

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-04424-0 - Wren's "Tracts" on Architecture and Other Writings

Lydia M. Soo

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Wren's "Tracts" on Architecture and Other Writings

Wren's "Tracts" on Architecture and Other Writings is the first scholarly study devoted to the theoretical work of one of the most important architects of early modern Europe. Trained as an astronomer, Wren applied seventeenth-century scientific methods to his investigation of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance architecture. From his analysis of ancient buildings, he posited a new version of the origins and development of the Classical style, thereby becoming one of the first to challenge theoretical principles of architecture that had been upheld since the fifteenth century. Rejecting the idea of beauty as absolute and innate, Wren formulated an empirical definition of it based on visual perception and custom. His understanding of the relativity of beauty led him to reaffirm the eternal validity of the Classical style, but also to recognize the Gothic, disparaged since the Renaissance, as a legitimate style that had evolved within particular cultural circumstances.

This edition of Wren's architectural writings includes, for the first time, accurate, annotated transcriptions of the texts.

Lydia M. Soo is Assistant Professor of Architecture at the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-04424-0 - Wren's "Tracts" on Architecture and Other Writings

Lydia M. Soo

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*Wren's "Tracts" on Architecture
and Other Writings*

LYDIA M. SOO



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-04424-0 - Wren's "Tracts" on Architecture and Other Writings
 Lydia M. Soo
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521573696

© Lydia M. Soo 1998

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1998
 This digitally printed version 2007

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Soo, Lydia M.
 Wren's "tracts" on architecture and other writings / Lydia M. Soo.
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-57369-6 (hc)

1. Wren, Christopher, Sir, 1632–1723 – Criticism and interpretation. 2. Architecture, Modern – 17th–18th centuries – England. 3. Architecture – England. I. Title.

NA997.W8S66 1997

720'.92 – dc21

97-13148

CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-57369-6 hardback
 ISBN 978-0-521-04424-0 paperback

This publication is supported by grants from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts and the Office of the Vice President for Research and the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-04424-0 - Wren's "Tracts" on Architecture and Other Writings
Lydia M. Soo
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

For my father

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>Editorial Note</i>	xv
Introduction	I
I. Notes on the Antiquities of London	18
Introduction	18
“Of <i>London</i> in ancient Times, and the Boundary of the <i>Roman Colony</i> , discern'd by the <i>Surveyor</i> , after the <i>great Fire</i> .”	22
Excerpt from “Of the taking down of the vast Ruins of the <i>old Cathedral</i> , and of the Foundations of the <i>old and new Structure</i> .”	31
II. Notes and Reports on Gothic Churches	34
Introduction	34
Excerpt from “Of the ancient cathedral Churches of <i>St. Paul</i> ; from the first Age of <i>Christianity</i> , to the last <i>great Fire of London</i> , in 1666.”	39
Report on Old <i>St. Paul's</i> before the Fire (7 May 1666)	48
Report on Old <i>St. Paul's</i> after the Fire (between 5 September 1666 and 26 February 1667)	56
Report on <i>Salisbury Cathedral</i> for Dr. Seth Ward, Bishop (31 August 1668)	61
Report on <i>Westminster Abbey</i> to Francis Atterbury, Dean (1713)	79
III. Letter from Paris	93
Introduction	93
Letter to a Friend from Paris (late September/October 1665)	103
IV. Letter on Building Churches	107
Introduction	107
Letter to a Friend on the Commission for Building Fifty New City Churches (1711)	112

Contents

V. Tracts on Architecture	119
Introduction	119
Tracts I through IV (beginning in the mid-1670s)	153
Tract V, "Discourse on Architecture" (beginning in the mid-1670s)	188
Conclusion: Wren's Method of Design	196
<i>Appendix: Comparison of Tracts IV and V</i>	242
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	247
<i>Notes</i>	249
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	312
<i>Index</i>	314

