

RELIGION AND STATE IN MADAGASCAR :

A Comparison of Antanosy and Sakalava in the 1600's

par

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« Ils méritaient que je leur ôtasse tout, ainsi que faisaient les ZafeRamini, mais je me contentai de prendre seulement six bœufs ».

(Etienne de Flacourt, 1661)

« Ny nataon'ny Sakalava azy dia Andriamisaraefadahy ; io no maha sakalava ny Sakalava ».

(Tsimanohitra Tombo and Mamoribe, 1965)

There is much ongoing discussion about the historical study of religion in traditional societies* and strong ties between religion and government have been and are widely noted in them. Nonetheless, Madagascar remains at best on the periphery of such international discussions while within it the older connections between religious symbols and political authority continue to be understudied by historians. The Great Island can undoubtedly add rich materials and offer valuable insights for this dual subject. It is clear, for example, that much of what has been written in some depth about traditional states in Africa derives from studies which rarely venture beyond the last century. Moreover, antecedent states tend to be explained away through intrusive state-builders whose own religions attain supremacy in the process, often because evidence is

* See, for example, T. Ranger and I. Kimambo (eds.), *The Historical Study of African Religion*, 1976.



hard to come by and may no longer be obtainable in some cases. The Antanosy of southeastern Madagascar and the Sakalava of its western littoral provide two older settings which deserve and need to be compared.

Both have had intrusive elements associated with local states. In Antanosy they called themselves the Descendants of Raminia or *Zafindraminia*, after the ultimate ancestor and subject of a well-known local legend (1). Among the Sakalava they were called the *Maroserana*, name which has received several interpretations (2). Both, moreover, yield written sources situated close enough in time to throw light on the ways in which temporal authority and religious sanction came together. Two Jesuits, for example, spent a year just where the first Sakalava state of Menabe would see its birth. One of them, Father Luis Mariano, was a prolific writer and left behind a number of letters and reports written between 1613 and 1620 (3). The Antanosy land was not only visited by literate Europeans, including the ubiquitous Father Mariano, but was also the site of a French settlement, Fort-Dauphin, for over three decades (1643-1674), a circumstance which produced an even greater number of sources written by visitors and residents alike. The most extensive as well as valuable contribution to come out of this period consists of two volumes by Etienne de Flacourt, Fort-Dauphin's Governor between 1648-1655 (4). Lastly, both the Sakalava and the Antanosy are subjects of monographs in the making for some time (5), work which should mitigate against unfamiliarity with wider contexts. Unlike the *Zafindraminia* in Antanosy, the *Maroserana* became in effect the family from which the Sakalava obtained their monarchs. As will be seen through the *Zafindraminia* failure and the *Maroserana* success, religion was pivotal in the acceptance of political authority but it may well be that the formula mentioned earlier is worthless as an explanation if what can be learned from Madagascar will encourage further comparisons elsewhere as well.

(1) See G. Ferrand, «La Légende de Raminia», *Journal Asiatique*, 9th serie, XIX/2 (1902), 185-230.

(2) Cf. Ch. Guillaud, *Documents sur l'histoire, la géographie et le commerce de la partie occidentale de Madagascar*, 1845, 11, note 1 ; J.V. Mellis, *Volamena et Volafaisy - Nord et Nord-Ouest de Madagascar*, 1938, 12 ; R.K. Kent, «Madagascar and Africa : The Sakalava, Maroserana, Dady and Tromba before 1700», *Journal of African History*, IX/4 (1968), 538.

(3) Six Letters, dated July 1616 ; 9-17-1616 ; 10-22-1616 ; 8-20-1617 ; 8-24-1619 ; 9-9-1630 ; a seventh letter-report, «*Relação da Jornada e Descobrimento da Ilha de S. Lourenço*», was prepared by Mariano in 1613-1614. One of the letters may have been written by his companion Antônio de Azevedo.

(4) *Histoire de la Grande Isle Madagascar*, 1658 and 1661 editions ; *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en l'Isle Madagascar depuis l'année 1642 jusques en 1660*, 1661. On the author himself see A. Malotet, *Etienne de Flacourt ou les origines de la colonisation française à Madagascar, 1648-1661*, 1898.

(5) R.K. Kent, *Western Madagascar under the Sakalava, 1650-1896*, 1978 ; *Southern Malagasy and the French, 1638-1675*, ca. 1979.

THE ANTANOSY

The first visual impression of the Antanosy Zafindraminia must be attributed to Father Mariano in 1613. All of the «kings of various neighboring districts» who came to see the Portuguese visitors seemed less impressive than the ruler of the «Maticassi kingdom» *. His party consisted of about 500 men armed with spears and axes, numerous relatives and progeny. Many appeared «almost» European as well as more refined in dress and ornaments than the crudely dressed soldiers and sailors who had gone ashore. Mariano was shown a book «written in Arabic characters». The Maticassi ruler told him of trading relations with the Dutch and mentioned that there had once been in his land a small Portuguese fort, that these earlier Portuguese were absorbed into some local families through inter-marriage, and that his line of Descendants of Raminia went back seventeen generations on one side and fourteen on the other (6). Some forty years later, Flacourt even came by a genealogy with seventeen descendants of Raminia and calculated, at thirty-year generations, that Madagascar was attained some five centuries before his time (ca. 1150), but pointed out that the Zafindraminia settled in Antanosy much later, around 1500 (7). There is no firsthand description of the Zafindraminia in Antanosy during the 1500's. A brief Portuguese account could be interpreted in a way favorable to the Zafindraminia presence (8) but there are no reasons to doubt that they were in Antanosy at least since the time of Maticassi ruler's grandfather (9).

Three years after Mariano's visit to Antanosy, two other European priests perceived the local society in terms of two «castes», one white the other dark. They felt that the local whites could «learn anything» but were completely amoral in the use of their intelligence. Both «castes», the priests held, were addicted to the same forms of sorcery as prevailed «among the Arabs» (10). The Portuguese were seeking a foothold in southeastern Madagascar at the time and the two priests escorted to Goa *Dian Ramach*, son of the Maticassi ruler

* A small area within Antanosy.

