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When sinologists were geologists: Chinese chronology in early modern England and the heterodox Chinese studies of Robert Hooke and John Beaumont

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ABSTRACT

The transmission of ancient Chinese history to Europe has often been thought to have contributed to a European crisis of confidence in biblical chronology, since Chinese history appeared to be dramatically longer than that of the Bible. This article explores the early modern English context of this reception, revealing the surprising dearth of anti-biblical uses of ancient Chinese history, with seventeenth-century English writers instead remaining relatively confident that it could be integrated into the biblical chronological framework. It then draws on the Chinese studies of Robert Hooke and John Beaumont to suggest that for those few who did bring the apparent antiquity of Chinese history into conflict with the Bible, sinology was rarely the primary driving force behind their critique. Rather, these cases suggest that Chinese history was normally weaponised against biblical chronology by writers already predisposed to scepticism of biblical world history by their scientific, particularly geological, interests. Although their sinological studies reinforced these geologically derived doubts, they were not what primarily instigated such scepticism. The article consequently concludes that ancient Chinese history had a more limited impact on overturning biblical chronology than has been hitherto assumed.

KEYWORDS

Biblical Chronology; Early Sinology; Enlightenment and China; Isaac Vossius; Robert Hooke; John Beaumont

The reception of ancient Chinese history has often been a surprisingly prominent feature of intellectual histories of late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, chiefly due to its perceived conflict with the chronology of the Bible.¹ Calculations based on the Masoretic Hebrew version of the Pentateuch, most famously those of James Ussher, dated Noah's Deluge to the mid-third millennium B.C.E., to 2348 B.C.E. precisely in the case of the Irish archbishop.² Accordingly, China's ancient history, which in some Jesuit accounts was depicted as reliably going back to the early-third millennium B.C.E., represented a troublesome challenge to biblical chronology. This is often assumed to have played a not insignificant role in the wider collapse of the pre-eminence of the Bible in the European writing of world history. As Felix Schlichter has recently put

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it, “the seismic impact of the growing awareness and understanding of Chinese history remains a powerful explanation for the gradual demise of biblical chronology and the desacralisation of universal history.”³

The most significant studies of the early modern European reception of ancient Chinese history, such as those by Virgile Pinot, Edwin van Kley, and Wu Liwei, have been Francophone in their focus, especially when it comes to examining such chronological conflict.⁴ Voltaire’s *Essai sur les Mœurs*, which famously began the history of the world with Chinese rather than biblical history, has typically been the culminating point on which these works have turned, as a demonstration of the Enlightenment’s liberation of world history from the fetters of scripture.⁵ In response to this Francocentrism, there have been a rising number of studies in recent years examining the response to ancient Chinese history in other areas of Europe, including that by Thijs Weststeijn on the Netherlands, Daniel Canaris on Vico, and Trude Dijkstra and Gianamar Giovannetti-Singh on Britain.⁶ These scholars have shown how the impact of ancient Chinese history on biblical chronology varied throughout Europe and, in the cases of Italy and Britain at least, that there were many who regarded its challenge to the Bible as eminently containable. In other words, the clash between Chinese and biblical history trumpeted by Voltaire was not an inevitable outcome of the reception of Chinese chronology in Europe.

This essay builds on this insight to examine more closely the early modern English reception of ancient Chinese history and to evaluate with greater caution its influence on the breakdown of biblical chronology. It is perhaps not always sufficiently emphasised that the supposedly reliable ancient Chinese history which the Jesuits transmitted to Europe is now universally regarded by modern scholars as mythological. Although there are continuing debates about when precisely Chinese mythological “history” ends and its reliable written history starts, even the most fiercely nationalistic modern Chinese historians do not acknowledge the earliest Chinese emperors identified by the Jesuits – Fuxi (伏羲), Shennong (神农), and others – as real historical figures.⁷ This is an obvious point, but it is one that needs further emphasising if we are to move away from a narrative about the inevitable crumbling of biblical chronology under the pressure of the deep antiquity of Chinese history. In fact, the supposedly reliable Chinese annals provided just as unreliable a historical narrative of the ancient past as that of the Bible. Concerns about the historicity of China’s ancient culture-heroes were often voiced by late imperial Chinese themselves: the thirteenth-century Song dynasty scholar Jin Lüxiang (金履祥), for example, began his history with Yao (堯), excluding Fuxi, Shennong, and other earlier emperors because “the period before Yao was not established by Confucius, it was crude and disorganized and hard to be put on a firm basis.”⁸

Since ancient Chinese history was really no more reliable than the sacred history of the Bible, its destabilisation of biblical history was far from inevitable. We need, therefore, to better understand the particular reasons why certain early modern European scholars came to regard the uncertain chronology of the Chinese as more dependable than that of their own scriptural tradition. Focusing on early modern England, this essay seeks to identify which early modern English writers took up the cause of Chinese chronology against that of the Bible, and to analyse their reasons for doing so. Whilst much of the existing literature on the European reception of Chinese chronology assumes the Enlightenment’s central role in disestablishing the primacy of sacred history, associated particularly with Voltaire, this essay follows the recent revisionist turn identified by

Dmitri Levitin in locating the origins of the Chinese chronological challenge to the Bible not in the Enlightenment proper, but in the murkier world of late-seventeenth-century erudition.⁹

Our two protagonists reflect this shift in focus from eighteenth-century Enlightenment to seventeenth-century scholarship. After a long period of neglect, recent decades have witnessed a flourishing of renewed interest in the life and works of Robert Hooke, primarily from historians of science who have also come to appreciate his non-scientific interests.¹⁰ Hooke's sinological studies remain neglected, however, although some attention has recently been drawn to them by William Poole.¹¹ Hooke's friend, John Beaumont, in contrast, remains an underappreciated figure altogether, aside from those with an interest in the history of magic, most prominently Jonathan Barry, who has written on the relationship between Beaumont's scientific and magical interests.¹² Beaumont's interest in Chinese chronology has been entirely overlooked, however.

While Hooke, the man of science, and Beaumont, the late defender of magic, might seem an odd pairing, the two friends were united by their shared interest in geology. Historians of geology have long noted the significant challenge natural histories of the earth posed to biblical chronology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although Ivano Dal Prete has recently revealed the extent to which this conflict between scriptural history and geological deep time was not a long-standing one, only emerging as a byproduct of post-Reformation scriptural literalism.¹³ It is these geological interests, this essay will argue, that prompted Hooke and Beaumont's heterodox studies of Chinese chronology. By putting the geological and sinological challenges to biblical history in dialogue, we can thereby cast greater light on the relative weight each of these challenges presented. The examples of Hooke and Beaumont suggest that geologists were led by their heterodox scientific research into an investigation of sinological material which they believed corroborated their geological theories. Beaumont's work nevertheless also shows that Chinese chronology could have a genuine, if modest, impact on the development of an individual's heterodoxy. But it is clear regardless that, in both cases, geology led the way, and sinology followed.

