1995 March, Centre National d'Etudes Agronomiques des Régions Chaudes (CNEARC), Montpellier. Personal Communication.

Towards an Archaeology of 'Empty' Space: The *Efitra* of the Middle West of Madagascar[1]

Zoë Crossland
University of Wales Lampeter

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the social construction of the *efitra* of the middle-west of Madagascar, an apparently empty region, that lies between the highland Vakinankaratra and the western Betsiriry regions (Figure 1). Variously described as prairie or savanna-like (Marchal 1974: 9, 17, McMahon 1892: 386) from at least the 19th century it has been known by people from the highlands as a dangerous region, inhabited by no-one, yet populated by roaming bands of marauders in search of slaves and cattle. Even today, people from highland towns such as Ankazomiriotra that lie on the eastern edge of this empty zone are suspicious of strangers and fearful of the raiders who regularly steal cattle from them. I suggest in this paper that this conception of the *efitra* region was a direct result of the social and political transformations that took place in the central highlands from the 18th to 19th centuries.

In particular, the creation and establishment of the highland state known as the Merina *fanjakana* had an enormous impact on patterns of inhabitation on the eastern edge of the *efitra* region, in the region around the Andrantsay river, which runs to the north of Ambohimanambola shown on Figure 2. The Merina conquered the lands of a powerful polity (or *fanjakana*) located in the Andrantsay region and incorporated them into the Vakinankratra administrative district at the beginning of the 19th century. This

[1] The results discussed in this paper were produced during fieldwork funded by the University of Michigan, the Wenner Gren Foundation, the National Science Foundation and the British Institute in East Africa. These projects were co-directed by Ramilisonina with the help of Victor Razanatovo, Vonjy Ramilisonina, Léa Ramilisonina, Zoelle Ramilisonina, Hanta Andrianavalona, Samüel Ratovoarizo, Kerry Harris and Brian Boyd. The Museum of Art and Archaeology, Antananarivo, provided essential logistical help; thanks especially to Jean-Aime Rakotoarisoa and Chantal Radimilahy. Finally, thanks to Lynne Griffin for help with bibliographic references.

appears to have effectively severed many of the older relationships between people that had lived in the area and the landscape that came to be known as *efitra*. However this conquest seems also to have built on trends in living practices within the Andrantsay region that had begun over a century previously as people started to move towards the east and abandon previously inhabited areas further west.

2. MISSIONARY ACCOUNTS OF THE *EFITRA*

This paper attempts to understand the development of the 19th and 20th century perception of the *efitra* among highland people living in the Merina *fanjakana*. This necessitates understanding how the term was used and defined by highland language users in the 19th century. The 1885 dictionary compiled for the London Missionary Society by Richardson defines it as:

> a separation, a division, a compartment, a border, a border territory, a wilderness, a desert.

This is consistent with the accounts of the middle-western *efitra* by the Reverends E. O. McMahon, and G. Herbert Smith; both British missionaries working in Madagascar in the 1880s and early 1890s (McMahon 1890a, 1890b, 1891; Herbert Smith 1896).[2] In May 1888 McMahon traveled through the *efitra* with a view to "planting a mission in the very heart of Sakalava country" in the Betsiriry region (1891: 279, also McMahon 1892). This was a risky project for which he was ill-prepared, leading him through the vast uninhabited "wilderness" that lay between the frontier of the Merina *fanjakana* in the Andrantsay area, and the unfriendly Betsiriry region of the Sakalava. He chose a route that followed the river Mahajilo towards the west where it joins the Tsiribihina in the Betsiriry region (Figure 1). The route was purposefully selected to avoid the Merina frontier garrisons (McMahon 1891: 273). McMahon characterized the region through which he traveled as *efitra*, using the Malagasy term and describing it as a depopulated wilderness or buffer zone that separated the warring "tribes" of Sakalava and "Hova" (Merina) on either side:

> From the highlands of Vakinankaratra one can look across some fifty miles of this wilderness... (McMahon 1891: 273)

[2] McMahon worked in highland Madagascar under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) (Herbert Smith 1896). The articles published in the Antananarivo Annual by McMahon suggest that the editors of the journal did not hold his scholarship in high esteem. In both his 1891 and 1892 articles editorial notes contradict him and undercut his arguments. This may reflect the tension between the non-conformist London Missionary Society (LMS), the first missionary organization to lay claim to the highlands of Madagascar, and the SPG, an organization associated with the established Church of England.

This *efitra* appears to have been a threatening and dangerous place for people from the highlands.

> Our difficulties soon began, for the porters, which, after much difficulty, I had engaged to accompany us, got disheartened as soon as we had passed all signs of human life ... (1891: 273).

There was a genuine threat of violent encounters with bandits or suspicious Sakalava. McMahon appears to have avoided these more by luck than judgment. As the highland porters must have known, in the years before the mission, the frontier had been ravaged by attacks, when people and cattle had been regularly seized and taken off into the *efitra* by raiders from Betsiriry. In 1885, three years previously, 148 people and 1,104 cattle were recorded as having been taken from Merina garrison towns in the area by raiders from the west (Marchal 1974: 26). It was only in the year after McMahon's mission that the Merina apparently gained the upper hand in the region (Marchal 1974: 26). Although McMahon's account is permeated with the sort of racist descriptions of highland "Hova"[3] and lowland Sakalava that are often found in 19th century colonial literature, it does provide an illustration of the landscapes of the *efitra* at the end of the 19th century.

