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**Review of "Bible et pouvoir a Madagascar au XIXe siècle" by Françoise Raison-Jourde**

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## Modernization in Madagascar

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death and destruction from wars and battles, the so-called 'mfecane' which Europeans assumed must have been responsible for the deserted villages full of skeletons that they encountered in the region. Accounts of battles focus on the struggle for cattle, crops, and stored grain; African informants attribute death on a large scale not to battles but to starvation. Also significant to the current debate over conflict in the 1820s is the absence of any evidence that Europeans or slave raiders of any origin had ever penetrated into this part of the interior of southern Africa. While silence can never be conclusive, given plenty of testimony from Africans and Arbousset's own anti-slavery position, this lack of evidence about slave-raiders is hardly likely to reflect a deliberate omission or cover-up. Indeed, in Arbousset's previous work he denounced the slave trade off the Portuguese coast in no uncertain terms. He related a story told to him 'by the natives' that the BaFokeng of Sebetoane had wandered all the way to the Indian Ocean where some were tricked into boarding a slave ship; others refused and returned to tell the tale, leading Arbousset to conclude that 'that diabolical trade has spread even to the foot of the Maluti mountains'. Notably this did not involve slave-raiders in the interior, but involved capture on the coast, so Arbousset wrote that 'I do not suppose that it [the slave trade from Delagoa Bay] has reached further on the southern side of this continent'.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to providing further insights into the causes of conflict in the region, Arbousset's narrative sheds light on the self-conscious and constructive process of nation-building. Even after stripping away any missionary gloss, Moshoeshoe is revealed as having special attributes that explain his emergence as a leader. Here we have evidence of his intellect, humour, and oratory skills. We learn that Moshoeshoe spoke isiZulu, so that in spite of the diversity of dialects from the two major language branches of the region, Moshoeshoe could speak with every one of his followers personally. Arbousset observes and explains the loan-cattle system (*mafisa*). New subjects of Moshoeshoe, isiZulu-speaking immigrants who had fled from Dingane, are found to have already adopted SeSotho clothes and customs, and to be already speaking SeSotho among themselves; one tells Arbousset's guide that they 'are no longer foreigners in your country. I too am a Mosotho calf!... Dingane, I served him for a while; I have also served his father.... But both of them have been the death of me. Believe me, friend, Dingane is nothing to me any more, nor to my family. We are Basotho' (p. 107).

If a clear picture of the circumstances surrounding the conflicts and the achievements of Africans in southern African in the early nineteenth century is ever to emerge, it will only be from a careful re-reading of primary sources from the period. Scholars will be pleased to have another of these sources made available to them, thanks to the tireless efforts of Ambrose and Brutsch.

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## MODERNIZATION IN MADAGASCAR

*Bible et pouvoir à Madagascar au XIXe siècle.* Par FRANÇOISE RAISON-JOURDE.  
Paris: Editions Karthala, 1991. Pp. 840. No price given.

This is probably the most sophisticated work ever written concerning the impact of Western culture on a pre-colonial African society: if, that is, the kingdom of Imerina which dominated nineteenth-century Madagascar can usefully be de-

<sup>3</sup> Arbousset, *Narrative*, 161-5.

scribed as African. It is consequently an important book for all historians of Africa, whatever their regional specialization.

It has all the strengths associated with a French *doctorat d'état*, of which it is an edited version. It is the culmination of 25 years' research by a brilliant historian at the height of her powers and is the fruit of vast learning. The author, as any good historian should do, reconstructs individual episodes with painstaking attention to her sources, but she also combines this with extended passages of subtle and elegant analysis. Although the discussion sometimes takes us to rarified intellectual levels, it avoids the impenetrable prose to which the analysis of ideas and of culture can easily give rise. Among the many achievements on view here is the fact that Dr Raison-Jourde speaks Malagasy well enough to have mastered an array of sources in the Malagasy language, enabling her to reconstruct and contemplate the history of nineteenth century central Madagascar more thoroughly than anyone has previously done.

The only drawback in all of this is the book's length – also a feature of *doctorats d'état*. The fact that it is so bulky will not make it easy reading for non-malgachisants and thus, alas, it may not be read by as many Africanists as it deserves. This is the fate of far too many books on Madagascar.

