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INFORMATION

BLAKE/AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY is published under the sponsorship of the Department of English, University of Rochester. Subscriptions are $60 for institutions, $30 for individuals. All subscriptions are by the volume (1 year, 4 issues) and begin with the summer issue. Subscription payments received after the summer issue will be applied to the 4 issues of the current volume. Addresses outside the U.S., Canada, and Mexico require a $15 per volume postal surcharge for surface delivery, and $20 for airmail. Credit card payment is available. Make checks payable to Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly. Address all subscription orders and related communications to Sarah Jones, Blake, Department of English, University of Rochester, Rochester NY 14627-0451. Back issues are available; address Sarah Jones for information on issues and prices, or consult the web site.

MANUSCRIPTS are welcome in either hard copy or electronic form. Send two copies, typed and documented according to forms suggested in The MLA Style Manual, and with pages numbered, to either of the editors: Morris Eaves, Dept. of English, University of Rochester, Rochester NY 14627-0451; Morton D. Paley, Dept. of English, University of California, Berkeley CA 94720-1030. No articles will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. For electronic submissions, you may send a diskette, or send your article as an attachment to an email message; please number the pages of electronic submissions. The preferred file format is RTF; other formats are usually acceptable.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER: 0160-628x. Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly is indexed in the Modern Language Association’s International Bibliography, the Modern Humanities Research Association’s Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature, American Humanities Index, Arts and Humanities Citation Index, Current Contents and the Bibliography of the History of Art.

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Cover: William Blake, Laocoon. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress.
Encyclopaedic Resistance: Blake, Rees's *Cyclopaedia*, and the *Laocoön* Separate Plate

BY ROSAMUND A. PAICE

There is an obvious, and frequently noted, visual connection between Blake's *Laocoön* separate plate (printed c. 1826; illus. 1)¹ and the representation of the famous *Laocoön* sculpture on Plate III of the "Sculpture" engravings that he produced for Abraham Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (1802–20). Yet, in spite of there now being a significant— if small—body of works dealing with the former, there has been little investigation into either its relationship to the Rees venture, or the *Cyclopaedia*’s relationship to it. James Bogan, in his 1980 essay "From Hackwork to Prophetic Vision," did at least touch on these issues, but, although he commented that, in the *Laocoön* separate plate, "We are a long way from encyclopedia information," and "If Blake had turned in this version of Laocoon to Abraham Rees, he would have been cashiered" (39–40), it is unfortunate that he failed to pursue this line of enquiry further. This failure, and the failure of subsequent critics, to tackle such issues may stem from the fact that, whilst it is now ten years since Robert N. Essick noted the disinclination of scholars to address Blake’s commercial engravings,² the reluctance remains. Moreover, since there is a certain awkwardness when it comes to addressing even Blake’s engravings of other artists’ creative works, it should be no surprise that the association of this “visionary artist” with the production of a compilation such as an encyclopedia seems to be regarded as an embarrassment. When Blake’s plates for the *Cyclopaedia* are mentioned at all, they are generally dismissed fairly abruptly with a gesture towards Blake’s financial difficulties (e.g., Bogan, "Blake’s Jupiter Olympus" 156).

Monetary considerations unquestionably did play a part in Blake’s acceptance of the Rees commission; yet this was the case with so many of Blake’s commercial engagements—not to mention those creative works produced under patronage, often to order—and none of those led to the creation of a work comparable to the *Laocoön* separate plate. Only David E. James, in his consideration of the *Laocoön*, has significantly addressed this issue. At its most instructive, James’s article highlights the engraving’s opposition to art as commercial undertaking, and preoccupation with the evils of money (230–31).³ There are, though, certain problems with James’s analysis. His notion that this work was intended directly as a challenge to the *Cyclopaedia*’s "Sculpture" article, written by John Flaxman, misses the real significance of that article to Blake, dismissing the many points of connection, indeed agreement, between it and the separate plate (230, 234n6). Moreover, by arguing that the *Laocoön* engraving "redeems his [Blake’s] original engraving" for the "Sculpture" article’s third plate "by transforming it into a work of art," and "reclaiming [it] for spiritual uses" (230), James makes a questionable assumption—that from the outset Blake had in mind the end purpose of the engraving. I hope to show that the relationship between the *Laocoön* separate plate and the *Cyclopaedia* commission is more intricate than has been recognized.

On the surface of things, the two seem ill matched. The *Cyclopaedia* was a commercial venture, its aim to attract a wide readership, and to deal in empirical facts. The *Laocoön* engraving exists in two impressions only, and nobody knows whom, if anybody, Blake had in mind as an audience for it. Blake’s engraving style in his *Cyclopaedia* plates is also strikingly dissimilar to what we encounter in the *Laocoön* separate plate. The former appeared in print between 1816 and 1819, and comprise images of many sculptures, all lightly rendered in stipple. The latter, on the other hand, was printed in 1826, features just one sculpture, and involves both image and text; its rendition of the famous *Laocoön* statue is also more densely engraved than any of Blake’s *Cyclopaedia* images, and is reproduced in hatching, and crosshatching, including "dots & lozenges" (E 572).

Nonetheless, the relationship between the two is important: the *Cyclopaedia*’s nature and production history, in connection with features of the "Sculpture" article and Blake’s engravings for it, raise issues of authorship, graphic style, and verbal definition that are played out in the composition and content of the *Laocoön* separate plate.

1. There are two impressions of this plate, designated A and B in Essick, *Separate Plates* (hereafter cited as SP) no. 29. Copy B (collection of Robert N. Essick, Altadena, California) has a “J Whatman 1826” watermark; copy A (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University) has no watermark, but the paper on which it is printed has been judged to be of the same stock as that of copy B, and, therefore, the two impressions were probably printed together. See Essick and Viscosi’s analysis, *Illuminated Books* (hereafter cited as IB) 5:241; and SP no. 29, fig. 51. The text of the *Laocoön* is transcribed in Erdman’s *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (I refer to the revised edition of 1988, hereafter cited as E) 273–75.


3. I owe this observation to Robert N. Essick, who kindly read over, and commented on, drafts of this essay.

4. Eaves, however, also draws attention to the fact that, in the *Laocoön* separate plate, Blake’s “attack on commerce broadens into a blanket denunciation of money itself, with money and art explicitly opposed” (*Counter Arts* [hereafter cited as CA] 162).
Collection of Robert N. Essick.
The seven engravings that Blake produced for the *Cyclopædia*, which appeared in fascicles between July 1816 and September 1819, tell a story. Of the three that appeared in September 1819, the one entitled "Miscellany. GEM Engraving," was drawn by John Farey, and engraved by Blake (fascicle F); the other two, accompanying the "Basso Relievo" and "Armour" articles, are simply signed "Blake sc." (fascicles F and 78 respectively). The four plates that were produced to accompany the article on "Sculpture" appeared earlier: the first ("PLATE III"; fascicle 66, July 1816) is signed "Blake del et sc.,” and shows the Venus de Medici, Apollo Belvedere, and Laocöon sculptures (see illus. 2); on the second ("PLATE I"; fascicle 67, October 1816); third ("PLATE II"; fascicle 68, October 1816); and fourth ("PLATE IV"; fascicle 69, February 1817) plates—which depict a variety of ancient sculptures—we read, as on the "Basso Relievo" and "Armour" plates, simply "Blake sc.," or "Blake, sculp." (CB 109–12).

Although these engravings display no unusual artistic merit, the manner in which they were incorporated into the *Cyclopædia* is worthy of some attention. As is clear from its eventual placement in the "Miscellany" section of the *Cyclopædia*’s plates (Plates, vol. 3), the single "GEM Engraving" plate was not for a major article, and cannot be considered a significant commission. Moreover, Blake engraved only half of this plate, the rest being the work of Wilson Lowry, the principal engraver in this encyclopaedic project. Blake’s "Armour" engravings constitute Plates IV and V of their section; however, both "plates" were engraved onto a single piece of copper, and were printed onto the same sheet (Plates, vol. 1). The first three plates that illustrate the "Armour" article, all engraved by T. Milton, are dated 1 September 1802 (Plate I), 9 January 1804 (Plate II), and 3 June 1803 (Plate III)—that is, about fifteen years before Blake’s 1818 plate. This, added to the fact that Plate II bears a later date than Plate III, suggests that the earlier part of the sequence was intended from the outset, and that Blake’s plate was an afterthought. Similarly, there are four "Basso Relievo" plates (Plates, vol. 2), the first three of which are dated 2 January 1804 (Plate III) and 1 December 1807 (Plates I and II), with Blake’s plate (Plate IV) again produced in 1818, some ten years later. As with the "Armour" plates, the earlier date on the third "Basso Relievo" plate suggests that the first three were at least in the planning stage at the same time. Both cases indicate that Blake was not considered in the original plans for the *Cyclopædia* en-

5. There are two versions of this plate: both are dated "1819," and both were used in copies of the *Cyclopædia* (see footnote 44). The three views of the engraved gems of Jupiter Serapis on this plate are based on plate 2 in Johann Laurenz Natter, *A Treatise on the Ancient Method of Engraving on Precious Stones* (London, 1754), engraved by C. H. Hemerich (Essick, "Blake in the Marketplace, 1992: Appendix" 159, crediting Alexander Gourlay with the discovery of this source).

6. The first mention of Blake in connection with the *Cyclopædia* is in a letter of John Flaxman to William Hayley of 2 January 1804, but here Blake is merely a courier for Flaxman’s "Basso Relievo" article; see Bentley, *Blake Records* (hereafter cited as BR) 138.
lighter, the images more delicate. Here too we have a more concrete indication of the date of the commission: the well-known anecdote of Henry Fuseli's encounter with Blake as the latter sketched the Royal Academy's cast of the Laocoon sculpture (BR 238) is proof that Blake was engaged on the work by early (spring?) 1815.

An obvious question arising from the dates of Blake's Cyclopaedia engravings is why it was then that he became involved, and not earlier. The answer lies in the involvement in the Rees project of Flaxman, who no doubt recommended Blake's graver to Rees and his publishers (CB 109). As I have noted, during the period when Blake very probably produced the Rees plates (?1808–15), he was certainly—and as usual—suffering from a shortage of funds; just as certainly, Flaxman knew of these pecuniary problems, and his recommendation of Blake for this commission must have been, in part, an attempt to remedy Blake's situation (see BR 138 and 151). Yet the earlier engravings, by artists other than Blake, in the "Sculpture," "Armour," "Basso Relievo," and "Miscellany" plate sequences, prove that initially Blake was not on Rees's lists. Since it is unlikely that Blake would have been involved in the project without Flaxman, we must conclude that the latter either had not used or could not use his influence with the publishers in the early stages of its production. Given Flaxman's frequent recommendations of Blake's graver to publishers over the years, the more probable of the two explanations is that Flaxman was not in a position to assert his authority in this case until after the initial engraving work had been commissioned.

What seems to have given Flaxman sway over the choice of engravers in the subsequent years is best demonstrated by the complications of his involvement in the "Sculpture" article—complications that have been ignored by Blake scholars. In G. E. Bentley's Blake Books, we are referred back to several sources in which this article is attributed to Flaxman (no. 489); the Annual Biography and Obituary for the Year 1828 (issue no. 997); a note on Blake's sketch of the Laocoön sculpture (in Frederick Tatham's hand); and W. Bent's List of New Publications for April 1803. Subsequent Blake scholars have accepted, apparently without investigation, this attribution (e.g., Taylor 72; James 226); even Essick, who does note that The Philosophical Magazine and Journal gives Flaxman as co-author of the essay on sculpture, parenthesizes the fact that he is named "(with John Bacon and Prince Hoare)" (CB 109). Yet it is not only The Philosophical Magazine, but also the Preface (1802) to the Cyclopaedia itself, that lists three authors—"Flaxman, P. Hoare, and Bacon"—for the essay (1:10). It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the article was the result of a straightforward collaboration: Flaxman's Lectures on Sculpture, delivered to the Royal Academy over roughly the same period as the Cyclopaedia was being produced, frequently contain passages identical to sections of the Cyclopaedia article, and there is no reason to doubt that the latter was his work. Rather, we need to consider how, and when, he came to be sole author of the essay.

It is difficult to work out exactly what happened in the case of Hoare, but the evidence suggests that he ceased to be a part of the project soon after the printing of the Preface. Although Hoare's name is linked with the Cyclopaedia in that Preface, none of the prospectuses to which I have had access—all of which were printed after the Preface—mentions him as a contributor to the Cyclopaedia, either as an artist or as a writer. Flaxman and Hoare were well known to each other by the early 1800s—exchanging articles, pamphlets, and letters (BR 136,177); thus, some sort of collaboration at the time might have seemed natural. It is more difficult to account for his disappearance from the project. Even after Hoare's name had been dropped from the prospectuses, there is evidence of his and Flaxman's continued professional relationship, which indicates that the parting of ways was amicable. Around the beginning of 1804, Flaxman sent a copy of his "Basso Relievo" article to Hoare (BR 139); later, in 1807, he also contributed to Hoare's serial publication, The Artist, an essay on the state of the arts, and sculpture foremost, in England, prior to the foundation of the Royal Academy.

Whether Hoare's initial decision to withdraw from the project was due to other commitments, or to ideological differences with its aims or contributors, cannot easily be judged. That he afterwards stressed the latter, however, is clear from the following statement, found in his 1813 work, Epochs of the Arts:

look at the crowded repositories—may we not almost say manufactories, of compilation, in which a circulating sale is, with equal industry and ingenuity, established in every street in London! Look at the torrents of science which every shop and every hour pours forth! Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, Galleries, Magazines, Repositories! Panoramical, Pantological, Allegorical, Historical, Biblical; Chymical, Medical, Practical, Universall (122–23; author's own emphasis)

This is not the statement of a man who is currently engaged on an encyclopaedia article. It seems rather the statement of one who wishes to parade his resentment; at the very least, it suggests this former contributor's unease over his relationship to Rees's Cyclopaedia.

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7. Since this essay was submitted for publication Paley, too, has acknowledged this attribution ("7" & his two Sons" 201n2).

8. The earliest of these prospectuses is from c. 1802. I am indebted to the University of Reading for providing me with copies from their library archives.

The other major problem with Rees's 1802 list of contributors is that John Bacon died in August 1799. His inclusion in the Preface's list, however, seems not to have been a mistake: Bacon alone is specified as the author of the "Sculpture" article in the first prospectuses for the *Cyclopaedia* ("Dr. Rees's New Cyclopaedia" [1802] 3). Nor would this have been impossible, since Bacon had already written the addition to the "Sculpture" article of Ephraim Chambers's greatly admired *Cyclopaedia* (1st ed. 1728), which appeared in an edition enlarged by Rees in 1781–86.10 This earlier article need only have been slightly adjusted, and added to, for the new work. Had the alterations not been made by the time of Bacon's unexpected death, they could have been performed by another hand. Some sources do specify Bacon as the sole author of the article in Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (e.g., Redgrave 17 and 18; DNB, "Bacon, John, R.A. 1740–1799")); these later attributions, however, probably stem from a misreading of Allan Cunningham's statement, in *The Lives*, that Bacon wrote a "Disquisition on the Characters of Painting and Sculpture, published in Rees's edition of Chambers's Dictionary" (3:230). On reading the articles from the Chambers and Rees encyclopaedias together, though, what is obvious is their difference: not only is the latter far more extensive in its coverage, but also it focuses much more on the biblical origins of sculpture, giving an almost mythological aspect to the history of that art. Thus Bacon must posthumously (probably post 1802), and quietly, have been ousted from the Rees project.

In fact, the attribution of the "Sculpture" article to "Flaxman, P. Hoare, and Bacon," in the Preface to the *Cyclopaedia*, signals a significant change: from sole contributor, Bacon is now third in line. By the time an advertisement appeared for the eighth part of the *Cyclopaedia*, Bacon's name had disappeared altogether—and without explanation—from the list of contributors ("Dr. Rees's New Cyclopaedia" [1804] 2). Bacon's untimely death clearly consigned him to a previous generation, and naturally it became more desirable that an alternative author be found for the "Sculpture" article of Rees's *Cyclopaedia*. That Flaxman should have taken over the project, however, is a notable development.