Illustrations

1. Title page of <i>Parentalia: or Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens</i> (London, 1750)	page 9
2. Map of Wren's finds in the City of London	24
3. Monument found on Ludgate Hill in 1669, drawn by John Aubrey	27
4. Pottery lamp found at St. Paul's, from an old drawing	28
5. Spitalfields urn discovered August 1678, drawn by John Aubrey	29
6. Old St. Paul's, plan, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1656	41
7. Old St. Paul's from the south, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1656	42
8. Old St. Paul's from the east, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1656	44
9. Old St. Paul's, interior of choir, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1656	45
10. Old St. Paul's from the north, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1656	46
11. Old St. Paul's from the west, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1656	47
12. Old St. Paul's, interior of nave, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1656	49
13. Pre-Fire Design for Old St. Paul's, plan, 1666	51
14. Pre-Fire Design for Old St. Paul's, section through nave showing Jones's recasing of the exterior, 1666	52
15. Pre-Fire Design for Old St. Paul's, longitudinal section, 1666	53
16. Old St. Paul's after the Fire toward the southwest, drawn by Thomas Wyck, c. 1672	57
17. Salisbury Cathedral from the north, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1673	63
18. Salisbury Cathedral, "Part of the Plan and a Perspective View . . . Taken from the North East," drawn by Francis Price, 1753	64
19. Salisbury Cathedral, "A Geometrical Plan," drawn by Francis Price, 1753	65

Illustrations

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 20. Salisbury Cathedral, "Part of the Plan, with the Section of the Body of the Church; shewing it's Mechanism, and part of the Vaulting," drawn by Francis Price, 1753 | 66 |
| 21. Salisbury Cathedral, "A Section of the Church, with the Tower and Spire: Shewing the Critical Mechanism of the whole Structure," drawn by Francis Price, 1753 | 70 |
| 22. Salisbury Cathedral, "A Plan and part of the section of the Tower, shewing the form of the Iron Bandage," drawn by Francis Price, 1753 | 71 |
| 23. Salisbury Cathedral, Wren's drawing showing a detail of how to join iron pieces, 1668 | 73 |
| 24. Salisbury Cathedral, Wren's drawing of how to repair the roof and wall of the west end and a detail of how to splice timber, 1668 | 75 |
| 25. Westminster Abbey, view of west facade, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1655 | 80 |
| 26. Westminster Abbey, view of north side, drawn by Wenceslas Hollar, 1654 | 81 |
| 27. Westminster Abbey, Wren's diagram showing the section through the aisle, with weight of tower at E, 1713 | 89 |
| 28. Westminster Abbey, Wren's design for the central tower and spire, 1722 | 90 |
| 29. Westminster Abbey, Wren's design for the north transept, 1719 | 92 |
| 30. Map of sites around Paris visited by Wren in 1665–6 | 104 |
| 31. London, St. James, Piccadilly, plan, east elevation, and section, 1676–84, drawn by John Clayton, 1848 | 116 |
| 32. London, St. James, Piccadilly, transverse and longitudinal sections, 1676–84, drawn by John Clayton, 1848 | 117 |
| 33. Structural diagrams in Tract II, 1750. <i>Fig. 1.</i> Rule-of-thumb method for determining the thickness of the piers supporting an arch. <i>Fig. 2.</i> Wren's method for determining the abutment of an arch by means of centers of gravity | 160 |
| 34. Diagrams of structural systems according to Wren's descriptions in Tract II | 164 |
| A. Fan vault, cf. <i>Fig. 33, Fig. 5</i> | 164 |
| B. Dome on pendentives, including alternative with drum (top), cf. <i>Fig. 33, Figs. 3, 4</i> | 164 |
| C. Structural system used at St. Paul's | 165 |

D. Cross vault, including alternative with pointed arch (top), cf. Fig. 33, Fig. 6	165
35. Wren's reconstruction of the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, elevation, with the shrine, 1750	170
36. Wren's reconstruction of the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, plan, 1750	171
37. Palladio's reconstruction of the "Temple of Peace" (Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine), plan, 1570	174
38. Palladio's reconstruction of the "Temple of Peace" (Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine), section and elevation, 1570	175
39. Palladio's reconstruction of the "Temple of Peace" (Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine), interior order, 1570	177
40. Plan of the Temple of Mars Ultor in <i>Parentalia</i> , 1750	179
41. Palladio's reconstruction of the Temple of Mars Ultor, plan and elevation, 1570	181
42. Palladio's reconstruction of the Temple of Mars Ultor, detailed elevation and section, 1570	182
43. Palladio's reconstruction of the Temple of Mars Ultor, interior order, 1570	183
44. Wren's reconstruction of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, elevation, drawn by Nicholas Hawksmoor, date unknown	186
45. Wren's reconstruction of Porsenna's Tomb, plan and elevation, drawn by Robert Hooke, 17 October 1677	194
46. Cambridge, Trinity College Library, exterior from west, 1676–84	204
47. Cambridge, Trinity College Library, exterior from east, 1676–84	205
48. Oxford, Christ Church, Tom Tower, 1681–2	219
49. Greek Cross Design for St. Paul's, plan, 1672	224
50. Greek Cross Design for St. Paul's, section, 1672	226
51. Greek Cross Design for St. Paul's, west elevation, 1672	227
52. Great Model Design for St. Paul's, plan, 1673, engraving from 1726(?)	228
53. Great Model Design for St. Paul's, view of model, 1673	229
54. Warrant Design for St. Paul's, plan, 1674–5	230
55. Warrant Design for St. Paul's, cross-section, 1674–5	232
56. Warrant Design for St. Paul's, west elevation, 1674–5	233

