

THE MERINA KINGDOM IN THE LATE 1870's  
AS REPORTED IN THE DESPATCHES OF COLONEL  
WILLIAM W. ROBINSON U.S. CONSUL  
IN MADAGASCAR

by

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The role carried out by European powers and in particular by their agents, administrators, missionaries, etc... in the history of Madagascar was of great importance, especially in the nineteenth century. The occurrences of the last years of the reign of Andrianampoinimerina and for the most part of the reign of Radama I, are highly significant<sup>1</sup>. In this period bitter hostilities between France and Great Britain caused by conflicting interests in the Indian Ocean found fertile breeding ground in Madagascar<sup>2</sup>.

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1. For the reign of Andrianampoinimerina (1787-1810) see J. Valette, "Pour une histoire du règne d'Andrianampoinimerina (1787-1810)", in *Revue française d'Histoire d'Outre-mer*, t. LII, 1965, pp. 277-285 ; A. Delivré, *L'histoire des rois d'Imerina*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974 ; G.M. Berg, *Historical Traditions and the Foundation of Monarchy in Imerina*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975 ; H. Deschamps, "Andrianampoinimerina ou la raison d'Etat au service de l'unité malgache", in *Les Africains*, t. II, Paris, Jeune Afrique, 1977, pp. 73-97 ; L. Mosca, *Il Madagascar nella vita di Raombana primo storico malgascio (1809-1855)*, Napoli, Giannini ed., 1980, p. 19, note n° 5 ; G.M. Berg, "The Sacred Musket. Tactics, Technology and Power in Eighteenth-Century Madagascar", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, v. 27, 2, 1985, pp. 261-279 ; *Ibidem*, "Sacred Acquisition : Andrianampoinimerina at Ambohimanga, 1777-1790", *Journal of African History*, v. 29, 1988, pp. 191-211. For the reign of Radama II (1810-1828) see : L. Mosca, *op. cit.*, p. 29, note n° 55.
2. For the anglo-french rivalry in the Indian Ocean see : C.N. Parkinson, *War in the Eastern Seas 1793-1815*, London, G. Allen Unwin, 1954 ; A. Toussaint, *Histoire de l'océan Indien*, Paris, PUF, 1961 ; G.S. GRAHAM, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean*, London, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1967 ; M.V. Haight, *European Powers and South East Africa 1796-1856*, London, Routledge & Kegan, 1967, (rev. ed. of 1942) ; H. Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient 1600-1800*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1976. For the anglo-french rivalry in Madagascar, see : G.S. Chapus, "Quatre vingt ans d'influence européenne en Imerina", in *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache*, n.s., t. VIII, 1925, pp. 1-350 ; R.E.P. Wastell, *British Imperial Policy in Relation to Madagascar 1810-1896*, University of London, thesis, 1944 ; E. Ralaimihoatra, *Histoire de Madagascar*, Tananarive, s.e., 2nd ed. ; A.O. Thompson, *The Development of the Merina Kingdom with Special Reference to European Influences upon it 1810-1863*, University of London, thesis, 1970 ; L. Mosca, *Fonti edite e inedite sulle relazioni americano-malgasce, 1676-1896*, Napoli, Fotocomp Rapid, 1987, p. 6.

In the decades which followed, France and Great Britain did not cease to bring their antagonism to bear on the island until the British government conceded a free hand to France, who in 1896 was able to fulfil her "dream of Madagascar"<sup>3</sup>.

Thus if the names of French and English agents, administrators, missionaries, etc..., are now part of Malagasy national history, the same cannot be said for those who came from other nations and who were also present on the island during the course of the 19th century, such as the U.S. Consul Colonel William W. Robinson, a prominent figure in his times<sup>4</sup>.

In *Relations between America and Madagascar published and unpublished sources*<sup>5</sup>, I point out, amongst other things :

"When we talk of Madagascar and in particular about events in her history (...) we tend to think of the Arabs, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the English. This work, on the other hand, will specifically deal with the presence of Americans on the 'Red Island' during the 19th century"<sup>6</sup>.

At this point, it is worth remembering that the young American nation, while being present in the South West of the Indian Ocean - so much so that at

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3. S. Howe, *L'Europe et Madagascar*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1936 ; G. Downum, *The Place of Madagascar in Anglo-French Rivalry*, unpublished Ph.D., Austin, Texas, 1939 ; *Ibidem*, "The Genesis of Madagascar Problem. A Study in Nineteenth Century Imperialism", in *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, v. XXIII, n° 3, 1942, pp. 197-214 ; *Idem*, "The Solution of Madagascar Problem. A Study in Imperial Adjustment", in *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, v. XXIX, n° 2, 1943, pp. 150-166 ; G.S. Chapus, *op. cit.*, ; S.P. Oliver, *The True Story of the French Dispute in Madagascar*, New York, Negro University Press, 1969, (reprint of 1885 ed.), G. Downum, "The Methodology of French Imperialism : The Case of Madagascar", in *Rocky Mountain Social Science Quarterly*, v. 9, n° 3, 1972, pp. 57-64 ; P. Mutibwa, *The Malagasy and the European Madagascar's Foreign Relations*, London, Longman, 1974 ; M. Brown, *Madagascar rediscovered. A History from Early Times to Independence*, London, Damien Tunnacliffe, 1978 ; V. Belrose-Huyghues, "At the Origin of British Evangelization : The Dream of Madagascar", in *Madagascar in History*, ed. by R. Kent, Albany, Foundation for Malagasy Studies, 1979, pp. 252-268 ; P. Randrianarisoa, *La diplomatie malgache face à la politique des Grandes Puissances (1882-1895)*, Antananarivo, FTM, 1983, 2nd ed..
  4. William W. Robinson, School teacher, farmer, prospector, army officer in the Mexican and Civil War and United States Consul to Madagascar. Born in Fairhaven (Vermont), 14 december, 1819 and dead in Tacoma (Washington) 30 April, 1903. For notice on his life see H. Brown, *Soldiers' and Citizens' Album of Biographical Record*, Chicago, Grand Army Publishing Co., 1890, pp. 553-556 ; "Colonel W.W. Robinson Dead", in *Daily Independent* (Chippewa Falls) May 3, 1903 ; A.T. Nolan, *The Iron Brigade. A Military History*, New York, The MacMillan Co., 1961 ; R.R. Dawes, *Service with the Sixt Volunteers*. Ed. with an Introduction by A.T. Nolan, Madison, The State Historical Society, 1962 (reprint of 1890 ed.) ; D. Shavit, *The United States in Africa*, New York, Westport, Conn., London, Greenwood Press, 1989, p. 105.
  5. L. Mosca, *Fonti edite e inedite*, *op. cit.*
  6. *Ibidem*, p. 5.

different times the English authorities were taking the possible colonial outcomes of such a presence into consideration - operated with both boldness and far-sightedness in trying to obtain an economic advantage from the rivalry between France and England. America's only aim was that of establishing, where possible, or else of consolidating, her own economic and commercial power<sup>7</sup>. In many ways Robinson can be considered a successful expression of such a policy.

Robinson was Consul in Tamatave from 1875 to 1886. In 1881, he drew up, together with Queen Ranavalona II, a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Commerce<sup>8</sup>. In 1882/1883 he accompanied, albeit privately, the Malagasy ambassadors to Europe and the United States<sup>9</sup> and strongly promoted the

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7. The literature on the subject is enormous. Here I will mention few titles : C.O. Paullin, *Early Voyages of American Naval Vessels to the Orient* (Annapolis ? 1910-) ; Idem, *Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers 1778-1883*, Baltimore, J. Hopkins Press, 1912 ; G. Putnam, *Salem Vessels and their Voyages*, Salem, Essex Institute, 4 vol., 1924-1930 ; E. Rosenthal, *Stars and Stripes in Africa*, London, Routledge, 1938 ; C.T. Brady, *Commerce and Conquest in East African*, Salem, Essex Institute, 1950 ; L.C. Howard, *American Involvement in Africa South of the Sahara, 1800-1860*, Harvard, Ph.D., 1956 ; *New England Merchants in Africa. A History through Documents 1802-1856*, ed. by N.R. Bennet and G. Brooks, Boston University Press, 1965 ; C.N. Haywood, *American Whalers and Africa*, Boston, Ph.D., 1967 ; P. Duignan and L. Gann, *The United States and Africa. A History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

8. *Treaties and Conventions concluded between the U.S. of America and other Powers since July 4, 1776*, Washington, Government Print Office, 1889, pp. 641-652.

9. William W. Robinson to Third Assistant Secretary of State, August 20, 1882, n° 107, United States Consular Despatches, Tamatave, Madagascar (hereafter cited as USCD, Tam.), National Archives, Washington. Robinson with this despatch informed the State Department that his position regarding the Malagasy Ambassadors was that of "a friendly adviser and guide". The State Department in response wrote : "Your despatch announces your intention to accompany the Embassy in an unofficial capacity hence it is proper. We instruct you to avoid any officious interference in the settlement with France which might imply that this Government took sides in the controversy. See A. Adey to W.W. Robinson, October 17, 1882, U.S. Consular Instructions, vol. 104, National Archives, Washington. On the question it is worth however to note that Robinson offered his services to the Malagasy Government, see W.W. Robinson to Rainilaiarivony, P.M., July 10, 1882 in Série DD 16, Consulat Américain 1866-1895, Malagasy Archives (ARM), Antananarivo. In the mentioned letter Robinson wrote : "You ask me to recommend your Embassy to my Government ; I trust I need to tell you that I shall be most happy to do so. But I will do more : If Her Majesty and yourself wish it, I will accompany the Embassy ; and not only give the introduction, but will assist them with what little legal and other knowledge I may possess. I make this offer with the more assurance, because I am entitled to a leave of absence and in fact applied for one three months ago ; to which application I am expecting a response by the next mail.