In order to properly appreciate the exceptionalism of Hooke and Beaumont's subversive invocations of ancient Chinese history, we will first examine the broader context of late-seventeenth-century English debates about Chinese chronology, revealing how limited an impact it had in fuelling heterodox criticisms of sacred history. We will then turn to Hooke's sinological works, focusing particularly upon a 1686 article in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. Finally, we will explore Beaumont's writings, analysing what role ancient Chinese chronology played in his critique of sacred history as it developed from his refutation of Thomas Burnet, *Considerations on a Book, Entitled The Theory of the Earth* (1693), to the first essay of his *Gleanings of Antiquities* (1724).

Chinese chronology in seventeenth-century England

The first printed text in English to discuss Chinese chronology was Robert Parke's 1588 translation of the Spanish Augustinian friar Juan González de Mendoza's history of China. Because Mendoza had not included any means by which to fix the reigns of

Chinese emperors to European history, however, it was impossible on the basis of his work to establish any firm connection between Chinese history and that of the Bible.¹⁴ It was only with the return of the China Jesuit Martino Martini to Europe in 1652 and the publication of his *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655) and *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima* (1658) that Britons were able to obtain detailed accounts of Chinese chronology, and, most importantly, dates which related it to biblical history.¹⁵

In 1637, the Jesuit missionaries in China had been given Papal permission to use the longer Greek Septuagint chronology as a means of conciliating Chinese literati to biblical history.¹⁶ Martini carried this across into his European works, stating in his *Sinicae Historiae* that although the Chinese annals were in conflict with the “opinion of our Chronologers,” they were however compatible with that of the “Septuagint translators.”¹⁷ He consequently began his work with Fuxi (“Fohius”), whom he represented as having ascended the imperial throne in 2952 B.C.E., long before Ussher’s dating of the Deluge in 2348 B.C.E.¹⁸ His *Novus Atlas*, meanwhile, although it did not provide as great a level of detail about China’s most ancient history, appealed to European readers because it gave an overview of all Chinese history from its beginning to the present day, placing its start date in 2847 B.C.E., a little later than would his *Sinicae Historiae*, but still significantly before the Masoretic Deluge.¹⁹

This was to prove the perfect ammunition for a rising Dutch scholar, later resident in England, whose work would come to dominate early English debates about ancient Chinese history. In his *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi* (1659), Isaac Vossius drew heavily on Martini’s work to argue in favour of the Septuagint as the most reliable version of the Bible, with its greater compatibility with the “very accurate” 4500 years of Chinese chronology being cited as significant evidence in its favour.²⁰ Although most modern scholars have assumed that Vossius was influenced by Martini’s *Sinicae Historiae*, even leading to some surprise that Vossius could have used it in 1658 when “The ink of the *Sinicae historiae* had scarcely dried,” it is clear that he was in fact relying on the *Novus Atlas* instead, since he claimed that Chinese history started in 2847 B.C.E., and went on to list all Chinese dynasties down to the present day, including the Tang (“Tanga”), Song (“Sunga”), Yuan (“Iuena”), and Ming (“Taiming”), none of which were mentioned in the *Sinicae Historiae*.²¹ Nevertheless, even if he did not use it for his famous essay, Vossius did quickly read the *Sinicae Historiae*, demonstrating an intimate knowledge of its narrative of ancient Chinese history, as well as its different dating of the beginning of Fuxi’s reign to 2952 B.C.E., in a 1659 letter to Andreas Colvius.²² The addition of Martini’s history to his arsenal only seems to have emboldened Vossius, who continued to defend the Septuagint and its supposed corroboration by ancient Chinese history even after he had been sternly castigated for his arguments by many in the Republic of Letters, most notably Georg Hornius.²³

The nature of Vossius’s work and his use of ancient Chinese history have remained difficult to interpret. For Jonathan Israel, Thijs Weststeijn, and Frank Boyle, Vossius was a secret radical working to destroy the credibility of the Bible, as evidenced by his controversial denial of the universality of the Flood.²⁴ On this view, his explicit criticisms of the Preadamite Isaac La Peyrère and professed orthodox aims were simply disguising his radical heterodoxy, a claim given credence by the fact that some contemporaries did indeed view Vossius this way, captured in a famous (but possibly apocryphal) quip from Charles II that “This man believes everything as long as it is not in the Bible.”²⁵

Recent scholarship has turned against the radical interpretation of Vossius, however. David Katz, Anthony Grafton, Scott Mandelbrote, William Poole, and Dirk van Miert have all argued that both Vossius's wider scholarship and his deployment of ancient Chinese history were intended to remain within the framework of orthodox biblical philology, albeit in innovative and controversial ways.²⁶ And indeed, this is what Vossius himself tells us, if we take seriously his own claim that his advocacy of the Septuagint and denial of a universal flood was intended to combat those "doubting the truth of the sacred text", namely La Peyrère and other Preadamites.²⁷ That Vossius was not dissimulating is suggested by the fact that many in the Republic of Letters did not regard his deployment of ancient Chinese history in support of the Septuagint as heterodox. His arguments were endorsed by the orthodox Anglican apologist Edward Stillingfleet, for example.²⁸ Many of those who disagreed with Vossius's thesis did not regard him as a radical critic of Christianity, moreover. The Scottish Presbyterian Robert Baillie, who sided with Hornius against Vossius and dismissed the Chinese annals as "fabulous," nevertheless continued respectfully to refer to Vossius as "a very learned man."²⁹ Others would explicitly draw a distinction between Vossius and heterodox Preadamites. In his polemic against Charles Blount, Josiah King, chaplain to the Earl of Anglesey, condemned the discussion of Chinese chronology in Blount's *The Oracles of Reason* (1693) as that of a Preadamite, but defended Vossius from similar insinuations.³⁰ He would continue to be respectfully cited well into the eighteenth century as "the learned Vossius," even by those like the strict Anglican clergyman Arthur Bedford who firmly rejected the Septuagint in favour of the Vulgate.³¹

Vossius's later publications on China do, admittedly, appear more subversive. Of particular note are comments on Chinese chronology included in his 1685 essay "On the Arts and Sciences of the Chinese," which claimed that the Chinese have preserved their language uninterrupted for "almost five thousand years." As Anthony Grafton has pointed out, this would date the foundation of China dangerously close even to the Septuagint Deluge.³² But although Vossius was certainly being provocative in further extending Chinese history from 4500 to 5000 years, this was not necessarily the "Preadamite argument" that Grafton suggests it was.³³ Five thousand years before the work's publication in 1685 would still only place the foundation of China in 3315 B.C.E., half a century after the Deluge in 3366 B.C.E., as Vossius had calculated it in his 1659 essay.³⁴ The word "almost" (*ferè*) is also surely doing considerable work here, giving Vossius room plausibly to argue that he had really meant around 4700 years, which would date Chinese history to c. 3015 B.C.E., long enough away from his dating of the Flood to convincingly deny Preadamite charges. Vossius was thus surely a provocateur, but it is not clear that he sought to use Chinese chronology to directly undermine that of the Bible. Instead, in his early writings at the very least, he seems to have been using it for purposes which he regarded as wholly orthodox, employing an admittedly unconventional approach to shore up biblical history against its Preadamite critics.

