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JAMES GIBBS'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY REVISITED

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James Gibbs (1682–1754) was one of the most important architectural figures in eighteenth-century England. Taught by Carlo Fontana, the most fashionable Roman architect of his day, Gibbs 'had a professional training at the fountain-head of Italian baroque that was unique among contemporary architects'.¹ He was the architect of the London churches of St. Mary-le-Strand and St. Martin-in-the-Fields; the Senate House, Cambridge, and the Radcliffe Library, Oxford; houses that include Sudbrook, Surrey, and Ditchley, Oxfordshire; and was the author of two highly influential books, *A Book of Architecture* and *Rules for Drawing the Several Parts of Architecture*. Critical assessment of Gibbs is, however, complicated by the fact that our knowledge of his biography is largely limited to a single document currently in Sir John Soane's Museum, London, henceforth referred to as the 'Gibbs manuscript'.² This has not received the scholarly attention that it deserves.

The only author to have written exclusively on the manuscript – John Holloway – limited his study to palaeographical analysis, proving that both halves were written by Gibbs but going no further. The authors of both monographs on Gibbs – Bryan Little and Terry Friedman – use the manuscript without engaging with it, offering conclusions that are either unadventurous or flawed.³ In the following article, which is the first close scholarly reading of the Gibbs manuscript, I will question both its content and the impetus that drove its creation. Heretofore Gibbs's

claim that the manuscript comprises 'Memorandums for his own use' has been taken at face value. After an outline of his biography, I will begin by arguing that Gibbs intended to publish the manuscript, having composed it during his final years. Following this, I will place the manuscript in the literary context of mid eighteenth-century England, contending that it was composed as a piece of travel writing. I will conclude that it was in this manuscript that Gibbs hoped to preserve his legacy. From this, Gibbs will emerge as an architect who sought to immortalise himself through books as much as through buildings.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATING

The Gibbs manuscript comprises 162 pages (81 folios) and is of a quarto size, bound in leather. All pages are watermarked with a Strasbourg Lily design. At around 21,000 words, its length is substantial. It contains six illustrations – all of the Pantheon in Rome and using the distinctive grey wash style that can be seen in Gibbs' drawings elsewhere – scaled to fit the margins of the document.⁴ These margins are drawn out in red ink. On the title page is a date of 1707, which has been struck through. The manuscript is divided into two parts. The first is entitled 'A few Short Cursory Remarks on some of the finest Antient and modern Buildings in Rome, and other parts of Italy', and contains notes on the buildings of Italy and

Of the Pantheon now y^e Rotunda

This Temple is of a Circular form, and the most intire,
of all the Antient Roman Buildings: It's call'd the Pantheon
because it was dedicated to all the Gods, and now nam'd
sta. Maria Rotunda dedicated to the Virgin Mary and all
Saints. At what time this Temple was first built, and by
whom is uncertain, but the first portico was added to it
by Marcus Agrippa in the time of Augustus, which makes
some believe that he built both Temple and portico, because
his name is upon it, as may be seen by the Inscription on
the Friz of this portico. M. Agrippa L. F. cos. Tertium Fecit.
The Columns of this portico are very large, being four feet four
inches in diameter, and 16. in number, each of one piece of granit
marble, the bases and Capitalls are of Grecian marble, and so is
the Entablature, the Carving is well done, and the Tympan of
of the pediment was embellish'd with some piece of history
but now decay'd and gon; All the Rafters under y^e covering of
this porch was of Brass gilt; And if one would examine and
consider the parts of this fabrick, it will be found that y^e Temple
and portico was built at different times, as may be seen by the
two pediments, that built by Agrippa standing before the Old
one, as likewise by the joining of the portico to the Old build-
ing looking on it flank ways. So it's thought this Temple
was built long before Agrippa's time. The antient Front with its
pediment project'd a great many feet from the outward circle
of the Temple, having a large Arch in the middle of it, in which
was the Entry, with a niche on each side of it. There was no Columns
in the inside or outside of it. The inside was adorn'd with eight
large

Fig. 1. Gibbs' description of the 'Pantheon, now y^e Rotunda', f. 3(r), 4to.
(By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London)

Europe.⁵ After a gap of several pages, the second half is headed 'A Short Account of Mr James Gibbs Architect And of Several things he built in England &c. after his returne from Italy'.⁶

A note in the catalogue of Gibbs's books that were left to the Radcliffe Library suggests that the document was intended to have been included in the bequest. An entry for 'A Manuscript by M^r. Gibbs, not to be Publish'd being imperfect' reads very similarly to a statement on the title page of the Gibbs manuscript that it was 'not intended to be made Public being imperfect'.⁷ A marginal annotation in the catalogue, probably by the first Radcliffe librarian Francis Wise, implies that the manuscript never reached Oxford.⁸ A possible clue to its transmission comes from the signature on the title page, in a different hand, of one 'Henry Holland'. This could well have been the architect who worked later in the century, or even his father, a London master mason who worked with Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Either way, it is almost certain to have entered the hands of Holland, who taught Sir John Soane. Soane later acquired much of Holland's collection, thereby providing a plausible transmission for the manuscript.⁹ Details from the Gibbs manuscript were used by the anonymous author of the architect's obituary in the *Scots Magazine* (1760), indicating a posthumous circulation.¹⁰ As a document that was owned by two major eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century architects, the Gibbs manuscript was clearly of interest to subsequent practitioners of Gibbs' profession.

