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HOOKE'S FIGURATIONS: A FIGURAL DRAWING ATTRIBUTED
TO ROBERT HOOKE

by

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The experimental philosopher Robert Hooke (1635–1703) is known to have apprenticed to the leading painter Peter Lely on his first arrival in London in the late 1640s. Yet the relevance of Hooke's artistic training to his mature draughtsmanship and identity has remained unclear. Shedding light on that larger interpretive problem, this article argues for the attribution to Hooke of a figural drawing now in Tate Britain (T10678). This attributed drawing is especially interesting because it depicts human subjects and bears Hooke's name functioning as an artistic signature, both highly unusual features for his draughtsmanship. From evidence of how this drawing was collected and physically placed alongside images by leading artists in the early eighteenth century, I suggest how it can offer new insight into the reception of Hooke and his graphic work in the early Enlightenment.

Keywords: Robert Hooke; drawing; art; collecting; Ralph Thoresby

In recent years, the formidable accomplishments of the English experimental philosopher and polymath Robert Hooke (1635–1703) have come to be memorialized in appropriately diverse ways. Since 2003 (the tercentenary of Hooke's death), several major biographies, conferences and edited volumes have documented the breadth of talent of this 'Leonardo of London' while effectively yielding a new archive of materials through which to study the experimental philosophy practised in Restoration London.¹ The apogee of these material discoveries may well be the Hooke Folio (MS 847), the massive collection of Hooke's minutes and notes from the meetings of the Royal Society, which was uncovered and purchased by the Royal Society in 2006.² However, fascinating specimens of Hooke's graphic work and important new insights into his architectural activity have continued to emerge.³ This expanding archive offers rich interpretive potential to historians of art and science alike, who have known Hooke's visual production primarily through *Micrographia* (1665), his extraordinary volume of printed images made from observation with microscopes and other optical instruments.⁴ It is in this light that a small drawing (T10678) now in the collection of Tate Britain deserves greater attention.

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Figure 1. Robert Hooke (attrib.), *Figural study* (pen and ink, ca. 1660?), T10678. (Copyright © 2009 Tate, London; reproduced with permission.)

Three studies of human heads triangulate at the centre of this ink-drawn composition (measuring 88 mm × 70 mm) (figure 1). Graphically largest and placed in prominent isolation, the head of a man depicted in profile sits at the pyramid's apex. Coarse, lanky hair peeks out from beneath this figure's loose-fitting cap as an arch of shadow projects along his aquiline nose, concentrating the cold glare of his singular, slit-like eye. Tracing downwards along the cursive scroll of the feather jutting from the headscarf of his neighbour just below, we find the smaller head of a bearded elder staring woodenly outwards. These studies of covered male bodies are, in turn, juxtaposed with the bared head and shoulders of a young woman rendered in profile at the left. Light, horizontal



Figure 2. Robert Hooke, *Study of a head* (pen and ink, later seventeenth century) pasted into Heinrich Lautensack, *Des Cirkels unnd Richtscheytz, auch der Perspectiva . . .* (Frankfurt, 1564). (Copyright © The British Library Board (BL 536.1.21[5]. fo. 3); reproduced with permission.)

pen hatches rake across her brow and cheeks as she turns obliquely towards the picture-plane, the darkening well of her mouth suggesting speech. Contrasted by a thicket of illegible markings at the base of the page, two schematic character studies of a stooped figure clutching a child and a shadow-faced man in a cloak and rakish hat bracket the left-hand border and central margin of the page. Two period inscriptions claim authorship for this image: 'Dr Hooks own Drawing' has been written in pen at the top centre, and 'R: Hook Fecit' is scrawled in pencil at lower right.

In its medium and scale, this Tate drawing does indeed bear strong connection to Robert Hooke's known graphic work.⁵ Now largely gathered in the Library of the Royal Society of London, Hooke's surviving drawings are frequently in pen and ink, rarely exceeding folio size.⁶ Although he is not known for depictions of the human form, the drawing in the Tate betrays significant stylistic affinity to other specimens of Hooke's figural representation. The handling of the profiled male head, for example, recalls a fragmentary sketch by Hooke now in the British Library (figure 2).⁷ In both drawings, stipples are used to demarcate the contours of eyelid, nostril and cheek, and each sketch renders the chin as a curvaceous, jutting swoop.

