

# Friendship, Secrecy, Transatlantic Networks and the Enlightenment

## The Jefferson-Barlow Version of Volney's *Ruines* (Paris, 1802)

Nathalie Caron

La circulation de l'imprimé entre France et États-Unis à l'ère des révolutions

Franco-American Networks of Print in the Age of Revolutions

Volume 11, Number 1, Fall 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1066940ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066940ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le livre au Québec

ISSN

1920-602X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Caron, N. (2019). Friendship, Secrecy, Transatlantic Networks and the Enlightenment: The Jefferson-Barlow Version of Volney's *Ruines* (Paris, 1802). *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*, 11 (1). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066940ar>

Article abstract

In 1802, a third English translation of Volney's *Ruines; ou, méditation sur les révolutions des empires*, a work already popular among English-speaking radicals and freethinkers, appeared in Paris. The anonymous translators of the work were none other than Thomas Jefferson and Joel Barlow. Barlow's name surfaced in 1819 whereas Jefferson's did not until the early twentieth century. The fact that Jefferson secretly contributed to the third translation of *Les Ruines* as well as to its circulation in the United States is an aspect of his career which, while it has not been ignored, has not been given adequate attention. The essay fleshes out knowledge of Volney and Jefferson's friendship, traces out the story of the translation, and explores the reasons for the success of *Ruines* in the young United States, shedding light on the networking which allowed radical Enlightenment ideas to infuse American culture.



**FRIENDSHIP, SECRECY,  
TRANSATLANTIC NETWORKS  
AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT:  
The Jefferson-Barlow Version of Volney's  
*Ruines* (Paris, 1802)<sup>1</sup>**

Nathalie CARON  
Sorbonne Université

ABSTRACT

In 1802, a third English translation of Volney's *Ruines; ou, méditation sur les révolutions des empires*, a work already popular among English-speaking radicals and freethinkers, appeared in Paris. The anonymous translators of the work were none other than Thomas Jefferson and Joel Barlow. Barlow's name surfaced in 1819 whereas Jefferson's did not until the early twentieth century. The fact that Jefferson secretly contributed to the third translation of *Les Ruines* as well as to its circulation in the United States is an aspect of his career which, while it has not been ignored, has not been given adequate attention. The essay fleshes out knowledge of Volney and Jefferson's friendship, traces out the story of the translation, and explores the reasons for the success of *Ruins* in the young United States, shedding light on the networking which allowed radical Enlightenment ideas to infuse American culture.

RÉSUMÉ

En 1802 parut à Paris une troisième traduction des *Ruines; ou, méditation sur les révolutions des empires* de Volney, œuvre déjà bien connue des radicaux et des libres penseurs anglophones. Les traducteurs anonymes n'étaient autres que Thomas Jefferson et Joel Barlow. Si le nom de Barlow finit par faire surface en 1819, celui de Jefferson ne fut associé à la traduction qu'au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le fait que Jefferson ait secrètement collaboré, non seulement à cette traduction, mais aussi à la diffusion des *Ruines* est un aspect de sa carrière, qui, sans être inconnu, a été largement sous-estimé. L'article raconte l'histoire de la traduction, décrit l'amitié qui unissait Volney et Jefferson et analyse les raisons du succès de *Ruins* dans des États-Unis qui en étaient encore à leurs jeunes années. Il met en relief la façon dont

certains réseaux ont pu favoriser la mise en circulation des Lumières radicales dans la culture américaine.

### **Keywords**

Volney, Thomas Jefferson, Joel Barlow, radical Enlightenment, translation

### **Mots-clés**

Volney, Thomas Jefferson, Joel Barlow, Lumières radicales, traduction

On November 16, 1793, the day he was arrested and imprisoned for debt at La Force prison in Paris on the orders of the Comité de sûreté générale, François-Constantin Volney started a correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, whom he had met some eight years before and who was then serving as Secretary of State in the Washington administration. In the brief note, which he wrote in French (as he did all the subsequent letters he was to send to Jefferson), Volney begins with the following convoluted but warm declaration, evocative of past affinity: “I have the honor of reminding Mr. Jefferson of a person whose own memory of him stems from times and events which have for ever made its interest most sacred.”<sup>2</sup> The note was accompanied by a gift, a “small work”—a “bagatelle” in Volney’s words—called *La Loi naturelle, ou Catéchisme du citoyen français*, which had just been published in Paris and extolled, in the form of a Q&A, the necessity of developing the germ of virtue and perfection inherent in all individuals in the view of human happiness.<sup>3</sup> If the gift obtained Jefferson’s approval, Volney concluded, he would have had a second reason for wishing he had not let the “philosophical voyage” the French government had asked him to accomplish escape him. By that he meant that his imprisonment for debt had unfortunately impeded a diplomatic mission in the United States the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Citizen Deforgues, had assigned him.<sup>4</sup>

More letters and gifts would follow, and in 1795 Volney finally made the journey to the United States. During the three years that he stayed in the country, he paid several visits to Jefferson. Although the latter wrote less often—Jefferson wrote 11 times, Volney 23—the tone, frequency, and length of the correspondence suggest that the two men were on the friendliest terms and thought highly of one another.<sup>5</sup> The letters bring to light a great deal about their intellectual interactions, and about the circulation of information,

books, portraits, and artefacts across the Atlantic. In particular, they reveal that, in the late 1790s, the two men secretly collaborated on a new English translation—the third, in fact—of Volney’s celebrated *Ruines; ou, méditation sur les révolutions des empires*. In November 1802, *A New Translation of Volney’s Ruins; or, Meditations [sic] on the Revolution [sic] of Empires: made under the inspection of the author* was printed in two volumes for Levrault, quai Malaquais, in Paris.<sup>6</sup> A “preface of the translator” justified the new version, pointing out the necessity of “faithfully” rendering a work that had already become a classic and making sure that it suffered “as little as possible from a change of country.”<sup>7</sup> The preface was unsigned, but the use of the first-person plural indicated that more than one person ought to be credited for the translation. Although this remained confidential for more than a century, two translators had accomplished the task. Jefferson translated one half—the first 19 of 24 chapters—and Barlow completed the translation upon Volney’s request.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that Jefferson collaborated on a new English version of Volney’s revolutionary drama is an aspect of his career which, while it has been acknowledged, has often been ignored by scholars—and by Jefferson scholars in particular—with the result that up until today, Jefferson’s contribution to the translation has remained largely unknown.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the rendering of *Les Ruines* in English was much improved by the undertaking to the extent that the 1802 translation seems to have become the standard translation.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, even before he set foot in the country, Volney was a celebrity in the young United States, where his *Voyages en Syrie et en Égypte*, published in 1787 and immediately translated into English, had been rapidly circulated. A first American edition of *Voyages* was issued in 1798, in the midst of the XYZ affair, a diplomatic dispute involving France and the United States, and just as Bonaparte was launching his Egyptian expedition, and then a second one appeared in 1801, in the first year of the first Barbary War.<sup>11</sup> What is more, his *Tableau du climat et du sol des États-Unis d’Amérique*, a penetrating and caustic ethno-geographic study of the United States published in 1803, attracted enough attention that it was translated into English a second time, by American novelist Charles Brockden Brown, who used the opportunity to reframe the work in nationalistic terms.<sup>12</sup> Although Volney has been integrated into the history of transatlantic networks by Pete Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, and, more recently, into the narrative of the early Republic by François Furstenberg, his influence as a writer outside of Europe has not

yet been fully gauged.<sup>13</sup> More often than not, when his name is not simply ignored, it is just one on a list that includes Voltaire, Hume, Paine and Godwin—as, indeed, was already the case in the early years of the American Republic.<sup>14</sup> Volney, however, was an inspiration for many in the English-speaking world, well into the nineteenth century. By the late 1790s, *Ruins* had become, together with Paine’s *Age of Reason*, required reading among radicals and freethinkers in Britain and in the United States.<sup>15</sup> It was also influential among early Africanists.<sup>16</sup> One of its numerous erudite endnotes stated that Ethiopians were the inventors of astronomy and that consequently “the first learned nation was a nation of Blacks.”<sup>17</sup> William Thornton, an amateur architect and designer of the US Capitol, called Volney “a man of virtue and genius,” because *Ruins* supported “the cause of the Africans” and its author advocated “the reduction of all languages to one alphabet.”<sup>18</sup>

It was the French-American literary historian Gilbert Chinard who, in 1923, first brought Jefferson’s role in the translation of *Les Ruines* to public knowledge.<sup>19</sup> The fact that Chinard’s monograph was never translated into English no doubt prevented his discovery from becoming readily available to American readers. It is also likely that, at least until recently, a preference for English-language sources in academic usage impeded scholarly exploration of Jefferson’s connection to Volney. The oversight may be better explained, however, by historiographical issues. In France, the long neglect of the period between the years 1794 and 1799, separating the “heroic” Revolution from the 18 Brumaire coup, which brought Bonaparte to power, has led to a general lack of scholarly concern with Volney and his colleagues at the Institut de France.<sup>20</sup> In the United States, a tendency among religion scholars to argue for the limited influence of deism, free thought and skepticism on North American soil no doubt also explains the lack of curiosity about the translation.<sup>21</sup> When dealing with Jefferson’s deistic views, emphasis has been laid instead on his discussions about Christianity with some of his other correspondents, most prominently Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, Benjamin Rush, and, after 1812, John Adams, who were all native speakers of English.<sup>22</sup>

Jefferson himself, however, may bear the greatest responsibility for the persistent silence surrounding his participation in the translation. He had been president of the United States for over a year when he explicitly requested that his collaboration with the author of *Les Ruines* be kept off the record, as

revealed by a letter he sent to Volney on April 20, 1802, in which he asked that the manuscript be burnt.<sup>23</sup> His position and ambition required a great deal of caution. The Louisiana Purchase, a project dear to Jefferson's heart, was already in the works, and the Federalists, although shattered by their defeat in 1800, remained dangerous political opponents who had launched a merciless attack on his religious views. *Les Ruines*, which suggested that religion was a social construct and forcefully argued that religious disagreements were obstacles to the improvement of the human race, had a truly subversive quality. Like Thomas Paine, who since 1801 had been intensely demonized by the Federalists in a campaign aimed at impairing President Jefferson's career, Volney had become a political liability, and this had been the case since he left the United States in 1798.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the question is, what prompted Jefferson to embark on the third translation of a 400-page book—probably as early as 1798—while he was still serving as John Adams's vice-president and about to run for president? What was so compelling about *Les Ruines* that in the late 1790s it became necessary for Jefferson, despite the risks entailed, to produce a new translation of a work by a French author whose engagement with heterodoxy was well known?

