

Eduard Graeffe (1833-1916) to Henry Baker Tristram (1822-1906)

Graeffe, Eduard
24.12.1890

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Bibliographic Metadata

TITLE

Eduard (Edw.) Graeffe (1833–1916) to Henry Baker Tristram (1822–1906)

SCOPE AND CONTENT

Letter from Trieste accompanying a Wardian case containing live molluscs. Graeffe reports a remarkable and “monstrous” deviation within a genus previously described by him and forwards several specimens for examination. The letter also alludes to contemporary folk beliefs concerning molluscs as a remedy for warts, in connection with Tristram’s affliction contracted in Palestine. Further reflections concern a Cypriot legend recounted by Tristram (a blood-marked veil; visions situated between Christian and Islamic chronology) and the possible relation between natural history and providential meaning.

AUTHOR, CONTRIBUTORS

Graeffe, Eduard (author; signatory)

Handwritten by an unknown person

(English fair copy; the known German handwriting of Graeffe does not correspond to this script)

PLACE AND DATE OF CREATION

Trieste, 24 December 1890

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

2 l./4 p.;

Ink on paper;

English cursive hand;

Signed “Dr. Edw. Graeffe”

LANGUAGE

English

PROVENANCE / HOLDING CONTEXT

Correspondence: Graeffe–Tristram papers (late 19th-century scientific and clerical exchange)

My dear Canon Tristram,
In the accompanying Wardian case, fitted
for the conveyance of live molluscs, I venture
to transmit to you certain specimens
which have greatly engaged my attention.
I trust they reached you in a living state.
They belong to that genus which, as you
will recall from our conversation in
Paris, bears my name, and which I formerly
described as marked by a triangular
patch of deep red upon the dorsum.
The present individuals, however, exhibit
a most singular deviation from the
customary type; an aberration, a very
monstrosity indeed, such as has not,
to knowledge, been observed even during
the years immediately following my
residence in those regions. The younger
naturalists now established there,
having encountered this extraordinary
variety, dispatched several living examples
to me, with a courtesy I scarcely
deserve in recollection of my earlier notes

upon the fauna of those parts
Some I have retained for continued
observation and anatomical examination
preserving others in spirits a few I now
forward to you I do so not merely
for scientific consideration but for
reasons that border, perhaps, upon the
spiritual. You once confided to me,
during the Congress, the persistence of
the warts first contracted in Palestine
an affliction which obliged you, as you
remarked with a certain irony to
wear gloves habitually. The coincidence
of these creatures presenting themselves
in so unusual a form, shortly after our
discourse, has impressed me more than I
readily admit.

Among the common people of my country
there survives a belief in the salutary
properties of certain molluscs in the
treatments of warts I do not hasten
to affirm the truth of such remedies
yet I cannot wholly dismiss the
curious harmony between the creature
and the complaint. Nature is often

more full of meaning than our discipline allows readily.

Our exchange in Paris touching upon our respective years in Samoa and in the Levant or as you more recurrently styled it, the Holy Land, has left a lasting impression upon me. In the months since, I have frequently reflected upon your account of that Cypriot maiden, that saint of pagan virtue in the ~~early~~ Christian age of hermaphroditic nature, and in this respect curiously akin to most slugs.

You related it as it is told there still in the local Christian oral tradition that her natal day fell precisely midway by the calendar, between the birthdays of Beer Lord and of Mahomet the false prophet; and that her visions foretold not only the rise of a faith not yet declared, but the terrors that should follow in its train. The image you described, a veil marked by a square stained with blood, has returned to my thoughts with unexpected insistence. You spoke of the cloth not merely as

relic but as warning of revelation obscure
and yet preserved within its folds. It is
not for me to draw conclusions, you
being yourself a clergyman, yet I confess
I find it difficult to regard the
sudden appearance of so strange an
aberration in one of the creatures
I have studied as entirely devoid
of meaning.

Whether these specimens prove to
be no more than an extraordinary
variation or whether they bear within
them some providential suggestion,
I leave to your discernment. At the
very least, they may serve the
advancement of natural history, at
most they may remind us that creation
still conceals correspondences beyond
our present comprehension.

With sincere esteem.

I remain,
Yours very faithfully,

Dr. Ed. Græffe

Trieste
24 December
1890.

P.S. Should you desire to keep them alive for any length of time the
assistent whom I sent with the case will explain the necessary precautions!



Digital Reproduction

P.S. Should you desire to keep them alive for any length of time, the assistant whom I have sent with the case will explain the necessary precautions!

My dear Canon Tristram,

In the accompanying Wardian case, fitted for the conveyance of live molluscs, I venture to transmit to you certain specimens which have greatly engaged my attention. I trust they reached you in a living state. They belong to that genus which, as you will recall from our conversation in Paris, bears my name, and which I formerly described as marked by a triangular patch of deep red upon the dorsum.

The present individuals, however, exhibit a most singular deviation from the customary type; an aberration, a very monstrosity indeed, such as has not, to my knowledge, been observed even during the years immediately following my residence in those regions. The younger naturalists now established there, having encountered this extraordinary variety, dispatched several living examples to me, with a courtesy I scarcely deserve, in recollection of my earlier notes upon the fauna of those parts.

Some I have retained for continued observation and anatomical examination, preserving others in spirits; a few I now forward to you. I do so not merely for scientific consideration, but for reasons that border, perhaps, upon the spiritual. You once confided to me, during the Congress, the persistence of the warts first contracted in Palestine, an affliction which obliged you, as you remarked with a certain irony, to wear gloves habitually. The coincidence of these creatures presenting themselves in so unusual a form shortly after our discourse has impressed me more than I readily admit.

Among the common people of my country there survives a belief in the salutary properties of certain molluscs in the treatment of warts. I do not hasten to affirm the truth of such remedies; yet I cannot wholly dismiss the curious harmony between the creature and the complaint. Nature is often more full of meaning than our discipline allows readily.

Our exchange in Paris, touching upon our respective years in Samoa and in the Levant, or as you more reverently styled it, the Holy Land, has left a lasting impression upon me. In the months since, I have frequently reflected upon your account of that Cypriot maiden, that saint of pagan virtue in the early Christian age, of hermaphroditic nature, and in this respect curiously akin to most slugs. You related it as it is told there still, in the local Christian oral tradition, that her natal day fell precisely midway, by the calendar, between the birthdays of Our Lord and of Mahomet, the false prophet; and that her visions foretold not only the rise of a faith not yet declared, but the terrors that should follow in its train. The image you described, a veil marked by a square stained with blood, has returned to my thoughts with unexpected insistence.

You spoke of the cloth not merely as relic but as warning; of revelation obscured and yet preserved within its folds. It is not for me to draw conclusions, you being yourself a clergyman; yet I confess I find it difficult to regard the sudden appearance of so strange an aberration in one of the creatures I have studied as entirely devoid of meaning.

Whether these specimens prove to be no more than an extraordinary variation, or whether they bear within them some providential suggestion, I leave to your discernment. At the very least, they may serve the advancement of natural history; at most, they may remind us that creation still conceals correspondences beyond our present comprehension.

With sincere esteem, I remain,
Yours very faithfully,
Dr. Ed. Graeffe

Trieste, 24 December 1890.