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THE TRAVELS OF THE REV. SIR GEORGE WHELER (1650–1723)

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The typical Grand Tourist of the early eighteenth century was an eldest son, with an estate and country house to inherit, which he might decide to alter or rebuild on his return. Since he was barely out of school or university, his programme of travel would be carefully planned by his parents or guardians, financial arrangements made on his behalf, and a suitable tutor appointed to accompany him. While abroad he might buy paintings, sculptures and other works of art to adorn his house on his return; these he would buy from established dealers, often for inflated prices.

George Wheeler, who travelled from 1673–6, was different in almost every respect: he was twenty-three on his departure, about five years older than most tourists; his parents were not at all well-off, though a fortunate recent inheritance had saved them from severe financial problems; far from having a large country house and an estate, they had recently left the Old Palace, Charing, a house which they had leased for many years, and were living modestly in that village in Kent. As a cherished only son, Wheeler did not dare confess to his parents his plans to go abroad; he discreetly made all the travel arrangements himself, inviting his tutor from Oxford, George Hickes to join him. He spent about a year in France and Switzerland with Hickes, a year in Italy, then a third year in Greece and Turkey with Jacob Spon, a Protestant doctor from Lyons (Fig. 1).

Perhaps because of the scarcity of reliable travel information, both men wrote about their journeys. First to publish was Spon in 1677, with his *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie, de Grèce et du Levant*. . . .¹

Wheeler was spurred into writing by the threat of an unauthorised translation of Spon's book, and brought out his *Journey into Greece in the Company of Dr. Spon of Lyons* in 1682, using a lot of the same material, but writing in a more relaxed and conversational style, and treating only of the journey from Venice onwards. He illustrated his book with his own drawings of local costumes, plants, animals, buildings and maps.

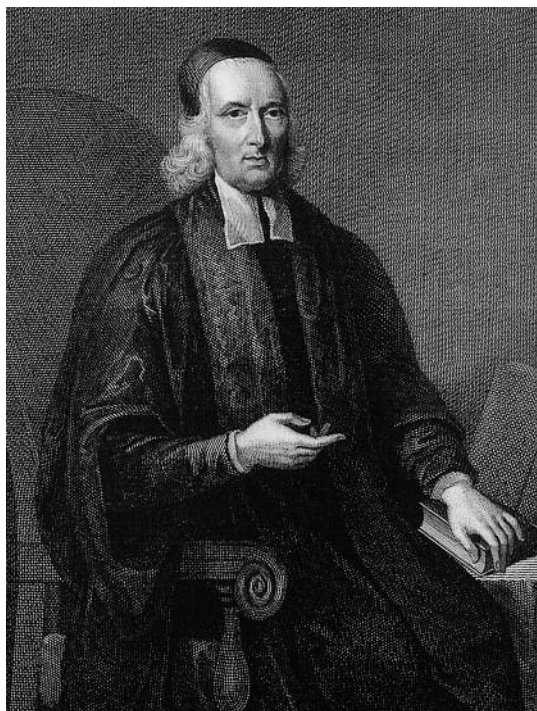


Fig. 1. George Wheeler, early nineteenth century print after anonymous portrait. *Caroline Knight*.

When they returned both had put together modest collections. Spon, with limited resources, had concentrated on copying inscriptions and buying some coins and a few manuscripts. Wheeler's was more wide-ranging: some Greek sculptures, many Greek and Roman coins and medals, Greek and Latin manuscripts, copies of many ancient inscriptions and a collection of about a thousand dried plants. Some of these he kept during his lifetime, but all ended up in collections where he hoped they would be of educational use.

What impelled Wheeler to travel to dangerous and little visited parts of the world, and how had his education fitted him to appreciate its past? Wheeler's

autobiographical note, dated 1700, records the return of the family, impoverished royalists, from exile in Holland in 1652; they settled in the Old Palace at Charing in Kent, where George's grandmother had lived.² His parents managed to educate their only son at the grammar school attached to Wye College, where he says he learnt little – although he did study Greek. By this time the lease of the Old Palace had expired, and his parents had moved to a smaller house in the village. This may have deeply upset George, who later bought the Old Palace, as well as Wye College³ (Fig. 2). With his family too poor to educate him further, George's future looked uncertain, until help came from an unexpected



Fig. 2. Part of the Old Palace, Charing. *Caroline Knight.*

quarter. When Sir William Wheeler – a City merchant, but probably no relation – died in 1666 he left his fortune to his widow for her life, but to George and his father thereafter. This prospect enabled George to go to Lincoln College, Oxford as a gentleman-commoner in 1668. Oxford made a deep impression on him, especially the Physic Garden, where he continued his childhood studies of botany.⁴ His tutor at Lincoln, George Hickes, went with him on part of his travels, while the Rector, Nathaniel Crewe, later became Bishop of Durham and appointed Wheeler to several posts in that diocese. Later, both the University and Lincoln College were to benefit from his gifts and bequests. When Lady Wheeler died in 1670 the will was hotly contested, and in 1671 George found himself studying law at the Middle Temple in order to help his father fight the case, which was long-drawn out and bitter, although ultimately successful. They had to pay off various claimants, but eventually inherited Sir William Wheeler's London house in Westminster, as well as properties in Spitalfields, the City, Hampshire and Wiltshire.⁵ So by the summer of 1673 George Wheeler was financially secure enough to contemplate travel, and determined to do so. But knowing his 'indulgent parents' would try to prevent it, he discreetly appointed trustees to look after his property in his absence and took out loans for his travel expenses, secured against his future inheritance. As 'tutor and fellow traveller' he invited Hickes, who had been ill, to travel with him in Europe. At that time his plans seem to have been vague, and the decision to go to the eastern Mediterranean may have been made much later. The *Autobiographical Note* closes with his parting visit to his parents in Kent, after which, guiltily conscious of his secret plans and the dangers he might face, he prayed for a safe return and vowed to take Holy Orders if he came back. Then he slipped away to Dover, joined Hickes and sailed to France in October 1673.

