An (Un)Natural History: Tracing the Magical Rhinoceros Horn in Egypt

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Abstract: Can emancipatory, decolonial histories of science be extracted from objects collected from—or made visible to history by—the archives of colonialism? To answer this question, this essay presents the case study of a rhinoceros horn amulet (*qarn al-khartit*), an ethnographic object collected by the British anthropologist Winifred Blackman during her fieldwork in Egypt in the late 1920s. Markedly decentering the traditional colonial history of how the rhinoceros horn was collected and displayed as an object in European museums, the essay follows the trail of the rhinoceros horn back to the site of its collection in Egypt to reveal a strikingly different story: one of non-Western histories of science/magic/medicine, gender, race, and enslavement, all set against the backdrop of Egypt's imperial pursuits in East Africa. The essay proposes the method of decolonial materialism to "read" objects, like the rhinoceros horn, as archives of scientific knowledge otherwise.

On 16 October 1928, at 8:30 P.M., the Oxford-trained anthropologist Winifred Blackman presented her work on "Egyptian Magical-Medical Practices" and its accompanying object collection to a crowd of over fifty scientists and colonial officials in the Reception Hall of

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London's Wellcome Historical Medical Museum.[1] The anthropologist had spent the previous seven years in the rural villages of Upper Egypt observing the practices and livelihoods of the fellahin, or peasantry. She recorded many of her experiences in the ethnographic study *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt*, which had been published just a year earlier. Blackman now worked for the pharmaceutical tycoon Henry Wellcome as a collector of contemporary Egyptian amulets and charms to add to his eccentric "museum of mankind." This presentation was the culmination of her first season collecting with the Wellcome, during which she spent eighteen months gathering "specimens" of the "magical-medical" practices of the Upper Egyptian peasantry.[2]

Over three hundred Egyptian amulets and charms lay on the table before her: crude glass cups; selections of plant seeds and powders (probably arranged in the wooden pillboxes that housed them on the ship to London); colored stones varying in size, shape, and purpose; an alabaster dish that had been almost impossible to negotiate out of the hands of a stubborn sheikh in Cairo; a collection of animal teeth; strings of beads; padlocks; small faience figures of ancient Egyptian gods; and a large, smooth black stone known to Egyptians as a "rhinoceros horn."[3] Blackman sought to showcase material evidence of the vernacular medical practices and spiritual beliefs of contemporary Egyptians. Unlike archaeologists, including her brother Aylward Blackman, who spent their lives collecting artifacts of Egypt's ancient past, the amulets Blackman collected were not excavated from ancient tombs. They were manufactured by local artisans, secured from traveling Sudanese wise women, or purchased at weekly markets and from local druggists (*'attarin*). In the skilled hands of revered healers and their customers, these amulets represented an entire world of beliefs and everyday practices. Each possessed an array of protective and curative powers for illnesses ranging from jaundice and itchy scalp to lovesickness and jinn possession. But these amulets were far from home.

Blackman and her anthropological contemporaries imbued these objects with other, more worldly powers—namely, the power to unlock the scientific history of human civilization. To them, these objects were survivals of scientific and medical traditions preserved from ancient Egypt.[4] Or, in the words of John L. Myres, the event's chair and Acting President of the Royal Anthropological Society, each object provided a glimpse "of a whole world of popular observance and belief representing only the last and most recent stage in traditions of culture which come down from the remotest times in Egypt."[5] Blackman, a true salvage anthropologist, hurried to collect amulets, charms, and other material evidence of "continuities with the past," as she believed that they were "dying out with increasing rapidity" owing to the implementation of rural reform projects in Egypt. Collecting these objects, as she continually stressed to the Wellcome, was "a case of now or never." She acquired thousands of "magico-medical" and ethnographic

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[1] Winifred S. Blackman, "Egyptian Magical-Medical Practice," in *Reception at Wellcome Historical Medical Museum* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1928), WA/HMM/CM/Col/12, Wellcome Collection Archives, London.

[2] For an overview of Winifred Blackman's life see Salima Ikram, "Introduction," in Winifred S. Blackman, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt* (1927; Cairo: American Univ. Cairo Press, 2000). For more on her work as a collector with the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum see Alice Stevenson, "'Labelling and Cataloguing at Every Available Moment': W. S. Blackman's Collection of Egyptian Amulets," *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 2013, 26:138–149; and Frances Larson, *An Infinity of Things: How Sir Henry Wellcome Collected the World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), pp. 213–217.

[3] Winifred Blackman, "List of Objects Collected in Egypt Illustrating the Life of the Fellahen [*sic*]," Entry 23, Section on Rhinoceros Horn (Karn el-Khartit), WA/HMM/CM/Col/12.

[4] Winifred Blackman's anthropological training and work was influenced by Edward Burnett Tylor's theory of "survivals." See Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1871); and George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), pp. 156–164.

[5] Blackman, "Egyptian Magical-Medical Practice" (cit. n. 1), p. 1 (Myres's remark).

objects during her six-year tenure with the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum.[6] The bulk of this collection is currently held at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford.

Blackman's collection of magico-medical objects is a rich and understudied archive for historians of global science. The life of Blackman herself, as one of Britain's first female anthropologists, provides a unique entry point into the history of colonial anthropology, collecting, and museum studies in Britain and in Egypt. The objects she collected are similarly a fecund archive whose movements from acquisition to display and storage illuminate the development of global scientific knowledge and its fast-growing networks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[7] The turn toward "the global" in the history of science has progressed steadily in the past twenty years. It has provided a number of frameworks, such as "networks," "circulations," and "go-betweens," to grapple with the complex interactions between bodies and knowledge, as well as colony and metropole.[8] Yet these frames remain insufficient to actualize fully the indigenous lives, bodies, and labor and robust local knowledge systems—such as those of Blackman's Upper Egyptian and Sudanese instructors and interlocutors—at the core of the development of something called "global" science. Their ways of knowing and living in the world are still not entirely accepted under the purview of "science."[9] Where Blackman and her contemporaries valued these objects as the last vestiges of an ancient past, I see in them the potential to provide glimpses into yet unwritten social histories of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egypt.

Each amulet and charm in Blackman's collection holds a multitude of intimate stories. These objects provide insight into the lives of those that sought out their powers during the most pivotal moments: a stone kept close to the breast to cure the aches of lovesickness, another sewn into a pocket of a man hoping to secure employment. They showcase a range of healing methods, agricultural knowledge, and the textures of rural life. Plant matter, shells, and animal parts reveal the political ecology of the Egyptian countryside, with accessibility to certain ingredients changing with the onslaught of cash-crop agriculture and the devastating impacts of Ottoman, French, and British imperial projects. Some objects—such as reed pens for writing charms or a small fox jaw to ward off black magic—act as gateways into secret histories of occult knowledge and practice. Others, like the rhinoceros horn, expose secret histories within these secret histories—histories of Egypt's own imperial aspirations, histories of enslavement, and histories of discrimination, suppression, and resilience.[10]

The pages that follow are neither an account of Blackman's work collecting with the Wellcome nor an examination of her collections within a larger framework of global science—or

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[6] See, e.g., Winifred Blackman to Louis W. G. Malcolm, 27 Aug. 1931, WA/HMM/CM/Col/12; and Stevenson, "'Labelling and Cataloguing at Every Available Moment'" (cit. n. 2), p. 139. Alice Stevenson estimates the Blackman collection at (at least) four thousand objects: *ibid.*, p. 138.

[7] An excellent example of charting the vast networks of a museum collection through the lens of a collector, as well as grappling with questions of colonialism and historical consciousness, is James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2017).

[8] Simon Schaffer *et al.*, eds., *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach, Mass.: Science History, 2009).

[9] Recent trends toward "the history of knowledge" offer an excellent example in this regard. Scholars like Lorraine Daston champion the history of knowledge as the new frontier for historians of science, creating space for histories centering the non-West, as well as "indigenous, artisanal, and other types of knowledge." New journals such as *KNOW* and the *Journal for the History of Knowledge* (the quotation above comes from the "About the Journal" section of the latter) speak to the flourishing of the field. For scholars of science in the non-West, this turn cannot help but feel like another polite ushering away from the grand arena of the history of science and another way of maintaining the stronghold on the field by scholars of and from the Global North. See Lorraine Daston, "The History of Science and the History of Knowledge," *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge*, 2017, *1*:132–154; and Lukas M. Verburgt, "The History of Knowledge and the Future History of Ignorance," *ibid.*, 2020, *4*:1–24.

[10] Minsoo Kang, "The Virtue of Unfaithful Translations," in *New Suns: Original Speculative Fiction by People of Colour*, ed. Nisi Shawl (Oxford: Solaris, 2019), pp. 37–61, on p. 59.

at least global science centered on or in the West. Rather, I use Blackman's object collection as an archive to chart a particularly Egyptian global science. This essay focuses on the rhinoceros horn (*qarn al-khartit*) as a material archive of the intellectual histories and social networks of science that existed long before Blackman arrived in Egypt, particularly those of the occult and medical sciences. As a "thing," the rhinoceros horn held many purposes.[11] Its users imbued it with a variety of meanings. The rhinoceros horn was simultaneously an ethnographic object collected by foreign anthropologists for display in ethnographic museums in Europe, a specimen of natural history in the form of an animal part, and an amulet possessing metaphysical and chemical healing capabilities. It tells both the natural and the unnatural histories of magic, gender, and race and of Egypt's imperial pursuits in East Africa, particularly how these categories came together to produce and police the scientific and medical knowledge of working-class urban and rural women, as well as individuals raced as African.