The intense debate generated by Vossius's thesis should not therefore be seen as one between radical anti-biblicism and Christian orthodoxy, but between scholars who on all sides wanted to remain within the biblical framework when approaching ancient Chinese history, but who envisaged fundamentally different methods of accomplishing this. There were several Britons who followed Vossius in accepting that the Septuagint was the best method of harmonising Chinese chronology and the Bible, perhaps most prominently

the aforementioned Edward Stillingfleet. Openly citing Vossius by name, Stillingfleet argued that it was only by adopting the Septuagint chronology that enough time could be made for the propagation of the world after the Deluge, which in turn made “sufficient *space*” for “the *plantation* of *Egypt*, *China*, and other places, all which seem to have been in that time, and to concur with that computation.”³⁵ The chronologer Robert Cary undertook a more thoroughgoing harmonisation of the Septuagint and Chinese history, including China in his chronological table of the history of the world, which began with the Creation in 5708 B.C.E., dated the Deluge to 3452 B.C.E., and continued down until the defeat of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 137 C.E.³⁶ The advent of Chinese history in 2952 B.C.E. was the first non-biblical event recorded in the table.³⁷ He continued to record Chinese history until the table’s end, noting that the Bar Kokhba revolt occurred at the time of China’s rule by the Han dynasty (“Hana,” 202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.).³⁸ As late as 1690, when Vossius’s work on the Septuagint had already been widely discredited by Humphrey Hody, the statesman and essayist William Temple would continue to argue for the compatibility of the Septuagint and Chinese chronologies.³⁹ He praised “the Antiquities of ... *China*” as “the oldest, that any where pretend to any fair Records,” extending “far above four thousand years” and containing such “clear and undeniable Testimonies” that those “Religious Men” the Jesuits, “rather than question their Truth, by finding them contrary to the vulgar Chronology of the Scripture, are content to have Recourse to that of the Septuagint.”⁴⁰

There was, predictably, also a critical response to Vossius’s work. We have already noted Robert Baillie’s objections to Vossius’s chronological synthesis, dismissing the supposedly “very reliable Chinese chronology” as “fabulous” (*fabulosas*).⁴¹ The Huguenot refugee Pierre Allix, who had settled in London in 1685 following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, also attacked those who “cry up the Calculation of the Septuagint” on account of Chinese chronology, devoting a whole chapter in his *Reflections upon the Books of the Holy Scripture to Establish the Truth of the Christian Religion* (1688) to refuting “the Objection which may be drawn out of the History of *China*, against the Mosaick Hypothesis, concerning the newness of the world.”⁴² The English judge Matthew Hale was similarly sceptical, since he considered European knowledge of ancient Chinese history to be only the “broken relation of a few travellers,” namely “some ingenious but uncertain Collections out of *Martinius* by ... *Vossius*, and some others.”⁴³ He was concerned that Martini’s work “possibly may be gathered up from a vulgar Tradition of that People, upon which little of sound conclusion can be made touching their Antiquity.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, despite his rejection of evidence from ancient Chinese history in support of the Septuagint, Hale, like Baillie, did not regard Vossius as heterodox in the way he did La Peyrère, whose use of Chinese chronology he also noted.⁴⁵ He even struck a note of sympathy with those like Vossius who adopt “the *Seventy*” as being “useful to the solution of some difficulties in chronology”, even if he himself preferred the Masoretic text.⁴⁶

Seventeenth-century English discussions of ancient Chinese history were not, therefore, defined by a conflict between heterodox attacks on and orthodox defences of sacred history, but were instead a more conservative affair of considering how or whether Chinese chronology might be made compatible with that of the Bible. It would only be in the 1690s that an English writer would first openly use ancient Chinese history to attack biblical chronology. This was Charles Blount, who invoked Chinese history in his essay “Concerning the World’s Age, Beginning and End” in

support of the radical Preadamite opinion that “Adam was not the first man ... only the first of the holy race.”⁴⁷ Blount appears not to have read Martini, however, since he concluded the essay by citing what he claimed was Joseph Scaliger’s *De Emendatione Tempore* on the Chinese calculating “the World to have been Eight hundred eight score thousand and seventy three [880,073] Years old.”⁴⁸ Not only had Scaliger’s claim, based on Mendoza, already been surpassed by Martini’s far more detailed account of Chinese history, but Blount had in fact not even derived this claim directly from Scaliger himself, for Scaliger had given the Chinese age of the world as 884,773 years.⁴⁹ Blount instead took his number from La Peyrère, who had misquoted Scaliger’s as 880,073 years, a mistake then reproduced by Blount.⁵⁰ That Blount had not even cross-referenced this error with Scaliger’s work, let alone with Martini or another work of more recent Jesuit sinology, suggests the limited influence Chinese chronology had on the development of his Preadamite heterodoxy: ancient Chinese history was little more than a useful polemical tool for him.

In the half century following the publication of Martini’s works, therefore, although there had been much discussion of ancient Chinese history, the vast majority of this debate remained within the parameters of the biblical chronological framework. When this history was used to openly challenge biblical chronology, as it was by Blount, it cannot be said to have played anything more than the most marginal of supporting roles. To this extent, the reception of ancient Chinese history in seventeenth-century England supports the revisionism which challenges modern Francocentric scholarship on the inevitable conflict between Chinese and biblical history.

We turn now to Hooke and Beaumont, who both undertook serious sinological studies and deployed the knowledge they derived therefrom to critique sacred history. The important question to resolve, therefore, is why Hooke and Beaumont were more attracted than their other English contemporaries to the heterodox potential of Chinese chronology.

