



The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean

By Engseng Ho

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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—in 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.

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The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean By Engseng Ho Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #395478 in Books
- Brand: imusti
- Published on: 2006-11-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.02" h x .92" w x 5.98" l, 1.41 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 406 pages

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Review

“An important contribution to the study of diaspora. . . . Elegant. . . . [A] very thorough study that deserves a wide readership.”

(Intl Journal Of Middle East Stds (Ijmes) 2010-07-15)

“This exemplary ethnography offers a distinctive approach to the ‘anthropology of mobility’.”

(Journal Royal Anthro Inst 2011-02-07)

About the Author

Engseng Ho is Frederick S. Danzinger Associate Professor of Anthropology and of Social Studies at Harvard University, and Academy Scholar at the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies.

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