Images as Evidence in Seventeenth-Century Europe

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In memory of Francis Haskell

This essay is concerned with one aspect of the European antiquarian movement between the early Renaissance and the so-called "scientific" archaeology of the early nineteenth century. As a cultural practice, antiquarianism may be defined by its concern for the material remains of the past, together with a wide conception of that past, including everyday life, since the evidence of artefacts, combined with that of texts, allowed a more detailed and accurate reconstruction of "customs" (modes of eating and drinking, marriage and burial, etc.) than had been possible from texts alone. It may sound anachronistic to attribute a concern with "total history" to early modern scholars, but their aim was indeed a reconstruction of the past out of surviving fragments, a restoration, in the words of the numismatist-diplomat Ezechiel Spanheim, of "the wholeness of history" (historiae integritatem).¹ Like the humanist movement out of which it developed, antiquarianism was originally text-centered, focused on the reading of inscriptions on monuments and coins, marble, and metal. However, in the course of time some antiquaries made what we might call a "visual turn," becoming more and more interested in the material culture of the past, including images.²

This territory was surveyed in a masterly fashion by Arnaldo Momigliano more than half a century ago in a famous article which stressed the antiquaries' "revolution in historical method" and their interest in "non-literary evidence." More recently, Francis Haskell devoted several chapters of his History and its

¹ Ezekiel Spanheim, Dissertatio de praestantia et usu numismatum antiquorum (Rome, 1664), 97.
In order to complement the work of Momigliano and Haskell, rather than simply repeat what they have argued so well, this article will adopt a comparative approach to the study of what might be called the “three antiquities,” classical, Christian, and barbarian. In the second place it will concentrate on the seventeenth century and on some scholars, such as Ole Worm and Jean-Jacques Chifflet, whom neither Momigliano nor Haskell discussed. In the third place, it will focus as sharply as possible on the question of evidence, especially on what the scholars of the time considered to be reliable evidence. Considering material culture in this way means placing Stuart Piggott alongside Momigliano and Haskell and situating the antiquaries in the history of archaeology.

**Antiquarians or Archaeologists?**

It is impossible and indeed undesirable to disentangle the history of the early modern antiquarian movement from the history of archaeology or, as some would say, its prehistory, describing the age before 1800 as “the pioneer, preparatory and speculative period.”

The opposite dangers which any study in this domain must try to avoid are those of dismissing the work of the antiquaries as “prescientific” and of identifying their concerns with those of contemporary archaeologists. A third way might take its cue from Michel Foucault and sketch what he would have called an archaeology of archaeology.

Looking for changes in the linguistic field, it is easy to notice the increasing use of such terms as “antiquities” (antiquitates), “remains” (vestigia), “monuments” (monumenta), and “archaeology” itself, a seventeenth-century term for the study of antiquities, linguistic as well as material. Sir Henry Spelman, for instance, used the term *Archaeologus* for his glossary of medieval words, published in 1626, just as Edward Lhwyd called his comparative study of the Celtic languages *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707). The French antiquary Jacques Spon proposed the alternative terms *archeologia* and *archaeographia* to describe the science of antiquities, including numismatics, epigraphy, glyptography, and iconography, as well as *angeiographia*, Spon’s name for what we call the history of technology.

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5 Jacques Spon, *Miscellanea erudita antiquitatis* (Lyon, 1685), preface.
The basic point that emerges from this brief philological survey is that the antiquarians were not specialists in one approach, like archaeologists today. For the most part amateurs working in their spare time, they were not confined to a single discipline but could move back and forth as they wished between literary and non-literary evidence, Romans and barbarians.

Turning from concepts to methods, it should be noted that many of the “fragments” which the antiquaries tried to fit together originally came to light by accident, often in the course of digging the foundations of buildings. In Rome in particular ancient artifacts were constantly being turned up in this way. Building work at the Vatican in 1544, for example, led to the discovery of the tomb of Maria, wife of the emperor Honorius, while some of the catacombs were discovered during the construction of the new St Peter’s in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Road works on the Via Flaminia near Rome led to the discovery of a painted room underground in 1674. The city of Pompei came to light in 1594 in the course of the construction of an aqueduct (although it was not identified till 1763), while Herculaneum was found in 1709 by workers in the course of digging a well.

In France the construction of fortresses designed by Vauban led to the discovery of Roman amphitheatres at Metz and Besançon. In the Spanish Netherlands the digging of the foundations of a hospital at Tournai in 1653 revealed the tomb of the Frankish ruler Childeric. In Britain finds included the Alfred Jewel, discovered at North Petherton in Somerset in 1693, and the Stonesfield Pavement, unearthed in Oxfordshire in 1712. However, in the course of the period, an increasing number of antiquaries were turning to “digging up the past” in deliberate and more or less systematic fashion. Early examples include the excavation of a dolmen near Roskilde in 1588, the dig in Uppland organized by the Swedish antiquary Olof Verelius in 1663, the one at Björkö by his colleague Johan Hadorph in the 1680s, and the excavations conducted by Edward Lhwyd in Britain.

The History of Evidence

The concern for system and method was associated with a concern for evidence, a concept which scholars have recently been replacing in its historical context. In English “evidence” is part of a cluster of terms including “testimony,” “document,” “fact,” “inference,” and “proof,” which were coming to

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7 Daniel, “Lhwyd.”
be defined with increasing care by lawyers, natural philosophers, and others. A similar point could probably be made about preuve and témoignage in French, Beweis and Zeugnis in German, and so on, but these usages still await systematic investigation.

The same goes for Latin, the language in which the majority of the texts discussed in this article were written. For a preliminary survey one might turn to the lawyers, who needed to make careful distinctions in this domain, for example to the Italian civil lawyer Giacomo Menochio, whose treatise on the topic, which went through at least fourteen editions in the century following its publication in the 1580s, may therefore be described as a standard work. Following Aristotle and the pseudo-Ciceronian Ad Herennium, Menochio distinguishes different degrees of proof from the slightest, suspicio, through the more probable praesumptio and probatio artificialis to the most certain, probatio directa, and discusses not only direct testimonia but also indirect indicia, signa, or vestigia. Similar points were made by Menochio's contemporary Giuseppe Mascardi, whose treatise on evidence (probationes) was published in 1593 and distinguishes indicia according to their evidential weight as levia, gravia, and gravissima and also as credibilia, remota, and so on.

The last cluster of terms refers to the mute but eloquent story told either by facial expressions or by material remains. In a passage which has often been quoted in the last thirty years the fifteenth-century Byzantine humanist Manuel Chrysoloras used the term autopsia—in other words eyewitnessing, seeing with one's own eyes—to refer to the evidence of material remains such as sculptures for “what kinds of arms the ancients had, what kind of clothes they wore ... how they formed lines of battle, fought, laid siege.” His point was increasingly reiterated in the following centuries.

For example, a series of writers on coins justified their studies on similar grounds. In 1559, the Venetian Sebastiano Erizzo noted that the medals of the Roman Empire “reveal the whole history of these emperors,” including facts which are not mentioned in the literary sources. In 1587 the Spaniard Antonio Agustin declared that he had “more trust in medals, tablets and stones than in anything written.” In 1664 it was the turn of Ezekiel Spanheim to emphasize

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9 Giacomo Menochio, De praesumptionibus, coniecturis, signis et indicis (Lyon, 1588); Giuseppe Mascardi, De probationibus (3 vols.; Frankfort 1593), especially 1, 21-25.


11 Momigliano, “Ancient History.”

12 Sebastiano Erizzo, Discorso sopra le medaglie de gli antichi (Venice, 1568, [1555]), 2.

The Uses of Historical Evidence

the importance of coins as historical evidence because they survive better than manuscripts, because they are less biased than texts and because they fill gaps in the historical record with their images of houses, ships, and so on. Spon made a similar point in 1673, describing monuments as books with pages of marble or bronze which resolved contradictions between the textual sources of Roman history and were written with the chisel instead of the pen (the same metaphor had been used a few decades earlier by the Italian Jesuit Agostino Mascardi). In 1697, John Evelyn described medals as “the most Authentic and certain Reporters, preferable to any other.”

Other antiquaries treated different kinds of material objects, from buildings to images, as “remains,” “traces,” or “vestiges” of the past, to be examined alongside texts. Developed in the course of studying Roman antiquity, this “materialist” method was applied in turn to early Christianity and to the other antiquities here classified (following the usage of the scholars of the time) as “barbarian.”

The Discovery of Classical Antiquity

The antiquarian movement was of course a part of the wider movement we call the Renaissance. It included the imaginative reconstruction of ancient cities and their buildings, especially Rome, stimulated by the discovery of ancient objects in the ground, from statues such as the Farnese Hercules to corpses such as the embalmed body of a girl found on the Via Appia in 1485 and described with enthusiasm by the humanist Bartolomeo della Fonte. It also included a series of learned monographs on the history of material culture in ancient Greece and Rome, beginning in the sixteenth century with treatises such as those of Guillaume Budé on coins, Lazare du Baïf on clothing and ships, Lilio Giraldi on tombs, and many more.

In the seventeenth century the study of ancient costume may be exemplified by the controversies about the Roman toga in which Ottavio Ferrari and Albert Rubens (the son of the painter) took part. Baïf’s work on ancient ships was continued in the books published by Johannes Gerhard Scheffer, a scholar from Nuremberg who was invited to court by Queen Christina of Sweden. Ancient tombs and funeral customs were discussed in works such as Johann

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14 Spanheim, Dissertatio, 96-97.
15 Jacques Spon, Recherche des antiquités et curiosités de la ville de Lyon (Lyon, 1673), preface; Mascardi quoted in Haskell, History, 94.
17 Ottavio Ferrari, De re vestiaria libri vii (1642); Albert Rubens, De re vestiaria veterum (Antwerp, 1665).
18 Lazare de Baïf, De re navali (1536); Johann Scheffer, De militia navali veterum libri iv (Uppsala, 1654); Herklotz, Cassiano, 166-72, 179-80.
Kirchmann’s *De funeribus romanorum*. ¹⁹ The different types of ring or bracelet used in antiquity were the objects of special attention. ²⁰

Today, these attempts to write the history of ancient togas, triremes, chariots, bracelets or lamps are likely to seem insufferably trivial and pedantic. Some writers already mocked these attempts at the time, Robert Burton for example, whose satirical essay “Democritus to the Reader” in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, refers to “curious antiquaries” who concern themselves with topics such as “what clothes the senators did wear in Rome, what shoes, how they sat, where they went to the close-stool,” and so on. The reference to shoes is probably to a book by Nigronius, *De caligula veterorum*, published in 1617, three years before the first edition of Burton, and the reference to “how they sat,” to a book on the *triclinium* by the Spanish scholar Pedro Chacón. ²¹ In similar fashion one character in Addison’s *Dialogues on Medals* pokes fun at scholars who “are amazed at a man’s ignorance, who believes that the toga had any sleeves to it till the declension of the Roman Empire.” ²²

