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Robert N. Essick

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## MINUTE PARTICULAR

### Dating Blake's "Enoch" Lithograph Once Again

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Archibald G. B. Russell was the first to suggest a date of composition and execution for Blake's only known lithograph (illus. 1). Although he believed that the design represents "Job in Prosperity," Russell's estimate of "about 1807" has held up surprisingly well over the years.<sup>1</sup> In *William Blake Printmaker*, doubts about this fairly specific date led me to suggest only the period c. 1803–1820 for the print.<sup>2</sup> Later, in an article in this journal and in a catalogue of Blake's separate plates, I argued more confidently for a date of 1806–1807 for "Enoch" because of its execution on "White Lyas" stone (according to George Cumberland's inscription on the verso of the impression reproduced here) and the buff and brown wove papers used for three of the four extant impressions.<sup>3</sup> Both characteristics associate the print with the early lithographic (or "polyautographic") printmaking in London by Georg Jacob Vollweiler during the years at issue. However, in a review published in 1981 of *William Blake Printmaker*, John Gage offered a different approach to dating "Enoch":



1. Blake. "Enoch." Modified lithograph, printed in relief from a stone, 21.7 x 31 cm., 1806–1807. The disfiguring marks above the central figure's head are fragments of George Cumberland's verso inscription that have bled through to the recto. Collection of Mrs. Edward Croft-Murray, Richmond, Surrey.

If we recall that the first [complete English] translation of the [Ethiopic] *Book of Enoch* appeared in 1821, and that the subject of the print [i.e., "Enoch"], although it bears some relation to an earlier watercolour by Blake, relates rather closely to verses 1–3 of Chapter XCII of this book, we may place the print, whose style and formal modelling seems to this reviewer to be very close to that of the *Job* engravings published in 1825, rather later even than Essick's bracket of 1803/20.<sup>4</sup>

This suggestion seems to have achieved some currency, for the catalogue of the 1986 exhibition of Blake's works at Wildenstein Gallery, London, accepts Gage's "convincing date of 1821 or later for [the] lithograph."<sup>5</sup> Gage's date and his rationale for it deserve a more careful consideration.

The passage in *The Book of Enoch* Gage refers to reads as follows:

1. After this, Enoch began to speak from a book.
2. And Enoch said; Concerning the children of righteousness, concerning the elect of the world, and concerning the plant of righteousness and integrity,
3. Concerning these things will I speak, and *these things* will I explain to you, my children: I *who* am Enoch. In consequence of that which has been shewn to me, from my heavenly vision and from the voice of the holy angels have I acquired knowledge; and from the tablet of heaven have I acquired understanding.<sup>6</sup>

The general parallels between these verses and Blake's print are certainly worthy of notice. Enoch holds a book, the three youths on the plinth may be his children, and the floating figures holding a tablet or open scroll may be the "holy angels." The radiance descending from above would seem to signal the divine origin of Enoch's wisdom. Other passages in the 1821 text speak to these same acts and associations, thereby underscoring their importance to Enoch's character. Enoch sees "a holy vision in the heavens" at the very beginning of the book (1), he is named as a "scribe" in the twelfth chapter (13), he is commanded by God in the eightieth chapter to "look on the book which heaven has gradually dropped down" (99), and a few sentences later told to "instruct thy family, write these things, and explain them to all thy children" (100).

On the face of it, Gage's textual source for Blake's "Enoch" is reasonably convincing. Yet, the parallels are fairly general, with the possible exception of the "angels" with a "tablet." The viability of Gage's thesis would diminish considerably if the essential features offered by the 1821 volume—Enoch's book, its divine inspiration, and the communication of its wisdom to his family—were available to Blake from some other sources.

One textual basis for "Enoch" is explicitly presented by the print itself. Enoch holds a book inscribed with his name in Hebrew, while the hovering figures on the right bear and point to a tablet or manuscript inscribed with the Hebrew words that begin Genesis 5:24, "And Enoch walked with God. . . ." Blake did not have



to wait until 1821 to find an authoritative statement of Enoch's direct access to divinity.