Illustrations

57. Warrant Design for St. Paul's, longitudinal section, 1674–5	234
58. Warrant Design for St. Paul's, south elevation, 1674–5	235
59. St. Paul's Cathedral, London, plan, 1675–1710, drawn by Arthur Poley, 1927	236
60. St. Paul's Cathedral, London, interior of nave, 1675– 1710	237
61. St. Paul's Cathedral, London, exterior from southeast, 1675–1710	238
62. St. Paul's Cathedral, London, section through choir, 1675–1710, drawn by Arthur Poley, 1927	239
63. St. Paul's Cathedral, London, section through crossing, 1675–1710, drawn by Arthur Poley, 1927	240

Acknowledgments

This book represents a stage in my continuing investigation of the inter-relationships existing among architecture, architectural theory, and cultural history, which for several years has focused on the case of Sir Christopher Wren. As such it owes a special debt to historians of Wren, especially Kerry Downes, J. A. Bennett, and the late John Summerson, all of whose work was critical as a foundation for my study of Wren's architectural theory. This book builds upon much of their research and ideas, and seeks to contribute new material and interpretations as well.

My research on Wren's theory, which began as a dissertation completed at Princeton University, has since its inception benefited from the wisdom and encouragement of several teachers. Special thanks must go to the advisor of my dissertation, David R. Coffin, as well as to Richard J. Betts and Anthony Grafton. Much appreciated assistance has also come from British scholars: Michael Hunter of Birkbeck College, University of London, and Ralph Hyde of Guildhall Library. Thanks are due to the helpful librarians and staff members at several institutions where I have conducted research. In England these included the Royal Society, the British Library, the Royal Institute of British Architects, Guildhall Library, Westminster Abbey, the Codrington Library at All Souls College, Oxford, the Bodleian Library, and Salisbury Cathedral. Three of these institutions kindly gave permission for the transcriptions of manuscript material: the Bodleian Library for MS Tanner 145, fols. 129–130v; the British Architectural Library, RIBA, for the "Discourse on Architecture" in the "Heirloom" copy of *Parentalia*, 1750; and the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral for MS 192. Closer to home the library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has remained an invaluable and dependable resource, in particular, the Ricker Library of Architecture and Art, as well as the Rare Book Room and Special Collections Library.

The book has also benefited greatly from the evaluations of the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript. In some specific areas it depended upon the expertise of several colleagues, including Michael Rabens (for seventeenth-century French architecture), as well as Christian Zacher and James Girsch (for Latin translations). The graphic material was produced meticulously by two graduate students in architecture, Christopher Moore and Anselmo Canfora. Some of the photographic work was provided by John Edwards. Acknowledgment must also be made of

Acknowledgments

the organized and careful work of my editors at Cambridge University Press during each stage of the publication process.

Generous financial support for the project came from two institutions. The manuscript was prepared with the assistance of a grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. The book was produced with the help of a publication subvention from the Office of the Vice President for Research and the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan.

Finally, I extend thanks to my family and friends for their quiet but enduring support, particularly to my father, to whom this book is dedicated.

Editorial Note

All of Wren's writings presented in this work have been transcribed either from the published *Parentalia* (1750) or from original manuscripts in the hand of Wren or his son. Changes and additions have been limited to what is described below.

For texts transcribed from *Parentalia* (1750): The printed "f" has been changed to "s" where appropriate. Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. Original editorial insertions, marginalia, and footnotes have been preserved.

For texts transcribed from manuscripts, the guidelines proposed by Michael Hunter ("How to Edit a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript: Principles and Practice," *The Seventeenth Century* 10, no. 2 [Autumn 1995]: 277–310) have been adopted, specifically: Standard abbreviations have been expanded. First words of sentences have been capitalized throughout. Manuscript insertions have been indicated by angled brackets (< >), and deletions noted. Editorial insertions have been indicated by square brackets ([]).

No annotations have been made of textual variations found in later versions, both manuscript and published, of the manuscripts existing in Wren's hand. Annotations have been made indicating significant differences found in the earlier manuscript versions of *Parentalia* in comparison to the texts transcribed from the final publication, as well as Tract V in the hand of Christopher Wren, Jr.