The critics surely had a point, since despite their references to the “integrity” of the past, the work of many antiquaries was as fragmentary as the material remains they collected and studied with such enthusiasm. Yet some of them at least were concerned with major themes such as Roman religion, warfare and slavery. Pignoria’s study of slavery, for instance, is exemplary in its use of visual evidence, including the collars worn by slaves who had attempted to escape. ²³

Some of the subjects the antiquaries studied were of topical interest. The Italian priest Onofrio Panvinio, for instance, discussed ancient Roman spectacles at the time of the Counter-Reformation critique of the theatre. ²⁴ The reconstruction of the ancient art of painting was obviously of contemporary relevance during the Renaissance, when artists were attempting to imitate the

²⁰ Johann Kirchmann, *De annulis* (1623; Leiden 1672, 2); Fortuni Liceto, *De anulis antiquis* (1645); Thomas Bartholin, *De armillis veterum* (Copenhagen, 1647); Johan G. Scheffer, *De antiquorum torquibus* (Stockholm, 1656); Giorgio Longo, *De annulis signatoris antiquorum* (Leiden, 1672).


²² Joseph Addison, *Dialogues upon the Usefulness of Ancient Medals* (London, 1726), 16-17.

²³ Lorenzo Pignoria, *De servis* (Augsburg, 1613), 22.

example of antiquity. The humanist Justus Lipsius wrote on ancient Roman warfare at a time when his former pupil Maurice of Nassau was reforming the Dutch army by introducing forms of discipline on Roman lines. Given his connections with the court of Sweden, Scheffer’s concern with naval warfare may well have had a similar aim.

Trained in the humanist tradition of philology, these scholars generally began by collecting all the classical texts they could find relating to their subject. Even when they looked at monuments, from coins to triumphal arches, they concentrated on their inscriptions. They often began their treatises with the etymology of the Latin and Greek words describing the objects they were studying. They were sometimes led to their specific topics by the desire to clarify the meaning of a passage in an ancient writer. In the case of the history of clothes, for example, doubts about the meaning of technical terms such as chlamys or latus clavus were a major stimulus to research. Some major studies of antiquities lacked illustrations altogether, including Johan Kirchmann on ancient funerals, Johannes Meursius on ancient games, John Selden on the gods of the Syrians, and Elias Schedius on those of the Germans.

However, the woodcuts and engravings that appear in many treatises offer us evidence of a gradual emancipation from logocentrism and an increasing concern with the testimony of images. In the later sixteenth century, at a time when new books were increasingly illustrated with frontispiece portraits of the authors, the Roman scholar Fulvio Orsini tried to identify reliable portraits of ancients such as Aristotle or Seneca. The works of Ferrari, Scheffer, and others were illustrated with engravings of the statues and coins on which they depended for much of their evidence. The increasing use of illustrations of this kind should be linked to the rise of private collections of classical sculpture and of cabinets of curiosities, especially cabinets of coins and medals. More intellectually ambitious than most collectors, the Roman cleric Cassiano del Pozzo attempted to collect images of all the remains of classical antiquity into his famous “paper museum,” well-known to scholars in his day although unpublished. To symbolize the shift from text to object as evidence about the classical past, one might contrast the famous treatise by the French humanist Franciscus Junius, *De pictura veterum* (1637), which attempted to reconstruct ancient painting from literary sources, with the Italian critic Gianpietro Bellori’s

25 Franciscus Junius, *De pictura veterum* (1636); and see Rolf H. Bremmer Jr (ed.), *Franciscus Junius and his Circle* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1998).
27 Kirchmann, *De funeribus*; Johannes Meursius, *De ludis graecorum* (Leiden, 1622); Elias Schedius, *De dis Germanis* (Amsterdam, 1648).
The Uses of Trajan’s Column

As a case study of the uses of ancient remains as evidence it may be illuminating to focus on Trajan’s Column. The accuracy of detail in the reliefs on the column, down to the eye-protectors for the horses of the Dacian cataphracts, are well known to ancient historians. This accuracy did not escape the notice of Renaissance artists and antiquaries. Mantegna, Raphael, and Giulio Romano all made use of the reliefs in order to represent Roman armor and weapons as accurately as possible. In his richly-illustrated study of Roman warfare, the French antiquary Guillaume Du Choul drew on the evidence provided by the Column, to show the Roman shield roof or testudo, for example. So did Justus Lipsius in his book on Roman machines or war, which also illustrated the testudo. A few years later Girolamo Aleandro drew on the evidence of the column in order to interpret the iconography of an ancient marble tablet.

Studies devoted specifically to the Column appeared in print from the later sixteenth century onwards. The Spanish Dominican Alfonso Chacón published a description of the column in 1576 under the title of The History of the Dacian Wars, drawing the reader’s attention in a prefatory note to the value of the Column’s evidence for the history of armor and weapons, military discipline, and so on. His description was written in order to accompany a set of engravings of the reliefs made by Girolamo Muziano.