In this essay, I tell the story of this translation, a story which has never been told. First, I flesh out scholarly knowledge of Jefferson and Volney's friendship, as well as of the extent of Volney's notoriety in the early United States. I then trace the origins and production of the third translation of *Les Ruines*, probing the reasons for the work's relevance to Jefferson. I emphasize the contingent dimension of the transatlantic collaboration by highlighting its relationship to the partisan politics of the young American Republic, but I also underscore its transcendent purpose. I show that the scope of the enterprise went beyond the narrowness of the present to encompass visions of a transnational enlightened future, and I argue that the project was in itself conceived of as revolutionary both in political and religious terms. I address only in passing the roles of Jefferson and Barlow as translators. In particular, I do not provide a close textual analysis or examine the differences between the three translations and their significance. I am mostly interested in the correspondence between Volney and Jefferson, the way their collaboration unfolded, and the sustained and collective effort that this confidential and yet truly successful Franco-American editorial project required on the part of the various protagonists. This essay explores the close relationship between two

influential men who regarded themselves as truly enlightened, and has two main goals. It first seeks to provide fresh insight into Jefferson's participation in the public diffusion of a work destined to fuel religious skepticism. Secondly, it aims to underscore the long-term significance of Volney's ideas in the history of the Enlightenment.

## I-

Volney and Jefferson probably met in 1785, sometime between the Frenchman's return from Syria in April of that year and Benjamin Franklin's departure from Paris in July. Jefferson had taken office as new commissioner and minister plenipotentiary in March, succeeding Franklin, and he had been in Paris since August 1784. Volney and Jefferson may have become acquainted at Madame Helvétius's reputed *salon* in Auteuil, where Jefferson had been introduced by Franklin and where they mingled with, among others, Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis, a close friend of Volney's, Condorcet, whose *Réflexion sur l'esclavage des nègres* Jefferson partly translated, and the abbé Morellet, who offered to be the first translator of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*.<sup>25</sup> It was thus in the lively company of men and women of letters that the two men realized that they shared interests in a wide variety of fields, ranging from politics and ethics to philology, comparative religion, anthropology, botany, agricultural science, medicine, climatology, and geology. Volney was reputedly bad-tempered, but at the same time he must have been an engaging person. He would have been likely to appeal to a learned Francophile like Jefferson, his senior by 14 years. Volney was just returning from the Middle East, where he had stayed for two years and gathered the material necessary to write his first published work, *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte*, which was also the first occasion for him to use his penname.

Volney, whose real name was Constantin-François de Chassebœuf, was a physiocrat interested in agriculture and in upholding property ownership. He often got involved in the political debates of his times. The editor of *La Sentinelle du Peuple* in Rennes in late 1788, he was, in March 1789, elected *député* of the Third Estate for the Haut-Anjou region to the Estates-General and then to the National Assembly. According to a contemporary, François-Yves Besnard, Jefferson was in the same room as Volney, La Révellière-Lépeaux, Cabanis, and others when these men rejoiced at the news that the Bastille had

fallen.<sup>26</sup> Jefferson did not leave Paris until September of that year. In 1795, Volney taught history at the first *École normale*, founded in 1794, and was elected to the Institut de France in the Class of Moral and Political Sciences. Volney was one of the *idéologues*, who supported the Directory. The group, led by Antoine Destutt de Tracy, the inventor of the word “ideology,” sought to create a science of ideas grounded in rationalism and Lockean sensualism, which would end the turmoil of the revolution and establish peace and order in a true republican state.<sup>27</sup> Although moderate in their politics, the ideologues were the heirs of a radical tradition that emphasized the role of education, and they were influential in the development of positivism in the nineteenth century.

Volney and Jefferson met again a decade later at Jefferson’s residence at Monticello during the Frenchman’s three-year stay in the United States. On November 13, 1795, one month after he had settled in Philadelphia, Volney expressed his eagerness “to re-establish [his] inestimable relationship” with Jefferson, and soon arrangements were made.<sup>28</sup> More was at stake than mere friendship, and each expected the other to be like a window onto the state of his country. On April 10, 1796, Jefferson wrote:

Your favor of [March] 28. came by our last post: and flatters me with the hope of seeing you here. I shall certainly be at home all the month of May, and very happy to receive [sic] and possess you here. I shall have a great deal to learn from you of what passed in France after I left it. Initiated as I was into the mysteries of the revolution, I have much still to learn which the newspapers never knew. In return I will give you all the information relative to our agriculture &c. which you as a traveller may wish to receive.<sup>29</sup>

On May 22, Volney announced to Jefferson that he was setting out from Georgetown on a journey which would take him to the mountains where he wished to spend the summer. On June 8, he arrived at Jefferson’s residence, where he stayed between two and three weeks. He then travelled west for several months, carrying letters of introduction from Jefferson. During his grand tour, which took him across the Alleghenies and then north, he collected primary data, which he relied on when writing his *Tableau sur le sol et le climat des États-Unis*; he also wrote Jefferson two long letters describing his



observations in detail.<sup>30</sup> He returned to Monticello in the summer of 1797, on Jefferson's invitation.<sup>31</sup>

The epistolary exchange between Volney and Jefferson lasted for over 10 years. Jefferson penned his letters in English, and Volney in French, an indication that neither felt comfortable enough in the other language to write in it, but also that they could both read the other language perfectly. On July 5, 1797, Jefferson expressed concerns about Volney's financial means and health, and proposed to lend him some money.<sup>32</sup> Volney, who was then in Philadelphia, replied on the same day to thank and reassure his friend. He had been delayed for "other causes," which he was desirous to discuss with Jefferson—and which might have concerned the new translation of *Les Ruines*—and he asked if he could be received in the evening, from six o'clock on.<sup>33</sup> Several other instances underscore the degree of intimacy and trust between the two men. One of them is the way Jefferson shared with other correspondents his frustration at Volney's sudden departure on board the *Benjamin Franklin* in early June 1798. The first *Alien Act* had already been brought into Congress at that point, and was to be passed on the 25th. To Jefferson, as he confided to James Madison as early as May 3, 1798, it seemed clear that the law intended to hurt Volney primarily:

The threatening appearances from the Alien bills have so alarmed the French who are among us that they are going off. A ship chartered by themselves for this purpose will sail within about a fortnight for France with as many as she can carry. Among these I believe will be Volney, who has in truth been the principal object aimed at by the law.<sup>34</sup>

In a letter to Thomas Mann Randolph, sent on the same day, Jefferson used the same wording, adding:

it suffices for a man to be a philosopher, and to believe that human affairs are susceptible of improvement, & to look forward, rather than back to the Gothic ages, for perfection, to mark him as an anarchist, disorganiser, atheist & enemy of the government.<sup>35</sup>

The Adams administration had accused Volney of being a spy and put him high on the list of the foreigners they wished to see deported. In 1798, Jefferson explicitly asked that Volney refrain from writing to him. Volney obeyed and the correspondence between the two men was interrupted until

Jefferson wrote again in March 1801 after he had been sworn in as President.<sup>36</sup>

In December 1801, Jefferson asked John James Barralet to draw a portrait of Volney, “in Indian ink and black chalk,” for which he paid five guineas—“double the value of the performance,” according to the artist—and, when he received the portrait in March of the following year, he hung it in the parlour at Monticello.<sup>37</sup> In 1805, he had a miniature representation of himself delivered to Volney, who acknowledged the gift in a letter dated July 2, and rejoiced at his friend’s plumpness, which he saw as a sign of good health.<sup>38</sup> In a letter sent to Jefferson on May 10, 1803, Volney acknowledged receipt of two volumes, the latest *Transactions* of the American Philosophical Society and Jefferson’s *Manual of Parliamentary Practice*, which Volney described as “a revolutionary book.”<sup>39</sup> In the last letter they are known to have exchanged, dated February 11, 1806, Jefferson reiterates his wish to send Volney a “polygraph,” a letter-copying device he used daily, and gives him his “last news of Capt’n Lewis.”<sup>40</sup> The president had placed great hope in the Lewis and Clark expedition, which was by now on its return journey after reaching the Pacific Coast, and he knew how interested Volney was in exploration. Volney had actually wished he were part of the expedition, as he admitted to Jefferson on May 7, 1804.<sup>41</sup> As for Mr. Hawkins’s polygraph, which Jefferson had asked Charles Wilson Peale to provide, several letters to diverse correspondents refer to the president’s impatience for its delivery.<sup>42</sup>

## II-

Volney’s *Ruines; ou, méditation sur les révolutions des empires* provided an analysis of the social and political reasons for the state of the world. It revolved around an erudite critique of institutionalized religions, giving emphasis to natural laws and human agency. The times were imbued with a fascination with ruins, which the mid-century excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum had enhanced. A book about excavation, *The Ruines* delved into the processes of the distant past and re-enacted events of the past years arguing for the creation of a revolutionary dynamic for the future. It drew on Volney’s memories of his travel in the Middle East as well as on his own involvement in the French revolution.

*Les Ruines* artfully combines narration and drama. It begins in Palmyra with a melancholy narrator pondering the causes of the ruins of empires once prosperous. Soon it takes the form of a lecture delivered by a learned imposing supernatural being (“*un génie*”), who embarks with the young man on an aerial journey in the search for truth. In a chapter entitled “The New Age,” both the *génie* (“Genius” in Jefferson’s translation) and the narrator are interrupted and become the witnesses of a revolution.<sup>43</sup> What they see from above is the “great body” of a nation, “composed of farmers, artificers, merchants, all professions useful to society,” challenging a much smaller body, “made up of priests of every order, of financiers, of nobles, of men in livery, of commanders of armies; in a word, of the civil, military and religious agents of government.” They hear a dialogue between “the people” and “the indolent class,” or, as Volney puts it in a footnote, “men who do nothing, and who devour the substance of others.” The chapter ends with the victory of the multitude over the minority and a wish for peaceful resolution:

And then the little group said: We are lost; the multitude are enlightened. And the people said: You are safe; since We are enlightened, we will do no violence; we only claim our rights. We feel resentments, but we forget them. We were slaves, we might command; but we only wish to be free, and we are free.

