The Old Roman Fashion

Architecture and Its Histories

Kelsey Jackson Williams

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Abstract and Keywords

Architecture preoccupied Aubrey at several points during the 1670s. First, as he realized he would lose his ancestral Wiltshire home, he drew a series of architectural fantasies recasting that home as a neo-classical villa and blending the West Country landscape with that of ancient and modern Italy. At the same time he began a system of dating medieval architecture through window styles—a now widely recognized practice, but one unknown in Aubrey’s time. Despite this, however, he remained a committed classicist in his thought, like his friend John Evelyn, denigrating the medieval in favour of the classical. His fascination with the architectural styles of antiquity reached its climax towards the end of the decade when he compiled a treatise, ‘Of Mausolea’, informed by conversations with Robert Hooke and Christopher Wren, a treatise which understood all subsequent architectural practice to have originated amongst the builders of Babel and their descendants.

Keywords: architecture, Babel, Christopher Wren, John Evelyn, neo-classical, Robert Hooke
The study of architecture fell within the purview of the antiquary from a very early date. Flavio Biondo’s *Roma Instaurata* (1444–8) had inaugurated a tradition of antiquarian investigations into classical architecture which was developed in the works of sixteenth-century polymaths such as Pirro Ligorio and Andrea Palladio until, by the early seventeenth century, when Cassiano dal Pozzo began to assemble his vast ‘paper museum’—of which drawings of Roman buildings formed a major part—architecture had become as central to antiquarian scholarship as numismatics or epigraphy.¹

This thread of antiquarianism was both scholarly and practical. It was scholarly in so far as it rested on a widely held belief that architecture was a valuable source for the recovery of ancient culture: the ongoing excavations in Rome, including, most spectacularly, the rediscovery of the catacombs, were ample proof of that.² This was balanced, however, by an awareness of the practical applications of such research. Many of the leading scholars of Roman and Greek architecture were architects themselves and their researches fed directly into new building projects. Andrea Palladio is perhaps the most famous example, but scholarship and practice were rarely far apart and their intersection led to innovation in both, whether this took the form of a new style of neo-classical architecture or a new precision in the study of ancient monuments. Aubrey’s contemporary, the French architect Antoine Desgodetz, is a particularly good example of this cross-fertilization.³ Desgodetz’s *Les edifices antiques de Rome* (1682) was prepared under French government sponsorship as an aide to contemporary architects, but provoked both scholarly and practical responses: the theoretical revisionism of Claude Perrault, the architectural emulation of Robert Adam, and the game-changing archaeological investigations of Robert Wood.⁴
This also meant that antiquarian scholarship on architecture, just like architectural scholarship on antiquities, was anything but unpolemical. Classicizing architects and antiquaries developed narratives of architectural development which privileged a recovery of ancient at the expense of medieval practices, and that developed a rhetoric of politeness and civilization, seen in neo-classical buildings, which contrasted with the rudeness and barbarism of the Gothic. In this milieu a neo-classical country house could be both an exercise in antiquarianism and a statement of humanist good taste.

Aubrey’s own forays into architecture exemplify this. Although he never built or oversaw any building himself, he was at the centre of a network of men who did: Christopher Wren, Robert Hooke, John Evelyn, and other Restoration virtuosi. Beginning with designs for a neo-classical ‘villa’ and gardens at his family home of Easton Pierse, Wiltshire, in 1669, Aubrey continued to engage with the architectural tradition and its implications throughout the following decade. This resulted in his *Chronologia Architectonica*, a methodology for dating post-Conquest English architecture, as well as an essay, ‘Of Mausolea’, this time using funeral monuments as a generic example which could help anchor the otherwise mystifying forts and barrows of the English landscape in a narrative of post-Babelic cultural diffusion.

In all three works Aubrey responded to the visual allure of the architectural past, but this response became progressively more nuanced over time. From a beginning in which his imagined architectures, themselves a *bricolage* of ancient and modern traditions, were both consolation and aesthetic delight, a deeply emotional response to the loss of his childhood home, he progressed to a theory of architecture as a tool with which to establish chronology, a set of physical objects which could provide a literal foundation for the abstract division of time. He also learnt to see with an eye to minute variation, paralleling architects like Desgodetz in his exchange of impressionistic descriptions for carefully delineated, precise sketches. Finally, he began to understand ancient architecture in much the same way he would later view ancient rituals and custom in the *Remaines of Gentilisme*: as the half-visible traces of past links and inheritances between cultures and, ultimately, as a thread which could tie the particularities of England and the English landscape into the grand narrative of humanity’s distant past.
Tusculum in Wiltshire: Imagining the Villa of Easton Pierse

