

INDONESIA AND NORTHWEST MADAGASCAR

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In this paper I do not want to come back to the discussion on how African or how Indonesian the cultures of Madagascar are, but rather I will give some information on dates and reasons of the voyages of the Indonesians that finally led to the formation of the Indonesian element in Malagasy cultures. I start with a traditional concept in anthropology and history as to the character of Indonesian cultures: Within the Indian Ocean culture history Indonesia is viewed as a recipient area and usually the point is made how flexible Indonesian cultures always have been in incorporating the many foreign influences, especially those from India, and notions like *Greater India* or *The Indian colonial empires in Further India and Indonesia* point to an idea prevailing in many a study that Indonesia was a barbarian area waiting to become cultured through the agency of some foreign *high* civilization. On who those agents were there was and still is a debate. Some authors held that traders were the transmitters, others thought of military conquests, still others were of the opinion that upper-class religious functionaries were in the main responsible for this cultural transfer. Some authors, however, rejected these views like Bosch who thought of several hundreds or even thousands of missionaries, but who rejected the idea of a *Hindu civilization*. He thought of the Indian influences as something enriching the already complex Indonesian cultures. This put more weight on the role of Indonesia but still failed to give a better picture of pre-Indian Indonesia. Since Heine-Gelderns (1923) early attempt to reconstruct an Old Indonesian culture (called *middle cultures* by him) no serious attempt has been made in this direction. However, authors who are more inclined towards the idea of Greater India, mention the *well-regulated tribal life, the political organization*, where the position of the king is high, and the fact that the vast majority of political titles in the early inscriptions are pre-Indian hence Austronesian (Sarkar

1970 : 132-33). This, at first sight, could mean that the incorporation of Indian ideas into Indonesia was not very difficult as a state ideology already existed in the area ; but it would still be in line with the incorporation-concept. One should not stop questioning at this point but try to examine the active role played by those Indonesian societies. Sarkar himself (1970 : 14) has a short passage on where to look and what to look for. In his reconstruction of the development of Indian navigation and seafaring he says : «...centuries, if not millennia, before the advent of Indians in the stage of South-East Asia, migrants belonging to what philologists describe as Austronesian stock had fanned out in many lands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It is not impossible that the Indian merchants and adventurers... had followed the same highway of the sea as was marked out for them by their Austronesian predecessors in the pre-historic period, but firm evidence of this hypothesis we have none ».

There is however firm evidence of these *Austronesian predecessors* making their way to East Africa and Madagascar. Anthropologists have no doubt that there was a considerable *racial* and cultural element in the formation of the Malagasy populations and cultures. Ever since in 1603 Houtman published a list of Malay, Malagasy and Dutch words, it was known that Malagasy belonged to the Indonesian language sub-family. With the proven relationship between the languages it was easier to be sure about relations in other cultural fields. I will not repeat the many elements mentioned in this context. But one has also to agree with Kent (1970) who called our attention to the much-neglected African elements in Malagasy and in many other fields of Malagasy culture.

Kent (1970 : 263) also proposed a sequence of events in the coastal area of East Africa and Madagascar. He sees first the arrival of Indonesians in East Africa in the first centuries of our era. Then with the advent of the Bantu there was increasing intermingling between them and the Indonesians, and finally Bantu pressure forced these mixed people between 300 and 1000 to Madagascar. Other authors proposed different dates. Vérin distinguishes an early (400 +) settlement of Indonesian people using slash-and-burn cultivation, pottery, and metal objects and a second movement (around 1300), characterized by the addition of wet-rice agriculture, a more sophisticated use of metals, and some contact with Islam. Ottino (1974 : 16) doubts the presence of Indonesians at an early date and suggests only one Indonesian movement arriving in Madagascar between the 10th and the 12th centuries. There is however a line of arguments to improve the dating of the arrival of the Indonesians on the East coast of Africa as well as to inform us about the reasons for the Indonesian voyages. The main reason seems to have been the spice trade, and especially the trade in cinnamon. Cinnamon was widely used in the Mediterranean area in Classical times as an aromatic admixture to various wines, as a supplement to various offerings, perfume and ointments, and the cinnamon bark, leaves, and the fruit were used in most combined remedies during that time. The Greeks and the Romans were unaware of the origin of the cinnamon tree. Herodotus described how birds brought the cinnamon from the East and let it fall down over deserts in Arabia.

