

past, present, and future—and are energizing in their proposal of new directions to the field.

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*Europeans and Africans: Mutual Discoveries and First Encounters.*

Michał Tymowski.

African History 10. Leiden: Brill, 2020. xii + 390 pp. €89.

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Michał Tymowski is a celebrated historian of West Africa. His latest work, *Europeans and Africans: Mutual Discoveries and First Encounters*, is further proof of his intellectual prowess. The work taps into a vast array of primary and secondary sources across disciplines to make the case for early modern “cross-cultural contacts” and “two-way acculturations” between West Africans and Europeans, primarily the Portuguese. In this, Tymowski introduces and reintroduces Portuguese sources within the context of a new critical analysis that might be considered a history of the collective consciousness of the groups of Africans and Europeans who share these encounters. He references this as a foray into psychohistory that few of his colleagues have attempted.

In spite of his intentions, Tymowski does his argument a disservice by opening the analysis with a trope that has underscored too many attempts at examining African historical interactions for the early modern: the “lack of evidence.” This is interesting, given that Tymowski refers to other cultural sources such as African sculpture in his introduction, and that he does provide some analysis of African material culture midway through the book. What Tymowski telegraphs in his opening, however, is a fundamental of conventional historiographic approaches to Africa: the privileging of European archival sources over an array of African sources that would have enhanced his desire for a more balanced and nuanced analysis. To be fair, Tymowski does speak to some of these, but his analysis here does not match the promise of his thesis.

That thesis is also hampered conceptually by the choice of terminology. “Black African,” though the default choice of many who write on African and European encounters in the early modern, works against the kind of balanced and deep historical argument Tymowski and other progressive historians are attempting to make. It concedes to modern racial and somatic conventions that the data show to be unwarranted. Those data suggest that there may be better conceptual paradigms that might allow scholars to make the very argument that Tymowski undertakes in this volume.

Interestingly enough, Tymowski speaks to the question of privileging European archives in a 2015 work. It is quite curious that he did not use that thesis as an entrée for this current volume. In the earlier work, he mused on how the African side of these encounters might be examined. A deeper examination of African art and

African oral sources would have greatly enhanced knowledge of these interactions from the African perspective.

If attention is given to the question of conceptualization, then all of the actors in question—African and European—might receive more intensive historical analysis. This would occur by acknowledging other cultural sources for analysis along with art and oral data, and by recognizing an amazing cultural engine that exceeded geographic and temporal space, as well as modern ideas of race. Tymowski references this at the very end of his volume when he speaks of the fact that “Europeans benefitted from the achievements of Islamic civilization.” In Europe alone, and for the Portuguese in particular, there existed an eight-hundred-year legacy of Afro-Arabic interaction of people of all complexions and stations with the people who would emerge as modern Europeans. Tymowski is not alone in this oversight. It is one that features widely in the scholarship of the last decade, scholarship that in many ways has been groundbreaking, yet seriously flawed in its glossing of the African and European interactions in the eight hundred years prior to the Renaissance. What might those interactions tell us of the participants of whom Tymowski writes? How does this history shape European expectations? What might it reveal of Africans already present in Europe and their assimilations, not necessarily to European culture and mores but to a life in the northern reaches of the Mediterranean Basin? How did they contribute to and shape the age that would launch modern European imperialism?

In all, Tymowski’s volume does what all good scholarship should: it forces us to ask more questions; in that, it is an important read.

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*Luxury, Fashion and the Early Modern Idea of Credit.* Klas Nyberg and Håkan Jakobsson, eds.

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When the neologism *luxury* (*lusso*) was first coined in the Italian vernacular in the mid-fifteenth century, it drew upon the twin concepts of excess and lust embedded in the etymology of the ancient Roman word *luxus*. Luxury, with these twin debased moral states born of unregulated desire, was an attribute applied by old elites to the aspirational middling classes. It lies at the heart of Emma Bovary’s morality tale: a woman whose obsessive attempts to mimic the fashionable classes in Paris, coupled with her libidinous desires, lead to utter ruin. But what ultimately enables Emma’s downfall is a reliance on the personal credit offered by her draper Lhereux. Emma is one of the many in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe who used a