In his dismissive description of the fears of the highland Merina, McMahon inadvertently recorded some of the late 19th century perceptions of the *efitra* among people from the Vakinankaratra. Although these perceptions are filtered through his own unsympathetic characterization of his guides and porters, they still provide a hint of the ways in which the *efitra* was perceived by his highland companions. McMahon makes much of the fact that this was "the first visit by a white man to the country of the Betsiriry tribe..." (1809a: 125), indicating that his understanding of the landscape must have derived jointly from his observations and from what his companions told him together with how they lived within the landscape as they traveled through it. He described the *efitra* variously as an "uninhabited region dividing different tribes", a "tractless waste" (1891: 273) and "a great belt of uninhabited country...which cuts off the coast tribes from the central plateau" (1891: 386). These descriptions bring together both perceptions of *efitra* recorded in Richardson's 1885 dictionary, as an empty wilderness, and also as a delineating zone that lay between the highland Merina *fanjakana* and the lowland Betsiriry region on the west.

McMahon claimed that any occupation of the area was of a transient nature, with Sakalava raiders said to follow the wild cattle, living on the available fish and game in the area. The mission party found the *efitra* to be populated with herds of wild cattle

[3] 'Hova' was the term used by Europeans to describe people from the highlands, more commonly known as 'Merina' today.

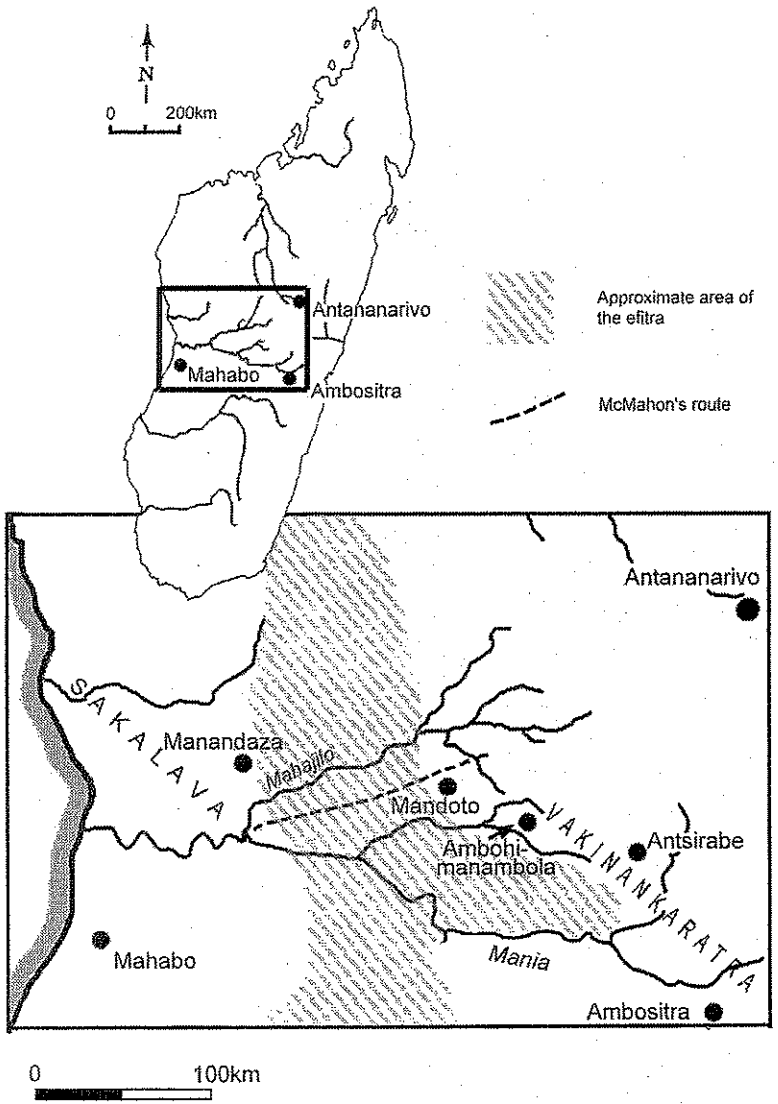

Figure 1: Study region, showing approximate limits of the efitra at the time of McMahon's journey.

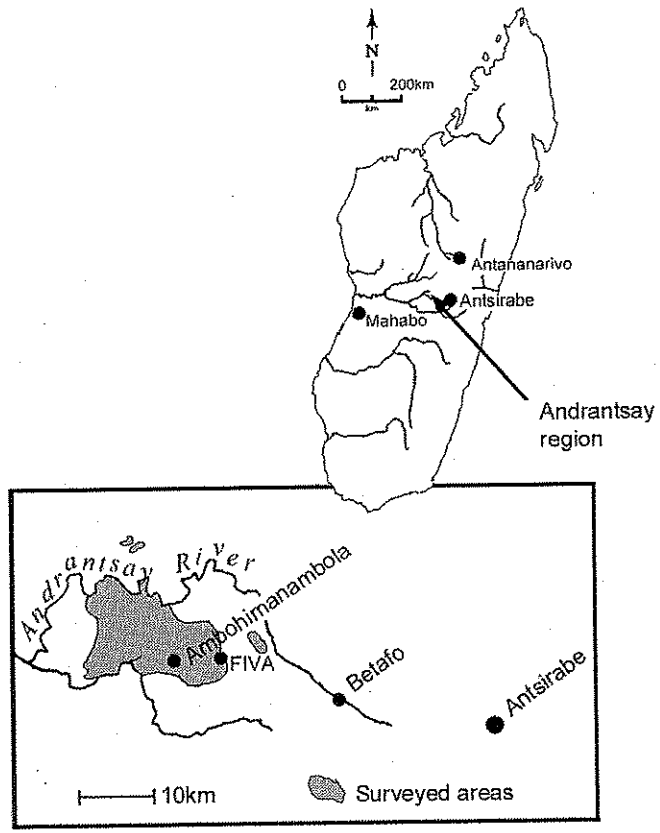

Figure 2: Location of the Andrantsay region and of areas that have been surveyed archaeologically.

