

NATIONALISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM:  
ON THE GODS OF GREECE, ITALY, AND INDIA

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A new form of cultural cosmopolitanism arose in Europe, in the second half of the eighteenth century, partly as a consequence of the Enlightenment and partly as the result of an increased colonial presence in Asia. One of its most illustrious and influential exponents was William Jones, the linguist, translator, and judge for the East India Company in Calcutta. His lecture ‘On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India’, written in 1784 and subsequently revised, offers a perspective on myth that is supple, flexible, and wide-ranging. It appeared some time before his famous statement about the kinship of languages, in the Third Anniversary Discourse of February 1786, and anticipates some of the conclusions at which he arrived later still. In fact, Jones’ writings in the months and years before the celebrated discourse of 1786, are already pointing to connections and syntheses across cultures; they offer a conception of mythological and religious contact that is startling in its openness and far removed from the parochialism of numerous contemporaries.

Jones’ work demonstrates that a cosmopolitan and transnational recuperation of the ancient narratives exists alongside national or nationalist readings of myth. The emergence of the nation state in the eighteenth century gave a new urgency to the idea and the actuality of the nation and, thus, also an important new context to the relationship between nation and myth. The Founding Fathers and other colonial Americans argued vehemently about the meaning of the story of Aeneas and the establishment of Rome. In France, Jacques-Louis David electrified audiences by raising questions about loyalty, patriotism, and national reconciliation in such paintings as *Antiochus and Stratonice* (1774), *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784), and *The Sabine Women* (1799). And in imperial England, opera from the 1790s mentioned Brutus the Trojan, who was said to make his way as an exile from Italy to the British isles, establish New Troy, and change the name of Albion to Britain. If these are instances of ‘national’ appropriations of classical myths, Jones opens a window onto other prospects, and in that respect he may be compared to the British and German Romantics, some of whom he directly inspired. The Romantics, with their philhellenism, respected national boundaries (they insisted on the independence of the modern Greek state) but also attempted to confound them (‘We are all Greeks’). The philhellenism espoused by Byron, Shelley, and Keats enjoyed an international appeal and allowed radical thinkers worldwide to feel a solidarity of cause and principle. For many of these thinkers, classical Mediterranean culture was cosmopolitan and the common property of all—in Europe, the Americas, and Asia. Jones, a political radical of sorts, made classical Greece and Rome part of a broader discussion about the gods and culture in general. He may have disagreed with the Romantics over the special value they assigned to classical Greece, but he also wrote with no small learning of the alternatives that lay elsewhere.

Well before he arrived, in 1783, on the coast of India, he had secured a reputation, in Britain, as an accomplished scholar of languages and an expert in the literatures of East and West. His publications from this period include a translation, into French and English, of the Persian history of the Afghan ruler, Nadir Shah; a grammar of the Persian language; translations of poems ‘from the Asiatick

languages'; the Latin treatise *Poeseos Asiaticae Commentariorum*; and translations of the speeches of Isaeus, to adduce a small selection from a long list. Jones' interest in non-European literature was not merely academic or linguistic, though he was a linguist of formidable attainments, and his work reflected a deep-seated passion for civilizations outside of Europe, and especially those of Persia and India. As early as 1768, he wrote, in Latin, to a correspondent that he used to believe that nothing could be more charming than ancient Greek poetry—until he happened upon Persian and Arabic poetry.<sup>1</sup> Later, in Calcutta, he was to place Eastern and Western literatures in dialogue with each other and make them part of a programme for mutual respect. When he sketched out a plan for 'Hymns in Four Books', the categories that he listed included the Indian and European, Arabian and African, 'Hyperborean' and American.<sup>2</sup> But more revealing than the plan for the hymns was the stated object of his literary project: 'to recommend universal toleration by showing that all nations, even those esteemed the most idolatrous, agree in the essentials of religion, a belief in one God, Creator and preserver, and in a future state of rewards and punishments'.<sup>3</sup> Here, then, was a European servant of the British Empire and a judge in Bengal arguing that all peoples shared basic religious beliefs, that their religious dogmas were fundamentally in agreement with one another, and that Christianity offered no unique road to God, truth, and salvation.

