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BLACK VENUS

Sexualized Savages,

Primal Fears, and

Primitive Narratives

in French

T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting

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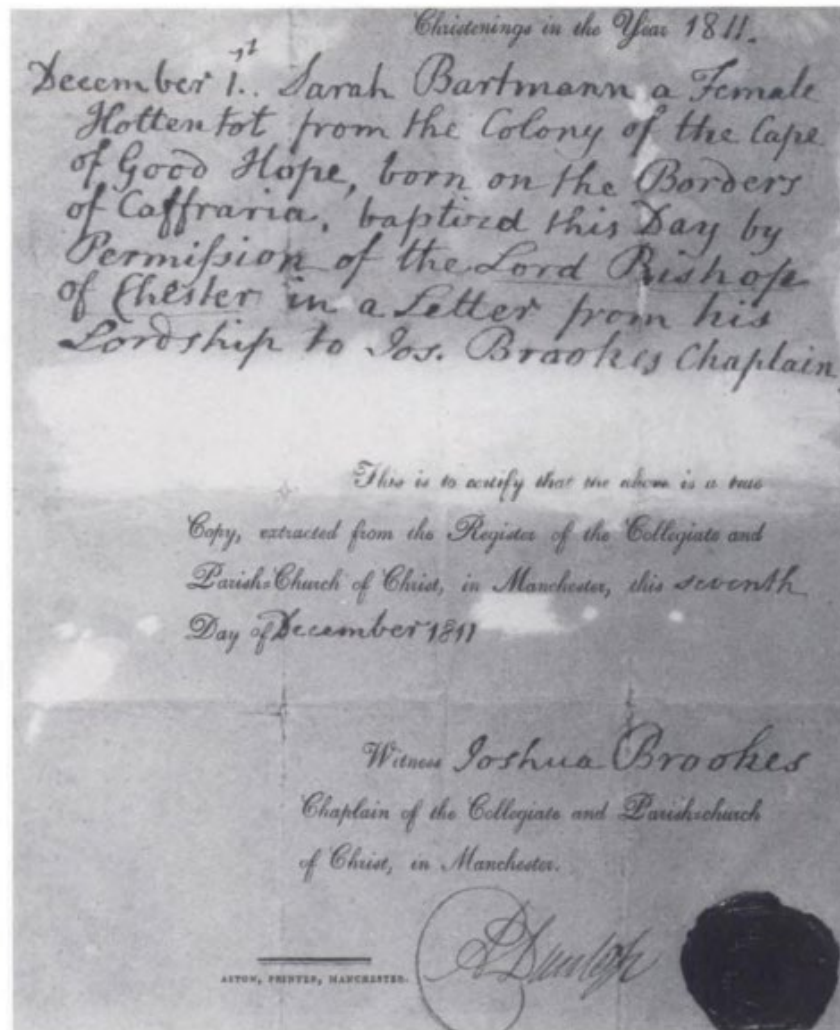
shortly after birth.⁴ She became a domestic of sorts to a Boer farmer, Peter Cezar, at the Cape of Good Hope.⁵

At the age of twenty-one or twenty-two, on October 29, 1810, Saartjie entered into a contractual agreement with Alexander Dunlop of St. James, Middlesex, England, a surgeon of an African ship, and Hendrik Cezar, the brother of Peter Cezar. The contract stipulated that in addition to performing domestic duties, she was to be exhibited in England and Ireland. She would be paid a portion of the profits from her exhibition and repatriated in five years. However, upon Baartman's arrival in London, Dunlop attempted to sell his share in the "Hottentot," as well as the skin of a giraffe, to William Bullock, director of the Liverpool Museum in London. In offering the Baartman, Dunlop described her as having "a very singular appearance" and predicted that "she would make a fortune for anyone who shewed [*sic*] her in London."⁶ Bullock passed on both propositions.

In September 1810, Baartman was exhibited at 225 Piccadilly. The advertising bill read: "Parties of Twelve and upwards, may be accommodated with Private Exhibition of the Hottentot, at No. 225 Piccadilly, between Seven and Eight O'clock in the Evening, by giving notice to the Door-keeper the Day previous."⁷

Standing a mere four feet six inches tall, Baartman's miniature frame was weighed down by her abundant buttocks. It was this riveting attribute, "large as a cauldron pot," as one bawdy English ballad attests,⁸ that Europeans paid to see.

A sensation in England, leaving in her wake street ballads, caricatures, an appearance in the Chancery Court of England, and a name change to Sarah Bartmann⁹ in December 1811, literally carrying her fortune behind her, Bartmann and her protuberant charms found themselves again in the limelight upon her arrival in Paris in September 1814. She and Cezar parted company in Paris; her new guardian was a showman of wild animals named Réaux. According to the widely read *Journal des dames et des modes*: "The doors of the salon open, and the Hottentot Venus could be seen entering. She is a 'Callipygian Venus.' Candies are given to her in order to entice her



Baptismal certificate of Sarah Bartmann (December 7, 1811). Courtesy of the Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

to leap about and sing; she is told that she is the prettiest woman in all society.”¹⁰

The price to view this one-woman spectacle was three francs. At rue de Castiglione and for the same admission price, Réaux was also exhibiting a five-year-old male rhinoceros. Bartmann was exhibited from 11 A.M. to 10 P.M. at the ground level of 188, rue Saint-Honoré.

