

A Transcription and Translation of Sloane MS. 2131, Robert Ashley's (1565–1641) *Vita*: with Additional Biographical Details

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Introduction

British Library Sloane MS. 2131, *Vita*, is an autobiography written in Latin by Robert Ashley (1565–1641), bibliophile, lawyer, and translator. Ashley bequeathed his collection of approximately 5000 books to establish a library at Middle Temple, one of the four Inns of Court. This is the first full transcription and translation of Ashley's manuscript to be published. Ashley's *Vita* has been cited in a variety of publications, ranging from studies on dreams and children's literature, to his role as a political agent in the late sixteenth century, but there has been no systematic examination of his autobiography in the context of early modern English biographical studies.¹

The autobiography ends in 1622, when Ashley was fifty-seven. No explanation is given for not continuing the work (he was seventy-six when he died), and it is possible that a continuation exists which has now been lost; the trimming of the leaves makes it difficult to determine if any further folios existed, as any catchwords apparent on the final leaf are now lost. It is possible that at least one folio is missing, as the catchword *Post* at 18v does not correspond with the first word on 19r. The manuscript forms part of Hans Sloane's collection, but no evidence remains as to how, why, or when Sloane acquired it. Ashley's will does not mention a recipient for his personal papers, but none now survive in the Inn's library or archive collections. It is possible, although no evidence exists, that the Inn discarded or sold his personal papers after his death.

The estimated size of Ashley's library, approximately 5000 printed books, and possibly some manuscripts, is based on the sixteen manuscript catalogues compiled forty-three years after Ashley's death. These catalogues accurately reflect his library's holdings, despite the long gap after his death, as the Inn did not actively acquire many books in the seventeenth

¹ These are, respectively: Carole Levin, *Dreaming the English Renaissance: Politics and Desire in Court and Culture* (New York, 2008), p. 76. Ronald S. Crane, 'The Reading of an Elizabethan Youth', *Modern Philology*, xi:2 (1913), pp. 269–71. M. O. Grenby, 'Chapbooks, Children, and Children's Literature', *The Library*, 7th series, viii:3 (2007), pp. 277–303. Vera Keller, 'Mining Tacitus: Secrets of Empire, Nature and Art in the Reason of State', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, xlv:2 (2012), pp. 189–212.

century – approximately 166 books were acquired between 1641 and 1699, the majority being law reports and statutes, and many of these were donated or purchased with donated monies.² Ashley's library was typical of a scholar's from the class of the landed gentry, including books on history, languages, medicine, philosophy, politics, science, theology, but also light literature such as Menippean satires and French, Italian, and Spanish literature.³ His library was also typical in containing mostly continental imprints in Latin, with many French, Italian, and Spanish titles, some English, and only a minor number of Dutch and German books. The collection is unusual, however, not only for its size, but that it was collected and housed in his chambers at the Temple; Ashley lived at the Inn for the whole of his adult life, never marrying or taking a larger residence outside of the Inn, although he did take on an extra chamber to house the growing collection in 1634.⁴ It is also unusual in that it has remained (mostly) intact where it originated in central London. Unlike comparable private Inn libraries of the time, such as those of William Crashaw (1572-1626) or John Selden (1584-1654), the collection remained where it was originally formed.

Ashley's life story reflects the life of a learned intellectual in early modern England who, despite some promising beginnings, did not gain noted success, particularly in comparison to his brothers, both of whom were knighted and achieved positions in high office; his library therefore stands as his greatest achievement. His *Vita* makes much of his misfortunes, such as health problems and being the victim of theft, but some of these are of his own making, and he was imprisoned at different times for debt. He speaks of the women in his life with tenderness, expressing shock at his elder sister's needless death, and leaving his younger sister £20 in his will. But there is a noticeable frostiness regarding his younger brother, Sir Francis, despite his having bailed Robert out of debt on at least one occasion. There are only brief mentions of his father, and at one point in the *Vita*, he accuses him of neglect. The *Vita* is also worthy of study for its inclusion of what Ashley himself deemed to be his notable dreams. As he was fifty-seven when the *Vita* was written, his recounting of at least ten of his dreams suggests he either kept a dream diary or had a very good memory, as some occurred when he was a young man. His retention of these dreams, and the trouble he took to recount them years later, reveals the early modern interest in dream divination, and the importance that Ashley placed on prophetic dreaming; he owned at least eight books on dream divination and four on prophecies.

Ashley's *Vita* omits some essential facts about his life, such as his role as MP to Dorchester in 1597/1598 and his unpublished *Of Honour*, produced prior to 1596. He also omits to

² From 1641 to 1646 the books remained in Ashley's chamber, and were then moved to the Parliament Chamber. The library did not have an official location until 1652, when porters were paid to remove books from the cupboards in the Parliament Chamber into the Library. Middle Temple Archive, *Minutes of Parliament*, MT/2/TRB/10. The records do not indicate whether the books were accessible while they were stored in his chamber or in the Parliament chamber, but they were kept under 'lock and key' from 1641. Charles Trice Martin, *Minutes of Parliament of the Middle Temple* (London, 1904-1905), vol. ii, p. 922. The catalogues (MT.9/LCA/1-16) are dated between 1684 and 1688. A full analysis and transcription of the catalogues is ongoing. The digitized versions are available at: <<https://www.middletemple.org.uk/archive-history/archive-information-access/sources-resources/digitised-records/library-manuscript>>. Books and monies donated to the library are recorded in the *Liber benefactorum*, Middle Temple Library MS. 137.

³ T. A. Birrell, 'Reading as Pastime: The Place of Light Literature in some Gentleman's Libraries of the 17th Century', in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds.), *The Property of a Gentleman: The Formation, Organisation and Dispersal of the Private Library, 1620-1920* (Winchester, 1991), p. 114.

⁴ Martin, *Minutes*, vol. ii, p. 829.

mention his visit to the Netherlands in 1617, which is curious given his obvious interest in travel. In addition to his trips to France and Spain, he collected over two hundred works on geography and travels, including a heavily annotated copy of Jean Zingerling's *Itinerarium Galliae* (Strasbourg, 1617), the Jesuit accounts of their missions in Asia, Africa, Canada, and South America, René Goulaine de Laudonnière's history of the Huguenot colony in Florida, Samuel de Champlain's account of his voyages to Canada, and one of the first books to be printed in Macau.⁵

The two most glaring omissions in his *Vita*, possibly, are the lack of detail regarding his book acquisition and the total lack of information regarding his legal career. Despite being imprisoned for debt at various points, he must have been a reasonably successful lawyer, given the large state of his library. The acquisition of approximately 5000 books would not have been achievable through any inherited monies alone (and of which we have found no evidence), and life at the Inn would not necessarily have been a modest one. The only information we have linking him to London's busy book trade is the £5 he left in his will to his bookbinder/book dealer, Samuel Josselyn.⁶ Josselyn is described in the Inn's *Minutes of Parliament* as a bookseller located at the entry to the Churchyard, on the south side of Temple Church, but no further details are known about him.⁷ One is thus left to speculate, albeit without much difficulty, as to where Ashley acquired his books – most likely from the various book stalls at St Paul's, and from the wide variety of booksellers trading in and around the Inns of Court, the Strand and Blackfriars.

In this work we have included additional details about Ashley's life which he omitted from the *Vita*, information about his translations and other writings, and a transcription of his will. Together with the *Vita* itself, these provide a fuller picture of Ashley's life and library and give modern readers further insight to the burgeoning seventeenth-century interest in meditative, enquiring and individual psychology as reflected in these autobiographical accounts. Ashley's life story is an excellent representative of the early modern English genre of autobiography, that is, a chronicle of an ordinary life,⁸ albeit one made extraordinary by a private library collection which was one of the largest of its time. It is also representative of our current interest in early modern life-writing and its process. This is not a polished piece of work: it is messy and disjointed, as evidenced by the seemingly random inclusion of dreams inserted in the middle of the life story. We also do not know Ashley's intentions for it: was this a rough draft, and was he working towards publishing it at some point? One does wonder what the purpose of writing it was, when Ashley did not have direct descendants to whom he could leave it. Autobiographies such as this were common for the time, but most were not

⁵ His copy of *L'histoire notable de la Floride* (Paris, 1586) was originally owned by Sir William Waad (1546-1623). The book printed in Macau in 1590 is Duarte de Sande's *De missione legatorum Iaponensium ad romanam curiam*.

⁶ Also variously spelled: Joscelyn, Joscelyne, and Joslin.

⁷ He is listed as 'Joslin' in the British Book Trade Index <<http://bbti.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>> and is described as a stationer who 'held a share in the Latin stock' in R. B. McKerrow, *A Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of Foreign Printers of English Books 1557-1640* (London, 1910), p. 161.

⁸ Margaret Bottrall, *Every Man a Phoenix: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography* (London, 1958), p. 28.

published until after the author's death,⁹ as the publication of such personal revelations was not deemed respectable in seventeenth-century England.¹⁰ The *Vita* is thus best understood in the context of other aspects of Ashley's life, most notably his important library collection. We recognize that there may be other elements of Ashley's life-writing yet to be discovered, thereby enriching his story even further.

Methodology

Some of the manuscript was transcribed and translated in 1940 by Charles Frank Russell (1882-1951), and published in his historical account of King Edward VI School in Southampton, the school that Ashley attended as a boy with Francis, and where Adrian Saravia was headmaster.¹¹ Russell omitted much from his transcription, including the dream sequences, and at least one entire folio. We have re-transcribed the manuscript in its entirety and translated those sections Russell omitted. We have used Russell's excellent translation as the basis for the first part of the autobiography, updating it to align with the rest of our translation and modernizing the English. Ashley used the Roman counting system, indicating for example that he was in his fifth year when he was four years old. We have therefore clarified the years and dates, and contrary to Russell's methodology, we have translated these to indicate how old he was at the relevant section, for example, four years old in 1569. To clarify this further, at the heads of the paragraphs of the translation we have indicated the date when Ashley has mentioned a change happening in his life, such as joining the Middle Temple, for example.

The manuscript is at times difficult to read owing to trimming and tears in the paper, particularly in the margins. Square brackets indicate where we have extended contractions, and questionable portions of the text (such as [m?]). Where a letter is not clear, we have used a forward slash (/) to indicate the potential possibilities. Letter forms have been normalized, such as replacing the long *i/j* with *i* (apart from where it is capitalized at the beginning of a word, such as *Julii*), and normalizing the ablative *â* and *ô* to *a* and *o*. We have removed the capitalization of academic subjects, such as theology, in the translation but retained it in the transcription. We have replicated underlining in the original text and have retained the scored-out sections of text, indicating as such. We have attempted to reproduce Ashley's narrative faithfully, but he wrote portions of the text in the margins, often without a clear indication of where they should be inserted in the main body of the text (in particular at f. 18v). We have provided the British Library's current foliation, which is not original to the manuscript, having replaced an earlier foliation.¹²

⁹ Examples of such writings contemporary to Ashley include Sir Thomas Bodley (1545-1613), Robert Cary (approximately 1560-1639), Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), and Simon Forman (1552-1611) to name a few.

¹⁰ Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1969), p. 17.

¹¹ C. F. Russell, *A History of King Edward VI School Southampton* (Privately printed, 1940).

¹² The foliation is 16r to 21r. An earlier foliation has been scored out, with 16r replacing 213r for example. The *Vita* is the second work in MS. Sloane 2131, bound between 'Johannis Bastiwickii Apologia Edoardo, Comiti Dorset, dicata' and 'a few pieces of poetry, in French'.

Transcription

Folio 16r

Vita

R A

ab ipso conscripta

Miserationes Domini narrabo cum vitae meae rationes enarrabo. Tu autem Domine dirige spiritu[m] meu[m] ut hic et in tota vita mea testatas faciam laudes et miserationes tuas qui vivis in secula seculorum. Amen.

Natus sum anno salutis millesimo quingentesimo, sexagesimo quinto; die secundo Julii feria sexta sub horam nonam vespertinam in australi angulo [scored out: in pago Wiltonensis Comitatus haud obscuro dicto Damerham] seu limite Wiltoniensis Comitatus in pago satis illustri dicto Damerham quid Wiltoniensem Comitatu[m] ab Hamtoniensi et Dorcestrensi fere disternat et a Sorbioduno nunc Sarisburia celebri emporio, et metropoli Wiltoniensis septem miliaribus distat.

Patre genitus Antonio Ashleiio, seu potius Astley, antiqua equestri fami[li]a [trimmed] apud Durotriges, nunc Dorcestrenses, oriundo; et ab antiquiori [scored out: originem] et illustriori Baronum de Astley prosapia (qui sub Eduardo 2 [scored out: Rege Angliae] hunc titulum adepti) originem ducente. Sedes Baronu[m] de Asteley: primaria dictum Asteley-castrum apud Cornavios secundu[m] Camdenum in Comitatu Warwicensie sita p[er] filium et heredem p[er] nuptam Reginaldo Grey Domino de Ruthin e qua prognati sunt Graii Dorsettie Marchiones in illam transiit familiam quoru[m] adhuc monumenta in nitidissimo collegio castro de Asteley adiacenti visuntur.

Matrem habui Dorotheam Litam ex illustri Litorum de Lites-Carie in Comitatu Somersetensi familia oriundam, feminam elegantem, liberorum educationi, ac domesticae curae deditissimam.

