Discussion

The Dates of Jerusalem

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 41, Issue 4, Spring 2008, p. 166
DISCUSSION

With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought

The Dates of Jerusalem

BY G. E. BENTLEY, JR.

AILLEEN WARD, “Building Jerusalem: Composition and Chronology” Blake 39.4 (spring 2006): 183-185, concludes that the “new Prophecy” of Blake with “60 Plates” referred to by George Cumberland in 1807 (BR[2] 246) “cannot have been Jerusalem [as we have it], and can therefore only have been Milton.” However, Milton as we have it consists of a maximum of only 50 plates, not the 60 of Cumberland’s reference.

She places Jerusalem firmly in the decade of the 1810s and dismisses the plain “1804” on its title page as merely evidence of Blake’s desire to link the two poems” Milton and Jerusalem, which are both dated 1804 on their title pages.

Her evidence that there cannot have been 60 plates of Jerusalem finished in 1807 derives chiefly from internal evidence of a post-1807 date on more than 50 of the 100 plates of Jerusalem. The character “Hand” appears on 26 Jerusalem plates, and Hand, with his “Three Brains in contradictory council” (Jerusalem pl. 70, l. 5) and his three pointing hands (pl. 93), is generally agreed to represent Robert, John, and Leigh Hunt in whose Examiner Blake was anonymously and recklessly attacked on 7 August 1808 and 17 September 1809 (BR[2] 258-61, 282-85). These 26 plates must have been finished after 1807. Further, BB p. 228 cites 37 Jerusalem plates which are anomalous (in terms of size, density of errata, erroneous catchwords, etc.) as suggesting lateness. However, the connection of odd plates with lateness is not very secure. Perhaps the 26 plates with Hand and 14 of the odd plates were finished after 1807.

There is a good deal of evidence that Jerusalem as presently constituted differs from previous versions. The simplest evidence is the title-page reference to a work “In XXVIII Chapters” (rather than the present four chapters) and the “End of the 1st Chap:” on plate 14, whereas the last words of chapter 1 are now on plate 25.

Further, watermarks on some proofs suggest an early date: EDMEADS & [PINE] on Jerusalem plate 9 and EDMEADS & PINE 1802 on Jerusalem (F) duplicate plates 28, 45, 56, plus a loose plate 28. These two watermarks also appear in Songs of Innocence (Q), which Joseph Viscomi, Blake and the Idea of the Book (1993) 243, 378, dates c. 1804.


2. Jerusalem pls. 5, 7-9, 15, 17-19, 21, 26, 32, 34, 36, 42-43, 58, 60, 67, 70-71, 74, 80, 82-84, 90 have references to Hand.


Is there evidence for Jerusalem before 1807 aside from the title-page date of 1804 and vague references in his letters to “My long Poem” (e.g., 25 April 1803)? Well, some of the events in it were of 1790-1803:

I heard in Lambeths shades [where Blake lived 1790-1800];
In Felpham [1800-03] I heard and saw the Visions of Albion.[
I write in South Molton Street [1803-21] what I both see and hear .... (Jerusalem pl. 38, ll. 40-42)

Some characters in Jerusalem derive from his trials for sedition of 1803 and 1804, particularly the references to Privates Scofield and Cock who accused him, Lieutenant Hulton who preferred the charges, and Justices of the Peace Brereton, Peachey, and Quantock who heard the charges.4

There is clear evidence that Jerusalem depicts some events of 1790-1804, and the “1804” on the title page clearly implies that the work was written and probably at least partly etched then. It is exceedingly difficult to ascertain what Jerusalem consisted of in 1804 or even in 1807, but it is very likely that some of it was committed to paper and to copper in 1804.


Reply to G. E. Bentley, Jr.

BY AILEEN WARD

FIRST, I wish to thank G. E. Bentley, Jr., for his careful reading of my paper and his thoughtful reply. However, I must respectfully disagree with a number of his points. Though he states it is “exceedingly difficult to ascertain what Jerusalem consisted of in 1804 or even in 1807,” he stands by his earlier argument that George Cumberland’s 1807 memorandum stating that Blake “has eng[rave]d 60 Plates of a new Prophecy!” must refer to Jerusalem, the only poem by Blake of over 60 plates (BR[2] 246 and fn), and dismisses my conclusion that it refers to Milton (“Building Jerusalem” 185), which, as he notes, “consists of a maximum of only 50 plates” in its final form. Rather, he concludes from the evidence of the 1804 date on the title page and other considerations that Jerusalem as a whole “was written and probably at least partly etched then,” that is, by 1804.

However, the 1804 title-page date is not plain evidence for the composition of Jerusalem, as Bentley implies, but prob-


Spring 2008

166 Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly