Building a Digital Portal for Exploring Bernard and Picart's Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the World

White Paper

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Project Summary
The project team set out to build an open-source online portal to facilitate the study of the transformative Enlightenment blockbuster, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of All the Peoples of the World*. Despite the massive influence of its numerous and variable lavishly illustrated editions, its unstable print history has deterred scholarly study of the work, not least because its many variants are strewn all over the globe. The portal we built allowed digitized copies of diverse editions from disparate repositories to be accessed in a single virtual space, permitting searching and comparative inter-textual study of word and image across multiple versions and in conjunction with other books from the era. It will now serve as a model for other comparative projects based on curated aggregations of texts, images, and collections in a way that avoids copyright problems and prohibitive costs.

Project Origins and Goals
In 1723, two expatriate Frenchmen in Amsterdam released seven folio volumes of text and 250 lavish engravings that fascinated and outraged Europeans. Dubbed “The book that changed Europe” by historians Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, it upended 18th-century notions of Christian orthodoxy by arranging world religions on an equal plane that suggested a new vision of religious tolerance. Publisher Jean-Frédéric Bernard and engraver Bernard Picart’s *Céremoines et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (*Religious Ceremonies and Customs of All the Peoples of the World*, hereafter *CCR*) marked a pivotal moment in Enlightenment thought and early modern book history. Despite being condemned by the Catholic Church, its analysis of Jews, Catholics, Muslims, Protestants, and the religions of the East and the Americas, along with deists, freemasons, and others, reflected an emerging secular idea of world religion.

A widely influential book, the *CCR* remains remarkably understudied beyond the aforementioned monograph by Hunt, et al. This neglect is due in part to its print history. The book was first published as unbound sheets that subscribers rearranged when purchasing their own volumes. Numerous reprints and translations by booksellers further expanded variations, and many intentionally changed the contents of the book in ways that altered its meaning and influence. No “standard” or “original” version of the *CCR* exists; rather thousands of different combinations of text and images housed in libraries worldwide confound understanding of the *CCR*’s historical influence and reception. Our Digital Humanities Advancement Grant (Level II) aimed to bring order to that confusion by developing an online portal that enables comparison of the thousands of combinations of text and engravings.
We proposed to build the portal to utilize the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF), a set of shared application programming interface specifications that allow digital image repositories to be accessed across technological systems. We also proposed to “stand up” our portal using Project Mirador, an IIIF viewing platform that enables collection, comparison, and annotation of digitized versions housed at different locations to be accessible remotely through a single open-source portal. Our intention with this proposal using these technologies was to allow scholars to compare each edition’s unique features and collaboratively engage with meaning making in early modern representations of world religions. We also hoped the resultant project would act as a model that the University of Minnesota (UMN) Libraries and other institutions can build upon to create portals for other collections of texts and images. Since IIIF/Project Mirador is open-source, community-based software, it was our hope that this prototype would showcase how the platform can enable sustainable curation and sharing of source material worldwide. Because many other influential early modern books were produced and disseminated in the same iterative, piecemeal way as the CCR, the IIF/Mirador protocol, we envision it serving as a model for other book history projects and facilitating research into the production of texts and images more broadly.

At the outset of the project we proposed three goals: (1) build a prototype of a Project Mirador digital portal for accessible, collaborative research on the CCR; (2) gather an international team of scholars to test, expand, and improve the portal’s usability to advance new research on the CCR and Enlightenment cultural history; and (3) create an inventory of print editions available in libraries worldwide to facilitate IIIF-compliant digitization and integrate them into our portal. We accomplished each.

**Project Activities, Team, and Participants**
To begin our work, our programmer, Chad Fennel, “stood up” a local instance of the Project Mirador platform. The GitHub repository for this project is accessible at: https://github.com/UMNLibraries/ccr. And the portal itself is accessible at: https://ccr.lib.umn.edu.

