

«Reports to Henry Cole on the plaster cast of the Portica della Gloria», 1867-1926, manuscript, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Transcription: Andrea Soubrier Benavides

40 Russell Street, Covent Garden
London, 20th February 1867

Sir,

In compliance with your intimation that you would be pleased to be furnished with particulars of my journey to Santiago, and also of the incidents connected with my stay in that city while reproducing the celebrated "Porta della Gloria", I have the honor to forward you the following details.

I secured berths for myself and staff of workmen on board the Spanish ship "Murillo" upon the 2nd of July last and received a written guarantee that the voyage should not exceed six days. Immediately after **quitting** our starting point (The Hermitage Pier) – at 2 P.M. – our vessel came in violent collision with a barge, which caused great alarm and did considerable injury, the support of one of the life Boats being fractured by force of the collision. On asking to see the Captain, I found to my astonishment that he was not on board. We arrived off Gravesend at 8 o'clock where we anchored and, as we had been without food nearly the whole of the day, we anxiously looked forward to supper, which after a time we found we were not to have as the Steward assured me with great coolness that he had no **power** to supply us with any food until the arrival of the Captain, and as the Steward was inflexible, though I pointed out to him that it was part of the contract that food should be **amply** supplied, I had to charter a boat and send on shore for provisions.

The Captain, a Spaniard named Marc, came on board at 2 o'clock the following morning, and in about an hour afterwards we sailed. We made considerable progress during the day but towards evening we had to bear the brunt of some very heavy seas and eventually to encounter a tremendous gale. Any description on my part would fail to depict the deplorable condition of my sick people, who were one and all prostrate; for my own part I suffered very little but I was extremely anxious about my men who were in a dreadful plight. The gale continued without cessation and with increased severity; and at the earnest entreaty of self and men the Captain declared his intention not to proceed further but make for Portland and accordingly he altered his course and we reached Portland the following day.

The bad weather still continuing we were detained two nights and a day. The storm having at length abated, we began to think of starting but here a very serious difficulty arose, for my men tired out, expressed their anxious desire to return home, and it was only by great entreaty and promises on my part that I dissuaded them from carrying out their desire, we continued on our route, all going smoothly enough for a day or two and kept a good look out for the much longed for Port of Carril, but found, after a time, that the Captain was, without assigning any cause, making for Saint-Andrea, a Port three or four miles out of our route, the only reason that I can give for this, is that our Vessel has not more than half freight. We of course were helpless and were

obliged to go, thinking our Voyage was never-ending. While in the Bay of Biscay the awful discovery was made that the ship was on fire, it was ascertained that the conflagration was in the hold where the Coals were stored and that the danger was imminent, but by the blessing of Providence, and the prompt energy of every one on board the fire was extinguished. Saint Andrea was at length in sight, and we were rejoicing at the prospect of a speedy deliverance, when the booming of a **Grin** over the waves attached our attention, which our Captain informed us was a signal that we must not proceed any further, immediately after a boat put off from the shore laden with officers and Men who came alongside and from their Vessel **protruded** an instrument very much resembling a pair of gigantic sugar tongs which held and conveyed a notification that the Ship coming from Country where Cholera existed we must perform Quarantine for 10 days in the "Lazaretto" situate at Vigo. We arrived at Vigo on the 10th at 12 o'clock and were taken in charge, on board of our Ship, by the health Officers, who consigned us to the "Lazaretto" a locality that defies description abounding with loathsomeness, and wretchedness, - In this den of defilement we were incarcerated, and compelled to herd with some of the worst specimens of humanity from all Countries the eye ever had the misfortune to look upon, and in this we had to abide the allotted time, ten days. Every now and then we were compelled to submit to the very unpleasant process of fumigation which is very debilitating in its effect and quite deprived us of our small remaining desire for food, - After intolerable delay and this revolting medical treatment we were only too glad to find ourselves once more on board our Vessel and trusted confidently we should soon reach the Port of Carril without additional impediments, but here again we were disappointed, as our Captain, without condescending to inform us why, expressed an inclination to **sail** to Corunna, which, had I permitted him to do, would have had the effect of keeping us at Sea for at least 5 days longer. I therefore made up my mind, notwithstanding the great expense incurred thereby, to travel with my people from Vigo overland, which resolution I carried out and arrived at Carril the following day, having left my material on board the "Murillo" which did not arrive at Carril until I had waited there four days in anxious expectation - Trouble followed Trouble, - The intellectual Authorities in connection with the Port would not allow the unloading of my Plaster of Paris, expressing the doubt as to its non-combustibility, and informed me that if it were of an inflammable character it would be contraband, and on this ignorantly puerile suspicion, they submitted a portion to analyzation. Thus incurring upon us a further delay of three days our Captain (Marc) here coolly made a demand upon me for remuneration for our keep while in Quarantine, and for the expense of the fumigation of myself, people and Cargo.

Santiago, at last, was reached, to our great satisfaction on the 27th of July, thus having been five and twenty days on our Voyage, instead of five days as had been agreed.

