

again. And the painters scarcely fared better.

It is Edward Lear - a writer and a painter days, in 1858. As he moves towards the city

April 9<sup>th</sup>. At length we started. A walk

And then, after three more days of travel, on his

eastern cliff are fully seen, I own to having

Mount Hor, crowded with perforated tombs,

rainbow hues of rock and cliff, — the dark

which the ablest pen or pencil has no chance What art could give the star-bright flitting

be understood by visiting the place itself, and those who have never seen it.' Yet, as the

and his party of trespass.

Fig.1 John Shaw Smith, Photograph of Tomb of

Fig.2 John Shaw Smith, Photograph of Theatre

Fig.3 John Shaw Smith, Photograph of The 1852. Modern print from glass negative, 215 x 165 mm. Coll-20-1-16-4 box 4 no.20, Centre for

Fig.4 John Shaw Smith, Photograph of Modern print from glass negative, 215 x 165 mm





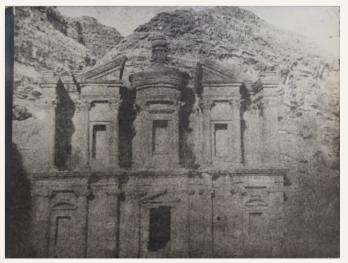


Fig.5 John Shaw Smith, Photograph of Palace Tomb or Corinthian Tomb at Petra, March 1852. Modern print from glass negative, 215 x 165 mm. Coll-20-1-16-3 box 4 no.19, Centre for Research Collections, University of Edinburgh.

Fig. 6 John Shaw Smith, Photograph of Petra, March 1852. Modern print from glass negative. 215 x 165 mm. Coll-20-1-16-6 box 4 no.22, Centre for Research Collections, University of Edinburgh

Fig.7 Kendra Matchett, Interior of the Tomb of the Urn, Petra, 2023. iPhone photo.



There were no paintings or decorations of any kind within the chamber; but the rock out of which it was hewn, like the whole stony rampart that encircled the city, was of a peculiarity and beauty that I never saw elsewhere, being a dark ground, with veins of white, blue, red, purple, and sometimes scarlet and light orange, running through it in rainbow streaks; and within the chambers, where there had been no exposure to the action of the elements, the freshness and beauty of the colours in which these waving lines were drawn gave an effect hardly inferior to that of the paintings in the tombs of the kings at Thebes.<sup>3</sup>

... many of them, however, are adorned with such a profusion of the most lovely and brilliant colours as, I believe, it is quite impossible to describe. Red, purple, yellow, azure or sky-blue, black, and white, are seen in the same mass distinctly in successive layers, or blended so as to form every shade and hue of which they are capable -as brilliant and as soft as they ever appear in flowers or in the plumage of birds or in the sky when illuminated by the most glorious sunset. The red perpetually shades into pale or deep rose or flesh colour. The purple is sometimes very dark, and again approaches

The white which is often as pure as snow, is occasionally just dashed with blue or red. The blue is usually the pale azure of the clear sky or of the ocean, but sometimes has the deep and peculiar shade of the clouds in summer when agitated by a tempest.

Yellow is an epithet often applied to sand

and sandstone. The yellow of the rocks of Petra is as bright as that of saffron. It is easier to imagine than describe the effect of tall, graceful columns, exhibiting these exquisite colours in their succession of regular horizontal strata. They are displayed to still greater advantage in the walls and ceilings of some of the excavations where there is a slight dip in the strata. This gives, in the perpendicular sides of the excavation, greater breadth and freedom to the exhibition of colours, while in the ceiling, the plane of which makes a very acute angle with that of the strata, the effect is indescribably beautiful. The colours here have full play and expansion, and they exhibit all the freedom of outline and harmonious blending of tints observable in a sunset scene. The ceiling of a large excavation just at the entrance of Wady Syke, and nearly opposite to the amphitheatre, affords an example of the magnificent effect which I so vainly attempt to describe. In the northern half of the ceiling a brilliant deep red is the predominant hue, intermingled, however, with deep blue, azure, white, and purple.

... The interior, which is without any ornament but the exquisite colouring I have already tried to describe, is in a better state of preservation than any other excavation which I examined, still bearing the marks of the chisel in every part. It is twenty-one paces square, having six recesses of various size in the wall. It was probably a tomb

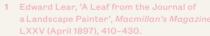
I have been not a little mortified at ascertaining the impossibility of obtaining and transporting specimens of the beautiful

Petra stone. It happens that the strata which are of the softest and most elegant colours are precisely those which possess the most frail and delicate texture. The yellow, rose-colour, azure, and white strata are disintegrated by the falling rain, and it is extremely difficult to disengage them from the rock, either separately or in a mass of various colours, without resolving them into their constituent particles; and I deem it quite impracticable to transport them on camels without some method of preserving them not now at my command.<sup>4</sup>

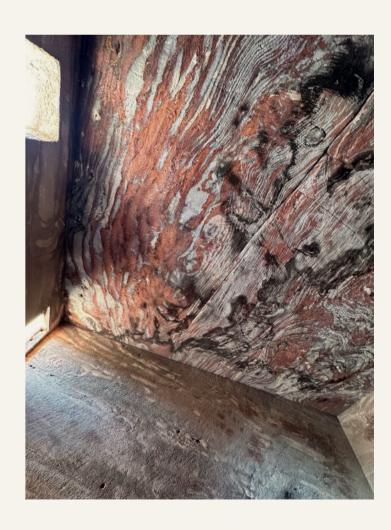
But it is Lear's Suliot cook, Giorgio Cocali, to whom, as ever, we must give what is (almost) the last word: "Oh master," said Giorgio (who is prone to culinary similes), "we have come into a world where everything is made of chocolate, ham, curry powder, and salmon."

PS Asked on 27 February 2023 to 'describe the striated sandstone at Petra', ChatGBT gave a description of a beauty markedly less edible:

The striated sandstone at Petra, Jordan is a stunning sight. The rocks have been naturally worn away by the wind, creating layers of ridges and grooves in the otherwis smooth sandstone. The striations range from light brown and beige to shades of deep red, orange, yellow, and purple – creating lines of breathtakingly beautiful visual texture. The different hues, shapes, and sizes all make the sandstone seem almost magical, as if it is a scene from a movie. The striated sandstone is an amazing site to see and offers a unique experience for visitors to Petra.



- 2 "... and the sandstone of colors the most astonishing, scarlet shaded down to the most delicate pink, purple, white, yellow, orange, all most brilliant'. Mary Shaw Smith and John Shaw Smith, transcript from John Shaw Smith's Travel Diary, vol.3, Monday, March 22nd 1852, 112. Coll-20, Centre for Research Collections. University of Ediphyrgh.
- 3 John Lloyd Stephens, Incidents in Egypt, Arabia Petraea and The Holy Land, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837), 59-60.
- 4 Stephen Olin, *Travels in Egypt, Arabia*Petraea and the Holy Land, vol. 1 (New York:
  Harper and Brothers, 1843), 22–24.



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