This initial version of the CCR Portal was populated with existing, publicly accessible copies of the CCR that conformed to IIIF standards. Our research assistant, Luke Freeman, identified these digital surrogates and Director of Digital Library Services, Jason Roy, compiled and uploaded a manifest that allowed our instance of Project Mirador to “pull in” these already-digitized examples. The initial set of CCR examples was drawn from the Getty Research Institute, the National Library of Naples, the Princeton Theological Seminary, and the University of Alberta Libraries. We attempted to include a copy that was IIIF-compliant from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, but encountered an unexpected error likely caused by the French-language metadata.
With a functional prototype of our portal in hand, we began inviting scholars to the University of Minnesota to test it as well as to present on their research related to the *CCR* and the historical context in which it was produced. These visits had the two-pronged effect of generating expert feedback on the functionality and content of our platform and building a multidisciplinary intellectual community of researchers interested in the text. Benjamin Schmidt, Professor of History at the University of Washington visited in November of 2019 and presented ““From Hot Reverence to Cold Sweat: Christian Art, Christian Objects, and Christian Souls in Early Modern Japan.” McCabe Keliher, Assistant Professor of History at Southern Methodist University, visited in January of 2020 and presented “Ritual in Early Modern Empires and the Making of Qing China.” Paola von Wyss-Giacosa, Lecturer and Guest Curator of Ethnology at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich, visited in March of 2020 and presented “Drawing Distinctions: Visual Dialectics in Bernard Picart’s Illustrations for the Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses.” Lynn Hunt (Distinguished Research Professor of History at the University of California-Los Angeles), Elizabeth Yale (Lecturer in History at the University of Iowa), Ellen McClure (Professor of Francophone Studies at the University of Illinois-Chicago), and Margaret Mansfield (Ph.D. Candidate in the History of Art & Architecture at the University of California-Santa Barbara) also tested the platform during visits to UMN that were funded by other means. Days after Dr. Wyss-Giacosa’s visit, the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown our university and much of the regular activities of the world. We had planned to have the software design team behind Project Mirador—Gary Geisler, Jennifer Vine, and Jack Reed—visit us in Minnesota for two days of platform usability testing in our university’s Usability Lab on March 26th and 27th of 2020, but that obviously did not take place.

The spring and summer of 2020 saw us take stock of the project and seek ways to adapt it to our new reality of virtual meetings and limited travel. Just before the pandemic shut down in-person activities of our university and all others, we digitized our library’s French and Dutch versions of the *CCR* and also facilitated the digitization of copies at the University of St. Thomas and the Newberry Library. In the spring of 2020, each of these new digitizations were posted in a IIIF-compliant format and pulled into our portal. During this time, too, our research assistant, Luke Freeman, working with a metadata librarian, Kalan Knudson-Davis, built up a list of other copies of the *CCR* in collections around the world for potential inclusion in our portal. Eventually, realizing the COVID-19 pandemic was not relenting, we re-budgeted our grant and shifted funding to activities that could work with mostly virtual interaction. The principal shift in our activities included: 1) conducting usability testing with the Stanford University Libraries-based Project Mirador team virtually, 2) hosting our scholar visits virtually with sponsorship from and distribution through the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, and 3) developing an experimental online journal to disseminate work related to the historical context of Enlightenment-era texts that could utilize the interactivity of our journal.

In the fall of 2020, we progressed with these revised plans by hosting the usability testing virtually. On October 26 and 27, 2020, two programmers from Stanford University Libraries...
(which built and maintains the Mirador platform), Gary Geisler and Jack Reed, joined the authors and Jason Roy (Director of Digital Library Services) in observing and evaluating the features of the platform and project with under the guidance of the Usability Testing Lab. The testing saw three history faculty and three digital humanities specialists work through four scenarios designed to test the usability of the platform and our project within it. After each user completed the tasks of the scenarios, the facilitator asked them a series of debriefing questions. The testing was witnessed live on Zoom over the course of two days and was also recorded. The Stanford and Minnesota team then debriefed with the Usability Lab facilitator, David Rosen, following the completion of the test to pull out actionable changes for the project and the platform. This usability test informed the final developments of Mirador 3.