Robert Hooke

Robert Hooke’s sinological interests were manifold, ranging from China’s language and geography to its porcelain and cuisine, encompassing topics as recondite as a paper he wrote for the Royal Society “On the Chinois cart with one wheel.”⁵¹ He even went out of his way to meet some Chinese merchants visiting England in 1693, although, perhaps unsurprisingly given the language barrier, he managed to get little out of the meeting other than being able to confirm that Chinese was indeed a tonal language, as the Jesuits had claimed.⁵²

It was this interest in language which led Hooke to make some deceptively casual remarks about Chinese chronology in a 1686 article published in the *Philosophical Transactions*, entitled “Some Observations, and Conjectures Concerning the Chinese Characters.” On the one hand, Hooke clearly stated that Chinese history prior to Fuxi was to be regarded as “hypothetical and Fabulous,” citing John Greaves’s translation of Ulugh Beg, which reported that the Chinese believe the world to be tens of millions of years old.⁵³ Hooke made no comment at all, however, on the claim that the Chinese “account [Fuxi] to have Lived 2950 Years before the time of *Christ*,” other than to assert that “during all which time they pretend to have a certaine and written account in their

Books.”⁵⁴ This is in spite of the obvious fact that, on this dating, Fuxi preceded the Deluge by over half a millennium, according to the Masoretic chronology. Indeed, far from denouncing this apparent incompatibility with the Bible, Hooke even went so far as to argue that the fabulous nature of pre-Fuxi Chinese history “need not Invalidate their History since *Fohi*.”⁵⁵ In other words, Chinese history from 2950 B.C.E. onwards is plausibly reliable. But nor did he appeal to the Septuagint as a means of reconciling Chinese history with biblical chronology. Instead, Hooke would take ancient Chinese history in a different, far more unorthodox direction.

“These accounts” of Chinese history, Hooke wrote,

made me more desirous to understand somewhat of the Reality and Truth, of what is related concerning the Knowledge of Literature and Manual Arts, which these people of *China* are said to have possessed so long a time in so great Perfection, and without Alteration from the Primitive Institution.⁵⁶

He proposed to uncover this ancient wisdom through a novel method of decoding Chinese characters via their strokes, each of which Hooke believed had anciently possessed “a primitive single or distinct notion or signification as well as sound”; in other words, strokes were once individual letters which combined to form larger characters or words.⁵⁷ Hooke had been led to this theory through his studies of the “*Ye-kim*” (易经, *Yijing, Book of Changes*), which he claims to have possessed a copy of, anticipating the Jesuit figurists in his fascination with its esoteric knowledge that contains “the whole Ground, Rule or Grammar, of their Character, Language and Philosophy.”⁵⁸ He made no attempt to connect this ancient Chinese wisdom to sacred history, however, such as by framing it as a tradition handed down from the biblical patriarchs, as his contemporary John Webb had done.⁵⁹

For Hooke, therefore, understanding the ancient Chinese language was the key to unlocking a forgotten ancient wisdom which had no apparent connection to sacred history but was manifest in the cryptic writings of the *Book of Changes*. This theory appears to have anticipated by almost a century the supposedly enlightened French esoteric visions of China recently uncovered by Alexander Statman.⁶⁰ Statman’s late-eighteenth-century French writers, such as Jean-Sylvain Bailly and Antoine Court de Gébelin, often linked this ancient Chinese wisdom to forgotten civilisations destroyed by a sudden cataclysm, sometimes associated with the myth of Atlantis.⁶¹ This interest in esoteric wisdom preserved following natural disasters and civilisational collapse seems also to encapsulate Hooke’s interest in the ancient sciences and arts esoterically preserved in the Chinese language, which, as William Poole has noted, “parallel his insistence throughout the geological work which he was undertaking in this period that there may have been many ancient, philosophically advanced cultures subsequently swept away by natural cataclysm, and of whom we have lost all memory.”⁶² Although he did not openly mention these geological interests in his essay on the Chinese language, that Hooke saw his sinological and geological writings as being in dialogue is clear from the frequent references to China in the latter.⁶³ The antiquity of Chinese history thus slotted naturally into Hooke’s conception of deep geological time, in which there was space for multiple civilisations to have come and gone even before the rise of China and the preservation of such forgotten ancient wisdoms in the Chinese language.

Needless to say, Hooke's vision of world history as defined by a cyclical recurrence of ancient civilisations swept away by natural cataclysms was not compatible with biblical history as traditionally interpreted, and insinuations of heterodoxy were consequently levelled at his geological work by others in the Royal Society.⁶⁴ His close friendship with Francis Lodwick, a secret Preadamite who shared Hooke's sinological interests and from whom he probably obtained his copy of the *Book of Changes*, further adds to the suggestive heterodoxy of his belief in the esoteric knowledge of the world's "Primitive Institution" embedded in the Chinese language.⁶⁵ When one combines this with his assertions about the reliability of Chinese history up to Fuxi in 2950 B.C.E., Hooke's essay thus emerges as by far the most sophisticated heterodox discussion of ancient Chinese chronology in seventeenth-century England. Prudent caution and an attachment more to science than theological polemic meant that Hooke's disregard for Mosaic history "manifested itself in silence more than in open heterodoxy," to use Dmitri Levitin's words.⁶⁶ But his writings on ancient Chinese history nevertheless display a conscious and subversive neglect of biblical chronology, reading esoteric ancient wisdom into sinological materials in line with geological theories that have long been noted by scholars to have posed a severe challenge to biblical orthodoxy.⁶⁷

As this suggests, however, although Hooke's sinological studies were wide-ranging and clearly motivated by genuine interest – unlike the polemical uses Chinese history was put to by Blount – they remained subservient to his geological work in the formation of his heterodoxy. He had already been developing his geological ideas about the changing nature of earth in the 1660s, long before his encounter with the *Book of Changes*: evidence from China thus, at best, only reinforced conclusions he was arriving at anyway through his geological research.⁶⁸ It may have given further impetus to these geological considerations in the 1680s, when his geological and sinological studies progressed side-by-side, but it was geology which clearly led the way, in large part due to the stimulus of Hooke's scientific rivalries within the Royal Society.⁶⁹ Therefore, whilst we can say that ancient Chinese history provided Hooke with confirmation of his subversive challenge to the chronological framework of the Bible, it can only be judged to have done so in a supporting role.