Flaxman and Bacon had been near neighbors when the latter lived in Newman Street, but it is unlikely that they were ever friends. Bacon's ability to secure commissions, and his resulting financial successes, were the envy of many artists of the time, with some regarding him as unscrupulous. Indeed, amongst those known to have been at odds with Bacon was another of Blake's friends, Fuseli. Ann Cox-Johnson attributes the tensions with Flaxman to the contrast between the latter's "mystical tendencies" and Bacon's evangelistic Methodism (21), but it is probable that the differences between the two men were as much professional as they were religious. The pair were in competition to secure commissions for the national monuments to commemorate naval and military heroes and victories. Moreover, though both were members of the Royal Academy, Flaxman was also Bacon's replacement there, being elected, along with Martin Archer Shee, to the Academy's Committee only following the deaths of Bacon and James Barry. Perhaps it was the Royal Academy promotion that made Flaxman desirable enough to the *Cyclopaedia*'s publishers for them to give him charge of the "Sculpture" article; or perhaps outright control became his in 1810, when he was elected as the first Royal Academy professor of sculpture.

However the transition from triple to single authorship came about, then, clearly it did so against the background of Flaxman's personal and artistic conflicts with Bacon. In light of this, it is questionable whether or not Flaxman would have agreed to take on unconditionally what amounts to sole authorship by default. Yet, even if Flaxman's undertaking of the task did not actually depend on his being allowed greater input in the project (and presumably a greater fee), such things undoubtedly would have resulted from his raised authorial status. A further sign that Flaxman was in favor with the *Cyclopaedia*'s publishers is found in the prospectuses: from the time that his name appears in association with the "Sculpture" essay, it is also consistently at the head of the (non-alphabetical) list of those who have made drawings for the work. In addition, prior to Flaxman's name appearing in the prospectuses (?1802), only two artists—"Messrs. Milton and Lowry"—appear to have been engaged to engrave the *Cyclopaedia* plates. Within the succeeding years, there was work for such a beleaguered engraver as Blake evidently was at the time.

Blake's commission, then, evolved out of a complex enterprise involving conflicting personalities, styles, and attitudes, and was probably a direct result of the issue of the article's authorship having been resolved. To Blake, the nature of the resolution must have seemed to herald the triumph of ideas with which he had sympathy, Flaxman's ideas—some of which feature, in a modified form, in the *Laocoön* separate plate. It is important, too, that these ideas were not those of Hoare and Bacon. That Hoare had jumped—or been pushed?—from the project by this time, and that the "Sculpture" article had once been in the hands of Bacon, might have acted as further inducements. As I have noted, the latter's sculptures had gained him ample monetary reward; Blake had not received the like as a result of his painting and engraving, and he no doubt found Bacon objectionable for the same reasons that Flaxman and Fuseli did. In the case of Hoare, however, the situation is more complicated.

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10. Rees first re-edited Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* in 1778, but it was only in the 1781–86 edition that he incorporated the extra material.

11. Ironically, the DNB fails to specify Flaxman as author of the "Sculpture" article ("Flaxman, John 1755–1826").
Hoare and Blake met as a result of Flaxman’s recommendation to the former of Blake’s engraving skills, and the two were evidently on good terms for a time; indeed, in a letter to William Hayley of April 1804, Blake is found asserting that Hoare is a man “worthy of every confidence you can place in him” (E 747). By the end of 1809, though, Blake clearly had begun to resent Hoare. In the fragment of a doggerel poem, “And his legs ...” (c. 1809), Blake characterizes Hoare as “trembling hare [who] sits on his weakly paper [The Artist] 14 / On which he used to dance & sport & caper” (lines 17–18, E 504). Bentley attributes this attack on Hoare to Blake’s overreaction, writing that Hoare had “merely praised” Robert Hunt (the prime target of this polemical attack), but that this seems to have been enough to confirm him as an enemy of Blake’s (BR 218). Blake’s description, however, is likely to have been influenced by additional factors. During the period when Blake was engaged in attacking Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Works (between 1798 and 1809; E 886 [textual notes], Bindman 522), Hoare had not only praised Reynolds extensively in his Inquiry into the Requisite Cultivation and Present State of the Arts of Design in England (1806), but had also commissioned Blake to produce the work’s sole engraving, after a painting of “Theory” by Reynolds himself. Moreover, a year later The Artist printed John Hoppner’s epistle commending Thomas Stothard’s painting of the Canterbury Pilgrims (no. XIII [6 June 1807]; 12–14), and Richard Cumberland’s equally approving remarks in response, with no reference to Blake’s own version (14–16); even the notice for Blake’s “Designs for Blair’s Poem of The Grave” which The Artist did include (no. XXI [1 August 1807]; 11) failed to give the name of the artist responsible (Essick and Paley 31). By the time the “Sculpture” article first appeared, then, Hoare and Blake had long since gone their separate ways, and, though it is quite possible that Blake knew of his former friend’s views on “crowded repositories ... of compilation”—expressed just three years previously—they may, temporarily at least, have increased the appeal of the Rees venture. Had the Cyclopaedia commission been offered to Blake in, or earlier than, 1806, he might have felt rather differently.

In addition to the bonus of Hoare’s and Bacon’s having disappeared from the Cyclopaedia project, one wonders whether Blake was thinking also of the state of his friendship with Flaxman when he undertook the commission. Flaxman and Blake were on rather strained terms by the early 1800s, and the offered work might have suggested a proffered hand, a gesture of solidarity. If Blake originally did feel optimistic about his engagement on the project, however, he no doubt soon saw that his relationship with Flaxman was not resuscitating with great speed; indeed it never fully recovered. Moreover, his engravings for Flaxman’s article appear to have proved less an exercise in solidarity than a subordination of Blake’s artistic inclinations to those of Flaxman, and to the aims of the Cyclopaedia as a whole. As Essick writes, in Blake’s day, reproductive engraving was generally dependent upon a rigorous division of labour and the subordination of individual expression to uniformity and repeatability. All illustrations in a book had to conform to its format, and this mechanical unity was extended to graphic style. If more than one engraver was employed, all had to practise compatible techniques. In spite of an engraver’s prerogative to ‘sign’ his plates, the truly autographic tended to be submerged beneath the anonymity of a corporate and systematic enterprise. (CB 5)

In this instance, however, the engravings plainly diverge from the rather harsher house style of the Cyclopaedia as a whole. Whereas, twelve years earlier, Cromek produced his hatched “Sculpture” plates, Blake’s new series was to consist entirely of the stippled lines which were so fashionable at that time (Viscomi 36, 171). As Essick has pointed out, the only other instance in which Blake fully adopts the stippled-line technique is in his engravings for Flaxman’s Compositions from Hesiod, published in 1817 (CB 109). Blake does use stippled lines in his engravings of Flaxman’s Iliad designs (1805; CB no. 46, figs. 208–10), and the first state of the Mirth engraving (c. 1816; SP fig. 48), but only in combination with more strongly linear outlines.18

12. Hoare employed Blake’s graver on two occasions (BR 136, CB 90–91, 94).

13. Blake seems to have acted as a kind of go-between for Hayley and Hoare, from February to July 1804, relaying messages of mutual respect, and urging Hayley (unsuccessfully) to take up the editorship of a periodical proposed, through Hoare, by the publisher Richard Phillips; see letters to William Hayley, 23 February 1804 (E 742), 16 March 1804 (E 744), 7 April 1804 (E 746–47), [26] <27> April 1804 (E 747–48), and 16 July 1804 (E 754).

14. The Artist folded in 1809, although it was reprinted in the form of two volumes in 1810.

15. Hoare again praised Reynolds in Epochs of the Arts ... (viii and xiv–xx).

16. The differences in artistic opinion between Blake and Hoare may also have come to the former’s attention after 1806. For example, in his Inquiry, Hoare credits the engravers Francesco Bartolozzi, Robert Strange and William Woollett with having “universally established the reputation of English Engraving” (260). By contrast, in 1809–10 Blake singled out the latter two as the chief culprits of “the English Style of Engraving,” which comes in for heavy criticism in his Public Address (E 573; CA 155).

17. See “My title as [a] Genius ...” (c. 1801–03; E 505); Public Address (c. 1809–10; E 573); BR 331.

18. There are of course several examples of Blake’s non-linear stipple work, such as two of his engravings for the Designs to a Series of Ballads, Written by William Hayley (1802; CB no. 41, figs. 190–91), and “The Fall of Rosamond” (first state 1783; SP fig. 60). In each of these cases, as in the Hesiod engravings, we can infer that the contemporary “mania of the public” for stipple work (Landseer 128) lay behind Blake’s stylistic choice.
Flaxman, then, had triumphed in gaining sole authorship of the "Sculpture" article, whilst Blake had been left to reproduce his images in a graphic style that he disliked. Proof of Blake's growing antipathy towards stippled lines can be found in his reworking of the Mirth engraving. Essick has concluded that the motives behind Blake's initial translation into stipple of his own watercolor (the first design of Blake's illustrations for Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso") are hard to fathom, unless he had hoped for it to appeal to a commercial audience (Essick, William Blake Printmaker 192-93). The dramatic change that takes place between that stippled first state and the second state (post 1816; SP fig. 49), however, implies Blake's artistic rejection of stippling as a substitute for outline at around the time he was producing the Cyclopaedia engravings, or shortly afterwards. At least from the mid-1810s, then, stippled lines were not Blake's own preference for engraving work, and this is evident from the fact that Blake seems to have been too happy to leave this style under the patronage of John Linnell, whom he met in 1818. Moreover, the technique was certainly a strange choice for some of the Cyclopaedia plates: as Geoffrey Keynes notes, stippling, which is "rather soft and indeterminate, is not a very suitable medium for recording the outlines of sculptured marble" (21), and a quick glance at Blake's separate plate Laocoon, with its continuous outlines and bold hatching patterns, supports this opinion.

Indeed, although Blake's theory and practice are far from consistent with each other, both physically and metaphorically the stippled line was diametrically opposed to Blake's concept of the "distinct, sharp, and wirey...bounding line" (E 550), and his statement that "a Line is a Line in its Minutest Subdivision[s]" (E 783). As Morris Eaves writes:

The criterion of mastery [for Blake] is not a repertory of time-consuming skills—"dots & lozenges," "clean strokes & mossy tints," and so on ([E] 572-73)—but a single skill, drawing, represented by a single unit, line, which is taken to be the product in space-time of an "eternal" mental activity. (CA 232)

Not only did the dots of stippling give merely the illusion of lines, in fact refusing firm outlines altogether (Viscomi 171), but also this technique, along with the equally prevalent aquatints and soft-ground etchings, was particularly associated with the reproduction of other art media (Viscomi 36). Whilst it is true that Blake believed all art to entail copywork of some sort, he did distinguish between servile reproduction, or copying nature, and the imaginative use of material found elsewhere, or copywork filtered through imagination. The mimicry, and abstract illusionism, involved in stippling produced what to Blake's mind were false engravings, since, to him, true engraving consisted of creating "Originals," just as "Originals" are created in any other art form. Stipple, then, did not produce either physical or "autographic" (Eaves, William Blake's Theory 42; CA 228) linearity.

Yet many of Blake's commercial engravings entail some level of uninspired copywork: the Laocoon separate plate itself has the hatching and "dots & lozenges" that are so often featured in imitative work, a fact to which I shall return. What distinguishes stipple from linear engraving is that it requires less skill, and is less time-consuming; as a result, journeymen could undertake this type of engraving work. It is not difficult to perceive, then, that an engraver engaged on stipple projects might well have had reason to feel that his talents were being insulted. Moreover, payment for stipple engraving in general was proportional to the level of skill that was believed to be required for such work; as stipple was believed to be the poor relation of conventional line engraving, so it contributed to poverty amongst engravers, and was complicit in the commercialization of art (CA 153, 223-24).

Flaxman may simply have been another victim of popular tastes, or of the Cyclopaedia's tight purse strings; given parallels between Blake's Hesiod and Cyclopaedia engravings, though, it is quite possible that Blake now found Flaxman advocating these foreign, and often commercially motivated, predilections—Flaxman, whom Blake had once believed to be the "Sculptor of Eternity," "a Sublime Archangel My Friend & Companion from Eternity," his "Best Friend." The absence of stippling in Flaxman's

21. E.g., "To learn the Language of Art Copy for Ever. is My Rule" (E 636); "The difference between a bad Artist & a Good One Is the Bad Artist Seems to Copy a Great Deal: The Good one Really Does Copy a Great Deal" (E 645).

22. E.g., "Men think they can Copy Nature as Correctly as I copy Imagination this they will find Impossible, & all the Copies or Pretended Copiers of Nature from Rembrat [sic] to Reynolds Prove that Nature becomes [same] to its Victim nothing but Blots & Blurs. Why are Copiers of Nature Incorrect while Copiers of Imagination are Correct this is manifest to all" (E 574-75).

23. Cromek's plates for the Cyclopaedia show how hatching can produce rather weak and lifeless reproductions, but Blake continued to use this method; the faults of Cromek's engravings he no doubt considered to be the responsibility of the artist rather than the technique.

24. See Bogan, "From Hackwork to Prophetic Vision" 36-37. On the contemporary French taste for stippling, see Viscomi 387n15.

25. Letter to Flaxman, 21 September 1800 (E 708). It is notable that in his letter to Flaxman of only a year later (19 October 1801) Blake's manner of addressing the latter is significantly less effusive (E 717-18).
sketches does not detract from this hypothesis, since, as I have noted, stippling was often used to imitate, or translate, other media for engravings. It is also conceivable that Flaxman's influence extended to the designs, as well as the engraving technique—the inventor(s) of which is not always specified on Blake's *Cyclopædia* engravings. James Bogart has already pointed out that Flaxman probably had some input in the Jupiter Olympus design of Plate 1 of the "Sculpture" article ("Blake's Jupiter Olympus" 162; see also "From Hackwork to Prophetic Vision" 36). Also, as I have noted, of the four "Sculpture" engravings, it is only on Plate III that Blake signed himself as both engraver and delineator: the sources of the other designs, then, are open to question. Thus, although he had produced the images on the copperplate, the commercial artist's authorship of those images was not allowed. With authorship went the rights of authorship: Blake would have had limited, if any, control over the style and subject matter of the *Cyclopædia* plates. The stippled lines were foreign to him, and may have been carried out at Flaxman's instigation; the subject matter was inevitably dictated by the articles that they accompanied.

What is evident is that, in his acceptance of the *Cyclopædia* commission, Blake had become part, not of an engraving project alone, but of an implicit and ongoing debate about authorship, graphic styles, and commissions. Interestingly, these concerns also figure in the inscriptions of the *Laocoon* separate plate. For example, the nature of authorship comes under scrutiny in the statement that the central image is of ""7" & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomon's Temple by three Rhodians ... " (E 273); graphic choices constitute the subject of Blake's assertions that "Hebrew Art is called Sin by the Deist Science" (E 273) and "The Gods of Greece & Egypt were Mathematical Diagrams ... " (E 274); and the idea of commissioned work is in direct opposition to Blake's statement that "Where any view of Money exists Art cannot be carried on ... " (E 275).

These echoes seem less coincidental when we consider one of the further debates that existed within the *Cyclopædia*, and the ways in which Blake engages with it in the separate plate: this debate had to do with the status and definition of sculpture. I have indicated that the significance of Flaxman's gaining control of the "Sculpture" essay was that it marked the ascendance of his views over those of the more commercially-minded Bacon. The proprietors of the *Cyclopædia*, moreover, probably had a fair idea of what they would get when they requested Flaxman to produce this essay; as I have observed, Flaxman was already engaged in a series of *Lectures on Sculpture* for the Royal Academy, which—in their later, published form at least—match, often word for word, large portions of the *Cyclopædia* article.