Pliny has a better report, although he also is unaware of the origin of the plant. He knows however that the Romans get their cinnamon from the East coast of Africa. Traders get it there from people who

«bring it over vast seas on rafts which have no rudders to steer them or oars to push or pull them or sails or other aids to navigation ; but instead only the spirit of man and human courage. What is more, they put out in winter at the time of the winter solstice, when the East winds are blowing their hardest. These winds drive them on a straight course, and from gulf to gulf. Now cinnamon is the chief object of their journey and they say that those merchant sailors take almost five years before they return. In exchange they carry back with them glassware and bronze ware, clothing, brooches, armlets and necklaces». (Plinius : Historia naturalis XII : 85-88).

Miller, in his study of the Roman spice trade, stated that these seafarer-merchants cannot have been people from Southern India or Sri Lanka as there is no indication of cinnamon production in that area before the fourth century A.D. In the detailed lists of plants used and plants exported which exist for Sri Lanka for the time between -400 to + 400 no mention is made of cinnamon. If India/Sri Lanka were not the areas from where cinnamon was brought to the East coast of Africa, the area of origin must have been Southeast Asia. The strange vessels Pliny describes most probably have to be interpreted as outrigger boats, and Indonesia with its many varieties of Cinnamon could be the cinnamon-producing area. The word for cinnamon in the Mediterranean points into the same direction. It is Phenician **quinnamon**, Greek **kinnamomon**, Latin **cinnamomum**. In all these languages the word for cinnamon is considered to be a loan word, and it cannot be ruled out that the Mediterranean words were derived from a common Indonesian term **kayu manis** 'sweet wood', used for all kinds of cinnamon and cassia.

If these interpretations are correct, we would have to assume the presence of Indonesian people on the East coast of Africa much earlier than all the theses mentioned above did. That there existed such an early trade from Indonesia is proven by Chinese sources which indicate the import of cinnamon into China from the Southern islands (Indonesia) from the 5th century B.C. on (Wang Gungwu : The Nanhai Trade). At least since the middle of the first millennium there were then Indonesians on the East coast of Africa. If we accept such an early date there should also be a shift in linguistic comparison ; it does not give much sense to compare Malagasy with Indonesian (the modern language) or with Malay. Both these languages saw a very recent and most dramatic development. Rather one should look for languages that were on the periphery of the major Indian and Arab and other interventions. But one also has to avoid to take one Indonesian language as the language of origin for Malagasy ; as there was Malay as a lingua franca in later times there must have been an earlier lingua franca for the time of the first westward expansion of the Indonesians. As this expansion took place not much later than the one into the Pacific it is not astonishing to find more similarities between Samoan and the languages of the New Hebrides

and Malagasy than between modern Indonesian and Malagasy. A task for the linguist then would be to reconstruct such an early lingua franca. One such a language that would have to be used for such an effort would be the language of Nias, an island off the West coast of Sumatra. Just to indicate how much closer Nias is to Malagasy than modern Indonesian I give some words in Indonesian first and then in Nias :

1	satu	sara	way	jalan	lala
2	dua	rua	coconut	kelapa	baniu
3	tiga	tölu	very	sekali	si-bai
4	empat	öfa	sea	laut	asi
5	lima	lima			
6	enam	önö			
7	tujuh	fitu			
8	delapan	walu			
9	sembilan	siwa			
10	sepuluh	fulu			

But this is an indication only of which languages should be used in the reconstruction of an early lingua franca.

Apart from the much earlier date this first Indonesian expansion to the West would correspond to Kent's first phase. The spread must have been via Southernmost India/Sri Lanka or the Maldives to East Africa and from there to Madagascar. The most probable area of entering the island would have been the Northwest, and more intensive excavations as well on the Comore islands as in the Northwest of Madagascar are tasks urgently to be done. They would reveal if there ever was an *Indonesian period* in Madagascar, or if it was due only to Bantu pressure on those Indonesian who lived in East Africa that Indonesian elements found their way in an already mixed (Indonesian/African) form into this island. The Northwest should in any case be considered as the first area where these elements arrived.

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