Rediscovering Britain's Lost Love of the Orient

Fatima Manji

'Timely, brilliant and very brave'
Jerry Brotton

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For the little explorers who traverse our galleries, museums and heritage sites wondering where their own story fits in

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. . . how strangely the East has come to the West in these times of upheaval.

Brighton Herald
28 August 1915

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Introduction

Have you been to a stately home lately? Despite the unique history of each building, it often seems like there is a rhythm to these visits. Walk through the hallways to see portraits of a lionised landed family with their porcelain skins and a compulsory display of European art, collected by a son on the Grand Tour. Admire the architecture; allow yourself to be amused by the story of a rogue uncle or scorned lover; and end your trip with tea and a scone. If you are interested in interior design, there is inspiration enough in the coving and the sconces; the gardens often prove delightful; and lovers of art will find enough to impress them. But beyond the twee trappings, Britain's heritage sites are home to a hidden history.

Every so often, strolling through marbled halls on my own such trips, I would encounter a familiar swirl of Arabic, Persian or Urdu letters, or the brown hue of a sitter's skin in a portrait. In these moments, I would excitedly attempt to seek out more information, from an explanatory sign or from the person manning the room or giving tours around the site. Yet what I sought was not always easily found. This did not seem malicious or deliberate. Often the answer was simply that the staff or volunteers did not know much about these objects, and even a frenzied flick through their guide-books proved unsatisfactory. Each time this happened, I would return home, my mind abuzz with questions: *Why was that there? How did it come about? What's the story behind this object? Who is that person? Why have I never heard about it?* Then I would trawl through

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books, fire off emails and wade through manuscripts to find the answers, and upon finally obtaining more information, I would share these discoveries in delight with friends: *'Did you know there was once a mosque built inside Kew Gardens?'* ... *'An actual mosque?'* ... *'Yes, in the Georgian period!'* ... *'Why have I never heard about that?'* That's when I knew it wasn't just me.

After the first few occasions, it became a ritual. I would walk into a gallery or museum, eyes already narrowed, seeking out that unusual object, searching for the unanswered question. It turned into a treasure hunt. I was pursuing these objects and places out of curiosity but, without knowing it, also perhaps using them to find a sense of belonging in my own country. In some strange way, because of my connections through language, culture or religion to these objects, it was like a part of me could be found here. The heritage in these places now felt more mine. *Ours*. I felt a compulsion to share the excitement and the evidence with others, because this was not just a personal adventure. It is proof of a more complex story – one that has implications for who we believe has the right to comment on Britain's history and identity.

Britain seems to suffer from historical amnesia. The popular national imagination often pictures no person of colour to have set foot on these isles before the arrival of Caribbean migrants on board the *Empire Windrush* in 1948, with South Asians following them in the 1950s and 1960s. In this telling of British history, people of colour are cast only as recent immigrants – grateful guests required to integrate into the preordained 'British' way of life. This version of history would have us believe two world wars were fought only by young white men from Europe. It produces narrow period dramas in television and film, wrongly supposing that there are no interactions with the rest of the world to depict, no significant stories of people of colour in Britain to reflect and no debts owed – cultural or otherwise.

Yet hidden away in heritage sites – in stately homes, museums and galleries, the temples of Britishness – I was finding clues to

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suggest otherwise. Objects and places that were revealing rarely told histories and, simultaneously, had something to say about our current divisions, at a time when Britain is reshaping its role in the world and debates abound over the legacy of Empire, the role of immigration and what 'Britain' or 'Britishness' is. But despite the abundance of polemic, a thoughtful interrogation of Britishness through the lens of cultural heritage is rare. In conversations around immigration, race and Islam in particular, dehumanising language has become the norm. As a journalist, I often witness first-hand a news narrative dictated by underlying assumptions that are racist and Islamophobic, perpetuated even by those who regard themselves as gatekeepers of civility. It is time to have a more thoughtful conversation about culture and heritage. Currently, stories from Britain's heritage buildings are told by a narrow set of people. Some of the objects illuminated in this book are only ever presented as the rewards of brave colonial conquest, while others are ignored altogether.