"[i]n almost every valley" (1891: 275), along with wild boar and quantities of guinea fowl. They also found plentiful supplies of wild oranges (McMahon 1890a: 127) Despite this, by the seventh day of the expedition the travelers were reduced to eating their sandals as their rice had run out (1891: 276). For many highlanders a region without rice paddies may as well have been a literal desert. McMahon recorded a saying amongst the men who accompanied him: "Better a foolish person should die than (the party should) be with a broken [rice?] cooking pot in the wilderness" (1891: 274). This saying appears to refer primarily to the calamitous eventuality of being without cooked rice. McMahon notes that the men he traveled with went on to say that it would be possible to cook the rice using a piece of bamboo instead, suggesting that this possibility was a source of discussion and probable anxiety among his group. This difficulty in exploiting the resources of the unfamiliar landscape was not peculiar to McMahon's mission. As Raison discusses, the aborted expedition by the Merina king Radama I through the *efitra* to conquer Betsiriry in 1820 was also bedeviled by an inability to find food in this "desert." According to oral traditions in the *Tantanan' ny Andriana,* the troops were reduced to eating frogs and even earth before finally finding rice when they had retreated back to the east (Charles 1990; Raison 1984: 275-6). McMahon was also aware of this history and when the mission found a large number of human bones on Sóamòdy hill in the *efitra* this can only have reinforced the their negative impression of the region. McMahon described the bones as those of the dead of Radama's army lying where they had fallen from exhaustion and hunger (1890a: 126, 1891: 275).

McMahon's comments suggest a dominant perception of the region both by him and probably by people from the central highlands as "empty" and uninhabitable as well as uninhabited. This was probably reinforced by the apparent lack of tombs in the area. As Bloch has described in detail for highland Merina (and indeed for people from the Vakinankaratra region), tombs play a key role in the creation and maintenance of understandings of place and identity (Bloch 1971). Amongst highland Merina communities in the 19th and 20th centuries (and probably earlier), every free person had an ascribed physical ancestral land or *tanin'drazana* (see also Evers this volume), which was defined by the presence of the family tomb associated with the rice paddies worked by the kin group. For people living in the Vakinankaratra, a landscape without rice and without tombs would have been empty indeed.

This perception would have reinforced the other elements of the imaginative space of the *efitra*. The hazardous nature of the apparently uninhabited 'empty' landscape was presumably intensified by the additional perceived threat from the bellicose Sakalava who made regular raids on the Merina frontier in the region of Andrantsay.

3. CONQUEST OF ANDRANTSAY BY THE MERINA

The battles between the Sakalava of Betsiriry and the Merina had been ongoing

throughout the 19th century, marked in particular by the failed attempts of the Merina sovereign (*mpanjaka*) Radama I to subjugate the region in 1820-1 (Callet 1908; Raison 1984: 275-6). The need to colonize the areas outside the frontiers of Andrianampoinimerina's *fanjakana* appeared to be a major concern of later rulers, as expressed in the *Tantaran' ny Andriana* (Callet 1974 vol. III: 204). Andrianampoinimerina is said to have expressed his expansionist vision at his death, to his son Radama I: "Imerina is now unified and the ocean marks the edges of your rice fields". Raison's (1984: 276-7) work on the history of the frontier region around Andrantsay also confirmed that the western frontier of the Merina *fanjakana* was more of a desired movement westwards, than a static delineated 'edge', especially in the early years of the *fanjakana.* However, after 1863 raids on the frontier area from the *efitra* increased. At this time Radama II was assassinated and rebellion broke out in the Vakinankaratra. Although rapidly suppressed, the rebellion weakened the Merina hold on its western frontier, leading to more systematic attacks from the west on communities in the borderlands (Raison 1984: 280; Marchal 1974: 26).

By the time of French arrival in the area in 1897, only nine years after McMahon's expedition, the western frontier area around the town of Ambohimanambola was practically deserted (Marchal 1974: 27). A bulletin reported:

> We found no trace of villages; this was due to the ever-present fear of the Malagasy of sakalava looters who often make raids as far as Betafo. Today our troops form a barrier between the Sakalava and the inhabitants of the central plateaux, it is without doubt that the latter will decide without fear to expand into the west, above all if the local authorities favor their installation (quoted in Marchal 1974: 26, my translation).

Archaeological study of the Andrantsay region, located on the eastern edge of the *efitra* where the highlands begin to soften and slope down towards the coast, (Figures 1 and 2) has indicated that the area has a longer and more complex history than that which would be ascribed to it on the basis of historical documents and oral traditions alone (Crossland 2001a). The history of the Andrantsay region has implications for our understanding of the *efitra* or 'wilderness', allowing some exploration of how far this 'wilderness' has been constructed as an idea as much as a physical reality. Although both Marchal (1974) and Raison (1984) have studied the recent history of the region, only an archaeological approach has the potential to investigate living practices for the period of 'mythic' time before memory and oral tradition can or care to remember. This approach allows another route to explore the ways in which memory and forgetting of the landscape of the *efitra* have been constructed in the frontier region of Andrantsay.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION ON THE EASTERN EDGE OF THE *EFITRA*