John Beaumont

If Voltaire, the modern Enlightenment philosopher, has served as the archetypal biblical critic in Franco-centred studies of the early modern reception of ancient Chinese history, then John Beaumont, the largely forgotten doctor and antiquary best known as a late defender of magic, is a fitting counterpoint. Made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1685, over the course of his long life and scholarly career – he passed away in 1731, already in his nineties – Beaumont moved around the edges of some of the most prominent circles of British intellectual life, forming close friendships with such notable figures as Robert Hooke and Hans Sloane. But despite his various contributions to antiquarian studies and fossil collecting in his native Somerset, Beaumont's reputation has always been overshadowed by the persistence of his belief in spirits, oracles, and other magical portents.⁷⁰ Indeed, his *Gleanings of Antiquities* (1724), where he developed a radical critique of the Bible based in part on Chinese chronology, ended with a section of notes defending the existence of genies.⁷¹ Beaumont was thus very far from the image of Voltaire and the Enlightenment as

emblems of modernity's rejection of superstition, although he is more in keeping with recent work on the Enlightenment's esoteric and even magical interests.⁷²

But despite his differences with Voltaire, in the first essay of *Gleanings of Antiquities*, "Explaining the Creation and the Deluge," Beaumont put forward one of the most radical and sustained attacks on the authority of the Pentateuch supported by evidence from Chinese chronology in early modern Europe. He had been reading some of the most controversial biblical criticism of the late-seventeenth century, most importantly that of Richard Simon, whose *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678) Beaumont cited several times.⁷³ Beaumont, like Simon a Roman Catholic, seems to have taken from Simon's work a conviction that the Pentateuch was not inspired by direct revelation to Moses, but instead that "the greatest part of the sacred books are come to us merely as abridgements of the ancient acts that were kept in the Archives of the Hebrews."⁷⁴ In other words, the text of the Pentateuch is not a direct record of divine revelation but an abridged and potentially distorted summary made centuries after the event.⁷⁵

From this scepticism about the reliability of the Pentateuch, Beaumont went on to consider the plausibility of the eternity of the world, which is where he first highlighted the special significance of ancient Chinese history:

When we consider that Moses intimates a time for the Creation, it may be proper to observe, that all the Gentiles (the Chineses not excepted) held the World to have been from Eternity.⁷⁶

Beaumont sided with the Chinese gentiles over the account of Moses, using the mouthpiece of a gentile critic to position Mosaic history as the fabrication of a crafty "Divine Legislator," concocting an account of "God the Creator" who was also "in a particular manner the Ruler of the *Jewish* nation":

if any of the Gentiles who have read the Books of Moses, should be asked what they thought of what Moses has written concerning the Creation; it's natural to believe, that not being brought up under an Engagement to what he had delivered, they would take the same freedom with him, as we have done with their Legislators, in saying, That, as to a Communion they pretended with invisible Powers, who dictated their Laws to them; this was only said by them to gain Authority with the People.⁷⁷

Most fascinating about this is the way in which Beaumont explicitly turns Christian apologetic arguments about pagan religion – that it is the creation of crafty legislators – to critique the origins of the biblical account itself.

Beaumont would employ this gentile perspective throughout his essay, and it is clear that the paradigmatic gentile exemplar he had in mind was China. We have already seen his singling out of the Chinese above ("the Chineses not excepted"). Later in the essay, as part of his denial of the Pentateuch's universal Deluge, he undertook an extended analysis of whether the Chinese had any knowledge of it.⁷⁸ Drawing chiefly on Martini, as well as Philippe Couplet and Louis le Comte, both also China Jesuits, Beaumont endeavoured to prove that Chinese records contained no evidence of a universal deluge, further arguing that they have no "Tradition concerning the *Antediluvian* Patriarchs, nor of the Creation; nor had they the least knowledge of the *Hebrew Language and Letters*."⁷⁹ Given this lack of corroborating evidence for Mosaic history, Beaumont then appealed to the antiquity and reliability of the Chinese annals, arguing that since China is "supposed by all Chronologers to have had a Government at least as near the Deluge, if

not before it, as any People ... it's incredible they should not have conveyed this Knowledge or Tradition to Posterity."⁸⁰ He thus forced his reader to choose between the credibility of Mosaic and Chinese chronology.

It is evident which choice Beaumont himself favoured. Once again adopting the Chinese gentile perspective, he wrote:

If it shall be said, that, tho the *Chinese* History be silent as to *Noah's* Deluge, the Relation that *Moses* gives of it suffices; the *Gentiles* will tell you, that whereas an Annalist plainly records Facts as they happen, the End of Legislators is to establish a Government and a good Morality among Men: wherefore they must set forth Facts, be they real or feign'd, which strike the imagination, whether they are as Judgments upon, or in favour of Mankind, who will not be brought to Obedience and a Compliance with moral Duties by other means.⁸¹

These gentiles, later described as "*Chinese* Philosophers," make clear that even if the fabrication of miraculous events is good politics for governing an ignorant people, "Philosophers, however they may acquiesce in Laws introduced for the Well-Government of Mankind, will not suffer themselves, in the Search of Nature, to be stinted in their Thoughts by Legislators."⁸²

Hiding behind the shield of this Chinese, gentile viewpoint, Beaumont thus argued that those who engage in natural philosophy should not be restrained by the need to make their investigations compatible with sacred history, which in any case "would save Christian divines a World of Labour, in answering almost insuperable difficulties which attend the Deluge, as commonly understood, according to the Letter."⁸³ And this applied not only to the Deluge, but to all other moments of tension between the Pentateuch and natural philosophy, for

If Noah's Deluge should be explained according to the Sense of the Gentiles [i.e. that the Mosaic story of the universal Deluge was merely a "paraboli- cal" morality tale], it would draw after it many other things which would require to be explained otherwise than generally they have been hitherto.⁸⁴

In fact, even political concerns were not a good enough reason to continue to suppress the natural philosophical truths undermining the Mosaic account, since "the Chinese, without Mythological Philosophy or Theology, or Enigmatical Doctrines, have carry'd on as antient, and perhaps as good a Government as the World has had." Moses's political account of the Deluge, and maybe even of the Creation, might therefore have been useful for a "rude and barbarous" people like the ancient Israelites, but in Confucian China or the newly enlightened world of early-eighteenth-century Europe, it was surely no longer necessary to retain it, especially not at the expense of progress in natural philosophy.⁸⁵

How and why had Beaumont arrived at such radical conclusions? And how significant a role did ancient Chinese history play in forming them? In answer to the first question, it is reasonably straightforward to identify Beaumont's immediate sources of inspiration. We have already noted his reading of Richard Simon's critical discussion of the Pentateuch. Unmentioned by Beaumont, but surely even more significant for his critical depiction of Moses, is the influence of the controversial cosmogonist Thomas Burnet. Drawing on a rich tradition of portraying Moses as a "legislator," Burnet had interpreted Mosaic history as, first and foremost, a political narrative: because the ignorant Israelites were too foolish to understand natural philosophy, Moses the politic legislator had obscured the natural

scientific origin of the universal Deluge within a straightforward morality tale more suitably adapted to the Israelites' current state. Through natural philosophy and a supposedly more penetrating exegesis of Mosaic history, Burnet claimed to have revealed this natural scientific explanation for the Deluge hidden allegorically within the biblical text.⁸⁶

