

Scott, who discovered that the emergence of coolie labor helped extend the plantation system and the institution of slavery beyond the period in which it should have ended earlier and with the termination of the African slave trade in the mid 1860s. Finally, her analysis balances the work of Manuel Moreno Fraginals, who demonstrated that although the coolies were treated like slaves, they were salaried workers. As a result, they assisted in the process that led to the use of free wage earners in the sugar industry by the end of the nineteenth century.

Yet, Yun failed to underline that Cuban officials and planters were initially dissatisfied with the quality of coolie laborers. This perception caused them to end the Asian trade while they sought to recruit other types of immigrant workers from Mexico, Spain, and the Canary Islands until 1853. Only when they failed to locate an alternate source of cheap labor did the Asian workers look attractive to the plantocracy. Yun also understated that the coolie trade and their subsequent treatment were engendered by the decline of the African slave trade. It was only after 1865 that a large number of coolies arrived. Their increased numbers and presence assisted sugar plantation owners in producing more sugar than any country in the world. Illuminating these workers' daily work regime and relationship to the production of this commodity could have been insightful in explaining why the majority of Chinese coolies were treated like African slaves. Those planters who held their contracts were slave owners, and they employed 80 percent of all coolies in agricultural tasks alongside black slaves. Nonetheless, Yun's book is essential for graduate students and scholars who study race, ethnicity, labor, and immigration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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*On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa.*  
 By GHISLAINE LYDON. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 496 pp. \$99.00 (cloth); \$76.00 (e-book).

Ghislaine Lydon has written a history of trans-Saharan trade that is both comprehensive and highly sophisticated. It will serve as a principal reference for those interested in the Sahara, and it will gain a place in the larger literature on early modern commercial networks around the globe.

Lydon's book is the first in-depth examination of Saharan com-

merce in many decades. To a much greater extent than other work on the trans-Saharan slave trade, which has relied heavily on European consular and colonial sources, Lydon bases her work on written and oral sources produced within the Saharan commercial networks themselves. Because of this, she is able to trace the internal social and cultural logics of different Saharan trading networks, showing how this difficult and dangerous commerce actually functioned historically. This is no small feat. It is this aspect of the book that is most original and exciting.

The book is a history of the commercial networks that crossed the western end of the Sahara (in the modern-day countries of Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, and Mali). It focuses in particular on groups of traders who originated in the northern Saharan region of Wad Nun and who organized camel caravans that moved south through Mauritania and ultimately to the market towns of the Middle Niger Valley and the Niger Bend in West Africa. There is an extensive overview of the long history of commercial crossings of the Sahara, but the focus of the analysis is on the nineteenth century. Lydon pays a lot of attention to explaining the social mechanisms that made Saharan trade possible. She provides detailed accounts of how caravans were organized, labor mobilized, and credit extended. There is no question that Lydon's ethnographic methodology allowed her to amass a tremendous amount of detailed information about a wide variety of issues connected to Saharan commerce.

The most spectacular source used in this book, though, is a set of Arabic legal texts found in Tishit (Mauritania) that were written in 1852 to resolve a complex inheritance dispute between different partners in commercial transactions, debtors, and the widows of the deceased. Using these remarkably detailed documents, Lydon is able to reconstruct the competing claims made against the estate of one deceased trader who was part of the Wad Nun commercial network. It is the basis of Lydon's explanation of the behavior of particular members of this network in seeking their own material advantage against other claimants located in both Tishit and Guelemin (in Wad Nun).

This inheritance case is a principal means for Lydon to intervene in the larger field of early modern commerce. She argues that scholars have underplayed the importance of religious institutions in organizing long-distance trade. In the Saharan case, both Muslim and Jewish communities relied on religiously based legal frameworks and on the services of legal scholars who were often also involved in the trade themselves to uphold contracts and agreements over long distances. This is not, on the face of it, a new argument; S. D. Goitein made

a similar point in his pioneering work on medieval Jewish traders in the Cairo Geniza documents.<sup>1</sup> But by emphasizing the importance of the role of the religious establishment—or legal scholars—in the functioning of Saharan trade, Lydon offers an important corrective to the emphasis on the cultural basis of trust found in Abner Cohen and Philip Curtin's model of the trade diaspora.<sup>2</sup> It also suggests that reputation-based institutions described by Avner Greif in his work on medieval Jewish traders found in the Cairo Geniza documents were not as important in the Saharan context. Greif argued that the trust and honesty of commercial agents was ensured by the flow of information between members of a trading network. Because of the damage that news of misdeeds could do to the future prospects of an agent, it was in his self-interest to behave honestly.<sup>3</sup> Lydon's book suggests that these reputational mechanisms were less important than in other contexts. In a similar vein, Lydon argues that Claude Markovits's de-emphasis of religious belonging as an important factor in the trust mechanisms of South Asian Sindi trade networks cannot be applied in the Sahara.<sup>4</sup> For Lydon, commercial networks in the Sahara formed around identities associated with religion, lineage, and locality of origin, but traders relied heavily on the services of religious legal scholars to execute complicated tasks such as the division of estates for which identitary bonds were not sufficiently strong to ensure trust.

One of the most interesting aspects of Lydon's argument is her emphasis on the role of writing for the commercial connections across the Sahara. Echoing Goitein again, Lydon shows just how important literacy was to the functioning of Saharan trade. She argues that by the nineteenth century the trans-Saharan trade was organized according to a "paper economy." The majority of trans-Saharan merchants were literate, paper was widely available, and contracts, transactions, and correspondence were commonly written down. It is not uncommon for historians of Africa to invoke literacy in Arabic as an important technology in the history of long-distance trade. Lydon however, takes this

<sup>1</sup> S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 2, *The Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> Abner Cohen, "Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas," in *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, ed. Claude Meillassoux (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 266–267; Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 26.

much further, suggesting that written commercial documents did not have legal standing as evidence in Islamic law. As such, they were not strictly speaking legal documents that could be introduced to resolve disputes. This, Lydon argues, was an impediment to fuller development of commerce across the Sahara. One wonders also, following this line of argument, the extent to which scarcities of paper created bottlenecks in the scale and scope of trans-Saharan trade before the nineteenth century.

Lydon has written an important book that is both rich and comprehensive in its treatment of a very difficult subject. It will stand as a milestone and reference in our understanding of the historical connections across the Sahara.

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*The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus.* By BRUCE GRANT. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009. 216 pp. \$68.50 (cloth); \$21.95 (paper).

Anthropologist Bruce Grant has produced a thought-provoking study of historical memory and its impact on contemporary political and cultural movements. The book examines the period from 1800 to the modern day, as the Caucasus region was claimed by the tsarist empire, transitioned through the Soviet era, and attempted to forge independent identities in the wake of the Soviet collapse. It is not a historical assessment of these events but rather a discourse analysis focused upon the meaning of “empire” throughout these distinct eras as seen through a wide variety of sources, primarily literature, film, and recent interviews with scholars and politicians.

Grant’s discussion is formed around two recurrent tropes: the Russian belief in the “gift of empire” and its benefit for Caucasian peoples, and the persistent “captive” narrative that Russians used to explain their actions in the Caucasus. These images allow Grant to address the nature of imperial sovereignty and its effect upon colonial communities. In the nineteenth century, the tsar’s gift to the Caucasus was the right to live under the rule of the tsar, which simultaneously meant that the tsar possessed political sovereignty over the Caucasians, but he graciously left them as “full sovereigns of their own labor” (as quoted on p. 40). Therefore, from the beginning of Russia’s entrance into the Caucasus, sovereignty never possessed a single meaning. The early sep-

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