From 1997 to 2000 the Andrantsay Archaeological Project surveyed a section of the western-most edge of the Vakinankaratra in the Andrantsay area (Figure 2). This borderland provides interesting contrasts between the densely populated area further east around Soavina and Betafo, where the valleys are heavily terraced for wet rice cultivation, and the drier, more savanna-like environment, west of the basin of Ambohimanambola, which has fewer rice paddies and which is more sparsely populated. I pinpointed this area for research for a range of reasons. Not only did it mark the beginning of the western frontier of the Merina *fanjakana*, but it was also the locus of the earlier Andrantsay 'kingdom' or *fanjakana* in the 18th and 19th centuries. In addition, the region provided an opportunity for archaeological exploration of the very different physical landscapes to east and west of Ambohimanambola. The Andrantsay *fanjakana* is usually viewed as the last significantly populated area before the *efitra* begins. Even before the Merina conquered the area and created a frontier for their *fanjakana* there, the limited historical records indicate that population did not penetrate further west into the *efitra* region (Mayeur 1913). The significance of the region has led to several previous studies of its geography (Raison 1984), history and oral traditions (Dez 1967; Larson 1992; Marchal 1967) and demography (Marchal 1974). These studies provided a detailed background for archaeological study, enabling me to begin to put the archaeological evidence into a broader historical and geographical perspective.

Archaeologically however, there has been little published work apart from Marchal's visits to some of the larger ditched and walled sites around Ambohimanambola (1967). In 1970 Mille recorded all the ditched and walled sites visible from aerial photographs over most of the central highlands (Figure 3). He divided the region into quadrants based on the 1:100,000 maps produced by the National Institute of Geodetic Survey and Cartography in Madagascar. Unfortunately the aerial photograph coverage to the west of Antirabe was incomplete, so he excluded two quadrants from his survey. These covered the whole of the Andrantsay region (designated by maps/quadrants M49 and N49). His study showed that the central highlands are covered by a high density of walled and ditched sites, particularly in Central Imerina, and to the north and east of the unsurveyed area of Andrantsay. In contrast, the quadrant directly to the west of Andrantsay, covering part of the *efitra* of the middle-west indicated a striking fall in the number of sites. According to Raison this quadrant (L49) had a density of less than one fortified site per 27 km^2 (1984: 45), in contrast to the region to the north of Andrantsay (map M48) which had a density of approximately one for every 3 km^2. This appeared to show that the historically known lack of occupation of the *efitra* had considerable time depth, with few traces of settlement visible from the air. However, only on-the-ground survey could demonstrate more conclusively whether there was any other evidence for human occupation in the

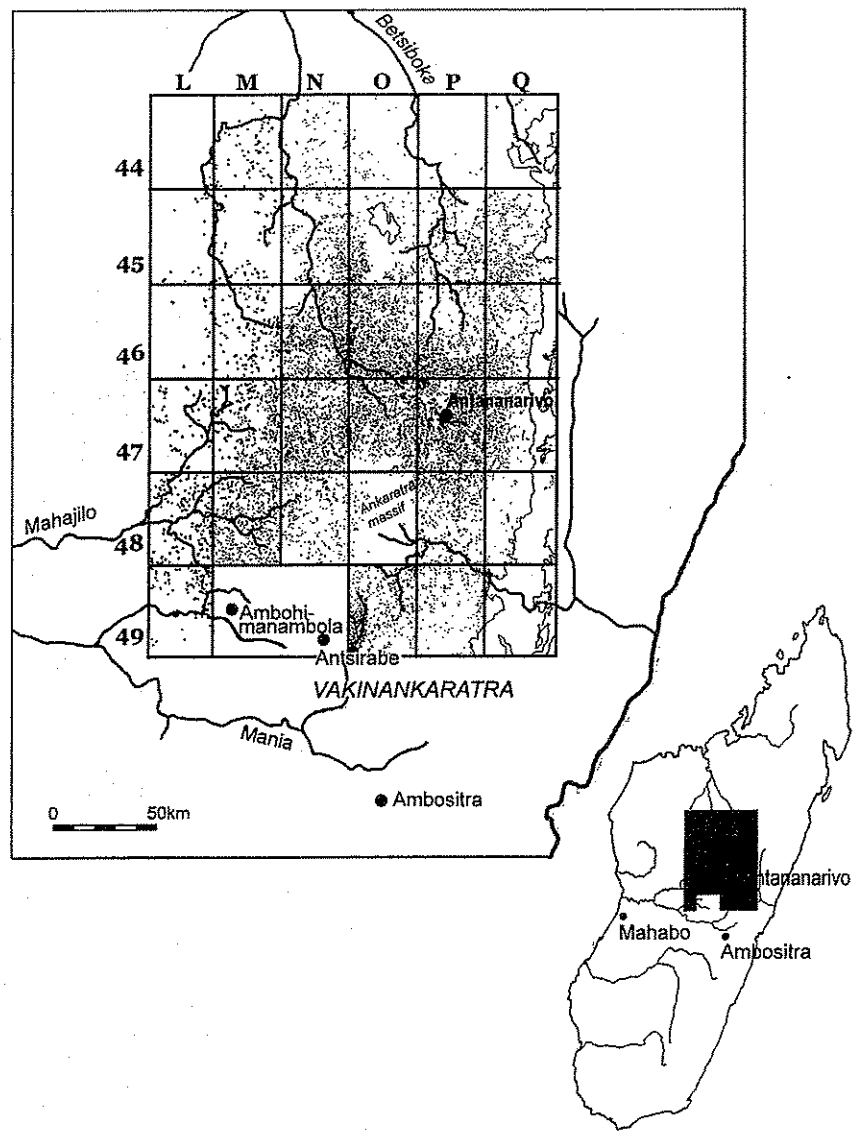

Figure 3: Map of ditched sites recorded from aerial photographs in the Central Highlands, after Mille 1970