Interestingly, Beaumont had started out as an opponent of Burnet, publishing a rebuttal of Burnet's cosmogony in 1693. There, Beaumont had argued against Burnet's scientific explanation of the Deluge, arguing that "the weak Reed of Reason" was insufficient to solve the problem of a universal deluge, which can only be understood as "a Miracle."⁸⁷ Beaumont's acceptance of the existence of the universal Deluge here stands in contrast to the arguments he would make in *Gleanings of Antiquities*, to which we shall return shortly. What is important to note for now, however, is that Beaumont had already shown clear signs of Burnet's influence, which would persist into his later work. This was enabled in part by the unsystematic organisation of his critique, which responded to Burnet's work point-by-point rather than making its own extended argument, thus allowing Beaumont to directly challenge Burnet's theory in some places and subtly adapt it to his own purposes in others.

Most importantly, when discussing Burnet's treatment of the Mosaic account of the Creation, although Beaumont disagreed with Burnet that ancient philosophers had described the creation of the world "more Philosophically" – i.e. more scientifically – than the legislator Moses had done in his political allegory, he did so not in order to defend the literal truth of Mosaic history. Instead, he argued that the Mosaic story of the Creation was fundamentally different from the views of other ancient philosophers, who held that the world is "eternal." It was Moses "as a divine legislator" who had newly "substituted a time for its Creation or Rise, and the *Modus* of it ... thereby to carry on a Doctrine for the Good and Salvation of Man."⁸⁸ So although Beaumont disputed Burnet's understanding of Mosaic history, it was only because he developed Burnet's theory in an even more radical direction, arguing that Moses had differed from other ancient philosophers by inventing the Creation for political purposes, rather than merely adapting a pre-existing, natural-philosophical tradition of Creation to a more popular form, as Burnet believed he had done. It was exactly this argument about Moses the political legislator that Beaumont took forward in *Gleanings of Antiquities*, where, despite failing to mention his old polemical opponent openly, Burnet's influence is suggested by Beaumont's almost word-for-word quoting of Burnet's claim that Moses had adapted his writings "to the use and understanding of the vulgar" (*ad usum captumque vulgi*).⁸⁹

So if the question of *how* Beaumont reached the conclusions he did can be answered by pointing to his further radicalisation of Burnet's already controversial arguments about Moses the legislator, the question remains as to *why* Beaumont adopted this heterodox view, especially given his earlier disagreements with Burnet and apparent support for a universal deluge. Here, we turn once again to the influence of geology. Aside from his studies of spirits, scripture, and Chinese history, Beaumont was above all a keen geologist, exploring the plentiful fossils of his native Somerset and sending samples to the Royal Society.⁹⁰ It was Hooke that put Beaumont's name forward for membership of the Society in 1685, and who later suggested that Beaumont write his rebuttal of Burnet's work, which Beaumont then in turn dedicated to his "Honour'd Friend."⁹¹ Like Hooke, Beaumont consistently rejected the claim that fossils could be explained by the Deluge, arguing even in his 1693 critique of Burnet that they had been created

through geological shifts long pre-dating the Deluge and that it is therefore “not possible for any Man fairly to solve the Phaenomenon of marine Bodies, found in Mountains, by any other Principle; especially by a Deluge.”⁹² He maintained the same stance thirty years later in the first essay of *Gleanings of Antiquities*, where his primary target was the 1723 third edition of John Woodward’s *Essay Towards a Natural History of the Earth*, which relied on fossils as evidence corroborating the Deluge.⁹³ Beaumont’s rebuttal of Woodward’s thesis takes up the bulk of the essay, again concluding that fossils are caused by geological shifts which date back long before the Deluge and perhaps even before the Creation.⁹⁴ Beaumont was thus, like Hooke, starkly aware of the contradictions between his geological research and biblical history, although it was only in his later work that he went even further and dismissed the possibility of a universal deluge entirely, including a miraculous one. It was in support of this geological rebuttal of Woodward’s arguments that Beaumont then went on to discuss the lack of Chinese evidence for a universal deluge, sinology once again merely playing a supporting role in a wider geological controversy.

It may seem therefore that we have also answered the question of how significant ancient Chinese history was in bringing Beaumont to his radical heterodoxy, with the answer being not very: fossils came first, China at best a distant second. It would therefore be easy to write off Beaumont as simply using Chinese history instrumentally to support his pre-established views, as Blount had done. However, a closer examination shows that Chinese history in fact played a major role in the development of Beaumont’s heterodoxy. He says as much in his introductory remarks to *Gleanings of Antiquities*, writing that the essay was inspired by discussions “concerning Matters of the most remote Antiquity, viz the Creation, the Deluge, the *Chinese* Chronology, & c.”⁹⁵ Unlike Blount, moreover, he had directly engaged with the aforementioned Jesuit sinological works by Martini, Couplet, and le Compte, whose chronological accuracy he accepted without reservation:

No Nation in the Universe has come to our knowledge, which has so much amused and amazed the Christian World, as that of *China*; and this especially on the account of its Chronology, that Nation having kept, from the Beginning of their Government, unexceptionable Records of Times and Transactions, far beyond those of any other Nation.⁹⁶

This led him to regard Chinese history as both completely reliable and fundamentally at odds with the Masoretic chronology, although he also conceded that the “authentic” Septuagint could better handle it, at least saving the China Jesuits “from being laugh’d at by the *Litterati*.”⁹⁷

The laughter of the literati was clearly at the forefront of Beaumont’s mind in his repeated appeal to “the Opinion of the Gentiles” as ridiculing sacred history, the paradigmatic case of which for Beaumont was the Chinese, as we have seen. Whilst this was of course in part a strategy to distance himself from his most radical opinions, claiming in the conclusion that his giving such arguments serious airing was merely for the purposes of “Academical Exercitation,” the frequency with which he adopted the viewpoint of the Chinese-gentile Other to critique biblical history suggests that he took this argument very seriously.⁹⁸ This might also plausibly explain why *Gleanings of Antiquities* resolved the inconsistencies present in Beaumont’s earlier critique of Burnet, the unsystematic structure of which led him simultaneously to espouse a miraculous origin of the Deluge while accepting and even further radicalising Burnet’s arguments about Moses the dissembling

legislator. It does not seem improbable, given that he did not mention China even once in the earlier work, that it was the shock of his encounter with Chinese chronology which subsequently forced Beaumont to bring his position on the universal Deluge into line with his broader views on Moses's politic Pentateuch.

