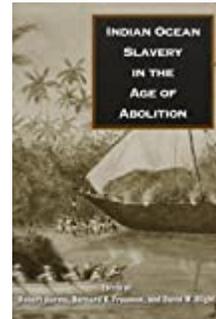


Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, David W. Blight. *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013. 253 S. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-300-16387-2.



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Published on H-Slavery (November, 2015)

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Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition, edited by Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight, is the latest of several publications that help to address the comparative neglect of the Indian Ocean vis-à-vis the Atlantic in the literature on slavery and the slave trade, while emphasizing that the two are not readily comparable. As Harms notes in his introduction, “the older Indian Ocean commercial economy never lost its identity. Underneath the dominant European capital and shipping, networks of indigenous traders travelling in traditional vessels remained vibrant and even expanded in the nineteenth century” (p. 3). The collected essays in this volume navigate carefully through these choppy waters of complex identities and competing spheres of influence and cover much ground.

The chapter by Gwyn Campbell offers useful insights into the fluidity of terminology surrounding those who were “slaves” and those who were considered “free,” and points out important gaps in our knowledge, especially regarding the links between indigenous systems of bonded labor and European-controlled migrant labor streams. Edward A. Alpers charts the growing British power in the Indian Ocean region and its impact on slave trading. Freamon’s overview of the place of slav-

ery in Islamic historiography makes important points about the need to differentiate the Indian Ocean, cautioning against “subtle pressures to view all slavery through the prism of the transatlantic paradigm” (p. 66), stressing that many non-Africans were involved and that Indian Ocean systems and practices of slavery were more complex, multidirectional, and fluid. Given this fact, it is rather disappointing that there is no separate chapter covering the role and experience of India in this volume. William Gervase Clarence-Smith partially makes up for the South Asian lacuna with his fascinating but all-too-brief discussion of Muslim abolitionists and their adversaries in nineteenth-century India. His contribution, which ranges widely from Egypt to Persia and Oman, offers a very welcome overview of the diversity of attitudes to slavery among Islamic elites, which defy simplistic generalization.

Lindsay Doulton returns the reader to the more familiar territory of Royal Navy antislavery patrols; the material is interesting but offers too few glimpses of the lives of “liberated” Africans post-voyage. Mandana F. Limbert provides a close reading of the archival record of the slave dhow Yasmeeen, while Abdul Sheriff’s essay gives new meaning to the term “slave trader,” being an account of

the life and career of Sultan bin Aman, a Zanzibari slave who was also a successful merchant. More slaves operating as traders are found in Thomas F. McDow's contribution, also dealing with Zanzibar. His case studies include the story of Mariam, a Gujarati slave concubine who traveled widely during the period of her servitude. The cases reveal the difficult realities of slaves who did not want to be freed and of slaves who were "freed" only to be handed to labor recruiters for the Mascarene sugar plantations. Richard B. Allen teases out continuities in slave, convict, and indentured migration, and further underscores the complexities of slavery and slave trading in the region, while Janet J. Ewald journeys through time and space with the "sidis" and discusses European en-

counters with enslaved Africans and Asians. Matthew S. Hopper closes the volume with a survey of the slave trade in Arabia and its legacy in the region.

Visualizing the Indian Ocean as a viable entity for the study of slavery in juxtaposition to the Atlantic has proved to be tricky. Several of the essays in this volume attempt to cover a great deal of ground in a few pages, a dizzying accomplishment, but the regional coverage remains patchy with South and Southeast Asia being particularly poorly served. This is not a beginner-friendly book, but for those who have already dipped into the Indian Ocean historiography, it offers a refreshing swim in those challenging waters.

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Citation: Marina Carter. Review of Harms, Robert; Freamon, Bernard K.; Blight, David W., *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*. H-Slavery, H-Net Reviews. November, 2015.

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