

**Malagasy, 'un pas de plus'. L'unification de Madagascar. Tome III:
1895-1905**



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Malagasy, 'un pas de plus'. L'unification de Madagascar. Tome III: 1895-1905. By MICHEL PROU. Paris et Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1997. Pp. 476. FF 260 (ISBN 2-7384-5074-1).

There is a long tradition of foreign visitors to Madagascar who have been inspired to write on the history of the Great Red Island. Many are people who, like Michel Prou, are not professional historians but first came to know the island in some other capacity and were then led to do further research. In this case, the fascination exercised by Madagascar has resulted in the production of a trilogy on the long nineteenth-century history of Imerina, the central region of the island which has constituted its political centre of gravity throughout the last two centuries. This third and final volume of the series deals with the French invasion of 1895, the suppression of various armed resistance movements and governorship of General Gallieni which did so much to mould the subsequent history of French colonization. Gallieni is the central figure of this volume and is seen as providing the climax to the unification of the island.

M. Prou provides us with a detailed reconstruction of the actions of the French colonial government through the reports of the officers who imposed colonial administration on every region of Madagascar. Although the book is based on extensive archival research, it includes no footnotes because, the author tells us, to include them would have doubled the length of an already long text. This is indicative of a failure to think through exactly for whom the book is intended: it is far too detailed to attract any general reader or even professional historians of anywhere except Madagascar, but at the same time lacks the scholarly apparatus or the attention to various scholarly debates which specialist *malgachisants* would expect. At the same time it is written in a narrative style which, while having the virtue of being quite readable, is hardly enough in itself to attract a general readership. The net result is a rather old-fashioned narrative which, while based on scrupulous research, pays scant attention to the inner workings of Malagasy society and passes over many aspects of social, intellectual and economic history. It provides probably the most detailed account yet produced of the bureaucratic history of the ten years of French colonization.

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Transatlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity. Edited by ANTHONY TIBBLES. London: HMSO, 1994. Pp 168. £14.95, paperback (ISBN: 0-11-290539-9).

This book is the catalogue of the permanent exhibition on the Atlantic slave trade recently opened in the Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool. It comprises, besides numerous illustrations, fifteen brief essays on aspects of the operation, impact and longer-term consequences of the slave trade in Africa, Europe and the Americas; and a concluding 'catalogue' of the exhibits (the great majority of which are actually illustrated in the book). The essays are mostly written by academics who served as guest curators in the preparation of the exhibition, and are described as being 'adaptations of briefing papers prepared for the gallery' (p. 14). They differ markedly in character, however, including both attempts at balanced synthesis and personal (in one or two cases, polemical) statements; and their sequence and scope do not seem to correspond with the organization of the exhibition itself, as reflected in the catalogue. Nevertheless, their authors include some of the leading authorities in relevant fields, and the best of them represent excellent examples of brevity without sacrificing clarity or