettres* (‘literature,’ we would now say, meaning writing with a consciously artistic aim). Other Scots—Lord Kames in his *Elements of Criticism* (1762); George Campbell in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776)—brought classical rhetoric up to date philosophically by welding it to the new psychology of their fellow Scot, David Hume; but this shift, crucial for theory of rhetoric, had little relevance to the issues at stake here. When in 1783 Blair finally printed his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, the publisher paid him the gargantuan sum of £1500 (something like two or three million dollars in today’s earnings)—and rightly: the book was a winner.<sup>37</sup>

Rhetoric had returned in a big way—not only in Scotland but also among other English speakers on the margins of the metropole. Although Oxford and Cambridge felt no need to teach rhetoric, Scottish patterns shaped American higher education from the later eighteenth century into the middle of the nineteenth. Scottish-style rhetorical teaching and Scottish textbooks became standard in the United States, as they did in English academies for the children of Protestant Dissenters from the established Anglican Church. Tellingly, Trinity College Dublin—from its founding in 1592 an Oxbridge for Irish Protestants—deviated from its English models in the eighteenth century in paying serious attention to rhetoric, including the new Scottish variety. Most Trinity boys may have come from reasonably comfortable Anglican families, but like their counterparts in Edinburgh and Glasgow they stood outside the metropolitan elite peering in.<sup>38</sup>

The Scottish rhetorical tradition commonly yoked rhetoric to *belles lettres*, as in Blair’s title, and to criticism, as in Kames’s. What did these links signify? To answer, it helps to imagine oneself in the position of a young native speaker of Lowland Scots, with its distinctive vocabulary, idioms, and accent. (A verse by Robert Burns: “And there’s a hand, my trusty fiere! / And gie’s a hand o’ thine! / And we’ll tak a right guid-willie waught, / For auld lang syne.”\*) The

\* *Fiere*: ‘friend or partner.’ *Guid-willie waught*: ‘friendly (good-will-y) drink.’ *Auld lang syne*: ‘old times’ sake’ (‘old long since’).

Scottish boy was striving to fit himself for success in a world where making it required fluency in the English spoken by elite Londoners. First, the youngster needed to learn the rhetorical *principles* governing sophisticated use of the language of the metropolis. But knowing theory did not suffice. The next step needed was immersion in examples of refined use of the language, with a knowledgeable guide to show how to put principles into practice. Scottish rhetoricians were adapting the method by which grammar schools had taught Latin since at least the early sixteenth century: practicing grammatical rules by translating classical authors. The pioneer Stevenson read ancient rhetoricians to his students and illustrated their principles with examples from Addison, Pope, Dryden, and other modern authors.<sup>39</sup>

Consider Blair's more elaborated version of this approach. He began by discussing big, general categories: taste, sublimity, beauty; then launched into the (speculative) historical evolution of language and its structure; finally reached the structure of English, paying considerable attention to sentence construction. Then Blair explained at length figures of speech and their effect. This segued into a discussion of style and how to form a proper one. (By now the student was listening to the nineteenth lecture.) Blair then devoted four lectures to analyzing critically Joseph Addison's style—meaning, really, his syntax—in four successive issues of *The Spectator* (the *ne plus ultra* of 'taste' at the time). He did the same to a selection from Jonathan Swift in a fifth lecture. The remaining twenty-three lectures examined rhetorical genres: several types of public speaking; historical writing; philosophic prose; types of poetry; drama; and so forth—again with critical discussion of specific texts. Kames's *Elements of Criticism* leaned more toward theory but nonetheless larded the text with examples drawn from well-known writers.<sup>40</sup>

'Criticism'—a term derived from the name for a textual philologist (*criticus* in Latin)—here took on intensely utilitarian meaning. If the young teenagers listening to Blair's Edinburgh lectures learned to dissect Addison's style, they could grasp it well enough to craft for themselves a pastiche of it. Looking at *belles lettres* with the eye of a 'critic' bought a ticket to social advancement. It is no wonder that Blair's book became a widely used manual in cultural provinces of England on both sides of the Atlantic (including Protestant Dissenting academies in England). No wonder, too, that it made no headway at Oxford and Cambridge, whose mostly elite students already knew how to speak and write 'proper' English—that of their own class.<sup>41</sup>

Did Scottish rhetorical teaching inaugurate the academic subject called English literature? No—unless the *Antiquities of Athens* started classical archaeology. True, rhetoricians like Blair taught students to look 'critically' at 'literature.' But they did so with the ancient rhetorical aim of polishing the boys' style, making them more effective writers and speakers. Not until well into the next century would students begin to pore over English and American poetry, plays, and novels 'for their own sake.' As late as 1869 the radical Scottish intellectual Alexander Bain, then professor of logic at Aberdeen, gave

as the only legitimate reason for teaching English literature “to extract from it everything that is of value for improving the diction of the pupils.” Scottish rhetoricians and their American imitators did regard literature as a helpful, if decidedly ancillary, thing to study. In that limited sense, they ‘introduced literature’ to the curriculum.<sup>42</sup>