Post septimanam qui me ad sacrum baptismæ sisterent σύντεκνοι (quos vulgo dicunt compatres sive susceptores) equites clarissimi advocantur duo, quorum cum alter is erat Patruus Henricus Ashley e vicino Dorsettensi agro advolaret, alter qui Guglielm[us] Keylway nominaretur ex proximo Hamtonie[nse] [trimmed] adventaret, de p[ro]nomine (q[uo]d sepiusculum accidit) imponendo nulla inter eos [scored out: ?] altercatio (quod faustum foelixque sit) unamini consensu Robertum vocitarunt, u[t] [trimmed] boni ominis augurio pro sua in me p[ro]pensione Roberto cuidam atavo meo assimilarer qui amplissima hereditate ex opimis nuptiis iteratis familiam nostram auxerat. Quinetiam cum sacerdos (ut infantibus tenellis preser[tim] ac delicatulis fieri solet) me leviter in facie aspersum a lavacro dimitteret, curavit Patruus Henricus exutum pannis ac penitus nudat[um] in sacro fonte intingendu[m] ac abluendum.

Cum postea nutrici in vicinis silvis degenti lactandus traderer, nono vix mense elapso ab illius praegnantiam ablactatus sum.

Quinto aetatis anno incohato cum nusquam a matris latere [scored out: puer quadrimus] discederem, memini me noctu in sinu eius cubantem puerum quadrimum aegerrime tulisse quod per ancillas, quae parturientis gemitus [scored out: two illegible words] praesenserant, ab eius amplexu avellerer. Mater tamen charissima eadem nocte ostetrice accersita [scored out: puerum] fratrem mihi enixa est. [catchword: Natus]

Folio 16v

Natus itaq[ue] Franciscus Ashley frater meus anno [scored out: nat] 1569 die 24 Novemb[ris] sub hora[m] quarta[m] antemeridiana[m]. In id tempus incidit insurrectio in p[ar]tibus [trimmed] Angliae borealibus. Paulo post febricula tertiana me invasit quae p[er] menses unum et alterum tenellum corpus meum misere affligeret.

Cum literas et prima gram[m]atices elementa in pago nostro a viro parum literato ediscerem oportune sub hoc tempus advenit ab Academia Oxoniensi vir modestus ac satis eruditus fratri meo maiori in Collegio Bailiolensi familiaris David Woodm[an] qui cum patre pacta mercede me in domo paterna cum affine altero p[er] aliquot menses grammaticis initiavit. Hic ex Insula Vecta oriundus, quae Hamtonensi agro obiacet ac eiusdem ditionis e[st], in patriam postea p[er]lectus, ut prefectus scholae publicae oppidi Newport (quod primum totius insulae emporium est) fide, moderatione ac diligentia sua meruit ut discipulos suos (tenellos licet ac imbecilliores) a parentum complexu ad spem maioris in literis progressus in Insulam secum instituendos abduceret.

Sexennis in Insulam Vectam traductus annu[m] integrum satis feliciter gram[m]aticae rei incubui. Verum altero scilicet octavo anno inchoante ex varis decubui quibus quamvis ne oculi quidem liberi, sed totum corpus coopertu[m] et fauces ac guttur oppressum fuerit. Misericordia tamen divina effectum est ut post mensem a morbo liberatus, exacto hieme [scored out: unam aut alteram] ne vestigi[u]m quidem exanthematis remanserit.

Preceptore meo Davide anno vertente Vindogladu[m]¹³ apud Durotriges quod mercatorium oppidu[m] in Comitatu Dorsettae Wimborn Minster vulgo appellatum ex Insula [scored out: Vecta] ad uberiore[m] messem et ampliora stipendia avocato, ego etiam eo paulo post cum praefato affine a parentibus amandatus ut sub eodem moderatore maiorem in literis p[ro]fectum facerem. Verum eo anno scilicet nono an decimo aetatis inchoato, incertum cum p[er] vepres ac spinas incautius transierem acuta spina infixae pupillae oculi dextri adhaesit cui laboranti cum frustra variis tentatis remediis visu in dies magis obscurato de eventu[trimmed] dubitaretur, Shirbornam (oppidum illius comitatus mercatorium) deduct[us] artificis expertis chirurgi manu exempto forcipibus spinae aculeo, etiam oculi pristinus vigor [scored out: ac visus] mihi sensim divina bonitate [scored out: boni clementis] est restitutus.

Per id tempus dum in schola Wimbornensi militarem hieme an precedenti an insequente non satis dixerim, dum ad matutinas preces et antelucanas in Templo celebratas festinarem in mamoreos [i.e., marmoreos]. Templi gradus collapsu vulneratu[m] e[st] os illud rotundum et cartilagosum genu dextri quod patella seu rotula genu [scored out: dextro] ab anatomicis appellatur, quo claudus per aliquod menses et incessu impeditus tandem probe curatus evasi.

Sed cum patri tunc temporis p[er] D[o]m[in]um Christofe[rum] Hattonu[m] Regine Elizabethae vicecamerariu[m] demandata esset custodia Corfe-Castri in Insula Purbeck q[uae] agro Dorsettensi adiacet, eo cum familia illuc transmigrante ubi moderator ludi literarii bonam de se famam excitaverat ego ipsius curae com[m]endatus facile illius scholae princeps evasi ubi menimi me ad luctam a sodali inter ludendum provocatum superiorem evasisse, adeo ut postea luxati inter luctandum cruris redemptione[m] a me exegerit. [catchwords: Ibi etiam]

Folio 17r

Ibi etiam cum in feriis Natalitiis Redemptoris nostri celebrandis comedia inter nos actitanda esset principes eius partes quae alii antea commissae fuerant mihi postea p[er] Magistrum delegatae qua gloriola fortasse mihi nimium placui.

Pertaesus Pater custodiae domus alienae, obtinuit ante annu[m] [scored out: transactum]

¹³ 'Vindogladia' corresponds to *Vindocladia* and was listed in the *Itinerarium Antonini*, but Ashley's source for this place name is not known. G. H. Wheeler, 'Textual Errors in the Itinerary of Antoninus, II', *The English Historical Review*, xlvii, no. 188 (1932), p. 623.

exactu[m] ut domum suam reverteretur. Brevi igitur factum est ut ad scholam South Hamtoniensem, tum loci tum moderatoris nomine [scored out: is erat Dn Hadrianus Saravia belga] satis celebrem, p[er] matrem [scored out: deducerer] una cum fratre minor[e] puero sexenni deducerer. Siquidem sollicita matris ac [scored out: ?] provida industria pro liberorum educatione patris incuriam supplebat. Ibi in praeceptoris domo [scored out: enutriti] Hadriani Saraviae belgae cuius ux[or][trimmed] et familia gallico sermone utebatur [scored out: ad] sedecim aut viginti adolesc[entes] [trimmed] nobiles enutriti [scored out: nobiles velut in gallico gymnasio] gallice velut in Gallia degeremus domi familiariter loquebam[ur] ea lege ut quis vernaculo sermone in domo uteretur deprehensus, is in refectorio tempore refectionis morionis capitali eousq[ue] vestiretur donec in al[ium] [scored out: in] eodem crimine deprehensum coronam sive cucusam suam transferre[t]. Hic latinae linguae solidiora fundamenta ieci stylum singulis hebdomadibus exercui, soluta et numerosa oratione [scored out: qua] Ovidii, Tullii ac Terentii facilitatem ac elegantiam quam affectabam pro meo puerili modulo ac tenuitate expressi; ac in Graecae linguae rudimentis addiscendis non inutiliter operam profui.

Accessit com[m]odum quod venit a praeceptore impetrata nonnunquam [scored out: (?)] studiis] adventantibus feriis [scored out: ad] in Insulam Vectam transfretavi quae [scored out: urbiculae] portui Southamton obiacet et ipsi urbiculae [scored out: aliquot] decem forte miliaribus distat, ubi inter matris necessarios transactis hilariter feriis alacer iterum ad studia traieci.

Verum preceptore Hadriano in Belgiam accito ac preparante ipse Sarisburiam duodecimo aetatis anno incohato traductus ad studiorum cursum continuandu[m] ubi in schola publica sub Doctore Adamo Hill Collegii Bailiolensis quondam socio literis incubui. Is ingenioru[m] haud segnis aestimator currenti praeconiis suis calcar addidit et cum comediae recitandae ac alia solemnna spectacula coram illustrissimo Henrico comite Pembroke (qui his in viciniis habitabat) exhibenda essent mihi primas partes demandavit.

Cumq[ue] in matutinis sacris quae in augustissimo templo [scored out: Sarisbur] ibidem div[ae] [trimmed] vergini sacrato quotidie celebrarent[ur] [scored out: electus] eligeretur e pueris unus qui alta voce[trimmed] priorem lectionem quam vocant e veteri testamento desumptam populo perlege[ret] ad hoc officium quod eo ceteris [scored out: plurisque] clarius et distinctius p[er]fungi videbar sepiuscul[e][trimmed] designatus nimis in re tantilla (quod essem laudis cupidissimus) mihi forte p[er]pla[cuit][trimmed].

Memini me etiam ibidem tempore aestivali nescio q[uo] festo p[er] urbem oberrantem incidisse in adolescentium [scored out: turbam] circum qui ludo gladiatorio se in pla[tea] exercebant, quibus me erociosum spectatore[m] additu[m] [two lines scored out: non tulit; me nil tale cogitantem] aegre tulit quidam [scored out: grandiusculus] exercitatus adolescens [scored out: me] ac nil tale cogitantem ad dimicationem provocat instat, urget, lacessit, nullum honestae excusationi aut subterfugio locum [scored out: relin] relinquit[trimmed], cum tandem prae pudore praelio me parare et clamydem abicere compulsisset, ac me invictum animo corpore satis validum [scored out: firmum] ac manu promptum praeter spem invenisset, plaudente turba provocator prior arma deposuit, ac deditionem fecit; qu[od] [trimmed] mihi [scored out: ex quavis re] undequaque inter sodales gloriolam aucupanti pergratu[m] ac periucundum fui.

Folio 17v

Eodem anno variolas quae urbem passim invaserant ipse satis [scored out: et frequentes] confertas perpessus divina ope quiete et patientia [scored out: ac patientia] sine incom[m]odo evici. Et cum pestis paulo post urbem affligeret a schola ad paternam domum una cum fratre minori sum revocatus.

At ne otiosi domi ageremus preceptor nobis brevi quaesitus est Franciscus Marburius qui nos in domu paterna cum tribus aliis affinibus erudiret, et nescio quo fato [scored out: qui] in eas regiones [scored out: com[m]odum] paulo ante advenerat. Is cum indolem nostram sagax perspiceret [scored out: et] severus ac rigidus [scored out: disciplinae] exactor eoru[m] quae dictasset ac tradidisset, cum styli exercitatione effecit ut Latinae et Graecae linguae suppellectili satis instructus, poetices non ignarus, [scored out: et] religionis etiam [scored out: illegible] iactis fundamentis Academiae spacia toto animo inhiarem.

Itaq[ue] anno aetatis decimoquinto ineunte sub finem Januarii a parentibus ad Academiam Oxoniensem transmissus, et in aulam qua[m] vocant Cervinam admissus in tutorem quendam Orbilium incidi, qui insolentem in me carnificinam [scored out: quotidie] exercuit flagris quotidie im[m]erentis corpus conscidit, cum essem literaru[m] amantissimus; tamen ea fuit hominis infamia (cuius nomini parco) ut corpus suu[m] in corpore meo excereret et animum suu[m] aestuantem [scored out: malo meo recrearet] cruciatu meo pasceret.

Post paucos menses ab hac laniena transgredior in aulam Albana[m] patre concio virum secutus humanissimum qui ex aula Cervina in Mertonense collegiu[m] socius tunc temporis e[st] cooptatus, quem mihi praeceptorem adsciveram.

Paucis post mensibus me nil tale cogitantem literae a fratre Antonio maiore, [scored out: comune faciunt] qui tum in partibus transmarinis cum [scored out: Domino] Gulielmo Hattono post equite clarissimo magni illius Cancellarii [scored out: filio] herede adoptivo peregrinabatur, comunefaciunt ut M. Joannem Barbonu[m] [scored out: apud Magd] praelatis illi literis quibus [scored out: fidei] curae su[ae] trimmed] me D[omi]n[u]s Hattonus com[m]endaverat in Collegio Magdalenae salutarem. Is mihi tutor designatus ut com[m]odius [scored out: instituaret] rebus meis e propriori loco consulerem confestim in au[lam trimmed] Magdalenae transtulit. Ac parum adhuc provectum in exercitia [provect? trimmed] disputationes [scored out: declarationes?] ac declamationes dialecticae, rhetoricae ac philosophiae quamvis ru[dem trimmed] ac tyronem rapuit et immisit. Hisce velitationibus iteratis audentior factus et Latinae linguae facilitate ac elegantia confisus, cum parum solidae eruditionis aut reconditoris philosophiae degustassem. In publicis Academiae scholis me disputationibus im[m]isceo, alioru[m] theses vellito, [scored out: convello] questiones exagito, proprias ac novas praepono et defendo. [scored out: (etenim anno aetatis decimoctavo inchoato peto ?)]

Aetatis anno 17o dum studiosus [trimmed li]teris operam darem vitam percurrans sedentariam intumuit [trimmed c]rus alterum sive illum an [trimmed aliam ob causam] incertum [trimmed ?] tumor post aliquot hebdomadas chirurgus operavit.

Pecuniam postea a parentibus ad sumptus literarios et necessarios usus transmissa[m] pravi sodalitiis exemplo chartis lusoriis in feriis natalitiis effundo. Maestitia memet diu macero et consumo tantisper donec [scored out: tandem] materna indulgentia, precibus ac sponsione in futuru[m] pecunia iterum adnumerat[ur] et refunditur.

