

Wright, John: *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*. Oxford: Routledge 2007. ISBN: 978-0-415-38046-1; 272 S.

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This short book is a brief introduction to the subject of the trans-Saharan slave trade. As an introduction, Wright looks at a series of themes, concentrating on the nineteenth century. He explores the Sahara as a land of grazing, war and trade, and looks specifically at the slave trade at Murzuk, Ghadames, Ghat, and along the Wadai road, thus covering the central Sahara. He also examines Morocco as the last great slave mart and the „middle passage“ crossing the Mediterranean. Wright argues that European style abolition imposed an illusion of change in the nature of slavery in the Islamic context.

The book is in a series on History and Society in the Islamic World, and as such is good as an introduction, combining factual evidence from documented sources with a view to context and with usually sufficient explanation. Wright skillfully uses British documentary sources and an adequate reading of the secondary literature to outline the broad contours of slavery in Islamic North Africa and the Sahara. However rich British source materials are, and they are indeed wealthy in detail, Wright limits his use of sources to English language texts alone, without explanation. He does not draw on the far more voluminous French materials on North Africa and the Sahara. He makes no reference to Ottoman sources, of which the whole region was subservient, or to the individual archives in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Chad that bear on trans-Saharan slavery. There is extensive documentation in Arabic, Turkish, and even Italian, but Wright does not even consider the importance of such materials. Hence, as a work of scholarship, the book is superficial. Wright's expertise is offered through a British lens without any reflection on the possible distortions that may have resulted. Hence, he asks questions that are introductory but in no way begin to address the nuances of the serious scholarship on the study of slavery in Islam.