

ECHOES OF INSIDIOUS GEOGRAPHIES

The Life History and Object Biography of a Carved Elephant Tusk
from the Medieval Mediterranean
to the Metropolitan Museum,
circa 750 CE to Present

A Thesis
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Master of Arts

by
Henry Thomas Ziegler
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ABSTRACT

Through the thick affective analysis of a carved ivory horn now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, this study traces the millennium-long development of several insidious geographies, a term I use to describe diverse assemblages of material, visual, textual, and intellectual culture entangled with a variety of cultural, political, and economic regimes that perpetuate themselves through naturalizing and aestheticizing the violence they deploy towards pernicious ends. Using a combination of object biography and life history methodologies, I situate the carved horn, a so-called oliphant, within its early life history in the medieval Mediterranean (ca. 750–1792 CE) and its later, documented object biography including its accession into the Met and its role in the development of the discipline of Islamic art history (1792–present). Using the horn itself as well as diverse examples of material, visual, and textual culture of the relevant periods, I demonstrate the horn’s complicity in the creation of medieval and modern pernicious geographies of East and West, simultaneously exposing the insidious mechanisms of action of such geographies. In light of this, the paper calls for a critical reassessment of the term “oliphant” and renewed attention from scholars to the entanglement of the materials of their study, particularly ivory, with such insidious geographies.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Henry T. Ziegler is an interdisciplinary humanistic scholar with a broad range of interests in the material, visual, and textual cultures of modern and premodern Afroeurasia as well as the variety of constructions of the past. He has been characterized as an art historian, archaeologist, philologist, Classicist, Egyptologist, Mediterraneanist, “material culture guy,” and academic “swashbuckler.”

Henry received Bachelor of Arts degrees from the departments of Art History and Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies at the Pennsylvania State University, during which period he developed regional specializations in aspects of the material, visual, and textual cultures of Bronze Age Egypt and Mesopotamia, first-millennium BCE Greece, and the medieval Mediterranean and Africa. At Penn State he also pursued several transhistorical interests in votive giving, the materiality of religion, and ivory. As a double-minor focus, Henry studied Classical/Modern Standard Arabic and Middle Eastern studies and developed interests in the early and medieval Islamic worlds as well as the modern and contemporary Middle East.

At the same institution, Henry pursued a postbaccalaureate certificate in Ancient Languages with a major emphasis in Greek and a minor emphasis in Aramaic. In his postbaccalaureate study of Greek, Henry concentrated his studies on the materiality of religion and the making of space, place, and memory in Greek literature with significant emphasis on Pausanias’ *Periēgēsis*. During this time he also deepened his interest in material religion and magical practices of the antique Mediterranean world.

At Cornell, Henry undertook graduate training as an interdisciplinary archaeologist and expanded his theoretical and methodological horizons while taking on new regional interests in pre–Silk Road Central Asia as well as the political economy of the construction of the past during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe, the United States, and the Soviet Union. In his graduate studies, Henry began to distance himself from certain disciplinary boundaries and labels in favor of synthetic forms of scholarship attentive to theories, models, and methods from a variety of fields across the humanities and social and natural sciences, engaging in particular with anthropology, artistic practice, museum studies, social theory, theater and performance studies, and visual culture studies.

*Dedicated to my grandparents, John Henry and Dorothy Jane,
for their undying love and eternal support
on all levels academic and otherwise*

...τίη γενεήν ἐρεείνεις;
οἷη περ φύλλων γενεή τοίη δέ καὶ ἀνδρῶν...
εἰ δ' ἐθέλεις καὶ ταῦτα δαήμεναι ὄφρ' ἐὺ εἰδῆς
ἡμετέρεην γενεήν, πολλοὶ δέ μιν ἄνδρες ἴσασιν

— *Iliad* 6.145–46, 150–51

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A tusk is a tusk is a tusk is a tusk

— *after* Gertrude Stein

*Oliphant, oliphant! Wherefore art thou oliphant? ...
'Tis but thy name that is my enemy...*

*What's in a name? That which we call a horn
By any other name does not sound as sweet.*

— *after* William Shakespeare

0 INTRODUCTION: ECHOES OF INSIDIOUS GEOGRAPHIES

0.1 Wherefore Art Thou Oliphant?



Figure 1: *New York Times* feature of the Dino collection. Sunday, May 7th, 1904. Center left and center right: ivory saddles reproduced alongside the elephant/stalker horn (*q.v.* note 4) in 1901 de Cosson catalog (here, Figure 7) and originally exhibited alongside the horns (Figure 2). Image: ProQuest.

In April 1904, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York moved to scoop up the renowned *cabinet d'armes* of the fourth Duc de Dino, Charles-Maurice Camille de Talleyrand-Périgord, intercepting it before it had the chance to hit the floor of Christie's in June of that year as scheduled (Pyhrr 2012, 183, 206–9). At just over \$250,000, it was the museum's most expensive single purchase yet. The press was quick to pick up the story, which they followed with great interest.¹ Five days after the collection's arrival in New

¹ For example, the report earlier in the week: "It is good news that the collection of armor made by the Duc de Dino is coming to New York[...] Its advent will do much to qualify the coldness that reigns in many of the galleries of the Metropolitan, where the useful and perhaps necessary plaster casts weigh heavily on the spirits and cause

York, the second section of the Sunday, May 15th edition of *The New York Times* opened with an illustrated feature lauding the museum's major new acquisition (Figure 1). Of the collection's dozens of *accoutrements de guerre*, the *Times* staff writer waxed poetic over two elephant tusks hewn in the shape of hunting horns (Figure 2):

Much older than the saddles are the carved ivory oliphants or horns, to modern eyes more suggestive of the chase than of the battlefield. ... These horns are gracefully turned, and, looking at them, one wonders whose was the gauntleted hand that first swung them, whose the lips that last sounded their sonorous call to successful attack or desperate defense.²

Today you will find both of these “gracefully turned” horns on display in the Met’s permanent collection on Fifth Avenue. The larger of the two tusks from the Dino purchase now occupies a central place in a second-floor gallery featuring the arts of Spain, North Africa, and the Western Mediterranean from the eighth to nineteenth centuries in a case for Ivory from Muslim Italy (Met № 04.3.177a; case view, Figure 3 and Figure 4).³ But what, exactly, are we to call this sumptuous artifact?⁴ Oliphant, horn, carved ivory, tusk—all of these terms mark specific features of the object that in no small way precondition its reception. The primary concern of my study is to provide an ethical critique of this work of art and the insidious geographies in which it is entangled by elucidating their real and often pernicious effects. The conventions of naming applied to this object and other works like it are thus of crucial significance to this study—but one should not expect this paper to be a terminological exercise. As highlighted by the second epigraph—apologies to Shakespeare—“what’s in a name” is often of serious social and political import and can engender intergenerational trauma with violent and dramatic consequences.

the froward to grudge them so much room and light as they absorb. *Every one is interested in war*, and nearly every one in *the quaint, the curious, and sometimes beautiful weapons and harness* wherewith our ancestors tried to get the better of each other in attack and defense” (*The New York Times*, “Famous Armor for New York,” May 1st, 1904; emphasis added).

² *The New York Times*, “The Duc de Dino Collection of Armor,” May 15th, 1904. Note that purchase price was reported erroneously by the *Times*; the sale in fact totaled just over \$250,000. For the saddles mentioned in the quote and illustrated in the *Times*, see Figure 1 (center right, center left) and Figure 2 (left, above and below each horn).

³ On the other horn acquired by the Met as a result of the Dino purchase (Figure 21–Figure 22) and the conditions of display of the other “oliphants” in the Met’s collection (Figure 23), see §3.1 below. On the use of “oliphant” with scare quotes and/or “so-called,” see note 6.

⁴ I will refer to it throughout the present paper by the specific appellations “the elephant/stalker horn,” “the Met horn,” and occasionally “the Dino horn” (“the other/second Dino horn” being Met № 04.3.178, *q.v.* p. 49 and §3.1 below). On the elephant and the “stalker,” see below, p. 17.



Figure 2a, b (detail): Dino purchase on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1907; left, vitrine with two “war (hunting) horns” (as labeled in exhibit); (b) detail, war/hunting horns; below, elephant/stalker horn. Image: Met.



Figure 3: Horn (“oliphant”) with elephant and stalking figure (“the elephant/stalker horn”/“Met horn”), elephant ivory (23 $\frac{1}{16}$ ” by 4 $\frac{15}{16}$ ” by 4”). Southern Italy, Sicily, or North Africa, 11th century CE. Metropolitan Museum of Art (№ 04.3.177a). *Mise-en-scène*, Gallery 457, August 2021. Photo: author.



Figure 4: Elephant/stalker horn on display in Gallery 457, alternate view. *Mise-en-scène*, August 2021. Photo: author.

0.1.1 A HORN BY ANY OTHER NAME...

I suggest that what we are dealing with is first and foremost a tusk—“*is a tusk is a tusk is a tusk.*” That is to say, it is a relic of the body of an elephant (a topic which will be of recurrent concern). It is also a *carved ivory horn* inasmuch as it is the product of craft (*carved, horn*) and commodification (*ivory*). Every inch of the tusk has been worked over by meticulous gouging and scraping—the patterns of line and shading perceived from across the glass wall as a variety of wild animals and entrancing vegetal forms are in fact the scars of violent and abrasive actions involved in the artifact’s production. But the *Times* reporter quoted above does not stop at mentioning the impressive visual features of the horn: the piece becomes most engaging precisely when the writer evokes layers of haptic and auditory interaction with the object during past episodes of its life through a speculative exercise of sense and sound. I will attempt to keep a similar focus on the affective and experiential here in order to engage the tusk as a body that, contrary to the

pretense of the vitrine that today attempts to encase the horn's presence, has always and continues to occupy an affective space between and across other real bodies—human and otherwise—doing no small amount of real violence in the process.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art currently identifies the tusk as an “oliphant,” a term that derives ultimately from the Old French word for the pachyderms whose teeth provide form and material to the object (*olifant*). Scholars of the medieval Mediterranean, particularly art historians (the discipline most represented in the existing scholarship) generally use the term to refer to a corpus of roughly seventy five surviving carved tusks, though ecclesiastical inventories indicate they once numbered dozens more (Shalem 2004, 3–4). Most of them, including the Met horn, were preserved for centuries as relics in Western European church treasuries: their first environs, however, were generally neither ecclesiastical nor liturgical in nature, but related to the medieval practice of the noble hunt and related forms of political performance and conspicuous consumption (Ebitz 1984). For reasons that will quickly become clear, I am generally opposed to the use of “oliphant” as a category of material culture, but I must nonetheless define it—if only to establish a coherent basis for a critical rebuttal of the term. I mark only two strict *sine quibus non* conditions for the application of “oliphant” as a descriptor of artifacts. Per the word's etymology, the historical context of the Met horn, and my own emphasis on the elephant beneath the object, I will use the word *oliphant* to refer to a variety of hornlike instruments carved from a single piece of elephant tusk in Mediterranean or Southern European workshops during the long medieval period (ca. 750–1400 CE). One will note that the use of iconography and typology do not appear as part of this strict definition. I do not seek here to identify a bounded corpus as much as an open assemblage.⁵ Within this assemblage, features of iconography and

⁵ The theoretical strain of assemblage theory I employ derives proximately from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (especially *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987 [1980]) and other social philosophers writing in their wake (especially Bennett 2010) as well as the contributions archaeological theorists based in their discipline's longstanding interest in assemblages. Archaeologists have also highlighted the important interventions of art practitioners themselves, particularly those associated with Dada and Surrealism (movements that were also influential to Deleuze and Guattari's developments; Hamilakis and Jones 2017, 77–79), and more contemporary makers such as Kara Walker (Hamilakis 2017, 169–70, 176–77). For an overview of early twenty-first century archaeological approaches to assemblage, see Fowler (2013).

facture continue to play significant roles, but the primary conditions I impose for study are material and historical.

0.1.2 ... DOES NOT SOUND AS SWEET

The problem of “the oliphant,” however, lies neither in particularities of definition nor difficulties in art-historical periodization and localization but rather from ethical-epistemic flaws inherent in the word itself⁶: it is the insidious nature of the term itself that lies at the heart of the issue. *Insidious geographies* emerge from diverse assemblages of material, visual, textual, and intellectual culture deployed by, entangled with, and constitutive of a variety of cultural, political, and economic regimes that perpetuate themselves through naturalizing and aestheticizing the violence they deploy towards pernicious ends. To be an oliphant—as opposed to a *cornu eburneum*⁷ or simply a tusk—is to be forever involved⁸ etymologically and culturally with Roland’s namesake instrument (Figure 5a, Figure 6a) and as such is inevitably to be both a weapon in and a relic of the (purportedly) righteous war against Saracen idolatry and barbarism (Figure 5b, Figure 6b). By referring to the Met horn and others like it as oliphants, authors and museums sustain and adapt particular cultural memories: old, insidious memories populated with actors such as Roland and Charlemagne. To speak of an oliphant is to recall *the olifant*, to hear an insidious echo still resounding from Roncesvalles. Scholars today may use scare quotes when citing Ernst Kühnel’s works on the “Saracenic oliphant horns” (§2.2.1), but there are no oliphants *per se* without Saracens against whom to sound the alarm. Why should such a term persist in our scholarly and wider cultural understanding of the

⁶ Hence my frequent use of scare quotes or “so-called” when using the term. I have attempted to deliberately avoid it wherever possible, but the reader will nonetheless find references to “oliphants” throughout this paper not encased in scare quotes. Such use is often in line with specific reference to the terminology of prior authors’ work; when not, the reader can consider the scare quotes implicit. *Olifant*, italicized and with ‘f,’ should be understood to refer specifically to the namesake horn of Roland. I use the term pseudo-oliphant (note 74) to describe later European imitations of Fāṭimid-style horns without other markers of dubiousness as the latter is implicit in the prefix.

⁷ In the records of medieval European church treasuries, so-called oliphants are commonly referred to as *cornua eburnea* (“ivory horns”) in analogy to the long-established use of the horns of ungulates as sonic-sonorous artifacts; the horns may also be referred to as “elephant teeth” (e.g. Middle German *helfantenzahn*).

⁸ *Involve*: not only in the standard sense, but also *sensu* Deleuze and Guattari: viz., “Accordingly, the term we would prefer for this form of evolution between heterogeneous terms is ‘involution,’ ... Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative. ... [T]o involve is to form a block that runs its own line ‘between’ the terms in play and beneath assignable relations” (*id.* 1987 [1980], 238–39).

Met horn and others like it, and how are we to deal with the persistence of “the oliphant” into the twenty-first century?

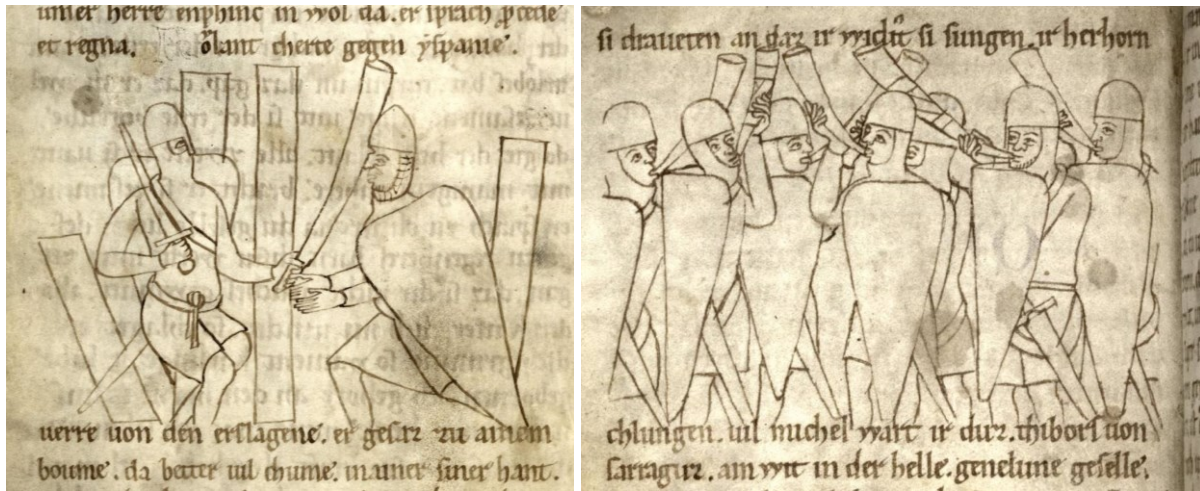


Figure 5a, b: Manuscript miniatures, *Rolandslied* (Pfalz Konrad), ca. 1180–1190 CE. Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. germ. 112. (a) Roland attacks a Saracen with his olifant., fol. 93v; (b) pagans sounding the horn, fol. 80v. Images: UB Heidelberg.