Should it not active however before the Embassy is ready to leave, I should have no hesitation to go upon Her Majesty's request. I shall be pleased to hear from your Excellency upon this point". The Prime Minister had informed the United States. See Rainilaiarivony to W.W. Robinson, July 1, 1882 in Série DD 81, ARM, Antananarivo. The offer of the U.S. Consul was accepted by the Malagasy Government. See Rainilaiarivony to W.W. Robinson, July 17, 1882, *Ibidem*. Robinson left Tamatave for Europe and the United States on August 22, 1882. See W.W. Robinson to P.M. Rainilaiarivony, August 22, 1882, Série DD 16, *op. cit.*

conclusion of negotiations between France and Madagascar<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, Robinson was dedicated to several Malagasy causes : alcoholism, medical care and juridical problems<sup>11</sup>.

Robinson's consular commission coincided with both the period in which Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony's power was at its highest<sup>12</sup> and with the outburst of the first Franco-Malagasy war and the consequent installation of a French protectorate on the island<sup>13</sup>.

## 1. Background

From June 1866, an American Commercial Agent, Major John P. Finkelmeier, was living in Madagascar, at Tamatave<sup>14</sup>. It was from this date onwards that official relations were established between the United States and Madagascar.

At that point in time, relations between the two countries were already good.

The two parties were united by decades of economic-commercial interests. American sailors, merchants and whale-hunters would frequent the 'Great Island' of the Indian Ocean<sup>15</sup>. The reputation and respect which some of these men managed to earn for themselves with the Merina authorities as was

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10. W.W. Robinson to A. Adee, August 14, 1884, n° 160, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.* Robinson suggested with this letter to propose to the French and Malagasy Authorities to arbitrate their dispute.
  11. On the alcoholic question, see W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, April 9, 1878, n° 37, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*, W.W. Robinson to Chas Payson, June 27, 1881, n° 82, *Ibidem* ; J. Valette, "Les relations américano-malgaches aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles", in *Bulletin de Madagascar*, n° 295, 1970, p. 974 ; G.M. Razi, *Malgaches et Américains. Relations commerciales et diplomatiques au XIXe siècle*, s.l., Agence d'informations des Etats Unis, [1985], p. 50, pp. 79-80. On the medical question, see : W.W. Robinson to Rainilaiarivony P.M., Tamatave, december 29, 1881 in Série DD 16, ARM, Rainilaiarivony PM to W.W. Robinson, Feb. 16, 1882 in Série DD 81, ARM ; Rainilaiarivony P.M. to Dr Peneaud, Dupry, etc., Feb. 16, 1882, *Ibidem* ; J. Valette, art. cit., pp. 974-975 ; G.M. Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 51 ; for the juridical question see below.
  12. G.S. Chapus and G. Mondain, *Rainilaiarivony, un homme d'Etat malgache*, Paris, Diloutremer, 1953 ; H. Deschamps, "Rainilaiarivony (1828-1900). L'homme d'Etat malgache, époux de trois reines", in *Les Africains*, t. V, Paris, Ed. Jeune Afrique, 1977, pp. 297-323.
  13. H. Ratrimoarinosy, *La société malgache et la crise de 1883-1885 à travers le journal de Rainilaiarivony*, thèse de 3e cycle, Paris I, 1972 ; F.V. Esoavelomandroso, *L'attitude malgache face au traité de 1885*, Antananarivo, Collection Etude Historiques, Université de Madagascar, n° 3, 1977 ; P. Randrianarisoa, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-84.
  14. J. Valette, art. cit., p. 972 ; L. Mosca, *Stati Uniti e Madagascar nel XIX secolo sulla scorta di documenti americano-malgasci* (unpublished thesis), University of Naples, 1971-1972, p. 57, *Idem*, *Fonti edite...*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
  15. L. Mosca, *Fonti edite...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-26.

the case of Vincent Marks<sup>16</sup> and his nephew William W.<sup>17</sup>, won them certain privileges and prestigious assignments from the sovereigns of Antananarivo. Vincent Marks, among other honors, was appointed judge in the city of Majunga<sup>18</sup> and his nephew acted as Foreign Minister for King Radama II<sup>19</sup>.

On February 14th 1867, Finkelmeier, following a series of negotiations in Antananarivo, during a stay in the capital, concluded a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with the Merina Government which was then endorsed by Queen Ravalona II on August 1st 1868<sup>20</sup>.

During the years which followed, the Washington representative made continual references in his report to the good relations which existed between the two countries. It is worth remembering that the Merina kingdom, once it was able to annul in 1865 the 'Charte Lambert' with an indemnity payment of 1.200.000 Francs<sup>21</sup>, believed the establishment of friendly relations with other countries to be of vital importance. Madagascar thus tried to establish and maintain relations with Great Britain, the United States, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Italy, etc...

16. G.M. Razi, *op.cit.*, pp.9-10 ; L.Mosca, *Fonti edite...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-31.

17 L. Mosca, *Raombana, op.cit.*, p. 35, note n° 73. It is worth to remember that Western as well as Malagasy students have confused the life and activities of Vincent Marks in Madagascar with those of the nephew William W. Marks. See : G. M. Razi, *Sources d'histoire malgache aux Etats Unis*, Antananarivo, Centre Culturel Américain, 1978, p. 12 ; R. Delval, *Radama II, Prince de la Renaissance Malgache*, Paris, Ed. de l'Ecole, pp. 453-455 ; G. Rantoandro, *Le gouvernement de Tamatave de 1845 à 1865. Développement économique*, Antananarivo, Collection Etude Historique, n° 5, 1980 (1981), pp. 107-109 ; M. Rasoamiamanana, *Aspects économiques et sociaux de la vie à Majunga entre 1862 et 1881*, Antananarivo, Collection Etude Historique, n° 6, 1981 (1983), pp. 46-48.

18 Radama II to Andrianatoro 13 V. tra sy Mouse Hamady and A.bty sy ny M.btra 3 Adizaoza 1862 in Série BB 49, ARM, Antananarivo ; Radama II to Andrianatoro 13 V.tra sy Andrianomanana 10 V.tra sy ny M.bra 9 Adizaoza, *ibidem* ; Radama II to Andrianatoro 13 V.tra sy ny M.btra sy Makitra An.bty 13 Asombola 1862, *ibidem* ; Radama II to Andrianatoro 13 V.tra sy ny M.btra sy Makitra And.bty 14 Asombola 1862, *ibidem*.

19 Radama II to Andriamandroso 14 V.tra sy Raintavy sy Reniboto sy Banoma And.bty sy Andrianavony 11 V.tra 15 Alohotsy 1863 in Série BB 49 *op.cit* ; Andriamandroso 14 V.tra sy Raintavy sy Reniboto sy Banoma And.bty sy Andrianavony 11 V.tra to Radama II 7 Alahamady 1863 in Série III CC 272, ARM, Antananarivo, W.W. Marks to T. Shaukland, U.S. Consul, Mauritius 9 Alohotsy 1863 in Série DD 17 *Ibidem* ; W.W. Marks to Earl Russell, Minister of Foreign Affairs, England, 9 Alohotsy 1863, *Ibidem* ; R. Delval, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

20. Treaties and Conventions, *op. cit.*, pp. 638-640 ; L. Mosca, *Fonti edite, op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

21. P. Mutibwa, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-70. The payment took place on January 1, 1866 at Tamatave.

## 2. The arrival of Colonel William W. Robinson

William W. Robinson was living in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin<sup>22</sup> when, in March 1875, he received the nomination of United States Consul in Tamatave, Madagascar<sup>23</sup>.

He reached the island of Madagascar on October 12th 1875<sup>24</sup>, after having travelled via Glasgow, London, Paris, Genoa, Alexandria, Aden and Mauritius<sup>25</sup>. As we have seen, official relations between the United States and Madagascar had existed since the arrival of Major Finkelmeier in 1866. However, it was through his successor, Colonel Robinson, that political-economic relations between the two nations were strengthened and only the outbreak of the Franco-Malagasy war in 1883 impeded their developing and further.

Robinson, as we have said, arrived in Madagascar on October 12th 1875 and remained there until 1886. During his term as Consul he became an alert and assiduous observer of Merina society. His despatches, relative to the period of time from the moment of the arrival in Madagascar to the transmission of the Protocol of the new Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Commerce of 1881, which constitute the sources for this paper, often contain complete and detailed analyses of both political and economic questions regarding the Merina Government and his representatives. However, these despatches also contain other types of considerations, such as references to beliefs and costumes of the time. Although such accounts are given by a qualified and official representative of a nation at the court of Antananarivo, they often reveal a vision of the island which, while being rather too personal, is of interest to us.