Beyond this formal evidence, the provenance of the Tate drawing also supports its attribution to Robert Hooke. The sketch came to the Tate in 1996, after the gallery's acquisition of A. P. Oppé's collection of British drawings and watercolours.⁸ The drawing had previously appeared in a checklist of the collection assembled after Oppé's death in 1957 by Aydua Scott-Elliot, where it was attributed to a 'Dr. Richard Hook 1635–1703'. This attribution was then included by Annie Lyles and Robin Hamlyn in their 1997 *British watercolours from the Oppé collection* and, as of autumn 2009, remains in place on the Tate's online catalogue.⁹ In part, this assignment can be connected to the two period

inscriptions that appear on the drawing itself, especially if it is recalled that Dr. Robert Hooke (1635–1703) was a little-known figure when Scott-Elliot's checklist was assembled in the 1960s. Indeed, as late as 1983, philosopher of science Ian Hacking could still lament that Hooke 'is almost forgotten'.¹⁰ It seems reasonable, then, to amend Scott-Elliot's attribution from the otherwise mysterious 'Dr. Richard Hook 1635–1703' to that of the celebrated experimentalist.

If this attribution is accepted, then the Tate drawing offers two particular points of interest in our understanding of Robert Hooke and his visual production. First, unlike Hooke's familiar graphic preoccupation with mechanical devices and natural phenomena, this sheet is dedicated entirely to the representation of the human form.¹¹ Greater density of attention to human comportment and expression can arguably be found in this small page than almost anywhere else in Hooke's graphic work. Although it is tempting to try to reconcile its figures with the colourful personalities who populate Hooke's famous diaries, a more plausible approach might be to link these rough figurations to the kinds of pictorial schemata that Hooke knew. As it forms a loose composition from fragments of figural sketches, for instance, the Tate page strongly recalls the evocative assemblages of Abraham Bloemaert's *Tekenboek* (ca. 1650–56) (figure 3). Hooke could have known Bloemaert's designs either from the original or as reprinted in Alexander Browne's *Ars Pictoria* (1669), both of which he owned.¹² From the biographies drafted by his friends John Aubrey and Richard Waller, we know that Hooke was an able copier of prints, and the posthumous inventory of his possessions made in 1703 contained 'A Collection of prints, drawings &c.' valued at ten pounds sterling.¹³ What is more, it should be remembered that when he first came to London in about 1648, Hooke was apprenticed to Peter Lely, England's reigning portraitist and an acclaimed collector of graphic art. The Tate drawing's connection with this painterly milieu is suggested by the rendering of Hooke's name in the lower right with the conventional artist's formula: 'R: Hook Fecit'. Whether or not this is a convincing specimen of Robert Hooke's autograph, it suggests a rare instance when Hooke's name (spelled indifferently Hooke or Hook in the period) has been made to function like an artist's signature.

Further insight into this specifically artistic dimension of Hooke's multifaceted identity might also be found through the larger collection of images with which this Tate drawing is presently conjoined. As now preserved, Hooke's figural study is affixed to a torn and folded sheet (measuring 327 mm × 311 mm), where it appears below a schematic rendering of coins (figure 4).¹⁴ At the base of this sheet we find abrasion marks and an inscription reading 'Stonehenge by Henry Gyles removed from here A.P.O. 23 XI 28 [i.e. A. P. Oppé, 23 November 1928]'. This drawing by Yorkshire glass painter Henry Gyles is also held by the Tate, bearing the florid legend 'Stonedge' at top left (figure 5).¹⁵ Using red chalk to render the monument's megaliths in vivid chiaroscuro, Gyles has initialled the sketch at the lower right, while the inscription 'Stone henge by Mr. Henry Gyles' reads across the base of the page. Most importantly, on the verso of the larger, torn sheet—and abutting a coarsely drawn copy of what seems to be the visage of Henry VIII—is the following inscription by an eighteenth-century hand: 'In this collection are drawings of the noted Mr. Hollar, Mr. Kent, Dr. Hooke, Dr. Cay and Henry Gyles for window painting . . . (Ducatus Leodiensis p. 476–7).'

