

FORUM: HOLBERG PRIZE SYMPOSIUM DOING DECENTERED HISTORY¹

1.

DECENTERING HISTORY: LOCAL STORIES AND CULTURAL CROSSINGS IN A GLOBAL WORLD

NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS

ABSTRACT

This essay was first presented at the 2010 Ludwig Holberg Prize Symposium in Bergen, Norway, where I, as the prize recipient, was asked to describe my work and its import for our period of globalization. The essay first traces the interconnected processes of “decentering” history in Western historiography in the half century after World War II: the move to working people and “subaltern classes”; to women and gender; to communities defined by ethnicity and race; to the study of non-Western histories and world or global history, in which the European trajectory is only one of several models. Can the historian hold onto the subjects of “decentered” social and cultural history, often local and full of concrete detail, and still address the perspectives of global history? To suggest an answer to this question, I describe my own decentering path from work on sixteenth-century artisans in the 1950s to recent research on non-European figures such as the Muslim “Leo Africanus” (Hasan al-Wazzan). I then offer two examples in which concrete cases can serve a global perspective. One is a comparison of the literary careers of Ibn Khaldun and Christine de Pizan in the scribal cultures on either side of the Mediterranean in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The other is the transmission and transformation of practices of divination, healing, and detection from Africa to the slave communities of Suriname in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Keywords: subaltern history, women’s history, global history, Christine de Pizan, Ibn Khaldun, African divination, Suriname divination

In 1403 in Cairo, the judge Ibn Khaldun made the final corrections to his *Muqaddima*, the Introduction to his *Book of Examples*, that great study in Arabic of the character and history of all civilizations. Two years later in Paris, the poet Christine de Pizan put the final touches on her *Book of the City of Ladies*, that innovating defense in French of the qualities and wide-ranging accomplishments of women, past and present. Contemporaries though these two writers

1. The Holberg International Memorial Prize is awarded annually for outstanding scholarly work in the fields of the arts and humanities, social sciences, law, and theology. The prize amount is Nkr4.5 million (approx. €550,000/\$760,000). The prize was established by the Norwegian Parliament in 2003; the 2010 winner was Natalie Zemon Davis.

In addition to award ceremonies, other events focus on the prize laureate’s research. One is the Holberg Prize Symposium, where scholars worldwide are invited to talk about a topic related to the laureate’s research. The Holberg Prize Symposium in 2010 took place June 8 at the University of Bergen with the theme “Doing Decentered History: The Global in the Local.” *History and Theory* is pleased to be publishing the papers from the 2010 Symposium in this Forum.

were, and universal in application though they both claimed their arguments to be, their manuscripts had rather little overlap in personnel or events, other than figures like Aristotle. Christine's illustrious women had mostly lived within the bounds of Europe, and those women who had not—such as the third-century Syrian queen Zenobia of Palmyra and the fourth-century martyr Saint Catherine of Alexandria—lived long before Islam arrived in Syria and North Africa.² Ibn Khaldun did praise the shrewd policies of the eleventh-century Berber queen Zaynab and approved the skills of midwives, but women were not singled out for discussion in the *Muqaddima*, neither for celebration, description, nor vituperation.³

Though a reader of political philosophy, Christine de Pizan would not have heard of Ibn Khaldun. A few of the medical and philosophical writings of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) had been translated from the Arabic into Latin in medieval times, but Ibn Khaldun's name appeared in a European publication only in the mid-sixteenth century and his writings in a European tongue only in the nineteenth century. And Ibn Khaldun, though a lover of poetry and aware, as he wrote, that “the philosophical sciences were flourishing” north of the Mediterranean, would not have heard of Christine de Pizan, indeed, could not have heard of her, for he died not long after her first works had been penned and copied.⁴ Her writings may never have been translated into Arabic, though I'm sure *The City of Ladies* is being read in French or in English translation in courses given today at some universities in North Africa or elsewhere in Arab lands.

With such a gap between their references, their circles, and their readers, why then do I juxtapose these two figures? Aren't they just worlds apart? My answer

2. Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, transl. Earl Jeffrey Richards, rev. ed. (New York: Persea Books, 1998), part 1, chap. 20, 52-55; part 3, chap. 3, 219-222.

3. Ibn Khaldun, *Le Livre des Exemples*, vol. I: *Autobiographie, Muqaddima*, transl. Abdesselam Cheddadi (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), *Muqaddima*, part 5, chap. 27, 803-805. Ibn Khaldun, *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l'Afrique septentrionale*, transl. Mac Guckin de Slane, ed. Paul Casanova, 4 vols. (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1925-1926), 2:271-272. The *Histoire des Berbères* is the continuation of Ibn Khaldun's *Book of Examples* and will eventually be part of Cheddadi's new translation of the entire book from the Arabic. A European figure who surfaces in both *The City of Ladies* and the extended historical section of the *Book of Examples* is the thirteenth-century ruler of France, Louis IX. Ibn Khaldun cites him as part of his description of the king's failed crusade against Tunis, and refers to him accurately as a “saint” (“Sanluwis ibn Luwis”); Christine de Pizan refers to him only as the son of Blanche of Castille, “who governed the kingdom of France while her son was a minor so nobly and so prudently that it was never better ruled by any man.” Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (London: Phoenix, 1982), 149-150; Christine de Pizan, *City*, part 1, chap. 13, 34, part 2, chap. 65, 207.

