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_Inigo Jones and the Classical Tradition_


Giles Worsley

_Inigo Jones and the European Classicist Tradition_


As the introduction to Giles Worsley’s _Inigo Jones and the European Classicist Tradition_ explains, we still need a definitive monograph on Inigo Jones (1573–1652), one attending to his “broader cultural position at the Stuart court” (3) as a designer and eventually writer of masques and other entertainments and as the royal servant entrusted with the implementation of James I’s and Charles I’s determination to see their metropolis raised to new, often Continental, standards of uniformity and amenity. It says something for Jones’s own determination, and confidence, that we continue to take him at his own and his friends’ evaluation as the authoritative preacher of a classical gospel purged of the inventive corruptions that he attributed to “fleminge[s],” among others: the comprehensive Jones book would examine the career paths followed, and self-promotional strategies employed, by his predecessors as surveyor and in other posts at the royal Office of Works. Christy Anderson’s _Inigo Jones and the Classical Tradition_ answers Worsley’s other desideratum for detailed attention to Jones’s library, and in particular to the annotations such as that about the licentious Flemings (in his copy of Alberti’s _Arcitettura_), while persuasively showing yet another path for Jones scholarship, that of tracing his accommodations, as well as his breaks, with English expectations for buildings of any pretension. Worsley’s concern is similarly two-fold: to situate Jones in a very specific Continental context in chapters devoted to comparable and roughly contemporary architecture in the Italian and south German territories, France, and the Netherlands, and then to argue that the architect’s overriding concern to maintain decorum, or propriety, sometimes extended to the considered omission of such motifs as the portico and the Serlian (or Venetian) window or other opening with three lights and an arched center. As “symbols of sovereignty” (3), these must be reserved for regents, since for Jones “architecture was essentially hierarchic” and buildings should reflect their owners’ place in the social hierarchy (72). Anderson’s and Worsley’s similar titles therefore obscure big differences; both studies will be forces to be reckoned with when that definitive monograph gets underway.

We know that Jones traveled on the Continent at least three times, that fifty-two books and related subjects (itemized and located in Anderson’s appendix) can be identified as having belonged to him, and that by 1614, when he returned to England for the last time, he owned at least 250 drawings by Palladio; the books, prints, and drawings he borrowed, buildings he studied, and conversations he conducted with other enthusiasts are unquantifiable. Both authors wish to demonstrate that the breadth and critical acuity of Jones’s self-education—the “Palladian” label applied by later generations is misleadingly limiting—is also evident in his architecture.

The differences between Anderson’s and Worsley’s books emerge in their discussions of the Banqueting House. This building and the Queen’s House at Greenwich, St. Paul’s Church in Covent Garden, the chapel at St. James’s Palace, the quadrants and pavilions at Stoke Park in Northamptonshire, and (more or less indirectly) the south front of Wilton House, Wiltshire, are today the standing remains of Jones’s career as a designer of buildings. As a tidily naturalistic device for gathering characters together, banqueting scenes often formed the climaxes of Jacobean tragedies: reconciliations ensue, but horrific revelations of treason, murder, cannibalism, incest, and combinations thereof were just as likely. After the not-quite-completed Banqueting House at the Palace of Whitehall was first used in April 1621, for a Garter feast, playwrights seem to have declared a regretful though tacit moratorium on such scenes for a few years, which may say something about the importance James I was perceived as attaching to the project, the “most public statement,” in Anderson’s words, “of his court’s cultural achievements and political aspirations” (166).

Anderson’s book is about processes, not products, and her major discussion of the Banqueting House appears, along with others on Covent Garden and the restoration of St. Paul’s Cathedral, in a chapter toward the end of the book entitled, carefully, “Practices.” A characteristically subtle attention to readings and receptions is apparent as Anderson begins with John Aubrey’s praise for the Banqueting House as a summa—“if all the Books of Architecture were lost,” in its face “the true art of Building might be retrieved” (166)—and reminds us of its canonical status ever since. That the newly built Banqueting House contrasted dramatically with the rest of the vast and straggling Whitehall Palace—ornamented by different codes, to be admired by different canons—is a commonplace, but Anderson amplifies it in important ways. The Banqueting House had two intended audiences: ambassadors and other foreign visitors, who would have liked it to monarchical façades and spaces abroad, and to the English. James I had the essentially religious ceremony of “touching” for scrofula, the “king’s evil,” transferred here from the Chapel Royal. For all the exoticism of Jones’s gridded array of the orders, English visitors could have associated the Banqueting House’s tapestry dressings, ornate carving, and external polychromy (the last mostly lost after later refacing) with its two richly decorated predecessors on the site and, more generally, with the “great hall” as a native type cultivated as the locus of the hospitable convention that structured so much of the period’s political and social thought.