Yet the document has neither been firmly attributed, nor has it been convincingly dated. Evidence below suggests both that James Gibbs wrote the document and that it was composed in the 1750s. At this point, the deficiencies of previous scholarship on the document begin to emerge. Little is somewhat hesitant in his view of the authorship of the text, writing that the document is 'quite probably (and with careful suppressions) by Gibbs himself'; he does not discuss its date.¹¹ Holloway does go

beyond this. He is, first, firm in his belief that the document was written entirely by Gibbs, arguing that his hand is visible throughout. Second, he speculates as to the date of the manuscript. Holloway posits that the second part of the document was written much later than the first, suggesting that a gap of 'perhaps forty years' is visible between the hands of the first and second parts.¹²

Friedman's dating of the text is problematic. He seems to ignore Holloway's convincing palaeographical analysis of the document in his assertion that the second part must have been written 'sometime after 1754 (since it records [Gibbs's] death)'.¹³ This must surely be a mistake, since no such event is present within the text. Reference is made to Gibbs's will, which included a 'present of all his Books [...] to the Radcliffe Library', but his will was written on the 9 May 1754, a few months before his death on the 5 August of that year.¹⁴ There is, therefore, nothing to preclude this passage from having been written by Gibbs. This, along with Holloway's earlier conclusions as to the consistency of the hand, allows us to discount Friedman's suggestion that the document was completed by an associate of Gibbs in the years following his death.

We can return to Holloway's earlier claim, accepted by Friedman, that the manuscript was composed over the course of some forty years. His argument rests largely on the supposed difference in hand between the two parts of the document. To establish this, Holloway employs a comparison of the hand in the second part to that in Gibbs' drawings in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, which date mostly to the 1740s.¹⁵ Whilst I do not dispute the similarities that he detects, I would posit that only one hand – consistent in appearance and date – can be seen throughout the whole of the manuscript. Holloway provides no example from the first part of the manuscript to prove its dissimilarity to the hand of the second. This is provided in Figs. 1 and 2. A comparison of these to the second part (Fig. 3) shows, I believe, a congruence rather than a disjoint

between the two. This could be further supported by a comparison of Gibbs's hand in the manuscript to examples known to date to the 1710s. Consistent in its script, it would therefore seem that the Gibbs manuscript should be dated to one single – i.e. late – period in his life.

This does not rest on palaeographical evidence alone; further support comes in the form of dates internal to the text. Friedman draws attention to the mention of books and buildings written and built long after Gibbs' return to England in 1709 – a list that includes Carlo Fontana's *L'Anfiteatro Flavio* (published in 1725), Nicola Salvi's Fontana di Trevi (begun in 1732), and Alessandro Galilei's façade for San Giovanni in Laterano (1733–5).¹⁶ He suggests that these dates prove that at least parts of the document were written after Gibbs had left Italy, not – as the title page states – written 'while he was Studying Architectur there'.¹⁷ However, the early appearance of remarks post-dating Gibbs's time in Rome makes it seem unlikely that any part of the document was composed during his stay in the city. The first of these comes in his description of the column of Antoninus Pius. Here he relates how Pope Clement XI ordered Carlo Fontana to repair the column and 'have it erected at the Fontana di Trevi', then explaining 'that Pope dying, it is not put up any wher yet'.¹⁸ As Clement died in 1721, the manuscript beyond this point – around four fifths – must have been written at least twelve years after Gibbs's departure from Rome.

A narrower dating can, however, be provided. It is here instructive to consider the statement on the title page that the document was 'not intended to be made Public being imperfect'.¹⁹ In the mid-eighteenth century the word 'imperfect' primarily signified that which is 'not complete; not absolutely finished'.²⁰ If the document is thus unfinished, I would suggest that this is due to the incompleteness of the first rather than the second part. Gibbs' autobiographical notes comprehensively cover his architectural accomplishments, containing a list of

his major buildings until his last, and concluding with an inventory of bequests made in his will. We can contrast this to the several points in the first part at which Gibbs leaves blank pages, presumably for the entry of additional information.²¹ Furthermore, a section of the manuscript that seems clearly to be incomplete, the 'Memorandums' on its last page, is linked most strongly to the first part. The 'Memorandums' comprise three brief biographies of Renaissance figures – Palladio, Pope Sixtus V and Filippo Brunelleschi – whose import is for the first rather than the second part of the manuscript.²² I would suggest that the 'Memorandums' were intended as a glossary of notable personages mentioned in the text; the fact that only three seemingly arbitrary individuals are mentioned indicates that the inclusion of more was intended.

If this material is considered alongside the consistency in hand, then we can suppose both the first and second parts of the document to have been composed contemporaneously. Following this, the latest dateable passages of the manuscript – which are found in Gibbs' autobiographical notes – can be used to suggest a date for the whole. Several buildings from the final years of Gibbs's life and career are mentioned in the manuscript. The latest of these is the entry on Ragley Hall in Warwickshire, of which it 'is said that it will turn out one of the best houses in England'.²³ Gibbs' remodelling of Ragley was not begun until 1751 and was completed after his death, hence the implication that work on the house was still ongoing.²⁴ This, alongside similar entries, allows the manuscript to be dated to the 1750s.

PUBLICATION

This 1750s dating will provide the background to my subsequent analysis. Previously, it has been assumed that the document was composed for Gibbs' own use; however, both the date suggested above and further indications outlined below suggest that this

