Striating Difference: From "Ceremonies and Customs" to World Religions

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INTRODUCTION

O BSERVERS OF THE ACADEMIC SCENE IN THE UNITED STATES pertaining to the study of religion would doubtless recognize a curiously twinned structure of the field, represented by two learned societies that seem to couple and decouple on various occasions, engage and disengage regularly, and not infrequently quarrel. These two bodies, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society for Biblical Literature (SBL), are not symmetrical either in size or in scope. As with any deeply entrenched division of long standing, moreover, they do not agree on the nature of the difference that divides them. That said, one way of characterizing this division that might be deemed relatively uncontroversial may be that the former organization claims or aspires to be global and pluralistic in the coverage of the subject, whereas the latter is essentially monocentric, if not also centripetal, in the sense that it is focused on a particular legacy, namely, the biblical—broad, expansive, and diversified though it may be within itself.

All this, to be sure, may be but a matter of local curiosity, a state of affairs sufficiently obscure and trivial for most outsiders, I presume, to feel perfectly at liberty to ignore or to remain confused about. It is certainly not my object here to discuss these scholarly bodies, explain their relation, or arbitrate between them. Rather, I draw attention to this regional condition as a backdrop to announcing my actual intention. This latter is, above all, to consider the dominant paradigm that governs our customary thinking about religious diversity today, or what I am inclined to call more generally the pluralist regime for organizing and regulating difference. In this essay I

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contemplate how this regime may have come into prominence in the course of the last few centuries and, in light of this historical trajectory and outcome, whether it is possible to reset, or to configure anew, the conceptual framework for apprehending and understanding difference and diversity, that is, in a manner other than the *pluralist regime* to which we have become inured. Such a reconfiguration, it will be suggested furthermore, may also entail a repositioning of the standpoint of scholarship in relation to the field of religious multiplicity.

A rumor, or perhaps a mere presentiment, has infiltrated various corners of our world today: not all is well with pluralism. Understood as a conceptual schema to comprehend any given field of diversity as an assemblage of distinct and discrete categories—in a word, as *striated* differences—pluralism has been broadly assumed to be a ready antidote to the hitherto-dominant monocentric universalism of Euro-American origin and anchorage. It would be foolish, indeed, to deny that pluralism has been a useful regulatory principle, a highly methodic regimen for containing, ordering, and representing a condition of diversity from a standpoint of totality. So pervasive and so thoroughly naturalized in our discourse, this regulatory power, and the constraints that the pluralist regime actually imposes on a given field of heterogeneity, are difficult to ascertain. Pluralism is seldom recognized as a strategy, let alone as an ideology. The seeming transparency of the pluralist regime may be a mark of its overwhelming success, but it does not necessarily signify the self-evidence of its truth. What goes unremarked is the fact that pluralism is by no means the only or, for that matter, a particularly efficacious strategy for representing diversity. Just as rarely contemplated is the possibility that, perhaps, the present epistemic regime dominated by pluralism—this curiously parsimonious, rigidly disciplinary, segmental ordering of difference—may not entail any progress in terms of equanimity, tolerance, broad-mindedness, and other such virtues that we at present like to ascribe to ourselves.

Of late, the pluralist principle has been questioned sporadically, not for its presumed goal of decentering power and allowing multiplicity to thrive, of course, but rather for its muddled logic and its doubtful efficacy as a remedy for past iniquities. One domain of public discourse in which such questions have risen most visibly is race. It has become evident that accounting for the physiological, dispositional, and genetic diversity of the human species in terms of racial distinctions is scientifically unsupportable, and accordingly, well-meaning efforts to legislate equity and equality among people predicated solely or primarily on racial categories now seem politically vulnerable, if not ultimately untenable. On the other hand, in comparison to differentiation according to race, striating human diversity in terms of multiple religions—understood as so many "belief systems" or "-isms" of distinct origins and histories—might seem somewhat less controversial; but for a variety of reasons this, too, has begun to trouble some scholars who study religion.

In view of this condition, my purpose here is twofold. First, this essay endeavors to illustrate, as an emblematic example, how this pluralist disciplinary regime came into effect. To that end, I will trace the transmutation of a particular pictorial image, one first created in the early eighteenth century and purporting to represent all the known variety of religions in the world, ancient and modern. By following the posthumous fate of this image, I aim to demonstrate graphically the process by which the condition of diversity and multiplicity eventually came to be represented as so many columns of separate, delimited, and isomorphic identities.

The pictorial legacy in question, the example that serves as the starting point of this survey, is a panoramic view (fig. 1) of "all the religions in the world" executed by celebrated eighteenth-century artist Bernard Picart (1673–1733). In addition to this well-known image, over 250 engravings by his hand—some of which were more or less copied from earlier publications, but many of Picart's original design—illustrated and embellished a monumental multivolume work entitled *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*. This costly yet extremely popular work was first published in Amsterdam (1723–43) by the printing house of Jean Frédéric Bernard, who almost certainly wrote the text.[1] Justly famous for its ambition, innovation, and luxuriant beauty, this work, or more specifically its illustrations, went on to be reproduced in numerous later editions—translations, expanded versions, abridged versions, and knockoffs—for nearly two centuries. Of these epigonic and derivative publications, I will examine one version produced in the late eighteenth century and two paired specimens dating from the 1820s and 1830s.[2]

FIG 1. *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: J. F. Bernard, 1723), frontispiece (Bernard Picart, engraver).

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[1] It was translated into English and published in London soon thereafter as *Ceremonies and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World*.

[2] My interest in Picart's volume dates back to the early 2000s when I was researching the history of European books on the "religions of the world." In 2007, I had a welcome opportunity to spend three months with a group of scholars at the Getty Research Institute, who were conjointly working on the legacy of Picart. I owe thanks particularly to the principals of the research group—Margaret Jacob, Lynn Hunt, and Wijnand Mijnhart—as well as to the Getty Research Institute, which also provided the Picart images.