How did he plan his itinerary, at a time when few guide books were available? Wheeler might have

known members of the Bargrave family of Kent, or heard about their travels. Robert Bargrave, who kept lively travel diaries, made several trips as a merchant to distant parts of Europe and to Turkey.⁶ His cousin John Bargrave was a canon of Canterbury cathedral and therefore a not too distant neighbour of the Wheeler family in Kent. He had travelled widely in Europe during and after the Civil War, and had built up a cabinet of curiosities.⁷ John Raymond, his travelling companion in 1646–7, wrote a very readable and informative little book, *An Itinerary containyng a Voyage through Italy* about one of these tours.⁸ For the eastern Mediterranean there was very little: one recent book, James Howell's *Instruction & Directions for Forren Travell, with a new Appendix for Travelling into Turkey and the Levant Part* was published in London in 1650, but although it praised Smyrna as a busy port, with many ships from Livorno and Venice stopping there, it made no mention of the antiquities along the Turkish coast. It was clearly not aimed at scholarly tourists like Wheeler and Spon, who seem to have relied on local information while in Asia Minor. For Greece, classical authors provided the essential background reading. Wheeler and Spon used Pausanias's *Guide to Greece* as their main source: Wheeler's *Journey* and Spon's *Voyage* carefully compare Pausanias's descriptions of the places they visited to the few visible remains of ancient buildings.

Wheeler's time in France, Switzerland and Italy is less well documented than his subsequent travels. He presumably considered travel in those countries so common as to be unremarkable. But his *Journey* allows us to glimpse some of his concerns: a scholarly interest in church history and a deep concern for the Protestant church, both of which are reflected in his later writings;⁹ an interest in botany;¹⁰ in coins and medals; and in surveying and map-making.

Although the Edict of Nantes was not to be revoked for another twelve years, French Protestants were already suffering some discrimination, and Wheeler and Hickes made contact with various

Protestants, such as Henri Justel, a secretary to Louis XIV, during their year in France. Justel later presented three rare seventh century manuscripts to the Bodleian Library in Oxford, using Hickes as his intermediary.¹¹ Wheeler took a close interest in the fate of French Protestants on his return to England, appointing a French curate to one of his livings, and considering giving a chapel he later built on his land in Spitalfields to the Huguenot immigrants there.¹² They spent some time in Paris, where Galland, the antiquary in charge of Louis XIV's *cabinet*, showed Wheeler the King's coin collection, perhaps inspiring him to collect coins too. From Paris they went to Blois, Toulouse, Montpellier, Lyons and then to Geneva, from where, now returned to health, Hickes went back to Oxford while Wheeler continued into Italy.¹³

In Rome Wheeler met Jacob Spon (1647–1685), his travelling companion in Greece and Turkey. Spon came from a Protestant family in Lyons where he practised as a doctor, but he was also a keen antiquarian with a particular interest in inscriptions, coins and medals. His friends in Lyons included many scholars and travellers, and in 1674, just before he set off, Spon had published a letter from Père Babin, a Jesuit priest who had been in Athens, about the buildings of that city.¹⁴ He had intended to go to Italy and perhaps on to Greece with his antiquarian friend Jean-Foi Vaillant (1632–1706), who had already been to both countries, and who was being sent back a second time by Colbert to find more coins for Louis XIV's *cabinet* at Versailles; but Spon missed his friend in Marseilles (just as well, as Vaillant was captured by pirates and only got back to France with difficulty). Instead Spon looked at Roman monuments in the south of France and eventually travelled on to Italy with a friend from Lyons. There he spent five months studying the antiquities of Rome and copying inscriptions, hoping eventually to publish them – as indeed he did, in the second edition of his book. Spon may have begun collecting coins while in Rome, as he mentions a Frenchman and an Italian who were dealing in coins there. He

studied manuscripts in the Vatican Library, and through his contacts with other antiquarians he gained the *entrée* to some of the great private collections in Rome, such as those of the Aldobrandini, Borghese and Barberini families. In Cardinal Barberini's library he examined a manuscript of 1465 'which showed many designs of the antiquities of Greece, before they were so much ruined by the Turks.'¹⁵ This reinforced his curiosity about Greece. But how was he to afford it, with few resources of his own?

A chance meeting with Wheeler in 1675 solved the problem: 'Je ne voulus pas quitter Rome sans aller visiter les environs, et Monsieur Wheeler, Gentil-homme Anglois, . . . voulut être de la partie. Nous fumes premierement à Tivoli . . .'¹⁶ where they were not at all impressed by the unexcavated remains of Hadrian's villa. Wheeler found him 'a very discreet and ingenious person'¹⁷ and they shared a serious interest in antiquities as well as curiosity about Greece; both were concerned about the persecution of Protestants in France. Wheeler offered to finance the Greek expedition, leaving from Venice, where they planned to meet later that summer.