Outside educational institutions, however, scholarship on imaginative literature flourished. More or less scholarly editions of ‘English classics’ like Milton and Chaucer multiplied in the second half of the century. William Warburton, besides his writing as combatant in the deist wars, published in 1747 an eight-volume Shakespeare. Hugh Blair also edited Shakespeare (1753) and oversaw a collection of British poetry in forty-four volumes (1772). Few people today recall Warburton’s or Blair’s Shakespeare. But Samuel Johnson’s (1765) is renowned; it took a more complex, balanced approach to resolving problems of textual philology than any earlier edition of the Bard. Johnson’s *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on Their Works* (1779–81)—though conceived merely as prefaces to a London edition of fifty-two poets meant to undercut a competing Scottish project—adopted a sweeping and acute approach to literary history and criticism also not seen before. Editing proliferated after 1750. Some was done sloppily for a quick pound. The best of it elevated editing to a new scholarly level. Edward Capell’s 1768 Shakespeare modeled unprecedented meticulousness. Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets* represented a newly prominent genre of books about poetry or drama. Several authors wrote histories of the English theater. Bishop Thomas Percy’s *Essay on the Origin of the English Stage* (1765) even tried to trace the evolution of modern drama from more primitive forms of public performance. (Percy remains best known for collecting folk ballads.) The poet Thomas Warton produced a three-volume *History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century* (1774–81). Densely written, more compilation than narrative, given to meanders, readers found it hard going. But it won admiration in its day and foreshadowed a literary history that smelled of the scholar’s midnight oil.<sup>43</sup>

Putting Hugh Blair’s rhetoric alongside Edward Capell’s Shakespeare and Thomas Warton’s literary history, one sees a newly prominent object of philological scrutiny: English literature. Its study did not comprise a coherent ‘field,’ as biblical or Anglo-Saxon scholarship did. Teachers of rhetoric used literature to drum into students principles of tasteful composition. Editors of Shakespeare used tried-and-true methods of textual philology to produce reliable, readable plays. Historians of the stage or of poetry recovered for readers a literary tradition. These scholars were not in the same business, even if they used similar raw materials. By the late eighteenth century, many more or less learned writers in the English-speaking world seriously studied vernacular literary texts. It cannot plausibly be said that they studied the same ‘field,’ still less that a new branch of philology had emerged.

## A REVOLUTION IN HISTORY

In contrast, Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), by adapting philology to new uses, precociously defined what would become—after a century of confusion—the modern discipline of history.<sup>44</sup> By 'historian' we mean nowadays someone who writes nonfiction about the past, based on factual evidence. The term in Gibbon's time had much wider range. Then, *history* could refer to a novel or to sheer speculation about bygone ages. Lacking any other label, for now the word will carry here its narrower present definition, because precisely such nonfictional writing about the past is in question.

Understanding Gibbon's innovation requires first recalling an eighteenth-century conflict over how to write about the past: 'philosophic history' versus what might be called 'philological antiquarianism' (for lack of a better label). Philological antiquarianism dwelled in the persons of Scaliger and Casaubon, Camden and Mabillon, Bentley and Hickes. Such scholars wrote painstaking, systematic treatises reconstructing particular topics rather than sweeping, connected narratives; they might freeze-frame a moment in the past rather than explain change over time; they collected and emended old charters, chronicles, and the like, in the spirit of the Maurists. Philological antiquarianism was early modern erudition surviving into the age of Enlightenment. Philosophic history was a suave, sophisticated granddaughter of the universal histories of the early modern period. It traced large patterns of human progress (often caring little about the accuracy of specific details) and spelled out their causes. It approached its subject from a cosmopolitan, tolerant stance. It wished to tell its tales with literary elegance. In all this, it aimed to offer compelling lessons to the present. In this view, proper history amounted to 'philosophy teaching by example.' Philosophic history was a facet of Enlightenment. Typical, if especially celebrated, exemplars included Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (*Essay on the Customs and Spirit of Nations*, 1756), which started with ancient Chinese and Chaldeans and brought the reader up to the glories of the age of Louis XIV, and Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), which more ambitiously traced the evolution of "the species itself from rudeness to civilization," as its author put it. Much of the genre fell under what Dugald Stewart later named conjectural history (social or cultural evolution plausibly imagined rather than materially evidenced). It aspired less to erudition about the past than to making the past speak to present concerns—for different styles of history aimed at different goals. Some philosophic history, such as Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs*, hid genuine erudition—lest learning dull its polished pages, weigh down its fast-flitting wit.<sup>45</sup>