‘My talent has been crushed by my long endurance of woes: no part of my former vigour remains.’ This was Aubrey’s melancholy assessment of his life, mediated through lines from Ovid’s *Tristia*, in 1669. At his father’s death in 1652, he had inherited a small estate already encumbered with lawsuits and haemorrhaging money at a worrying rate. First to go were his Welsh lands, but breaking the entail upon them required a ‘chargeable and taedious lawe-suite’ which Aubrey later believed had cost him £1,200. Despite, or because of, this storm clouds continued to gather: ‘then debts and lawe-suites, *opus et usus* [toil and wear], borrowing of money and perpetuall riding’. His family’s Herefordshire manors of Bushelton and Stratford were disposed of to scholarly acquaintances: Dr Thomas Willis and Herbert Croft, Bishop of Hereford, respectively. Aubrey had already been once disappointed in his attempts to marry an heiress when Katherine Ryves, to whom he was engaged, had died some years before, but in an attempt to revive his flagging fortunes he began to court Joan Sumner, a member of a Wiltshire gentry family, in the mid-1660s. What happened next is not entirely clear—it seems that Sumner discovered the extent of Aubrey’s debts after lending him a large sum of money during their engagement and began to have second thoughts—not only did the marriage fail to proceed, but Aubrey found himself in a lawsuit with his prospective bride. When he copied out the passage from Ovid he knew there was no going back: his childhood home at Easton Pierse and his farm at Broad Chalke, the only properties left of his patrimony, would be sold.

It was at this point that Aubrey composed a farewell love-letter to his home. The *Designatio de Easton-Piers in Com: Wilts.* —‘per me (heu!) infortunatum Johannem Aubrey R.S. Socium’—was part epitaph, part (p.77) fantasy. Intermixed with shadowy watercolours of the manor house at Easton Pierse and the surrounding countryside are luminous images of an imagined rebuilding in the latest neo-classical style (see Figure 3.1). This ‘villa’ was both a fantastical consolation prize, dreamt of at the moment when the more prosaic, real Easton Pierse was about to be lost, and Aubrey’s first major engagement with the study of architecture, past and present.
Aubrey’s ‘villa’ was, first and foremost, a Restoration-era country house in the style of Inigo Jones or Roger Pratt. Its double pile shape with visible quoins, a hipped roof, and cupola closely echo Pratt’s Coleshill House, begun in 1651.10 This is not surprising. While there is no evidence that Aubrey and Pratt were directly acquainted, they shared several close friends and colleagues. John Evelyn, who would later contribute annotations to the *Chronologia Architectonica*, had been Pratt’s ‘old acquaintance at Rome’, while Christopher Wren served with Pratt on the committee which supervised the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire and would later debate the evolution of primitive architecture with Aubrey and Robert Hooke.11 If there was a specific link between Aubrey and Pratt it was probably Evelyn, whose 1659 drawings of a proposed residential college, outlined in a letter to Robert Boyle, contain a building and a rough sketch of a garden which almost exactly match Aubrey’s dreams for Easton Pierse and which show the influence of Coleshill and Pratt’s other designs.12 The three men, in turn, shared an admiration of the earlier work of Inigo Jones, particularly his banqueting house at Whitehall which Evelyn thought a ‘glorious object’ compared to the ‘fantastical and licentious manner of building’ brought in by the ‘Goths, Vandals and other barbarous nations’.13 (p.78)
As Evelyn’s impassioned words make clear, this choice of architectural style was something more than just selecting a pleasing design from a pattern book; it was a statement of cultural values. Rejecting one past—the ‘licentious’ Gothic—in favour of another, more polite, more classical antiquity had wide-ranging ramifications. It was no accident that Aubrey described his fantasy Easton Pierse as a villa (and was, perhaps, the first Englishman to do so). He and his contemporaries were attempting to realize their vision of the classical world, reviving ‘the old Roman Architecture’ but only as part of a larger dream in which Cicero’s Tuscan villa could be transported wholesale into the home counties of seventeenth-century England.