In the course of delineating this pictorial legacy, moreover—and here lies my second objective in this chronological survey—I underscore the changing configuration of the position of the viewer/observer/scholar, as these images amount to a series of visual specifications as to where, from what vantage point, the field of religious diversity was to be viewed. In effect, I will argue that these different versions of the "religions of the world"—Picart's original and three later adaptations from different historical moments—can be seen as representing not only the steadily growing tendency toward the pluralist striation and compartmentalization of difference but also the dislocation of the scholarly stance and the transmutation of the epistemic regime inscribed in each successive image. Toward the end of the essay, I will return to Picart's original image in order to ponder, briefly and provisionally, if there might be an alternative position for the scholar/observer that is already prefigured in this early eighteenth-century representation.

PICART'S PANORAMA, TODAY'S PLURALISM

Picart's own vision of "religious diversity" is best represented in the famous frontispiece that opens the first volume, which appeared in 1723. I propose that this vision is valuable for us today precisely because it differs from the regnant pluralist model, and that it can be a resource for us, if not as a preferred alternative to pluralism, then at least as an occasion to imagine another way of coming to terms with difference and diversity. I suggest also that this exercise might help us reconfigure the place of scholarship in relation to the field of difference we inhabit.

As I have argued elsewhere, the pluralist model for representing religions came to prevail in the late nineteenth century. This was a jolting transformation in the European discourse and a sea change in the way the variety among humans was envisioned. More specifically, the principle of pluralism was the result of three newly emergent and deeply entwined sciences: comparative philology, comparative theology, and the science of race. A critical terminus of this transformation was the onset, in the early twentieth century, of what I call the "world religions system" (fig. 2).[3]

Prior to the nineteenth century, the stock phrase "customs and ceremonies" was paramount in representing religion, and the distinction between sacred and profane, or religious and secular, was extremely liberally (i.e., laxly and indistinctly) drawn. For early-modern thinkers, representing "all the religions of the world" generally meant covering a massive number of disparate human practices, exhibiting the vast array of persons, costumes, implements, gestures, acts, and processions, not to mention wondrous landscapes and monumental structures—all that was especially appealing to the eye. Given the penchant for the visual and the panoramic, it is not surprising that Picart and Bernard's collaborative work came to be far better known by the name of the designer of the illustrations rather than by the name of the author of the text, and that it was the engravings, rather than the discursive prose, that went on to be replicated in countless new editions, translations, and adaptations. In the course of this long afterlife, Picart's pictorial legacy itself came under the sway of the pluralist regime. What had been in earlier times conceived of as the

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3 This transformation is most noticeable as a change in numbers, from the long-standing four-part division into a far more numerous, ten or more, "major religions of the world" plus an indefinite number of "minor" ones subsumed into a generic category, variously called "primitive religions," "primal religions," "tribal religions," etc. But the implicit narrative of scientific progress here is misleading. We should not presume that this change is a result of greater differentiation and precision in the field of knowledge. Far more than numerical increase and refinement was involved. I have dealt with this topic elsewhere; see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
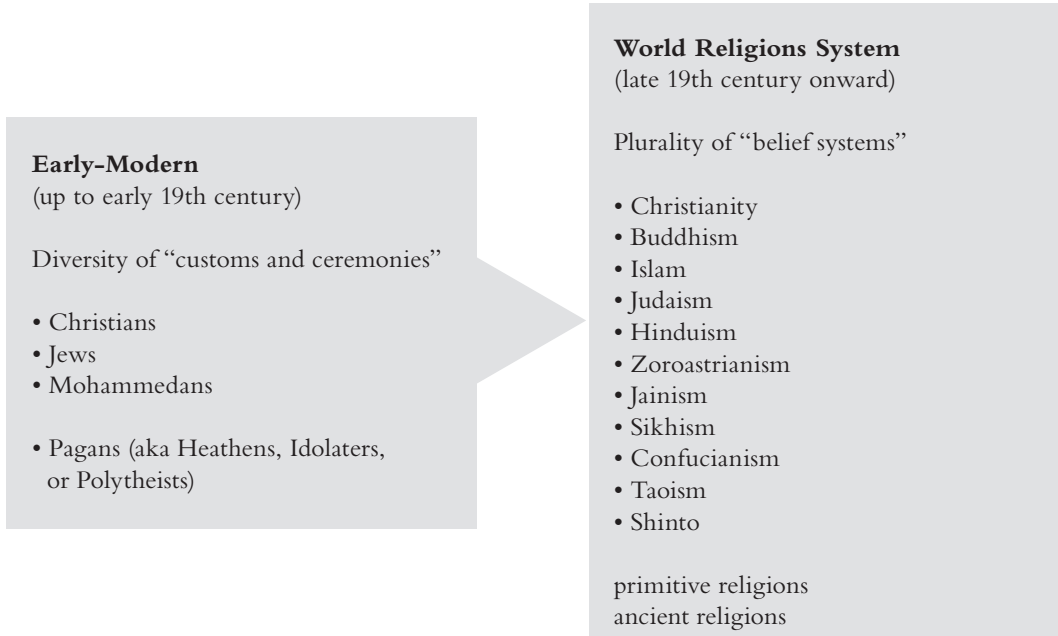
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Early-Modern
(up to early 19th century)

Diversity of "customs and ceremonies"

• Christians
• Jews
• Mohammedans

• Pagans (aka Heathens, Idolaters,
  or Polytheists)

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World Religions System
(late 19th century onward)

Plurality of "belief systems"

• Christianity
• Buddhism
• Islam
• Judaism
• Hinduism
• Zoroastrianism
• Jainism
• Sikhism
• Confucianism
• Taoism
• Shinto

primitive religions
ancient religions

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FIG 2. Transformation of categories classifying religions (from early-modern to modern systems).

great "*variety* of nations" (i.e., divergent peoples variously engaging in different "rites, customs, and ceremonies") came to be understood in terms of the "*plurality* of religions" (i.e., a series of distinct populations or communities, each of which is presumed to be bound and regulated by a particular "belief system").