Not every philosophic historian bypassed erudition or concealed it. In his own day, David Hume enjoyed a much bigger reputation as historian than

philosopher. His six-volume *History of England* (1754–62) made him rich. While not deeply researched by antiquarian norms, the work rested on substantial reading in sometimes arcane sources; and Hume cited these in reference notes as well as in episodic discussions of special subjects interlarded in the narrative. The three volumes of William Robertson's 1769 *History of the Reign of Charles V* (the sixteenth-century emperor) sat on an even solidier documentary basis. Robertson partly exposed its learned foundations in abundant, terse footnotes citing sources, interspersed with less frequent, longer notes considering matters supplementary to the main narrative. He included a lengthy appendix giving "Proofs and Illustrations" keyed to specific pages of a yet longer preliminary essay on "the Progress of Society in Europe" from the fall of Rome to the start of his story proper. This appendix, like Hume's digressions, resembled the clunky dissertations characteristic of antiquarian learning and of ecclesiastical history. Neither writer seamlessly integrated erudition and narrative.\* Yet on these two Scotsmen dawned the idea that an entertaining and edifying narrative needed documentary support to earn plausibility.<sup>46</sup>

In general, however, philosophic historians scorned the 'pedantic' labors of deeply learned philological scholars like Mabillon and Bentley—or at best thought their toils irrelevant to writing history. Engineers of erudition like these two focused not on instructive narrative but on recovering or restoring relics of a lost past. They made bricks with which to rebuild that past rather than erecting the whole reenvisioned structure itself. That archetype of Enlightenment, Jean D'Alembert, in his *Discours préliminaire à l'Encyclopédie* (*Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia*, 1751), sneered—as Gibbon later recalled—that the "sole merit" of these "*Erudits*" lay in "the exercise of memory"—an inferior power now "superseded by the nobler faculties of the imagination and the judgement."<sup>47</sup>

At this Gibbon balked. He admired the broad views, the literary skill of philosophic historians. Like them, he aspired to write wide-ranging history ripe with meaning for the present. He endorsed the widening of historical vision to take in private life as well as politics. For models of narrative, he turned to the remotest source of philosophic history, classical historians, notably Tacitus. But Gibbon stood apart from the general run of philosophic historians in his esteem for hard-core philological scholarship, as well as for the thorough documentation long typical of ecclesiastical history. "Even as a child," Joseph Levine reported, "he had been fascinated by textual and chronological problems, and as a young man he dared to quarrel with the experts about dating and emending texts." His first publication, *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature* (1762), defended antiquarian erudition against Enlightened scoffers such as

\* Robertson did stand out in writing the history of a modern country not his own—a detachment from national identity that would become commoner among historians in the next century. Both Hume and Robertson displayed, too, the sentimentalism of eighteenth-century literary culture. But this sensibility was a matter of genre rather than method, and method concerns us here.

Diderot. Gibbon took Bentley as a hero, not a butt of ridicule. What French philosophes scorned as fact grubbing, Gibbon admired as deep scholarship. He studied the Maurist scholars Mabillon and Montfaucon and the innovative numismatics of their German contemporary Ezechiel Spanheim. Gibbon believed that only the manifold techniques of philological antiquarianism, applied with hard labor of learning, could rediscover the lifeways and thoughtways of the faraway past: the philosophically minded narrator should explain the transition from one state of society to the next, but he could do so only if he understood in depth the conditions on either side of the changeover. A Voltaire who disdained philology was apt to write fiction when he meant to write history. And for Gibbon truth was *sine qua non*. History depended utterly on correctly attested facts. One might think of him as inheriting and putting to new use Mabillon's and Le Clerc's insistence on strict scrutiny of evidence.<sup>48</sup>

And so the *Decline and Fall* brought to stylish adulthood this new kind of history, excelling even Robertson. Gibbon paraded in the philosophic historian's shirt—worn over the antiquarian's undershirt. *Decline and Fall* emulated the chronologically sequential, stylistically refined narrative of the philosophic historians, alert to historical change and its causes. But Gibbon built that narrative on sequentially and causally incurious, but painstaking and culturally inclusive philological antiquarianism. He himself was no philologist. (A mostly admiring Göttingen reviewer called his source criticism superficial.) Rather than delve into manuscripts, he used materials collected by others, notably the great Italian antiquarian-historian-philologist Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672–1750). To understand events, he depended on deeper scholars more than on the printed ancient sources that he read assiduously. But Gibbon combined the moral vision and narrative force of philosophical history with philology's insistence on critically certified documentary evidence, à la Mabillon—even though the certification came to Gibbon second-hand, from reliable scholars. He also melded the formerly distinct traditions of secular political history and document-heavy ecclesiastical history. His reference notes did not merely offer clipped citations of books but *discussed* sources—and digressed, often amusingly, into much else. John Burrow described Gibbon's footnotes as “a commentary [note the philological genre] in which he gives rein to a relaxed, garrulous intimacy which acts in counterpoint with the tautly controlled formality of the text.” In the first volume in 1776 Gibbon tucked away the notes at the back of the book. An admiring David Hume advised him to move them to the bottom of each page, so readers could follow the basis of the argument as it moved along; and Gibbon did. In him, as Arnaldo Momigliano put it, “Philosophic history ceased to be approximate and arbitrary and was subjected to the traditional rules of historical criticism” evolved by philological antiquarians. A lot of philosophic historians judged philological criticism a fossil. Thanks largely to Gibbon, it entered the genome of later history writing.<sup>49</sup>