This longing for a baroque reimagining of a pastoral Roman country house is writ large in Aubrey’s Designatio. Liberally spiced with classical quotations, its paratexts revolve around the theme of Aubrey’s loss, imagined through quotations from Ovid describing the beauty of the countryside at one moment and Daedalus’s hatred of Crete and his exile from his native land the next. On its title page Aubrey gave as an epigraph the *locus classicus* from Horace: ‘this is what I prayed for!—a piece of land not so very large, where there would be a garden, and near the house a spring of ever-flowing water, and up above these a bit of woodland’. Elsewhere in the text he turned once again to Ovid: ‘then she looked round on the ancient woods, the grottoes, and the grass, spangled with countless flowers. She declared the daughters of Mnemosyne to be happy alike in their favourite pursuits and in their home.’ On the facing page he quoted Horace again, distilling his emotions into a single line: ‘I praise the lovely country’s brooks, its groves and moss-grown rocks.’ These classical effusions were apparently matched by another thirteen or fourteen sheets ‘in verse & prose’ by Aubrey himself, entitled *Villa, or a Description of the Prospects from Easton-Piers.* Although this manuscript is lost, Michael Hunter has identified likely drafts of a small portion of it in one of Aubrey’s mathematical notebooks. There Aubrey wrote that ‘in such fine solitude as these shades the Muses [were] wont in vision to appeare to their worshippers … to build in the mans phancy, magnificent \’stately/ castles, palaces, gardins’. 
The praises of bucolic existence which open the *Designatio* are followed by drawings of both the existing and the imagined houses at Easton Pierse, the magnificent palaces and gardens of the Worcester fragment. While Aubrey’s sketches of the surrounding countryside occur later in the volume, it would be a mistake to suppose that the classical texts with which he frames the work as a whole are solely lyric responses to this soon-to-be-lost landscape (though they are that as well). They are the textual colonization of a real landscape, the Wiltshire Downs in the 1660s, by an imagined one, the hills and groves of northern Italy in the first century CE. The extent to which this colonization was complete, at least in Aubrey’s visions, is seen in the imagined vistas looking away from the new house: a long walk lined on either side with Lombardy poplars or, more dramatically, a cartouche which may also be a window and which reveals a vista of rolling hills, a forested river course, two ancient towers, and two pyramids. The cartouche reproduces a detail from an engraving which had previously appeared in his friend Evelyn’s translation of Roland Fréart’s *Parallel of Ancient and Modern Architecture* (1664). Through a classical archway we see a hilly Italian landscape above which clouds are gathering; in the distance two pyramids dominate a wooded plain. This is a real place, whatever fantastical touches have been added by the engraver. Fréart specified it as a ‘very antient Sepulchre to be seen near Terracina’ on the southern border of the Papal States, in ‘a wild and uncultivated place’ and identified the source of the engraving as a plan taken by the sixteenth-century antiquary Pirro Ligorio who ‘discovered and (as one may say) disinter’d it (for ’twas almost buried amongst the brambles)’. This vista was transported by Aubrey in its entirety from Latina to Wiltshire: the never-built villa would have looked out on the Appian Way.

Aubrey’s engagement with architecture began both practically and theoretically as plans for a house which was never, and could never have been, built. His villa was overtly classicizing, almost to the point of being displaced from England into Italy, and reflected the latest designs of Aubrey’s architecturally minded colleagues in the Royal Society. Paradoxically, however, as he was composing this paean to neo-classicism, he was also preparing a text devoted to the study of the belittled and unfashionable Gothic architecture which surrounded his Horatian retreat.
Dating the Medieval, Praising the Classical

In the same year in which he compiled the *Designatio*, Aubrey asked his new friend Anthony Wood, ‘as you looke upon your papers, pray lay aside some remarks for me chronologicall as concerning guessing by Windowes. I have something improved it here since: and about the Priory by Easton.’ Aubrey’s ‘guessing by Windowes’ meant establishing the date of medieval buildings by their window styles, now a common practice, but not one which was in the mainstream of seventeenth-century antiquarian methodology. His notes on this method of guessing eventually became a document entitled *Chronologia Architectonica*, part of a ‘stromata’ (Greek for a patchwork or miscellany) which now forms an appendix to the second volume of the *Monumenta Britannica* (Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25). Of the tracts contained in the *Stromata*, the *Chronologia Architectonica* was the first to be composed—its title page is dated 1671—and eventually became the largest in size (fifty pages in Aubrey’s numeration). It was planned as a visual history of architecture in England, from Roman times to the present, and H. M. Colvin has seen in it the first sympathetic and reasonably accurate treatment of Gothic architecture. Aubrey, Colvin argued, stood apart from the common early modern consensus that, as Sir John Clerk of Penicuik wrote, the Goths had ‘introduced a bad manner not only in Architectory but in all other arts & sciences … we have been for upwards of 200 years endeavouring to recover ourselves from this Gothicism’. Colvin thought that to Aubrey ‘must go the credit for being the first to think historically about medieval English architecture’, and saw him essentially as a precursor to the nineteenth-century architectural historian Thomas Rickman, a scholar willing both to sympathize with the style and to see in it a clear process of historical change extending from the late antique to the early modern.
However tempting it is to place Aubrey in a narrative of growing aesthetic appreciation for the Gothic, these views are untenable. Aubrey does appear to have been the first antiquary to attempt a chronology of medieval architectural styles, but his ideological conception of architectural progress was entirely at odds with those of the nineteenth-century Romantic antiquaries of Rickman’s generation. In the ‘diatribe’ prefacing the Chronologia Aubrey set out his views on the development of architectural style, seeing a decline from the ‘primitive beautie’ of Roman architecture into the ‘barbarous’ and ‘fantastick’ styles of the Middle Ages, and a subsequent gradual recovery, shepherded by Palladio and Inigo Jones, until once again ‘the old Roman fashion is become the common Mode’.