Jones' cosmopolitanism turned on the notion that all human beings, ultimately, derived from a common origin. In this idea, he was not far from Johann Gottfried Herder, whose work, however, inspired nationalist rather than cosmopolitan movements in the nineteenth century. Herder wrote voluminously across a number of years, but among the theories he was developing in the 1770s was one that emphasized the role of Asia as the original homeland of the *Völker* who inhabited the earth. Myths were crucial sources for Herder in the formulation of his work, and he used 'the evidence of myths to trace the world's *Völker* back to their place of common origin', namely, Asia.<sup>4</sup> Herder also provides a frame for Jones' theories of commonality: by positing the existence of an originary homeland (*Urheimat*), Herder was arguing that the original inhabitants (*Urvolk*) of this original location would have spoken an original language (*Ursprache*) and believed in a set of original myths (*Urmythen*).<sup>5</sup> There is no reason to believe that Jones was reading Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* in Calcutta (Herder himself read *Poeseos Asiaticae* and, much later, he was swept up by the *Shakuntala* fever of the 1790s). But it was Jones who supplied the arguments and 'evidence' for a common language, a shared Asiatic homeland, and shared features in the religious systems of Greece, Italy, and India.

In relating Jones and Herder in this way, we need to acknowledge a couple of small paradoxes. Herder's impact on nationalism should be set against Jones' cosmopolitan approaches to history, literature, and culture. Joep Leerssen says, 'Most of the 'national awakenings' that took place in Central and Eastern Europe, from Germany to Bulgaria and from Slovenia to Finland, can be more or less directly traced back to the philosophy and influence of Herder.'<sup>6</sup> If Jones' research contributed to any nationalism, it was to the Indian nationalism that developed in the later nineteenth century, but such a nationalism found inspiration in a variety of sources and not only in the contributions of the Asiatic Society. Moreover, where Herder investigated folk songs, folk lore, and popular literature as the essence of a nation, Jones confined his writings mainly to the 'classical' periods of the literary traditions about which he wrote. Herder published 'collections of folk songs from all the corners of Europe and indeed the world'; Jones published on literature in classical

Persian and Arabic, in classical Greek and Latin, and in classical Chinese and Sanskrit.<sup>7</sup> ‘Oh the accursed word *classic!*’ [O das verwünschte Wort *klassisch!*], Herder wrote, with a sigh that is audible even today;<sup>8</sup> yet Jones preferred the spelling *Asiatick* for the society he founded precisely because the term was ‘both classical and proper’.<sup>9</sup>

That all religious and mythological traditions shared certain fundamental beliefs is a theme that Jones was exploring in his creative compositions as well as in his essays, and he did so before he had gained a first-hand familiarity with Sanskrit and other Indian traditions. Few of the poems Jones wrote prior to sailing to South Asia capture the flavour of this idea more directly than ‘Kneel to the Goddess’, which he drafted in 1780, supposedly in an hour, out of despair at recent riots against Catholics. The poem was written for the Druids, a society of judges ‘who, during the summer circuit at Cardigan, were accustomed to meet and dine in a romantic situation on the banks of the river Teifi’.<sup>10</sup> As Michael Franklin writes, ‘The poem’s playful emphasis upon the universality of the divine female (Astarte, Diana, Venus, or Mary) and the ubiquity of inspired revelation, whether Egerian or avian, anticipate the comparative mythology and imaginative syncretism of Jones’s path-breaking essay ‘On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India’ (1784).’<sup>11</sup> Here are the first five stanzas:

What means all this frensy, what mad men are they  
 Who broil and are broil’d for a shade in religion?  
 Since all sage inspirers one doctrine convey  
 From Numa’s wild nymph to sly Mohamed’s pigeon.  
 Then Druids arise,  
 Teach the world to be wise,  
 And the grape’s rosy blood for your sacrifice pour,  
 Th’ immortals invoke,  
 And under this oak  
 Kneel, kneel to the Goddess whom all men adore.

By various high titles this Goddess is nam’d,  
 At Ephesus Dian, in Syria Astarte,  
 In *New Rome* ’tis Mary, Heaven’s Regent proclaim’d,  
 In *Old Rome* ’twas Venus, the buxom and hearty.  
 But crown’d and enthron’d  
 Her Godhead is own’d  
 In desert, in valley, on mountain, on shore,  
 Then join our gay crew,  
 Turk, Roman and Jew,  
 And kneel to the Goddess, whom all men adore.

