

A Letter from Dublin to the Publisher of these Tracts, concerning the Porphyry Pillars in Egypt.

SIR,

YOU engage me after a very undeniable manner, as I perceive by the minutes of your Philosophical Society, to send you some Account of the *Porphyry Pillars in Egypt*: And though I could have satisfied your Curiosity much better in this matter, had you thought of it when I was amongst my Papers in *Oxford*; yet rather than hazard your good Opinion, or give the least pretence of disrespect to your worthy Company, for whose persons and designs I have so just an esteem and veneration: I here send, not what's fit for me to write, or you to read; but what I can remember upon this subject.

Nor do I intend to speak concerning the nature or composition of stones in general, or of *Porphyry* more particularly: But meerly as to matter of Fact, so far chiefly as it fell under my own Cognizance, *i. e.* if you please, rather like an *Historian* than a *Philosopher*.

In the first place then, I think it may be taken for granted, that there is no such *Quarry*, or Rock of stone rather, in all the lower parts of *Egypt*: For so far as the Nile o'flows, is perfect soil. A sample whereof I hope you still retain; and let me entreat you to be very exact in weighing it this year, that you may be sure whether it be heavier in the time of the Inundation (as is generally believ'd) than before or after: And when, and in what proportion, it encreases.

The Boundaries of this overflow (which are never so miles from the *Channel*, that I saw, generally scarce $\frac{1}{2}$ of it, and in some places but a mile or two, (the *Delta* still excepted which is universally covered, all but the North side to the Sea, and a little to the East for some miles above

bove *Damiata*) are rising hills of sand, beyond which is perfect desert, upon the *Afric* side, the *Libyan*. [Higher South I have been told, there are Rocks nearer the River, and in some places streighten it] but under those sands, is a yielding stone, not much harder than Chalk, tho not so white, and very easily manag'd, as at the *Mummies*, deep spacious Vaults which were the old Repositories for the Dead. And the like also may be said of those Cells or Sepulchres which are hewn purely out of the rocky earth $\frac{3}{4}$ mile on the South of *Alexandria*. Albeit nearer the Sea, there are stones of a harder kind, and with which they build: but by their mouldring away, as appears by the Remains of houses within the Walls of the City, 'tis plain they can't endure the weather; which is sufficiently corroding there: The Iron which once plated their thick wooden Gates being mostly eaten away, and the deep Characters upon the sides of these very *Porphyry Pillars*, exceedingly defaced. Indeed about *Memphis* i. e. by the *Pyramids*, they have a milder Air; and the *Hieroglyphics* cut in those stones will last well enough, till they shall be removed into a rougher: But then, they'll crizle and scale, as I found by sad Experience. For having procur'd 4 stones, the best mark'd with those figures of Antiquity, I could meet with, and sent them down to *Alexandria* in order to their Transportation for *England*; I found them upon my second Voyage into *Egypt* very much injur'd, being put into the Custom-house-yard (where they lye still embargo'd,) by the *Aga*s; who demanded an intollerable Summ for liberty to ship them, as you may remember I told you the story.

But yet farther in the Country there are Mountains of harder stone: In the *Nitrian*, now the Desert of *St. Marcarius*, and not far from the Lake where the *Latroon* or true *Nitre* incrustates upon the top of the water, there are many; and some of them not utterly unlike *Porphyry*. That which nearest resembles its Colour, tho not

its Consistence, is the vein that produces the Eagle-stone: of which there are many in the *Bahr Batama*, a great sandy valley. But these stones are of a different Complexion from *Porphyry*, as you may perceive by those I sent you, which also will assist your Conjectures of their original.

However, I can't pronounce that there is no *Porphyry* hereabouts: For in the chief Monastery of the 4 now remaining (of 366 as many as are days in the longest year) dedicated to the *Blessed-Virgin*; the 2 stones which secure their Entrance are of the like, if not the very same substance: which I more particularly observ'd upon the account of their ingenious Contrivance. For these poor people, lying otherwise at the mercy of the roving *Arabs*, with these 2 Mill-stones (for that's their make) thus make good their Gate against them, (or rather their passage;) into which they run them, and then drive a great wooden wedge between them on the inside, which so fastens them that they cannot be loos'd but upon the inside neither. And of such a sort of *Porphyry*, is the noted *Sphynx* (a mighty head and shoulders 110 feet in compass) yet standing by the Northern *Pyramids*.

I have indeed been told of the place upon mount *Sinai*, whence this *Porphyry* came: but so they shew the very Rock where the 2 excellent double Rows of Pillars, in the Church of *Bethlehem* were hewn: tho I went away satisfied that 'twas a quite different sort of stone. Another tells of a Pillar of the same make yet lying there: and if this be certain, you need seek no further. Albeit, I must tell you that the stones brought thence, with the Representation of a Buck (it must needs be call'd) upon them; some of which you had, tho reddish; are of a much finer, and more even texture.