In the early spring of 2021, we proposed our idea for a fully online journal to the University of Minnesota Libraries Press. Originally titled Notes & Records of the CCR and since retitled Enlightenment Unbound, we envisioned it as a digital venue to include pieces ranging from short, precise reports that simply add new knowledge to our existing understanding of the CCR and its history to fully elaborated interpretive articles and analyses that are not suited for some reason to existing journals with their cost limitations and discipline specific editorial paradigms.

The proposal was accepted by the Press and we began the foundational work to mount it in the fall of 2020. Following the acceptance of the proposal, author one assembled an international and multidisciplinary editorial board of twelve members: 1) Dr. Caroline Fowler, The Starr Director of the Research and Academic Program at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, MA; 2) Dr. Cécile Fromont, Associate Professor in the History of Art at Yale University, New Haven, CT; 3) Dr. Ellen McClure, Associate Professor of French and History at the University of Illinois-Chicago, Chicago, IL and the Director of the Mellon Engaged Humanities Initiative at UIC; 4) Dr. Mary Helen McMurry, Associate Professor in the Department of English and Writing Studies at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada; 5) Dr. J. Michelle Molina, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL; 6) Dr. Ulrich Pfisterer, Chair of General Art History at the Ludwig Maximilian University and the Director of the Central Institute for Art History in Munich, Germany; 7) Dr. David H. Price, Professor of Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN; 8) Dr. Benjamin Schmidt, The Costigan Professor of History at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA; 9) Dr. Katie Scott, Professor in the History of Art at the Courtauld Institute in London, England; 10) Dr. Mark Valeri, the Reverend Priscilla Wood Neaves Distinguished Professor of Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis, MO; 11) Dr. Anne Vila, Professor in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI; 12) Dr. Paola von Wyss-Giacosa, curator and lecturer at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich, Switzerland. Then, guided by Publishing Librarian Emma Molls, we selected the platforms most appropriate to our aims: a “frontend” of the open-source Manifold multimedia publishing system to present the content and a “backend” of the open-source Open Journal Systems software to host the content and facilitate peer review. When it became apparent that we would not use all of the
travel budget for the grant, we directed more of our funds to the development of this journal. In particular, we hired a graphic designer to build out the graphical elements of the journal including logos, covers, and a style guide. This work was done in the concluding months of the grant and is set to be incorporated into the impending release of the first issue and thereafter.

Beginning in the late spring of 2021, we coordinated with the American Society of Eighteenth Century Studies (ASECS) to broadcast the formerly in-person scholar visits over Zoom and YouTube with coordination from project administrator Molly Bostrom. These were also imagined as replacements for a series of parallel panels scheduled for the 2019 Annual Meeting of ASECS planned for St. Louis that were designed to publicize our project and CCR scholarship more generally, but were canceled, along with the meeting as whole, because of the pandemic. When the 2020 ASECS meeting was likely postponed, we moved to a different model, selecting three speakers to present their ongoing CCR scholarship as hybrid virtual and in-person seminars that were held at UMN and recorded for permanent broadcast on the ASECS YouTube Channel. On October 1, we welcomed Mark Valeri (Washington University in St. Louis) who spoke on "Power, Ceremony, and Roman Catholicism in Bernard and Picart’s Ceremonies and Religious Customs;" on November 5, we welcomed David H. Price (Vanderbilt University) who spoke on "Authenticity and Perspective: Looking at Jews and Judaism through the Eyes of Bernard Picart;" and on December 10 we welcomed Anne Vila (University of Wisconsin - Madison) who spoke on “The ‘French Convulsionaries’ and their Fellow Fanatics in Bernard and Picart’s Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde." Each session was well attended with over 20 participants and included audience members zooming in from California to Switzerland.

