

## **HISTORY**

**Kristin Mann. *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760–1900*.** Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. xii + 473 pp. Bibliography. Index. No price reported.

Kristin Mann's fat and heavy book—473 pages of very small print, produced on very superior paper and in very ornate format—is written at several levels. It is first and foremost on Nigerian (and therefore African) history. Second, it addresses the history of the slave trade across the Atlantic and the history of slavery (and thus also Atlantic history). Finally, it explores British imperialism in two eras: that of free trade imperialism, and that of full-blooded political, economic, social, and cultural imperialism. The topic it treats—the British occupation of Lagos and what came after—has two storylines that are already well-known. One, a line we may regretfully call sympathetic to colonialism, is that Britain intervened in Lagos to assuage her abolitionist conscience and to maintain her international reputation as the world's number 1 enemy of the slave trade and of slavery. The other line is that Britain seized Lagos to get control of an important overland trade route that brought natural produce from the far interior—for this was a time when Britain, the most industrialized nation in world, sought tropical goods for her industries. This line is the favorite of the “disciples” of Eric Williams and of African nationalist historians. Without giving reasons, Mann chose the first line, thus making her book one that will convince those who need no convincing but that will not pass muster with those who need convincing.

No sooner had the would-be crusaders against the slave trade and slavery arrived into Lagos, thus making sure of their control of the Atlantic terminal of the overland route to Oyo and beyond, they lost their will and zeal to engage their enemies frontally. Instead they became apostles of *fes-tine lente*, which they said would over time put the slave trade and slavery to a painless death. The fact of the matter was that the indigenous institutions that were implicated in the slave trade and slavery were the same ones that were pioneering and handling the much desired legitimate trade. The dilemma was how to assault slave trade and slavery directly and achieve total success without harming the expanding legitimate trade. With no easy way out of this dilemma, the British retreated to the traditional pastime of imperialists down the ages—prevarication and double talk—thus betraying those they said they had come to save. This unfortunate development is well covered by Mann without emotion and in measured language.

However, the very fact of British presence in Lagos as colonial overlords, coupled with their masterly inactivity in the matters of abolition and emancipation, created a new situation for slaves, other dependents, and slave owners. The attempt by all concerned to negotiate this new ground created by British presence and hypocrisy—on the part of the British prevarica-

tors themselves, the slave owners and other overlords, the slaves and other dependents—affected everything else in Lagos: abolition, emancipation, labor, land ownership and use, and trade and relations with the Yoruba of the interior. By 1900 the result was the port city of Lagos, whose evolution into the living hell and the frontier of opportunity we know of today still lay in the womb of time.

This story is told by the author with the skill of a master—master researcher, master analyst, master story-teller, and master essayist. Had it been presented simply as “The Economic and Social History of Lagos, c. 1760–1900” without the mix-up of trying to read the kaleidoscopic minds of practiced imperialists on the question of motives, one would have nothing but praise and still more praise for the work because of its scintillating scholarship.

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**Henri Médard & Shane Doyle, eds. *Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa*.** Eastern African Studies series. Athens: Ohio University Press; Oxford: James Currey; Kampala: Fountain Publishers; Nairobi: Eastern African Education Publishers, 2007. xiv + 273 pp. Maps. Tables. Notes. References. Index. \$59.95. Cloth. \$26.95. Paper.

This book on slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa opens a new field of research. Written by historians and one anthropologist from universities in France, England, and the United States, it consists of an introduction and ten chapters on slavery in different parts of the area. The book arose from a conference held in Paris in 2002 on the impact of slavery and the slave trade in this large region—a hitherto neglected subject since most scholars working in the region had incorrectly believed that slavery had arisen only in the nineteenth century and had been of merely marginal importance. In colonial times the region was divided between Britain, Belgium, and (until 1918) Germany; today it includes parts of Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Such divisions hamper the historian, since the colonial archives are scattered and in different languages. On the ground, however, the region has what Henri Médard describes as a “distinctive” unity, socially, culturally and politically; furthermore, many of its institutions, it now appears, have been “structured around slavery.”

In his introduction Médard makes the interesting point that slavery here was very much like that elsewhere—except that surprisingly it did not leave a lasting social stigma on its victims and their descendants. The chapters begin with an interesting discussion of how linguistic evidence shows that slavery existed before the eighteenth century, with a useful explana-