(6) Mariano, *Relação*, 1613-14, French translation, in *Collection des Ouwages Anciens Concernant Madagascar* (henceforth cited as *COACM*), II, 1904, 48-51.

(7) *Histoire*, 1661, 5 (for modern text see *COACM*, VIII, 1913, 13, 25 and 86-7).

(8) Visit of Diogo Lopes de Sequeira, *COACM*, I, 1903, 49.

(9) One of the most aged men encountered in Antanosy had vivid recollections, supported by good detail, of events going back to his youth, while the Maticassi ruler virtually stated that his father's and grand-father's times were alone still in his memory.

(10) Father Manoel de Almeida, «Report», 5-25-1616, *COACM*, II, 1904, 139.

who returned home as a Christian convert (11). In the late 1630's, as the new Maticassi king, Dian Ramach placed under his protection François Cauche who thus lived in Antanosy several years before his compatriots founded Fort-Dauphin. Cauche did not make sharp distinctions in terms of pigment, rank and power. The society did not consist only of *blancs* and *noirs* as there were many *olivâtres*, too. As ruler, Dian Ramach alone wore red robes. «His *blancs*» (the Zafindraminia) and the *noirs* wore blue cottons generally with some of the more important *blancs* displaying a few red threads and some of the more important *noirs* wearing trousers. There were no distinctions in armaments as everyone carried a shield and a handful of throwing spears which varied only in the size of their heads. In one respect, the *blancs* seemed to have an advantage as it was an observable practice to have animals for consumption slaughtered only by a *blanc* (12). According to Flacourt there were two parallel hierarchies in Antanosy for the *blancs* and the *noirs* or *Nègres*. The *blancs* had three estates, the *Rohandrian* (from *andriana* for Lord, Lords), the *Anacandrian* (*anak*-children of Lords), and the *Ondzatse*; the *noirs* had four, the *Voadziri*, *Lohavohits*, *Ontsoa* and the *Ondeves* (13).

Flacourt argued that the Rohandrian were the «race of princes» among whom the *Grands* (rulers) were selected but it is clear from his entire text that this term did not at all apply strictly to the Zafindraminia and that it did not always indicated or imply an office or political function (14). Indeed, the «children of Rohandrian» became increasingly «bastards' descendants», sired by the *Grands* and not, in fact, the immediate issue of Rohandrian. Since an Anacandrian could issue from a female of any «estate», *blanc* or *noir*, as long as the father was considered to be a Rohandrian, the Zafindraminia did not practice endogamy in Antanosy. The *Voadziri* and the *Lohavohits* were the analogous *noir* «estates», the former hereditary chiefs, richest and most powerful among the *noirs* (Antanosy), the latter their progeny. Among the *blancs*, the third estate consisted of «reddish-skinned» *Ondzatse* who were mainly

(11) Dian Ramach was taken to Goa in May 1614 and returned home in April 1616. He returned as a Christian convert with the name of Andreas de Azevedo. He eventually repudiated the new faith and turned against the Europeans very much like his African contemporary, prince Yusuf bin Hasan, sent to Goa from Mombasa, re-named Dom Jeronimo Chingulia, and converted by Augustinian friars. It is interesting to note that after Yusuf's rebellion against the Portuguese he had fled temporarily to northwestern Madagascar and remained hidden among the «East African Arabs» of Boina Bay. Cf. Justus Strandes, *The Portuguese Period in East Africa*, (1899), 1971 (English transl.), 171-179; and Flacourt, *Histoire*, 1661/1913, COACM, VIII, 60-61.

(12) François Cauche, *Relations veritables et curieuses de l'Île de Madagascar...*, 1651, COACM, VII, 1910, 131-132.

(13) *Histoire*, 1661, 47.

(14) For example, Flacourt reported factually that the «village of Amboule» was ruled by a member of the «Noir estates» who was at the same time the head of all the *Grands* in «this area».

fishermen and guardians of the *Grands'* tombs. The *Ontsoa*, third *noir* estate, were children of Lohavohits but whereas the Voadziri usually ruled over several villages and their sons over their own village, the *Ontsoa* could not hold an office and were, in contrast to the upper two estates, «poor». For this reason, the *Ontsoa* often attached themselves to a powerful Rohandrian. The fourth estate was composed of slaves or *Ondeves*. One could become an *Ondeve* through debt, purchase or capture in war but the Rohandriana and the Voadziri could not be enslaved (15).

The Zafindraminia did not introduce or impose a hierarchy in Antanosy. As they came already *metisé* from elsewhere in Madagascar the Zafindraminia saw a clear Andriana-progeny analogy in the Voadziri-Lohavohits «estates». Lands under the Antanosy occupation did not have to be alienated since land was not scarce and the Zafindraminia established their own villages with facility. The old chiefs, sometimes remembered as *Antebobaka*, continued to rule over most of Antanosy and since a military conquest by the Zafindraminia was out of question, the Rohandrian needed to attain an economic or religious hold over the original inhabitants or find a combination of both through the manipulation of cultural symbols. A large number of followers could mean political power but real wealth was perceived in terms of cattle. A *Grand* was often expected to feed large numbers of people on festive occasions, an act resulting in the slaughter of many head of cattle (16). Acquisition of cattle in an agricultural society went into the making of the local «cattle-barons». The Zafindraminia are known to have stored away their harvests until these could be traded for cattle at great advantage to themselves (17). Still, the preferred method of acquiring already domesticated cattle was a raid on someone else's pen allowing for continuous redistribution of wealth among the upper estates. Abbé Nacquart, who wrote a number of letters from Fort-Dauphin to the head of the Lazarists, pronounced warfare in Antanosy as nothing more than raids for livestock (18). To Flacourt, many local *Grands* «would hardly make war upon their neighbors» because of an offense. The real cause of war involved the actual «possession» of large numbers of *bœufs* and the capture of slaves. The *Grands*, he wrote, even used to say «haughtily» that anyone who owned many *bœufs* became thereby their enemy (19). Virtual monopoly over cattle and two other features, one imported and the other local in origin, combined to give the Zafindraminia preeminence in Antanosy.