In fact, it must be admitted that even Flaxman's lectures were not entirely without precedent. In particular, the features that his article has in common with the "Sculpture antique" section of the article on "Sculpture" in the French *Encyclopédie* (vol. 30) suggest that it was consciously expanding on that essay, written by the Chevalier de Jaucourt.26 It is worth noting that, had Flaxman known much about Jaucourt, and his methods of working, he may have been less keen to use him as a model. The Chevalier churned out roughly a quarter of the *Encyclopédie*'s articles, and evidently many of his co-contributors were rather disdainful of this "ruthless compiler": "it is pretty clear," writes Lough, "that Diderot and his circle looked upon the worthy Chevalier as a pedantic old bore" (*The Encyclopédie* [1971] 45, 56). More to the point, perhaps, regarding the articles on painting, sculpture and engraving Diderot himself made the comment "à refaire," that is, "redo" or "start again" (Diderot 132).

One major point on which the two articles coincide is their concern with the issue of sculpture's place in religion, in particular the role of sculpture in Christianity. Jaucourt wrote that, although the twelve tablets forbade images of false gods, sculpture did not in itself count as idolatry with the Hebrews. The *Cyclopædia* article takes up this idea, but marks this opposition between images of true and false gods in sculpture as a spiritual conflict. Within this conflict, the making of the golden calf becomes a "dreadful attempt to annihilate inspired art at its birth"; the judgment visited upon those responsible is portrayed as the "deliverance from Egypt" and "the deliverance of man, both as to his bodily and mental faculties, from slavery" ("Sculpture," vol. 32, n.p.). Again correspondences are drawn between mental and artistic slavery:

the necessity of such inspired sculptures and other inspired works of art is explained sufficiently in the deliverance of Israel from the idolatry of Egypt; where no one dared to practise any art or science, but that of his fathers; who, like him, were kept from every indication of individual character. And the Hebrew being born a slave, continued so while under the Egyptian yoke: let his inspiration be what it would, he was compelled to work in making bricks, and in iron-furnaces. Such was the deliverance of art and science from destruction and the earth from returning to its primeval chaos.

Through Flaxman's lectures or conversation, Blake must have been acquainted with at least the majority of Flaxman's ideas prior to their appearance in the "Sculpture" article. That, to a significant degree, Blake agreed with those ideas is also clear. He too abhorred unimaginative art and the

26. Although the entire "Sculpture" article in the *Encyclopédie* is said by Lough to have been written by the sculptor Etienne Falconet (The *Encyclopédie* [1971] 53), the sections on "Sculpture antique" and "Sculpture en bronze" are signed "D.J.," initials which were the frequently used abbreviation for the Chevalier's name (see Morris 38–39).
dark Satanic Mills" of England ("And did those feet," E 95); he believed that art had been yoked by (priestly) idolatry; and he frequently linked spiritual to artistic slavery. In Blake's view, these forces turned the artist into the artisan (CA 117–23). There is, though, a particularly strong connection between the "Sculpture" article, and thus the Cyclopaedia, and the Laocoon separate plate, since in the inscriptions of that plate Blake has created echoes of Flaxman's sentiments: "Spiritual War," we read, "Israel delivered from Egypt Art delivered from Nature & Imitation" (E 274). As Morton D. Paley points out, in his essay on Blake and ancient sculpture, this adds "a further dimension [to Flaxman's original equation of art and freedom] by including mimesis as a form of bondage" ("Wonderful Originals" 183). David James, then, is patently incorrect in his insinuation that, in the Laocoon engraving, Blake is simply criticizing "Flaxman's deeply flawed ideas about art" (230).

Moreover, as Paley also points out ("Wonderful Originals" 183), Flaxman's lectures and article on sculpture mention as "the most magnificent production of Hebrew art" the Temple of Solomon, which contains "the same cherubim that Moses had seen on the Mount," "done by divine command, for purposes whose importance reaches to the end of time" ("Sculpture"; cf. Lectures 30). In Blake's Descriptive Catalogue (1809) there is a comparable reference to "wonderful originals called in the Sacred Scriptures the Cherubim, which were sculptured and painted on walls of Temples, Towers, Cities, Palaces": their neglect (symbolized by Solomon's quest for more exotic luxury for his Temple), and ultimate disappearance or destruction, mark the increase in distance between conception and execution in art, a key element of the slavery of man's imagination (CA 122–23). Whereas Flaxman considers it impossible to judge the nature of these lost works ("Sculpture," Lectures 53), Blake claims that it was from these that the Greeks and Etrurians copied "all the grand works of ancient art" (E 531): in their copies we have some sense of those originals. In turn, this correspondence helps us to understand Blake's description of the Laocoon sculpture as "77" & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomon's Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact or History of Ilium" (E 273).

Thus, in spite of resonances—which it is difficult to believe were not deliberate—Blake's statements make significant moves away from the "Sculpture" article, in which the Laocoon statue is described according to the account in Pliny's Natural History (XXXVI. iv. 37–38):

The group of Laocoön, animated with the hopeless agony of the father and sons, is the work of Apollodorus, Athenodorus, and Agesander of Rhodes. The style of this work, as well as the manner in which Pliny introduces it into his history, gives us reason to believe that it was not ancient in his time.

Yet James is blatantly wrong when he remarks that "In asserting a Hebraic original for the statue, Blake argues against Flaxman, who, on the evidence of Pliny, thought it not ancient" (James 234n6). What actually distinguishes Blake's ideas about this fascinating sculpture from Flaxman's is his conception of it in spiritual terms, as a copy within a much grander scheme of eternal forms. As a copy, its own time of creation is immaterial, just as it is insignificant; but, for all its fallen condition, as a copy of a "wonderful original," it still signifies that original. In turn, Blake's engraving of the Laocoon sculpture can be seen as a "copy of a copy," or, within the context of the surrounding inscriptions, "an attempt to go back to the presumed archaic source of its subject": whilst it is a copy—either of the copy (the Rhodian Laocoon statue) or the Original seen in Blake's vision—it is also an anti-copy, and "an original in its own right" (Paley, "Wonderful Originals" 190, 191).

The Laocoon engraving derives at least part of its power from "subverting[ing] our preconceptions of what the famous sculpture is" (IB 5:231)—preconceptions that depend on the viewer's immediate recognition of the work, and knowledge of its artistic status. Whilst Blake draws on the Laocoon sculpture's connections—some of which were specifically rehearsed in the "Sculpture" article—he also evidently reinterprets the links. The central image may strike us initially as the Laocoon, but when we begin to read around it we find that it is not "Laocoon" at all: it is neither the statue nor the Trojan priest of Virgil's account (Aeneid II: 40–233). This rather undermines the title that the engraving commonly is given, which we can be fairly certain was not one conferred by Blake:11 "Laocoon," even as a name, appears nowhere on the engraving; and to call Laocoon what Blake specifically has set about reconceiving as not "Laocoon" is to be a slave to the "misapplication" of the image to "Natural Fact"—the corruption of its eternal significance—that Blake was opposing. Blake, then, took the documentary-style article of the Cyclopaedia, and played out the spiritual implications of some of its ideas in connec-

27. Paley reiterates this point in "77" & his two Sons" 218-19.
28. See also Paley, "77" & his two Sons" 218.
29. Paley also notes this point in "77" & his two Sons" 219.
30. Amongst the works that had contributed to the statue's fame in Blake's day are numerous engravings, such as those in Jan De Bisschof's Paradigmata Graeciae Variorum Artificum (1671), and the debate on the nature of the arts played out in Johann Joachim Winckelmann's Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bilderkunst (1755), and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Laokoon: Oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie (1766). On Blake's transformation of recognizable statues, see Paley, "Wonderful Originals" 171–72.
31. The title may have been conferred on the separate plate by Linnell, who acquired copy A (BB 268).
tion with an artwork that it had characterized only materially. His construction of the statue opposes conventional interpretation, and with it the standard encyclopaedic definition or explanation of the work.

Blake's treatment of the Laocoon statue in his separate plate is especially pointed in the light of his reaction against the requirements of commercial engraving. It is not alone the central image, and the views on art expressed around it, that connect the Laocoon separate plate to the Cyclopaedia. The aforementioned concern of the engraving with the evils of money also reflects back to its encyclopaedic forefather, and makes it essential to our understanding of Blake's attitude towards the Rees project. Such phrases as "Christianity is Art & not Money / Money is its Curse" (E 274), and "Where any view of Money exists Art cannot be carried on, but War only" (E 275), focus on the hindrance of art by monetary considerations. These statements do indeed suggest Blake's bitterness at having to undertake engravers' hackwork, and they are linked to Blake's emphasis elsewhere in the Laocoon engraving on the necessity of escaping the confines of uninspired art, and the financial obligations that force an artist to bow to the fashions of the day and to produce copywork. 32 Appearing in a work that critically engages with the views on sculpture expressed in Flaxman's article for the Cyclopaedia, they also point towards that work as a particular target of Blake's attack.

As I have mentioned, reproduction was entailed in all of Blake's commercial engraving; this demand, however, was foremost in the case of an encyclopaedia, whose object is to represent a natural world ordered by reason. 33 By contrast, Blake's engraving displays a lack of conventional order—a fact that has been frequently commented on, but not deeply investigated. One aspect of the non-sequentiality of the written element in the Laocoon engraving is to deny what is a keystone of any encyclopaedic enterprise, so-called "logical" order itself. Of course, there are different types of order: the Cyclopaedia adopted alphabetical order, or dictionary form (which is the most easily accessible, or reader-friendly, type of order), but all encyclopaedic works employ some manner of ordering. Blake, on the other hand, has ensured that there is not even a formal headword, or title, for his Laocoon engraving: nothing sits outside the plate's framing line to guide us. We might nominate as the title any of several candidates, including "77" & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact or History of Ilium,"The Angel of the Divine Presence," and "[R] [R] [R] [R] [R] [R] [R] 72" [Angel Jehovah] (E 273). Taylor also nomimates the first of these, but, instead of treating it as a definitive title, she suggests that "Art Degraded, Imagination Denied, War Governed the Nations" and "If Morality was Christianity, Socrates was the Saviour" act with it as three "more or less complementary titles" (73). Paley, following Keynes (22), believes that "77 & his two Sons . . ." is the "true title" ("Wondrous Originals" 191; see also "77 & his two Sons" 217), and certainly it could be: on the other hand, it could just as easily be a subtitle, or not a title of any sort. In fact, none of these phrases, either individually or in "complementary" groups has an indisputable right to a titular role: each time we elevate one, or even three, above the others, the existence of the alternative possibilities—equally prominent on the engraving—undermines our choice. Indeed, if we accept as a rough definition that a title is a means of entry into a work (be it graphic, written, or performed), and is applied to designate, indicate content, or seduce the reader, or a mixture of these (see Genette 73), then it could be argued that the "title" of the Laocoon engraving is the image of the sculpture, and not a word, or group of words, at all. On the other hand, if we follow the argument that a title mediates between the viewer and the creation, neither the image nor any of the inscriptions can be titles, as they all form part of the creation.

There are many reasons why Blake may have wished to re-frame his relationship to an encyclopaedic enterprise, a few of which are ascertainable by considering the character of Rees's Cyclopaedia within the context of other contemporaneous encyclopaedic works. The most famous was Diderot and D'Alembert's Encyclopédie (1751–72), which, for all the variations in the views of its contributors, was founded on those strong beliefs in the autonomy of reason, and in causality, that we associate with the Enlightenment. Its plates reflect this concern: as Diderot announced in the Prospectus of 1750, a primary concern of the illustrations was to demonstrate "les arts mécaniques" (see Lough, The Encyclopédie [1971] 87); and, as the Encyclopédie's "Sculpture" plates (Planches VIII) demonstrate, presenting examples of works of art was of less concern than presenting the tools and processes by which works of art were created. Overall, the project embodied a confidence in perfectibility and progress within a system of natural principles governing the world; as an encyclopaedia, it also inevitably valued the particular over the general, and observable facts over principles.

Even Archibald Maclain's generally favorable article in the Monthly Review of 1787, however, noted that the Encyclopédie's project to advance the compass of human knowledge entailed opposition to "those who looked higher than nature, for the principle object of their veneration and confidence" (243). As John Lough remarks, this criticism became more prominent after 1789, with the Encyclopédie being regarded as one of the heralds of, and even contribu-

32. E.g., "Israel deliverd from Egypt is Art deliverd from Nature & Imitation" (E 274); "Money (the lifes blood of Poor Families)" (E 275).

33. That Blake abhorred abstract order is particularly obvious in his poem, The French Revolution, in which Order is one of the "terrible towers" of the Bastille; see 1:19 (E 286), and 3:38–43 (E 287–88).
itors to, the French Revolution (The Encyclopédie [1970] 12). It is unsurprising, then, that, as many well-to-do, and loyal, British subjects sought to distance themselves from the revolutionaries, some of them began to find the contents of their libraries a source of discomfort. An entry under the heading of “Domestic Occurrences” in the Gentleman’s Magazine of August 1798 reads, “The Earl of Exeter has expunged from his large, and well-selected library, and burnt, the works of Voltaire, Rousseau, Bolingbroke, Raynal, and that grand arsenal of impiety, the French Encyclopédie” (718; author’s own emphases).

It is possible that Blake managed to find common ground with the Encyclopedists on account of their links with the Revolution. He had done so with the Deist Thomas Paine in his 1798 annotations to Richard Watson’s Apology for the Bible. Yet, as Paley has demonstrated, the Blake of 1798 became the Blake of The Four Zoas and Milton, hostile to the Deists (Paley, “‘To Defend the Bible...’” 37–38). The Blake of 1815 was much more outspoken, both in his aversion to Reason and resistance to natural philosophy, and in his belief in vision. In fact, apart from the esteem in which he held “Minute Particulars” (see, for example, Jerusalem 55:61–64, E 205), Blake’s views during this period are almost entirely at odds with those of the philosophes. 34 Even the Encyclopédie’s attitude towards established authorities would have been problematic for him: although he no doubt approved of the French philosophes’ questioning of the State, their challenging of the Church cannot have appealed, given that it was founded not on a wish for reform, but on the total rejection of God.

Even had Blake managed to sympathize with the Encyclopedists, however, this would hardly have made a British encyclopaedic effort appeal the more to him. Hostility towards the Encyclopédie’s values did not preclude envy of its position as the most scholarly work of its kind; and envy was one cause of the boom in encyclopaedic activity in late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain (Wells 13). More particularly, the Encyclopédie’s relation to the Revolution was frequently stated as a major impetus behind the production of these British encyclopaedias, whose editors and proprietors courted the competition with their French rival in political terms. The subversive history of the Encyclopédie is adduced to in the Dedication that appears in the third and fourth editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1797–98, and 1810). Addressing King George III, Andrew Bell and Colin MacFarquhar write of the Proprietor’s “loyalty and duty;” and of the British as “a free, a happy, and a loyal people”; they also express their “earnest prayer” that

“the Sceptre of the British Empire may be swayed by your Majesty’s descendants to the latest posterity” (both 1:v and vi). In the 1801 supplement to the third edition of the Britannica, however, the editor of that work, George Gleig, goes much further:

The French Encyclopédie has been accused, and justly accused, of having disseminated far and wide, the seeds of Anarchy and Atheism. If the Encyclopaedia Britannica shall, in any degree, counteract the tendency of that pestiferous work, even these two Volumes will not be wholly unworthy of your Majesty’s Patronage. (Dedication, vol. 1)

The object appears to be to stress the contrast between these works and the anti-authoritarian Encyclopédie, which had contributed to the removal of the French monarchy.

Rees’s Cyclopaedia is somewhat more moderate than the Encyclopaedia Britannica in its opposition to the French Encyclopédie. Certainly the emphasis of its illustrations is not always consistent with the French work: Blake’s own depictions of sculptures, rather than the instruments of their production, are a case in point—although it should be emphasized that many of the Cyclopaedia’s plates did follow their continental counterparts in depicting tools and processes. What betrays the Cyclopaedia’s anti-Encyclopédie bias most, however, is that, whilst it was intended to rival both the French work and the Britannica, Rees’s Preface seems more concerned with distinguishing his compilation from the former. The plan of the Cyclopaedia is set against only the design of the Encyclopédie, with specific indications as to where the two differ, and the reasons why this English production alone followed the plan “most suitable to the nature and design of a Scientific Dictionary” (1:vi).