To be sure, it might appear that the earlier conceptual scheme, too, assumed plurality of religions, only with a smaller number on the list; it might seem, in other words, that the older system clearly distinguished four religious communions: Christian, Jewish, "Mohammedan," and idolatrous heathen or pagan. But this stereotypical system of four did not imply the same conception of difference *as* plurality. For, in this system, only one religion was recognized—the true one, of course—while all other "religions" fell into one of the three ways of straying from it. To wit, one could stubbornly refuse to accept the true religion, as Jews did; willfully contradict and pervert it, as Mohammedans did; or else pitifully wallow in the ignorance of it, as heathen idolaters did.[4] In short, this formulaic four-part division was not a way of numerating separate and distinct religions as we understand them today.[5]

Picart's work exemplified this early-modern conception. In the course of time, its vision of diversity was incrementally replaced by the pluralism of striated difference, as the diversity of practice became partitioned and consolidated to align with one or another discrete identities, so that each portion or segment of the spread of difference could be enumerated and counted in a quasi-parliamentary system of separate but in principle equal representation. By thus segment-ing, regularizing, and ultimately equalizing difference, moreover, this pluralist regime feigns to

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4 Ibid., 46–61.

5 A corollary to this is the fact that these early-modern texts often employed the terms "religion(s)" and "denomination(s)" interchangeably. What we today regard as differences and divisions *within* a religion, on the one hand, and differences *without* and *among* separate religions, on the other, were not clearly distinguished.

evacuate itself from the field of difference. In other words, the pluralist regime disavows its own location and vantage point within the field of representation. The study of religion for the past century or more has been overwhelmingly dependent on this pseudodemocratic representational pluralist system as the ground for its legitimacy—that is, for its professed neutrality, objectivity, and, if not to say outright secularity, at least its equal footing with all other, presumably secular, academic disciplines. My aim here, then, is to present a graphic demonstration of the advent of this pluralist regime, or what I call the world religions system, by tracing the posthumous fate of Picart's work, which will illustrate at the same time how the particular perspectival positioning predominant in scholarly practice today has been dependent on this system.

At the outset, however, there is a conundrum. Even granting their obvious aesthetic and ornamental values, the longevity of Picart's images is still puzzling if the conception of religion indeed underwent such a profound transformation in the following centuries. What exactly about his designs continued to appeal to the sensibility of later writers? What use were such "external incidentals" as clerical costumes, ritual implements, architectural details of the place of worship, and so on—which were, after all, the main objects of these pictorial representations—to later authors, who were increasingly stressing the difference among religions in terms of certain characteristic beliefs, mind-sets, and inner feelings?

This inquiry will be structured in the following way. I will examine serially Picart's own view of the "religions of the world" envisaged in the frontispiece to the 1723 volume and a series of equivalent overviews presented by some later, derivative versions. These latter publications are essentially copies of Picart; I will first discuss one that was published in 1780 and then a pair of related specimens that appeared around 1830. Thus, the survey will offer a glance at three different moments roughly half a century apart.[6] These derivative works are all sizable volumes of at least five hundred pages, but still a mere fraction of Picart and Bernard's original three thousand pages. In most cases, the illustrations in these works are almost entirely copies of Picart's designs; but each of the epigonic publications devised its own frontispiece to represent, each in its own way, what the author (or the publisher) took to be the most comprehensive view of the subject. Although these frontispieces are therefore "original" and not lifted from Picart, we shall see that each of them refers to certain aspects of Picart's work, thus making all the more evident the differences in the ways each text conceptualized the relations among peoples and nations. It is in this chain of references that I aim to plot the course of change: the gradual disaggregation of "nations" and the movement toward the list of "world religions" that renders human diversity in terms of a finite and enumerable set of striated difference.

But what exactly do I mean by the world religions system, or the epistemic and classificatory regime predicated on the striation of difference? This may be conveniently illustrated by a series of images taken from the websites of some well-established departments of religious studies in the United States (fig. 3). These strips delineating iconic figures and objects in a row exemplify the regime of "separate but equal" or, if not quite that, at least "separate and *comparable*" representation; each religion is given its own niche, quiescent and uniform, secure in its own borders, neatly and isomorphically ordered in the total scheme of things. How did our discourse arrive at this highly structured regime from what we see in Picart?

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6   To my knowledge the last work in which Picart's images were extensively employed was Frank Dobbins, *Error's Chains: How Forged and Broken—complete, graphic, and comparative history of the many strange beliefs, superstitious practices, domestic peculiarities, sacred writings, systems of philosophy, legends and traditions, customs and habits of mankind throughout the world, ancient and modern* (New York: Standard Publishing House, 1883).
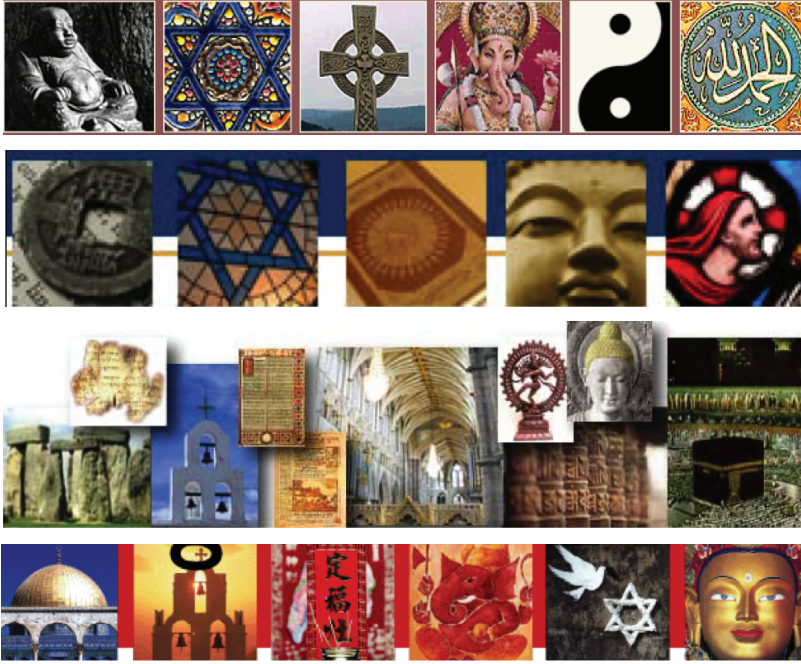
FIG 3. "World religions" under pluralist regime: several examples of striation.