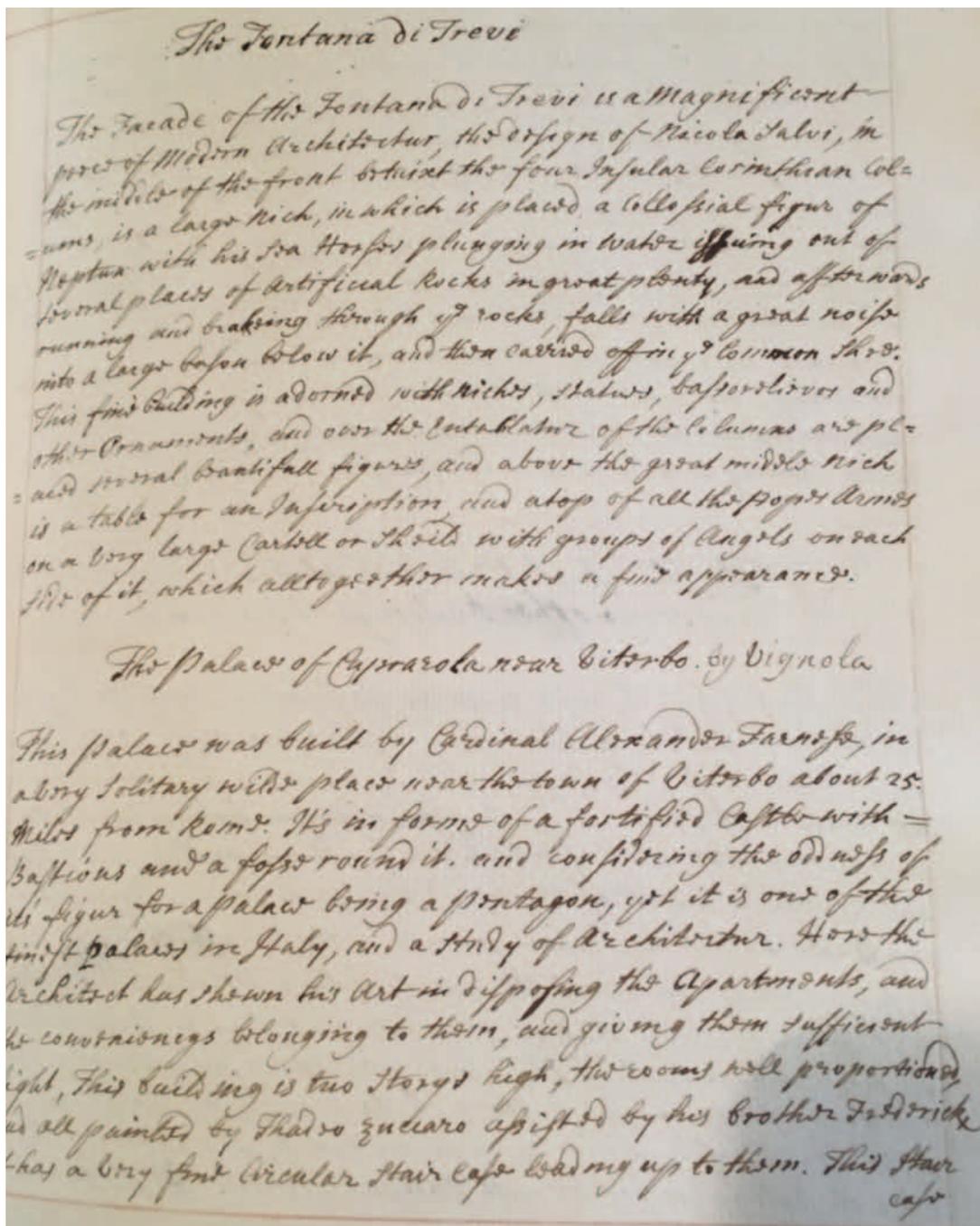


Fig. 2. Extract from Gibbs' notes on 'The Fontana di Trevi' and 'The Palace of Caprarola near Viterbo by Vignola', f. 27(r), 4to. (By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London)

A Short Account of Mr James Gibbs Architect
and of several things he built in England &c.
after his returne from Italy

James Gibbs was born in Scotland Decbr 26 1682 near
Aberdeen, at a place belonging to his Ancestors called
Tittys mire; His fathers name was Peter Gibbs, a gen-
tleman of an antient family, and a small fortune. He
married a gentlewoman of a good family in the north of
Scotland whose name was Gerson, and had several Chil-
dren by her, who all eyed young but two sons, William and
James, to whom the father gave a liberal education, but
both father and Mother dying, William being eldest, suc-
ceeded y^e father, James y^e younger, had a great genius, to
drawing, and being of a rambling disposition wanted to
go abroad to see other Countries, who acquainted his friends
with his intentions, and gott their consent, raised some men-
ey for him, and he imbarked for Holland to visit an Aunt,
he had ther, who was very kind to him, with whom he stayed
some time, and afterwards went through Flanders to Paris,
and then travell'd through Switzerland and Germany, into
Italy, where he remained several years. He was highly pleas'd
with the fine Buildings, pictures, and Statues he saw in the
great towns of Italy, in his way to Rome, but when He gott
to that famous City, it surpass'd all the rest in Magnificence
and grandeur: And as he was a lover of Architecture, painting,
and Sulptry, those arts did shine in perfection there.

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Fig. 3. First page of James Gibbs' autobiographical notes, f. 43(r), 4to.
(By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, London)

is not the case. Thus, the purpose for which the document was written remains open to question. I would like to suggest a solution: that the document was written for publication. Physical evidence strongly suggests that the document is not what it claims to be: namely, notes 'made when [Gibbs] was studying' in Italy 'for his own use'.²⁵ This would imply that the manuscript is Gibbs' Italian notebook. However, it does not at all resemble a notebook that would have been created for an architect's private use. One would expect a notebook to be untidy, eclectic and, importantly, for it to contain information useful to the architect in his practice. None of these categories is fulfilled by the Gibbs manuscript.