When sallow Parsees, in vain Anquetil’s rant,  
 Repeat the strange lessons of false Zoroaster,  
 Or hymn ruddy Mithra’s in rapturous cant  
 As their surest preserver from every disaster,  
 They worship but one,  
 Warm and round as the sun,  
 Which Persia’s rich kings on their diadems wore;  
 The circle they prize  
 Had long left the skies,  
 And they kneel to the Goddess whom all men adore.

When dark visag'd Bramins obsequiously bow  
 To the rock whence old Ganges redundantly gushes,  
 They feign that they bend to the form of a cow,  
 And save by this fiction the fair maiden's blushes;  
     But from Sanscritan Vedes  
     The discov'ry proceeds  
 That her aid, whom we honor, e'en Bramin implores;  
     Like us wildly they dance,  
     Like us lightly advance,  
 And kneel to the Goddess whom all men adore.

You have heard of the mysteries hallowed in Greece,  
 And shewn to th' elect in the groves of Eleusis,  
 Our learned, about them, have cackled like geese,  
 But their learning vain pomp or mere idle abuse is:  
     Th' initiate were told,  
     In verses of gold,  
 Mad Jove and rough Neptune to worship no more;  
     But with love and with truth  
     To frolic thro' youth,  
 And kneel to the Goddess whom all men adore.<sup>12</sup>

Franklin, who has devoted considerable attention to Jones' pluralism, has analysed the poem skilfully:<sup>13</sup> let it suffice here to add that, in the face of sectarian strife, Jones underlines the folly of religious conflict by saying that all religious systems are founded on essentially similar principles ('all sage inspirers one doctrine convey'). What is significant in Jones' verses is that rather than write only about Anglicans and Catholics, he chooses to cast his plea for toleration in far broader, more global terms. His poem refers to ancient Romans and Greeks, Muslims and Christians, Hindus and Parsis, the last despite his scepticism about Anquetil's claims for Zoroastrianism, and these various believers uniformly appear to pay obeisance to 'the Goddess whom all men adore'. Jones, ever the Orientalist, responds to religious violence in the best way that he can respond, by speaking, through the person of a Druid, to remind his fellow Britons about the similarities that bind religions together. Even the presence of the Druid in the poem alludes to contemporary arguments that connected druids and brahman priests as much as it nods to the circuiters' society or to its Welsh haunts.<sup>14</sup>

Jones' 'Preliminary Discourse on the Institution of a Society', delivered on 15 January 1784, in Calcutta, returns his audience to the voyage he made to India on the frigate *Crocodile*. Of course, it is possible to discern in that memorable opening the commanding gaze of the European observer, one who is the master of all he surveys, thrilled at the prospect of a new world that appears to beckon to him.

When I was at sea last August, on my voyage to this country, which I had long and ardently desired to visit, I found one evening, on inspecting the observations of the day, that *India* lay before us, and *Persia* on our left, whilst a breeze from *Arabia* blew nearly on our stern. A situation so pleasing in itself, and to me so new, could not fail to awaken a train of reflections in a mind, which had early been accustomed to contemplate with delight the eventful histories and agreeable fictions of this eastern world. It gave me inexpressible pleasure to find myself in the midst of so noble an amphitheatre, almost encircled by the vast regions of *Asia*, which has ever been esteemed the nurse of

sciences, the inventress of delightful and useful arts, the scene of glorious actions, fertile in the productions of human genius, abounding in natural wonders, and infinitely diversified in the forms of religion and government, in the laws, manners, customs, and languages, as well as in the features and complexions, of men.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, if Bruce Lincoln is correct to say that ‘Mr. Jones fancied himself at the center of the world’, Franklin is also right to claim that ‘Jones encourages a re-centring of perspective from the hub that is India’.<sup>16</sup> Jones invites the other founders of his Society to join him in studying ‘the history and antiquities, the natural productions, arts, sciences, and literature of *Asia*’.<sup>17</sup> Calcutta, not London or Paris, will be the headquarters of this new body whose interests will radiate outward from India to all parts of Asia and ‘whose members may not be displeased occasionally to follow the streams of *Asiatick* learning a little beyond its natural boundary’.<sup>18</sup> Jones is summoning other Europeans to join him on the further voyage on which he is embarking, after his arrival in India, and it is a voyage whose chief goal is the study of non-European cultures in the East. At his instigation, and with the support of such powerful patrons as Warren Hastings, a new centre of learning is established in colonial India. As Franklin observes, ‘If this sounds imperious, well so it was; if it sounds imperialistic, it was that also; he was building an empire of science.’<sup>19</sup>