Anderson further suggests that to move through Whitehall was also to recapitulate recent history, the benign
and providential transition from the Tudors to the Stuarts. All accessions prompt a kind of “crisis of representation,” as court historians call it, the need to balance presentations of continuity with marks of difference, but Scottish James’s accession was particularly tricky. In the retrospective light of Charles I’s (and possibly his father’s) schemes for rebuilding the entire palace to match, it is easy to think of the Banqueting House as a seed-crystal waiting for space in which to replicate, but Anderson’s hypothesis of a constructed “progression of styles, like the royal lineage itself, progress[ing] from Tudor to the new era, from chivalry to classicism” (180), of a stone Banqueting House requiring its brick and knapped-flint context in order to take on its full meaning, is persuasive. The reader is prepared for it by an introduction sketching England’s characteristic way of viewing buildings “that valued the surprising, the inventive, and the cleverly wrought” (9) while at the same time nursing a gloomy mistrust of its own supposed susceptibility to novelty and foreign inventions.

Throughout the book, Anderson alludes to Jones’s efforts to balance presentations of continuity with marks of difference. The lasting value of her text will reside not least in its concern to show Jones drawing “on English customs in order to shape classical architecture for a domestic audience” (1). “For a contemporary English viewer the effect of Jones’s ‘reading and writing practices’ (19) and his architecture is, therefore, one of Anderson’s subjects, and she concludes that it was hardly a direct one. Some of the marks on the pages are very inconsequential looking, little more than scribbles; for Anderson they are all inconsequential, if what we are seeking is direct evidence for the ‘genesis of his architectural thinking and . . . architectural projects’ (165). Though the young Jones may have been apprenticed to a joiner, his route to practice was not through one of the craft ‘mysteries,’ like masonry or carpentry, tied to a building material. Pen and paper were Jones’s materials, and Anderson shows us how hand, eye, and mind together worked them. Along the way we get some comparative analyses of drawings—Jones’s and Robert Smythson’s elevations of a gate at Arundel House, for example, and two versions of the dome on Jones’s design for James I’s catafalque—so informative that the reader wants more.

Worsley’s study includes sharp and fine-grained source spotting, inspired, in part, by the density of some of Jones’s annotations. Hence, for example, the Banqueting House’s window surrounds derive from the Composite door surround illustrated in Vincenzo Scamozzi’s L’idea della architettura universale (1615), “with minor alterations taken from Scamozzi’s . . . Corinthian door surround” (107). This kind of analysis resists graceful exposition, and quick reading, but such passages in a book offering for comparison an enormous range of buildings, drawings, and prints are buttressed by excellent illustrations, many in color. For Worsley, the Banqueting House is “perhaps the only one of Jones’s buildings whose overall design, rather than details, may be directly derived from Palladio” (95), specifically from a drawing for the Palazzo Chiericati that Jones owned and the Palazzo Thiene as illustrated in I quattro libri, a portion of the text heavily marked in his copy. This discussion appears in the chapter “Jones, Palladio, Scamozzi and Rubens,” one of a pair about Jones’s architectural debts (and departures) in the middle of Worsley’s book, which redirects it away from the work of Jones’s Continental peers and toward the iconography of the “architecture of sovereignty.”

Inigo Jones and the European Classicist Tradition challenges the casual but prevailing assumption that in the broader European context Jones is a kind of academic throwback, “promoting the architectural discourse of the sixteenth century just as everyone else was moving towards the Baroque,” visiting the old Scamozzi, once Palladio’s pupil, like a “hapless provincial turning up at the party just as the guests are all leaving” (1). The first part shows just how far Jones was from being isolated in his attraction to what Worsley calls the “classicist” tendency toward a relatively restrained and orderly use of architectural ornament that clearly delineates and isolates individual elements. Much of the material in this section of the book was a revelation to me: the breadth of comparison is a tribute to Worsley’s wide travels and an exceptional visual memory.
The point is that Jones's Continental experience assured him that the kind of architecture he was interested in practicing was very much in the mainstream—or alternatively, that if he wanted to be in the mainstream, this was the kind of architecture he should practice. Anderson's book repeatedly alludes to Jones's confidence in his project, and Worsley's argument that this confidence was grounded in a realistic perception of Continental modernism could have received more emphasis in his text, which occasionally entangles itself in such details as whether Jones knew Elias Holl's St. Anna Gymnasium (1612) in Augsburg: that is, it does not always maintain the distinction between generalized and specific inspiration. The Banqueting House emerges, in this part of the book, in relation to the Netherlanders' well-documented interest in (and in Rubens's case, direct involvement with) the building. Worsley concurs with Konrad Ottenheym's suggestion that the front of the house Jacob van Campen designed for the Coymans brothers (1625) in Amsterdam paraphrases the Banqueting House's slightly projecting center, Composite over Ionic orders, and segmental and triangular pediments (since removed from the Coymanshuis) alternating over the windows.