Wheeler and Spon originally intended going only to Greece. However Spon's contacts in Venice had alerted them to the chance of travelling out with the new Venetian ambassador to the Ottomans, so Wheeler, Spon and two young Englishmen, Francis Vernon and Sir Giles Estcourt, managed to secure places in the galley accompanying that of the ambassador.¹⁸ Wheeler and Spon visited the university in Padua and were hardly ready in time:

We had but that day to prepare ourselves for so great a voyage, get Licence to embark in one of the Gallies, and to order our Letters of Credit . . . yet many things also are requisite to one who intends to make the best advantage of his time in those remote parts, especially a good Sea-Compass, a Quadrant, or other instruments to take latitudes; and a measure of a foot etc.¹⁹

It was a leisurely journey, leaving Venice in June 1675 and stopping all along the Istrian and Dalmatian

coast, inspecting the Roman remains at Pola and Zara [Zadar]. At the latter they had a letter of recommendation to the Venetian governor, who was

very curious in medals; of which the number he hath is far less considerable, than the rarity. . . . He hath travelled in all parts of the Levant, where he collected the greater part of them. Some of which indeed are so curious, as not only exceeded our expectations, but gave us hopes, that we might find also some worth the pains of collecting.²⁰

At Spalatro [Split] the boats moored for eleven days, which gave them the chance to examine the ruins of Diocletian's vast palace, as Robert Adam was to do almost a century later. Wheeler drew a bird's-eye view – unfortunately his drawing skills were fairly rudimentary, as he was the first to admit – and visited local monasteries, in one of which they found a medieval manuscript. In Trau [Trogir, the Roman Tragorum] the local lawyer offered them 'half a dozen of ancient Roman inscriptions' which he had arranged in his garden; reluctantly they refused, due to the problems of transporting them. In Corfu, where they transferred from galleys to warships, Wheeler was able to buy several Greek coins, and to examine a cache of Roman coins from the time of Septimius Severus which had just been discovered. Apart from looking at classical ruins, at all these places Wheeler explored inland and collected samples of plants, which were carefully pressed and eventually preserved in his *hortus siccus*.²¹

For the last part of the journey to Constantinople, the young men left the Venetian convoy and, taking first a small boat and then ox-carts, explored along the coast of the Dardanelles, hoping to find the site of Troy, and examining ancient fragments which were lying around or incorporated into later buildings. Once, not having a pen between them, they were reduced to plucking quills from the wing of a dead goose in the street in order to copy down some inscriptions.²²

They arrived in Constantinople in late September. Since this had not been their intended

destination they had no letters of introduction, so they concentrated on sightseeing. Spon dressed as an Armenian and Wheeler 'in the Turkish mode'.²³ Thus disguised they visited the Sultan's palace, Santa Sophia, the great mosques, the Hippodrome, the baths and the Bazaar. But their descriptions are brief, because so many other accounts had already described the city. Plague was endemic there, so they lodged outside the walls at Galata, the district in which the foreign merchants and diplomats lived. The French ambassador, the Marquis de Nointel, was a keen antiquarian who often invited them to his house, and

with great courtesie, entertained us with the curiosities of his travels. He hath there about thirty marbles with ancient inscriptions and basso-rilievos brought from Athens and the Isles of the Archipelago, of which he permitted us to copy what we would.²⁴

Nointel employed an artist, Jacques Carrey, to record landscapes, buildings and sculptures which he visited. They were shown his drawings of the Parthenon and admired the frieze, wherein 'are represented sacrifices, processions and other ceremonies of the heathen worship' which the artist had spent two months recording.²⁵

The English ambassador, Sir John Finch, eventually returned from the Sultan's court, which had gone to Adrianople [Edirne] to avoid the plague; once back, Wheeler and Spon visited him daily. Finch had already spent nine years in Turkey and was a mine of information for the travellers.²⁶ His chaplain, Dr. John Covel, had until recently been chaplain to the Levant Company in Smyrna and was the ideal friend for Wheeler and Spon, being a keen traveller and antiquarian, fascinated by church history, natural science and medicine, and an enthusiastic botanist and surveyor.²⁷ Covel showed them his collection of 'many rare medals and ancient intaglios or figures, cut on several sorts of precious stones.'²⁸

But their real destination had always been Greece rather than Turkey, and they planned to visit Mount

Athos on their way to Athens. However their plans were thwarted: the severity of the plague outbreak prevented them going overland via Thrace, fear of pirates prevented them going by sea. Finch, eager for them to leave the infected city, introduced them to some English merchants and a physician who were returning to their base in Smyrna.²⁹ Thus, quite by chance, they travelled east instead of west to a part of Asia Minor little visited by tourists.

Together they made up a group of six horsemen, a few lesser merchants on foot, a janissary and two servants. They chartered a small boat for part of the journey, then continued to Bursa on primitively harnessed horses. Taking advantage of the illness of one of the merchants at Bursa, Covell (who accompanied them for the first part of the journey) and Wheeler had time to explore the countryside together and came back with rare plants.³⁰ Spon showed little enthusiasm for botany, but instead concentrated on copying inscriptions. This was another interest of Covell's, who seems to have been more impressed by Spon than by his companion. A letter from Covell, written about 1676–7 from Smyrna, discusses them.

I shall make inscriptions and such knackes but onely my pasetime; . . . last year was here one Mr Wheeler [sic] a pretty ingenious youth, our countreyman, and one Mr. Spon a french man who certainly have made ye best collection in ye world and intends to print them when he comes home; he hath gathered up and down about 10,000 that never yet saw light I have a very great intimacy with him and maintain a strict correspondency with him; I shall certainly give him all I have which he wants.³¹

Smyrna was a thriving city with a large Greek and Jewish population and many foreign merchants, who each lived in their own compounds; the substantial English trading post was on the sea-front, between those of the French and the Dutch. 'The English Factory consists of fourscore or an hundred Persons, most of them the younger sons of Gentlemen.'³² In charge of this outpost of the Levant Company was

the Consul, Paul Ricaut (1628–1700) a scholar and linguist, author of *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* and an authority on the Greek church.³³ Here was a man well fitted to help Wheeler and Spon in their researches and collecting, and no doubt delighted with these visitors whom he often invited to dine with him. As usual Wheeler was map-making and surveying, and a few little sketches, very roughly drawn, which survive among his papers, were part of that process; some were used as the basis for illustrations in his book. He shows Smyrna's position on the sea front with the large Turkish customs house ('dongana di turkes') in the centre; at the top fragments of the Roman aqueduct lead down to the city from the hills, with the old castle and horseshoe of the theatre to the east³⁴ (Fig. 3). Wheeler reports on the trade and position of Smyrna, and on his pleasure at procuring some coins. These had the image of the Amazon Smyrna, the foundress of the city, and Wheeler 'got several pieces of them very rare, and saw many more, in the Cabinet of an ingenious Merchant there, Mr. Falkener, who designs his collection for the University of Oxford'³⁵. Faulkener realised his intention of presenting his coins to the University of Oxford, and they are today in the Ashmolean Museum. Spon too visited Faulkener: 'Je recherchay particulièrement à Smyrne des medailles antiques, pour apprendre quelques singularitez du pays. Ms. Falkner marchand Anglois curieux et scavant m'en fit voir de fort belles, et presque toutes des villes d'alentour de l'Ionie, de la Carie et de la Lydie, et m'en fit present de quelques-unes.'³⁶ Spon had an additional reason for searching out coins, as he had promised his friend Monsieur Patin, his 'maitre d'antiquitez' that he would procure some coins for him; also he hoped to sell some on his return to cover the costs of his purchases. (This indeed happened, and in Padua he exchanged some of his coins for a good horse on which he rode back to France in comfort). He acquired coins not only from Faulkener, but also from 'de differente personnes assez avantageusement.'³⁷ Wheeler says nothing about

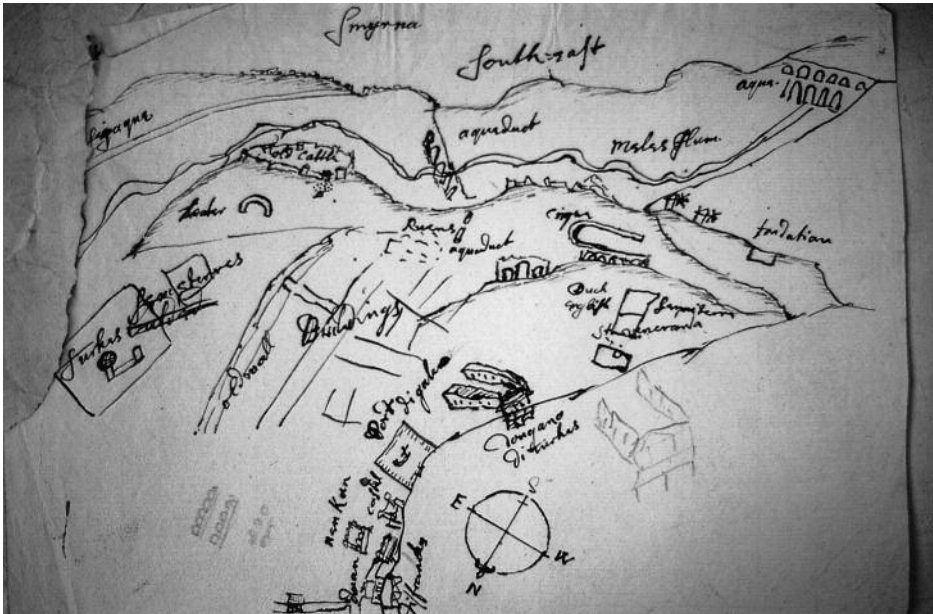


Fig. 3. George Wheeler, sketch map of Smyrna. West Yorkshire Archive Service.

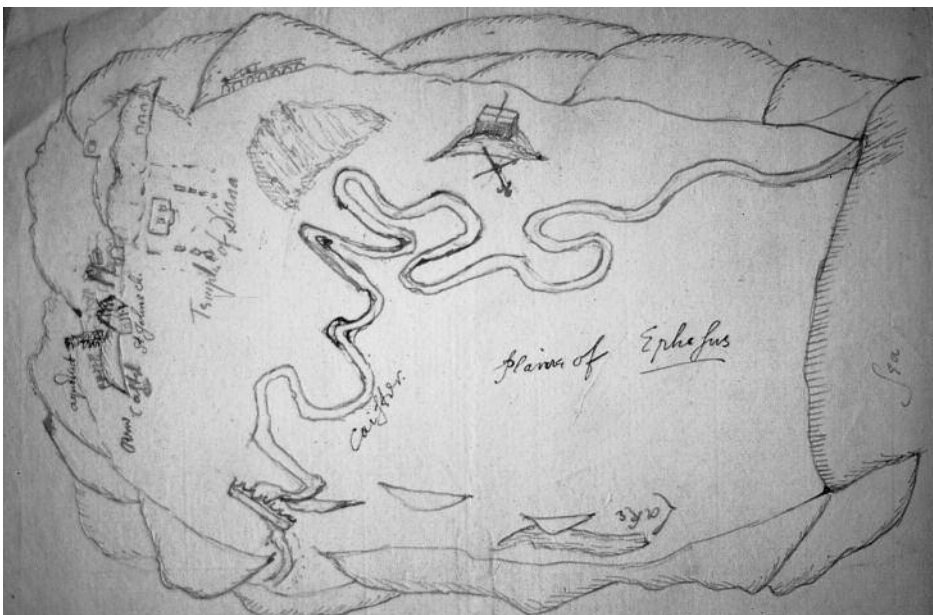


Fig. 4. George Wheeler, sketch map of Ephesus. West Yorkshire Archive Service.