Long denigrated as ignorant charlatans, and threats to the welfare of the Egyptian population, these women feature in the Egyptian archive as deviants and objects of scientific study. Yet they were collectors and producers of scientific knowledge in their own right. The rhinoceros horn tells some of this tale, highlighting the racing and erasing of women-based, gynocentric magical knowledge (*'ilm al-rukka*) in Egypt. It illustrates how Egyptian officials and elites attempted to suppress "illicit magic" in urban and rural centers and cast this type of magical practice as a distinctly Black African endeavor. To understand the intimate relationship between the rhinoceros horn and the racialization of magico-medical practices in Egypt, I excavate the story of the racialization of *'ilm al-rukka*, and other magico-medical practices, and their connection with Ottoman Egypt's imperial pursuits in East Africa. The rhinoceros horn was an artifact of the Trans-Saharan slave trade. The history of its commodification and sale is intimately linked to that of enslaved Africans.

The rhinoceros horn, like the many other Egyptian charms and amulets displayed by Blackman at the Wellcome, is a material archive of occult economies in Egypt and the late Ottoman world. It is also part of a deep history of scientific and medical knowledge in the Islamicate world. These economies were also figuratively occult in that amuletic objects, and the practitioners who used them to heal and to earn their living, were "hidden in plain sight" in more mainstream parts of economic production in Egypt.[12] Magic, not simply a category of anthropological interest for Western and Egyptian scientific elites, was a profession and an intellectual pursuit for many in late Ottoman and interwar Egypt. The kinds of amulets Blackman collected were bound to working-class labor, and, as such, the influence of amulets infiltrated Egypt's cash-crop economy, corvée labor, and other major points of trade. Rhinoceros horns, for instance, accompanied enslaved Africans along the Trans-Saharan trade routes from the heart of Darfur to markets in Cairo and Asyut. Despite the ubiquity of occult objects and practices in the daily lives of many Egyptians, their importance in the social and economic history of Egypt and in the late Ottoman world has yet to be explored.

Before delving into the specific case of the rhinoceros horn, I ponder the possibilities of using the methods of science and technology studies to write what I have come to call decolonial materialist histories of science. In decolonial materialists' histories, objects collected as museum specimens, like the ones presented by Blackman at the Wellcome, can act as an archive to

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[11] Marwa Elshakry, "When Science Became Western: Historiographical Reflections," *Isis*, 2010, *101*:98–109; and Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, 2001, 28:1–22.

[12] Hannah Frydman, "Capitalism's Back Pages: 'Immoral' Advertising and Invisible Markets in Paris's Mass Press, 1880–1940," in *The Hidden Worlds of Capitalism: Beyond the Visible Market*, ed. Kenneth Lipartito and Lisa Jacobson (Philadelphia: Univ. Pennsylvania Press, 2019), pp. 119–138.

illuminate the networks, actors, and economies whose bodies and labor are generally rendered invisible in Eurocentric histories of global science. Their stories, too, are stories of science and of collecting, just not the kind readily recognized by conventional historians of science. I gesture to the Blackman amulet collections' entangled roles in the genealogies of more (un)natural histories: histories that highlight Egyptian peasants and Sudanese wise women as important producers of scientific knowledge; histories that reckon with the power of occult cosmologies as adjacent, connected, and in opposition to those of Western science.

AMULET TALES: (UN)NATURAL HISTORIES, DECOLONIAL MATERIALISMS

Can emancipatory, decolonial histories be coaxed from objects made visible to history through the violence of the colonial archive? This question has plagued me since I began researching and thinking about the Blackman amulet collection in 2015. Working with the objects and archival papers in Blackman's collection presented me with a difficult conundrum. As a scholar interested in the social history of enslaved African and Upper Egyptian occult workers and in the intellectual history of their largely nonliterate occult practices, I jumped at the chance to work with the physical materials of their craft. I saw in each object a plethora of possibility, a wealth of stories that would help to rebuild and recenter the lifeworlds of these practitioners and their customers within the historical imaginaries of Middle Eastern history and histories of science and medicine.

It disturbed me that my excitement about these objects eerily matched that of Winifred Blackman and her anthropologist contemporaries—even if I thought I would use them for a more worthy cause. I was forced to sit with this discomfort. Even if each amulet was an archive of intimate encounters between various actors and witnesses to everyday life in ways traditional archival documents could not rival, they came laden with layers upon layers of European and Egyptian colonial baggage.[13] A search for theoretical and methodological approaches to object histories involved similar frustrations. Much of the scholarship on material culture and the growing field of new materialisms seemed focused solely on nonhuman objects in and of themselves, as opposed to the possibilities they held for writing grounded social histories of the humans that interacted with them in the absence of the more "reliable ghosts" of archival documents. Neither of these approaches seemed to hold space for the issues of race, sexuality, and multilayered colonialisms that the Blackman collection presented. All seemed to be tracking the wrong ghosts of this archive's history.[14] In an effort to grapple with these questions, I propose a method of decolonial materialism.

New materialism's foundational philosophy of a nonhuman ontology and ethics, or the idea that the material worlds we inhabit are "vibrant" and "alive," has long been a part of indigenous cosmologies across the globe. Feminist scholars have explored materiality through examinations of sexuality, subjectivity, the body, and the body's production as an object.[15] Similarly, scholars of blackness and race have worked to identify the deeply violent processes by which human bodies

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[13] Sara Ahmed, "Orientation Matters," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2010), pp. 234–257.

[14] Anjali Arondekar, "In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts: Sexuality, Historiography, South Asia," *Differences*, 2014, 25(3):98–122; and Edward Jones-Imhotep, "The Ghost Factories: Histories of Automata and Artificial Life," *History and Technology*, 2020, 36:3–29, esp. p. 4.

[15] Some prominent examples include bell hooks, "Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 113–128; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1993); and Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, rev. ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2011).

are rendered as nonhuman objects—particularly in the context of Atlantic slavery.[16] A cohort of scholars—from postcolonial feminists, queer of color critique scholars, critical animal studies scholars, and historians of science focusing on the non-West—have rejected the new materialist turn, as well as global science studies. They argue that these "new" fields are simply a repackaging of the same "old" neocolonial modes of thinking that have run rampant in STS.[17]

Historians of the Middle East have also largely remained skeptical of new materialism, in particular owing to the approach's dismissal of "the explanatory force of capitalist social relations, while assigning historical agency to non-human objects."[18] However, new works in the history of medicine, environment, and art history are pushing the boundaries of what materialist histories of the Middle East that remain grounded in critical political economy can look like. As such, I join a growing number of Black and indigenous scholars and scholars of the non-West who are interested in utilizing the ontological possibilities of new materialism.[19] By this, I mean using objects as archival material to tell the stories of "humans that have never been human enough," to channel the worlds they were a part of and to highlight the lives the objects intersected, connected, and brought together.[20]

Decolonial materialism draws together approaches and methods from both postcolonial science studies and decolonial thought.[21] Calls to "decolonize" history have become a highly fraught terrain. Debates rage about the definition of "decolonial," the kinds of forms this work should take, and their relevance for STS, the history of science, and museum and preservation work.[22] Some might argue that the term's overuse and decontextualization in the past few years have rendered it all but meaningless.[23] The difficulties presented by Blackman's amulet

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[16] Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy," in "Forum: Emergent Critical Analytics for Alternative Humanities," *Lateral: Journal of the Cultural Studies Association*, 2016, 5(1).

[17] For more traditional literature on new materialism see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007); Latour, "When Things Strike Back: A Possible Contribution of 'Science Studies' to the Social Sciences," *British Journal of Sociology*, 2020, *51*:107–123; and Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Penguin, 2018). Several scholars have questioned the newness of new materialism. See, e.g., Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2006); and Projit Bihari Mukharji, "Occulted Materialities," in "Thinking with the World: Histories of Science and Technology from the 'Out There,'" special issue, *Hist. Technol.*, 2018, *34*(1):31–40. On the limits of new materialism see Tompkins, "On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy."

[18] Aaron Jakes, "A New Materialism? Globalization and Technology in the Age of Empire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2015, *47*:369–381, on p. 378; and Zachary Davis Cuyler and Gabriel Young, "Space and Materiality in Recent Studies of Labor and Class in the Middle East and Islamic World," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 2022, *101*:184–200.

[19] See, e.g., Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: NYU Press, 2020); and Jen Rose Smith, "'Exceeding Beringia': Upending Universal Human Events and Wayward Transits in Arctic Spaces," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2020, 39:158–175.

[20] Tompkins, "On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy" (cit. n. 16) (quotation). See also Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 2003, 3:257–337; and Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2014).

[21] Suman Seth, "Colonial History and Postcolonial Science Studies," *Radical History Review*, 2017, no. 127, pp. 63–85; Walter Mignolo, "The Enduring Enchantment (Or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go from Here)," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 2002, *101*:927–954; Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought, and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 2009, *26*(7–8):159–181; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies*, 2007, *21*(2–3):240–270; and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed, 2012).

[22] See, e.g., the special section "Engagements with Decolonization and Decoloniality in and at the Interfaces of STS," in *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, 2027, 3(1). On museums and object restitution see Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence, and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto, 2020); and William Carruthers, "Heritage, Preservation, and Decolonization: Entanglements, Consequences, Action?" *Future Anterior*, 2019, *16*(2):ii–xxiv.

