



Arts and  
Humanities  
Research Council



UNIVERSITÀ  
DI PAVIA



HARAR  
THE LIVING MUSEUM

## ***Geographical Societies, Exploration, and African Collections between Egypt, Italy, and the Horn of Africa***

**The Egyptian Geographical Society, Cairo, 23-25 June 2026**

**Workshop Series (2026-2027)**

***Reassessing (Hi)stories of Early Italian Colonialism:  
The Afterlives of Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti's African Collections in Italy and Beyond***

To be held at the Egyptian Geographical Society (EGS) in Cairo—a key historical and institutional site for the production, circulation, and preservation of geographical knowledge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—this workshop constitutes the first event of the Workshop Series (2026–2027) launched by the AHRC research project *Reassessing (Hi)stories of Early Italian Colonialism: The Afterlives of Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti's African Collections in Italy and Beyond*. It aims to bring together scholars from different disciplines to critically examine the entangled histories of geographical exploration, colonial expansion, and the production, circulation, and afterlives of African collections.

Founded on 19 May 1875 by Khedive Isma'īl with the stated aim “to study all branches of Geography, and to shed light on the still unexplored or little known countries” (Reid 1993: 540), the Egyptian Geographical Society emerged as a crucial actor in Egyptian imperial expansion in Sudan and the Horn of Africa. Its establishment coincided with similar initiatives across Europe, at a moment when Egypt itself was increasingly entangled within the British imperial sphere and the Horn of Africa became a contested space shaped by competing ambitions pursued by Egypt, Ethiopia, Italy, Great Britain, and France.

Against this backdrop, the workshop interrogates the reciprocal entanglements between geographical knowledge, exploration, “modernization”, and colonial expansion in Italian, European, Egyptian, Ethiopian, and African histories. Taking the Egyptian Geographical Society as a heuristic site, the workshop seeks to explore the reciprocal influences, circulations, and co-productions that shaped geographical knowledge, scientific practices, and colonial imaginaries at the intersection of Africa and Europe.

Moving beyond Eurocentric narratives by foregrounding African actors, agendas, and institutions, the workshop approaches African societies not merely as passive objects of European imperialism, but as historical agents who mobilized explorers, geographical knowledge, and collections within their own projects of territorial, institutional, and political reform, as well as expansion. From this perspective, Italian colonial expansion is examined in dialogue with Egyptian and Ethiopian imperial trajectories, including their respective “civilizing” discourses, practices of territorial control, and engagements with nineteenth-century debates on slavery and abolition.

The workshop will also explore the Egyptian Geographical Society as a space of networking, circulation, and co-construction of knowledge and collections. The figure of the Italian explorer Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti (1855–1926) —whose travels and collections have long been narrated within a depoliticized and romanticized historiography of scientific exploration—will serve as a point of departure to investigate the so-called “Italian phase” of the Society (from the mid-1880s to the First World War). During this period, Italian figures occupied leading positions within the EGS alongside African actors such as the Egyptian officer and explorer Mohammed Mokhtar. Their careers and writings, produced in the context of Egyptian imperial expansion into Harar, Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia, invite cross-cutting analyses of African and European explorers, highlighting the co-production of epistemic frameworks, collecting practices, and institutional trajectories.

We invite scholars from a range of disciplines—including history, geography, anthropology, museum studies, African studies, postcolonial studies, and heritage studies—to submit proposals engaging with (but not limited to) the following thematic clusters:

### **Theme 1: Geography, Exploration, and Colonial “Modernity”**

- The role of geographical societies, scientific exploration, and antislavery movements as vectors of “modernization,” imperial projection, and colonial expansion
- The production, circulation, translation, institutionalization, and mutual shaping of geographical knowledge across European and African contexts
- Exploration narratives and the construction of colonial imaginaries

### **Theme 2: Geographical Societies as Networks and Nodes of Knowledge**

- The Egyptian Geographical Society as a node of intellectual, scientific, and political networks
- Foreign communities in Egypt and their role within the EGS
- Relationships and exchanges between the EGS, the Società Geografica Italiana, and other European and African geographical institutions
- The roles and trajectories of African actors, explorers, intermediaries, and institutions within these networks

### **Theme 3: Ethnographic Museums, Collections, and logics of Co-production**

- The history of the Ethnographic Museum of the Egyptian Geographical Society as a site for the collection, classification, and exhibition of African objects, and the roles of explorers, African intermediaries, and donors in shaping these practices
- Comparative perspectives on ethnographic museums and collections across Africa and Europe, focusing on similarities and differences in collecting, exhibiting, and scientific or political agendas
- The contemporary afterlives of these collections, including preservation, accessibility, reinterpretation, and debates on restitution, shared heritage, and the decolonisation of knowledge

Contributions based on archival research in Italy, Egypt, Ethiopia, and other relevant contexts are especially welcome. We also strongly encourage papers that reflect on the contemporary resonances of these histories, including debates on museum practices, restitution, and the public reception of colonial-era collections.

**A subset of high-quality submissions will be invited to submit extended versions for publication in a peer-reviewed academic outlet.**

### Submission Guidelines

Please submit an abstract of no more than **500 words**, in either English or Arabic, together with a short biographical note (maximum **150 words**), by **April 15<sup>th</sup>** to [lrb@unipv.it](mailto:lrb@unipv.it). Notifications of acceptance will be sent by **April 30<sup>th</sup>**.

### Scientific Committee

Emma Bond (University of Oxford); Federica Ferrero (University of Pavia); Teferi Mekonnen (Addis Ababa University); Takele Merid (Addis Ababa University); Antonio M. Morone (University of Pavia); Chiara Pagano (University of Pavia); Amir Remedan (The Harari People Regional State Culture, Heritage and Tourism Bureau); Sean Wyer (University of Oxford); Ismail Youssef (Egyptian Geographical Society).