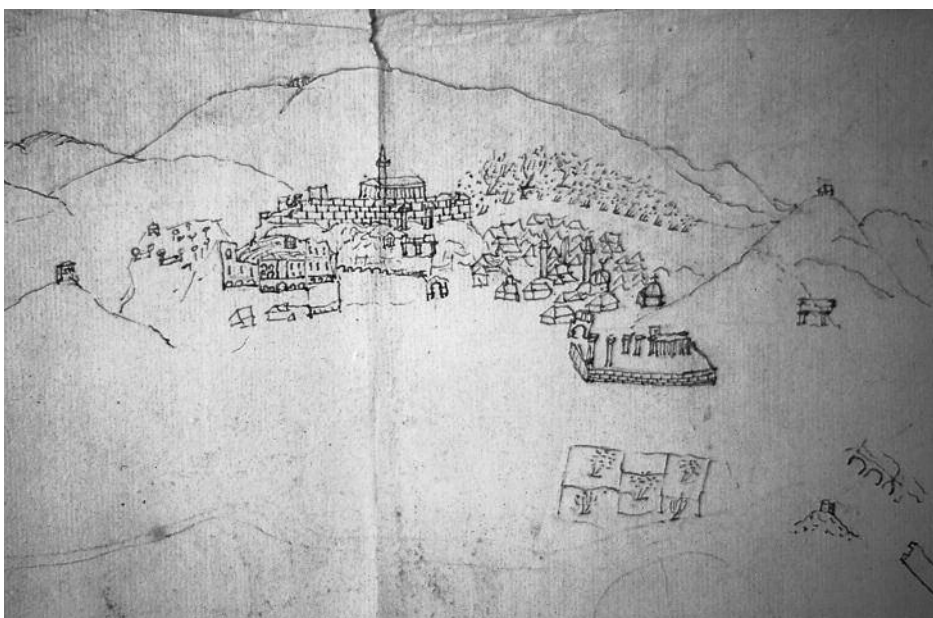


Fig. 5. George Wheeler, sketch map of Athens.
West Yorkshire Archive Service.

sculpture, and since the surviving pieces from his collection are Attic he probably bought none till he reached Greece. It was late autumn, and not ideal weather for either plant-hunting or travelling, but they made one expedition along the coast to Ephesus, which gave Wheeler the chance to find many more plants and to survey the area (Fig. 4). His rough sketch shows the meandering River Caistor, the site of the Temple of Diana marked with a cross, and 'St. John's ch[urch]' (now a mosque) beside the castle. The ancient city of Ephesus, unexcavated, was 'vast heaps of ruins, now without form.' They clambered down into the warren of rooms below the great Temple of Diana, being careful to take 'a long Pack-thred, tied to the hole where we first entered, but with all the light our candle allowed, we made no great discoveries. But when we wearied of the thick vapour of the place, we returned to the fresh air.'³⁸

Athens, 'a city now reduced to the lowest ebb of fortune' was a place of so little importance that it was impossible to find a ship going there. Taking advantage of an English warship escorting some trading vessels they set sail for Zante [Zakynthos] again, where after a stormy journey lasting thirty-seven days they arrived on Christmas Eve. From there they headed for Patras, where they stayed with the English Consul, then set off for Athens via Delphi and Thebes. A month later, after a cold and uncomfortable journey, they reached Athens, 'which we had so long wished to be at.' They stayed in the Plaka, in the house of Mr. Giraud, the English consul. Giraud (in fact a Frenchman from Lyons, and probably known to Spon) had been forewarned of their interests:

We made a greater Harvest of Inscriptions there than in all Greece besides: for the greatest part we may thank our Honest Consul, who had collected and

copied them before we came. So we had little to do, but examine them and search out new ones: which we daily did to our satisfaction. Some of the most curious that I found I procured and ordered to be sent to me, by first occasion, into England; of which, that which I esteem the most singular, is this of the Thirteen Tribes of the Athenians: which you have on the ensuing page We saw and copied many others very curious lying about in the Churches, in the Streets, and among the Walls of the Buildings, too numerous there to give account of.³⁹

Wheeler took lessons in modern Greek, and explored Athens at a leisurely pace.⁴⁰ He was astonished at the small size of the city compared to its ancient walls, and the dearth of trade there. His drawing shows a tiny huddle of buildings below the Acropolis⁴¹ (Fig. 5). But from his now extensive travels he found the monuments more impressive than anywhere except Rome. The Parthenon, which he calls the Temple of Minerva, he found ‘the most beautiful piece of antiquity remaining in the world’ and devotes pages of description to it. He saw it more or less complete, still ‘covered outwardly with great planks of stone.’⁴² Only eleven years later it was to be partially destroyed during the Venetian siege of Athens. He climbed up the minaret which had been added to it to admire the view – but not for long, in case he was noticed and taken for a spy.

From Athens they travelled north with a guide procured for them by the consul. Armed with ‘a mattock and spade’ they were able to dig up various inscriptions near Eleusis.⁴³ Their plan was to visit Mount Athos on their way to Germany, but Spon seems to have found the constant travel exhausting, and when faced with a snow-covered and impassable mountain gave up and decided to return home as quickly as possible via Venice.⁴⁴ Wheeler, unable to face another rough winter sea-crossing, chose to travel slowly back to Athens with his guide, where he stayed again with the Consul who helped him to arrange another shipment of his sculptures to England before taking a boat to Venice.

Wheeler reached Venice safely, and made contact

again with the English ambassador, Sir Thomas Higgons, whose daughter Grace he subsequently married, and whose family connections were to prove useful in his ecclesiastical career.⁴⁵ With vast relief he reached England safely, and apart from one visit to France in 1681 to see how the Huguenots were faring, he never went abroad again.⁴⁶ Instead he settled down to a comfortable life, enjoying his inheritance and family life, studying theology and writing up his travels. His book, published in 1682, was dedicated to Charles II, who knighted him for his efforts. The same year he was ordained, and through his family and Oxford contacts preferment quickly came his way: he was made a canon of Durham Cathedral in 1684, vicar of Basingstoke in 1685, and in 1709 became rector of Houghton-le-Spring in County Durham, said to be the richest living in England. A substantial house in The College, close to Durham Cathedral, became his main home; but he was constantly travelling to his various livings, visiting London to inspect his Spitalfields properties and attend Royal Society meetings, and seeing friends and family in Kent.⁴⁷

Almost everything Wheeler brought back seems to have been acquired in Greece and Turkey; the plants were easy enough to collect, but without an established network of dealers, it was not obvious how travellers set about acquiring coins or sculptures. Wheeler and Spon both make clear that it was the merchants who were settled in these parts who were the most useful source of information and of goods: men who had spent many years abroad, they were good linguists, often well-educated and with wide interests. They knew the local scene, were aware of any recent discoveries, and were in a position to collect in a small way themselves, or to help others to do so.