Since COVID-19 restricted so many of our travel plans, we transferred funds that were planned to facilitate travel to the digitization of particularly unique copies of the CCR. Physical copies held at the Ostrow Library of the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, CA and at the Klau Library, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, OH were digitized and placed into the portal, joining other grant-funded digitizations from the University of St. Thomas and UMN.

**Project Outcomes**

The project produced the portal itself, the above listed digitizations, and a landing page for the project activities that will be maintained by UMN Libraries. Additionally, the project facilitated the aforementioned mix of in-person and remote scholarly presentations and the soon-to-be-released Enlightenment Unbound journal. Perhaps most importantly, it informed the design of Mirador 3 through the rigorous usability testing that was conducted across the project. And also helped to inform the design of Mise through extended conversations with the Stanford Libraries team that developed it in the final six months of the grant. Mise is the next generation of IIIF viewer that enhances not only the annotation capabilities of the platform, but also
introduces hosted portals (hosted and managed by Stanford Libraries) in the vein of software-as-a-service platforms.

While less tangible than the products above, the lasting legacy of this grant is likely to be the intellectual communities that developed around the project, especially among scholars focused on the intersection of the CCR and Enlightenment thought. This community can be glimpsed in the editorial board of the journal and the continued collaboration of technologists and these scholars can also be seen in how the journal plans to incorporate the portal into the text of its articles to create an interactive experience for readers.

**Project Evaluation and Impact**
The CCR portal was built early on in the project and evaluated regularly throughout the project. On the day each in-person or virtual visitor spoke, PI Wiggins and RA Freeman interviewed them for one hour. The first half hour of each of these interviews centered on their general research process and the second half hour of these interviews saw each visitor interact with the portal and talk out loud about their expectations for their actions and voice their frustrations and praise. The questions used to structure these interviews were:

1) Walk us through your process for accessing archival materials online.
2) After you consult a document online do you ever consult it in person? If so, why do you feel the need to access the physical object?
3) What frustrates you about accessing archival materials online?
4) When looking at your digital copies of archival materials where do you take your notes?
5) In order to perform your analysis do you view either physical objects or digital copies side-by-side?
6) How might a digital portal like this one fit into your research?
7) If you could collect digital files from archives around the world and place them into a portal like this, what would you collect? And would this be more for your own research or does it function better as a way to share your primary sources with your readers?
8) Is there a project you’ve done where you would have liked to present a collection of your primary sources? Why didn’t you? Were there barriers? Can you envision this software serving that function?
9) If users had the ability to make annotations on these images, would you like that option to be accessible to anyone or would you like to limit that ability to a community of scholars who you manage?

Visitors approached these open-ended questions from the perspective of their own research. We found that all of the scholars used digital proxies first (when they were available) and then sought out physical copies of the texts. Most importantly, all of the visitors lauded the portal’s ability to compare images and texts side by side. Each of them stated that comparison of texts was important to their research and they saw digital surrogates as useful for that task. This
included comparison of texts (like the *CCR*) that might otherwise be assumed to be identical printed copies.

These usability studies informed our virtual Usability Lab test of the platform in October of 2020, which was the primary means of evaluating the Mirador platform and our implementation of it. In order to test the effectiveness of the design of our portal and Mirador generally, the project team and two programmers from Stanford University Libraries created four scenarios and seven debriefing questions for six test users to work through. The scenario questions asked test users to try and accomplish a task with minimal guidance and to talk out loud to a usability specialist while attempting to complete the prompt. The scenarios were as follows:

1. **Scenario 1:**
   a. Please read this out loud: You are interested in seeing what is unique to different versions of the *CCR* title page.
   b. Your Tasks:
      i. Read each task out loud. Then, say out loud what steps you are taking in order to complete the task. Tell us what you are thinking as you go.
      ii. In each of the windows currently displayed in the Mirador workspace, find the title page of that version of the *CCR*. This should be the complete title page that includes the author’s name (Bernard Picart).
      iii. Make any necessary adjustments to the Mirador workspace or windows so that you can easily compare the details of the two title pages and see their unique features.
   c. Starting Point
      i. https://ccr.lib.umn.edu/
   d. Follow-up questions
      i. How would you envision using this tool for comparison purposes in your own work?
      ii. How effective do you think the Mirador viewer is for making this sort of comparison?