[23] Olúfemi Táíwò, *Against Decolonization: Taking African Agency Seriously* (London: Hurst, 2022).

collection–cum–archive raise new questions regarding the utility of decolonial critique for historians of science. They similarly reveal the potential for developing novel approaches to writing social histories of science in the non-West.[24]

Amulets in the Blackman collection elucidate the limits of the category of the postcolonial and the possibilities of decoloniality as method. As the rhinoceros horn shows, Europeans were not the only colonial actors at play in the history of the objects in that collection. The rhinoceros horn illuminates the structures and individual actors participating in an Ottoman-Egyptian imperial project in East Africa—a project rooted in anti-Black racism, dehumanization, and discrimination.[25] The resonances and effects of this project are still felt today, long after the country's independence from British rule. I draw on the contemporary Egyptian artist Amado Alfadni's sound installation "Black Ivory" to give the reader a sense of the brutality of this colonial project and evoke its ongoing historical legacy.

Blackman's amulet archive similarly provides an avenue to think about decoloniality and indigenous ecologies outside of the Americas—and in contexts where efforts like Land Back may not be possible. Each amulet is an "artifact of dispossession" and an archive of Black and rural Egyptian displacement throughout the nineteenth century.[26] The rhinoceros horn, in particular, is indicative of what Kathryn Yusoff terms "ontology without territory." It marks a historical moment in which Sudanese and Abyssinians were dispossessed of their land, their intellectual histories, their spiritual and medical knowledge, and their humanity. It is fully imbricated in the "dual excess" of Egyptian colonialism that "conquered lands for resource extraction and to organize labor forms to mobilize that extraction, while simultaneously severing the bonds of attachment and territory of enslaved peoples." As such, decolonial materialism allows the object-archives of communities that left few written documents to act as "material vectors that open out new geographies of space and time" and to present new historical imaginaries and terrains forgotten by many in the progressive push of modern history.[27]

In this essay, I experiment further with decolonial materialism using the device of the amulet tale—a storytelling form and practice similar to Jane Bennett's "onto-story." I orient an amulet—the rhinoceros horn—at its center while also destabilizing Eurocentric stories about science, matter, and nature.[28] The amulet tale is a necessarily speculative endeavor, owing to the enchanted nature of the objects that inspire it and the labor of "imaginative practices of worlding" it requires.[29] It takes up the difficult work of navigating multiple connections across racial, gendered, and material lines to challenge Eurocentric and essentialist narratives, while offering positive visions of the worlds otherwise conjured by these magical objects. This approach allows space for rationalities not anchored in white Western capitalist thought (and bodies) to come to the forefront of fields like

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[24] I use the word "archive" both to refer to a collection of papers, documents, or objects and to refer to a more conceptual "archive" meant to shift our historical lens toward overlooked forms of knowledge and historical subjects. See Michelle Caswell, "'The Archive' Is Not an Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies," *Reconstruction*, 2016, *16* (1).

[25] Eve M. Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 2003); and Alice Moore-Harell, *Egypt's African Empire: Samuel Baker, Charles Gordon, and the Creation of Equatoria* (Brighton: Sussex Academic, 2010).

[26] I borrow the term "artifact of dispossession" from Chris Gratien, who posits malaria as an "artifact of rural dispossession" and "the erosion and destruction of indigenous ecologies" in late Ottoman Çukurova: Chris Gratien, *The Unsettled Plain: An Environmental History of the Late Ottoman Frontier* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2022), pp. 6, 12.

[27] Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: Univ. Minnesota Press, 2019), pp. 81, xii.

[28] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2010), pp. 116–119.

[29] Jackson, *Becoming Human* (cit. n. 19). See also Katherine McKittrick on the "fictive perimeters" of science in *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2021), p. 186.

global science studies that have largely ignored them.[30] It also decenters the assemblages or interpretive tropes used by European anthropologists, collectors, curators, and doctors that deliberately ignore race and "depoliticize the claims of historically oppressed communities and the persistent intergenerational harm" inflicted by objects and their users.[31]

The amulet tale highlights the objects' connections to the very lives and bodies that are rendered into objects of science and used as the building blocks for the foundations of Western science and philosophy. Each amulet, whether stone, plant matter, or bone, engenders different questions, illuminates different histories, and presents unique limitations and possibilities. However, these amulets require the right diviner—a willing and patient medium, if you will—to navigate, to understand, and to translate this multitude of worlds for their many stories to be told. This essay explores the very (un)natural histories of one such object, centering it within the raced and gendered history of magic in Egypt. I call these histories (un)natural in the sense that they are fully entangled in the very material processes of colonial violence and slavery, while also being simultaneously a part of metaphysical and spiritual cosmologies of magic and healing.

Unlike the rhinoceros horn, neither decolonial materialism nor the amulet tale acts as a magical, cure-all method for writing histories of science. In proposing decolonial materialism, I have no delusions about a historical imagination fully disentangled from the literal and conceptual terrains that colonialism has filled. Rather, the approach is intended to haunt historians of science in ways that promote new approaches to thinking, teaching, and writing global histories of science. For, as Juno Salazar Parreñas warns, what is now considered decolonial can easily become its own hegemonic force.[32]

HEALING HORNS, FORCED MIGRATIONS

The rhinoceros horn was a powerful cure for snakebite, scorpion sting, and stomach pain that circulated in late Ottoman and interwar Egypt. Winifred Blackman highlighted several different rhinoceros horn amulets in her presentation to the Wellcome. She described them as a "great catch" from her first season of collecting, especially given the large number of snakes that summered in the garden of her home. The first of these was a grey stone in the shape of a rhinoceros horn. "This is said to be a rhinoceros horn, but it is not. Anyhow, it does not matter; because they *believe* it is," she remarked to her audience.[33] Blackman thought the other objects were fragments of actual rhinoceros horn. In each case the remedy required the patient to consume milk, which absorbed the healing properties of the horn: either it was soaked in the liquid, or the milk was drunk directly from the horn itself.

The provenance archives of one horn segment stress the object's value and the difficulty of obtaining it. They also reveal the opacity and silences of the Blackman archive. Winifred Blackman purchased the object from a man in the village of Sarabu in Beni Suef province. She describes him as the man "to whom all the people go if they are bitten by a snake."[34] As with many objects in the collection, the anthropologist is not forthcoming about how she acquired the horn; nor does she reveal its price. She simply notes that she obtained the object through the help of a friend. According to correspondence between Blackman and Wellcome

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[30] Chad Shomura, "Exploring the Promise of New Materialisms," *Lateral*, 2017, *6*(1).

[31] Diana Leong, "The Mattering of Black Lives: Octavia Butler's Hyperempathy and the Promise of the New Materialisms," *Catalyst*, 2016, *2*(2).

[32] Warwick Anderson, "Decolonizing Histories in Theory and Practice: An Introduction," *History and Theory*, 2020, 59:369–375; and Juno Salazar Parreñas, "From Decolonial Knowledges to Vernacular Ideas in Southeast Asia," *ibid.*, pp. 413–420.

[33] Blackman, "List of Objects Collected in Egypt Illustrating the Life of the Fellahen," Entry 23 (cit. n. 3); and Blackman, "Egyptian Magical-Medical Practice" (cit. n. 1), p. 16.

[34] Blackman, "List of Objects," Entry 23.

conservator Louis W. G. Malcolm, the anthropologist thought the item "too valuable to send [to England] by cargo boat." Instead, she entrusted her brother, Aylward, with the horn, stating that he would hand deliver it to the Wellcome. The curious note—"not found (?)"—scrawled next to its accession number on an undated packing room list makes me wonder if the object ever arrived at all.[35]

This archival mystery notwithstanding, the Pitt Rivers Museum currently holds five specimens of rhinoceros horn amulets obtained by Blackman between 1928 and 1929, during her second and third seasons collecting for the Wellcome.[36] Four of the five are labeled as "real" rhinoceros horn material. Blackman purchased all of them from Egyptian, Sudanese, and Abyssinian "wise women" whom she met in public markets, by way of friends' connections, and through serendipitous encounters. These women had acquired the amulets from pilgrims traveling from Mecca, from mountainous regions in Sudan, and from the tombs of venerated sheikhs in Egypt.[37] If we trace the hands through which the rhinoceros horn and other such occult objects passed, a rough outline of interwar Egypt's robust occult economy begins to take shape. At the heart of this economy was women's magico-medical knowledge, commonly known as "the science of the old wives" (*'ilm al-rukka*).[38]

Much remains to be written about women practitioners and their influence on the history of science and medicine in the Islamicate world. Gendered tropes of ignorant old crones and superstitious women have colored the vitriolic writings of literate male scholars since the early medieval period. Yet the tropes of these women's ignorance and the perceived threat they posed to society overshadow a rich history of nonliterate and experiential magico-medical knowledge passed down between generations of women. Historian Shireen Hamza noted the difficulty of writing about women's medical knowledge and expertise in the premodern Islamic world when confronted with "an archive of men's writing so full of silences." Scholars working on the modern period face similar challenges. Amulets in the Blackman collection, such as the rhinoceros horn, and new approaches to writing these histories, like decolonial materialism, may help to "flesh in" or texture our understandings of women's knowledge and practice where textual sources fall short.[39]

The Egyptian doctor Abdel Rahman Ismail wrote extensively about *'ilm al-rukka* and the variety of women healers and occult practitioners working in late nineteenth-century Egypt. Between 1892 and 1894 he published a two-volume, thickly descriptive medical ethnography on

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[35] Blackman to Malcolm, 30 Oct. 1927, 19 Nov. 1927; and "3083 AM Blackman, Packing Room List": WA/HMM/CM/Col/12.

