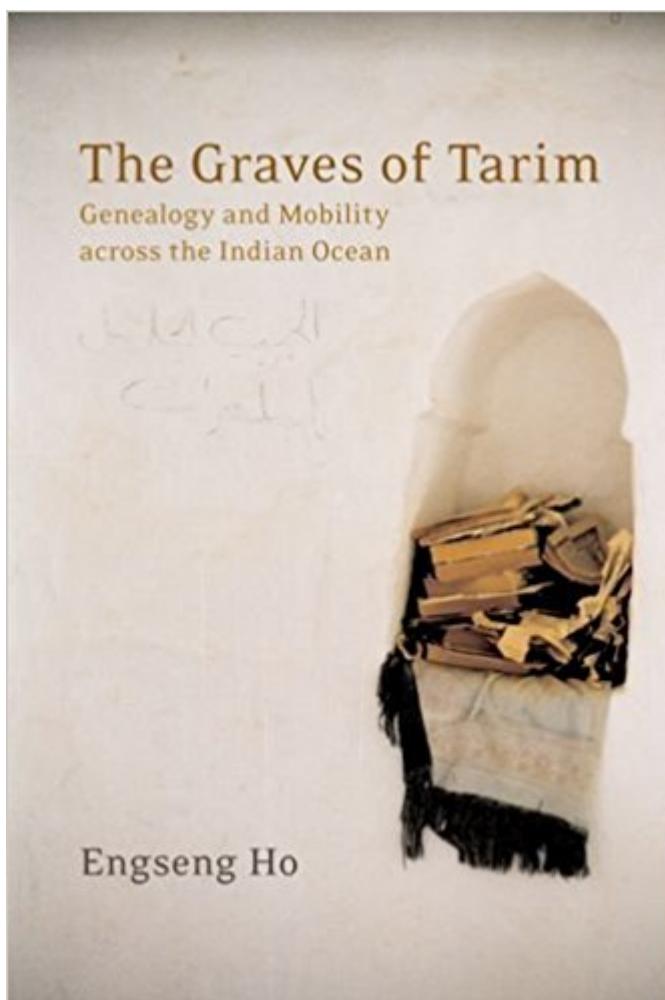


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The Graves Of Tarim: Genealogy And Mobility Across The Indian Ocean (California World History Library)



Synopsis

The Graves of Tarim narrates the movement of an old diaspora across the Indian Ocean over the past five hundred years. Ranging from Arabia to India and Southeast Asia, Engseng Ho explores the transcultural exchanges—kinship and writing—that enabled Hadrami Yemeni descendants of the Muslim prophet Muhammad to become locals in each of the three regions yet remain cosmopolitans with vital connections across the ocean. At home throughout the Indian Ocean, diasporic Hadramis engaged European empires in surprising ways across its breadth, beyond the usual territorial confines of colonizer and colonized. A work of both anthropology and history, this book brilliantly demonstrates how the emerging fields of world history and transcultural studies are coming together to provide groundbreaking ways of studying religion, diaspora, and empire. Ho interprets biographies, family histories, chronicles, pilgrimage manuals and religious law as the unified literary output of a diaspora that hybridizes both texts and persons within a genealogy of Prophetic descent. By using anthropological concepts to read Islamic texts in Arabic and Malay, he demonstrates the existence of a hitherto unidentified canon of diasporic literature. His supple conceptual framework and innovative use of documentary and field evidence are elegantly combined to present a vision of this vital world region beyond the histories of trade and European empire.

Book Information

File Size: 5083 KB

Print Length: 406 pages

Publisher: University of California Press; 1 edition (November 7, 2006)

Publication Date: November 1, 2006

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0033WSDTW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #1,315,202 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #73

in Books > History > Middle East > Yemen #2018 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks >

Customer Reviews

You can't get through some books because they are boring. You can't get through others because they are so poorly written. But then, there are a few that take a long time to get through because they are so full of ideas and new currents that constantly join a dense, learned discussion. This is one of the latter. I'm not going to tell you that it's an easy trot through the anthropology and history of Hadramawt and its diaspora. No, if you can't sail through "key site of articulation", "ready apparatus of signs", "two distinct realms of textual circulation", or "dynamics of signification"---plus a lot more---your ship is going to sink. The writing is poetic and lyrical at times, but often hard to pin down. Discussions of genealogical texts from a remote Yemeni region are not everybody's cup of tea. So, let's just say that this is a book for scholars, a book that will impress you for sure if you stay the course. Devout Muslims from the remote region of Hadramawt---today in eastern Yemen---began emigrating abroad some five hundred years ago. At first they served as teachers, judges, religious officials, or holy men, settling in India, East Africa, and Southeast Asia. They maintained ties with their distant homeland, often returning to die there. Their remittances or savings bought date orchards in wadis of Hadramawt, their tombs became places of pilgrimage for their descendants and others. Graves of ancestors and holy men turned into pilgrimage sites, beloved of many, condemned as not Islamic enough by others. As European colonial empires grew in the 18th and 19th centuries, Hadrami Arabs linked up with them economically, becoming ever more prosperous merchants and businessmen. They blended into the societies where their diaspora had settled, but maintained contact over many generations with Hadramawt. As the wider Arab world awoke and currents of pan-Arabism, Islamic revival and nationalism began to run, some segments of the Hadrami community became involved. Genealogy played a continuous role in their links to one another, to the rising native elites in such places as Indonesia, Malaysia and Zanzibar through intermarriage. The creoles (Hadrami fathers, local mothers) played important parts in the adoptive societies. Hadramawt's remoteness (and lack of obvious resources) meant that it was not colonized until the late 1930s. It was the last place to fall under European colonial rule. The British ruled it with bombs and bribes, trying to maintain order via treaties with a myriad small rulers. By that time, some 20-30% of the population lived abroad. When the British left, Hadramawt, now absorbed into the Marxist People's Republic of South Yemen, entered at last into the 20th century world of nation states, where everybody had to be a citizen of one or another entity, but not more than one. The

creoles faced difficult dilemmas. The new rulers tried to break the bonds of Islam and family built over many centuries. When the two Yemens joined, Marxism got the thumbs down, and the sayyid-tribal complex--bound by Islam--re-emerged. That's the story in a nutshell. From Malaysia himself, Ho probably came to this subject with unique advantages. It is neither a work totally about Yemen nor a work about the diaspora in Southeast Asia, India, etc. It is a work full of questions about emigration, travel, opportunity, eviction, return, family, religion and graves. For the details, and to know how the author answered many questions, I think you'll have to read this complex, fascinating, and sometimes extremely difficult book.

I am a descendant of the Diaspora that Mr. Ho writes about, tracing my roots through the UAE, USA, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and finally Tarim where my great-grandfather migrated from and is buried. While the prose of the book is very academic and difficult to read at times for a layman like myself, I persevered through it and was rewarded when the pace picked up from around chapter 8 or so. This book helped me to understand my personal family history and also why Hadramis place such importance on genealogy. A fascinating bit of history of which I had only heard little bits and pieces of at various family gatherings while growing up. This book has given me the complete picture. Thanks.

Many terms are created by the author and the book lacks a glossary. Regarding the Kindle edition, not having page numbers made it impossible to keep up with my class discussion.

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