Without becoming an antiquarian himself, Gibbon made antiquarian methods of scholarship a new substratum of historical narrative, a new test of its validity. His Scottish predecessor William Robertson lauded him as inaugurating a new kind of history. Robertson immediately adopted Gibbon's footnote technique for his *History of America* (1777) as well as giving therein, at Gibbon's suggestion, a full account of his Spanish sources. With *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the modern era opened of scholarly history writing based on thick documentation. Birth must not be confused with maturity. Other scholars, more laborious than Gibbon, would nurture the infant, fend off threats to it. But, admired or not, Gibbon loomed over historians writing in English during the next several decades as they struggled to define the proper practice of their vocation.<sup>50</sup>

#### A REVOLUTION IN BIBLICAL PHILOLOGY

During Gibbon's lifetime, a similar revolution shook biblical philology, though it took place mostly out of eyeshot of English-speaking scholars. Already before 1700, daring students of the Old Testament, like Richard Simon and Jean Le Clerc, had challenged the traditionally accepted authorship of its books. But ideas about *how* its authors—whoever they were—put the Bible together remained spotty and vague. Simon had conjectured that Israelite secretaries deposited records of events in public archives first set up by Moses. Then in 1753 appeared a work turning speculation into hypothesis by sustained analysis of the text: *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux [sic] dont il paroît que Moyse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Génèse* (*Conjectures on the Original Sources That Moses Apparently Used to Compose the Book of Genesis*). The book was published anonymously, allegedly in Brussels, where the French government's writ did not run. The cautious author was Jean Astruc, professor of medicine at Paris, reputed for a seminal treatise on sexually transmitted diseases. He noted that Genesis sometimes calls God Elohim and sometimes Yahweh. Astruc arranged in two columns all the text that use the one name or the other. He believed that he had thus reassembled two different source documents—or the pieces of them—that Moses had stitched together to construct the history recorded in Genesis. Like most good philologists, Astruc did not minimize the problems his theory faced. Yet without oversimplifying he had hit on a key idea: different textual strands in the Old Testament might be separated out by their distinctive language.<sup>51</sup>

Astruc did not tend his young shoot; rather, it blossomed in Germany. The soil there had been prepared by British deists' attacks on biblical revelation. Germans translated some of their works, starting with Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* in 1741. The deists profoundly unsettled two scholars in particular: Johann Salomo Semler and Johann David Michaelis. The Göttingen professor Michaelis has popped up more than once—introduc-

ing into Germany Wood's *Original Genius and Writings of Homer*, criticizing Kennicott's Old Testament, revising Lowth's *Praelectiones de sacra poesi Hebraeorum*. Semler likewise held a professorship, at Halle, instancing the growing role of universities as centers of erudition in Germany. (In contrast, neither Wood, Kennicott, nor Lowth made university careers.) Reading British deists pushed Michaelis and Semler to look at the Bible with disillusioned eyes, privileging reason over revelation. Philology did not dictate this outcome; rather, the Enlightenment rationalism that the two shared with deists guided their use of philological methods. But the deist critique was destructive, not affirmative. It convinced Michaelis and Semler to take the Bible as a product of human history but gave little idea how.<sup>52</sup>

In their unsettlement they appear to have turned specifically to Richard Simon and, under his inspiration, tried to craft a historical reconstruction of the Bible's meanings. Like Simon they retained Christian faith while reanalyzing its biblical basis. (Undermining its basis, detractors insisted—depending, again, on nonphilological premises such as theories of biblical inspiration.) In Michaelis's case, personal contact with English biblical scholars in the 1740s—then the most sophisticated in Europe—also mattered. Indeed, an English reviewer in 1769 summarized well the point from which Michaelis and Semler started:

[I]n order to understand the Scriptures to any useful purpose, it is not barely sufficient to know the mere sense of the words and phrases of the original, but . . . it is likewise necessary to be acquainted with the circumstances of the world at the time of our Saviour's coming; to have a knowledge of the government, sanhedrim, sects, customs, traditions, and opinions of the Jews; a knowledge of ancient history, chronology, geography, and the general system of pagan mythology, which is not to be acquired by turning over a Lexicon; . . .

