Colen Campbell and the Preparatory Drawings for Vitruvius Britannicus


Abstract

Colen Campbell (c.1676-1729) is remembered for his contribution to English architecture in the early eighteenth century, and most notably for his authorship of three volumes of the architectural book Vitruvius Britannicus. In recent interpretations, Campbell's part in this venture has been called into question, assigning him the role of a mere draughtsman, only promoted to author due to circumstantial pressures. This thesis aims to contribute to the existing scholarly work by taking into consideration the drawings for the production of Vitruvius Britannicus, which have hitherto remained understudied. These drawings will be used as the basis for my investigation of the production of Vitruvius Britannicus. I also supply the first catalogue raisonné of these drawings. Across five chapters, I trace the production of Vitruvius Britannicus in the order in which it occurred. This chronology is reflected in the structure of my thesis. Chapter I sets out the provenance of the Campbell drawings and investigates their purpose and technique, both in the categories of drawing for building and drawing for engraving. Chapter II presents the origins of the designs included by Campbell in Vitruvius Britannicus. Chapter III investigates possible origins of the book in Scotland, by looking at three disparate individuals who may have provided Campbell with graphic material or skills needed for the production. In addition, visual material Campbell certainly utilised when in London is analysed. Chapter IV considers the accuracy of the source material which Campbell adopted, drawing on specific remaining examples. Chapter V deals with the final stage of production, the transformation of the drawings to engravings. The engraver for Vitruvius Britannicus, Henry Hulsbergh, is investigated, as is another, unidentified, engraver who assisted in the production of volume I. I present a challenge to the recent interpretations of Vitruvius Britannicus, and add to the existing understanding of the role which Campbell played in the production. I develop a hitherto unexplored interpretation of the genesis of the book, emphasising Campbell's own Scottish origins, and promote the view that he was instrumental in the conceptualisation of its production from the earliest stages.

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1715-1729). Vitruvius Britannicus or The British Architect. London: sold by the author, John Nicholson, Andrew Bell, W. Taylor, Henry Clements and Jos. Smith, 1715-1717. Volumes I-II only, 2º (441 x 272mm). In volume I 40 plates are signed as drawn by Campbell, though none of the architectural plates are signed by an engraver. In volume II the elevations and sections are nearly all signed as drawn by Campbell and engraved by Henry Hulsbergh, Fowler 76; Harrison 97; RIBA Early Printed Books 3544. (2). II.) Colin Campbell Esqr. Vitruvius Britannicus, ou L'Architecte Britannique, Contenant Les Plans, Elevations, & Sections des Bâtimens Reguliers, tant Particuliers que Publics de la Grande Bretagne, Compris en 200 grandes Planches gravez en taille douce par les Meilleurs Maitres, et tous ou desinsez des Bâtimens memes, ou copiez des Desseins Originaux des Architectes: En Deux Tomes. Imprint. Cum Priveligio Regis. Sold by the Author over against Douglas Coffee-house in St. Martins-Lane, John Nicholson in Little Britain, Andrew Bell at the Cross-Keys in Cornhill, W. Taylor in Pater-Noster-Row, Henry Clements in St. Pauls Church-yard, and Jos. Smith in Exeter-Change., London: MDCCXV. (MDCCXVII.), [1715 (-1717)]. Other articles where Vitruvius Britannicus is discussed: Palladianism: ...first volume of Colen Campbell's Vitruvius Britannicus (1715), a folio of 100 engravings of contemporary "classical" buildings in Britain (two more volumes followed in 1717 and 1725), the designs of which had enormous influence in England. William Benson, a Whig member of Parliament, had already built the first English Palladian...