It appears that in Beaumont's case, therefore, Chinese chronology was not only instrumentally useful as a way of attacking biblical chronology but was also genuinely significant in the formation of his heterodoxy, albeit in a supporting role of strengthening a critique of the Bible which he had come to by other means, via his geological studies and the influences of Simon and Burnet. Beaumont's case also demonstrates that heterodox uses of Chinese chronology do not straightforwardly fit into a linear narrative of Enlightenment progress: Beaumont used the Chinese annals to challenge the literal truth of the Bible in the same work in which he defended the existence of genies. He was thus a truly exceptional figure in the reception of ancient Chinese history in England, combining geology and sinology far more explicitly than Hooke to launch a devastating attack on the authority of the Pentateuch, anticipating by several decades the anti-biblical uses of Chinese chronology by Voltaire and other *philosophes*.

It is probably precisely because of the radical heterodoxy of his work and eccentricity of personal character, however, that Beaumont's writings on Chinese chronology have made almost no impact, both at the time and since: I have been unable to find any responses to or discussions of the radical arguments of *Gleanings of Antiquities*, contemporary or modern. Beaumont's work thus marks a fascinating but ultimately uninfluential moment in the early modern English reception of ancient Chinese history.

This is oddly representative of English discussions of Chinese chronology more broadly, which, as we have seen, were not dominated by the French Enlightenment conflict between anti-biblicist critics and their orthodox opponents. Hooke and Beaumont's sinological studies show that ancient Chinese history could challenge biblical chronology, but also that it was only deployed this way by thinkers who were already predisposed to scepticism about sacred history. We should, therefore, be more cautious about exaggerated claims for the importance of Chinese chronology in undermining that of the Bible, and when it appears to have done so, we need to ask tougher questions about exactly how much influence it had in the development of such heterodoxy. This essay suggests that, in the case of early modern England at least, heterodox sinology was usually subservient to other concerns. The sinologists were primarily geologists, not the other way around.

Notes

1. Hazard, *Crise de la Conscience Européenne*, 38; Rossi, *Dark Abyss of Time*, 140–67; Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 640–41; Rubiés, “From Antiquarianism to Philosophical History”, 313–67; Mortimer and Robertson, “Nature, Revelation, History”, 34–6.
2. Ussher, *Annalis Veteris Testamenti*, 4.
3. Schlichter, *Mythology, Chronology, Idolatry*, 304.
4. Pinot, *La Chine*; van Kley, “Europe's ‘Discovery’ of China”; Wu, *Nuoya fangzhou*. See also Witek, “Chinese Chronology”; Giovannetti-Singh, “Astronomical Chronology”.
5. Pinot, *La Chine*, 11; van Kley, “Europe's ‘Discovery’ of China”, 385; Wu, *Nuoya fangzhou*, 566–616. See also Song, *Voltaire et la Chine*, 19–25, 245–51; Giovannetti-Singh, “Astronomical Chronology”.

6. Weststeijn, “*Spinoza Sinicus*,” 541–8; Weststeijn, “Saint Confucius”; Canaris, *Vico and China*; Dijkstra, “A Chinese Philosopher in European Dress”; Giovannetti-Singh, “Oriental Chronology”.
7. Chang, “China on the Eve of the Historical Period”, 65–73. For a contemporary debate, see Nivison et al., “Astronomical Evidence”.
8. Quoted in Standaert, *Intercultural Weaving of Historical Texts*, 26.
9. Levitin, “From Sacred History to the History of Religion”.
10. Hunter and Schaffer, *Robert Hooke*; Inwood, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*; Bennett et al., *London’s Leonardo*; Jardine, *The Curious Life of Robert Hooke*; Cooper and Hunter, *Robert Hooke: Tercentennial Studies*.
11. Poole, “Heterodoxy and Sinology”.
12. Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 124–64. See also Peone, “Invisible Worlds”.
13. Porter, *The Making of Geology*; Rappaport, *When Geologists were Historians*; Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time*; Dal Prete, *On the Edge of Eternity*.
14. Mendoza, *Historie of the Great and Mightie Kingdome of China*. It has recently been suggested that Robert Parke was, in fact, a variant spelling of the name of the English merchant Robert Parker (d. 1623): McGovern, “The Identity of Robert Parke”, 200–2.
15. Mungello, *Curious Land*, 124–33; Collani, “Theology and Chronology in *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*”; Brancaccio, “*Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*”.
16. Mungello, *Curious Land*, 127. The Greek translation is referred to as the Septuagint after its legendary seventy translators, supposedly acting on the orders of Ptolemy II (r. 284–246 B.C.E.).
17. Martini, *Sinicae Historiae*, 9.
18. *Ibid.*, 11.
19. Martini, *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, 16.
20. Vossius, *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi*, 18 ; Mandelbrote, “Isaac Vossius and the Septuagint”.
21. Vossius, *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi*, 46–7. Quotation from van Kley, “Europe’s ‘Discovery’ of China”, 363. See also Pinot, *La Chine*, 203; Mungello, *Curious Land*, 127–8; Wu, *Nuoya fangzhou*, 424–5; Grafton, “Isaac Vossius, Chronologer”, 44; van Miert, *Emancipation of Biblical Philology*, 224. Thijs Weststeijn does note the importance to Vossius of Martini’s atlas as well as his history, but does not note the discrepancy in dates between the two: Weststeijn, “*Spinoza Sinicus*”, 543–4.
22. Vossius, *Septuaginta Interpretibus*, 383–410, esp. 407. Vossius did not retrospectively alter the 2847 B.C.E. start date of Chinese history given in his earlier essay, however, even though a revised version of this essay was included in the same collection: Vossius, *Septuaginta Interpretibus*, 278.
23. Pinot, *La Chine*, 203–9; Weststeijn, “*Spinoza Sinicus*”, 541–8.
24. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 640–1; Weststeijn, “*Spinoza Sinicus*”; Weststeijn, “Saint Confucius”; Boyle, “China in the Radical Enlightenment”.
25. Quoted in Jorinck and van Miert, “Introduction”, 4.
26. Katz, “Isaac Vossius”, 175; Grafton, “Isaac Vossius, Chronologer”; Mandelbrote, “Vossius and the Septuagint”; Poole, “Heterodoxy and Sinology”, 146; van Miert, *Emancipation of Biblical Philology*, 220–5.
27. Vossius, *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi*, 54.
28. Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, 556–7.
29. Baillie, *Operis historici et chronologici*, 2.24.
30. King, *Mr. Blount’s Oracles of Reason*, 21–3, 179.
31. Bedford, *Scripture Chronology Demonstrated*, 151.
32. Grafton, “Isaac Vossius, Chronologer”, 82–3; Vossius, *Variarum observationum liber*, 69–70.
33. Grafton, “Isaac Vossius, Chronologer”, 83.
34. Vossius, *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi*, 27–8.
35. Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, 557.