Praeceptor meus Barbonus e Collegio una cum Traversio, Durdantio ac aliis doctis et cordatis viris nescio quo ostracismo expulsus ante meum adventum (post annu[m] unu[m] ei indultum ut migrationi se com[m]odius pararet quo minus mala malitia adve[r]sarioru[m] videretur pr[ro]fecturus iam in agerum Northamtoniensem. [catchword: ubi]

Folio 18r

ubi mediocre beneficiu[m] cum expectabat, M[agist]r[u]m Joannem Hardingum delegerat, virum in variis linguis apprime eruditum et multiplici eruditione refertum Magd Collegii tunc

socium nunc eiusdem Praesidem dignissimum et Hebraicae linguae publicum ac Regium in [scored out: illa] Academia Professorem, cuius tutelae ac fidei me cum ceteris pupillis suis com[m]itteret. Hic studia et conatus meos literarios [omnes] prudentia consilio auxilio direxit, auxit et adiuvit. Post annum decimum septimu[m] completu[m] ineunte decimo octavo baccalaureatu[m] peto, obtineo.

Decimo nono completo ac vicesimo aetatis anno inchoante in sodalitiu[m] Collegii Magdalensis cooptatus sum et sequenti anno confirmatus. Hic mei iuris factus aestimare non potui quantum pretiosi temporis inutiliu[m] libroru[m] lectiones aliena studia officiosae aliorum [scored out: iuvenum] adolescentium visitationes, itinera, rusticationes mihi surriperent. Menimi me dum puer essem [scored out: ac] licet magistri me in officio continerent, [scored out: cum] si forte in manus meas [scored out: incidisset] incideret libellus aliquis qui fictas et futiles fabellas continerent qualia de Bevisie Hamtonensi, Guidone Warwicensis, historia Valentini et Orsoni, vita Arthuri Regis Britanniae et equitum [scored out: rotundae tabulae] orbicularis mensae [scored out: continent?] circumferuntur ac huiusmodi portentis ac monstribus qualia aut nunquam extiterunt, aut certe supra omnem fidem futilia ac vana per ociosos monachos de eis addita (ad irretiendam plebeculam et voluptate inescandam conficta in superiore seculo) ad nos pervenere; teneri non potuisse quin tempus ludo, somno, cubationi, immo ipsis studiis ac occupationibus seriis surreptum, in heroum istoru[m] ingentibus factis armis, amoribus, ac huiusmodi naeniis perlegendis collocarem. Liber iam animus pertaesus horu[m] ut vulgariu[m] et pueriliu[m] oblectamentoru[m] eoru[m] loco linguaru[m] exoticaru[m] notitia substituerat Bocacii [struck out: Decame] *Decameronem* et *Octomeronem* Reginae Navarrae quod nihil aliud erat quam diabolium eicere molestum ut aliu[m] vel deteriorem admitterem, et puerilia oblectamenta amandare ut adolescentiae [scored out: illecebras corrumperem] corruptelas introducerem.

Hac pretiosissimi temporis iactura effectum e[st] ut Magister [scored out: gradum adeptus] artium renunciatus in Gram[m]atica satis versatus, Rhetorica ac Dialectica mediocriter imbutus, [scored out: in] Philosophia satis leviter tinctus, Musica ac Mathematicis, Arithmetica, Geometria Astronomia [scored out after Astro: logia] tantum a lumine salutatis. Publicus Geometriae professor eo anno designatus munus illud obierim satis ἀγεωμέτρητος.

[Scored out: Ceterum e[st] spem et expectationem quam de me concitaveram potius quam ob aliquam solidum eruditionis fructum] Hisce ornamentis, hac egregia supellectili ornatus, anno aetatis vicesimo tertio inchoato et mense Decembri cum feriae Natilitiae Redemptoris appropinquarent celebrandae [scored out: cum] et solemnis in Collegio mos [scored out: esset] inolevisset ut aliquis e primariis iuvenibus inter sociis eligeretur quem ceteri ut Dominum praeconiis ac laudibus venerarentur et efferrent, cuius tanquam [scored out: Domini et] Principis auspiciis cetera turba in triumphis tripudiis et choreis moderaretur. Ob spem et expectationem quam de me concitaveram, Ego Dominus ac Princeps Juventis¹⁴ sum salutatus me in regno illo claustrali humeris evehunt, in solio constituunt [scored out: panegyricis] encomiis ac orationibus ornant, condecorant. Ego tam flagrantium adolescentum in me propensionem grato animo recognoscere; modeste de meipso ac humiliter sentire, illorum de me iudiciu[m] et existimatione[m] magni facere ut [catchwords: mos erat]

¹⁴ Ashley presumably meant 'Juventutis'.

mos erat brevi oratione celebrare. *Epago: Deo regno, triumpho.*
 Sed feriis ac ludicris peractis cum, *Philologiae an Juris civili me*
 addeam serio deliberat, *fratrem Antonium Ludovicum a fratre Antonio Ludovicum*
Regii consilii anagoride acceptus ad Regni instituta idferenda, ubi anno
 atatis vicesimo quarto mensis in Templariorum Societatem admissus vix
 tertium hanc mensuram consideram quoniam orta inter illos opinio aliqua de
 Ingenio eruditione et eloquio (quoniam omnia in me imitata) ex ips
 qua ante in Academia adhiberentur certante anno et feriis iterum
 hic
 hic hoc hanc divina
 factum Providentia quod
 loquar quoniam quoniam
 Episcopo Ludovicum Ludovicum
 non omnia sunt
 Fratres meos major Antonius
 et instanciam meam (si
 qua fieri) remitteret et
 facilius me adhibere
 in officio continuaret ac Gallicae partes aliquas insidi: Cuius in Germaniam post Horatium
 Franciscum quadringentis
 Palaticum Legatum eo missum destinaret, defundo peregrinatione patriae
 Welingtons bis interpretis defervit.
 Fortasse tanta haud prodehendum quomodo hoc ipso anno 29. parte
 ferias illas Ludovicus Securus quidam (qui forte me intus rem inquam
 importunus exigebat, ac regio quid factum imitabatur) pugnam aggressus
 qui in pugna e capulo exivit vulnus in capite saucius acceperim.
 Anno atatis 29. mensis
 cum meatus estographo
 obstrictus ipse pro familiari
 qui solutus non erat a
 Ludovicus mensis Julii coram
 presentibus portum affuit quoniam
 ad carcerem stravit. Hoc
 testimonio oratione, et
 soluta precum me videtur.
 Mensis proximo autem
 meam familiam convalescentem
 inveniendi meae ac puerorum.
 Sed tantus fervor illius Reatis ut nos ille impure turbavit nec ego diu
 sustinere potui, dum foret in me impetu factus, simul
 utq. iterum in capite et brachio dextro, *illam quoniam vulnere dimissim*
 Past anni unum aut alterum in quibus *Mistica inter etiam Ludovicus*
 associaveram, *fratrem Ludovicum et*
fratrem Ludovicum contulerunt. Equitis personam Dni Thomae Baffro
 Baffrovilii in militiam pellectus sum eam que in Franciam a Regina
 Elizabetha in auxilium Regis Navarrae adversus Guischaes missa est
 ad in officio Gornacensi *primitus cum Dni Guillelmo Casdale a*
fratre Ludovicus nisi proximus glauca plumbra, *cadere, intus erasit.* Et
 didicim Corbis interfui cum a labore Baffrovilii vix inquam offeodere
 donec morbo, *cum fratre invidente ac diu affligente patriam sum*
 coactus reperire nostris in officio Rotbomagensi occupatis, *quo*
fratrem Ludovicum tempore magnum ille *fratrem Ludovicum* e vita excipit: qui fratri meo a
 sumus Patreus exheret. *Past reditum diu cum morbo*
 conflictatus tandem e mortis faucibus proter spem ereptus novum
 confirmata valetudine *restitutio* eo ut firmius convalescerem.
 Anno atatis 29. mensis
 mensi Julii et octavo *restitutio* Ea recuperata Ludovicum reversus, Dno Joanne Puckerio Custode
 in patria rei amplificatione
 eventa est: Et circa id
 tempus *fratrem Ludovicum* *fratrem Ludovicum* *fratrem Ludovicum*
 huiusmodi *fratrem Ludovicum* *fratrem Ludovicum* *fratrem Ludovicum*
 postea mensibus Junio et
 Julio omnia *restitutio*
 fratrem ut ad *maiora* *fratrem Ludovicum* *fratrem Ludovicum* *fratrem Ludovicum*
 huiusmodi *fratrem Ludovicum* *fratrem Ludovicum* *fratrem Ludovicum*
 mensi Decembri, ad Templarios *restitutio*, *fratrem Ludovicum* *fratrem Ludovicum*
 Past *fratrem Ludovicum*

Fig. 1. Sloane MS. 2131, f. 18v.

Folio 18v

mos erat brevi oratiuncula significare satago. Dein regno, triumpho.

Sed feriis ac ludicris peractis, cum ad seria redirem et Theologiae in Juri civili me addicarem serio deliberarem, [scored out: frater Antonius] Londiniu[m] a fratre Antonio [scored out: ad regni instituta ediscenda] Regii consilii anagnoste accersitus ad Regni instituta ediscenda advolo ubi anno aetatis vicesimoquarto ineunte in Templarioru[m] Societatem admissus vix tertium iam mensem consederam quin orta inter illos opinione aliqua de ingenio, eruditione et eloquio (quamvis omnia in me i[m]matura) ex iis quae ante in academia actitaveram vertente anno et feriis iterum adventantibus novum hic mihi regnu[m] obtruditur, principatus novus demandat[ur] quibus ludicris pro mea tenuitate defunctus.

{In margin} Sub hoc tempus divina factum Providentia quod torque aureo quem conda[m] egregio impostori accomodavera[m] [?] haud fueram. Non omittendu[m] tamen q[uo]d frater meus maior Antonius, ut insolentiam meam (si quae fuit) reprimeret et facilius me addito aemulo in officio contineret ac [scored out: humiliore] com[m]odiore uteretur, fratrem Franciscum quadriennio minore ab Academia post annu[m] ab adventu meo accersit, et impensis suis in iuris studia [scored out: im[m]ittit] apud Templarios im[m]ittit.

Cum levi etiam morbo, urinae difficultate, eodem tempore conflictarer, relictis Templariis ob fratris dissidium conversi me totum ad linguas peregrinas et prudentiam politicam comparandam et a D[omi]no Fr. Walsingham opera [scored out: D[omi]ni] Henrici Untoni equitis mihi amicissimi ad peregrinationem egregie animatus et instructus Galliae partes aliquas invisi. Cum[que] in Germaniam post Horatium Palavicinu[m] legatum eo missum destinarer, defuncto peregrinantium patrono Walsinghamo hic impetus deferbuit.

Fortasse tamen haud praetereundum quomodo hoc ipso anno 24 post ferias illas ludicras sicariu[m] quendam (qui forte me intuens rem iniquam importunius exigebat, ac nescio quid tetrum minitabatur) pugione aggressus, qui in pugna e capulo exiluit, vulnus in capite saucius acceperim. Sed tantus fervor illius aetatis ut neque ille impune tulerit nec ego diu inultus remanserim; qui post paucos dies illi obviam factus districtis gladiis dum ferocius in me impetu[m] facit semel atq[ue] iterum in capite et brachio dextro saucium illum [scored out: graviter vulneratum] dimiserim.

{In margin} Anno aetatis 25o ineunte cum incautius chirographo obstrictus essem pro familiari qui solvendo non erat a lictoribus mense Julio comprehensus parum abfuit quin ad carcerem p[er]traheret. Sed vadimonio primum, et postea saluta pecunia me redemi. Mense proximo aufugit nequam famulus convasatis fundamentis meis ac pecuniola.

Post annu[m] unum aut alterum in quibus musica[m] [scored out: inter] practicam ceteris studiis [scored out: operum operam dederam] associaveram familiaritate et contubernio equitis perhumani D[omi]n[i] Thome Baskervilii in militiam pellectus sum eam quae in Franciam a Regina Elizabetha in auxilium Regis Navarri adversus Guisianos missa est ubi in obsidione Gornacensi periclitatus cum [scored out: a latere proximus] [scored out: Dns] Guilielmus Constable, nunc eques militia clar[us], mihi tum a latere proximus glande plumbea in femore ictus caderet, intactus evasi. Et deditioi urbis interfui cum a latere Baskervilii vix unquam discedere[m] donec morbo me cum hieme invadente ac diu affligente patriam sum coactus repetere nostris in obsidione Rothomagensi occupatis: quo tempore Londinum veni magnus ille Hattonus e vita excessit: qui fratri meo maiori sum[m]us Patronus extiterat. Post reditum diu cum morbo conflictatus tandem e morbis faucibus praeter spem ereptus nondum confirmata valetudine rusticatu[m] eo ut firmius convalescerem.

{In margin}: Anno aetatis 28o ineunte magna mihi spes et occasio expectata in patria rei amplificandae erepta est: et circa id tempus febris tertiana satis levi mense martio laboravi, postea mensibus Junio ac Julio urinae difficultate.