A brief comparison can here be made between the Gibbs manuscript and William Kent's 'Remarks by way of Painting and Archit.'. Composed during the painter-architect's six-month tour of northern Italy in 1714, Kent's notebook contains memoranda on the buildings, paintings and artefacts that he encountered.²⁶ Both in terms of its appearance and in terms of the information that it contains, Kent's Italian notebook is clearly written for his own benefit. Bound in a lightweight calfskin with flaps to protect the notebook during travel, the document is untidy and shows evidence of having been written on the spot in the prevalence of hasty crossings-out, rough sketches of compositions, and notes on practical information, such as the materials needed 'per dipingere a frescho'.²⁷

By contrast, the Gibbs manuscript is striking in the formality of its organisation. As a sample page (Fig.2) shows, the document is clearly and neatly ordered. Second thoughts are extremely rare and when Gibbs corrects or changes a word he uses the same careful method of erasure that is visible in his presentational drawings. Furthermore, the manuscript is lacking in information that would have been of assistance to his career as an architect. He notes, for instance, the fact that St Peter's in Rome was intended to be built in the 'forme of a

greek Cross, having all its legs equal', but was then 'inlarged and made like to a latin Cross, having one lege longer than the rest'.²⁸ An architect would have had no need to note something so basic as the difference between a Latin and a Greek cross. Colen Campbell takes it as read that his readers would have been aware of the distinction.²⁹ Furthermore, in his observations on ancient buildings, Gibbs makes no mention of specific architectural details, only observing, for instance, that the Arch of Septimus Severus is 'of the composite Order, full of work and built at a great expence', a remark far too general to have been of use to an architect.³⁰

The tidiness and structural clarity of the manuscript strongly suggest that it was intended for publication. First, both the lack of corrections and the neatness with which they are made implies that the document has been worked up from a draft. Secondly, the manuscript is divided into neatly headed 'chapters' with titles centred above each section, reflecting an idiosyncrasy of Gibbs' publication practice (it was more common for contemporary authors to divide chapters by marginal headings). Thirdly, at many times in the manuscript Gibbs adds beneath the last word of the page the first word of the following page. Thus, in the notes on the Church of the Gesù in Rome 'each side of this fine altar are groups of ^{figures} /of figures cut in statuary marble'.³¹ This feature of the manuscript is directly linked to book production. Known in bibliography as a 'catchword', 'its purpose was to assist the binder in the assembling of the book' or to serve 'as an aid to the compositor in imposing pages of type in correct order'.³² Fourthly, a reference in the catalogue of Gibbs' books to the fact that the document was 'not intended to be Publish'd' counter-intuitively suggests the reverse, implying that Gibbs believed the manuscript would in fact be published unless he specified otherwise.³³ This is unlikely to be a posthumous corruption. Gibbs states in his will that he was personally involved in the cataloguing of his books, as is attested by the presence of his hand in

one entry.³⁴ Fifthly, the fact that the document is referred to as a 'manuscript', which in contemporary usage specifically described 'a book written, not printed', lends further weight to my contention that it was intended for publication.³⁵

For Gibbs to have sought to publish the document is entirely consistent with his known activities. Publication had played an important role throughout his career. His *Book of Architecture* and his *Rules for Drawing* were both extremely successful; the former was 'probably the most widely used architectural book of the century'.³⁶ The financial incentive to publish alone was compelling. Gibbs earned around £1,900 from the sale of his architectural books, towards the upper end of the amount that it was possible for an author in the period to earn.³⁷ Books retained their money-making potential for the author long after they had initially gone to press. In 1737, five years after its initial publication, Gibbs sold the plates and copyright to the *Rules for Drawing* for £400.³⁸ It was doubly advantageous for an architect to publish books in the period: it was served as a means by which he could both advance his own designs and demonstrate his capabilities to prospective patrons.

Gibbs was a canny self-promoter and publication was one of the chief tools at his disposal. Unparalleled among his peers in the single-mindedness with which he advertised himself, it has been observed that 'with the exception of Sir William Chambers, Gibbs seems to have had himself recorded [in portraiture] more often than any eighteenth-century British architect'.³⁹ He had realised the potential for self-advertisement that was presented by publications early on. Anticipating even Campbell, in 1713 Gibbs wrote of his plans to write a 'book of architecture' by which he could launch his career.⁴⁰ It was probably the death of Queen Anne and the ensuing fall of his then patron, Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, that caused the fifteen year gap between the idea and its realisation. Containing exclusively his own designs, Gibbs'

Book of Architecture went beyond rival publications in advancing his status as a pre-eminent architect. No publication devoted solely to the designs of one architect had been issued in England before this.⁴¹ Gibbs innovated in his use of publications throughout his life. The frontispiece of his 1747 *Bibliotheca Radcliviana* is Hogarth's portrait of the architect, framed by a decorative border of Gibbs's design; an assertive statement that was unprecedented in the publications of living British architects.⁴²

LITERARY CONTEXT

If it is accepted that it was written to be published, our understanding of the Gibbs manuscript can be enhanced by an awareness of the literary context in which it was created. It must first be stressed that the Gibbs manuscript is atypical of contemporary publications devoted to architecture. Publications on Roman antiquities in the middle-to-late Early Modern period grappled in different ways with the matters of archaeology and imaginative reconstruction. The works of four authors illustrate the different approaches that were adopted. The first is Andrea Palladio's *Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* (1570), whose fourth book comprises measured drawings and descriptions of ancient Roman buildings.⁴³ Following Palladio, Roland Fréart de Chambray's *Parallele d'Architettura Antiqua avec la Moderne* (1650) synthesises treatises on the Orders of architecture that had been written by various scholars, both ancient and modern.⁴⁴ Another approach came in the form of the publications of Gibbs's old master, Carlo Fontana. In Fontana's *Il Tempio Vaticano e sua Origine* (1694) and *L'Anfiteatro Flavio Descritto e Delineato* (published in 1725 but written earlier), the architect seeks to marry detailed surveys with knowledge derived from antique literary sources in order to give plausible reconstructions of classical structures.⁴⁵

However, the most influential author on classical ruins in the 1750s was Antoine Desgodets. Desgodets, whose *Les Edifices Antiques de Rome* was published in 1682, believed that a true understanding of ancient monuments could only be gained from an accurate and precise knowledge of their measurements.⁴⁶ Desgodets sought to provide a corrective to the inadequate measurements of Palladio and particularly of Fréart. He set out to disprove Fréart's generalising statements on the Orders, aiming to advance an understanding of Classical architecture in which material evidence superseded architectural treatise.⁴⁷ Such was Desgodets' popularity in the 1750s that in 1755 Robert Adam was unable to find a copy London, Paris or Rome below double its original price.⁴⁸ His exacting attitude towards accuracy set the tone of architectural publications on antiquity in the second half of the eighteenth-century. This trajectory was established in the years before Gibbs' death in Robert Wood's 1753 *Ruins of Palmyra*, a publication that he owned, which was among the first to apply Desgodets' methods to ruins outside Rome.⁴⁹

