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New Middle Eastern Studies

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Review of Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno (eds.), *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*

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To cite this article: Lofkrantz, Jennifer, review of Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno (eds.), *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*, (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 2 (2012), <<http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archives/1074>>.

To link to this article: <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archives/1074>

Online Publication Date: 20 December 2012

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NEW MIDDLE EASTERN REVIEWS

Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean

Edited by Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno

Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2010, xii + 264pp., LE 150.00, Hardback.

ISBN: 978 977 416 398 2

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In using *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* as their title, editors Terence Walz and Kenneth Cuno invite comparisons with Bernard Lewis's 1990 monograph of the same name. One of the striking differences between these two works is the use of sources. Each of the contributors to the recent volume was able to access the voices of enslaved individuals. When generalizations are made on the lived enslaved experience, or on the lives of those recently emancipated, they are grounded on a breadth of individual experiences. The contributors base their articles on careful and nuanced analysis of the sources available to them including narrative sources, police records, court cases, and censuses. These sources depict individuals fully engaged in their lives as they tried to navigate their place in society and to build social lives of meaning.

This volume originated in a 2008 Middle East Studies Association conference panel. The editors had three goals. They wanted to contribute to the inclusion of sub-Saharan Africans in the modern social history of Egypt and the Middle East; to demonstrate that the sources are available to accomplish this goal; and to highlight commonalities in the social and cultural experiences of sub-Saharan Africans in the Middle East. To a large extent they accomplished all three goals. Moreover, when compared to recent studies on slavery in other parts of the world, the studies presented here confirm that there were commonalities in the enslaved experience in terms of power relations and common practices no matter the regime. Beyond the introduction, the volume consists of nine chapters by different authors. Six of these chapters are on Egypt, and one each are on Anatolia, Sudan, and Crete.

Despite the heavy emphasis on Egypt, each of the Egyptian chapters deals with a different aspect of the enslaved experience. Both Emad Ahmed Helal and Kenneth Cuno explore the male slave experience. Helal deals with the issue of race in the establishment of Muhammad Ali's slave army. He demonstrates that initially Ali wanted a completely mamluk (white slave) army; however, due to a shortage of mamluks he recruited black slaves. While it was possible for a black African to rise to the officer class, the infrequency of this, in Helal's view, confirms that Ali had racial notions concerning the occupations of his slaves. White slaves were officers whereas black slaves were soldiers. Cuno explores the mostly male slave experience in the mid-nineteenth-century Egyptian countryside. Unlike the urban environment where slaves were largely female, in rural regions slaves were primarily men employed in agriculture, principally cotton. Using census records from four villages in Lower Egypt, Cuno was able to trace Egyptian classifications of sub-Saharan Africans, slave ownership, and slave occupation, but also the social lives of individual enslaved men including their marriages, formation of family life, and interactions with the free population.

George Michael La Rue, Terence Walz, and Liat Kozma show the diversity of experiences of sub-Saharan Africans in Egyptian cities. La Rue offers a fascinating glimpse into the lives of sub-Saharan African slaves in European households. Using a wide array of biographical, epistolary, narrative and legal sources he reconstructs the lives of individual enslaved men and women from the time of capture to their experiences of slavery in Egypt. He finds that the experiences of slaves in European households mirrored the experiences in Egyptian and Turkish households. Like the other authors, he focuses on the agency of enslaved individuals as they made the best choices available to them.

Walz and Kozma offer differing views on the integration of manumitted black slaves into Egyptian society. Using the 1848 census Walz argues that for many blacks, their positions within society reflected Egyptian society as a whole. Black freedmen and women were integrated into elite households but also, like many Egyptians, lived in poverty and economic uncertainty. He shows that contrary to popular perception, many ex-slaves chose and were able to live close together, whether that be in permanent housing that they owned themselves or in shantytowns, revealing a series of social networks. Kozma's article, on the other hand, demonstrates the importance of gender and race in the manumitted slave's experience. She argues that being black and female added vulnerabilities for manumitted black women that freed white female slaves and freed black male slaves did not face. Black freedwomen had fewer employment options and often had to support young children. Moreover, as demonstrated with the case of Saluma, they faced the possibility of re-enslavement. As discussed by Eve Troutt Powell, the uncertain fate of ex-slaves was debated in the late nineteenth-century Egyptian press. Freedom meant independence but also insecurity. Would an ex-slave be better off striking off on their own or maintaining ties with their former masters? Did the government have a responsibility towards ex-slaves? Should the government provide freedmen with land as was the tradition with ex-soldiers? These issues were discussed through journalist 'Abdallah al-Nadim's dialogues about the family.

The three non-Egyptian chapters explore some of the same themes that were apparent in the Egyptian experience. Y. Hakam Erdem addresses the issue of agency in his chapter on the life of Feraset, an enslaved African woman, in İzmit, Anatolia. He includes a noteworthy discussion on the benefits and negatives of using legal sources to access the voices of enslaved individuals and their social networks and milieu. This brings to mind some interesting comparisons that could be made with court cases and testimony involving slaves in colonial West Africa.

Ahmad Sikainga wrote an intriguing chapter on the role of slaves in the formation of urban culture and leisure activities in Khartoum, both as providers of entertainment in upper and middle class households and as participants in street culture. This is a welcomed counter to previous studies that had focused on the origins of the free population in the formation of culture. In a city where between one half and two thirds of the population was enslaved, the multiethnic origins of the black slave population are important in the study of the formation of Khartoum's unique cosmopolitanism. Sikainga demonstrates how non-Sudanese and non-Arab Africans contributed their art forms and leisure activities to the mix of European, Turco-Egyptian and Sudanese forms to produce Khartoum's entertainment culture. Like Sikainga, Michael Ferguson also explores the contribution of sub-Saharan Africans to local culture. Yet, what makes this article especially interesting is the discussion on the expulsion of people of sub-Saharan African descent from Crete and their relocation to Anatolia as part of the Greek-Turkish population exchange of 1926. These individuals were defined by others as Muslims and therefore as Turkish even though they may not have defined themselves as such.

Many of the authors commented on the under-emphasis of the contribution of enslaved sub-Saharan Africans and their descendants to the formation of present-day societies, culture,

and national identity. This volume helps to rectify this problem. However, this observation also brings up the question of public memory. How do communities remember the enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans? Even though memory was not a subject within the scope of this volume, it is a topic that is especially intriguing for places such as Crete where the descendants of sub-Saharan African slaves have been expelled, and is just as applicable to the former Ottoman European territories, Egypt, Arabia and Syria. For a book on the “Middle East” it would have been useful if the volume had included chapters from a wider geographic area. Kozma’s discussion of Saluma’s trafficking from Egypt to Palestine makes the reader wish that for contextual purposes an article specifically on this region had been included. Overall, though, the volume gives a complex and nuanced treatment of race and slavery in Muslim societies. At times it seems that historians and commentators, despite evidence to the contrary, have wanted to stick with the theoretical ideal that race was not a factor in slavery in Muslim states. Yet as demonstrated by scholarly discussions taking place across the Sahara and its shores from at least seventeenth century, it certainly was. This volume demonstrates that race did matter and was a complicating factor as slaves, manumitted slaves, and their descendants negotiated their social positions in nineteenth-century Ottoman territories.