Ea recuperata Londinum reversus, D[omi]no Joanne Puckering Custode Magni Sigilli Angliae post aliquot menses electo ei ut pro amanuensi a scriniis [scored out: inservirem] essem a fratre traditus, comandatus, cum[que] post annu[m] unum aut alterum ob multitudine

amanuensium [scored out: quibus utebat[ur]] quos admittebant dominus perexiguum fructum p[er]ciperemus persuasit frater ut ad maiora viam sternerem et ad studia iuris amplectenda toto me animo converterem. Ita[que] procedente anno aetatis vicesimo nono mense Decembri, post quinquenniu[m] eo vario vitae genere me exercui, ad Templarios reversus, totum me iuris studio mancipavi. [catchword: Post]¹⁵

Folio 19r

Vertente Ludovici Regii de vicissitudine ac varietate rerum libros duodecim, quos e Gallico in vernaculum subsicivis horis verteram, ne mihi postea studio iuris addicto impedimento essent aut negotium facerent, absolvi, recognovi, et inscriptos D[omi]no Custodi Magni Sigilli Angliae (quem mihi in causaru[m] patrociniis et actionibus forensibus fautorem speraveram, Patronum proposueram) in lucem edidi. Opuscula autem alia dum varium vitae genus exercerem typis ante vulgaveram: comparatione[m] Angliae cum Hispania quam e Gallico etiam traductam D[omi]no Gulielmo Hattono magni illius Hattoni adoptivo inscripseram [struck through: alterum] poemation hexametris Latinis Uraniam sive Musam celestem dictam e Gallicis poematibus nobilis viri Salustii Bartasii expressam quam Henrico Unton equiti clarissimo et eximio fautori meo dedicaveram.

[Scored out: Anno] Tricesimo primo aetatis anno licentiatum iuris adeptus cum foro et causis actitandis me pararem Custos ille Magni Sigilli in quo mihi spem collocaveram haud multo post e vita excessit. Hoc anno mense Februario morbus in intestinis me diuturnis invasit qui tantum non animum despondere coegit.

Aetatis anno 35^o inchoante mihi magna occasio rei bene gerendae in patria oblata est quae eodem anno mense Martio et Aprili fataliter erepta est et in fratrem minorem translata. Quimetiam circa hoc tempus in carcerem coniectus ob aes alienum conflatum quod in hanc rem impenderam post quadriduum eo sponsore intercedente sum liberatus.

36o aut 37o aetatis anno mense Augusto die quo festum cum nundinis S[ancti] Bartholomei comprehensis iterum [scored out: quod solvendo non essent] ob pecuniam non solutam et in custodia vicecomitis detentus quinque septimanas integras donec tandem p[er] fratrem maiorem pecunia soluta est.

{In the margin}¹⁶ Hic non semel, quasi rebus peractis, de effugio cogitare [?] parato forte q[uo] p[er] fenestram [ela]berer, nisi me custodis [hu]manitas retinisset, ne quid [mihi] aut illo indignu[m] admitterem. [Inte?]rim (ut sunt mala malis adiuncta) servulus pixidibus scrinii domi compilatis [l?]ata pecuniola q[uae] mihi [re]liqua erat, aufugit.

Anno aetatis 38o mense Martio incidi in impostores duos gallos qui se chirugos Montisbelgardenses dicebant ac egregie se peritos in intestinis et omento collapsis restituendis per punctum quem vocant aureum venditabant: quibus ego satis credulus cum me commissem sic meam cutem cum ca[rne] incederunt crumenam lanciarunt ut tandem post complures septimanas ex eorum manibus elapsus satis acres credulitatis meae poenas dedisse videar; et non minimum periculi evasisse.

Aetatis anno 43o sub [Frigidum?]¹⁷ Januarii incatus in scamni aut asseris aciem duriolem collapsus ossis tibiae cutem confregi quod leviusculum censeri posset nisi quod ob rigorem hyemis, quo ipse Thamesis ac omnia fere sunt congelata, plusculum temporis intercessit priusquam posset cutis reparari.

Mense etiam proximo nescio quid humoris maligni crus utrumque occupaverit ut ob eorum tumorem et indispositionem claudicans in lecto ad paucos dies iacere coactus sum, donec levi purgatione, et emplastro diachalitheos discussa ac purgata materia turigida ac venenosa sanatus sim.

¹⁵ The catchword *Post* at 18v does not correspond with the first word on 19r.

¹⁶ This section is in particularly poor condition, and it was difficult to achieve an accurate transcription.

¹⁷ The actual word is difficult to make out with any accuracy, but there was a very cold January in this year (see the corresponding footnote in the translation).

Folio 19v

Anno aetatis 46. inchoante ipso die mihi natali secundo Julii circa horam secunda[m] aut tertiam pomeridiana[m] annuntiarunt mulieres trepidae sororem mihi maiorem [scored out: ex aedibus suis] p[er] conquisitores deputatos comprehensam ex aedibus suis divelli et in custodia detineri; quam ego (novitate facti commotus) dum redimere satago; nihil proficio: sed variis molestiis et anxietatibus discrucior dum indignabundas remedium rei paro quinetiam ipse acerbe ac graviter a gravissimo viro ac summo magistratu correptus; dum facti iniquitate[m] liberius expostulo.

Eodem an[no] pene elapso penultimo Junii An[no] D[omi]ni 1611 die qui Divo Petro sacratur eadem soror, sive ob animi molestiam ac maerorem quod in lite preter spem suam [page torn] accidisset (quamvis causa superior), sive diuturna tussi ac tabe emaciata, vigiliis ac dyspnoea tandem confecta, etiam rubris maculis per cutem conspersa in ipso carcere circa horam primam pomeridianam Deo ac naturae animam reddidit.

Non omittendum puto sed memoriae mandandum quod mihi saepiscule in vita somnia matutina obtigerint. Anno aetatis meae 30. aut paulo post imago sese obtulit in somnis foeminae cuiusdam servilis aut potius furiae cuiusdam infernalis scopa verrentis domum quae dira mihi miniabatur ac disparuit. Ego tam horrido viso totis artibus contremui ac illico experrectus Deum obnixe obtestatus sum ut mala omnia impendentia ac tristes casus a malo genio ominatos pro multiplici misericordia sua averteret aut in bona commutaret.

[This paragraph marked with a {] Anno autem aetatis 44. si recte memini cum noctu acrioribus carnis stimulis urgerer e lecto surgens et in genibus provolutus Deum in adiutorium meum ardentem invocavi ut tantis malis quae me misere divexabant succurret et in lecto iterum recubui ac placide ad sequentis diei diluculum dormivi. Circa id tempus observata mihi in somnis Angelica quaedam species mulieris cuiusdam formosissimae quae me bono animo esse iussit, mirum in modum recreavit ac in meliorem spem ac fiduciam erexit, et supra captum humanum consolata e[st?]. Ego tam alacri visu tanquam conspectu bonis genii mei totus gaudio perfusus expergiscor exultans ac triumphans totum me Deo dia dedico ac devoveo.

Dentem unum molarem superiorem sine dolore excidisse mihi aliquando somniavi, ac illud Patris omissionem aut alterius parentis [page torn] [non ausim] dicere. Mater quidem prior obiit, Pater aliquot annis supervixit temporis autem in quo somnium illud oblatum fuit nunc non recordor.

Omnes simul dentes meos una nocte e maxillis et mandibulis mihi elapsos quandoque me somniasse memini: sunt autem qui fratres et consanguineos per dentes nobis in somnis affirmant significari.

Semel atque iterum sub initiis rerum agendarum futurorum praenuntia oblata mihi sunt somnia. Semel etiam cum de nuptiis contrahendis cu[m][torn page] virgine quadam locupleti quam nondum videram questio facta esset mihi in somnis, tum virginis illius licet vigilantem nunquam vis[ae] species tum eius matris observata est, quas cum postridie videre contingeret facile agnovi eiusdem esse quas ante in somni videram.

Ego etiam interno quodam morbo laborans cum satis incaute ac nimis credule quibusdam erroribus qui se chirurgos Montesbelgardenses ac mire dextros in restituendo intestino aut omento collapse p[er] punctum quem vocant aureum venditabant credidissem per somnium admonitus sum dolosos illos esse eum impostores, qui aegrorum corpora et crumenas miseri torquerent, quod ego cum somnio fidem non adhiberem nimio sanationis desiderio, meo magno cruciat ac malo in me sum expertus.

9 Maii anno domini 1614. Aetatis meae 49. currente Luna in Geminis existente post solis exortum in somnium obtigit quo videre visus sum avis cuiusdam ingentis ac perpulebrae speciem quae a caelo delapsa in terra gradiebatur caput excelsae ferens plumis aureis vestitum

collum ac reliquium corpus[torn page] argenteis ac viridantibus quales pavones aut turtures habent coopertum. Eius avis capiendae magnum mihi [??] est aut [?] et [?] ab hominibus [?] qui praelongis [?] ac [??].¹⁸

Folio 20r

Eodem etiam anno paulo post, s. 9 die Junii qui dies Jovis erat Luna circa finem Scorpii existente nocte diem illum subsectua aut circa p[ro]ximu[m] diluculum, visus est mihi in somnis Archiep[iscopu]s Cantauriensis episcopalem dignitatem conferre p[er] manuu[m] Impositionem ac verba haec pronuncia[re]: Instituo te habere curam animarum.

30. Novembris eodem anno die qui Andreae Apostolo sacer est circa finem noctis [scored out: audire] Luna in Ariete existente mihi visus sum in somniis audire Ducam de Lenox et fratrem etiam meu[m] minorem nomine Franciscum obiisse.

Nec omittendum quod eodem mense a Rectoribus Medio-Templariis in electione Lectoris p[ro] anno insequenti omissus ipse fuerim ob familiaris rei penuriam, licet in eoru[m] o[mn]ibus exercitiis versatissimus. Et paucis post diebus in aula Westmon[asterii] ad aes alienu[m] iterum citatus sum non solutus.

Eodem anno aetatis mei 49. die 14 mensis Martii AD 1614 circa horam 4 p.m. a tonsore mihi nunciatu[m] est unicu[m] fratris mei minoris Francisci filiolum diem extremu[m] obiisse Luna in Aquario existente quo tempore hoc mihi narratu[m] fuit.

14 Julii [moon symbol] in [Sagittarius symbol] Anno aetatis 52 currente visus est mihi in somnis notus quidam cum lucerna in plateis Lond[inii] argentum in variis crumenis deperdita[m] p[er]scrutari ac invenire, et ex singulis marsupiis portiunculas mihi et servulo meo largiri.

S. Mich. anno aetatis 53 mihi nil tale cogitanti nunciatum fuit a fratre minori a Rectoribus Templariis designatum et electu[m] in Societatis illius Thesaurarium: quod muneris quamvis dignitatis aut emolumenti satis mediocris; tamen ut viroru[m] in me talium propensionis testimonium cum ambire certe refugerem, admittere tamen haud recusarem eorum precibus tandem effectum ut huiusmodi viroru[m] famae parceret ne forte temeritatis notam incurrerent quod veterem officiarium ob suspiciones et offensiunculas indicta causa exturbassent. Hanc illi gratiam a me non ingrati viginti magnis aureis aut redemerunt aut saltem extorserunt.

A.C. 1618 16 Jac. R. Aetatis meae 54 incipiente mense Julio vergente, peregrinandi stu[diu]m? p[er]lectus partim etiam quid rerum gereret Ro. Sherleyus Persaru[m] Regis apud Hispaniae Regem Legatus nobilis eques Anglus vivendi desiderio, ex Anglia Caletum transfretavi et Lutetiae Parisioru[m] per aliquot dies com[un]oratus Aureliam postea et oppida ac urbes ad utramq[ue] Ligeris ripam sitas invisens, ac p[er] Drotaviam, Rupellam, Burdegalam, Baiono[m] et alias urbes transiens in Hispaniam iter feci, Madritu[m] cum illa stupenda Escurialis S. Laurentii structura Vallisoletu, Segovia, et aliis spectatu dignis inveni: et medio mense Octobri proximo Londinum redii.

A.C. 1622 20 Jac. R. [this section marked with a {] Aetatis 57 17 Junii [moon symbol] in [Aquarius symbol] mane post solis exortum visus sum mihi in somno videre augustam quandam viri an mulieris speciem quae sub pedibus suis velut victrix calcabat auratam ac praeifulgidam serpentem sive draconem cui perpulchris characteribus inscriptum erat Alchymi[a].

¹⁸ This paragraph was very difficult to transcribe as it is written close to the bottom of the page and the last line is trimmed.

English translation¹⁹

Folio 16r

In telling the story of my life, I shall be recounting the mercies of the Lord. And you, O Lord, guide my spirit, so that in this task, as well as in my whole life, I may testify your praises and mercies, you who live for ever and ever. Amen.

I was born on Saturday 2 July, in the year of our Lord 1565, at nine o'clock in the evening, in the southern corner, or border, of the County of Wiltshire, in the well-known village of Damerham, which serves more or less as the boundary line of the County of Wiltshire from Hampshire and Dorset and is located seven miles from the famous city of Salisbury and the capital city of Wiltshire.²⁰

My father was Anthony Ashley,²¹ or rather Astley, sprung from an ancient knightly family of *Durotfriges*, now called Dorset, and claiming descent from the more ancient and famous stock of the Lords Astley (who obtained this title under King Edward II). The illustrious seat of the Barons de Astley – called Astley Castle by the ancient Cornavii people – is located, according to Camden, in the County of Warwickshire and passed into the family of the Greys through a marriage with Sir Reynold Grey of Ruthin – from which union were born the Marquesses Grey of Dorset – and passed to that family, of whom, to this day, we see monuments in the very beautiful college located next to Astley Castle.²²

My mother was Dorothy Lite, of the illustrious family of the Lites of Lites-Cary in Somerset; she was a graceful woman, devoted to the tasks of bringing up her children and managing her household.²³

The σύντεκνοι, or godfathers as we say, who brought me to baptism when I was a week old were two distinguished gentlemen; one was my uncle on my father's side Henry Ashley,²⁴ who lived close by in Dorset, and the other, William Keylway²⁵ from over the Hampshire border. As rarely happens, there was no difference of opinion between them about my name (may it prove a good omen!) and I was called Robert, by unanimous consent, in the hope that I should take after a great-grandfather of mine who bore that name,²⁶ and who, by marrying more than one wealthy bride, had greatly increased our family's wealth. Indeed, when the clergyman was sending me away from the baptismal font having only just sprinkled the water lightly on my face, as is the usual custom with children who are specially weakly or delicate, my uncle Henry saw to it that all my clothes were removed, and I was plunged naked in the holy water.

