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MATERIAL TURNS IN BRITISH HISTORY: III.
COLLECTING: COLONIAL BOMBAY, BASRA, BAGHDAD AND
THE ENLIGHTENMENT MUSEUM*

ABSTRACT: This lecture explores the history of Enlightenment era collecting of antiquities to probe the claims to universality of Western museums. Focusing on the British Museum's Enlightenment Gallery, it underscores the imperial and familial contexts of British collecting cultures. Questioning received narratives of collecting which highlight the role played by individual elite British men, it suggests that women, servants and non-European elites played instrumental parts in knowledge production and the acquisition of antiquities. The private correspondence of the East India Company civil servant, Claudius Rich—the East India Company's Resident or diplomatic representative at Baghdad 1801–1821—his wife Mary (née Mackintosh) Rich illuminates social histories of knowledge and material culture that challenge interpretations of the British Museum's Enlightenment Gallery which privilege trade and discovery over empire.

What is Enlightenment? In 1784, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant famously asked and answered this question, declaring that '*Enlightenment is mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity.*' 'Public' enlightenment, Kant urged, was 'nearly inevitable', if only the public were 'allowed freedom'. For Enlightenment, 'nothing more is required than *freedom...namely the freedom to make a public use of one's reason in all matters*', he proclaimed.¹ Ostensibly universalist and cosmopolitan, Kant's vision of Enlightenment was predicated on a belief that the autonomous exercise of reason was a fundamental

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¹ Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment', trans. James Schmidt, in James Schmidt (ed.), *What is Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley, 1996), 58-59.

characteristic of humanity. As twenty-first century philosophers and intellectual historians have however abundantly demonstrated, Kant's universalism was both imbricated with and undercut by his repeated theorisations and exemplifications of human difference. 'In the critical philosophy Kant writes as if all humans, regardless of race or gender, have reason', Theodore Vial observes. 'Yet in [his] writings about non-Europeans and women, many people seem to be deficient in reason.'² Kant's 1775 essay 'Of the Different Human Races', his 1785 essay on 'Determination of the Concept of Human Race' and his 1788 essay 'On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy', indeed, played such foundational roles in theorising 'natural' human differences that some scholars credit him 'with "inventing" the concept of race'.³ Feminist critics have likewise underlined the exclusionary implications of Kant's dim view of women's ability to reason. Any laboured learning 'or painful pondering' the female of the species undertook, Kant suggested, worked against the natural grain of her limited understanding; a scholarly woman, he observed, 'might as well even have a beard'.⁴

Over the past two decades, historians have done much to illuminate the central tension in Enlightenment treatises between universalism, on the one hand, and perceptions of gender- and race-based difference, on the other.⁵ In tonight's lecture I build on those foundations, by interrogating the imperial and material pathways by which universalism, gender and race came to be instantiated in—and erased from—the Enlightenment museum. Eighteenth-century European museums were physical, material and organisational structures calculated

² Theodore Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (Oxford, 2016), 24.

³ *Ibid.*, 22-23, 54, note 6; citation from chapter abstract of online edition.

⁴ Citations from Mari Mikkola, 'Kant on Moral Agency and Women's Nature', *Kantian Review*, 16: 1 (2011), 89-111, 89. Mikkola however argues against the most severe feminist critiques of Kant.

⁵ See for example Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (eds), *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment* (New York, 2005); Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (New York, 2013); Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge, 2004).

to elicit the autonomous, public exercise of reason.⁶ They thus lie at the heart of the Enlightenment project, and share its conflicted, questionable claims to universalism. To surface these issues, I explore the colonial collecting practices that brought material objects from the Middle East into Europe's Enlightenment museums. Beginning my lecture in Bloomsbury, in the present-day Enlightenment Gallery of the British Museum, I travel to Enlightenment era Bombay, Basra and Baghdad, with brief excursions to the ruins of ancient Babylon and to Kurdistan, before returning to contemporary London. This vantage point affords an opportunity to integrate an analysis of late Enlightenment colonial collecting cultures with some preliminary reflections on potential next steps for the twenty-first century agenda of decolonising the museum.⁷

My lecture is underpinned by three basic research questions. It begins by asking, 'How "universal" is the 'universal museum?' The Altes Museum in Berlin, the British Museum in Bloomsbury, Paris's Louvre and New York's Met are all commonly described as universal museums. This usage has recently become a central plank in museums' defensive platforms, in the face of increasingly clamorous claims for the restoration of heritage objects.⁸ Assertions of the European museum's universalism, of course, have an extended genealogy, one that is rooted in the museum's Enlightenment function as a built environment designed to foster the public's exercise of reason through scientific scrutiny of global

⁶ R.G.W. Anderson, M.L. Caygill, A MacGregor and L. Syson (eds), *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century* (2003); Kim Sloan with Andrew Burnett (ed.), *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (2003).

⁷ For an introduction to the museum decolonisation literature, see John Giblin, Imma Ramos and Nikki Grout, 'Thoughts on Representing Empire and Decolonising Museums and Public Spaces in Practice an Introduction', *Third Text*, 33: 4-5 (2019), 471-486; Viv Golding and Wayne Modest (eds), *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections, Collaboration* (2013); Claire Wintle, 'Decolonising the Museum: The Case of the Imperial and Commonwealth Institutes', *Museum and Society*, 11: 2 (2013), 185-201.

⁸ A foundational text in this debate is the 'Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums' signed by eighteen museum directors in 2002: http://archives.icom.museum/pdf/E_news2004/p4_2004-1.pdf. See also James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton, 2008). For the opposing view, see for example Rafia Zakaria, 'Opinion: Looted Art and the "Universal Museum": Can 21st-Century Collections Ever Escape Colonialism's Violent Legacy?', *Frieze* (28 November 2018): <https://frieze.com/article/looted-art-and-universal-museum-can-21st-century-collections-ever-escape-colonialisms>.

material cultures.⁹ Here, instead, I underscore the contribution of Enlightenment imperialism to the making of these museum collections. My second research question, then, is ‘How colonial or imperial was the Enlightenment universal museum?’ This is hardly a novel material turn on my part.¹⁰ My bookshelves bulge with studies of Enlightenment collectors such as Sir Joseph Banks and Sir Hans Sloane, contextualised within a colonial frame, and excellent new studies are now extending this line of analysis to less familiar eighteenth- and nineteenth-century museum donors.¹¹ My third research question is more novel. It adds another gender to this male mix by asking: what happens to our understanding of the universal museum and its entanglement with Enlightenment colonial collecting practices if we not only posit that there were women in the Enlightenment, but also acknowledge that imperialising women contributed to the making of the Enlightenment museum? By inserting women back into the Enlightenment Galley of the British Museum, I hope to accomplish two main goals. The first is to reveal more fully the broad spectrum of social, material and political practices that undergirded East India Company collecting cultures in the Enlightenment era. My second purpose is to use the archival traces left by European women to recover contributions made to colonial collecting by male and female South Asian and Middle Eastern labourers, servants, go-betweens and governing elites. For, if we are to contextualise—much less to decolonise—the museum, these historical agents and their vital engagement with the Enlightenment’s conflicted universal histories will also demand to be acknowledged.

⁹ See esp. Sloan (ed.), *Enlightenment*.

¹⁰ T.J. Barringer, Geoff Quilley and Douglas Fordham (eds), *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester, 2007); Sarah Longair and John McAleer (eds), *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester, 2012).

¹¹ Neil Chambers, *Endeavouring Banks: Exploring the Collections from the Endeavour Voyage 1768-1771* (2016); James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane* (2017); Kate Donington, *The Bonds of Family: Slavery, Commerce and Culture in the British Atlantic World* (Manchester, 2019), esp.chap.7.

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To visit the British Museum’s Enlightenment Galley today is to stand in the centre of a universal museum. Or, is it? The celebration of the Museums’ 250th anniversary in 2003 saw this gallery reopen after a major refurbishment engineered to explore ‘the way people of the time looked at the “natural and artificial curiosities” being collected from all over the world by scholars and collectors, who then sought to make sense of their past and their present’. For Neil Macgregor, then the Museum’s Director, Enlightenment universalism was the taproot that had fed the Museum’s evolving practices of collecting and display from its foundation in 1753 through the late Enlightenment of the 1820s. MacGregor argued that Enlightenment universalism, recast for ‘an age of global citizenship’, also provided the justification for the Museum’s continued existence in the twenty-first century. ‘The universal scope of the Museum’s collections’, he suggested, made the British Museum ‘a unique repository of the achievements of human endeavour’ and thus ‘truly the memory of mankind.’¹² Part I of the exhibition catalogue published to accompany the gallery’s relaunch was, appropriately, entitled ‘The Universal Museum’, and the title of the volume itself celebrated the European Enlightenment’s ‘discovery’ of the world.¹³

From the vantage point of 2019, the ‘discovery’ paradigm now appears inherently flawed, suggesting that Europe is the centre of the universe, and that Europeans were precocious or are exceptional in the exercise of their reason.¹⁴ Three significant absences, moreover, mark the Enlightenment Gallery’s celebration of an enduring universalism born in the age of reason. The first is empire, and is closely implicated with the second—which is slavery. Both of these defining features of the Enlightenment universe are at once

¹²Neil MacGregor, ‘Preface’, in Sloan, (ed.), *Enlightenment*, 6.

¹³ Sloan, (ed.), *Enlightenment*, esp. Part I.