In the later seventeenth century the artist Pietro Sante Bartoli made a new series of engravings of Trajan’s Column with an accompanying text by Bellori and a note by the printer remarking on the value of the reliefs as evidence. The ecclesiastical lawyer Raffaello Fabretti produced a new account of the column in 1683, richly illustrated with woodcuts of details, together with discussions of the history of Roman warfare and religion. Fabretti also checked older images of the column against the original reliefs and criticized the illustrations of 1576 as “perhaps more elegant than accurate,” as well as pointing out mistakes on the part of Du Choul and Chacón and misreadings of the inscriptions by other scholars.

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31 Guillaume Du Choul, *Discours sur la castrametation et discipline militaire des Romains* (Lyon, 1557); Justus Lipsius, *Polioreticon* (Antwerp, 1599, 2), 32.
34 Raffaello Fabretti, *De columna traiani syntagma* (Rome, 1683), 2, 51, 53, 92, 204; *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, sub voce.
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The Discovery of the Early Church

In the age of the Counter-Reformation there was a turn to a second antiquity, to the material remains of early Christianity. Fulvio Orsini, for example, dedicating to pope Sixtus V the treatise on the Roman *triclinium* by Pedro Chacón, remarked on the value of Roman antiquities for purposes such as the understanding of passages in Scripture, in this case a passage in St. Luke (7, 36) about the woman anointing Christ's head when he reclined to eat. The combination of devotion to Christ's passion with antiquarian interests produced more than a century of scholarly debate on modes of crucifixion, in which Lipsius and the Dane Thomas Bartholin were the best-known participants. Gallonio's still more gruesome *Instrumenti di martorio* (1591) should be linked to the contemporary scenes of torture shown in the church of San Stefano alla Rotonda in Rome, to prepare missionaries for their possible future fate.35

However, the great stimulus to what has come to be known as "Christian archaeology" was the discovery of the catacombs. The first of these underground cemeteries was found in 1578 on via Salaria Nuova in Rome, and it was soon followed by a series of similar discoveries. The excitement associated with the finds was evoked by Cesare Baronio, whose famous history of the Church described his visit to the cemetery of Priscilla. Particularly inspiring to scholars were the paintings found in the catacombs, which dated from the third and fourth centuries.36

Alfonso Chacón, for example, copied some of the images himself and employed six artists to assist him in the process of reproduction. A friend of Chacón's, Antonio Bosio, began to explore the cemeteries from 1593 onwards. His treatise *Roma sotterranea*, published posthumously in 1632, gained him the later title of "the Columbus of the Catacombs." Drawing on the pictures made by Chacón and the Flemish artist Philips van Winghe as well as on his own observations, Bosio discussed such antiquarian topics as the sandals of the apostles, early gestures of prayer, and the meaning of images of lambs, doves, cocks, palms, cypresses, images of Orpheus (whom he identified with Christ), and so on.37

The special importance of the finds was their contribution to the controversy over the use of images in the primitive church. The Cambridge divine William Perkins, for instance, attacking Catholic images as "idols," had argued that "Images were not established in churches in these West parts, till after 700

35 Justus Lipsius, *De cruce* (Antwerp, 1593); Thomas Bartholin, *De cruce Christi* (Amsterdam, 1670).
To this argument Bosio’s treatise was a powerful reply, emphasizing the value of sacred images and giving a history of the cult of images that would be continued by Catholic scholars such as Louis Maimbourg and Noël Alexandre. Despite the many illustrations in Bosio’s book, it has been argued that he, too, was a logocentric humanist who put “text before trowel.” A famous critique of Maimbourg and Alexandre by Friedrich Spanheim, the brother of the famous numismatist Ezekiel, ignored images and based itself on texts. Other Protestants denied the visual evidence, claiming, for instance, that the catacombs were not Christian or that the paintings came from a later period, the “Gothick.”

The Discovery of the Barbarians

Alongside the concern with the classical and Christian past there was a gradual rise of interest in what might be called “alternative antiquities.” The best-known example is that of ancient Egypt, its hieroglyphs and its mummies, which attracted the interest of scholars such as the Italian canon Lorenzo Pignoria, the French magistrate Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, and the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher. The Spanish scholar Benito Arias Montano wrote on Jewish antiquities (temples, altars, candelabra, the tabernacle, and so on), the Englishman John Selden published a treatise on the gods of the Syrians, and the French Protestant pastor Samuel Bochart studied the Carthaginians. The spread of information about the “Indies” led to an interest in their antiquities on the part of a few scholars. Pignoria, for instance, studied the gods of the Mexicans and the Japanese as well as those of the Greeks and Romans.

Of these alternative antiquities, the one which attracted most interest in seventeenth-century Europe was “barbarian antiquity,” from what we call “prehistoric” to the early Middle Ages or even later. Despite the contempt for the Middle Ages on the part of early humanists, their successors found the “barbar-

41 Haskell, History, 106.
43 Benito Arias Montano, Antiquitates Judaicae (Leiden, 1593); John Selden, De diis syriis (London, 1617); Samuel Bochart, Phaileg (Caen, 1646).
ians” increasingly fascinating, largely because they viewed the ancient Britons, Gauls, Franks, Lombards, and others as their ancestors. The Danes identified themselves with the Cimbri, the Dutch with the Batavians, the Hungarians with the Huns. The Swedish cult of the Goths and the Polish cult of the Sarmatians have attracted particular attention from scholars, but these examples are only the most spectacular instances of a general trend.45

The scholars who turned to the study of these national antiquities generally began from texts. They learned dead languages such as Gothic and Anglo-Saxon and edited collections of laws or chronicles such as Gregory of Tours on the Franks, Jordanes on the Goths, or Paul the Deacon on the Lombards. They also studied non-classical epigraphy, notably the runes.

