

Four Poems · *Thomas Lux*

PLEASE DON'T TOUCH THE RUINS

In bad shape, buried
3,500 years, the ruins, nevertheless,
are beautiful: I take the tour.
Their houses were crude, and the people,
judged by doorframes, short.
They had many jars. Their island green
and their harbor safe.

Half-excavated, not much to see,
the tin roof over the dig
keeps it dark amid the dust.
Their art packed off to museums.
Boxes and boxes of shards
remain—must be millions—and is someone
going to fit them all together again?

I'd like to lift just one, but the guards
won't allow you a pebble
in your shoe. The tiny
citizens living here were painterly,
prosperous, and all escaped
(not a human femur found)
the lava and the ash—as, often,

people did before eruption, tidal wave,
invader—though not from famine or plague.
Where did they go in their baby boats,
did they pack their jars with oil
and barley, where did they sail
without their art and larger animals?
Little long-agoes, the sign says

not to touch your ruins.
I won't. And were the mainland museum
open when I went there
I would have seen your art
other than on postcards or cheap gifts:
they moved me very much,
your ebullient blue monkeys and fish.

MR. POPE

*"Do you think I would not wish
to have been friends with such a man
as this?"*

— Charles Lamb

Life on earth,
for Mr. Pope, was not lenient: four foot six, hunch-
backed, grinding migraines,
hard-to-breathe, deep-bone aches
and, most likely, never, *never*,
any sex. That he did not
tolerate nincompoops,
poetasters, or pompous fops,
one can understand.
Not meanness, misanthropy
that drove him to ravage dunces,
but more so sorrow
and some rage. Attacks on the work,
part of the deal ("A very pretty poem,
Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer"),
he could take, but upon his body ("... a lump,
a toad, a venomous spider,
a monkey dropping filth"),
compounded its pain.
The censure he dealt almost always
earned, rarely the spirit mean,