Wansleben writes of a great many, more Southerly; but I know him too well to believe all that he says for Gospel. And a more sober man, Father *Carlo Francisco d' Orleans*, now Superior of the *Capucines* at *Cairo*, who
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went 300 Leagues up the Nile in the year 69 ; told me of many Temples, Statues, and Pillars at that distance ; tho I can't be sure he said there were any of *Porphyry*. But since 'twas in *Thebais*, why may we not suppose them of that black, white and red speckl'd *Thebaic* Marble, famous in the World ; and wherewith the lesser Pyramid perhaps was crufted, yet to be feen upon the ground about it, and when polish'd looks finely.

Those which I have my self feen, are one of them at the *Matarea*, 3 or 4 miles East of *Grand Cairo*, and 2 at *Alexandria* juft within the Wall upon the North fide of the City : (for *Pompey's* Pillar as they call it) $\frac{1}{2}$ mile without the Gate to the South, is quite of another make and matter : one of thefe is thrown down and broken into pieces, but was of the fame dimenfions for breadth and thicknefs with the other. The *Francks* call them *Agulia's*, the Englifh particularly *Cleopatra's* needles ; but the Inhabitants content themfelves with the general name of Pillars. They have no *Bafis* or Pedeftals above ground ; and if they never had, they muft needs be very deep in the Earth. The Draughts I here fend you will excufe all farther Defcription. One of them was very well taken by Monsieur *Brute* a *French* Druggerman ; the other by a *Dutch* Painter, who, you'll fee, has but little commended his Art.

If you have a Fancy upon the fight of 'em, to fift out the *Hieroglyphic* Character with which they are engraven ; perhaps you'll find it to be the Aborigina! *Egyptian* Letter, long fince worn out of common ufe in the Country, as the *Samaritan* (fo 'tis now generally call'd,) was amongft the *Jews*. And that it bears proportion with the *China* (now in ufe) where each note represents a word, or rather an entire fignification. And moreover that 'tis wrought the fame way too, from the top to the bottom ; as you have feen in the Bord I brought from a door in the Village *Succara* (which is next to the *Mummies*) the largeft
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piece of Ægyptian Writing perhaps, at this day in *Europe*. I confess that in the Vaults or Priest's Chambers cut out of the Rock, close by the 2d. Pyramid, the whole walls are inscrib'd therewith; but I speak of an Original. And if all that is there written were but exactly copyed, it might be then lawful to hope, that the Language so long since dead and buried in the House of Bondage, might have its resurrection in the Land of Liberty.

That such vast Monuments might be remov'd from place to place, is difficu't indeed, but not impossible. And if one *Archimedes* (as *Athenæus* preserves the story for us) could lanch the vast ship of *Hiero*, which all the strength of *Syracuse* was not able to bring to Sea; what might not many great Masters in the same Art perform, and upon their own Dunghil too? for I may call *Ægypt* the Mother of the Mathematics.

Besides, some of these Mountains are near the *Red-Sea*; and *Sufs* from *Cairo* but 2 or 3 days, from Nile less: And how possible it is to convey mighty weights by water, let the Obelisks at *Rome* declare; which were all of them brought from this very Country, And that such things may be done by Land too, tho not by every one; is plain enough, because we see they have been done. At *Baalbec* which is 14 hours from *Damascus* (for thence I went, accompanied with Mr. *Ant. Balam* and Mr. *Jo. Verney*, both now in *England*, whom I thought fit to name for my Compurgators, if you should question the credit of story :) There is a stone about 66 foot long on the N. side of the Castle-wall, and 2 more of 60 each: And I believe we saw the way they travel'd, having left one of their Company, tho not quite so big in the Road, as a Monument thereof to this very day.

If you have got the piece of this *Aguglia* (for I have nothing here;) you will thereby best discern its Colour and Composition: 'Tis something more lively than the *Porphyry* of *St. John's Font* (for by that name 'tis known)

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at *Ephesus*; much more vivid than those 4 tall square Pillars at *Tadmora* (in its middle age *Palmyra*) which are each of them but of, I think, one piece; whilst all the rest, exceeding many, of another sort of stone, are of several pieces and round: If you'll attribute the clearness of their Complexion, in part to the Air; which corrodes them especially upon the N. and East; I impose not upon the liberty of your Reason.

If the *Ichnography* of them (which I desire you to reserve for me) won't excuse me from any farther description, I beg your pardon that I have said thus much, and hazarded my judgment to demonstrate my Affection, how much I am, and endeavour to be,

Your faithful Friend

And humble Servant,

R. H.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The Cuts of these Pillars are not prefixed to this Paper, because said to be engraven and published elsewhere.

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