It is true that Robinson's despatches do not add anything particularly substantial to what had already been written by scholars of Madagascar on the subject of the Merina Government and Franco-Malagasy relations at that period of time<sup>26</sup>. However, the American Consul's reports do represent for historians a source of information which, when added to the numerous Western sources, without any doubt contributes to a more complete picture of the Merina Kingdom.

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22. (H. Brown) *Soldiers' and Citizens*, *op. cit.*, p. 555.

23. W.W. Robinson to Hamilton Fisk, Secretary of State, March 27, 1875, n° 1, USCD, Tam. *op. cit.*

24. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, October 12, 1875, n° 3, *ibidem*.

25. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, October 20, 1875, n° 4, *ibidem*.

26. On the subject see H. Deschamps, *Histoire de Madagascar*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1972 (4 ed.) ; P. Mutibwa, *op. cit.* ; P. Boiteau, *Contribution à l'histoire de la nation malgache*, Paris, Ed. sociales, 1982 (rev. ed. of 1958) ; P. Randrianarisoa, *op. cit.*

From the moment of his arrival our representative from Washington proved to be a man with a strong personality. He was, furthermore, reasonably well read. We know that he received a certain number of publications on a regular basis from the United States. Among these, Robinson received *Religio Philosophical Journal*<sup>27</sup> and, whenever necessary, he would ask the Department of State to send him law books, thus demonstrating a certain knowledge in jurisprudence<sup>28</sup>. Above all, Robinson was inspired by a strong sense of fierce idealism which, throughout his stay in Madagascar, he tried to transfer into the consciences of both the authorities and the people of Madagascar.

### 3. On duty

As soon as he had landed in Tamatave on October 12th 1875, Robinson went to the Governor of the city to introduce himself. The Merina official agreed to allow him to carry out the functions inherent to this *status* until the arrival of his *exequatur* from the central government<sup>29</sup>. This *exequatur* was quickly released but owing to delays between Antananarivo and Tamatave, it got to Robinson about two months later. Thus it was not until January 1st 1876 that he was able to communicate to his superiors that he had taken up his consular functions to the full<sup>30</sup>.

In the meantime he had not wasted any time. A week later after his arrival, on October 20th 1875, he nominated the merchant J. Orne Ryder Vice Consul. Ryder, from Salem, Ma., had been living 10 years in Madagascar, 8 of which in Tamatave where he worked for the Merchant Houses John Bertram of Salem, Ma. and Arnold Hines & Co. of New York<sup>31</sup>.

Robinson had chosen Ryder for two reasons. Firstly, as Ryder had lived on the island so long he was, by now, an expert not only of economic matters, but also of the socio-political ambience on the island. Furthermore, the agent spoke fluent Malagasy<sup>32</sup>.

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27. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, March 29, 1876, n° 13, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*, *The Religio Philosophical Journal* appeared with this title from 1865 to 1895. It was then superseded by the *Mountain Pine Colorado Magazine*, see *Union List of Serials in Libraries of the United States and Canada*, New York, H.W. Wilson, Co., 1965, 3rd ed., vol. 4 : N-R, p. 3340.

28. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, July 15, 1879, n° 46, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*

29. USCD, Tam., n° 3, *op. cit.*

30. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, January 1st, 1876, n° 8, *Ibidem*.

31. USCD, Tam., n° 4, *op. cit.* On the John Bertram House of Salem see *New England Merchants in Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 198. On the Arnold Hines and Co. see *The Zanzibar Letters of Edward D. Ropes, Jr. 1882-1892*, ed. by N.R. Bennett, Boston, African Studies Center, Boston University Press, 1973, p. 8.

32. USCD Tam., n° 4, *op. cit.*, See also *The Zanzibar Letters*, *cit.*, p. 49.

Robinson, therefore, had found in Ryder the very person who answered to his needs, bearing in mind that the amount of time between his nomination as Consul in Madagascar in March, and the date of his leaving for the island in June, was hardly very long so that he was unable to put together particularly detailed informations about Madagascar, apart from what his superiors deemed fit he should know.

Thus if Ryder's nomination can, however, gives us an idea of the American Consul's personality and what might have been his intentions regarding his official functions, what he wrote to Washington may be considered still further proof.

From the moment of his arrival, Robinson set out to improve American-Malagasy relations by means of the revision of the Treaty which existed between the two nations. The various phases of this matter, which took about five years to complete, gave Robinson the opportunity to inform his superiors, more than once, on the political situation in Madagascar, on the relationship between nominal and actual power, on the socio-political structure of Madagascar and its economic conditions.

In a despatch of August 11th 1876<sup>33</sup> which included two letters from Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony<sup>34</sup>, in which the American government was invited to consider the hypothesis of modifying the Treaty of February 14th 1867, Robinson carefully and meticulously set out any information that could be useful to his superiors in evaluation Antananarivo's offer in the best way possible. Regarding the social conditions and Merina state structure, he wrote :

*"The condition of society seems to resemble that of the middle age in Europe (...). Up to the time of Radama II they had no written constitution nor code of laws ; but now have both, although the monarch is still nearly if not quite absolute - something more than nominal owner of all the land and water of all the citizens, together with all their belongings real and personal.*

*Second, is a class of nobles - or more correctly, classes, as there are many grades. Third, the common people, who, with the slaves, perform all the manual labor. All classes are permitted to hold slave ; limited only by their ability to purchase. The actual condition of the slave is not much worse than that of the free labor ; they (...) hire themselves out where they please (...) the Master seldom, if ever, furnishing them either clothing or food. - The same with the Government - it pays nothing for the services of its own subjects - the soldiers receive neither pay, food nor clothing- the Officers, military and civil, the same (...). The houses of the nobles are large, and constructed almost wholly of wood.*

33. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, August 11, 1876, n° 18, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*

34. Rainilaiarivony P.M. of Madagascar to H.E. the Chief Secretary of State, August 1, 1876, *Ibidem.*



*Of the lower classes, both in country and city, they are small, and constructed of material from the travellers tree, using the leaves for the roof.*

*The Royal palaces lately erected at the Capital are quite elegant in their size, finish, and furnishing. There are a number of fine churches of wood and stone. There are also many substantial dwellings, stores, and shops of both wood and stone. Also one large hospital ; and I think the Government is now building another. The higher classes have nearly universally adopted the European costumes with a tendency to the richest quality of material (...). The Prime Minister (who is the real head of the Government - he is married to the Queen) and Queen, with the Cabinet, and a majority of the nobles are supposed to be in favor of progress ; but seem to be timid about taking important steps in that direction. They may have some fear of meeting the fate of Radama II, who had some very good ideas in regard to the needs of his country in the direction of improvements, but very unwise plans for their accomplishments”<sup>35</sup>.*

In the same report, Robinson also describes the large agricultural resources of the country which were not adequately exploited. The Malagasy lacked modern cultivation techniques and consequently, the country was still underdeveloped. Such a state of backwardness, however, did not match the innate capacities of the Malagasy population who had made great progress in the field of education as well as modernization. He believed there were two reasons for the lack of socio-economic developments in Madagascar : slavery, which at the time was supported by a small part of the nobility and above all the fear of a foreign invasion. These factors stopped the Merina authorities from adopting the necessary measures to allow the country to progress.

In particular, Robinson, almost prophetically wrote :

*“As these fears are the sources of their prohibitory measures, arresting all material improvement, so are these unwise measures the very elements of their weakness ; for this policy if persisted in, must sooner, or latter lead to complications which will bring upon them the disaster they seek to avoid (...). The Government of Madagascar must fall in with the procession of improvement of this age to avoid being crushed under its wheels. For if this non progressive policy be persisted in, England or France, of perhaps both, will, sooner or later, make as excuse, some question of dispute, or matter of outrage, committed - some such affairs have occurred, and are liable to occur again - and seize the island ; open it to civilization, when immigration will pour in from all parts, and the civilized world will say Amen”<sup>36</sup>.*

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35. USCD, Tam., n° 18, *op. cit.*

36. *Ibidem.*

Two months later, a wrong done to an American Quaker missionary, Louis Street<sup>37</sup> by the Governor of Vangaindrano, gave the Consul the change to refer once more to Washington that power in Madagascar was in the hands of the Prime Minister. Robinson wrote as follows :

*"In case you are not already posted : His Excellency (the Prime Minister) is in fact the head of the Government - in power and practice the Monarch. The Queen is only nominally such - in fact, a mere cypher - His Excellency preferred her to others - better entitled by consanguinity to the throne - and through his personal influence and power caused her to be crowned and then married her"*<sup>38</sup>.

On June 20th 1877, Queen Ranavalona II proclaimed the emancipation of all slaves<sup>39</sup>. Robinson, who had taken part in the War of Succession and who fervidly believed in republican ideals, fully approved of the decision made by the Merina authorities. He declared that if the royal edict was applied correctly, the country would obtain great benefits. The royal decree, furthermore, gave Robinson a chance to rectify some comments he had made regarding political measures taken by Merina authorities and which, in view of the recent legislation against slavery, revealed a political logic. In fact, he wrote :

*"The Government has been reorganizing, or recruiting and drilling their Army during nearly a year past ; and now has 25 000 troops in the Capital and its immediate vicinity, in addition to the many small garnisons on the coasts and in the interior. These circumstances, together with the fact that the Prime Minister was seeking a revision of treaty stipulations and to emancipate the Mozambique slaves (...) has caused much uneasiness to the foreign residents, and has injured trade to a considerable extent. It was rumored to be the intention to drive all foreigners out the Country and that this Military preparation was to make ready to enforce such order. Even to the massacre of all who did not go willingly and quickly. This Military demonstration was, of*

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37. B. Gow, *Madagascar and the Protestant impact. The Work of the British Missions, 1818-1895*, London, Longman, 1979, p. 47.

38. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, June 28, 1877, n° 26, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*

39. With the despatch of June 28, 1877, Robinson forwarded to Washington a letter of Rainilaiarivony with the copy and the translation of the *Kabary* of the Queen Ranavalona II of the emancipation of the slaves. See Rainilaiarivony to W.W. Robinson, 21 st June 1877, USCD, Tam. On the situation of the slaves and the slave trade in Madagascar see G. Campbell, "Madagascar and the slave trade, 1810-1895", in *Journal of African history*, 22, 1981, pp. 203-227 ; B. Domenichini-Ramiaramanana and J.P. Domenichini, "Aspect de l'esclavage sous la monarchie merina", in *Omaly sy Anio*, n° 15, 1982, pp. 53-98 ; G. Campbell, "Slavery and *Fanompoana*: the Structure of Forced Labour in Imerina (Madagascar), 1790-1861", in *Journal of African History*, 29, 1988, pp. 463-483.

course, only to deter or prevent armed resistance to the act of Emancipation, by the owners of the Mozambique slaves"<sup>40</sup>.

Robinson was convinced of having a discreet knowledge of the Merina authorities way of thinking and therefore believed that he could express his opinions about them, even when they were not what one would call flattering.

In his annual report of 1878, he pointed out that customs taxes were still being paid in goods both to the disadvantage of foreign merchants and the Merina treasury and that it would have however been impossible to get the Malagasy authorities to accept other forms of payment, not only because of their suspicious nature, but also because of their natural reluctance towards any form of change<sup>41</sup>.

A robbery at the Merchant House of John Bertram of Salem, Ma., which had occurred during the transportation of goods from Tamatave to Antananarivo, obliged Robinson to supply Washington with a new and detailed explanation regarding the political situation in Madagascar and to repeat that power was exercised exclusively in the capital. Thus only by establishing direct relations with the central authorities, would it have been possible to safeguard the rights of American citizens, which according to the Treaty already in existence should have been respected all along.

"You must" - wrote Robinson - "understand that little or nothing can be done through the local authorities (...) as they stand in mortal fear of the Prime Minister, and dare not decide the most trifling question. Their course being to kill your application, or case, by tiring you out with sophisticated excuses for delay and if this fails, you are told that they must refer the matter to the Capital and between the local authority, and the Government at the Capital, you are delayed until you become wearied and disgusted, and let the matter drop - unless it be one of great importance"<sup>42</sup>.

However the short-sightedness and intransigent politics of the Merina authorities seemed to be coming to a closure and a desire for modern political structures was growing among the authorities in Antananarivo.

Queen Ranavalona II — and the consul comments that she may have wanted to make this decision for a long time-ordered the government to

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40. USCD, Tam., n° 26, *op. cit.*

41. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, October 1st 1878, n° 40, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*, On the financial situation of Madagascar at the time see G. Campbell, "Currency crisis, Missionaries and the French Takeover in Madagascar, 1861-1895" in *International Journal of African Historical*, 21, 1988, pp. 273-289.

42. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, July 21st, 1879, n° 47, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*

reorganize itself by forming new ministries, and giving the old ones new and more specific functions. The Council of Ministries was thus organized :

*"Premier the same as Prime Minister before Chief Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs  
Chief Secretary of Interior  
Secretary of War  
Minister of Finance  
Lord Chancellor  
Minister of Religious Affairs  
Minister of Education  
Minister of Agriculture<sup>43</sup>.*

During 1879 and for some months of 1880, the Merina government increased its number of soldiers until it had 30.000. Furthermore, they also decided to replace discharged soldiers and to modernize armaments too. In order to do this the government decided that it would need to collect \$ 500,000.

Robinson disagreed with this decision because, as he pointed out, the Malagasy economy could only count upon a very small amount of capital and the subtraction of such a large sum would only have the effect of killing of trade. If from an economic standpoint Robinson's opinion was, in fact, true, on the other hand it was less than worthy, when considering the aim of the Merina government, that was :

*"To bring all those parts of Madagascar which are now, and have been only nominally under Hova jurisdiction, into complete subjection ; and to establish permanent military posts at all ports, as well as through the interior of those districts. They include all the west and south coast - all the Sakalava tribes, and a number of others, which are always in state of semirellion (sic !)"<sup>44</sup>.*

In his fifth commercial report, Robinson outlined a short history of trade in Madagascar followed by extremely hard judgement on the natives, the French and the English and of the political and commercial situation of the island. We read :

*"The peculiar disposition of the Hovas (the ruling race) has thus far prevented the adoption of any of the economies and conveniencies of the present age of the civilized world. They have adopted, or at least have pretended to do so - the belief and practice of Christianity. (Modern Christianity !) let it be understood (...). My own opinion is that England and*

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43. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, August 21st, 1879, n° 52, *Ibidem*.

44. W.W. Robinson to Ch. Payson, May 20, 1880, n° 70, *Ibidem*.

France are in a measure responsible for this condition of inanity at to material progress - or rather perhaps their respective colonies Mauritius and Bourbon are (...). For a long period of years the authorities and peoples of the two nationalities have entertained suspicions and jealousies of each other relative to this island. Each colony desiring to make Madagascar a dependency of its own (...) then each wished to constitute itself the entrepôt of trade with the island and to control in a measure its commerce.

It is well known that Radama I gained his conquests over the coast tribes by British assistance (...) and until the present time we see more sympathy and affiliation between the Hovas and the British than between the former and the French (...) and mixed with these temporal interests at variance are the spiritual discords between the English protestant Missionaries and the French catholic Missionaries (Jesuits) ; each party striving to conserve for itself the preponderance of influence and control over the Hova Government.

With this state of things there is little chance for unity of action or unity of influence on the part of these two great nations, in measures or counsel, for inducing the Hova Government into wiser measures for the promotion of the best interests of the Government and people"<sup>45</sup>.

His annual report ended with an information which was totally of a diplomatic nature. Robinson communicated that Germany had nominated a consul in Madagascar and that he had received his *exequatur* in September 1880. At the same time, after having waited 4 years, *exequaturs* were also released to the consul of Sweden and Norway. The Italian representative, instead, was still waiting after two years the permission to carry out his duties.

He concluded his report with the news that the Merina governors had finally decided to do something for the progress of Madagascar and that he had learnt :

*"Some measures have been proposed, and are being discussed by the proper functionaries, having in view an amelioration of the status of things commercial and industrial"*<sup>46</sup>.

#### 4. The Franco-Malagasy Dispute

Robinson's constant attention of politico-commercial matters, which were necessary for the Merina kingdom to rise above its condition of underdevelopment and place itself on the road towards progress, was, now, also dictated by the fact that in the past months Franco-Malagasy relations has

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45. W.W. Robinson to Ch. Payson, October 2nd, 1880, n° 70, *Ibidem*.

46. *Ibidem*.

deteriorated. There were signs that did not point to anything constructive between the two governments.

Robinson, immediately after his arrival in Madagascar, had deemed of extreme importance the approval of a legislation which would have allowed the country to counterbalance the political and economic weight of France and Great Britain and to avoid either of the two powers to use any pretext to establish her own political supremacy on the island. Now in the presence of real, rather than hypothetical friction between Paris and Antananarivo, the Consul claimed that such a legislation could no longer be deferred.

On the other hand, the usefulness of a more illuminating and more modern policy had been put forward by Robinson more than once and he never seemed to doubt that such a policy would give Madagascar advantages.

Undoubtedly the Washington representative was afraid that the anomalous conditions of Franco-Malagasy relations would cause damage also to the commercial interests of the other countries. Specifically of the United States.

Therefore Robinson paid great attention to the development of relations between Antananarivo and Paris in his despatches to the Department of State.

On August 24th 1879, the Consul informed his superiors that the French Commissioners and Diplomatic Agent, Mr Cassas, had arrived in June to substitute the Consul Jean Laborde who had died at Antananarivo on December 27th 1878<sup>47</sup>.

The arrival of a new representative from Paris had aroused a sense of excitement in french circles, but, over and above this excitement, everyone hoped that Paris and Antananarivo would overcome all their disputes and that trade would flourish once more.

However, such hopes were soon dashed, according to what Robinson refers to his superiors regarding rumours heard following the introduction of Mr Cassas to Queen Ranaivalona II.

We can safely say that Robinson remained impartial to the two parties and he reported the events as a person totally above the dispute.

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47. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, August 24, 1879, n° 48, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.* For Jean Laborde important career in Madagascar see L. Mosca, *Raombana, op. cit.*, p. 147, note n° 54.