¹⁴ For a powerful critique of the ‘discovery’ paradigm of British and European history, see Sujit Sivasundaram, *Waves across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire* (New York, 2020).

conspicuously on display in the gallery's material culture and curiously invisible in the textual interpretations that elaborate on exhibited objects' identity and meanings. An informed visitor is, for example, struck by the embodiment of imperialism and slavery manifest in the gallery's many busts. Sir Hans Sloane, the Irish physician whose collecting began in earnest in 1687 when he resided in the British slave colony of Jamaica and whose West Indian specimens were among the British Museum's founding collections, and Sir Joseph Banks, the botanist who accompanied Captain Cook on his first Pacific voyages and later advised the British government to colonise Australia—are both prominently on display.¹⁵ Textual references to empire and slavery—much less to indigenous or enslaved peoples—are, however, exceptionally thin on the ground.¹⁶ The Enlightenment Gallery's explanatory leaflet observes that the room that houses its objects was completed in 1828 and 'now contains an exhibition about the Age of Enlightenment, a time when people—including the collectors who created the British Museum—used reason and first-hand observation of the world around them to understand it in new ways'.¹⁷ The leaflet, like the gallery itself, proceeds to organise the Enlightenment within seven broad themes. Concealed within the seventh theme, 'trade and discovery', empire and slavery lie submerged under a rubric that depicts the violently acquisitive practices of 'Merchants, diplomats, explorers and collectors' as a modernising, scientific impulse 'in which objects were classified by culture rather as exotic curiosities.'¹⁸

¹⁵ Banks, indeed, is the only historical figure in the Enlightenment Gallery to merit two busts. The visual analysis of the gallery in this lecture is based on visits made to the British Museum in August–November 2019.

¹⁶ Significantly, slavery is 'dealt with' in passing by referencing abolitionism: Kim Sloan, "'Aimed at universality and belonging to the nation": The Enlightenment and the British Museum', in Sloan (ed.), *Enlightenment*, 23–25. For the representation and repression of Jamaican slavery in Sir Hans Sloane's eighteenth-century publications, see Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700–1840* (New Haven, CT, 2008), chap.1.

¹⁷ 'Enlightenment: Room 1: Discovering the World in the 18th Century' (London, nd), not paginated.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Complementing this amnesia with respect to empire and slavery is the third salient absence from the Enlightenment Gallery: the roughly half of adult human kind who are women. To be sure, there are female forms in this room: no fewer than four goddesses and seven female mythic figures grace the Enlightenment Gallery. A lion-headed Egyptian goddess and a Roman statue of Demeter are thus visibly displayed.¹⁹ We can, perhaps, also deduce the presence (offstage) of yet another mythical woman from the fact that the Roman cupid on display is depicted stringing his bow. Historical women are however entirely absent. Only by exiting the gallery and turning left into the corner of an adjacent room do we encounter an Enlightenment woman who is also a human. Here Sarah Sophia Banks is mentioned as an Enlightenment collector—albeit one who was ‘Less well-travelled’ than her eminent brother, Sir Joseph Banks, and whose collection—‘put together at home’—featured ‘popular prints...and general ephemera’, rather than the universalising global goods encased next door in the Enlightenment Gallery.²⁰ The texts that elaborate on the Enlightenment Gallery’s material objects likewise ignore women, or relegate them to an historical side-room. The gallery leaflet depicts Sir Hans Sloane’s bust prominently on its cover and cites two named men in its synopsis, but it otherwise effaces gender from its analytical repertoire, employing instead putatively generic collective nouns such as ‘people’, ‘Europeans’, ‘scholars’, ‘collectors’ and ‘Britain’.²¹ ‘Women too’ were part of the Enlightenment, the

¹⁹ The Enlightenment Gallery can be explored virtually via Google Arts & Culture: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/enlightenment>.

²⁰ For Sarah Sophia Banks, see John Gascoigne, ‘Banks, Sarah Sophia (1744-1818)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), which begins by describing her as a ‘collector of antiquarian items’. See also Valerie Schutte, ‘Cutting, Arranging, and Pasting: Sarah Sophia Banks as Collector’, *Early Modern Women*, 9: 1 (2014), 127-140, and Catherine Eagleton, ‘Collecting African Money in Georgian London: Sarah Sophia Banks and Her Collection of Coins’, *Museum History Journal*, 6: 1 (2013), 23-38. Citations are from the British Museum descriptions on display in Room 2. The material culture and texts depicting Sarah Sophia Banks are telling: small reproductions of original images of her, rather than the originals, are on display, under a rubric entitled ‘The Age of Curiosity’.

²¹ The named individuals are Robert Smirke (the Enlightenment architect who designed the room) and George III. The full list of human categories is: ‘people’, ‘collectors’, ‘European collectors’, ‘man-made’, ‘antiquaries’, ‘specialist historians and archaeologists’, ‘the British Museum’s founders’, ‘Europeans’, ‘scholars’, ‘Britain’, ‘Merchants, diplomats, explorers and collectors’.

exhibition catalogue does acknowledge.²² But a visitor to the gallery is hard-pressed to find them in the figures that embellish the exhibition itself.

In the decade and a half since the relaunch of the Enlightenment Gallery, a burgeoning scholarship on Enlightenment women has made this absence much more obvious than it can possibly have been in 2003.²³ In what follows, two types of archaeology serve to reveal women whose histories are both materially present and entirely hidden from the public in the Enlightenment Gallery's display cabinets. By deploying forms of reason that include the well-tested methodologies of feminist historical recovery—that is, digging into both new and old archives and reading manuscripts and the printed record against the grain—and by looking for actual women who participated in Enlightenment archaeological digs—this lecture both expands upon and challenges the universalising claims of Enlightenment museum collections.²⁴ Case 15 of the Enlightenment Gallery, labelled 'The Search for Modern Babylon', provides my point of departure.

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Focusing on early nineteenth-century excavations in what was then a marginal outpost of the Ottoman Empire and is now Iraq, Case 15 is sub-divided into six sections. Three upper compartments contain a combination of small objects and textual exegeses, while the three compartments below display larger archaeological finds from ancient Nineveh and Babylon. The descriptive texts that interpret these objects recite a familiar late Enlightenment narrative,

²² Sloan, "Aimed at universality", 20.

²³ See for example JoEllen DeLucia, *A Feminine Enlightenment: British Women Writers and the Philosophy of Progress, 1759-1820* (Edinburgh, 2015); Elizabeth Eger (ed.), *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830* (Cambridge, 2013); Patricia Fara, *Pandora's Breeches: Women, Science and Power in the Enlightenment* (2004); and Knott and Taylor (eds), *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*;

²⁴ For feminist methodology in the British colonial context, see esp. Antoinette Burton, 'Archive Stories: Gender in the Making of Imperial and Colonial Histories', in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* (Oxford, 2004), 281-93. For the early history of women in archaeology (and their erasure from the discipline), see Amara Thornton, *Archaeologists in Print: Publishing for the People* (2018), esp.chap.3.

inflected by English nationalism.²⁵ ‘In the seventeenth century’, they assert, these ancient cities ‘were still undiscovered’. With the coming of Enlightenment, however, and the arrival of ‘A young Englishman, Claudius James Rich’, Babylon and Nineveh were ‘discovered’ by European collectors. Scientific practices—exemplified by Claudius Rich’s geographical mapping of these sites and his removal from them of material artefacts destined for the British Museum—gave birth to a new, modern form of alchemy. Through archaeological investigation, ‘rubble’ was distilled by reason into scholarly knowledge of the ancient world.²⁶

Who was Claudius Rich, and how did his collections come to embody English Enlightenment in the British Museum? We can only answer these questions if we subvert the logic of the Enlightenment Gallery by interrogating his Englishness and situating Rich in the context of empire. To unpack Case 15 fully, we need as well both to follow the money and to *cherchez la femme*. Rich features in Case 15 as ‘A young Englishman’, but he was born in France, the bastard son of a military officer of Scottish and Irish heritage who had been cashiered from the British army for his leading part in a notoriously brutal wartime scandal in Europe’s West Indian slave colonies.²⁷ Rich’s illegitimacy is reflected in the uncertainty that continues to surround the precise date and place of his birth. It is also registered in his surname: Rich was the maiden name of his Irish paternal grandmother; his father was Colonel

²⁵ For the heroic narrative of masculine archaeology in this region, see Eleanor Robson, ‘Old Habits Die Hard: Writing the Excavation and Dispersal History of Nimrud’, *Museum History Journal*, 10:2 (2017), 217-232, esp. 218-221.

²⁶ The case description reads: ‘In the seventeenth century...the sites of the destroyed cities of Nineveh and Babylon were still undiscovered. During the Enlightenment, new attempts were made to find the ruins of these cities, famous from descriptions in the Bible....A young Englishman, Claudius James Rich, discovered the site of Babylon, mapped ancient Nineveh and gathered artefacts and inscriptions. This “rubble” ...inspired...a century of...scholars.’

²⁷ His reputed father was Sir James Cockburn, 5th Bt. Alastair W. Massie, ‘Cockburn, Sir James, fifth baronet (1723-1809)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). Edmund Burke denounced the British plundering of St Eustatius in parliamentary speeches of 14 May 1781 and 4 December 1781. See P.J. Marshall, Donald C. Bryant and William B. Todd (eds), *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 4: Party, Parliament, and the Dividing of the Whigs: 1780-1794* (Oxford, 2015), 66-94, 104-114.