Gibbs exhibits none of this concern with academic rigour in the manuscript. He cites authorities on Classical architecture interchangeably, instructing his readers for example that 'both Paladio and Degodez have given draughts of' the Temple of Mars Ultor.⁵⁰ Desgodets, who criticises Palladio for giving measurements of this temple that were incorrect by an inch-and-a-quarter, would surely not have approved of Gibbs' bracketing of the two together.⁵¹ Further evidence of this fundamental difference in approach can be seen in Gibbs' remarks on the Temple of Fortuna Virilis. Whist he praises only the 'remarcable [...] Volutos of it's Angular capitells, which have a very fine effect' Desgodets devotes three and-a-half pages and four illustrations to the temple.⁵²

This is also visible in the six illustrations that Gibbs includes of the Pantheon in Rome, which are copies after Fontana's illustrations of the developmental stages of the same building.⁵³

(Figs. 4–5) Yet when Gibbs's drawings are compared to those of Fontana, a considerable variance in method can be seen. The differences between the two reveal a fundamental variance of approach. Although Gibbs corrects Fontana's depiction of the Pantheon as it appeared in Republican Rome, he does this silently and in so doing refuses to engage with the archaeological debate raised by Fontana. More could also be said on the dissimilarity of the Gibbs manuscript to publications on English buildings. In books such as Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Kent's *Designs of Inigo Jones*, or even Gibbs' own previous efforts, it was the plates not textual descriptions that made up their bulk.

An analysis of Gibbs's intended readership helps to suggest a more likely genre, that of travel writing, Gibbs had, in his career as a publisher, been deft in his choice of audience. This is particularly striking in the *Rules for Drawing*. In the preface, Gibbs states that he intended the book to be used by 'Beginners' and those who were 'but little skill'd in Arithmetick'.⁵⁴ Yet, there was a dual public for which this remark was intended. Costing one and a half guineas, the *Rules* was an expensive folio beyond the purchasing-power of the artisans that it ostensibly served. The *Rules* instead came to the knowledge of workmen by dissemination in compilation literature.⁵⁵ Rather, this statement should best be seen as an advertisement to aristocrats such as the book's dedicatee, Edward Harley, the second Earl of Oxford, of Gibbs's desire to further the cause of good architecture throughout the country. His *Book of Architecture*, moreover, was both a pattern book and had a subscription list larger than William Kent's for the *Designs of Inigo Jones*.⁵⁶ In short, Gibbs had in previous publications skilfully appealed to his ennobled readership by unconventional – and professedly unselfconscious – means.

He is similarly adroit in his targeting of a readership in the manuscript at hand. Hints of this audience come in the books to which he refers. Mainly expensive folios, these would only have been available

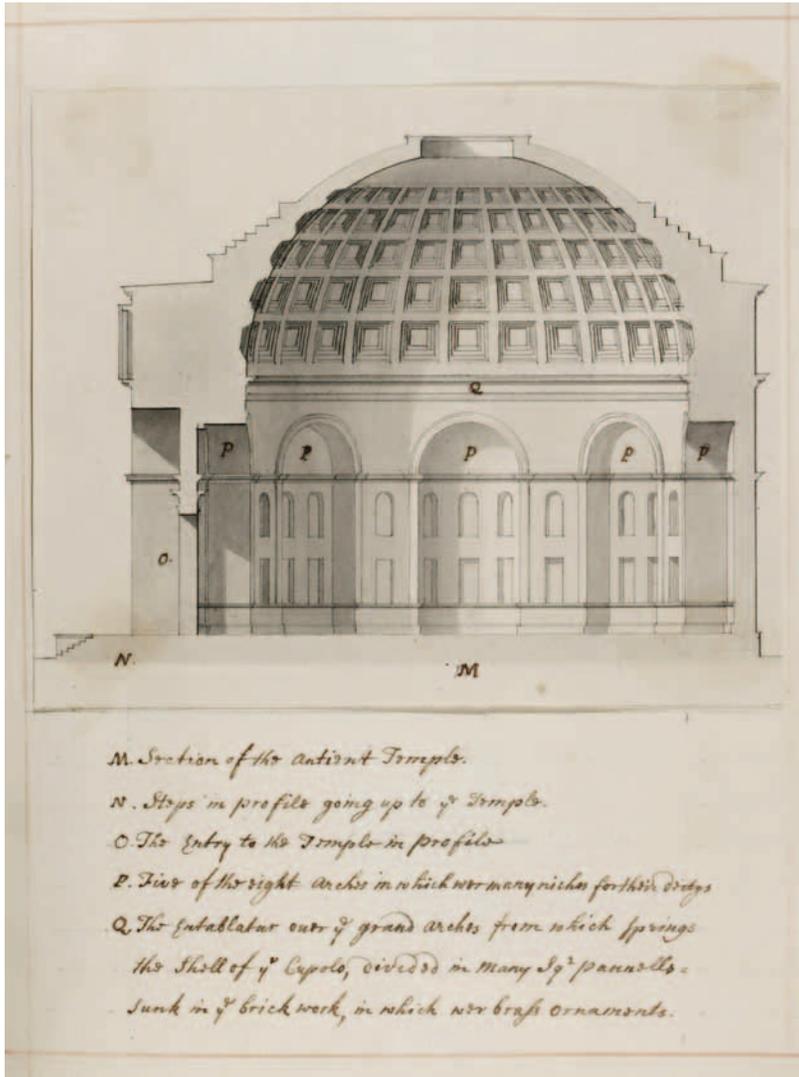


Fig. 4. James Gibbs (after Carlo Fontana, with emendations), annotated sectional view of the Pantheon, ink and wash, 1750s (?). (© Sir John Soane's Museum, London. Photo: Hugh Kelly)

to the most affluent and well-educated members of eighteenth-century society.⁵⁷ Readers are pointed, for instance, to the *L'Anfiteatro Flavio* 'a large book in folio' by Fontana.⁵⁸ We are told, in addition, that the Triumphal Arches of Rome have 'been given a full description' by Pietro Sancto Bartoli, Palladio,

and Desgodets; and that 'Ciaconius has described [Trajan's Column] and all it's partes very exactly'.⁵⁹ Other than Palladio, none of these costly books existed in an English translation during Gibbs's life.