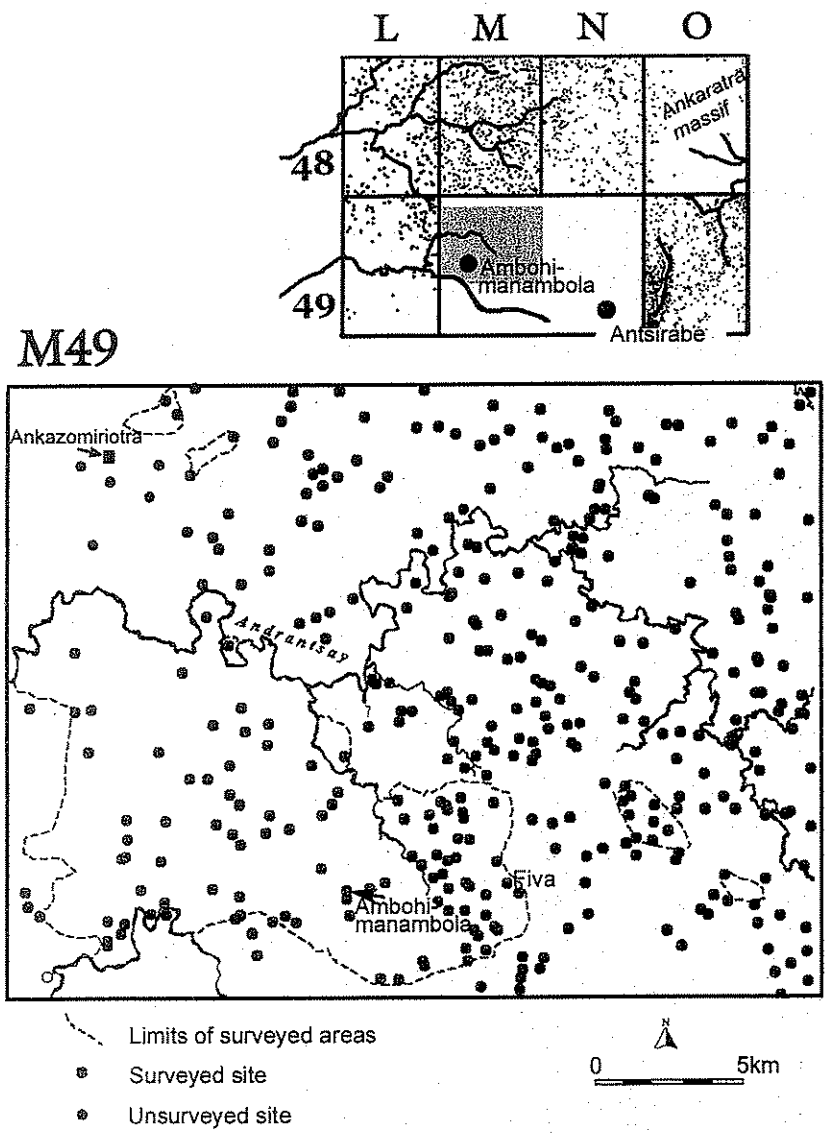

Figure 4: Ditched sites visible from aerial photographs.

areas with few or none of the large fortified sites visible from the aerial photographs. I particularly wanted to find out whether people had inhabited this area on the edge of *efitra* without leaving any monumental traces, and the implications of this for our understanding of past inhabitation of the *efitra*. Figure 4 shows the distribution of ditched and walled sites in the part of quadrant M49 that has aerial photographic coverage. It also shows the area that we surveyed on foot, with all the ditched and walled sites found within that area. It indicates that the number of sites falls at the westernmost extreme of the quadrant. Although there are no aerial photographs for the south of the quadrant, on-the-ground observation from high points in the Andrantsay region suggests that the number of ditched and walled sites also declines rapidly towards the south. Our intensive ground survey also recorded some walled sites that were not visible or difficult to interpret from aerial photographs alone. All of this pointed to an apparent 'edge' to the human settlement of the area, with the number of visible sites falling precipitously towards the juncture of quadrants L49 and M49. This 'edge' is usually interpreted, not unreasonably, as the western frontier of the Merina *fanjakana* (Marchal 1967, 1974; Raison 1984).

However, when the distribution of walled and ditched sites is given a temporal dimension through interpretation of the associated ceramics, the apparent edge can be seen to be a fluctuating zone that has moved from west to east according to the fortunes of people living in the area and the exigencies of the Merina *fanjakana*. Indeed most of the largest sites in the west of Andrantsay date to well before the Merina conquered the Andrantsay region and many appear to have been abandoned some time in the 17th to 18th centuries, before the campaign against Andrantsay (Crossland 2001a).

What the archaeology shows clearly is that the west of Andrantsay had a long and apparently continuous occupation dating back to as early as the 12-13th century C.E., which was gradually abandoned over the subsequent centuries until, by the 19th century it was practically deserted. The earliest occupation in the surveyed region (based on the ceramics) appears to have been concentrated in two areas, one lying to the west, along the banks of the river Andrantsay and Ipongy and the hills between them; the other further east in the basin of Ambohimanambola (Figure 5). Significantly, this earliest (12th to 14th century) occupation, known as the Antsahabe phase,[4] has no preserved monumental traces: the lack of any large walled and ditched sites makes it effectively invisible from the air. Only on-the-ground surface survey can find and record these earliest sites. The highest concentration of sites dating to the Antsahabe phase is in the west of the surveyed area, in areas with no or few ditched sites,[5] as may be seen by comparison of Figures 4 and 5. The sites are small, and consist of a small scatter of

[4] The Antsahabe phase ceramic material is similar to that of the Fiekena Phase in Imerina (Wright and Kus 1977, 1979), and the Vohimasina Phase of the Manandona Valley (Raharijaona 1988).

