

“The number of figured stones and fossil shells found in the bowels of the earth were remarked in all ages and nations, but they were considered merely as the sports of nature, and even by philosophers themselves, as the productions of chance or accident; they regarded them with a degree of surprise, but passed them over with a slight attention, and all this phenomena perished without any fruit for the progress of knowledge. A potter in Paris, who knew neither Latin nor Greek, towards the end of the 16th century, was the first man who dared affirm, in opposition to the learned, that the fossil shells were real shells formerly deposited by the sea in those places where they were found; that animals, and particularly fish, had given to stones all these different figures, &c. and he desired the whole school of Aristotle to contradict his proofs. This was Bernard Palissy, as great a natural genius as nature could form: his system slept near 100 years, and even his name was almost forgot. At length the ideas of Palissy were revived in the mind of several philosophers; and science has profited by all the shells and figured stones the earth furnishes us with; perhaps they are at present