[36] See Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) Object Catalogue, Object Numbers 1985.54.129 (1929), 1985.54.1783 (1928), 1985.54.1868 (1929), 1985.54.2792 (1929), and 1985.54.3514 (n.d.), Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

[37] Wellcome Collection Flimsy Notecard Archive, WA/HMM/CM/Inv/A.96: Box 287, A70082; and WA/HMM/CM/Inv/A.138, A107839, A107970, A108078.

[38] For more on this genealogy of healing knowledge in Egypt and the Middle East more generally see Ellen J. Amster, *Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam, and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco, 1877–1956*, rpt. ed. (Austin: Univ. Texas Press, 2014); LaVerne Kuhnke, *Lives at Risk: Public Health in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1990); Nancy Elizabeth Gallagher, *Medicine and Power in Tunisia, 1780–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002); and S. A. Morsy, "Towards a Political Economy of Health: A Critical Note on the Medical Anthropology of the Middle East," *Social Science and Medicine Part B: Medical Anthropology*, 1981, *15*:159–163.

[39] Shireen Hamza, "Do Old Women Know Medicine?" *Immanent Frame*, 2022, https://tif.ssrc.org/2022/05/18/do-old-women-know-medicine/; see also Hamza, "Vernacular Languages and Invisible Labor in Tibb," *Osiris*, 2022, N.S., 37:115–138. On "fleshing in" as method, and on its importance in decolonial, Black feminist bioarchaeological research, see Aja M. Lans, "Decolonize This Collection: Integrating Black Feminism and Art to Re-Examine Human Skeletal Remains in Museums," *Feminist Anthropology*, 2021, 2:130–142.

the topic, titled *Tibb al-Rukka* (*Old Wives' Medicine*).[40] Like Blackman, Ismail collected Egyptian amulets and charms—albeit not as physical specimens. He collected knowledge of these amulets and the practitioners who used them through his own ethnographic observations and archival research at the Khedival Library in Cairo. Unlike Blackman, however, he did not wish to preserve these practices. He hoped to rid Egyptian society of these "charlatans" (sing. *dagala*) and their "superstitions" (sing. *khorafa*).

In the introduction to the first volume, Ismail provides an expansive definition of "'*ilm al-rukka*," along with an explanation of its folk etymology. Ismail, like many of his contemporaries, used the term "'*ilm*" (science) sarcastically to describe the practice of these women. Literate male nineteenth-century scholars and jurists believed these women's work had no foundation in any rational sciences or the teachings of Islam. "*Rukka*," Ismail explained, was a term applied to the gossip of women who engaged in domestic chores at home while men were working in the fields: "they naturally gather together in the evening to perform whatever duties their husbands or masters may have imposed on them." A large component of this gossip was the sharing of "prescriptions" (sing. *wasfa*) that the women used on family members. The term's roots (r-k-k) indicate a possible relationship to the Arabic words "*rikka*" and "*rikaka*," denoting old women of weak intellect.[41] *Tibb al-Rukka* details over fifty of these prescriptions, ranging from medical treatments for everyday illnesses (sunstroke, headache, and skin disease) to more esoteric practices (summoning jinn, the preparation of talismans, and divination).

An entire chapter of *Tibb al-Rukka* is dedicated to the rhinoceros horn. According to Ismail, old wives (*al-'agouz*) used rhinoceros horn as a cure for all internal diseases (*amrad batina*) for which they did not already have some other trick, or magical recipe, to fool Egyptians living in the countryside.[42] These controversial healers diagnosed illnesses such as *sukwa* (poisoned drink), a term derived from the Arabic root s-q-y, meaning to make someone or something drink. The drinker in question could be human, plant, or animal, as words for irrigation, watering livestock, and water carriers are all related to this root. The drink given to sufferers was usually water, milk, or, in this case, poison.[43] To cure *sukwa*, the old wife instructed her patient to place the rhinoceros horn in a porcelain bowl and expose it all night to the dew. The following morning, on an empty stomach, the patient was to drink the water that had collected in the bowl.

Ismail attributed the prevalence of rhinoceros horns in Egypt to Sudanese pilgrims and merchants who sold them as an antidote for poison. He suspected that the horns used by old wives were actually fragments of cow or buffalo horns, suggesting that the women practitioners, the Sudanese merchants, or both were dishonest actors.[44] Even if they were real rhinoceros horns, he concluded that there was no scientific evidence that these objects had beneficial properties. European scientists and travel writers in Egypt corroborate the presence of rhinoceros horns in the Egyptian marketplace throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Orientalists Edward Lane and Carl Klunzinger note cups forged from rhinoceros horns for the purposes of

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[40] Abdel Rahman Ismail, *Kitab Tibb al-Rukka*, 2 vols. (Al-Qahirah: Al-Matba'a al-Bahiyya, 1892, 1894).

[41] *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 17–18. The trope of charlatan old wives and their gullible women customers was prominent throughout the Islamicate world. See Gülhan Balsoy, *The Politics of Reproduction in Ottoman Society, 1838–1900* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), pp. 15–20; Cyrus Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong: Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900–1950* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 2009), pp. 43, 120–121; and Alireza Doostdar, *The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2018), pp. 39–41.

[42] Ismail, *Tibb al-Rukka*, Vol. 1, pp. 86–88, esp. p. 86.

[43] Hans Wehr, "Sukwa," in *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. M. Cowan (Urbana, Ill.: Spoken Language Services, 1993), p. 485; and Edward William Lane, "Sukwa," in *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate, 1874), p. 1394.

[44] Ismail, *Tibb al-Rukka* (cit. n. 40), Vol. 1, p. 87.

curing poisoning and snakebite in their respective discussions of Egyptian popular medicine and magic. The archaeologist John Wilkinson cited "*kharn el-khartit*" in his 1843 appendix of important words for travelers to Egypt. The physician Max Meyerhof lists the African rhinoceros horn (*chartit*), imported from Sudan, as one of the many animal-based "drugs" he found in Egyptian bazaars in 1914.[45]

Although Ismail did not trust the horn's healing properties or those who sold and used it, the rhinoceros horn was a staple in the global arsenal of nineteenth-century *materia medica*—and had been for centuries. From ancient Greece and the Achaemenid Empire to the royal courts of early modern Europe, many populations used the rhinoceros horn as a water purifier and detector of poison. By the seventeenth century, the horn was so closely associated with healing that the London Society of Apothecaries featured the rhinoceros on its crest. The rhinoceros was one of the many creatures medieval and early modern scholars believed to be the fantastic beast the unicorn. Its horn was a prized object sought out by naturalists to display in their curiosity cabinets.[46] Many still seek out the therapeutic properties of the rhinoceros horn today.[47] The demand for rhinoceros horn is so high, in fact, that museums in the United Kingdom removed all specimens from displays owing to a string of rhinoceros horn heists in the early 2010s.[48]

Before their disembodied use as an antidote for poison, the rhinoceros horns that circulated in local economies of healing in Egypt were attached to a living animal: the rhinoceros. Often overshadowed in historical accounts by the elephant, whose "teeth," or tusks, were highly prized in the ivory trade, the rhinoceros was equally sought after for its horn's magico-medical properties.[49] Sources on the rhinoceros horn in the medieval and early modern period are abundant. Yet modern reports of living African rhinoceroses (with their horns intact) are difficult to find outside of European and Ottoman accounts of hunting expeditions in Sudan. Even the Egyptian Zoological Gardens, which prided itself on acquiring and exhibiting "African" animals,

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[45] Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*, ed. Edward Stanley Poole, 5th ed. (London: John Murray, 1864), p. 259; C. B. Klunzinger, *Upper Egypt: Its People and Its Products* (New York: AMS, 1878), p. 423; Sir John Gardner Wilkinson, *Modern Egypt and Thebes: Being a Description of Egypt; Including the Information Required for Travellers in That Country* (London: John Murray, 1843), p. 576; and Max Meyerhof, *Der Bazar der Drogen und Wohlgeruche in Kairo* (Berlin: Guztave Kiepenheuer, 1918), p. 189.

[46] E. C. Spary, "On the Ironic Specimen of Unicorn Horn in Enlightened Cabinets," *Journal of Social History*, 2019, 52:1033–1060; and Richard Ettinghausen, *The Unicorn*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, 1950). For more on the London Society of Apothecaries and its history see Jacob Henry Burn, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the London Traders, Tavern, and Coffee-House Tokens Current in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Corporation Library, 1855), p. 58; and George Corfe, *The Apothecary (Ancient and Modern) of the Society, London, Blackfriars* (London: Elliot Stock, 1885).

[47] The rhinoceros is still hunted in parts of Africa and Asia for its horn. It remains a curative substance in high demand in multiple medical traditions, including traditional Chinese medicine. See Ahmed Safi, *Traditional Sudanese Medicine: A Primer for Health Care Providers, Researchers, and Students* (Khartoum: Dar al-Azza, 2006); and Liz P. Y. Chee, *Mao's Bestiary: Medicinal Animals and Modern China* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2021), on "faunal medicalization" and the rhinoceros horn trade in twentieth-century China.

[48] Many thanks to Nicholas Crowe for alerting me to this. See, e.g., Natural Sciences Collections Associations, "NatSCA Guidance for Rhino Horn in Museum Collections in Light of Recent Thefts," Natural Sciences Collections Associations Official Website, Natural Sciences Collections Association, 5 Aug. 2017, https://www.natsca.org/rhino-horn-guidance-museums; Simon Stephens, "Thieves Steal Rhino Horn Worth €500,000," Museums Association, 22 Apr. 2013, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2013/04/22042013-thieves-steal-rhino-horn-from-national-museum-of-ireland/#; Rebecca Atkinson, "Museums Told to Remove Rhino Horn from Display," Museums Association, 10 June 2011, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2011/06/13062011-rhino-horn-warning/; and "Fact Sheet: Rhino Horn Museum Heists," Lawyers' Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation, 20 July 2011, https://www.culturalheritagelaw.org/rhinofactsheet.

