

Part transcript of a letter from Elgin, in Constantinople, to Lusieri in Athens, dated 10 July, 1801(post script 14 July).

“Balestra has with him several drawings of my house in Scotland, and some plans of the site on which it is intended to build here. As regards the latter, it would be necessary to me to have them by the first opportunity. The plans for my house in Scotland should be known to you. This building is a subject which occupies me greatly, and offers me means of placing, in a useful, distinguished and agreeable way, the various things that you may perhaps be able to procure for me.

The Hall is intended to be adorned with columns - the cellars underneath are vaulted expressly for this.

Would it be better to get some white columns worked in this country, in order to send them by sea to my house? Or to look out for some different kinds of marble that could be collected together in course of time and decorate the hall (in the manner of the great Church at Palermo) with columns all different one from another, and all of fine marble – supplementing them with agates and other rare marbles which are found in Sicily, and which are worked in small pieces?

I am inclined towards the latter plan. If each column was different and each beautiful, I should think that the effect would be admirable but perhaps better if there were two of each kind.

In either case I should wish to collect as much marble as possible. I have other places in my house which need it, and besides, one can easily multiply ornaments of beautiful marble without overdoing it, and nothing truly, is so beautiful and also independent of changes of fashion.

These reflections only apply to unworked marble. You do not need any prompting from me to know the value that is attached to a sculptured marble, or historic piece.”

dwelling at Athens shall be employed in going in and out of the said citadel of Athens, which is the place of their occupations; or in fixing scaffolding around the ancient Temple of the Idols, or in modelling with chalk or gypsum the said ornaments and visible figures thereon; or in measuring the fragments and vestiges of other ruined edifices; or in excavating, when they find it necessary, the foundations, in search of inscriptions among the rubbish; that they be not molested by the said Disdar (or commandant of the citadel) nor by any other persons, nor even by you (to whom this Letter is addressed;) and that no one meddle with their scaffolding or implements, *nor hinder them from taking away any pieces of stone* (qualche pezzi di pietra) *with inscriptions* or figures. In the above-mentioned manner, see that ye demean and comport yourselves.

(Signed with a signet.)

SEGED ABDULLAH KAIMACAN.

Such was the tenor of the fateful firman. We have it on the authority of Lord Elgin⁵⁴ that the general state of political relations was an important consideration attending its issue.

In proportion with the change of affairs in our relations towards Turkey, the facilities of access were increased to me and to all English travellers; and about the middle of the summer of 1801 all difficulties were removed; we then had access for general purposes The objection disappeared from the moment of the decided success of our arms in Egypt? Yes; the whole system of Turkish feeling met with a revolution, in the first place, from the invasion by the French, and afterwards by our conquest.⁵⁵

Lord Elgin's views at this stage are fully set forth in a letter to Lusieri of instructions which are of sufficient interest to be printed at length.⁵⁶

SIR,

Your letter of May 16th and the news which Mr. Hunt has brought us from Athens, have received my most serious attention. I have indeed felt how precious the moment is, what advantages there are to be gained or lost.

Mr. Hunt will tell you how much we have thought about the means of coming to your help, and will show you better than I can describe the proofs of the efficacious measures that we have taken—I refer to him for all the details.

When you have heard about the matter, you will feel the importance of taking all possible advantages from it. The first aim is to finish the great work well, the ensemble with which you are all busy, and I dare to flatter myself that by the means which we now have, there will be nothing that will not be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

The progress already effected makes observations from me unnecessary as to the course to be followed. Perhaps there will be some doubt about the number of objects that you ought to undertake personally—But that will depend partly upon what others undertake and the different considerations that Mr. Hunt's journey will suggest to you.

Besides the general work (by which I mean that which had been begun at the departure of Mr. Hunt) it would be very essential that the *Formatori* should be able to take away exact models of the little ornaments, or detached pieces if any are found, which would be interesting for the Arts. The very great variety in our manufactures, in objects either of elegance or luxury, offers a thousand applications for such details. A chair, a footstool, designs or shapes for porcelain, ornaments for cornices, nothing is indifferent, and whether it be in painting or a model, exact representations of such things would be much to be desired.

⁵⁴ *Report*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ *Report*, p. 40.

⁵⁶ Elgin to Lusieri, July 10, 1801.

Besides, you have now the permission to dig, and there a great field is opened for medals, and for the remains both of sculpture and architecture. Your zeal will be kindled, I am sure, at this occasion of doing me such essential a service, as the making use of this opportunity affords; and the permission being as extraordinary as the circumstances which procured it are precarious, I charge you to take every care, and to make them work well, and carry on our undertaking in every way that you shall think useful.

The journey that Mr. Hunt is undertaking offers a field for your talent and taste that has never before been offered to any artist. The places he is going to visit, the support he will have everywhere, his zeal, his intelligence, and his knowledge being all equally favourable, promise a most happy end to this excursion. I hope that in going through these classic scenes in this manner you will see exactly what there is; and everywhere where you have not leisure for what you think interesting, you will be able easily to take measures for going back, either alone, or with some of the artists to finish the work.

Balestra has with him several drawings of my house in Scotland, and some plans of the site on which it is intended to build here. As regards the latter, it would be necessary to me to have them by the first opportunity. The plans for my house in Scotland should be known to you. This building is a subject that occupies me greatly, and offers me the means of placing, in a useful, distinguished and agreeable way, the various things that you may perhaps be able to procure for me.

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These reflexions only apply to unworked marble. You do not need any prompting from me to know the value that is attached to a sculptured marble, or historic piece.

Farewell, Sir, keep well, and be assured of my esteem and respect.

ELGIN.

14th July.

P.S. I have just received your letter from Myconos. It has not hurried.

The letters which Mr. Hunt brings, and the advantages that he happens to have, are such that I beg you very urgently to make the trip with him, in the way that I have proposed in this letter. Everything makes me set great store by this expedition.

The firman had to be conveyed to Athens, and in the ordinary course would no doubt have been entrusted to some courier or ship-captain. It chanced, however, that the political position made it desirable that Hunt should return once more to Athens as mentioned above. The nature of his mission is explained in a letter from him to Hamilton⁵⁷ who was at that moment on a special errand in Egypt. After giving general news, he notes

⁵⁷ Hunt to Hamilton, July 8, 1801.