
ANNOTATIONEN

Gwyn Campbell: Africa and the Indian Ocean World from Early Times to circa 1900 (New Approaches to African History, 4), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019, xv + 305 pp.

In 2019, Gwyn Campbell, Director of the Indian Ocean World Centre at McGill University, Montréal (Canada), published the monograph “Africa and the Indian Ocean World from Early Times to circa 1900” in Cambridge University Press’s “New Approaches to African History” series. In line with the series’ objectives, the book both introduces students and general readers to the history of Africa in the context of the Indian Ocean world, and stimulates debate by arguing for a particular approach to the subject, namely a focus on human-environment interaction as driving force for the region’s history in the longue durée. The latter is not to be confused with ecological determinism, as “humans can have major impacts on the environment” (p. 17). Instead, Campbell makes a case for correlating a dynamic understanding of environmental phenomena with developments and events in human history.

The book consists of twelve chapters, sketching over two millennia of human-environment interaction in the Indian

Ocean world and in Indian Ocean Africa. After an introductory chapter explaining the book’s guiding principles, the author discusses the Indian Ocean world as a “global economy” (what Fernand Braudel has called “une économie-monde”) in chapter 2, and moves on to suggest a periodization of three upswings/upsurges (chapters 3, 5, 6 and 9) contrasted with periods of instability and uncertainty (chapters 4, 7, and 8). Volcanic eruptions, changes in climate, oceanic currents and winds, as well as in agricultural activity and in the use of energy, provide plausible explanations for these vicissitudes. The final three chapters present “indigenous modernization” in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Madagascar within a single interpretative framework (chapter 10), a narrative on the Scramble for Africa in an Indian Ocean context (chapter 11), and an innovative interpretation of slavery and slave trade in the Indian Ocean world (chapter 12).

The book is richly illustrated, with over 50 figures, maps, and informative tables. Twelve pages of (somewhat dated) references point to further reading. A thirteen pages index helps the reader to browse through this thought-provoking monograph.

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