¹⁹ As noted in the introduction, the first part of the translation, up to when Ashley left Oxford ('After this, I was proclaimed King and marched in a triumphal procession') is based on Charles Frank Russell's excellent work, updated to align with the rest of the translation and modernizing the English.

²⁰ In 1895 the boundary changed and Damerham is now in Hampshire.

²¹ Anthony Ashley (d. c. 1580).

²² Sir Thomas de Astley founded the Collegiate Church of Astley. 'Colleges: Collegiate church of Astley', in William Page (ed.), *A History of the County of Warwick*, (London, 1908), vol. ii, 117-20. *British History Online*, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/warks/vol2/pp117-120>> [accessed 18 May 2021]. 'Cornavios' or 'Cornavii' refers to a region, according to William Camden, that encompassed 'Warwick-shire, Worcester-shire, Stafford-shire, Shrop-shire and Cheshire'. William Camden, 'Britain, or A chorographicall description of the most flourishing kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland', from *Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership*, 2011. <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A17832.0001.001/1:21?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

²³ Dorothy Lyte (c. 1545-1601). Daughter of John Lyte and Edith Horsey. Lytes family of Lytes Cary.

²⁴ Sir Henry Ashley (1519-1588).

²⁵ Possibly Sir William Kellaway (1501-1569) of Rockbourne, Hampshire.

²⁶ Possibly Robert Ashley (d. 1432/33).

After this I was handed over to be nursed by a good woman who lived in the woods close by, but when scarcely nine months had passed, I had to be weaned because she was expecting again.

One night, when I had just turned four and had never left my mother's side, I remember being greatly upset because, while I, a four-year-old boy, was lying asleep in her bosom, her maids came and took me out of her arms, because they could tell from her groans that she was suffering labour pains. That same night my dearest mother gave birth to a son, my brother.

Folio 16v

My brother, Francis Ashley, was born at four o'clock in the morning of 24 November 1569.²⁷ At that very time there was an insurrection taking place in the north of England.²⁸ Not long afterwards I was taken ill with tertian fever, which greatly afflicted my weak body for a couple of months.

I was receiving lessons in language and the rudiments of grammar in our village from a man of no great learning when, most opportunely, David Woodman came to us from Oxford, a kindly man of considerable erudition, and a friend of my elder brother at Balliol College. Father engaged him to act as tutor to me and another relation, and for several months he taught us grammar at my home. He was originally from the Isle of Wight, which lies opposite to Hampshire and indeed forms a part of the county, and after a time he was induced to return there to become headmaster of the public school at Newport, which is the chief town on the Isle of commercial importance. His character and ability were such as to attract a number of pupils – albeit some of them rather delicate and feeble boys – who were sent from their homes to live with him in his school as boarders, in the hope that they would make better progress in their studies.

[1571] When I was six years old, I was myself sent to the Isle of Wight and quite happily spent a whole year at the school. When I had just turned seven, however, I was taken ill with smallpox; my whole body, including my mouth and throat, was overcome by the disease, and not even my eyes escaped; however, by divine mercy I recovered after a month, and by the end of the winter not the least trace of the rash remained.

In the course of the year my schoolmaster David received an appointment to a more fruitful and remunerative position in *Vindocladia* in Dorset, the busy market town we call Wimborne Minster, and shortly afterwards I was sent there by my parents also, with the cousin whom I mentioned before,²⁹ in order that, by remaining under the same teacher, I might make better progress in my work. But in that year – I am not sure whether I had just turned eight or nine – as I was going through some brambles and thorns without paying attention, a sharp thorn was driven into the pupil of my right eye. Various remedies were tried without success, and my eyesight was getting worse by the day, when at last I was taken to Sherborne, a market town in the same county, and the sharp point of the thorn was removed with forceps by a

²⁷ The Northern Rebellion, 1569.

²⁸ Sir Francis Ashley (1569-1635).

²⁹ The school was likely Queen Elizabeth's Free Grammar School. Ashley does not name the cousin, but it could possibly have been Henry Ashley (fl. 1622), son of Sir Henry Ashley (1548-c.1605) from whom his brother Anthony acquired the Wimborne St Giles estate.

skilful surgeon. By the goodness of God my former power of sight was gradually restored.

While I was at school at Wimborne³⁰ – I cannot say for sure whether it was during the first or the second winter – as I was hurrying one dark morning to matins and pre-dawn prayers at church, I slipped on the marble steps of the church and injured the round cartilaginous bone of my right knee, which anatomists call the patella or rotula. The result was that I was lame for some months and had difficulty walking, but after a time I completely healed.

Since the custody of Corfe Castle, which is on the Island of Purbeck lying over against Dorset, was at this time entrusted to Father by Sir Christopher Hatton,³¹ he moved there with his family. There was a schoolmaster there who had made himself a good reputation, and I was put under his charge. I easily attained the position of Head Boy at the school, and I remember that once during our games, when I was challenged by a schoolmate to wrestle, I won so decisively that he afterwards demanded compensation from me because his leg had been dislocated in the struggle.

Folio 17r

The Christmas festivities at this school included the acting of a comedy, and our teacher assigned the principal roles to me to play, although these had previously been given to other boys; this small triumph made me very proud of myself.

Tired of looking after somebody else's house, before a year had passed Father obtained permission to return home. So shortly afterwards it came about that I was taken by my mother to Southampton School – a place of considerable fame, not only for its own sake as a town, but also because of its schoolmaster – and my younger brother, who was now six years old, went with me. Thus our mother's anxious and prudent concern for her children's education made up for our father's neglect. At home the schoolmaster, the Belgian Adrian Saravia,³² and his wife and family habitually used the French language in conversation. Sixteen or twenty young fellows of high rank were boarders in his house; and we used to speak French to one another just as if we were living in France, for the rule was that anyone caught in the house using his native language had to wear a dunce's cap in the dining-room at mealtimes, until he could pass it on to someone else who had been caught committing the same offence. It was here that I laid more firmly the foundations of my Latin studies, practised composition every week, and tried again and again to put into prose and verse the ease and elegance of Ovid, Cicero, and Terence to which, in so far as a simple boy could be, I was greatly attracted. I also worked, by no means without effect, at the task of learning the elements of Greek.

Another advantage from my being in Southampton was that sometimes, when the holidays were approaching, I obtained permission from my schoolmaster to cross to the Isle of Wight, which lies opposite the entrance to the port and is only about ten miles away from the little town itself; after spending my holidays happily among my mother's relations, I went back cheerfully disposed towards my schoolwork.

[1576] But when I turned eleven, I was sent to Salisbury to continue my studies – because my schoolmaster Adrian had been summoned to Belgium and was preparing to leave – where I became a pupil in the public school under Dr Adam Hill,³³ formerly a Fellow of Balliol College. Quickly recognizing my abilities, he spurred me on to greater efforts by his commendations; and when the time came for comedies and other plays to be performed, as they were every year, before Henry, Earl of Pembroke,³⁴ who lived in the neighbourhood, he

³⁰ Ashley uses the term *schola militarem* in the original, likening his experience at this school to military service.

³¹ Sir Christopher Hatton (1540-1591).

³² Adrien Saravia (1530-1612).

³³ Adam Hill (d. 1595).

³⁴ Henry Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (d. 1601).

entrusted the chief parts to me.

At morning prayers, which were said daily in St Mary's Cathedral at Salisbury, it was the custom for one of the boys to be selected to read aloud to the congregation the first lesson, the one chosen from the Old Testament. As I was considered to perform this duty more clearly and distinctly than the others, I was often chosen to do it, and I attached far too much importance to such a trifling occurrence, for I was excessively greedy of praise.

I also remember that, on the occasion of some festivity or other in the summer, as I was strolling through the city I chanced upon a crowd of young men who were engaged in contests of strength in the town square. I had nothing to do, so I stopped to watch them, whereupon one of the youths became annoyed and challenged me repeatedly to fight him, though I had had no thought of anything of the kind. His insistence left me no room to escape by an honourable, or even a feigned, excuse; but when at length he had forced me, from very shame, to take off my coat and prepare to fight, he discovered, contrary to his expectation, that I had an invincible temper, a good deal of physical strength, and a ready hand, and in the face of the delighted shouts of the crowd the one who was formerly my aggressor had to lay down his arms and surrender. By this adventure I acquired something of a reputation among my companions, which was most welcome and pleasant to one who was always striving for it.

Folio 17v

That same year I fell victim to the smallpox which had become rife in the city, but rest and patience enabled me, with God's help, to recover without trouble.

Not long afterwards, however, there was an outbreak of plague, and I and my younger brother were summoned home from school. In order that we might not waste our time while at home, a tutor was soon obtained for us named Francis Marbury;³⁵ he happened to have moved to our neighbourhood just before, and he taught us, along with three of our cousins, in my father's house. He was a shrewd man, and as soon as he perceived our natural talents he was most strict in requiring us to perform whatever tasks he set us. Through composition exercises, he made it so I had a fairly good grasp of Latin and Greek, and some acquaintance with the poets as well as the principles of religion, such that I began to long with all my heart for the wider life of the University.

[1579] Consequently, when I was fourteen, at the end of January I was sent by my parents to Oxford University and was admitted at Hart Hall.³⁶ For my tutor I had some Orbilius,³⁷ who practised upon me the most insolent cruelty; every day he tore my body with his floggings, although I was devoted to my work and did not deserve them. This fellow (whose name I will not mention) was so horrible that he got his exercise through physical assaults on me and fed his passionate soul on my anguish.

After a few months I migrated, with my father's blessing, from this butchery to Alban Hall, following a man of the kindest disposition, whom I had decided to take as my tutor; he had been a member of Hart Hall, but had at that time just been elected a Fellow of Merton.

A few months later, I unexpectedly received a letter from my elder brother Anthony, who was at that time travelling abroad with William Hatton,³⁸ who would later be the adoptive heir of the Chancellor. The letter instructed me to go and see Mr John Barbon of Magdalen

³⁵ Francis Marbury (d. 1611).

³⁶ Hart Hall became Hertford College in 1740.

³⁷ Orbilius Pupillus was a schoolmaster and grammarian, whom Horace dubbed *plagosus* due to the severe beatings he inflicted upon his students. William Smith (ed.), *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (London, 1880), vol. iii, p. 41.

³⁸ Sir William Hatton (formerly Newport, c. 1565–597) was Sir Christopher's nephew and heir.

College,³⁹ and he informed me that Hatton had written to him to commend me to his care. When Barbon had become my tutor, he at once transferred me to Magdalen Hall in order that, being nearer to him, I could more conveniently consult him on any of my affairs. Up to this time I had not made much progress in my work, and was really nothing but an ignorant novice at it, but he made me take part in disputations and declamations, whether in logic, rhetoric, or philosophy. By means of these debates, repeated often, I became bolder and more confident in my Latin, acquiring ease and elegance, although I did not know much about real scholarship or the more abstruse aspects of philosophy. In the public schools of the University, too, I joined in the disputations, pulling apart the arguments of others, raising points of my own, and putting forward and defending new opinions.

[1581] At the age of sixteen, while I was leading a rather sedentary life focused on my studies, I developed a tumour, of uncertain origin, on which a surgeon operated after a few weeks.

Some time afterwards, during the Christmas holidays, being led astray by the example of some wayward companions, I spent on card-playing the money which my parents had sent me for the necessary expenses of my education; for a long time I was tormented and consumed with remorse until finally, through the kindness of my mother, and in response to my prayers and my promise to behave better in future, some more money was given to me.

My tutor Barbon had been expelled from the college on some ground or other before my arrival, and along with him Travers, Durdant, and other learned scholars;⁴⁰ but he was allowed a year in which to make his preparations for departure, so that the ill-will of his opponents might be less apparent. When the year was over, and he was going away to Northamptonshire [folio 18r] where a small benefice awaited him, he handed me and the rest of his pupils over to the care and responsibility of Mr John Harding,⁴¹ a man of immense learning in a variety of languages and indeed in many other subjects, who was at that time a Fellow of Magdalen College and is now the distinguished President of the College and Regius Professor of Hebrew at the University. His wise advice, his help and his guidance were of great benefit to me in my studies and literary efforts. When I had turned from sixteen to seventeen years old, I supplicated for and obtained my Bachelor's degree.

[1584] When I turned from eighteen to nineteen, I was admitted into the society of Magdalen College and was confirmed in my Fellowship in the following year. Having come of age at this point, I could not calculate how much of my precious time I wasted on the reading of useless books, on studies which I found congenial outside my work, on visits to other young men, on travelling, and on outings to the countryside. I remember that, when I was a boy, although my masters kept me to task, if any book chanced to fall into my hands containing stories and worthless tales, like those which are circulated about Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwick, the story of Valentine and Orson, and the life of Arthur King of Britain and the Knights of the Round Table – books which have come down to us full of portents and wonders of the sort that either never really happened or at least are so absurd as to beggar all belief, and must have been added to the accounts by lazy monks (to ensnare and captivate the common people by portraying the pleasures of an earlier time) – I could not be restrained from devoting all my time to them. My time was snatched from games, from sleep, from food, even from my serious studies and occupations, to be spent in reading about the mighty deeds, battles, loves, and deaths of those mighty heroes. But now, freed from restraint and grown weary of these vulgar and childish pleasures, I had, with my knowledge of foreign languages, replaced them with the *Decameron* of Boccaccio and the *Heptaméron* of the

³⁹ Also known as John Barbone. William Dunn Macray, *A Register of the Members of St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford. New Series* (London, 1894-1915), vol. ii, p. 188.