Contrary to Rees’s claims, however, the Cyclopaedia and the French work were founded on very similar structural principles, both adhering to an alphabetical, rather than scientific, order, which was at that time by no means a requisite of an encyclopaedia. Moreover, this choice was in both cases influenced by Chambers’s Cyclopaedia. The Encyclopédie originated in a proposal to publish a French translation of Chambers’s two-volume work; although in passing into the hands of Diderot and D’Alembert it became a very different and much more radical work, Chambers retained the model. Rees’s first edition of Chambers’s work appeared in 1778; this was followed, between 1781 and 1786, by a four-volume version, which incorporated a supplement and much new matter (reprinted between 1788 and 1791). It was in recognition of these efforts that Rees was, in 1786, elected as a Fellow to both the Royal Society and the Linnean Society. The favor shown him on this account was in large part what led him to begin work on his own encyclopaedia, which, including the six volumes of plates, emerged in forty-five volumes. Though obviously more comprehensive, this too was modeled on the Cyclopaedia of Chambers.

34. Michael Ackland has argued convincingly that Blake from the outset considered the philosophes as “errring temporal prophets and mockers of divine vision,” and would have been aware that Voltaire’s writings demonstrated “what amounts to a systematic attack on his most hallowed tenets” (7–18).
The inescapable problem for Blake was that, no matter what political or religious stances they adopted, and no matter how the information was accumulated, encyclopaedias were an attempt to contain the world in a circle of knowledge. Moreover, whilst the boom in encyclopaedias suggests that such works were universally in demand, already we have noted Hoare’s resistance, and the form had many other detractors. Writing in 1759, on “The present state of polite learning in France,” Oliver Goldsmith referred to the “Trevoux, Encyclopédies and Bibliothèques of the age” as “monsters of learning” (Collected Works 1:305). Even Goldsmith’s choice of phrase—his use of the French names—indicates his wish to distance himself from these productions.

The real genealogy of these “monsters of learning,” however, led back, not to France, but to Britain. Whilst not the first encyclopaedia, John Harris’s Lexicon technicum, or an Universal English Dictionary of Arts and Sciences (1704) was the first encyclopaedic work to follow the dictionary form. As R. Loyalty Cru points out, prior to being “virtually superseded” by Chambers’s Cyclopaedia, the Lexicon enjoyed great popularity (231), and must, therefore, be credited with heralding the rash of encyclopaedic works that followed its dictionary form. Yet the facility of reference that these new encyclopaedias offered—the facility of reference that made them so popular—also could be perceived as offering only a superficial coverage of the circle of knowledge. Ironically, given the Lexicon’s original prominence, many considered Chambers’s Cyclopaedia to be the main culprit in what they alleged was the resultant decline in learning. In his Pursuits of Literature (1797), for example, the royal librarian Thomas James Mathias wrote of the achievements of his character Dr. Morosophus:

At last the Doctor gave his friends a work!
(Not verse, like Cowper, or high prose, like Burke.)


36. According to the OED, “encyclopaedia” is derived from a pseudo-Greek word, ἐγκυκλοποιείν, which is “an erroneous form (said to be a false reading) occurring in Mss. of Quintilian, Pliny, and Galen, for ἐγκυκλοπία ‘encyclopedic education,’ the circle of arts and sciences considered by the Greeks as essential to a liberal education.”

37. Trevoux, i.e., Dictionnaire Universel Francois de Latin, contenant la signification et la definition Tant des Mots de l'une & de l'autre Langue, avec leurs differens usages (first pub. Trévoux, 1704). Although this work was commonly known as the Dictionnaire de Trévoux, after its original place of publication, all editions issued between 1732 and its final publication in 1771 were published in either Nancy or Paris.

38. Many works, from Pliny’s Natural History onwards, have been encyclopaedic in coverage; the first usages of the word “encyclopaedia” in the titles of books, however, occurred in the sixteenth century (Shackleton 778–79).

39. E.g., Jerusalem 15:14–20 (E 159); The Everlasting Gospel [k] 36–46 (E 519), [h] (E 525); Annotationes to Thornton [ii] (E 667).

40. For just one of the “Sculpture” engravings Blake received £10. 10s. od.; if this was in line with what he received for the other plates, his total earnings from this commission could have been around £73. 10s. 6d. (Bentley, Blake Records Supplement 72).

41. J. C. Strange recorded in his journal that Samuel Palmer “shewed me a fine engr. of Blakes of the Laocoön with writing surrounding being Blakes sentiments on many subjects which P asking him about he had given him one of the prints saying at the same time ‘you will find my creed there’” (quoted in Bentley, The Stranger from Paradise 498).

Chambers abridged in sooth ‘twas all he read
From fruitful A to unproductive Zed.
(lines 339–42; author’s own emphasis)

Paradoxically, then, encyclopaedias were seen by some as a genuine threat to knowledge, drawing the reader away from the true works of science and literature. Blake—ever ready to denounce what he considered to be the false learning of the day—could not have been unaware of the charge, and doubtless had some sympathy with those who levied it.

If Blake did have objections to the Cyclopaedia’s aims, the inclinations of Rees himself must only have added to them. Away from his involvement in the business of encyclopaedia production, and in the Royal and Linnean Societies (which also turned on ordering the world), this well-known Evangelical Dissenter was also inclined towards the doctrines of Arius—that is, he denied that Jesus Christ was consubstantial with God. Although Blake’s writings provide no confirmation of an antipathy towards Arianism, nor of any direct contact with Rees himself, the link with Arius, combined with Rees’s evangelism, surely jarred with Blake’s outlook. Throughout his writings, Blake equates God and Jesus, and in the Laocoön engraving itself we find the words “God himself / The Divine Body” (for “Jesus we are his Members”) together with the clear statement that “GOD IS Jesus” (E 273).

Realistically, any philosophical objections to the Rees project that Blake might have had would hardly have been sufficient for him to have resisted the significant payment he was to receive for his contributions to the Cyclopaedia. beggars, as they say, cannot be choosers, and Blake, though not destitute, equally was not in a financial position which would allow him to reject commissions. Even more reason, therefore, that he should have expressed his resentment of the necessity of accepting such work in the Laocoön separate plate, and should have communicated it as part of a creative statement of his personal artistic creed.

Yet the production, and even the format, of the Laocoön separate plate, in particular its conjunction of image and text—which in its ultimate effects is significant—may have been fortuitous. I do not contend that Blake saw no significance in the interaction between the text and image of...
the Laocoon engraving: I think he saw it quite clearly. I am persuaded, however, that he engraved the image before the c. 1826 execution of the accompanying texts. No such highly wrought figure could have been engraved freehand onto the plate (Viscomi 9n11), and this idea is confirmed by the "boldly etched and engraved crosshatchings" (SP 100), which indicate that Blake employed a "mixed-method" process, etching at least a good proportion of the lines, and then finishing them with his graver. The writing that Blake has added to the sculpture's base, "Drawn & Engraved by William Blake" (see detail, illus. 4), also supports this idea. The statement, within the sculpture, refers only to the sculpture: it suggests that the central image was once the whole work, an end in itself. Moreover, these words tell us that Blake produced an original drawing of the sculpture, which was then transferred onto the copper plate for engraving. By contrast, the uneven spacing, and the mistakes, of the surrounding text suggest that it probably was scratched and/or engraved straight onto the plate. Some portions of writing, for example, are well-sized, commanding the surrounding space, whereas other portions are made up of smaller letters and are crammed into tiny areas. There is also the problem of the Aleph (א) in "[1111] 7(9)72," which has been engraved back to front. Again this suspicion is supported by the fact that the inscriptions (including the signature line) appear to have been cut with a graver, and not etched.42

The most obvious reason for Blake initially to have produced the central image alone is that it was intended as a commercial engraving, and, in fact, many of the characteristics of the Laocoon plate support this possibility. At the engraving's heart is the carefully copied statue, the copywork as ever implying a commercial context; then there is the matter of the image having been rendered with the hatching, and even a little of the dot and lozenge work, so typical of commercial reproductions. In turn, the most obvious reason for Blake to have transformed the plate into

the work we know today is that it went unused in that commercial capacity. Although to date this has not been the accepted view of the Laocoon separate plate's genesis, it is much more probable than the widely held idea that Blake produced the whole work within the last year or two of his life. Whereas the inscriptions could have been—and indeed seem to have been—quite quickly produced, it would have taken a great deal of time for Blake to have etched and engraved the central image. Around 1826–27 Blake simply did not have that time, immersed as he was in producing his Illustrations of the Book of Job (1823–25; published 1826), and the designs and engravings for Dante's Divine Comedy (1824–27). Moreover, he was already sick.43

A later addition of text to the central image would account for the disparity between the separate plate's careful central image and array of rather haphazard inscriptions, and explain why it is difficult to determine what kind of audience Blake had in mind for the work. Unlike those who, consciously or otherwise, have remained silent on the matter (e.g., Taylor, Herrstrom), James's reference to "the plate's resistance to commodity status and the consequent precariousness of its existence" (226) at least offers a solution to this problem; once again, however, James's certainty that this effect was Blake's intention from the outset is a failing. As the impulse behind the engraving changed from commercial to imaginative, no doubt at times even Blake himself wondered what audience he would find for it. On the other hand, that, at some stage, he did concern himself with the idea of there being an audience is pointed to in the aforementioned phrase, "Drawn & Engraved by William Blake": such statements act as a declaration of copyright, and are generally found not on private studies and experiments, but on works intended for circulation.

When attempting to posit a history for the Laocoon engraving, however, we encounter some difficulties. Much depends on how we envisage the original state of the engraving: I have argued that it did not include the encompassing text, but there are other possible subtractions, such as the burnishing on the central image. This would include

42. As with the engraved inscriptions in Blake's Job illustrations, slight magnification of the inscriptions of the Laocoon engraving reveals the "stroking" of the graver, and the places where the tool was lifted from the plate to take up a new angle of attack.

43. First suggested in Puice, "William Blake's so-called Laocoon" 117-25; see also Paley, "71 & his two Sons" 213, 214.
the inscription "Drawn & Engraved by William Blake," which appears over one of the burnished areas. What makes it possible that the burnishing was another alteration to an earlier state of the Laocoon is that this signature line does not appear to have been part of the original design. There is a long standing tradition of engravers adding their signature to the bases of the statues that they have depicted. This tradition is not least apparent in Laocoon plates, such as those by Marco Dente (reproduced in Bieber figs. 2 and 3), which Blake seems to have known, and which he no doubt studied as part of his Royal Academy training (SP 99; Paley, "Wonderful Originals" 174): in such cases the signature appears as if chiseled into stone (literally "sculpted"). By placing his own signature within the plinth of the statue, Blake certainly gestures towards this tradition (although, in the context of his inscribed protestations against slavish imitation, he may well have been invoking it in order to challenge it). Yet the appearance of his signature differs in one key aspect: the area beneath it has been burnished away, erased, in order to make room for it, and thus it seems to be floating over the plinth, instead of chiseled into it. Had Blake intended this inscription when he began work on the Laocoon engraving, he surely would have rendered the stone more lightly, and incorporated the writing within it.

The later addition of the signature is supported by the fact that, although overall the style of the Laocoon's central image appears late (Paley, "Wonderful Originals" 191), if we imagine the image unburnished, and without this line, we find that the hatching itself—in its patterns and darkness—is more characteristic of Blake's earlier work: it is comparable, say, to the darkened third state of his "Canterbury Pilgrims" (c. 1810–20; SP no. 16 3, fig. 36). By contrast, if we compare the Laocoon with the Job illustrations (1825–26; commissioned 1823), which Essick and Viscomi have suggested as parallels (IB 5:242), we find that they are not at all alike in terms of the basic use of hatching and crosshatching, Job containing little of the bold and rather rigid crosshatching so dominant in the Laocoon engraving. Rather, the similarity between the Laocoon engraving and Job illustrations is a result of the burnishing, and the form of the inscriptions. Moreover, there are other examples of images revised in this way by Blake, including the Job separate plate (SP no. 5, figs. 7 and 8), and, most obviously, Joseph of Arimathea Among the Rocks of Albion (SP no. 1, fig. 2), in which, as with the Laocoon, Blake recontextualizes an image copied after the work of another artist. Although, in the Joseph plate, Blake incorporated his own imaginative background for the figure from the outset, it was later that he took the trouble to alter details, burnish areas, and annotate the work. In addition, we might compare Blake's Mirth engraving, which, as I have mentioned, also probably was conceived as a commercial production, but transformed into a more individualistic, "private" plate: like the Laocoon separate plate, its second state features inscriptions placed over burnished areas.

The likelihood of the Laocoon engraving's once having existed unburnished and unsigned returns us to the additional likelihood that it was originally intended as a book illustration. Not only is it much more usual with works of this nature to find the signature placed below the image, rather than incorporated into it, but also in most cases this line would have been inscribed by the house lettering engraver, and not by those responsible for the individual plates. By adding the line within the sculpture, Blake emphasizes his authorship, an authorship that would have been subordinated to the whole in an illustrated book; and, indeed, if the transformation from the hypothetical first state of the Laocoon engraving to what we see today was comparable to that of the first to the second state of Joseph of Arimathea, Blake's wish to note his authorship at this stage is wholly understandable.

In the light of this theory that there were at least two states of the Laocoon engraving, the first of which was designed as a commercial plate, it is inevitable that we should consider in what context it might have appeared. Even as a commercial endeavor, the Laocoon may have been a separate plate, but it seems more likely that it was part of a book project. Perhaps the most tantalizing possibility is that it was commissioned for Rees's Cyclopædia. The Cyclopædia is just the sort of work for which a plate engraver would not have engraved his own signature; clearly too, the sub-

44. The abundant copying of the Laocoon statue had been the subject of derision perhaps as far back as Titian's day; see Niccolo Baldinucci's c. 1540–45 woodcut, after Titian, of Three Monkeys Imitating the Laocoon (Bieber fig. 9). As early as 1667 M. van Opstal had asserted that the image was intended to satirize the excessive admiration, and imitation of, classical art prevalent in Florence and Rome; the now well-known theory that the print was a specific criticism of Baccio Bandinelli's sixteenth-century marble copy, however, is first found in print in a footnote by none other than Henry Fuseli (Aphorisms, no. 199 [note], in Knowles 3:137; see Janson, 356 nn7–8).

45. Whilst allowing the obvious lateness of the burnishing in the Laocoon engraving, I disagree with the statement that "though more conservative in appearance [than the second states of Job, Ezekiel, and Mirth], its burnishing [was] done as an integral part of the engraving process, as in the Book of Job plates" (IB 5:242). As I have shown, the burnished area beneath the signature line in itself proves that there was a return to the Laocoon after the original engraving work was completed.

46. Although the letter forms are sometimes inconsistent, the fact that the inscriptions in both works are cut with a graver, rather than etched, gives them a similar visual character.

47. In another parallel with the Laocoon separate plate, we find a signature line on the second state of Joseph of Arimathea, which was not present in its first state.

48. Blake may of course have scratched his signature, as is seen in
ject and layout are suitable for the *Cyclopaedia*'s pages, there being found within it many full-page engravings, including Cromek's image of the Cupid and Psyche statue (Plate I of the first sequence of engravings for the "Sculpture" article). The hatching of Blake's image also is consistent with the technique used by Cromek, although Cromek's image is less accomplished. Furthermore, the fact that Blake's *Laocoon* separate plate, in its final state, hearkens back to issues covered by Flaxman in the "Sculpture" article again suggests a more than coincidental relationship between the two.