Would Jones have seen a certain lèse-majesté in operation here? Worsley later describes how the “careful control of architectural ornament [Jones] favored, in which pilasters were reserved for the grandest buildings such as the Banqueting House, broke down in the face of the bourgeois desire for embellishment” (89) met elsewhere in London, for example at the houses on the south side of Great Queen Street in Lincoln’s Inn Fields built around 1640 and probably designed by Peter Mills. The Dutch bourgeoisie were pushy enough to get applied temple fronts too: as Worsley points out, we do not find these, let alone freestanding porticoes, on private English houses until England became a republic in the mid-century interregnum. The first designs for the Banqueting House would have given it a pediment (though one unrelated to any entrance to the building, which is perhaps why Jones abandoned it). The Banqueting House as built then disappears almost entirely from the last part of Worsley's book because, aside from the basilican plan, it lacks the identified “symbols of sovereignty.” Worsley's penultimate chapter on the unexecuted designs for Whitehall Palace also focuses on the so-called P set of designs, which according to Worsley best represents Jones's intentions for the palace (as opposed to those of his pupil and assistant John Webb), and the P set does not incorporate the Banqueting House.

Worsley's observations about the temple fronts raise questions about the political allegiances of those 1650s portico builders, for example, and what (if any) categorical distinctions we should draw between pilasters (which were used by private builders during Charles I's reign) and pediments (which were not). Some of these questions are acknowledged in the text; others probably would have been had Worsley been able to make final revisions before his untimely death. The most fundamental question (as another reviewer has already pointed out) concerns the relationship between decorous and symbolic ornament.1 Decorous ornament is assessed in relation to the building type and the patron's standing, alongside other criteria like size and materials. Someone surely sneered at the Great Queen Street houses because early modern Londoners generally did sneer, but indecorousness could be a dangerous political liability: well into the next century, Sarah Churchill, duchess of Marlborough, worked hard to defend herself and the duke from the charge. By Worsley's reasoning, the Serliana at the house of a commoner, for example, would have been indecorous in Jones's eyes because it was a royal-cum-sacral symbol.

Yet, once translated to the house it becomes symbolically neutral, though possibly indecorous. In the face of the range of evidence Worsley amassed for his chapter on the Serliana, one of three on “The Architecture of Sovereignty,” we cannot deny his contention that, beginning in the early sixteenth century, the device must have acquired powerful connotations though cumulative use in papal and other regnal contexts, but from what we can judge, the Serliana, unlike a royal cipher (for example), would have lost those meanings in lesser buildings. A symbol that cannot be relied upon to symbolize is misnamed.

Worsley's beautifully presented book draws together a vast range of material. His survey of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century architecture within Jones's wide ambit is all the more valuable for its frank tendentiousness, that muscular argument that turns Jones from the hapless provincial to one of the stars of the party. The book's concluding part makes the simple but vital point that the great projects of the 1630s, including the restoration of St. Paul’s Cathedral, must be understood in the context of the “personal rule” during the decade after Charles I's prorogation of a troublesome parliament in 1629. Worsley's Jones, and more implicitly Anderson's, is to a valuable extent a politicized Jones who followed his master all the way as the king became enchanted by an iconography of triumph and submission in the years leading up to the Civil Wars and his own decapitation on the stage fixed to the Banqueting House in 1649. In the climactic moment of Jones's last masque, Salmacida Spolia (1640, written with William Davenant), the body-armored figure of Charles I was revealed sitting on a throne of honor supported by, in Jones's words, “captives bound in several postures, lying on trophies of armours, shields, and antique weapons, all [the] . . . throne being feigned of goldsmith's work.”2 In designing the throne, Jones sketched three pairs of captives facing one another, feet and hands bound, as he sought precise alignments of rolling shoulders and heads averted in mutual shame. The masque's theme is a conciliation between the king and his recalled parliament, and Davenant's lyrics accordingly describe a merciful monarch who will not punish the “vulgar sickness” of discontent. But the message is disrupted by Jones's treatment of the captives in the printed text, as it must have been by the
sight of those faux-gilt figures in the performance; Jones was the more triumphally minded of the two collaborators.3