4. Nancy Siraisi, *Avicenna in Renaissance Italy: The Canon and Medical Teaching in Italian Universities after 1500* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 19, 19 n. 1 on translations of Avicenna by Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187) and his pupils. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, part 6, chap. 18 in *Livre des Exemples*, 1:946. There were Arabic manuscripts of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* in the library of the University of Leyden and in the royal library at Paris in the seventeenth century, but European interest in him and in these manuscripts as well as the first translations into European languages seems to have occurred only in the early nineteenth century. Franz Rosenthal, “Translator's Introduction,” in Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, transl. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 1:c-cii, cviii; Cheddadi, “Redécouverte d'Ibn Khaldun,” in *Livre des Exemples*, 1:liv-lvi; Lucette Valensi, “La Découverte d'un grand auteur en Europe: le cas d'Ibn Khaldun” (conference paper 2008, forthcoming as a publication). See below, n. 16, on the first mention of Ibn Khaldun's name in Europe in the sixteenth century.

to this question is connected with the seemingly contradictory pull in the themes of our symposium today: history “decentered” but yet held together in a “globalized world.”

Decentering involves the stance and the subject matter of the historian. The decentering historian does not tell the story of the past only from the vantage point of a single part of the world or of powerful elites, but rather widens his or her scope, socially and geographically, and introduces plural voices into the account. There are many antecedents to this expansion, but let us here follow it in waves after World War II. The first social wave involved writing history where the main actors were the working people or lower classes—slaves, serfs, peasants, artisans, tradesmen, industrial workers, and more: the *menu peuple*, as they were called in France and as I named them in the 1950s when I started my doctoral research; “the exploited or oppressed classes” in Marxist terms; the “subaltern classes” as they were called by the school of social historians in India in the 1980s.

The second social wave, starting in the 1960s, brought women and gender to the fore. And once women are a full part of the historical narrative, rigid notions of central power structures are undermined further by the study of households, families, and sexuality—all arenas where the relation between intimacy and domination is especially unsettling. Even female rulers had a paradoxical relation to power.

Rightly done, such history is always relational: the history of women involves men, the history of peasants involves proprietors; the history of workers involves employers. But even while describing all the parties, the decentering historian may let the subalterns and their practices and beliefs carry the narrative. Through resistance, collaboration, craft, improvisation, or good luck, they can influence outcomes and their own destiny.

The geographical wave in decentering history grew out of questions that erupted in the study of working people and women, and that were also posed by the independence and postcolonial movements of the late twentieth century. Scholars of slavery in the Americas insisted on the importance of racism in slave experience and the relevance of Africa to slave practices and beliefs. Scholars of Jewish and other immigrant women in the United States insisted on the distinctive experiences of these groups. European feminist movements had different trajectories from those in North America, and don't we need to speak of *varieties* of early feminism even in the late eighteenth century?

Meanwhile, postcolonial scholars were turning the history of expansion and empire upside down. It was not enough to describe the policies of the conquering or imperial nations; the actions of their governors, soldiers, settlers, and missionaries; their treatment of and attitudes toward conquered or colonized peoples. The peoples themselves had to be given voice and agency, reacting to Europeans, suffering, resisting, exchanging knowledge and objects, sometimes intimate with Europeans, often ignoring them and going on with their lives. Efforts were also made to elucidate a history for peoples said to have no memory of one, as in Bruce Trigger's use of archeological evidence and folktales to recount the history of the Iroquoian-speaking Wendat peoples of the Saint Lawrence basin, and Richard

Price's interviews with the keepers of the historical past among the Saramacca Maroons of the Suriname rain forests. Recent Norwegian studies of Saami history have achieved a similar reconstruction.⁵

Two warnings have been issued loud and clear about this historical enterprise. One was uttered in 1983 by Johannes Fabian: in describing encounters with non-European cultures, Western anthropologists and historians must not view them simply as an earlier version of their own, stuck in some prior historical stage. Rather (to pick an example that historians might face), the Ursuline sisters and the Wendat women farmers who met in the convent church yard in Québec in the seventeenth century should be seen as "absolutely simultaneous, radically contemporaneous." A second admonition has come from Dipesh Chakrabarty in his 2000 book *Provincializing Europe*, and it's addressed to his fellow Indian historians as well as to Western ones. Historical thought, he said, had taken Europe's pattern as the exclusive model for modernization, and other parts of the world were always being described in terms of "catch-up" or "not yet there." But the West, he insisted, represented only one path to the present.⁶

A second geographical wave effacing fixed center points has been the new world or global history. Here, too, there are antecedents going back to the seventeenth century, but the current forms respond to events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century: the end of the Cold War and the spread of multinational capitalism; the reconfiguration of the international political and religious landscape; the new technology of communication; and the threats to climate, species, and resources. The publications in world history that have appeared are geographically inclusive, stress the history of great units over time, such as political empires or trade networks, and large encounters of peoples and cultural forms. Comparisons are made across an extended geographical space, say, in patterns of consumption or prophetic movements. Animals and plants, taken seriously as historical actors, share the narratives with human beings.

And yet, despite its commitment to multiple modernities, questions have been raised about the new global history—including by some of its own practitioners—about whether its historical agenda and categories are still just Western and Eurocentric, about whether the sharp edges of social history and gender history are being ignored in the descriptions of large-scale interactions among civiliza-

5. Bruce Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (Kingston and Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987); Richard Price, *First Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Elsie Mundal, "The Perception of the Saamis and Their Religion in Old Norse Sources," in *Shamanism and Northern Ecology*, ed. Julia Pentikäinen (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), 97-116; Bjørnar Olsen, "Belligerent Chieftains and Oppressed Hungers? Changing Conceptions of Interethnic Relationships in Northern Norway during the Iron Age and Early Medieval Period," in *Contact, Continuity and Collapse: The Norse Colonization of the North Atlantic*, ed. James H. Barrett (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 9-31.

6. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6-11 and chaps. 1-4.

tions, trading empires, and species.⁷ Is “global history” the only form suitable for recounting the past in a globalized world?

