

by the early modern city, such as the problem of finding drinking water for the city's population, or the fact that the canals functioned as an open sewer that spread an almost continuous stench. Connection with the Amstel, set lower than the canal system, was also problematic, solved only two centuries later with a system of new sluices and pumping stations around the city.

Rather than lofty ambitions and a single unified town masterplan, it was the pragmatism of the ruling merchant elite that characterised the approach taken to expanding Amsterdam, and makes it stand out as an interesting case of early modern planning. The spatial development of its harbours, its stacked warehouses, the ordering of its urban structure, its residential environment of the canal district and the regulations to design, build and maintain it, were all governed by the city's commercial interests. Abrahamse's achievement is to show in detail how this seventeenth-century city was built.

Vaughan Hart, *Christopher Wren: In Search of Eastern Antiquity* (New Haven and London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and Yale University Press, 2020), 209 pp. incl. 180 colour and b&w ills, ISBN 9781913907079, £45
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Reviewed by ROGER BOWDLER

This book investigates the impact of Levantine antiquity on Christopher Wren's architectural and intellectual development, an aspect of his work and thought that has not been intensively studied. In doing so, the author, Vaughan Hart, sets the scene by using rich seams of seventeenth-century writings to chart how British interest in the Levant grew during the seventeenth century. He explores the prevalent culture of curiosity, tracing the exchange of ideas through the tying-down of encounters, facilitated by such institutions as the Royal Society, Gresham's College and the new-fangled coffee house. He considers trading links and voyages of discovery, which informed the shaky understanding of the sites of Ottoman lands. He explains, too, how chairs of Arabic had been founded at Cambridge and Oxford in the 1630s to encourage trade and learning as well as the conversion of 'them who now sitt in darkness'.

It was within this culture that Wren developed his own ideas about the buildings of the east, largely inspired by descriptions in books since he never knew them at first-hand. Like Fischer von Erlach a generation later, Wren was intrigued by the idea that six of the seven wonders of the ancient world stood in lands beyond Greece and Rome, which, according to Hart, led him to consider 'the East as nothing less than the cradle of classical civilisation'. Also important for Wren was the idea that the east was biblical territory, which intensified his interest in investigating the origins of Christian architecture. As with many other Anglicans, he was intrigued by what 'primitive' Christian architecture might have looked like, at a time before Roman Catholicism, and maintained that the buildings of the eastern church, later transformed into mosques, provided clues as to early forms of worship.

How Wren applied his book-learning to the practical business of building is approached through an introduction and four thematic chapters. The introduction is a survey of the close interest Wren, Robert Hooke, John Evelyn and others were taking in eastern buildings. Chapter one focuses on Wren's ideas about the eastern sources for classical architecture. It looks at the 'Tyrian Style' and the idea that the Greek orders emerged from prototypes in Phoenician Tyre, which he explored in several of his Tracts, and considers Wren's views on Solomon's Temple, a building that had already been identified by earlier scholars as a likely forerunner of classicism. It also takes in a group of buildings, such as the tombs of Absalom at Jerusalem and of Porsenna at Clusium, that were used by Wren to create a theory of columnar origins, and the author plausibly sees reflections of the latter in Wren's 1694 design for Mary II's catafalque in Westminster Abbey.

In chapter two, Hart looks at Wren's deployment of the Gothic and his interest in its eastern origins. Initially this feels a sideways excursion into structures such as Tom Tower at Christchurch, Oxford (1681–82), but the connections are duly established: 'In explaining the birth of the Gothic, Wren favoured imaginary stone arches standing in the Arabian desert over the bent branches of the German forest suggested in the Renaissance'.

Chapter three — the longest in the book — addresses the topic of domes and their eastern origins. Hart ranges far and wide, exploring who had access to the interior of Hagia Sophia at the time and who could have furthered Wren's understanding of it, identifying several masters of Cambridge colleges who had spent time in Ottoman lands and were well placed to report back. One of the strengths of this book is its exploration of Wren as a gatherer of knowledge, and it becomes clear that, despite his limited travel abroad — the one trip to Paris in 1665–66 — Wren was a frequent traveller in his imagination. Books, journals, conversations, meetings of the Royal Society: all contributed to its formation and these encounters are carefully documented.