By the time he composed ‘On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India’, in 1784 (the paper was read to the Asiatic Society on 24 March 1785), Jones was already thinking comparatively about myth and religion, and the basis for his comparisons was now enriched by what he was learning in India.<sup>20</sup> The essay suggests correspondences between Janus and Ganesha, Saturn and Manu or Satyavrata, Jupiter and Indra, Hermes and Narada, Ceres and Lakshmi, Dionysus and Rama, and Apollo and Krishna. Among the other figures Jones discusses are Minos and Manu as well as Vishnu, Kali, Diana, Hecate, Durga, Minerva, Durga, and Saraswati. For Jones, all myths—not just Greek, Roman, Hindu, or Egyptian, but all—appear to be the result of four types of process. One source of myth is history, so that a king of Crete may become a mythological figure or treacherous rocks may be turned into Scylla and Charybdis. A second source of myth is the sun, moon, stars, and other bodies in the sky. A third source is ‘the magick of poetry; whose essential business it is, to personify the most abstract notions, and to place a nymph or a genius in every grove and almost in every flower’.<sup>21</sup> And a fourth source is metaphor and allegory, ‘of which a thousand examples might be adduced from Plato, Cicero, and the inventive commentators on Homer in their pedigrees of the Gods’.<sup>22</sup> If Jones is less interested in exploring these processes in detail and more eager to discuss the parallels and resemblances in Greek, Roman, and Indian myths, he is nonetheless also attentive to method and to the problems raised by the comparative study of myth. He is hesitant to argue simply for superficial borrowings across ‘idolatrous’ peoples, ‘but, when features of resemblance, too strong to have been accidental, are observable in different systems of polytheism, without fancy or prejudice to colour them and improve the likeness, we can scarcely help believing, that some connection has immemorially subsisted between the several nations, who have adopted them’.<sup>23</sup>

On the issue of polytheism, Jones implies that systematicity, especially a system derived from the monotheistic religions, is incapable of comprehending the complexity of ancient Greece, Rome, and India. Jones thus declines to point out that ‘such a God of India was *the* Jupiter of *Greece*; such *the* Apollo; such, *the* Mercury: in fact, since all the causes of polytheism contributed largely to the assemblage of *Grecian* divinities (though Bacon reduces them all to refined allegories, and Newton

to a poetical disguise of true history), we find many Joves, many Apollos, many Mercuries, with distinct attributes and capacities'.<sup>24</sup> Jones draws out the multiplicity of Indian notions of divinity and offers numerous examples in which he relates a Greek god to more than one Indian deity, although he does also make the one-to-one parallels that he decries here.

Near the end of his discourse, Jones acknowledges a possible explanation for the many parallels he has identified, but also cautions against the identification of an original source. He observes that it is not unusual to find similarities among the gods of these nations since they are all more or less drawn from a handful of deities. With a proleptic nod to the Indo-European thesis and to Max Müller's solar theories, he says that 'the characters of all the pagan deities, male and female, melt into each other, and at last into one or two; for it seems a well-founded opinion, that the whole crowd of gods and goddesses in ancient Rome, and modern *Várânes*, mean only the powers of nature, and principally those of the Sun, expressed in a variety of ways and by a multitude of fanciful names'.<sup>25</sup> Yet, Jones implies that the seemingly reductive nature of this explanation should not be mistaken for simplicity and he suggests that the process of ascertaining how Rome, Athens, and Varanasi arrived at gods that have parallel features cannot be determined too readily. For,

which was the original system and which the copy, I will not presume to decide; nor are we likely, I believe, to be soon furnished with sufficient grounds for a decision: the fundamental rule, that *natural, and most human, operations proceed from the simple to the compound*, will afford no assistance on this point; since neither the *Asiatick* nor *European* system has any simplicity in it; and both are so complex, not to say absurd, however intermixed with the beautiful and the sublime, that the honour, such as it is, of the invention cannot be allotted to either with tolerable certainty.<sup>26</sup>

In arguing vehemently for parallels between the gods of Greece, Italy, and India, Jones refrains, in this passage, from taking a position on which of the cultures was the source for the others.