Figure 6a, b (detail): “Roland in der Schlacht zu Roncesvalles,” engraving after oil painting by Louis Guesnet. *Die Gartenlaube*, January 1885, Heft 1. Image: Wikimedia Commons.

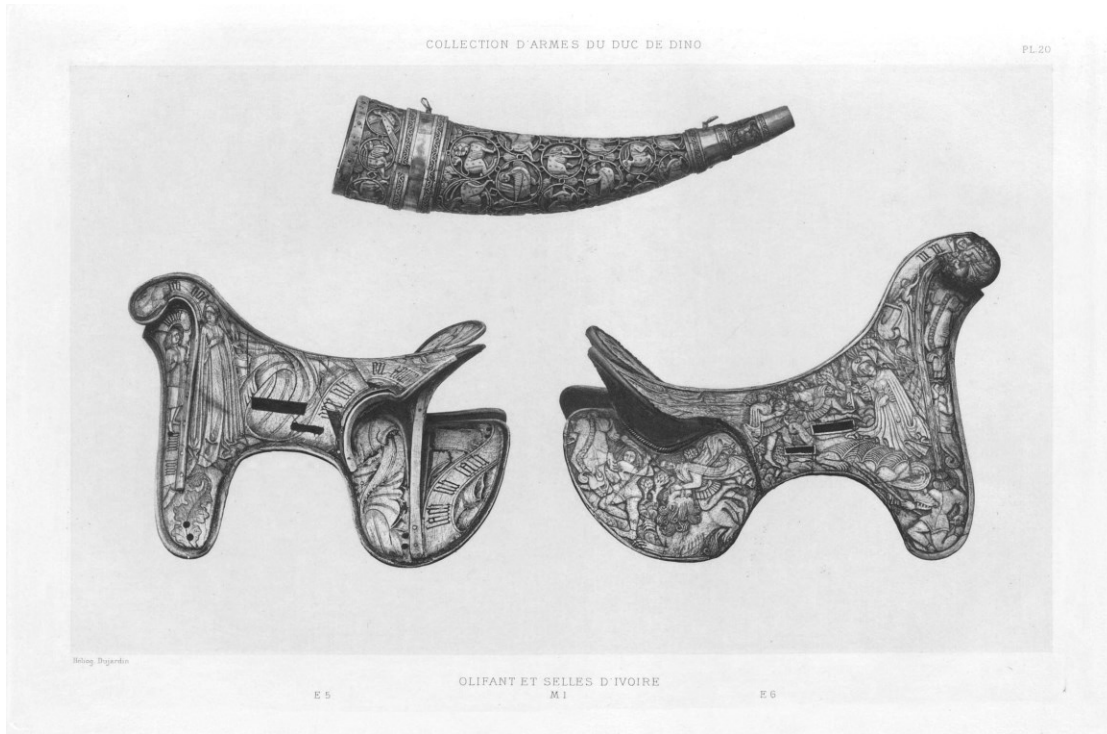


Figure 7: Photogravure reproduction of the elephant/stalker horn in the 1901 catalogue of the Duc de Dino's collection (cf. Figure 1, Figure 2a, b). Image: Cleveland Museum of Art (via Internet Archive).

0.2 Cartographic Arcana: "Face to Face ... from the Ends of the Earth"

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face though they come from the ends of the earth!*

— Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West" (1940 [1889], 233)

The Met horn has likely never seen the fray of battle nor heard the grating of sword against mail, the desperate cries of wounded soldiers, or the squawking of the carrion crows, but it has nevertheless been at the front lines of a deadly ideological crusade for the lion's share of its millennium-long life history. Beginning with a calf's expulsion from its mother's womb and the subsequent fatal capture of that grown elephant, literal and metaphorical blood has been the price paid for the tusk's grandeur and power. The Met horn and many like it have marshalled troops and signaled the advance of this ideological conflict through particular affective qualities and practical associations embodied in these objects regardless of their use in on the literal battlefield.

Kipling's famous refrain above is as deeply contradictory as the insidious geography that it is so often used to epitomize, yet it remains a classic quip, the subject of praise, polemic, and parody—due in no small part to the poem's deep roots in a pernicious aesthetic and the refrain's subsequent momentum in the continual unfolding of this insidious geography. The Met horn has patrolled and enforced the borders of these very same geographies and done its part to effect this omnipresent ideological bisection of the world. It has served as a potent agent in the creation of a geography of the "Other" that has come to be known, among other names, as the East–West divide.⁹ The Met horn and "oliphants" like it form but portion of the massive roundup of material, visual, and textual culture dedicated to and/or deployed in service of this evolving/involving¹⁰ insidious geography.

Twelve years after Kipling published his poem, a certain Edward Stanford, who proudly identified himself as "Geographer to Her Majesty" Queen Victoria of England, pressed a run of an impressive folio-sized volume under the title *Stanford's London Atlas Of Universal Geography, Exhibiting the Physical and Political Divisions of the Various Countries of the World* (1901). This particularly lavish edition of full-color lithographs was published in the same year as the Baron de Cosson's catalog of the Dino collection (Figure 7) and three years before the Met's acquisition of the elephant/stalker horn.¹¹ The second and third plates of the atlas deftly execute a visual politics of East and West part of the same insidious geography as Kipling's verse (Figure 8a, b). The lithographs' framing, the cartographic projection, and the very pigments themselves produce a world of purportedly discrete political entities that stretch as a patchwork across the skinned surface of the earth: the very world announced by Kipling, in which the eternal separation of the hemispheres has been neatly defined in crisp lines and bright colors. Note, however, the clever geographical sleight of hand that places Britain and Western Europe astride both East and West. Such a move necessitates

⁹ Some commentators have noted that this divide has in historical terms only relatively recently been reified geoculturally as East and West (Appiah, "There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilisation," *The Guardian*, Nov. 9th, 2016), whereas during the time of the horn's carving, the contemporary incarnation of this ideological conflict was understood (among other terms) largely as one of (European/Roman Rite) Christian versus Pagan/Saracen (Oriental/Asian).

¹⁰ *Involving*: see note 8.

¹¹ On the naming of the horn and the use of "stalker," see below, p. 18.

the inclusion of West Africa as well, but the cartographer has come up with a cunning longitudinal ploy, and the portion of Western Europe worthy of inclusion negotiates deftly with the boundaries of French colonial territories in North and West Africa, visually sealed to Metropolitan France by the same light-purple coloration.¹²



Figure 8a, b: ‘The World, East’ (a) and ‘West’ (b). Color lithographs, 22” by 26” (ea.). Edward Stanford, *Stanford’s London Atlas Of Universal Geography Exhibiting The Physical And Political Divisions Of The Various Countries Of The World*. London: Edw. Stanford, 1901. Images: David Rumsey Collection (color levels corrected by author).

An examination of the historical foundations of the very cartographic arcana that pulled off the conniving bisection of the world depicted in Figure 8 casts serious aspersions upon the East–West divide these resplendent lithographs seek to instantiate. Figure 9 depicts an ancestor of the 1901 atlas made more than

¹² The visual construction of the West to justify the inclusion of Western Europe in this hemisphere is established on another level by a thick web of trade routes connecting traversing the North Atlantic, emphasizing those connecting Britain with the eastern seaboard of her partially-estranged child, Canada (Figure 8b).

five centuries earlier to accompany a manuscript copy of the *Nuzhat al-muštāq fī iḥtirāq al-āfāq* (“The Excursion of the One Who Desires to Penetrate the Horizons”) of Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Idrīsī al-Qurṭubī (b. ca. 1100, Sicily? ¹³–d. after 1160 CE). Al-Idrīsī was a foundational figure in the cartographic tradition known as the Islamic-Ptolemaic school that traced its methodological lineage to Claudius Ptolemy. He dedicated this major geographical opus to the Christian monarch Roger II of Sicily (1095–1154 CE; the volume is also known as the ‘Book of Roger,’ *Kitāb Rujār*). As part of the project, al-Idrīsī supervised the production of a wide variety of cartographic materials in the Islamic-Ptolemaic tradition of cartography, including a famed silver planisphere (Ahmad 1992, 156–57).



Figure 9: World map depicting Sub-Saharan Africa (uppermost portion), North Africa (central right), Europe (bottom center), and Asia (bottom left). Parchment with ink, polychrome, and gold leaf (detail approx. 8” by 8”). Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-muštāq fī iḥtirāq al-āfāq*. Text: after 1154 CE. Manuscript: late 13th/early 14th century. BNF MS Arabe 2221, 3v–4r. Image: BNF Gallica (color levels corrected by author).

¹³ Like several of his contemporaries, it is difficult to establish an exact date and location of birth for al-Idrīsī. Jean-Charles Ducène has located his birth in Sicily or Calabria “well after the 450s [هـ]/1060s [CE]” based upon an assertion from later historian al-Ṣafādī that al-Idrīsī’s father took refuge with Roger I of Sicily, father of Roger II (*id.* 2018).

Maps created for the *Kitāb Rujār* are attested by several manuscript copies from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries CE. This early example, now housed in the collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, opens with this unified, circular rendering of a world bounded on all sides by a relatively thin blue circle punctuated with fine white waves—the entirety of the earth, neatly encircled by the World Ocean (Figure 9). The other primary geographic delimiters in the Idrīsī map are also bodies of water and they assemble a single world articulated into two portions—not, however, East and West. Idrīsī’s map presents instead a world composed of two moieties, neither wholly separate from one another, bound by the Ocean into a single tectonic entity. These moieties correspond to the cardinal directions of North and South. In this fourteenth-century rendering of Idrīsī’s world map, the top half of the image contains a vast and mostly empty space corresponding to sub-Saharan Africa. A proliferation of toponymy and increased geographic detail in the bottom half mark this lower half as the *oikoumene*, “the inhabited world” known to many premodern Mediterranean scholars. The vast southern majority of the African continent (oriented towards the top of the image) is characterized by an emptiness in stark contrast to the detailed inventory of place names covering Asia, Europe, and North Africa. Nowhere in this image are we presented with clear, reified geographical entities of East and West, much less given a total bisection of the world along any such boundary.

The Met horn was carved in the environs of eleventh-century Sicily, Southern Italy, or North Africa, less than a century before the *floruit* of al-Idrīsī. In the most recent comprehensive catalog, Shalem dates the horn to eleventh-century Egypt, Sicily, or Southern Italy (Cat. A 3; 2014, 210). I believe that the likeliest location of production may be found in the highly connected and contested exchange corridor extending roughly from Qayrawān to Amalfi, specifically Ifrīqiya or Sicily. The iconographic considerations that tie the horn and others like it to Fāṭimid Egypt do not concretely tie the horn’s production to Egypt. The political and historical situation of the region, the proposed West African origin of the tusk, as well as the similarities in facture to Iberian ivories would seem to me to indicate a central Mediterranean origin rather than Egyptian.

0.3 Sources and Methods

In this study I employ a variety of inter- and multidisciplinary methodological and theoretical interventions to provide an holistic analysis of the life history and object biography of the elephant/stalker horn and criticize its role in the production of several insidious geographies. Particular attention will be paid to interventions from archaeology, art history, and anthropology, but I engage with diverse methodical and theoretical approaches from scholarship grouped under traditional disciplinary labels spanning the humanities as well as the social and natural sciences, most the emerging field of sound studies. In addition to the thick description of the elephant/stalker horn itself, my study is predicated on the analysis of a *mélange* of material, visual, and textual sources contemporary to the various periods of its life. These labels—material, visual, textual—represent overlapping and copresent qualities of objects and relations; they ultimately resist reification and nominalization, and the study of one will eventually demand the inclusion of all others. Most importantly for the present purposes, these categories, which are frequently construed as the privileged domains of particular scholarly disciplines, do not correspond neatly to specific theoretical models or methodological approaches. I have chosen to adopt a focus on the thick description of the affective qualities of the materials, particularly dwelling on the sonic affordances of the elephant/stalker horn. A valuable source of supplementary evidence comes from recourse to other Fāṭimid-style horns, especially those known to have resided in church treasuries. Importantly, my methods are object-based as opposed to the plethora of corpus-based studies of medieval oliphants (von Falke 1929; 1930; Kühnel 1959; 1971; Shalem 2004; 2014).¹⁴ The study of particular artifacts in their long-term historical and cultural context is by no means a groundbreaking methodological innovation; numerous precedents and models have come and gone, frequently associated with particular academic disciplines or traditions. I will engage here with two particular

¹⁴ Mine is certainly not the first object-based study of an “oliphant.” Several of these object-based studies of the horns are predicated on the analysis of craft and facture, contributing art historical perspectives alternative to that of the von Falke/Kühnel corpus tradition(s). In particular, see David Ebitz’s article dedicated to the study of a horn now in the Musée de Cluny, in which he argues that the horn was originally carved by artisans “steeped in the art of Fatimid Egypt” and subsequently recarved on the occasion of its donation to a church (*id.* 1986a, 37). See also Jennifer Kingsley’s detailed facture analysis of the horn in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (2010).

analytics: object biography, which emerged from anthropological studies of material culture, and the life history approach developed by archaeologists of the post-processual persuasion (Tringham 1995).¹⁵

I already alluded indirectly to the concept of object biography above in describing my study as “object-based” as opposed to “corpus-based.” Object biography as an analytic is often associated with anthropological studies in material culture, the term being derived from an influential essay by Igor Kopytoff (1986; for an overview of twentieth-century archaeological and anthropological studies in similar veins, see Gosden and Marshall 1999). Object biography approaches to artifacts and art objects from the Middle Ages have begun to appear in recent decades in archaeological (Eckardt and Williams 2003, especially 141–43) and art historical scholarship (Ebert 2019). Object-biography methods rely on tracing an object as it passes through exchange relationships between specific owners, but the Met horn lacks such a transactional history for the vast majority of its life. Where it has been, who owned it; who made it, who used it—all of these remain largely unknown quantities. Its textually documented provenance begins in 1792, and the transition of ownership has only been documented thrice since then: first as part of an inheritance and subsequently twice in exchange for money (the Baudot auction in 1894 and the 1904 Dino purchase). In this regard, the distinct advantage of a life history approach is its open-ended and interpretive nature: most importantly, it dwells in an epistemological space that accepts and revels in ambiguity (Tringham 1995, 97–98).

0.4 Plan of the Work

In this paper, I assert that the elephant/stalker horn has been an integral element in the articulation of several overlapping and successive insidious geographies, the most recent of which is conceived of as an irreconcilable division of the globe into worlds East and West. To prove this point, I will approach the elephant/stalker horn through thick, affective description of the horn itself and contextual analysis of its object biography and life history. The first chapter, “From the Medieval...” takes place during the long

¹⁵ Tringham’s concept of life history makes explicit reference to processual archaeologists’ emphasis on the use-life of objects (1995, 81, 85–86). Although I do not adopt this term, it plays no small part of this paper’s methodological genealogy—it is worth noting, though, the close alignment of use-life to studies in commodities (i.e. things that fulfill use values).

period of the elephant/stalker horn's life during which we know nothing of its specific whereabouts (ca. 750–1792 CE). Throughout the paper, I will repeatedly ask you to consider the elephant beneath the oliphant: accordingly, the chapter begins with the body of the elephant that gives the horn both form and material before moving on to subsequent arenas of use and the early insidious geographies in which “the oliphant” is complicit. The second chapter, “... to the Metropolitan” discusses the object biography of the elephant/stalker horn from its first historical attestation in 1792 through its acquisition by the Met to its subsequent role in the development of the discipline of Islamic art history. The paper closes with a focus on the coming century, first discussing the pernicious cultural memories embodied in Met horn that persist into the present before concluding with some outwardly-focused remarks on the dire plight of today's African elephants and the continuing legacy of violence surrounding the Met horn and other elephantine objects.