(later Sir) James Cockburn.²⁸ Raised and educated in Bristol, Rich as we shall see insisted that he was Irish.²⁹ Lacking a family fortune but displaying a precocious ability to master foreign languages, he was an obvious candidate for employment in the East India Company. Appointed in London to the Bombay civil service in 1804, Rich was first dispatched to Aleppo, Alexandria and Cairo, honing his Oriental languages. He fetched up (dressed as a turbaned Mamlūk) in colonial Bombay in September 1807.³⁰

Bombay in 1807 had a population of a few hundred East India Company men. The city was also home to at least ninety-nine adult British women, accompanied by their many daughters. Enumerated among these women in a census of 1806 was Lady Mackintosh, the second wife of the Recorder of Bombay's main court.³¹ It was to the Mackintosh residence that Claudius Rich repaired upon his arrival, swiftly gaining the approval and patronage of the Whig historian, politician and judge, Sir James Mackintosh, and also winning the heart of Sir James's eldest daughter, Mary. Seventeen years old when she met Claudius Rich and just eighteen when they wed a few months later, Mary Mackintosh had been educated by a combination of boarding school, a governess and her father. She spoke French, Italian and German and was a voracious reader of both history and novels.³² Like her husband—with whom she was deeply in love—she lacked a fortune: her father's improvidence had forced the sale of his Highland estate in 1801, precipitating his exile to the Bombay judiciary, where

²⁸ Constance M. Alexander, *Baghdad in Bygone Days: From the Journals and Correspondence of Claudius Rich, Traveller, Artist, Linguist, Antiquary, and British Resident at Baghdad, 1808-1821* (1928), 1-3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10, 13-17.

³¹ *The Bombay Calendar and Register, for the Year 1806; With an Almanac* (Bombay, [1806]), 181-183. The Calendar enumerated 176 'Ladies' of Bombay Presidency and 99 for Bombay itself, but did not include any of Lady Mackintosh's three teenage step-daughters, including the eldest, Mary.

³² Alexander, *Baghdad in Bygone Days*, 19-22, 24. They sailed on the *Princess Augusta* East Indiaman. Mary's half-brother recalled the presence of a German governess and that Mackintosh educated the children on the voyage by reading them Milton's works and Addison's *Spectator* articles. Sir James recorded in a letter of 16 July 1806 that 'I read through the whole of Gibbon, with such omissions and explanations as children require', as well as Robertson's *Charles V* and *America* 'with the very delightful interludes of Walter Scott and Miss Baillie'. Robert James Mackintosh, (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh*, 2 vols (1835), 1: 203-204, 254, 291, 438 (citation 291). He read both Burke and Hume to them as part of 'a regular course of the political history of England'. (291).

Mackintosh's spendthrift habits continued unabated.³³ His patronage however secured Claudius Rich's appointment as the East India Company's Resident or diplomatic representative at Baghdad. Within a few weeks of the couple's marriage in January 1808, they were sailing from Bombay for Basra.³⁴

Both a major Persian Gulf port and a caravan city, Basra lay at the interface between the Indian Ocean world and the Ottoman empire. Its roadways carried commerce to Persia, Syria, Kurdistan, Armenia and Asia Minor; its waterways carried goods and people, via the Tigris and Euphrates, three hundred miles northwest to Baghdad, and thence toward Constantinople.³⁵ The city's population was dominated by Sunni Arabs but also home to Shia tribesmen, Armenians, Jews, Syrian Christians, Indians and Europeans.³⁶ English merchants had been trading at Basra since 1635, and the East India Company had established its first factory (or warehouse) there in 1723.³⁷ The Company's agent at Basra when the Riches' ship docked in March 1808 was Samuel Manesty. The eighth son of a successful Liverpool slave trader, Manesty had been in the Company's employ since 1778, acting as Resident at Basra from the early 1780s and developing a lucrative private trade both as the owner of substantial shipping and as the husband of an Armenian Christian whose family owned extensive date plantations.³⁸ Claudius Rich took an instant dislike to Manesty and refused to allow his wife to disembark at Basra, determined that Mary should not be tainted by contact with Manesty's

³³ Christopher J. Finlay, 'Mackintosh, Sir James of Kyllachy (1765-1832)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). For the sale of Mackintosh's estate, and his improvident lifestyle thereafter, see Mackintosh, (ed.), *Memoirs*, 1: 169, 188. As his son notes, prior to his Bombay appointment, Mackintosh had been offered a position as a judge at Trinidad (*Ibid.*, 187), a reminder of the extent to which the empires of Britain's Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds were connected through their governing elites.

³⁴ Alexander, *Baghdad in Bygone Days*, 22-24. Mary may have been the only 'lady' sailing with the fleet. She reported reading the theologian William Paley on board. Mary Rich (henceforth MR) to Lady Mackintosh, 18 February-31 March 1808, British Library (henceforth BL), BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 7 verso.

³⁵ Thabit A.J. Abdullah, *Merchants, Mamluks, and Murder: The Political Economy of Trade in Eighteenth-Century Basra* (Albany, NY, 2001), 3, 11-13.

³⁶ Abdullah, *Merchants, Mamluks*, 13, 17, 25-27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁸ For Manesty, see Robin P. Walsh, 'Manesty, Samuel (1758-1812)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2010) and M.E. Yapp, 'The Establishment of the East India Company Residency at Baghdad, 1798-1806', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 30: 2 (1967), 323-336, esp. 323-325.

spouse, who Rich insisted was merely a concubine and described in a letter to Sir James Mackintosh as both a ‘Trull’ and ‘a dirty Armenian drab’.³⁹ The first salvo in an extended battle between Rich and Manesty, this comment—which Rich’s in-laws in Bombay found deeply offensive—conveys the fragility of his class, race and gender identities as the unacknowledged illegitimate son of a disgraced British military officer.⁴⁰

From Basra the Riches sailed by schooner to Baghdad, arriving in May at this provincial seat of government. By 1808, Baghdad had been under the turbulent dynastic rule of Mamlūk pashas for decades. The Mamlūks were Georgian warriors, enslaved and imported as boys by the Ottomans, converted to Islam and set to govern the empire’s unruly Iraqi borderlands.⁴¹ By the later eighteenth century the Baghdad province or *pashalik* had attained an unstable quasi-independence.⁴² Claudius and Mary Rich’s residence in the city from 1808 to 1821 coincided with a period of instability that saw successive sons and sons-in-law of the Mamlūk pasha Sulaymān the Great vie for power.⁴³ Defeat in these dynastic contests was violent and decisive, resulting in the death and beheading of successive vanquished pashas. Women in Baghdad—as Mary Rich was to find to her discomfort—lived enclosed lives physically

³⁹ Claudius Rich (henceforth CR) to William Erskine, from Basra, 31 March 1808, BL, Add MS 80751, fol.17; Alexander, *Baghdad in Bygone Days*, 25–27. Walsh, ‘Manesty’, cites Lachlan Macquarie’s April 1807 description of Mrs Manesty as being ‘an Armenian by Birth of a respectable Family, and has brought her Husband no less than 13 Children....Mrs Manesty is still a beautiful Woman, and very pleasing in her manners.’ See also X. W. Bond, ‘Claudius Rich and Samuel Manesty’, Untold Lives Blog (4 March 2016): <https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2016/03/claudius-rich-and-samuel-manesty.html>, who ascribes Rich’s comment instead to ‘Orientalist’ concerns. Mary recorded the incident on 23 March 1808 to her step-mother, Lady Mackintosh. Manesty’s letter to Claudius was very pleasant, she observed, but he wished her to meet ‘Mrs Manesty at the Factory....We must if possible contrive some excuse as it is totally out of the question. No I am not quite so dawdling as all that comes to visit a dirty Armenian drab as Claudius calls her.’ BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 12. The couple were convinced that Manesty was not married, and that the invitation was intended to dupe them into thinking that ‘Mrs Manesty was indeed a wife’. (Ibid., 13 verso–14).

⁴⁰ Mary wrote to Maitland on 30 August 1808 expressing sorrow on learning that their father and step-mother disapproved of the couple’s response to Manesty and his wife, repeating the rumour that Mrs Manesty was an ‘Armenian Trull’ and saying that she had written to her stepmother for advice on the propriety of their actions. BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 37. On the next folio (38), in contrast, she reported a pleasant visit with the Armenian wife of her husband’s servant Coja Mokeill: her perceptions of both Armenian and ‘native’ Iraqi women varied both over time and by context.

⁴¹ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge, 2014), 8–10.

⁴² Abdullah, *Merchants, Mamluks*, 11–12; Tom Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq: Mamlūk Pashas, Tribal Shayks and Local Rule between 1802 and 1831* (The Hague, 1982), vii, 9–13, 76, 80.

⁴³ Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, 15–16.

confined to their own and each other's female quarters within the home. But it would be mistaken to assume that the wives, sisters and mothers of Mamlūk men lacked power or political agency. To the contrary, their role as dynastic marriage partners, their personal immunity from beheading during episodes of regime change and their ability to accumulate substantial fortunes ensured that 'Many Mamlūk pashas owed the continuation of their power to the use of status and wealth brought to them through their wives.'⁴⁴ In this context, Mary—who, unlike her husband, could socialise freely with the ladies of Baghdad in their homes, and who learned Turkish to do so—proved a valuable asset to Claudius as a diplomat.⁴⁵

Baghdad mattered to the British in these years chiefly because they feared that Napoleon's troops would use Mesopotamia as a route to reach and conquer the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁶ Claudius Rich's duties as the Company's Resident combined official diplomatic relations with management of an extensive spy-ring that transferred clandestine information about the French and their allies between Britain and India via Basra and Constantinople.⁴⁷ In defiance of the Company's orders, he also intervened in Mamlūk succession disputes. Over a hundred letters to family in Bombay written by Mary and Claudius Rich survive from these years. In this correspondence, Mary's letters veer between

⁴⁴ Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, 16–17, 23–24, citation 24. See more broadly Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet (eds), *Ottoman Women in Public Space* (Leiden, 2016).

⁴⁵ She mentioned in a letter to Maitland that she was learning Turkish when she reported her first visit with Baghdad women ('two Armenian ladies') three days after arriving in Baghdad (7 May 1808, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 19). On 12 June 1808 she wrote to Lady Mackintosh: 'I have been so busily occupied in copying dispatches for Claudius that I have hardly a few moments left me to write a few words to you.' *Ibid.*, fol. 23. Recognition of the roles played by diplomatic wives has emerged as a key component of the 'new diplomatic history'. See Jennifer Mori, 'How Women Made Diplomacy: The British Embassy in Paris, 1815–1841', *Journal of Women's History*, 27: 4 (2015), 137–159; Glenda Sluga and Carolyn James (eds), *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500* (2015).

