

HISTORY

Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, eds. *Women and Slavery. Volume 1: Africa, the Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval Atlantic.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007. xxvii + 399 pp. Maps. Tables. Figures. Notes. Index. \$55.00. Cloth. \$30.00. Paper.

Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, eds. *Women and Slavery. Volume 2: The Modern Atlantic.* xxvi + 329 pp. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007. Maps. Tables. Figures. Notes. Index. \$55.00. Cloth. \$30.00. Paper.

Enslaved females attached to households have represented the major form of slavery throughout most of world history. So argues *Women and Slavery*, a two-volume edited collection that considers histories of women as slaves through diverse geographical, chronological, and methodological approaches. Contributions from thirty authors engage enslaved women's roles as producers and reproducers, draw on African historiography, and establish the basis for a more complex view of world history.

Women and Slavery advances the continuing debates about slavery (and specifically slavery in Africa) that Miers and Kopytoff launched with their 1977 edited volume, *Slavery in Africa* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), but the current volumes also strive for a broader world-historical approach deeply informed by the historiography of slavery in Africa. Whereas slave studies had previously overlooked Africa, the Miers and Kopytoff thesis positioned slaves on a continuum of African kinship. Further work in the 1970s and 1980s by Meillasoux, Lovejoy, and Klein and Robertson, among others, brought slavery within Africa into sharper focus. The volumes under review recognize the centrality of African histories and studies of slavery to world history. These volumes began as a festschrift for Suzanne Miers but were not published as such because she emerged as a principal editor. Nevertheless, these volumes may be the ideal tribute to Miers and her esteemed contributions as scholar, collaborator, and editor to the study of slavery in Africa and beyond.

The two volumes of *Women and Slavery* are organized geographically and their subsections are divided thematically. The first volume concerns Africa, the Indian Ocean world, and the medieval North Atlantic. The second volume has a more narrow spatial and historical focus on the Atlantic system. Both volumes have five subsections of between two and four chapters each, though some of these groupings seem quite arbitrary. Katrin Bromber's detailed study (including a rich bibliography) of gender as a linguistic and social force in Swahili, and Jan-Georg Deutsch's deconstruction of slave prices to account for age and other factors, constitute a subsection in itself titled "Women in Islamic Households." Why these two, with their relatively narrow focus on East Africa (or the greater Swahili world), stand for all Islamic households is not clear.

The geographic and methodological diversity of the chapters constitute one of the collection's salient appeals. Kirsten Seaver critically reads Norse sagas to argue for the importance of slaves in Iceland and Greenland between the tenth and twelfth centuries, a time when Dublin was a slave trade center and travelers feared Estonian pirates. Richard Follett crosses history with knowledge about physiology and nutrition to make a surprising argument about slave fecundity in the harsh regime of industrializing sugar plantations in Louisiana in the 1840s and 1850s. He demonstrates that enslaved women conceived more children during harvest months, the time of hardest physical labor, in part because additional rations of molasses temporarily increased their health. Elizabeth Jordan's archeological study of an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century washing site in Cape Town recasts buttons and other objects as clues not toward slave ethnicity, as those in the Americas have, but as evidence of the gendered nature of slave labor. These are but three examples from the twenty-seven articles that are consistently superior. Although each chapter fits into a region and a period, reading the contributions serially brings to the fore central tensions of enslaved women, and the chapters speak to one another in unexpected ways. Despite its broader goal of recasting slavery in a global context, however, *Women and Slavery* focuses almost exclusively on slaves from Africa and in the African diaspora. Only Seaver's contribution and Martin Klein's chapter on the harem address slaves or slave systems that were not African. Greater reference to women and slavery in Europe and Asia would have enhanced the global comparative value.

Across both volumes, Joseph Miller's arguments about women and slavery come across most strongly, in part because he claims the most ink. In addition to writing both prefaces and introductions, Miller is the author of a stimulating chapter on slaving as a history of women that serves as the collection's coda. Miller asserts the primacy of female slaves attached to households, and takes this as a starting point for a reinterpretation of Atlantic World history. In short, across forty thousand years, as economies and societies developed beyond a household focus, impersonal institutions arose to arbitrate between slaves, household heads, merchants, and the state. The gender imbalance of Atlantic slavery further skewed the imbalance—and Paul Lovejoy's chapter ably grounds the evolution of such gender imbalances in political geography and in Muslim social practices on the borders of the Atlantic and Saharan catchment areas.

Women and Slavery is not destined simply to be cherry picked for undergraduate reading packets. While the chapters are well-written and concise enough for our students' attention spans, the strength of Miller's provocative work and the overall quality of the individual contributions make this an important collection on its own. The two volumes challenge us to reconsider women and slavery and appreciate the strongly gendered nature of servitude in world history.

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