[49] For more on the ivory trade in East Africa see Alexandra Celia Kelly, *Consuming Ivory: Mercantile Legacies of East Africa and New England* (Seattle: Univ. Washington Press, 2021); and Raymond W. Beachey, "The East African Ivory Trade in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History*, 1969, 8:269–290.

had no records of a black rhinoceros "specimen" until 1910—ten years after it first opened its doors.[50]

Many large animals were trafficked within the Ottoman Empire as a part of what Alan Mikhail called a "globalized economy of charismatic megafauna," particularly in the early modern period.[51] According to Mikhail, "large charismatic animals" from Egypt, India, Iran, and East Africa, such as elephants, lions, and tigers, played the dual roles of projecting sultanic authority and serving as gifts of exchange between the Ottoman empire and other imperial sovereigns within the Indian Ocean worlds. These animals endured grueling conditions during their transportation by land and by sea to and from imperial courts to be enjoyed by royalty, by sultanic elites, and, later in the nineteenth century, by the general public in the imperial institutions of the menagerie, dynastic processions, and the hunt. This "enchanted charismatic economy," he argues, swiftly transformed into an "economy of brutality" in the form of zoos and with the rise of veterinary medicine in the nineteenth century. For Mikhail, the trafficking of elephants highlights Ottoman Egypt's connection to Indian Ocean economies, and particularly Mughal South Asia. I believe a similar examination of the African rhinoceros and the commodification of its horn reveals an economy of brutality much closer to home—an economy built on the Ottoman-Egyptian subjugation of African lands, people, and animals throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one linked to the forced migration of animals (alive and dead) *and* enslaved African populations along the Indian Ocean and Red Sea. If the elephant points to "early modern economies and aesthetics of the human–animal world, and the role of animals in the politics of early imperial rivalries," the rhinoceros horn points to the racialization of African bodies and knowledge and their circulation in local and global economies of magic and healing.[52] The case of Egypt provides a link between these two worlds.

Mikhail's account of the enchanted nature of the Indian Ocean economy and its growing legibility to a European (and Europeanist) audience overlooks the humans who were forcibly transported with these animals—not as handlers or experts, but as commodities themselves. The early modern period was not devoid of slavery and brutality, nor can we argue that such events are the modernist's burden to bear. Ottoman populations may have stood in awe as the elephants and giraffes passed through their towns, but what were their reactions upon seeing the exhausted humans—barely alive—being marched on foot into the markets of Asyut, Cairo, or Istanbul? Were there any reactions at all?[53] The rhinoceros horn is intimately connected to this process as it moved—lifeless, but not devoid of active magical power, much like many of the forcibly enslaved Africans it traveled with.

The rhinoceros horn is as much an artifact of the Trans-Saharan slave trade as it is of Egyptian folklore—although this history was erased. As such, it is also an archive of the Ottoman-Egyptian presence in East Africa and the revitalization of trade along the ancient route, Darb al-Arbain (the Forty Days Road).[54] This trade route, stretching between Egypt and Nilotic East Africa, took new

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[50] Stanley S. Flower, *List of Animals at Cairo Zoological Gardens* (Cairo: National Printing Department, 1910), p. 88. Noteworthy accounts of early twentieth-century hunting expeditions in Sudan that mention rhinoceroses include Mehmed Mihri, *Sudan Seyahatnamesi* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Halk-i Osmani-i Şirketi, 1926); and Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails: An Account of the African Wanderings of an American Hunter-Naturalist* (New York: Scribners', 1909).

[51] Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), Ch. 5: "Enchantment," pp. 109–139. See also Heather J. Sharkey, "La Belle Africaine: The Sudanese Giraffe Who Went to France," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/ Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 2015, 49:39–65.

[52] Mikhail, *Animal in Ottoman Egypt*, pp. 110 ("large charismatic animals"), 122 ("politics of early imperial rivalries"), Ch. 6: "Encagement," pp. 137–176.

[53] Leong, "Mattering of Black Lives" (cit. n. 31); and Zakiyyah Jackson, "Sense of Things," *Catalyst*, 2016, 2(2).

[54] Terence Walz, *Trade between Egypt and Bilad As-Sudan, 1700–1820* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1978).

shape following the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517. It developed robustly in the seventeenth century as Egyptian Nubia was incorporated into the empire and continued to grow with the Ottoman-Egyptian colonization of Sudan in the nineteenth century. Darb al-Arbain originated in Darfur and stretched over a forty-day journey until it reached a large market called Wakalat al-Jallaba in Cairo. The market took its name from the traders, or *jallaba*, who transported enslaved peoples and animal goods such as ostrich feathers, rhinoceros horns, and ivory along the caravan route from the Eastern Sudan. It was open for operation every day. Like the rhinoceros horn, enslaved Africans were treated as commodities in the market. Their sale was regulated under commercial contract laws.

When the Ottoman Viceroy Mehmet Ali took control over Egypt in 1805, he co-opted Darb al-Arbain, monopolizing the trade of people and goods from the Sudan. He then used enslaved Sudanese and the commodities he controlled to build the foundations of modern Egypt. Under the Ottoman pasha, the colonial relationship between Egypt and the Sudan was institutionalized—solidified by army presence and codified into law. Mehmet Ali Pasha sent expeditions into Sudan in attempts to expand his territory, to build a modern army using forcibly conscripted Sudanese men, and to search for precious minerals, like gold, to finance his reforms in Egypt.[55] The initial expeditions failed owing to inadequate medical service and lack of effective transportation. These literal death marches never made it to Cairo, as Mehmet Ali's troops and thousands of forcibly enslaved Sudanese men succumbed to disease, exhaustion, and starvation before reaching Egypt.[56] After this devastating blow to his troops, Mehmet Ali utilized the Egyptian fellahin as the new source for his army, declaring mandatory conscription for all males. This disaster also provided the impetus for the creation of Qasr al-Ainy, Egypt's first modern medical school, which used the bodies of enslaved Africans to subsidize the development of modern medical knowledge. The first students of the School of Midwifery were enslaved Abyssinian and Sudanese girls purchased from Wakalat al-Jallaba.[57]

Under the rule of Mehmet Ali's descendants, Egypt maintained a steady presence in Sudan until forced out in the 1880s by the Mahdist uprising.[58] The Ottoman-Egyptian rule in the Sudan was violent. The army committed acts of terror to instill fear in the Sudanese population. Soldiers were trained in torture techniques and various methods of corporal punishment listed in the *Kanunname*, or the Ottoman Law Codes. Even so, the Sudanese organized retaliatory attacks and armed resistance.[59] Those who were not killed in battle were sent to Cairo to be sold in the slave markets.

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[55] Troutt Powell, *Different Shade of Colonialism* (cit. n. 25), p. 29.

[56] Walz, *Trade between Egypt and Bilad As-Sudan* (cit. n. 54), p. 227.

[57] For more on the history of Qasr al-Ainy Medical School and the School of Midwifery see Khaled Fahmy, "Women, Medicine, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 35–72; Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, *The Creation of a Medical Profession in Egypt, 1800–1922* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1991); and Hibba Abugideiri, *Gender and the Making of Modern Medicine in Colonial Egypt* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010).

[58] Gabriel Warburg, *Historical Discord in the Nile Valley* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1992); and Heather J. Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 2003).

[59] Mohamad Shamil Jeppie, "Constructing a Colony on the Nile, circa 1820–1870" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Univ., 1996), pp. 423, 130. For more on Ottoman colonialism and the production of racial difference see Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, "Ottoman Travelers' Perceptions of Africa in the Late Ottoman Empire (1860–1922): A Discussion of Civilization, Colonialism, and Race," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 2012, *46*:187–212; Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review*, 2002, *107*:768–796; and Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (New York: Tauris, 1999).

European sources from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries illustrate the prominence of Darb al-Arbain in East African trade and the composition of the caravans that traveled along it. The English traveler William George Browne recorded his round-trip journey with a *jallaba* trading caravan from Asyut to Darfur between 1793 and 1796. The five-hundred- camel caravan he returned to Asyut with carried commodities valued at an estimated £115,000 sterling (over £17 million sterling today). Browne supplied his readers with a list of commodities the caravans transported to Egypt. The top four items were "1. Slaves, male and female; 2. Camels; 3. Ivory; 4. Horns of the rhinoceros."[60]

Other sources, like the Rev. Michael Russell's *View of Ancient and Modern Egypt* (1835), depict the gruesome journey from Sennar and Darfur to Wakalat al-Jallaba in Cairo undertaken every year by disembodied rhinoceros horns and thousands of dehumanized enslaved Africans.[61] Rhinoceros horns were likely carried by camel with other products intended for the Egyptian market. The enslaved were forced to endure the journey through the desert on foot. They were provided extremely scant rations of food and water. This was in stark contrast to the ample provisions dedicated to the camels who carried precious commodities. Many of the enslaved fell sick or died before reaching Cairo. Caravans would stop near villages in Asyut for Coptic monks to castrate a selection of boys chosen to become eunuchs. These men went on to serve in great Ottoman households—perhaps in the palace of the Ottoman sultan himself.[62] Beginning in the 1850s, enslaved Africans were brought into the empire by new technologies of transportation, such as steamships and trains.