2. **Scenario 2**
   a. Please read this out loud: With two versions of the *CCR* title page set up for comparison, you want to compare the title page from another version to the first two.
   b. Your Tasks:
      i. Read each task out loud. Then, say out loud what steps you are taking in order to complete the task. Tell us what you are thinking as you go.
      ii. Find the University of Minnesota French version of the *CCR* with “Volume 5” in its title and add it to your current Mirador workspace.
      iii. Make any adjustments necessary to the Mirador workspace or windows so that you can easily compare the title page of all three versions.
3. Scenario 3
   a. Please read this out loud: After comparing versions of the *CCR* title page you want to keep a copy of one of the title pages for inclusion in a future presentation.
   b. Your Tasks:
      i. Read each task out loud. Then, say out loud what steps you are taking in order to complete the task. Tell us what you are thinking as you go.
      ii. Download the title page from one of the open versions of the *CCR*.
   c. Follow-up question
      i. What are your expectations for downloading content you see in a Mirador viewer window?

4. Scenario 4
   a. Please read this out loud: Since you’ll be including the title page in a presentation, you want to prepare a citation for that version of the *CCR*.
   b. Your Tasks
      i. Read each task out loud. Then, say out loud what steps you are taking in order to complete the task. Tell us what you are thinking as you go.
      ii. For the version of the *CCR* of which you downloaded the title page, find the descriptive information (publisher, date, etc.) you will need to create a citation. (You don’t need to actually create the citation for the task.)
   c. Follow-up question
      i. Is there other information about the open resources you would expect to find in Mirador?

The testing saw three history faculty and three digital humanities specialists complete these scenarios and then discuss the following debriefing questions with a usability specialist:

1. If you were telling a colleague about your experience of trying out Mirador today, what would you say?
2. Who do you suppose this Mirador was built for?
3. What did you find to be the easiest and most intuitive about it?
4. What was most difficult or confusing about it?
5. How does the design and the information compare to what you would expect?
6. What other information or features would you expect to see that you didn’t see here today?
7. Are there any other comments you'd like to give the usability team?

The six tests, each of which took around an hour, resulted in 61 observed issues which were numerically ranked by observed impact across the tests. From these data, the project team and
the Stanford team collaboratively developed and implemented 24 action items to improve usability. All of this information informed our final version of the portal, the design of Mirador 3, and, to an extent, the design of the Mise platform prototype.

The impact of the project is still ongoing, but in the course of the project, we conducted the following engagements with scholars and students:

- **2021, April 1**, “Enlightenment Unbound: Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses,” for Prof. Ioana Vartolomei Pribiag, “Gateways to French Studies,” University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
- **2021, April 26**, “Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses, the Enlightenment, and Print,” for Prof. Austin Mason and Prof. George Shuffleton’s course, “Textual Technologies from Parchment to Pixel,” Carleton College, Northfield, MN.
- **2022, January 10**. Pre-recorded presentation of “Picart’s Illustrations and Studying the Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses” for asynchronous use by Prof. J. Michelle Molina in her class, “Introduction to Religion,” Northwestern University, Chicago, IL.
- **2022, March 31**, Panel chaired by J.B. Shank at 2022 Annual Meeting if ASECS in Baltimore, MD entitled “Thinking Enlightenment Medialogogically.”