⁴⁰ See Macray, op. cit.

⁴¹ John Harding (d. 1610).

Queen of Navarre,⁴² which amounted to casting out a mildly troublesome devil in order to admit a worse one, and putting away childish pleasures to bring in youth's corruptions.

This wasting of valuable time led to the result that, when I was declared a Master of Arts, I was reasonably proficient in grammar and moderately so in rhetoric and logic, of philosophy my knowledge was slight, and of music and the mathematical subjects of arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, I had no more than a passing acquaintance. That year I was appointed to give public lectures in geometry, and managed, without knowing much about the subject, to discharge the duty pretty well.⁴³

[1587] This was the splendid apparatus with which I was equipped by the time I turned twenty-two, when in December the Christmas celebrations drew near. There had grown up in the college an annual custom that one of the leading young men from among the Fellows should be chosen as ruler of the revels, and the rest should pay respects to him and proclaim his praises; then they all took part in processions and dances, obeying his every sign just as if he were a prince. I had led them to expect great things from me, and for that reason I was hailed as the ruler and Prince of Youth. They bore me on their shoulders into my little kingdom, set me on a throne, paid me compliments, and made speeches in my honour. I for my part had enough to do in making grateful recognition of the favour shown to me by these boisterous young men, in exhibiting a modest and unassuming attitude in my own behaviour, in making much of their generous opinion of me, and in intimating all this according to custom in a short speech. After this, I was proclaimed King and marched in a triumphal procession.⁴⁴

Folio 18v

When the celebrations and revels [in Oxford] were over, I returned to serious matters. While I gravely considered whether I should devote myself to theology or civil law, I was summoned to London by my brother Anthony, clerk of the King's Council,⁴⁵ and I rushed to that city to learn the Statutes of the Realm. There I sat [as King of the Revels] just as I was turning twenty-three,⁴⁶ despite having been admitted into the Middle Temple for barely three months – because a certain belief had arisen among its members about my talent, education, and eloquence (although all these praises were premature in my case) on account of all that I had previously undertaken in the University. Hence, at the turn of the new year, when the holidays arrived once more, a new kingdom was thrust upon me, and a new principate was demanded of me. I performed these revels as best I could, given my meagre means.

During this time, divine Providence saw to it that I gave the golden crown to an extraordinary pretender whose name I shall not mention, and with whom [...] I fought. Moreover, I must not omit that my elder brother Anthony, in order to restrain my insolence (if such a thing existed), bound me more easily to my duties by introducing a rival, and to render

⁴² The *Heptaméron* was written by Margaret of Angoulême, but only published posthumously, around 1558-1559.

⁴³ It is possible that Ashley is referring to the public lectures the Masters of Arts were obliged to give upon completion of their degree. J. M. Fletcher, 'The Faculty of Arts', in James McConica, *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. iii, *The Collegiate University* (Oxford, 1986), p. 186.

⁴⁴ This marks the end of Russell's translation.

⁴⁵ Anthony was clerk to the Privy Council. Robert was granted residence as a fellow at Magdalen College for four years from 1584 and was granted a year's absence on 30 October 1588 which was extended on 10 October 1589 to the following January. He resigned his fellowship in 1590. Macray, *Register*, p. 91.

⁴⁶ Ashley's manner of recalling his own timeline is somewhat confusing here: he turned twenty-three in July 1588, was admitted to Middle Temple from New Inn on 8 October 1588 (there are no surviving admission records from the New Inn for this period), and would have been named King of the Revels in January 1589 (Middle Temple's archival records do not record this event).

me more amenable to him, summoned my brother Francis – who was four years my junior – out of the University in the year after my own arrival, whom he sent, at his own expense, to study law at the Temple.

[1590] Since at that time I was also suffering from a mild disease, namely difficulty in passing urine, and having left the Temple owing to a disagreement with my brother, I turned my attention wholly to foreign languages and the acquisition of political knowledge.⁴⁷ Through the efforts of my dearest friend Sir Henry Unton,⁴⁸ I obtained encouragement and equipment from Sir Francis Walsingham⁴⁹ and visited some parts of France. Although it had been intended that I enter Germany as a legate after Orazio Pallavicino,⁵⁰ this initiative cooled after the death of Walsingham, who had acted as patron for travellers.

[1588] In addition, perhaps I should not pass over how in that very year when I turned twenty-three and when, after those ridiculous revels, a certain assassin attacked me with his dagger, which he had drawn out of its scabbard during the fight, I received a wound on the head. As it happens, he had been watching me and committed this unjust deed at a rather inconvenient moment, especially since I had not known what evil he was harbouring.⁵¹ The fervour of my youth was such that he neither inflicted this with impunity, nor did I remain unavenged for long. After a few days, we met again with swords unsheathed, and as he lunged towards me again and again, I dispatched him by wounding him in the head and right arm.

[1589] When I turned twenty-four, I incautiously fettered myself with a signed promissory note on behalf of a relative which could not be paid. Consequently, I was arrested in July by the watch and almost dragged off to prison. However, I first released myself on bail and afterwards by paying off the debt. In the following month, a worthless servant absconded, taking both my savings and petty cash with him.

[1590-1591] After one or two years, during which I combined the performance of music with other studies, owing to my friendship and intimacy with the kindest Sir Thomas Baskerville⁵² I was persuaded to join that army which had been sent by Queen Elizabeth to France so as to aid the King of Navarre against the House of Guise. There, I experienced danger at the Siege of Gournay,⁵³ where William Constable,⁵⁴ who was then fighting by my side and is now a knight famed for his soldiery, fell wounded after being hit by a musket-ball in the thigh. I escaped unharmed, and was present at the surrender, since I did not leave Baskerville's side until I was forced by my disease, from which I had suffered for a long time

⁴⁷ Ashley was fined for his absence from the Lent, Autumn and Christmas readings in 1589/1590, and the 1590 May and Autumn readings.

⁴⁸ Sir Henry Unton (1557?-1596).

⁴⁹ Sir Francis Walsingham (1530?-1590).

⁵⁰ Sir Horatio Palavicino (d. 1600). No other evidence has been uncovered regarding Walsingham's instructions regarding Ashley and Palavicino, nor any correspondence with Unton. The likely scenario is that Walsingham's intention was for Ashley to act as a messenger, not an ambassador.

⁵¹ The original conjunction between the two parts of this sentence is *ac* ('and'), to which we have granted a causative meaning to explain the rather curious designation of this deed as 'inconvenient'.

⁵² Sir Thomas Baskerville (d. 1597).

⁵³ Ashley gives the place name here as 'Gornacensi'. The authors believe he is likely referring to the fall of Gournay which took place in September 1591. R. B. Wernham, 'Queen Elizabeth and the Siege of Rouen, 1591', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xv (1932), pp. 163–79.

⁵⁴ Sir William Constable (dates unknown). This is most likely the Sir William Constable who was involved in the Earl of Essex's plot of 1601. Mary Anne Everett Green (ed.), 'Queen Elizabeth-Volume 278: February 1601', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Elizabeth, 1598-1601*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1869, pp. 572-3. British History Online, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/edw-eliz/1598-1601/pp542-602>> [accessed 20 February 2021].

and which worsened in winter, to return to England even as our forces were engaged in the Siege of Rouen. When I arrived in London, the great Hatton, who was the foremost patron of my elder brother, had died. After my return, I struggled for a long time with my illness. Against all hope, I was ultimately snatched from the jaws of that disease. However, as I was not yet restored to full health, I went to the country to make a more complete recovery.

[1592] When I turned twenty-seven, a great hope and opportunity for advancing the state of my country was stolen from me;⁵⁵ around this time, moreover, I suffered from tertian fever in the month of March, though it was a rather mild case, and afterwards, in June and July, from difficulty in passing urine.

[1592] Having recovered from this ailment, I returned to London. After Sir John Puckering had been chosen as Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England,⁵⁶ I was appointed as his secretary, having passed into this role out of the scribal ranks by my brother. However, when after a year or two we derived little benefit from this position – on account of the sheer number of secretaries which that gentleman had appointed – my brother convinced me to direct my path towards greater things. I thus turned all my attention to mastering the study of Law. As a result, in the month of December before I turned twenty-eight, and after I had followed a different walk of life for five years, I returned to the Temple and devoted myself wholly to the study of the Law.

Folio 19r

Lest they should burden me or increase my workload when I was thereafter devoting myself to the study of the Law, I finished, re-read, and published twelve books narrating the various ups-and-downs and diverse events which had occurred during King Louis's reign, which I had translated from French into English in my spare time,⁵⁷ dedicating them to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England, who I was hoping would become my beneficent supporter in law-cases, and whom I had already established as my patron in public suits. I had previously published other brief works when I was following different walks of life: a comparison of England with Spain, which I had also translated from French and dedicated to Sir William Hatton, the adopted son of that great Hatton;⁵⁸ a poem in Latin hexameters entitled 'Urania, or the Celestial Muse', likewise derived from the French poems by the nobleman Salluste Du Bartas,⁵⁹ which I had dedicated to Henry Unton, a most distinguished knight and one of my most devoted patrons.

[1595] When I was thirty I obtained my Licentiate in Law.⁶⁰ I was preparing myself for the public courts and handling cases, but that Keeper of the Great Seal in whom I had placed my hopes died not long afterwards. In February of that year, a long-lasting disease invaded my intestines which stopped just short of making me despair of survival.

[1599] When I had just turned thirty-four, a great opportunity for governance in my country was offered to me, but was by chance snatched away in March and April of that same year and passed on to my younger brother.⁶¹ Moreover, around that time I was thrown in jail owing

⁵⁵ It is unclear what honour this could be.

⁵⁶ Sir John Puckering (1543 or 1544-1596) was named Lord Keeper in 1592.

⁵⁷ Louis Leroy, *Of the Interchangeable Course, or Variety of Things in the Whole World* (London, 1594).

⁵⁸ *A Comparison of the English and Spanish Nation* (London, 1589).

⁵⁹ Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas, *L'Uranie ou muse celeste* (London, 1589).

⁶⁰ Ashley was called to the Bar on 24 October 1595.

⁶¹ Ashley has a tendency to euphemistically describe adverse matters so that the situation reflects more favourably upon him, and we have tried to retain this in the translation. In this paragraph, his loss of a position to his brother is thus described passively (it was 'offered' then 'snatched away'), and his brother's payment of his debt is periphrastically expressed as 'he intervened while acting as bondsman'. It is not clear to which position Ashley is referring. It is not that of Serjeant at Law, which Francis was named in 1617.

to the mounting debts I had incurred in this matter. I was freed after four days when my younger brother, acting as bondsman, intervened.

When I was thirty-five or thirty-six, on St Bartholomew's Day (with its attached *novena*), I was arrested once more for unpaid debts and detained in the custody of the sheriff for five whole weeks, until the money was finally paid by my elder brother.

My brother more than once, as if giving me orders, told me to prepare to escape through the window, which I would have done, had I not been held back by the kindness of my Warden, on account of which I would not commit anything unworthy of myself or of him. [?] As evils follow upon evils, a servant ransacked my cabinets and boxes of the little money which remained to me, took it, and ran off.

[1603] In March of my thirty-eighth year, I came upon two French fraudsters who said that they were surgeons from Montbéliard. They also marketed themselves as being extraordinarily skilled in repairing intestines and collapsed abdominal walls by means of what people call the *punctum aureum*.⁶² Being rather gullible, I entrusted myself to them and they thus cut my skin along with the flesh so that they tore open my scrotum. Eventually, after several weeks, I escaped from their grasp. I seem to have paid a suitably harsh penalty for my credulity, and indeed evaded no little danger.

[1607] When I was forty-two, amidst the frosts of January I carelessly tripped over the edge of a step or a beam. Falling rather hard, I broke the skin above my shin bone, which might be considered quite a minor wound, were it not for the glacial temperature of that winter, as a result of which the Thames itself and everything else were frozen.⁶³ Hence, a little more time passed before my skin could heal.

Furthermore, the following month an unknown but malignant humour invaded both of my thighs. I was forced, on account of the swelling and indisposition, to lie lame in bed for a few days, until I was healed with a light purgative and the application of a calcium [carbonate?] plaster, which caused me to bring up and expel a congested and poisonous substance.

Folio 19v

[1610] On my birthday, the second of July, when I had just turned forty-five, around two or three o'clock in the afternoon some women brought me the bad news that my elder sister had been arrested by deputized officers. She had been forcefully removed from her own home and was being held in custody.⁶⁴ I busied myself, troubled as I was by the strangeness of the matter, in freeing her, but I was of no use; on the contrary, I was myself tortured by different troubles and anxieties while, growing angrier by the day, I arranged some remedy for the issue. I was even bitterly and harshly censured by the Lord Mayor, a most severe man, when I outlined, in rather free language, the injustice of what had been done.

⁶² The *punctum aureum* or 'golden point' was an operation used to repair ruptures, which was both 'dangerous and ineffective' and involved passing a gold wire through the rupture of the hernia sac. George Arnaud de Ronsil, *A Dissertation on Hernias, or Ruptures. In two parts, ... Translated from the Original Manuscript, etc.* (London, 1748), p. ix.