Let me illustrate how “local storytelling” may serve a global program by my own move toward decentering. I first read Christine de Pizan’s *City of Ladies* in 1951, when I was a graduate student at the University of Michigan. Her works were suggested to me by my professor, Palmer Throop, in an innovative seminar on social and gender roles in the great Renaissance text, *The Courtier*, by Baldassare Castiglione.⁸ Until that time I had never heard of Christine de Pizan; indeed, I had never read a text written by a late medieval or early modern woman during all my previous studies at Smith College and Harvard.

Christine de Pizan’s defense of the capacities of women in all realms of human experience filled me with astonishment and delight. Learning of her literary strategies, I wrote an essay on “Christine de Pizan as a Prototype of the Professional Literary Woman.”⁹ But I did not want to choose her for my doctoral dissertation: Christine was close to royal courts; she was not “decentered” enough for me. I wanted to change the perspective on the Protestant Reformation by seeing it through the eyes not of the usual theologians and princes, but of artisans, and specifically the printing workers of Lyon, with their strikes, psalm-singing street marches, and pride in printing the Bible.

At about the same time, I read a newly published book of excerpts from Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddima*, translated from the Arabic by Charles Issawi, then a young professor at Beirut.¹⁰ I may have bought the book because I had heard that Ibn Khaldun anticipated Karl Marx’s labor theory of value and that the *Muqaddima* had won the praise of Friedrich Engels. I was enthralled by how Ibn Khaldun wove together geography, economics, society, and the state, and by his analysis of forms of social organization and knowledge. But I would never have thought

7. Peter Stearns, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, and Kenneth Pomeranz, “Forum: Social History, Women’s History, and World History,” *Journal of World History* 18, no. 1 (March 2007), 43–98.

8. Palmer Throop, a specialist in the Crusades and the medieval papacy, was the author of *Criticism of the Crusade: A Study of Public Opinion and Crusade Propaganda* (1940). He had the seminar do a close reading of Castiglione’s *Courtier* in conjunction with a text by his University of Michigan colleague Theodore M. Newcomb, *Experimental Social Psychology*. Such an interdisciplinary approach was very unusual at the time, and it was reinforced by my intellectual exchange with my fellow graduate student, the social psychologist Elizabeth M. Douvan.

9. Even though this paper was written from Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1951, several of Christine de Pizan’s works in poetry and prose were available in print, including a late nineteenth-century edition of her poetry (*Oeuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan*, ed. Maurice Roy, 3 vols. [Paris: Firmin Didot, 1886–1896]) and an edition of her prose work *L’Avison (L’avison-Christine: Introduction and Text*, ed. Sister Mary Louis Towner [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1932]). *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* was available to me only in the English translation printed in England in 1521 (*The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes*, transl. Bryan Anslay [London: Henry Pepwell, 1521]). Christine was long referred to as “de Pisan,” and that was how I spelled her name in my 1951 study. About thirty-five years ago Susan Groag Bell pointed out that her father was called “da Pizzano,” and since that time, scholars have referred to her as Christine de Pizan.

10. Ibn Khaldun, *An Arab Philosophy of History: Selections from the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun of Tunis (1332–1406)*, transl. Charles Issawi (London: John Murray, 1951). When Charles Issawi and I became colleagues at Princeton many years later, I told him how much I had enjoyed reading this translation. After teaching at the American University at Beirut, Issawi (1916–2000) taught the economic history of the Middle East at Columbia University and then at Princeton University.

at that time of plunging into a study of Ibn Khaldun's world. Rather I categorized him, together with Giambattista Vico, Marx, and Max Weber, as important thinkers, associated in my mind as they might be in the pages of *Journal of the History of Ideas*, which I was then reading avidly.

Only twenty years later did I see the study of women as a second site from which I could do history. By then I had written about printers and other artisans, reckon-masters, the urban poor, and welfare reformers. Women had had brief appearances in these studies, but had not been central to the analysis. But by 1970, I had been active in the feminist movement at the University of Toronto, and I had gotten to know Jill Ker Conway, a pioneer in the study of the first generation of American women with doctorates. I now began to see how gender position could be as important to consider as social position in understanding, say, sixteenth-century French structures of power and religious change. (Other scholars of my generation and the next, such as Michelle Perrot and Joan Wallach Scott, have had a similar trajectory, adding the study of women to their study of workers.)¹¹

From 1971 on, I taught a course on Society and the Sexes in Early Modern Europe, with Christine de Pizan's *City of Ladies* the opening text.¹² Women were now centrally part of my historical work, whether in the person of the wife of Martin Guerre or in sorting out the appeal of the Protestant Reformation to urban women or the gender element in symbolic festivities and popular uprisings.¹³ Moreover, the female case was especially important in urging me toward another decentering, the refusal to privilege a single path or geographical location as the model for assessing historical change.

Shmuel Eisenstadt in 1968 had already conceived of "multiple modernities" in comparing European religion with Japanese.¹⁴ For me, the move came in making comparisons within Europe itself. As I considered the relation of women to the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Reformation, I saw possibilities and limitations on both sides: stress on literacy in the one, female collective organization in the other, persistence of some form of hierarchy in both. Calvinism and Catholicism had differing ways of defining sacred space and sacred time, but each

11. Jill Ker Conway, *The First Generation of American Women Graduates* (New York: Garland, 1987). One of Michelle Perrot's earliest publications was *Les Ouvriers en grève, France 1871–1890* (Paris: Mouton, 1974); Joan Wallach Scott's first book was *The Glassworkers of Carmaux: French Craftsmen and Political Action in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974). Both went on to become major figures and innovators in the historical study of women and gender.

12. From 1971 to 1982, I had to introduce undergraduate students to the text of Christine de Pizan's *City of Ladies* either through photocopied excerpts from Bryan Anslay's 1521 translation or through mimeographed copies of those excerpts, made by me in modern transliteration. Only in 1982, with the appearance of the first edition of Earl Jeffrey Richards's translation of the work (see note 1 above)—the first translation made into English since 1521—were students able to have access to the entire text.

13. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), chaps. 3, 5; *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

14. S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View* (New York: Basic Books, 1968). The sociologist Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt was awarded the Ludwig Holberg Prize in 2003; he and I had talked of subjects of common interest during my visits to Jerusalem, and I was especially glad to cite his important book in my Holberg symposium talk. He died in September 2010.

connected with the economic activities and rhythms of urban life in a city like Lyon. The differences between the religions were important, but they were better understood as alternate and sometimes equivalent paths to “modernity.”¹⁵

In this spirit I decided in the early 1990s to write *Women on the Margins*, itself a reflection on the creative possibilities of lives led outside of centers of authority and high learning. Through the German Jewish merchant-woman Glikl Hamel, the French Catholic missionary Marie de l’Incarnation, and the German-Dutch Protestant entomologist-artist Maria Sibylla Merian, I wanted to portray three versions of seventeenth-century life for urban women in Europe—their differences to be linked to religious sensibility or occupational practices, but without either of them being “backward” or deprived of cultural resources.¹⁶

It was also thanks to these women, especially Marie de l’Incarnation and Maria Sibylla Merian, that I finally made a decentering move outside of Europe. As I wrote of the Amerindian women whom Marie de l’Incarnation tried to convert to Christianity in Québec, and the Carib and African slave women who served as Maria Sibylla Merian’s assistants in her entomological studies in Suriname, I realized that I had to give the non-European women voice and that they must not be merely instruments in the accomplishments of European women.

I did what I could but felt it was just a start. And the experience of writing *Women on the Margins* changed my sense of myself as a historian. I was no longer going to think of myself as “a Europeanist,” but would be a historian who could change her sites. Moreover, when I wrote from Europe, or from anywhere, I would always try to run my story, if only as a mental exercise, through the eyes of those elsewhere in the world. The first place I turned in this new endeavor was to North Africa, which had been the home of Ibn Khaldun. I decided to write a book about the sixteenth-century figure whom Europeans called “Leo Africanus,” and restore him as the Arabic-speaking Muslim Hasan al-Wazzan, who lived as a seeming Christian for a time in Italy. A devoted reader of Ibn Khaldun’s manuscripts, al-Wazzan was the first to make his name known to European readers.¹⁷

I circle back now to my query about forms for writing history in a globalized world. I want to offer two different examples of focused, concrete cases that can expand history’s borders. The first is the direct comparison of Ibn Khaldun and Christine de Pizan, whom I had put in separate boxes for so many years and who are ordinarily not conceived by historians as possible figures in the same discourse.

15. Natalie Zemon Davis, “City Women and Religious Change,” in *Society and Culture*, chap. 3; “The Sacred and the Body Social in Sixteenth-Century Lyon,” *Past and Present* 90 (February 1981), 40-70.

16. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

17. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006; London: Faber, 2007), 103, 106, 132, 317 n. 50. In the 1526 manuscript of his great work on Africa, Hasan al-Wazzan referred to “le Hystorie de li Arabi di Ibnu Calden” and again to the “opera de Ibnu Chaldun cronechista.” In the printed edition of the work, *La Description dell’Africa*, published in 1550 and again in 1554 and later editions, its interventionist editor Giovanni Battista Ramusio omitted the first reference, but did keep the second as “Ibnu Caldun storico.”

Ibn Khaldun and Christine de Pizan provide alternate versions of life as a person of letters on the two sides of the Mediterranean in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, with differences due especially to gender and to literary and philosophical traditions. Both were born to learned fathers, Ibn Khaldun in Tunis, Christine in Venice. Both moved from their places of birth, Christine as a girl to Paris, where her father became astrologer-physician to the King of France, Ibn Khaldun as a young man to Fez, where he became chancellor to the Merinid sultan. Their paths to learning differed, Ibn Khaldun relishing studies with his professors at the schools of Tunis, Christine being instructed by her father under her mother's disapproving eye, and then, as a young widow, plunging by herself into French, Italian, and Latin classical letters. Both were associated with royal courts. Ibn Khaldun was secretary, advisor, diplomat, or jurist for courts in Fez, Granada, and Cairo. Christine was the wife of a royal notary, then a widowed literary figure at the courts of France and Burgundy, on one occasion being given a commission to write the life of the late king Charles V.¹⁸

With such contrasting roles, Christine de Pizan and Ibn Khaldun wrote at a different pace. Christine composed steadily over a period of about twenty-five years, poetry and then prose—a conduct book for women, treatises on military conduct and on peace, literary criticism, history, autobiography, and more. Ibn Khaldun produced some early works on theology, logic, and arithmetic, and a later book on Sufism, along with his diplomatic correspondence in rhymed prose and occasional poems. But he compressed the composition of most of his *Book of Examples* into three years of retreat from political activity when he was in his forties, and then revised and finished his voluminous manuscript over the next twenty-four years. Much of his learning he packed into this one great book: his reflections on all aspects of civilizations, his universal history, and his autobiography.

Producing books in the busy networks of scribal culture, Christine de Pizan and Ibn Khaldun thought much about audience and patronage. For Christine, these were critical matters, for without a large inheritance and without an office in church or government, she was dependent on patronage to support herself and her children. Her intended readers were men and women of the royal courts and learned clerics, but as a female writer—and with a daring message in *The City of Ladies*—her status as author was precarious. If Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris, acclaimed her as “distinguished woman, manly female” (*femina*