[5] It is possible that these oldest sites are more visible in the west because this area has been less disturbed by later inhabitation.

sherds on low hills close to springs and rivers. Remote sensing at two of these provided no clues as to the kind of practices that went on at them. As yet no early site has been found with enough depth of deposits to excavate. However, the small size of the sites, the lack of any permanent architecture, and their location close to the rivers may indicate that they are traces of a more mobile (perhaps seasonal?) way of life that may have followed the rivers and herds of wild cattle. Further work is needed to understand the nature of these early sites, and their relationship to the possibly contemporaneous tombs found in the same area. These tombs are made of a few stone slabs or stones placed flat on the ground and are difficult to date at present. They are of a form that is usually associated with inauspicious or temporary burials in most parts of the highlands (Callet 1974 vol. I: 510; Ramilisonina, pers. comm. 2000). They were historically used for people of slave status, and are still used in some cases today where people of slave descent are discriminated against (see Evers this volume). They are also used for people who have died of contagious disease and so cannot be placed in the family tomb, and also for 'strangers': people who have died away from home and cannot be brought back to the ancestral land for burial. All of these categories are classed as somehow not 'real' tombs, as they are not associated with the *tanin'drazana*. Yet this is the dominant style of tomb in the west of Andrantsay, suggesting that they were part of a different set of burial practices that have now been forgotten.

The relatively high density of these earliest sites in an area usually understood to be an 'empty' frontier area, suggests that the *efitra* contiguous to Andrantsay, (and perhaps even further west), may also have been occupied at an early date, but in a way that has left few traces archaeologically. Archaeological survey in the *efitra* further west may well turn up many early sites that are relatively undisturbed by later farming practices, and would be a profitable area of study.[6]

The evidence for inhabitation of the *efitra* raises the question of why this early occupation was effectively forgotten by the 19th century, and probably earlier. I believe that this was a direct result of the major social and political upheavals that the area saw

[6] On the western edge of the *efitra* large ditched sites appear again at around 45.5° longitude. This is the area that McMahon recorded as "Betsiriry" and where he encountered people for the first time after traveling through the *efitra*. I visited and recorded two of these sites with Ramilisonina and other team members in 1999 (Crossland forthcoming):

– Ambohimanga (Site 901) 19° 47.339 / 45° 31.100, altitude approx 200m. (Ditched and walled site with associated sherds and tombs).

– Ambalavato (Site 902) 19° 51.102 / 45° 32.086, altitude approx 200m. (Stone walled site with associated sherds, tombs and terraces).

Within the *efitra* itself lies a large site at 19° 35.569 / 46° 16.583 953. This is Songombato (Site 900). It has stone walls, with associated sherds, tombs, entrance stone, small standing stone and traces of stone structures with hearth traces interior.) Songombato shows little clear evidence of being a Merina garrison, but further work is needed as these are not necessarily easily recognizable from ceramics alone (Crossland 2001b). The visible traces of Radama I's failed campaign to the west described by McMahon may also be traceable archaeologically in the *efitra*.