By contrast with Rickman, who defined the architecture of the early Middle Ages as the ‘Roman mode debased’ but who believed that the architecture of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries represented ‘the perfection of the English mode’, Aubrey’s architectural chronology is a straightforward one of decline and recovery; Roman architecture degenerated into Gothic, but was gradually restored to its antique purity. This parabola of change maps on to the understanding of the Middle Ages elsewhere in his work. Aubrey had no sympathy for the barbarian successors of the Romans, seeing them as both superstitious and ignorant of technical skills.

Moreover, the generic ‘Goths’ of this larger narrative could be identified by Aubrey as the brutish Saxons, whose culture he had summed up elsewhere in the preface to his Description of Wiltshire:

here was a mist of ignorance for 600 yeares. They were so far from knowing Arts, that they could not build wall with stone. They lived slutishly in poor howses, where they ate a great deale of beefe & mutton, and dranke good Ale in a browne mazard [i.e., a cup or bowl]: and their very Kings were but a sort of Farmers.
Though Aubrey was aware of the evolution from Romanesque to Gothic, for him all post-Roman architecture fell under the epithet of ‘Barbarous fashion’ until ‘the old Roman Architecture began to be revived’, first in Italy in the time of Henry VII and then in England in the reign of Edward VI. In identifying the moment when the new style came to England, he focused on the two great architectural projects sponsored by Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset: Somerset House on the Strand in London and Longleat House, not far from Aubrey’s home in Wiltshire. For both projects, Aubrey maintained, Somerset had ‘sent for Architects & Workmen out of Italie’. He gave no further description of Somerset House, but sketched a quick pen-portrait of Longleat, presumably from first-hand experience. It was, he wrote, ‘three stories high (above the stately vaulture under ground) adorned with Dorique, Ionique, and Corinthian pillars. Leaded on the top.’

He contrasted this with Elizabethan architecture, which ‘made no growth: but rather went backwards’ with its ‘greate wide Windowes, which were not only cold, but weakned the Fabrique’ of the building. Burghley House and Audley End he identified as examples of this inferior style.

While Aubrey cited Andrea Palladio and, implicitly, his *I quattro libri dell’architettura* (1570) as an origin point for the ‘Roman Architecture’, his real hero in its revival was Inigo Jones, whose banqueting house at Whitehall (1619–22) he singled out as ‘so exquisite a piece, that if all the Books of Architecture were lost, the true art of Building might be retrieved thence’. In the wake of Jones, Aubrey concluded, ‘the old Roman fashion is become the common Mode’. Certainly it was the mode which he chose for the imagined villa at Easton Pierse. Crucially, though, it is the ‘old Roman fashion’; not a new style based upon Roman architecture, but Roman architecture itself. Aubrey’s vision of architectural history was essentially circular. Paradoxically, this meant that there was no place for any exaltation of the Romanesque and Gothic architecture with which the majority of the *Chronologia* was concerned; at best it could only be tolerated.
This does not, however, vitiate Colvin’s placement of Aubrey as the first historian of Gothic architecture.\textsuperscript{41} The \textit{Architectonica} was undeniably original in its emphasis on the specific shapes of architectural forms and the ways in which these could be arranged into a recognizable, chronological pattern of change. Olivia Horsfall Turner has argued that this was due to the influence of Aubrey’s contemporaries in the Royal Society, notably Christopher Wren, as well as Meric Casaubon via his \textit{Treatise of Use and Custome} which Aubrey cited in the \textit{Monumenta}.\textsuperscript{42} She links Casaubon’s emphasis on ‘bare forms or matter’ to a growing interest in palaeography and the established dating techniques for epigraphic evidence in the same period, seeing in these the methodological origins of Aubrey’s architectural schema.\textsuperscript{43} While the chronology of epigraphic styles had been developed earlier, it is suggestive that the \textit{Architectonica} should date from the same period as both Aubrey’s own \textit{Chronologia Graphica} and the more famous palaeographical treatise, Jean Mabillon’s \textit{De re diplomatica} (1681).\textsuperscript{44} When composing the \textit{Architectonica} Aubrey had noted to himself that ‘[t]were an easy matter to make a Scriptura Chronologica of the severall hands from the Conquest till now, which (p.85) would be of good use’.\textsuperscript{45} In 1672 he followed through with his idea, taking advantage of an extended visit to Hothfield, the estate of his friend Nicholas Tufton, 3rd Earl of Thanet, to use the earl’s ancient deeds as the basis for such a ‘Chronologia Scriptoria’ which attempted to identify, date, and systematize scripts on the same plan as the \textit{Architectonica} did for building styles.\textsuperscript{46} However, regardless of the systemizing tendencies which may have underlain the \textit{Architectonica}’s compilation, why did Aubrey choose to focus on the dating of a series of architectural examples from the Conquest to the mid-sixteenth century? If he viewed this as a period of ‘Barbarous’ and ‘fantastick’ fashions, why did he record its morphologies with such care?
The answer to this can be found in his methods. Early in the work he noted that ‘I found by Mr Anthony Woods Antiquities of Oxford, in what Kings reigne & yeare of the Lord such or such a part of a college was built.’\(^{47}\) This is borne out by the text, in which the majority of the precisely dated examples are from Oxford colleges. Aubrey had recognized early on that the shape of windows was the surest indicator of the age of a building and the text consists chiefly of watercolours of windows, in greater or lesser detail depending on which feature he wished to emphasize (see Figure 3.2). Below these Aubrey added notes such as that appended to a drawing of a Perpendicular Gothic window:

At All-Souls Colledge in Oxford built tempore Henry 6. 1437. Memorandum there are two windows of double Lights, as here. A windowe at the Parsonage house at Streete in Somerset, just of this fashion. v. the glasse in the inside. The old window of the old Hall at Easton-Piers is of this very fashion. In these western parts are many windowes of this fashion.\(^{48}\)

Aubrey derived the initial date from materials gathered by Wood, then used his knowledge that the style of windows changed rapidly and predictably to identify similar buildings which could thus be determined to be of a similar age. The bulk of the *Architectonica* was not a history of architecture, as such, though Aubrey attempted to briefly sketch such a (p. 86)
history in his introduction, but rather a handbook for the dating of buildings whose age would otherwise be unknown. Aesthetic considerations could be left aside in favour of the obvious benefits of establishing an architectural chronology.

Aubrey's schematization of Gothic architecture went beyond window style. The Architectonica did not address the fabric of buildings, but it did include reflections on the technological and physical changes associated with visual changes in architecture, one notable example of which Aubrey had from Sir William Dugdale:

Figure 3.2 A characteristic sketch from Aubrey's Chronologia Architectonica: the rose window in the south transept of Westminster Abbey (Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 172v).
Sir W. Dugdale tells me, that he finds by W. Malmesbury &c: that glasse was not used but in churches, & great persons chiefe Roomes: and I remember that before the Civil-warres, poor peoples windowes were not glassed: nor yet in Herefordshire, Shropshire, &c: even at freeholders houses.\(^49\)

(p.87) The *Chronologia* participated not only in an antiquarian tradition which prioritized the construction of a chronological framework, but also owed a debt to the Royal Society’s fascination with technology and technological change, which Aubrey engaged with at more length elsewhere in works such as his *Nouvelles*, a record of inventions and innovations in English culture.

Like many of Aubrey’s works, the *Architectonica* was looked over and annotated by several of his acquaintances at various stages in its composition. The most important annotations are those by John Evelyn, who had also influenced Aubrey’s designs for the villa at Easton Pierse, as discussed in the section ‘Tusculum in Wiltshire’, and who shared his vision of a neo-Roman Britain. Evelyn contributed additions to Aubrey’s historical preface, chiefly notices of significant buildings, offered sociological explanations for the changes in window fashions, and provided comparisons between English and Italian architecture.\(^50\) An example of Evelyn’s interventions can be found in his response to Aubrey’s complaint that, in sixteenth-century houses ‘the fashion of those times was to have the side of a roome all one window: which was cold, & weake’.\(^51\) What was for Aubrey merely an uncomfortable imperfection on the road to the Palladian ideal, was for Evelyn a space which shaped the social discourse of the age. These ‘great bay-windows’, Evelyn wrote, ‘were in stead of Withdrawing-rooms & there lay large Cushions to leane upon. Where after dinner they us’d to retire & discourse in private of businesse. They had also commonly a Curtaine to draw before them, for privacy.’\(^52\) Somewhat unexpectedly, Evelyn emerges as the more thoughtful observer of past customs in this exchange.
The Chronologia was a handbook, a guide to ‘guessing by Windowes’. Aubrey had recognized the value of architecture as a tool for establishing chronologies, but this recognition existed in tension with his own fervently held beliefs in the superiority of the ‘old Roman fashion’. His ideal was the stoic retreat he had created in the Designatio, not any Gothic pile with its ‘licentious’ and ‘fantastical’ ornament and, as a result, his approach to medieval architecture was essentially pragmatic. Perceived irregularities which might be unacceptable in medieval architecture could, however, be not only acceptable but paradigmatic in the architecture of remote antiquity. Aubrey, together with his friends Wren and Hooke, would return to the issue of architectural evolution in the 1670s, but in a very different context: that of the ancient, post-Babelic world. There, rude or baffling architectural forms could hold the keys not only to the later development of classical styles, but to the origins of man-made features in the ancient British landscape.

