

PREFACE

Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education; in the elder a part of experience ... It is a strange thing that in sea-voyages, where there is nothing to be seen but sky and sea, men should make diaries, but in land travel, wherein so much is to be observed, for the most part they omit it, as if chance were fitter to be registered than observation. Let diaries, therefore, be brought in use.⁽¹⁾

Francis Bacon
The Essays, or Counsels, Civil and Moral. 1625

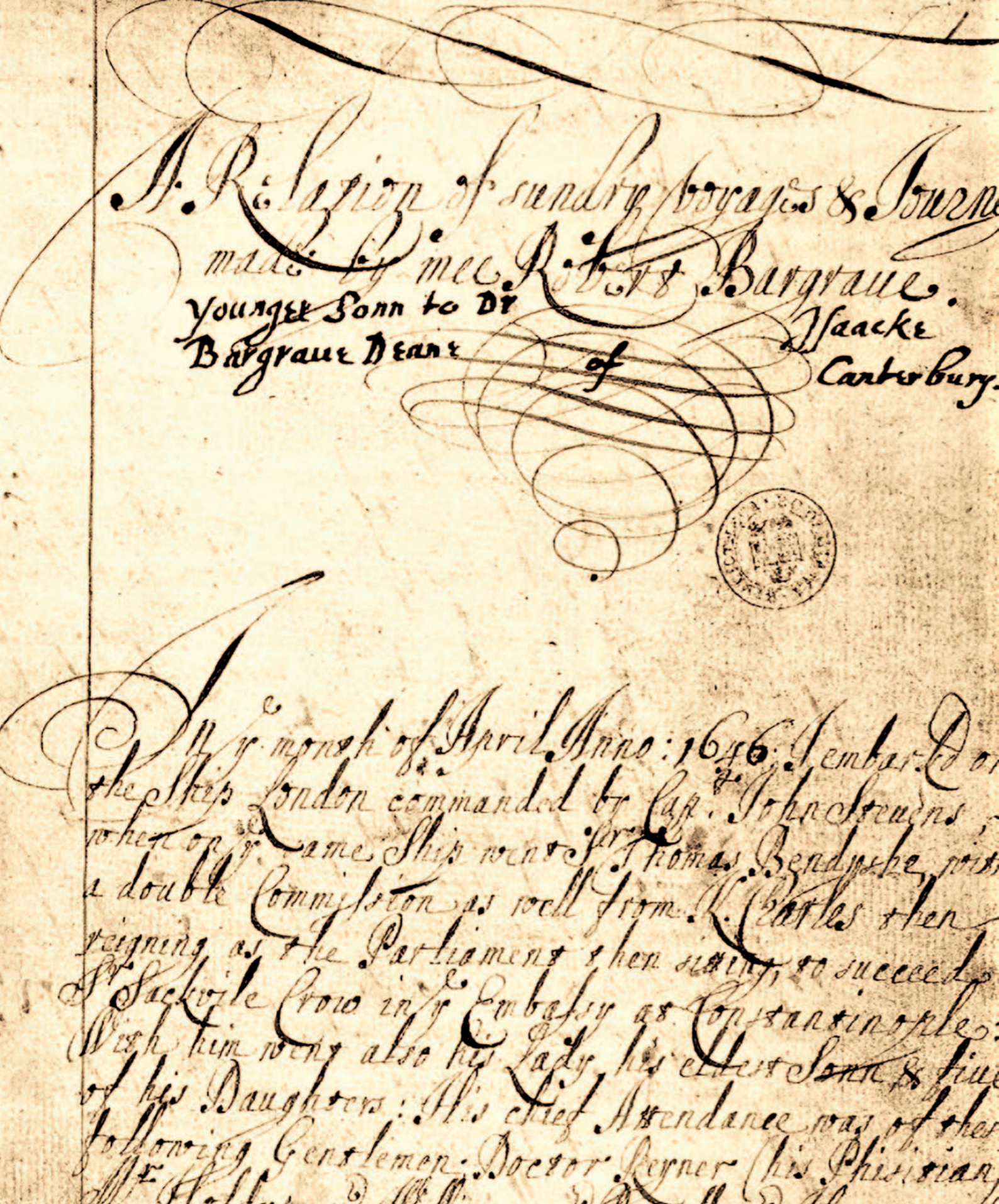
With these words Francis Bacon, the great English philosopher who served at the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts, would exhort those about to set off on a foreign journey to note down their impressions and experiences. Although travel diaries had already been in use for some time, they would become an established practice in the decades that followed. This guide is the result of the painstaking translation and compilation of these very chronicles into one single, comprehensive, and fascinating narrative, often told in the first person, like many mosaic tiles that form what ultimately appears as a complete picture.

Our travellers visited Italy, the *Bel Paese*,⁽²⁾ starting from the middle of the sixteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth, almost two and a half centuries before the most renowned among diarists, J. W. Goethe. Hence, they are to be considered tourists *ante litteram*, where the term

‘tourist’ indicates someone who would undertake the *Grand Tour*, namely a tour of Europe that had the purpose of completing a gentleman’s cultural education, and would typically culminate in the Tour of Italy. This is why we have named them the *Early Tourists*.⁽³⁾

They came from the most disparate social backgrounds of the time. Some were merchants, others diplomats, politicians, aristocrats, patrons and art collectors, architects, clergymen, and others still writers, poets, musicians, philosophers, explorers and scientists, mostly English, but also Welsh, Scottish, German, Austrian, Swiss, French, Flemish and Dutch.