18. The literature on both of these figures is now extensive. For Ibn Khaldun, his *Autobiography* is essential, and is included in Cheddadi's French translation of the *Livre des Exemples* (see note 1 above), 1:51-248. Other sources on Ibn Khaldun's life and thought are Rosenthal's "Translator's Introduction" to Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 1:xxix-lxxxvii; Cheddadi's Introduction to Ibn Khaldun, *Livre des Exemples*, 1:ix-liv; and Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun in Modern Scholarship: A Study in Orientalism* (London: Third World Centre for Research and Publishing, 1981), which includes extensive bibliography, and Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation* (London: Cass, 1982; Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003). Among the many studies of Christine de Pizan, the classic biography, drawn from years of study, is that of Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Work* (New York: Persea Books, 1984). Recent approaches can be found in *The City of Scholars: New Approaches to Christine de Pizan*, ed. Margaret Zimmermann and Dina De Rentiis (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994); *Christine de Pizan 2000: Studies on Christine de Pizan in Honour of Angus J. Kennedy*, ed. John Campbell and Nadia Margolis (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000); and *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, ed. Barbara K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady (London: Routledge, 2003).

insignis, virilis illa femina), her opponent in a literary quarrel about the *Roman de la Rose* ridiculed her “foolish presumption. Oh, words issuing ill-advisedly from the mouth of a woman condemning a man of such high understanding.”¹⁹ Thus, Christine was very attentive to the accuracy and beauty of her manuscripts, setting up a scriptorium for copying and illuminating them, employing among other artists “the highly esteemed” Anastasia (“people cannot stop talking about her”), and then sending the books to kings, countesses, dukes, and duchesses with flattering dedications. Some of the recipients would find themselves named in a chapter of *The City of Ladies* on “the virtuous women of France.”²⁰

Ibn Khaldun also addressed readers among the sultans and their entourage as well as among learned scholars and students who flocked to his lectures. Though he mentioned his wife in his autobiography, there is no clear sign that he imagined her or other women among his readers.²¹ He had some critics in his own day, men jealous of his reputation and traditionalists opposed to what he called “a new science,” but no one challenged Ibn Khaldun’s right to publish. Still, Ibn Khaldun used some caution. While breaking with the *isnad*, that is, the chains of transmitted wisdom so important in Islamic methods of proof—“I have invented a remarkable path,” he wrote, “an original approach”—he eulogized all his teachers and invited other scholars to “correct his errors.”²²

He also cared deeply, as had centuries of Arab writers, about the accuracy of his manuscripts: “There exists no copy superior to this one,” he wrote on the manuscript one scribe had made of his *Muqaddima*. Illustration was not important to him: he had an explanatory diagram placed in only two manuscripts, and a map, copied from the celebrated twelfth-century geography of al-Idrisi, appeared in only the last manuscript made under his supervision. But he made sure that his copyists were using an Arabic script appropriate to the region in which he hoped for readers. And the approval of rulers was important enough for him to dedicate manuscripts to the sultans at Tunis, Fez, and Cairo.²³

19. Jean Gerson to Pierre Col, winter of 1402–03, quoted by Earl Jeffrey Richards, “Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson: An Intellectual Friendship,” in Campbell and Margolis, eds., *Christine de Pizan*, 199. Citation from Maître Pierre Col, Chanoine de Paris, in Christine de Pizan, Jean Gerson, Jean de Montreuil, Gontier and Pierre Col, *Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks [1977] (Geneva: Slatkine reprints, 1996), 100. Christine could take consolation not only from Gerson’s appreciation, but from the respectful address extended to her in the same controversy by Pierre Col’s younger brother, the royal secretary Gontier Col: “woman of lofty understanding (*femme de hault entendement*), demoiselle Christine” (23).

20. Willard, *Christine*, 44–47; John Laidlaw, “Christine and the Manuscript Tradition,” in Altmann and McGrady, eds., *Christine*, 231–249. Three different scribes have been identified for the fifty extant manuscripts made in Christine’s scriptorium; all of them have signs of correction by her, and it is believed that she herself was one of the three copyists. The illuminator Anastasia in Christine, *City of Ladies*, part 1, chap. 41, 85; “virtuous ladies of France,” part 2, chap. 68, 212–214, including the queen Isabelle de Bavière, who had commissioned a manuscript, and Valentina Visconti, Duchess of Orléans, to whom she made a gift of another work.

21. Ibn Khaldun, *Autobiographie in Livre des Exemples*, 1:95, 170.

22. Ibn Khaldun, *Livre des Exemples*, 1:xxxvi, 8, 10, 255; many pages of the *Autobiography* are dedicated to describing and praising his teachers (1:59–82). Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay*, 107–119. Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15–16, 36, 102.

23. Ibn Khaldun, *Livre des Exemples*, 1:1293–1296 (quotation on 1296), 1393–1397. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 1:xcv–xciv, 109 n. 43. Ibn Khaldun also made a gift (*waqf*) of one copy to the library of the great madrasa al-Qarawiyyin at Fez (Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 185, 185 n. 20).

Taking a single moment and two innovative lives on either side of the Mediterranean, I have tried to expand the geographical and cultural frame in which historians usually reflect on the production and circulation of knowledge. I have tried to privilege neither the European Christian setting nor the North African Muslim setting, and have presented the woman's experience as alternative to rather than lagging behind the man's. (If anything, Christine's scribal adventures were more inventive.)

A second way to enhance the historian's global consciousness while sustaining his or her love of the concrete story is to focus on cases of cultural crossing.