*"There are" - wrote Robinson - several matters of controversy between French residents and the natives to be settled. One of them, is a case of assault and battery committed on a French Jesuit priest, by native protestant evangelist (...). The story is, that this priest, together with others of his order, made themselves quite officious in calling these evangelists to account of their heresies, which exasperated these protestants, and excited them to the perpetration of the assault.*

*Another, is a question of title to certain real estate located at the capital, and belonging to the estate of the late Consul Laborde (...). This real estate has been sold by Laborde's administrators to the Society of Jesuits (...) for the sum of \$20 000 (...). The Hova Government now lays claim to this property ; saying, that under their laws it reverts to the Queen"<sup>48</sup>.*

On this matter one must remember that during 1878 the Antananarivo government had put forward a law which banned the renting of land and houses to foreigners without the prior consent of the Malagasy authorities. Robinson had informed Washington of this and commenting on the Merina decision sustained that the law aimed at preventing foreigners settling in Madagascar and that above all it was contrary to the spirit of existing treaties between the Malagasy kingdom and foreign powers : France, Great Britain and the United States<sup>49</sup>.

In October 1879, the Consul informed the Department of State more fully of the Franco-Malagasy dispute. He wrote :

*"The air is full of portentous rumours ; the last being that war will be declared by France against this nation in one month from the present time. Out of all these rumours (...) with a little information received from the capital (...). I am able to state (...) the principal question at issue is not one of evidence, but of law, or right involving the right of this Government to appropriate to itself the property of a French citizen after his death, when such property has been acquired from this Government (...) that is, that this Government is the sole inheritor of all that portion of a foreigners property (...) which has been acquired from the Government"<sup>50</sup>.*

As Robinson had feared, the continuation of the controversy between Paris and Antananarivo ended with the residents of other nationalities being equally damaged in their commercial activities.

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48. USCD, Tam., n° 48, *op. cit.*

49. USCD, Tam., n° 40, *op. cit.*

50. USCD, Tam., n° 52, *op. cit.*

Robinson took care to keep his government up to date regarding this particular situation. The despatch of January 12th 1880 reads :

*"To the present moment, nothing has been accomplished toward an amicable settlement of the matters in dispute. Monsieur Cassas (...) having failed to obtain concession to any of his demands, returned to this port (...) whatever may be thought of the justice or injustice of his demands, or of the propriety of his manner of presenting them, it is to be feared that a failure to enforce them, will react to the injury of all foreigners in the country, or interested in its trade.*

*I am also credibly informed (by the Prime Minister private Secretary - this in confidence- ) that the Hovas have decided to fight before conceding to one of the demands (...). Business has been injured more or less by this dispute, partly by diminishing confidence in its safety an yet more directly by drawing into active duty in the army a large number of Hovas who have been engaged in trade, as well as thousands of the carriers of goods to the interior"<sup>51</sup>.*

If this situation appeared to be fairly complex to the American Consul, it caused no less worry to the merina authorities, who from the beginning of the dispute with Paris, as can be seen in the *Postscriptum* of the above despatch, sought help and advice at an international level.

*"I see - wrote Robinson - "That I have omitted to say that Rasingy 11 Vtra, private Secretary to the Prime Minister, came to me asking advice, under pledge of secrecy, in the matter of their unpleasantness with the French (...). I told him, that I was not a diplomatic officer, but if my Government were to be asked for advice in the matter, and should think it advisable to give any which I doubted, I said, unless it were asked by both parties"<sup>52</sup>.*

One might speculate that Robinson behaved as a true diplomat in this circumstance. Not only did he reminded his interlocutor that he did not have the power to make decisions, which rightly belonged only to his superiors, but he treated the report of this encounter with the high Merina official as a marginal matter, almost as afterthought.

Perhaps he feared that a more highlighted report might have triggered a contrary evaluation by Washington concerning the request for help from Antananarivo, while a marginalized report would more likely be uncritically accepted.

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51. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, January 12, 1880, n° 54, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*

52. *Ibidem.*



At this point the reader might conclude that the American Consul was not keen to address the possible negative repercussion of the Franco-Malagasy dispute on the welfare of the Merina kingdom. Such is not the case. Proceeding to the second part of the *Postscriptum*, Robinson clearly outlined how the Merina authorities ought to have acted. In his opinion they should have done their utmost to reach a conciliatory conclusion of the dispute. Only in case contrary, they should seek the arbitration of a friendly power<sup>53</sup>.

Some months later, in May 1880, Robinson sent further informations regarding the state of the Franco-Malagasy dispute writing at the same time that European newspapers were publishing false reports. The Consul took particular care to point out that the Merina Foreign Minister had often asked what the U.S. would do in the event of a French attack on Madagascar<sup>54</sup>.

The following July there was a sudden Franco-Malagasy reconciliation and trade picked up<sup>55</sup>.

## 5. Revision of the American-Malagasy Treaty

As has already been mentioned, Robinson began his consular activity intending to improve American-Malagasy relations and naturally such an improvement appeared even more urgent after the Franco-malagasy crisis.

The proposal of revising the Treaty between the United States and Madagascar - as we have said - had been advanced by the Merina authorities in August 1876. The Prime Minister had in fact written to the American Secretary of State in the following terms :

*"It might be advisable either to change or add to our Treaty as might be agreeable to and for the good of both parties, according as may be seen to be the best on mature consideration (...). I would be pleased to transmit to you my ideas as to what might be well to be altered as also the additions I think necessary, and possibly there may be other matters which you also would desire to have considered"*<sup>56</sup>.

In his second letter, the Prime Minister informed the Secretary of State of his intention to end the importation of African slaves to Madagascar. He also proposed the liberation of all those who had arrived since the reign of Radama I. The Prime Minister, in fact, declared that he was convinced that any

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53. *Ibidem*.

54. USCD, Tam., n° 61, *op. cit*.

55. W.W. Robinson to Ch. Payson, July 14, 1880, n° 65, USCD, Tam., *op. cit*.

56. Cf. note n° 34.

other kind of struggle against slavery would not succeed<sup>57</sup>. Already this had in part happened with Ranavalona II's edict of October 10th 1874, which had established freedom to all slaves who had arrived on the island since June 7th 1865<sup>58</sup>.

Robinson - as we have said - accompanied the Prime Minister's letters with a despatch dated August 11th 1876 in order to represent the politico-economic advantage of the Antananarivo government's proposal in the best possible way. This despatch was perhaps indirectly urged by a request made by Rainilaiarivony to intervene with his superiors so that a positive result would be the outcome. As Robinson had no diplomatic function, he was unable to act officially, nevertheless he did transmit all the informations he was able to collect in his first months of residence in Madagascar.

In the despatch of August 11th 1876, Robinson sustained the necessity of the involvement of the United States in favour of Madagascar. The American government should have tried to convince the Merina to begin a large programme of socio-economic reforms. Such a line of action from Washington, as well as being humanitarian, had a good chance of succeeding because the Malagasy had seen that the U.S., faithful to their tradition of freedom, had no designs on the island whatsoever and neither did they want to become involved in internal matters. As regards the question of revising the Treaty, Robinson had marked five points which needed to be modified, regulated and defined.

In particular these were :

- "1st Regulation for the recovery of debts due to American residents.*
- 2nd A law of regulating arrest, trial and punishment of petty crimes against Americans- securing punishment - but graded to the offence.*
- 3rd A change in the treaty stipulation giving this Government the right to take laborers and servants from the employ of Americans without giving notice.*
- 4th Regulations in regard to the Custom House and officers of Custom.*
- 5th Regulations relating to leasing or purchasing of real estate"<sup>59</sup>.*

Robinson repeated his interest in the progress and well-being of Madagascar, a country which, owing to its natural resources, ought to become one of the richest in the world.

The episode regarding the American missionary Street, confirmed the urgency of revising the Treaty also considering that what had happened to the American missionary and his travelling companion an English missionary

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57. *Ibidem*.

58. Ch. Finklemeier to W. Hunter, November 3rd, 1874, n° 122, USCD, Tam., *op. cit*.

59. USCD, Tam., n° 18, *op. cit*.

James Sibree<sup>60</sup> was the result of a precise policy of the Malagasy authorities regarding foreigners. According to Robinson, the policy aimed at forcing foreigners to leave the island<sup>61</sup>.

Contrary to both Robinson's and the Merina authorities's expectations, the Washington government did not reply either quickly nor, as well shall see, positively, to the Antananarivo invitation.

On June 28th 1877, Robinson reminds his superiors that the letter from the Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony had not been answered and furthermore, that the Merina officials had expressed the desire of meeting him, imagining that he was in possession of instructions from Washington regarding the revision of the Treaty<sup>62</sup>.

However, as we have said, Washington's reply was not positive.

The Acting Secretary of State, on September 8th 1877, mistaking the Prime Minister for the Foreign Minister as author of the communication of August 1st 1876, informed him, in the name of the administration which he represented, in the following terms :

*"I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of two communications (...) in which you express the desire of your Government to make certain changes or additions to the Treaty of Friendship now so happily existing between the two nations. While this Government is not at present prepared to enter into negotiations for a new Treaty (...) I beg to assure your Excellency that the subject of a new Treaty with Madagascar will receive carefully consideration"*<sup>63</sup>.

The decision to abandon the offer of the Merina government, at least for the time being was communicated to Robinson by the Third Assistant Secretary of State. He did not have to use any form of diplomacy with the Consul, thus he could let Robinson know exactly what Washington's opinion on the subject was :

*"It is not deemed advisable to authorize you to take up temporary residence at the capital of Madagascar (...) especially so as this government has*

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60. Reverend James Sibree was one of the first missionaries of the London Missionary Society to arrive to Madagascar during the reign of the Queen Rasoherina and from the very beginning he wrote about Madagascar and his people.