The general structure and text of this guide are based on the prototype of the first guide to Italy, *Itinerarium nobiliorum Italiae regionum, urbium, oppidorum, et locorum*, published in Vicenza, for the Jubilee or Holy Year of 1600, by Franz Schott – whose name had been Italianised as Francesco



Scotto – a Flemish jurist, and Girolamo Giovannini da Capugnano, a Dominican friar from the Convent of Santa Corona. The first edition of the guide in Latin was met with enormous success, which led to the publication of an Italian version in 1610, that was followed by numerous French and English editions, up until the end of the eighteenth century.⁽⁴⁾

Some of the *Early Tourists* – like Thomas Coryat, for example – used Schott’s guide in the course of their travels, but since it mainly focussed on places and information of a religious nature, having been aimed at pilgrims, many decided to include in their own chronicles detailed descriptions not just of the sights and works of art they admired, but also of strange customs, traditions, objects, food, and more mundane aspects of Italian life. Among these, the most curious are the fork and grated cheese, wines, various types of seafood, fruits and vegetables, cultivations and the weather, the signs and fares of lodgings, the umbrella and the game of balloon, including the Venetian fashion of the so-called *chopines*, platform shoes as high as twenty inches. Many were also the proverbs and epithets they cited. Fynes Moryson first reports that “touching the cities of Italy, it is proverbially said among them: Rome the holy, Padua the learned, Venice the rich, Florence the beautiful, Milan the great, Bologna the fat, Ravenna the ancient, Naples the gentle, Genoa the proud” and Shakespeare – even though he never had the opportunity to see it in person: “*Venetia, Venetia, chi non ti vede non ti pretia.*” Half a century later John Raymond would add: “Verona the ancient, Brescia the armed.”⁽⁵⁾

William Shakespeare lived and produced the whole of his works around the turn of the sixteenth century, at the peak of the *Early Tourists’*

travels, and the *First Folio*, the first official collection of his plays, was published posthumously in 1623. Except for the historical plays relating to the English kings – which necessarily take place in England – most of his remaining works are set in Italy. We have therefore integrated the guide with some quotes from England’s greatest playwright’s so-called ‘Italian Plays’, because they match surprisingly well the *Early Tourists’* actual descriptions of Italy, contrary to what was believed in the past, namely that they must have been, for the most part, a figment of his imagination, since he had never set foot outside of his country.⁽⁶⁾

Shakespeare, however, was not the only English playwright to choose Italy as his favourite foreign setting. Ben Jonson’s most famous comedy, *Volpone, or the Fox* – written and performed in 1606 – takes place in a Venice of that period, and one of the characters is even a parody of the English Ambassador at that time, Sir Henry Wotton.⁽⁷⁾

England was then witnessing an unmatched flourishing of theatrical and literary production that gave rise to what can be called an unprecedented English Renaissance. Indeed, in addition to Shakespeare and Jonson, other playwrights and poets such as Christopher Marlowe, John Webster, Philip Massinger, John Donne (his are the famous lines “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”) rose to prominence, who were later followed by the first great post-Shakespearean author, John Milton.⁽⁸⁾

A fundamental contribution to the promotion of the Italian language in England came from John Florio, an Anglo-Italian linguist, who, after *Firste Frutes* (1578) and *Second Frutes* (1591), pub-

lished the very first Italian-English dictionary, *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598), its title revealing the Elizabethan court’s high esteem and appreciation for the Italian language.⁽⁹⁾ His dictionary was also consulted to translate some of the more obscure words of the original texts used to compile this guide.

The century that went from 1550 to 1650 was a turning point in the history of western culture in general, in terms of innovation and progress that occurred simultaneously in literature, art, science, philosophy, as well as in the reformation of religion and in the establishment of the early settlements that followed the journeys of discovery. A crucial role in bringing about all this change and advancement was played by the free movement and exchange of ideas – which the *Early Tourists* also in part contributed to – without which the Enlightenment and the modern era would have never happened. We have therefore set up a chronological table of the most significant events of the time, in order to help the reader put the journeys into context and to underscore their historical importance and interdependence.⁽¹⁰⁾

For a more in-depth look at the *Early Tourists*, their biographies have been grouped together in a section at the end of the guide. We have also marked their principal travel itineraries, together with the sites and locations where Shakespeare’s plays were set, including a political map of Italy of that period. The sights and itineraries we recommend to the reader thus trace the same routes undertaken by these forerunners of the modern tourist, and can be found on the appropriate maps.

As to the style and method employed, we have decided to quote directly from the *Early Tourists’* travel diaries, using modern spelling for easier reading and only a few conjunctions to improve fluency, as well as added some explicatory notes.⁽¹¹⁾ The intent has been to present all comments and observations – precursors to our modern reviews, yet still so true and reliable almost five centuries later – as much as possible in their original version. We, therefore, trust and hope to be able to make today’s tourists relive that same sense of amazement and those same emotions the *Early Tourists* experienced in admiring those very same landmarks, and in discovering the customs and traditions of the Italy of that time.