But, at the same time, Gibbs assumes very little prior knowledge from his readers. We see this in the

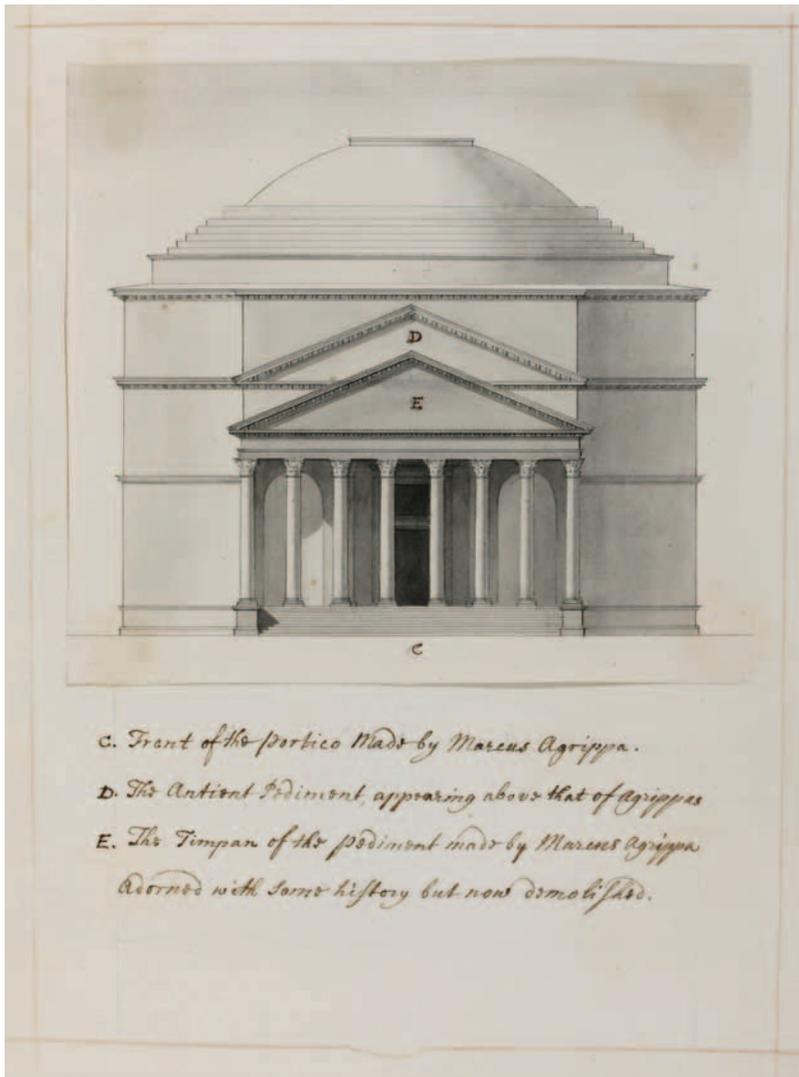


Fig. 5. James Gibbs (after Carlo Fontana, with emendations), annotated elevation of the Pantheon, ink and wash, 1750s (?). (© Sir John Soane's Museum, London. Photo: Hugh Kelly)

'Memorandums'. The biographies in this section of the architects Palladio and Brunelleschi expect no awareness of either architect, two of the most famed in the eighteenth century. The information on the former is so brief that it can be quoted in full: 'Paladio was born in Vicenza, a town belonging to

the Republic of Venice, he was one of the greatest Architects of his time, was a great honour to his Country, he dyed in the year 1580'.⁶⁰ In an age for which Palladio was the architectural *ne plus ultra*, it seems plausible to suggest that these remarks were intended for a less-educated audience.⁶¹

As a book that appealed to a reader who was lacking in education but who also had access to expensive literature and foreign language skills, I would suggest that it was intended to target an aristocratic readership whose education was incomplete, which in turn suggests the category of the Grand Tourist. By the 1750s it had become standard for any cultured young noble to finish his or her education with a Grand Tour, and travel writing played a vital role in conditioning the expectations of tourists before they embarked.⁶² The first part of the Gibbs manuscript can be seen to reflect many traits of the genre of travel writing, more specifically the subgenre of the guidebook. That this was a field in which Gibbs had an interest is demonstrated by the many accounts of travels in his library.⁶³

One component of the guidebook genre is present in the pedagogic tone of the manuscript. Gibbs often identifies buildings that would be of particular interest to the prospective visitor. He writes, for instance, of Santa Maria in Vallicella that 'ther are some fine Monuments in this Church, and other things well worth the Observation of y^e Curious'.⁶⁴ A similar pattern can be seen elsewhere, such as in his description of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, in which 'ther are a good many Curious things to be seen here, worth y^e observation of y^e Virtuosi', and his mention of 'above a hundred other fine Palaces done by several great Masters of excellent Architectur worthy the Observation of the Curious' in Venice.⁶⁵

Two structural features strengthen this. The first is the organisation of the document. Its first part adheres to a clear though flexible structure. It is prefaced and post-scripted with two historical excurses, the first on Ancient Rome and the second on its Renaissance reconstruction 'and of its having layen in Rubbish many hundreds of years'.⁶⁶ Between these come Gibbs's remarks on the buildings, which are grouped first by city and then according to type. In the case of Ancient Rome,