In principle, Erasmus would have said the same; but he knew far less of such matters as “sects, customs, traditions, and opinions of the Jews” or ancient chronology. By Kennicott's time, philologists approached the Bible not only with vastly richer historical contexts but also with an appreciation of the cultural gap estranging ancient Israel or Roman Judea from the European present. Michaelis and Semler viewed the Old Testament text as recording divine teaching (and other things) but also as reflecting the premodern worldviews of its writers. These two and subsequent German philologists immensely strengthened and radicalized treatment of the Bible as a historical document.<sup>53</sup>

The relation of Michaelis and Semler to Jewish scholarship was alternately dismissive and uncomprehending. On one hand, they could not ignore Jewish learning when trying to understand Hebrew scriptures. Semler, for example, published in 1771 a German translation of Elyahu Levita's controversial essay in Hebrew philology, *Masoret ha-Masoret* (1538). On the other hand, they did

their best to make rabbinic erudition immaterial in Old Testament studies. Semler translated Levita's book precisely because it argued that the vowel points in the received Masoretic Text were a post-Talmudic invention, unknown in antiquity. If so (and Levita was right), Christians gained flexibility to reinterpret the Hebrew text while (in Semler's eyes, not Levita's) rabbinic traditions lost authority. Semler dedicated his translation to the Jewish Enlightenment writer Moses Mendelssohn. Michaelis likewise sent Mendelssohn the first volume of his own work on Mosaic law, assuring him that nothing in it attacked Jews. Both Semler and Michaelis assumed that Enlightened Jews shared their contempt for the "unfathomable opinions spread by the common horde of Jewish scholars," as Semler referred to rabbinic writings. (Mendelssohn kept tactful silence. He and other Enlightened Jews took the "unfathomable opinions" of medieval rabbinic interpretation as starting point for biblical philology, not obstacle to it.) Moreover, because the Hebrews of Moses's day lived in so different a society and culture than rabbis of the early Christian era, Michaelis argued, Talmudic learning barely mattered for Old Testament philology. These "oral traditions of somewhat ignorant rabbis," as Michaelis called the two Talmuds, might inform us about Jewish law in the times of the ignorant rabbis, but not about Mosaic law. Predictably, Michaelis opposed giving Jews civil rights, as other Germans were starting to advocate; and he deployed the new concept of biological race, just then being articulated by his Göttingen colleague J. F. Blumenbach, to denigrate Jews. Timeworn anti-Judaism did not sate Michaelis. He was that modern devil, an anti-Semite.<sup>54</sup>

Even while sidelining Jewish textual scholarship, Michaelis and Semler themselves remained basically textual philologists who strove to understand the Old Testament by placing it in specific historical milieux of the ancient world. They tried to reconstruct Hebrew society and its institutions, using information gleaned from geography, philological analysis, classical and (even) rabbinic writers, Arabic and Syriac texts, studies of ancient Egypt, and modern travelers in the Middle East. The method in detail was not new. (William Lowth, Robert's father, had used modern Middle Eastern customs—like wearing nose jewels—to explicate Old Testament passages.) The thoroughness *was* new, in analyzing the Bible as *essentially* a historical document to be interpreted by secular means.<sup>55</sup>

Michaelis became celebrated for such efforts, odd and even offensive though some of them now seem. Recall the impression that Wood's *Original Genius of Homer* made on him. His ancient Hebrews likewise lived in the childhood of humanity and likewise saw the world through the veil of myth. Modern Arabs existed in a similar splendidly primitive state. Michaelis set the agenda for a famous Danish expedition in 1761–67 to Yemen, from which only Carsten Niebuhr returned alive. It may strike a reader as bizarre that present-day Arabs could cast light on ancient Hebrews. But Michaelis thought Arabic nomads an unchanging people, stuck at the same rude stage of social development as nomadic ancient Israelites. Even modern Arabic words for plants

could help to identify vegetation known only by name in the Bible, given the very close relationship of Hebrew and Arabic and the very little that Arabic must have changed, by Michaelis's axioms, since Moses's day. By such means he sought to recover, as Rudolf Smend put it, the "relationships of life in the biblical world and time" in order to lay open the real meaning of the Bible—as he imagined it. Michaelis's idea of a distinct, preexilic, 'classical' Hebrew civilization owed much to contemporary efforts by classical philologists, such as his Göttingen colleague C. G. Heyne (see below), to grasp ancient Greek culture as a whole. Michaelis's "biblical world and time" lay light-years away from classical Greece or even from the coeval but more 'advanced' ancient Egypt. The six volumes of his *Mosaisches Recht* (*Mosaic Law*, 1770–75) made that clear. So did his Old Testament translation, conditioned not only by Kennicott-like standards of textual emendation but also by ethnological and archaeological data.<sup>56</sup>

When Michaelis applied similar historical-critical method to the New Testament, he invented a long-lived hypothesis: that the authors of the Gospels drew on earlier, written proto-Gospels, now lost. Ironically, in his 1787 introduction to the Old Testament, Michaelis fought Astruc's thesis of multiple, pre-Mosaic sources for Genesis, arguing that Moses wrote almost all of the Pentateuch—and Job, to boot. But in his 1788 *Einleitung in die göttlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes* (*Introduction to the Holy Scriptures of the New Covenant*), Michaelis put forward an Astruc-like theory to explain the strong similarities among the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. He contended that their writers had all drawn on "other apocryphal Gospels" long vanished. Increasingly, biblical philologists would analyze books of the Bible in terms of underlying but forgotten sources revealed in their internal structure—an approach dating from Astruc and Michaelis and eventually labeled 'documentary.'<sup>57</sup>