However, the relative paucity of texts, compared to those surviving from the other two antiquities, encouraged the students of barbarian antiquity to pay more attention to material objects. In Britain the artefact or collection of artefacts which inspired most interest was Stonehenge, whether it was viewed as classical or barbarian. Inigo Jones thought it Roman and Walter Charleton ascribed it to the Danes, while John Aubrey thought it the work of the Druids.46 Thomas Browne’s essay on urn burial also deserves to be noted here as a serious contribution to the study of antiquities as well as a meditation on mortality. When it first appeared in print, this essay included a frontispiece illustrating four urns, which later editions have generally failed to reproduce or even to mention. It discusses whether the urns were “British, Saxon or Danish” (though Browne thought they were probably Roman), and it should be placed in the context of a European interest in urns and funeral customs which seems to have been particularly strong in Germany, where it attracted Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz among others.47

It is striking how often British antiquaries such as Aubrey, Browne, and Lhwyd refer to their Danish and Swedish contemporaries. The point is that in the study of the third antiquity, Danish and Swedish scholars were playing a particularly important role in the seventeenth century. Even the state was involved in these studies, which were already associated with national identity. In 1622, for instance, Christian IV of Denmark issued an edict protecting antiquities, while in Sweden a Riksantikvariat or “State Office of Antiquities” was founded in 1630, a chair in antiquities at Uppsala University in 1662 and a


College of Antiquities in 1666. A circle of scholars specialized in the study of what were known as “Swedish-Gothic” antiquities.

Johan Bure, for instance, collected runic inscriptions. Olof Verelius was another leading specialist in “runology” (to use his own term), and so was Johan Hadorph. The excavations directed by these two scholars have already been mentioned. Verelius and the polymath Olof Rudbeck were both aware of the significance of what was later known as “stratigraphy,” and so were Martin Lister and Edward Lhwyd in Britain, thus blurring the line between “scientific” and “pre-scientific” archaeology.48

In Denmark the early artefacts found in Sleswig and Roskilde had already caused excitement in the sixteenth century. The leading Danish antiquary of the seventeenth century was Ole Worm, who interested himself in runes, megalithic tombs, urns, and ship-burials, and employed assistants to draw objects for him.49 Worm was equally well known for his collection of antiquities and other objects, the Museum Wormianum in Copenhagen.50 The Danish circle of antiquaries also included Thomas and Caspar Bartholin and Johan Rhode.

Among the signs of increasing sensitivity to visual evidence are Worm’s engravings of graves, stones, swords, spurs and especially the famous golden horn. Worm was summoned by King Christian IV, whose physician he was, to view a golden drinking-horn soon after its discovery in Gallehus in Jutland in 1639. He published a study of it soon afterwards, discussing the scenes represented on the horn and comparing it to other objects of the same kind. Today the engraving from Worm’s book is the best evidence for the appearance of the horn, since it was stolen from the royal collection in 1802 and destroyed.

The Discovery of Childeric

An even more spectacular discovery of the time was that of Childeric, who died in 481 and was a Merovingian ruler, the father of Clovis. His grave was discovered at Tournai in 1653, by accident, when the foundations of a new hospital were being dug.51 The magnificence of the many objects which came to light on this occasion made Tournai, in Piggott’s phrase, “The Sutton Hoo of the day.” With Childeric there were found, in the words of Sir Thomas Browne (following Chifflet), “his sword, two hundred rubies, many hundred Imperial Coyns, three hundred golden Bees, the bones and horse shoe of his horse in-

50 On Worm, Dansk Biografisk Leksikon (Copenhagen, 1979), sub voce; Klindt-Jensen, Archaeology; Schnapp, La conquête, 160-67.
J.-J. Chifflet, a scholar from Besançon who became physician to the archdukes in Brussels. His work dealt with all three antiquities. He wrote on a Roman port in the Low Countries. He made an early contribution to the unending debate over the Turin Shroud. In a study published in 1624, the year in which the shroud was exhibited in public in Turin, Chifflet claimed the authenticity of both the Besançon and the Turin shrouds, illustrating them in parallel and arguing that they were used respectively before and after the burial. Chifflet also pointed out that the shroud was not painted (as a French bishop had claimed in the fourteenth century), because there were no traces of brushstrokes to be found. His book was illustrated with engravings of coins and mosaics as well as a folding plate comparing the Turin shroud with that of Besançon.

A later book, *De ampulla remensi* (1651), on the ampulla preserved in Rheims holding the holy oil used to consecrate the kings of France, dismissed the story of the dove bringing the oil to Clovis as a “pious fable,” making not only a scholarly point about evidence but a political point against France (as a native of Franche-Comté, Chifflet was a subject of Philip IV of Spain). In the context of the history of evidence, however, it is Chifflet’s use of the testimony of coins and of two images of the baptism of Clovis that most deserves to be emphasized.