⁶³ 1608 was the first instance of the use of the term 'frost fair', and this event was celebrated in a pamphlet entitled *The Great Frost* (London, 1608).

⁶⁴ Jane Ashley (c. 1557-1611). Jane was first married to Francis Langley (1548-1602) and lived in the manor of Paris Garden at Bankside, where Langley had built the Swan Theatre. He died intestate with many debts, leaving Jane to deal with claims on the estate; at one point she was sued by her brother Anthony. She later married George Delahaye (d.1608), but after his death returned to Paris Garden, where she is recorded as living in 1610. William Ingram, *A London Life in the Brazen Age: Francis Langley 1548-1602* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 232.

In that same year,⁶⁵ when June was almost over – that is, the year of our Lord 1611 – and on the day sacred to St Peter,⁶⁶ that very sister of mine gave up her soul to God and nature while still in prison, around one o'clock in the afternoon. She died either from the grief and distress stemming from the unexpected legal proceedings against her (even though the case was favourable to her) or from a long-standing cough and a consumptive illness, which destroyed her with insomnia, shortness of breath, and even a red rash which had spread all over her skin.

I do not think I should pass over, but rather commit to written memory, the fact that I have often experienced prophetic dreams in my life. When I was twenty-nine, or a little older, the image of a woman presented itself to me in my dreams. She was a serving-woman, or rather some infernal Fury, who swept my house with a broom, threatened me with horrible evils and then disappeared. All my limbs trembled at such a hair-raising sight and I woke up immediately, then fervently prayed to God that he might either turn away or transform for the better, through His abundant mercy, the coming evils and tragic outcomes which had been foretold by that wicked spirit.

[1608] When I was forty-three, if I remember correctly, I was attacked at night by strong carnal impulses. Rising from my bed, I fell upon my knees and passionately called upon God to help me by relieving the great evils which tormented me, wretched as I was. I then lay back down in bed and slept peacefully until dawn the following day. Around this time, a certain angel came to me in my dreams, with the appearance of a most beautiful woman, and ordered me to be of good spirits. She revived me in the most wondrous way and lifted me up into a more positive state of hopefulness and trust in God. She moreover consoled me for my human afflictions, and I was completely filled with joy, looking upon her as happily as if I were looking at my guardian angel. I woke up rejoicing and triumphant, and from then on have turned and devoted myself [owing to this divine goddess] wholly to God.⁶⁷

I once dreamt that one of my upper molars fell out without pain, but I would not dare to say whether that symbolized the loss of my father or of my other parent: Mother died first, and Father survived her for some years, but I do not now remember at what point in my life that dream was revealed to me.

I do remember that at one point I dreamed that all of my teeth fell out of my jaws and cheeks in a single night. There are, however, some people who claim that in our dreams teeth symbolize our brothers and relatives.

Once and again, dreams that foretold the future came to me at the outset of my undertakings. For once, when I was wrangling with the question of joining myself in marriage to a certain wealthy maiden, whom I had not yet laid eyes on, the sight of that maiden along with her mother – though I had never looked upon them while awake – presented itself to me within a dream, and when I met them the following day, I easily recognized that they looked exactly the same as those figures which I had previously seen in my dream.

[1603] In addition, when I was suffering from a certain internal disease, I had rather incautiously, not to mention too gullibly, believed certain itinerant tricksters who marketed themselves as surgeons from Montbéliard, who were extraordinarily skilled at repairing intestines and collapsed abdominal walls by means of what people call the *punctum aureum*. I was warned through my dreams that they were crafty impostors, who, wretched as they were,

⁶⁵ Given the timeline, Ashley must mean that it was in 1611 when he was censured by the Lord Mayor. As his sister died in June 1611, this would have been Sir William Craven (1548-1618).

⁶⁶ In the Church of England calendar this is 29 June, the Holy Day of Peter and Paul, Apostles; Peter can also be celebrated alone on that day.

⁶⁷ The bracketed text corresponds to *dia* in the manuscript (19v), which is correctly transcribed, but which would need to be stretched greatly in meaning to fit into the sentence at all; this might be a scribal error from an attempt to spell 'dedico', which follows it.

tortured the bodies and scrotums of the sick. I did not, however, accord sufficient belief to this dream owing to my excessive desire for healing, as a result of which I experienced great torture and injury.

On 9 May, the year of our Lord 1614, when I was forty-eight, and when the moon was rising in Gemini after sunrise, a dream befell me. I seemed to see the image of some kind of bird, extremely large and beautiful, which had fallen from the heavens onto the ground. It walked about carrying its head high; its neck was cloaked in golden feathers, and the rest of its body in silver and green ones, like the kind that cover peacocks or doves. I was seized by the notion to catch that bird. [?] there is either [?] and [?] from my good attempts who comes from the present crowd and the beast [...].⁶⁸

Folio 20r

Not long after, in that same year, either on 9 June – a Thursday during the eve of which the moon had been rising within the confines of Scorpio – or at dawn the following day, a vision came to me in my dreams that the Archbishop of Canterbury was conferring the dignity of bishop upon me. He placed his hands on me and said the following words: ‘I charge you to have the care of souls.’

On 30 of November that same year, which is St Andrew’s Day, when the moon was in Aries, towards the end of the night I seemed to hear in a dream that the Duke of Lennox, along with my younger brother Francis, had died.

[1614] Nor should I omit that in that same month I was passed over by the Rectors of the Middle Temple in their election for reader the following year, even though there were few candidates that year, on account of my personal poverty, notwithstanding the fact that I was extremely experienced in all of the requisite duties.⁶⁹ A few days later, I was again summoned to the court of Westminster on account of my debts and was not released.

In the same year, when I was forty-eight, on 14 March A.D. 1614 at around 4 p.m., my barber gave me the news that the only son of my younger brother Francis had died; at the time that this was told to me, the moon was rising in Aquarius.

[1616] [Margin: 14 July with the moon in Sagittarius] When I was fifty-one I saw in my dreams a man I knew standing in a town square in London holding a lamp and searching in various purses for silver he had lost, and finding it; and then from each pouch he generously gave a portion of it to me and my servant.

[1617] [Michaelmas in margin] Similarly, when I was fifty-two, even though I was not expecting it, my younger brother announced to me that I had been designated and elected by the Rectors of the Temple as the Treasurer of that organization. Although this was an office of great honour, it offered only a mediocre stipend. In addition, I certainly wished to avoid the impression that such great men had been inclined towards me only through bribery. Hence, I did not shy away from admitting that, despite their entreaties, I had ultimately decided to spare the reputation of such men, lest by chance they should incur accusations of temerity for having destroyed that oldest of offices on account of the suspicion and offence which would occur if a case were brought against me. They therefore either redeemed or extorted that

⁶⁸ The bottom of the folio is trimmed, and it is likely that Ashley has added this text at a later date, as it extends into the left-hand margin and the lines are more densely written than in the preceding paragraph.

⁶⁹ Ashley uses the term ‘Rectors’ but no such title exists at the Inn, and he is probably referring to ‘Reader’. The senior members of the Inn were (and still are) called Benchers, but one had to become a Reader first. Readers were expected to fund a feast for the Benchers and Barristers at the Inn, and it may be that Ashley refused to be Reader, rather than being passed over for the position. Wilfrid R. Prest, *The Inns of Court Under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts 1590-1640* (London, 1972), pp. 60-1. He was fined on 25 October 1616 for not reading. Martin, *Minutes of Parliament*, vol. ii, p. 610.

privilege from me – though in a not unwelcome manner – with twenty gold coins.⁷⁰

The Year of Christ 1618 | Sixteenth year of King James's reign. At the beginning of July, when I was fifty-three, motivated on the one hand by a desire to travel and on the other by the wish of [Sir] Robert Shirley – a noble English knight who had served as Legate to the King of Persia – to live at the court of the Spanish King, I crossed the sea from England to Calais and stayed in Paris for a few days, after which I went to Orléans, visiting the towns and the cities on both banks of the Loire.⁷¹ Passing through Dreux, La Rochelle, Bordeaux, and Bayonne, along with other cities, I journeyed through Spain. Setting out from Valladolid, I visited Madrid along with that astounding edifice of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, and also visited Segovia as well as other places which were worth seeing. I returned to London in mid-October.

The Year of Christ 1622 | Twentieth year of King James's reign. When I was fifty-six, after sunrise on 17 July, a day on which the moon was in Aquarius, I saw in a dream a sort of thin figure of a man or a woman who trampled under his or her feet, as if having triumphed over it, a shining gold serpent or a dragon upon which the word Alchymi[a] ('Alchemy') had been inscribed in extremely beautiful letters.

[The *Vita* ends here.]

Additional biographical information

In this section we use a variety of sources to provide further biographical information about Ashley, such as his book marginalia, the paratexts in his translations,⁷² the archival records at Middle Temple, the few letters that mention Ashley or were written by him, amongst other miscellaneous sources. This additional material is presented chronologically and is followed by a transcript of his will.

In May 1594 as part of his admission to the Middle Temple, Ashley was bound to Thomas Straungwayes of Dorset.⁷³ In 1594 he moved to the chamber of Walter Newburgh and Edmund Morgan in place of the latter, paying a fine of 40s.

At some point prior to 1596, he wrote *Of Honour*, of which three manuscript copies survive. The first copy was dedicated to Sir John Puckering and the second to Sir Thomas Egerton, who succeeded Puckering as Lord Keeper in 1596.⁷⁴ *Of Honour* was not an original work, being a translation of Sebastián Fox Morcillo's *De honore* (Basel, 1556). Ashley owned a copy of this book which retains evidence of his marginalia and underlining. In 1597 he was elected MP for Dorchester, but it is not clear whether he 'was able to secure his own election

⁷⁰ There is no record of this payment or honorific in the Inn's archival records. It is possible that Ashley is referring to the position of Sub, or Under Treasurer. In 1619 there was a change from William Baldwin as Under Treasurer to John Bayliff. Being a Bencher was the prerequisite for becoming Treasurer, and Ashley had already forfeited this right. Interestingly, f. 129 of the relevant *Minutes of Parliament* volume was 'torne out by the consent of all the Masters of the Bench'. Martin, *Minutes of Parliament*, vol. ii, p. 624.

⁷¹ No evidence of Sir Robert Shirley's (1581-1628) instructions to Ashley have been traced.

⁷² For a general discussion of paratexts, see Sussana de Schepper, "'For the Common Good and for the National Interest?': Paratexts in English Translations of Navigational Works", in S. K. Barker and Brenda M. Hosington (eds.), *Renaissance Cultural Crossroads: Translation, Print and Culture in Britain* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 185-208.

⁷³ Thomas Strangways (dates unknown).

⁷⁴ Trinity College Cambridge, R.14.20 and Huntington Library, MS. Ellesmere 1117 respectively. A third, undated copy was owned by Elias Ashmole (1617–692), Bodleian Library Ashmole MS. 1148.

for Dorchester or whether this was due to the influence of the 3rd Marquess of Winchester'.⁷⁵ Ashley was MP with Richard Wright (c. 1568-1639), who in 1592 was employed as a clerk for the Commission overseeing the dispersal of prizes from the carrack the *Madre de Dios* (for more on this carrack see below).⁷⁶ In 1598 Edward Boys was admitted to Ashley's chamber in 1598 when Walter Newburgh died.

In 1602 Ashley drafted the defendant pleading in a Chancery suit between his sister Jane (Langley) and William Gresham and Thomas Gresham.⁷⁷ At some point prior to the death of Elizabeth I (1603) Robert was personally involved in a suit against Samuel Tynson and Thomas Stapleton at the Court of Requests involving the hire of a defective hackney.⁷⁸ In 1604 he was bound to John Pyncombe of Devon, and in 1607 to Richard Smyth of St Sepulchre's Parish London and Henry Salesbury of Lleweny Denbigh. In 1607 Ashley wrote to Robert Cecil, the Earl of Salisbury, requesting that he be considered successor to his brother, Sir Anthony, as Clerk of the Privy Council upon Anthony's retirement: 'my brother [...] is now desirous to have me his successor being willing to retire himselfe from his attendance'.⁷⁹ He was unsuccessful, and his brother continued as Clerk until 1610. Cecil's rejection of Robert may have stemmed from the animosity caused by the plundering of a diamond after the capture of the *Madre de Dios* in 1592. Anthony conspired with his brother-in-law, Francis Langley, to acquire and sell the diamond, leading Cecil to pursue both men for its return and transfer to the queen.⁸⁰

At an unknown date in the early seventeenth century, Ashley worked on the only known miscellany in his hand, which is now held at the Newberry Library, Chicago (Newberry MS. 5017). This miscellany consists of excerpts on charms, medical recipes, ritual magic, and miscellaneous contents such as longitude and latitude tables. Analysis of the manuscript has shown how it demonstrates Ashley's access to a wide range of manuscript and printed texts from outside his own collection.⁸¹

In 1617 Ashley travelled to the Netherlands, but omitted any details of this voyage from the *Vita*. On 14 August 1617 Sir Ralph Winwood wrote to Sir Dudley Carleton: 'My last [letters] (if I forget not) were by Mr. Robert Ashley of the Inner Temple [sic], some time fellow of Magdalen college in Oxford, of whom I pray you to take notice.'⁸² In a letter dated 1 September 1617 Sir Dudley wrote: 'upon occasion of the return of Mr. Robert Ashley, ... [he

⁷⁵ 'Ashley, Robert (1565-1641), of Damerham, Wilts', in *History of Parliament Online*, <<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/ashley-robert-1565-1641>> [accessed 20 March 2021].