(15) *Histoire*, 1661, 47-48.

(16) Also during funerals all those attending were fed beef, see Flacourt, *Histoire*, 1661, 101, and *passim*.

(17) Flacourt, *Histoire*, 1661, 87.

(18) Nacquart, *Letter*, 5-2-1650, *Mémoires de la Congrégation des Missions (à Madagascar)*, IX, book 4, 1867.

(19) *Histoire*, 1661, 95-96.

In old Antanosy law inheritances went to kin of the deceased in practice although the chiefs «owned» everything in theory. There is no evidence that the Antanosy chiefs applied this theoretical prerogative to accumulate personal wealth and where it was exercised at all it must have been to *avoid* concentrations of wealth in families and lineages through inheritance uncontrolled by authority. Communal rather than individual wealth and election of chiefs provided the older society with mechanisms which reduced political tension. The link between economic wealth and political power was not allowed to be made in any lasting ways, reason which suggests why larger states would not evolve out of the internal situation. It was the right of all free Antanosy to take part in electing their *Grands*. Whenever a *Grand* or *Roi* passed away, «it was licit for the Voadziri, Lohavohits and Ontsoa to place themselves under any *Grand*» of their choice. The ritual which ratified this relationship between an incoming ruler and his subjects was called *lafic-douve* which meant «mat given to one's potential enemies» whose possible opposition was diffused by acceptance of voluntary submission, of the «mat». By Flacourt's own definition, *lafic-douve* was an engagement for succession through a *Grand*'s gift committing him to the protection of his wards in return for his right to inherit from them upon death (20). The local custom of theoretical ownership was endowed by the Zafindraminia Rohandrian with a new ritual, taken in part from a divination (*sikidy*) formula as the term *douve* reveals (21). And, as Nacquart observed, it was the common practice in his time for the *Grands* to «take everything» for themselves leaving nothing to the heirs and kin of the deceased» (22).

As founders of their proper villages in Antanosy, the Zafindraminia obtained *Grands* among the *Roandrian* a majority of whom held no political office but most of whom possessed wealth in cattle. The Zafindraminia ethos did not aim at the creation of a centralized state in which the newcomers would monopolize the political function and there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the Zafindraminia were sophisticated state-builders. They did, however, believe in amassing wealth, especially in cattle, and wealth attracted followers from the *Noir* estates as well, especially among the *Lohavohits* and *Ontsoa*. In time, there grew two parallel societies—the old and the new but the new one would gain ascendancy based on materialism, on «amoral intelligence», as the Jesuits observed in 1616. As *Grands*, the descendants of Raminia, readily copied the covenant between old chiefs and the people, adding the «mat» ritual. There was, just the same, a fundamental difference between the traditional chiefs and the Zafindraminia *Grands*. The former were regarded as «fathers» by their

(20) *Histoire*, 1661, 48.

(21) See J. Richardson, *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*, 1885, 128. Noting that the term «is used chiefly in the Sikidy divination» and that it means «enemy», Richardson gave it the Arabic etymon, *aduva*, «enemy».

(22) Nacquart, *Letter*, 5-2-1650, 1867, 69.

subjects, partly the reason why even later in time, in the 1600's, *Grands* could not hold office unless of age (23). Being of the local people and taking a non-hereditary position in society the old chiefs assumed the role of parent which came with authority. But, the Zafindraminia—as newcomers to Antanosy—did not understand the web of real and psychological relationships which had formed within the covenant. By the time the French residents could observe the Antanosy society, the *Grands*, in Nacquart's indignant words, took «everything without leaving anything to the children of those who had spent entire lives in gathering a few possessions». Indeed, the very success of the new society produced intermarriages between the *Roandrian* males and *Voadziri* females while the old covenant became devoid of its meaning and the *Grands*, whether *Blancs* or *Noirs*, came to behave not as representatives of two societies but as men *above* both, possessors of the best lands and most of the cattle. As Nacquart perceived (24) :

«Each section has a *Grand* who is its acknowledged ruler and who (behaves) like a *petit Roi*. The vassals of these kinglets range from three to four thousand men. Their riches consist of three to four thousand bœufs which they personally own and of the tribute paid by their subjects, namely a fifth of the rice and the yam harvests. The title of King would not be appropriate to them as they are not at all absolute... The royalty cannot be inherited by the children unless they are sufficiently advanced in age at the death of their father. Under these kinglets are other *Grands*, just about as powerful and rich as they are (themselves)».

And the wealth in cattle was undoubtedly also protected by the imported feature, the prerogative to slaughter animals for consumption which was known elsewhere in the island as *sombili* (25).

Again according to Nacquart, «wherever they have managed to become masters the *blancs* have monopolized the right to cut the throat of animals to be eaten»: In areas, however, «where the *nègres* have remained masters, the *blancs* would not dare slaughter their animals at all» (26). François Martin saw a different dimension by noting «il y a un degré de science parmi eux pour avoir la liberté de couper la gorge au bétail ; ce degré dépend d'être nés des premiers d'un village et de savoir une espèce de prière qu'ils disent tout bas avant

(23) Nacquart, *Letter*, 5-2-1650, 1867, 60.

(24) Nacquart, *Letter*, 5-2-1650, 1867, 60.

(25) The term *sombili* has been used among the Antambahoaka of eastern Madagascar ; see also G. Ferrand, *Les Musulmans à Madagascar et aux Iles Comores*, II, 1893, 32.