1 FROM THE MEDIEVAL...

ca. 750–1792 CE

In Palermo (*Bularm*) there is a congregational mosque, the biggest [in the city], which was a church for the Christians before the conquest, and within it lies a great temple; some of the locals say that a Greek sage—that is, Aristotle—hangs in a coffin in the temple, which the Muslims have put to use as a mosque; [they also say] that the Christians revered his tomb and through it perceived what the Greeks [of old] had seen in terms of his esteem and magnificence. ... I myself saw a coffin there that was perhaps the very same sarcophagus. (Ibn Ḥawqal 1992, 113–14, author's translation; cf. French translation by Wiet, Ibn Hauqal 1964, I:117–18)

In this account of tenth-century Arab geographer Ibn Ḥawqal's visit to Palermo's Friday mosque, we are presented with an apt theoretical model from contemporary thought through which to interpret the elephant/stalker horn. The traveler's firsthand account imbues the space of Palermo's preeminent mosque with multiple, overlapping layers of religious and cultural significance, both historical and contemporary. Ibn Ḥawqal uses three different architectural designations to describe the structure: firstly, he identifies it as a congregational mosque, *masjid al-jāmi'*, a central social space of the city as well as an official place of

worship in which Muslim citizens gather for public Friday prayers.¹⁶ The mosque, which the geographer specifies has now been “put to use” as such by the Muslim inhabitants (phrasing that identifies the space as performative and in transition), was a Christian church before the Fāṭimid conquest, and within it he locates a great temple.¹⁷ Ibn Ḥawqal’s narrative crafts a sort of architectonic chiasmus wherein the persistent memories embodied in the space are brought into being on several simultaneous levels by the practices of various citizens of the city, including the Sicilian *Rūm* who author enduring layers of cultural memory through practices both narrative and bodily in which Ibn Ḥawqal also participates through his firsthand interaction and subsequent literary memorialization of the space. The power of memory invested in this sanctum creates coexistent temporalities so tangible that the Palermian Christians (of an unspecified time) found themselves able to “perceive what the Greeks [of old] had seen.” The overlapping cultural and religious regimes of value and interpenetrating temporalities of Palermo’s Friday mosque present an architectonics of memory that parallels my own analysis of the Met horn’s life history, grounding this twenty-first-century analytic in modes of interpreting material culture contemporary to the origins of the tusk. The affective power of the elephant/stalker horn deployed by successive, overlapping, and copresent insidious geographies relies upon its similar abilities to hold and shape memory through bodily, visual, and narrative practices.

¹⁶ Large urban mosques of Ibn Ḥawqal’s time were highly adaptive, dynamic social spaces and public prayer was only one of their many uses. Paul Wheatley has described early mosques in vivid terms: “Open by day and by night, [the mosque] served as a popular meeting place for gossiping townsmen; a forum for the dissemination of sacred knowledge and secular opinion; a venue for creative interaction among special interest groups; a retail outlet for hawkers of food and drink; and the preferred stage for a variety of entertainers and others who are best described as mountebanks, all encouraging subcultural allegiances in a minor way to be founded on social characteristics rather than on mere spatial proximity” (2001, 235).

¹⁷ The Arabic word used by Ibn Ḥawqal, *haykal* (“[pagan] temple”), derives from the Sumerian E₂.GAL (literally “great house”), used in Mesopotamian sources of the third millennium BCE to describe large official buildings (i.e. elements of both royal/political and temple/religious infrastructure, inasmuch as the difference is articulated in the period). The Arabic word thus has an etymological heritage dating back many thousands of years, directly descended from the same architectural spaces that, excavated and recreated by archaeological means during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries CE, were deployed in service of the insidious geography of the Modern West. The prepositional phrasing used by Ibn Ḥawqal to situate the *haykal* within the church is spatial, lacking temporal indicators. This phrasing (*fīhi*) specifically locates the *haykal* within the mosque (otherwise understood as contemporary to Ibn Ḥawqal), not the *bī‘ah*.

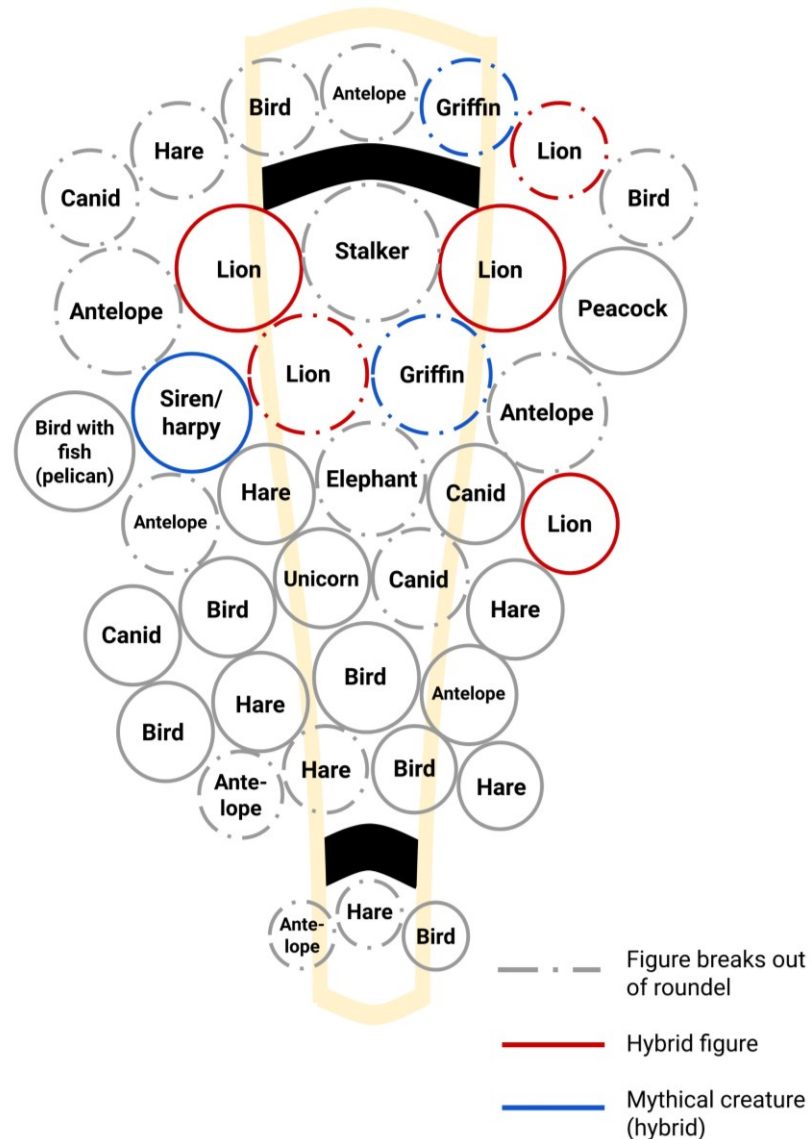


Figure 10a, b: Elephant/stalker horn, elephant ivory (23 $\frac{1}{16}$ " by 4 $\frac{15}{16}$ " by 4"), sounder's view. Photo: author, August 2021; (b) Schematic of roundels on the elephant/stalker horn, projected from sounder's view (not to scale). Author, after own photos and figures in Shalem (2014).

Let us now return to the elephant/stalker horn itself. Imagine away the glass for a moment, and reach in to pick up the horn: as you raise it to your lips, the surface of the tusk takes on an alignment somewhat like that depicted in Figure 10. The act of bringing the horn to your mouth—the meeting of tusk and lips—is accompanied by the creation of an axial relationship between your own body and the graven likenesses of an elephant and a stalking human (Figure 11a, b, c). As the rich decoration and lively figures draw your vision upward across the tusk’s surface, your eyes replicate the emergence of sonic vibrations from the tusk

(Figure 11d) as they spread their gaze over a bellowing elephant whose trunk crosses the roundel's bounds to project its call upward (Figure 11b). When used as a horn, the body of the tusk amplifies vibrations produced by the buzzing of your pursed lips and projects them outward into the atmosphere¹⁸ as a vibrant-vibrating¹⁹ intensity that is at once human, elephantine, and neither.²⁰

Your eyes subsequently alight upon an armed and bearded human figure whose raised sword and flexibly set legs cast him halfway between the prance of a sport hunter and the poise of a soldier (Figure 11c). Although the figure is most frequently identified as a hunter in the scholarly literature (Kühnel 1971, 58, Cat. № 67; Shalem 2014, 210, Cat. № A 3), his props and costume are not unambiguous elements of the hunt, but also potential *accoutrements de guerre*.²¹ Given the horn's later biography (particularly its inclusion in the Dino collection, specifically dedicated to arms and armor) and the martial origins of the term *olifant*, it is highly likely that the figure on the Met horn was also frequently received as a soldier. In line with the present study's emphasis on the lenses of both war and hunting, I have opted to call the figure a "stalker," a term that I suggest describes the predatory aspects and careful poise of both hunters and soldiers and aligns thematically with my recurrent use of the adjective insidious. Accordingly, I will refer to the tusk in question as the *elephant/stalker* horn to emphasize what I contend is the most important relationship among the entangled creatures covering the horn's surface (on which, cf. schematic, Figure 10b).

¹⁸ On the term "affective atmospheres," see Anderson, B. (2009). See also Kanngieser (2019, 228–29 and *passim*) for the political atmosphere of sound (cf. the "affective tonality" of Goodman [2009, xiv, 189; defined p. 195]).

¹⁹ On the political ecology of things and vibrant matter, see Bennett (2010). The "vibrating" element derives from the sonic nature of the horn's political ecology (cf. Goodman 2009).

²⁰ The vibrations projected from the horn's bell (Figure 11d) emerge proximately from the lungs and lips of its human user, which are then transformed by the body of the horn *qua* instrument that, as an ivory tusk, remains a stubbornly elephantine body. This is a becoming-animal—becoming-elephant, becoming-sound, and becoming—"oliphant"—as described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: e.g. "We believe in the existence of very special becomings-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980], 237).

²¹ My thanks to Prof. Caitlín Barrett for calling my attention to this point. Any errors or eccentricities in the description and interpretation of this or other aspects of the horn remain, of course, my own.



Figure 11a, b, c, d: Elephant/stalker horn, details; (a) view with stalker, griffin, and elephant depicting crack in surface, (b) stalker, (c) elephant, (d) view of upper end. Photos: author, August 2021.

The iconographic content of the Met horn belies its hybrid,²² transspecies nature. Animals both mythical and zoologically attested populate its surface, and many of them have tails from which the head of another

²² A note on another type of hybridity RE: “oliphants.” Avinoam Shalem has written on multiple occasions on assemblage and hybrid aesthetics in medieval art objects. His concept of assemblage derives from the theory and practice of Dada and Surrealism, viewing the conversion of Islamic art objects into Christian reliquaries as akin to Dadaist readymades (*id.* 2007; 2010). On the role of artists and art practice in the development of assemblage theories, cf. Hamilakis and Jones (2017, 77–79).

animal emerges.²³ All four of the roundels directly surrounding the stalker, who is the only human figure represented on the horn, encircle hybrid creatures. Three are lions: two flank the stalker on either side (Figure 12a, b) as one rushes for the latter's right foot (visible in Figure 10a); each features a different type of hybrid head emerging from the tip of their tail: a bird (Figure 12a), a canid, and a hare (Figure 12b). The fourth opponent, to the figure's lower left is a griffin (Figure 11a), the only of the three mythological creatures depicted on the tusk to be endowed with a tail-head in addition to its *prima facie* hybridity (Figure 12a, lower left). Far from being representations, these graven figures are themselves real affective bodies, "becomings-animal not content to proceed by resemblance and for which resemblance, on the contrary, would represent an obstacle or stoppage" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980], 233).



Figure 12a, b: Elephant/stalker horn, details; (a) lion with aviform tail, (b) siren and lion with leporiform tail. Photos: author, August 2021.

1.1 *Elephants (Remember)*

The largest land animal is the elephant, and it is the nearest to man in intelligence: it understands the language of its country and obeys orders, remembers duties that it has been taught, is pleased by affection and by marks of honour, nay more it possesses virtues rare

²³ Of the thirty-eight forms enclosed by roundels on the surface of the tusk, eight (21%) are hybrid creatures. Three—two griffins and a human-bird figure variously identified as a siren (Kühnel 1959, 40) or a harpy (Shalem 2014, 214)—are mythological hybrids, while six (including one of the griffins) have tails ending in the heads of a variety of creatures (three are avian, two are canids, and one is leporiform). None of the hybrid tail-heads breaks out of its roundel's confines. See Figure 10b for a schematic of the roundels and their contents. Similar creatures with the tail-head hybridity can be found on the elephant/stalker's sister horn in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 14a; hybrids with tail-heads on the VAM horn do occasionally break out of their roundels).

even in man, honesty, wisdom, justice, also respect for the stars and reverence for the sun and moon. (Pliny the Elder, *NH* 8.1, trans. Rackham; *id.* 1940, 3–5)

Before becoming an “oliphant,” the Met horn was the living tusk of a particular *elephant*. From the long list of qualities that make elephants a celebrated topic of discussion across a wide variety of traditions, generations of human observers have noted elephants’ remarkable faculty of memory. Pliny the Elder begins his discussion of animals, book eight of the monumental *Natural History*, with the paean above. His observations regarding elephants’ behavior are remarkably vivid and profoundly sympathetic. According to Pliny they are proud creatures, sensitive to the social activities of their own kind as well as the humans with whom they interact and cohabitate; he portrays them as strong but incredibly emotionally vulnerable.²⁴ Other antique and medieval authors such as Isidore (b. ca. 560–Seville, 636; *Etymologies* 12.2.16; *id.* 2006, 252) and Albert the Great (b. ca. 1200–Cologne, 1280; *id.* 2008, 276–77) made note of elephants’ prodigious memories. We should consider, then, that an elephant’s memory does not end with its death and that ivory is as such a preeminent reservoir of embodied memory. Throughout its life, this tusk has grown, mutated, aged, died, endured, and been reborn in a series of more or less violent bodily collisions and convergences. It has mediated and embodied social relationships between generations of elephantine and human bodies and played a core role in enacting bonds of power within and between species, and the overlapping and interpenetration of these diverse bodies tell a history much longer and deeper than any individual trunks or hands that caressed this tusk throughout its long (after)life.

²⁴ Pliny reports several elephants falling in love with humans, showering their beloved with gifts and attention and wallowing in their absence. “Nor is it surprising,” he asserts, “that animals possessing memory are capable of affection” (*NH* 8.5; 1940, 13).



Figure 13a, b: Manuscript miniatures, Allegory of the Elephant, Greek *Physiologus*. Manuscript: Southern Italy, 11th century CE. Text: Alexandria, late second century CE. Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana (MS E 16 sup., fol. 15r, 15v). Images (not to scale): Bib. Ambrosiana.

A wide variety of medieval authors dedicated leaf after leaf of parchment to the habits of elephants, each noting particular zoological and ethological characteristics of the species, and they were likewise beloved subjects of manuscript miniaturists. The miniatures above articulate episodes in a moralizing allegory that maps a Christological genealogy onto a family of elephants whose patriarch (Adam) has fallen victim to the stalker's (*viz.*, Satan) trap (Figure 13a). But of course, God would forsake neither his chosen people nor his chosen pachyderms. The smallest and youngest of the lineage—Jesus Christ, “the holy intelligible elephant”—raises his fallen patriarch through the former's divine, virtuous nature.²⁵ The overlapping and interpenetration of Christ and the young elephant is so potent that the former's divine presence persists in the very members of his elephantine form beyond the latter's death and disarticulation.²⁶ The allegory is spelled out in detail by the text that accompanies the miniatures, a Christian moralist tractate written some nine centuries earlier and known by its author's appellation as the *Physiologus*. The text was composed by

²⁵ “Indeed, even as the priest did not lift up the one fallen among thieves (cf. Lk. 10:30). Nor did the twelve elephants (that is, the chorus of prophets) raise [the fallen elephant, Adam] up, even as the Levite failed to raise up the one wounded by thieves (cf. Lk. 10:32). But the holy intelligible elephant (that is, the Lord Jesus Christ) did so. Although he is greater than all the rest, he was made small in comparison to them. ‘For he humbled himself and became obedient unto death’ (Phil. 2:8), in order to raise up man” (*sic*; *Physiologus*, trans. Curley 1979, 32).

²⁶ “It is one of the natural qualities of the tiny elephant that, where any part of his hair or bones is burned, neither the dragon nor any other evil thing may come” (*Physiologus*, trans. Curley 1979, 31).

an anonymous author in late second-century Alexandria and was subsequently copied, edited, translated, and expanded by scholars around the Mediterranean and Western Europe for over a millennium. This leaf of parchment (the recto and verso of folio fifteen) and the others with which it was assembled into a manuscript were lettered and illuminated in eleventh-century Southern Italy in the direct environs of the elephant/stalker horn's production, demonstrating an immediate (though longstanding) concern with the habits of elephants and the ethical investments of these ethological observations that persist into the material of ivory itself.