⁷⁶ 'Wright, Richard (c.1568-1639), of Sherborne, Dorset', in *History of Parliament Online*, <<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/wright-richard-1568-1639>> [accessed 21 February 2021] and Browne Willis, *Notitia Parliamentaria* (London, 1750), p. 139.

⁷⁷ National Archives, C 2/Eliz/G2/28.

⁷⁸ National Archives, REQ 2/90/28.

⁷⁹ Cecil Papers 123/149.

⁸⁰ The story of this diamond and its connection to Langley and Anthony Ashley is a complicated one, best summarized by William Ingram, 'The Closing of the Theaters in 1597: A Dissenting View', *Modern Philology*, lxix:2 (1971), pp. 105–15. It is interesting to note that Sir Horatio Pallavicino was commissioned in 1592 to handle £24,000 worth of goods from the same carrack. Ian W. Archer, 'Palavicino, Sir Horatio (c. 1540–600), merchant and diplomat', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21153>> [accessed 21 February 2021].

⁸¹ Renae Satterley, 'Robert Ashley and the Authorship of Newberry MS. 5017, *The Book of Magical Charms*', *Manuscript Studies* (forthcoming autumn, 2021).

⁸² *The Letters from and to Sir Dudley Carleton, Knt. During his Embassy in Holland, from January 1615/16, to December 1620*, 2nd edn (London, 1775), p. 160.

related], how much here in the Hague the number of those, which make profession of the old religion in the new church, exceeds that likewise of the new religion in the old church; as likewise the compliment, with which his excellency entertained us, as we both met yesterday (for so our ways lie) coming from morning service, that though we had contrary ways to church, yet that it was *la mesme voye de salut*'.⁸³ In his copy of Thomas Brugmann's *Quadratura circuli nova* ([s.l., s.n.], 1608), Ashley noted that in August 1617 he saw Ludolph van Ceulen's (1539–1610) memorial stone and the algorithms inscribed on it in St Peter's church, Leiden. He also recorded a reference to van Ceulen's gravestone in his copy of Justus Lipsius's *Mellificium duplex ex media philosophia* (Leiden, 1591).

On 15 October 1619 he was fined 'five marks' for being one of the principal instigators for commanding 'flesh to be dressed' and served in Hall on 20 September, St Matthew's eve, despite it being a fasting day.⁸⁴ In December 1622/January 1623 Ashley visited the Bodleian Library.⁸⁵ In April 1623 he signed the *album amicorum* of Lucas Holstenius,⁸⁶ and in August, that of Metrophanes Critopoulos,⁸⁷ who later became Patriarch of Alexandria.⁸⁸ In 1624 Ashley lent Sir Robert Sherley his copy of Leandro Alberti's *Descrittione di tutta l'Italia, et isole pertinenti ad essa*.⁸⁹ In 1626 he contributed a Latin poem for the memorial volume honouring Sir Francis Bacon, *Memoriae honoratissimi domini Francisci, Baronis de Verulamio, vice-comitis Sancti Albani sacrum*. On 23 June he was granted a full chamber to himself, for life, *gratis*.⁹⁰ In 1627 he published his translation of *Almansor*, writing in the advertisement to the reader that he spent 'some hours of some few weeks' in the Bodleian Library.⁹¹ Although the work was dedicated to Charles I, in the preface Ashley wrote that the original dedicatee was James I. In August 1628 he consulted the physician-astrologer Robert Napier, to whom he gave one of his publications.⁹² In 1633 he published his translation of Cristoforo Borri's *Cochin-China*, dedicated to Sir Maurice Abbot, governor of the East India Company. In 1634 he took on a second chamber to house his growing collection of books. Finally in 1637 he published his translation of Virgilio Malvezzi's *Il Davide perseguitato, David persecuted*. Ashley was buried in Temple Church on Monday 4 October 1641.⁹³

⁸³ *Letters from and to Sir Dudley Carleton, Knt*, pp. 172-4.

⁸⁴ Martin, *Minutes of Parliament*, vol. ii, p. 640.

⁸⁵ Bodleian Library, *Liber admissorum*, e.532, f. 12v.

⁸⁶ F. J. Blom, 'Lucas Holstenius (1596-1661) and England', *Studies in Seventeenth-Century English Literature, History and Bibliography* (Amsterdam, 1984), p. 28.

⁸⁷ Kritópoulos, Mētrophánēs (1589-1639).

⁸⁸ F. H. Marshall, 'An Eastern Patriarch's Education in England', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, xlvii (1926), p. 197.

⁸⁹ This loan is recorded in Ashley's copy of *Browne 1624: a New Almanacke and Prognostication* (London, 1624).

⁹⁰ Martin, *Minutes of Parliament*, vol. ii, p. 707.

⁹¹ Miguel de Luna, *Almansor* (London, 1627). Ashley's translation is a partial one of the Bodleian's copy of *Verdadera historia del rey Don Rodrigo* (Çaragoça, 1603). He presented a copy of this work to John Bainbridge (1582-1643), Bodleian Library, Savile Z9 (2); the Bodleian Library, 4 H 4 (10) Art.; and Henry Briggs (1561-1630), Magdalen College, Oxford Magd.ASHLEY-R (ALM).

⁹² Lauren Kassell, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, John Young, Joanne Edge, Janet Yvonne Martin-Portugues, and Natalie Kaoukji (eds.), 'CASE66846' The Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634: a digital edition, <<https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/cases/CASE66846>> [accessed 22 April 2019]. The publication was not specified in Napier's notes.

⁹³ Henry George Woods, *Register of Burials at the Temple Church, 1628-1853* (London, 1905), pp. 4-5.

Transcription of Robert Ashley's Will, 27 September 1641⁹⁴

In the name of God Amen. I Robert Ashley of the Middle Temple do make my last will and testament in manner hereafter enseweing being of perfect memory but infirme of body, First I bequeath my soule & spiritt into the hands of my Creator that gave it my only Redeemer & Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ who layd downe his life for me and my Body I bequeath to the Earth to bee buried att the discretion of my Executors Haveing had some opportunity of a Retyred life in this Society for many yeares together and of some short Excursions to acquaint my selfe with our neighboring Nations I have addicted my selfe to the Generall Study of the great Booke of the World wherein All the glorious works of God are comprehended: for the Attayneing of some knowledge whereof I have not spared my Labour or Expençe in procuring the Principall Writings in their severall languages espetially such as had oportunitie to be Acquainted with the most Remote and Unknowne parts These with all the Residue of my Library being not nowe any longer desirable unto me yet may happily bee usefull to some good Spiritts after me and many of them not easily to bee mett withall elsewhere I doe therefore Leave and bequeath to this Noble Society of the Middle Temple in which I have spent so many yeares of my life how unworthy soever yett a Member thereof. My desire is that the Bookes may be preserved in such order as they are left in both Chambers for the essentiall use of the Society. Not excluding any student whether of our owne or of any forraigne nation that may bee curious to see somewhat which hee can not soe readiely fynd elsewhere. For the better Accomplishment whereof I have by this my last Will and Testament given the sume of Three Hundred pounds sterling to the Society to bee delivered by my executors that by the yearely Revenewe thereof some able student being chosen by the Bench to be the Governour or Keeper of the sayd Library may bee the better Mayneteyned: for whose farther commodity and use I leave all such Bedsteads, bedding, furniture of chambers studdies, shelves, presses, tables and desks and other implements as shalbe found in any of my chambers or clossetts Provided that (as is usuall in other Libraries) noe booke bee lent out of the Library without a sufficient Pledge, yet permitting every man to peruse att his leasure what hee thinks good att all convenient tymes to bee limited att the discretion of the Governour or Library Keeper for the tyme being for the better effecting whereof I have ordayned and intreated my two next Neighbours my good freinds Mr William Cox and Mr Burton the Clarke of the Temple Church to bee my Executors of this my last will and in regard of their paynes and care therein doo bequeath unto them Tenn pounds a piece in hope they wilbe carefull to see my Library preserved and all my other legacies following duely performed. Moreover knoweing the Right Worshipful Mr Ball the Queenes Attorney and Mr Lane the Princes Attorney to be learned men and favorers of Learning I doe intreat and Request them both as my very Undeserved Antient Freinds to Vouchsafe to bee Supervisors of this my last will and due Execution thereof. Espetially desireing their particular care for the conservation and disposition of the said library for the publicke benefitt unto which it is intended that it bee not otherwise distracted, but from tyme to tyme by some fitt person to bee thereunto Chosen by the Bench it may be ordered to the best uses aforesaid. To my nephewe John Langley being of the Ministry I bequeath one hundred pounds towards the increase of his Library. To the second sonne of my cosin Yeardeley being a hopefull Scholler I give an other hundred pounds towards his Maytenance and placeing in the University. To my sister Katherine if shee bee liveing I leave the sume of twenty pounds if shee dye before me the money to bee devided amongst the next of Kinn. To my oldest sisters doughters I also give the sume of an hundred pounds to be equally divided amongst them. To Nathaniell Peacocke twenty pounds. To my Loveing Kinsman Captane Henry Ashley if hee bee liveing I bequeath my sword and dagger and belt and twenty pounds in money. To Samuel Josselyn the

⁹⁴ The will is not accompanied by an inventory.

Bookbynder I give five pounds in money desireing him henceforward to pay his accustomed rent for his shop to the Library Keeper appointed by the Bench. All my Apparell and linen such as it is I desire the second sonne of my cosin Yeardeley may make choyce of what hee thinks good, the rest to bee distributed some to the poore man William lodgeing att my stayres foote or to other that Want: But all my Linen which my Nephewe Yeardeley may spare I leave to my poore Laundresse besides twenty shillings in money to bee payd her by my Executors att my death. Robert Ashley. Memorand. That the within named Robert Ashley this twenty seaventh of September one thousand six hundred fortie one did publish and subscribe these presents to bee his Last will and Testament in the presence of William Cox; John Foulis.

Conclusion

Wilfrid Prest has described common lawyers as 'cultural heroes of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Their occupation, office trade, profession, or craft offered unequalled opportunities for rising in the world ... [and they] represented themselves ... as servants of the commonweal, ... and upholders of order in a world of turmoil and transition'.⁹⁵ Despite his inability to achieve career success equal to that of his brothers, Robert Ashley's library and writings, including his *Vita*, form part of this commonweal endeavour. His life story is also an important representative of the rise in life-writing accounts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that were 'part of a march towards modernity' and which reflected an increased interest in the individual self.⁹⁶

Ashley's misfortunes, and they were many, show us the precariousness of life in early modern London, and the many ways that one came close to death. Ashley was afflicted by smallpox twice, fell victim to two French quacks who carried out a gruesome procedure on him (giving insight into the unlicensed medical trade in London), fell, tripped, and suffered a thorn in the eye. But despite the rudimentary medicine available at the time, he lived to the relatively late age of seventy-six. We must assume that he negotiated the medical world with the assistance of his books, gleaning valuable information from the over 400 titles he collected on natural philosophy, medicine, and chemistry. His interest in astrology and dream divination is expressed at numerous points in the *Vita*, and in addition to the eight books on dreams and prophecies in his collection, his library contained over ninety works on astrology. And although he does not discuss his library or book collecting habits in this work, he does provide some insight into his childhood and early adult reading practices.

Ashley's life-story provides the modern reader with valuable insight into the life of an early modern Londoner who managed to acquire one of the largest and most important private libraries of the time. Ashley lived through the Spanish Armada, the Gunpowder Plot, at least one frost fair on the river Thames, five plagues,⁹⁷ the Thirty Years War, and the reigns of Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I, passing away just before the start of the Civil War. He was potentially acquainted with Shakespeare, given that the first recorded performance of *Twelfth Night* took place in Middle Temple Hall. His brother-in-law Francis Langley also owned the Swan Theatre and was involved in a writ between Shakespeare and William Gardiner.⁹⁸ In

⁹⁵ Wilfrid Prest, 'Legal Autobiography in Early Modern England', in Ronald Bedford, Lloyd Davis, and Philippa Kelly (eds.), *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices* (Ann Arbor, 2006), p. 291.

⁹⁶ Alan Stewart, *The Oxford History of Life Writing*, vol.ii, *Early Modern* (Oxford, 2018), p. 5.

⁹⁷ During four of these plagues (1603/1604; 1625/1626; 1630/1631; 1636/1637) the Inn ordered the premises closed, and those living and working there were forced to leave. Middle Temple Archive, *Minutes of Parliament*, MT/1/MPA/3-6.

⁹⁸ W. W. Greg, 'Reviews', *The Modern Language Review*, xxvii: 2 (1932), pp. 218–21.

addition to the early modern period generally being a turbulent one, his *Vita* reveals how unstable one's life could become owing to a lack of patronage: all of Ashley's patrons died in quick succession, and he relied on his brothers' assistance, in particular the eldest, well into his thirties.

Ashley's *Vita* has been cited, sometimes briefly and sometimes more fully, in a variety of publications. This piecemeal presentation of his life story has undermined its potential and led to some misunderstandings about this important man's life, in particular the authorship of his only 'original' work, *Of Honour*; and a comprehensive appreciation of his library collection. We do not know Ashley's intentions for writing his life story, but with this publication we have situated it within the context of early modern life writing and have provided greater detail and a better context about his life. Scattered remnants of Ashley's *Vita* have appeared in publication since 1641, and it is likely that more details will eventually come to life, but three hundred and eighty years after his death we are finally able to present a more fulsome version of his life story.



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