61. USCD, Tam., n° 21, *op. cit.*

62. USCD, Tam., n° 21, *op. cit.*

63. The acting Secretary of State to H.E. Minister for Foreign Affairs, September 8, 1877 in American Consulate Tamatave, Correspondance, ARM, Washington.

*not fully determined upon the advisability of entering into negotiations for the substitution of a new treaty for the one now in force*"<sup>64</sup>.

The American Consul, who was still in the dark about the negative reply from Washington, in transmitting his annual commercial report in 1877, towards the end wonders whether the United States could not render itself useful to Madagascar<sup>65</sup>.

Once again what transpires through his writings is the firm conviction that man is the cause of his own destiny and that therefore, progress could only spring from his own work and goodwill. This, of course, did not exclude the search for somebody else's help.

This is how Robinson expresses himself :

*"May I be permitted to remark" - wrote Robinson - "that with a little friendly influence from our government brought to bear upon this, in the direction of advising and inducing a policy a little more liberal and encourageing towards the industries-agricultural, and others, tending to developpe the rich natural resources of the country in a word, a policy a little more in consonance with the spirit of the age, a large American trade could and would be drawn to these shores, and a great blessing confered upon this people (...). Aside from our commercial interests, has not a great and powerful nation lika ours, some moral obligations to fulfill towards a people like this ? If the civilization of this age, and the material developments and improvements attending its progress, values more to a people, and to the world, at large, than the conditions and circumstances attending heathenism, or, a state of semibarbarism, is it not the duty of our Government to urge, in, a friendly manner, some of the measures which have brought the blessings that we enjoy, to be adopted by this people ? (...). I think if there is one government more capable than any other to influence this to adopt some new, and very necessary measures, in the interests of Commerce, that government is ours - for this reason : this government would known that we have no concealed sinisters motives looking to future possession of their island"*<sup>66</sup>.

Robinson, being worried about the long silence of his superiors regarding the Prime Minister's proposal of a revision of the Treaty, wanted to know how he should behave toward the Merina authorities and invited Washington not to neglect the economic opportunities that Madagascar could offer in the reciprocal interest of the two countries.

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64. The Third Assistant Secretary of State to W.W. Robinson, September 8, 1877, *Ibidem*.

65. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, October 1st, 1877, n° 30, USCD, Tam., *op. cit*.

66. *Ibidem*.

As we have said, Robinson's appeals on behalf of Madagascar, at least for the time being, had no positived effects.

Nevertheless, the despatches show that the Consul continued to take advantage of any opportunity to draw the attention of the United States towards the island and especially the action they could take in favour of the Malagasy people.

The theft undergone by John Bertram of Salem, Ma.<sup>67</sup>, and the impossibility of obtaining justice from the Merina authorities as was accorded in the Treaty between the two countries, caused Robinson to draw once more Washington's attention to the revision of the Treaty with the Merina kingdom.

He writes :

*"It needs for the safety and benefit of our commerce with Madagascar as our trade now is, and more especially for the object of expanding it, that the U.S. Consul should be authorized in some manner, to exercise diplomatic functions (...).*

*To correspond with this government upon the many and various questions which may, and to continually arise (...) and yet pertaining to the functions of a diplomatic agent (...). It is especially needed in consequence of the peculiar disposition and tracts of this people grade having great influence with them (...). Our treaty needs revision - the revision is needed even if no new privileges can be obtained, for it is too coincise, as now worded, for the present political policy and peculiar traits of this people (...).*

*This Government desire the revision, I know (...). This Government is annoyed at the refusal of ours to confer upon the matter, I believe (...) I do not know what changes or additions the Prime Minister seeks (...). A little relaxing of the present restrictive policy (...) would cause a wonderful improvement in the commerce with this country, and be a blessing to the natives, for happily, all the changes we wish to make by revision - all the points we desire to gain would in every way and manner conserve the best interests of Her Majestys Government and people"<sup>68</sup>.*

We can imagine that, at this point, Robinson considered the possibility of negotiating a new Treaty quite remote. Therefore the letter he received from the Department of State authorizing him to discuss its revision with the Merina government come to him quite unexpectedly.

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67. Cf. note n° 42.

68. USCD, Tam., n° 47, *op. cit.*

This change in the Washington government was due to the fact that the dangers faced by American trade were no longer a hypothesis but a reality, as the case of the John Bertram Merchant house shows.

Washington's decision was immediately communicated to the Foreign Minister Ravoninahitriniarivo, who just as quickly informed the American Consul of the willingness of his government to negotiate and as well as to send representatives endowed with ample powers<sup>69</sup>.

The presence of certain Merina officials at Tamatave gave Robinson the idea of proposing to Antananarivo that negotiations should begin at once<sup>70</sup>.

The Prime Minister agreed to this proposal Rainimanjisoa, 14 honors and Andriamisa, 13 honours, received orders to discuss the revision of the Treaty and any other subject of reciprocal interest with the Consul<sup>71</sup>.

Rainifiringa, Governor of Tamatave, also took part in the negotiations. The United States were represented by Robinson and the Vice-Consul Whitney<sup>72</sup>.

The negotiations, which took place in secret at Tamatave, concluded with a Protocol which was then sent to Antananarivo to be examined by the central authorities<sup>73</sup>.

In communicating the news to Washington, Robinson, aware that he had gone beyond any reasonable request, warned that as the Protocol stood, it could not be accepted by the counterpart.

*"I asked" - wrote Robinson - "for much hoping thereby to gain a little"<sup>74</sup>.*

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69. Ch. Payson to W.W. Robinson, November 22nd, 1879, in U.S. Consular Instructions, vol. 94 (the same in Despatches to Consuls), National Archives, Washington ; W.W. Robinson to Ravoninahitriniarivo, January 21st, 1880, Série DD 16, *op. cit.* (the same in Série BB 56, ff. 173-175, ARM, Antananarivo) ; Ravoninahitriniarivo to W.W. Robinson, January 30, 1880, American Consulate Tamatave, Correspondance, *op. cit.* (the same in Série BB 56, ff. 176-177, *op. cit.*)

70. W.W. Robinson to Ravoninahitriniarivo, February 7, 1880 in Série BB 56, ff. 178-179, *op. cit.*

71. Ravoninahitriniarivo to W.W. Robinson, February 25, 1880 in American Consulate Tamatave, Correspondance, *op. cit.*, (the same in Série BB 56, *op. cit.*, f. 180) ; Letter of Rainilaiarivony given powers to Rainimamonjisoa and J. Andrianisa, 16 Asombola 1880 in Série BB 56, *op. cit.*, fol. 172.

72. Rainilaiarivony to Rainifiringa, Rainimamonjisoa, J. Andrianisa, February 25, 1880 in Série BB 56, *op. cit.*, fol. 170 ; Rainifiringa, Rainimamonjisoa, J. Andrianisa to Rainilaiarivony, undated in Série III CC 1880, ARM, Antananarivo. On Whitney see *The Zanzibar letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

73. W.W. Robinson to Ch. Payson, April 28, 1880, n° 60, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*

74. *Ibidem.*

That "gain" which was possibly jotted down in haste is indicative, however, of the fact that Robinson was essentially aiming at gaining advantages for his own "flag".

Actually the matter is puzzling. One would have expected Robinson to be less on sided, even if, of course, the Malagasy representatives, as was only natural, looked after Merina interests.

Perhaps, one can say as a justification for the Consul that despite his years of residence in Madagascar, he still had only a partial knowledge of the men and their country. Robinson, in fact, had still not had a direct meeting with the Antananarivo authorities, neither he had direct knowledge of the other provinces of the island, but only of the province of Tamatave where he resided.

At any rate, we know that the Merina government asked for time to examine the Protocol, judging it so important as to define it *raharaha lehibe* (big business)<sup>75</sup>.

Actually, the revision of the American-Malagasy Treaty, as we shall see further on, was certainly an important question, especially considering the delicate political atmosphere in the country owing to the strained relations with France.

It was perhaps the very seriousness of the political situation which made the Malagasy authorities invite Robinson to Antananarivo for consultations (this was not the first invitation he had from the Merina authorities).

If, however, in the past, Robinson had not accepted the invitation, this time he did. Nevertheless, he had to wait some time before leaving for Antananarivo.

The Queen and her court, according to tradition, had gone to the sacred city of Ambohimanga after the annual feast (the *fandroana*)<sup>76</sup> and the Merina were not allowed, according to tradition, to deal with affairs for the entire period that preceded and followed this national holiday.

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75. Ravoninahitrinarivo to W.W. Robinson, May 10, 1880, in American Consulate, Tamatave, Correspondance, *op. cit.*, USCD, Tam., n° 61, *op. cit.*

76. Rainilaiarivony P.M. to Rainifringa, Rainimamonjisoa, J. Andrianisa, 26 Adaoro 1880 in Série BB 73, ARM, Antananarivo ; W.W. Robinson to Ch. Payson, October 23, 1880, n° 71 ; USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*

On December 17th 1880, Robinson, who had left Tamatave on December 8th, finally arrived in Antananarivo. The Consul, who has left us a highly detailed description of his trip, would have preferred to travel privately but was advised, for political reasons, to make his trip officially<sup>77</sup>.

