

## World Archaeological Congress 4

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### Symposium: Consuming Texts and Traditions in the Archaeology of Madagascar

#### *Abstract Package*

#### **Convenor:**

Zoe Crossland (USA)

Chantal Radimilahy (MADAGASCAR)

William Griffin (USA)

How do we know the past? In Madagascar, the past is a vibrant and continuing part of the present, drawn from the rich written histories and enduring oral traditions. Archaeology, as a relative newcomer to Madagascar, is creating alternate ways of knowing the past, in an environment where the past is already created and understood from other sources. This has made it hard if not impossible for archaeology to break free of these all-consuming texts and traditions. By looking critically at the neglected relationship between archaeology and the texts and traditions we ask whether archaeology can exist independently of these sources and indeed whether and why it needs to.

Madagascar, familiar to many as 'The Island of the Ancestors' is known for the connectedness of the past to the present. In this context we hope to explore the tension that exists between a sociopolitically informed archaeology that takes account of its positioning within present day understandings of the past, and yet the simultaneous need for archaeology to be able to stand alone, able to know the past without the crutch of history. We hope that in reassessing the relationship between archaeology and the texts and oral traditions we can critically explore the choices we make when creating the past through archaeology. A more nuanced understanding of the relationship of archaeology to these other ways of knowing the past can only benefit archaeology and open fruitful new avenues for research in Madagascar.

We also hope that holding a symposium on Madagascar at WAC 4 in South Africa will encourage people to place Madagascar within a wider African context: too often its archaeology and history are written as somehow outside the currents of world history.

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Yet the presence of the Sorabe, a Malagasy writing system based on Arabic, and the influence of British missions and later French colonialism testify to Madagascar's involvement in the world system, and our archaeology should engage with this. This session will bring together archaeologists from Madagascar, France the US and Britain, and will provide a opportunity for many of the archaeologists currently working in Madagascar to discuss these issues together.

***Statements in stone: marking Merina state presence***

***on the frontier***

Zoe Crossland

Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

The vatolahy or 'male-stones' of Betafo are well-known throughout the Andrantsay region of the highlands of Madagascar. Erected in the 1880s these stones honoured military leaders of the Vakinankaratra. Unlike vatolahy in the rest of Madagascar they are incised in Malagasy with details of whichever lehibe or 'great man' they represent. Rainimandaniarivo's vatolahy directly addresses the reader in his 'voice'. ("My name is Rainimandaniarivo...I was commandant of the Vakinankaratra region when I left you.") This paper addresses the vatolahy of Betafo from an anthropological and ethnohistorical perspective. I look at the vatolahy in the context of state expansion from Imerina into the Andrantsay area and subsequent attempts at state consolidation. To do this I move between historical accounts of the placing of the vatolahy, present day understandings of them and a broader crosscultural perspective of the use of monumental architecture to represent people and bodies by state societies and hierarchically organized polities. I suggest that although the vatolahy in Betafo are exceptional in their use of text, they can be used to understand the role of un-inscribed vatolahy in other areas of the central highlands.

***How to understand the past to save modern forests in Madagascar.***

Robert E. Dewar

Department of Anthropology, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, USA

The loss of much of Madagascar's northeastern coastal rainforest is frequently lamented. It is common to attribute the deforestation to people, either Malagasy or French. Yet, (1) the original distribution of forest in this region is unknown; (2) when forest disappeared is uncertain; (3) the history of human settlement in the region is largely conjectural; and (4) the ways people use forests are poorly documented. Thus, we can neither describe the deforestation nor discuss its causes, and without this history, plans for saving the remaining forests are moot. Much of our ignorance can be dispelled through (1) inventories of existing forest patches, (2) interviews of local populations to learn how they value, use and control access to forests, (3) censuses to monitor changes in population, (4) study of colonial and later descriptions of land use

and expropriation in the 20th century, and of earlier travelers' descriptions of this landscape and (5) archaeological analysis of more ancient population distributions. In this short talk, I show how historical texts illuminate deforestation, and provide, even by themselves, an improved basis for comprehension of deforestation in this region.