What was the fate of the various objects he had collected and sent back from his travels? Some have disappeared, but are mentioned in his will, such as the ‘Marble Table . . . incised with stones collected in my Travells.’ This could be *pietradura* from



Fig. 6. Fragment of an early 4th century B.C. grave relief. *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.* Caroline Knight.

Florence or Rome which was later made up, rather as John Evelyn commissioned a cabinet to display the pieces of *pietradura* which he had bought in Italy. Wheler seems to have been fairly unacquisitive, but to have felt strongly that a wide circle of people should be able to see what he had brought back. First to be given away were his sculptures, which he presented to Dr. Fell, the Bishop of Oxford, just before his ordination in 1683:

These few Marbles I had then, and since, collected, I have presented to the University of Oxon; where they have the honour to be placed among the famous Marmora Arundeliana & Seldeniana.⁴⁸

So Wheler's sculptures joined those collected in the earlier seventeenth century by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel and by John Selden. They had fairly recently been given to the University, which seemed uncertain what to do with them. In 1683 a new building was completed to house Ashmole's collection of curiosities, so the sculptures were arranged in niches in the wall running to the Sheldonian Theatre, and in the open space nearby. They finally went to the present Ashmolean Museum in 1888⁴⁹ (Fig. 6). Twelve of his sculptures, mainly Attic, are in the Ashmolean today. Most of them are fragments of grave and votive reliefs, none of them large, and of



Fig. 7. George Wheeler's coin cabinet,
Dean and Chapter Library, Durham Cathedral.
Dean and Chapter of Durham. Caroline Knight.

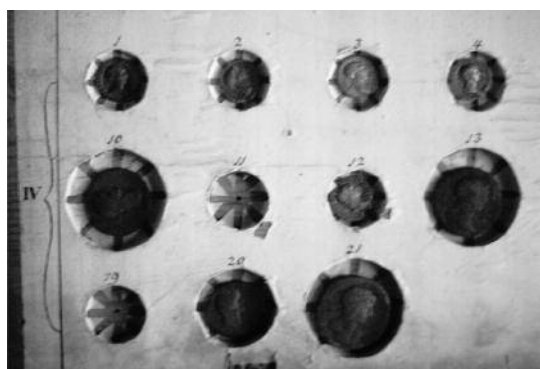


Fig. 8. Part of George Wheeler's coin collection,
Dean and Chapter Library, Durham Cathedral.
Dean and Chapter of Durham. Caroline Knight.

medium quality.⁵⁰ Wheeler did keep some 'few figures and basso-rilievos' for himself, which have since disappeared. His book illustrates two of these, a figure of Ceres and a bas-relief of Serapis.

Although Wheeler meant to publish the harvest of inscriptions which he had copied, he never did so. But he did put together a bound copy which he left to his son Granville, containing three hundred and ninety-seven Greek and Latin inscriptions, in the order in which he saw them from the Dalmatian coast onwards.⁵¹ Unlike Spon, he seems not to have collected inscriptions while he was in Italy. But he did buy a few inscriptions carved on stone, which were presented to Oxford together with the sculptures.

Wheeler's coin collection clearly gave him a great deal of pleasure. He kept it in Durham, and had a simple oak fall-front desk made, with several shallow trays for coins replacing the top drawer (Fig. 7). At his death he left to the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral 'all my silver and brass Medalls or antient coins with my collection of . . . Curiosities together with the Escritoire in which they are placed, and I order and desire that the same may be placed in the Dean & Chapter's Library.'⁵² The coins remain there today, the collection somewhat depleted, but the 'curiosities' have disappeared (Fig. 8). Some of the coins still in Durham appear to be seventeenth century fakes and these were more likely to have been bought in Italy, where there was a flourishing trade in antique coins, than in the much less visited Levant.⁵³ He mentions buying two coins 'of Antioch . . . which I lighted upon at Venice.'⁵⁴ Otherwise, he bought mainly in Turkey and Greece.

Wheeler is not very forthcoming about his buying, and the sources of his forty-four Greek and Latin manuscripts are difficult to trace. One, very rare, was written in the early fourteenth century in Constantinople and was probably bought there.⁵⁵ He mentions visiting the Patriarch of Constantinople and hoping to see his library, but was told that 'he had but few, or no books at all: though in a Paper-shop hard by his door we bought about twenty or thirty ancient



Fig. 9. Monument to the Rev. Sir George Wheeler, Durham Cathedral.
English Heritage: National Monument Record Centre.

Greek manuscripts.⁵⁶ In Athens he and Spon found St Dionysius his works, with the comment of St. Maximus.⁵⁷ Spon returned to France with some manuscripts, Wheeler with many more. These he kept in his own library until 1698, when he sent them to Lincoln College on loan, part no doubt of his efforts to make his own collection available to a wider circle of scholars. When he died these manuscripts were specifically bequeathed to the College, together with other unspecified manuscripts which had remained with Wheeler in Durham; they remain in the Lincoln College Library. It is also just possible that other manuscripts had already been given away. From 1685–1702 Wheeler was vicar of Basingstoke, and although living mainly in Durham, he often visited his parish and established a library attached to the church. Among his family papers is a short list with the names of early church fathers, implying that he had presented either manuscripts or books about them to this library.⁵⁷