Chifflet’s most famous book is his *Anastasis Childerici I Francorum Regis* (1655). This study of the discovery or “resurrection” (*anastasis*) of the Merovingian ruler is also a good example of the antiquarian’s attempt to resurrect the past. After describing the finds, which are fully illustrated, Chifflet identified the dead man as Childeric on the evidence of his seal-ring. He noted that the king had been buried outside the city “with barbarian ritual” (*ritu barbarico*) and argued that his tunic and *chlamys* show that the ancient custom of dressing up the dead for burial had been taken over by the Franks.

Chifflet’s analysis of the contents of the grave drew on a range of secondary literature by the antiquarians of his day, including Liceti, Kircher, and Albert Rubens. He made considerable use of literary sources, including Salvian, Sidonius, Gregory of Tours, and the laws of the Visigoths. However, his attention was focussed on the objects themselves and the social customs associated with them. He quoted a saying of Peiresc’s that coins and seals are “uncorrupted witnesses of Antiquity” (*testes esse Antiquitatis incorruptos*). Discuss-
ing rings and their uses, he concluded that the ring with Childeric’s name and portrait was a signet ring. A golden object was identified as a writing instrument to be used with wax tablets, leading to a digression on the history of writing. The golden bees were interpreted both as an “emblem, or hieroglyphic enigma” and as “symbols of kings.” Chifflet was also extremely interested in the weapons and the horse buried with the king, discussing details of the harness ornaments (figures 1-4).

Chifflet has recently been criticized for his lack of a sense of archaeological context.56 He did not show the interest in stratigraphy of Verelius or Rudbeck, but few scholars did at that time. In any case he did not carry out an excavation but tried to interpret the objects that had been discovered by accident. In the course of his work, Chifflet appealed to the testimony of other artefacts, for example, comparing Childeric’s sword and axe with the weapons of the Dacians as represented in the reliefs on Trajan’s Column.57 His book shows very clearly how some antiquaries combined the evidence of texts and images. As in the case of Worm and the golden horn, Chifflet’s treatise is the best evidence remaining of the appearance of some of the objects from Childeric’s tomb, which were stolen from the Bibliothèque royale in 1831 (they had been given to Louis XIV by the emperor Leopold I in 1665).

The Eighteenth-Century Synthesis

In the outpouring of scholarly monographs in the seventeenth century the ideal of the “integrity” of history expressed by Spanheim was sometimes in danger of being forgotten. A synthesis of literary and non-literary evidence was much needed, and various attempts were made. Francesco Bianchini, for instance, described his universal history as “based on the evidence of monuments” (provata con monumenti) and reproduced some at the beginning of each chapter, although he made little use of them in his text.58 To provide a synthesis and “concilier les monumens avec l’histoire” was the life work of the French Benedictine Bernard de Montfaucon. It was around 1693 that Montfaucon began collecting prints and drawings of antiquity, and by the early 1720s he had between 30,000 and 40,000 of them. Part of his “paper museum,” unlike Cassiano del Pozzo’s, was printed in the fifteen volumes of his Antiquité expliquée (1719-24), which opened with the complaint that the work of the antiquarians was fragmented and that virtually no one had the knowledge of “all the parts of antiquity.”

56 Schnapp, La conquête, 204.
57 Chifflet, Anastasis, 204, 209.
58 Francesco Bianchini, La istoria universale provata con monumenti (Rome, 1697).
Figure 1: from Jean-Jacques Chifflet, *Anastasis Childerici* (Antwerp, 1655), by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
Figure 2: Jean-Jacques Chifflet, Anastasis Childerici, by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
Figure 3: Jean-Jacques Chifflet, *Anastasis Childerici*, by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
Figure 4: Jean-Jacques Chifflet, *Anastasis Childerici*, by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
The Uses of Historical Evidence

The use that Montfaucon made of the evidence of Trajan’s Column may serve as an example of his method. Following Fabretti for the most part, but showing himself to be aware of earlier commentators, Montfaucon calls the column as a witness for the history of costume, for instance, as well as reproducing a long series of engravings of the column, juxtaposed to other evidence, in his section on the history of war, not forgetting the famous testudo.\(^{59}\)

The indefatigable Montfaucon then carried out a similar enterprise by publishing the “monuments” of France. The most famous section of his work is that reproducing and discussing what is now known as the Bayeux Tapestry, though Montfaucon, working from a copy, calls it a “painting,” while his informant Antoine Lancelot described it as the “toilette du Duc Guillaume.” The Tapestry might be described as the Trajan’s Column of barbarian history, a fine example of the contribution of the study of antiquities to the history of events, and Montfaucon compared its evidence with that of the chronicles.\(^{60}\)

Montfaucon was also well aware of the importance of the grave of Childeric, which he calls one of the great discoveries of the seventeenth century. He combined a narrative of the king’s reign derived from Gregory of Tours with a description of the grave goods and four plates all derived from Chifflet, although he disagreed with his predecessor on several interpretations, arguing that the golden bull’s head is an ornament rather than an idol and identifying what Chifflet thought to be a writing instrument as a buckle. He took coins seriously as evidence, noting that the quantity of Roman coins in the grave “proves that this money circulated among the French.”\(^{61}\)

Evidence and Interpretation

Like texts, material objects posed problems of authenticity. Treatises on medals and coins in particular discussed how to detect fakes, but inscriptions and other monuments sometimes fell under suspicion as well, from the ancient shield owned by the English antiquary John Woodward to the Spanish “lead books” offering testimony about the early medieval past.\(^{62}\) Another problem was that the iconography of ancient images was often mysterious to post-classical eyes. The early history of iconography still remains to be written. It might reasonably include attempts to solve iconographical problems such as Stephanus

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\(^{59}\) Bernard de Montfaucon, Antiquité expliquée (10 vols. in 15; Paris, 1719-24), II, 82; III, 294; vol. IV, 22, 32-33, 98-112, 143-45, and see Haskell, History, 131-35.