The Tower of Babel and Porsenna’s Tomb

When composing a portion of the Monumenta Britannica in the 1670s, Aubrey stepped back for a moment from the sketches and descriptions of individual ancient sites which composed the vast majority of his materials, and prefaced a series of chapters on barrows, urns, and sepulchres with a short architectural treatise ‘Of Mausolea’. This essay aimed to map out a genealogy of ancient burial architecture. It began with the Tower of Babel, proceeded through the Egyptian pyramids and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus to the monument of Almansor, the earthen burial mounds of the Chinese, and Lars Porsenna’s tomb. Aubrey traversed widely across ancient history for examples and made use of the modern scholarship available on each of the monuments he discussed. He evidently imagined the finished text would be richly illustrated and made numerous notes towards the insertion of images within the text, of which the following—intended to be inserted immediately after his discussion of the Tower of Babel—is a characteristic example:

De la Val, in his Travells, speaks of the Tower of Babel: and also of Ezechiel’s Tombe: and also of Absolom’s Pillar, which was cutt out of a Rock: which Sir Christ Wren sayes ’twas a pretty thing: insert his draught of it here: and also desire him to shew me his excellent draught of Porsenna’s Monument.
Wren appears as a source at other points in this essay and his presence helps establish its context within contemporary understandings of ancient architecture. Amongst Wren’s incomplete architectural manuscripts is a ‘Discourse on Architecture’, whose aim was to ‘reform the Generality to a truer tast in Architecture by giving a larger Idea of the whole Art, beginning with the reasons and progress of it from the most remote Antiquity’. His discussion of postdiluvian building began with Babel—‘the first Piece of Civil Architecture’—continued with the pyramids, the pillar of Absalom, Solomon’s temple, and the walls of Babylon, and concluded abruptly with Porsenna’s tomb. On one hand, the structures discussed by Aubrey and Wren belonged to a common fund of marvellous ancient buildings, frequently studied and reconstructed in the early modern period, but as Lydia Soo has argued, the references to Wren in the Monumenta together with the striking parallels between the two works suggest that they were more closely related.

The most likely point of contact between Aubrey and Wren was their mutual friend Robert Hooke, also named as a source in ‘Of Mausolea’. On 4 October 1677, Hooke had met Wren at a tavern and ‘Discoursed of Porsennas Tomb’. They disagreed and the following day Hooke drew ‘a rationall porcena’, continuing the conversation with Wren at regular intervals throughout the month. Aubrey was living with Hooke in the latter’s lodgings in Gresham College during the autumn of 1677 and, as such, was in an ideal position to discuss with Hooke, and probably also with Wren, the funereal buildings of the ancient world, material which he subsequently incorporated into the Monumenta. Aubrey, however, was not concerned with recovering the larger history of ancient architecture, as were Wren and Hooke, but rather with developing a specific genealogy within which British monuments could be located.

Aubrey’s discussion of the Tower of Babel began with the locus classicus of Genesis 11:3, but then moved on to its present appearance:

This tower of Belus is now a great hill, the arch’t brickwork being covered over with dust and earth. The Basis of it is as big as the middle Moore-fields: of which you may read a most accurate account in Samuelis Rayheri Mathesis Mosaica.
Aubrey was referring to the German mathematician Samuel Reyher’s exegesis of the mathematics of the Pentateuch. Reyher had reconstructed Babel as something resembling a ziggurat, but pendulously tall. He was aided by the precise figures for its size given by the twelfth-century traveller Benjamin of Tudela, who was also the ultimate source for Aubrey’s description of its present state. The final step in this reconstruction was a passing comment in Wren’s ‘Discourse on Architecture’: ‘Providence scatter’d the first Builders [of Babel], so the Work was left off, but the Successors of Belus the son of Nimrod probably finished It and made it His Sepulchre, upon his Deification.’ Wren’s discussions with Hooke appear to have provided Aubrey with the identification of Babel as a tomb and this, combined with the narrative of Benjamin of Tudela, as mediated by Reyher’s Mathesis, allowed him to describe what he understood Babel to be: a squat, four-sided brick tower, now ‘a great hill’. It was, evidently, the architectural forebear of the ‘great Mausolea of Earth’ which Wren identified as characteristic of the Chinese, but was also related to native British sites such as Silbury Hill and Roseberry Topping, descriptions of which immediately follow the essay on ancient mausolea in the Monumenta.