36. Cary, *Palaeologia chronica*, 1–97.
37. *Ibid.*, 5.
38. *Ibid.*, 96–7.
39. Mandelbrote, “Isaac Vossius and the Septuagint”, 109–17.
40. Temple, *Miscellanea in Four Essays*, 22.
41. Baillie, *Operis historici*, 24.
42. Allix, *Reflections upon the Books of the Holy Scripture*, 1.106–20. This was a translation of the original French: Allix, *Réflexions sur les Livres de l’Ecriture Sainte*, 1.115–29. Larminie, “Peter [Pierre] Allix”.
43. Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind*, 148, 135.
44. *Ibid.*, 148.
45. *Ibid.*, 184ff.
46. *Ibid.*, 133.
47. Blount, *The Oracles of Reason*, 218.
48. *Ibid.*, 226.
49. Scaliger, *Opus de Emendatione Temporum*, 19 (“octingenties octagies quater millesimus, septingentesimus septuagesimus tertius”); Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger*, 2.362, 2.405–7.
50. La Peyrère, *Præadamitæ*, 149 (“octingenties octagies millesimus septuagesimus tertius”); La Peyrère, *A Theological Systeme*, 177. Jonathan Israel has suggested that Blount’s source for Chinese history was Isaac Vossius, but Vossius’s rendering of Chinese chronology was far too short: Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 604. For the wider influence of La Peyrère on Blount, see Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère*, 123; Bonanate, *Charles Blount*, 58–62.
51. Hooke, “Collections”; Hooke, “On the Chinois cart with one wheel”.
52. Poole, “Heterodoxy and Sinology”, 149.
53. Hooke, “Some Observations”, 64; Beg, *Epochæ Celebriores*, 42–68.
54. Hooke, “Some Observations”, 64.
55. *Ibid.*, 65.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*, 72.
58. *Ibid.*, 73–5. Collani, *Die Figuristen*.
59. Webb, *An Historical Essay*.
60. Statman, *Global Enlightenment*.
61. Statman, *Global Enlightenment*, 107–47. On Hooke and Atlantis, see Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 216–17.
62. Poole, “Heterodoxy and Sinology”, 151. See also Poole, *The World Makers*, 104–13; Drake, “Hooke’s Ideas of the Terraqueous Globe”, 144–5.
63. For a list of which, see Poole, “Heterodoxy and Sinology”, 151 n. 50; Hooke, *Posthumous Works of Robert Hooke*, passim. See also Waller and Hooke, “Letter from Richard Waller”, fol. 26v.
64. Oldroyd, “Geological Controversy”, 212; Poole, *World Makers*, 107–8.
65. Poole, “A Rare Early-Modern Utopia”, 121–22. See also Henderson and Poole, *Francis Lodwick*.
66. Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 218.
67. Rossi, *Dark Abyss of Time*, 12–17; Ito, “Hooke’s Cyclic Theory of the Earth”, 303; Rappaport, *When Geologists were Historians*, 204–8.
68. Ito, “Hooke’s Cyclic Theory of the Earth”, 301.
69. Rappaport, “Hooke on earthquakes”, 133–5.
70. Mandelbrote, “John Beaumont”; Hunter, *Magic and Mental Disorder*.
71. Beaumont, *Gleanings of Antiquities*, 189–206.
72. Edelstein, *The Super-Enlightenment*; Matytsin and Edelstein, *Let There Be Enlightenment*; Lynn, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*; Statman, *Global Enlightenment*.
73. Beaumont, *Gleanings of Antiquities*, 3–4, 15. For Simon, see Twining, “Richard Simon”.
74. Beaumont, *Gleanings of Antiquities*, 3. On Beaumont’s Catholicism, see Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 128–33. On the greater flexibility of post-Tridentine Catholicism

towards biblical chronology compared with Protestant Europe, see Schlichter, *Mythology, Chronology, Idolatry*, 214–21.

75. For the long history of this “subversive idea”, see Malcolm, “Hobbes, Ezra, and the Bible”.
76. Beaumont, *Gleanings of Antiquities*, 8.
77. *Ibid.*, 9.
78. *Ibid.*, 45–9.
79. *Ibid.*, 46.
80. *Ibid.*, 48.
81. *Ibid.*
82. *Ibid.*, 49.
83. *Ibid.*, 15.
84. *Ibid.*, 15, 52.
85. *Ibid.*, 52.
86. Mandelbrote, “Isaac Newton and Thomas Burnet”; Poole, *World Makers*, 55–63; Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom*, 181–9.
87. Beaumont, *Considerations on a Book*, 185–6.
88. *Ibid.*, 19.
89. Beaumont, *Gleanings of Antiquities*, 18. This was slightly changed from Burnet’s original phrasing of “for the understanding and use of the People” (*ad captum usumque populi*): Burnet, *Telluris theoria sacra*, 139. Although variants on such a statement were an early modern commonplace, that Beaumont had Burnet in mind is suggested by the fact that he quoted Burnet’s statement directly and exactly (a small typological mistake noted in the errata aside) in his earlier work: Beaumont, *Considerations on a Book*, 19; errata: unpaginated, sig. A4v.
90. Mandelbrote, “John Beaumont”.
91. Beaumont, *Considerations on a Book*, unpaginated, sigs. A2r–A2v; Ito, “Hooke’s Cyclic Theory”, 305–6; Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 134–6.
92. Beaumont, *Considerations on a Book*, 30. Burnet had not in fact appealed to fossils as evidence of his theory.
93. Beaumont, *Gleanings of Antiquities*, 18; Woodward, *Essay Towards a Natural History of the Earth*. For Woodward, see Rossi, *Dark Abyss of Time*, 217–22; Rappaport, *When Geologists Were Historians*, 149–60; Poole, *The World Makers*, 63–7. For Beaumont and Woodward, see Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology*, 154–5.
94. Beaumont, *Gleanings of Antiquities*, 19–40, esp. 33–5.
95. *Ibid.*, 1. The italics are Beaumont’s.
96. *Ibid.*, 2.
97. *Ibid.*, 22.
98. *Ibid.*, 9–10, 49, 53.

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