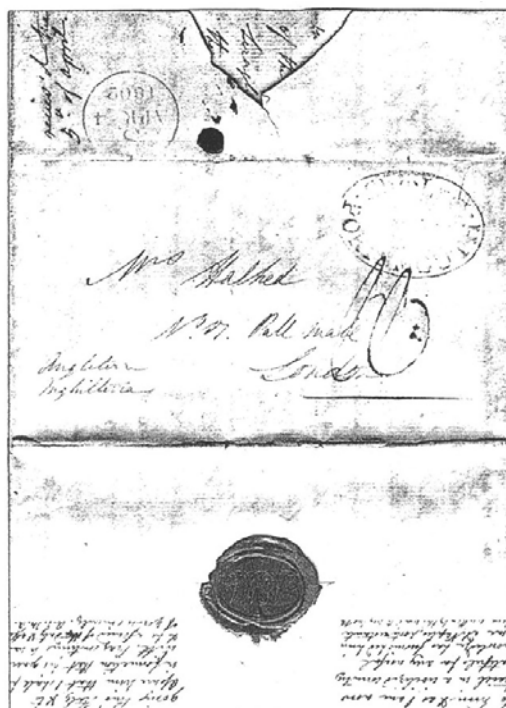


AN INTERESTING ITEM FROM MY COLLECTION

Mrs Halhed, Correspondence of 1802

Arthur Moyles



Postal markings : Postmarked Ship Letter /PORTSMOUTH in oval black, with Red circular S/APR 4/1802 and Sealed in wax reading A E M A

Mrs. Halhed, No. 17 Pall Mall, London, I understand was the wife of a Member in Parliament.

Malta, February 22nd 1802

It is long, my dear Aunt,

since I had the pleasure to write to you, and as all I have written since that time has been little more than tedious journals, you have perhaps had an escape by not hearing from me during our voyage, the arrival of our letters in England was what we would only hope, as the conveyance in Turkey must be uncertain.

We did not arrive at Constantinople till the middle of December, I had the pleasure to find there 15 letters for me and three half sheets from you, the last of which dated October 18th was the latest date that I have heard from England. I am very sincerely obliged to you for the trouble and goodness you have had in forwarding my letters and I think their arrival into my hands is due to your friendly offices. I have heard nothing of Baron de Rhaum but we shall very probably meet somewhere on the continent. I assure you I should have been very happy in a trip to Petersburg.

My voyage to Alexandria was quite unexpected, I had imagined that as that part of the Mediterranean was full of English ships I should probably meet with a good passage to this place, and as safe conveyance in a barbarous country is always difficult I preferred going round by Egypt in an English bottom to any shorter route in a foreign one, I was so fortunate as to meet Captain Hillyar (*Later Sir James, Vice Admiral*) of the Niger frigate (*in fact a cruiser*) at Constantinople, he insisted on giving me a passage and with as much politeness and good humour that I immediately accepted his offer, this rendered my stay at the Ottoman Capital short but long enough for me, (indeed it had nearly been too long), and although I was extremely happy at arriving there and considered it as a kind of haven, yet my prospects there were much too dull to induce me to refuse so fair an offer opportunity of escape, accompanied with a glimpse of Egypt, so I had just time to settle our party account and embark. I think I was there only 6 days during which I saw the grand Signor, who has the appearance of for this gratification we waited an hour.

As Pera where the Franes reside is opposite Constantinople on the other side of the harbour, we crossed over and walked to the Hippodrome, where is an Egyptian obelisk, covered with Hieroglyphics, and the brazen column which supported the tripod of Apollo at Delphos. St. Sophia we were not allowed to see, there is little of antiquity worth viewing at Constantinople.

The city is certainly a beautiful object at a little distance, the Turkish manner of building is very picturesque and the quantity of the Cyprus trees with which they fill their burying grounds, and plant round their mosques and houses make a great variety of colour, and break the line of sameness usually to be observed in towns.

The boldness of the domes of the mosques and the delicate elegance of the minarets which surround them, many of which are gilt at the seraphs point afford a very pleasing appearance, to crown the whole the waving of the 7 hills on which the city stands and their general inclination to the water's edge form a consistent harmony, and the scene is enlivened by the very elegant little boats which ply about in swarms in the water. You will hear of our narrow escape as we were returning home at night from Poronkvere.

I had not time to take leave of the Ambassador and Lady Elgin, who had behaved very polite to us and friendly. We had a voyage of three weeks to Alexandria. Mr. Stratton sent on a mission to Egypt was on board and made a pleasant addition, we had only bad weather once at sea, we went about and headed back to the Dardanelles, we touched at Smyrna but I did not go ashore. I only staid at Alexandria 5 days, perhaps I shall be blamed by some for not proceeding to Cairo and the Pyramids, but really the fatigues and difficulties we had already encountered had damped my curiosity and given me a disgust to the Levant. The plague was at Rosetta and some instances had happened in Alexandria tho' the English keep up a strict quarantine. The Pyramids are stupendouout elegance and grand without beauty, what I had seen at Athens united everything to be written in Architectural purity, and to go up the great pyramid for the sake of going was not my ambition. I wished to take my last leave of the Turks and after what I thought sufficient consultation with myself, accepted Captain Hillyer's offer of a cabin to Malta.

The sandy environs of Alexandria is the only apology for seeking refuge in that town. it is the only object that breaks the line of the desert as you approach, the walls are very extensive and the French have made them strong, the houses and the inhabitants do not near fill the space, a very large portion is given up to rubbish, ruin and rats. Under ground are the reservoir for preserving the Nile water before the English introduced the sea water into the canal, many of them preserve their original plaster and remain entire, many are broken in, which render riding

there about dangerous. I hope the obelisk (one of Cleopatra's needles) will arrive safe in England.

I saw the sepoy employed in throwing out a mole into the sea in order to embark it, they say it weighed near 700 tons, it is perfect lying on the ground and covered with hieroglyphics, there is another standing close to it. They are just out of the town to the east. Pompeii's pillar is a beautiful column of polished granite, 114 feet high including base and capital, there was once a statue on the top, the foot of which was discovered by 4 Englishmen who got up by flying a kite over and drank there a bowl of punch, the present Consul of Smyrna is I believe one. We dined at Lord Cavan's (*Lambart, Richard Ford William, seventh Earl of Cavan, present at attack on Alexandria 1801*), commander in chief and at General Baird's (*Sir David, commanded Indian forces in Egypt against French 1801-2*), commander of the Indian forces, the plague is now in one of the Indian Regiments. I hope they will not carry it to India.

We had a passage to Malta of 18 Days and part of the time terrible weather, we performed quarantine of 12 days. Mr. Gell (*Sir William*) and Mr. Dodwell (*Edward*), my old companions arrived here from Constantinople 4 days after us, the latter has been dangerously and is still very ill. Gell and I are going to Garganti, thence to Palermo from whence a Packet sails to Naples. I like much the appearance of this place, the houses good all built of stone the streets large and rectangular all paved and dry two hours after heavy rain, they say the fortifications have little need of guns and are absolutely impregnable.

Gell and I rode the other day in a two wheeler coach drawn by one mule to Citta Vecchia where is the cave of St. Paul, which has nothing curious but that they give all strangers a piece of the stone to preserve them from vipers..... The harbour is excellent and the largest ships lashed to the shore like barges..... I think I saw in Egypt that Gentleman who came to Cowes one summer when we were there and whom we had the pleasure of knowing thro' your recommendation, he is I suppose in some foreign corps in our service, he did not know me nor could I recollect his name, but I think it was him, however I saw him but once and that for a minute.

Adieu my dear Aunt, I was happy to hear that you and my Uncle have been continually in good health, pray give my love and duty to him and as I am now going thro' Italy and to travel in a civilised country Assure him that I shall feel

grateful for any useful information that his general knowledge has furnished him with. Pray continue to write to me at Naples poste restante and be assured of the duty and affection of your one and only A.E.M.A.

P.S. I have written by this mail to my mother.
