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Early Modern

***European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850.* By Richard B. Allen.**

Ohio University Press. 2014. xviii + 378pp. \$34.95.

The transportation of slaves around the Indian Ocean helped to satisfy the labour requirements of European trading outposts and colonies. The importance of this commerce is understated in the histories of early modern empires. In *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*, Richard Allen demonstrates that the institution of slavery, which has commonly been seen as the sole preserve of New World plantations, also shaped the development of European colonialism in the Indian Ocean. By tabulating the available data from a wide variety of international archives, Allen has been able to discern long term trends relating to the European involvement in the Indian Ocean slave trade. European slave trading networks interconnected the Indian Ocean, moving human cargo in all directions and contributing to the diverse demographic and cultural makeup of the regions involved. The book's first chapter offers an engaging overview of Portuguese, Dutch, English and French slave trading, which is particularly useful for scholars of the Atlantic world who are seeking an introduction to the historiography and defining characteristics of slave systems in the Indian Ocean. Subsequent chapters provide a more detailed analysis of the slaving conducted by the English East India Company, the French participation in Mascarene trafficking, and how India and Southeast Asia were integrated into regional slave trading circuits. In the final section, Allen examines the continued importance of forms of forced labour migration after the abolition of the slave trade, providing a clear sense of how slavery in the Indian Ocean changed over time. The quantitative elements of the book are organised into a variety of impressive tables and appendices, which provide valuable datasets for future research. There are limitations to a wholly quantitative approach, such as the large number of contraband slave trading voyages which are not represented in the written record. However, these methodological issues are addressed in the book, where it is stated that many of the figures calculated from official documents have a large margin of error, and could be estimated upwards.

The general overview of slave trading patterns and the quantitative data contained within *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean* will become the foundation for future studies which analyse the role of slavery in Asia and aim to introduce a global perspective to the history of forced labour. There are a number of fruitful directions that scholars could pursue which are not given enough attention in Allen's study. For example, it would have been interesting to have seen more explicit comparisons between the slave systems that existed in the Indian Ocean. What was the importance of interactions between European labour traditions and Asian customs of bondage and dependency, which had been present in the Indian Ocean for many centuries before the arrival of European merchants? Were the labour regimes established by the Portuguese in the *Estado da India* an institutional precedent for the forms of slavery which would later be developed by other European nations with a commercial presence in the Indian Ocean? Perhaps a more sustained focus on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would have helped to highlight the crucial role of transnational connections in the formation slave labour regimes, and demonstrate how Europeans assumed control over pre-existing slave trading networks in Asia.

These minor caveats should not detract from the novel ideas which *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean* brings to the debates surrounding the history of slavery. Allen's thorough archival research has produced a richly detailed monograph which makes a number of important contributions to the historiography. The place of the Indian Ocean as the principal unit of analysis

pushes the field in new directions by challenging the Atlantic-focused and Afro-centric narrative which has preoccupied historians of slavery for decades. For example, by emphasising the intersections between the Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean, Allen supports the recent move towards questioning the historiographical tradition which isolates Asia from colonial developments in the Atlantic. Historians who focus on the commercial operations of European corporations have been reticent to explore the role of these overseas trading companies in the transportation and mobilisation of slave labour in the Indian Ocean. Whilst Allen acknowledges that slave trading in the Indian Ocean was of less demographic and economic significance when compared to transatlantic commerce, he also places emphasis on the global dimensions of European slave trading networks. This provides new insights into the history of long distance labour migration. For instance, Allen has used data from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database to estimate that around 540,000 slaves from the western Indian Ocean were transported to the Americas in the years between 1624 and 1860. French merchants exported slaves bought in West Africa to work in the Mascarene Islands, and also moved chattel labour from East Africa to Saint-Domingue, the sugar powerhouse of the Caribbean.

The most innovative section of the book explores the export of thousands of slaves from India and Southeast Asia, providing evidence that both Asian and African slaves laboured at European settlements in the Indian Ocean. The high cost of free labour in the region meant that the Dutch, who were the largest slave traders in the region during the seventeenth century, bought many slaves and debt bondsmen from Asian merchants and transported them to European colonies to work in domestic and urban occupations. A novel and particularly interesting perspective that Allen introduces in this chapter is that a large proportion of children, who were either kidnapped or sold into bondage by their indebted parents, made up the population of Asian slaves who were exploited by European empires. During the late eighteenth century, abolitionist discourses in British India focused on the moral degeneracy of enslaving children, and Allen raises the thought provoking question of whether these debates influenced the abolitionist agenda that was emerging in the Atlantic world. These kinds of new and probing remarks challenge the current historiography, and will influence the direction of future research, as other scholars use the datasets contained within this book to construct an even fuller understanding of the Indian Ocean slave trade.

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