For this inquiry let us leave the late medieval Mediterranean and its patterns of learned communication for the Atlantic and the Caribbean and the eighteenth-century world of slavery, the subject of my own current research. I will follow African practices of divination, detection, and healing, as they crossed the Atlantic Ocean and were used or transformed in the mixed communities of slaves in the Americas, especially in the Dutch colony of Suriname.²⁴

Our first sources here are the recollections of slaves and ex-slaves themselves, such as Olaudah Equiano, and the accounts published by European observers of western Africa: Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi, Capuchin missionary to the kingdoms of Kongo and Angola in the seventeenth century; Willem Bosman, agent for fourteen years for the Dutch West India Company in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer, factor for the Danish West India and Guinea Company at Christianborg (Accra) in the 1740s; the eighteenth-century British slaver captain William Snelgrave; John Atkins, surgeon on a slave ship; and others.²⁵

24. Examples of books that trace African practices and beliefs and their use and transformation in the Americas are Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1444–1770* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery*, ed. José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004); *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, ed. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004); Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

25. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African Written by Himself* was first published in London in 1789; I am using here the ninth edition, published in 1794: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003). A review of the evidence confirming Equiano's birth as an Igbo in what is now southeastern Nigeria is given by James Sweet, "Mistaken Identities? Olaudah Equiano, Domingos Álvares, and the Methodological Challenges of Studying the African Diaspora," *American Historical Review* 134 (2009), 279–281, 301–304. Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi, *Descrição Histórica dos Três Reinos do Congo, Matamba e Angola*, transl. Graciano Maria de Leguzzano, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1965); Cavazzi's *Istorica descrizione* was first published in Bologna in 1687. Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, Divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coast . . . Written Originally in Dutch. . . and now faithfully done into English* (London: James Knapton and Daniel Midwinter, 1705); Bosman's book had a first edition in Dutch at Utrecht in 1704. Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer, *A Reliable Account of the Coast of Guinea (1760)*, transl. Selena Axelrod Winsenes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Rømer's book was first published in Danish in Copenhagen in 1760. William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave Trade* (London: James, John, and Paul Knapton,

Along the whole range of the Guinea Coast and inland kingdoms of Africa, the gods were always drawn upon for divination, detection, and healing—not the high god who ruled more distantly over all, but one of the pantheon of responsive lesser gods, the *voudun*, the *orisha*, who ruled realms of the sea or the air, or were embodied in a special kind of tree or snake, or more intimately connected to an ancestral spirit. The diviner's rod encapsulated the god's presence, a wooden rod filled with earth, oil, bones, feathers, hair, and other objects that are imbued with divine aura. Consulting a healer about an illness or a wound, the supplicant discovered what the god wanted in order to bring a cure—a sheep, a hog, gold, or cloth—and left the gifts. At the same time, the healer dispensed medicaments: appropriate juices, herbs, gums, roots, barks. Willem Bosman said they worked well: "The green herbs, the principal remedy in use amongst the Negroes are of such wonderful efficacy that 'tis much to be deplored that no European Physician has yet applied himself to the discovery of their nature and virtue."²⁶

Diviners were called upon at the earliest stage of crime detection, including when the victim or the victim's family was unsure of who had been the perpetrator.²⁷ When poisoning was suspected in a death, the diviner asked the corpse at the funeral if there had been foul play. If the answer was yes, the dead spirit impelled the men bearing the corpse to lower it, and sometimes forced them to run to the house of the poisoner.²⁸

The innocence or guilt of those accused of a crime— theft, adultery, murder, poisoning, kidnapping, witchcraft—was then established by a diviner's test. Three major tests were used, widespread throughout the Guinea Coast and beyond in various forms. Before the god, present through the diviner's rod, the accused drank a special drink (Rømer spoke of eating a special dough), and was smeared by the diviner with a powerful ointment; the accused then called on the god for death if he or she was guilty. (We can see what leeway the diviner had in preparing the drink and ointment, for he or she came to the ceremony informed by preliminary inquiry about the crime.) In another test, the accused had to place his or her arm in the diviner's great pot of boiling water to retrieve a rock or a cowry shell. If the accused was guilty, the arm would become ulcerated. In a third test, the diviner passed a cock's quill through the tongue of the accused; easy removal revealed innocence. Here again we can see the leeway allowed the diviner in the choice of a heavy or light object for the hot water or the temperature of the water or in the size or manipulation of the cock's quill.²⁹

Once guilt was established, the person was given a sentence by the king and his council of great men or by a regional governor or local headman and his advisors.

1734). John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil, and the West-Indies: In his Majesty's Ships, The Swallow and Weymouth* (London: Caesar Ward and Richard Chandler, 1735).

26. Bosman, *Description*, Letter 13, 225.

27. I have treated the matter of detection, judgment, and punishment of crime in the Guinea Coast polities of Africa and among the slave communities of Suriname in an extended essay with much reference to sources and commentary, "Judges, Masters, Diviners: Slaves' Experience of Criminal Justice in Colonial Suriname," forthcoming in *Law and History*, 29, no. 4 (November 2011).

28. Bosman, *Description*, Letter 10, 148; Equiano, *Narrative*, 42-43.

29. Cavazzi, *Descrição*, 1:102-106, 109; Bosman, *Description*, Letter 10, 149-150, Letter 21, 450-452; Atkins, *Voyage*, 52-53; Rømer, *Account*, 100-101.

The death penalty was possible in cases of murder and a heinous crime like witchcraft, but was by no means regularly pronounced. Fines, the restoration of stolen goods or persons, and compensatory payments were the more frequent penalties. And when these restitutions were not suitably forthcoming, the preferred penalty in the course of the eighteenth century was selling the guilty person to a European slaver to be transported to the Americas.

Such are the memories that Africans brought with them to their lives as slaves—and African-born slaves still made up the majority of those on the Caribbean plantations in the eighteenth century. These survivors from the Atlantic crossing entered societies with unfamiliar and highly punitive disciplinary regimes under their white masters, and they would experience cultural contrasts with Europeans and with Africans from other language and ethnic groups: contrasts in the names of the gods, in rules for marriage, and much more. Communication was made possible in Suriname by the creation of a creole language, mostly the work of slaves themselves, referred to at the time as *Neger Engelsche* and today called *Sranan*, with English and African vocabulary and an African substrate (the slave creole language in the Danish colonies, with a different vocabulary, was called *Negerhollands*).³⁰ Known to Suriname owners and overseers sufficiently to give orders, *Sranan* expanded in the mouths of slaves and their children to be the language in which many features of life, including divining, detecting, and healing, were carried on.³¹

Healers surface on all the Suriname plantations, and diviners, known as *Lukuman* or *Granman* and *Gran Mama*, emerge on plantations of any size.³² Some were born in Africa, others (especially later in the eighteenth century) were born in Suriname. These men and women did not have the realm of curing all to themselves, as they would have had in Africa: every plantation also had its medical cabinet with surgical instruments, and sometimes a physician was summoned to see a slave. But on the whole, slave healers were allowed to flourish, with a mixed response from the settler physicians, as we will see in a moment, but still without the controls exercised by the medical profession in Europe against so-called *Empiricks* and *Quacks*. Indeed, the slave healer-midwife was listed on the plantation inventory.