All the objects and places described in this book are derived from or inspired by the 'Orient'. Though the term 'Orient' has become unfashionable, I have deliberately chosen it in full knowledge of the connotations. Geographically it encompasses West Asia (described through the British imperial gaze as 'the Middle East') and South Asia. Much of this region was, in some important ways, culturally contiguous for centuries until the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Using only contemporary labels for countries or regions ignores how they were interconnected and influenced each other. For instance, in the Victorian period, a pair of wood carvers from modern-day Pakistan (then India) were inspired by elements of North African architecture, and they used these inspirations to decorate an object due to be displayed in London; they then signed their names in Persian calligraphy. Only the word 'Orient' captures the multitude of influences here. It was also the term commonly used during the periods when the objects and places in this book were acquired or built.

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I am aware too that, while this book calls for a more complex and accurate understanding of British history and identity, to refer to the 'Orient' today is to invite charges of flattening the history of West and South Asia. But to use the term 'Orient' is not necessarily to engage in orientalism – the practice of caricaturing people and cultures across West and South Asia as all possessing the same 'essential' characteristics and then using such caricatures to dominate, oppress and subjugate them.

On the contrary, I write with the intention of reminding us how the cultural objects discussed in this book were acquired or built – often simultaneously in a performance of appreciation of the Orient and its cultures, and as part of a political project to dominate the regions and their peoples. That honest reappraisal must be the first step towards liberating British discourse on our history from the tyranny of jingoism.

The heritage sites introduced in this book include places managed by the National Trust, English Heritage and other charitable institutions. I have generally avoided the larger museums and more famous objects or places, unless they are a crucial part of the story in a particular chapter, because this work is about things we have forgotten and how they might help us understand some contemporary events in Britain.

This book does not offer a comprehensive narrative history or geography. It covers a vast period, beginning in the sixteenth century when Elizabethan England was a vulnerable state seeking alliances with the powers of the Orient and developing its own privateering empire. It ends with stories from the final years of the British Empire, when Britain had become the stronger power and used the people of the Orient to fight its wars. These tales are based on a collection of objects and places that have caught my attention in a combination of fortuitous *flânerie* and sober study. There are many more that will capture you, and I look forward to hearing about them. I sincerely hope this is merely the beginning of a process – an adventure for you as you look anew at

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familiar and less familiar heritage sites, but also for us collectively to think about our heritage differently.

It is important to emphasise that the investigative energy with which I want us to think about heritage sites should not cast attention away from nor excuse the brutalities of the colonial relationships Britain had with so many countries and peoples. Some of these heritage sites were built directly from the proceeds of such cruelties, and others could never exist without the structure of subjugation, extraction and racialised oppression of the British Empire. As a result, there is contention over whether some of the objects should be in Britain at all. There are many good scholars and organisations tackling these issues, and although it is not the focus of my work, these conversations are essential in our reckoning with the suppression of Britain's past.

A whitewashed presentation of history directly affects how Britons today perceive the people, buildings and languages of the Orient. All are regarded as alien threats and new arrivals to be defended against. The thread running through the pages that follow shows the opposite – that in fact, the Orient always had an established place within British (and before it English) history, sometimes in unexpected ways. Our story begins with the mystery of a gentleman on horseback. It details his diplomatic mission from Morocco to Britain and how admiration of this refined visitor was sparked in society circles as he was whirled through dinners of pickled eels in Cambridge and a hurricane in Oxford. We later find ourselves under the reimagined dome of an eighteenth-century Turkish mosque erased as much from the soil as from our collective memory. The delicately designed mosque – the first to be built in Britain – was not in a faraway land, but in Richmond, and was commissioned by the Princess of Wales. Later in our journey, we will explore how the languages of West and South Asia, now regarded with such suspicion that their utterance is cause for teachers to consider reporting children to security services, were once the most desirable proof of cultural refinement in Britain's ruling class, including for Queen Victoria.

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This, then, is my rediscovery of lost histories – a way to rethink the simplistic, divisive and alienating history we have previously been presented with. The narratives around Britain's heritage sites inform the national imagination of who is British and who has the right to speak about this country's past and present. I want to inspire those who are searching for a complex, grounded alternative to a parochial sense of Britishness fixated on arbitrary ideas of race.