Gibbs takes a broadly systematic approach: first, temples are described; then, triumphal arches; public buildings; columns; and other monuments. This is clearer still in his section on modern Rome, with churches; palaces; villas; fountains; and buildings in the surrounding countryside dealt with in turn. In adopting this structure, the manuscript relates directly to earlier guidebooks such as Germaine Brice's *Description Nouvelle de la Ville de Paris* or Edward Hatton's *A New View of London*.⁶⁷ Both works, like Gibbs's, included historical overviews and, importantly, sought to convey information in a non-narrative form, unlike many other works.⁶⁸

Secondly, Gibbs is careful to include essential information about buildings that would be desired by a touristic reader: the general form and appearance of a building; those responsible for its commission; its architect; and, finally, its most notable artefacts. He at times imparts additional information that would only have been of use to the prospective traveller, explaining that although the 'palace of Caprarola near Viterbo' is 'now almost forsaken, the family not living there these many years, however ther are always some person belonging to the family in it to show it to strangers and to take care of it'.⁶⁹ Most striking are his notes on the library of San Giovanni in Laterano. Here, Gibbs outlines details of the visiting hours of the library; 'any person may go there, and call for what book he wants to consult or read, from 8. Of y^e Clock in y^e Morning, till eleven. And from tuo, till five in y^e Affternoone'.⁷⁰

The wider environment of eighteenth-century travel-writing, can account for some seemingly peculiar features of the manuscript such as its extremely cursory account of the 'the Buildings in France, Flanders Germany and Holland'. Of Paris, we only learn that 'There are numbers of large Buildings, Palaces, Hotells, Churches and other Fabricks, which have a particularity in them that distinguishes them to be built by French Architects'.⁷¹ For Gibbs, whose collection of visual materials proves his interest Parisian architecture,

to be so brief is at first surprising.⁷² However, this can be understood if these notes are seen as a signal towards travel-writing. Innovation in the travel account was an important aspect of the genre, but it needed to be done with reference to precedent.⁷³ Joseph Addison provided an equally truncated account of places that were non-essential to his 1705 *Remarks on the Several Parts of Italy, &c.*⁷⁴ Lacking information about the countries beyond Italy that is implied by the '&c.' in the title, it is as though Addison's account is 'suspended between two unwritten narratives'.⁷⁵ However, this was a device by which Addison indicated that he intended his work to supplement other accounts, rather than to act as a freestanding guide.⁷⁶ In kind, John Breval's 1726 *Remarks on Several Parts of Europe* expands Addison's narrative, covering the countries that his predecessor omitted.⁷⁷ Like both authors, in referencing these standard *topoi* of travel accounts Gibbs positions his account by relation to those of his peers.

Further seeming idiosyncrasies of the document relate to this literary milieu, such as Gibbs's claim that the document comprised 'Memorandums for his own use'.⁷⁸ This was a common rhetorical feature of travel writing. Edward Wright, for example, professes that he 'had no intention of troubling the Publick with' his account.⁷⁹ Moreover, Gibbs's descriptions of buildings that we know that he could never have seen becomes less unusual in this context. It was standard practice for travel writers to invent aspects of their narratives. There is no evidence, for instance, that Thomas Nugent – author of four volumes of travels – ever went abroad.⁸⁰

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND GIBBS'S CAREER

As a piece of travel writing-cum-autobiography, we can now relate the manuscript to the activities of its author in the 1750s. Although recent discoveries show that these were more than years 'of assured,

unambitious ease', a 21,000-word document would probably have been the most prominent of Gibbs' final projects.⁸¹ The manuscript tells us much about his state of mind in the 1750s when, I would like to suggest, he embarked on a busy project of self-memorialising. In this, Gibbs attempted to craft his own legacy to show himself, first, as a successful architect and, secondly, as a man of learning who had been educated by the most important architects of his youth.

As a Catholic, Gibbs, who left £100 in his will for the saying of requiem masses, was deeply concerned with his afterlife.⁸² However, his desire to preserve his own legacy went beyond what was usual for members of his faith. This can be seen in the autobiographical second part of the Gibbs manuscript. In his other publications, Gibbs referred to himself in the first-person, but here he employs the third-person. Holloway took this as evidence of Gibbs' 'modest reticence'; however, I would infer the reverse.⁸³ If the manuscript was indeed composed at the end of his life, it is probable that its author was aware that he might not live to see its publication. In adopting the third-person, Gibbs is able anonymously to laud his own architecture. So he could write of the 'beautifull Cube Room' in the Duke of Argyll's villa at Petersham, and of the Chapel he designed at Canons, which 'was reckoned the finest in England'.⁸⁴ He is also able to recast the historical record to his own advantage. Thus he claims that two additional buildings to the Senate House of the planned Cambridge quadrangle were not built because 'the University had not money to finish them'.⁸⁵ In reality, the project was dropped as members of the university were dissatisfied with his designs.⁸⁶ This is in keeping with the retrospective alterations that Gibbs made to some designs in the *Book of Architecture*.⁸⁷

Gibbs's self-memorialising can be seen in his listing of his charitable donations and in his use of the past tense. Thus, he writes that to St. Bartholomew's Hospital '[h]e gave all his drawings, time, and

Attendance gratis [...] out of Charity'. Similarly, he devotes a separate section headed 'The Inscription on the First Stone' to the foundation plate of the building.⁸⁸ He makes, moreover, careful note of the gifts that he made in his will 'of his Busto in Marble done by M^r Rysbrack' to the Library; 'his own Picture' to the Schools; and of 'his Picture being of a Kitcat Sise' to St. Mary's College, Oxford. Additional emphasis is placed on the 'present of all his Books [...] for the use of the University'.⁸⁹ This all combines to give an impression of an architect who wished to isolate and stress his own noble deeds.