In addition to the reproduction and recension of Christian texts such as the *Physiologus*, the Met horn's provenance in eleventh-century Sicily or its environs makes it a close contemporary of scholarly workshops in which Arabic-, Greek-, and Latin-speaking intellectuals worked to render the writings of Classic Hellenophone philosophers into the Latin to which Europeans had generally become accustomed. Among the most popular were Aristotelian writings on animals, a topic of great significance for all parties that was adapted to serve the intellectual, religious, and political needs of each translator and, perhaps more significantly, their patron. Michael Scot, philosopher, translator, and astrologer to Frederick II, produced a translation in 1220 from the Arabic of the zoological works under the title *De animalibus*, and this version was used by Albertus Magnus to produce his commentary of the same title. Scot himself is only a rather junior member of a longstanding tradition of translation and commentary on Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. Several centuries earlier, multilingual and multi-confessional groups of scholars in 'Abbāsīd Mesopotamia began the process of collecting, editing, and commenting on Greek philosophical texts in an organized fashion with state and community patronage in a phenomenon known somewhat deceptively as the Graeco-Arabic translation movement. The importance of this movement for the reception of Classical philosophy in the late medieval and early modern worlds is difficult to overstate and its exclusion from the canonical history of Western ideas is a deliberate oversight, another insidious geographic sleight of hand.²⁷

²⁷ Dimitri Gutas has described the movement's significance in a passionate (and nonetheless problematic) passage: "[T]he Graeco-Arabic translation movement of Baghdad constitutes a truly epoch-making stage, by any standard, in

1.2 “The Most Cruel Aspect of its Tragic History”: Ivory and Human Trafficking

After being torn from the jaw of an elephant, these tusks—now become ivory, harvested and commodified flesh—made their way across long distances in caravans bearing a wide variety of other commodities in tow. Pliny claimed that elephants themselves understood that their tusks more than anything made them “desirable plunder” for human hunters whose murderous hunger placed them in perpetual peril (*NH* 8.4; *id.* 1940, 7). Even when their tusks fell off “owing to some accident or to age,” elephants were reported to deny enterprising human scavengers the opportunity to claim the ivory for themselves by burying their tusks out of sight.²⁸ This insatiable appetite for ivory did not, however, bring destruction and despair to elephants alone. Throughout the *longue durée*, the ivory of African elephants has repeatedly traveled northward by the same routes and in the same caravans as enslaved persons, and the relationship between the two types of commodified bodies is ancient and intimate (for an historical view with attention to nineteenth-century trans-Saharan sources, see Mattingly and Cole 2017, 211–17). A former ivory trader writing for *Scientific American* in 1931 observed,

The story of the acquisition of ivory in the 19th Century is also that of Africa in the most cruel aspect of all its tragic history. The slave trade and the ivory trade were one, interlocking and interdependent. Probably never in any other land or age did the natural treasure of a continent bring upon it so cruel a fate, over so immense a territory, as was Africa’s in the years of the domination of the Arab ivory raiders. ... They forced the natives, in every conceivable cruel manner, to deliver their accumulations of ivory, enslaved them when they could produce no more, and sold them for more ivory as human meat to the cannibal tribes about; then, since the only means of transporting the ivory was by human carriers ... enslaved still more to carry the ivory to the coast. ... Without the ivory, so Livingstone and others were told by the Arabs, the slave trade could not pay. Livingstone proposed the

the course of human history. It is equal in significance to, and belongs to the same narrative as, I would claim, that of Pericles’ Athens, the Italian Renaissance, or the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it deserves so to be recognized and embedded in our historical consciousness” (*id.* 1998, 8). But note that Gutas’ paean does little to actually address the consequences of continuing to privilege this “embedded ... historical consciousness.” In an effort to rehabilitate the reputation of the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, Gutas falls back upon the same legitimizing tropes of the history of civilization, reaffirming the eminence of the Western canon while petitioning for the inclusion of Golden-Age Baghdad alongside Classical Athens and Cinquecento Florence.

²⁸ Elephants do not in fact lose their tusks due to age, the latter remaining indispensable until the animal’s death. I am unaware of independent verification of elephants burying their own tusks, but it is in my own estimation more than possible given their formidable intelligence.

placing of armed steamers on the African lakes to enforce a legitimate trade in ivory and thus kill the slave trade at its source.²⁹

Note Moore's blatant disavowal of the role of European colonialism in the acquisition of ivory and the power of the metropolitan European and American markets fueling the demand for both the tusks of elephants and, until very recently, that for enslaved persons as well.³⁰ Moore tosses the blame like a hot potato to "Arab raiders" and manages to demonstrate the supposed moral superiority of white Europeans through their clever application of economic and military technologies. Moore's pernicious, racist narrative obscures crucial historical dimensions in order to generate political effect in the present (while simultaneously exposing crucial historical elements of this insidious geography). This passage nonetheless does place a noteworthy emphasis on the torturous overlap and exchange of commodified human and elephantine bodies in an ensemble of processes that must be understood as crucial to the assemblage of the same insidious geographies emergent from the elephant/stalker horn—and possibly to its own existence as a material artifact (*q.v.* 27 below).

1.2.1 TRANS-SAHARAN TRADE IN TRANS-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Historically, Arab traders had admittedly played a significant role in the trafficking of both humans and ivory.³¹ During the long medieval period in which the elephant beneath the horn was slain and the tusk

²⁹ Ernst D. Moore, "Ivory, the Pearl of the Forest," *Scientific American*, January 1931, pp. 9–12.

³⁰ A fact not lost on earlier contemporaries: "Lucrative as may be to-day the trade in the ivory which unfortunate pachydermatous quadrupeds are called upon to furnish, its gains are as nothing with those that used to accrue to the dealers in the black variety [i.e. enslaved persons]. ... The ideal course, perhaps, from the trader's point of view, would be to make one carry the other, and then sell both carrier and carried; but modern Europe sternly vetoes any such arrangement. ... It is curious to reflect that only a few decades have elapsed since Englishmen bought and sold their fellow-beings as naturally as, to-day, they buy and sell horses and dogs" (A. A., "Black Ivory," *The Sketch*, April 5th, 1899, p. 462). Note that modern Europe did not in fact "veto any such arrangement," as European and American demand for ivory continued to fuel the traffick in enslaved persons for decades after this piece's publication. On the insidious trope of "black ivory," see below, §2.1.1.

³¹ Notably, however, some Arab Muslims disavowed the trade in ivory based on Islamic laws regarding the consumption of animal materials, including two influential Mālikī scholars in tenth- and eleventh-century Qayrawān. Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (922–926 CE), author of a popular handbook of jurisprudence in the Mālikī tradition, ruled that pious Muslims should abstain from the use of elephants' teeth in accordance with Qur'ānic dietary restrictions. The jurist designates the use of ivory as *makruh*, meaning that pious Muslims should avoid it, but stops short of rendering the material unlawful (Ar. *ḥarām*; note also that Ibn Abī Zayd disapproves of trade with "the territory of the enemy and the land of the Sūdān"; English translation, Hopkins and Levtzion 2000 [1981], 55; Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī 1975, 158). In the same city just a century later Abū Bakr 'Abdullāh al-Qayrawānī al-Mālikī

carved into an instrument, Arab geographers such as Ibn Ḥawqal who lived and worked in cosmopolitan communities across the Islamic world similar to that which produced the elephant/stalker horn fastidiously recorded global trade routes and the commodities available at particular stops along the way, often from firsthand research. These geographers practiced a synthetic form of scholarship exhibiting methods now associated with those of not only (human) geographers but also ethnographers, historians, antiquarians, folklorists, and theologians.³² Several authors describe trans-Saharan trade routes in which ivory, slaves, and gold were among the primary exports of West Africa.³³ Al-Zuhrī, an Andalusī author active in the twelfth century CE, describes trans-Saharan trade routes linking the Western Sūdān with Ifrīqiya, al-Andalus, and Western Europe³⁴; he reported that the primary exports of the Western Sudan were slaves, gold, ivory (‘*āj*), and elephants’ teeth (*anyāb al-fīl*), the latter listed as two separate commodities (al-Zuhrī 1968, ١١٨; English translation, Hopkins and Levzion 2000 [1981], 95).³⁵

When the caravans of enslaved persons and ivory arrived at Sijilmāsa (in modern-day Morocco), they would have encountered merchants bound for Europe to ply commodities such as sugar from al-Sūs al-‘Aqṣā on the far western coast of North Africa. In many serious and damning respects, the experiences of these enslaved humans and slain elephants are closer to one another than either were to the rapacious grasp

recorded the refusal of a certain Abū-l-Faḍl of more than a thousand dinars from his father’s inheritance “out of piety and asceticism” because “it came from trading in ivory and [he] was loath to be involved in something which had received adverse comment from men of learning” (trans. Hopkins and Levzion 2000 [1981], 61; al-Mālikī 1981, 479).

³² Their geographies were often insidious in their own ways, of course, but such a comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this study.

³³ On medieval trans-Saharan trade between West Africa and Europe with attention to ivory, see Guérin (2013) and with attention to the relationships between organic and inorganic commodities including ivory and copper *id.* (2017, esp. 100–01, 107–14).

³⁴ Authors writing in Arabic used the term Bilād al-Sūdān (“Lands of the Blacks”) to describe a wide belt of sub-Saharan Africa running east to west. Here, the Western Sūdān refers to a broad region of West Africa south of the Sahara and west of Lake Chad, including the Sahel and the especially regions connected by the Niger river. Ifrīqiya refers to the region in central North Africa centered around Tunisia corresponding to the Roman province of Africa. Al-Andalus is the Arabic name for the Iberian peninsula (cf. modern Andalucía), especially those portions under Muslim rule.

³⁵ Timothy Insoll has suggested that the use of the two separate terms may indicate that not all materials considered ivory were of elephantine origin based on archaeological evidence of a cache of hippopotamus ivory in modern Gao, Mali (Kawkaw or Jawjaw in medieval Arabic sources; 1995, 333–35).

of those persons who manipulated their bodies during the duration of their commodification.³⁶ Given the proximity and documented economic, political, and material-cultural ties between the Western Sūdān, the Maghreb, and Southern Italy where the elephant/stalker horn was likely produced (see Metcalfe and Rosser-Owen 2013 and contributions to the same volume; for Sicily, Kapitaikin 2013; 2017), I suggest that the tusk that became the Met horn crossed the Sahara from West Africa along these routes and may well have encountered or even been carried by enslaved Africans headed for the markets of the Maghreb.

1.2.2 “THESE BLOOD-STEEPED TUSKS”³⁷

Accordingly, the study of the elephant/stalker horn—indeed, that of any ivory object—must reckon with its immediate and historical entanglement with various deadly practices of commodification, none more gravely so than slavery. Was the elephant/stalker horn itself borne by enslaved persons as a raw tusk across hundreds of miles of desert? More than likely so, but as an elephantine object of African origin it remains intimately entangled with a millennium-long practice of human trafficking regardless of whether this tusk was one of the uncounted many borne by and/or alongside enslaved persons during the early centuries of the long medieval. The elephant/stalker horn’s entanglement with slavery, however, did not end with the advent of the so-called Modern period. In fact, the relationship between ivory and the trade in enslaved Africans remained of paramount significance well into the twentieth century. European and American authors spent yard after yard of print on the topic in a wide variety of periodicals throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from all conceivable positions on a broad spectrum of ideological and moralistic concerns. On December 3rd, 1888 *The Pall Mall Gazette* printed an excerpt of remarks made by one Sir W. Butler pertaining to the continuing British complicity in the African slave trade along with an

³⁶ This is in no way to suggest an actual equivalence between enslaved human persons and ivory tusks, but to highlight the similar bloody processes of commodification that violated the bodies of both humans and elephants from Africa. On the insidious geography of ivory and slavery expressed through the motif of “white” and “black ivory,” see §2.1.1 below.

³⁷ After Rev. Horace Waller: “[W]hat a factor the use of white ivory is for intensifying the misery of Africa ... But how far the evil comes within the bounds of practical treatment, or whether any amount of exposure will lead to the substitution of vulcanite or other compounds in the place of these blood-steeped tusks, is very difficult to say” (“White Ivory and Black,” *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, May/June 1890, p. 86). Quoted also below, p. 38.

editorial response. Butler's suggestion for ending the "worst horrors of the slave trade" is notable in that it began neither in Africa nor with Africans:

Get the ladies of England and America to combine to boycott ivory. If ladies would renounce ivory-backed brushes, if householders would go without ivory-handled knives, if clubmen would find some other material for their billiard balls, the sum of human misery would be lightened all over a continent. I believe from my heart that if the leisured classes of this country would agree to forego the use of ivory, more would be done to crush out the worst horrors of the slave trade than if all the battleships of the united navies of Europe were to draw a cordon round Africa.³⁸

Butler's remarks respond to the echoes of Livingstone's assertions encountered in the 1931 *Scientific American* quote above. Rejecting the military interventions of Livingstone's memorable suggestion, Butler provides a solution much closer to home for his audience, wherein the continuance or downfall of slavery is embedded in the daily accoutrements of the home and social life of "leisured-class" Europeans and Americans. The well-to-do on either side of the North Atlantic could allegedly have brought about the end of this slow-to-die "sum of human misery" if only they had been willing to part with the luxury of that other kind of African flesh—*white* flesh—ivory. The editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette* in which Butler's exhortation appeared was decidedly more cynical and brushed off the suggestion with damning indifference: "What an impossible remedy! There would not be a single billiard ball the less used if each ball represented the cost of a black man's life."³⁹

1.3 *Thirty Leagues: The Geopolitics of Sound*

One of the most politically significant aspects of the elephant/stalker horn is its potential⁴⁰ as a sonic-sonorous instrument. The real political effect of the horn's presence is activated by an assemblage of bodily practices involved in the carrying, display, and particularly the blowing of the horn (Figure 5b, Figure 6a).

³⁸ Butler's remarks and the editorial comments originally appeared in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Dec. 3rd, 1888. A version of the remarks was reprinted several days later in (Northern) Irish newspaper *The County Derry Liberal* (Dec. 8th).

³⁹ *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London), Dec. 3rd, 1888.

⁴⁰ That is, when in a better state of repair than its current condition. The Met horn currently sports several cracks and fissures, including a particularly long one running most of the length of the horn's body (Figure 11a) as well as another in its bell (Figure 11d).

Sounding the horn, one engages in a process of real bodily transformation: the echoes of these heterogeneous, colliding bodies resound outward as a vibrant/vibrating sonic assemblage—elephant and human, (un)tamed and taming, organic and manufactured—that produces a political geography of sound⁴¹ and body which persists long after the horn’s call has faded into the wind.⁴² Horns were politically symbolic but more importantly *efficacious*, performing as powerful political agents in a variety of functions and settings, especially during the first centuries of the new millennium during which the elephant/stalker horn was carved and first used (Bourgeois 2021). In European literary culture, this is nowhere more apparent than in the legend of the paladin Roland, whose *olifant* enabled the warrior to manipulate of political space on a continental scale—the horn is able to determine the fate of Europe by its call that resounds thirty leagues from the pass at Roncesvalles to roust Charles and embolden the Franks.

Unlike the ungulates whose horns gave rise to the instrument’s name, elephants are known to produce sounds similar to the call of a clarion.⁴³ The iconography of the Met horn emphasizes the elephant’s sonic power in its portrayal: its tusks receive far less space and attention than its thick and powerful trunk, which is the only part of its body that breaks free from the roundel, facing upward to the mouth of the horn (Figure 11b). Although their tusks are not involved in elephants’ vocalizations, ivory remains materially entangled with elephants’ sonic prowess long after its separation from the mouth and trunk of the living elephant. Isidore of Seville traced the etymology of the Latin *ebur* (“ivory”) to the Indian word for an elephant’s cry (*Etym.* 12.2.14; *id.* 2006, 252) and medieval Latin bestiarists writing six centuries later continued to echo his assertions (e.g. Clark 2006, 127). The elephant/stalker horn has a sibling, seemingly the product of a closely related ensemble of makers, that now resides in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum; it bears the likeness of an elephant remarkably similar to that on the Met horn (Figure 14). Note the trunk of the VAM elephant, which is punctuated not only by the bands representing wrinkles but also by several

⁴¹ On sound and human geography, see Gallagher, Kanngieser, and Prior (2017; with several references, 619).