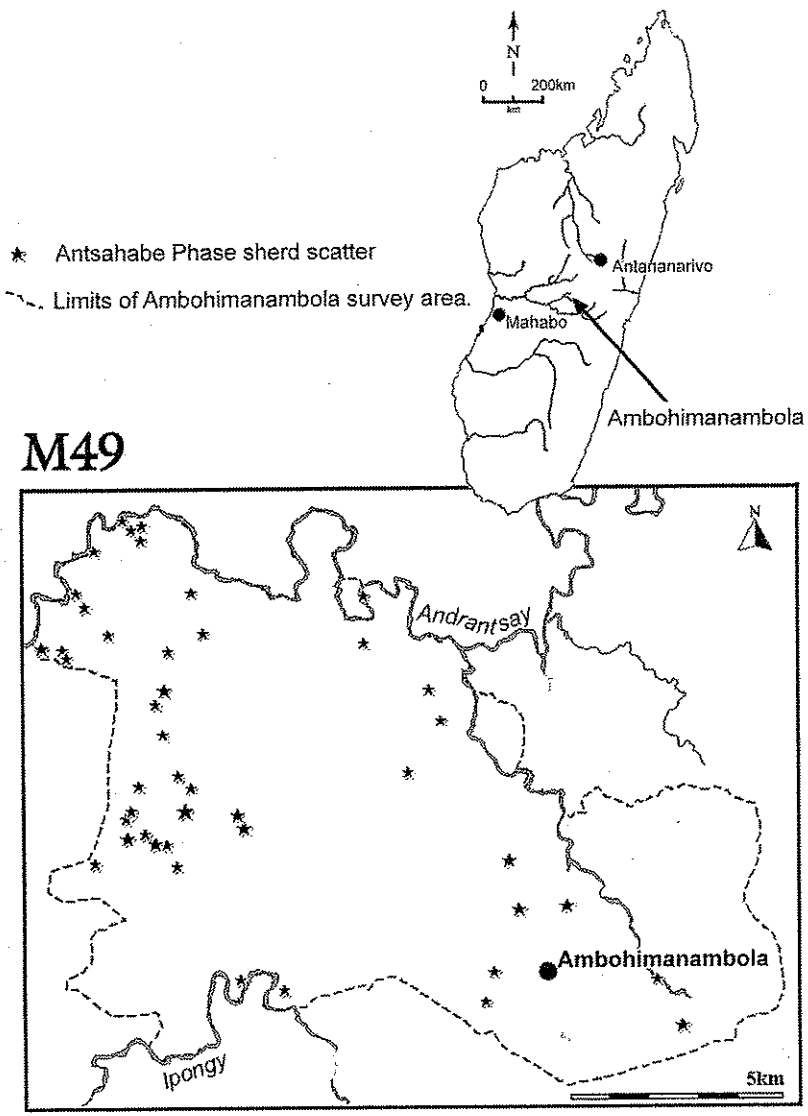

Figure 5: Concentration of earliest sites (Antsahabe phase) in the Andrantsay area.

during the 18th and 19th centuries. Up until the 18th century, in both western and eastern parts of Andrantsay people made similar changes in the construction and location of their villages. Over the course of the 18th century the Andrantsay region saw a jump in the number of new ditched villages constructed, probably due to people migrating to the region as recorded by oral traditions (Dez 1967; Marchal 1967: 254). Most of this growth in the number of new sites built and extensions to older sites took place in the east of the Andrantsay area. The oral traditions recall the founding of the Andrantsay *fanjakana* during this period, in the east of the surveyed area at the site of Fiva, which lies just to the east of Ambohimanambola (Figure 2). They do not record any information about earlier sites in the west of the surveyed area, towards the *efitra*. It is likely that this period saw a change in the locus of political power in the region, with a stronger center of political control emerging towards the east, that may or may not have been associated with a migrating kin-group as recorded in the oral traditions. From this point onwards, people in the west began to abandon many of the fortified villages in the area. However, it was not until the Merina took over the Andrantsay *fanjakana* that the west was completely abandoned.

Around 1808-9 (Delivré 1967: 216; Larson 1992: 320) the Andrantsay region was conquered by the Merina *fanjakana*. One of the first acts of Merina governance of what came to be known as the Vakinankaratra region, was to shift the locus of government to the east, away from the old centers of political power in the heartland of Andrantsay, around Fiva. The new administrative center was located at Betafo, around 50 miles east of the basin of Ambohimanambola (Figure 2). In other words, there was a two-step movement east, first to Fiva and then Betafo, as the Merina built upon the earlier trend to move east that had been established within Andrantsay.

The archaeology provides evidence for the social and political upheavals experienced in the Ambohimanambola area after Merina conquest, showing that all the fortified villages in the west were abandoned over the course of the 19th century. This abandonment may be ascribed to a range of reasons. No longer safeguarded by the close proximity of the center of the powerful Andrantsay *fanjakana*, people may have chosen to move further east to live in the more protected areas near Betafo. Many others were probably taken from the area as slaves by the Merina (Larson 1992: 320-1), either to be sold, or re-settled in Imerina to defuse possible rebellion (Callet 1974 vol. II: 366-7). Above and beyond these depredations, this abandonment is usually ascribed to the Sakalava raids from the west, well-documented for the 19th century. McMahon described meeting highland people held as slaves in the villages in Betsiriry that he visited during 1888 (1892: 392) and described how the villages were raided:

> In their marauding expeditions on the borderland they surround a village during the night and lie hidden until the morning when the cattle are driven out to grass. They then surprise the people and carry off as many captives as they can secure, together with the cattle...(1892: 388).

Sakalava raids are documented throughout most of the 19th century. In 1821 following the defeat of Radama I's army in Betsiriry, raiders attacked the area northwest of Ambohimanambola, stealing animals and rice (Marshal 1974: 25). Raison (1984: 285-6) found records of attacks on Ambohimanambola in 1884 and 1889 when 23 people were abducted together with 420 animals from Ambohimanambola alone. These figures show how over the course of the 19th century the attacks pushed further and further east, until the Ambohimanambola area was almost deserted as described above.

However, the relocation of the site of administrative control in Betafo does not in itself explain why these raids intensified in number after Merina conquest. It seems probable that it was the shift in political power within Andrantsay that made the region more open to attack. The evidence of some abandonment of the west in the 18th century before the Merina conquest may indicate that the area had been subjected to raids from the west previously. However there is also evidence from oral traditions that there were strong kin ties between Andrantsay and the Betsiriry on the other side of the *efitra* up until Merina conquest.

Despite contradictory accounts on many details, the oral traditions all agree that the son of the 'first' ruler of Andrantsay moved to the Sakalava area. They also record that on moving west he 'became' Sakalava and founded the royal lineage that would later produce Rasalimo, wife of Radama I (Dez 1967: 664). Oral traditions also record that the Andrantsay *fanjakana* was in a tribute-paying relationship with the Sakalava lineage until the 18th century when it broke free and became an independent *fanjakana*. Regardless of the accuracy of the details of the different political relationships of one lineage to another, these traditions preserve a memory of kin links across the *efitra* between Betsiriry and Andrantsay. After Merina conquest many of the ruling dynasty appear to have fled west to the Betsiriry region (Raison 1984: 275). This meant that those who stayed in their ancestral homeland in Andrantsay had effectively submitted to the Merina. Indeed, the Vakinankaratra is known to have been administered by rulers drawn from the local ruling lineages, who were obedient to Imerina (Callet 1974 vol. II: 626; Raison 1984: 118-21). The implications of this for the kin relationships with the west are apparent, as those who remained in Andrantsay shifted allegiance to the Merina north rather than the Sakalava west. Any treaties or alliances with the west that may have been in operation previously, during the rule of the Merina *fanjakana*, would have been invalidated by the actions of those who remained in Andrantsay. In addition, the people who had escaped west across the *efitra* would have had incentives to raid the edges of the old *fanjakana* to try to destabilize the government there and to regain their old ancestral lands, which had been lost to them.