(26) Nacquart, *Letter*, 5-2-1650, 1867, 69.

que d'égorger la bête » (27). Indeed, if one looks closer at the principal contemporary accounts these reveal that much of the actual killing and butchering of cattle in Antanosy was *not* done by either the Rohandrian or the Voadziri but by priests or *ombiassa* who were the ubiquitous immolators at important as well as ordinary occasions. The *ombiassa* were «wonderously feared by the people» who regarded them as «sorcerers», and they subdivided broadly into «writers» (*ompanorats*) and «diviners» (*ompitsiquili*). The «writers» were particularly respected and writing itself was perceived as a high form of magic by the Antanosy. Even ink, washed off cabalistic scrolls, was at times administered to the ill, perhaps as the ultimate cure (28). In the eyes of the local populations, the Zafindraminia were intimately associated with the art of writing, form of *magic* which had arrived with *them*. Even Flacourt believed that the writers were Zafindraminia, in contrast to the diviners, throwers of *siquili* (modern Malagasy *sikily/sikidy*, pronounced *sh'kidd*), who were mostly «Nègres» (pre-existing *tompontany*, owners-of-the-land) with some *Anacandrian* or *metis* in this context. If the writers were associated with medicine, as the books examined by Flacourt confirm, they tended to serve generally the upper estates in Antanosy. Flacourt, who in time came to be regarded as a local potentate, was himself taught to read Arabico-Malagasy by an *Ombiassa* named *Dian Radam* who later acted as an unofficial go-between, acting on behalf of *Roandrian* hostile to Fort-Dauphin in a rather high diplomatic capacity (29). The diviners, in contact with all the estates, applied their art not only to determine the nature of illness and its most likely cure. Their endeavors were also directed at individual hopes and fears, accumulated tensions and problems of any type and at any level. Some of the Antanosy were becoming dependent on the «oracle of *siquili*» to an extreme, refusing to leave their huts until it could be learned what «awaited» them outside. Some individuals in Antanosy even refused to trade, plant, marry, construct a residence or travel until the *siquili* became favorable (30).

The *siquili* (*sikidy* today) is and was impersonal, becoming personalized only during the divination itself. It is thrown, «awakened», by the *ombiassa*-diviner as well as interpreted by him. While the «awakening of the *sikidy*» usually involved a formula that might be memorized by someone else, the *ombiassa*-diviner could not be separated from the divination itself, at least not in the Seventeenth century. If Antanosy land is taken in its broadest possible geographic sense it contained 110 villages of varying sizes around 1660 (31).

(27) *Mémoire concernant l'île de Madagascar*, 1665-1668, *COACM*, IX, 1920, 608-9.

(28) *Histoire*, 1661, 189.

(29) *Relation*, 1661, 293.

(30) *Histoire*, 1661, 25 and 175.

(31) See «Carte de Carcanossi», *Relation*, 1661, 203-bis and *COACM*, VIII, 1913, 24-bis. By «villages» one means village-concentrations on about 110 sites in Antanosy.

Even if each village had at least one *ompitsiquili* (or *ombiassa*-diviner) there were never enough diviners on hand to meet the real or imagined needs of thousands in Antanosy. The bulk of local inhabitants did, however, have recourse to their personal amulets, the *auli* (*oly/ody* in modern Malagasy, pronounced *oodd*) for prediction, explanation and succor. Abbé Nacquart, who described the *auli* (or *oli* and *olis*, plural, in his own text) as «idols», was convinced that both the *Grands* and «their subjects» alike turned to the *auli*-an «*espèce de culte*» which would be hard to «dislocate». The «idols» were in effect made and sold by the *ombiassa* and (32) :

«these little idols consist of a piece of wood or hollow root and are attached to a belt. Thereafter powder and oil are inserted and figures of small men are carved in the belief that they are alive as well as capable of providing whatever might be desired... Everyone has them inside the homes and individuals take them along into the fields. They turn to (the idols) in times of need as we do to God. They will do nothing when uncertain without consulting them ; and any thought that might occur to them is believed to have been suggested by their *Olis*».

In effect, the *auli* were seldom far away from their owners. Flacourt-whose description of the *auli* as small boxes embellished with glass beads and crocodile teeth reveals that he saw mainly those belonging to the wealthier Antanosy-also knew that the *auli* were placed on wooden staffs inside the residences of their owners. This is where the *auli* were addressed «as if they were endowed with reason». Their owners could talk to the *auli* «for two hours at a time, even fall into extatic trance while so doing», and they ascribed the content of their dreams to the «will of the '*auli*'» (33).

It was Abbé Nacquart's firm conviction that the Antanosy were «simple de leur nature» and having «neither laws nor religion» could easily be attracted to the «superstitions of Mohammedanism» (34). Although some of the features among the Zafindraminia *Roandrian* point to probable Islamic antecedents-such as a form of fasting during Ramadan for example (35)-they were at best highly «diluted» Muslims, hardly capable of imposing a Muslim culture upon the Antanosy. If, as is quite probable, the Zafindraminia did introduce *sikidy* into southeastern Madagascar, its successful diffusion within Antanosy (and elsewhere) was made possible precisely by the pre-existing cult of the *auli*, by the presence of religion which allowed for the *sikidy* to become one of the highest forms of sacerdotal consultation. Like the amulets which contained

(32) Nacquart, *Letter*, 5-2-1650, 1867, 67.

(33) *Histoire*, 1661, 191-2.

(34) Nacquart, *Letter*, 5-2-1650, 1867, 61.

(35) *Histoire*, 1661, 67-70.

cabalistic writing, itself relatively novel in the area, or even the Christian agnus which a successor of Abbé Nacquart requested because the Antanosy would carry it «like their *Olis*», around the neck (36), the *siquili* became incorporated into a cosmology concerned with assessment and prediction, prevention and cure. Nacquart himself described a healing process in which the interaction of the *siquili* and the *auli*, with the *ombiassa* as intermediaries, is clear (37) :

«First (the *ombiassa*) perform their abstractions and look busy (then) taking a board (into their hands) they spread sand on it and make a number of calculated points, what they call *squile*, and they repeat this often in order to assess the disease's nature. A part of the sand (thus used) is sold within a piece of wax which they place around the neck (of the ill) in order to obtain health».

An *auli* which produced the desired result, such as end of illness, would continue to be worn long after the need had passed. In time, the fundamental *tompontany* belief that disease was either supernatural or unnatural, willed by displeased ancestors or living personal enemies, led to ever wider use of the *siquili*, not only as detector of the nature and source of illness but also as counter-measure and weapon of the will. The last two in particular strengthened the association of the *siquili* as the higher sacerdotal adviser and the *auli* as its faithful agent, the *ombiassa* both prescribing and manufacturing appropriate amulets for healing or prevention, even for someone else's death. The *auli* roles are best depicted not for the commoners in Antanosy but — as could be expected— for the *Roandrian*, around the mid-1600's. A list of some thirty *auli* belonging to the *Roandrian* reveals their strong desire for control, power and absolute protection : control over natural pests, like the locust, and natural phenomena like rain, wind, thunder and lightning ; control over cattle and cattle-theft ; control over women ; control over subjects who must serve the *Roandrian* ; power to punish instantly those who speak ill of the *Roandrian* in public or in private ; power to cast spells on anyone ; power to turn invisible at will ; power to deprive an enemy of will to resist ; power to crush enemies ; protection against all attempts to put spells on the *Roandrian* ; protection against ulcers and against venereal disease (38).

Flacourt also notes that not all of the *Grands* believed in the *auli*. The matter is however one of mere form, not of real substance since the *Roandrian* and *Grands* who had not «converted» to the *auli* were just as attached to the «Muslim» talismans, the *hiridzi*, manufactured by the *ombiassa*-scribes, with purposes and functions identical to those of the *auli*, the only difference being in

(36). Abbé Bourdais, «Événements Divers», (ca. May 1655 ?), *MCM*, 1867, 232.

(37) Nacquart, *Letter*, 5-2-1650, 1867, 66.

(38) *Histoire*, 1661, 192-3.

the interior contents as the *hiridzi* were encasing Quranic verses as general protectors or astrological incantations geared to specific tasks (39). Carpeau du Saussay, who composed his account of the southeastern Madagascar in 1663 and who spent some four months devoted exclusively to an attempt to understand the *Oly*, «ce Dieu», readily perceived the point. The *Grands* placed the *Oly* box into another, made of gold or silver and carried around the neck, suspended on a rather slack chain. But, when the *Grands* resorted to the «other» style of carrying boxes around their necks, the «*bôêtes*» were replete with «caractères magiques, & d'espèce de Talismans». The «Commissaire Provincial de l'Artillerie de France» left no doubt that he considered the boxes filled with a variety of «drogues» and those containing writing to be *Oly* just the same (40).

The two-way flow of the *tompontany auli* and the Zafindraminia *hiridzi* reveals with slight chance of error that the parallel societies were not simply in a state of interpenetration but an ascending one at that. An increasing involvement of the *Roandrian* with the *auli* cult was a process of both manipulative and sincere adaptation which brought them closer to the Antanosy cosmology. Conversely, the Antanosy could readily assign both religious and magical value to the *hiridzi* and even the ink in which the contents were written and adopt them as another form of *auli*, the pivotal element of their religion. The Zafindraminia did not bring with them a coherent idea of state or a discernible political theory but they were--just the same--moving in the direction which would centralize political and not mainly economic power in the hands of the *Roandrian* who were active rulers at the same time, having attained preeminence through the cultivation of acquisitive impulse and, as *ombiassa*, through association with ritual; immolation, circumcision, writing, divination, medicine, and magic--both white and black. This preeminence was even to be sanctioned by a myth of origins in which the six estates in Antanosy had issued forth from six women that God had fashioned out of Adam's brain, neck, shoulders, thigh, leg's calf, the seventh female deriving from his heel as mother of slaves. The upper estates were all above the waistline while the *Roandrian* alone were «of» Adam's brain (41).

Despite the myth that everyone in Antanosy had a common ancestor in *Radama* (Adam) the ancestral trees of the original settlers (*tompontany*) and of the Zafindraminia could not merge in the presence of parallel societies. The specific *auli*, espoused by some of the most powerful *Roandrian*, could not become the national «idols» of all Antanosy. As the *Roandrian* had adapted

(39) *Histoire*, 1661, 16, 171 and 192.

(40) Carpeau du Saussay,

(40) Carpeau du Saussay, *Voyage à Madagascar*, 1722 (written in 1663), 258-260.

(41) *Histoire*, 1661, «Avant-Propos».



the inheritance covenant to their acquisitive drive so they came to perceive the *auli* not as benevolent helpers of men and women coping with daily life but as coercive magico-political tools having a dual purpose : to gain control through fear and to insulate this control from challenges to it, again through the agency of fear. The *Roandrian* will-to-power, as their *auli* attest, was intense and, at least under Dian Ramach, as a response to the French fort and its local impact, the Antanosy in general began to move toward centralization. But, lack of unity and discipline among the *Roandrian* and their inability to seek support by means other than coercion would have made it impossible to have a single political authority in Antanosy even if the French fort had not prevented its establishment.

THE SAKALAVA

«One searches in vain», noted an observer in 1895, for «those Roandrian, the lordly families of yore... they have disappeared» from Antanosy land (42). No Zafindraminia *Grand* is recalled in this area by tradition and the last of Raminia's known Descendants left Antanosy back in the 1840's (43). The Maroserana, oldest dynastic family in Madagascar, are, in contrast, still around among the Sakalava. If they no longer rule the memory of Maroserana kings is preserved among the Sakalava through the *dady* cult, an enduring feature of local society. In general, the term *dady* stands for «ancestors» but it is used among the Sakalava only for the relics of departed male monarchs, great men of the past, the *Ampagnito-be*. There are nine *dady* in Menabe, area which saw the birth of the first Maroserana-Sakalava kingdom, and four main *dady* in Iboina, second of the two states located along the coast of northwestern Madagascar. Successive monarchs could not mount the throne and rule without being in possession of the *dady* ; they were housed in the inner court of the royal village ; and they were taken out every two years for the ceremony of *Fitampoha*, ritual bath of the relics (44). The relics, fashioned shortly after a royal death, contained (45) :

«une touffe de cheveux au-dessus du front, les deux canines, l'ongle du petit doigt de la main droite, un fragment du frontal et un éclat de l'occipital... Chaque 'dady' renferme ses dépouilles royales dans deux dents de crocodile, jumelées, des dents en argent... remplacent les

(42) Louis Catat, *Voyage à Madagascar, 1889-1890*, 1895, 379.

(43) On the so-called «Antanosy émigrés», see A. Grandidier, *Ethnographie de Madagascar*, IV/1, 1908, 211-12.

(44) For a description of *Fitampoha* see J. Valette and S. Raharijaona, «Les grandes fêtes rituelles des Sakalava du Menabe», *Bulletin de Madagascar*, IX, no. 155 (1959), 218-313.

(45) Ch. Poirier, «Notes d'Ethnographie et d'Histoire malgaches», *Mémoires de l'Académie Malgache*, XXVIII, 1939, 13-15.

dents vétustes, décomposées par l'âge ; ces dents sont encastrées, avec plusieurs tubes de bois fermés par une rondelle de calebasse, dans un bandeau, dans une armature d'argent, décorée de figures géométriques au repoussé ; les tubes de bois contiennent des ingrédients végétaux mélangés de cire, de graisse de bœuf et de miel ; ils furent préparés par des 'omasy' » (*ombiasa*).

Although ceremonies of the royal ritual Bath took place also in two other societies within the island they involved *living* rulers and they came to end with the respective monarchies. The cult of the *dady* continues. Despite the fact that most Malagasy respect their ancestors in a variety of religious ways, the cult of the *dady* is unique in Madagascar. It literally defines the Sakalava. The central feature of this cult is the incorporation of defunct monarchs into one's family at the exclusion of the more immediate familial ancestors. It is hence no accident that the Maroserana *Ampagnito-be* are at the same time the *dady* of all Sakalava.

It has been an established feature among the Sakalava that only their nobility could maintain ancestral trees and that their oral traditions recorded, in effect, only the deeds of the «upper estates», to use Flacourt's terms. Guillain was struck in the early 1840's by the widespread recall of ancestral names among the Sakalava, who invoked them «in all (the) important activities of their social life», and by the pride with which events relating to ancestors were told (46). His text leaves no doubt that the ancestors in question were mainly rulers and nobility. Some decades after Guillain, Captain Rey was even more explicit. The common people in Sakalava land had completely accepted the idea that they had no *razana* (family) traditions since they did not «need» them. Ancestral trees and traditions of the past were confined to the *Mpanito-be* and *Mpanito-taloha* (living and departed kings and princes), to the *longon' mpanilo* («lateral friends», from *anila* or side, aside), and to the *vohitsy-mananila* (commoners elevated to nobility laterally) (47). In our own day, an educated Sakalava, has made the point that it is difficult to separate the exercise of power from religious functions involving the great Sakalava chiefs, the *Mpanjaka-be*, «Sovereigns and Pontiffs» at the same time. As the supreme guardian of royal relics and head of the ritual, the *Mpanjaka-be* remains human but has a sacred quality ; posthumously he becomes the object of the cult himself. When the colonial authorities abolished royal government among the Sakalava the act itself did not alter the mass-veneration of the royal ancestors ; the possession of relics remains more important than even the principle of heredity ; and the relics symbolize to this day both the cult of the *dady* and the

(46) Guillain, *Documents*, 1845, 9-10.

(47) H. Rey, « Le Folklore Menabe », *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache*, XII/2 (1913), 1930 reprint, 70-71.

origin of unity among the *Zafimbolamena*, ruling branch of the Maroserana (48).

As a long-time student of the Sakalava observed not very long ago, ancestral spirits in the act of possession (*tromba*), especially the benevolent ones (*tromba tsara*), turn out to be those of the earliest Maroserana (49). Custom dictates that departed monarchs may be recalled only through their *fitahina* or posthumous names and the most common of such names are those of *Andriamisara* and *Andriamandazoala* in Menabe, with *Andriamandisoarivo* being added in Iboina, which he had founded. If there is a single name for the four main *dady* of Iboina it must be *Andriamisara efa dahy* (50). There is also the specifically royal *tromba* through which designated mediums (generally called *vaha* or *famahavaha*) assume the personality of a previous king at the site of the royal tomb and then «speak to the people», usually to urge them not to adopt any new ways. After such a speech, the *vaha* would enter the inner and sacred chamber of the royal enclave (*Zomba-be*) to receive the sacred lance which princes of the Maroserana line had dipped in water; and he would sprinkle anyone approaching with it to dispense the «benediction of Andriamisara» upon all of his descendents (51). How and when did a family of outsiders manage to become venerated like gods and personal ancestors after death, to become the powerful guardians of tradition even from the tomb? They founded Menabe as conquerors, as «spearheads», mark which they placed on the ears of their cattle (52). Did they in fact impose a religion defining their own family as one of the populations under their control, affirming that venerable dictum of *cujus regio ejus religio*?

If one consults the internal source of Sakalava past, namely their own oral traditions, a sacerdotal person is connected almost invariably with the founding of Menabe as kingdom under the *Volamena* (*Zafimbolamena*) or golden branch of the Maroserana family. Because the Maroserana became a dynasty first among the Mahafaly populations in Madagascar's deep southwest the Sakalava traditions have come to reflect a certain amount of confusion as to where in the Maroserana family tree the *Volamena* should properly begin. It is generally agreed in the traditions that Menabe's conquest took place under *An-*

(48) Ch. Betoto, «*Histoire de la Royauté Sakalava*», typescript, 1950, 30-32.

(49) A. Dandouau, «Le Trumba — Razana ou Angabe», in Kent, *Early Kingdoms in Madagascar, 1500-1700*, 1970, Appendix, 324-332.

(50) H. Rusillon, *Un Culte Dynastique avec Evocation des Morts chez les Sakalaves de Madagascar. Le «Tromba»*, 1912, 180.

(51) H. Rusillon, *Culte Dynastique*, 1912, 70-71.

(52) E. Birkeli, *Marques de Bœufs et Traditions de Race. Documents sur l'Ethnographie de la Côte Occidentale de Madagascar*, Oslo Etnografiske Museum, *Bulletin*, 2, 1926, 30-41. Cf. R. Drury, *Madagascar... Journal*, 1729, ed. of 1890, 271, where the Maroserana cattle-marking is named for the first time with certainty by an external source.

driandahifotsy (d. ca. 1685) who is thus its founder but it is still an open question as to whether the Volamena branch of the Maroserana began with his father, uncle or grandfather. The father-and-uncle traditions often given both as *Andriamisara* while the grandfather is given as *Andriamandazoala*. There is, however, no disagreement in traditions relating both the advent of Volamena and birth of Menabe that a *moasy* (Sakalava equivalent of *ombiassa*), especially the diviner variety, occupied a central place in both events. In the northwest, a long distance from the southern reaches of Menabe, there is a composite version which accounts for the Maroserana success in creating their first Sakalava kingdom and which seeks to explain how the royal relics came into being. In it, a *moasy* named either *Ndramboay* or *Tahezamboay* (noble or violent crocodile) advises through divination that Andriamandazoala must offer in sacrifice his favorite spouse if Menabe is to be his. The spouse herself exonerates Andriamandazoala from an unpleasant decision favoring the *moasy*'s advice. In return, her progeny acquire lasting primacy over children of all the other Maroserana female spouses. It is she who fashions the first Volamena royal relics with a lock of her own hair, a nail and one of her canines; and following her sacrifice, the *moasy* dips a spearhead into her blood, recasts the iron, mounts it on a royal staff and proclaims Andriamandazoala as king of Menabé (53). In contrast, traditions prevalent between rivers Tsiribihina and Onilahy, tend to remain silent on matters of human sacrifice, on the royal relics, and even to downplay the role of *moasy* in favor of those who ruled. They insist nonetheless that Andriamisara was the first Maroserana in contact with the Sakalava and Guillain was able to learn that the very name «Sakalava» was given to those who willingly placed themselves under Andriamisara's authority (54) which Guillain did not define as either secular or religious. Still, the unembellished *moasy* does often appear in one composite tradition from Menabe as the originator of the idea to use a red bull in a ruse directed at opponents of the Maroserana, ruse which was successful, which made the red bull a sacred animal and the red color itself a part of the kingdom's name.

If such symbolic traditions are not apt to command attention as good history their links to the past should not be dismissed either. The female spouse represents a local kinship base for the Maroserana. She is the fundamental link of local populations to their new monarchs. Through her, voices of the past suggest that the royal relics' origin should be sought locally and not among outsiders; and the ubiquitous *moasy*, especially the *mpisikidy* or diviner, has in fact been a fixture at the court of Sakalava rulers. If his advice worked, the ruler would get most of the credit; if it failed, the *moasy* would earn most of the blame and a «mistaken» priest could be put to death by a disappointed Maroserana ruler.

(53) Betoto, «*Royauté Sakalava*», 1950, 3-5.

(54) Guillain, *Documents*, 1845, 9.

There is, however, in the single instance of Andriamisara, a priest-king problem which yields both symbolic and historical traditions and which leads into the advent of *royal* relics. Henri Rusillon was among the first to discuss the «Andriamisara problem». «On veut», he wrote, «que (le) père (d'Andriandahifotsy) soit Andriamisara. Les uns en font un guerrier farouche, les autres un... moasy sans pouvoir autre que celui de ses remèdes ou de ses charmes... on se trouve devant un problème qu'il n'est pas possible d'éclairer complètement» (55). On linguistic grounds, Rusillon also held that Andriamisara was a noble (*andriana*) noted for his constant efforts to purchase (*misara*) a variety of magico-religious objects, the *ody*; more recently, it has been proposed that the root-word in this name is *Isara* or Arabic for «divination», that whole clans are extant in Madagascar claiming the name of *misara*; that *Andriamisara* crops up in divination formulae in many parts of the Island; and that we are hence dealing with the figure of a noble who became a diviner or a diviner who was elevated to nobility at the highest possible point, as the «father» or «uncle» of the conqueror of Menabe (56). Indeed, it is difficult to find anything about Andriamisara as a *ruler* in the Sakalava traditions, while it is common to find him associated with religion, magic and service to the Maroserana. There is also an important text collected from attendants of an *Mpanjaka-be* in Iboina, attendants who had no stake in shielding the past. They were Makua and not Sakalava and, moreover, they resided among the Iboina Sakalava who generally believed and still do that Andriamisara was «chef de la famille royale sakalava qui régna dans le Menabe» (57). According to the Makua text (58):

The dady go back to Andriamandresi and Andriandahifotsy, who had subjected several villages in Menabe, extended and augmented their father's kingdom. They had a moasy of great renown. At the death of Andriandahifotsy, king of the warriors and the moasy's master, the moasy cut his hair and his nails and pulled his teeth out, placing them together with his own ody (amulets). Then he prepared a wooden box, ornamented with pearls, and placed the remains of the deceased monarch into it. The box came to be respected as much as the king when still alive. As the conquests went on, Andriamisara took the box along saying «the king's body is in here and those who do not obey

(55) H. Rusillon, «Notes d'Histoire Sakalava», *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache*, new serie, VI (1922-1923), 1924, 3 (offprint).

(56) Rusillon, *Culte Dynastique*, 1912, 180; Kent, *Early Kingdoms*, 1970, 134-135.

(57) Sgt. Firinga, «La Dynastie des Maroserana», *Revue de Madagascar*, III/9 (September 1901), 661, quoting Ch. Bénévent.

(58) Anonymous mss. Document 2238/2, Archives of the Académie Malgache, *Niandohan'ny Fiavavahan'ny Sakalava* (Origins of Sakalava Religion), 1-7, sat on paper ca. 1908.

me... take away the ancestral force from the box». The people submitted to the Zafinimena kingdom. No one could handle the dady as well as the moasy, Ndramboay who — after his (own) death — became Andriamisara. When he died and in accordance with the will of Andriandahifotsy, his own hair, nails, and teeth were placed in the box. He was thus greatly honored and considered as the king's son although this he was not, no more than being the king's father. Andriandahifotsy's son, Andriamandisoarivo, when sent by his older brother to conquer the north, would not leave without the wooden box. This is how the royal ancestors became the Zanahary (Gods).

This is by far the most lucid resolution of the Andriamisara problem and a key to how the *dady* were put to use.

