

Burkhard Schnepel and Julia Verne (eds.). 2022. *Cargoes in Motion: Materiality and Connectivity across the Indian Ocean*. Athens: Ohio University Press. 337 pp.

Research on connectivities that economic activity has forged across the Indian Ocean has tended to focus on people. Challenging this standard approach, *Cargoes in Motion* shifts attention to cargo, “focusing on the ways in which the cargoes themselves have informed and continue to shape processes of exchange across the Indian Ocean” (pp. ix-x). Contributions cohere around cargo ranging from both commercial items like pearls, tea, salt, cloves, cowries, cattle, and beads to non-commercial ones like letters, bride wealth in the form of elephant tusks, and diplomatic gifts in the form of animals (giraffes and elephants) that polities in the Indian Ocean world have exchanged. This wide range of cargo, originating from different parts of the Indian Ocean world and equally destined to divergent locations, enables this book to trace and retrace networks in the Indian Ocean world that intersect and diverge in equal measure. Contributors arrive at these networks by examining how “different cargoes are formed and made, adapted, appropriated, put to use and transformed” (p. xi). The breadth of the areas under study is quite expansive, extending from the South China Sea through the Bay of Bengal and the Red Sea to Zanzibar and the Mozambique channel.

The book is neatly organized into three sections of four chapters each. The first part, “Cargoes in the Making,” showcases processes of making and preparing cargo. The cargoes examined in this section are pearls from the Bay of Bengal, salt from the Red Sea, Bohea tea from Wuyi mountains in China, and Zanzibari cloves. I take this section as an example of how this book adequately and elaborately shows the ability of cargo to lay bare systems of relations in the Indian Ocean world and beyond. An example is Kunbing Xiao’s chapter that traces the circulation of Bohea tea from Wuyi mountains in China where the tea was produced to its large market in Britain in the 17th-19th centuries. Here, we find different actors working together—tea growers, makers, dealers, laborers, tax officials, merchants, inspectors, buyers, and retailers. These actors are situated differently both temporally and spatially, highlighting the ability of a single commodity to connect many people and places. The second part, “On Board,” more directly gestures to the title of the book and explores the processes and the attendant complications of transporting cargo. Two chapters focus on live cargo—giraffes, elephants, and cattle—and another two on Maldivian cowries and written documents including letters. The final part, “Cargoes in Use,” focuses on the appropriation of cargo and demonstrates how processes of adapting, utilizing, and transforming cargo underlie connectivities within and beyond the Indian Ocean world. Cargoes used to make this point are civet, a secretion by the civet cat and that is used as an aromatic; glass beads and beadwork in Malaysia’s Penang city; elephant tusks as bride wealth among the Lamaholot in East Indonesia; and tails of the *Phelsuma* gecko which are transformed to organic matter for use in laboratories before they are translated to information on the evolution and habitat of this species of geckos.

The twelve chapters approach cargo from multidisciplinary perspectives, producing a rich and fertile ground from which to imagine the ability of cargo to fashion networks along and across Indian Ocean coasts. Historians, linguists, anthropologists and geographers variously apply two theoretical and methodological perspectives on objects, both of which treat cargo as objects with lives of their own.

The division of the book into three parts separates otherwise intertwined processes of preparing, shipping, and distributing cargo. These processes are often chaotic, disorderly, and messy, aspects that the current layout glosses over. At the same time, a side by side focus on multiple elements of each cargo—its preparation, its transportation and its appropriation—would perhaps take away from the scrutiny with which individual cargoes are attended to in the current layout.

Although the editors state from the onset that they are shifting focus from human-centred analyses of connectivities in the Indian Ocean world in favor of a method that centres on cargo, it might have been productive for this book to also include contributions on human cargo, particularly slaves. Already, it focuses on both commercial and non-commercial as well as live and inanimate cargo. Including human cargo would foster a more complete picture of cargo in the Indian Ocean world. Overall, however, *Cargoes in Motion* is a timely and valuable book to researchers in the field of Indian Ocean studies. The in-depth engagement with which authors handle their respective topics makes this book invaluable for experts, and its clarity and neat outline invites non-specialists as well. What stands out is the interdisciplinary focus on cargo, which makes this a great read for researchers from varied disciplines.

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