PICART (1723)

This frontispiece, though not among the largest in size, is certainly one of the most intricate, lively, prolific, and endlessly fascinating. We can imagine two horizontal lines, each with a jog or two, dividing the composition into three: foreground, center, and background (fig. 4). In the center is a rather raucous congregation of Christians, teeming with figures representing various sects, presumably, whose number must be "countless," judging from the rows of bobbing heads that disappear into obscurity (fig. 5). The principal division within this group is located in the middle, parting the Catholic domain from the Protestant. On the right side, the reigning figure is the Catholic Church (fig. 6). Richly clad and bearing the papal crown, she is mostly in shadow; instead, light is abundantly shed upon her capacious lap and upon a large open book beside her. But this is not the Bible but rather a registry of *concilia* and *traditiones* (i.e., councils and successions), with a notorious indulgence document hanging just below it. Underfoot are two earlier dispensations, now fallen to the ground yet still in the full glory of their classical magnificence. Both of the vanquished look up almost adoringly toward the countenance of the victorious Church. One reveals the sacred Hebrew script (though she is not looking at this revelation), while the figure of classical antiquity offers her an orb with a winged Victory, even though the gesture of the old nun just behind him is ambiguous; she could be either encouraging this transfer of power or possibly usurping it. This ensemble clearly points to the bifurcated taproot of Christianity—that is, the two types of pre-Christian antiquity, the pagan and the biblical, which eventually came to be called Hellenism and Hebraism, respectively, in the nineteenth century.
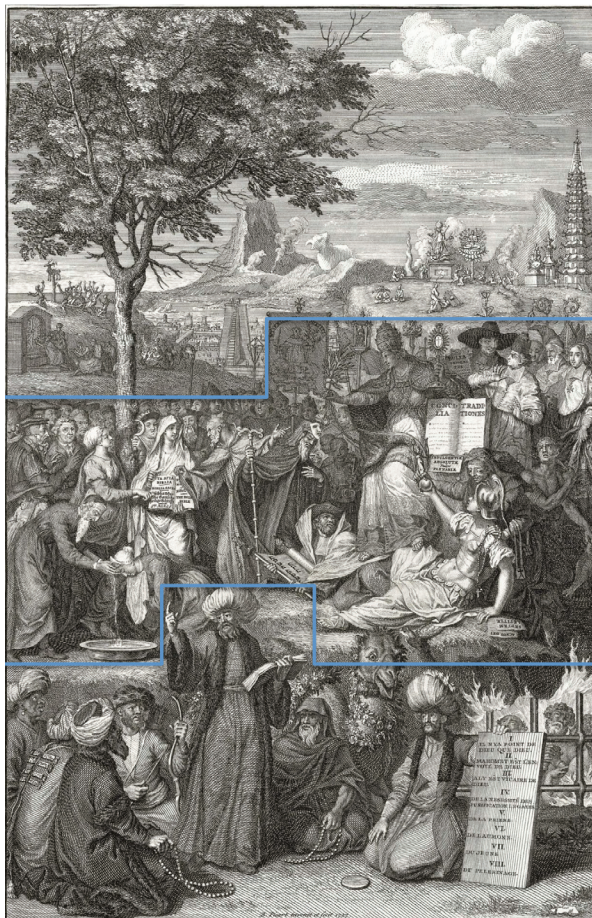
FIG 4. Picart's frontispiece for *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses*, with foreground, center, and background delineated.

FIG 5. Picart's frontispiece for *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses* (detail): domain of Christians.

FIG 6. Picart's frontispiece for *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses* (detail): Catholic Christianity.

To the left are the Protestants (fig. 7). Among them we recognize Luther and Calvin, neither of whom could have been looking too kindly upon the scene just in front of them: the Anabaptists engaged in adult baptism. But the central figure of the Protestant ensemble, no doubt, is the demure young woman in white, holding an open Bible, which is inscribed in several different languages. Immediately behind her are two figures, arguably representing Henry VIII and John Knox, scions of the two rival Protestant streams of the British Isles. More conspicuous is the figure to her right, however, an apparent emissary from the Catholic domain. The stately elder is pushing to close her Bible while pointing with his other hand toward the Catholic Church and to the record of councils and successions, thus making the irreconcilable choices all the more apparent. At the same time, it is precisely this "either-or" figure that not only divides but also engages the two domains, because his pointing finger and the angle of his shoulders inevitably draw the viewer's attention to a counterpoint to this gesture coming from the right: the Mother Church's gaze toward, and her right arm offering an olive branch to—or so it seems—the white-clad Reformed Church and her open Bible, this line extending, in fact, all the way to the Host in her left hand (fig. 8). But the meaning here—seemingly a gesture of blessing and transfer of power—is complicated by a few details. Only a minute scrutiny reveals what is offered with the olive branch: a chain and a shackle and, inconspicuously but surely, a little snake coiled around the branch (fig. 9).[7]

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7 While it seems only natural to interpret this offering as something of a surreptitious evil—and the caption to the image endorses this view—the image as such may be still more ambiguous. For, even if the serpent coiled around a tree branch evokes the story of the beginning of human troubles and travails in the Garden of Eden, it is also reminiscent of the rod of Asclepius, a symbol of healing and, as such, the insignia for various medical professions and organizations, but which—to complicate the matter even further—is often confused in popular usage with the caduceus, or the wand of Hermes (with two serpents coiled in the form of a double helix), the god of traders, traitors, and thieves.

FIG 7. Picart's frontispiece for *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses* (detail): Protestants.

FIG 8. Picart's frontispiece for *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses* (detail): opposition and communication between Catholic and Protestant Christianities.

FIG 9. Picart's frontispiece for *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses* (detail): ambiguous transaction/transmission.

Behind these unharmonious multitudes of Christians are the scenes with distant pagans (fig. 10). On the left side are several different congregations of heathens worshiping animals, possibly fire, and possibly some astral deity. Beyond these bucolic scenes lies a great ancient city, with a ziggurat and other monumental structures. To the right are figures and monuments recognizable as those from farther East, with stupas in several different styles, colossal idols in fantastic shapes and forms, and a variety of holy men, charlatans, and penitents engaged in outlandish acts.[8]

In the foreground is a peaceable assembly of Muslims, or "Mohammedans" as they used to be called more commonly (fig. 11). Here we see an apparently unified congregation flocking about a preaching figure with an open book in hand. Among his audience are men in different modes of dress, including a Moor, and even a garlanded camel. The tablet with its eight articles of faith suggests that this is a gathering of Shi'ia Muslims, as the third item claims that "Aly [Ali] is the vicar of God." It is not immediately clear, incidentally, why the figures with vaguely classical features suffering in the fire-filled prison behind the creedal tablet came to be in this sorry condition (but this scene is also directly beneath the Christian territory).