\(^{60}\) Bernard de Montfaucon, Les Monumens de la Monarchie Francoise (5 vols.; Paris, 1729-33), I, 371-74; Haskell, History, 138-44.

\(^{61}\) Montfaucon, Monumens, vol. I, 8-16. On the buckle, see James, Franks, 61.

\(^{62}\) Enea Vico, Discorsi sopra le medaglie de gli antichi (Venice, 1555), chapter 22; Antonio Agustín, Dialogos de medallas, inscripciones y otras antiguedades (Tarragona, 1587), chapter 11; and see Joseph Levine, Dr. Woodward’s Shield (Berkeley, 1991), and Julio Caro Baroja, Las falsificaciones de la historia (Madrid, 1992).
Pighius's analysis of a bas-relief of the seasons belonging to cardinal Granvelle; Lorenzo Pignoria's study of a bronze tablet of Isis and his interpretation of a Roman fresco discovered in 1606, the Aldobrandini Wedding; Girolamo Aleandro's "explanation" of an ancient marble tablet; Bosio's study of the paintings in the catacombs; Claude Menestrier's study of the symbolism of the many-breasted goddess Diana of Ephesus; and Lukas Holsten's study of a picture of a nymphaeum.63

Attempts at decoding such as these should be related not only to the aristocratic fashion for collecting antiquities but also to the interest in encoding exemplified in another fashion of the period, emblem-books. Pignoria annotated a new edition (published in 1621) of the most famous of emblem-books, that of Andrea Alciato, and added an appendix to the 1626 edition of Cartari's *Imagini degli dei antichi*, a guide to encoding like Cesare Ripa's even more famous *Iconologia* (1593).

The method employed in these iconographical studies was essentially a humanist one, juxtaposing quotations from classical texts to the problem-image, although Aleandro, for instance, drew on the testimony of Trajan's Column as well as that of ancient writers. Today, more attention is probably given to comparisons between different images, but in its essentials the humanist method is one that students of iconography still follow, even if our knowledge of both the classics and the Bible is probably less than theirs.

The difficulties of iconographical interpretation in this period—difficulties which have not yet vanished—may be illustrated from the attempts to read the paintings discovered in the catacombs. A figure now regarded as Noah in the Ark, for instance, was first interpreted as St Marcellus in the pulpit.64 The successes of the approach included Peiresc's recognition of the emperor Tiberius on the cameo preserved in the Sainte Chapelle at Paris and traditionally known as "Joseph," together with the identification of the classical equestrian figure in Rome traditionally believed to be Constantine (or sometimes Commodus, Hadrian or the Ostrogothic ruler Theoderic) as the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Proposed in the fifteenth century by the Italian humanist Bartolomeo Platina, it was in the seventeenth century that this identification came to be accepted.65

Working out the uses of ancient artefacts was not always easy. Even the identification of an object as an artefact, a flint arrowhead or dagger for ex-


ample, was sometimes problematic. Solving these problems was facilitated by the increasingly widespread knowledge of ethnographic parallels, a by-product of European exploration and colonization. The Danish scholar Johan Lavrentzen, for example, compared axes found in Denmark to those of the Indians of Louisiana. Lhwyd noted that the ancient Britons used "just the same chip'd flints the natives of New England head their arrows with to this day."66

Despite the problems, artefacts, including images, were taken increasingly seriously as evidence of what were increasingly called historical "facts."67 William Camden read crop marks as signs of vanished structures, long before aerial photography made the task a relatively simple one.68 The remarks by numismatists on the testimony of medals have already been quoted. Aubrey declared that barrows "would be evidence to a Jury," while the stones of Stonehenge and elsewhere "give evidence for themselves."69 In these ways the study of antiquities, as Momigliano noted fifty years ago, supplied ammunition for the refutation of historical skeptics or "pyrrhonists" and aided what has been described as the eighteenth-century "rehabilitation of history."70

Artists and Physicians

A social history of the antiquarian movement, were one to be written, might profitably investigate the influence of the occupations of antiquaries on their attitude to visual evidence. Despite the place of material indicia in court, and the interest of many lawyers in scholarship, there were relatively few of them in this field (among them Agustin, Peiresc, Selden, and Fabretti). Two occupational groups which stand out are the artists and the physicians.

