Researchers and students would be better served by relying on existing monographs and articles on South African medical history. The best use of this weighty, uneven book might be as an example of the difficulties of writing comprehensive national cultural histories with an incomplete set of tools.

University of Illinois at Urbana TERESA BARNES

LABOUR CULTURE IN EAST AFRICA'S CARAVANS

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Carriers of Culture: Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-century East Africa. By STEPHEN J. ROCKEL. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2006. Pp. xix + 345. £16.95/$29.95, paperback (ISBN 978-0-325-07133-6).

KEY WORDS: East Africa, Tanzania, labour, precolonial, trade.

Over the past two decades, historians have reinterpreted the commercialization of nineteenth-century East Africa by demonstrating how the region's cultural institutions actively shaped the penetration of global capital, mainly through analyses of the consumption, distribution, and localized meanings of imported commodities. Stephen Rockel's study of Nyamwezi porters – in many ways the epitomizing actors of nineteenth-century commercialization – examines how caravan workers shaped this economic transformation by creating robust 'crew cultures' that embraced wage-labor opportunities but also defended worker interests by invoking rights of custom. Infant East African capitalism had to rely heavily on mature porterage systems. The free wage labor of these caravan workers, Rockel argues, thus represented 'an alternative modernity counterposed and integrated to European capitalist modernity, a translated wage-labor system representing a translated modernity' (p. 10).

Much of the book's introduction is devoted to demonstrating that nineteenth-century porterage was overwhelmingly the work of free laborers, with slaves and slavery having little to do with it. For reasons of wider ideology and narrow politics, European accounts habitually misrepresent this fact by drawing a tight connection between porterage and slave labor, thus laying the groundwork to justify the regulation and eventual dismemberment of caravan work through abolitionist appeals. Rockel considers this knot of misrepresentation and misconception the product of 'post-Enlightenment philosophy', and draws upon a mixture of subaltern studies and transnational labor historians to find alternative conceptual paths to recover the history of Nyamwezi porterage. Marcus Rediker's work on eighteenth-century merchant seamen[1] looms largest among these influences, providing Rockel not only with terminology ('crew cultures') but also a comparative model wherein transport workers transcended plebeian localism and contributed to 'processes of cultural standardization and communication among working people' (p. 23). Origins of the caravan trade are covered in the book's second chapter, which reaffirms the widely accepted point that interior peoples pioneered East Africa's caravan routes, and which sketches out the environmental and economic reasons for Nyamwezi dominance over the region's 'central' route to the *Mrima* coast. Caravan work, Rockel argues, became professionalized during

[1] M. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge, 1987).

the 1850s, and was by then already firmly grounded on Nyamwezi cultural norms that regulated 'working hours and routines, conditions, and, to some extent, discipline' (p. 65).

Carriers of Culture is at its best in providing vivid portraits of porter work routines and daily life within the caravan. Rockel brings to life the environmental and material world facing African porters to explain the logic of path selection, the timing of marches, diverse carrying styles, hunting strategies, and the hierarchy and ritual within marching orders. The author's exhaustive reading of European documentary sources – hence the book's post-1850 focus – allows him also to draw finely textured images of porter leisure and camp life. Food takes its rightful place centre stage, not only as a cultural marker of ethnic difference between Rockel's Nyamwezi protagonists and their coastal 'Waungwana' co-workers but also as a major point of wage bargaining. The specter of famine haunted all porters, and was 'the Achilles' heel of the long-distance caravan system' (p. 149). But as grim as these environmental constraints might have been, Rockel never loses sight of the entrepreneurial and optimistic spirit that motivated male caravan workers and the women who joined them. Along the way, he offers an important correction to Marcia Wright's influential account of nineteenth-century East African women,[2] who were in general desperately insecure and seeking protection, by showing the trading ambitions and property accumulation skills of these formidable caravan women.