The French physician Louis Frank documented the abysmal conditions awaiting the enslaved at Wakalat al-Jallaba in early nineteenth-century Cairo. He described how they were inspected and sold like animals once they arrived—forced to remain compliant as potential buyers scrutinized the whites of their eyes, the color of their tongues, and the health of their nailbeds to determine their "character" and, as such, whether they were fit for purchase. Enslaved Africans were so dehumanized in the Egyptian imagination that some Cairenes claimed that the *jallaba* often sold cannibals (*anthropophages*), which could only be identified by a small tail or a slight extension of the tailbone ("par une petite queue ou une prolongation de l'os du coccix").[63] They informed Frank that an astute buyer would know that the *jallaba* removed these tails before arriving at the market and, accordingly, would check for a telling scar during the inspection. The physician found no evidence of cannibals—or individuals with tails. His account provides only a glimpse into the horrific experiences of enslaved Africans at the Cairo slave market.

The silences surrounding enslaved Africans in historical accounts of the late Ottoman world are reminiscent of those pertaining to the rhinoceros horn. The Cairo-based artist Amado Alfadni ruminates on the connections between animal commodities and enslaved Africans that were trafficked along Darb al-Arbain in his recent exhibition *The Alternative Museum of the*

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[60] William George Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from the Year 1792 to 1798*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1806), pp. 62 (value), 348–349 (list).

[61] Rev. Michael Russell, *View of Ancient and Modern Egypt with an Outline of Its Natural History* (New York: Harper, 1835), p. 270. See also W. B. Shaw, "Darb Al-Arba'in: The Forty Days Road," *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1929, *12*(1):63–71.

[62] On castration and the making of eunuchs in Upper Egypt see John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia* (London: John Murray, 1819), pp. 329–330; and Otto Meinardus, "The Upper Egyptian Practice of the Making of Eunuchs in the XVIIIth and XIXth Century," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1969, *94*:47–58. An exemplary case is that of the enslaved Abyssinian Beshir Aga, who held the office of chief eunuch in the Ottoman imperial harem. See Jane Hathaway, *Beshir Agha: Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Imperial Harem* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), esp. pp. 18–23.

[63] Louis Frank, *Collection d'opuscules de médecine-pratique avec un mémoire sur le commerce des negres au Kaire* (Paris: L'Imprimerie de Bossange, 1812), pp. 191–237; the quotation is from p. 210.

Sudan. One of the exhibition's most powerful pieces is the audio installation "Black Ivory."[64] Its title references the process by which the trade in enslaved Africans—"the black ivory of the Dark continent"—became "more lucrative and less arduous" than that in ivory.[65] The project's narrative is based on the historical account of Captain Ali Gifoon Effendi, a Sudanese man from Fashoda who was sold into slavery by Baggara traders, as a part of their annual tax to the government. Gifoon was immediately conscripted into the Fifth Regiment of the Sudanese Battalion in the Egyptian Army. He served in the army for at least forty years, fighting in Sudan, Egypt, Mexico, and Abyssinia.[66]

Influenced by his family's history as *jallaba*—Sudanese traders who trafficked and sold enslaved people—and his experiences as a Black Arab man living in Cairo, Alfadni posits "Black Ivory" as a "re-appropriated historical device" to highlight the narratives of Shilluk men, like Ali Gifoon, who were kidnapped from their homes, enslaved, and forced to transport ivory as they were marched from Sudan for sale in Egypt.[67] Much like the Black feminist historical method of critical fabulation, "Black Ivory" is a mode of storytelling that underscores the limits of the archive. Alfadni emphasizes the silences and unknowability always present in the histories of those who left behind no traditional historical documentation of their lives.[68]

The audio installation is a first-person account in Shilluk of a man who was sold into slavery as a young boy. The narrator begins with his mother hiding him from vicious hyenas, the animal form of therianthropic Arab enslavers, who kidnapped children and took them to the faraway land of Geza'n. Mother and son are separated, and the young boy is soon caught. He describes being marched with other young captives to a market town a few days' journey away. The captives are inspected, cleaned, and "lined . . . up next to the ivory." Soon, he continues, "some Jellaba arrived in their white clothes; one of them negotiated with our abductors."[69]

The narrator recalled the bond that formed between himself and the ivory he was forced to carry on his head during the long desert march along Darb al-Arbain to Asyut. He detailed the harsh journey that forged living beings into commodities: "The rope tying us jerked every time one of us collapsed from illness or fatigue. Then one of the Jellaba would get off his horse, check the sick person, untie him, take the ivory he was carrying and place it on his horse in annoyance. They left the sick to die and kept going." According to the narrator, only half of the captives survived the journey. Amid his horror and fatigue, he is still able to recognize a parallel between his plight and that of the elephant whose tusk he bore, lamenting "the poor elephants

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[64] For the press release see Najlaa El-Ageli, ed., *The Alternative Museum of the Sudan: Amado Alfadni Exhibition* (London: Sulger-Buel Gallery, 2022), https://www.sulger-buel-gallery.com/exhibitions/44-alternative-museum-of-the-sudan-a-solo-exhibition-of-amado-alfadni-curated-by/; regarding the audio installation see Amado Alfadni, "Black Ivory [Audio Installation]," in *Alternative Museum of the Sudan: Exhibition Catalogue*, curated by Najlaa El-Ageli (London: Sulger-Buel Gallery, 2022).

[65] Muhammad Fuad Shukry, *The Khedive Ismail and Slavery in the Sudan (1863–1879)* (Cairo: Librairie de la Renaissance d'Egypte, 1937), p. 12; and Phillippe Gilbert, *L'Afrique inconnue: Récits et aventures des voyageurs modernes au Soudan oriental*, 2nd ed. (Tours: Alfred Mame et Fils, 1865), pp. 221–231. See also Edward A. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves: Changing Pattern of International Trade in East Africa to the Later Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1975).

[66] Ali Effendi Gifoon, "Memoirs of a Soudanese Soldier," dictated in Arabic to and translated by Captain Percy Machell, *Cornhill Magazine*, 1896. Ali Gifoon was a part of the Sudanese Battalion of the Egyptian Army sent to Veracruz, Mexico, to fight on behalf of France during the Mexican Campaign (1862–1867). The most comprehensive study of this battalion is Richard Hill and Peter Hogg, *A Black Corps d'Elite: An Egyptian Sudanese Conscript Battalion with the French Army in Mexico, 1863–1867, and Its Survivors in Subsequent African History* (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1995).

[67] Najlaa El-Ageli, "Alternative Museum of the Sudan: Curatorial Statement," in *Alternative Museum of the Sudan: Exhibition Catalogue* (cit. n. 64), p. 4. For an introduction to Shilluk history and society see Patricia Mercer, "Shilluk Trade and Politics from the Mid-Seventeenth Century to 1861," *J. Afr. Hist.*, 1971, *12*:407–426.

[68] On critical fabulation see Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe*, 2008, *12*(2):1–14; and Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007).

[69] Alfadni, "Black Ivory" (cit. n. 64), p. 14.

that were killed for all this ivory." Upon arrival in Asyut, the young boy is finally allowed to lower his ivory companion. He remarks, "I missed the ivory I had been carrying. It had listened to me throughout the journey."[70]

The trade between Egypt and the Sudan reached its peak in the mid-nineteenth century. Upper Egyptian cities, such as Asyut, rose to great wealth owing to their centrality along the caravan routes. Trade along Darb al-Arbain thrived, inspiring Khedive Ismail to extend the Egyptian empire to the source of the Nile at Lake Victoria.[71] These efforts failed drastically. Egypt went into debt, and the encroachment of British colonial powers into Egypt and Sudan in the 1870s affected the trade of enslaved people and commodities, like rhinoceros horns, along Darb al-Arbain. European enterprises, like the Sudan Company, took control of the trade route, directing the sale of Sudanese and Egyptian goods into European markets. The dwindling of trade along Darb al-Arbain may have contributed to Ismail's suggestion that the rhinoceros horns used by healers were not really from rhinoceroses, but from buffaloes and cows.[72] Ultimately, European financial domination in Egypt led to the *de jure* abolishment of the trade in enslaved Africans in 1877 and Britain's colonial conquest of the country in 1882. Yet the complex entanglement of the rhinoceros horn and African bodies did not end here. These two living bodies–turned–objects remained bound together throughout the first half of the twentieth century—but no longer through the discourses of commodity and spectacle within the market. Post-abolition, they were defined through the discourse of superstition, a term that locally signified a need for reform and modernization and, for salvage anthropologists like Winifred Blackman, pointed to an important field of study.

RACING AND ERASING SUPERSTITION

Despite the reduction in Egyptian-controlled trade along Darb al-Arbain, the rhinoceros horn remained on the market as a precious magico-medical object. Black African bodies and labor remained in high demand, too. Many elite Egyptian households, like that of the feminist activist Hoda Sha'arawi, employed the formerly enslaved as domestic servants.[73] Others could be found in the market, on the busy streets of bazaars, and in secret alleyways. They were no longer there as objects for sale but, instead, as sellers of their own wares. Many provided occult services like sand divination or geomancy (*darb al-raml*), shell divination (*darb al-wada'*), bibliomancy (*fath al-kitab*), and the manufacture of amulets.

Throughout the early twentieth century, Sudanese, Upper Egyptians, and other southern migrants engaging in occult work were a common sight on the streets of the country's urban areas. Scholars like Abdel Rahman Ismail pinpointed these precarious laborers, and especially the Sudanese, as the source of these false beliefs.[74] As such, amulets and charms, like the rhinoceros horn, became racialized as objects of a particularly African superstition. The bodies of those that wielded and sought out its powers—primarily women, the urban poor, formerly enslaved Africans, and Upper Egyptians—were similarly deemed ignorant, feeble-minded, and biologically predisposed to superstition. Eradicating these superstitious practices became a goal of Egyptian nationalist reformers, while foreign anthropologists, like Blackman, scrambled to record and catalogue them before they disappeared.