⁴² Cf. Anja Kanngieser: “In the moment of its activity, sound can cause acute physical and psychological violence, which may resonate well after the vibration itself has diminished” (2019, 229).

⁴³ Aside from their trumpeting, sounds of a wide spectrum of frequencies and amplitudes play a primary role in elephants’ sensory perception and faculty of communication (Garstang 2015, 97, 100).

small, beadlike decorations around the open end of the trunk that bear no apparent resemblance to pachyderm anatomy (Figure 14b). They do, however, closely resemble a common feature of Fāṭimid-style horns such as the elephant/stalker horn and the VAM horn itself: these circular forms emulate the horns' upper frieze (VAM horn, Figure 14a; Met horn, Figure 11d), rendered on a smaller scale as the circular, beadlike elements on the end of the trunk of the elephant on the horn in the VAM.



Figure 14:a, b (detail): Horn (“oliphant”), elephant ivory. Southern Italy, Sicily, or North Africa, 11th century CE. Victoria and Albert Museum (Nº 7953-1862). Image: VAM.

Scholars studying sound have begun to adopt approaches that emphasize the affective nature of sonic vibrations, opening up new possibilities for understanding the role of sonic-sonorous instruments in the production of social space (Gallagher 2016, 43–47 and *passim*) including the creation and maintenance of political spaces and relations through sonic violence (Goodman 2009). The elephant/stalker horn’s capability as a political agent and its control of both (hyper-)local and global geopolitical space can be most effectively understood when considering it as an affective body, specifically a sonic-sonorous body. The actual and potential sound(ing) of the horn creates and manipulates the many political spaces it occupies over the course of its life, and even without being blown for uncounted years, the horn’s power as a sonic body is omnipresent, remaining couched within the affective fields assembled by the tusk/horn through its material, form, and associated practices.

1.4 *Hunting for Power and Prestige*

One of these omnipresent assemblages emergent from the elephant/stalker horn is that of the courtly hunt.⁴⁴ Although such ivory horns likely saw little use in the course of actual hunts (Ebitz 1986, 125; Shalem 2006, 782), their association with its suite of violent bodily practices remained at the fore. Hunting was part of a shared political culture across wide swaths of the *oikoumene* during the ancient and medieval worlds (Allsen 2006; on ritual aspects of the medieval hunt, see Crane 2008). Recall Kipling’s quote above from “The Ballad of East and West”: less frequently quoted than “never the twain” is the following couplet, a summation of the poem’s core message (which, in the form of a refrain, is also the poem’s last): “*But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face though they come from the ends of the earth!*” (Kipling 1940, 236, emphasis original). Elite hunting culture served to bring together various forms of all of these entities that Kipling reifies through their capitalization—East, West, Border, Breed, and Birth—in a vibrant assemblage of political (domestic and diplomatic alike), economic, and ritual practices. This enduring intercontinental phenomenon was sustained through various forms of material and textual culture, including certain ivory horns of which the elephant/stalker horn is a prime example (on the hunter/stalker, recall above, p. 18).

The distinction between hunt and battle, however, is fluid and contextual, an ambiguity noted by the *New York Times* writer quoted at the beginning of the paper as well as the author of the *Song of Roland*. Ganelon, the titular hero’s treacherous stepfather, attempts twice to convince Charlemagne not to respond to Roland’s imperiled calls, asserting that the emperor’s nephew childishly “sounds his horn all day long for a mere hare,” simply “showing off now before his peers” (*ll.* 1780–81). This is one of the only references in the *Chanson* to the *olifant* as an object of the hunting assemblage as opposed to that of warfare. In this

⁴⁴ Recall that the elephant/stalker horn was first exhibited at the Met as a “war (hunting) horn” alongside its companion from the Dino collection (Figure 2). The current display of the second Dino horn in the Met’s Arms and Armor collection labels the object as an “Oliphant (hunting horn)” (Figure 21; see also §3.1 below).

context, the association is derogatory due to the less-than-martial character of hunting as well as the meager game Ganelon suggests Roland pursues.⁴⁵

1.5 *Echoes from Roncesvalles*

But these ivory horns did not long remain instruments of the hunt, neither in terms of their historical contexts of use nor in the insidious tales of legendary warriors. Count Roland, nephew of Charles the Great and foremost among the latter's paladins, was the first known possessor of an *olifant* in the terminological sense and as such lurks just beneath the characters of every printed instance of the term. As an historical figure he is attested only scantily, and the character presented in the poem is cut from the whole cloth of twelfth-century Norman chivalry (Irujo 2021, 156). Perhaps the most significant deviance from the historical narrative involves the recasting of the villains: the Franks' opponents in the historical Battle of Roncesvalles were local "pagan" Basques, neither Saracens nor Muslims. But such facts do not serve the insidious geography of the West as neatly, and this is not the tale that prevails among the cultural imagination of Roland and his *olifant*. The importance of his literary persona in the construction of European histories, particularly during the nineteenth century, is difficult to overstate (Duggan 1989; Gilbert 2008 *passim*).

Roland's efficacy as a paladin and a martyr against Saracen barbarism is predicated upon a political ecology of things overlapping with but decidedly distinct from the relatively safer (and thus less impressive) arena of the hunt. The hero is defined by three unique accoutrements: his sword Durendal, his steed Velantif, and his *olifant* (Bigalke 2016). In the fight against the Saracens at Roncesvalles, it is the *olifant* that is the most consequential and defining element of the trio. His horse and sword eventually fail the paladin in the course of battle, but the *olifant* remains our alleged hero's final recourse and by far most geopolitically effective weapon, able to marshal the strength of the entire Frankish host under Charlemagne from a

⁴⁵ Hares were one of the animals whose hunting permitted the use of a horn, although the capture of a hare was not generally announced with the horn, unlike larger game, due to the hare's allegedly queer nature (Bourgeois 2021, 36; the hare was understood to be capable of changing its sex under certain conditions). One should note that hares occupy seven of the thirty-eight roundels on the elephant/stalker horn, and one lion bears a leporiform tail-head (Figure 12b; see also the schematic, Figure 10b).

distance of thirty leagues. In some versions of the tale, Roland even strikes a pagan (Old German *heiden*) with the *olifant* while still armed with his blade (Figure 5b). Its *ad hoc* use as a cudgel aside, it is the sonic political power of the olifant that enables the plot of the *Song of Roland* and his significance as a martyr.

1.5.1 BECOMING-CHRISTIAN: CORNUA EBURNEA AS RELICS

The final act in the drama of Roland's legendary *olifant* begins with its donation at the altar of Saint Severin in Bordeaux (ll. 3684–3687; Brault 1984, 225). According to the *Chanson*, Charlemagne bequeathed his fallen nephew Roland's *olifant* upon the church to serve as an object of pilgrimage. Charles' dedication of the *olifant* ultimately has far less to do with Roland's saintliness than it does the horn's incredible value as a political agent—the horn is perhaps better described as a relic of the Christian victory of Roncesvalles than as one of the Christian knight of Roland. Donating an ivory horn was a politically efficacious act for anyone capable of such a gift, especially those donations made to sites of pilgrimage where the horn's presence could reach a wider geographical audience. Historical “oliphants” likewise made their way into church treasuries across Europe (on a slightly longer timeline; Shalem 2006, 782). The first textual sources known to refer directly to the Met horn appear in the nineteenth-century catalogues of its then-owners.⁴⁶ In his 1901 catalogue of the Dino collection, the duc's arms and armor consultant Baron de Cosson described the significance of the two “olifants” in the following terms, accompanied by photogravure reproductions of each (here, Figure 7):

Il nous paraîtrait probable que c'est en Orient que ces olifants ont été fabriqués, et qu'ils ont été rapportés en Europe à l'époque où les croisades familiarisaient les peuples d'Occident avec les produits de l'art de l'Orient. Il est certain que l'on faisait un très grand cas de ces olifants, car plusieurs ont été conservés comme objets précieux dans les trésors des églises[.] (1901, 14)

⁴⁶ The Baudot catalogue, assembled in preparation for the 14th–24th November, 1894 sale of the late M. Henri Baudot's collection of art and antiquities, contains almost two thousand entries, of which the elephant/stalker horn is easily among the longest (Brenot 1894, 45, Cat. № 310). The volume contains twelve plates spread out over 182 pages; the elephant/stalker horn and its case are given one of these precious slots in a full-page photogravure reproduction (unlike the five other “olifants” reportedly in Baudot's collection, which are summarily listed with neither visual reproduction nor textual detail).

The elephant/stalker horn abided an undetermined amount of time in the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Bénigne de Dijon until the year 1792, when it was sequestered from the convent in the wake of the French Revolution by Louis-Bénigne Baudot, a Dijonaise magistrate (on the Baudot family, see de Winter 2003). De Cosson's description quoted above characterizes the horns as relics of the Crusades, triumphal Christian appropriations of "Oriental" material culture. The collection and display of objects of (perceived) Islamic manufacture as relics and/or reliquaries in Christian churches has a long and storied history in Western Europe and especially the Iberian peninsula, particularly textiles, caskets, and ivories (Rosser-Owen 2015, 39). Andalusí ivories produced in Islamic styles (in the case of many Umayyad ivories, for named Muslim individuals) frequently featured as reliquaries in Iberian churches. These objects have been traditionally interpreted through a triumphalist paradigm emphasizing their role in projecting Christian military and religious superiority over Muslims, although Mariam Rosser-Owen has shown the great importance of relic translation in the political negotiations between Christian and Muslim polities in the Iberian peninsula as well as its significance in competition for influence amongst the Christian kingdoms of northern Spain (*id.* 2015), and Glaire Anderson has provided an astute analysis of an ivory cross of Umayyad manufacture dedicated at the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla highlighting its role in interfaith familial politics of tenth-century Iberia (*id.* 2014).

2 ... TO THE METROPOLITAN

1792–Present

This problem is in no way behind us. Ideas do not die. Not that they survive simply as archaisms. ... Their application and status, even their form and content, may change; yet they retain something essential throughout the process, across the displacement, in the distribution of a new domain. Ideas are always reusable, because they have been usable before, but in the most varied of actual modes. ... The history of ideas should never be continuous; it should be wary of resemblances, but also of descents or filiations; it should be content to mark the thresholds through which an idea passes, the journeys it takes that change its nature or object. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980], 235)

“The oliphant” *qua* artifactual category has undergone numerous transformations of modality of the types highlighted by Deleuze and Guattari in the above quote. Displaced into new arenas,⁴⁷ it comes to serve new insidious geographies through permutations parallel to those documented above between the Idrīsī map and the plates from *Stanford’s Atlas* (§0.2; Figure 8, Figure 9). But what is that “something essential” that remains? In “the oliphant,” two characters remain eternally involved/involving across the millennia: the elephant beneath the oliphant and the first attributed bearer of such an artifact, the acclaimed Roland himself. Roland’s tale and the Battle of Roncesvalles have occupied a prominent space in the self-creation of local, regional, and international identities across Western Europe for over a millennium (Walter 2010). The January 1885 issue of the German illustrated periodical *Die Gartenlaube*—published just shy of ten years before the first recorded sale of the Met horn—featured an impressive two-page engraving after an oil painting by Louis Guesnet that portrays an heroic and romantic scene of the Frankish count astride his steed, blowing his *olifant* amidst a gathered horde of Saracens (Figure 6a). According to the *Chanson*, by the time Roland blows his *olifant* he has been unhorsed, covered in his own blood and viscera and that of both his enemies and countrymen. It is a grimy scene of desperation and failure, wholly unlike this neat, sanitized affair. More important, however, is the representation of the Saracens whose figures the deep scoring of the plate has left defined in thick, dark lines that together cast the entire horde in a chaotic, obscure mess. Their figures are illuminated only by a bright light cast down from the upper right of the image, a heavenly beam that centers directly on Roland, his *olifant*, and his steed, aiding the trio in the smiting of infidels underfoot. The racialized features of the Saracens quite openly belie nineteenth-century Orientalist aesthetics (Figure 6b) rather than attempting an historical depiction of eighth-century Iberian troops (cf. Figure 5b).

As the times change, so does the racism, and Roland’s *olifant*, alongside its tusky namesakes in museum collections, remains at the center of an updated insidious geography. Increasingly throughout the nineteenth

⁴⁷ Cf. Appadurai: “Finally, the commodity context refers to the variety of social arenas, within or between cultural units, that help link the commodity candidacy of a thing to the commodity phase of its career” (1986, 15).

and twentieth centuries, the Met horn began to play a role in the articulation of insidious, Orientalist⁴⁸ geographies through the theoretical and methodological approaches of generations of scholars studying these newly-rechristened “oliphants.”⁴⁹ The elephant/stalker horn in particular occupied an important position on the art historical front lines of the early–twentieth-century struggle to develop coherent art histories implicated, either explicitly or implicitly, in the contemporary political landscape. The Met horn—an impressive object by any number of standards, prominently displayed in a culturally and economically influential institution in an economically and culturally influential city—has garnered its fair share of admirers over the past century-and-a-half in both scholarly and collecting circles. By and large, they have understood it as an “oliphant”: indeed, a particularly illustrative example of the Islamic, “Oriental,” or “Saracenic” origins of the corpus (Figure 15a, b; cf. cover of Shalem [2004], Figure 15c). The methodological approaches and terminological commitments of generations of scholars studying the object continue to shape its reception and influence the political effect of the Met horn up even to the present moment.

⁴⁸ On Orientalism in art and art history of the nineteenth century, see Linda Nochlin’s famous article, “The Imaginary Orient” (1983) and the introduction of Wharton (1995). On Orientalism and Islamic art history see *inter alia* Blair and Bloom (2003, 153–54), Shalem (2012a; 2012b *passim*).

⁴⁹ Though the term is of course much older, carved ivory horns from the medieval period were not primarily known as “oliphants” during the earlier stages of their lives; the term’s use increased in frequency during the nineteenth-century growth in scholarship on the horns (*q.v.* Shalem 2014, 19–20). Of course, some scholars continued to refer to the objects as tusks or (ivory) horns, including notably Ernst Kühnel’s mentor, Otto von Falke (who referred to them primarily as “Elfenbeinhörner”: *id.* 1929; 1930).

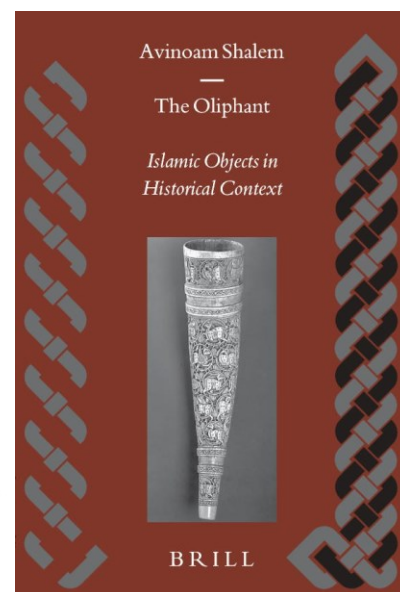


Figure 15a, b, c: (a, b) Elephant/stalker horn as depicted in (a) 1970 promotional material for Kühnel's posthumous catalog (1971), after Kröger (2005, fig. 181), and (b) in the English translation of his popular handbook (1971 [1925]); (c) cover of Shalem (2004) eBook, featuring subtitle and image of a Fāṭimid-style oliphant (Berlin, MIK № K. 3106, cf. Figure 19b).

2.1 *I(vory) Put a Spell on You: Insidious Aesthetics*

The present chapter is to no small extent predicated upon the biographies and motivations of white male scholars and connoisseurs whose values and convictions had profound institutional effects on the reception and significance of the elephant/stalker horn throughout the twentieth century. This is not the result of historical accident—ivory and above all tusky objects such as the elephant/stalker horn have embodied several key aspects of white masculinity for generations of Europeans and Americans. Of particular relevance are ivory's roles as a form of commodified white flesh (as opposed to the commodified black flesh of enslaved Africans) and the notable resemblances between tusk and phallus.