The pharmacopoeia of the Suriname healers was carried over from Africa when possible, and was also enriched by exchange with the indigenous Caribs and Arawaks and by discoveries they made in the local flora. Their treatments were accompanied by appeal to the gods, and a patient's death might be blamed, as in Africa, on a hostile poisoner. The Scottish soldier John Gabriel Stedman, in Suriname on a military mission, had nothing but praise for the spiced drink given him by a woman healer, which saved him from a high fever after the draught

30. Christian G. A. Oldendorp, *History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren on the Caribbean Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John*, ed. Johann Jakob Bossard, transl. Arnold R. Highfield and Vladimir Barac (Ann Arbor: Karoma Publishers, 1987), fourth book, chap. 9.

31. *Atlas of the Languages of Suriname*, ed. Eithne B. Carlin and Jacques Arends (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002). Natalie Zemon Davis, "Creole Languages and Their Uses: The Example of Colonial Suriname," *Historical Research* 82 (May 2009), 1-17.

32. Jan Jacob Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, of de Wildekust, in Zuid-America* (Amsterdam, 1770; facsimile edition Amsterdam: S. Emmering, 1974), 904.

prescribed by an army surgeon had almost killed him, and Stedman did not mind when the woman “thanked her god” in her own fashion. In contrast, the learned Jewish physician David Nassy, descendant of one of the first settler families in Suriname, ridiculed the divinations employed by black healers to diagnose and their indiscriminate use of certain kinds of herbs and spices. Still, Nassy affirmed there were blacks who had remarkable knowledge of the medicinal plants of Suriname and had made cures that had astonished physicians.³³

One such was the celebrated Lukuman Quassie, revered as a seer and healer by blacks throughout Suriname, and discoverer of a bark that would bring down high fever. (A specimen was sent by a Swedish planter to Linnaeus, who then named it *Lignum Quassiae*.) Another such was Granman Soadé, who had a cure for neonatal tetanus, an affliction affecting many black infants in Suriname; try as he would, Nassy could never extract Soadé’s secret for the cure. Meanwhile a European physician spending several years in Suriname was permitted by a black woman healer to observe her successful cure of an adult with tetanus: she began with scarification and leeches, then continued with repeated hot compresses of water and oil infused with local plants. The leeches may have been a remedy adopted by this woman from white medicine, for they are not mentioned in descriptions of Guinea Coast healing from the time.³⁴

The transmission and transformation of practices of criminal detection were more difficult to achieve than those in healing because, in principle, all wrongdoing by slaves was to be investigated, judged, and punished either by their owners and overseers on the plantation or by the colonial courts. Yet, the slaves managed to establish a criminal justice system of their own. The diviners were central to this process, and along with them slave figures of prestige and authority on the plantation: the black driver—the *ningre bassia*, as he was called in Sranan—and other leading men and women. The black driver was usually born in Suriname, and though named by the overseer, had to have the strong support of the other slaves if he were to have any success. He had to combine the political skills of an African headman, learned from his father or from the African-born slaves on the plantation, with the savvy of a native about what was necessary to tell the white bosses. As one white driver put it to his fellow officers in Suriname, “Never trust a black driver, for his solidarity lies not with the plantation staff, but with the

33. John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam. Transcribed for the First Time from the Original 1790 Manuscript*, ed. Richard Price and Sally Price (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 278; John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a five years expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana on the Wild Coast of South America from the year 1772 to 1777*, 2 vols. (London: J. Johnson, 1796), 1:343-44. David Nassy, *Essai historique sur la colonie de Surinam*, 2 vols. (Paramaribo, 1788 [*sic* for Amsterdam: Hendrik Garman, 1789]), 2:64-69.

34. Hartsinck, *Beschryving*, 906; Stedman, *Narrative* (1790), 581-584; Stedman, *Narrative* (1796), 2:346-348; Frank Dragtenstein, “*Trouw aan de Blanken*”: *Quassie van Nieuw Timotibo, twist en strijd in de 18de eeuw in Suriname* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2004); Natalie Zemon Davis, “Stedman’s *Suriname* Book in Sweden,” in *Vänskap över Gränser. En Festschrift till Eva Österberg ed.* Kenneth Johannsson and Marie Lindstedt Cronberg (Författarna, 2007), 85-86. Nassy, *Essai*, 2:71-72; David Nassy, “Discours . . . Présenté à la Societé Philosophique de Philadelphie . . . le 20 Fevrier 1794,” 4, n. 6 (Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, Archives, 20 February 1794). Philippe Fermin, *Traité des maladies les plus fréquentes à Surinam, et des remèdes les plus propres à les guérir* (Maestricht: Jacques Lekens, 1764), 96-97.

slaves.”³⁵ The other prestigious figures on the plantation were the skilled craftsmen, such as carpenters and coopers, and the female cooks, knitters, and seamstresses. Whether born in Africa or in Suriname, they all had channels to the white bosses, especially the women.

Together with the diviners, these men and women arbitrated disputes and established slave justice.³⁶ As I read the evidence, a slave community with any coherence preferred to deal first with its own offenders before deciding whether or not to yield them up to the white masters or courts. An essential means to this end was the control of information to the white overseer and the master and mistress, who lived apart from the slaves and had limited knowledge of Sranan.