Jones' hesitation in declaring an original system is further complicated by his words about Egypt and the putative relationship between Egypt and India. Jones not only supposes that Egypt is an important source of knowledge in the western hemisphere and India in the eastern but also argues for contact between the two ancient cultures. One reason for assuming contact between Egyptians and Indians is the similarity of the name 'Misr', in Egypt, with 'Mishra', in India, an etymology which, as with many others of Jones, seems dubious in hindsight. Jones also comes close to saying that ancient Egyptians established a colony in India and that Egyptian priests came from the Nile to the banks of the Ganga and the Yamuna. These Egyptian priests learned from brahman priests and presumably took back their learning to Egypt. Thus, Jones argues for a connection between the peoples of Egypt, India, Greece, and Italy, 'long before they migrated to their several settlements, and consequently before the birth of Moses'.<sup>27</sup>

If, with these claims, Jones intervenes in eighteenth-century debates about the place of Egypt in world history, he also comments on a related question, that is, the status of Mosaic chronology and early history as it appears in the Bible. While, at first glance, Jones appears to be accepting of biblical history and chronology in this essay and in his other writings, he also qualifies and inflects his remarks in such a way that it seems more appropriate to aver that he makes the deferential gesture toward Christian authority only so that he can then proceed to make claims for the antiquity of non-biblical nations. As one critic observes, 'to declare faith in biblical

history, even if not necessarily in good faith, is to give oneself space, within the broadest bounds of orthodoxy, for speculative activities which might yet prove corrosive of traditional authority'.<sup>28</sup> When Jones writes in the essay that 'it is not the truth of our national religion, as such, that I have at heart: it is truth itself', the reader understands that Jones is giving himself the space to move beyond biblical primacy, even as he keeps on insisting that he is not abandoning it. Indeed, Jones' elaborate hand-wringing on the subject ('Either the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*, all due allowances being made for a figurative Eastern style, are true, or the whole fabrick of our national religion is false; a conclusion, which none of us, I trust, would wish to be drawn'<sup>29</sup>) and the need he feels to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Bible lead us to believe that he is prepared to accept the greater depth of non-biblical history and even the inaccuracy of biblical chronology. Perhaps, Jones' attitude toward Mosaic history is best encapsulated in these words: 'if any cool unbiassed reasoner will clearly convince me, that Moses drew his narrative through Egyptian conduits from the primeval fountains of Indian literature, I shall esteem him as a friend for having weeded my mind from capital error, and promise to stand among the foremost in assisting to circulate the truth, which he has ascertained'.<sup>30</sup> There is humour here, and much irony besides, but neither the humour nor the irony should obscure the fact that Jones himself laboured hard to establish the antiquity and the wisdom of those primeval fountains of Indian literature.

Jones' essay on the gods of Greece, Italy, and India thus exceeds the scope of its ambitious title and encompasses Egypt and Christianity as well. This combination of diverse traditions stays with Jones through to the end of his essay, where, still protesting too much, he writes that connections between Egypt, India, Greece, and Italy should not be taken to detract from 'the truth and sanctity of the *Mosaic* History, which if, confirmation were necessary, it would rather tend to confirm'.<sup>31</sup> Moses must have known about 'the mythological system of Egypt' and condemned it, even 'though some of their traditions concerning the creation and the flood were grounded on truth'.<sup>32</sup> These traditions, Jones acknowledges, can also be discerned in India and the Mediterranean cultures. And yet,

There is no shadow then of a foundation for an opinion, that Moses borrowed the first nine or ten chapters of *Genesis* from the literature of *Egypt*: still less can the adamantine pillars of our *Christian* faith be moved by the result of any debates on the comparative antiquity of the *Hindus* and *Egyptians*, or of any inquiries into the *Indian* Theology. Very respectable natives have assured me, that one or two missionaries have been absurd enough, in their zeal for the conversion of the *Gentiles*, to urge, "that the *Hindus* were even now almost *Christians*, because their Brahma', Vishnu, and Mahe'sa, were no other than the *Christian* Trinity;" a sentence, in which we can only doubt, whether folly, ignorance, or impiety predominates. The three powers, *Creative*, *Preservative*, and *Destructive*, which the *Hindus* express by the trilateral word *O'm*, were grossly ascribed by the first idolaters to the *heat*, *light*, and *flame* of their mistaken divinity, the Sun; and their wiser successors in the East, who perceived that the Sun was only a created thing, applied those powers to its creator; but the *Indian* Triad, and that of Plato, which he calls the Supreme Good, the Reason, and the Soul, are infinitely removed from the holiness and sublimity of the doctrine, which pious *Christians* have deduced from texts in the Gospel, though other *Christians*, as pious, openly profess their dissent from them. Each sect must be justified by its own faith and good intentions: this only I mean to inculcate, that the tenet of our church cannot without profaneness be

compared with that of the *Hindus*, which has only an apparent resemblance to it, but a very different meaning.<sup>33</sup>