2.1.1 WHITE IVORY AND BLACK

Ivory has long been implicated in European contexts as an uncanny substitute for human flesh, particularly of the white variety. Nowhere is this more apparent than the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century during the height of the European colonization of Africa. During this period such a move was accomplished through the constitutive juxtaposition—metaphorical and dreadfully actual—of two types of ivory: the “white ivory” brought to Europe and America as the tusks of elephants and the “black ivory” of

enslaved Africans, whose persons remained distanced by insidious geographies from proximate contact with most white inhabitants of the Global North. Despite this geographic displacement, the overlap between ivory and enslaved persons was never far from the minds of white authors. Europeans and Americans employed the trope for a wide variety of ends and from opposing political stances and it permeated their cultural imaginations on any number of levels. In a letter to London-based periodical *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, the Reverend Horace Waller made note of the entanglement of the “two ivories”:

[The previous correspondent] Mr. Stanley forcibly points out to the world what a factor the use of white ivory is for intensifying the misery of Africa[.]⁵⁰ ... Given an increase in billiard-playing as a pastime, there will be a rise in the price of “scrivelloes”—the smaller tusks, from which billiard balls are cut—and the elephant herds will eventually become aware of it by the administration of bullets. This is simply in accordance with the laws of supply and demand. ... As with the white-ivory yielding elephants in their tribes, so with the black ivory tribes who exist by the same rivers and lakes which they haunt, and they have this in common when demand comes from without—the bullet decimates alternately in hunt and raid.⁵¹

The Reverend Waller’s full remarks are as passionate for the liberation of his “darker relatives” as they are deeply problematic. Apart from the convention of naming itself, the Reverend’s concern in the use of the white/black ivory motif is based upon significant commonalities between the experiences of elephants and Black Africans, namely their origin in the East African landscape and their vulnerability to the deadly violence of commodification and colonization brought about at the collision of lead and flesh. But such serious sympathy for Africans human and elephant alike (demeaning and reductive as it may have been) was not echoed by all.

⁵⁰ Forcibly indeed—Stanley’s piece, printed on the previous page, closed with confident assertion: “I say that if there was no market for ivory there would be no ivory raiders, and he who buys ivory now-a-days buys an article which has been obtained by murder, theft, and rapine” (*id.* “Response to Mr. Pease,” *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, May/June 1890, p. 85).

⁵¹ Rev. Horace Waller, “White Ivory and Black,” *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, May/June 1890, p. 86.



Toy Town.
All the people of Toy Town are very busy: you see, they are making Tommy Brown's birthday presents. Yellow Ball and Big Drum are nearly finished, but Soldier has been rather naughty. "I won't have another coat of paint on," he said. Quacker Duck, in the corner there, is mighty proud of his yellow spots, and he gounded so loudly about them just now that Missus Mouse cried because he wanted some too!

HIDDEN behind the clump of mangoes, the boat rocked lazily, as a sluggish tide made its way up-river. The steamy heat was almost unbearable, even in the shade, for the African sun had been pouring down on the swamp for several hours, but the occupants of the boat were very wide awake.

In the sternsheets sat two middlemen, Denys Bolton and Jack Deere. Denys, the elder of the two, was in command.

"They ought to be dropping downstream now," said Denys, nipping his face. "If they give us the slip, we shall be 'for it'!"

"We should miss a scrap, too," remarked Jack. "I wonder what sort of a hole Podgy has crept into."

"Podgy" it must be explained, was Lieutenant James Bartram, R.N. A cherubic countenance and portliness of figure were responsible for the nickname by which all ranks knew him. At the moment he and his boat were concealed somewhere along the opposite bank of the river.

For some time East African authorities had been complaining that somebody was supplying the natives with modern rifles. When these complaints reached the Admiralty, Captain Shandon was ordered to proceed in H.M.S. *Rufand* to the likeliest points of delivery to take "necessary action." A rumour that a strange craft had nosed her way up the Marangi River with lights out, seemed to invite investigation, and two days later the cruiser crept into the river mouth after dusk.

Guns

and Black Ivory

An Adventure Story by E. L. ROBERTS

FOR another half-hour the boat and its occupants sweltered in the scorching heat. Then, suddenly, from up the river came a faint hum.

"They're coming," whispered Denys to his cox. "Ease her forward."

Noislessly the boat glided through the mangroves, till it reached the last fringe of leaves. Through the foliage the two boys peered up the river, their eyes fixed on the distant bend. Suddenly a blunt bow pushed into sight, and there a dirty tramp steamer chugged round the corner.

"Here she is!" exclaimed Denys.

"And she's coming down our side," chuckled Jack. "Podgy won't let her get much farther before—"

A rifle-shot split the silence.

"Give way!" shouted Denys.

The boat shot out into the stream, and at the same moment Podgy's hall of the expedition emerged from a creek on the opposite bank. "They've a machine-gun in the bows," announced

Jack, "and Podgy's going to get it right in the neck—"

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

Before the burst of firing ceased Denys steered alongside.

"No shooting unless you have to," he commanded, as he swarmed up the side.

The attention of the tramp's crew had been riveted on the shore from which the rifle had been fired, and Denys and his men were aboard before their opponents realised that a double attack was in progress. Then, led by a burly, unshaven giant swinging a spangler, there was a rush aft.

THERE was a confused scrimmage as the *Rufand's* party tried to make good their footing on the deck. But they were heavily outnumbered, and were being pressed back when, with a cheer, "Podgy" and his men tumbled over the side and charged the gun-runners from the rear. Taken by surprise, the crew of the tramp were soon overpowered and securely tied up.

"Hot work while it lasted," remarked Podgy, as he wiped his brow. "You got aboard very smartly, Bolton, but you might have had a rough passage if we hadn't caught the beggars heading, as it were."

"I was jolly glad to see you come over the side, Sir," said Denys. "In another five minutes they'd have pushed us into the river."

"Yes," agreed Podgy. "Hullo, young Deere! You look as if you'd found a chest full of pirate gold."

"Not quite, Sir," replied Jack, "only a board of black ivory."

Podgy glanced down an open hatch and whistled.

"These!" he said, "the fellow was a glutton—running guns one way and slaves the other!"

Poering into the shadows, Denys saw scores of negroes packed like sardines.

"Very good!" remarked Podgy rather fiercely. "Just to show what we think of him, we'll clap the skipper of this barge into iron, and let him sample the atmosphere down there for a spell."

Toy-making from Trifles

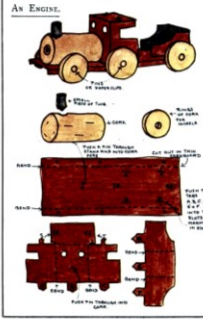


Figure 16: Page four of "The Fun Fair" supplement to *Britannia & Eve* vol. 1 № 4 (Aug. 1929), featuring "Guns and Black Ivory." Image: ProQuest (color levels corrected by author).

Some forty years later the newly incorporated *Britannia & Eve*, a self-described *Monthly Journal for Men & Women*, published a "Fun Fair" supplement aimed at a younger audience, replete with brightly-illustrated comics and tales of adventure. On the last page, negotiating its way between a single-panel comic on the left depicting the travails of the industrious inhabitants of Toy Town and a diagram for making a toy engine from "trifles"⁵² below (Figure 16), the magazine spelled out an action-packed vignette with the simple and tantalizing title "Guns and Black Ivory." The brief adventure centers on Lt. James "Podgy" Bartram's adroit sting operation on behalf of the British Admiralty against a party of slavers led by an unnamed "burly, unshaven giant." When the Brits seize the slavers' ship, they rejoice in the handy victory pulled off

⁵² Specifically speaking: cork, cardboard, pins or paperclips, and "a small piece of twig."

by Podgy's timely intervention. The story ends with a brief exchange between the lieutenant and his compatriots:

"Hot work while it lasted," remarked Podgy, as he wiped his brow. ... "Hullo, young Dacre! You look as if you'd found a chest full of pirate gold."

"Not quite, Sir," replied Jack, "only a hoard of black ivory."

Podgy glanced down an open hatch and whistled. "Phew!" he said, "the fellow was a glutton—running guns one way and slaves the other!"

Peering into the shadows, Denys saw scores of negroes packed like sardines.

"Very good!" remarked Podgy rather fiercely. "Just to show what we think of him, we'll clap the skipper of this barge into irons, and let him sample the atmosphere down there for a spell."⁵³

The posse's mission was prompted not by a desire to palliate human misery but rather a formal request from colonial officials to disarm the "natives" of their "modern rifles," and the slaver captain's just desserts are predicated on the continuation of the pernicious effects of his trade as he is thrown into the otherwise unaltered bowels of the ship he had once captained. Apart from its usefulness in demonstrating the commonplace and pernicious characterization of enslaved Africans as "black ivory," the story reveals a startling variety of entangled economic, cultural, and political phenomena in under a thousand words—quite the weight of historical violence in such an ostensibly innocent tale of adventure for imaginative children.

2.1.2 HORNS AND HORNY MEN: TUSK AND PHALLUS

Although for most of the elephant/stalker horn's history, ivory was widely understood as a particularly feminine material,⁵⁴ tusks and horns have perhaps even longer-standing ties to the performance of masculinity. Countless cultures and makers have deployed the formal similarity between horn and phallus to the point of cliché, and the practical use of horns during the medieval period played an important role in the

⁵³ E.L. Roberts, "Guns and Black Ivory." *Britannia & Eve*, August 1929, vol. I № 4 (Supplement, "The Fun Fair").

⁵⁴ During the medieval period in Europe, ivory held strong associations with the Virgin Mary, grounded in several of the tusks' affective affordances, particularly whiteness and coldness. The material bound her to a Christological genealogy through her role as the *sedes sapientiae* in material, visual, and literary culture of the period. For ivory, coldness, and the throne of Solomon in medieval Marian devotional poetry, see e.g. Konrad von Würzburg, *Goldene Schmeide*, ll. 1746-59 (1840, 52–53). Ivory as a feminine medium for masculine genius is an important trope in classical and medieval literature through the foundational myth of Pygmalion and his ivory bride—an early insidious aesthetic of its own.

construction of masculinity in both martial and cynegetic scenarios, as demonstrated by Ganelon's attempts to deflect Charlemagne by downplaying the seriousness of the *olifant*'s call and questioning Roland's masculinity in the process (31 above). The formal qualities of carved ivory horns also afford them an ostentatiousness and theatricality absent in the majority of other medieval works in ivory, which are of a smaller, more intimate scale, and such scale and theatricality make tusky objects prime candidates for both exhibition (Figure 2–Figure 4, Figure 19, Figure 21–Figure 23) and advertisement (Figure 7, Figure 15a, *q.v.* also 44 below; Figure 18a).

In April 1904, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Purchasing Committee dispensed just over \$250,000—almost the entire returns up to that point from the newly-established Rogers Fund—for the acquisition of the *cabinet d'armes* of the fourth Duc de Dino (Figure 1, Figure 2). The duc, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, was a member of the French minor nobility whose penchant for both weapons and women was infamous on both sides of the Atlantic.⁵⁵ The entire collection was purchased as a single lot, and none of the committee members who officially approved the allocation of funds had seen the collection with their own eyes (though they did have access to a catalogue of the collection published three years prior, which included photogravure reproductions of both “oliphants”; here, Figure 7b). Unofficially, its purchase had been set in motion by the swift decision of then-President of the Board J. Pierpont Morgan, acting on personal knowledge of the Duc de Dino's tight financial situation as a result of the latter's impending divorce from his second wife, an American heiress born Adele Livingstone Sampson, whose wealth he had used to amass the famous collection.⁵⁶ Talleyrand's marriage to the erstwhile Mrs. Stevens

⁵⁵ For a profile of the Duc de Dino on the occasion of the collection's purchase by the Met, see the Marquise de Fontenoy's piece, ““Citizen Perigord”: Duke of Dino Whose Armor Has Been Bought by Metropolitan” (*New York Daily Tribune*, April 15th, 1904).

⁵⁶ Stuart Pyhrr asserts that the details of Talleyrand's means of financing his incredibly expensive collecting habit cannot be established without doubt (2012, 186), but contemporaries assumed much of it came from the considerable sum of three million dollars brought into the marriage by Ms. Sampson. Indeed, they made quite a significant matter of the relationship: “There is a certain poetical justice in the coming to New York of [the Duc's] collection, for had he not obtained the sinews of war by his marriage to a New York lady, the Duke could have acquired neither the tools of wars gone by nor the pranksome clothing of dead grandees who thought themselves in all seriousness warriors” (*The New York Times*, “Famous Armor for New York,” May 1st, 1904, p. 6).

(Mr. Stevens, a prominent New Yorker, being her first husband) and the events preceding it⁵⁷ were the source of much consternation⁵⁸ among the social elite of contemporary New York: two days after the lovers were wed in Paris, news of the nuptials broke above the fold of *The New York Times*, in the top right corner just below the words PRICE TWO CENTS.⁵⁹

The duc's interests in material culture were somewhat eclectic—he was known as an enthusiast for “bibelots and bric-a-brac”⁶⁰—but the focus of his “serious” collecting was quite specific, and he dedicated his efforts to amassing the best representative pieces of European arms and armor with strong concentrations in the Renaissance and early modern period. The Dino horns likely made it into the *cabinet* because the duc appreciated them as “artifacts belonging to the same chivalric culture” as the rest of his collection (Pyhrr 2012, 184; note, however, that they antedate the other items in his collection by several centuries, a fact acknowledged in de Cosson's catalog). The tusky origins of the object and its use as an instrument of war and/or hunting interpenetrate with other layers of prestige embodied in ivory to assemble a potent image of aristocratic masculinity. The elephant/stalker horn and its compatriot, as unmatched items in the duc's hypermasculine assemblage, were no less performative of his noble manhood than Roland's *olifant* at Roncesvalles, and the elephant/stalker horn's brief ten-year stint with the duc is above all an episode in the tumultuous story of an oversexed aristocrat, two faithless lovers, and three failed marriages.

⁵⁷ Her flight to Europe (while still married to Mr. Stevens) was taken by many as a pursuit of the then–Marquis Talleyrand-Périgord, although individuals close to the newly-anointed Duchesse naturally denied the allegations (*The New York Times*, Feb. 20th, 1887). Ms. Sampson divorced Maurice in 1903, not long before the sale which brought the elephant/stalker horn to the Met; she dropped his surname but kept her title, thereby becoming the second well-to-do American socialite to do so. Maurice's first ex-wife, a Brooklynite of standing born Miss Elizabeth Beers-Curtis, was known from their marriage until her death as the Marquise de Talleyrand-Périgord (dying in 1933, she outlived both Adele [d. 1912] and Maurice [d. 1917]). Not to be outdone, Adele insisted that her marriage to Maurice come with a distinct (and more impressive) title; on their wedding day, the Marquis' father transferred his ducal title to his son, making Maurice the fourth Duc de Dino and Adele the Duchesse de Dino (Pyhrr 2012, 184), allegedly for the explicit benefit of the new bride (*The New York Times*, Jan. 27th, 1887; Marquise de Fontenoy, “‘Citizen Perigord’,” *New-York Tribune*, Apr. 15th, 1904).

⁵⁸ The pair is mentioned in an 1893 *New York Times* piece as an example of wily European men absconding with American heiresses (“Have Found Husbands Abroad,” Apr. 19th).

⁵⁹ *The New York Times*, “Married to Her Marquis: The Final Act in a Strange Life Story,” Jan. 27th, 1887.

⁶⁰ “[The Duc's] collection of bibelots and of bric-a-brac is as marvellous as that of his ancient armor, which he has just sold, his taste in these matters being as delicate, sure and eclectic as that of Rochefort” (Marquise de Fontenoy, “‘Citizen Perigord’,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, April 15th, 1904, p. 9).

When the elephant/stalker horn debuted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it was exhibited as part of a collection of largely (but not exclusively) European arms and armor (Figure 2a, b). This is more than appropriate in light of the Rolandian legacy of *olifants*, but one would be hard-pressed to describe the Met horn at this point as a fundamentally “Islamic” object.

2.2 *Becoming-Saracen: 1909–1971*

Much of the most influential early twentieth-century scholarship on the medieval ivory horns came from German-language institutions affiliated intellectually with the Vienna School, most notably works by Otto von Falke and his student Ernst Kühnel. Many scholars working in the Viennese model spent countless hours on the close and prolonged autopsy of material culture: both the methodological commitments and personal convictions of art historians such as Kühnel and his mentee Richard Ettinghausen aligned with a collector’s ethos, and the two held prominent positions in influential museums throughout their careers. Materials-based collecting practices of museums of craft and industry such as the Kunstgewerbe Museum Berlin, where von Falke and Kühnel worked together, allowed for the inclusion of a variety of art objects produced in the Islamic world alongside those of European decorative arts traditions. The results of materials-based collecting practices were especially fruitful with respect to ivory, whose particular affordances proved captivating to a wide variety of audiences. The prior owners of several of the other so-called oliphants in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including both the pseudo-oliphant and the Hoentschel piece (*q.v.* notes 74 and 75 respectively), had devoted their efforts to amassing collections specifically oriented around the decorative arts and ivories specifically.