Here then is a brief tour of Picart's image, the world coming together in a picture. Differences and distinctions are discernible, but the differences are not (yet) striated, not segmented, structurally equalized, and pigeonholed in the world religions system. Rather, the field of difference covers a vast and uneven terrain, where great and small are as much an effect of perspectives as absolute magnitude. How did this assemblage of humanity become disaggregated, eventually to end up in the bizarre, boxy, identically compartmentalized system of striation?

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[8] These small images are cursory sketches of the scenes and objects depicted in more detail later in the volume.

FIG 10. Picart's frontispiece for *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses* (detail): distant pagans.

FIG 11. Picart's frontispiece for *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses* (detail): "Mohammedans."

HURD (1780)

The first specimen of the Picart knockoffs to be considered is dated 1780, a book authored by a prolific and successful writer on many different subjects—in other words, a hack—named William Hurd (fig. 12). Other than this frontispiece, every illustration in the book appears to be copied from Picart, without any mention of his name. Far less elaborate than Picart's own frontispiece, this image, too, depicts an assemblage, though with less drama, each figure seemingly absorbed in his or her own act, oblivious to all the others. Hurd supplies his own explanation of this frontispiece, which I will quote, piecemeal but at length.[9] The opening paragraph rehearses the familiar formulaic list:

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9   William Hurd, *A New Universal History of the Religious Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs of the Whole World: or, a complete and impartial view of all the religions in the various nations of the universe* (London: Alexander Hogg, [1780?]). This explanation page is not included in all extant copies, though it is present in the copy owned by the Getty Research Institute.

FIG 12. William Hurd, *A New Universal History of the Religious Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs of the Whole World* (London: Alexander Hogg, [1780?]), frontispiece.

> It displays a general emblematical Representation of the Christian Religion, as well as that of the Jewish, Mahometan, Pagan, and Heathen Systems; including also Symbols of the Faith, embraced by the Persians and the various idolatrous Nations.

The first emblem of faith to be described is the Christian communion (fig. 13):

> The Female Figure with the Cup and Cross in the Middle, represents the Protestant or Reformed Church, at whose Feet are placed the Pope's Crown, Crosier, &c. and likewise a Monk in a prostrate Attitude, with the Beads, Mask, &c. denoting the Ignorance and Duplicity of that Persuasion, and shewing the great Decline of Superstition, and that the Reformed Religion, from its reasonableness and agreement with the Holy Scriptures, is the most consistent with the Divine Attributes.

In effect, the multiply divided and variegated Christianity of Picart is here reconstituted under a single figure, and this unity is achieved by a unilateral proclamation of the triumph of the "Reformed Church" over Catholicism.

FIG 13. Hurd, *New Universal History*, frontispiece (detail): Christian.

The assembly of Mohammedans, too, is reduced to a single figure, though this individual is rather confusingly called "Osman Ali" (fig. 14):

> The front Figure on the Left is *Osman Ali*, who explained the Doctrines of Mahomet, according to his own private Opinions, and then established them in that Form, by the Force of the Sword in Persia, where his Tenets are still the Religion of the Country.

Finally, the closing paragraph draws the viewer's attention to the authorial position (fig. 12):

> The Books, Manuscripts, &c. in the Fore-ground, discover the great Labour of the Author, in writing an IMPARTIAL HISTORY OF ALL RELIGIONS, for which this Frontispiece was designed as an Embellishment.

In this manner, the open books—so dominant in Picart's representation of the "major" religions—are banished from the hands of the religionists and are variously replaced by other emblems: an indistinct scroll and a sword, a cross and a chalice, and law tablets. Instead, many closed books signifying the author's scholarly labor are piled high in a shadowy corner diametrically opposite the sun, separated from the religious terrain by a band of light, as if to mark off the domain of scholarship from that of "religion itself." The implication may be that, despite the highly tendentious language used in describing various religions, in the author's view "an IMPARTIAL HISTORY OF ALL RELIGIONS" could be articulated only from this obscure corner.

FIG 14. Hurd, *New Universal History*, frontispiece (detail): "Osman Ali," or Muslim.

MACKENZIE (1826) AND GOODRICH (1834)

However great his own authorial labor might have been, Hurd did not mention Picart by name, despite the fact that the engraver supplied most of the artwork in the volume. In contrast, Colin Mackenzie's treatise, published in 1826, broadly advertises that the illustrations are taken from Picart.[10] But the embellishment on the ornate title page is apparently original, sporting another image of the variety of religions (fig. 15). Here, one of the innovations in Hurd's version, namely, representation of "each religion" by a single figure associated with a particular architectural structure, is carried even further. As a result, the individuated religions begin, literally, to line up.

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[10] Colin Mackenzie, *The Religious Rites and Ceremonies of Every Nation in the World: Impartially described and beautifully Illustrated with Engravings on Steel & Wood. Modernized from the Celebrated & Splendid Work of Bernard Picart* (London: John Williams, 1826). Rather confusingly for modern readers, the same work is issued under the name of Robert Huish, with a simple addition of a second title page that reads: *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of Every Nation of the World, Abridged from the Celebrated and Splendid Work of Barnard* [sic] *Picart. Illustrated by Beautiful Engravings on Steel and Wood, by Robert Huish* (London: John Williams, printed by Lowe and Harvey, 1828). I consulted this "duplicated" version owned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

FIG 15. Colin Mackenzie, *The Religious Rites and Ceremonies of Every Nation in the World* (London: John Williams, 1826), title-page illustration.

Eight years later, a version of the same image appeared as a frontispiece to yet another Picart knockoff, this time by Charles A. Goodrich (fig. 16).[11] It is difficult to say definitively whether the Goodrich version actually "borrowed" the image from Mackenzie's title page or whether both were copied from an earlier, unknown source. It may appear that only the chronological order of these publications supports the conjecture that the Goodrich version represents a further point in the progress of the discursive transformation.