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[70] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[71] Onofrio Abbate, *Le Soudan sous le règne du Khédive Ismail; notes d'une décade historique, 1868–1878* (Cairo, 1895); and Pierre Crabitès, *Ismail, the Maligned Khedive* (London: Routledge, 1933).

[72] Walz, *Trade between Egypt and Bilad As-Sudan* (cit. n. 54); and Ismail, *Tibb Al-Rukka* (cit. n. 40), Vol. 1, p. 87.

[73] Troutt Powell, *Different Shade of Colonialism* (cit. n. 25), pp. 180–185.

[74] Ismail, *Tibb Al-Rukka* (cit. n. 40), Vol. 1, p. 33.

In 1880 the legality of magic, or occult work, in Cairo shifted with the passage of the "Legal Procedures and Jurisdictions of Quarter Police Station Commissioners," which tasked the urban police force with maintaining public order and safeguarding the welfare of "female widowers, pregnant women, the weak, and the elderly" from unruly elements. The law explicitly designated as threats "charlatan" (*dagala*) Sudanese, West Africans, Upper Egyptians, and Bedouins who loitered in the streets, performing geomancy, shell divination, and bibliomancy and advising unsuspecting passersby on spiritual matters (*masa'il al-ruhaniyya*). It also described "trickster" Sudanese and Upper Egyptian women, including practitioners of the spirit healing ritual *zar*, who were said to steal the silver dirhams of innocent citizens.[75] Legislation against magic was also part and parcel of government attempts to reform and institutionalize Islamic mysticism—with which the occult sciences were heavily associated.[76]

This trend could be seen in other parts of the late Ottoman world as well. Between 1894 and 1903, during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876–1909), the government in Istanbul ordered the confiscation and destruction of numerous magic books and occult texts.[77] Well into the first half of the twentieth century, numerous practitioners—ranging from self-proclaimed magicians to faith healers—arrested in Istanbul were exiled to other cities, like Thessaloniki, or to imperial frontiers like the Aegean islands of Lemnos and Kos.[78] Scholars of the late Ottoman period have shown that many enslaved African women were exiled from Istanbul for performing occult work or participating in occult ceremonies. Yannis Spyropoulos highlights one case in which seven Black women were banished from Istanbul to cleanse the neighborhoods they lived in from their "evil and detrimental influence."[79]

A particular "Africanity" became associated with the occult sciences in Islam in the late nineteenth century.[80] This caused a conundrum for Egypt, whose geographical location in Africa undermined its attempts to bring the world to see it as a part of Europe. The roots of the state's concentration on the "southernness" of superstition can perhaps be traced to three interconnected phenomena. Two of these have been discussed above: Egypt's failed colonial pursuits in East Africa and its long history as a major point for the distribution of enslaved peoples on the Trans-Saharan trade routes. The third phenomenon further incorporated the steadily globalizing field of anthropology and the long-standing debates regarding the "race" of the Egyptian people. European and Egyptian scientists became increasingly interested in the physical and environmental composition of Egyptian bodies—and particularly their biological and

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[75] Filib Ibn-Yusuf Gallad, *Qamus al-idara wa'l-qada*, Vol. 3 (Al-Iskandariya: al-Matba'a al-Buhariya, 1891), p. 1188.

[76] F. De Jong, *Turuq and Turuq-Linked Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Egypt: A Historical Study in Organizational Dimensions of Islamic Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

[77] Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Istanbul, Maarif Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi (MF.MKT) 154.24 (24 R 1310/15 Nov. 1892); BOA.MF.MKT 157.32 (11 C 1310/31 Dec. 1892); BOA.MF.MKT 825.87 (10 B 1310/28 Jan. 1893); BOA, MF.MKT 590.6 (26 B 1319/8 Nov. 1901).

[78] Nimet Elif Uluğ, *Elemterefiş: Superstitious Beliefs and Occult in the Ottoman Empire (1839–1923)* (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2016), pp. 209–215. On the importance of Mediterranean islands in the Ottoman Empire see Antonis Hadjikyriacou, ed., "Insularity in the Ottoman World," special issue, *Princeton Papers*, 2017, *18*.

[79] Ehud R. Toledano, *As If Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2007); Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800–1909* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996); and Yannis Spyropoulos, "Beys, Sheikhs, Kolbaşıs, and Godiyas: Some Notes on the Leading Figures of the Ottoman-African Diaspora," *Turcica*, 2017, *48*:187–218, on p. 191.

[80] James Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Luzac, 1939), pp. 25–28; and Dahlia M. Gubara, "Al-Azhar and the Orders of Knowledge" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 2014), p. 319. For more on Africanity and the occult in Egypt see *ibid.*, Ch. 4: "Muhammad al-Kashnawi and the Everyday Life of the Occult"; Terence Walz, "Trans-Saharan Migration and the Colonial Gaze: The Nigerians in Egypt," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 2006, no. 26, pp. 94–127; and Nefertiti Takla, "Barbaric Women: Race and the Colonization of Gender in Interwar Egypt," *Internat. J. Middle East Stud.*, 2021, 53:387–405.

mental proximity to the Egyptian pharaohs presumed to be their ancient forebears. They conducted medical and anatomical studies to show that Egyptians were not (Black) Africans but, rather, a unique racial type. These conclusions, in turn, shaped the field of Egyptian ethnology, while also providing a scientific foundation for an Egyptian nationalist project that distanced itself from Africa—and Africanity.[81]

Egyptian fears of Black African "superstition" heightened following the abolition of slavery, as the formerly enslaved turned to occult practices to gain money. Turco-Egyptian and European households' intimate relationship with Black Africans in the domestic sphere put them in direct contact with those individuals' spiritual beliefs and practices. For example, Zeinab, the Sudanese cook of the wealthy Mme. Rushdie Pasha in Cairo, quit her position because of her *zar* spirit's dislike of her employers' black mourning clothing after the death of a close friend. This event precipitated the Frenchwoman into the world of *zar*, leading her to claim that every Black woman in Egypt was possessed or involved in a *zar* cult.[82]

As the practice spread beyond the Black community into Ottoman-Egyptian homes, employers and government officials feared the influence female *zar* priestesses had on their devotees. They believed that these powerful women manipulated the enslaved to steal from or even kill their owners to appease the material demands of greedy *zar* spirits. In the memoirs of her time as a lady-in-waiting in Istanbul's Çırağan Palace, the Turkish author Leyla Saz described the power these priestesses held over enslaved Black Africans in the palace, who offered the women lodging once they were freed but then "stripped [their devotees] of everything," forcing them to work "day and night" to pay off their accumulated debts. The Egyptian author Mohammed Hilmi Zayn al-Din similarly scorns *zar* as "a plague" on Egyptian society. In his 1903 pamphlet *Madar al-Zar* (*The Harmfulness of Zar*), Zayn al-Din warned men of the dangerous power *zar* could give women over their husbands, especially if the latter were wealthy. These sentiments continued well into the first half of the twentieth century. Writing in 1940, the Egyptian author Out el-Kouloub vividly describes a young Egyptian woman's visit to a *zar* priestess, undertaken at the request of her new husband. She suggests that the practitioners gained their wealth honestly, as many women flocked to them for their services, but chose to practice their craft in the suburbs of urban centers to avoid demands of bribes from the police: "The authorities pursue codias who do no harm rather than the criminals running rampant in the city!"[83]

In many ways, Egyptian legislators' anxieties were correct. Certain magical professions and healing practices were directly related to the large influx of foreign students from the Maghreb and West Africa attending al-Azhar University, the forced migration of enslaved Africans, and Upper Egyptian migrants into Egypt's urban centers during the nineteenth century. Before the

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[81] Some examples include Charles S. Myers, "Contributions to Egyptian Anthropometry, II: The Comparative Anthropometry of the Most Ancient and Modern Inhabitants," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1905, 35:80–91; and Georgy P. G. Sobhy, *Notes on the Ethnology of the Copts Considered from the Point of View of Their Descendance from the Ancient Egyptians* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1936). On race and Egyptian nationalism see Eve Troutt Powell, "Brothers along the Nile: Egyptian Conceptions of Race and Ethnicity, 1895–1910," in *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths*, ed. Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni (Boulder, Colo.: Rienner, 1999), pp. 171–182; and Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860–1950* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 73–98.

[82] Niya Salima, *Harems et Musulmanes d'Egypte: Letters* (Paris: Felix Juven, 1902), pp. 255–257. On the intertwined discourses of anti-blackness and superstition in Egypt see Taylor M. Moore, "Betraying Behita: Superstition and the Paralysis of Blackness in Out El Kouloub's Zanouba," *Internat. J. Middle East Stud.*, 2022, *54*:149–158.

[83] Leyla Saz, *The Imperial Harem of the Sultans: Daily Life at the Çıragan Palace during the Nineteenth Century: Memoirs of Leyla (Saz) Hanımefendi*, trans. Landon Thomas (Beyoglu, Istanbul: Pera, 1994), p. 75; Muhammad Hilmi Zayn al-Din, *Madar Al-Zar* (al-Qahira: Matba'a Diwan Umum Al-Awqaf, 1903); and Out el-Kouloub, *Three Tales of Love and Death*, trans. Nayra Atiya (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2000), p. 50. On the metaphor of *zar* as "plague" in Zayn ad-Din's work see Taylor M. Moore, "Occult Epidemics," *History of the Present*, 2023, *13*:87–100;

centralization of Al-Azhar Library in 1897, many of the university's residential student lodges (*riwaq*), organized by country or province of origin, held autonomous authority over their regional manuscript and book collections. This was especially true for the Upper Egyptian lodge, "one of the largest and most powerful" of the residential lodges, which did not relinquish its collections until 1936.[84] Different ethnic groups were known for different magical specializations. Sudanese and West Africans are characterized in early twentieth-century literature as making up the bulk of the practitioners of geomancy, bibliomancy, and *zar*. North African practitioners were famed for their ability to control spirits and successfully exorcise jinn.[85] Several sources from the time speculate that the *zar* and *bori* cults spreading in the Ottoman Mediterranean were only recently introduced from Egypt's southern hinterlands by way of the Trans-Saharan slave trade.[86]

The anthropologist Hagar El Hadidi suggests in her examination of *zar* cults in contemporary Cairo that the practice of *zar* and other spirit possession rituals was a necessary means of economic and social support for free and enslaved African women, just as other Egyptian guilds and Sufi organizations served for various economic collectives in urban areas.[87] Particularly with the abolition of slavery, the formerly enslaved turned to magical trades, such as *zar*, fortune-telling, and geomancy, to provide for themselves at a time of economic precarity. The notes and papers of Winifred Blackman are full of evidence of Black wise women's presence in the Egyptian occult marketplace. She purchased several magico-medical objects from Sudanese and Abyssinian women, including three of the five rhinoceros horn specimens held at the Pitt Rivers Museum today.[88]

Black Africans were not the only individuals engaging in occult work, nor were they the only perceived superstitious menaces to Egyptian society. Experts and elites—Egyptian and European alike—also viewed Upper Egyptians as charlatans. Much like the forged relationship between Africanity and superstition, this development too was historically rooted. Following Egypt's failed attempts to colonize Nilotic East Africa in the 1860s and 1870s and the British seizure of the Sudan in 1882, the semiautonomous region of Upper Egypt became Egypt's new southern hinterland.[89] For centuries, Upper Egypt was a thriving commercial and cultural hub with flourishing agriculture and renowned educational institutions. Urban centers like Qena, Qusayr, Tanta, and Asyut anchored the region at the intersection of pilgrimage routes, as well as Trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trading routes.[90] The historian Zeinab Abul-Magd shows that Upper Egypt was the Ottoman viceroy—and acclaimed founder of modern Egypt—Mehmet Ali's first colonial acquisition after a six-year war, 1805–1811, to conquer the region. This acquisition

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[84] Gubara, "Al-Azhar and the Orders of Knowledge" (cit. n. 80), p. 180.

[85] Ismail, *Tibb Al-Rukka* (cit. n. 40); Klunzinger, *Upper Egypt* (cit. n. 45); Gallad, *Qamus al-idara wa'l-qaḍa* (cit. n. 75); Hagar El Hadidi, *Zar: Spirit Possession, Music, and Healing Rituals in Egypt* (Cairo: American Univ. Cairo Press, 2016); and Tewfik Canaan, *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel*, Vol. 12 (Hamburg: Friederichsen, 1914).

[86] Hani Fakhouri, "The Zar Cult in an Egyptian Village," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 1968, *41*(2):49–56; Richard Johan Natvig, "Arabic Writings on Zar," *Sudanic Africa*, 1998, 9:163–178; and Gerda Sengers, *Women and Demons: Cultic Healing in Islamic Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[87] Hadidi, *Zar* (cit. n. 85); and Y. Hakan Erdem, "Magic, Theft, and Arson: The Life and Death of an Enslaved African Woman in Ottoman İzmit," in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*, ed. Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno (Cairo: American Univ. Cairo Press, 2011), pp. 125–146.

[88] PRM 1985.54.1868 (1929), 1985.54.2792 (1929), and 1985.54.3514 (n.d.).

[89] For more on the internal colonial project in Upper Egypt see Martina E. Rieker, "The Sa'id and the City: Subaltern Spaces in the Making of Modern Egyptian History" (Ph.D. diss., Temple Univ., 1997); Peter Gran, "Upper Egypt in Modern History: A 'Southern Question'?" in *Upper Egypt: Identity and Change*, ed. Nicholas S. Hopkins and Reem Saad (Cairo: American Univ. Cairo Press, 2004), pp. 79–96; and Zeinab Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 2013).

[90] Terence Walz, "Asyut in the 1260s (1844–53)," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 1978, *15*:113–126.

"paved the imperial road to neighboring colonies in the Sudan and Arabia." The Egyptian government used the Upper Egyptian population for corvée labor and army conscripts.[91] Others migrated to the Delta as manual and menial laborers.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Egyptian elites and social reformers relegated Upper Egypt to a space of backwardness, ignorance, and superstition. The fuzzy cartographic borders between Upper Egypt and "Africa" led early anthropometric scientists to believe that Upper Egyptian stock was contaminated by their African neighbors to the South, making Upper Egyptian inhabitants more susceptible to superstition.[92] Anthropological theories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries posited Upper Egyptians as both living archives and living fossils of ancient Egypt.[93] Scientists used data gathered from hundreds of bodies exhumed during archaeological digs to argue that Upper Egyptians were anachronistic, physical replicas of their ancient forebears. Many scientists claimed that, mentally, these people carried with them the ancients' predilection for magic. As a result, anthropologists and folklorists, like Blackman, traveled to Upper Egypt to collect ethnographic information and museum specimens and to record the primitive beliefs that they theorized as the cornerstone of modern science and medicine.[94]

The canon of this citationally incestuous group of mostly European scientists (anthropologists and archaeologists), missionaries, and curators formed an archive that furnishes—rather ironically—much about what we know of popular healing and folk medicinal practices in Egypt during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

CONCLUSION

By 1928, when Winifred Blackman gave her presentation at the Wellcome, a timeless understanding of Egyptian magic pervaded the global imagination. Yet the collected magico-medical objects she displayed were no longer understood as archives of local, Egyptian economies of healing. These amulets traversed hands, oceans, and social contexts, yet their powers and meanings did not travel with them.[95] With the gradual decline of folklore studies in the 1930s, Blackman and her work practically disappeared. Her expansive amulet collection was moved from the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum and divided among the British Museum and the Science Museum in London and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Her ethnography, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt*, also faded into oblivion until its reprinting in 2000. Blackman was well aware of the rhinoceros horn's importance to Western anthropology and Egyptology. To her, the horn was an ethnographic object, an artifact of magico-medical knowledge that was under threat from a swiftly modernizing Egypt. But the rhinoceros horn was linked to a much darker history as well.

This essay has explored the more (un)natural history of the magical rhinoceros horn and its imbrication in the Trans-Saharan slave trade and the racialization of African occult knowledge in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, highlighting the dual process by

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[91] Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires* (cit. n. 89), pp. 72 (quotation), 90–92; and Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), Ch. 2: "Birth of an Army: Conscription and Resistance," pp. 76–112.

[92] Winifred S. Blackman, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt, Their Religious, Social, and Industrial Life To-day with Special Reference to Survivals from Ancient Times* (London: Harrap, 1927), pp. 22–23.

[93] Leslie V. Grinsell, "The Folklore of Ancient Monuments," *Folklore*, 1947, 58:345–360; On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 2013), p. 97; and Michael Ezekiel Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008).

[94] Examples of anthropologists and collectors who came to Egypt and the Sudan to conduct fieldwork include E. E. Evans Pritchard, E. Wallis Budge, and John Cotton Dana. For more on the development of ethnography in Egypt see Omnia S. El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007).

[95] Londa Schiebinger, "West Indian Abortifacients and the Making of Ignorance," in *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, ed. Robert Proctor and Schiebinger (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 149–162.

which Black Africans and nonhuman animals were commodified by the Ottoman-Egyptian state. To do this work, it takes the form of an amulet tale, a storytelling device that experiments with the potential of using objects to produce decolonial materialist histories of global science. Decolonial materialism as a method attempts to use the materiality of object-archives to emphasize race and the subjugation of blackness and Black people in the historical production of objecthood, particularly in a multilayered colonial context. We follow the horn as it is transported along the Darb al-Arbain, sold alongside enslaved Africans in Egyptian markets, and demonized as African superstition following the abolition of slavery. Decolonial materialism is not meant to be used in a vacuum. It is an approach that is intended to supplement other critical research methods, like oral history, ethnography, and document-based archival work.

In proposing decolonial materialism and the device of the amulet tale, I merely hope to convey a fraction of the lessons that I have learned from working with Blackman's amulet archive to historians of science. These methods are not meant to be prescriptive or all-encompassing but, rather, to underscore the power of developing new theories and methods from vernacular knowledges—some that may leave sparse historical residues. My thinking will be forever indebted to the Black and Upper Egyptian wise women who wielded occult objects like the rhinoceros horn. For behind every amulet is the life and practice of one such woman and her customers. Historians of science—and scholars of the humanities more generally—have much to learn from them. We are all haunted by specters in our work, and by the stories that pester and eat away at us until they are told. In taking on the mantle of the historian, we all are forced to become mediums, to act as diviners. We all traverse and translate between the worlds that we study and the world in which we live. It is only in embracing the inner medium in us all that we can imagine new possibilities for the history of science and new narrative forms for writing history. And there is still much ground to cover. For, as N. K. Jemisin reminds us, "much of history is unwritten. Remember this."[96]

[96] N. K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (London: Orbit, 2015), p. 3.