In heritage buildings across Britain lie paintings, drawings, carvings, statues and tiles that serve as evidence for the sons and daughters of the Orient that there are roots connecting us to these islands hundreds of years before we were born. They suggest that people of colour need not imagine themselves as eternal newcomers, as 'the immigrants' who must 'integrate'; objects and individuals and, even more, ideas and inspirations have travelled here before us and shaped these islands. They are a reminder that we too have a history to draw on in this place and it is as British as any other. That is not a request to be granted. It is merely a reality that can no longer be denied.

Consider this in part a love letter to our heritage sites. They are fascinating and important places, and exist for us all. You may be an avid visitor already. Or you may find the prospect of their vaulted ceilings and gilded grandiosity unnerving. But no one is out of place in these sites, however much or little you may think you know about the history of the buildings, the people and the art that populates them, or once did. Walking into a heritage site is often akin to walking on stage into history itself, and through this book I hope you will find, just as I did, that there may be surprises hiding in plain sight, which perhaps can tell you something unexpected about your own connection to these isles.

We need to share more effectively the stories of these places and the objects that reside in them. Britain has been schooled out of its admiration of the Orient. A knowledge and understanding of these objects and places and the stories they tell can kindle that

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affection anew – with conquest supplanted as the motivating factor by a curiosity born of respect and admiration. Yet curiosity is not a panacea. It is what originally motivated some of the interactions you will find in the pages that follow. As all children of Empire know, it is a thin line between curiosity and conquest.

These themes recur constantly in the stories detailed in this book. But neither curiosity nor admiration for other cultures is a safeguard against racist policies or the persistent widening of inequalities rooted in racial hierarchies. Curiosity, or even sympathy, does not amount to material support. In fact, some of the most influential inspirations for those who see themselves as fighting to preserve a virtuous (and white) origin tale for Britain espoused a deep love for the Orient. Enoch Powell, now remembered almost solely for the 'Rivers of Blood' speech that marked him as a founding father of Britain's postcolonial white nationalist movement, said as late as 1968: 'I fell head over heels in love with it [India]. If I'd have gone there a 100 years earlier, I'd have left my bones there.'[1]

Powell was renowned for giving florid speeches about his longing for India and had added Urdu to his linguistic repertoire, along with Greek and Latin, 'to identify' himself 'with the life and language of the country' as a colonial officer in the British Raj. There is a compelling case that it was the Raj and its systematised colonial power that he loved rather than India itself. Nevertheless, his desire for an egalitarian British Commonwealth modelled on Rome, with open borders and a freedom for all to settle anywhere across its territory, was suffused with romance. That lasted until Caribbean and South Asian subjects of the Crown were implored to journey to these shores in the mid-twentieth century to supply a Britain reeling from the 'loss' of Empire with much-needed labour. It was at that point that Powell began painting Britain as a state under siege. His invention of Britain as a *victim* of Oriental conquest is a myth infused throughout our media and political language, and is, arguably, the defining belief that underlies all mainstream debates on immigration. It is also Powell's victimhood myth that

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enables far-right firebrands to position themselves as defenders of heritage when they lionise an inanimate Churchill in Parliament Square. They are able to do so because, in the orthodox, nativist telling of our national history, conquest is divorced from the Empire – to the point where it has become normal to hear that Britain was merely helping those it colonised.

Indeed, in the course of researching this book, I overheard a guide at one heritage site announcing to a tour group that Britain's Empire came about because 'the English were asked to help the Indians', while at another site a guide in conversation with a visitor bemoaned the fact he had been to India and not seen signs 'thanking' the British for all the 'good things'. Clearly, these ahistorical narratives have been so embedded in the national culture that even some of those who give of their time to educate others about our past have had their curiosity dimmed.

In the hysterical reaction to the 2020 toppling of Edward Colston's statue by protesters inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement on an avenue named after the slaver in Bristol, it was often ignored that local activists had been trying for some time to place a plaque on the statue explaining Colston's deeds and beliefs. But suggestions to update the language on the existing plaque to reflect his importance in the slave trade had been struck down as 'vandalism' and 'utterly devoid of impartiality' by a local right-wing councillor who campaigned against the changes. Part of his concern was that Colston would be named on the revised plaque as a Conservative MP. This dispute, long before anyone took action to dump Colston in the city's harbour, illustrates the difficulty of relying on our political parties to lead us into honest discussions on heritage. Their long histories of support for Empire abroad and forced 'integration' at home renders them ill-equipped to escape the narrow, parochial parameters of our national debate, which is still caught in the grip of Powell's ghost. This book is partly motivated by a desire to take back control of our national history and empower others to find themselves in it.