Semler's pupil Johann Jakob Griesbach took such source criticism—and a documentary approach—in a different direction. In 1774–75 Griesbach published an epochal edition of the Greek New Testament. Griesbach's textual philology mattered hugely for three reasons. First, his edition, though it started from the 'received text' (*textus receptus*) derived from Erasmus, did not hesitate to replace readings with Griesbach's own when he thought manuscript testimony warranted. Unlike the earlier editions of Edward Wells and Daniel Mace—in a more conservative place, a more cautious time—Griesbach's became widely admired. It slew the Erasmian *textus receptus*. Wells, Mace, and more powerfully Griesbach had tinkered with the old *textus receptus*. From now on, philologists aimed to build a new, more reliable one. Second, in research for his edition—conducted with great skill and rigor—Griesbach developed a new understanding of the history of the New Testament text. Building on work by his mentor Semler and Johann Albrecht Bengel, Griesbach concluded that all New Testament manuscripts came down from three ancient families of manuscripts, the third derived from the first two. Put dif-

ferently, he reduced hundreds of manuscript witnesses to essentially two or three. The method immensely clarified—for all textual philologists, not just biblical ones—the problem of how to make sense of variant readings in a given textual tradition. Finally, Griesbach gave up age-old efforts to ‘harmonize’ the obvious variations among the four Gospels, such as their chronology of events. (Even Michaelis’s *Einleitung* still tried to harmonize over a decade later.) Instead Griesbach recognized the fourth Gospel (John) as distinct, and he printed the other three in parallel columns as “A Synopsis of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.” Ever since, these have been known as the ‘synoptic Gospels.’ This tool gave the critic a method for explicating the Gospels’ sources, and biblical philologists have gnawed on the ‘synoptic problem’ ever since. Later scholars rejected Griesbach’s theory of just how the Gospel writers used each other’s material; but, as Werner Kümmel put it, his method “laid the foundation for a truly historical investigation of the literary interrelationships of the Gospels.”<sup>58</sup>

In the next generation others carried further a historical approach to the Bible, notably Michaelis’s student and successor at Göttingen, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn. (The surname means ‘squirrel,’ and in pictures he resembles one.) The absence of modern academic disciplines allowed cross-fertilization vital to the evolution of philology, and Eichhorn’s writings give a prime example. Eichhorn wrote *Litterärsgeschichte* (a precursor of today’s intellectual history), Arabic studies, several volumes of general and political history, and, pivotally, biblical criticism. As to his teacher Michaelis, Eichhorn “regretted only,” as Jonathan Sheehan said, that Michaelis “had not gone far enough in making the Hebrews strange,” in failing to see that primitive customs must imply a similar spiritual state. Eichhorn refined Michaelis’s idea, honed on Wood’s Homer, that primitive Hebrews naturally filtered reality through myth. Eichhorn’s Göttingen colleague C. G. Heyne conceived Greek myth as the poetic residue of primitive reactions to an often frightening world. Borrowing from Heyne (perhaps also from Lowth and Wood—more cross-fertilization), Eichhorn developed a parallel mythical explanation of parts of the Old Testament. Neither true nor false (the black-and-white categories deployed by deists), myth was a poetic mode of apprehending reality, typical of primitive cultures. This theory gave biblical scholars a new way of explaining, for instance, the origin stories in Genesis. To comprehend the Pentateuch, the philologist needed to enter into the primitive mind-set of its authors. In Moses’s day the Hebrews, Moses included, remained in their childhood as a people, devoid of varied literature and real learning. The record of a slow, relapsing struggle to get from polytheism to monotheism, the Old Testament had no spiritual lessons to teach modern people. But it offered unique resources for probing the cultural evolution of the human race. Only scraps of Greek oracles survive; the Old Testament delivers complete Hebrew prophecies. Greek songs for divine worship are lost; the book of Psalms supplies age-old Hebrew tem-

ple songs. The oldest Hebrew historians antedate Herodotus and Thucydides by centuries.<sup>59</sup>

Eichhorn's *Einleitung in das alte Testament (Introduction to the Old Testament, 1780)* set a new benchmark for historicist biblical philology. Again, Heyne strongly influenced his approach, in this case by insisting on placing classical authors empathetically in their historical contexts. Unlike Michaelis, Eichhorn had no trouble accepting Astruc's notion of two sources of Genesis, even dissected it more finely. *Einleitung* dated Chronicles after the Babylonian Exile (sixth century BCE) on the ground that depictions of Satan and of angels showed Persian influence. But Eichhorn also argued that its author relied on materials earlier than the books of Samuel and Kings: by comparing the texts he detected traces of a common earlier source. He suggested that the book of Isaiah may have assimilated matter from diverse prophets. Other German biblical philologists among Eichhorn's contemporaries made similarly dramatic proposals. No other philologist of his day had Eichhorn's range nor his wide influence, but he did not stand out as a lonely radical like Spinoza or Simon.<sup>60</sup>