At this stage, it is important to distinguish between the overall size of the *Laocoon* plate, which is 26.2 x 21.6 cm. to the framing lines (or 27.6 x 22.9 cm. to the platemark), and the image of the statue, which measured at its widest points is just 21 x 16.8 cm. Clearly, if we consider only the size of the engraving as we know it through the extant impressions, we have to conclude that it is too large for the *Cyclopaedia*: the largest single-page engravings in the volumes go up to just c. 24.5 x 18 cm., and even the leaves of the volumes measure, in the largest copies that I have been able to locate, only 29 x 21 cm. By considering the central image of the *Laocoon* engraving only (21 x 16.8 cm.), however, we find that it does fall within this range, even if we allow extra room for a title and imprint line. Moreover, it would still be smaller than the engraving of the "Isis Magna Mater" bust ("Drawing," Plate IV [Plates, vol. 2]), which measures 21.5 x 18 cm. Nor would it have been unusual for the copper plate itself to have been larger than the leaf onto which it was intended to be printed.

In addition to the technical possibility of the *Laocoon*'s having been meant for the pages of the *Cyclopaedia*, there is a further suggestion of this provenance in the relationship between the separate plate's central image and the depictions of the sculpture in Blake's extant pencil drawing (c. 1815; Butlin no. 679; see illus. 5) and stipple engraving ("Sculpture," Plate III). It tends to be assumed (e.g., *IB* 5:229 and 230, Taylor 72, Paley, "Wonderful Originals" 191) that the pencil drawing was followed by the stipple engraving, and that the *Laocoon* was produced later. In many important respects, however, the *Laocoon*'s image is closer to the pencil drawing than is the *Cyclopaedia* image. For example, the snake coil around the elder son's left ankle is lower down in the drawing and separate plate than it is in the stipple engraving; where it is held by *Laocoon*'s left hand, the serpent is much more curved in the stipple engraving than it is in either of the other two versions; and the right hand of *Laocoon* is twisted further round, so as to show less of the fingers, in the stipple plate.49 Differences between the heads of *Laocoon* and his sons in the separate plate and the drawing and stipple engraving (e.g., teeth, hair) are difficult to ignore; however, given that in the separate plate the engraving in these areas seems more linear and flowing than elsewhere on the plate, it is possible that these elements were reworked at a later point.

In fact, many of the differences between the drawing and stippled versions can be accounted for if we add the image from the *Laocoon* separate plate into the equation between them, rather than after them; the plausibility of this reordering can be seen by further analysis of the details. The folds at the bottom of *Laocoon*'s cloak in the pencil drawing are a recognizable source for those in the separate plate, whereas their shape is very different from those in the stipple the drawing it is all but invisible; in the separate plate it is pointed and pronounced; in the stippled plate it is rather bulbous. This area is not very clear in the Royal Academy cast, which would account for Blake's presentation of it in the sketch. The *Laocoon* separate plate seems to be following the tenet that "Art can never exist without Naked Beauty displayed" (E 275), in its re-envisioning of what had been concealed, or made indistinct: it is possible too that this was one of the plate's characteristics that led to its rejection. The bulbous nature of *Laocoon*'s penis area in the *Cyclopaedia* plate tells us that something is there, without being too specific for the tastes of the day.

50. If the untraced drawing of the *Laocoon* (Butlin no. 680) was produced as a transfer for the *Laocoon* separate plate, it would have fallen second in this order of production.

engraving. On the other hand, if the Laocoön separate plate's image were its model, it is easy to see how the cloak in the stippled plate could have been engraved as it is. Compared with the drawing, the folds in the separate plate and stipple engraving are thicker, more solid, or even serpentine, and the extreme bottom left fold is more rounded; moreover, additional folds in the drapery appear in the separate plate (folds not present in the drawing or the sculpture itself), which are then roughly repeated in the stippled plate. Equally, the shading on the base of the Laocoön's image follows the pattern of the drawing, whereas the latter's light and dark areas are frequently reversed in the stippled image; again, though, the separate plate's image features heavy shading on the thigh of the younger son, and the right hand side of Laocoön's chest, which is not found in the drawing, but could have been the model for the same treatment in the stipple engraving. It can also be seen that, despite possible reworkings to the figures' heads, Laocoön's beard in the separate plate still shows some of the two-pronged effect seen in the drawing, which in the stippled version has disappeared. Each point individually might signify little, but cumulatively they are strong evidence for the separate plate having been intermediate between the extant drawing and the stipple engraving.

In inspecting the details, however, what is most interesting to note is that there are certain signs of carelessness in the stipple engraving. For instance, where the muscles of Laocoön's neck form a curved section in the pencil drawing, and this shape is suggested by shading in the separate plate, in the stippled plate we see instead an unnatural triangle of heavy shading: the way in which the serpent is wrapped around Laocoön's left leg in the stipple engraving also departs from both of the other versions. More compelling evidence of Blake's inattention is found in the strange bulge to the left of Laocoön's penis on the stipple engraving, which is not present on either the separate plate or the drawing—or, for that matter, on the statue itself. This bulge cannot be read as part of Laocoön's cloak, because not only is it too round and smooth, but also the cloak does not extend to that point in the sculpture; nor is it part of the genital area. It is simply a mistake. Another mistake in the Cyclopædia plate can be seen by Laocoön's left foot, in the two unerased stippled lines extending out from the base of the statue; the point where Blake has actually ended the base in this stippled image would be far too narrow for any statue, and indicates that he spent little time plotting his dimensions. Moreover, the stippled image's selective use of the shading patterns in the pencil drawing and Laocoön engraving result in an inconsistent, not to mention highly improbable, depiction. As the inferior quality of the second version of the "GEM Engraving" plate leads us naturally to infer that the superior, and rarer, copper plate was the original, and was probably "damaged in the course of printing or lost and the other one prepared as a substitute" (CB 110), so the facts before us here point to a similar conclusion. The production of "Sculpture" Plate III, then, could very well have been hurried—either after a previous plate was damaged or lost, or perhaps after the rejection of the first state of what later became the Laocoön separate plate engraving. Certainly the plate's defects add weight to Bogán's judgment that the "Sculpture" engravings were "mere copywork" ("Blake's Jupiter Olympus" 157), "feeble," "lackluster," and "puny" ("From Hackwork to Prophetic Vision" 36, 37, and 39).

These details all point towards the idea that the Laocoön separate plate was begun as a commercial plate, and that it may have been more than just a by-product of the Rees commission. If it was originally intended as one of the Cyclopædia's plates, it is quite conceivable that the instructions for the plates changed, just as the contributors and engravers themselves changed. As I hope to have shown, Rees's work was less ordered in its compilation than its encyclopaedic nature suggests: just as there were complications concerning the authorship of articles, and thus what position those articles would take, it is possible that the specifications for the "Sculpture" engravings altered over time. This may have involved the rejection of a first state of the Laocoön separate plate in favor of stippled images.

Whatever the case, it seems likely that the Laocoön engraving was begun much earlier than has previously been allowed (probably before 1815), and that the difference, in graphic technique and style, of the work's image and text is the result of its having been adapted from its original purpose towards the end of Blake's life. I would emphasize that I am not suggesting that the Laocoön separate plate as we know it was printed before 1826: that would be to deny all the evidence (see IB 5:241). A printing date, though, is not a date of composition, and, as we are constantly reminded by others of Blake's other engravings, a "date" of composition may be "dates." If an earlier state of the Laocoön separate plate was produced for a commercial project, it too must once have existed in print, if only so that Blake could see how his work progressed; and, if the plate was rejected by the publishers, it also would have been seen by them in its printed form.

The existence once of an earlier version of the Laocoön separate plate cannot be proved: there is of course no known impression of a previous state. Yet the fact that no such impression survives today does not mean that there never was one. A precedent for this argument can be found in

51. In fact, this second version is not only less skillfully executed in general, but also, like Plate III of the "Sculpture" engravings, contains a mistake: whilst in its counterpart the pointed leaves on the far left side of Jupiter's crown number four in both depictions of the head, in the inferior plate there are four leaves in the same area on the bust on the left, but only three in the bust on the right.
Essick’s account of the *Ezekiel* separate plate: his claim for a “hypothetical first published state” is based upon similarly indicative features of the known state, and comparisons with *Ezekiel*’s companion piece, the *Job* separate plate, of which two states are extant (SP 21–23). As with the two states of the *Job* plate, the posited earlier state of the *Laocoon* engraving must have been artistically far removed from what it became. All those features that have led to the engraving being placed so firmly in Blake’s final few years would have been absent. Unburnished, unlettered, and with its heavy crosshatching patterns, the plate probably would have seemed rather old-fashioned to the eyes of Flaxman and the publishers of Rees’s *Cyclopædia*—perhaps even too bold and primitive for the tastes of the day.

Whilst these ideas about the genesis of the *Laocoon* separate plate must remain hypotheses, and although there are many facets of both it and the *Cyclopædia* plates which are not dealt with here, it is evident that Blake’s encounter with the Rees project is more significant than has previously been allowed. The commission probably offended Blake’s artistic sensibilities, and may further have damaged the already cooled friendship between Blake and Flaxman: it is at least improbable that their relationship could have been aided much by the fact that the aims of the *Cyclopædia*, and *Cyclopædia* in general, were in many important respects out of keeping with Blake’s philosophies. Moreover, we can be sure that Blake had no hand at least one of the *Cyclopædia* plates (“GEM Engraving”). It seems fair to surmise, then, that Blake was not enamored of the *Cyclopædia* project by the time he finished his work for it.

The multifaceted relationship between the *Laocoon* separate plate and the world of commissions, including that for the *Cyclopædia*, demonstrates the need further to attend to Blake’s commercial engravings. It also highlights the wonderful irony that the commission for that work of order and reason—a commission apparently so inconsequential in itself—should have suggested ideas, and provided the basis (perhaps even the raw material), for one of Blake’s most perplexing works of art. In the *Laocoon* sculpture the figures struggle with their material serpents; in the *Laocoon* engraving the struggle seems to be with those “Reasonings like vast Serpents”—reasonings as present in the *Cyclopædia* of Rees, as they are in any of Newton’s works—which Blake felt “Infold[ed] around” his limbs, bruising his “minute articulations” (*Jerusalem* 15:12–13, E 159).

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*Cyclopædia; or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences; containing the Definitions of the Terms, and Accounts of the Things signified thereby: In the several Arts, both Liberal and Mechanical; and the Several Sciences, Human and Divine... The Whole intended as a Course of Antient and Modern Learning. Compiled from the best Authors, Dictionaries, Journals, Memoirs, Transactions, Ephe- merides, &c. ...* By E. Chambers... 2 vols. London, 1728.


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Fall 2003

Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly 61

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Blake's Graphic Use of Hebrew

BY SHEILA A. SPECTOR

The one certainty that emerges from the controversies surrounding the relationship between Blake's verbal and visual art is that neither medium alone was capable of expressing the plenitude of his Divine Vision. As the articulation of a conception beyond the range of either conventional painting or poetry, Blake's visual art, as Christopher Heppner has said, "is in continual flight from the purely and/or merely visual towards the more explicit modes of meaning available only to language itself." Conversely, it might be added, the poetic is in continual flight from the purely and/or merely literal, the language of the prophecies being illuminated by the composite art. Basically, Blake lacked a medium of expression through which to articulate the full range of his imagination, for it exceeded the material limitations of the visual and the verbal, inevitably leaving a gap between his conception and the means of its execution. Consequently, much of Blake's artistic experimentation was dialectical, involving the attempt to develop a vehicle through which to coordinate the two. Most likely, it was in conjunction with this aim that Blake turned to Hebrew. Because of its significance as the language of the Old Testament, and hence, as the purported language of Adam, Hebrew provided Blake with a medium that could be used to expand the magnitude of his poetry. Beyond its literal implications, however, Hebrew could also contribute to the graphic dimensions of the art as well, its symbolic and mystical associations providing a useful tool for extending the range of the visual art.

Hebrew was clearly not a major element of Blake's graphics, there being fewer than a dozen examples of obvious Hebrew lettering in the entire corpus. Even so, its use clusters into definite chronological periods, each reflecting a distinctive approach to the alphabet. Specifically, the first period, introduced by graphic experimentation on the verso of a Tiriel drawing, spans the decade of the 1790s, Night Thoughts 30E and 435 using pseudo-Hebrew to imply some sort of indecipherable supernatural message. After that, we have no evidence that Blake drew any letters again until 30 January 1803, when he wrote his brother James that he was studying Hebrew. During the decade introduced by that letter, Blake produced Job's Evil Dreams, Enoch and Milton plate 15, each of which contains what can be considered a text-based use of Hebrew, revolving around explicit passages from the Old Testament. Finally, Blake returned to Hebrew in his last years when, on Milton 32*(e), the title page and plate 2 of the Linnell Job engravings, and Laocoon, he again experimented with hebraic graphics, though this time Blake seems to have replaced the literal sense of the text with symbolic aspects of the alphabet that expand the verbal and visual components into the dynamic unity of his last works. Before analyzing how Hebrew contributes to the graphic art, though, it is necessary first to consider the non-linguistic aspects of the alphabet.

Non-Linguistic Aspects of the Hebrew Alphabet

Because of its special history, Hebrew developed in conjunction with numerical, visual and mystical modes of thought that extend the use of the alphabet far beyond its conventional function as a component of a material sign system (illus. 1). Numerically, Hebrew is used for computational purposes to a far greater extent than the system developed by the Romans. Mathematically, each of the twenty-seven characters of the alphabet (twenty-two letters, five of which have different forms for use at the end of a word) has a specific value, so that letters, or even words, can be used as the equivalent of numbers. For example, the word for "life," ה (ha'ı), composed of the eighth and tenth letters — ח (beth) and י (yod)—is equivalent to the number 18, with which it is used interchangeably, haisignifying 18, and conversely, 18 the concept of life. Certain...
### Plate 1. Table of Hebrew and Chaldee Letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew and Chaldee Letters</th>
<th>Numerical Value</th>
<th>Roman Character by which expressed in this work</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Signification of Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a (soft breathing)</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Aleph</td>
<td>Ox.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b, bh (v.)</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Beth.</td>
<td>House.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g (hard), c.k.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>G.</td>
<td>Gimel</td>
<td>Camel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d, dh (flat th.)</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Daleth</td>
<td>Door.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h (rough breathing)</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>H.</td>
<td>He.</td>
<td>Window.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v, u, o</td>
<td>6.</td>
<td>V.</td>
<td>Vau.</td>
<td>Peg, nail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z, dz.</td>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Z.</td>
<td>Zayin</td>
<td>Weapon, sword.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>th (guttural)</td>
<td>8.</td>
<td>T.</td>
<td>Cheth</td>
<td>Enclosure, fence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t (strong)</td>
<td>9.</td>
<td>K.</td>
<td>Kaph</td>
<td>Palm of the hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i, y (as in yes)</td>
<td>10.</td>
<td>L.</td>
<td>Lamed</td>
<td>Ox-goad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k, th.</td>
<td>11.</td>
<td>M.</td>
<td>Mem.</td>
<td>Water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>12.</td>
<td>N.</td>
<td>Nun.</td>
<td>Fish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>13.</td>
<td>S.</td>
<td>Samek</td>
<td>Prop. support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>15.</td>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Dalet.</td>
<td>Mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>th, t</td>
<td>22.</td>
<td>K.</td>
<td>Kaph</td>
<td>Palm of the hand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Groups of letters, especially those containing particular combinations of א (alef), ה (he), ו (vav) and י (yod), that are associated with the name of God, are avoided in arithmetical computations. Thus, instead of yod-he or yod-vav, a 10-5 or 10-6 combination, teth-vav, that is, 9-6, is used to signify 15, and teth-zayin, 9-7, for 16.

Gematria (from the Greek γεωμετρία), the numerological computations developed by Kabbalists, extends these practices to the fullest. Believing that words with identical numerical values are mystically related, Kabbalists substitute words of equivalent value for each other in the biblical text. In other words, any group of letters totaling 18 could be used to replace the Hebrew word chai, thereby producing entirely new meanings for the text. In addition, Kabbalists practice letter substitutions, for example exchanging all א's, the first letter, for ה's, the last letter, ו's, the second letter, for ח's, the next to the last, and so forth. Finally, they extract the first letters of words in particular sentences to develop acronyms that themselves become the basis for further numerical computations.