This inscription's paginated reference to Ralph Thoresby's *Ducatus Leodiensis* (1715) offers crucial evidence that can help to date and possibly identify the agents at work in this collection of images. A member of the 'York virtuosi', the Leeds-based collector



Figure 3. Abraham Bloemaert's figural designs as reproduced in Alexander Browne, *Ars Pictoria: or, An Academy Treating of Drawing, Painting, Limning, Etching* (Arthur Tooker, London, 1675), Fig. no. 8. (Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.)

Thoresby claimed work by three of the five artists named in this Tate sheet among his collections of 'Prints, Histories, maps, &c.'.¹⁶ Possessing numerous 'Designs drawn by the Pens of ingenious Gentlemen', Thoresby asserted that he owned 'Originals of the noted Hollars'.¹⁷ First among the draughtsmen named in the Tate sheet, Thoresby was



Figure 4. Robert Hooke's *Figural study* as now mounted with a study of coins in the collection of Tate Britain (T10678 and T10680). (Copyright © 2010 Tate, London; reproduced with permission.)

clearly identifying the celebrated Bohemian etcher Wenceslaus Hollar, arguably the leading graphic artist of the Restoration.¹⁸ However, Thoresby lavished even greater praise on the second name on the Tate list, the artist he calls 'Mr. Will. Kent'. Best known now as a premier proponent of the English Palladian aesthetic associated with Richard Boyle, third earl of Burlington, William Kent is described by Thoresby as

[a]n ingenious Artist now at *Rome*, where he won the Prize of Drawing this very Year [i.e. 1713], from all the Students in that Science, for which his Holiness presented him with two Silver Medals of his own Bust, with *St. Luke* on the Reverse: He was also the first



Figure 5. Henry Gyles, *Stonehenge* (red chalk on paper, later seventeenth century), T08901. (Copyright © 2009 Tate, London; reproduced with permission.) (Online version in colour.)

of the *English Nation* who was admitted into the Great Duke of *Tuscany's* Academy of Artists, which is an Honour to his Native County of *Yorke*: This Curiosity was the Present of my worthy Friend Mr. *Sam. Gale* (Son of the late excellent Dean of *Yorke*).¹⁹

Finally, in *Ducatus Leodiensis*, Thoresby notes ownership of 'Mr. Hen. Gyles's Historical Draught for Windows'.²⁰ Thoresby and Gyles were clearly friends, and the inscription made by Thoresby on the portrait of the artist now in the British Museum closely resembles the hand at the base of Gyles's rendering of Stonehenge in the Tate.²¹ Thus, although the drawings by Hollar and Kent promised by the Tate sheet are now absent, the page's inscription encourages us to infer that they, too, once accompanied the surviving, signed sketches of Gyles and Hooke.

But who assembled this collection of drawings and when did they do so? Again, the Tate sheet's paginated reference to Thoresby is helpful, as it would logically postdate the publication of *Ducatus Leodiensis* in 1715. And perhaps a clue to the identity of the collector is suggested by the list's final and most mysterious draughtsman: Dr Cay. In the last years of the seventeenth century, a physician named Dr John (?) Cay of Newcastle was in correspondence with Sir Hans Sloane, Secretary and later President of the Royal Society. It is clear that this Dr Cay was also an intimate of Dr Martin Lister, another York-based virtuoso and an active Fellow of the Royal Society.²² Lister is known to have produced his heavily illustrated natural philosophy through collaboration with local artists, including William Lodge and Francis Place.²³ If Cay shared Lister's passion for images, it is tempting to assign his authorship to the anonymous drawing of coins now mounted above the Hooke study in the Tate sheet. At the same time, from attention to these intellectual networks, a figure such as Sloane emerges as a strong candidate for agency in the formation of this collection. Not only would he have known Thoresby's text, but Sloane was also the kind of collector to whom drawings were sent.²⁴ The redundant identification and descriptive caption that Thoresby is likely to have inscribed on Gyles's Stonehenge drawing could thus be explained if we imagine that the image had been sent by post or given in person. Sloane had access to the more recondite draughtsmen on the Tate list (including Hooke and Cay) and certainly possessed the omnivorous appetite requisite for gathering such materials together. What is more, we know that Sloane clearly came into possession of specimens of Hooke's draughtsmanship after the latter's death in

1703. When preparing his *Posthumous Works of Dr. Robert Hooke* of 1705, the biographer and early editor Richard Waller reported re-acquiring drawings by Hooke from ‘Dr. Sloane, into whose Hands they happily fell’.²⁵