### ***3. Toponymie et archeologie***

Chantal Radimilahy

Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie de l'Université d'Antananarivo, Madagascar

La toponymie a toujours tenu un rôle important dans la localisation des sites dans l'histoire de l'archéologie à Madagascar. Il est d'ailleurs probable qu'une grande partie de l'histoire ancienne malgache pourrait être retracée avec l'aide seulement des toponymes. Les légendes comme les traditions orales mentionnent des noms de lieux, qui peuvent aider à retracer les déplacements de populations. Ces dernières gardent de temps à autre le nom du village d'origine.

En outre, la population actuelle a l'habitude de désigner les établissements correspondant à un mode de construction qui n'est plus habituel. Tel est le cas des sites à fosses, ou des sites entourés de murailles, ou encore les sites abandonnés ayant laissé des traces d'intervention humaine.

L'analyse portera sur la coutume populaire d'utiliser soit des noms de plantes, soit d'autres facteurs se rapportant à l'environnement naturel (toponymes, hydronymes, zonymes, etc.). On pourrait peut-être lier cet usage à des exemples extérieurs à Madagascar. Une analyse statistique des tendances régionales et nationales comparée aux résultats des travaux archéologiques aidera probablement à tirer des conclusions conséquentes.

### ***. L'ARCHEOLOGIE ET FORET SACREE "ALA FALY" EN PAYS TANDROY SUD MALGACHE***

Ramilisonina

Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie de l'Université d'Antananarivo, Madagascar

Avant 1960, à Madagascar, l'Archéologie a été le fait de chercheurs amateurs passionnés ou intéressés. Et vers le début de ce dernier siècle tous ces chercheurs et voyageurs pensaient que le Sud Malgache n'avait pas connu de population qu'au XV-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Mais depuis 1962, grâce à la volonté du Centre d'Art et d'Archéologie de l'Université d'Antananarivo, la recherche archéologique a pu se développer par ses chercheurs professionnels. Les résultats obtenus étaient prometteurs et bien répartis malgré l'immensité de l'île et le nombre très restreint des archéologues. La datation au C.14 de sites découverts au Sud Malgache "zone côtière et intérieure" permettait de comprendre que le Sud a été habité avant le XII<sup>e</sup> siècle.

A partir de 1971 la recherche s'intensifiait. Puis dès 1991 à 1997, en collaboration entre l'Université de Sheffield-Angleterre représentée par le Dr. M. Parker Pearson, et l'Institut de Civilisations - Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie de l'Université d'Antananarivo Madagascar dont je le représente, un survey archéologique systématique a pu se faire sur l'ensemble de ce pays "Tandroy" (1) dont plus de 590 sites sont recensés. Les différents vestiges archéologiques : poterie locale et importée, fort "Manda" en mur de pierres sèches, l'habitat, l'architecture funéraire, la forêt sacrée et les traditions orales attestent d'une rupture d'occupation entre XIVe et XVIe siècle. En effet deux phases de peuplement sont distinctes, l'une avant le XIVe et l'autre après XVIe, dont la forêt sacrée "ala faly" avait pris sa place à la deuxième.

A Madagascar et chez les Malgaches tout est sacré ; colline, rocher, forêt, eaux, animaux, oiseaux etc. Cependant chez le Tandroy la Forêt "sacrée" "Ala faly" est très importante et remarquable par sa taille et ses nombres. elle avait été habitée par le clan Andriamanary (2). Devenu oui ou non d'un lieu d'enterrement "Lonake" du Roi ancêtre et tombeaux de ses descendants, l'accès à ces endroits est strictement interdit sauf pour l'enterrement. De ce fait, sol fertile, défrichement culturel non autorisé, les arbres se développaient assez vite et forment actuellement de grandes et belles forêts. Tous les Malgaches respectent et croient aux aides des morts ancêtres d'où l'élaboration et respect de leur habitation (tombeau) est meilleure que la maison des vivants. Parfois ces endroits sont destinés à la réserve des ruches et à des plantes médicinales dont elles sont des éléments indispensables au culte des ancêtres.