Once Robinson was certain that the Merina authorities intended revising the Treaty, he waited for negotiations to begin.

These negotiations began towards the middle of January and continued for roughly 4 months. The consultations took place between the Consul, aided by an English interpreter who spoke fluent Malagasy and Ravoninahitriniarivo, Foreign Minister, who was aided by the officials Rainandriamampandry, Andrimaifidy, Rainizanoa, Ratovelo and Rainisolofa. It seems that the Malagasy party, as well as continually referring the state of negotiations to the Prime Minister, also sought the counsels of other officials who were not present.

The starting point of negotiations was the Protocol which had been prepared at Tamatave. This was examined article by article<sup>78</sup>. The results which were achieved, despite the numerous difficulties, which Robinson referred to his superiors, were way beyond all expectations.

It was with great satisfaction that the Consul wrote to Washington :

*"Instead of a rough draft of a revision which would be accepted by this Government as at first contemplated and as directed by you, you will find it a revised treaty duly ratified by the Queen. Should anything in this step be considered as irregular I trust our government will waive such objection if the provisions of the treaty are found acceptable"*<sup>79</sup>.

The Protocol of the new Treaty was signed by Robinson and Ravoninahitriniarivo, Foreign Minister, on May 13th 1881<sup>80</sup>.

The Antananarivo authorities, considering the historical and juridical values of the new agreement, decided to give just importance to the ceremony

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77. Rainifiringa to Ranavalona II, 8 Asorotany 1880, in Série III CC 1880, ARM, Antananarivo ; W.W. Robinson to Ch. Payson, January 15, 1881, n° 74 ; USCD, Tam., *op. cit.* ; W.W. Robinson to Ravoninahitriniarivo, December 16, 1880, in Série DD 16, *op. cit.* ; Journal du Premier Ministre Rainilaiarivony, Série PP 4, 27 Février, 31 Décembre 1880, ff. 147-154, ARM, Antananarivo.

78. USCD, Tam., n° 74, *op. cit.*, Journal du Premier Ministre Rainilaiarivony, Série PP 5 1er Janvier, 18 Mai 1881, fol. 4, ARM, Antananarivo.

79. W.W. Robinson to Ch. Payson, April 28, 1881, n° 77, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.*

80. Rainilaiarivony, P.M. to Hon. Secretary of State of the U.S. of America, May 13, 1881, enclosure in W.W. Robinson to Ch. Payson, June 27, 1881, n° 82, *Ibidem* ; see also L. Mosca, *Stati Uniti e Madagascar*, Thesis, *op. cit.*, p. 83.



which took place in Tsiazompaniry so the whole council of ministers and the Queen's counsellors took part<sup>81</sup>.

The Treaty was ratified on March 12th 1883 in Washington on occasion of the visit of a Malagasy diplomatic mission to the United States<sup>82</sup>.

The Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Trade consisted of an introduction followed by 12 articles, which were subdivided into 94 paragraphs<sup>83</sup>.

This Treaty was the most organic agreement stipulated by the Merina kingdom during the 19th century.

Furthermore, the American-Malagasy Treaty decreed the juridical principle of Merina sovereignty over the entire territory of the island and historically decreed the principle of political unity of the Great Island of the Indian Ocean.

The new Treaty assumed international relevance also for some other clauses which Robinson underlined in his summary to his superiors :

*"In the first place we have prescribed the manner in detail for the execution of various provisions of the treaty, this has been very much needed in dealing with this people.*

*Then we have regulated the vexed question of leases of land, so that foreigners can obtain leases for any length of time required by inserting agreement for renewals. We have regulated the native employee labor question and made the first innovation upon the vexations forced labor laws.*

*We have obtained the liberty of the press, a liberty which has not heretofore been conceded.*

*We have regulated the question of duties on imports, and how such duties may be paid-a point of great importance to our present trade.*

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81. Journal du Premier Ministre Rainilaiarivony, Série PP 5, *op. cit.*, ff. 152-162.

82. On the Embassy to the United States see Série DD 30, Série DD 33, in ARM, Antananarivo. See also G.S. Chapus and G. Mondain, "Quelques rapports du gouvernement malgache avec les Etrangers", in *Mémoire de l'Académie Malgache*, Tananarive. Pitot de la Beaujardière, F. XXXI, 1940, p. 57 ; J. Valette, "Le traité américano-malgache de 1881-1883", in *Bulletin de Madagascar*, n° 218, 1964, pp. 471-517, *Ibidem*, "Le Protocole de Washington du 12 Mars 1883", *Bulletin de Madagascar*, n° 249, 1967, pp. 193-198 ; P. Rosenblum, "Le séjour aux Etats Unis de l'ambassade malgache en 1883", in *Bulletin de Madagascar*, n° 263, 1968, pp. 362-372 ; L. Mosca, *Stati Uniti e Madagascar*, Thesis, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-117 ; G. Downum, "The Madagascar Mission to the United States in 1883 : Diplomaty and Public Relations", in *Historian*, n° 39, 1977, pp. 472-489 ; L. Mosca, *Fonti edite, op. cit.*, p. 35.

83. *Treaties and Conventions*, *op. cit.*, pp. 641-652. See also Série DD 3, ARM, Antananarivo ; G.M. Razi, *Malgaches et Américains, op. cit.*, pp. 106-114.

*We have obtained the privilege of the coasting trade, i.e. of trading by coasting vessels at ports which are not regular ports of entry.*

*We have obtained the privilege of landing and storing coal, and taking it away again for the use of our national and private steamers, without payment of duties, or other charges. This may be a valuable privilege to us some day, if not now.*

*We have obtained the privilege of landing goods in bond, another valuable privilege for our present trade, which has heretofore been refused.*

*Then by the tenth article we make the first break of their ultra repressive policy against material improvements, which has caused a complete dead-lock to the advancement of commerce"<sup>84</sup>.*

## **6. The Merina kingdom**

During his long stay in the Merina capital, December 1880-May 1881, Robinson, despite his involvement in negotiations of the new Treaty, collected all the informations which could give both him and his superiors a more precise knowledge of the theory of power held by the Merina authorities, as well as informations regarding the legal system, the economy, trade, etc...

It is worth nothing that the Consul, describing the centralized structure of the Merina government, did not question the subjection of various provinces of Madagascar on the part of Antananarivo.

In fact, similarly to the majority of foreign observers, except the French for obvious colonial interests, Robinson considered Madagascar as a unity, also because of the international agreements which were concluded between the sovereigns of Antananarivo and foreign powers from 1817 onwards<sup>85</sup>.

It is certain that the acts of homage and the honorary tributes paid to the Consul, both during his trip to the capital and during his stay in Antananarivo, contributed to rendering ties between the two parties even more cordial and profitable. Robinson reports the banquet given in his honour as follows :

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84. USCD, Tam., n° 82, *op. cit.*

85. During the 19th c. the Kings of Antananarivo signed various Treaties. The first was concluded with the British Agent Captain Bibye Lésage on February 4, 1817. The Treaties which followed were signed : October 23, 1820, June 27, 1865 with Great Britain ; on February 14, 1867 with the United States. August 8, 1868 with France. See J. Valette, "Le traité anglo-merina du 23 octobre 1817", in *Bulletin de Madagascar*, n° 222, 1964, pp. 909-918. *Ibidem*, "Le traité conclu entre Radama I et Lésage le 4 Février 1817, in *Revue française d'Histoire d'outre-Mer*, t. LXI, 1974, pp. 572-578 ; P. Mutibwa, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-152 ; L. Munthe, C. Ravonanary, S. Ayache, "Radama I et les Anglais : les négociations de 1817 d'après les sources malgaches ("Sorabe" inédits), in *Omalý sy Anio*, n° 3-4, 1976 (1977), pp. 9-14 ; P. Randrianarisoa, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

*"By the time they had exhausted every means that the Government could devise for doing honor to the United States"<sup>86</sup>.*

Robinson too, underlined the importance of this trip to Antananarivo, noting :

*"I have learned much in regard to the condition of things commercial and political, since I came to the capital and am very glad I came - my only regret being that I did not come four or five years ago"<sup>87</sup>.*

What was it that the Consul had personally learnt in his daily dealings with the Merina authorities ?

Regarding the form of government and the handling of power, Robinson observes :

*"The Government although nominally a Monarchy, is very generally considered by Foreigners in the island more or less acquainted with the political situation, to be more of an oligarchy, and that the dominant spirit is the Prime Minister. But, whatever name may be given to it, it is certain that he is the power that rules everything. As to whether any of the Government measures are suggested by the Queen is a question that I cannot answer, and I doubt there being an official except the Queen and Prime Minister themselves able to answer it. However the Prime Minister can scarcely be called an Autocrat under the present status-perhaps if he was it really it would be better for the material advancement of the country"<sup>88</sup>.*

Regarding the precarious economic-commercial situation which Robinson had often tried to explain, the Consul makes the following consideration :

*"One of their peculiarities in an over-riding fear of being obliterated by immigration from other lands. This unreasonable fear has caused the adoption, since the commencement of the present reign, of an excessive restrictive policy, which has proved to be a complete prevention of development of the material resources of the country, and consequently a great hindrance to increase of its foreign commerce. Some of the Government officials the most enlightened now begin to see the error of this policy which prohibits mining, cutting timber, making roads - in fact nearly all modern modes of industry and*

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86. USCD, Tam., n° 74, *op. cit.*, Journal du Premier ministre Rainilaiarivony, Série PP 4, *op. cit.*, ff. 155-159.