Beyond their numerological signification, the letters also serve as visual icons, being associated with the natural objects they resemble. Of those letters found in Blake's drawings, the most significant include the א (alef), named after the ancient word for the head of an ox; ב (beth), named for the word "house"; ג (gimel), a camel; ד (daleth), a door; ה (he), a word of uncertain derivation, though visually associated with a window; ו (vav), a peg or nail; ז (zayin), weapon or sword; ח (cheth), of unknown derivation, symbolizing an enclosure, fence; ט (teth), also of unknown derivation, symbolizing a serpent; י (yod), from hand; and ק (ayin), the eye.

In addition, the letters are also associated with the gamut of phenomena in both the corporeal and spiritual worlds. On the physical level, different numbers and letters signify body parts, the senses, physical activities, emotions, and planets; on the spiritual plane, they represent the angels, their intelligences, spirits, their significations, aspects of the Supernal Man, names of God, and commandments of the Law. In this context, the fifth letter, ה, signifies sight, and is governed by the angel Melchizedek; ו, hearing, governed by Asmodeel; י, copulation, governed by Hamaliel; א, laughter, and Hamael.

Most significantly, Kabbalists, identifying language as the material of Creation, believe that each letter is incarnate, deriving from a Divine hypostasis through which the Godhead produced the cosmos. Associating each letter/number with a particular state in the twenty-seven steps of cre-
tion, they divide the process into three parts. The first ten numbers, comprising the World of Emanations, correspond to the ten Sefirot, or Divine hypostases, that emanated successively each from its immediate predecessor. In this context, the first letter, א (alef), corresponds to the first emanation, the “Supreme Crown”; the second letter,beth, to “Divine Wisdom”; third, ג (gimel), “Human Intelligence”; and so on to the sixth, י (yod), “Grace”; and finally culminating in the tenth,” ת (yod), the “Divine Kingdom,” also known as the Shekhinah, or “Divine Presence.” Each of these emanations has numerous theological, mythic- al and anatomical associations, the most germane to this paper being the association Christian Kabbalists developed between the sixth, י, “Grace,” and Christ. Located in the symbolic “heart” of the human configuration of the emanations, the ה is depicted as the intermediary between the corporeal cosmos inhabited by man, the spiritual realm of the emanations and, finally, the Godhead Himself. The World of Emanations constitutes the highest spiritual level of the created cosmos. Beyond that, the next twelve numbers, which correspond to the next twelve letters of the alphabet, contain the “Starry World,” including the First Mover, the Circle of Fixed Stars, and the seven planets, followed by the Rational Soul, the Animal Soul, and the Elements of Sense. Finally, the last five numbers refer to the corporeal cosmos, which contains the four elements, inanimate matter, vegetation, animals, and finally, number 27, ת (toph), man himself.

The most important letter is א (alef). Symbolizing unity and the undifferentiated reality of the One, it is considered the most spiritual of the letters, having been emanated directly from the Godhead Himself, and itself serving as the source for subsequent emanations. As summarized by Jacques Basnage in his popular History of the Jews (translated into English in 1708):

The א or א is the Doctrine. This Letter denotes the inaccessible light of the Deity; that infinitum, call’d Ensoph, and relates to the first of the Sephiroths, which is the Crown: But this is not all; for this Letter is composed of a ו (vav) [1] and two י (yod)’s [1], which has still some great Mysteries compriz’d in it; for the ו that makes the middle Branch, signifies the Tipheret. The two י are two Arms, which open to embrace the Malkhut or the Kingdom. The י on the right indicates Wisdom, which always carries her views upwards; and sheds her influences upon the other splendors beneath her. The ו is the intelligence, which Wisdom has conceived, and the י above bespeaks the Knowledge which the Intelligence has produced. Another inverts the Letters which compose the word א, which making Pala, and signifying to conceal, he here discovers another way the first of the Splendors; that Crown which is actually conceal’d; for Eye has not seen it, nor has it enter’d into the Heart of Man.

In his account, Basnage alludes to most of the non-linguistic aspects of the letter. In addition to the concept of incarnation, and the associations with numerical values, planets, angels, intelligences, spirits, Divine names, bodily organs, physical senses and emotions, Basnage also personifies language, endowing the letters with gender and will. Not only are the two י described in terms of arms reaching up to embrace Malkhut, but, as he will explain in his discussion of the letter ב (beth), at least one Kabbalist believes “that this Letter is a Woman, and that the two Lines ב are two Arms, betwixt which she receives and embraces her Husband Tipheret.” This would be especially significant to Christian Kabbalists, who believe that Tiferet, the sixth Sefira, signifies Christ. For this reason, Basnage reminds his reader, “Jesus Christ says that one י, or rather least point of the Law shall not pass away” (190), each containing its own kind of mystery.

These mysteries are visual as well as literal. As Basnage notes, the graphic א (alef) can be broken down into two י (yods), the one descending on the left, and the other ascending on the right, connected by the diagonal ו (vav), like two hands pegged onto an intervening nail. Numerically, when broken down in this way, the quantitative value of the א is increased to 26, the value of the two י, at 10 each, and the 6 of the intervening ו; and 26 is the number of the Tetragrammaton—יHV— -the ineffable name of God, rendered as Jehovah in English. Consequently, the א contains the totality of themacrocosm, from 1, the “Supreme Crown,” down through the corporeal cosmos. Visually, therefore, the outline of the א, the symbol of the “Supreme Crown,” can be interpreted cosmically, the expanses at the top and bottom corresponding, respectively, to the spiritual and corporeal realms, above which is the Godhead, and beneath which is man. The intervening ו provides the horizon, the starry realm intended to mediate between the spiritual and material worlds. In the kabbalistic myth—as well as Blake’s version—the initial fault occurred on this median plane, when the Rational Soul/Urizen, looking down, lost sight of the upper spiritual realms, and mistaking himself for the height of existence, became an impediment, preventing man, in the lower space, from perceiving higher things.

attitudes towards Kabbalism, I published “Kabbalistic Sources: Blake’s and His Critics,” in which I distinguished between the printed sources of Kabbalism available to Blake and those used by later critics. In my “Wonders Divine: The Development of Blake’s Kabbalistic Myth, I establish the historical context for the kind of Kabbalism to which Blake would have had access, and then trace his gradual incorporation of the kabbalistic myth into his illuminated books.

8. The twenty-seven steps of creation are comparable to Blake’s twenty-seven heavens, both systems tracing the cycle of existence from Creation through Apocalypse. Because my purpose here is to analyze Blake’s use of the alphabet, I have somewhat simplified the discussion of Kabbalism, whose multifaceted complexity actually comprises a four-part structure that conforms to the Tetragrammaton. This particular delineation derives from Stehelin 156-66.
Graphic Experimentation

From the beginning, Blake seems to have been attracted to the graphic potential of the Hebrew alphabet. In what might be the earliest surviving example of his Hebrew lettering, found on the verso of a sketch for the drawing, Tiriel Denouncing His Sons and Daughters, executed around 1789, Blake outlined a random Study of Hebrew Characters in Human Form (B 199v), in an apparent attempt to personify the first ten letters of the Hebrew alphabet (illus. 2). Blake seems to have begun with the נ drawn in the center of the page, and from there, randomly filled in the rest of the letters. Reading from right to left, the top row apparently contains a ת (he, the fifth letter), ג (gimel, sixth letter), and י (yod, seventh letter). Right in the middle of the page is a giant נ, apparently followed by a ד (daleth, fourth letter) and an י (yod, tenth letter). Then, the bottom seems to contain a ב (beth, second letter), followed by a ה (beth, eighth letter), a ג (gimel, third letter), and an ת (tesh, ninth letter). The human heads and torsos on the letters suggest an attempt to personify in a manner comparable to that alluded to by Basnage in his discussion of the Hebrew letters. As Heppner notes, "The little fantasy drawing of small human forms on their way to becoming letters of the Hebrew alphabet, [is] a representation in the form of a miniature allegory of a powerful tendency within Blake's art" (233).?

The next examples are numbers 30E and 435 from the Night Thoughts illustrations, both of which contain pseudo-Hebrew messages. Collectively, Night Thoughts 108 and 30E, along with page 43 of The Four Zoas, call into question the conventional assumption that the lettering must contain a literal message somehow related to the visual text. In what is likely its earliest extant version, the rough sketch on Night Thoughts 108 contains the figure of a bearded old man, usually identified as Death. The figure holds in his hands a

9. Although Butlin tentatively dates the letters 1803 (1:82), circumstantial evidence suggests the possibility of an earlier provenance. The Tiriel drawing, whose verso is used for the lettering, was executed in the late 1780s, and David V. Erdman dates comparable experimentation with the Roman alphabet in the early 1790s (see The Notebook of William Blake, ed. Erdman, N74-75).
partially unfurled scroll that, in this early state, contains a few illegible scrawls, usually interpreted as indicating how it is possible that "Life lives beyond the Grave." When finally engraved, the picture is used to illuminate the next page of text, in which the line, "This KING OF TERRORS is the PRINCE OF PEACE," is highlighted. In the engraved version, the figure looks away from, rather than towards, the viewer, and in this case, the scroll contains what can best be described as pseudo-hebraic letters that are virtually impossible to decipher. Some are in mirror writing, others are symmetrically ambiguous, while the rest, though generally approximating Hebrew, actually are not. The effect of the lettering is non-verbal. Functioning like runes, which some of the characters actually resemble, the writing appears to contain the secrets of immortality possessed by Death, though impenetrable to us in our mortal state. Of course, the opposite inference is also plausible: what appears from a distance to be the secret of life might also be revealed, upon closer examination, to be nonsense ("This KING OF TERRORS is the PRINCE OF PEACE"). The fact that both interpretations are equally feasible suggests the larger significance of the graphics, that we will have to use our imaginations, rather than our rational faculties, if we wish to penetrate the essential truth beyond the range of Young's meanderings.

The same hermeneutic can be applied to page 43 of The Four Zoas, where, in Night the Third, Blake uses the same illustration, this time apparently to underscore Urizen's hubris in identifying himself as God (Magno and Erdman 49). By using the same illustration for both Young's conventional interpretation of Death and the Urizenic imposture, it is possible that Blake is implying an equivalence between the two false doctrines, both to be abrogated in part by the regeneration of Urizen himself, at the climax of Blake's epic. In both cases, the pseudo-Hebrew lettering might be seen to reflect back on the inadequacy of a literal reading of Scripture, the kind of interpretation upon which both Urizen's and Young's vacuous theologies are predicated.

The same kind of reasoning applies to Night Thoughts 435. Although the letters are clearly recognizable, they do not spell any words in conventional Hebrew. Rather, it would appear, they are used to evoke the secrets of eternity, especially those contained in a book held by the personification of Eternity, the subject of the text on the plate.

The most significant aspect of the Hebrew in these drawings is its unintelligibility. Clearly, Blake had no interest in conveying a literal message; yet, he painstakingly executed the lettering, in the one obfuscating the characters, in the other clarifying them though signifying nothing comprehensible, in both cases apparently to imply a message that extends beyond the bounds of either the visual or the verbal medium. In contrast, when he did wish to convey a decipherable message, Blake reverted to the Roman alphabet, as in Night Thoughts 60/Four Zoas 51. Exploiting Young's allusion to Belshazzar, Blake's illustration depicts, according to Essick and LaBelle (xiv), the figure of a prophet interrupting Belshazzar during his feast—he drops his glass and the wine spills out—to see the writing on the wall. Here, the Roman letters spell out the first word and a half of the warning in Daniel (5:24-28), "MENE" and "TEK." As explained by Daniel: "MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting." Missing from Blake's picture is the third word, "PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." Blake's choice of Roman rather than Hebrew letters seems to indicate that in this instance, he considered the content of the message to be more significant than its medium.

Biblical Commentaries

The next extant example of Hebrew graphics is found in the letter to James Blake of 30 January 1803, in which Blake boasts

I am now learning my Hebrew. In Greek as fluently as an Oxford scholar & the Testament is my chief master. astonishing indeed is the English Translation it is almost word for word & if the Hebrew Bible is as well translated which I do not doubt it is we need not doubt of its having been translated as well as written by the Holy Ghost (E 727)

The passage is problematic for several reasons. Most obviously, as indicated by the Tiriel and Night Thoughts illustrations, not to mention the verbal art, Blake had clearly been interested in Hebrew long before this letter to his brother, and presumably, some time in the previous decade and a half, Blake would have mentioned it to James. Moreover, by the nineteenth century, the problems with Hebrew linguistics and Bible translation were fairly well known, as Blake certainly would have discovered from his experimentation with hebraic etymologies. Finally, the

10. In their commentary about page 63, Robert Essick and JeniJoy La Belle summarize early attempts to read the letters (Night Thoughts or The Complaint and The Consolation xiv-xxv). See also John E. Grant, "Visions in Vaux" 162. The fact that these readings generally conform to preconceptions about the message might be attributed to Hebraists' projections of their own expectations onto what remain inherently ambiguous figures that, with a bit of imagination, can be made to resemble any number of possible Hebrew letters.

11. In personal correspondence, Grant associates these illustrations with a series of messages found throughout Blake's Night Thoughts, including NT 53, 108, 109, 298, 302, 303, 330, 388, 434, 435, 436, 18:4E, 20:8E, 52:17E, 60:19E, 30E.

12. On the impact of biblical High Criticism, see McGann 152-72.
inclusion of Hebrew lettering was obviously gratuitous, just to show off to James how well William could draw the first three letters of the alphabet—which we have no reason to assume that James would have recognized. Yet, despite all this, the letter does indicate that, meaning aside, in the next decade Blake would use the Hebrew allusively, to refer to a specific context. Here, in the letter to James, he includes the first three characters to create a hebraic equivalent to learning one's ABCs. Similarly, during this period, while Blake worked on the series of Bible and Milton illustrations, as well as his own prophecy Milton, he included Hebrew lettering in three pictures—Job's Evil Dreams of the Butts series, Enoch, and Milton, copy C, plate 15—in each case manipulating a biblical text to comment on the larger theme of the visual art.

Begun soon after the letter to James, the watercolor Job's Evil Dreams (c. 1804-07) contains the first example of what appears to be an attempt to combine the symbolic implications of literal Hebrew with graphic art (illus. 3). Depicting a dream state, the drawing portrays Job resisting being pulled down. At the bottom of the picture are the flames of hell, out of which rise three demonic beings that attempt to restrain the prone figure of Job, who apparently otherwise might rise beyond their grasp. The figure on the left holds Job's ankles, the one in the middle his loins, and the demon on the right lifts a chain towards Job's head, presumably intending to lock up Job's mind. Stretched out above Job, in a parody of the Elohim Creating Adam (1795), is Satan, identifiable by his cloven hoof and the serpent entwined around his body. Not breathing life into Job, whose head is turned away, Satan gazes down, at a point beyond his extended left arm that, itself cradled by the serpent's head, in turn cradles Job's head. Above Satan's body is the lightning that pierces the two tablets, to which Satan points with his right hand. The movement of the picture is downward, as the lightning, Satan and the demons all combine to manipulate Job to the lower reaches. In contrast, Job, lying flat on his back, pushes upward, thus keeping as much distance as possible between himself and the serpentine Satan, who otherwise would be pulled by gravity down onto Job.

Unlike the later engraving for the Linnell series, in this early version of the drawing, Blake includes Hebrew lettering to underscore the threat implied by Satan. His choice of text, consistent with Jewish iconography, contains the tablets of the Law, frequently illuminated by abbreviations of the ten commandments. Blake's text comes from Exodus 20. Read from right to left, the first tablet contains the single Hebrew word הַוָּא, "heaven," which occurs twice in the Commandments: in verse 4, "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth"; and verse 11, "for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." The second tablet contains commandments from verses 12 and 13:

יָהָה יָא הַוָּא (from Exodus 20:12: Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.)

יָהָה יָא הַוָּא (Exodus 20:13: Thou shalt not commit adultery.)

יָהָה יָא הַוָּא (Exodus 20:13: Thou shalt not steal.)

