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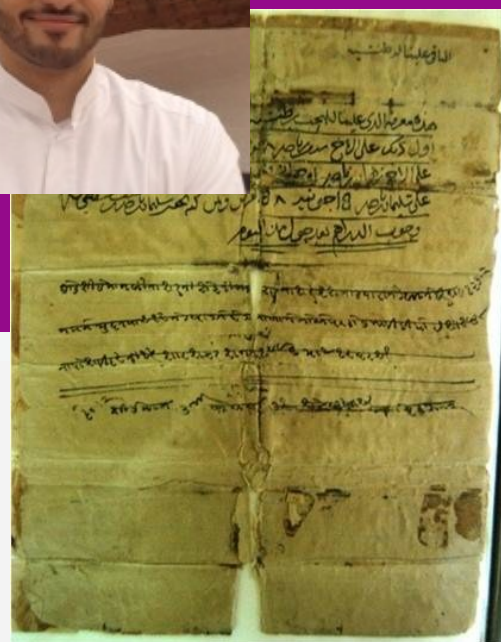
# The Most Enduring Obligation

Debt, Personhood, and Political Economy in Omani East Africa, c. 1800-1860

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11:00 AM, Morton 314



From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Omani merchants and planters and their Indian financiers had been settling in East Africa in growing numbers, as they sought to participate in the increasingly lucrative ivory and slave trades and a burgeoning plantation economy. Debt formed a central component of this world. Debt facilitated access to the capital necessary to fuel economic activity, but also provided intellectual fodder for Muslim thinkers, generating a philosophy on the nature and shape of the increasingly dense web of commercial obligations that ran through the Western Indian Ocean. This paper charts the juristic construction of debt and legal personhood in the Western Indian Ocean. It explores how jurists constructed the individual legal subject and how they bound commerce to blood, and linked personhood to membership in a changing economic and political community at a time of emerging modern capitalism.



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