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In recent years, those who have argued for a nuanced account of Britain's imperial past to be taught in schools have been shouted down as 'hating Britain'. This is short-sighted. Britain's state and civic institutions have been trapped in a confused sense of their purpose in the postcolonial period, still geared at moulding loyal imperial subjects rather than producing well-informed citizens. A less monochrome account of our history is essential as Britain reckons anew with its place in the world. We must have the curiosity to seek out the stories hidden from us, the courage to confront the uncomfortable truths within them and the grace to remember that culture is always the product of interwoven influences and exchange.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Ambassador

Chiswick House, London

It was created as a temple of the arts. A villa to be filled with paintings – inspired by the architecture of ancient Rome and built in the eighteenth century to show off an art collection. Today, Chiswick House is a neo-Palladian oasis in the architectural desert of suburban west London. The building's perfect proportions are a picture of symmetry. Atop white Corinthian columns sits a pediment – a triangular gable, heavily referencing the Pantheon – and an octagonal dome. The scene has provided an ideal backdrop for many a period drama and, even as I walk through the exquisitely kept grounds, I instantly feel transported to another era.

As I enter, the interior is surprisingly intimate, in contrast with the grandeur of the exterior. At first glance, the ground-level rooms feel a little sparse. I am greeted by stone floors and cream walls with sketches of the building displayed upon them. Only the geometric shapes of the rooms themselves seem striking. But after I climb up a set of unassuming stone steps, an astonishing set of lavish interiors is revealed. These are rooms with velvet walls in striking crimson, cornflower blue and an olive green so dark it almost looks black, with a trimming of gold leaf surrounding the coving, the moulding between the wall and ceiling. Above some doors, this gilding is finished in a scaled pattern, as if large shells are hanging down, while on the floor mythical creatures and cherubs of gold hold up tables of marble.

Underneath the building's central octagonal dome, half-moon windows let in small glimmers of sunlight whenever the clouds

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deem it worthy. Though it is summer, the rain is pelting down. A little more light is offered by a chandelier hanging so low it nearly obscures the view of what adorns each of the eight walls of this room. Above busts of sleepy-looking Roman emperors on gilded podiums hang large paintings. Some are typical of the eighteenth-century European style, featuring voluptuous neoclassical nudes with porcelain skin, Cupid with his wings and bow hovering above them. Others depict Stuart kings and their families, a series of pretty, upturned mouths and daintily formed noses. But in this sea of white faces, one regal figure stands apart. His striking visage has darker, warmer-coloured skin. He is tall, turbaned and seated upon a horse. A lance firmly gripped in his left hand, the wind blows back his cloak, making him look as if he might be flying. The rampant horse's legs rise upwards in a stunt or an act of rebellion, yet the rider stares back calmly, very much in control. The pose is used as a metaphor to show the power this man wields. In the distance, similarly clad characters ride towards us, but it is he who looms large. Below his painting, a small sign providing a date and a title: 'The Moroccan Ambassador.' Who is this mysterious man?

His name was Muhammad bin Haddu al-Attar. In January 1682, he arrived in London as an ambassador from Morocco tasked with negotiating peace and trade. It was a visit that mattered greatly to the English polity, which was riven by sectarianism, the grim fallout of civil war, and the threat in Europe of an ever-more dominant France under Louis XIV. Political relations between Morocco and England had first begun over a century before, when England had sought various diplomatic and trading alliances as it warred with Spain following its attempt to seize Spanish territories in the Netherlands. But maintaining this relationship with Morocco was complex; England's diplomatic priorities changed over the years, and as rival European powers went to war with each other, they attacked port cities in North Africa, claiming them for themselves.

In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the kingdom of Morocco was an independent state ruled over the years by the

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Sa'adi and then the Alawite dynasties. The latter is the family from which the present-day Moroccan King is descended. For most of this era, the Kingdom's capital was the city of Marrakesh, but in later years it shifted to Meknes. Threats to the Kingdom came from internal rebellions, occasionally from the Ottoman Empire as it expanded its reach in North Africa and from incursions by European powers.

In 1662, King Charles II – then King of England, Scotland and Ireland – took control of the Moroccan port city of Tangier, which had been captured by the Portuguese and given to Charles as a part of his dowry upon his marriage to the Portuguese princess Catharine of Braganza. The decision was unpopular with Moroccans. Settlers from the British Isles populated Tangier as part of English efforts to fortify the city against the possibility of its liberation by Moroccan forces, and found themselves in constant clashes with locals. Though there were extensive trade opportunities, many fishermen and sailors feared being taken captive by pirates. Charles hoped for a truce with Morocco to ease conditions for his countrymen. So when an ambassador was sent to England from the court of the Moroccan King Mawlay Ismail, it was essential that he should be treated extremely well. Besides, Charles enjoyed pomp and pleasantry. The Ambassador's visit lasted six months and prompted great intrigue and excitement in England. The accounts of his trip illustrate forgotten exchanges between Britain and kingdoms of the Orient, and reactions to Muhammad bin Haddu paint a picture of how men from Muslim countries were perceived in this period of history.

The Ambassador travelled from Tangier aboard a ship named *The Golden Horse* and arrived at the town of Deal, on the east Kent coast, on 26 December 1681. As he stepped onto the shingle beach, he would have been greeted by the bustle of a major port and the sight of a creamy-yellow limestone castle, created in circular Tudor Rose shape. Its walls would perhaps have showed some damage from a battle fought during the English civil war only

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three decades earlier. Deal Castle still stands on the Kent coastline today, but the town is no longer a magnet for the shipping trade. In December 1681, state officials sent orders from Charles II for the Ambassador's ship to be unloaded as quickly as possible, not just out of respect for the visiting dignitary, but also because of their worries for the menagerie consisting of seven horses and thirty-two ostriches that he had brought along with him.[1] Perhaps of even more concern was one of the Ambassador's human companions, an English soldier who had deserted in Tangier and converted to Islam. In official state correspondence between the King's diplomats, he is described as a 'villain' and officials express frustration over the fact that they cannot demand the man be 'given up to justice'.[2] In English letters and newspapers at the time, he is mainly referred to as 'the renegado' (a term often used in the period, originally derived from Italian, meaning to 'renege' on your religion). It is believed his name was originally either Lucas or Jonas Rowland, though, having converted to Islam, he was now using the name Lucas Muhammad, and throughout the Ambassador's visit he accompanied him as an interpreter. The state officials were likely angered by his apostasy, but the concerns they raised about Lucas were rather prescient, and 'the renegado' would do his moniker justice.

Once the ship had docked, four coaches including the King's own were sent to fetch the Ambassador from Deal. The Moroccan and his party travelled via Canterbury to Rochester and then headed into Greenwich, stopping each day just before sunset to pray for an hour. Along the way they were met with many offers of wine, but they refused them all.[3] At Greenwich, the Ambassador and his twenty-five-strong entourage were met by the King's courtiers, who accompanied him onto the royal barge and along the Thames towards Tower Hill, where they were greeted by gun salutes. Muhammad bin Haddu and his companions then settled in at a house prepared for him on the Strand, where a number of nobles dropped by to pay their respects in the days that followed.[4]

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On 11 January 1682, the Ambassador met the King and his Queen Consort for the very first time, presenting himself at the Banqueting House. From the very moment of his arrival at court, the Ambassador caused a stir by presenting Charles II with an extraordinary gift: two lions and thirty of the ostriches he had brought on board his ship. Though the King was amused, and homes were quickly found for the gifts – St James's Park for the ostriches and the Tower of London for the lions – Charles II was at a loss as to how he should match such a gift, suggesting he might only be able to offer up 'a flock of geese' in return.[5] Then, as now, the art of diplomatic gift exchange was far from straightforward and fraught with anxieties over status, symbolism and respect.