The final chapter discusses how Wren put columns to work. Fired by reports of the heroic avenues of columns at Persepolis, Palmyra and elsewhere in 'Tyrian' lands, Wren saw how these could be revisited to endow English institutions with a functional dignity. Hart argues, for example, that the colonnade outside the chapel and hall at Chelsea Hospital connected what today would be called veteran care with distant memories of the stoa and the shaded urban corridors of the Levant. The small but growing number of accounts of Levantine buildings (generally of a fairly brisk nature) aroused Wren's imagination and provided him with ideas of what post-Restoration London was looking for: new functional spaces that returned to first principles which embodied the aspirations of a city on the rise. The discussion of the influence of giant columns in Constantinople on the concept of the Monument, designed by Hooke and Wren and built in 1671–77, widens our understanding: unlike the Roman prototypes, these were Christian erections, and hence suitable to mark the 'deliverance of the New Jerusalem in London'.

Hart is careful not to claim pioneering status and pays due recognition to Lydia Soo and other scholars who have looked into Wren's writings before and identified Byzantine influences on Wren's designs. The book has a topicality, given recent events in the Middle East and the sensitivity of east–west relations, also reflected in the recent

Stealing from the Saracens by Diana Darke (2020), which presents a broader survey of this theme advocating greater recognition for the wider influence of Byzantine and Ottoman buildings. Hart sets 'Orientalism' aside as being a concept identified with the Napoleonic period onwards, and he has little interest in the more theoretical explorations of cultural exchange, a decision that may strike some readers (though not this reviewer) as problematic. That said, the book — an intellectual architectural history constructed from connections which range from the secure to the speculative — engagingly takes the reader through sometimes arcane sources, enhancing the broader understanding of the buildings of later Stuart England.

Carolyn Yerkes and Heather Hyde Minor, *Piranesi Unbound* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 240 pp. incl. 193 colour ills, ISBN 9780691206103, £54
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Reviewed by MAARTEN DELBEKE

To the already impressive list of identities assumed by and attributed to Giambattista Piranesi — etcher, draughtsman, architect, antiquarian, trader, theorist, polemicist, visionary — this publication adds another: bookmaker. Carolyn Yerkes and Heather Hyde Minor, who each wrote three chapters of this book and co-wrote the introduction, emphatically argue that the 'primary medium' defining Piranesi as an author is the book, not the etching, the text or the building. With that, they position themselves against a historiography rooted in the twentieth-century genre of the catalogue raisonné that has separated Piranesi's etchings from their discursive and material context, and within the burgeoning interest in the architecture book as a site of intellectual and artistic production in its own right, perhaps best exemplified by André Tavares's *The Anatomy of the Architectural Book* (2016).

Piranesi Unbound centres on a particular episode in Piranesi's editorial ventures: in the early 1750s, the Irishman James Caulfield, Lord Charlemont, intended to fund one of his publications. Dedicatory plates and frontispieces were drafted, title pages were printed, but the relationship turned sour and the patronage apparently never materialised. If this incident is well known in the literature, it is because Piranesi broadcast it: he published his correspondence with Charlemont in the *Lettere di giustificazione scritte a Milord Charlemont* (1757), a libellous indictment of Charlemont's apparent dereliction of duty, and prefaced the book that grew out of the botched initial project, the *Antichità Romane* (1756), with a visual *damnatio memoriae*: a first frontispiece with Charlemont's coat of arms and an engraved dedication is followed by a second where the arms have eroded and the name has been erased.

The Charlemont episode is significant in several respects. According to the authors, it marks the moment when Piranesi positioned himself as a maker of books rather than prints, conceiving his publications as composites of texts and images intended to dialogue