Other motifs of the lithograph accounted for by the passage in *The Book of Enoch* also appear in other texts. The descriptions of Enoch in the pseudepigraphic Book of Jubilees 4:17–24 are particularly important. Enoch is there described as the first man to learn writing. Further, he "was the first to write a testimony, and he testified to the sons of men among the generations of the earth . . ." (4:18).<sup>8</sup> Jubilees was not translated into English until 1885; but it is possible that Blake knew something of it through verbal or visual allusions, much as he seems to have known about the apocryphal Testament of Job.<sup>9</sup> Other sources of information about Enoch could have come more readily to Blake's attention by 1806 or earlier. In chapter 30 of *Mysterium Magnum: or, an Explanation of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, Jacob Boehme claims that Enoch marked "a Beginning of the prophetic Spirit," a comment of the sort almost designed to attract the notice of a latter-day English prophet.<sup>10</sup> Later in the same chapter, Boehme refers to that "Time when Enoch and the Children under his Voice lead a *divine Life*, of which the first Life of Enoch was a Type . . ." (3:159, para. 46). In *The True Christian Religion*, Emanuel Swedenborg refers to Enoch in one of his many discussions of his key doctrine of correspondences. The "men of the Most Ancient Church which existed before the flood, were of a genius so celestial that they talked with the angels of heaven, and were able to talk with them by means of correspondences. . . . Furthermore, I have been informed that Enoch (who is mentioned in Gen. v. 21–24) and those associated with him collected correspondences from the lips of these men, and transmitted this knowledge to their posterity . . ."<sup>11</sup> The possibility that Swedenborg's writings transmitted this knowledge to Blake is buttressed by Blake's reference in his *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809 to Swedenborg's "Universal Theology" — the subtitle of *The True Christian Religion* — as the basis for his painting (now lost) of *The Spiritual Preceptor*.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Enoch's role as a communicator of divine wisdom to his offspring — a key feature of the passage Gage cites from the Ethiopic text — can also be found in a work known to have influenced Blake's pictorial works long before 1821.

The most intriguing dimension of the iconography of Blake's print is the association of the young folk (presumably Enoch's children) with the instruments of poetry, painting, and music. Enoch's parentage of the arts may be lurking somewhere in the texts and legends surrounding his name, but I have not been able to find any evidence for it.<sup>13</sup> Gage's claims for the 1821 volume would be strengthened materially if it contained a refer-

ence to Enoch and the arts, but such is not the case. It is of course possible that this association is Blake's own addition to Enochian lore. The arts were for Blake the necessary vehicles of that divine wisdom of which Enoch was himself a channel. Keynes (*Blake Studies*, 178) quite rightly associates the lithograph with Blake's identification, in "A Vision of the Last Judgment," of Noah and his sons Shem and Japhet as representatives of "Poetry Painting & Music the three Powers in Man of conversing with Paradise which the flood did not Sweep away" (E 559). Since Enoch was Noah's great-grandfather (see Genesis 5:22–29), the quill and book, brush and palette, and lyre in "Enoch" simply place the iconography of Blake's "Vision of the Last Judgment" in the hands of an earlier generation of the same antediluvian family.



2. Blake. *Enoch Walked with God(?)*. Pen and water color over pencil and charcoal, 45.4 x 61 cm., c. 1780–1785. Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Warrington.

A subsidiary feature of Gage's argument depends upon the pictorial associations between "Enoch" and Blake's Job illustrations. But in fact these very connections speak more forcefully for a date of 1806–1807 than for c. 1825. While Gage bases his opinion on a sense of general parallels in "style and formal modelling," the "early watercolour" he mentions in passing establishes a documentary link between "Enoch" and the Job series. Martin Butlin has tentatively entitled this water color *Enoch Walked with God* (illus. 2) and dated it to c. 1780–1785 with somewhat greater confidence.<sup>14</sup> The de-



sign shares with "Enoch" a patriarchal figure holding a book, several youths of both sexes who may be his children, and hovering figures on the right holding a tablet or open scroll bearing sketchy indications of written characters. If Butlin's title correctly indicates its subject, then this drawing demonstrates Blake's knowledge in the 1780s about Enoch's association with books, the transmundane source of his wisdom, and the appropriateness of placing Enoch within a family setting. But even if the subject is not Enoch, it remains clear that Blake recycled motifs from this undoubtedly early drawing for both the "Enoch" lithograph and the second design in his Job illustrations. The latter were first created for Thomas Butts as a series of water colors datable to c. 1805–1806 (Butlin #550). If the pictorial parallels between "Enoch" and the Job illustrations signify anything at all about the print's date, then it seems most probable that Blake borrowed from his early drawing to create "Enoch" at about the same time he was reworking the same drawing into a Job illustration. This reworking took place not in 1825, when Blake was transforming his Job water colors into copperplate engravings, but in the same period to which "Enoch" has been traditionally assigned. In contrast, Blake's series of five pencil sketches based on *The Book of Enoch*, dated by Butlin to c. 1824–1827 (#827), bear no relation in format, composition, or motif to the lithograph.