Today, the Banqueting House is all that remains of the Palace of Whitehall, the rest of which was destroyed by a devastating fire in 1698. As I walk along Whitehall, throngs of tourists are absorbed in trying to distract the mounted trooper on duty at Horse Guards. The man may change, but the image is always the same: gold-topped hat, scarlet cloak, still and solemn face above an even stiller body, tall and upright on a black horse. The iconic London postcard, often enlivened in reality by the echoes of a protest under way further down the road outside the gates of Number Ten Downing Street. Those images tend not to make it onto the postcards. I muse to myself on the way in which tourism is divorced from reality – how we serve visitors an idealised version of history that is centred on inanimate objects rather than tackling the complex questions raised by the forces that animate progress. We glory in our architecture without asking the price of its beauty; we salute the static soldier without a thought of where he has marched and what for. I cross the road, moving away from these delicate questions, and am met with an unostentatious entrance to a grand interior.

The Banqueting House still boasts its stunning original ceiling commissioned by Charles I and painted by Rubens. Nine canvases

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set in gilded frames; classical creatures and mythical beings all proclaim the divine right of kings and glorify their infinite wisdom. A crimson throne with a royal gold crest is centre stage. I settle down onto one of the fortuitously placed brown leather beanbags to gaze at the ceiling, trying to ignore the very sensible modern addition of fire extinguishers on the walls as I conjure up an image of a royal reception in Stuart England.

Some 300 years ago, the excited crowds who had gathered inside the hall to catch a glimpse of the visitors from Morocco made such a cacophony of noise that they could not be controlled by the King's soldiers. The small party of Moroccans accompanying the Ambassador looked back at them, astonished at the scene.[6] The diarist John Evelyn described how the Ambassador and his party were dressed in what he calls the 'Moorish habit', outfits of silk coloured cassocks 'with buttons and loops' and 'calico sleeved shirts', over which were white woollen cloaks wrapping their entire bodies. Their feet were clad in 'leather socks like the Turks', their heads adorned with small turbans – with a string of pearls woven into the Ambassador's. They came armed with short, richly decorated, curved swords. To Evelyn's eye, they exuded grandeur and were reminiscent of ancient Romans in their togas. The Ambassador walked up to the throne without showing deference or bowing to the King; the Rubens ceiling designed to overwhelm visitors obviously did not quite do the job here. With Lucas beside him to interpret, he made a short speech and offered up a letter to Charles II, and despite the lack of a bow to the King, Muhammad bin Haddu seemed to have left a good impression. Evelyn describes him on that day as a 'handsome person, well featured, of a wise look, subtle, and extremely civil'.[7]

This was the first of very many engagements for the Ambassador. A few days after their first meeting, he had a private audience with the King in his bedchamber, and was then much in demand among the nobles of England. One of those he dined with was the scholar Elias Ashmole, whose curious collections would later

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be donated to form the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The Ambassador admired the rarities Ashmole was collecting and he recommended recipes, including eating crushed snails to help with gout. Ashmole in turn gave the Ambassador a magnifying glass as a present.[8] Muhammad bin Haddu was also invited to a banquet hosted by one of the King's mistresses, a Frenchwoman named Louise de Kéroualle. She had been given the title of the Duchess of Portsmouth, a far kinder way of referring to her rather than the nickname that had been devised by a rival mistress – 'Squintabella'. The Duchess of Portsmouth had glamorous apartments in Whitehall featuring lavish French tapestries, cabinets from Japan and other luxurious furniture, said to be 'ten times the richness and glory of the Queen's'. Here she entertained politicians and courtiers, playing her part in political intrigues. At the banquet, sweetmeats, music and perhaps less innocent activities were on offer. Yet the Ambassador and his party only drank a little milk and water, tasted some chocolate, but not a drop of wine; something the diarist John Evelyn noted with praise, adding that 'the Moors' behaved with 'extraordinary moderation and modesty . . . did not stare at the ladies' and that the Ambassador showed a 'courtly countenance' with his 'wit and gallantry'. Ultimately, he declared Muhammad bin Haddu to be a 'civil heathen', a relative compliment given that he deemed the Russian Ambassador who was visiting at the same time 'a clown'.[9]