Jones passes quickly from the ‘adamantine pillars of our Christian faith’ to the efforts of Christian missionaries who attempted to convert natives on the grounds that there were strong similarities between the central tenets of Christianity and Hinduism.

Jones points out that the missionaries have misconstrued at least one alleged similarity, the ‘Indian Triad’, which, like the triad described in Platonic dialogue, is not similar in any deep sense to the Christian trinity.

But even as he purports to criticize the missionaries and underline the ‘sublimity’ of Christian doctrine, Jones cannot resist going on, in the words immediately following this extract, to mention yet another Hindu narrative, now about Krishna, whose name and biography ‘were long anterior to the birth of our Saviour, and probably to the time of Homer’.<sup>34</sup> The tradition of Krishna suggests to Jones ‘that the spurious Gospels, which abounded in the first age of *Christianity*, had been brought to *India*, and the wildest parts of them repeated to the *Hindus*, who ingrafted them on the old fable of Ce’sava, the Apollo of Greece’.<sup>35</sup> With that claim, Jones once again returns us to the syncretism that is a dominant theme of his essay, and here, as often, Jones asserts the originality of Christianity and biblical tradition, only then to advance arguments for contact between the Mediterranean religions and the religions of South Asia. In fact, he ends his essay by saying that neither Muslims nor Hindus in India will easily convert to Christianity and that the only way to ensure such a conversion would be to translate parts of the bible into Sanskrit and Persian. While that logic sounds like a strategy for spreading the word of Christ among the heathen, it also calls on his fellow Britons to devote greater resources to Sanskrit and Persian.

Jones succeeded in communicating his enthusiasm for Indian myths to readers outside of Asia, the essay exerting ‘a quick, powerful impact in Europe’.<sup>36</sup> Thomas Maurice, a younger contemporary, incorporated Jones’ findings in his *Indian Antiquities* (1793–1800), *The History of Hindostan* (1795–98), and *The Modern History of Hindostan* (1802–03). *Gentleman’s Magazine* described the essay as ‘a most learned and ingenious investigation to prove the affinity between the systems of Polytheism that prevailed among the Greeks and Romans, and the popular worship of the Hindus’ and urged Christian missionaries to heed the advice that Jones delivered to his readers (May, 1801: 441). *The American Museum* magazine serialized much of the essay in 1792. Not all these readers are prepared to extol the Hindu over the Greek and Roman, but they appreciate Jones’ labours and insights. Coming in the wake of J. J. Winckelmann and the rise of a wider philhellenism, Jones’s arguments for the similarity of the Indian and the Greek systems are a challenge and a provocation. For his part, Herder writes in his *Ideen*, ‘The Grecian language is the most refined of any in the World; the Grecian mythology, the richest and most beautiful upon Earth; the Grecian poetry, perhaps the most perfect of its kind, when considered with respect to time and place.’<sup>37</sup> The adult Jones admires the accomplishments of ancient Greece and Rome, but one rarely finds him expressing such a sentiment even before his arrival in India, let alone after 1783.

Jones’ essay shows that it is possible, in the late eighteenth century, for a European intellectual to think broadly about mythology and to explore connections across religious traditions. Jones is exceptional in many respects, but, like Orientalists of every age, he is not afraid of declaring his love, and even his preference, for things Eastern. In June of the same year that he composed this essay, he wrote to a friend,

I am in love with the *Gopia*, charmed with *Crishen*, an enthusiastick admirer of *Ram*, and a devout adorer of *Brimha-bishen-mehais*: not to mention that *Judishteir*, *'Arjen*, *Corno*, and the other warriors of the *M'hab'harat* appear greater in my eyes than Agamemnon, Ajax, and Achilles appeared, when I first read the *Iliad*.<sup>38</sup>