As trained observers, artists obviously had an important role to play both in recording and in interpreting the material remains of the past.71 A number of artists were employed, as we have seen, by antiquaries such as Alfonso Chacón, Cassiano del Pozzo, and Ole Worm. Philips van Winge, Santi Avanzino, and Francesco Fulcaro were among the painters and engravers involved in recording the images painted in the catacombs. Matthieu Ogier of Lyon illustrated the

67 Shapiro, Fact, 51-53.
works of Spon with magnificent engravings. Wenceslas Hollar, a friend of Aubrey, made the plates for Dugdale’s *Monasticon*.\(^{72}\) Pietro Sante Bartoli, a pupil of Poussin, illustrated Bellori’s work on Trajan’s Column. However, to break away from the text-dominated approach to the past, it was surely necessary either for antiquaries to become artists or for artists to become antiquaries. Scholar-artists included Aubrey, Lhwyd, Worm, and Bure (who drew runestones and made his own woodcuts). On the other side the most famous examples of seventeenth-century artist-scholars are those of Poussin and Rubens. Poussin consulted Bosio on early Christian history and knew Cassiano well. Rubens also knew Cassiano, Lipsius, and Peiresc, sharing their interest in stoicism and antiquities, collecting medals, and making sketches of Roman gems and Egyptian mummies. Franciscus Junius sent his book on painting to both Rubens and van Dyck for comment.\(^{73}\) Inigo Jones both drew and wrote about Stonehenge.

As for physicians, a study of their place in early modern culture, along the lines of William Bouwsma’s essay on the lawyers, is much to be desired.\(^{74}\) Like artists, they were trained observers, and it is striking how many of them—especially those trained at Padua—doubled as antiquaries in this period. Among these antiquary-medics were Liceto, Chifflet, the Frenchmen Patin and Spon, the Danes Worm, Bartholin, and Rhode, the Englishmen Browne, Charleton, and Lister, and the Scotsman Sir Robert Sibbald.

Given this predominance of medical men, it may be suggested that the habit of interpreting symptoms aided emancipation from logocentrism and served as an alternative model to the legal model of evidence for the interpretation of antiquities. Carlo Ginzburg’s famous discussion of the pursuit of “clues,” pointing to the seventeenth-century physician-connoisseur Giulio Mancini’s careful observation of small details, has important implications for the study of the antiquarian movement. In 1950 Momigliano had already noted that the physicians Spon and Patin “brought something of the method of direct observation into historical research.” A nineteenth-century scholar had gone further still by remarking of Spon, “Ce qu’il cherche dans un monument, c’est l’interprétation du signe.”\(^{75}\)

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An early meaning of the term “evidence” is “sign.” The epistemological problem of signs was a subject of some interest in the seventeenth century, and even the word “semiotics” was in use at this time, in Latin, Italian, French, and English, especially in a medical context. Nicholas Culpeper’s *Semeiotica uranica* (1651), for instance, discussed the “astronomical judgement of diseases.” The growing literature on physiognomy—Mascardi’s *De affectibus* (1639) for example—discussed not only the form of faces but expression, posture, gesture, and even hairstyle and clothing as so many signs of character and emotions. John Evelyn’s book on medals included what he described as a “digression” on physiognomy, discussing what he called “semiotics and configurations” and suggesting, for example, that the face of Tiberius, recorded on his medals, was a clue to his character.\(^76\)

Some writers showed a still wider interest in material signs. The physician-philosopher Camillo Baldi studied the handwriting and the language of letters from this point of view, while the Jesuit rhetorician Agostino Mascardi explained how to infer emotional states from the study of the hands, the voice, clothing, gait, and so on. In England, John Wilkins described communication by gestures under the heading “Semaeology,” while John Locke discussed signs or “marks” and what he called “semiotike or the Doctrine of Signs” in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.\(^77\)

The rise of a concern with non-visual evidence in the seventeenth century, palpable as it is, should not be exaggerated. No general semiotics developed out of Locke’s suggestions. Neither Montfaucon nor anyone else formulated the general rules for interpreting visual evidence in the way in which his colleague Jean Mabillon formulated the rules of documentary evidence (Scipione Maffei’s *Ars critica lapidaria* was concerned only with epigraphy).\(^78\)

The failure of the antiquaries to go further in this direction should not surprise us. No systematic training in the use of visual evidence was yet available, as was the case for philology. No wonder that some humanist antiquaries focussed on words even when ostensibly dealing with things. Even Montfaucon has been described as relatively lacking in “visual curiosity,” and considerably less critical in his use of images than in his use of texts, although he deserves the credit for “footnoting” images in the sense of making the provenance of each one clear to his readers.\(^79\)

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76 Evelyn, *Discourse*, 292-342.


All the same, the examples of Worm and Aubrey as well as a succession of numismatists support the idea of a revaluation of objects (as opposed to texts) in the assessment of evidence about the past. The change in the methods of English antiquarians in the 1680s has been noted, as in the rise of more careful descriptions of excavations.\textsuperscript{80} Important observations about method were also made. For example, the polymath Peiresc made the point that the study of ancient artefacts was necessary precisely because ancient writers "never wrote consciously or deliberately" about the topics which to them were "well known and trivial."\textsuperscript{81} The remarks by Claude Chifflet and John Evelyn on the value of "a perfect and uninterrupted series" of coins or medals also deserve to be emphasized.\textsuperscript{82} Aubrey, Laverentzen, and Edward Lhwyd adopted a comparative approach to artefacts.\textsuperscript{83} In ways such as these the visual turn of the early modern period not only extended the subject matter of history but also refined historical methods. Let us hope that the same will be said about the visual turn of the 1980s and 1990s.

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\textsuperscript{81} Quoted in Herklotz, \textit{Cassiano}, 233-34.
\textsuperscript{82} Claude Chifflet, \textit{De numismate antiquo} (Louvain, 1628), 15; Evelyn, \textit{Medals}.
\textsuperscript{83} Schnapp, \textit{La conquête}, 192.