Inigo Jones and His French Sources

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English architecture entered the seventeenth century with a legacy of the great Elizabethan prodigy houses especially built to receive the Queen and her entourage. In the reign of James I the palace and great house were still a matter of a succession of courtyards, of mounting silhouette, and of broken staccato forms. The decorative repertory consisted largely of borrowings from German and Flemish pattern books or crude commentaries upon the much favored treatise of the Italian architect and painter Serlio. Although in some cases the decoration was refined and of Renaissance quality, on the whole it was coarse and grotesque, or naïve and immature. A pointer to the future disruption of the pattern can be seen at Hatfield House, one of these Jacobean palaces begun about 1607. The gallery front and cupola are distinctly more refined than the rest of the house. They were put up about 1610, and there is reason to suppose they were designed with the advice of Inigo Jones. This genius, who was to alter radically the prevailing, and one might almost say vernacular, style of English architecture, had until then only a reputation for designing scenery and costumes for masques and festivals.

Jones was probably of humble birth, and must at an early age have found powerful patrons. When he was twenty-eight, in 1601, he is known to have been in Venice. He made a second visit to Italy about 1605. In 1611 he was made surveyor to the then heir apparent, Prince Henry, and upon that prince’s death in 1612 he was granted the reversion of the office of surveyor of the works to King James. This position, taken up in 1615, was something on the order of a petty dictatorship of taste. Jones would have been responsible for all the major royal architectural projects and would have been the vortex for the dissemination of ideas and architectural style. He left again for Italy in 1613. There he made a close study of the antiquities, especially the architecture of Andrea Palladio and Vicenzo Scamozzi in Venice, Vicenza, and around the Veneto. This was the first time that an English architect (and it was rare for any northern architect) had made a systematic study of Italian architecture. The results were to bear fruit startling in contrast to the current buildings being erected in England. Jones returned to London in 1615 and was immediately occupied on royal works. In 1616 the Queen’s House was begun at Greenwich; yet the influence this building may have exerted would have been small, for it remained in an incomplete state until recommenced in the late 1620s and completed by 1635. More significant were the designs for the banqueting house in Whitehall, begun in 1619, and those for the Prince’s lodging at Newmarket Palace, begun about the same time. Both were a sudden breath of Italian air and must have appeared to most of Jones’s contemporaries with the same sharpness of innovation as if the Seagram Building had been erected for the 1851 Crystal Palace Exposition. Since Jones was the vortex of this English renaissance, his style became disseminated throughout the Office of Works. The legacy was naturally weakened by usage and copying, but even in provincial districts one can detect, perhaps in the handling of

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a pediment or in the management of a cornice, some reflection of the Palladian revival.

This revival in England has frequently been evaluated and analyzed. There is, however, considerable speculation as to the various eclectic manifestations within it, especially in the sphere of decoration. The influence of Italy upon Inigo Jones is paramount, as is his dependence upon the treatises of Scamozzi, Palladio, and Serlio. The influence from France, however, has been hardly emphasized in any detail and, because of a lack of documentary evidence, has not received the study it deserves. Yet any examination of Jones’s works will reveal aspects in the program of interior decoration which are consistently indebted to French sources.

These aspects almost always concern the chimney surround and overmantel. This is logical, for no satisfactory Italian source provided engravings of this element of a room. Since the chimney piece essentially belongs to the northern climes, it would be to northern and especially French pattern books that Jones would turn for his exemplars. Serlio was the only Italian exception, and, significantly, he had worked in France; besides, his patterns were few and had been used earlier by Elizabethan and Jacobean artists.

A drawing recently added to the Metropolitan Museum’s collection is one of a small series of important documents relating to the problem of French sources. Its publication here provides an opportunity to discuss the extent of French influence upon Inigo Jones.

The period of influence seems to be nicely fixed by a post quem date of 1633, the year of publication of Jean Barbet’s *Livre d’Architecture, d’Autels, et de Cheminées*. Why Barbet should become of paramount importance by the mid-1630s is not easy to elucidate. He was a relatively
minor French architect, certainly attached to royal circles, but whose architectural works are little known. The Château de Cheverny (Loir-et-Cher) has tentatively been attributed to him. His importance may lie simply in the dissemination of his publication and the immediate usefulness of the designs, which were stylistically the current French fashion. As there had been no earlier suite of engravings of such adaptability, Jones would naturally have made their acquaintance. It can be no accident, however, that this period of French influence coincides precisely with the patronage of the “French” queen, Henrietta Maria, who had come to England in 1625.

The use of Barbet occurs at Greenwich, where the apartments of the Queen’s House were being fitted up from 1635. A design for one chimney piece, dated 1637 and inscribed “for the room next the bakstaiers” (Figure 2), has the jambs of the surround formed by term figures with scrolled shoulders and swagged chests. This is taken almost literally from Barbet (Figure 3), substituting a straight entablature for Barbet’s broken pediment and putti. Another Jones design, drawn in a very fluid free manner (Figure 4), is simply inscribed “for Greenwich.” Its source is again Barbet (Figure 5), who provides the broken triangular pediment enclosing a double-scrolled segmental one supported on a tablet. For the putto blowing trumpets, Jones substitutes putti holding the crown over the cipher HMR. The standing figures on the Barbet overmantel are significant for the future development of the Jonesian type. Jones’s overmantel with a form of history painting is non-derivative, but the urns upon the sloping sides of the pediment are taken from the engraving shown in Figure 3.

The drawing in this Museum’s collection (Figure 1) is one of a number by the hand of an anonymous Frenchman who, if not connected directly with the English court, would appear to have sent his designs from France for execution under Jones’s supervision. It is unfortunately uninscribed, but in type and style belongs to the period under discussion. The only discoverable parallel with any part of an Office of Works design occurs in that by Jones inscribed “first scitzo chimney peese for oatlands 1636” (Figure 13), where there is a similarity in the use of terms on two faces of the overmantel jambs. This feature might, however, also be of Barbet derivation.

Other drawings by the same anonymous French hand are known to have been used by Jones, and it is important to underline the difference between his use of them and of the Barbet engravings. Normally, as we have seen in the case of Barbet, Jones extracted elements of an engraving and incorporated them into a design distinctly his own. This is not the case with the anonymous drawings; they were transposed verbatim, as if the Queen had ordered...

Fig. 3. Design for a chimney piece, by Jean Barbet, French. Plate 9 from Livre d’Architecture, d’Autels, et de Cheminées, 1633. 8 x 5 3/4 inches
Dick Fund, 1935
them executed just as they were. For example, Jones's drawing inscribed “Greenwich 1637 Cabinet room above behind ye round stair” (Figure 8) is literally copied from one by the anonymous hand (Figure 6). Jones's drawing is by far the better one. The only alteration he permits himself is to slightly anglicize details like the heads in the entablature of the chimney jambs.

Why should Jones execute designs by another architect for a project very intimately his own? As surveyor of the works he was responsible for the whole program of royal projects. If, however, the Queen had her own favorite architect, there is no reason to suppose that she did not stipulate the execution of his designs. The accounts of the Office of Works record no payment to this Frenchman, neither do they particularize France. It is inscribed—and by Jones—“Chimney from ye French ambasator 1 Jan 1636.” This inscription can be interpreted in two ways: either the design was meant for the ambassador, Henri de la Ferté-Nabert, or he was the medium through whom the designs were conveyed from France. If the former interpretation is correct, the chimney might have been executed at

Fig. 4. Design for a chimney piece for Greenwich, by Inigo Jones
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Fig. 5. Design for a chimney piece, by Jean Barbet. Plate 14 from Livre d'Architecture, d'Auteurs, et de Cheminées, 1633. 7 3/8 x 5 3/4 inches Dick Fund, 1935
Fig. 6. Design for a chimney piece for Greenwich, 1637, by an unknown French artist
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Fig. 7. Design for a chimney piece “from ye French ambassador,” possibly for Brooke House, 1636-1637, by an unknown French artist
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Fig. 8. Design for a chimney piece for the “Cabinet room above behind ye round stair” at Greenwich, 1637, by Inigo Jones
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Fig. 9. Design for a chimney piece for Somerset House, 1636, by Inigo Jones
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Fig. 11. Design for the altar wall of the royal chapel at Somerset House, by Inigo Jones. Plates 28 and 29 from Designs of Inigo Jones and Others, by Isaac Ware, 1743. 7 3/4 x 9 1/2 inches
Bequest of W. Gedney Beatty, 1941

Fig. 10. Design for a chimney piece for Somerset House, 1636, by an unknown French artist
Royal Institute of British Architects

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Fig. 12. Design for an altar wall, by D. Antoine Pierretz, French. Plate 4 from Livre d'Autels et d'Épitaphes, n.d. 10½ x 7½ inches
Dick Fund, 1944

Fig. 14. Design for a cabinet, by an unknown French artist
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Fig. 13. Design for a chimney piece for Oatlands Palace, 1636, by Inigo Jones
Royal Institute of British Architects
Brooke House, Holborn, used by the French ambassadors for entertainment purposes from about 1628. This house, which had previously belonged to Sir Fulke Greville, was newly fronted, perhaps by Jones, before 1619.

At Somerset House, a large rambling Elizabethan and Jacobean palace where Jones carried out for the Queen one of his most important decorative programs, works were in hand from about 1625 to about 1640. Jones's design inscribed "for a chimney piece of wainscott So: House 1636" (Figure 9) is copied from one by the French hand (Figure 10). Except for the substitution of a cartouche with the Queen's monogram in the upper part of the overmantel, the borrowing is again literal. A chimney piece dated 1636 for the Cross Gallery is only slightly influenced by French sources. The most important architectural scheme at Somerset House was the royal chapel begun in 1630 and dedicated in 1635. It was undoubtedly a lavish affair, but was unfortunately dismantled by Sir William Chambers in the eighteenth century. A few records show it to have been the largest domestic chapel in England at the time, measuring 104 by 36 feet. An engraving of its screen shows slight dependence upon Barbet details. The same suite of engravings, by Isaac Ware, shows the altar wall (Figure 11), derived this time from another French authority, D. Antoine Pierretz, whose Livre d'Autels et d'Epitaphes (undated) contains the source used by Jones (Figure 12). In this case, as with Barbet, the method of borrowing and transposing details is the normal one. The common factors are the entrances with statues in niches each side of the reredos; the fluted Ionic order; and the segmental pediment raised upon a panel.

It remains to discuss two other aspects of French influence within the Palladian revival in England: the existence of other designs by the anonymous Frenchman, and the influence of Barbet in projects outside the jurisdiction of the Office of Works.

In the Clarke Collection at Worcester College, Oxford, are several designs (unfortunately not

*Fig. 15: Design for a chimney piece, attributed to John Webb (1611-1674), British*

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available for photography) by the anonymous French hand; they are for a variety of projects, including a baldachino and antique temple plans. The Ashmolean Museum at Oxford contains three designs by the same hand. Like the Metropolitan’s drawing, they have gold mounts elaborately crested at the top. These are the hallmark of the Talman Collection and appear on many of their drawings. They point to a Jones–Office of Works source, since by 1700 a large portion of the Jones designs were in the possession of William Talman, who sold them in 1721 to the Earl of Burlington. The Metropolitan’s drawing may have found its way to the market in 1727 when the major Talman sales occurred. The Ashmolean Museum designs are interpolated in an album by or attributed to Jean Cotelle. This album came from the collection of James Gibbs, and there is reason to suppose that he obtained it from a Talman sale. It seems likely, therefore, that it was owned either by Jones or by his colleague and relative-in-law John Webb.

Two of the Ashmolean designs are for cabinets or armoires in a Louis XIII style. The larger and more sumptuous one (Figure 14) seems to have been intended for the French court and incorporates the monogram perhaps of Marie de Médicis. The smaller cabine has been attributed in previous literature to Inigo Jones, but is patent not from his hand. It would be interesting if there were any similar pieces of furniture extant from English collections at the time. There are, however, none except the insignificant “Laudian” cabinet at Arbury. The third Ashmolean design is like a chimney piece with a closed surround. Its composition is singular and may in fact have been intended for some other paneled fixture. It is, nevertheless, by the same hand.

The influence of Barbet is to be seen in certain other designs probably connected with Inigo Jones but not necessarily with the English court. The drawing shown in Figure 15 is attributed to John Webb, who takes the center part of the overmantel and the scrolled pediment from Barbet (Figure 17). It would seem to have been intended for a royal project, but the place remains unidentified. It includes, like the Barbet engraving, full standing figures on the entablature. Similar figures occurred on the design for the French ambassador’s chimney piece and are also to be seen on a design by Jones (Figure 18).

Fig. 17. Design for a chimney piece, by Jean Barbet. Plate 16 from Livre d’Architecture, d’Autels, et de Cheminées, 1633. 8 3/4 x 5 3/8 inches
Dick Fund, 1935

The latter incorporates an earl’s coronet and has tentatively been attributed to the program of decorations carried out, in the late 1630s and again in the late 1640s, for Philip, Earl of Pembroke, at Wilton House. (The problem of
dating is a complicated one and has never been satisfactorily resolved. In point of style the earlier period is the more likely, as this was precisely the period of Barbet’s influence.) Reclining dragons on the pediment of the Colonnade Room chimney piece at Wilton House were taken directly from the last mentioned Barbet engraving. The great Double Cube Room, one of the most sumptuous of the English renaissance, has a chimney piece (Figure 16) also composed from different Barbet engravings, but with details combined in such a way as to make the borrowing less obvious. Pembroke was a friend of Charles I and of Inigo Jones. Therefore the commission for Wilton House was within the orbit of the court style. Whether it was entirely characteristic of Jones’s style is another matter.

This article does not propose to lessen the importance of the Palladian predominance on Jones’s works. Its intention is rather to stress the eclectic content of his decorative program, a content brought about by the necessity of finding precedents in northern artists when there were none from Italy. It also shows that at times, owing probably to royal command, he literally translated another’s designs. The identity of this anonymous French hand is likely to remain unsolved unless specific accounts are found. That he was not an Office of Works man is proved by negative mention in the Declared Accounts. The very diversity of the designs shows that they were not merely sent from France as examples of the latest style—which was, in fact, supplied by Barbet.

Fig. 18. Design for a chimney piece, possibly for Wilton House, by Inigo Jones
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