**Continuation of the Project**

In tandem with the specific work already described, especially the initiation of a digital publication organ with the UMN, we also began to envision a collaborative international research project centered at UMN and linked directly to our portal that would pursue systematic CCR scholarship. In the spring of 2021 an international and cross-disciplinary 12-member Editorial Board for Notes and Records of the CCR was assembled under the direction of Executive Editor J.B. Shank, and discussions were initiated with Editorial Board member Paola von Wyss-Giacosa (Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich, Switzerland) about digitally publishing a newly expanded open access English translation of her 2006 book published by Benteli, Religionsbilder der frühen Aufklärung: Bernard Picarts Tafeln für die Cérémonies et Coutumes religieuses de tous les Peuples du Monde. This would allow for the portal to be integrated into the publication to provide a comparison between images, and as our first digital publication it would also launch our new publication platform. These discussions are continuing, and we also made the decision to expand the reach of our digital journal beyond the CCR, a change which led to a new name for the journal: Enlightenment Unbound. Graphical work on logos and design has been completed establishing this new journal, and in the coming years we imagine activating the platform through the publication of works by scholars in our emerging and expanding networks. While this effort will largely involve the continued use of the portal we have already built, we
will also work to enhance it in ways that will make it better serve our scholarly research and publication agendas.

The biggest challenge we face is finding adequate funding to support the ongoing work, especially funds to hire necessary administrative labor. Our work so far has mobilized an international group of scholars interested in pursuing CCR-related scholarship, so we believe that we can sustain the project in the short-term. By expanding beyond the CCR in particular to the more general questions this one publication raises about the nature and history of the Enlightenment book overall, and its media and print instability, we hope to draw a broader community of scholars and students to our group and to expand our reach accordingly. We also look forward to adapting our portal in ways that will make it less CCR-specific and more of a general digital tool for accomplishing research on Enlightenment media history using digitally accessible resources of all sorts.

Starting with the argument that the CCR served as an exemplary case illustrating a broader Enlightenment phenomenon, we are now moving toward a focus on that broader phenomenon while nevertheless retaining the CCR as a crucial case and site for focused research. Under the new banner of Enlightenment Unbound, we hope to build on past successes while also enlisting other scholars, and other digital humanities projects in new investigations. Previous discussions with the American Research Treasury of the French Language (ARTFL) at the University of Chicago regarding the inclusion of French editions of the CCR into the searchable Fran-Text database will be continued, and we have recently started to work with Daniel Watkins (Baylor University) in support of his project to use crowd-sourcing methods to get a searchable database created of the eighteenth-century Jesuit periodical Lettres curieuses et edifiantes, an important intertextual source for the CCR and other Enlightenment travel narratives. We are also hoping to connect soon with the MEDIATE project (Middlebrow Enlightenment: Disseminating Ideas, Authors, and Texts in Europe, 1665 - 1830) at Radboud University in Nijmegen, NL about our common interests in Enlightenment media history, and a project recently funded by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) through the UMN Center for German and European Studies will make possible a series of international workshops in 2023 devoted to the theme “The Scientific Authority of Large Illustrated Books in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1800: A New Assessment.” These meetings will be held in Minneapolis, the Newberry Library in Chicago, and the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, a library which we had hoped to connect with during our grant period but were prevented from doing so by the pandemic. We plan to introduce the scholars assembled for these workshops to our portal as part of these meetings, and to perhaps publish its results as a special issue of Enlightenment Unbound.

Like all of these plans, the details of these workshops are yet to be finalized, but they indicate our future trajectories and our confidence that this project will continue even after the completion of our grant period.
Appendixes

A: The Existing CCR Portal

Screenshots of the existing CCR Portal built on Mirador 3.0.0

Three editions, arranged in the portal to compare text with images (above left). The portal ready to examine four different editions at once (above right). The portal showing the same subject (Greek Christians) in two different versions of the CCR (below left). The portal showing an image from a scrapbook made up of images cut from the CCR paired with an image from an intact CCR; this set of images is often missing or removed from bound copies (below right).
B: Wireframe of front page of *Enlightenment Unbound* (Formerly *Notes and Records of the Cérémonies et Coutumes Religieuses*)

C: Wireframe of back-end interface of Open Journal System used for *Enlightenment Unbound*