However, Gibbs goes beyond this in seeking to foster his legacy as a man of books. This is first evidenced by the donation of his books and drawings to the Radcliffe Library. Gibbs notably gave more thought to his collection of books than his collection of art-works. Whilst all 117 of his works of art were sold and see no mention in the Gibbs manuscript, he ordered his books to be placed in the Radcliffe rotunda.⁹⁰ Further, his eclectic and disorganised collection of drawings contrasts to the efforts of architect-collectors William and John Talman (father and son), who wished to build a legacy for themselves in the elaborate display of their collection.⁹¹ Gibbs' large and wide-ranging library, which comprised 'near seven hundred Volumes', was exceptionally comprehensive for an architect of his time.⁹² In his will Gibbs pointedly stipulates that the books should 'be placed next to [his] Bustoe' (by John Michael Rysbrack), thereby ensuring that the link between books and benefactor could not be missed.⁹³ As a further reminder of his ownership, Gibbs' bookplate – his portrait engraved by Bernard Baron – is in the front of every volume.

Gibbs proudly affirms his membership of the scholarly community in his account of the opening of the Radcliffe Library, during which he was matriculated into Oxford University and was mentioned by Dr William King, Principal of St. Mary Hall, 'in a most honorable manner, in his learned Speech'.⁹⁴ Further, Gibbs is careful

to note dedicatory inscriptions relating to his career, such as the legend underneath his bust in the Radcliffe Library: 'IACOBUS GIBBS R.F.S./HUJUS ÆDIFICIJ ARCITECTUS'.⁹⁵ Belonging to antiquarian culture that strove constantly to emulate Rome, Gibbs also kept copies of dedicatory plates laid at the foundation of his buildings.⁹⁶

Just as he wished to show himself as a man of learning, Gibbs wished to lay emphasis on the two sources from which he learned the most: Rome and Sir Christopher Wren. Rome is crucial to the manuscript and provides the link between the first and the second halves. The crux of his brief narrative autobiography is his arrival 'in that famous City, it surpassed all the rest in Magnificence and grandeur'.⁹⁷ This had been an essential means by which he fashioned his identity throughout his career. When seeking employment on the Commission for Fifty New Churches, Gibbs argues that he should be awarded the prestigious position as he had 'studied Architectur abroad for several years under the greatest Masters at Rome'.⁹⁸ In the *Book of Architecture*, he boasts that his designs are done 'in the best Tast I could form upon the Instructions of the greatest Masters in *Italy*'.⁹⁹ Known to the Earl of Mar as 'Signor Gibbi' before William Kent was 'Kentissime' to the Earl of Burlington, Gibbs was notable in his desire to memorialise himself as an Italophile architect.¹⁰⁰

This accounts for his positive account of the 'modern' buildings of Rome. Gibbs owned books relating to all of these buildings.¹⁰¹ For him the portico of Bernini's Sant'Andrea al Quirinale is a 'Masterpeece of art' and the twin churches of Santa Maria di Montesanto and Santa Maria dei Miracoli in the Piazza del Popolo are 'one of y^e finest Scenes can be seen'.¹⁰² He also praises the 'very good effect' of the nave niches of San Giovanni in Laterano designed by Borromini.¹⁰³ Although he criticises them for 'a little bordering upon the gothick' this is weak compared to Campbell's condemnation of Borromini for endeavouring 'to debacuh

Mankind with his odd and chimerical beauties'.¹⁰⁴

However, Gibbs' conclusion that 'ther can not be any comparison betwixt y^e grandeur of Antient and Modern Rome' shows that his attitude was not uncritically positive.¹⁰⁵ Rather, in describing these buildings Gibbs displays both his erudite knowledge of the most up-to-date buildings in Rome and his discerning taste in ultimately rejecting their 'humble imitation of the Antient Architectur'.¹⁰⁶

In this, parallels can be drawn between the manuscript and Sir Christopher Wren's *Parentalia*, which, it might be suggested, as a book written by an architect not exclusively on architectural matters, provided the germ of inspiration for the Gibbs manuscript. Published in 1750, *Parentalia* was the work of three successive generations of the Wren family.¹⁰⁷ A publication that references, by turns, the genres of family chronicle, scientific tract, and architectural treatise, like the Gibbs manuscript Wren's narrative biography is brief and with an inventory of his architectural and scientific achievements serving to complete it. Further, in an attitude that can be likened to Gibbs's towards the Baroque, Wren demonstrates an appreciation of the relative merits of Gothic architecture, only to argue for the suitability of classical architecture to the age in which he lived.¹⁰⁸ Gibbs, who arguably learnt as much from Wren as from Fontana, writes with humility of his debt to Wren who was 'much his freind who having seen some of Mr Gibbs drawings was much pleased with them'. Indeed, St Paul's Cathedral 'which is a very fine building and shows very much the skill of that great man' is the only modern English building not designed by Gibbs that is mentioned in the manuscript.¹⁰⁹

CONCLUSION

I would like to end with some concluding observations. The first is that we emerge from this study of the autobiography less certain than we were about Gibbs' activities abroad in his youth. His documentation of buildings that he was known not to have seen attests to the fact that much of his information came at second hand through books and engravings; thus his description of a building by no means implies that he saw it in person. All that can be said for certain is that he studied in Rome and possibly took the route that he outlines in his autobiography: through Holland, Paris, Germany and Switzerland.¹¹⁰ However, inaccurate or misrepresented information about Gibbs' own buildings should give us cause to treat this insight with caution. Nevertheless, I hope my analysis is more than simply destructive. If it is accepted that the Gibbs manuscript is an unpublished piece of travel writing dating to the 1750s, we are left with a greater awareness of how Gibbs' understood his own achievements. He sought to act in death as his own self-publicist, just as he had been in his lifetime, memorialising himself as both a *literato* and an architect whose education abroad had allowed him to understand the achievements of the greatest English architect of his youth.

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