87. USCD, Tam., n° 77., *op. cit.*

88. USCD, Tam., n° 82., *op. cit.*

improvements, as well as selling land, or even leasing it to foreigners except for short period.

*Among these are the Prime Minister, the present Chief Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and other officers of the Prime Minister's party as well as the young men who have been educated in England and France, together with the young students of the home schools and colleges. But there is still a numerous class of the old conservative element - leading men of the old nobles - such as we would call 'old fogies'<sup>89</sup>.*

However, above all, Robinson in his analysis of the backwardness of the country foresaw the precise responsibility of the missionaries, so much so that he wrote :

*"I was surprised to find on the part of the high functionaries very confused ideas relative to the modern polity of the nations of christendom, and nearly total ignorance of the rules of political economy ; knowing as I did their natural intelligence, and their proficiency in theological matters after some sixty years training by English missionaries. I had supposed their lack of progress in secular affairs was due to prejudice wholly ; but the truth is that, with the exception of matters pertaining to theology, and the branches of common school education (in which, by the way, the particular religious tenets and forms of the respective missionary societies are largely mixed), and a tolerably extensive knowledge of mechanical hand-work which has been taught them principally by men of secular occupation, they as yet possess but very little of modern knowledge. Their natural love of pomp and display has been stimulated instead of restrained by these same missionaries.*

*Being subjects of European monarchs, they come to this country with their exaggerated ideas of the grandeur and sacredness of sovereigns and of all pertaining to their courts, and of the non-importance of the common people.*

*These ideas have been adopted with a relish by the hovas, and in their efforts to imitate the courts of Europe we see a mixture of the customs of the middle, with those of the modern age. We notice also in all their acts, customs and laws, the same contempt for the common people - their idea seems to be that the common people are created only to support the sovereign, and the nobility and contribute the means to supply them with luxuries and pleasures.*

*The system of slavery undoubtedly has much to do in maintaining these ideas, as well as in preventing material progress"<sup>90</sup>.*

In the face of such lasting obscurantism, favoured by the example of the missionaries, it was with a great sense of pride that Robinson, referring to the legislation and the administration of justice was able to claim :

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89. *Ibidem*.

90. *Ibidem*.

*"I gave them an awakening upon subjects which, they told me, had never been brought to their attention before. In fact they told me that I was the first foreign official who had ever given them a word of information relative to national polity and political economy. The volume containing our treaties with foreign nations was loaned them and read with avidity ; the same with 'Halleck's Elements of International Law'. The result was that a list of books upon these subjects was made at their request to be sent for, and when received to be translated into their language and printed upon their own press.*

*The compilation and printing of their laws and decrees in book form, which was published in March last, was done at my suggestion ; also were many of the new laws published in that volume framed from points I had suggested to them<sup>91</sup> ; although, their egotism preventing the calling for instruction from a foreigner as to details, their classification and grading of crimes and offences and their penalties, fell short of our ideas of proportionate justice, and in some cases appear whimsical.*

*The idea for the new form of Judicature was drawn from the same source. They have already purchased a large building at the Capital, for a Court house, and are fitting it up in the style and form of like houses in civilized countries. So we may expect to see the old 'kabar' form of courts in the open air disappear"<sup>92</sup>.*

## **Conclusion**

In the period of time examined here (1875-1881), many other questions demanded the attention of both Antananarivo and Washington. In general the two governments were able to come to terms without any serious difficulties and found rapid and mutually convenient solutions.

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91. The underlining is the author's work.

92. USCD Tam., n° 82, *op. cit.*

One must note that one of these matters was the opening of new American Consular Agencies on the island. Expressing his opinion on this, Robinson indicated that the most suitable localities were Antananarivo, the capital, and Majunga on the Northwest coast of Madagascar. On their part, the American authorities were eyeing the port of Andakabe on the Southwestern coast. After a series of enquiries and consultations the choice fell to the two port cities. In 1880, Robert F. Andrew was appointed head of the Consular Agency in Majunga, and in 1881 Victor Stanwood was chosen for the Agency in Andakabe<sup>93</sup>. At this point one must also mention the mission of Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt which took place on the Southwest coast of Madagascar in September 1879. In the course of his mission which was part of a voyage to Liberia, the Congo and later Corea, the Commodore cast anchor in St Augustin Bay. There he entered into agreements with the Sakalava kings Balambé and Lamarese. The authorities in Washington having decided to modify the 1867 Treaty with Antananarivo, as we have said, and having accepted their consul's opinion on the legitimacy of the Merina sovereigns, did not recognize the agreements transacted by the Commodore<sup>94</sup>. Perhaps they feared that they might hinder the impending negotiations with the Merina authorities for the Treaty revision.

Let us not forget that in the years following the conclusion of the new Treaty, up to his departure to the United States in August 1886, Robinson continued to hope in the socio-economic development of the country. That such a progress did not necessarily have to grow out of an American influence does credit to the American Consul.

93. W.W. Robinson to W. Hunter, October 8, 1879, n° 51, . USCD, Tam., *op. cit.* For the Agency of Antananarivo, Robinson suggested the name of Mr Frank Pitman, Agent of J. Bertram of Salem, see USCD, Tam., n° 51 *op. cit.* For the Agency of Majunga, the Consul suggested the name of Mr Robert F. Andrew, Chief Agent of Geo Ropes of Boston. See Ch. Payson to W.W. Robinson, July 1st, 1880, U.S. Consular Instructions, vol. 96, National archives, Washington. Regarding the Agency of Andakabe, see Robinson to Ch. Payson, August 31st, 1880, n° 71, *op. cit.* : W.W. Robinson to Ch. Payson, June 9, 1882, n° 82, USCD, Tam., *op. cit.* ; M. Rieger, "United States Consular Agencies in Africa 1789-1939", in *Africana Newsletter*, n° 2, 1964, p. 36, p. 38 ; *The Zanzibar Letters*, *op. cit.* p. 5 : G.M. Razi, "Le Despatch Book des Consulats Américain et britannique de Majunga (1881-1904)", in *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache*, t. 54/1-2, 1976 (off-print), pp. 1-19.

94. On the mission of Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt, see R.M. Smith, *Robert Wilson Shufeldt at the Opening of Korea*, B.A., unpublished thesis, University of Virginia, 1953, pp. 57-60 ; D.M. Pletcher, *The Awkward Years . American Foreign Relations under Garfield and Arthur*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1962, p. 125, pp. 227-228 ; L. Mosca, *Stati Uniti e Madagascar*, thesis, *op. cit.* pp. 69-78 ; K.J. Hagan, "Showing the Flag in the Indian Ocean", in *America Spreads Her Sails. United States Seapower in the 19th century*. Compiled and edited by C.R. Barrow jr., Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1973, pp. 153-175 ; J.T. Noer, "Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt and America's South African Strategy", in *American Neptune*, vol. XXXIX, n° 2, 1974, pp. 81-88 ; D. Shavit, *op. cit.* p. 200.

It does not seem hard to imagine that Colonel Robinson, in his own way, yet in perfect harmony with the republican spirit, during his stay in Madagascar cultivated his personal "dream of Madagascar".

It does not seem to be unlikely that Robinson continued to cultivate such a "dream" once he had returned to the snows of Wisconsin, and that there, at the height of nostalgia, he was to miss the bright colours and the sweet perfumes of the land of Madagascar.



## FAMINTINANA

Ny tantaran'ny fifandraisan'ny fanjakana malagasy sy ny fanjakana amerikana no fakafakain'ny mpanoratra ka ireo antontan-taratasy tamin'ny naha-solontenan'i Etazonia an'i William W. Robinson (1875-1881) no dinihany amin'izany.

Ireo loharanon-kevitra notrandrahana dia hita any Washington sy eto Antananarivo ; nomena toerana manokana tamin'izy ireny ny tahirin-kevitra malagasy sy eoropeana (frantsay, anglisy, sy ny hafa) ; izy ireny dia ahitana fa tsy mba dia nanana tombontsoa manokana teto Madagasikara ny Amerikana tamin'ny taonjato faha-XIX.

## RESUME

*Dans cet essai très intéressant, l'auteur décrit l'histoire du royaume merina à Madagascar, et en particulier ses relations avec les USA à travers la correspondance relative à quelques années (1875-1881) du consulat de William W. Robinson, représentant des Etats-Unis dans la Grande Ile de l'océan Indien.*

*La documentation d'Archives a été consultée aux Archives nationales de Washington et aux Archives nationales d'Antananarivo. Les sources américaines ont été généralement laissées de côté pour donner la préférence, non seulement aux sources malgaches mais aussi aux sources françaises, anglaises, ainsi qu'à celles d'autres pays européens. Néanmoins, elles se révèlent très intéressantes et importantes, parce que les Etats-Unis n'avaient aucun intérêt, ni politique ni colonial, dans cette zone, au XIXe siècle.*