⁴⁶ For fears of military invasion as a motive for engagement with Baghdad in the Napoleonic era, see for example John Macdonald Kinneir, *Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia, and Koordistan, in the Years 1813 and 1814; With Remarks on the Marches of Alexander, and the Retreat of the Ten Thousand* (1818), esp. viii and 512–539. Twenty-first-century historians dispute the economic and political motives for British diplomacy in Baghdad. See Jonathan Parry, 'Steam Power and British Influence in Baghdad, 1820–1860', *Historical Journal*, 56: 1 (2013), 145–173, 147, esp. fn. 6.

⁴⁷ England obtained commercial concessions from the Ottoman sultan in 1809 through the Treaty of Dardanelles. See Iftikhar Ahmad Khan, 'Indian Shipping at Basra: The Incident of 1820', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 54 (1993), 724. For Rich's engagement in espionage, see Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, 85.

thinly veiled expressions of terror during the violent coups that marked Mamlūk succession disputes, and prolonged recitals of the couple's great boredom and lassitude during the interminable summer months.⁴⁸ They document her own and her husband's political views, their diplomatic endeavours and their labile, racialised perceptions of the Ottoman population. Her correspondence also positively pullulates with material objects. It is animated with thick descriptions of the couple's strategic circulation of luxury goods, obtained in the modern consumer markets of Europe, India, the Persian Gulf and the Ottoman empire; it also registers Claudius's efforts to extract ancient artefacts and medieval manuscripts from Mesopotamian, Kurdish and Indian collectors.

The Riches rapidly established a twofold pattern of material and epistolary communication with Mary's kith and kin in Britain and India.⁴⁹ By sail, letters and goods travelled to and fro between London, Bombay, Basra and Baghdad; at the same time—on horseback and in caravans—boxes, parcels and correspondence journeyed via the overland route between continental Europe, Constantinople and Kurdistan to Baghdad, from whence the Riches dispatched selected items onward to Bombay via Basra.⁵⁰ In both the overland and the maritime iterations of this communication network, material goods flowed alongside—

⁴⁸ Writing to Maitland on 10 July 1808, she wished one of her sisters would come and stay with her, 'but I am afraid you young gay ladies would find it rather a bore being shut up in a *Haram* all day'. On 13 July 1808, again writing to Maitland, she reported that Wahhabi tribesmen had appeared 'in swarms' outside the gates of Baghdad and that the Pasha and his troops, having marched out against them, decided it 'more prudent to retreat'. A few years previously, the Wahhabi had, she reported, murdered 8,000 men, women and children of Baghdad, 'shewing not the least quarter or mercy and it is even said drank in exaltation the blood of their victims. They remind me of the Musselmen in the time of Mahomet and the first Calih.' She knew the latter from Gibbon. BL, Add MS 80751, 31–31 verso, 32–32 verso. Many of her letters, in contrast, are marked by the generic ennui of white experiences of imperialism, as detailed by Jeffrey Auerbach, *Imperial Boredom: Monotony and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2018).

⁴⁹ The first goods recorded as being dispatched to Bombay were the bottles of red wine from Shiraz that Claudius purchased at Bushire, en route to Basra, for Sir James Mackintosh. MR to Maitland Mackintosh, 16 March 1808, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 7 verso.

⁵⁰ For the communication networks upon which they relied, see Joshi Chitra, 'Dak Roads, Dak Runners, and Reordering of Communication Networks', *International Review of Social History*, 57: 2 (2012), 169–189 and Edward Ingram, 'Directing the Mail from Baghdad', in Edward Ingram, *Empire-building and Empire-builders: Twelve Studies* (1995), 30–46.

and enabled—a constant exchange of gossip, tactical information, political news, patronage, scholarly expertise, emotion, labour and human beings.

Most of the couple's surviving letters from Baghdad were written by Mary Rich to her sister Maitland in Bombay. Named by her father to honour the trustee of his debt-ridden Highland estate, Maitland Mackintosh at age seventeen married a Bombay civil servant several years her senior.⁵¹ Her husband, William Erskine, had been her father's private secretary before obtaining his judicial appointment, and became a distinguished scholar of Indian languages and history.⁵² In Bombay, Claudius Rich had lived with Erskine before his marriage to Mary. The brothers-in-law shared a passion for Oriental manuscripts and material culture, an ambition to compensate for their lack of inherited wealth by accumulating cultural capital, and a sense of humour about their own personal idiosyncracies. Although Mary wrote the great bulk of their surviving letters, these manuscripts also include letters and insertions authored by Claudius, which allow us to see the couple's sexual division of marital labour and the extent to which his diplomacy, mental health, scholarship and collecting activities rested on his wife's intellectual, social and acquisitive investment in global material cultures.

In keeping with established gender norms, Mary assumed responsibility for provisioning the household at the Baghdad Residency and for ensuring that her own and her husband's material comfort appropriately registered their identities, dignity and status. Her requests for snuff, shoes, textiles, books and musical instruments were at once a means of retaining links to distant family, and assertions that even in distant Baghdad the Riches upheld elite, contemporary, Enlightenment values of propriety and elegance. Mary was an exacting commissioner of goods, determined to combine economy, taste and signification through her

⁵¹ For Maitland's naming, see Finlay, 'Mackintosh'. James Maitland was the eighth Earl of Lauderdale. Her naming reflects Mackintosh's early commitment to including his daughters fully in his patronage networks.

⁵² For Erskine, Katherine Prior, 'Erskine, William (1773–1852)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

vicarious purchasing.⁵³ Having discovered that only slippers could be obtained in Baghdad, she requested many pairs of shoes from her sister in Bombay, but instructed her to send footwear made in Bengal or China, instead of ‘vulgar ill made Bombay shoes’.⁵⁴ Not just nail brushes but ‘Smyths Nail Brushes’ must be dispatched to her; the flute for Claudius ‘must be a Patent Flute of the newest kind with all the additional keys’.⁵⁵ In return, she sent Persian Gulf and Ottoman luxuries that included attar of roses, pearls, embroidered Turkish handkerchiefs, velvet and silk, as well as mobilising the overland European route via Constantinople to obtain yard upon yard of fine but inexpensive French lace.⁵⁶

These commissioned goods served political ends, allowing the Riches to express specific national identities and to mobilise selected forms of Britishness when engaging in Mamlūk diplomacy. The couple’s seemingly obsessive demands for Irish linen for Claudius’s trousers illustrate the ways in which material culture bolstered their unstable personal claims of belonging. His contemporaries associated Claudius with Bristol, but both he and Mary laboured to underline his essential Irishness, and thus his association with his reputed father’s Cockburn family line.⁵⁷ Assertions that Claudius was Irish had a habit of surfacing when husband and wife perceived his status to be under threat. Suspected lapses in their acquaintances’ sexual propriety and references to their own economic precarity both

⁵³ Notwithstanding Mary’s location in Baghdad, her provisioning activities mirror in many ways those described for propertied provincial Englishwomen in Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT, 1998).

⁵⁴ MR to Maitland, 15 September 1808, 1 October 1809 and 29 April 1811, BL, Add MS 80751, fols 40 verso, 113 and 270 (citation from fol. 270).

⁵⁵ MR to Maitland, 29 April 1811 and 22 January 1810, BL, Add MS 80751, fols 274 and 133. On 4 November 1810, she wrote to Maitland: ‘I do not much like the music you sent me’, observing that Claudius had described it as ‘d—d dull’. (Ibid., fol. 206).

⁵⁶ For the Ottoman trade in luxury textiles, see Dagmar Schäfer, Giorgio Riello and Luca Molà (eds), *Threads of Global Desire: Silk in the Pre-Modern World* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2018), Introduction and chaps 4–5.

Examples of French lace, which Mary was very keen for Maitland to provide comparative Bombay prices for, include MR to Maitland, 20 February 1811 and 24 October 1812, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 243 and fol. 274; 24 October 1812, BL, Add MS 80752, fol. 35 verso.

⁵⁷ For example, Rich’s patron, Richard Hall, writing to Sir James Mackintosh on 30 December 1803, stated that ‘He is of Bristol, where I had the pleasure lately of seeing him.’ Hall continued, ‘He is a young man of good family’, without elaborating on Rich’s parentage. Mackintosh, *Memoirs*, 1: 201.

triggered their invocation of Rich's Irish identity. It is thus unsurprising that Claudius couched his objection to Mary meeting with Samuel Manesty's Armenian wife in Basra in terms of his own Irish nationality, or that Mary ascribed their lack of a Scottish country seat to having 'married an Irishman' rather than to her Scottish father's notorious improvidence.⁵⁸ This leitmotif of Irish identity took material form in Mary's persistent efforts to clothe Claudius's nether regions in Irish linen. In 1809 she wrote to remind Maitland that she had commissioned two dozen pairs of Irish linen trousers for Claudius, which had yet to arrive.⁵⁹ Repeated reminders that Claudius would soon have nothing decent to wear gave way, when the commissioned trousers finally arrived, to complaints that the cloth was 'so horribly coarse' that Claudius had 'declared he will not wear anything you have sent'.⁶⁰ Worse yet, on inspection the 'Irish linen' trousers Maitland had sent proved instead to be merely 'Indian long cloth, and so tight & rotten that hardly any of them now remain'.⁶¹

Mary's rejection of Indian textiles was selective, focusing primarily of Claudius's person and his personal dignity as the British representative in Baghdad.⁶² The Dardanelles Treaty of

⁵⁸ 'Do you know the Fellow had actually the impudence to imagine that I would suffer Mrs Rich to keep company with his Trull. Oh how my Irish blood boiled'. CR to Erskine, 31 March 1808, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 17. Mary did not visit Scotland until her return to Britain in the 1820s, but wrote of Inverness, the nearest town to her father's erstwhile Highland estate: Inverness 'I always claim [it] as my Town and will certainly persuade Mr Rich though no Seat to visit your & Major Campbell's in the Highlands from which I am forever exiled having married an Irishman.' MR to Mrs Campbell, 30 September 1809, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 108 verso.