Thus, a possible account of the fate of this Hooke drawing might be ventured in the following way. Hooke draughted this figural study, perhaps in the 1660s when the evidence of his drawing activity is strongest.²⁶ Probably after Hooke’s intestate death in 1703, the draught then passed into the hands of a collector such as Sloane who inscribed the legend ‘Dr Hooks own Drawing’ on it.²⁷ Possibly at the same time—that is, in the first quarter of the eighteenth century—the sketch was bound together with a gathering of drawings by other artists working (so Thoresby had put it) in ‘the *English Nation*’. Although the draughts by the best-known artists, Hollar and Kent, would subsequently be detached from the group, the sheet bearing sketches by Gyles, Hooke and possibly Cay was acquired by Oppé at some time after 1900 (when he began collecting works of British art) and before 23 November 1928 (when Oppé recorded detaching Gyles’s depiction of Stonehenge from the group).²⁸ In the 1960s, Hooke’s figural study was mistakenly assigned to ‘Dr. Richard Hook’ and so entered the Tate collection in 1996.

Provisional though this narrative is, what this delightful Tate sketch suggests is how, in the early eighteenth century, Robert Hooke’s images found a place beside the work of leading artists from the century past such as Hollar and amid the emerging taste exemplified by William Kent. In addition to what future research might disclose of the subjects or sources it represents, the drawing thus offers material evidence towards the historical reception and collection of Hooke’s work—topics that are only now emerging in scholarly consideration. More broadly, drawings such as this indicate how a greater attention to Hooke and his circles can shed new light on the dynamic interactions between scientific and artistic communities in the early British Enlightenment.

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NOTES

- 1 Recent studies include the following: Stephen Inwood, *The man who knew too much: the strange and inventive life of Robert Hooke 1635–1703* (Macmillan, London, 2002); Lisa Jardine, *The curious life of Robert Hooke: the man who measured London* (Harper Perennial, London, 2003); Jim Bennett *et al.* (eds), *London’s Leonardo: the life and work of Robert Hooke* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Michael Cooper, ‘A more beautiful city’: *Robert Hooke and the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire* (Thrupp-Stroud, Sutton, 2003); Allan Chapman, *England’s Leonardo: Robert Hooke and the seventeenth-century scientific revolution* (Institute of Physics, Bristol, 2005); and Michael Cooper and Michael Hunter (eds), *Robert Hooke: tercentennial studies* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006).
- 2 This manuscript is now available for consultation online at <http://webapps.qmul.ac.uk/cell/Hooke/Hooke.html>
- 3 For graphic materials, compare Janice L. Neri, ‘Some early drawings by Robert Hooke’, *Arch. Nat. Hist.* **3**, 41–47 (2005), and Bloomsbury Auctions, *Manuscripts & autograph letters*,