When accusations were made of bad-mouthing, theft, or physical harm, especially poisoning and associated witchcraft, the practices of detection began. In case of a death where poison was suspected, the African corpse-carrying test was a possibility for finding the evildoer: it was reported on certain Danish and English plantations, and the Moravian Brother missionaries described its use in Suriname.³⁷ Procedures of detection and determination of guilt in Suriname were variants of those in Africa. In the *kangra*, as it was called in Sranan, the tongue of the accused was smeared with a potion from a special herb, then a chicken quill was passed through it. If it went through the tongue easily, the person was innocent; if not, guilty. “*Mi sa da ju kangra*” “I want to make the *kangra* test with you” was how the accusation began. The oath-drink test and plunging the arm of the accused in the diviner’s hot water pot were other forms of proof used in Suriname and nearby Brazil.³⁸ The diviners always sought information ahead of time about the persons and accusations, and as in Africa, this guided decisions about the kind of herb potion, the size of the object in the pot, and the temperature of the water.

Judgment, so I suggest, was made by the black driver with other leading men or women, a replication of the council of headman with his councilors in the Guinea Coast, though here with an enhanced role for women. In cases of theft, the punishment was not likely to have been strokes of the whip, as the master would have done, but some form of compensation, that is, the African practice adjusted to Suriname: produce from one’s garden or a garment or a bracelet or tobacco.

35. Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams Contrast: Roofbouw en Overleven in een Caraïbische Plantagekolonie 1750–1863* (Leiden: KITLV, 1993), 276–283 (quotation, 277).

36. I am here trying to flesh out for Suriname the slave tribunals also referred to by a planter in Jamaica: “On many of the estates the headmen erect themselves into a sort of bench of Justice, which sits and decides privately, and without the knowledge of the whites, on all disputes and complaints of their fellow slaves” (quoted by Dennis Forsythe, “Race, Colour and Class in the British West Indies,” in *The Commonwealth Caribbean into the Seventies*, ed. A. W. Singham [Montreal: McGill University Centre for Developing-Area Studies, and Washington, DC: Howard University Committee on Caribbean Studies, 1975], 21). For a full picture and reference to the archival evidence, see Davis, “Judges, Masters, Diviners.”

37. Johannes Andreas Riemer, “Riemers Mitteilungen über die Freineger und ihre Sitten und Gewohnheiten,” in *Die Mission der Brüdergemeine in Suriname und Berbice im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, ed. Firtz Staehelin, 3 vols. (Paramaribo: C. Kersten for the Missionsbuchhandlung in Herrnhut, 1913), vol. 3, part 2, 267–268. Equiano, *Narrative*, 42, 245 n. 69.

38. Christian Ludwig Schumann, *Saramaccanisch Deutsches Wörter-Buch* (1778), published in Hugo Schuchardt, *Die Sprache der Saramakkaneger in Surinam* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1914), 76. Riemer, “Mitteilungen,” in Staehelin, *Mission*, vol. 3, part 2, 265–266. Nassy, *Essai historique*, 2:69–70. Sweet, *Recovering Africa*, 120–123.

Poisoning was much more serious. In Africa, as we have seen, it was punishable by death or by being sold into slavery. In Suriname the courts punished it by the death sentence. In such an instance, slaves might yield the uncontrollable poisoner up to the white authorities for punishment.

Is there any sign that slave justice adopted procedures in use in the Suriname courts? Torture to obtain confession was foreign to African practice, and when Suriname courts tortured slaves, they rarely broke. As for testimony, slaves were sometimes interrogated in a case involving a free person, but that testimony was never admissible in court.³⁹ Thus, slaves had little to pick up from Old Regime criminal justice. They might as well stick with the *kangra*.

I have extended the City of Scholars to include both Christine de Pizan and Ibn Khaldun within its walls and have followed medicinal plants and cocks' quills as they crossed the Atlantic and were reused or adapted in Suriname. I hope this can show us something new—about literary lives and making books, about slavery, healing, criminal justice, and human resilience and improvisation. “One of the advantages of latter-day times,” said Erik Pontoppidan, former Bishop of Bergen, in his Foreword to Ludewig Ferdinand Rømer’s account of the Guinea Coast, “is that the inhabitants of the world have come to know one another better than they did formerly.” Rømer’s violent report of African life led Pontoppidan to justify slavery in the West Indies as a better condition for Africans—provided that it did not separate families from each other, that their masters were kind, and that they were brought closer to God through Christianity. I like to think that Frederik Svane, one-time chaplain at the Danish Gold Coast castle at Christianborg and then a schoolmaster on the estate of Ludvig Holberg in Denmark, drew upon stories from his African mother to give his historian host a more balanced picture than Rømer’s of African life.⁴⁰

Indeed, the direct exchange among scholars across boundaries is one of the best paths to discovery in our globalized latter-day times. So I witnessed at a recent gathering of scholars from Africa, Europe, and North America where we talked of Tales of Slavery.⁴¹ And so one can hope will be increasingly the case in the history of the book and communication technologies, where Western evolutionary schemes still hold sway. Meanwhile, I am grateful to the memory of Ludvig Holberg, which has allowed us to cross the earth today and meet to decipher decentering.

University of Toronto

39. For full discussion of these matters and reference to the legal and archival sources, see Davis, “Judges, Masters, Diviners.”

40. Erik Pontoppidan, “Foreword: to the Reader,” Copenhagen, 1760, in Rømer, *Reliable Account*, 5, 7-9. On the mulatto Frederik Svane, 72, 72 n. 130.

41. “Tales of Slavery,” a conference held at New College, University of Toronto, May 20-23, 2009, which brought together scholars and writers from Africa, Europe, and North America.