Freed “from tyrants and parasites,” the people draws the “universal basis of all right and law” and debate. A general assembly of nations leads the people and its legislators to address the “search [for] truth.” After a thorough examination of the “origin and filiation of religious ideas” and the survey of the 13 “systems” of faith, the assembly reaches the conclusion that “all religions have a same object,” namely that the priests have encouraged the errors of a superstitious people in order to live “exempt from the burdens of other classes.” In the final chapter, the united nations (“*l’universalité des nations*”) call for a universal reform based on a separation, by an “inviolable barrier,” of “the world of fantastical beings” from “the world of realities.” In other words, they proclaim that the solution lies in secularism—“all civil effect must be taken away from theological and religious opinion”—and urge the legislators to be the “legislators of the whole human race.”<sup>44</sup>

*Les Ruines* shared similarities with Diderot's 1767 essay on the "poetics of ruins" and certainly drew on Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published between 1776 and 1789.<sup>45</sup> More crucial sources, however, may have been two French-speaking authors interested in "origins," d'Holbach and Charles-François Dupuis. Baron d'Holbach was the actual author of the posthumous work by Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger, *Recherches sur l'origine du despotisme oriental*, which was published clandestinely in 1761 and censured in 1763, and from which Volney may have borrowed the subtitle of *Les Ruines*. In this comparative study of religions, the politicization of religion is deplored:

These signs of heaven were no longer the proclaimers of the last judgement, or of the life to come, but of the fortunes and *revolutions of empires*, and of the great political changes that were to happen.<sup>46</sup>

The research conducted by the astronomer Dupuis, a colleague of Volney's at the *Institut*, was also influential. In the extensive endnotes to *Les Ruines*, Volney cites *Mémoire sur l'origine des constellations* three times. In the chapter on "Origin and Filiation of Religious Ideas," he points to Dupuis's work as the explicit source of inspiration for an orator's contention that "the worship of the stars" was established 17,000 years ago and that "the chronology of five or six thousand years in Genesis [is] little agreeable to this hypothesis."<sup>47</sup> In 1794, the first three volumes of Dupuis's *Origines de tous les cultes; ou la religion universelle* were published. Dupuis, like Volney, argued that all religions originated with the worship of the sun, stars, and other elements of nature, and that Jesus had not existed.<sup>48</sup> As George A. Wells had it, both Volney and Dupuis sought to demonstrate that "Christianity was but paganism reshaped."<sup>49</sup>

Volney's religious views are not easy to fathom, since no "profession of faith" is at our disposal, as in Thomas Paine's case.<sup>50</sup> But, although neither the narrator nor the *génie* should be mistaken for Volney, *Les Ruines* does suggest that all religious systems of belief are superfluous, including the deistic concept of an architect-creator, which is discussed in the examination of the Eighth system—"The World-Machine: worship of the demi-ourgos, or grand artificer."<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, whereas positive religion is critically examined in *Les Ruines*, belief in God is central to *La Loi naturelle* (Volney's catechism and the sequel of *Les Ruines*), since natural law emanates from God and teaches his

very existence. Like other ideologues, Volney ceased to back Napoleon after the Concordat with Pope Pius VII, which recognized Catholicism as “the religion of the great majority of the French,” was signed in 1801, but he shared with his republican friends the utilitarian notion that some civil religion was necessary to society.

While its promotion of human agency and freedom of conscience reflected its author’s confidence in revolution, *Les Ruines* also pressed for moderation and conciliation. In Britain and the United States, however, it was lambasted by many as an impious book and the work of an infidel. To others, it was an important text. In Britain in the 1810s, it influenced Mary Shelley, who had the creature in *Frankenstein* read Volney’s *Ruines* (in the London translation), and it also influenced her husband, the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, author of *Queen Mab* and *A Revolt of Islam*.<sup>52</sup> In the early United States, it was celebrated by Elihu Palmer, the founder of the New York Deistical Society, who in *Principles of Nature*, defined it as,

*Holy Writ, which ought to be appointed to be read in Churches—*  
not by his Majesty’s special command, but by the universal  
consent and approbation of all those who love nature,  
truth, and human happiness.<sup>53</sup>

In the 1830s, the painter Thomas Cole produced a five-painting allegory, *The Course of Empire*, depicting the rise and fall of an unnamed ancient empire in a way reminiscent of Volney’s *Ruines*.<sup>54</sup> Later in the century, Walt Whitman regarded *Les Ruines* as one of the books on which he “may be said to have been raised.”<sup>55</sup> The copy that the poet owned, annotated and quoted from in his early notebooks, was the Jefferson-Barlow translation.

Little is known about the first American translation, but research in the library catalogues reveals that the 1799 Philadelphia edition was what was then called a piracy.<sup>56</sup> *Les Ruines* had first appeared in English in 1792 in London, in a translation by James Marshall, a friend of William Godwin’s, under the title *The Ruins: or a survey of the revolutions of empires*, an American edition of which was issued in 1796 in New York. Dissatisfied with the first English translation, Volney had planned the publication in late 1795 of a new edition under the title *The Ruins: Or, Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires*. It was to be “corrected by the author, upon the spot, with considerable additions,” and printed for Thomas Stephens by Francis and Robert Bailey in Philadelphia,

as shown by the title page deposit of its copyright.<sup>57</sup> The project was confirmed by several advertisements in December, but the edition never came out.<sup>58</sup> In a letter dated June 4, 1798, first published in *Claypoole's Daily Advertiser* on June 6, and then reproduced in *Porcupine's Gazette* on June 7 alongside William Cobbett's scathing comments, Volney stated that he was about to leave the country and that the translation of *Les Ruines*, "announced two years ago, and which [he] was to direct, [was] stopped, and [could not] take place."<sup>59</sup> He warned that he "remained the sole proprietor of the copy and the copy right," and that if a new edition appeared, it would be without his "authority and approbation."<sup>60</sup> He also underlined the imperfection of the London translation and advised the reader to correct a regrettable error he had noticed regarding an omission in the fifteenth chapter, which had led the translator to paraphrase. A second translation appeared nonetheless the following year in Philadelphia. This unauthorized publication, for which the translator's name remains unknown, came out from the press of James Lyon, a Francophile and radical printer who received financial support from Jefferson. The title was identical to that of the London edition, but it was revamped by the indication that it was a "New Translation from the French." It was also flawed, with additional information and mistranslation. Volney had meanwhile secretly launched his own editorial project, namely the completion of a "correct and elegant" translation written in a refined English and faithful to his own phrasing and wording, which he would supervise and which would be published in Europe.<sup>61</sup>

The involvement of Jefferson in the 1802 translation and circulation of Volney's *Ruines* is discussed in seven of the letters the two men exchanged. They display concern over confidentiality during Jefferson's presidency, and only four letters explicitly refer to the translation work. In a letter written from Washington on March 17, 1801, Jefferson asks Volney if he received "the residue of the translation to the end of the [19<sup>th</sup>] chapter inclusive," which had been "sent through mr. McLure."<sup>62</sup> On June 24, 1801, Volney confirmed that he had received what Jefferson had sent him through William Maclure, the geologist, but that he had not wanted to contradict his wish by acknowledging its receipt. In the same letter, he also announced that Mr. Barlow had taken responsibility for continuing the work and explained that he had transmitted a copy of the "Invocation" (the first lines of *Les*

*Ruines*) to Louis-Henri Pichon, the French ambassador, for publication. He then added,

I do not know whether he [Pichon] has done it. He does not suspect its true source. The manuscript remains at your disposition in my hands; I shall await your orders concerning it.<sup>63</sup>

It was only on April 20, 1802, that Jefferson mentioned the translation again, in a letter in which he congratulates Volney for “engag[ing] so fine a writer of English to translate [his] work” and makes the following request: “when you shall be done with the manuscript you recieved [sic] from mr McLure it is desired that it may be burnt.”<sup>64</sup> Volney complied, as indicated in the letter he sent on March 21, 1803: “your order to cancel the handwritten pages was immediately carried out.”<sup>65</sup> Jefferson and Barlow did not revise previous translations; they started anew. The decision to split the translation of *Les Ruines* between two translators may have been made at the outset of the project, and it is possible that Jefferson and Volney evoked Barlow’s name prior to Volney’s departure. Barlow lived in France between 1788 and 1793, and then again from 1797 to 1805 (before returning in 1811 as the American minister to France). He was the author of the *Vision of Columbus*, an epic poem in nine books published in 1787 which bears some resemblance to *Les Ruines* in form and in content.<sup>66</sup>

Like Volney, Jefferson was sensitive to translation issues. He had already gone through the frustrating experience of the abbé Morellet’s unsatisfactory translation of his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In January 1787, he had sent his translator a seven-page list of errors, later referring to the translation as a “blotch of errors.”<sup>67</sup> In 1810, he revised a translation of Destutt de Tracy’s *Commentary and Review of Montesquieu’s Spirit of Laws*, which came out in English in 1811 before it did in French in 1819. His letters to the author and to William Duane, the publisher, underline his concern for a faithful translation and indicate a degree of familiarity with strategies meant to circumvent censorship. Jefferson, who was well acquainted with the French language, was able to identify “sentences incomplete, false syntax, want of perspicuity, and sometimes a suspected mistranslation” in the French version he had received from Duane.<sup>68</sup> Most relevant to our understanding of his contribution to the diffusion of *Les Ruines* is the way he satisfied Destutt de Tracy’s wish to have his translated work published anonymously in the United

States. To that effect, Jefferson suggested that a letter be prefixed to the book, the object of which was “the concealment of the author.”<sup>69</sup>

It was not until 1828 that the Paris translation of *Les Ruines* was published in the United States. It was by Dixon and Sickels, in New York.<sup>70</sup> The Paris translation, however, had circulated among American readers as soon as 1803. Within three months after its publication, in February of that year, Jefferson had expressed his impatience and suggested Volney get in touch with Nicolas Gouin Pougens, a French bookseller of Philadelphia he knew well: “we have been long expecting your petit format translation of the Ruines,” Jefferson noted, adding that Mr. Pougens had established “a commercial connection with Duane here, [and] might be a convenient agent in that business.”<sup>71</sup> But Volney had other contacts. As he explained to Jefferson on May 10, John Hurford Stone, a British radical publisher who collaborated with the Levrault brothers, had dispatched one thousand copies of the book in New York.<sup>72</sup> Jefferson received his own copy of the translation through William Thornton, who had been entrusted five copies by Joseph Curwen of Philadelphia on his way back from Paris.<sup>73</sup> The four other copies were for Thornton himself, James Madison, Aaron Burr, and Louis André Pichon.<sup>74</sup> Volney also sent a copy of the new translation to the naturalist Benjamin Smith Barton, with a note which revealed nothing about the identity of the translator.<sup>75</sup>