- modern first editions (16 November 2006) (Bloomsbury Auctions, London, 2006), lot 52. For architectural interests and contributions, see, for example, Anthony Geraghty, 'Robert Hooke's collection of architectural books and prints', *Architect. Hist.* **47**, 113–125 (2004), and Christine Stevenson, 'Robert Hooke: monuments and memory', *Art Hist.* **28**, 43–73 (2005).
- 4 Robert Hooke, *Micrographia: or, Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies made by Magnifying Glass* (John Martyn and James Allestry, London, 1665). For an account of the broader interpretive context, see Matthew C. Hunter, 'Experiment, theory, representation: Robert Hooke's material models', in *Beyond mimesis and convention: representation in art and science* (ed. Roman Frigg and Matthew Hunter), pp. 193–219 (Springer, New York, 2010).
- 5 For Hooke's surviving graphic work, see especially Royal Society Library Classified Papers, vol. XX.
- 6 For an example of a drawing that exceeds these dimensions, see Royal Society, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 159.
- 7 This sketch appears glued into a collection of books that Hooke owned; see Heinrich Lautensack, *Des Cirkels unnd Richtscheits, auch der Perspectiva . . .* (Frankfurt, 1564), British Library 536.1.21(5), fo. 3. I thank Dr Felicity Henderson for bringing this drawing to my attention.
- 8 On the history of Oppé's collection, see Annie Lyles and Robin Hamlyn, *British watercolours from the Oppé collection* (Tate Gallery, London, 1997), esp. pp. 9–18.
- 9 See Lyles and Hamlyn, *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 239, <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ArtistWorks?cgrouid=999999961&artistid=2510&page=1>
- 10 Ian Hacking, *Representing and intervening: introductory topics in the philosophy of natural science*, p. 151 (Cambridge University Press, 1983). For an influential biography of Hooke contemporaneous with Scott-Elliot's checklist, see Margaret 'Espinasse, *Robert Hooke* (Heinemann, London, 1956).
- 11 On the absence of figuration in Hooke's draughtsmanship generally, see Lisa Jardine, *On a grander scale: the outstanding career of Sir Christopher Wren* (HarperCollins, London, 2002), p. 278.
- 12 On Bloemaert's *Tekenboek*, see Marcel G. Roethlisberger, *Abraham Bloemaert and his sons: paintings and prints*, vol. 1, pp. 389–394 (Davaco, Doornspijk, 1993). For Hooke's ownership of 'Abraham Bloemaerts Book of Drawings' and 'Alex. Brown, of Drawing, Paint Limn, and Etch. with Fig', see Leona Rostenburg, *The library of Robert Hooke: the scientific book trade of Restoration England* (Modoc Press, Santa Monica, CA, 1989), p. 187, no. 138; p. 186, no. 105.
- 13 John Aubrey, in *Brief lives* (ed. John Buchanan-Brown), pp. 334–335 (Penguin, London, 2000); Richard Waller, 'The Life of Dr Robert Hooke', in *The posthumous works of Robert Hooke* (ed. Richard Waller), p. ii (S. Smith and B. Walford, London, 1705). For the inventory, see 'Hooke's possessions at his death: a hitherto unknown inventory', in *Robert Hooke: new studies* (ed. Michael Hunter and Simon Schaffer), pp. 287–294 (Boydell, Woodbridge, 1989). On Hooke's relation to prints more broadly, see Matthew C. Hunter, 'The theory of the impression according to Robert Hooke', in *Printed images in early modern Britain: essays in interpretation* (ed. Michael Hunter), pp. 164–193 (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2010).
- 14 See Tate T10679 V.
- 15 See Tate T08901. I thank Professor Michael Hunter for helping me to interpret this inscription.
- 16 For a useful account of the York virtuosi and their visual work, see Kim Sloan, *'A noble art': amateur arts and drawing masters c. 1600–1800* (British Museum Press, London, 2001).
- 17 Ralph Thoresby, *Ducatus Leodiensis: Or, The Topography of the Ancient and Populous Town and Parish of Leedes* (Maurice Atkins, London, 1715), p. 496.
- 18 See Richard T. Godfrey, *Wenceslaus Hollar: a Bohemian artist in England* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1994).
- 19 Thoresby, *op. cit.* (note 17), p. 497.
- 20 *Ibid.*

- 21 The inscription reads, 'ye effigies of Mr. Henry Gyles the celebrated Glasse-Painter at Yorke'; see British Museum 1852,0214.372.
- 22 For a letter that Cay sent to Lister and then copied out to Sloane, see British Library, BL Sloane 4025, fos 72–73.
- 23 For an excellent study of Lister's privilege of pictures in his scientific work and his collaboration with provincial artists, see Robert Unwin, 'A provincial man of science at work: Martin Lister, F.R.S., and his illustrators, 1670–1683', *Notes Rec. R. Soc.* **49**, 209–230 (1995).
- 24 On Sloane's collections of prints and drawings, see *Sir Hans Sloane: collector, scientist, antiquary, founding father of the British Museum* (ed. Arthur MacGregor) (British Museum, London, 1994), esp. pp. 245–262.
- 25 See Waller, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 281.
- 26 For more on this point, see Matthew Hunter, 'Robert Hooke Fecit: making and knowing in Restoration London' (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2007), pp. 191–261.
- 27 However, as Antony Griffiths and Marjorie Caygill have kindly pointed out to me, the hand that made this inscription was not Sloane's. Nor can it be convincingly reconciled with other likely agents such as Richard Waller and William Derham, Hooke's period editors.
- 28 For the dates of Oppé's collecting, see Lyles and Hamlyn, *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 9.