⁵⁹ MR to Maitland, 1 October 1809, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 114. Interestingly, she now asked as well for multi-coloured Turkish style nankeen pantaloons, tied at the ankles, but it was to the Irish linen trousers that her letters repeatedly returned, for example in a letter to Maitland of 4 November 1810 (fol. 205 verso). Trousers entered genteel British men's wardrobes in response to colonial and imperial trade and warfare in the eighteenth century, as discussed by Beverly Lemire, 'A Question of Trousers: Seafarers, Masculinity and Empire in the Shaping of British Male Dress, c. 1600–1800', *Cultural and Social History*, 13: 1 (2016), 1–22, esp. 13–18.

⁶⁰ MR to Maitland, 29 April 1811, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 270. Claudius added a note, telling Maitland that was using some of the goods for his annual clothing allowance for his guard, and makes a point of noting 'as for my wearing them that is all a joke'. John Styles (personal communication) notes that Irish flaxen linen imported into Bombay, although a cool textile well-suited to the tropics, would likely have been intended for plebeian nautical use and very coarse.

⁶¹ MR to Maitland, 27 July 1812, BL, Add MS 80752, fol. 23. E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (Cambridge, 2001), chap. 2, esp. 62–63, 65–66 discusses the gendered regimes that governed East India Company clothing and fashions.

⁶² Mary herself—although exceptionally punctilious with respect to the weight, composition, colour, pattern and ornamentation of material for her gowns—accepted that Indian textiles were well-suited for her own wardrobe. See for example her letter to Maitland, 21 September 1810, BL, Add MS80751, fol. 189.

Peace, Commerce and Secret Alliance signed in 1809 ended the Anglo-Turkish War, pledging the British to protect Ottoman interests and restoring British access to Turkish markets.⁶³ In this context, Mary not only commissioned Maitland to supply fine Indian textiles for her own Baghdad wardrobe, but also ordered items from the subcontinent to serve as diplomatic gifts at the Mamlūk pashas' court. As in India, the Company's Residents were, soon after their arrival at Baghdad, invested with robes of honour to mark their incorporation into the ruler's ambit, and were expected to offer fine gifts in return as signs of fealty. As pasha succeeded beheaded pasha, Claudius repeatedly processed to the palace to be invested with a pelisse made from cloth of gold and lined with sable.⁶⁴ In return, he offered expensive gifts of luxuries, the cost of which Mary sought to reduce by commissioning Indian textiles from her sister in Bombay.⁶⁵

With time, moreover, Mary emerged as a diplomat in her own right. The norms of Sunni propriety in Baghdad prohibited her from meeting with Muslim men other than her household servants.⁶⁶ Mary's circle of even female acquaintances was, moreover, initially very narrow: there was only one other English woman in Baghdad when she arrived, and the Anglo-Turkish war prevented the ladies of the pasha's family from visiting. Armenian women did come to the Residency, and were duly entertained with coffee and sweetmeats, but Mary initially reported that they were 'disgustingly ugly and indecent and I am obliged to keep

⁶³ Allan Cunningham, 'Robert Adair and the Treaty of the Dardanelles', in Allan Cunningham (ed.), *Anglo-Ottoman Encounters in the Age of Revolution: Collected Essays* (London, 1993), 103–43.

⁶⁴ See for example MR to Erskine, 27 March 1809, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 71 verso. The horse was caparisoned 'in the Turkish manner'. See similarly MR to Maitland, 29 October 1810, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 221. The analogous investiture ceremonies for East India Company Residents on the subcontinent are discussed in Margot Finn, 'Material Turns in British History: II: Corruption: Imperial Power, Princely Politics and Gifts Gone Rogue', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 29 (2019), 1–25.

⁶⁵ She complained to Maitland on 29 May 1811 that the failure of the 'Poonah Chintzes' to arrive was especially irksome 'as Mr Rich is now preparing to make the present to the Pasha and...the Chintzes would have been very acceptable & saved me great expence as now I shall be obliged to set them down in my own account whereas otherwise they would have been purchased for the Company & been very much admired by the Turks.' BL, Add MS, 80751, fol. 277–277 verso.

⁶⁶ MR to Kitty Mackintosh, 23 December 1810: 'A Turk would not allow even his dearest friend even to mention the name of his wife and two men would be intimate for 30 years without either presuming to speak concerning their Haram.' BL, Add MS, 80751, fol.226 verso.

them at a great distance'.⁶⁷ In sharp contrast, when the cessation of war allowed her to visit the Muslim ladies of the Pasha's court, their elite status trumped their race and religion, and Mary fulsomely praised their pleasing politeness.⁶⁸ Her sometimes esteem for elite Ottoman men derived from their solicitude for these women, which protected them from physical violence when successive pashas were overthrown. As Mary observed to Maitland in the midst of the bloody coup of 1810, 'The respect and tenderness of Turks towards women is astonishing, and in a different manner equals any of the most civilized nations in Europe'.⁶⁹

Once welcomed into the women's quarters of Baghdad's courtly elite, Mary Rich reported to her sister that she had become the frequent recipient of 'very handsome presents, [and] of course I am obliged to do the same, but find Jewellery so very expensive that I wish much to procure some Indian goods which they will esteem more, as they are not to be procured here'.⁷⁰ Deploying domestic sociability, limited verbal communication and the exchange of luxury goods, Mary Rich cultivated unprecedented European relations with Baghdad's governing-class women.⁷¹ We can see the impact of her friendships in Claudius Rich's repeated interventions to save the male kin of deposed pashas from execution in the aftermath of violent succession disputes: it was the women who Mary entertained at the Residency and whose houses she visited who pleaded for Claudius Rich to appeal to the

⁶⁷ MR to Maitland, 10 July 1808, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 27.

⁶⁸ MR to Maitland, 1 October 1809, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 111.

⁶⁹ MR to Maitland, 5 October 1810, BL, Add MA 80751, fols 196 verso–197. The complexities and internal contradictions of Enlightenment 'Orientalist' interpretations of Ottoman gender norms are explored by Joanna de Groot, 'Oriental Feminotopias? Montagu's and Montesquieu's "Seraglios" Revisited', *Gender and History*, 18: 1 (2006), 66–86.

⁷⁰ MR to Maitland, 19 March 1810, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 149. She went on to specify Madras gold muslin, Pune muslin embroidered with gold and silver, and kincob from Gujarat: 'mind however in choosing them not to consider your own taste, but to let them be as gaudy as possible'.

⁷¹ She told Maitland that she could now follow their conversations in Turkish, but not yet participate in them. 22 December 1810, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 226. Mary Rich's status as a wife and a Christian was important in this context. Both Claudius's predecessor as Baghdad Resident and Samuel Manesty at Basra had been entangled in diplomatic rows involving European men's alleged or actual relations with Muslim women in the pashalik. For Sir Harford Jones, who was expelled from Baghdad in 1804 as a result of such allegations, see Yapp, 'Establishment', 331–332. For Manesty, Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, *The Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, in Asia, Africa, and Europe, during the Years 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, and 1803. Written by Himself, in the Persian Language*, trans. Charles Stewart (Professor, 2 vols (1810), 371–376.

newly-installed pashas who had supplanted their sons and husbands. Already in 1812, trust between Mary and these women was sufficiently robust to allow the late Pasha's widow to defy etiquette and travel to the British Residency, where she appealed directly to Claudius to intervene on behalf of her son.⁷² This behaviour reflects a new style of European material diplomacy exercised by the Riches as a couple, rather than—as the extant secondary literature suggests—providing yet another example of Claudius Rich's personal charisma and his exceptional command of the 'Oriental mind'.⁷³

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What of collecting, archaeological excavation and Enlightenment science? Here too we can only understand Claudius Rich's contributions if we recognise his reliance on and partnership with his wife. Neither Mary nor her sister read Oriental languages, a major impediment to participating actively in the accumulation of Arabic, Persian and Syriac texts—to which their husbands devoted much time, effort and money.⁷⁴ Their correspondence, however, demonstrates that the two men expected their wives both to facilitate and to take an active interest in their acquisitions. Claudius thus wrote to Maitland, rather than to William Erskine, to report that he had purchased 'a very famous work' of Arabic 'natural magic' for her husband, which although the price was 'rather extravagant' was 'just the thing he wants'.⁷⁵ Mary's letters to her sister routinely interlarded information about consumer goods with information about the acquisition of manuscripts and antiquities; her correspondence

⁷² MR to Maitland, 19 May 1812, BL, Add MS 80752, fols 11–11 verso. See also MR to Erskine, 12 March 1817, BL, Add MS 80752, fols 230–230 verso.

⁷³ Alexander, *Baghdad*, exemplifies this characteristic interpretation of Claudius Rich: 'He ... had the gift given to few Europeans, that of thoroughly understanding the Oriental mind and outlook He understood the Oriental phlegm and patience, and could become as Oriental as themselves.' (32–33).

⁷⁴ Rich had begun to seek out manuscripts for his brother-in-law within a few days of his arrival in Baghdad: 'I have instituted a search for such MSS as I think you should like', he wrote four days after their schooner docked. CR to Erskine, 8 May 1808, BL, Add MS 89751, 21 verso.