FIG 16. Charles A. Goodrich, *Religious Ceremonies and Customs* (Hartford, CT: Hutchison and Dwier, 1834), frontispiece.

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11 Charles A. Goodrich, Religious Ceremonies and Customs, or the Forms of Worship practised by the several nations of the known world, from the earliest records to the present time; on the basis of the celebrated and splendid work of Bernard Picart; to which is added, a brief view of minor sects, which exist at the present day … (Hartford, CT: Hutchison and Dwier, 1834).

One marked difference between the Goodrich frontispiece and the Mackenzie title page is that in the former, for the first time, the individuals in the lineup are clearly labeled. But the designations themselves may strike us as odd and uneven, for, from today's point of view, "Egyptian" and "Persian" are nationalities, whereas "Christian" and "Jew" are religious (and ethnic) identities, "Mahomet" is a personal name, and "pagan" is an outdated generic category, which surely must have included Egyptian and Persian as well. This irregularity in the nomenclature may support the hypothesis that the image came first and the labels were supplied later.

With Goodrich, moreover, it becomes evident how the shifting trend that we began to see in the transition from Picart to Hurd is carried still further; the field of diversity is ever more differentiated and demarcated into a series of "individual" religions. At the same time, the apparent uniformity of the visual field renders less visible the fundamentally uneven categories of the representation, for the actual placement of each religion seems merely accidental; their relative positions seem, in principle, interchangeable.

At the center of Goodrich's frontispiece is "Christian," portrayed again as a robed female figure, in a pensive posture. To her left is "Jew" in his ritualistic ancientness, with an awesome thunderstorm above the mountain as his backdrop. On her right is what we might call the Eastern ensemble. Of the three figures depicted, the one nearest the center is a Muslim in a markedly belligerent attitude, now identified specifically as Mohammed.

While individual figures and their respective backgrounds are thus nearly identical in the Mackenzie and Goodrich versions, the difference becomes palpable when they are juxtaposed (fig. 17). If the Goodrich rendition seems to mark an advance in an equalizing and flattening

FIG 17. Mackenzie's and Goodrich's illustrations compared.

trend, what contributes most to this effect are the labels, which technically lie outside the image. These labels do not merely explain; they let the columns of different "traditions" arise from below, originating in the subterranean region outside the picture, growing straight up, thus containing each in its own proper architectural domain. It is also the effect of the labels—which, since they are outside the frame, are absolutely equidistant from the viewer—that the curvature of the placement in the Mackenzie version is hardly recognizable in Goodrich. The image, in both versions, clearly forefronts the three Abrahamic religions, with Christianity at the center; but this feature is effectively obscured in Goodrich.

One other factor contributing to the erasure of this curvature—therefore further flattening the lineup—is the excision of the figure farthest to the left that we see in Mackenzie, an image somewhat at a distance so that it begins to connect the human figures in the foreground and the architectural elements in the background in an elliptical orbit. This scene, excised in Goodrich, is that of a human sacrifice (fig. 18).

TRANSFORMATIONS

At this point, I should probably anticipate the question: Does this have anything to do with Picart? That is, other than the fact that these later authors each pilfered Picart's images and rendered them in cheap editions for their own benefit, do these latter-day deteriorations signify anything about the transformation of discourse traceable back to Picart's time?

Since the argument thus far has been mobilized largely through pictures, I will maintain the same strategy and answer with two sets of images. The first series juxtaposes images representing "Islam" in Picart, Hurd, Mackenzie, and Goodrich (fig. 19). As noted earlier, in Picart, the central figure among the Mohammedans, the Shi'ite founder Ali, is shown preaching to a gathering of men, with an open book in one hand and pointing to the heavens above with the other. In
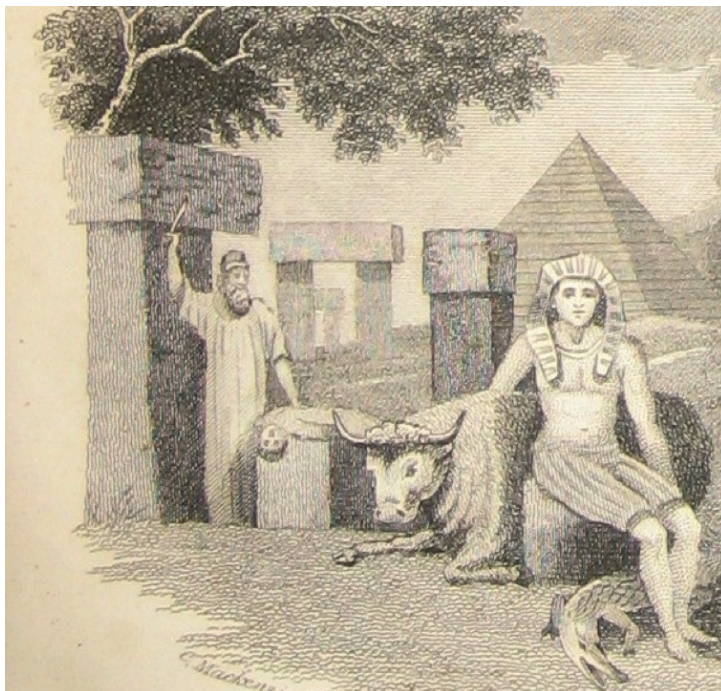

FIG 18. Mackenzie, *Religious Rites and Ceremonies*, title-page illustration (detail): human sacrifice.

PICART (1723)   HURD (1780)   McKENZIE (1826)   GOODRICH (1834)

FIG 19. Images of Mohammedanism (Islam) compared.