Muhammad bin Haddu's conduct was also praised by the Puritan minister and political journalist Roger Morrice who kept a diary in secret code, which was deciphered by specialist code-breakers and academics at the University of Cambridge in 2003. He describes an incident when the Ambassador was urged by 'English gentlemen' to 'receive a whore into his bed'. The Ambassador apparently responded with a rebuke, saying that his religion forbade such a thing: 'Does not yours?' Morrice declares Muhammad bin Haddu to be a man of 'great bravery and honour', praising his devout behaviour, including the fact that the Ambassador had been to visit

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the grave of the Prophet Muhammad in Madina. He wistfully adds that if only 'this brave man had fallen into acquaintance of grave wise and religious persons ... he would have become a Christian'.[10]

The Ambassador from Morocco toured the sights of London, including the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the tombs of Westminster Abbey. He observed the new St Paul's Cathedral being built, after the original structure had been destroyed in the Fire of London. Here he tipped the workmen fifteen guineas.[11] He dined with lawyers at Lincoln's Inn, enjoyed a tour of their gardens and signed their golden guestbook.[12] His signature in Arabic can still be found in the archives of Lincoln's Inn. Entered on 4 March 1682, it reads 'Praise be to God and God alone. Written by the servant of the wise, the pilgrim to God, Muhammad the son of Muhammed the son of Haddu, from Sus, the Bahamwani. May God be gracious unto him! Amen.'[13] A second signature in Roman script alongside his reads 'Al Hajj Muhammad Lucas Abençerahe', likely to be the same Lucas who was his interpreter.

In the evenings, the Ambassador went to theatres to take in performances of *The Tempest* and *Coriolanus*.[14] He also travelled beyond the capital, spending time in Newmarket, Windsor, Cambridge and Oxford. On 1 April between eleven o'clock and noon, the Ambassador arrived at Cambridge University. A local official wrote an account of the visit in his diary, describing Muhammad bin Haddu wearing a gold cloak, with a cap on his head 'like a night cap'. He was accompanied in the king's coach by some of his attendants who were dressed in scarlet-red garments. Other companions rode on horseback alongside them, wearing white mantles and with their heads 'bound' in turbans of the same material. All of them are described as having a 'very swarthy complexion'.[15] Since the Ambassador himself had apparently been keen to see the curiosities of Cambridge, Charles II sent instructions to the Vice Chancellor of the university to put on a graduation ceremony for his benefit. It was, of course, the wrong time of year for such a ceremony, so the degrees to be awarded would

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have to be honorary.[16] With a critical peace treaty at stake, a good show was necessary. In the evening, the Ambassador and his party were treated to a banquet hosted by the Vice Chancellor. They dined on pickled eels, sturgeon and salmon, and then took a walk around Trinity and St John's colleges. But the culinary combination served up to the Ambassador seemed to leave him feeling a little ill and in need of a lie-down shortly after the walk, the party then later headed back to Newmarket, where they had been based for a few days. Despite the impact of the pickled eels on his stomach, it was reported Muhammad bin Haddu returned to Newmarket 'extremely pleased'.[17]

His visit to Oxford the following month was much more hectic. When it was first planned, the various heads of the university's colleges were apparently reticent, worried that it would set a lavish precedent for other Ambassadors.[18] But the King sent strict instructions that Muhammad bin Haddu was to be received with every honour, so on arrival the Ambassador was greeted by more than a hundred academics.[19] He took up lodgings at the Angel Inn, which at the time was an important coaching inn visited by many dignitaries. The site on which it once stood is now partly the Examination Schools of Oxford University built in the nineteenth century, and partly a cafe and a series of shops along the High Street. On the evening of 30 May 1682, Muhammad bin Haddu met the Vice Chancellor of Oxford and a number of academics dressed in scarlet robes, including the first chair of Arabic studies at Oxford, the Orientalist scholar Dr Edward Pococke.

The organised study of Arabic and Islamic studies had begun at Western European universities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but while scholars had already taken up the subjects in Paris and Rome, English educational establishments were late adopters. The earliest reasons for the interest were religious; it was believed Arabic could aid with understanding of Hebrew and the Bible, and knowledge of the language and Islam itself could provide material for polemical arguments with Muslims. Later, the interest

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