Soon the work was advertised in the newspapers, published, printed, and sold. On October 18, 1803, *The Aurora* announced that Hocquet Caritat, the Philadelphian bookseller and Frenchman, had published and was then selling a number of standard books “printed on good type and fine paper,” among which “a new translation of Volney’s Ruins of Empires [*sic*], made under his inspection.”<sup>76</sup> The “Invocation” had been quoted in American newspapers as early as 1801 to excite interest.<sup>77</sup> Barlow’s name surfaced in 1819 in two Philadelphia papers, *The Democratic Press* and the *Franklin Gazette*, as well as in the *City of Washington Gazette*, before it appeared in the 1828 print edition.<sup>78</sup> Much emphasis was laid on the fact that it was a “new” translation, made “under the immediate inspection of the author.” The advertisement inserted in the first pages of the New York edition quoted the three translations of the “Invocation” to underline the quality, “in regard to faithfulness and elegance,” of the “Paris translation.”<sup>79</sup> *Les Ruines* was re-edited 15 times in the United States throughout the nineteenth century, twice in the 1799 unauthorized



translation, and 13 times in the Jefferson-Barlow translation. A short statement by Whitman at the top of his annotated copy of the 1890 New York edition of *The Ruins, or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires: and the Law of Nature* confirms that at the end of the century, Jefferson's contribution to the translation was still a well-kept secret, and that even Barlow's was not established with certainty. According to Whitman, "this translation seems to have been made either by Joel Barlow, or supervised by him, in Paris, and favoured by Volney."<sup>80</sup>

### III-

There has been little scholarly awareness of the popularity of *Les Ruines* in the United States among historians of the Early Republic. *Les Ruines*, however, was greatly disturbing to many. Its author was frequently berated and reviled in the Federalist press and regarded as a dangerous writer, together with Voltaire, Godwin, and Paine. In *Porcupine's Gazette*, on June 22, 1798, during the XYZ affair and on the eve of the quasi-war with France, two weeks after Volney had left the United States, William Cobbett, who sided with the Federalists and was one of the prominent editorial combatants in the war waged by the partisan press, could write that

such a man [Volney] may with justice be classified with that merciless horde of infidels and cannibals that have destroyed the peace of Europe, spread desolation through the civilized world and entailed so much misery on human nature.<sup>81</sup>

To a certain extent, Volney did not fare better than Thomas Paine. In fact, for Joseph Priestley, a Unitarian English émigré, he was even worse than Paine, since unlike the author of *The Age of Reason* he claimed that "no such a person as Jesus Christ ever existed."<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, what markedly differentiated Volney from other freethinkers was his marginalization of Jesus. A central human figure for Jefferson and a man with special powers given by God for Priestley, Jesus was only a "rumour" in *Les Ruines*.<sup>83</sup> In Chapter XII, in the section entitled "Christianity, or the allegorical worship of the sun under the cabalistical names of Christ-en or Christ, and Yesus or Jesus," a neutral protagonist explains:

the great mediator, the final judge was expected and desired. ... This being was so much spoken of, that some person finally was said to have seen him; and a first rumour of this sort was sufficient to establish a general certainty. Popular report became an established fact: the imaginary being was realised; and all the circumstances of mythological traditions, being assembled around this phantom, produced a regular history, of which it was no longer permitted to doubt.<sup>84</sup>

Volney's denial of the historicity of Jesus led Joseph Priestley to start a theological dispute with him in 1797. Priestley had great respect for Volney and had even quoted from *Travels* in his *Discourses Relating to the Evidences of Revealed Religion* delivered in Philadelphia in 1796, but he blamed him for the impact *Ruines* and such works might have on young minds.<sup>85</sup>

Volney wrote a 15-page tongue-in-cheek answer to Priestley, published by Benjamin Franklin Bache, in which he listed the reasons why he had made the decision to decline Priestley's theological challenge.<sup>86</sup> A few weeks later, Priestley publicly responded in *Letters to Mr. Volney*.<sup>87</sup> Volney sent the pamphlet to Jefferson, noting: "the holy man will not get one more comma from me," but Jefferson voiced his discomfort with seeing "the time of genius wasted in polemics."<sup>88</sup> Jefferson and Volney disagreed about Jesus, but both shared the opinion, as Volney had phrased it in his answer to Priestley, that "no one has a right to ask of me my religious opinions: every inquisition of this kind is a pretention to sovereignty, a first step to persecution." In 1803, in a letter to Benjamin Rush, Jefferson claimed:

I am a Christian, in the only sense he [Jesus] wished anyone to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others, ascribing to himself every human excellence, and believing he never claimed any other.

In the same letter, however, he also admitted that he was "averse to the communication of [his] religious tenets to the public because it would ... seduce public opinion to erect itself into that Inquisition over the rights of conscience, which the laws have so justly proscribed."<sup>89</sup>

Jefferson's contribution to the translation of *Ruines* and the concern over secrecy, which seems to have predated his presidency, must first be

interpreted through the prism of the impassioned partisan politics of the times. In 1798, Jefferson, who was John Adams's vice president, was already campaigning for the presidency and had to endure his opponents' relentless attacks, which in large part targeted his religious views. It was a time of intense political agitation and polarization between two emerging parties, one leaning to France, the other to Britain. Jefferson, who was a political pragmatist, could not publicly approve of Volney's *Ruines* by acknowledging a collaboration, but he could certainly translate half of it in the privacy of his home in Monticello. The war of words, which worked to polarize the nation over international alliances and conflicting interpretations of the American and French revolutions, extended to the booksellers' catalogues, as well as to the numerous book reviews and excerpts published in the print media, or pamphlets and books reprinted as serial newspaper articles.

The story of the third translation of *Les Ruines* sheds light on the painstaking care with which Volney, Jefferson, and Barlow, together with the publishers, handled its production, publication, and circulation. They all sought a flawless translation because their long-term goal was the patient education of mankind. *Ruines* had a fictional dimension aimed at stimulating the reader's imagination. It was a provocative and empowering work, which encouraged critical thinking, broadened the notion of popular freedom, and provided powerful arguments against institutionalized religion. Moreover, its focus on the search for truth was in line with the requisites of free speech, popular sovereignty, and self-rule of republicanism. Jefferson may not have fully endorsed the content of *Les Ruines*, but he was as eager as Volney and Barlow to make this work public for the benefit of his contemporaries and of generations to come. He too contended that "kings, nobles, and priests"—a recurrent trilogy in Jefferson's lexicon—worked against human happiness. He was aware that a genuine search for truth implied a thorough examination of the religion of one's own country and of the existence of God—as he pointed out to his nephew Peter Carr in 1787—and that such a process could embrace an examination of Jesus's historicity.<sup>90</sup> Because society was not yet culturally prepared, Jefferson assumed that his own part as translator had to be done in the dark. On February 8, 1805, in response to some of Volney's complaints about criticisms directed at his *View of the Soil and Climate of the United States*, he wrote:

The *genus irritabile vatum* could not let the author of the Ruins publish a new work, without seeking in it the means

of discrediting that puzzling composition. Some one of those holy calumniators has selected from your new work every scrap of a sentence, which detached from its context, could displease an American reader. A cento has been made of these, which has run thro' a particular description of newspapers, and excited a disapprobation even in friendly minds, which nothing but the reading of the book will cure. But time and truth will at length correct error.<sup>91</sup>

Jefferson knew what he was talking about. He, too, had been calumniated. In particular, he had been called an atheist by his political and religious opponents on the basis of one damaging remark from his *Notes on the State of Virginia*: “it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”<sup>92</sup>

In the early United States, voicing one's doubts about the truths of Christianity remained a somewhat risky business and was subject to prosecution under blasphemy laws. Those were few and rarely enforced, but they may have hindered the desire of some to truly think and speak freely.<sup>93</sup> Volney in particular remained controversial. Thus, *Recherches nouvelles sur l'histoire ancienne*, published in three volumes in Paris in 1814 and 1815, was not published in the United States until 1858.<sup>94</sup> It had been made available to the Anglophone public in 1821, when an English translation, produced “under the superintendence of the author” according to the title page, was published posthumously in London.<sup>95</sup> In a letter he sent to Jefferson in 1817, the architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe had praised Volney's *Recherches nouvelles*. He had also denied the rumour, publicized in several newspapers, that Volney had corrected some of his erroneous opinions in the fifth edition of *Les Ruines*:

I have seen in the papers a notice, that M<sup>r</sup> Volney has published a new edition of his ruins, with correction of such opinions as he had formed hastily in his Youth. The evident bearing of the notice was to insinuate that he had changed his religious sentiments. I find nothing in the “Recherches nouvelles” to authorize such a supposition, but rather the contrary.<sup>96</sup>

Jefferson declined his correspondent's offer to send him Volney's three volumes, explaining that he was certain that they had “the stamp of a genius” but that the work was “too bulky to come by mail, & not to be trusted to the

stages.”<sup>97</sup> He conceded moreover that he had “never paid any attention to Oriental literature, antient or modern, and [was] therefore not qualified to recieve [sic] much edification or perhaps amusement from them.”

The Volney-Jefferson correspondence ended in 1806 with a friendly letter from Jefferson. Volney’s name appears several times in Jefferson’s correspondence after that year, and a few instances indicate that despite his disregard for *Recherches Nouvelles*, Jefferson consistently supported Volney’s notoriety and continued to recommend his works, in particular *Law of Nature* and *Lectures on History*. Volney’s name also crops up in a letter from John Adams, who, on January 23, 1825, complained of the non-reality of the much-touted liberty of conscience and referred to the blasphemy laws:

Now what free inquiry when a writer must surely encounter the risk of fine or imprisonment for adducing any argument for investigation into the divine authority of those books? Who would run the risk of translating Volney’s *Recherches Nouvelles*? who would run the risk of translating Dupuis?<sup>98</sup>

Volney and Jefferson ceased to correspond for reasons that are difficult to elucidate. To assume that it was due to their differing views of the gospels would be in contradiction with the way they conceive of liberty of conscience and their refusal to scrutinize other people’s religion. Maintaining a correspondence with Volney, even after his presidency, was potentially dangerous for Jefferson’s long-term reputation, a fact to which Volney was certainly sensitive. Between 1806 and his death in 1820, Volney returned to his work on the simplification of language, a project essential to progress, which William Thornton had applauded in 1796.<sup>99</sup> In any case, none of them had any doubt about the power of the printed word. With Barlow, Jefferson and Volney had completed the task of making a dependable English version of *Les Ruines* available. The subterranean educational work could follow its natural course.