⁷⁵ CR to Maitland, 14 December 1810, BL, Add MS 80751, fols 223–223 verso. Lindsay Allen offers an excellent analysis of the wider context of East India Company families and the collection of antiquities in "'Come Then Ye Classic Thieves of Each Degree": The Social Context of the Persepolis Diaspora in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Iran*, 51: 1 (2013), 207–234.

combined together in the same sentences and paragraphs news that she was sending ‘excellent velvet’ from Constantinople, complaints that she was yet again disappointed by her sister’s dispatch of ersatz Irish linen, and notification that she was sending books of Oriental scholarship which Claudius had ordered from Constantinople, Vienna and Paris .⁷⁶

Both ancient history and archaeology, moreover, allowed Mary Rich to participate directly in Claudius’s scholarship and collecting. In preparation for the couple’s archaeological excursions. Mary read ancient history avidly. Shortly after arriving in Baghdad, she took up the multi-volume *Universal History* produced by eighteenth-century London booksellers to bolster her understanding of the history of Islam.⁷⁷ A year later, Mary was supplementing the *Universal History* with the works of Enlightenment historians such as Edward Gibbon and developing a preference for Islamic military culture. ‘I have lately been reading again with fresh instruction and delight the Chapters in Gibbon respecting these Countries, and his most elegant account of Mahomet, and the first Arabian Heroes for surely they deserved that appellation in contradistinction to the cowardly & effeminate Greeks’, she observed in a letter to Maitland.⁷⁸

Historical understanding was a collaborative, not an individualistic, enterprise in the Rich household. The couple replicated the sociable practices of domestic reading Sir James Mackintosh had instituted in Bombay to instruct his family in history. In the long, hot afternoons at the Baghdad Residency, Mary read aloud from historians such as Gibbon,

⁷⁶ MR to Maitland, 27 February 1812, BL Add MS 80752, fols 20–23.

⁷⁷ Claudius, for example, recommended that she read the multi-volume eighteenth-century *Universal History*, recommending the edition with a preface by Mr Sale, and at his recommendation Mary read Robertson’s *Charles V* aloud to him. MR to Maitland, 10 July 1808 and 15 September 1808, BL, Add MS 80751, fols 27 verso–28 and fol. 43. MR to Maitland, 12 June 1808: ‘I am now reading the first Vols of the second part of the Universal history containing the History of Life of Mahomedt which I believe [is] reckoned the best part of the whole book. Though rather dry I read it with great pleasure & interest & after I intend going through carefully Monsieur Sale’s prefatory treatise on the Arabs. Claudius has recommended [it] to me as the best book I could possibly read on that subject.’ Ibid., fols 28–28 verso. For the *Universal History*, see Guido Abbattista, ‘The Business of Paternoster Row: Towards a Publishing History of the Universal History, 1736–65’ *Publishing History*, 17 (1985), 5–50.

⁷⁸ MR to Maitland, 1 October 1809, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 112.

allowing Claudius simultaneously to refresh his historical knowledge of the ancient world and to hone his skills of drawing and draughtsmanship as he listened to her.⁷⁹ These artistic and technical skills came into active use as the couple began to venture beyond Baghdad to explore the ruins of ancient Babylon, sixty miles to the southwest. The precise location of this famous biblical city was hotly disputed by East India Company men of science.⁸⁰

Cartography was an Enlightenment and an imperial science par excellence, and Claudius Rich's initial visit to the reputed site of Babylon in 1811 figures in twenty-first-century historiography as a case study in Enlightenment reason put to the service of empire.⁸¹

Wielding astronomical, mathematical and surveying instruments,⁸² Claudius Rich exercised his reason in the rubble of Babylon to dispute his predecessors' assumptions—which had been based on armchair cartography—about the ancient city's location relative to the banks of the Euphrates.⁸³ More than merely measuring, Claudius set his companions to dig in the ruins. These excavations amid what Claudius in his journals repeatedly described as the 'rubble' of Babylon, revealed the inscribed cuneiform bricks, clay tablets, coins and cylinder seals that now populate Case 15 of the British Museum's Enlightenment Gallery.

⁷⁹ MR to Maitland, 26 September 1808, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 43.

⁸⁰ Rich's first excursion was framed by a desire to test the assertions of the Company's official surveyor, James Rennell, with actual fieldwork. Rennell's arguments are found in James Herodotus Rennell, *Geographical System of Herodotus Examined and Explained by a Comparison with Those of Other Ancient Authors, and with Modern Geography. In the Course of the Work are Introduced, Dissertations on the Itinerary State of the Greeks, the Expedition of Darius* (1800). See Rich's *Memoir on the Ruins of Babylon. With Three Plates* (London, 1815), esp. 51–52.

⁸¹ For this argument with respect to the East India Company in particular, see Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping and Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (Chicago, 1990). Edney however does not mention Rich. For Rich in this context, see Robert J. Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography: The Political Languages of British Geography, 1650–1850* (Basingstoke, 2000), chap. 10, esp. 205. For an argument that the nexus between empire of geography was more heterogeneous and less relentlessly instrumental, see Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford, 2001).

⁸² Or so the advertisement for the probate sale of these goods claimed they were: *Bombay Gazette*, 17 April 1822.

⁸³ Rennell disputed Rich's interpretation in 'Remarks on the Topography of Ancient Babylon', *Archaeologia* (1816). Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography*, 205, notes that it was Rich, not Rennell, who undertook observational fieldwork.

Absent from modern accounts of Rich's excavations at Babylon are both Mary Rich and her errant younger sister, Kitty Mackintosh.⁸⁴ Both were indisputably present, as their letters to their sister Maitland in Bombay attest. Kitty Mackintosh had been dispatched at the age of fifteen by her father to Baghdad to keep Mary company. Described by her elder sister as a 'madcap' and only lightly chaperoned, on shipboard she had attracted the attention of a twenty-seven year old naval lieutenant, whose proposal of marriage Kitty rashly accepted.⁸⁵ She was rescued before the marriage could take place by the Riches, who—as Mary reported to Maitland—set sail hastily from Baghdad to the port of Bushire 'to restore our giddy sister I hope to her senses'.⁸⁶ Sequestered with the Riches for several months at the Baghdad Residency, Kitty remained resolute in her marital intentions, and it was immediately prior to her marriage, age sixteen, that the Riches travelled *en famille* to the site of Babylon.⁸⁷ Now a safe distance from the strictly policed gender regime of Sunni Baghdad, Kitty ranged freely over the ruins with Mary, and observed that she was 'very pleased' with the ancient site. She also reported to Maitland that 'Mary has told me that she has sealed her letter to you with a seal dug up at Babylon & therefor begs you will observe it particularly.'⁸⁸

When in 1813 Claudius Rich began to bring his analysis of the 'heaps of rubbish' he had excavated at Babylon into the public domain, he erased Mary and Kitty entirely from the record of his scientific investigations.⁸⁹ His popular *Memoir on the Ruins of Babylon* thanked

⁸⁴ For example, Michael Seymour offers a perceptive account of Rich's 1811 investigations at Babylon, but mentions Mary only in the context of her subsequent sale of his collection to the British Museum. Michael Seymour, *Babylon: Legend, History and the Ancient City* (2016), 133–138, esp. 137.

⁸⁵ For the description of Kitty (born 1795) as a 'madcap', see MR to Maitland, 29 May 1811, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 275.

⁸⁶ MR to Maitland, 9 April 1811, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 261.

⁸⁷ The marriage took place in Baghdad on 8 January 1812, and may have been performed by Rich as Resident. The Riches and Kitty left Baghdad for Babylon 9 December 1811. MR to Maitland, 18 December 1811, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 311.

⁸⁸ Kitty (Catherine) Mackintosh to Maitland, from Babylon, 18 December 1811, fols 313–313 verso.

⁸⁹ The first edition of the *Memoir* was published in Vienna in 1813 in the journal *Mines de l'Orient*. It was republished without corrections in London 1815, a 2nd edition appeared in 1816 and a 3rd in 1818. A *Second Memoir on the Ruins* also appeared in 1818. Mary Rich additionally published his 'Narrative of a Journey to the Site of Babylon in 1811' in an edited compilation of his and her journals and writing published in London in 1836: Claudius James Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh; With*

‘a gentleman who accompanied me (Mr. Lockett), who superintended’ the surveying operations, referred to both Arabic and European male scholars and mentioned in passing his use of Turkish men as ‘native’ informants.⁹⁰ Rich expressly wrote both this text and his 1818 *Second Memoir of the Ruins of Babylon* in the style of a reasoned scholarly conversation among men, principally conducted with Major James Rennell, the East India Company’s renowned Surveyor General of Bengal. In these publications, Rich made relentless use of personal pronouns and possessives—‘I’, ‘me’, ‘myself’ and ‘my’—to describe his research methodology: these four words appear no fewer than thirty-seven times in the first four pages of the *Second Memoir*.⁹¹ His usage prefigures the stylistic convention that was to be adopted in the 1830s by Mary’s half-brother, Robert James Mackintosh. When Robert composed a memoir of their father, Sir James Mackintosh, he too was to write Mary and her sisters out of the annals of Enlightenment science. In Robert’s memoir, Claudius James Rich and his relations with Sir James Mackintosh merited many pages of attention. Mary’s first mention in this work—without the dignity of a name—occurred only when she married Claudius. Like her sister Maitland, with whom she thus became indistinguishable in the text, Robert signified her presence in the historical record only by the letter ‘M’, followed by a dash.⁹²

If we allow these persistent forms of erasure to stand uncontested, we lose sight of multiple layers of Enlightenment universalism. For effacing the records left by European women such as Mary Rich and her sisters also erases from the record South Asian and Middle Eastern women and men who participated in Enlightenment knowledge-making.

