

scholars as they continue to examine the ramifications of the way the war is remembered and relived.

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## ARABS AND THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

*The Arabs and the Scramble for Africa.*

By John C. Wilkinson.

Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing, 2015. Pp. xiv + 497. £70.00/\$115.00, hardback (ISBN 9781781790687).

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**Key Words:** Islam, imperialism, colonialism, politics.

John C. Wilkinson, one of the most prolific historians of Oman, the Persian (or Arab) Gulf, and the Indian Ocean region, has published a work on a topic of great import: the history of the Arabs in Africa from 1820–1890 CE. Why did he use the freighted and Eurocentric term, ‘scramble’, to describe Arabian and African relationships? The answers lie in this richly sourced book. Most Western-oriented studies and analyses of the Indian Ocean and their peoples focus mainly on the force of external threats, interests, and priorities on the region. Wilkinson shifts the perspective from such ethnocentric and European concerns.

This book opens with the Omani relationships between East Africa and the European powers of the epoch (Britain and France), then analyses the German colonization in East Africa, and ultimately considers the Congo of King Leopold II (1835–1909), who caused 2 million deaths in a total population of 15 million. Throughout, the author devotes his focus to the dynamic interfaces between sea and land, giving equal attention to ocean, shore, and coastal fringe. Adopting a maritime and coastal vantage point, this book seeks to address questions of continuity, change, and identity. More specifically, it aims to uncover the resources and strategies that people used at different periods in the East African colonial past; the nature and form of port towns and the natural and cultural landscapes in which they were situated; the mechanisms and technologies of trade and maritime activities; and the varieties of settlement activities outside of towns. As Wilkinson demonstrates, shared ecologies around the Indian Ocean helped to foster similar social and cultural fields, giving rise to culturally connected land and maritime societies. The monsoon system that dominates the Indian Ocean region also fostered shared social and cultural connections, which resulted in truly cosmopolitan maritime societies. Those societies long preceded the incursion of capital that entered the Indian Ocean with Europeans from the sixteenth century onwards.

This book offers a different approach to the concepts of power, political control, and borders of the Indian Ocean littorals and of the East African hinterland. The Arab communities of East Africa are often portrayed in the literature as a monolithic group who migrated to the continent in search of wealth. Wilkinson advances a much more dynamic

interpretation, arguing that the realities of terrain, climate, and maritime connections played a crucial role in the fluid construction and reconstruction of Arab identities in the Indian Ocean World.

The growing trade along the coasts soon led to numerous caravan routes to Central Africa where new trading centres and new societies emerged; these societies were deeply influenced by Asian and Arab actors, especially from Oman, who soon became economically influential in the Great Lakes region and started menacing Great Britain imperialist strategies in East Africa. The threat represented by European influence – Cameron and Stanley on the Congo, the German colonists, Leopold II's Congo Free State, and the missionary societies that fought the slave trade – presented major challenges for Omani economic interests in the Tabora and Ujiji regions. The portrait of the legendary figure of the slave trade, Tippu Tip (Hamad b. Muhammad al-Murjabi), offers a valuable view into the interconnections between colonial interests, regional conflicts, and trading influences in East and Central Africa.

In his conclusion, Wilkinson suggests that the Omanis will have to come to terms with their colonial past in the same way that British and European powers have had to, although perhaps through a different political process. There is a deep need for such reckonings with the histories and linkages that span the Indian Ocean region.

The eight maps are interesting, although the editing – plus some misprints in the text – could have been attended to with more care. This book is nonetheless strongly recommended not only for those interested in Eastern and Central Africa, but in Arabia and the Indian Ocean as well.

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## THE MAHDIST STATE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SUDAN

*Shari'a and the Islamic State in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Sudan: The Mahdi's Legal Methodology and Doctrine.*

By Aharon Layish.

Leiden: Brill, 2016. Pp. xxx + 348. \$149.00, hardback (ISBN 9789004311381).

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In March 1881, a Sudanese holy man named Muhammad Ahmad began to confide to his intimate associates that he was the Expected Mahdi, a prominent figure in Islamic eschatology. In the months and years to follow, he and his supporters overthrew the Ottoman colonial regime in the Sudan and united much of the country under a Mahdist State that endured until the colonial conquest by the British of 1898. The Mahdi himself died in June 1885, but his Companions, following the example of the Prophet Muhammad, thereafter recorded anecdotes concerning his words and deeds, which were broadly comparable in their legal effects to the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad.