

Bentham, Voltaire, and Biblical Exegesis

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In 1774, Bentham translated Voltaire's philosophical tale *The White Bull*, adding an anonymous preface of his own. This paper will present this little-known text and interpret it as a significant moment in the philosopher's intellectual and philosophical formation. Bentham's translation was one of his first steps, in print, into the Republic of Letters. In the form of a tale, *The White Bull* summed up Voltaire's arguments on Biblical exegesis and contained a direct satire of revealed religion. A close analysis of Bentham's translation, of variants and additions to the original text reveals his appropriation of Voltaire's arguments and style. It casts light on Bentham's later religious writings. A comparison with other early texts on religion hand throws light on its connection with legal reform, which was at the forefront of the philosopher's programme. More broadly, a reevaluation of Bentham's early religious and legal writings brings new element to consider his place in the late Enlightenment.