Andriandahifotsy died around 1685 and his conquests and fame are attested as far back as the 1650's. It is when one turns to the first half of the 1600's, to an important society within future Menabe, one for which records are available, that the real *origin* of the *dady* cult comes to the fore, with all of its fundamental and associated features. It emerges from the letters and reports of Father Mariano that the most important place in the area of future Menabe or, for that matter, between Boina Bay in the north and Onilahy River in the south, was *Sadia* located in the Manambolo delta. During his first visit in 1613 it had some 10,000 inhabitants and around a thousand dwellings. Sadia's people were agriculturalists, millet was the main crop, and some cattle-keeping was present. The local ruler, *Capitapa*, was well-advanced in years, he befriended Mariano and offered his son and heir-apparent *Loquexa* as a guide to further coastal exploration (59). A treaty was concluded with the Portuguese and *Capitapa* permitted a future posting of Jesuit priests at Sadia (60). Mariano returned to Sadia in June 1616 with his companion Antonio de Azevedo. They remained until June 1617. Although Father de Azevedo did pen some pages of reports at Sadia, Mariano is the principal writer. His religious bias is clear but his descriptions retain undisputable value. In disapproving of polygyny and of levirate, for example, he described local marriage and family ; and in being repulsed by «witchcraft» Mariano depicted some of the most salient features of local religion.

The Jesuits noticed fairly soon that there were no priests in Sadia for otherwise they would assist at such events as circumcision and sacrifice to a deity. Still, the inhabitants of Sadia undertook virtually nothing of any importance without the aid of divination which many practiced on sand. There was in Sadia, however, a high diviner, called *Maganga*, who had the «attributes» of a *Caçis* (priest). He was a close relative of the ruler holding a public office and

(59) Mariano, «Relation», 1613-14, *COACM*, II, 1904, 20-21.

(60) Paulo Rodrigues Da Costa, *Diario*, 1613-14, in H. Leïtao (ed.) *Os Dois Descobrimentos da Ilha de Sao Lourenço*, 1970, 120.

at the same time much sought after by other important men of the land. In the town of Sadia, this dual function was exercised by a brother of Capitapa, uncle of the heir-apparent, Loquexa. In other sections of the state it was exercised by the most respected members of nobility. Although the *Maganga* was frequently in error, as perceived by the Jesuits, he was the object of such blind faith that his slightest whims were responded to without question (61).

The absence of local priests was indeed in sharp contrast with the many divinities. Local deities were infinite in number because anyone who passed away in adulthood would become an *Afo* or ancestral spirit. The very aged and heads of families were venerated in particular after death but the greatest honors were reserved for the spirits of departed nobles and princes of royal blood. Any males of royal blood who passed away in very old age would be honored posthumously «by the entire population, like national deities». The *Afo*, continued Mariano, were objects of a cult similar to the one rendered by Christians to their Saints yet obviously «in error». The Sadians knew nothing of Hell and Damnation and they regarded the *Afo* as benevolent, begging them for help and honoring them «incessantly». They could not even spot the Devil who was nonetheless present, taking the name of an *Afo* and possessing someone to preach to an assembled crowd «about wars past or yet to come, to incite those listening into some enterprise». The Devil wasted no time as only a day or two after someone's death he would come to speak in the deceased person's name, «assuming its voice». It was «strange and lamentable» for the Jesuits to see a people in communion with the Devil «as if they were speaking with their fathers, brothers or friends» (62).

Sadian gods and *Afo* were represented by «wooden images», «mis-shapen and ugly», yet decorated with glass beads and «other crude jewelry», and carried crosswise while attached to some «sort of scarf». In wartime or when a dangerous journey had to be undertaken, the «representations» would be anointed with lard. There was a «general custom» for commoners and nobility alike, which required the eldest sons to cut the beards and nails of their departed fathers, usually on the day of death. But, whereas the commoners would also add a piece of the deceased's loincloth to «these relics» and sew them up into some cotton, the nobility placed «these objects into an evil little reliquary attached to a belt», usually brought out during festivities and always carried in times of war (63). In many parts of his text, Mariano repeats with consistency that the specific customs described for Sadia were in fact widespread along the western littoral of Madagascar in areas which include the central and northern Menabe as well as southern Iboina.

(61) Mariano, *Letter*, 10-22-1616, *COACM*, II, 1904, 230, 254 (small print).

(62) Mariano, *Letter*, 10-22-1616, *COACM*, II, 1904, 228, 253 (small print).

(63) Mariano, *Letter*, 10-22-1616, *COACM*, II, 1904, 229, 253 (small print).

It is clear that such innovations as may have arrived into the Menabe with the Maroserana did not include a «new» or «superior» religion. As in Sadia, commoners and nobility venerated their departed males over much of Sakalava land long before Menabe and Iboina were created. The inclusion of conqueror-kings like Andriandahifotsy or Andriamandisoarivo into a wide-spread and tailor-made ancestral cult could not have been an act hedged with great difficulties. On the contrary, it must have been *impossible* to do otherwise and retain the fruits of conquest. If the initial inclusion was a calculated effort, suggested or made easier by diviners and elders, one of whom entered the Maroserana family tree as a result, in time the royal ancestors could not be «controlled». They became the «national deities» (an apt expression by a Jesuit priest) and the Sakalava government could not function until royal successors attained legitimacy through the formal possession of the *dady*. In contrast to the Zafindraminia, who settled among the relatively homogenous and culturally-resistant Antanosy, the Maroserana faced some very diverse populations, dispersed over a vast area. The diverse groupings, clustered for the most part along river-mouths of the western littoral, shared the same religion and spoke a language barely penetrated by Malagasy loan-words. In the Sakalava, the Maroserana had the formidable warriors needed to induce a host of self-governing clusters into becoming «Sakalava» themselves. In the widespread ancestral cult the Maroserana found an avenue for the acceptance of their dynasty by isolated and self-sustaining groupings. Neither the Zafindraminia nor the Maroserana can be perceived as particularly astute in the domain of religion; the former could not accomodate to the pre-existing cult of the *auli* and the Maroserana came into a highly developed ancestral cult. In neither case can religious innovation be remotely perceived but while the Zafindraminia copied the Antanosy «estates» the Maroserana brought with them their own political ideas and did not subscribe to the acquisitive impulse of Raminia's Descendants. There is a great deal of oral and written evidence to support such a conclusion but that is another subject.