Wheeler's botanical interests were primarily scientific, and there is no evidence that he tried to cultivate rare plants or trees at any of his houses. He did try to organise the plants which he had collected and pressed on his travels, and amazingly these very fragile objects still exist. His *hortus siccus* was a carefully arranged series of four leatherbound volumes, which appears to have been bound in the early eighteenth century, perhaps after Wheeler's wife died in 1703. The plants – sometimes one to a page, usually four – are pasted onto the pages, with their Latin names in Wheeler's hand, but without any further information, such as where they were found. Not surprisingly, most of them are seaside plants, such as *eruca marina*, or *plantago marina*. Only one new plant was discovered by Wheeler, the St. John's Wort of Olympus or *hypericum olympicum*. Under the terms of his will these volumes were bequeathed to the University of Oxford, and are now in the Bodleian Library.⁵⁸

When Wheeler died in Durham in 1723 various bequests were made to his daughters but most of his

property was bequeathed to his only surviving son Granville, the seventeenth of his eighteen children, on condition that he was ordained. It was presumably Granville who commissioned the fine monument in Durham Cathedral placed near the Galilee 'by his own desire to be near to the tomb of the Venerable Bede for whom he had an enthusiasm and veneration'⁵⁹ (Fig. 9).

Spon had also bought manuscripts, and came back with about fifty, as well as around six hundred antique coins. He and Wheeler corresponded for the rest of his short life, about their books, coins and the doings of the Royal Society. But Spon's life was less settled than Wheeler's comfortable career. It is much harder to trace what happened to his collection: he probably sold off various things during his lifetime, and what remained was divided among several relatives. His Protestant family left France after 1685, and Spon himself died that year, unmarried, heading into exile in Switzerland.⁶⁰

Although only parts of his collection remain, and his book is little read today, Wheeler does stand out as a more adventurous and scholarly tourist than most of the young men who travelled in Europe from the Restoration onwards. With his keen powers of observation he noted down all sorts of details about the geography, botany and customs of the places through which he passed. Later, through his publications and his gifts, he made a serious attempt to increase awareness of Greek and Roman art, and of the early church. Until the mid-eighteenth century no-one equalled either his travels or his observations. When Stuart and Revett went to Athens in 1751 to study and record Greek architecture for their lavishly illustrated volumes *The Antiquities of Athens* they took with them Pausanias's *Guide to Greece*. But they also took Spon's *Voyage* and Wheeler's *Journey*, and at every major building they compared their impressions with those of their predecessors. Almost a century after their visit, the travel writings of Wheeler and Spon were essential reading for the new explorers.⁶¹

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NOTES

- 1 Jacob Spon, *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmaties, de Grèce et du Levant, faites années 1675 et 1676 par Jacob Spon, medecin aggregé à Lyon, et George Wheeler, Gentilhomme Anglois*, Lyons, 1677 (hereafter Spon, *Voyage*).
- 2 E.G.Wheeler (ed.), *Autobiography of Sir George Wheeler*, Birmingham, 1911 (hereafter Wheeler, *Autobiography*). This is a printed version of Wheeler's notes on family history (recently bought by Lambeth Palace Library).
- 3 He bought the Old Palace for £1,430 in 1692. In his will, he left it to his unmarried daughters as 'a convenient place to inhabit' [Durham Cathedral Library, Durham Probate Records, George Wheeler 1723].
- 4 Wheeler, *Autobiography*, 14.
- 5 Wheeler, *Autobiography*, 8, gives this information, and tells us that the Westminster house was in Channon Row (sometimes written as Channel Row and now called Cannon Row), Westminster. His will, dated 1723, refers to his 'messuage' in 'Channel-Row, Westminster' as well as a house in Milk Street in the City [Leeds, West Yorkshire Archive Service (hereafter WYAS), LD Add. IV, 4/6, 1–2].
- 6 Robert Bargrave (1628–1661) went out to Smyrna in 1661 to be Secretary of the Levant Company, but died soon after his arrival. His diaries have recently been published: Michael G. Brennan (ed.), 'The Travel Diary of Robert Bargrave, Levant Merchant (1647–1656)', *The Hakluyt Society*, 3rd Series, III, 1999.
- 7 David Sturdy and Martin Henig produced a handlist of surviving objects from Bargrave's collection in *The Gentle Traveller: John Bargrave, Canon of Canterbury and his Collection*, Abingdon, 1985.
- 8 Raymond was aged about twenty during his travels, and it is assumed that the book was written largely by Bargrave. It was published in London in 1648, and dedicated to Prince Charles (later Charles II).
- 9 George Wheeler, *An Account of the Places of Assembly of the Primitive Christians*, London, 1689; *ibid.*, *The Protestant Monastery, or Christian Oeconomics*, London, 1698.
- 10 In Wheeler's *Autobiography*, 9, he relates that 'My greatest inclination was ever bent towards gardening, plants and flowers ... and has never left me to this day.'
- 11 Justel (1620–1693) fled to England in 1681 and became Keeper of the King's Library at St. James's Palace. [*Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter DNB), London, 1892, XXX, 231].
- 12 The history of Wheeler's church building project in Spitalfields is given by W.H.Manché, 'Spitalfields, Sir George Wheeler and his Chapel, St. Mary's Spital Square', in F.M.Geudens (ed.), *Maria's Tongerlo*, Mechelen, 1912, 454–9.
- 13 Some biographical notes, undated and not in Wheeler's hand, refer to the places visited in France, to the meeting with Justel, and to Hickeys's return [WYAS, LD Add. IV, 4/7].
- 14 R.Etienne and J-C Mossière (eds.), *Jacob Spon, un Humaniste Lyonnais du XVIIème Siècle*, Paris, 1993, 284–5.
- 15 George Wheeler, *Journey into Greece in the Company of Dr. Spon of Lyons*, London, 1682 (hereafter Wheeler, *Journey*), 396–7.
- 16 Spon, *Voyage*, I, 47.
- 17 Wheeler, *Journey*, 1.
- 18 Wheeler, *Journey*, 365, refers to a letter about the Theatre of Bacchus sent by Vernon to the Royal Society. Estcourt died of a fever in Greece, Vernon was murdered in Persia in 1677 [J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Greek Revival*, London, 1972, 4].
- 19 Wheeler, *Journey*, 3.
- 20 Wheeler, *Journey*, 13.
- 21 Unfortunately the dried plants of his *hortus siccus* had only plant names written in, but not the place in which they were found. However Wheeler's *Journey* lists some of the most interesting plants he found, along with his descriptions of places. For examples of his plant collecting, see his *Journey*, 3, 7, 14, 20, 25.
- 22 Wheeler, *Journey*, 79.
- 23 Spon records that on his return to Venice he was still wearing his 'habit d'Armenien' and continued to do so till he arrived back in Lyons [*Voyage* II, 370]. While in Turkey, Wheeler also dressed 'after the Turkish mode', as did the English merchants of Smyrna.
- 24 Wheeler, *Journey*, 202.
- 25 Wheeler, *Journey*, 362.
- 26 Sir John Finch (1626–1682) was, like Spon, a physician by training. Because of his studies in Italy was sent as