Hurd's version, the equivalent figure is called—rather nonsensically—"Osman Ali," as if to confound, deliberately or inadvertently, two major Islamic dynasties, Safavid (Persian) and Ottoman (Turkish), by conflating the two names that are historically irreconcilable.[12] Whoever he was meant to be, Osman Ali is still richly dressed as in Picart; but he exchanges his book for a scroll and a sword. Clutching these items, neither hand points to the heavens. Yet his posture is more pensive than bellicose. True, he holds a sword, but in his left hand; its tip happens to be pinning the robe of the hapless Catholic monk, but there is almost an air of inadvertence in this gesture. In Mackenzie, by contrast, the sword is indeed raised, held in his right hand, which causes him to handle the Koran with his left—rather bad form, as we understand from the tradition.[13] When it comes to Goodrich, the Koran is verily upside down, and the figure is now named Mohammed.[14]

[12] I am indebted to Carl Ernst for the clarification and for an educated guess as to the apparent puzzle of this nomenclature. In response to my query he wrote: "If Hurd [in the eighteenth century] is referring to Osman Ali as the one who established the dominant form of religion in Iran, that means he is talking about Twelve-Imam Shi'ism. However, it would be paradoxical indeed for anyone associated with Shi'ism to be named Osman (Arabic 'Uthman), since he was one of the first three caliphs, who are regarded as usurpers of the rightful position of 'Ali; their names are publicly cursed in the rituals established by the Safavid empire in the 16th century. I suspect that 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad) is intended as the nominal founder of Shi'ism, and that the name of Osman was added by mistake, possibly by association with the Ottoman dynasty which is also named after Osman. Such a slip of the pen would be understandable at a time when the Ottomans were still regarded as a major threat by Western Europeans." Email message to author, May 1, 2007.

[13] It should be noted, however, that in the age of premechanical reproduction, it is sometimes difficult to determine right and left, owing to the fact that a copyist would often create a mirror image of the original, an easier task than producing an identical image. As a matter of fact, the later edition of the Hurd volume published in 1799—with far fewer illustrations, incidentally—contains a frontispiece that is the reverse of the 1780 original.

[14] If the Muslim's sword once again points to the heavens, one cannot help but view this as an act of defiance, violence, and a sacrilege. It may be remarked, incidentally, that the only sword conspicuously present in Picart's

PICART (1723)   HURD (1780)   GOODRICH (1834)

FIG 20. Images of Christianity compared.

The second series in my response depicts Christianity (fig. 20). In Picart, as we saw, Christianity is represented in terms of the fundamental tension between the two prominent female figures, but it is also depicted by a swarm of other figures staged in a complex drama of operatic proportions. The "Christian" figure in all later versions is clearly a descendant of the young woman on the left representing the Reformed Church—as attested by the similarity of their dress, for example. In all later versions, however, her posture seems to echo that of Picart's triumphant Catholic Church. In Hurd, notably, what lies beneath her feet is no longer the pair of figures representing Roman and Israelite antiquity but Catholicism itself, represented by the monk with a very long ear, beads, mask, and crosier. But she does not trample upon this half-devilish figure; rather, her foot is on the pope's crown, or, to be exact, the very headdress of Mother Church in Picart's rendition. The deeply problematic schism within Western Christianity between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism—which is delineated in an extraordinarily complex figuration in Picart—would have militated against the trend toward the world religions system, because, in this system, "Christianity" had to be consolidated as one religion. Hurd resolved this, with some violence, by the Protestant triumph over Catholicism; they are not peaceably united.

But that is precisely what the Mackenzie-Goodrich version accomplishes. "Christian" is evidently the same figure as the one we see in Hurd, though a mirror image; but she is now reconciled with the Vatican; for, unmistakably, in her background is the circular piazza in front of Saint Peter's Basilica. At the same time, the church façade itself may be more reminiscent of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London than Saint Peter's in Rome; this ambiguity may further signal, intentionally or not, a reconciliation or fusion of Catholicism and Protestantism (or at least high-church Anglicanism). Accordingly, the pope's crown underfoot in Hurd is now replaced by an anchor, so that reformed and consolidated Christianity not so much tramples upon but claims a

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frontispiece is in the hand of the Grand Inquisitor; but the Inquisitor himself is represented not in person but symbolically as an image on a banner, holding a sword in one hand and an olive branch (similar to the one held by the Catholic Church) in the other.

new accoutrement. The addition of this emblem has the effect of amplifying this female figure's resonance with a much older tradition, evoking a legendary trio of martyred saints: Fides (faith), Spes (hope), and Caritas (charity), who are said to have been three young daughters of Sophia (wisdom). Fides is typically pictured with a cross and a chalice, whereas Spes is often shown with an anchor (fig. 21).[15] At the same time, the anchor may have a more modern valence as well, as a symbol of navigational prowess, mobility, and freedom, all critical in the good turn of fortune for European modernity (fig. 22). Here, then, Christianity made peace with itself, claiming its past and future, thus to be contained and counted as a single religion ready to be listed in the system of world religions. (It goes without saying that Christianity is never missing from this system.) Such a composed, unified, and individuated image of Christianity stands in striking contrast to the gregariously disputatious lot represented by Picart.

PHILOLOGY OF THE FUTURE

My purpose in this survey has been to dislodge the conceptual apparatus for comprehending diversity and multiplicity from the familiar terrain and, at the same time, to shift the ground of debates concerning secularity and modernity, especially in reference to the scholarly representation of religions. It may be commonplace—and easiest on our current habits of thought—to presume that scholarship has achieved a degree of functional objectivity and equanimity by aspiring to rise above the plain of comparison, that is, by removing itself from the sphere in which various "religions" are presumed to coexist. At the same time, it has become commonplace also to recognize that this scholarly aspiration to transcend the domain of sundry religions—and to claim the position of secularity in this specific sense—is tantamount to disavowing the scholarship's

FIG 21. Fides (Faith) and Spes (Hope), from Cesare Ripa, Iconologia (Roma: Lepido Faeij, 1603).

15 I thank Bertram Kaschek of Technische Universität Dresden for directing my attention to this connection of the anchor and Spes and also for providing me with several useful references to explore this iconography.

FIG 22. City of London, from Ripa, *Iconologia*.

own historical and political placement. This recognition often leads to a broader question, now routine, concerning the continuity or discontinuity between the academic and the ecclesiastic: Is the position of the secular/scientific yet another transmutation of the Euro-Christian hegemony? And if so, what should we do about it? As productive and necessary as this line of questioning may have been hitherto, the very proliferation of responses and reactions, and the apparent impasse resulting from the veritable glut, seem to indicate that some strategic shifting of inquiry may be in order. That is, instead of struggling with a kind of interrogation that has become something of a compulsion, we can opt to trace and to investigate the nature, the extent, and the trajectory of the work that the modern discourse on religion (in multiple variations, to be sure) has been effecting in the world for the last few centuries, the work whose consequences continue to hold sway, in varying forms yet overall in the name of religious pluralism and multiculturalism.