Pre-colonial Madagascar is of interest to historians largely as a result of the exceptional nature and range of its sources. For much of the nineteenth century Madagascar appeared to Victorians to be an example of an indigenous society modernizing as a result of missionary endeavour coinciding, at least during some periods, with the presence of enlightened local rulers. The inland kingdom of Imerina in particular became the subject of a considerable literature in both English and French as well as in Malagasy. The latter included both published volumes and private diaries or other manuscripts written by individuals and archive material produced by the royal government, much of which may still be consulted at the National Archives in Antananarivo. Added to this variety of written sources, unusual in pre-colonial Africa for including so much indigenous material, are the important oral traditions which were transcribed in the mid-nineteenth century, notably those edited by the Jesuit Father François Callet and published as the five-volume *Tantara ny Andriana* ('The History of the Kings').

Dr Raison-Jourde uses her mastery of this material to reconstruct episodes in the history of the nineteenth century which have always been regarded as being obscured by lack of sources, notably in regard to the reign of Ranavalona I, the queen who expelled missionaries from the island for almost 25 years. This is in itself a major achievement since the new material on the mid-nineteenth century opens new perspectives for Madagascar specialists.

But this is not the aspect of the book which will most interest readers who are not already malgachisants. Of major interest to them will be the fact that Dr Raison-Jourde has penetrated the culture and the ideology of a pre-colonial society to the point that we may appreciate what is really meant for people whose behaviour was modelled on the customs of the ancestors to learn the skill of writing, to have important concepts of time and space revolutionized by the infusion of new ideas, to create a standing army which provided a power-base for ambitious generals, and to subjugate two-thirds of a large island by the use of imported technology. In other words, the book is about how a society went about coming to terms with the modern world in the form in which it was presented to Madagascar, as to the continent of Africa, in the last century.

The introduction of literacy and of Christianity was a major cause of these innovations, and in the end the adoption of Christianity as a state religion by the queen and prime minister of Imerina in 1868–9 was also a way of managing change. The form in which Christianity was organized was both forward- and backward-looking at the same time. It was a new ritual, but the organization of parishes in

many respects reproduced much older forms of spatial organization. Christianity also became an ideology of domination, in that Christian Merina came to despise some of the non-Christian peoples of the island for their perceived backwardness.

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### SCIENTIFIC OVERKILL

*Science and Empire: East Coast Fever in Rhodesia and the Transvaal.* By PAUL F. CRANFIELD. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp. xvii + 385. £45; \$65.

Readers who are deeply interested in the history of medicine, and particularly veterinary medicine, and those who enjoy the minutiae of British imperial politics, will no doubt find *Science and Empire* an engaging book. The study is meticulously researched and provides an almost overwhelming amount of detail on both subjects.

The author carefully traces the efforts of veterinary surgeons and bacteriologists to identify and develop a method for controlling a virulent disease that began killing cattle in Rhodesia and the colonies of South Africa in 1902. The disease, which eventually became known as East Coast Fever, was initially confused with a disease which already existed in the region, redwater fever. Cranfield describes how efforts to identify and control the disease were hampered by squabbles among medical professionals, the obstructive behaviour of white farmers and transport riders, and the machinations of imperial authorities, including Lord Milner and Joseph Chamberlain, who tried to block the appointment of Robert Koch to investigate the outbreak because Koch was German. In this sense the book's title is appropriate; the book is about the practice of medical science within the British Empire.

Readers interested in African history will find Cranfield's book less useful. Africans go largely unmentioned except in a single chapter entitled 'The African Owned Cattle in Rhodesia'. Even here we learn little about African experience with East Coast Fever or veterinary science. We are told that the disease did not initially affect African cattle to nearly the same degree as European cattle. This was apparently because Africans withdrew their cattle (or more likely were pushed back) from contact with European herds. Those in close contact suffered similar levels of devastation. We are not told what happened when the disease did begin to penetrate African herds. Missing is any description of the way in which veterinary resources were directed primarily toward the protection of European herds. Nor is there any mention of how quarantine measures were employed to keep African herds from infecting European cattle; or of how veterinary regulations and quarantine markets were employed in the Transvaal to protect white stock owners from economic competition. This side of the link between science and empire goes unexamined.

We also learn little about African responses to the disease. We are told that against all expectations on the part of European veterinarians, and on the part of the author himself, Africans proved to be very cooperative in complying with European control measures. We are told that this was because they valued their cattle – a point which is curiously documented with references to information on the Zulu attitudes – and that Africans appreciated European efforts to control the disease. This may be so, but given the negative reactions of Africans to dipping regulations elsewhere in the region it needs a bit more explanation.

All readers will find this book slow going. The author's insistence on providing