He stood, rather, as the leading figure of a new school of biblical philology erected on foundations laid by such foregoers as Semler and Michaelis. Eichhorn called it *höhere Kritik*—higher criticism. The name distinguished the new school from the ancient and supposedly 'lower' effort of textual criticism simply to establish the best possible text of the sacred books. Higher criticism aimed higher because it sought to decipher authorship, literary origins and form, date, composition, and ultimately meaning of the books of the Bible in original context. Although Eichhorn called higher criticism only humanism under a new name, it set in motion sweeping changes in biblical scholarship.<sup>61</sup>

#### A NEW CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Study of those other ancient texts central to philology, the Greek and Roman classics, underwent in Germany a parallel, equally stunning transformation. This story begins with Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Winckelmann fell in love with ancient Greece as a youth and, in his thirties, moved from scholarly study of Greek literature to passionate engagement with Greek art, especially sculpture. The discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum also inspired him. His *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums (History of the Art of Antiquity, 1764)* is commonly, if anachronistically, called the founding text of art history. More to the immediate point, Winckelmann's writings stirred in Germany zest for Greek antiquity as the aesthetic, even ethical apex for moderns to emulate. Ancient Rome, long the dominant study, soon took a back seat to Greece. And, Winckelmann insisted, Greek antiquity had to be grasped as an integral whole: each artifact understood in relation to the concepts and spirit that infused the artist and formed the artwork. The neo-Hellenism awakened by

Winckelmann so gripped the German imagination that its historian Eliza Butler labeled it “the tyranny of Greece over Germany.”<sup>62</sup>

One of the despot’s worshippers was Eichhorn’s colleague at Göttingen, Christian Gottlob Heyne. Like Winckelmann, he saw in classical antiquity a whole, once breathing world to be revived, not a medley of artworks and manuscripts. Heyne’s Grecomania, however, paid as much attention to texts as to torsos, while refusing to study either in isolation from the other. And whereas Winckelmann was a loner, who lived mostly in Italy, Heyne was a star at perhaps the most admired university in Germany. He not only breathed new life into German classical philology; he reinvented it. He gave scholarly definition to Winckelmann’s romantic appreciation of Greek antiquity as a distinctive whole, with its own aesthetic and ethical norms. By doing so, Heyne effectively created a new field of academic research and teaching. He inspired a host of followers. Among them was the even more celebrated Friedrich August Wolf, who eventually wrote Winckelmann’s biography.<sup>63</sup>

This broad new vision of antiquity led Wolf to articulate in its classic (so to speak) form ‘the Homeric problem.’ Wolf went to study at Göttingen in 1777. There he encountered both Heyne and Eichhorn. Characteristically, he fought with Heyne but learned from both. Heyne handed on the lessons of Winckelmann along with his own view of preclassical Greeks as primitives whose poetic slant on the world expressed itself in mythology. Heyne had gotten his theory about early Greeks in part from Wood’s *Original Genius and Writings of Homer*, and Heyne may have introduced young Wolf to Wood’s book. (Its German vogue would have made it hard for Wolf to ignore in any case.) “The inspired guesser,” Wolf later called Wood. From Eichhorn’s biblical philology Wolf inherited methods of reconstructing the history of an ancient text. Within Heyne’s and Wood’s conceptual framework, Wolf applied Eichhorn’s biblical methods to Homer. (The porousness of the frontiers between various regions of philology once again mattered.) In 1795 Wolf published *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (*Prolegomena to Homer*). In it he meticulously traced, for the first time, the history of the Homeric text in antiquity. He showed the hopelessness of knowing anything of a text earlier than the one in the hands of the critics of Hellenistic Alexandria. (He much esteemed Bentley. Did Wolf have at the back of his mind Bentley’s proof of the futility of recovering the original text of the New Testament—Bentley who had also doubted the unity of the Homeric poems?) Homer, Wolf argued, was not an actual person, not even the illiterate bard depicted by Wood. Rather, a series of rhapsodes had produced the poems eventually stitched together into the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and attributed to ‘Homer.’ The book stirred a hornet’s nest: damned as sacrilege, hailed as brilliantly original.<sup>64</sup>

But Wolf did far more than pose the Homeric problem for generations of classical philologists; he imposed Heyne’s new approach to the study of antiquity—while typically trying to steal his teacher’s laurels. Wolf melded the textual history of Homer with the historical development of ancient philology,

and he set all in the larger context of Greek culture. Like Heyne but even more forcefully, Wolf insisted that philologists examine every piece of classical culture in connection with every other. He named this holistic scholarship of the ancient world *Altertumswissenschaft*—the science of antiquity. In the philological seminar he created and lorded over during his quarter century at the University of Halle (1783–1807), Wolf formed the philologists who would dominate the next generation of German learning. There were limits to Wolf’s ‘science of antiquity’ that eventually undermined it. Unlike Heyne, Wolf privileged textual over material remains of antiquity; and art and archaeology would have their revenge. His *Altertumswissenschaft* encompassed only Greece and, almost grudgingly, Rome; but there was more to the ancient Mediterranean, and later scholars would insist on its inclusion. Nonetheless, the long European tradition of classical studies had been permanently transformed, as decisively as biblical philology.<sup>65</sup>

