

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN MADAGASCAR

During the years 1971-75, the Institute of Archaeology continued its development in two areas: museology and archaeology. Since the end of 1972, its direction has been assured under M. Jean-Aimé Rakotoarisoa.

The Museum of Art and Archaeology, in collaboration with the Museum of Neufchâtel, presented an exhibition entitled 'Malgache qui es-tu?' (Malgache, Who are You?) in Switzerland. This exhibition, which was accompanied by a well-documented catalogue, covered most aspects of the Malgache civilisation: technical, artistic, historical and linguistic. More than 100,000 people visited it. After its return to Madagascar, this exhibition was displayed in the Palais de l'Ancien Premier Ministre, and this display marked the beginnings of the National Museum, to whose creation the University has contributed so much.

As far as archaeology is concerned, work has been concentrated on the following three regions:

The Northwest, the subject of a work published by Verin, entitled *Les Echelles du Commerce sur les Côtes Nord de Madagascar* (Trading Ports on the North Coast of Madagascar), which was accepted as a doctoral thesis by the Sorbonne in 1972. An abbreviated version of this work in English is to be published shortly in Holland by Balkema.

One of the most ancient cultures in the Northwest is that of Makilaka. According to H. Wright, this culture has similarities to that of an ancient site discovered on Mayotte at Agnognondrao. This investigator, together with S. Kus and M. Lambek, discovered several dozens of sites on the island of Mayotte. The results obtained from these discoveries are likely to clarify in a remarkable fashion the origins of the civilisation of the Northwest, and of its contacts with Africa.

Work in the far South. Excavations carried out in April-May 1972 by Heurteville, Verin and Ramilisoamina in the oldest Portuguese settlement in Madagascar, have revealed that, prior to its establishment, a town trading with the Islamic world had been in existence on the same spot up until the fifteenth century. This town was probably contemporary with the settlement at Matitana in the Southeast, where the Portuguese also set up a warehouse,

in about 1515. Matitana, which contains great quantities of choritoschist, has been studied by J. Pannetier and J.P. Dominichini.

But the most spectacular research has been that carried out since 1975 in the *Highlands*, in particular in Central Imerina. H. Wright and S. Kus, with the collaboration of J.P. Dominichini and of Ramilisoanina, have established a sequence for the Merina civilisation in this region between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. This sequence, based on a study of changes in the pottery and sites, will entail a reassessment of traditional history as presented in the royal chronicles. For the first time a discovery has been made in the Highlands of imported potsherds - of Chinese celadon of the sixteenth century.

Finally, as regards anthropological works, the appearance of that by C. Kottak on the Betsileo is eagerly awaited; it will give a new interpretation of the culture of the Southern Tablelands. The work by J. Poirier on the Bezanozano has also seen the light of day.

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(translated from the
original French by
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HONG KONG

The inclusion of Hong Kong in the section on 'Southeast Asia' may warrant some explanation. In the first place, it is not argued that present-day Hong Kong, a thoroughly Chinese place with some non-Chinese elements (probably in much the proportion as in Shanghai some time ago), should be counted as part of Southeast Asia any more than the equally at least 90% Chinese Taiwan qualifies for such a label. However, the past of Hong Kong as well as the 'ethnographic present' of Taiwan definitely attach both these islands to the Southeast Asian cultural area.

Furthermore, much of southern China can be looked upon as having in the remote past belonged to the Southeast Asian cultural sphere rather than to that of northern China; its inhabitants, too, were ethnically akin to Southeast Asians. It is also well known that for some time during the last centuries BC the centre of gravity of states in southeastern China and northeastern Southeast Asia (such as Nam Viet) was Canton, a stone's throw from Hong Kong.

In this connection it seems appropriate to draw attention to a recent work by William Meacham, *Rock Carvings in Hongkong*, published by the Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 1976, which emphasises this point. While perhaps not epoch-making, this booklet of 63 pages (English and Chinese text, and many illustrations) is more important than it may appear at first sight.