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Notes

Ralf Mennekes
Die Renaissance der deutschen Renaissance
Petersberg, Germany: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2005, 622 pp., 432 b&w illus. €89.95, ISBN 3-937251-67-7

The user of this book oscillates between a fascination with the subject as presented through the author’s breadth of knowledge and fruitful insights, and the pain of wading through roughly a quarter of a million words of text and perhaps another hundred thousand words of information in the notes, along with hundreds of small black-and-white illustrations. On the whole, it is curious to note that decades of German scholarship has not until now dealt systematically with the country’s most important design movement of the later nineteenth century. Earlier investigations judged the neo-Renaissance, of which the German neo-Renaissance forms a subsection, as ephemeral and incoherent.1 To this day German historiography generally characterizes architecture of this period in terms of “historicism,” reflecting a modernist point of view that nineteenth-century designers passively adopted past styles. Old forms are assumed to be just there, an idea that completely ignores the fact that these forms first had to be discovered, “seen,” learned, and valorized, and only then given contemporary significance, which has varied over time.

Ostensibly the Deutschrenaissance was one among many nineteenth-century architectural styles, but Ralf Mennekes’s work establishes that it should rather be seen as a movement, in the fullest nineteenth-century sense of that word—a movement that carried immense strength of conviction and had an enormous breadth of application. In this Mennekes goes a step beyond the limitations of usual German historiography. He shows that it was only this movement that, quite suddenly, loaded a small number of buildings of the sixteenth century with nineteenth-century kinds of meaning.2 The Deutschrenaissance movement emerged in the Second German Empire around 1873–76, proclaiming a solution for Germany’s problems of style, from which the country had suffered for some time, certainly from the 1850s onwards. It seems that no major region in Europe, except perhaps Holland, took the “style problem” as seriously as the Germans. They asked, which was the “best” style overall? Which was most suitable for Germany? The new movement very quickly gained popularity for many kinds of buildings, excepting the highest kinds of government offices and churches, which still adhered to Roman classical or Italian Renaissance and Gothic or Romanesque, respectively. At this time, Germans were remiscing about the golden age of their bourgeois sixteenth century, and the town hall appeared to be an especially suitable bearer of the style. The giant examples at Hamburg and Leipzig of the 1880s and 1890s have been surprisingly well preserved. For the typical suburban German villa, the new Renaissance seemed to apply most naturally, a topic that has been already explored in much greater detail in several books by Wolfgang Brönnem.3 But the most enduring use of the style was with the German, or more precisely the Bavarian, Bierkeller. Here good cheer and a limited degree of roughness were the essence of both the style and lifestyles of this venue—a result that was altogether a successfully devised corporate image.

On the whole, Mennekes is less interested in buildings or building types than in the wider manifestations of the neo-Renaissance style. He touches on the applied arts and their “reform” but is most fascinated by artistic pageants and their costumes. Richard Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk, Die Meisteringer von Nürnberg of 1868, was one of the major manifestations. The immense degree of design control that artists such as Lorenz Gedon or Franz Seitz of Munich exercised over seemingly ephemeral objects formed a crucial and novel element of the movement. In some of his most interesting contributions, Mennekes discusses the domestic interior of the 1870s and 1880s, which he characterizes as picturesque in the extreme, combining firm enclosure and often darkness with complex vistas, like a “lichte Höhle” (well-lit cave; 330). Interestingly, at this point he also provides a link with Camillo Sitte’s new articulation of the value of tightly enclosed town squares. Rather doubtful, however, is Mennekes’s suggestion that the desire for vivid color can be seen as the overall formal concept or design intention of the period. Surely, the period of the strongest desire for architectural color internally and externally was around the mid-century, whereas the new preference for darkness and stress on genuine materials from the 1870s, especially wood, took away much of this multicolorism. Central Europe experienced some “brown decades” too.

There are ways in which one may well compare Germany, or at least Munich, with London if one rolls “Old English,” the Queen Anne Revival, and the aesthetic movement into one stylistic direction, even though their end products looked very different. The Germans now perceived their “Old German” times in the same way that the British, in the 1830s to 1850s, had interpreted their sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as happy “Olden Times.” By the 1870s and 1880s, London designers were leaning first toward a new “art” and then toward a serious Arts and Crafts and vernacular