#### FIN DE SIÈCLE: END OF AN ERA, OMENS OF ANOTHER

But in the European tradition’s English-speaking corner both revolutions were postponed, owing in part to a changing climate for international scholarly communication. (This was not the only reason, as will later become clear.) Latin remained a means of learned exchange, as since Roman antiquity. Throughout the nineteenth century scholars who shared no modern tongue could write to each other in at least basic Latin, since European and American schoolboys learned the language. But the drift toward publication of scholarship in vernaculars speeded in the later eighteenth century. Such works sometimes got translated into Latin, so that the learned in other countries could read them. Yet in 1803 an erudite American, Samuel Miller, observed that Latin had “ceased to be that familiar medium of conversation and of writing, among the learned, that it once was.” “A singular revolution,” he marveled, which “has rendered the intercourse between learned men more difficult, for want of a common medium.” Although Wolf wrote his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* in Latin, his biography of Winckelmann and his programmatic lectures on *Altertumswissenschaft* appeared in German. Eichhorn’s and Michaelis’s introductions to the Old and New Testaments came out in German.<sup>66</sup>

English-speaking philologists often got only a vague idea of these revolutionary German works. The mother tongue of the eighteenth-century Republic of Letters was French; and few British, Irish, or American scholars understood German. The best English classical philologist of his generation, Richard Porson (1759–1808), is supposed (plausibly) to have declared, “Life is too short to learn German.” Porson certainly did not appreciate German philology and proved deaf to his great contemporary Wolf. The wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon reinforced linguistic barriers. For much of the time between the mid-1790s and 1815, British and American travelers had a hard time

reaching the European continent, and international scholarly contact became difficult. The earthquakes that transformed biblical and classical philology in Germany barely stirred the English-speaking world until well into the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup>

Nonetheless, the faces of philology everywhere looked very different around 1800 than even in 1750. As German innovations in biblical criticism and classical studies trickled across the Rhine, explorations of classical sites such as Pompeii, astonishing to all Europe, hinted at other new approaches to antiquity—though for the moment more significant as art than as revelation of a different past. Investigations of Sanskrit by Jones and others had given birth to Indology, a scholarly field new to the West, and to the transforming methods of comparative philology. These were only the most spectacular children of European imperial expansion. Growing knowledge of languages across the world and increasingly rigorous study of them gave a new empirical basis for generalizing about the nature of language; some of these efforts, as in study of Amerindian languages, spilled over into new inquiries into the histories of their speakers. Even long familiar products of language gained new types of attention. A widespread, if diffuse, interest in the study of modern English literature paralleled a longer-standing, more focused study of Anglo-Saxon. And a merging of antiquarian scholarship and philosophic history in the hands especially of Edward Gibbon provided a new model of how to practice the ancient genre of history. Novelty was everywhere. Did this grab-bag display any unifying traits?

Diversity now teemed in so many different directions as to threaten dispersion. To move from William Jones and the discovery of the Indo-European family to F. A. Wolf and the invention of *Altertumswissenschaft* is to leap across the globe and, evidently, across intellectual worlds as well. What—in the world—did Jones's and Wolf's endeavors have in common? And what, to stretch further, did these share with the work of Benjamin Barton and Hugh Blair, Edward Gibbon and Johann Eichhorn?

One answer points to continuity, another to change. The first is that all these ventures augmented the historically oriented, contextualizing, at least implicitly comparative bias of philology. The historical sensibility fostered by philology and allied studies had grown deeper and richer than ever before. As a teenager Walter Scott studied at Edinburgh University when William Robertson was principal, hung around Adam Ferguson's literary salon. In the historical novels Scott started publishing in 1814, change over time determines what characters can think and say. In contrast, the novels of Daniel Defoe or Henry Fielding less than a century earlier, even when called 'history,' even when set in the past, show no sense that historical context shapes the people inhabiting them.<sup>68</sup> As in Scott, so in the writings of William Jones, Friedrich Wolf, or J. D. Michaelis, the perception of distance between cultures became greater than ever, and the urge to compare (at least tacitly) in order to understand became stronger than ever. Comparison, in the first

place, had birthed the keener alertness to historical and cultural difference. In these respects, as the nineteenth century began, philology amplified rather than altered its heritage.

The second answer, foreshadowing shift of direction, is this: most of the philologically rooted initiatives in this chapter took a tradition of intellectual speculation—whether conjectures concerned Amerindian languages or authorship of the Pentateuch, philosophic history or Homer—and grafted onto it new empirical solidity and rigor, grounded in the historical-comparative methods of philology. This joining of—put very crudely—theory and evidence set in motion a process that eventually transformed several loose-jointed intellectual enterprises into something resembling new sciences. And this process carried philology during the nineteenth century into the heart of a revolution in academic knowledge.