Rockel writes as an unabashed advocate for Nyamwezi porters, with the benefit of great sensitivity to their agency and constrained choices, but at the consequent cost of minimizing conflict among caravan workers. His analysis of African resistance in Chapter 6 is primarily one of African workers righteously battling exploitative European employers, in which deserters were not weakening caravan morale but defending individual interests; in which food thieves were not endangering caravan health but protesting racially inequitable rations; *et cetera*. Rockel ascribes seemingly any and all negative historic portrayals of porters to the ignorance and insensitivity of their European chroniclers. No doubt much of it can be, but thorny issues of contested normative work discipline and restricted entry into the porter profession remain, and cannot be examined by a default strategy of positive representation. Rockel argues that historians have overstated the hegemony of coastal culture in East Africa's nineteenth-century commercialization (pp. 55–6), but he does not put his claims of Nyamwezi cultural hegemony over East African porterage to basic cultural tests, such as explaining the synchronous linguistic spread of Swahili language and Islam over these same caravan routes, or showing what the Nyamwezi linguistic contributions to East Africa's *lingua franca* have been. 'Crew cultures', Rockel asserts, were based on honor and custom, but over the course of the book these cultures primarily appear as snapshots of bargaining stances and thus seem essentially oppositionist in content, with few roots either in generational and other types of internal social conflicts within caravans or in Nyamwezi society.

Rockel's story ends with the de-skilling of caravan work during the early decades of German colonial rule, but questions about the legacy of caravan culture for twentieth-century East Africa remain. In particular, one wonders what impact Nyamwezi 'crew cultures' might have had on colonial-era transport workers, who seem to have mirrored their nineteenth-century forebears in remarkable ways, such as in their capacity for immediate strike actions and in the high negotiating value placed on rations. Readers hoping for a full analysis of local economic and

[2] M. Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life Stories from East/Central Africa* (New York, 1993).

environmental factors that either induced or restrained Nyamwezi participation in the caravan trade will have to await the author's promised second volume. *Carriers of Culture* is an attractive book with useful maps, evocative illustrations, and richly documented footnotes. But the index is less than thorough, some captions are cut short, and – in an appalling production error – the final two chapters end in mid-sentence. These are undeserving blemishes to what is a fine study and important contribution to the historiography of nineteenth-century East Africa.

University of Illinois at Urbana JAMES R. BRENNAN

ON THE IRRELEVANCE OF THE STATE IN RURAL UGANDA

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Beyond the State in Rural Uganda. By BEN JONES. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, 2009. Pp. xx + 199. £65, hardback (ISBN: 978-0-7486-3518-4).

KEY WORDS: Uganda, local history, rural, state.

For twenty years now, the West has held up Uganda as one of the few bright spots on a continent still mired in corruption, still struggling to achieve liberal democracy, still unwilling to tackle HIV/AIDS head on. Yoweri Museveni, so the story goes, has made the hard decisions that would usher in economic, social, and political development, and for that he is fêted in Western capitals and is showered with millions in aid. Of course, the true picture is not that rosy: one need only look at Uganda's involvement in Congo to realize that something is amiss in the pearl of Africa. Museveni's Uganda also attracts a good deal of academic attention among scholars of 'the state'. Writers pose questions of how particular schemes work, or how government decentralization has sparked innovation by civil society. In the end, asserts Ben Jones in this fascinating work, 'the state becomes the central object of study', while 'changes at the local level are understood to be no more than a reaction to the government's decentralization efforts' (pp. 4–5). Instead, Jones examines Oledai subparish in the Iteso region of eastern Uganda, where the state and NGOs appear more or less irrelevant to daily life, and the achievements for which Museveni is hailed are nowhere to be seen. Instead, the people of Oledai have invested meaning and power in local institutions over which they exert authority, and in which the state plays no role.

Jones first briefly traces the history of Oledai and Teso generally since the late precolonial period. The colonial state intervened forcefully in the region, coercing peasants into cotton growing. In the early postcolonial years, however, Teso remained somewhat on the margins of national politics, and the impact of the Amin years was limited mostly to the economy. 'For Teso,' Jones argues, 'the postcolonial disaster started in 1986' (p. 48). The accession to power of Museveni worried many in Teso, which was over-represented in the army and police of the government that he had just overthrown. Cattle raids also began to increase in number and severity, a situation the central government did nothing to remedy. For the next seven or so years, Teso was wracked by warfare. Young men loosened the authority of their seniors, rural-dwellers were herded into internment camps, corpses were mutilated or dumped into mass graves.

As the insurgency ended, so too did much of the state's regular involvement in Oledai. Development programs, the growth of local bureaucracy, the intervention