Journal of a Voyage down the Tigris to Bagdad and an Account of a Visit to Shirauz and Persepolis, [ed. Mary Rich], 2 vols (1836).

⁹⁰ Claudius James Rich, *Memoir of the Ruins of Babylon: With Three Plates* (London, 1818, 3rd edition). Lockett is mentioned on 3; the Kurdish historian and geographer Abu ‘l-Fida (1273–1331), for example, on 8; and the Turkish man on 29.

⁹¹ Claudius Rich, *Second Memoir on Babylon: Containing an Inquiry into the Correspondence between the Ancient Descriptions of Babylon and the Remains Still Visible on the Site: Suggested by the "Remarks" of Major Rennell in the Archæologia* (1818), 1–4.

⁹² McIntosh, (ed.), *Memoirs*, 1: 366, 432, 435, 438.

Mary's descriptions of domestic life in Baghdad and the couple's travels in the wider Ottoman territories highlight this point. Servants, go-betweens and political elites from the Indian subcontinent and a cosmopolitan mélange of Armenians, Arabs, Baghdadis, Jews, Kurds, Mamlūks, Syrians and Turks enabled the Riches to read, write, eat, travel, dig and collect during Claudius's tenure as Resident.⁹³ His texts are unusual in acknowledging the existence and role of many of these collaborators,⁹⁴ but by consulting Mary's unpublished personal correspondence as well as the careful annotations and footnotes of her editions of his posthumous works, we can add both substantial volume and human detail to her husband's records. Indeed, it is precisely Mary's female gender identity, her responsibility as a married woman for management of her husband's household, which predisposes her writings to the task of recovering the lost names and voices of their servants in particular.

The 'servant problem' is a cliché in middle- and upper-class British household history. Locating, training, tolerating, disciplining, paying and perhaps most of all retaining servants was a perennial source of anxiety for British and imperial women alike.⁹⁵ Mary Rich was no exception. Claudius brought thirty Indian sepoy with him to Bagdad to act as a personal bodyguard and also employed a small troop of European hussars; he had a Company surgeon, who served as his assistant, at least one manservant, a Slavic household steward,

⁹³ For the role of 'native' men as brokers of Enlightenment knowledge, see esp. Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Scientific Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Basingstoke, 2007), and Simon Schaffer, Lisa Roberts, Kapil Raj and James Delbourgo (eds), *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach, 2009).

⁹⁴ Seymour, *Babylon*, 135–136 notes that 'A final merit of Rich's account, no doubt enhanced by the author's long residence in Iraq and linguistic ability, is its incidental coverage of local and non-European tradition relating to the site [of Babylon], a subject that is only now reappearing in archaeological discourse generally.'

⁹⁵ For British examples, see for example R.C. Richardson, 'The "Servant Problem"', *Social Class and Literary Representation in Eighteenth-Century England*, in Simon Barker and Jo Gill (eds), *Literature as History: Essays in Honour of Peter Widdowson* (London, 2010), 106–117. Carolyn Steedman, 'Servants and Their Relationship to the Unconscious', *Journal of British Studies*, 42: 3 (2003) 316–50. Colonial examples include for example Charlotte Macdonald, 'Why Was There No Answer to the "Servant Problem"? Paid Domestic Work and the Making of a White New Zealand, 1840s—1950s', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 51: 1 (2017), 7–35.

grooms and several interpreters and clerks.⁹⁶ Mary's letters underscore the relative paucity of her available human resources in Baghdad. Unlike the ladies of the pashas' families with whom she socialised, who could rely on bebies of slave-girls imported from the Caucuses to boost their status and perform their menial tasks, she had brought only one Indian maidservant with her in 1808. By autumn, this woman insisted on leaving for Bombay with Claudius's Indian manservant, Abdullah—'indecent conduct' that her mistress decried as 'abominable'.⁹⁷ Mary then reluctantly made do with a young female relation of Claudius's Armenian chief interpreter.⁹⁸ In 1810 she added an Indian tailor from Madras to her minuscule establishment of servants.⁹⁹ Several months later, the arrival of a so-called 'Portuguese'—a term denoting a mixed-race Indian Christian—swiftly confirmed Mary's existing race prejudices about the colonial lower orders. To her 'no small annoyance in such a place as Bagdad [sic] where they are remarkably particular in everything respecting a' [harem], Kitty's maid 'proved a useless idle creature' and was soon discovered to be with child. Mary promptly sacked her, and wrote to Maitland to 'beg you will immediately stop her wages & to never let me see the face of a Portuguese woman again'.¹⁰⁰

It is nonetheless through Mary's anxious correspondence with Maitland about servants that we first catch fleeting glimpses of non-European agency, personal preferences, prejudice and reason. The initial reactions of Claudius's Indian manservant, Abdullah, to the Muslim women of Baghdad were captured by Mary in a letter to Maitland a few days after their arrival at the Residency, in which she described a visit from the wife and mother-in-law

⁹⁶ Alexander, *Baghdad in Bygone Days*, 60. She estimates that there were 15 hussars; the steward, who stayed with Rich until his death, was known as Pietro.

⁹⁷ MR to Maitland, 18 November 1808, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 59 verso.

⁹⁸ Alexander, *Baghdad in Bygone Days*, 60, states that an Armenian maid was her only servant, but the information in the letters and journals that record her travels speak of 'attendants', and name the mother of Claudius's dragoman (chief interpreter) among them.

⁹⁹ MR to Maitland, [November 1810], BL, Add MS 80751, fols 211–212 verso. She was to pay him Rupees 30 per month, half to the tailor himself and half to his family in Madras, an arrangement that proved very difficult to effect.

¹⁰⁰ MR to Maitland, 28 October 1811, BL, Add MS 80751, fols 307–307 verso.

of one of Claudius's officers. 'You never saw such witch-like figures in your life as they all appear coming into a room with a thick black gauze veil over their face and a blue-check shawl covering their body', she reported. 'Abdulla very genteelly calls them so many Devils.'¹⁰¹ A few months later, despite Mary's offers of presents and additional payments, her Indian maidservant emphatically articulated her dislike for Baghdad and desire to travel with Abdullah home to Bombay, and voted with her feet. The Portuguese maidservant who arrived in 1811—already pregnant when she set sail from Bombay—may instead have seen the Baghdad Residency as a conveniently distant Company home in which to bear an illegitimate child.¹⁰² The instrumental uses to which empire could be put were not enjoyed equally by the Riches and their servants, but neither were the latter entirely powerless within the imperial master servant relationship.¹⁰³

In Baghdad, Claudius's physical and mental health declined sharply from 1812 onward. Mary's letters record an alarming escalation of symptoms such as fits, fevers and fainting, and she and Claudius both wrote openly about his mounting 'melancholy' and inability to shake off the 'blue devils' of depression.¹⁰⁴ Seeking relief from the social isolation, political upheaval and intolerable heat of Baghdad, they made extended journeys to the Kurdish provinces to the north, using their travels to explore ancient ruins and collect both antiquities and manuscripts. These activities necessitated large-scale mobilisations of colonial labour.¹⁰⁵ Their Kurdish expedition of 1820, for example, was undertaken with perhaps sixty tent-pitchers, muleteers and other skilled labourers—Arabs, Christians, Indians,

¹⁰¹ MR to Maitland, 7 May 1808, BL, Add MS 80751, fol. 19 verso.

¹⁰² The ability of 'subaltern' Indian women to negotiate East India Company power hierarchies in this period is discussed by Durba Ghosh, 'Making and Un-making Loyal Subjects: Pensioning Widows and Educating Orphans in Early Colonial India', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31.1 (2003), 1–28.

¹⁰³ Mary's letters are punctuated with requests that the Erskines would forward the correspondence of the Riches' Indian tailor to his family in Madras, to prevent him from leaving their household in Baghdad. See for example MR to Maitland, 5 August 1812, BL, Add MS 80752, fol. 26.

¹⁰⁴ See for example MR to Maitland 24 June 1812, 19 November 1812, 7 May 1813 and 21 May 1813, and CR to Erskine, 26 April 1813, BL, Add MS 80752, fols 14–14 verso, 47, 90–90 verso, 94 and 68.

¹⁰⁵ For this aspect of East India Company knowledge-making, see esp. Onni Gust, 'Mobility, Gender and Empire in Maria Graham's Journal of a Residence in India (1812)', *Gender & History*, 29:2 (2017), 273–291.

Jews, Persians and Turks, commanded by Claudius's Armenian steward, Aga Minas.¹⁰⁶

Combing Mary Rich's writings yields many more records of the personnel who enabled their travels and excavations than does reading her husband's journals alone. For Mary's records also allow us to enumerate and name specific women among their servants, go-betweens and interlocutors.

Both Claudius and Mary kept journals of their 1820 Kurdish expedition, and Mary chose to print her text as well as Claudius's when she published a posthumous edition of his works in 1839. Before the couple departed Baghdad, they were feted, at gender-segregated events, by the men and women of Baghdad's governing elite, many of whom they had now known for over a decade. Claudius's account of these festivities mentions that Mary's exclusively female gathering included 'her friend Salkha Khatoon, one of the widows of old Suleiman Pasha'. Mary's account also mentions this powerful woman, but describes her as 'my Koordish friend Salkha Khanum', and endows her with both a birthplace and opinions, by suggesting that her friend 'seemed not a little to envy me my excursion to her native mountains'. Additionally, Mary named 'my constant and intimate friend Hanifa Khatoon, who was very angry at our fancy, as she called it, of flying off to such a solitary savage place as Koordistan, and leaving all the comforts and amusements of Baghdad'. A third named female friend in Mary's account was Zabit Khatoon, who in stormy weather, had mounted her horse and arrived at the women's gathering late at night, to bid Mary farewell.¹⁰⁷

Just as Mary Rich's letters to Maitland registered—however schematically—the volition and views of her domestic servants in Baghdad more fully than Claudius's writings, so too her Kurdish travel narrative attended more carefully to servants' identities, lives and

¹⁰⁶ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence*, 5. Aga Minas 'had all the patience and good humour which such a post required—was unwearied in his endeavours to make everyone comfortable, and most zealous in the discharge of his duty'. Significantly, this detailed description comes not from Rich's text but from Mary's editorial footnote.