- Minister to the Grand Duke of Tuscany before being posted to Constantinople, where he spent sixteen years. [DNB, London, 1889, XIX, 18].
- 27 Dr. John Covel (1638–1722) finally wrote *Some Account of the Present Greek Church* published in London, 1722. His unpublished *Journal* in London, British Library (hereafter BL), Add. MSS 22,912, covers his travels from 1670–78. His coin collection catalogue is BL, Add. MSS 22,912.
- 28 Wheler, *Journey*, 202.
- 29 Wheler, *Journey*, 212.
- 30 Wheler, *Journey*, 217.
- 31 The fragment of Covel's letter is in BL, Add. MSS. 22,912 f. 246.
- 32 Wheler, *Journey*, 245.
- 33 Sir Paul Ricaut (or Rycaut), whose family came to England from the Spanish Netherlands, had been secretary to Sir Heneage Finch during his eight-year embassy in Constantinople from 1661–1667. Ricaut then went to Smyrna. His book was published in London in 1668, and he returned to England in 1679. [DNB, London, 1897, L, 38–40].
- 34 This is a preparatory sketch for the illustration in Wheler, *Journey*, 240.
- 35 Wheler, *Journey*, 241.
- 36 Spon, *Voyage*, I, 312.
- 37 Spon, *Voyage*, I, 314.
- 38 Wheler, *Journey*, 258.
- 39 Wheler, *Journey*, 399.
- 40 Wheler probably spoke French to Spon; he was also fluent in Italian. Some of Wheler's notes from his lessons in Greek are among his papers [WYAS, LD Add. IV, 1/3].
- 41 This sketch was the source for the illustration in Wheler, *Journey*, 340.
- 42 Wheler, *Journey*, 364.
- 43 Wheler, *Journey*, 429.
- 44 Spon, *Voyage*, II, 346.
- 45 Grace Higgons's uncle, the Very Rev. Denis Granville, was a canon of Durham Cathedral till 1684, when he was made Dean [Information provided by Dr. Roger Norris, Assistant Librarian to Dean and Chapter Library, Durham].
- 46 In 1681 Wheler returned to France to draw up a report on the plight of French protestants, which he sent to each Member of Parliament [Manché, *op. cit.*, 'Spitalfields', 460].
- 47 Letters in his papers are addressed to him in London, Hampshire and Kent [WYAS, LD/Add. MSS IV, 1/5]. A dispute with his French curate, M. Genay, prompted Wheler to claim that he preached 'in great towns from North to South' [LD IV, 4/7].
- 48 Wheler, *Journey*, 405.
- 49 Exposure to the air caused deterioration, and in the eighteenth century they were moved inside the Schools [W.D. Macray, *Annals of the Bodleian Library*, Oxford, 1890, 190–91].
- 50 The sculptures were catalogued by Adolf Michaelis in *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, Cambridge, 1882, 579, 582, 585, 592.
- 51 This is now in the BL, Add. MSS. 35,334.
- 52 WYAS, LD Add. IV, 4/6; Durham, Durham Cathedral Library, Durham Probate Records, George Wheler 1723.
- 53 A pointer to a flourishing trade in antique coins is the discovery that some of the coins are 'counterfeits or copies made in the seventeenth century. Some of these must have been made to deceive 'tourists' such as Wheler [N. Shiel, 'The Wheler Cabinet' *Transactions of the Architectural & Archaeological Society of Durham & Northumberland*, New Series, III, 1974, 107–8].
- 54 Wheler, *Journey*, 281.
- 55 Brief references to this collection are given in Vivian Green, *The Commonwealth of Lincoln College 1427–1977*, Oxford, 1979, 283–4, 675.
- 56 Wheler, *Journey*, 194–5.
- 57 WYAS, LD Add. IV, 4; in this undated draft letter Wheler lists the manuscripts already in the library, in the hopes that a benefactor will present suitable material to add to it.
- 58 Bodleian, MSS Ashmole 1800–1803. The plants are extremely fragile, and therefore cannot be photographed.
- 59 Richard Pulteney, *The Progress of Botany in England*, London, 1790, I, marginal note to page 358.
- 60 An attempt to trace Spon's collection is made by Catherine Santschi, in Etienne and Mossière (eds.), *op. cit.*, 'De Zurich à Vevy en passant par Genève et Lyon: le Réseau Familial de Jacob Spon', 187–206.
- 61 James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, London, 4 vols., 1762–1816. The first volume, published in Stuart's lifetime, contains many references to Wheler and Spon; later volumes, in which various editors try to order Stuart's notes, contain progressively fewer.