Aubrey deployed this diverse array of scholarly insights as a frame within which to site the monuments he subsequently discussed in the Monumenta. He is sometimes portrayed as a radical freethinker, dismissing the literal truth of Genesis in his support of Hooke’s theories of the origins of the world, and it is tempting to extend that dismissal to his understanding of the ancient human past. ‘Of Mausolea’ quashes such temptations. Aubrey’s view of the ancient past was essentially biblical: a gradual repopulation of the world after the fall of Babel leading to a dissemination of primitive Hebraic culture across Europe. While he was willing to admit that the physical world was much older than commonly supposed, human culture was only a postdiluvian construct with an origin a few thousand years in the past. English sites, including Stonehenge, had been built by the not-so-distant descendants of the architects of Babel.
If Babel had its natural place in Aubrey’s narrative, both as ‘the first Peece of Civil Architecture’ and as the direct precursor of British hill forts and burial mounds, the significance of Lars Porsenna’s tomb in his narrative remains to be explained. Aubrey devoted more attention to it than to any other single ancient monument and this cannot be explained solely through the interests of Wren and Hooke (theirs was largely born from an attempt to rationalize the description in Pliny’s *Natural History* with a structure that could both feasibly exist within the strictures of physics and accurately represent the historical evidence). In the course of his discussion Aubrey cited five different reconstructions and made notes towards obtaining images of each for the *Monumenta*. In the end, however, Aubrey only copied the reconstruction prepared by Hooke into the *Monumenta* and it would seem that his intense fascination with the monument must have derived either from Hooke or from Pliny himself. The text and paratext surrounding his reproduction of Hooke’s vision (see Figure 3.3) suggest a possible reason for this fascination. Beneath the reconstruction Aubrey noted that, ‘In the East Indies such another Monument is mentioned in a Book, which Mr R. Hook hath.’

Nearby he noted that a map of Asia he had seen in the Earl of Pembroke’s house contained depictions of several pyramids ‘and by them is wrote Sepulchra Regum Tartariae’. Aubrey’s small drawings of the four ‘pyramids’ on the map closely resemble the pyramids in Hooke’s (p.92)
reconstruction of the tomb of Lars Porsenna. They are both tall and thin, reminiscent more of obelisks than anything else. In the case of the tombs of the kings of Tartary they are also slightly irregular in shape and resemble nothing so much as Aubrey’s drawings and descriptions of British standing stones elsewhere in the *Monumenta*. While the exact map to which Aubrey referred has not been identified, it is likely that his pyramidal (p. 93) tombs were not, in fact, representations of man-made structures, but rather Aubrey’s misreading of stylized mountains. The tombs of Genghis Khan

*Figure 3.3* The tomb of Lars Porsenna according to Robert Hooke (Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 9br).
and his descendants make regular appearances in the writings of early modern geographers and travellers. They are never described as pyramidal, but are regularly sited in the Altai Mountains; Aubrey’s pyramids were almost certainly a misunderstanding of a visual representation of this tradition. Regardless, they provided him with the link he needed. Porsenna’s tomb functioned like Babel; it served as an ancient parallel to the monuments Aubrey had discovered and recorded in the British Isles, though in this case it paralleled megaliths rather than burial mounds. Megaliths, in fact, had been subtly displaced from the contexts in which Aubrey located them in the *Templa Druidum* and were introduced into the history of ancient architecture.

These parallels were part of a larger attempt by Aubrey to anchor his discoveries within a recognizable historical framework. In a postdiluvian world, it was only reasonable to suppose that similar forms of architecture could be discovered throughout antiquity, and Aubrey’s placing of the prehistoric British landscape within existing narratives of post-Babelic migration was a naturalizing of that strange country into the mapped world of the biblical and classical past, along the same lines as his Homeric interpretations of ancient British culture. As such, it paralleled the work of his Swedish contemporary Olof Rudbeck—although, as yet, Aubrey had not come directly into contact with Rudbeck’s writings—more closely than might initially appear. Just as Rudbeck had erected a scaffolding of classical myth around the otherwise alien archaeology of prehistoric Scandinavia, Aubrey had linked the baffling remains scattered across the British landscape to a recognizable tradition of ancient architecture and learning.
Architecture fitted naturally into Aubrey’s collection of scholarly interests, both as the flip side of his fascination with megaliths and other man-made aspects of the ancient landscape and as a discipline whose inherited pieties tallied well with his own convictions as to the cultural superiority of Rome. From an initial engagement with it as an amateur designer, he developed a remarkable new antiquarian tool in the *Chronologia Architectonica*, allowing architectural forms to serve as chronological markers, and finally returned to his central focus on ancient culture in the study of funereal architecture in ‘Of Mausolea’. Throughout, he participated in the English architectural and antiquarian culture which centred on (p.94) scholar-practitioners such as Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke. His fascination with measurement, minutiae, and the careful observation of detail, however, echoed architectural practice across Europe and was part of the larger shift in antiquarian practices which led to an increasing privileging of architectural data, whether derived from ancient or medieval buildings, in the eighteenth century.