## Conclusion

Jefferson and Barlow’s exchange with Volney about the translation of *The Ruines* was one of the many intellectual transatlantic conversations which took place in the post-revolutionary period. One of the specificities of the

Volney-Jefferson-Barlow connection is that it confirms that the radical Enlightenment paradigm applies to the United States, as Margaret Jacob suggested in 2007, while the story of the translation underscores the resistance to American critiques of institutionalized religion as well as to French conceptions of popular revolution.<sup>100</sup> With regard to Jefferson, full acknowledgment of his role in the collaboration allows us to revisit what prompted him to plan his idiosyncratic biblical compilations and to affirm the total humanity of Jesus—a bone of contention with Priestley, a millenarian for whom Christ was not divine but had received from God the power to perform miracles and to resurrect.<sup>101</sup> On April 23, 1803, Jefferson wrote a letter to Priestley to congratulate him on his *Socrates and Jesus Compared*, which he had received and perused.<sup>102</sup> Two days previously he had sent Rush his “Syllabus of an Estimate of the merit of the doctrines of Jesus, compared with those of others,” acknowledging that he was a Christian “in the only sense he wished anyone to be,” and that he had been inspired by Priestley’s work.<sup>103</sup> But as we have seen, Jefferson’s reflection on the place of Jesus coincided with the diffusion of the third translation of *Les Ruines*, a work that was also largely predicated on the comparative method and linguistic analysis, and to which he may have wished to respond. Furthermore, while *Les Ruines*, contrary to Jefferson’s own views, questioned the historicity of Jesus, it exposed religious contradictions—including Christianity’s—and enhanced secular morality, and it was in that sense plainly in line with Jefferson’s philosophy. Hence, it can be argued that Volney’s work was as much an incentive as Priestley’s short essay—in which the author is mainly concerned with demonstrating the superiority of revealed religion over polytheism—when, later in his life, Jefferson considered cutting and pasting four different versions of the Bible in English, French, Greek, and Latin in order to finally issue an edited “Bible,” from which he had removed all miraculous events, including Jesus’s final resurrection.<sup>104</sup>

But *Les Ruines* is not just a cogent critique of religious contradictions displaying hostility to organized religion. Its literary power lies elsewhere. It lies in the peculiar way Volney articulates his theory of universality, or, as Alexander Cook has argued, his powerful “vision of a transnational public sphere.”<sup>105</sup> In *Les Ruines*, all religions are placed on equal terms and no Christocentrism comes to devalue Enlightenment calls for universal happiness. It ends with a hopeful call to the united nations and an insistence

on the oneness of human nature. The book captures the idea of a global world, one whose plurality of cultures is connected by a common genealogy, history, problem, and purpose. This fact may explain, at least in part, the new scholarly interest in Volney, whose work is relevant to contemporary concerns regarding environmental and political challenges. *Les Ruines* may resonate, with a particular acuteness, with the growing awareness that what is deeply needed now is joined-up responses and expansion of national efforts to the level of the whole planet.

Nathalie Caron is a professor at Sorbonne University in the department of Anglophone Studies. Her field of research is religion in the young United States. She is interested in the American Enlightenment, secularization and religious transformations. She is the author of *Thomas Paine contre l'imposture des prêtres* (1999) and a number of articles on Paine, including “The Relevance of Thomas Paine’s Religious Thought Today,” in *Thomas Paine: Common Sense for the Modern Era* (edited by Ronald King, 2009). She is co-editor, with Richard Anker, of *Transferts du religieux/Religious Transfers*, special edition of *Revue française d’études américaines*, no. 141 (2014), and, with Guillaume Marche, of *La Politisation du religieux en modernité* (2015). Her recent publications include “Sécularisme, sécularité, laïcité aux États-Unis,” in *La laïcité dans la tourmente* (edited by Roseline Letteron, 2019). An essay on religious indifference in the United States is forthcoming.

---

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The research was made possible by short-term fellowships awarded by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, the Library Company, and the EMSI/Huntington Library. Special thanks to Kirsten Fischer, Sophia Rosenfeld, Peter Mancall, Élise Marienstrass, James Green, Christopher Phillips, Joseph Rezek, as well as to the reviser and anonymous referees, for their helpful remarks.

<sup>2</sup> “To Thomas Jefferson from Volney, 16 November 1793,” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 27, 1 September—31 December 1793, ed. John Catanzariti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 390–391, my translation.

<sup>3</sup> C.-F. Volney, *La loi naturelle, ou Catéchisme du citoyen français* (Paris, 1793).

---

<sup>4</sup> The classic studies on Volney are Gilbert Chinard, *Volney en Amérique d'après des documents inédits et sa correspondance avec Jefferson* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1923); Jean Gaulmier, *L'idéologue Volney (1757-1820) : Contribution à l'histoire de l'Orientalisme* (Beyrouth: Impr. catholique, 1951; Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1980); Jean Gaulmier, *Un grand témoin de la révolution et de l'empire, Volney* (Paris: Hachette, 1959). See also Nicole Hafid-Martin, *Volney* (Rome: Memini, 1999), and more recently Antoine Lilti, “Et la civilisation deviendra générale: L'Europe de Volney ou l'orientalisme à l'épreuve de la Révolution,” *La Révolution française*, Dire et faire l'Europe à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, online 10 June 2011, accessed 3 March 2019; Alexander Cook, “Entre l'ancien et le nouveau monde. C.-F. Volney et la politique des récits de voyages en France, 1782-1803,” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 385, no. 3 (2016) : 87–108; Kim Minchul, “Volney and the French Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 79, no. 2 (April 2018): 221–42. See also François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French* (New York: Penguin, 2014), and, on Volney's mission, 355 more particularly.

<sup>5</sup> In the period extending from 1790 and 1806 Jefferson and Volney are known to have exchanged 34 letters—two prior to 1795, 19 during the Frenchman's sojourn in the United States, and 13 during Jefferson's presidency—and a note, which has not been found. Only the letters Volney sent after Jefferson was elected president have been translated into English by the Princeton editors. The first letter Jefferson received from Volney was an anonymous essay entitled “Moyens que le congrès peut employer pour forcer les régences de Barbaries à faire la paix avec les Turcs” in *Count de Volney to Thomas Jefferson, July 12, 1790, in French*, Manuscript/Mixed Material, retrieved from the Library of Congress. Calling Volney a count in 1790 is inaccurate; he was not made count of the Empire until 1808.

<sup>6</sup> Volney, *Les Ruines; ou, Méditation sur les révolutions des empires* (Paris, 1791); C.-F. Volney, *The Ruins: or a survey of the revolutions of empires* (London, 1792); C.-F. Volney, *The Ruins: or a survey of the revolutions of empires. A New Translation from the French* (Philadelphia, 1799); C.-F. Volney, *A New Translation of Volney's Ruins; or Meditations on the revolution of Empires: made under the inspection of the author*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1802).

<sup>7</sup> Volney, *A New Translation of Volney's Ruins*, vii.

<sup>8</sup> The manuscript of the translation of the first 12 chapters of *Les Ruines* by Jefferson is held by the Massachusetts Historical Society (Coolidge Collection, reel 16). Chapters 13–19 are at the Library of Congress and are available online (*Thomas Jefferson, no date, Literary Notes on the Progress of the Human Race*, Manuscript/Mixed Material). A comparison between Jefferson's manuscript and the first edition of the 1802 translation reveals that quite a large number of changes were brought by Barlow or the publisher. A close textual comparative analysis would be needed to bring to light Jefferson and Barlow's subjectiveness. The manuscripts show that Jefferson did not translate any of the endnotes.

<sup>9</sup> Most Jefferson biographers do not mention the translation. Edwin Gaustad does in *Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 35. Others, like Merrill D. Peterson in *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), do so in passing (604). Although Furstenberg discusses Volney and Jefferson's friendship, he does not mention the translation in *When the United States Spoke French*. The translation as well as the friendship between Jefferson and Volney is discussed at some length in Wilson J. Moses, *Thomas Jefferson: A Modern Prometheus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).



---

<sup>10</sup> A research on WorldCat and Amazon reveals that the latest editions of *Ruins* are based on the 1802 translation.

<sup>11</sup> M. C.-F. Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte pendant les années 1783, 1784 et 1785*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1787); C.-F. Volney, *Travel through Syria and Egypt, in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785...* By M. C.-F. Volney. Tr. from the French ... (London, 1787).

<sup>12</sup> C.-F. Volney, *Tableau du climat et du sol des États-Unis d'Amérique : suivi d'éclaircissements sur la Floride, sur la colonie française au Scioto, sur quelques colonies canadiennes et sur les sauvages*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1803); C.-F. Volney, *View of the Climate and the Soil of the United States to which are annexed some accounts of Florida, the French colony on the Scioto, certain Canadian colonies, and the savages or natives* (London, 1804); C.-F. Volney, *A view of the soil and climate of the United States of America: with supplementary remarks upon Florida; on the French colonies on the Mississippi and Ohio, and in Canada; and on the aboriginal tribes of America*, translated with occasional remarks by C. B. Brown (Philadelphia, 1804). On the American translation, see Cecelia Tichi, "Charles Brockden Brown, Translator," *American Literature* 44, no. 1 (1972): 1–12.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2000), 341–44; François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*. Lilti, Cook, and Minchul focus on Volney's place in European intellectual history and in the French Revolution.

<sup>14</sup> Volney's influence for example is not acknowledged in Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), though this study gives prominence to Paine's *Age of Reason*.

<sup>15</sup> On Volney's place in the controversies of the early American republic, see Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 66. On his influence in Britain, see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1968), 107. Thompson makes the interesting comment that the rewording in English enhanced the radicality of the text.