Those were the feelings that informed his views as he tried to render the religious texts of the Hindus no more strange than than the texts of Greece and Italy or even the words of the Bible. His was a Sisyphean task, for so many Europeans had devoted so many tomes to showing the gods, customs, beliefs, and values of non-Europeans as bizarre, disagreeable, and preposterous. A whole set of attitudes and entire systems of thought had been mobilized to demarcate the Eastern gods as essentially alien to Europe. As Marcel Detienne has observed, 'the vocabulary of the scandalous is not gratuitous, it is used to convene the phantoms of alterity'.<sup>39</sup> But Jones is not interested in turning the gods of the East into feral barbarians who will obliterate the values of Europe and set the torch to Christian civilization; he seeks to understand the strangeness of the Indian gods and to relate them to the more familiar, classical Greek and Roman deities.

While it is true, lastly, that Christianity and British colonialism provide the contexts for Jones' essay on the gods, Jones himself reframes contemporary European approaches to the Bible and shows how polytheism, rather than biblical monotheism, can serve the cause of universalism. Earlier commentators had argued for a common homeland or language for humanity on the basis of Hebrew scripture—for example, by tracing all peoples back to Noah or his offspring—but Jones turns that discussion on its head by using polytheism to stake the claim for shared beliefs, values, and faiths, without disputing the worthiness of the Bible. Equating the polytheisms of ancient Greece and Rome with that of India in his time can be seen as colonialist or, in the pejorative sense of the term, Orientalist. Yet, Jones frequently accords these polytheist writings the status of authority and deals seriously with their chronological, historical, and religious implications: these writings are part of a wider analysis that encompasses Mosaic ethnology, comparative mythology, and Enlightenment history. Thanks to the influence of thinkers such as Herder, the nations of Europe were each invoking their own mythologies and traditions in order to give their national histories an anchor in the past. Jones overcame the borders that people drew up around their set of histories, literatures, and deities, and made a forceful case to place the gods in a cosmopolitan world.

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<sup>1</sup> Jones 1807: i.78.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin 2011: ix.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lincoln 1999: 54.

<sup>5</sup> Lincoln 1999: 74.

<sup>6</sup> Leerssen 2006: 97.

<sup>7</sup> Leerssen 2006: 0000.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Menges 2009: 202.

<sup>9</sup> Jones 1807: iii.5 ('Preliminary Discourse').

<sup>10</sup> *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany*, 2nd series, 3 vols., ed. Lady Llanover (London, 1862), ii.539.

<sup>11</sup> Franklin 2011: 173.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany*, 2nd series, 3 vols., ed. Lady Llanover (London, 1862), ii.539–40. The poem is reprinted, with helpful notes, in Franklin 1995: 57–61.

<sup>13</sup> Franklin 2011: 107–10.

<sup>14</sup> See Drew 1987: 50–51.

<sup>15</sup> Jones 1807: iii.1–2.

<sup>16</sup> Franklin 2011: 205.

<sup>17</sup> Jones 1807: iii.3.

<sup>18</sup> Jones 1807: iii.5.

<sup>19</sup> Franklin 2011: 210.

<sup>20</sup> I quote from the text in Jones 1807, vol. iii, with changes in orthography and capitalization.

<sup>21</sup> Jones 1807: iii.321–22.

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- <sup>22</sup> Jones 1807: iii.322.  
<sup>23</sup> Jones 1807: iii.319.  
<sup>24</sup> Jones 1807: iii.323.  
<sup>25</sup> Jones 1807: iii.385–86.  
<sup>26</sup> Jones 1807: iii.386.  
<sup>27</sup> Jones 1807: iii.391.  
<sup>28</sup> David 1996: 175–76.  
<sup>29</sup> Jones 1807: iii.325.  
<sup>30</sup> Jones 1807: iii.325.  
<sup>31</sup> Jones 1807: iii.391.  
<sup>32</sup> Jones 1807: iii.391, 392.  
<sup>33</sup> Jones 1807: iii.392–93.  
<sup>34</sup> Jones 1807: iii.293–94.  
<sup>35</sup> Jones 1807: iii.395.  
<sup>36</sup> Cannon 1990: 297.  
<sup>37</sup> Herder 1968: 172.  
<sup>38</sup> Cannon 1970: ii.652.  
<sup>39</sup> Detienne 1986: 20.