Of the ten, Blake cites those most concerned with material existence. While the commandment to honor one's parents is itself idealistic, the justification is corporeal, for long life. Similarly, by omitting the fourth commandment from verse 13—"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," the text in the illustration concentrates on crimes of property violation. In selecting these commandments, Blake seems to be implying that the evil dream imposed by Satan consists of corporeal values, at the expense of the spiritual ideals relegated to the other tablet.

Consistent with the choice of commandments, it can be argued that Blake selectively introduces errors to underscore the erroneous law being imposed by Satan. Leaving the correctly spelled "heaven" to speak for itself on its own tablet, Blake crowds the second stone with linguistic anomalies that apparently emphasize the theme of the picture as a whole. Most noteworthy in the context of English Hebraism is the pointed ת at the end of the first word. Here, Blake correctly includes the final kaph, ת, at the end of the word signifying "your God." Even more noteworthy, though, is the inclusion of the vowel, in the letter, both because vowels were eschewed by many Christian Hebraists of the day (including John Parkhurst, whose lexicon Blake likely used15), and because that particular form is extremely rare. This suggests that Blake had a Jewish text in front of him as he completed the drawing. In contrast, the second word, "gave," contains an error, Blake's version omitting the final nun at the end of the word. That is, Blake hasаЈ instead of יָא הַוָּא.

13. In contrast to the English expression, the common Hebrew equivalent is to cite only the first two letters, that is, to say that one is learning the alef-beth. The fact that Blake transliterates the English version rather than using the Hebrew seems to be further evidence that he did not study the language with a Jewish teacher.

14. See John E. Grant, "Blake's Designs for Young's Night Thoughts" 80-82.

15. In "The Reasons for 'Urizen,'" I argue that Parkhurst's Hebrew and English Lexicon, without Points was probably Blake's main source of Hebrew. For more complete discussions of Parkhurst's influence on Blake, see my "Blake as an Eighteenth-Century Hebraist" and "Glorious incomprehensible" 47-49.
The assumption that the error was committed out of ignorance seems belied by the technical accuracy of the previous word. It is at least conceivable that the anomaly was deliberate, reflecting a corruption of the concept of giving, a possibility in the context of this particular version of the Godhead, especially since Satan's finger points directly at the word Elohechu, the genitive form of Elohim.

Significantly, the next commandment, lo tirzah, "Thou shalt not kill," is executed flawlessly, Blake apparently having no quarrels with its sentiment. Interestingly, the word tirzah provides the basis for both the plate, "To Tirzah," a late addition to the Songs of Innocence and of Experience, as well as the mythological figure who, in the major prophecies, seems to symbolize the material concept of time, mortality.16

In the next commandment, Blake again introduces an anomaly, this time reversing the first 8, from the word lo, "thou shalt not," of the injunction against adultery. Considering the fact that there is a correctly executed 8 directly above this reversed one, as well as one for the third letter of the next word, it seems likely that Blake deliberately corrupted the letter of this particular negation, possibly to indicate ambivalence about the commandment.

Collectively, the Hebrew in this picture seems to associate the literal interpretation of the Bible with the false image of God, now specifically identified as Satan. In this context, the tablets containing the law are products of the Satanic imposture, as symbolized by the broken Hebrew engraven on their surface. Yet, the fault lies with Job's own limited mode of perception. According to kabbalistic belief, the material manifestation of the Bible, as perceived by man in his fallen state, is incomplete, reflecting the inability to apprehend the One. Similarly, the damaged text on this picture is a projection of Job himself, his perceptual limitations being personified by the figure of Satan. The challenge, as suggested by the letters, is to see through the distorted literal level into the Divine truths of Scripture.

This theme also dominates the two samples of Hebrew lettering contained in the lithograph of Enoch (1807; illus. 4). Erroneously identified as Job in Prosperity, the subject of the picture was not identified until 1936, when Laurence Binyon and Geoffrey Keynes credited Joseph Wicksteed with the discovery that the Hebrew lettering on the book in the picture spells out the name Enoch.17 As interpreted allegorically by Essick, Enoch represents the Divinely inspired instructor of the arts, especially writing, as represented by the other figures surrounding the father figure in the center of the picture.

16. On the name Tirzah, see my "Sources and Etymologies of Blake's 'Tirzah.'" On her linguistic and mythic significance in the major prophecies, see my two monographs, "Glorious incomprehensible" 134-36 and "Wonders Divine" 126 and 135.


The inclusion of the Hebrew, though, seems to suggest that as with the biblical character himself, the situation is far more complex. Historically, the ambiguous phrase in Genesis, that "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24), has generated a great deal of speculation, the most mystical being that he was the first man to ascend to heaven without having to undergo the pains of death. As such, Enoch became the subject of mystical discourse, especially in the apocalyptic literature of the intertestamental period. In the most significant account, 1 Enoch, or the Ethiopic Book of Enoch, Enoch provides the basis for the earliest form of Kabbalism, Merkavah, or Chariot Mysticism. Consequently, beyond the spare biblical account can be found a fairly extensive body of myth, most revolving around the mystery of his death.18

Consistent with the legends, the figure in the picture is the illuminated center, looking straight ahead, half-seated half-kneeling, holding on his lap an open book on which his name is written. Enoch's stillness is emphasized by the activities of the surrounding figures, placed like spokes in a wheel whose center, the source of light, is located beyond the margins of the picture. As noted by Essick, those closest to Enoch are the three artists, the painter, musician and poet, all deeply engrossed in their own creativity. Beyond them are two groups of figures, each reading some sort of scroll, the one to the right containing legibly written Hebrew. Probably the most striking aspect of the picture as a whole is that with the exception of Enoch, no one seems the least bit affected by the light, all looking down towards the material forms of their productions, as opposed to the spiritual source of their inspiration. Only Enoch looks "through the eye." Not requiring the text for his vision, he gazes out rather than down towards the book, which would be pulled down were he not holding it.

This apparent disparity between the letter and the spirit of the Law seems underscored by the use of Hebrew on the plate. Written on the book held by the central figure is הָיוּ, the Hebrew for Enoch. While the lettering is lexographically correct, the text is located on the wrong half of the page. Because Hebrew is read from right to left, the name should either be in the center, as the title, or at the right margin. Here, however, it seems to be justified to the left margin. While, obviously, the left hand of the central figure blocks our view of the appropriate location of the name, Blake could either have moved the hand over or he could have visually turned the book in the other direction, placing the lettering on the side secured by the left hand of

18. The First Book of Enoch was not translated into English until 1821, long after Blake had finished this lithograph. However, John Beer argues that Blake's picture might have been influenced by an unsigned article, "Concerning the Writings and Readings of Jude," itself clearly influenced by the Book of Enoch, that was published in The Monthly Magazine for 1 February 1801. For an analysis of the influence of the Book of Enoch on Blake's later work, see Bentley.
the figure. It seems possible that Blake deliberately chose to place the name in an odd position, thus emphasizing the need to look beneath the surface appearance of the text. For his part, Enoch seems oblivious to the book, which almost falls from his lap. Bathed in the Divine light, he has already transcended the limitations of the material volume.

In contrast, the two figures at the right holding the scroll, though facing the light, look down at the writing, the one at the right pointing, with his left hand, to the final word of the phrase, *elohim*:

In their anxiety about the material manifestation of the Word, they apparently overlooked the omission in their text of the "(yod, symbol of the Divinity), which is the third letter (Trinity) of the first word (God) in the biblical text. (The middle three words of the sentence—"because [he] took him"—are correct, containing no anomalies.)

Worked on around the same time as the Job and Enoch illustrations,? *Milton*, copy C, plate 15 combines the biblical text of *Job’s Evil Dreams* with the symbolic import of *Enoch* to provide a mythic representation of the Urizenic imposture. In dramatizing the motivation of the hero, Blake places Milton with his back to us, as he apparently climbs up into the Urizenic world in order, as punctuated by his right foot, “to Annihilate the Self—hood of Deceit & False Forgiveness.” Although the two figures constitute the focal point of the picture, they are flanked by the two tablets of the Law, this time held by a sorrowful Urizen. By replacing the Satan of *Job’s Evil Dreams* with Urizen, Blake redefines the concept of morality, substituting for the conventional duality of good and evil the delusions produced by an erroneous interpretation of the text. In contrast to the Satanic prototype, Urizen is not as old, not assisted by acolytes but alone, not powerful but sorrowful, almost as though he realized the necessity of reforming his mode of thought.

Consistent with the transformation, this time the Hebrew on the tablets is virtually indecipherable. While it is possible that the tablet in Urizen’s right hand might contain on the first line the word תיהו, *tohu*, “chaos,” and on the third, כז, *lo,* “not,” there is no way to be certain what the first printed in 1811. For a detailed discussion, see “The Production and Evolution of Milton: 1804–1818,” chapter 32 (315–29) of his *Blake and the Idea of the Book.*

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19. According to Viscomi, the full production and evolution of *Milton* span the period from 1804 to 1818, though it was probably...
letters signify. Rather, the point seems to be the corruption of the text. Because the visual tablets provide the obvious allusion to the Ten Commandments, Blake has no real need to etch particular letters to convey a literal reading of the Law. All he need do is sketch in a few Hebrew-like characters to imply the irrationality of Urizenic thinking, that which Milton will revise throughout the rest of the epic. In contrast to the illegible lettering found on the scroll in Night Thoughts 30E/Four Zoas 43, though, here the graphics are text specific, the allusion to the Ten Commandments being obvious, even without legible lettering.

**Verbal Illumination**

During the period when Blake completed Jerusalem, his last illuminated prophecy, he also experimented with alternate ways of combining pictures and poetry in his composite art, in some cases actually reversing the orientation between the two media. That is, while in the earlier books, the verbal message was illustrated by the visual ornamentation, in some of his last works, the visual message was complemented by surrounding graphics whose ornamentation is verbal. Consistent with this reorientation, the Hebrew lettering used in the last years of his life tends to be more symbolic than verbal. That is, generally unconstrained by a specific text, as the Hebrew of the middle phase had been, here the Hebrew seems to be used more for its mystical and graphic associations than for the literal meanings signified by any particular group of letters.

As a transition to this new approach, the Hebrew in Milton 32(e), a late addition to the prophecy, printed after 1821, provides a graphic ornamentation for a verbal text. Apparently intending to exploit a macaronic pun, Blake includes the Hebrew word/phrase, "יִנֶּהוֹב", to correspond with the English "as Multitudes" and the Latin "Vox Populi" in the margins of the plate. The correct Hebrew for "as multitudes" is a single word without the first yod—יהוה—with a spelling that could also signify the Hebrew for cherubs, the order of angels surrounding the Holy Ark (this is a complex word to which the Hebraist John Parkhurst devotes almost twenty pages [339-57]). The Cherubim were especially significant to Blake, who associated them with the

original forms of "all the grand works of ancient art," which were later copied by the classical artists (*Descriptive Catalogue*, E 531).

Beyond any literal associations it might have, the Hebrew also has symbolic and graphic significance. Symbolically, the inclusion of the extra yod could indicate the presence of the "hand of God," the word yod meaning "hand," while its number, ten, signifies God. Thus, it is possible that to illuminate a verbal passage explaining the difference between individuals and states, Blake includes a verbal ornament whose implications graphically illuminate the refrain repeated periodically in the Bard's Song: "Mark well my words. they are of your eternal salvation!" Visually, the verbal phrase is intertwined with the tendrils decorating the side of the page, becoming part of the ornamentation as well.

In the Linnell Job, Blake completely inverts his approach to the media. In the earlier book illustrations, like those for Young's *Night Thoughts*, the verbal text was spatially central, its literal contents providing the focal point for the surrounding pictures. In the engraved Job, however, the biblical text is reduced to the level of ornament, the central "text" being Blake's visual rendition of "**יִנֶּהוֹב** / [Illuminations of / The Book of Job / Invented & Engraved / by William Blake] / 1825." To be distinguished from the biblical text, this is Blake's composite reproduction of the "original," of which, by implication, the later versions and interpretations are merely derivative. In this reconstruction, the verbal line found in the biblical text is reduced to the level of visual ornamentation, and within this context, the two examples of Hebrew lettering, as with that of Milton 32(e), seem to be graphic rather than literal, both revolving around the full symbolism of **א** (alef), the first letter of the alphabet.

When considered as an example of Blake's Hebrew, the most significant aspect of the lettering on the title page is the absence of errors. The two words, literally meaning "the book of Job," are both appropriate and correct, visually comprising the top part of the circle formed by the line of angels surrounding the English title of the book. That the Gothic letters of the English title are decorated by angels suggests a limited form of sanction, the implication being that the English, i.e., verbal, text can convey only so much about the true import of *sefer ‘yoh*, a book whose Hebrew title stands, as Burwick notes, "aloft upon a cloud of material reason (the statement of legal conformance, given here within the cloud, is excluded from the frame in all twenty-one subsequent plates)" (136). Significantly, the Hebrew contains a perfectly engraved alef, almost identical to the one found in the early doodling, though without the stylistic grace of the two on *Night Thoughts* 435. The symbolic implication, as will be clarified on the next plate, is a starkly outlined letter that omits the Divine spirit.

These inferences are underscored by the illumination of plate 1. In this picture of *Job and His Family*, Blake depicts

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20. Essick and Viscomi provide a "conjectural" transcription in their Blake Trust edition of *Milton*, 143, with commentary on 24-25.

21. Burwick notes that in the Job series, Blake "gives us in sequence a visual narrative meditated through a frame containing the verbal text," and that the "abundantly annotated Laocoon . . . mediates the visual image through a welter of polemical graffiti . . . Indeed, Blake uses the Laocoon, much as Lessing used it . . . to argue the nature and limits of verbal and visual signs" (128).

22. According to Viscomi, plate 32(e) is a late addition to copy C of *Milton*, being printed on paper Blake did not begin using until c. 1821. For a full discussion, see Blake and the Idea of the Book 327-28.

the initial fault of Job in terms of a literal, as opposed to imaginative, reading of the Bible. In what might be viewed as a parody of the title page of the Songs of Innocence, Blake portrays Job and his wife seated beneath a tree whose fruits, in contrast to those of the earlier drawing, are musical instruments. Surrounded by kneeling children, Job and his wife are seated, with their knees bent in Urizen's characteristic pose, to form two tablets, and both have open books on their laps. Severely boxed in by the borders of the picture, the illustration is contained within a border depicting the outline of a Gothic church, at the bottom of which is an altar whose flames appear to generate the entire picture. The message beneath the altar is from 2 Corinthians 3:6 and 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The Letter Killeth / The Spirit giveth Life / It is Spiritually Discerned." Beyond the outline of the church is a ring of clouds containing the opening of the Lord's Prayer.

Both literally and figuratively illuminating the engraving, the verbal lines help to recontextualize the visual message. By expanding the perspective beyond the border of the picture itself, the circumscribing ornamentation indicates that Job's own perspective is foreshortened, the physical presence of the unused instruments, which themselves are enclosed within the lines of the church, obscuring the spiritual message above and its explanation below. Not an evil man, Job "feared God & eschewed Evil," as the illuminating text explains. But he lacked vision, and as a result, he projected a moralistic interpretation onto the Bible, creating God in his own literalistic image. The function of his experience, then, will be to expand his own imaginative faculties so that he might elevate himself spiritually, rather than literalistically debasing the concept of God.

Mystically, the narrative can be said to revolve around the loss of the alef, symbol of the unified vision of God, as manifested by the first Divine hypostasis, the "Supreme Crown." Hence the use of Hebrew on plate 2. Satan Before the Throne of God (illus. 5). Visually, the picture introduces God, drawn in the image of Job from plate 1, the only difference being that God, whose hair is spiked to resemble a king's crown, looks down, while Job had looked up. Between God and Job is presumably a figure of Satan, though without the cloven hoof or encircling serpent, it is hard to tell (Burwick notes the resemblance between Satan and Job's eldest son). At the bottom of the picture, Job and his family all have reading materials in their hands, though with the exception of his wife, whose gaze is ambiguous, all look away from the texts. Although not as foreshortened as plate 1, plate 2 is also confined by the religious institution, this time a Gothic trellis working its way up the side of the page, its spire projected beyond the border of the engraving. Even though it is not physically present, its imaginative lines convey the verbal illumination in the clouds above the picture.