My first act after my arrival was to introduce myself to his reverence the Dean, being anxious if **inferable**, to make arrangements for commencing my labours on the succeeding day. I was with the least possible delay, granted an interview with that Gentleman, who received me kindly and courteously, we had rather a lengthened conversation, the substance of which related to England and the English in general and your Museum in particular. Previously to my quitting his presence he gave me his

promise that he would immediately convoke a Meeting of Canons, without whose deliberation and assent my work in connection with the Cathedral could not be done. The Canons met on the following morning, and in the course of the day I again waited upon the Dean, imagining that no obstacles could possibly exist and that I should be permitted to commence my operations at once, when to my dismay I was informed that in consequence of the death of the Architect, subsequent to the permission having been accorded to reproduce the Porta della Gloria and who had been appointed to watch over the work, it had been decided after deep deliberation and mature consideration not to permit me to take the Copy, I was now almost in despair, feeling assured that I would have to retrace my way to England without having fulfilled my important mission, in this dilemma I met and consulted Mr Valardeva, an influential gentleman at Santiago, who holds the position of Chairman of the Railway, and I have to express to you my profound sense of my obligations to him for the deep interest he took in the matter, and the great assistance rendered not only then but in many subsequent occasions, - Acting upon his advice I solicited and obtained an interview with the Archbishop of Santiago which his Grace accorded me both promptly and cordially, - I was surprised to learn that he knew nothing of the permission having been granted for the Copy to be made and he expressed his deep regret and disapproval at the negative result of the Convention of Canons observing "Because one man is dead, have we no other to take his place? It will be an insult to Great Britain to allow you to return without the Copy of the Gloria". He inquired most minutely as to my method of procedure, and was much interested and pleased with the practical illustrations which he honoured me by allowing me to give him. - He interceded for me and I can not express delight I felt that intercession had had the desired effect as in a few days the previous resolution rescinded and I received an official message purporting that the required permission had been acceded. My material for scaffolding was all in readiness and I really now thought there would not be anything to prevent work in right good earnest, but, at the last moment, found it was necessary for me to procure the assent of an official styled the "Fabrichiero" (a sort of superintendent of work at the Cathedral) before I could proceed with the erection, this Reverend Gentleman was very particular and required me to enter into long and tedious explanations as to the place of my nativity, however after retarding my work by withholding his consent for two days he expressed his satisfaction, as he termed it, with my explanations and the scaffolding having been erected I commenced the moulding at once and without subsequent delay and annoyance, saving the appointment by the Cannons of an Artist one Signor Cancellata to supervise the work as it advanced but though their own appointed Official this Gentleman had to be remunerated by myself, however we managed to get along pretty smoothly with him but not so with others, who were constantly interposing their interference and thereby greatly retarded the work. They had got a notion into their heads that I should either destroy or injure their *beautiful Gloria*, and it was not until some of the models had been taken from the moulds already completed that they were satisfied - Their praise became most eulogistic when they inspected the productions of the most delicate and difficult details brought forth without the slightest detriment to the original. All continued now to go on pretty well and I had about half completed the work when my superintendent Signor Cancellata from some fancied grievance informed me that it was his intention to retire from his post and as I was aware that the absence of the Official

to overlook my proceedings would subject my work to further delay, I was very much annoyed and perplexed and on my entreating him to forego his resolution, he replied, that he would stay no longer and the Cannons might get someone else to supply his position, however by the assistance of a “*douceur*” I prevailed upon him to abide with me until the completion of the work. All the time our work was going forward I was daily visited by the population of Santiago – They came to see us in great numbers and a ridiculously absurd report got about that the *French people* – as they called us – were about to deprive them of their Gloria and it took no little explanation to disabuse their minds of this laughable misconception – At length an idea suggested itself to me that an admirable method of convincing them of their error would be to make a Public exposition of the results of my *foil*. I therefore communicated my notion of the affair to the Archbishop and the Clergy who were much pleased with the suggestion and gave me authorisation to publish a Public advertisement of which the following is a translation

“13th October 1866

By permission of His Grace the Archbishop and the Cannons of the Cathedral of Santiago the Public will be admitted to view the copy of the Gloria on this day from 10.30 to 3.30

(Signed) D. Brucciani”

The numerous portions were placed in order around the Cathedral forming a small Gallery of Art. As early as nine o'clock A.M. the Archbishop arrived in his Carriage drawn by a pair of fine mules and with his paternal benediction open the Exhibition. So numerous did the populace assemble to witness the display that it became necessary to have assistance with the whole of my people to keep order. During the five hours no less than seven thousand persons passed through the Cathedral inspecting with which they shewed their approbation by their repeated exclamations of gratification.

I had now only to look to the package and careful transit of my packages to Corunna but I must here inform you as a finish to my annoyances I was subjected to the most fearful impositions in all my disbursements, this I believe was partly attributable to a report that got abroad that I represented the Government of England and that I had paid the Glory of Santiago a million reals!!! for permission to take the model. I was fleeced on all sides but especially by the *Carretuerres* who although they were paid well for the transit of the cases were incessant in their demands upon my purse.

I trust that I shall be excused acquainting you that it was a matter of great gratification to me to be elected an honorary member of the “*Societa Economica*” (the Academy of Sculpture) and to be presented by the Archbishop and Cannons with a testimonial in Silver and with other little presents from Gentlemen of Santiago with whom it had been my pleasant lot to associate in connection with the reproduction of the “*Porta*” the whole of whom bade me adieu in the most cordial and affectionate manner.

As soon as I had seen the last case in the hands of the Agent at Corunna I returned with my men – who had positively declined to come back by sea – overland.

I have the honor to remain

your very Obedient Servant

[Signature] Domenico Brucciani

Henry Cole [illegible] C.B.

Science and Art Department

South Kensington