Unique sensory and affective affordances of ivory have made it a particularly enchanting material in itself as well as a prestigious medium of artistic production. Ernst Kühnel was certainly taken by the spell of ivory and spent the better part of his career producing a massive critical catalog on Islamic ivories, substantial portions of which he dedicated to an extensive discussion of the “sarazenischen Olifante” (see below, p. 44). *Olifante*, particularly those so-called Saracen pieces, were his lifelong obsession. He spent decades collecting hard-to-get photographs of the horns—tearing plates straight from volumes when

possible—and visited the objects on tours of collections across Europe and the Eastern United States (Kröger 2005, 277 and *passim*).

2.2.1 BECOMING-OLIPHANT: ERNST KÜHNEL

Oliphant Horns. Among the works in ivory which go under this mediaeval name, and which can in part be brought into more or less legendary association with historical personalities, is a comparatively well-defined group that can be claimed as Islamic. ...

Stylistically, these horns are close both to the Fatimid period of Egypt and to the orientally influenced romanesque art of southern Italy, and it is quite possible that they were produced exclusively for Christian countries in the Norman kingdom of Sicily during the eleventh century by Saracen craftsmen. (Kühnel 1971 [1925], 224, emphasis original)

In 1971, the popular handbook *Die islamische Kleinkunst*, written forty-six years prior by German art historian Ernst Kühnel (Neubrandenburg, 1882–Berlin, 1964), received an English translation by Katherine Watson published by Cornell University Press. The thin and well-illustrated volume surveys a wide variety of “minor”/decorative arts from across the Islamic world, and the horns receive their own particular heading in the chapter “Ivory, Wood, Stone, and Stucco.” Notably, Kühnel immediately asserts the medieval pedigree of “oliphant horns” and, without dropping the count’s name, cements their “more or less legendary association ... with historical personalities” of whom Roland is the quintessential example and most widely-accessible point of reference. The second crucial element present in this passage is the relationship established between material culture types and the identity of their makers. Kühnel posits that the Islamic-ness of oliphants such as the elephant/stalker horn—which itself appears as the sole representative of the “Saracenic” oliphants in the English translation (1971 [1925], fig. 190; here, Figure 15b)—is inscribed upon the objects by the hands of the craftspeople who carved them, despite the scholar’s own contention that the horns may have been made “exclusively for Christian countries” and consumption. Correspondingly, later “oliphants” made in such styles by Christian hands fail to pass muster as Islamic objects despite their “equally apparent” Islamic influence (*ibid.* 226).

Kühnel’s works on the medieval ivory horns, particularly those of “Saracenic” make, continue to be regularly quoted and have continued to serve as the basis for subsequent studies of the corpus into the twenty-first century (Shalem 2007, 164–65). In the same year as the English translation quoted above,

Kühnel's magnum opus *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen: 8.–13. Jahrhundert* was published posthumously in Berlin (1971). The first announcement for this long-awaited monumental volume⁶¹ featured a large and detailed reproduction of a single object from two angles (Figure 15a). Of the more nearly 150 ivories cataloged by Kühnel, the corpus' single representative piece, worthy of reproduction in two planes, was none other than the elephant/stalker horn. The opus' extensive treatment of *Olifante*⁶² along with his earlier articles on the subject (1959) are considered by many twenty-first century authors to be the starting point for modern scholarship on the corpus.⁶³ In this model, the Islamic-ness of carved tusks of a type such as the elephant/stalker derives directly from the ethnoreligious identity⁶⁴ of the objects' creators. Kühnel is also in no small way responsible for the persistence of the "mediaeval name" *oliphant*. His teacher and the prior major name in scholarship of the tusks, Otto von Falke (Vienna, 1862–Schwäbisch Hall, 1942) had written of the tusks as a meaningful corpus under the title *Elfenbeinhörner* ("ivory horns") which he considered under two regional stylistic groups, Egyptian/Southern Italian and Byzantine. Kühnel, dedicating his most intense treatments to horns in von Falke's former group, rechristened the ivory horns as *Olifante*. In addition to the insidious baggage of "the oliphant," Kühnel's resurrected determinant *sarazenisch* now explicitly foregrounded the ethnoreligious identity of the artifacts' makers.

⁶¹ Kühnel's corpus was published as part of Adolph Goldschmidt's longstanding series *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen*; Kühnel was asked by Goldschmidt himself to produce the volume on Islamic ivories, which the former continued to develop until his own death. More than one hundred years after its inception, the series is still published under the Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft imprint: the most recent volume is none other than Shalem's corpus, *Die mittelalterlichen Olifante* (2014), which continued the series' tradition of publishing volumes with impressive folio-sized plates (the earlier volumes were entirely folio-sized, a fact that did not initially appeal to Kühnel, who found it impractical and unwieldy; Kröger 2005, 280–81).

⁶² Note that the objects are no longer "oliphant horns" (*Olifanthörner*), per Kühnel's earlier work such as that quoted above in translation. The terminology used in the 1971 catalog, representative of Kühnel's most developed work on the *Olifante*, all but wholly effaces the formal and functional aspects of the objects in favor of the continuance of the insidious geography of the oliphant. We are left with the legacies of the elephant (fortunately) and Roland (less so); *q.v.* 34 above.

⁶³ E.g. Shalem: "Es war Ernst Kühnel, der 1959 in einer bedeutenden Abhandlung mit dem Titel «Die sarazenischen Olifanthörner» ein neues Konzept präsentierte und für die Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Olifante neue Prinzipien und Standards aufstellte" (2010, 299). Note that Kühnel's work on the horns goes back several decades further to at least 1921, when Kühnel delivered a lecture to the Kunstgeschichtliche Gesellschaft, Berlin titled "Die orientalischen Olifanthörner" (summarized in *id.* 1921), though he did not publish an extended treatment until the 1959 article.

⁶⁴ That is to say, the insidiously imposed identity of "Saracen."

2.3 Becoming-Islamic: 1971–Present



Figure 17: Elephant/stalker horn as depicted in a September 12th, 1975 *New York Times* article announcing the upcoming opening of the Met's new Islamic galleries Image: ProQuest (contrast edited by author).

Beginning in the 1970s, the Met horn began to play an increasingly large role in the scholarly and museological construction of Islamic art, corresponding with an explosion of studies in Islamic art and archaeology entangled with contemporary global political and economic turmoil (Blair and Bloom 2003, 156). It advertised Kühnel's monumental corpus of Islamic ivories (Figure 15a) and illustrated the "oliphant horns" in the English edition of *The Minor Arts of Islam* (Figure 15b).⁶⁵ In 1975 the horn was a central part of the new Islamic Galleries' debut under the guidance of Kühnel's mentee Richard Ettinghausen (Frankfurt am Main, 1906–Princeton, N.J., 1979). It even heralded the exhibit's opening to the readership of *The New*

⁶⁵ Note that the replacement of the 1925 illustration of a horn whose contemporary location was listed in publication only as "Kunsthandel" occurs as the location of publication shifts from Germany (Berlin) to the United States (Ithaca, N.Y.). This revision of the visual material facilitates the creation of a much more accessible relationship between the photographic representation, the audience, and the object itself—under new geographies and conditions of display.

York Times (Figure 17)⁶⁶—and it was lavishly reproduced as a two-page spread in *The Metropolitan Museum Bulletin*’s feature on Islamic art at the museum in anticipation of the new galleries’ upcoming opening penned by Ettinghausen, then–Consultative Chairman of the Islamic Department (1971–1979; Figure 18). This historic exhibit has continued to shape the conditions of display⁶⁷ of Islamic art for subsequent decades both at the Met and throughout the United States and Western Europe.



The school of art centered in Egypt during the reign of the Fatimids from Cairo (969–1171) is noted for a surprising increase in the use of human and animal motifs. They can be found on virtually all media, and in addition to their ubiquitousness when compared to earlier periods, the animals and figures now appear to be more alive and less spineless than their predecessors. The decoration on the deeply carved “elephant” (a horn of ivory) comprises a veritable encyclopedia of creatures popular at the time. This piece was made in southern Italy, and exemplifies the important role played by Fatimid artists in the art of neighboring countries.

In addition to the introduction of new motifs to the iconographic repertory, this period is also noted for a high level of craftsmanship. The goldwork is especially fine, with elaborate designs such as those on the pendant above constructed in filigree on a gold grid. The use of crescent-shaped ornaments was borrowed by the Fatimids from Byzantine art, as was the technique of cloisonné enamel (employed here for the birds in the center). This pendant would have been framed by strands of pearls or beads of precious or semiprecious stones, laced through the gold hoops around the edge.

Proof that artists were held in high esteem under the Fatimids is supplied by the number of signed works from this period—a quite sporadic practice until then. This luster-painted bowl with a powerful heraldic eagle bears the artist’s signature beneath the left talon and on the back.

Elephant: Southern Italy, second half of the 11th century; l. 23½ in.; Rogers Fund, 64.3.177. Pendant: Egypt, early 12th century; h. 1½ in.; The Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 30.95.37. Ceramic bowl, signed by Muslim: Egypt, about 1000; d. 10 in.; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles R. Wilkinson, 63.128.1.

Figure 18: Elephant/stalker horn as depicted in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*’s feature on Islamic art at the Met in anticipation of the opening of department’s new exhibit (after Ettinghausen 1975, 10–11).

⁶⁶ Grace Glueck, “Met Devoting 10 Galleries to Opulent Art of Islam.” *The New York Times*, September 12th, 1975.

⁶⁷ On conditions of display, cf. Richard Neer’s “conditions of (in)visibility” (ed. vol. Neer 2019a; and chapter *ibid.*, 2019b).



Figure 19a, b (detail): View of the exhibition of the Islamische Abteilung of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin ca. 1909–1910. Center case containing three ivory horns: two so-called “oliphants,” MIK № K. 3106 [center left, see also Figure 15c] and Skulptengalerie № 586 [horizontally oriented on lower level, center], and one later European pseudo-oliphant (*q.v.* note 74), K. 3107 [center right]). After Kröger (2005, Figure 175).

Two decades ago, Shelia Blair and Jonathan Bloom wrote of the 1975 Met galleries’ reception: “In many ways, the galleries were—and remain—intellectually conservative, for they essentially re-created the fabled exhibit of Islamic art that had been mounted in the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum of Berlin at the beginning of the century” (2003, 157). Despite widely commented-upon changes to the galleries’ names,⁶⁸ today’s Gallery 457 and particularly the two central vitrines dedicated to ivory objects from the Islamic West continue to echo the museological conventions of early twentieth-century Germany. A 1909–1910 photograph of the Islamische Abteilung of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum features a prominent case containing several carved ivories including a Fāṭimid-style horn like the elephant/stalker (Figure 19; the horn, Berlin MIK № K. 3106, would later appear as the cover illustration of Shalem’s 2004 monograph, Figure 15c). Casemates of the Berlin horns included caskets related stylistically to Fāṭimid-style horns such as the elephant/stalker, remarkably similar to the famed Morgan casket that currently occupies its own vitrine

⁶⁸ In 2011, the galleries reopened after several years of renovations, rebranded as the Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia. The renaming was not without its critics, even among admirers of the exhibit who continued to use the appellation “Islamic.” *The Economist*, in a glowing review of the galleries, referred to the new “official and unwieldy name” only once (Oct. 29th, 2011), while Nasser Rabbat, writing in *Artforum*, opined, “[A]lthough I am absolutely taken by the Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia, I will still call them the Galleries of Islamic Art, without the inverted commas” (*id.* 2012, 78).

cattycorner to the case that contains the elephant/stalker horn and the Hoentschel piece (Figure 20). The parallel conditions of display between the case in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum and that containing the elephant/stalker horn in Met Gallery 457 are unmistakable (Figure 3–Figure 4; Figure 19). The Fāṭimid-style horns in both displays share a prominent, upright, and speciously self-supported stance, as opposed to horizontal orientations such as those used in the 1907 display of the Dino collection (Figure 2b) and the current display of the second horn from the Dino purchase (Figure 21–Figure 22). As hunting horns such tusks may be left dormant when unemployed by their user’s “gauntleted hand,” but as emissaries of Islamic art these “oliphants” need no longer wait for activation by the hands (and lips) of their users: the objects themselves, as the products of Muslim or “Saracen” craftspersons, embody Islamicness through a quasi-magical relationship with their makers’ hands insidiously effected by the geography of the vitrine.



Figure 20: Casket (so-called Morgan casket), elephant ivory. Sicily or Southern Italy, 11th or 12th century CE. Including view of case with elephant/stalker horn, back left. *Mise-en-scène*, Gallery 457, August 2021. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: author.



Figure 21: Horn (*sic*: “oliphant [hunting horn]”) *ex coll.* Dino, elephant ivory. Sicily or Southern Italy, 11th century CE. Metropolitan Museum of Art (№ 04.3.178). Photo: author, August 2021.



Figure 22: Case with carved ivory horn *ex coll.* Dino and crossbows with ivory inlay. *Mise-en-scène*, Gallery 373 (Arms and Armor), August 2021. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: author.

But this self-evidently Saracenic or Islamic object functions so only as an insidious fiction. Based upon both its deeper life history and its more proximate object biography, I vehemently oppose the characterization of the elephant/stalker horn as an Islamic object and, barring significant variations between the life history of individuals, I would extend such an argument towards other Fāṭimid-style “oliphant” horns (a term whose ethical-epistemic flaws I have already lain out). Inasmuch as one can (re)use “the oliphant,” objects of these types are hardly Islamic objects on the mere basis that the human whose hands carved the horn had also pronounced the *shahada*.⁶⁹ The inclusion of the elephant/stalker horn in the construction of the discipline and display of Islamic art is, however, incongruent with contemporary meta-disciplinary discourse and represents a vestigial spur entangling these constructions in insidious geographies directly emergent from European colonialisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their directly implicated counterparts in the United States.

3 EPILOGUE: AN ELEPHANT’S MEMORY

The Next Hundred Years

Entre yeso y jazmines, tu mirada
era un pálido ramo de simientes.
Yo busqué, para darte, por mi pecho
las letras de marfil que dicen siempre.

Siempre, siempre: jardín de mi agonía
tu cuerpo fugitivo para siempre...

*Between plaster and jasmine,
your glance, a pale branch of seed.
I searched my breast to give you
the ivory letters saying: Ever.*

*Ever, ever, my agony’s garden,
your elusive form forever...*

— Federico García Lorca, “Gacela del amor imprevisto,”
trans. Catherine Brown (García Lorca 1991 [1940], 654–55)

⁶⁹ I do *not* however wish to make the claim that there are neither many truly Islamic art objects nor art(s) of Islam. As historians of Islamic art have recognized, there is a fallacious artificiality to treating “Islam” and “Islamic art” as monolithic entities (e.g. Shalem 2012b, 1). This had led some to believe that the discipline’s very organization is based on faulty premises, while others have indicated that emic theories of art, culture, and religion support the notion of the “art(s) of Islam.”

Elephants' legendary memories extend beyond their mortal tenure in the form of the continuing vital relationships sustained between their stripped tusks and generations of human bodies. The above passage is taken from the first *gacela* of Lorca's *Tamarit Divan*, a collection of verse ruminating on, indeed *obsessing* over the enduring cultural presence of Muslim habitation in Lorca's native Andalucía: Lorca even adapts a popular genre of Arabic-Persian love poetry, the *ghazal*, to give form to this *gacela*. In these stanzas, the narrator plunges into his breast for a material intimate and visceral enough to hold the forever he would give his lover. These ivory letters are alive, ripped from the poet's flesh (or rather, the elephant's),⁷⁰ but they do not share in the latter's mortality. Ivory not only brings Lorca closer to eternity with his lover but indeed binds him with the same ties of memory and desire to both the Andalucía of his own time and the Andalus of 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Nāṣir and Lady Ṣubḥ.⁷¹ For Lorca, ivory more than any other material is capable of conveying the excruciating, gravitational attraction of lover and beloved, both human and historical, throughout time.

3.1 *Conditions of Display: Seeing the Met Horns Today*

Recall the vivid account from the Sunday, May 15th *New York Times* feature that introduced this study. Like my own, the reporter's time and interest are lavished primarily upon the elephant/stalker horn, but the author does not fail to mention the existence of a second horn acquired during the purchase. The other Dino horn (Met № 04.3.178, Figure 21) is displayed in a small gallery in the Arms and Armor collection (Gallery 373, Figure 22). The contrast in the conditions of display between the first Dino horn in the Islamic gallery and the second horn in Arms and Armor is of great significance. The Arms and Armor horn has far fewer representations of animals,⁷² being instead characterized by lengthwise bands of vegetal motifs that divide

⁷⁰ Note also the substantial formal similarity between ribs and tusks.