¹⁰⁷ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence*, 3 (CR), 331–332 (MR).

labour than did his. Claudius for example mentioned that he was accompanied by a bodyguard of twenty-five Indian sepoy and that Mary initially travelled in a covered mule-litter or takht-raven and was ‘attended by women servants, and all the state of a haram’.¹⁰⁸ Mary’s parallel description identifies her two attendants: one was her maidservant ‘Taqui’ and the other was the mother of Claudius’s interpreter, Aga Minas. She accorded them an ethnicity and a social identity. And unlike Claudius, whose comments spoke only of the great dignity with which he and his wife travelled, Mary’s account elaborated on the discomfort her female attendants must have endured. She travelled in a recumbent position in her takht-revan, but her attendants instead journeyed sitting up in ‘mohoffas, or a kind of cages, two of which are swung on one mule, and balance each other’, she reported. ‘It is by no means a comfortable conveyance, owing to the constrained posture the person is obliged to sit in.’¹⁰⁹

In Kurdistan, as in Baghdad, Mary continued to visit the harems of the governing elite, meeting the mothers, sisters and wives of Kurdish pashas and—if they spoke Turkish—conversing with them. The couple stayed for several months in Sulaimani, a northern provincial capital and Kurdish seat of learning where Claudius avidly sought Oriental manuscripts and Mary too engaged in the work of Enlightenment. In June 1820, accompanied by her female attendants, she was greeted at the Pasha’s harem by ‘a crowd of slave-girls’ and introduced to the ‘ladies of the family’. The Pasha’s wife was a woman of Mary’s own age, Adela Khanum. Mary noted in her journal that she was the pasha’s only wife, and that ‘they...have been endeared to one another by their common sorrow for the death of many children by the smallpox’. Adela Khanum had learned Turkish as a child in Baghdad, and Mary—by birth, marriage and personal inclination a daughter of Enlightenment science—

¹⁰⁸ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence*, 2 (CR); 333 (MR). She notes that as ‘Minas’s mother is very stout, and Taqui very slender, it was a difficult and nice operation to make the balance equal by throwing in a quantity of stones on Taqui’s side’.

mustered her own Turkish language skills to convince her new friend of the wisdom of vaccinating her surviving son. ‘Perhaps too when they hear their Pasha has consented to try the vaccine on his only child, the common people may be induced to allow us to vaccinate their children’, she mused, in keeping with a Kantian conviction in the power of public reason. ‘Our journey to Koordistan will then indeed not have been in vain.’¹¹⁰ Conducted in good faith, this experiment ended fatally. The vaccine ordered at Mary’s behest by express delivery from Baghdad duly arrived in the autumn, but both Adela Khanum’s young son and her infant nephew died of the disease itself, an outcome Claudius blamed on the inept administration of the vaccine by a Turkish inoculator.¹¹¹

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What do the imperial and material lives of Mary and Claudius Rich tell us about the claims to universalism of ‘Western’ museums today? How can we best acknowledge the myriad, cross-cultural forms of Enlightenment knowledge production—powerfully marked by empire, slavery and patterns of prejudice—which extended from Bombay to Basra, Baghdad and Babylon? Should we bin the Enlightenment as a concept, or perhaps boycott the Enlightenment Gallery of the British Museum?

I think not. Instead, in concluding this lecture, I make three modest proposals. The first is that, beginning with Case 15, the British Museum should take a first step toward ‘universalising’ its history by acknowledging the existence of Enlightenment women and

¹¹⁰ ‘Fragment of a Journal from Bagdad [sic] to Sulimana by Mrs. Rich’, in Rich, *Narrative of a Residence*, 1: 373–375, citations 374. For Enlightenment British women and vaccination, see esp. Michael Bennett, ‘Jenner’s Ladies: Women and Vaccination against Smallpox in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain’, *History*, 93: 312 (2008), 497–513, and Daniel Grey, “‘To bring this useful invention into fashion in England’: Mary Wortley Montagu as Medical Expert”, in Teresa Barnard (ed.), *British Women and the Intellectual World in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Farnham, Surrey, 2015), 15–32.

¹¹¹ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence*, 1: 303, 268. For the mixed record of such vaccination campaigns, see also Susan Heydon, ‘Death of the King : The Introduction of Vaccination into Nepal in 1816’, *Medical History*, 63: 1 (2019), 24–43; Katherine Foxhall, ‘The Colonial Travels and Travails of Smallpox Vaccine, c.1820–1840’, in Catherine Cox and Hilary Marland (eds), *Migration, Health and Ethnicity in the Modern World* (New York, 2013) 83–103.

their contribution to public forms of reasoning. Mary Rich was with Claudius Rich for every day and night of his tenure at the Baghdad Residency. She kept him in Europeanised clothing, read Gibbon's history aloud to him, wrote letters for Claudius, copied his diplomatic correspondence, tended him through a succession of physical and mental illnesses, negotiated on his behalf with the East India Company when he fell out of their favour and accompanied him on archaeological digs and manuscript purchasing expeditions.¹¹² When he died of cholera in 1821, it was Mary who settled his estate, preserved his collections, shipped them to England and (with her father's assistance) sold them to the British Museum.¹¹³ In the 1830s, as the race to decipher cuneiform began to accelerate in Europe, it was she who carefully annotated and produced scholarly editions of Claudius's published and unpublished works.¹¹⁴ Surely she too deserves some mention.

My second modest proposal is that we acknowledge that Claudius Rich worked collaboratively not only in tandem with his European wife but also with a wide, cross-cultural universe of servants, agents and go-betweens that included princely elites in Baghdad and Kurdistan who shared his collecting habits as well as the grooms, muleteers and river navigators whose skills ensured that his wife and his collections journeyed safely via Baghdad, Basra and Bombay to Britain. Mary Rich's writings, as I have argued here, enhance our ability to recognise—and in some instances, even to name—specific non-European persons who—sometimes wittingly, and not always willingly—sustained Claudius's colonial collecting. Just as her letters chronicle domestic scenes that allow us briefly to glimpse moments of opportunism or resistance among the servants of the Rich household, so too the

¹¹² Her trip to London (while Claudius remained behind in Paris) to negotiate with the East India Company on his behalf is detailed in CR to Erskine, 24 October 1815, BL, Add MS 80752, fol.189.

¹¹³ Claudius Rich died intestate; Mary was awarded administration of his estate in Bombay in February 1822. The decision to send his 'variety of valuable oriental Manuscripts and natural curiosities' to England for sale reflected the assessment that they could not be sold at Bombay 'except at a ruinous sacrifice'. Account of the estate of Claudius Rich, 5 April 1823, BL, IOR/L/AG/34/27/391, 1–7, citation 1.

¹¹⁴ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence*. In addition to including an excerpt from her own journals in this volume, Mary Rich used the footnotes to register her own presence in her husband's life and career.

fakes from the Rich collection that are displayed in Case 15 remind us that the empire does strike back.¹¹⁵ We know from her writings that Mary Rich had opinions—about politics, about history and about the myriad Mesopotamian peoples with whom the Riches lived for over a decade. Although many of her views are unpalatable today, by writing Mary Rich back into the historical and material record of the European Enlightenment we can nonetheless take steps toward ‘universalising’ the Museum by recognising the existence, labour and agency of these men and women. They too merit explicit reference in Case 15 of the Enlightenment Gallery.

Third and finally, we need to name empire and colonialism—rather than merely referencing ‘trade and discovery’—in the Enlightenment Gallery, and more broadly in the universal museum. Acknowledging histories of both race and slavery is vitally important in that context. But recovering the full range of gender at play in colonial collecting is also integral to the task of decolonising the museum. In defending Britain’s ‘universal’ museums from restitution claims, Tristram Hunt has recently argued that ‘There remains something essentially valuable about the ability of museums to position objects beyond particular cultural or ethnic identities, curate them within a broader intellectual or aesthetic lineage, and situate them within a wider, richer framework of relationships’.¹¹⁶ Gender is entirely absent from this ostensibly universalising gaze. The history of Mary and Claudius Rich reminds us, however, that it is precisely such sweeping claims to universalism that have, historically, allowed us to write the roughly half of humankind who are non-men out of museum histories, and in so doing to entrench the effacement of non-Europeans from ‘universal’ museum

¹¹⁵ Forgeries of antiquities attest to the agency of ‘native’ men and women caught up in East India Company collecting cultures. Case 15 notes the presence of nineteenth-century forgeries of ancient figurines in the Claudius Rich collection, which it purchased from Mary Rich in 1825. See for example the fired clay figurine, British Museum number 91893 (Registration number R.97).

¹¹⁶ Tristram Hunt, ‘Should Museums Return Their Colonial Artefacts?’, *Guardian* (29 June 2019). The alternative case is made by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, trans. Drew S. Burk, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics* (November 2018): http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf.

collections. Today, at so many levels, Immanuel Kant's argument of 1784—that 'Public' enlightenment is 'inevitable', if only the public is 'allowed freedom'—may ring hollow. Perhaps, by replacing the 'bearded' learned ladies of Kant's imagination with analyses of actual historical women who engaged with Enlightenment reason, we can begin to improve upon this partial and unsatisfactory interpretative tradition by replacing the 'universal' with the 'human'.