Notes:


(5) Ovid, *Tristia*, V.xii.31–2 (‘contudit ingenium patientia longa malorum, et pars antiqui nulla vigoris adest’), quoted in Bodleian MS Aubrey 17, fol. 20v.

(7) Aubrey, Lives, i. 434.

(8) Aubrey, Lives, i. 434, 441. See Powell, Aubrey, 115-27.

(9) Now Bodleian MS Aubrey 17.


(15) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 168r.

(16) Bodleian MS Aubrey 17, fol. 2r, quoting Ovid, Metamorphoses, VIII.184.
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(17) Bodleian MS Aubrey 17, fol. 1r, quoting Horace, Satires, II.vi.1–3.

(18) Bodleian MS Aubrey 17, fol. 1v, quoting Ovid, Metamorphoses, V.265–8. Aubrey has written ‘Maeonidas’ for ‘Mnemonidas’, supplanting the Muses’ mother, probably quite unconsciously, with Homer Maeonides, the Maeonian bard.

(19) Bodleian MS Aubrey 17, fol. 2r, quoting Horace, Epistles, I.x.6–7.


(22) Bodleian MS Aubrey 17, fols. 15r (poplars), 17r (pyramids).


(24) Fréart, Parallel, 34.


(26) StromataNouvellesStromataDescription of WiltshireAubrey’s Miscellanies (London, 1696)MonumentaDescriptionChronologiaeArchitectonicaMonumenta Britannica

(27) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fols. 152r–179r.


(31) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fols. 168r–169r.

(32) See Rickman, Attempt to Discriminate, 4–5.

(33) Jean-Louise Guez, Seigneur de Balzac, The Roman: The Conversation of the Romans and Maecenas, in Three Excellent Discourses [London, 1652], 92

(34) Bodleian MS Aubrey 3, fol. 10v.

(35) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 168r.

(36) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 168r.

(37) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 168r.

(38) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 168r.


(40) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 169r.


(42) Horsfall Turner, “‘The Windows of this Church are of several Fashions’”, 180, and cf. the present work’s introduction.

(43) Horsfall Turner, “‘The Windows of this Church are of several Fashions’”, 180–1. Aubrey’s paraphrase of Casaubon’s argument is at Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 5v.

(44) Chronologia GraphicaJean Mabillon, De re diplomatica (Paris, 1681).

(45) Bodleian MS Aubrey 3, fol. 3v.
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(46) *Chronologia Graphicamagnum opus* Edward Bernard’s *Orbis eruditii literatura à Charactere Samaritico deducta* ([Oxford], 1689)


(48) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 163r.

(49) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 167ar.

(50) For Evelyn’s additions see esp. Bodleian MS. Top. Gen. c. 25, fols. 164v, 165v–166r.

(51) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 165r.

(52) Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c. 25, fol. 164v.

(53) For the eighteenth-century afterlife of the *Chronologia* see Hunter, *Aubrey*, 206.


(57) He was also Aubrey’s source for more information on Porsenna’s tomb and on Chinese burial customs (Aubrey, *Monumenta*, ii. 675, 679).


(59) Wren, *‘Tracts’*, 188–95.


(63) This can be proven through his correspondence with Andrew Paschall at that time, including letters from Paschall directed to Aubrey ‘at Mr Hookes lodgings in Gresham Coll’ on 19 August (Bodleian MS Aubrey 13, fols. 21–22), 25 October (fol. 24), 31 October (fol. 25), and 20 November 1677 (fol. 26).

(64) Aubrey, Monumenta, i. 673.

(65) Mathesis Mosaica, sive loca Pentateuchi mathematica mathematicè explicata Kircher’s Turris Babel (Amsterdam, 1679).


(68) Aubrey, Monumenta, ii. 683.

(69) See Poole, Aubrey, 84–5. Poole notes that this theory came out of conversations with Hooke and readings in Kircher (in this case his Mundus Subterraneus, 2 vols. [Amsterdam, 1665]), but does not discuss the other pairing of Hooke and Kircher in the Monumenta.


(71) Monumenta De tintinnabulis Girolamo Maggi, De tintinnabulis liber postumus, ed. Francis Sweerts [Amsterdam, 1664], 24–5, 122–3); Commentariorum disputationum in Genesim Tomi QuatuerPyramidographiaPyramidographia or a Description of the Pyramids in ÆgyptMonumenta

(72) Aubrey, Monumenta, ii. 677.

(73) Aubrey, Monumenta, ii. 675.
See, for example, Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimage* (London, 1613), 337, and Pierre d’Aity, Sieur de Montmartin, *The Estates, Empires, & Principallities of the World* (London, 1615), 707. The story seems to have originated with the fourteenth-century writer Hayton of Corycus’s *La Flor des Estoires d’Orient*, which was cited by d’Aity.

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