<sup>16</sup> On Volney and early Africanism, Wilson J. Moses, see Théophile Obenga, ed., *Cheikh Anta Diop, Volney et le sphinx: Contribution de Cheikh Anta Diop à l'historiographie mondiale* (Paris: Présence africaine; Gif-sur-Yvette: Khepera, 1996), and *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 56. On the success of *Les Ruines* in France, see Lilti, "Et la civilisation deviendra générale."

<sup>17</sup> Volney, *A New Translation of Volney's Ruins*, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Quote in William Thornton to Constantin-François Volney, December 15, 1795; see also William Thornton to [Anthony Fathergill], November 20, 1797, in *Papers of William Thornton*, vol. 1, ed. C. M. Harris (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 343, 426. Thornton was a founding member of the American Colonization Society. Volney's *Simplification des langues orientales* was published in 1794.

<sup>19</sup> Chinard, *Volney en Amérique d'après des documents inédits et sa correspondance avec Jefferson*, 115.

<sup>20</sup> On the Directory, see Marc Belissa and Yannick Bosc, *Le Directoire* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2018), 12.

---

<sup>21</sup> See Nathalie Caron and Naomi Wulf, “American Enlightenments: Continuity and Renewal,” *The Journal of American History* 99, no. 4 (2013): 1072–91. Beside Schlereth, other American historians have started to take seriously the history of freethought, in all its forms, in particular Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) and Kirsten Fischer, *American Infidel: Elibu Palmer’s Visionary Religion in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

<sup>22</sup> See for example Peter Onuf, ed., *The Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); Paul K. Conkin, “The Religious Pilgrimage of Thomas Jefferson,” in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, ed. Peter Onuf (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1993), 19–49.

<sup>23</sup> Jefferson to Volney, 20 April 1802, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 37, 4 March—30 June 1802, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 295–97.

<sup>24</sup> On Paine, see Jerry Knudson, “The Rage over Tom Paine: Newspaper Reaction to His Homecoming in 1802,” *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 53 (1969): 34–63. Thomas Paine returned to the United States in the summer of 1802 after 10 years spent in France. In a letter sent on March 18, 1801, Jefferson had told Paine that arrangements had been made to “accommodate [him] with a passage back.” The letter was made public by the Federalist press and launched the assaults on the “two Toms” (*The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 33, 17 February—30 April 1801, ed. Barbara B. Oberg [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006], 358–59.)

<sup>25</sup> Gaulmier, *L’idéologue Volney*, 170; Antoine Guillois, *Le Salon de Madame Helvétius. Cabanis et les idéologues* (Paris, 1894), 45; Mary Kimball, *Jefferson: The Scene of Europe 1784–1789* (New York, Coward-McCann, 1950); Martin S. Staum, *Cabanis: Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). The manuscript of Jefferson’s translation of Condorcet’s *Réflexion* is located at the Library of Congress. It is available online: “Jefferson’s Notes From Condorcet on Slavery,” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. James P. McClure and J. Jefferson Looney, Charlottesville, 2008–2016. It is undated but arranged in volume 14 with other items from January 1789.

<sup>26</sup> *Mémoires de François-Yves Besnard: souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*, vol. 1 (Paris: H. Champion, 1880), 351–53.

<sup>27</sup> On the idéologues, see George Gusdorf, *La conscience révolutionnaire. Les idéologues*. Vol. 8 of *Les sciences humaines et la pensée occidentale* (Paris: Payot, 1978); Jean Roussel, ed., *L’Héritage des Lumières: Volney et les Idéologues* (Angers: Université d’Angers, 1988); Yves Citton et Lise Dumasy, *Le moment idéologique: Littérature et sciences de l’homme*, new ed. [online] (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2013). See also Gilbert Chinard, *Jefferson et les idéologues d’après sa correspondance inédite avec Destutt de Tracy, Cabanis J.-B. Say et Auguste Comte*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1925).

<sup>28</sup> Volney to Jefferson, with Postscript by Thomas Lee Shippen, 13 November 1795, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 28, 1 January 1794–29 February 1796, ed. John Catanzariti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 525–26, my translation.

---

<sup>29</sup> Jefferson to Volney, 10 April 1796, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 29, 1 March 1796–31 December 1797, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 61.

<sup>30</sup> Volney to Jefferson, 12 July 1796, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 29:150–52. Volney to Jefferson, 24 August 1796, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 29:174–77.

<sup>31</sup> Jefferson to Volney, 5 August 1797, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 29: 507.

<sup>32</sup> Jefferson to Volney, 5 July 1797, *ibid.*, 474.

<sup>33</sup> Volney to Jefferson, 5 July 1797, *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Jefferson to James Madison, 3 May 1798, in *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 17, 31 March 1797–3 March 1801 and supplement 22 January 1778–9 August 1795, ed. David B. Mattern, J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne K. Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 123–26.

<sup>35</sup> Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, 3 May 1798, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 30, 1 January 1798–31 January 1799, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 325–27.

<sup>36</sup> On Volney accused of being a spy and on the interruption of the correspondence, see Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 371–75. According to Furstenberg, Collet was the chief target of the *Alien Act*.

<sup>37</sup> Jefferson to John James Barralet, 12 March 1801, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 33:251.

<sup>38</sup> *Count de Volney to Thomas Jefferson, July 2, 1805*, in *French*, Manuscript/Mixed Material, retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib014879/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib014879/)>.

<sup>39</sup> Volney to Jefferson, 26 November 1803, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 42, 16 November 1803–10 March 1804, ed. James P. McClure (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 46–47.

<sup>40</sup> Jefferson to Constantin-François de Chassebœuf, Comte de Volney, February 11, 1806, in Thomas Jefferson. *Writings*, ed. Merrill Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1158–1160

<sup>41</sup> Volney to Jefferson, 7 May 1804, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 43, 11 March–30 June 1804, ed. James P. McClure (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 398.

<sup>42</sup> On Volney and the polygraph, “From Jefferson to Charles Wilson Peale, 7 November 1804,” *Founders Online*, accessed 23 July 2019.

<sup>43</sup> MHS Coolidge Collection, 6 sqq.

<sup>44</sup> *A New Translation of Volney’s Ruins*, 1:147, 148, 153–154, 158, 178; 2:61, 194, 211, 227–28. The chapter announced *Ruines’s* sequel, *Law of Nature*.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Denis Diderot, *Ruines et paysages (Salon de 1767)* (Paris, 1995), 335.

---

<sup>46</sup> [Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger], *The Origin and Progress of Despotism in the Oriental and Other Empires, of Africa, Europe and America* [Amsterdam, 1764], 59, my emphasis.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in *A New Translation of Volney's Ruins*, 2:85.

<sup>48</sup> Charles-François Dupuis, *Mémoire sur l'origine des constellations et sur l'explication de la fable par le moyen de l'astronomie* (Paris, 1781) and *Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle* (Paris, 1794). It is not until 1873 that an abstract of Dupuis's work appeared in English: *Christianity a Form of the Great Solar Myth*. From the French of D. London, [1873]. Joseph Priestley had contributed to the circulation of his ideas in the United States in *A Comparison of the Institutions of Moses with those of the Hindoos and other ancient nations: with remarks on Mr. Dupuis's Origin of all Religions ...* (Northumberland, PA, 1799). Volney may have also drawn upon the influential *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* by Jean-Frédéric Bernard Picart and the engraver Bernard Picard, published in Amsterdam, 1723–43. See Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in George A. Wells, "Stages of New Testament Criticism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30, no. 2 (Apr.—Jun. 1969), 152.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, Part 1, 1794, in Moncure Daniel Conway, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 4 (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 21–23.

<sup>51</sup> *A New Translation of Volney's Ruins*, 2:149. Volney was not the first to conceptualize religions as systems which could be compared. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Christian thinkers had begun to conceive of religion as an "intellectual system"; Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe*, 287. See also Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, eds., *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> On Mary Shelley, see Johanne Lamoureux, "Frankenstein et Les Ruines de Volney: L'Éducation littéraire de la Créature," *Protée* 35, no. 2 (2007), 65–73. On Percy Shelley, see K. N. Cameron, "A Major Source of *A Revolt of Islam*," *PMLA* 56, no. 1 (1941), 175–206.

<sup>53</sup> Elihu Palmer, *Principles of Nature, Or, A Development of the Moral Causes of Happiness and Misery Among the Human Species* (New York, 1801), italics by Palmer. On September 1, 1802, Palmer sent Jefferson a copy of the second edition. See Elihu Palmer to Jefferson, 1 September 1802, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 38, 1 July—12 November 1802, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 333.

<sup>54</sup> Several scholars have linked Volney and Cole. See for example Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Laurinda S. Dixon, eds., *Twenty-First-Century Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Art: Essays in Honor of Gabriel P. Weisberg* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> Whitman, Walt. "The Ruins, or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires [marginalia], 1890 or later," ed. Matt Cohen. *The Walt Whitman Archive*, gen. eds. Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, <http://www.whitmanarchive.org>, accessed 11 April 2019. Whitman annotated the 1890 New York edition. Quote in Betsy Erkkila, *Walt Whitman Among the French: Poet and Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 12–19.

---

<sup>56</sup> On the term “piracy” and issues of copyright, see Will Slauter, *Who Owns the News: A History of Copyright* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2019).

<sup>57</sup> 114. District Court Ledger, 262 PA 86, date of deposit November 7, twentieth year of the Independence, *Federal Copyright Records, 1790–1800*, edited and with an introduction by James Gilreath, compiled by Elizabeth Carter Wills (Washington: Library of Congress, 1987), 33.

<sup>58</sup> *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), December 14, 1795; *The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), December 28, 1795.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Volney to Messr Claypoole, dated June 4, 1798, in *Porcupine’s Gazette* (Philadelphia), June 7, 1798.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> In their transcription of the letter, the editors of *The Papers* write: “did you ever receive the residue of the translation to the end of the [20th] chapter inclusive?” *Thomas Jefferson to Count de Volnery [sic]. -03–17, 1801*. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/item/mjtbib009827/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mjtbib009827/). The letter is hardly legible. It is hence hard to tell whether the mistake is Jefferson’s or the editors’.