Le non respect de ces endroits de forêt, souiller, couper les arbres provoque un procès devant une grande assemblée de population et se termine par une amende d'un à plusieurs zébus. Par contre la confection d'un cercueil "hazo" est autorisée après avoir eu l'accord pris par une délégation de chefs du clan Andriamanare, et un sacrifice d'un zébu "vositra". Je signale que les Tandroy pratiquent uniquement la culture sèche. Pour cela ils ont besoin de grandes surfaces. Pourtant le sol est sablonneux, l'oblige de changer de champ et défricher d'autre endroit aux arbres actuellement insuffisant et difficile à retrouver. Attention la forêt sacrée "Ala faly" reste toujours intouchable.

En conclusion, pour l'avenir de l'archéologie d'une part, la protection de la nature et de l'environnement d'autre part, ces forêts sacrées "Ala faly" en pays Tandroy Sud Malgache sont des patrimoines naturels et culturels. aussi Musée d'histoire naturelle et d'Art et d'Archéologie, leur protection, restauration et conservation seront souhaitées en tenant compte de la population et sa culture.

(1) - Un groupe culturel habitant l'extrême-Sud malgache zone à "roy" épineuse. (2) - Clan noble considéré propriétaire de la terre, forêt sacrée et pouvoir traditionnel.

### *Texts and Surveys on the Matitanana River*

William Griffin

Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Since pre-colonial times the Antemoro people on Madagascar's southeast coast have created their own texts called 'Sorabe' written in the Malagasy language, but using a modified Arabic script. The majority of these 'Sorabe' are magico-religious in nature and a number of linguists and ethnographers have recently renewed the efforts to gain cultural insights from them. A sizable minority is also historical in nature and documents the founding of royal towns, the migrations of peoples, and the occurrence of local wars and village conflicts. All of these events should leave more obvious archaeological traces, and correspondences should exist between the archaeological record, the 'Sorabe,' and the local oral traditions. This paper will report the results of the first archaeological survey of the lower Matitanana River Valley - the geographical focus for most of the existing 'Sorabe.' The fruitful synergy found between 'ethnohistory' and archaeology in many other parts of the world is less common in Africa as a whole, and this case study will begin to explore their connections within a Malagasy setting. Beyond simply searching for similarities and differences however, the interconnections, and especially how the texts and traditions affected the archaeological fieldwork as it was carried out and the interpretations which resulted, will be considered.

### ***INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENT AND EUROPEAN CONTACT IN SOUTHERN MADAGASCAR***

Mike Parker Pearson  
University of Sheffield

This paper will review the work of the Androy Project in investigating the last 1000 years of social change in the extreme south of Madagascar, from the large stone-walled ceremonial enclosures of the 11th-13th centuries AD, to the stratified society of the Tandroy kingdom in the 17th-19th centuries, through to the more egalitarian Tandroy communities of the 20th century who construct remarkable monumental stone tombs. The Androy Project, commenced in 1991, is a multidisciplinary Anglo-Malagasy project which draws principally on the methods of archaeology, oral history and textual history. One of its current focuses is the archaeology of the colonial encounter, most powerfully embodied in the story of the wreck of the East Indiaman *Degrave* in 1703, recounted by Robert Drury. This encounter ended in tragedy when the ship's crew were massacred. Drury was one of the few European survivors and he writes about his subsequent years of slavery in great detail. With the likely site of the wreck now located and in the light of many links between Drury's account and oral historical and archaeological sources, it now appears that his story is a reliable one rather than a work of semi-fiction by Daniel Defoe. It is one of a number of European sources which can be used in conjunction with oral histories and archaeology to understand the political and social changes of the last 500 years and the impact of outside interference. Although guns became a significant and numerous commodity by 1700, there was little interaction with the rest of Madagascar, or further afield, until the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 16th and 17th centuries people also initiated an unusual adaptive change by leaving the river valleys for the waterless plains. The impact of this transformation, with its drastic implications for the role of women and

for the raising of cattle, still affects the way that people live today even though the conditions of warfare that gave rise to it have long gone.