What should worry us at this moment is not whether the concept of "religion" (and the scholarship that has both produced this modern notion and at the same time claimed to account for it) is specifically European, Christian, and predominantly Protestant in origin. Nor is it the question of whether this legacy has shaped the pluralist regime that orders and regulates the world of knowledge with an overwhelming sense of facticity. The answer seems too obvious to remain interesting. Rather, the question may be rearticulated to allow another angle, redirecting the focus more sharply on the functional value of the pluralist epistemic order, particularly in relation to the cosmopolitan ideal of egalitarian, noncoercive sociality, which this order has been presumed to foster. How enabling is pluralism—which enforces essentially *sectarian* arrangements upon the field of difference—in advancing this ideal? And, following on its heels is another question: What has been the role of the academy in general, and the scholarship on religion in particular, in producing the pluralist order of things?

In the historical exposition above, I indicated my distrust in the placement of scholarship as articulated by the images in Hurd and in Goodrich. I find satisfactory *neither* a retreat into a shadowy corner with piles of books from which to issue an opinion on the world as if it didn't belong to it, as we see in Hurd, *nor* a transcendental enframing, naming, and striation imposed upon the field of difference from outside the frame to create a pluralist regime, as in Goodrich. Both these renditions seem to be instances of deterioration and decline in comparison to Picart, and not on aesthetic grounds alone. To be sure, it would be imprudent to revert automatically and to privilege Picart's image over and above the epigones without any further deliberation and critical reasoning. All the same, his image continues to intrigue and fascinate, beckoning attention as a potential resource to reorient our sense of religious diversity. I will end with a momentary reflection on this potentiality.

Above all, my attention is drawn to the quiet figure occupying the center of Picart's illustration. Positioned immediately next to, and configured as something of a counterpart to, the either-or figure presenting the choice between the open Bible and the authority of the Church, this darker figure somehow seems to have it both ways. For, while his placid white mask duly looks up to the Catholic Church and its empty eyes are directed straight to her book of "councils and successions," his dark furrowed face beneath the mask peers down intently at a different kind of open "book," in Hebrew script, at which no one else—including the proprietary holder of the scroll—is looking. Who could this be?

This dark figure—suggestive of some regions at the eastern edge of Christendom, insofar as he is in the full regalia of the Eastern Orthodox metropolitan[16]—seems somewhat abstracted from the scene, as if the billowing folds of his robe were opening to another space. Apparently, he is making a surreptitious study of an ancient oriental script. This may remind us that, for much of European history, this sort of study, even when undertaken with pious intentions, has been a risky enterprise all along, perforce conducted under surveillance by church authorities. Perhaps it is no accident that this figure is placed directly below the Grand Inquisitor's banner. At the same time, we also know from this history that such philological toiling under duress has proven extraordinarily productive for (indeed, foundational to) modern European scholarship on religion. In Picart's design, this enterprise is being carried out right in the bull's-eye of the picture, while escaping the notice of everyone around him. And if we step back and view the pictorial plain of this image as just what it is—that is, a two-dimensional surface—the line of this cleric-scholar's gaze, immediately directed to the Hebrew scroll, drops down further to yet another open book below, the one in the preaching imam's hand. And so does the line extending from his remarkably shaped staff, as if to reinforce the target of his gaze (fig. 23).

Although we cannot see the actual writing on the pages of the Muslim's book, it is presumably in Arabic, and that would be quite appropriate, historically speaking. For, from the days of Guillaume Postel (1510–81) to the pathbreaking generation of scholars emerging in the nineteenth century, classical literature in Arabic had been an indispensable ancillary body of knowledge for the serious student of the Hebrew Bible. This long scholarly tradition heavily reliant on Arabic sources came to an abrupt end in the late nineteenth century, when pioneering archaeologists

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16   I base this inference on the klobuk (round, flat-topped headdress with a long veil) and the characteristic bishop's staff of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Why he should wear a mask, not on his face but slightly above it, is not immediately clear to me. There may be a number of additional references and associations evident in this image.

FIG 23. Picart's frontispiece for *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses* (detail): gaze of philological scholarship.

CARICATURE OF PROFESSOR SMITH DURING THE PROGRESS
OF THE CASE.

FIG 24. Caricature of William Robertson Smith (1846–94) defending himself during the heresy trial concerning the article "Bible" published in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (9th ed., 1875); from *The Bailie* 12, no. 293 (May 29, 1878).

traversing the Near East began to uncover and decipher many other ancient tongues either contemporaneous with or, in fact, immensely older than biblical Hebrew.[17] As a result of these discoveries and advancements in knowledge of the ancient Near East, the relative significance of Arabic sources was precipitously diminished, and thenceforward, biblical studies and Islamic studies went their separate ways. But until that moment, almost all the prominent biblical scholars—Heinrich Ewald (1803–75), Abraham Kuenen (1828–91), Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), and William Robertson Smith (1846–94; fig. 24) among them—dedicated much of their labor to Arabic studies, and some of them managed to sustain their precarious clerico-academic living by obtaining professorships in Arabic after they were forced to evacuate their chairs in divinity, theology, or Hebrew.

In view of the common fate shared by many biblical scholars during the nineteenth century, then, Picart's mysterious hierarch (or whatever he was) seems well placed—indeed, presciently staged. For, in the dead center of this panoramic view of the well-populated world, he seems to carry on the quiescent labor of philological scholarship, amid the cacophony of prolific Christianity and its all-out battle of the books (which is not really about *reading*). To find a fulcrum of transformative potentiality in this dark spot at the center, perhaps even to regenerate the domain of the secular from within the most sacred—such is the ambition that Picart's image inspires. A̲

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[17] The excavation of the ancient Babylonian library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, Champollion's decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics, and some other significant discoveries came earlier in the century, but their full impact upon biblical studies did not materialize until later.