<sup>63</sup> The fact that Volney received Jefferson’s manuscript from Maclure indicates that Jefferson finished the translation before 1799, when Maclure departed from the United States. Volney to Jefferson, 24 June 1801, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 34, 1 May—31 July 1801, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 437–42, editors’ translation. In the letter Volney mentions a note attached to the translation transmitted by Maclure. According to the editors, the note has not been found.

<sup>64</sup> Jefferson to Volney, April 20, 1802, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 37:295–97.

<sup>65</sup> Volney to Jefferson, March 21, 1803, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 40, 4 March—10 July 1803, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 96–98.

<sup>66</sup> On the influence of Volney on Barlow’s poetry, see Steven Blakemore, *Joel Barlow’s Columbiad: A Bicentennial Reading* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 263. On Barlow and Volney, see Richard Buel Jr., *Joel Barlow: American Citizen in a Revolutionary World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 259–60. I am thankful to Christopher Phillips for drawing my attention to the resemblance between *Ruins* and Barlow’s *Vision of Columbus*.

<sup>67</sup> Dorothy Medlin, “Thomas Jefferson, André Morellet, and the French Version of Notes on the State of Virginia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (Jan. 1978): 85–99. The phrase “blotch of errors” is in *Thomas Jefferson, July 27, 1821, Autobiography Draft Fragment, January 6 through July 27*, Manuscript/Mixed Material, retrieved from the Library of Congress, 40.

---

<sup>68</sup> Jefferson to William Duane, 18 January 1811, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 3, 12 August 1810 to 17 June 1811, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 310–11.

<sup>69</sup> “Enclosure: Thomas Jefferson’s Preface for Destutt de Tracy’s Commentary on Montesquieu, [ca. 18 January 1811],” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, 3:311–12.

<sup>70</sup> *Volney’s Ruins; or, Meditation on the revolutions of empires*. Translated under the immediate inspection of the author from the sixth Paris edition. To which is added The Law of Nature, and a short biographical notice by Count Daru (New York, 1828).

<sup>71</sup> Jefferson to Volney, 6 February 1803, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 39, 13 November 1802–3 March 1803, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 466–67.

<sup>72</sup> Volney to Jefferson, 10 May 1803, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 40:348–53.

<sup>73</sup> Volney to Jefferson, 21 March 1803, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 40:97. See also Volney to James Madison, 21 March 1803 (Abstract), in *The Papers of James Madison*, Secretary of State Series, vol. 4, 8 October 1802–15 May 1803, eds. Mary A. Hackett, J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, Susan Holbrook Perdue, and Ellen J. Barber (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 441.

<sup>74</sup> Volney to Thornton, 21 March 1803, in *William Thornton Papers*. Madison received another copy from Barlow in 1809. See Joel Barlow to Madison, 9 June 1809, in *The Papers of James Madison*, Presidential Series, vol. 1, 1 March–30 September 1809, eds. Robert A. Rutland, Thomas A. Mason, Robert J. Brugger, Susannah H. Jones, Jeanne K. Sisson, and Fredrika J. Teute (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984), 233–35.

<sup>75</sup> Volney to Dr. Smith Barton, March 2, 1803, in Letter from L. H. Butterfield to Librarian Stephen T. Riley, September 10, 1947, Massachusetts Historical Society, Coolidge Collection.

<sup>76</sup> On Caritat, see George Gates Raddin, *The New York of Hocquet Caritat and his Associates, 1797–1817* (Dover, NJ: Dover Advance Press, 1953).

<sup>77</sup> On the Invocation, “To Jefferson from Volney, 24 June 1801” and “Literary Information,” *The Spectator* (New York), May 13, 1801.

<sup>78</sup> *Franklin Gazette* (Philadelphia), March 20, 1819, 2; *The Democratic Press* (Philadelphia), May 4, 1819, 2. The two articles are identical. *The City of Washington Gazette* (Washington), March 22, 1819. The *Franklin Gazette* (1818–24) was the succeeding title of the *Aurora*.

<sup>79</sup> Quote in *Volney’s Ruins; or, Meditation on the revolutions of empires*, title page and “Advertisement.”

<sup>80</sup> Walt Whitman, “The Ruins, or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires [marginalia].”

<sup>81</sup> *Porcupine’s Gazette*, June 22, 1798.

---

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Observations on the Increase of Infidelity: To Which Are Added, Animadversions on the Writings of Several Modern Unbelievers, and Especially the Ruins of Mr. Volney*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, 1797), 38. *Observations* had first been published in London in 1796. The American edition included an addition regarding Volney's *Ruines*. Priestley knew Volney was in the country and encouraged him to respond (p. xix).

<sup>83</sup> On Jefferson and Jesus, see Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), 13; Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter S. Onuf, "Most Blessed of the Patriarchs": *Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2016), 297.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in *A New Translation of Volney's Ruins*, 2:180; see also the endnote, 2:56.

<sup>85</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Discourses Relating to the Evidences of Revealed Religion* (Philadelphia, 1797), 2:471–74, and *Observations on the Increase of Infidelity*, xx.

<sup>86</sup> *Volney's answer to Doctor Priestley* (Philadelphia, 1797), 9.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Letters to Mr. Volney: occasioned by a work of his entitled Ruins, and by his letter to the author* (Philadelphia, 1797).

<sup>88</sup> Volney to Jefferson, 15 March 1797, and Volney to Jefferson, 15 March 1797, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 29:320–21, my translation. Jefferson to Volney, 9 April 1797, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 29:352–53.

<sup>89</sup> Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 21 April 1803, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 40:251–53.

<sup>90</sup> Jefferson to Peter Carr, with Enclosure, 10 August 1787, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 12, 7 August 1787–31 March 1788, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 14–19.

<sup>91</sup> *Thomas Jefferson to Count de Volney, February 8. -02-08, 1805*. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib014337/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib014337/). Transcribed in Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, 1157.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia," in *Jefferson. Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 285.

<sup>93</sup> Chris Beneke, "The Myth of American Religious Coercion or Failures of the Unofficial Religious Establishment, Briefly Told," *Common-Place* 14, no. 3 (Spring 2015), n.p., [www.common-place.org](http://www.common-place.org); Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith*, 342.

<sup>94</sup> C.-F. Volney, *New Researches on Ancient History* (New York, 1856).

<sup>95</sup> C.-F. Volney, *New Researches on Ancient History*, translated in Paris, under the superintendence of the author, by Colonel Corbet, 2 vols. (London, 1821).

<sup>96</sup> Benjamin Henry Latrobe to Jefferson, 12 August 1817, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 11, 19 January—31 August 1817, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014), 610–15. The fifth edition was that of *Ruins: or, A survey of the revolutions of empires* issued in London in 1811.

---

<sup>97</sup> Jefferson to Benjamin Henry Latrobe, [25] August 1817, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, 11:649–50.

<sup>98</sup> John Adams to Jefferson, 23 January 1825, *Founders Online*, accessed 23 July 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Thornton to Constantin-François Volney, 1 April 1796, in *Papers of William Thornton*, 389. Volney is also the author of *L'alphabet européen appliqué aux langues asiatiques* (Paris, 1819) and *L'Hébreu simplifié par la méthode alphabétique* (Paris, 1820). The Volney Prize (Prix Volney) was founded by Volney himself in his will in 1820.

<sup>100</sup> Margaret Jacob, “Les Lumières radicales,” in *Qu'est-ce que les lumières “radicales”? Libertinage, athéisme et spinozisme dans le tournant philosophique de l'âge classique*, eds. Catherine Secrétan, Tristan Dagron, Laurent Bove (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2007), 31. See also, Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981); Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). On French conceptions of revolution, see Richard C. Rohrs, “American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 14, no. 3 (1994): 359–77.

<sup>101</sup> Joseph Priestley, *An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ, Compiled from Original Writers; Proving that the Christian Church Was at First Unitarian* (Birmingham, 1786).

<sup>102</sup> Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 40:157–59. See also Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 21 April 1803, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 40:251–53.

<sup>103</sup> “Syllabus of an Estimate of the merit of the doctrines of Jesus, compared with those of others” was added to the letter to Rush, see note 87. “The philosophy of Jesus” and “The life and morals of Jesus,” in *Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels*, ed. Dickinson W. Adams (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>104</sup> Joseph Priestley, *Socrates and Jesus Compared* (London, 1803), 3, 48. Jefferson compiled “The life and morals of Jesus” between 1819 and 1820.

<sup>105</sup> Alexander Cook, “Representing Humanity during the French Revolution: Volney's ‘General Assembly of Peoples,’” in *Representing Humanity in the Age of Enlightenment*, eds. Alexander Cook, Ned Curthoys and Shino Konishi (London & New York: Routledge, 2015), 21. It is worth noting that *Les Ruines* appealed to an international audience. A Spanish edition appeared in New York in 1822, and then at least four German editions appeared in Philadelphia between 1845 and 1854. *Ruines* was also translated into Swedish, Portuguese, Dutch, and, in the early 1900s, Yiddish.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

[Boulanger, Nicolas-Antoine]. *The Origin and Progress of Despotism in the Oriental and Other Empires, of Africa, Europe and America*. [Amsterdam, 1764].



---

Cole, Thomas. *The Course of Empire*, oil on canvas, series, New York Historical Society, 1833–36.

Dupuis, Charles-François. *Mémoire sur l'origine des constellations et sur l'explication de la fable par le moyen de l'astronomie*. Paris, 1781.

———. *Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle*. Paris, 1794.

———. *Christianity a Form of the Great Solar Myth. From the French of D. London*, [1873].

*Early American Newspapers, Readex, Series 10 and 11*.

Jefferson, Thomas. Translation of Volney's *Ruins*, 1801, *Coolidge Collection of Thomas Jefferson Manuscripts*, Massachusetts Historical Society, reel 16 (Chapters 1–12).

———. *Literary Notes on the Progress of the Human Race (no date)*. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib025774/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib025774/) (Chapters 13–19).

———. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. 44 vols. Julian P. Boyd, Charles T. Cullen, John Catanzariti, Barbara Oberg, and James P. McClure, general editors. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997–2013.

———. The Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Series 1: General Correspondence. 1651–1827.

———. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*. Edited by James P. McClure and J. Jefferson Looney. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008–2016.

———. “The philosophy of Jesus” and “The life and morals of Jesus.” In *Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels*, edited by Dickinson W. Adams, with an introduction by Eugene R. Sheridan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

———. *Writings*. Edited by Merrill Peterson. New York: The Library of America, 1984.