⁷¹ 'Abd al-Raḥman III, first Umayyad Caliph of Córdoba (r. 912–961 CE), patron of numerous surviving works in ivory. On Lady Ṣubḥ (d. 999 CE), consort of al-Ḥakam II (son and successor of 'Abd al-Raḥman III) and her pyxis now in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, see Silva Santa-Cruz (2014, 117ff.).

⁷² The second Dino horn does have a series of roundels around its bell that contain a variety of fantastic and natural creatures, most of which, in contrast to the elephant/stalker horn, contain multiple animals; none of the latter break free from their roundels (detailed figures can be found on the Met website as of writing). Many of these figures are difficult if not impossible for most visitors to see in any detail, again in contrast to the Met horn, which is

the horn's body into several sections of flat, polished, and mostly unadorned tusk in the large central portion. The horn sits in an out-of-the-way spot on the lower left-hand floor of a tall case, apparently an afterthought to complement the crossbows that are the display's main concern (note that the Dino horns were exhibited alongside one of the duc's ivory-inlaid crossbows in the original installation of the purchase, Figure 2b). To inspect the piece in any detail requires crouching awkwardly in the corner of the gallery. On an August 2021 research visit to the Met, I expected to secure and photograph the second Dino horn with little ado—much to my chagrin, I located the object only after my third rotation through the gallery. Underwhelmed and somewhat bemused, I found the conditions of display to be nonetheless incredibly thought-provoking. Why should the elephant/stalker horn occupy such a commanding space in the Islamic gallery while its erstwhile companion sits in relative obscurity among the archaic instruments of slaughter—or elite pretense thereof?



Figure 23: Fragment of a horn (“oliphant”), elephant ivory. Southern Italy, Sicily, or North Africa, 11th century CE. Metropolitan Museum of Art (№ 17.190.219). *Mise-en-scène*, Gallery 457, August 2021. Photo: author.

visible from 360°. Notably, the frieze remains consistent with the iconographic construction of hybridity attested by the roundel surrogates on the VAM horn mentioned above (p. 29, Figure 14a, b) despite its substantial formal differences between the two in terms of both body and frieze (the second Dino horn does not feature any animals exhibiting the tail-head hybridity present in both the elephant/stalker and VAM horns).

Today the five⁷³ medieval⁷⁴ “oliphants” in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s collection are under the curatorial care of three different departments and occupy spaces in four separate galleries. The elephant/stalker horn resides in Gallery 457, Spain, North Africa, and the Western Mediterranean, 8th–19th centuries, alongside the fragment *ex coll. Hoentschel*⁷⁵ (№ 17.190.219, Figure 23; also back right of Figure 3). The second Dino horn is housed in Gallery 373, European Arms and Armor, as described above. The pseudo-oliphant from the Oppenheim collection (№ 17.190.215; note 74) is displayed in Gallery 684, dedicated to musical instruments and organized by their functional similarities rather than under any specific regional, cultural, or other geographic schema. An impressive and age-worn tusk depicting a cross-bearing lamb (№ 17.190.218) for a long time occupied a prominent space in Gallery 305 (Medieval Art) and a placard remained in its place when I visited in August 2021 despite the object’s removal, according to the slip, two years prior; since then, it has been transferred for exhibition at the Met’s secondary location dedicated to medieval art, the Met Cloisters. As for the curatorial departments claiming responsibility for these tusks, the two Dino horns (including the elephant/stalker horn) fall under the aegis of the Department of Arms and Armor as a result of the circumstances of their acquisition: in fact, the Dino purchase, of which the horns were an unique and significant element, played a major role in the establishment of the department itself (Pyhrr 2012, 183, 209–10). The fragment that shares a case with the elephant/stalker horn belongs to

⁷³ This is somewhat of a generous figure: the Met has three complete “oliphants” that meet my established material and historical requirements as well as a piece of the upper portion of another Fāṭimid-style horn, sawn off at the lower end and broken at the top (№ 17.190.219, Figure 23, *ex. coll. Hoentschel*, via Morgan).

⁷⁴ The final “oliphant” in the collection, № 17.190.215, which I include here with a strong caveat, is in fact a seventeenth-century recreation of a Fāṭimid-style horn like the elephant/stalker and is thus most accurately referred to as a pseudo-oliphant based on its conscious adaption of proper “oliphants” and significant historical distance from the requisite period. Despite the confirmation of the horn’s early modern origin through radiocarbon dating reported to Shalem by Met personnel (*id.* 2014, 419, Cat. Anhang B 4; the *terminus post quem* for the elephant’s death is 1640 CE), as of August 2021 the object’s label and the Met’s website both ascribe the object to Italy of the twelfth or thirteenth century.

⁷⁵ Georges Hoentschel, the piece’s former owner and himself an interior designer, was a collector of European decorative arts, including many ivories. The Hoentschel piece’s lack of structural integrity (or at least the formal pretense thereof) is of great import, given the present emphasis on the tuskiness/hornlike qualities of “oliphants” (but ultimately not enough to disqualify it from consideration, as its elephantine origin remains loud and clear on several other levels). Divorced from the appearance of horn and to a degree tusk as well, the piece becomes primary evidence of traditions of iconography and craft in support of the insidious geography emergent from the exhibit. This evidentiary positioning is certainly abundantly present in “complete” horns, but the prominence of the role of craft and iconography ascends to a much higher level in the presentation of the Hoentschel piece.

the Met's Department of Islamic Art, along with the pseudo-oliphant in the musical instruments gallery. The *agnus dei* horn—the only of the Met pieces bearing explicitly religious (viz., Christian) imagery—belongs to the Met's Department of Medieval Art, despite coming to the museum as part of the same donation as the Hoentschel piece and the Oppenheim pseudo-oliphant (all three entered the museum's collection as part of the famed Morgan Gift of 1917). Each horn is used in its respective gallery to promote a different art historical discourse, of which the elephant/stalker horn's display (accompanied by the Hoentschel piece) may be the most insidious.

3.2 “An Article Obtained by Murder, Theft, and Rapine”⁷⁶

Many lives are still on the line in the material and ideological conflict heralded by the elephant/stalker horn: I wish to end this study by directing your urgent attention to the devastatingly small number of elephants roaming Africa today. Since I began this project, the International Union of Nature and Natural Resources has declared the African savannah elephant endangered and its smaller cousin the African forest elephant critically so (IUCN 2021; Gobush, Edwards, Balfour, et al. 2021; Gobush, Edwards, Maisels, et al. 2021). Over the course of the past century, African elephants have been the victims of a relentless campaign of other-than-human genocide. In 1930, as many as ten million elephants freely roamed Africa; today there are fewer than five hundred thousand.⁷⁷ To say that their population has been decimated is quite literally inaccurate and does not begin to capture the astounding decline in African elephant populations.

As you prepare to finish this paper, the tuskless corpses of dozens of elephants lie rotting in the hot African sun. Thousands of elephants die per year for the insatiable desire of their teeth, but not even a dozen new ivory horns and a thousand resplendent pyxides could justify the murder of one more elephant. The slaughter of even a single elephant is a grave crime: they are highly social creatures living in multigenerational matriarchal kin groups, displaying traits of grief, compassion, altruism, and generational memory (Garstang 2015). Poaching has been shown to adversely affect the social development of elephant kin

⁷⁶ Henry M. Stanley, “Response to Mr. Pease,” *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, May/June 1890, p. 85. Quoted also in note 50.

⁷⁷ *World Wildlife Magazine*, “The Status of African Elephants,” Winter 2018.

groups, especially for orphaned elephants (Goldenberg and Wittemyer 2018). And yet the deadly commodification of their bodies continues at unsurpassed rates.

3.2.1 A MURDEROUS GAME: TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SAFARIS

Europeans and Americans spent the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sponsoring large-scale ivory hunting operations and murderous safaris for “pranksome ... grandees who thought themselves in all seriousness warriors.”⁷⁸ The disgusting tradition of bumbling affluent Americans reenacting the colonial exploits of their fin-de-siècle predecessors is alive and well in the present day. In April 2021 *The New Yorker* in association with *The Trace* published clips from a 2013 video of Wayne and Susan LaPierre depicting the gruesome and pathetic attempt of the National Rifle Association’s president to end the life of an elephant he had been tailing on a shoot for an NRA-sponsored television series, *Under Wild Skies*.⁷⁹ LaPierre, equipped with the trappings of industrial murder and accompanied by experienced guides, was unable to end his victim’s life after wounding it with a poor shot; after four attempts, a high-ranking (and far more capable) NRA associate moved in to finish the dirty work. LaPierre’s wife Susan, depicted in another video from the same excursion, fared much better: with the aid of a tripod, she was able to end the life of her quarry in a single shot. Walking around the corpse after shooting the animal a second time to ensure its death, LaPierre expresses awe but little respect. At the instruction of her guide, she hacks off the final two feet of the elephant’s tail, waving it proudly in the air while laughing and reciting the show’s tagline.

Although NRA spokespeople maintain that the hunt itself was licensed and fully legal, documents reported in a follow-up to the above-cited *New Yorker* article suggest that the LaPierres committed several crimes related to the hunt in the subsequent months of 2013.⁸⁰ In the process of arranging for the transport

⁷⁸ As *The New York Times* described the original owners of the Duc de Dino’s collection (article quoted also in note 1).

⁷⁹ Mike Spies, “The Secret Footage of the N.R.A. Chief’s Botched Elephant Hunt,” *The New Yorker*, April 27th, 2021. Sponsorship of the television series *Under Wild Skies* and the 2013 hunt itself form an explicit part of the NRA’s political activism according to an email from the NRA’s managing director of public affairs quoted in the July 29th follow-up to the exposé (*id.*, “How the Head of the N.R.A. and His Wife Secretly Shipped Their Elephant Trophies Home,” *The New Yorker*).

⁸⁰ Mike Spies, “How the Head of the N.R.A. and His Wife Secretly Shipped Their Elephant Trophies Home,” *The New Yorker*, July 29th, 2021.

of their victims' carcasses (elephants and several other species), both LaPierres allegedly undertook criminal actions to cover their tracks and ensure that their names remained unassociated with such revolting acts.⁸¹ The forefeet⁸² of their elephant victims were turned into stools, an umbrella stand, and a trashcan.

Consider that again: a trashcan. The limb of a sentient being whose murder was recorded for entertainment and political gain, the foot that once held up a beast of unparalleled majesty and grace now sits, skinned and hollowed-out on the floor of some multi-millionaire's villa, collecting the detritus of decadence. Their extensive efforts to cover up the details of their murderous vacation may suggest that the LaPierres did feel a certain amount of shame surrounding the affair, but resting one's posterior on an elephant's foot would appear to indicate little remorse. To truly ensure the survival of elephants into future generations, there is a radical but unavoidable solution: the complete abolition of trade in elephant flesh on a global scale and the uniform enforcement of these provisions.

3.2.2 ENDING COMMODIFICATION: DISMANTLING THE IVORY TRADE

The LaPierres cannot take all the blame. They are merely elements of an insidious geography dependent upon the quasi-universal commodifiability of vulnerable persons and bodies, human and animal alike. No other global economic system has underwritten the slaughter of so many elephants worldwide as advanced capitalism. Although the CITES Treaty has since 1989 banned the international trade in elephant ivory harvested before 1948, most ivory on the market comes from newly slaughtered elephants living within specific geopolitical zones (itself a result of the continuing legacies of colonialism underwritten by the discursive and economic forces entangled with "oliphants'" modern reception; Aryal, Morley, and McLean 2018, 2768). Two sanctioned, "one-off" sales of ivory stockpiles in 1999 and 2008 added a combined sum

⁸¹ As of the exposé's writing, the transactions related to the taxidermy of their trophies were implicated in the New York Attorney General's ongoing effort seeking to dissolve the NRA.

⁸² Susan LaPierre took a particular interest in the feet. Approaching her quarry after the kill, she fondled his feet, proclaiming, "A podiatrist would love working on him." LaPierre is not the only recent high-profile recipient of elephant-foot stools: at a 2019 summit President Mokgweetsi Masisi of Botswana presented his counterparts from Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe with stools made from elephant feet. The intent of the summit was to promote a relaxation of the CITES ban on the trade of ivory (*BBC News*, "Botswana Gives Leaders Stools Made from Elephant Feet," May 7th, 2019).

of over twenty million dollars of ivory to the global market, and quite likely fueled the rapid and alarming increase of poaching rates in the past decade. Discrepancies of several orders of magnitude between the output of ivory workshops in China and estimates of illegal shipments of ivory to the country suggest that ivory is being hoarded by speculators hoping that its increasing rarity will provide ample returns in the future (Sosnowski et al. 2019, 397).

A wide community of scientists, conservationists, and concerned individuals operating under the aegis of dozens of state and non-governmental institutions assert that the only effective way to ensure the survival of elephant species from imminent extinction is a complete ban on the trade in ivory (Harvey 2016; Aryal, Morley, and McLean 2018; The Elephant Charter n.d.). In other words, the rapacious commodification of their desirable teeth is causing elephants' disappearance at an alarming rate, and their very survival depends upon the immediate decommodification of their flesh.

3.3 *Remember: Elephants*

The virtue of kindness is inate^(sic) to [elephants], such that if perchance they should see a man wandering through the wastelands, they offer to guide him as far as the familiar roads. Or if they should meet with cattle roped together, they make way for themselves with a gentle and quiet trunk, lest any tusks should kill an animal in the way. If it happens that they are engaged in battle, they take more than modest care of the wounded, for they take the tired and hurt into their midst. (medieval bestiary after Solinus, *Collectanea* 25.6–7; Clark 2006, 130)

Odds are strong that you have neither blown an ivory horn nor slain a pachyderm, but elephants' remains continue to embed themselves in our environments in unexpected ways. During the course of my research I moved into a boarding house of some age, and after a week or so I descended to inspect the neglected piano in my building's basement. Its dull blue-green paint—clearly not the instrument's original coat—was cracked in several places while the keys, five of which had been stripped of their facings, were covered with a thin layer of grime and dust that nonetheless exposed traces of fingers from the not-too-distant past (Figure 24). A thin, cream-colored veneer lay atop the piano, stripped from one of the wooden key bases (Figure 25a, b). Picking it up to inspect, I noticed its lightness and incredible tensile strength as well as the marks of growth indicating its age and origin.



Figure 24: Kurtzmann piano, detail showing keyboard with ivory veneer. Piano: Buffalo, New York, 1917; keyboard: likely Connecticut. Serial № 62306. Photo: author, August 2021.



Figure 25a, b: Two ivory veneers from keyboard pictured above. Left key: obverse high C (single long strip of ivory); right key: smaller end, reverse, showing scoring to attach glue and fabric and incision at bottom to fit ivory facing. For scale: 2022 Maya Angelou quarter (reverse), 1947 wheat penny (reverse). Photos: author, April 2022.

For the entire preceding week, I had been reading and writing of elephants and their tusks, totally oblivious to the presence of those teeth laid out just a flight of stairs below me in thin, bleached strips. In retrospect, such a discovery perhaps should not have come as a surprise. The largest single consumer of

ivory in the early twentieth century was the keyboard industry, dominated in North America by three New England companies.⁸³ The piano had been assembled in Buffalo, New York more than a hundred years ago, and the keys most likely were produced in one of two Connecticut towns responsible for the production of most ivory keyboards for the booming piano industry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, places so dependent upon elephants for their livelihood that one of them was renamed “Ivoryton” during the nineteenth century.⁸⁴

I hope you have gained an appreciation of the Met horn’s role in the development of insidious geographies of East and West, and in particular I hope you have come to respect the elephant behind “the oliphant” as a creature whose body has been insidiously manipulated, through its murder and the subsequent (com)modification, transfer, and display of one of its most iconic anatomical features, into complicity in the creation of a pervasive and permuting geocultural war, both literal and discursive. Let this new regard inspire you to raise your own voice for the defense of our elephantine kin, just as they would do for the wounded, tired, and hurt of our own species.

⁸³ Ernst D. Moore, “Ivory, the Pearl of the Forest.” *Scientific American* vol. 144 № 1, January 1931, pp. 11–12.

⁸⁴ Alexandra Celia Kelly, “The Towns That Elephants Built,” *Natural History*, May 2021, p. 39.

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