Viewed from center to circumference, the text focuses on the Hebrew phrase, melekh "Jehovah," above which is "The Angel of the Divine Presence." Beyond that is "Hast thou considered my Servant Job," and finally, "I beheld the Ancient of Days." Although the Hebrew phrase can be literally translated as "the king Jehovah," its use could convey both ironic and mystical dimensions beyond what can be conveyed by a simple English translation. First of all, the Hebrew can be read as a corrupted form of the English "The Angel of the Divine Presence," that would be melekh "Jehovah," with the inclusion of an alef. Second, for the name of God, Blake chooses the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable Name whose numerical value, 26, is the same as the total of the components of the omitted alef. Thus, by substituting the corrupted spelling, Blake may be visually implying Job's debased concept of God, who has been transformed into a royal image of man. At the same time, the Hebrew could suggest a corresponding degeneration of the concept of angel, from which the alef of the One has been eliminated.25 Thus, the version of the "Angel of the Divine Presence" found in Job's conventional mode of thought is incomplete, for it lacks the visionary component provided by the spirit of the letter, the 1 and 26 of the alef, whose total, 27, symbolizes man. Symbolically, the loss of the alef can be attributed to the intervening line, "Hast thou considered my Servant Job," the challenge that caused the literalistic debasement of the concept of God into the pseudo-One who abdicated his responsibilities to Satan. Above the challenge, though, is the phrase "I beheld the / Ancient of Days." Taken from Daniel 7:9, the term "Ancient of Days" was used by Kabbalists to designate the highest physiognomy of the Supernal Man, corresponding to alef, "the Supreme Crown." Thus, even though the challenge may have obscured Job's vision, thereby degrading the "angel" into a corporeal "king," the Divinity is still ever present. This Divine Presence might be graphically indicated by the formal properties of the picture itself. In the center, it is possible that Satan is depicted in the form of an alef, his raised arms, like those described by Basnage, reaching up, as if ironically to embrace God, while his legs extend outward to encompass Job and his family. From a broader perspective, Satan himself could be viewed as part of a larger alef, formed by the whirlwind rising on either side of God, and the figures extending down towards either corner. Kabbalistically, the diagonal corresponds to the mediating yod, the symbol of Christ whose function is to unite the lower material world with the spiritual realm. Thus, from the cosmic perspective, Satan's challenge could be perform-

24. See S. Foster Damon's commentary on the plate, in Blake's Job, 14.

25. According to Burwick, "'The Angel of the Divine Presence' is manifest as satanic contradiction, and the Hebrew words, 'Jehovah is King,' pronounce the surrender to his tyranny" (144).
ing the Christological function of helping to expand Job's visionary faculties so that he might perceive the Ancient of Days. Hence the absence of cloven hooves or serpents. Just as the depiction of God is a projection of Job, so, too, is that of Satan.

Blake does not include any more Hebrew lettering in the series, its absence in this version of Job's Evil Dreams (plate 12) possibly indicating a graphic economy. By now, the bare outline of the tablets has become enough to convey his criticism of the Commandments. Instead, he engraves Job's prayer at the bottom of the page: "Oh that my words were printed in a Book that they were graven with an iron pen & lead in the rock for ever." Blake's illuminations graphically literalize the verse.

Although there are no other Hebrew words in the Job series, it is possible that Blake exploited the symbolic values of the alef as an underlying form through which to criticize Job's vision of God. As Munk points out in his first chapter in The Wisdom of the Hebrew Alphabet, the mystical value of the alef, as symbol of God's unity and omnipotence, is visually conveyed through its graphic form (43-44). As such, the alef is the symbol that unifies God and man, alef also being the first letter of the name Adam. Consequently,

The N is seen as a ladder placed on the ground reaching heavenward. . . . Thus the N conveys to man that—in order to free himself from earthly bondage—he must infuse his physical existence with spirituality so that he can ascend to the summit: the Divine. . . . In summary:—N is the channel by which the Infinite Spiritual is brought to the finite physical. . . . (54)

While there is no way to be certain whether or not the formal resemblance of some pictures to the letter alef is intentional, still, there are enough similarities to warrant their exploration.

It is quite possible that as early as Europe, Blake was interested in the structuring potential of the alef. On copy E, plate 13 (plate 12 [14] of the Blake Trust/Princeton facsimile, ed. Dorrbecker, 4:239), the two angels, extending their wings up the sides of the plate, and connected in the middle by an intervening cloud, create the symmetrically distorted impression of the kind of alef Urizen might use to support himself and his book of brass (illus. 6). Unlike the true alef, in this one the intervening van, which should symbolize the Christological function, has been flattened out into the horizontal plane on which sits the erroneous image of a god who lacks the dynamics of a true diagonal reaching up to the heavens. This kind of outline can also be found on several of the Job plates. As seen on plate 2, a horizontal swath occupies the middle third of the picture, with God resting on its top, and Job and his family pressed down by the bottom. Yet, as noted, the extended figure of Satan seems to generate the energy of the true diagonal, his challenge providing the means by which to correct the alef. In contrast, on plate 16, The Fall of Satan, the lines produced by the flanking angels, whose extended wings resemble those framing Urizen in Europe 13, here clearly comprise an intervening diagonal, as Satan is summarily—with a true vertical—exiled to hell.

It is also possible that the alef contributed to Blake's development of human figures as well, especially as culminating in the Laocoön. In Europe, plate 17(18) (Blake Trust/Princeton 4:249), Blake could conceivably be indicating the future role of Los as Christ figure by positioning him like a dynamic alef, his torso and extended left leg suggesting the diagonal of the van, and his left arm (yod) lowered in the attempt to raise the figure he attempts to bring along with him. Similarly, the central statue of the Laocoön might also be viewed as a symbolic alef, which in its totality signifies the dynamic unity of God, while its components—the two yods and the median van—total 26, the number of the Tetragrammaton (illus. 7). In addition, the two yods, each signifying 10, reach up to embrace heaven, while the diagonal van, numerically 6, symbolizes Christ, who mediates between the upper and lower worlds. In Blake's version, while his right arm reaches up to the level of God,
being situated next to the Hebrew Tetragrammaton, his left arm is lowered to restrain the intertwined serpent, located just above the Hebrew for Lilith, the she-demon, thus emphasizing the mediating function of the \( \text{vav} \), through which the viewer will be able to apprehend the occluded Divinity of the figure. In this way, the engraved \( \text{Laocoon} \) might be seen as revolving around the dynamics of an \( \text{alef} \) in the process of completing itself, thereby providing the means by which the reader/viewer could discern the true form of the Divinity occluded by the overlay of Greek art.

This is not to imply that the engraving was original to Blake. To the contrary, Blake's \( \text{Laocoon} \) was likely based on the reconstructed cast of a marble statue that was carved around 25 B.C., and rediscovered in the Palace of Titus in Rome in January 1506. When found, the statue lacked, among other things, the right arm on the central figure. In his version, Blake tilted the head more to the left, contracted the stomach muscles and moved the right knee more to the left. Essick suggests that Blake might have been influenced by Johann Winklemann’s description of \( \text{Laocoon} \)'s body, in "Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks." Still, the figure's form is also quite close to that of the male in \( \text{Europa} \) 17(18). Even though \( \text{Laocoon} \) looks up while the others look back at the person he is bringing along with him, their heads are in the same position. A Kabbalist might infer that Blake had attempted to bring out the \( \text{alef} \) he had envisioned incarnate within the Greek statue. Not insignificantly, although he had first begun working on the concept of the \( \text{Laocoon} \) around 1814-15, in a commission for Abraham Rees’s \( \text{The Cyclopaedia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature,} \) published 1816-19, Blake returned to the concept at the end of his life, the \( \text{Laocoon,} \) completed c. 1826-27, being his last illuminated work.

Sporadically interspersed in the verbal component of the visual line are Hebrew messages. Directly in the center of the picture, between the figure of \( \text{Laocoon} \) and one of his sons, is the only grammatically correct Hebrew on the entire plate, the name of Lilith: \( \text{股权投资} \). "Probably derived from Babylonian demonology, Lilith was the first wife of Adam. Because, like him, she was also formed from dust, Lilith demanded sexual equality, and when her husband refused, she ran away, to be transformed into a she-demon who killed new-born infants and seduced men. In kabbalistic myth, Lilith is Samael’s female counterpart, queen of the “other side,” becoming the demonic counterpart of the Shekhinah, the Divine Presence (Jerusalem in Blake’s myth). Not an isolated name, Lilith is visually enclosed in a space circumscribed by \( \text{Laocoon} \) and the son on his left, bisected by \( \text{Laocoon} \)'s arm that restrains the serpent. Visually, the Hebrew is the lower part of a duality opposed by the English word “Good,” coordinated by the serpent. Within the context of the picture as a whole, the verbal duality of good and evil/Lilith is, on the one hand, a product of the intervening serpent, and on the other, enclosed within the lowered \( \text{yod} \) of \( \text{Laocoon} \)'s left arm. Consequently, while the duality occupies the central area of the picture as a whole, it is spatially reduced to an aberration that, presumably, will be eliminated when \( \text{Laocoon} \) raises his arm to complete the form of the \( \text{alef} \). In the meantime, the mediating \( \text{vav} \), whose width is visually expanded by the touching arms and legs of \( \text{Laocoon} \) and his son, extends the christological function which will ultimately facilitate the completion of the \( \text{alef} \). Within this visual context, the grammaticality of Lilith’s name reflects the facile appeal of the letter, ultimately to be superceded by the spirit of the \( \text{alef} \).

Although the Hebrew Lilith is in the middle of the picture, the most prominent example of Hebrew is the heading at the top: \( \text{股权投资} \). Revolving around the same concept as that used for plate 2 of the Job engravings, here the Hebrew rendering of “The Angel of the Divine Presence” contains the \( \text{alef} \), though reversed. In addition, the context is far different. In the Job drawing, the Hebrew was used to describe the devolution of transcendence, from the Ancient of Days (the kabbalistic \( \text{alef} \) of the Supernal Man, to Christian mystics the symbolic Christ) down to the mediating angel, manifested in our world by the symbol of material power, the king. Now, assuming that the inclusion of the \( \text{alef} \) was deliberate, Blake reverses the perspective, portraying the \( \text{alef} \) in terms of the concept of incarnation, the internal Christ, the means by which man can apprehend the One.

Located spatially where Blake frequently (as in \( \text{Enoch} \), for example) places the source of light, the Hebrew is part of a triangle whose point is apparently the head of \( \text{Laocoon} \), which describes the materialization of art.28

Where any view of Money exists Art cannot be carried on, but War only

by pretences to the Two Impossibilities Chastity & Abstinence Gods of the Heathen

He repented that he had made Adam
(of the Female, the Adamah)

[scratched out] & it grieved him at his heart

The Angel of the Divine Presence

26. For detailed discussions of Blake’s \( \text{Laocoon} \), see Essick’s \( \text{Separate Plates of William Blake,} \) 98-101, and Essick and Viscomi’s edition of \( \text{Millon,} \) 229-33. Essick and Viscomi note that some of Blake’s changes may have been influenced by Marco Dente’s engraving of the statue before its restoration.

27. On the Lilith myth, see Graves and Patai 65-66; on the mystical implications, see Schollem 356-60.

28. According to Morton D. Paley, the aphorisms surrounding the statue transform the \( \text{Laocoon} \) into “& his two Sons Satan & Adam by surrounding it with texts denouncing money, war, and empire and affirming the ultimate value of art” (235).
In this area of the picture, the messages of the verbal and visual art coalesce, as the horizontal lines cross, and thereby block, any potential source of light beyond the picture. The reason, as the verbal lines explain, is materialism, and the result is an inverted concept of God. While it is always possible that Blake simply erred in executing the alef, we should not discount the likelihood that as a careful artist, Blake deliberately reversed the letter, perhaps in order to shift the burden of interpretation to the readers/viewers who must for themselves reverse the perspective on the Divinity, and thereby recognize the fallacy of the “good versus Lilith” duality, so that Laocoon might be freed to raise his left arm towards the heavens and thus complete the potential alef on which the picture’s form might be predicated.

Until then, only half of the alef will be possible, as indicated by the inscription beneath the plint: “T" & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact, or History of Ilium.” Reflecting the degeneration from the original inspiration of “the Cherubim of Solomons Temple,” the Greek rendition of Laocoön, while good art, lacks the full inspiration of “the Cherubim.” Consequently, it can only be identified by ya, the first two letters of the Tetragrammaton (yod and he), lacking the final y (vav), Christ, and the full name of God, in English rendered “Jehovah.”

The final instance, barely visible in the upper left corner of the picture, involves Christ as “The Eternal Body of Man,” that is, “the Imagination, that is God himself / The Divine Body.” The English is followed by a corrupted version of the Hebrew name Jesus: בַּשָּׁמְךָ, in which the ayin is reversed, and the mediating vav is omitted. Ayin, the name of the letter, is also the Hebrew word for “eye”; and, as already noted, the vav is the kabbalistic symbol of Christ. Again, assuming that the variations were deliberate, the reversed ayin and omitted vav could suggest that the conventional interpretation of Jesus is a corruption that ignores the true christological vision. By implication, the audience will be able to reconstruct the true Christ by symbolically reversing the ayin and adding the vav, that is, by retrieving the true art occluded by the transformations of later versions.

This brief excursion into Blake’s graphic use of Hebrew suggests that we may have been asking the wrong question: it is less a matter of what the words mean than how the letters signify within the total context of a particular picture or plate. In “Glorious incomprehensible”: The Development of Blake’s Kabbalistic Language, I argue that Blake was never interested in Hebrew as a conventional sign system. Rather, believing in the Adamic theory of language, Blake incorporated Hebraisms into his verbal art, ultimately as the vehicle for expanding consciousness in order to apprehend the One, through whose speech the act of Creation had been accomplished. I also argue that at some point during the composition of The Four Zoas, Blake redefined the name Albion (etymologically a Latin reference to the white cliffs of Dover), in terms of spurious hebraic roots—all, meaning “God,” and ben, for “son”—to justify his belief that the English were the true chosen people, and English the Divine language, containing within its material shell (“rough basement”) the alef incarnate. Blake’s graphic use of Hebrew lettering seems to complement the belief that English derived from Hebrew, the language of God.

In the first instances—the lettering on the verso to the Tyriel drawing, and the pseudo-Hebrew words in the Night Thoughts/Four Zoas illustrations—Blake seems to be seeking ways to penetrate the mystical essence contained within the material form of the letter. By the second phase, the text-based use of Hebrew probably completed after he had redefined Albion as the “son of God,” Blake exploits the symbolic values of the letters, reforming the Word, as found in the biblical text, to comment prophetically on contemporary England as the promised land. At the end of his life, when he again returns to the Hebrew alphabet, his use is purely mystical. Consolidating the disparate approaches to Hebrew, Blake seems to have unified all of his earlier experimentation around the concept of the alef. As the first letter of the alphabet, the alef is the first of the Divine emations, the unknowable Supreme Crown from which all successive potencies were emanated. Yet, the visual correspondence between the letter and the human form suggests the existence of an incarnate relationship between God and man, who was created in His image. Consequently, even though the Job engravings were based on a series of drawings initiated approximately twenty years earlier, and even though the Laocoön design was not original to Blake, in both cases he seems to have revealed the incarnate alef that he might have intuited as early as the mid-1790s, when he worked on Europe, as the means by which he—and we—might apprehend the One.

29. It should be emphasized that at this point, I am referring to the mystical plenitude of the Tetragrammaton, as opposed to a signifier signifying the concept of God. While both yod alone and the yod-he combination are names of God, the full Tetragrammaton—yod, he, vav, he—is a mystical concept, the ineffable Name which is never pronounced (when the Tetragrammaton is encountered in the text, the signifier “ha-shem,” i.e., “the Name,” is usually substituted). Therefore, while yod-he does signify God, it still comprises only half of the Tetragrammaton.

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1908-2003