*The Writings of Thomas Paine*. 4 vols. Edited by Moncure Daniel Conway. New York: AMS Press, 1967.

Palmer, Elihu. *Principles of Nature, Or, A Development of the Moral Causes of Happiness and Misery Among the Human Species*. New York, 1801.

Picart, Jean-Frédéric Bernard, and Bernard Picard. *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*. Amsterdam, 1723–43.

---

Priestley, Joseph. *An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ, Compiled from Original Writers; Proving that the Christian Church Was at First Unitarian*. Birmingham, 1786.

———. *Observations on the Increase of Infidelity: To Which Are Added, Animadversions on the Writings of Several Modern Unbelievers, and Especially the Ruins of Mr. Volney*. 3rd ed. Philadelphia, 1797.

———. *Discourses Relating to the Evidences of Revealed Religion*. 2 vols. Philadelphia, 1797.

———. *Letters to Mr. Volney: occasioned by a work of his entitled Ruins, and by his letter to the author*. Philadelphia, 1797.

———. *A Comparison of the Institutions of Moses with those of the Hindoos and other ancient nations: with remarks on Mr. Dupuis's Origin of all Religions ....* Northumberland, PA, 1799.

———. *Socrates and Jesus Compared*. London, 1803.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text, Contexts, Nineteenth-Century Responses, Criticism*. Edited by J. Paul Hunter. New York: London, W. W. Norton, 1996.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Queen Mab. A Philosophical Poem*. New York, 1821 [1813].

———. *A Revolt of Islam. A Poem in Twelve Cantos*. London, 1817.

Thornton, William. *Papers of William Thornton*. 1 vol. Edited by C. M. Harris. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995.

Volney, C.-F. *Voyage en Syrie et en Egypte pendant les années 1783, 1784 et 1785*. 2 vols. Paris, 1787.

———. *Travel through Syria and Egypt, in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785 ...* By M. C.-F. Volney. Tr. from the French... London, 1787.

———. *Les Ruines; ou, Méditation sur les révolutions des empires*. Paris, 1791.

———. *The Ruins: or a survey of the revolutions of empires*. London, 1792.

———. *La loi naturelle, ou Catéchisme du citoyen français*. Paris, 1793.

———. *Simplification des langues orientales, ou Méthode nouvelle et facile d'apprendre les langues arabe, persane et turque, avec des caractères européens*. Paris, 1794.

———. *Volney's answer to Doctor Priestley*. Philadelphia, 1797.

---

———. *The Ruins: or a survey of the revolutions of empires. A New Translation from the French.* Philadelphia, 1799.

———. *A New Translation of Volney's Ruins; or Meditations [sic] on the revolution [sic] of Empires: made under the inspection of the author.* 2 vols. Paris, 1802.

———. Volney to Dr. Smith Barton, March 2, 1803, in Letter from L. H. Butterfield to Librarian Stephen T. Riley, September 10, 1947, Massachusetts Historical Society, Coolidge Collection.

———. *Volney's Ruins; or, Meditation on the revolutions of empires. Translated under the immediate inspection of the author from the sixth Paris edition. To which is added The Law of Nature, and a short biographical notice by Count Daru.* New York, 1828.

———. *Tableau du climat et du sol des États-Unis d'Amérique: suivi d'éclaircissements [sic] sur la Floride, sur la colonie française au Scioto, sur quelques colonies canadiennes et sur les sauvages : enrichi de quatre planches gravées, dont deux cartes géographiques et une coupe figurée de la chute de Niagara.* 2 vols. Paris, 1803.

———. *View of the Climate and the Soil of the United States to which are annexed some accounts of Florida, the French colony on the Scioto, certain Canadian colonies, and the savages or natives.* London, 1804.

———. *A view of the soil and climate of the United States of America: with supplementary remarks upon Florida; on the French colonies on the Mississippi and Ohio, and in Canada; and on the aboriginal tribes of America.* Translated with occasional remarks by C. B. Brown. Philadelphia, 1804.

———. *Lectures on history: delivered in the Normal School of Paris,* by C. F. Volney, author of *The ruins of empires*, member of the National Institute of France, &c. &c.; Translated from the French. Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington City, 1801.

———. *L'alphabet européen appliqué aux langues asiatiques.* Paris, 1819.

———. *L'Hébreu simplifié par la méthode alphabétique.* Paris, 1820.

———. *New Researches on Ancient History.* Translated in Paris, under the superintendence of the author, by Colonel Corbet. 2 vols. London, 1821.

———. *New Researches on Ancient History.* New York, 1856.

Whitman, Walt. "The Ruins, or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires [marginalia], 1890 or later." Edited by Matt Cohen. In *The Walt Whitman Archive*, gen. eds. Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, accessed 11 April 2019, <http://www.whitmanarchive.org>.

---

## Secondary Sources

---

Belissa, Marc, and Yannick Bosc. *Le Directoire*. Paris: La Fabrique, 2018.

Beneke, Chris. "The Myth of American Religious Coercion or Failures of the Unofficial Religious Establishment, Briefly Told." *Common-Place* 14, no. 3 (Spring 2015), n.p., [www.common-place.org](http://www.common-place.org).

Blakemore, Steven. *Joel Barlow's Columbiad: A Bicentennial Reading*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007.

Buel, Richard Jr. *Joel Barlow: American Citizen in a Revolutionary World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.

Cameron, K. N. "A Major Source of *A Revolt of Islam*." *PMLA* 56, no. 1 (1941): 175–206.

Caron, Nathalie, and Naomi Wulf. "American Enlightenments: Continuity and Renewal." *The Journal of American History* 99, no. 4 (2013): 1072–1109.

Chinard, Gilbert. *Volney en Amérique d'après des documents inédits et sa correspondance avec Jefferson*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1923.

———. *Jefferson et les idéologues d'après sa correspondance inédite avec Destutt de Tracy, Cabanis J.-B. Say et Auguste Comte*. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1925.

Citton, Yves, and Lise Dumasy. *Le moment idéologique. Littérature et sciences de l'homme*. Rev. ed. [online]. Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2013.

Cook, Alexander. "Entre l'ancien et le nouveau monde. C.-F. Volney et la politique des récits de voyages en France, 1782-1803." *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 385, no. 3 (2016): 87–108.

———. "Representing Humanity during the French Revolution: Volney's 'General Assembly of Peoples.'" In *Representing Humanity in the Age of Enlightenment*, edited by Cook Alexander, Ned Curthoys and Shino Konishi, 15–26. London & New York: Routledge, 2015.

ten-Doesschate Chu, Petra, and Laurinda S. Dixon, eds. *Twenty-First-Century Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Art: Essays in Honor of Gabriel P. Weisberg*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008.

Errkila, Betsy. *Walt Whitman Among the French: Poet and Myth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Fischer, Kirsten. *American Infidel: Elibu Palmer's Visionary Religion in the Early United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming.

---

Furstenberg, François. *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation*. New York: Penguin, 2014.

Gaulmier, Jean. *L'idéologue Volney (1757-1820). Contribution à l'histoire de l'Orientalisme*. Beyrouth: Impr. catholique, 1951; Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1980.

———. *Un grand témoin de la révolution et de l'empire, Volney*. Paris: Hachette, 1959.

Gordon-Reed, Annette, and Peter S. Onuf. *“Most Blessed of the Patriarchs”: Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2016.

Grasso, Christopher. *Skepticism and American Faith: From the Revolution to the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Guillois, Antoine. *Le Salon de Madame Helvétius. Cabanis et les idéologues*. Paris, 1894.

Gusdorf, George. *Les sciences humaines et la pensée occidentale*. Vol. 8, *La conscience révolutionnaire. Les idéologues*. Paris: Payot, 1978.

Hafid-Martin, Nicole. *Volney*. Rome: Memini, 1999.

Hunt, Lynn, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt. *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.

———, eds. *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010.

Israel, Jonathan. *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Jacob, Margaret C. *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981.

———. “Les Lumières radicales,” in *Qu'est-ce que les lumières “radicales”? Libertinage, athéisme et spinozisme dans le tournant philosophique de l'âge classique*, edited by Catherine Secrétan, Tristan Dagron, and Laurent Bove, 29–35. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2007.

Kimball, Mary. *Jefferson: The Scene of Europe 1784–1789*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1950.

Knudson, Jerry. “The Rage over Tom Paine: Newspaper Reaction to His Homecoming in 1802.” *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 53 (1969): 34–63

---

Lamoureux, Johanne. “Frankenstein et Les Ruines de Volney : L’Éducation littéraire de la Créature.” *Protée*, 35, no. 2 (2007): 65–73.

Lilti, Antoine. “‘Et la civilisation deviendra générale’: L’Europe de Volney ou l’orientalisme à l’épreuve de la Révolution.” *La Révolution française, Dire et faire l’Europe à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, online 10 June 2011, accessed 3 March 2019.

Linebaugh, Peter, and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.

Medlin, Dorothy. “Thomas Jefferson, André Morellet, and the French Version of Notes on the State of Virginia.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (Jan. 1978): 85–99.

*Mémoires de François-Yves Besnard: souvenirs d’un nonagénaire*. 2 vols. Paris: H. Champion, 1880.

Minchul, Kim. “Volney and the French Revolution.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 79, no. 2 (April 2018): 221–242.

Moses, Wilson J. *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

———. *Thomas Jefferson: A Modern Prometheus*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Obenga, Théophile, ed. *Cheikh Anta Diop, Volney et le sphinx: contribution de Cheikh Anta Diop à l’historiographie mondiale*. Paris: Présence africaine; Gif-sur-Yvette: Khepera, 1996.

Onuf, Peter, ed. *Jeffersonian Legacies*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993.

———. *The Mind of Thomas Jefferson*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.

Prothero, Stephen. *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003.

Raddin, George Gates. *The New York of Hocquet Caritat and his Associates, 1797–1817*. Dover, NJ: Dover Advance Press, 1953.

Roussel, Jean, ed. *L’Héritage des Lumières: Volney et les Idéologues*. Angers: Université d’Angers, 1988.

Schlereth, Eric R. *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

---

---

Slauter, Will. *Who Owns the News: A History of Copyright*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2019.

Staum, Martin S. *Cabanis: Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Thompson, E. P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Penguin, 1968.

Wells, George A. "Stages of New Testament Criticism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30, no. 2 (Apr.—Jun. 1969): 147–60.