Gage has raised some interesting issues about the dating of Blake's only known lithograph. He has not, however, demonstrated that the 1821 *Book of Enoch* supplied any information about its eponym unavailable in texts very probably known to Blake many years earlier. Nor does the association with the Job designs testify to a date in the 1820s. What are arguably the most specific motifs shared by the print and the 1821 text—the patriarch's book and the hovering "angels" holding a "tablet"—were part of Blake's repertoire of Enochian (or at least proto-Enochian) images as early as the 1780s (illus. 2). The circumstantial evidence summarized by Russell and Keynes in their catalogues, supplemented and extended by details in mine, remains the best basis for dating "Enoch."

<sup>1</sup>Russell, *The Engravings of William Blake* (London: Grant Richards, 1912) 91. The same date is given in Geoffrey Keynes, *Engravings by William Blake: The Separate Plates* (Dublin: Emery Walker, 1956) 43–44.

<sup>2</sup>Essick, *William Blake Printmaker* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), caption to pl. 166.

<sup>3</sup>Essick, "Blake's 'Enoch' Lithograph," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 14 (1981): 180–84; Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake: A Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 55–59.

<sup>4</sup>Gage, review of J.-C. Le Blon, *Coloritto*, and Essick, *William Blake Printmaker*, in *Art History*, 14 (1981): 473. I was not aware of Gage's proposal until after my catalogue of Blake's separate plates had gone to press.

<sup>5</sup>*William Blake and His Contemporaries: A Loan Exhibition in Aid of the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*. Wildenstein Gallery, London, 11 June–11 July, 1986. (Cambridge, Cambs.: Fitzwilliam Museum Enterprises, 1986) 104, No. 63. This catalogue also served for the exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum, summer 1987.

<sup>6</sup>*The Book of Enoch the Prophet: An Apocryphal Production*, trans. Richard Laurence (Oxford: at the University Press for the author, 1821) 134.

<sup>7</sup>The identification of this quotation is credited to Joseph Wicksteed in Laurence Binyon and Geoffrey Keynes, *Illustrations of the Book of Job by William Blake* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1936), fascicle 1, 8–9; Keynes, *Blake: Separate Plates*, 43–44; Keynes, *Blake Studies*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) 178.

<sup>8</sup>R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913) 2: 18.

<sup>9</sup>The influence of the Testament on Blake's Job designs is discussed in Bo Lindberg, *William Blake's Illustrations to the Book of Job* (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1973) 137–48. See Robert Watt, *Bibliotheca Britannica* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1824), vol. 3, "Enoch," for a list of works published before 1806 that at least refer to the patriarch in their titles. I have not been able to locate a copy of one particularly intriguing title, *Enoch; a Poem: Book I* (London: Cadell, 1805).

<sup>10</sup>*The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher* [the so-called "Law's Edition"] (London: G. Robinson, 1772) 3: 154–55, para. 14. Boehme is an often-cited source for many of Blake's spiritual concepts. He refers to "Behmen" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c. 1790–1793) and in a letter to John Flaxman of 12 September 1800 (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982] 43, 707). According to Henry Crabb Robinson, in 1825 Blake praised the illustrations "in Law's transl.<sup>n</sup>"; in 1864, Frederick Tatham wrote that Blake had "a large collection of works of the mystical writers, Jacob Behmen, Swedenborg, and others" (G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1969] 41, n. 4, 313).

<sup>11</sup>*The True Christian Religion Containing the Universal Theology of the New Church* (New York: American Swedenborg Society, 1915) 1: 300, para. 202.

<sup>12</sup>*Complete Poetry and Prose*, 546. Blake's knowledge of *The True Christian Religion* is discussed in Morton D. Paley, "'A New Heaven is Begun': William Blake and Swedenborgianism," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 13 (1979): 64, 78–80, 82.

<sup>13</sup>For useful and surprisingly detailed summaries, see *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1910) 1: 676–79, 5: 178–82.

<sup>14</sup>*The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) No. 146 and color pl. 181. For another early drawing with similar motifs and compositional format, see *Moses and Aaron(?) Flanked by Angels* (Butlin #112 and pl. 121).