I have already mentioned the importance of tombs in the highlands to the construction and maintenance of identity. The archaeological evidence suggests that tombs were similarly important in the Andrantsay region before the Merina conquest. The severance of so many people from their ancestral tombs would have been a powerful and painful disruption of people's felt-connection to the landscape, whether

this severance was accomplished by enslaving people or by forcing them to flee. A landscape with tombs that were left unmaintained and uncared for by their tomb groups was the inevitable result of the massive depopulation of the western frontier. The ancestors held in these tombs have subsequently been forgotten in the region, and much of the landscape of the west of Andrantsay is seen as 'empty' today, bereft of any descendents who remember the people and histories associated with many of the abandoned tombs.

After slavery was formally abolished in 1896, people who had been taken as slaves had few options (Bloch 1979). Many stayed where they were, continuing to work the land for the people who had previously held them as slaves, but there were few opportunities to buy land to establish a family tomb where they lived. Others returned to the areas from where they had been seized, although this was not a simple task as most had lost contact with their kin in their ancestral lands (Evers 1999: 283). Many others left for uncultivated areas in the central highlands where they could lay claim on land and start again with a new tomb that would mask their previous slave status. The Andrantsay area, almost completely depopulated by the end of the 19th century, was an obvious choice for many ex-slaves to set up in, not least because some may have had remembered kin-connections with the area. Marchal's demographic study (1974) of the area led him to claim that people of slave descent made up most of the population of Ambohimanambola.

Many people who moved to the region in the 20th century must have had at best only a vaguely remembered connection with the landscapes of Andrantsay. The lack of continuity in the maintenance of their ancestral tombs had the effect of breaking the strong association between kin groups and the local landscape. The separation of slaves from their ancestral lands and from the rest of society contributed to the forgetting of names and places that were connected with the older occupation of the landscape.

Today, when carrying out fieldwork in the Andrantsay region we often ask people about the tombs we find there. In the majority of cases they are described by local people as *Vazimba* tombs (Dez 1971). This effectively means that they belong to no-one, that there is no remembered kin-connection between those buried there and the living. The further west one moves the more *Vazimba* tombs, one finds, until in the far west of Andrantsay, all tombs are called *Vazimba*. This demonstrates the absolute rupture of people's relationships with the landscape in the region (see also Tucker, this volume). Many of these *Vazimba* tombs can be no earlier than the 18th century in date, yet people do not remember to whom they belong, something that would be unthinkable in Central Imerina. In other cases, people have apparently moved back to the area and re-established tombs, moving remains from older tombs to the new ones. No one we spoke to however could remember the names of the ancestors buried in the old tombs. Much of this reticence must also derive from the large number of people of slave descent in the area. Questions about descent and tombs are usually met with suspicion, as they appear to question the legitimacy of people's habitation of the landscape. To talk about the landscape and the tombs within it is to discuss one's

ancestral heritage, something that is unwelcome and often threatening for people of slave descent (Evers 1999).

In this respect it is revealing that the families and descent groups that had retained power in the region, as subjects of the Merina *fanjakana*, were also those whose oral traditions had been maintained and remembered. These were people who held power and influence in the east of the old *fanjakana* of Andrantsay, far from the borderland of the *efitra*. The incorporation of Andrantsay into the Merina district of Vakinankaratra emphasized the internal coherence of the Merina *fanjakana*, the links between people *within* this bounded entity, and the outside-ness of people lying on the other side of the *efitra*. Without kin-links to people on the other side of the *efitra*, it necessarily became an empty wilderness, a land without memory or ancestors, which began within the confines of the old kingdom of Andrantsay and stretched away for miles towards Betsiriry.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It can be seen from the archaeological evidence that the 19th century definition of *efitra* made sense in terms of the strategies of control and administration of the Merina. The border was not only a defined edge, but also an "empty" place. It was a wilderness and a "tractless waste" because of the absence of memory and of ancestral connection to the land, and across and through the land. This made its edges a suitable place for repopulation by displaced people, but also a dangerous place, which only people with no other options, people without place, would want to inhabit.

Although the *efitra* was never inhabited in the same way that the central highlands were, where people built large fortified sites and elaborate rice terraces, it seems probable that it does have its own occupational histories. The archaeology suggests that at an early date people may have inhabited the *efitra*, perhaps living a mobile way of life based on hunting and fishing. This way of life may have continued for centuries; only archaeological survey can start to reconstruct the histories of inhabitation of the region. Whether or not people lived permanently in the area during later periods, it seems unlikely that it was considered to be such a dangerous and "empty" wilderness during the time of the Andrantsay *fanjakana*. Kin connections between Betsiriry and Andrantsay would have made the area a known place, a place to be crossed, perhaps where cattle were herded, or seasonal camps were inhabited. It was only with the creation of a bounded Merina *fanjakana*, reinforced by violent military control that it became known as the "wilderness" of today.

The echoes of these earlier relationships were perhaps apparent in McMahon's experiences during his mission. Distrusting him because he both traveled from the highlands, and was accompanied by highlanders, most Sakalava refused to have anything to do with him. The only Sakalava leader who was sympathetic was

Ilehikibobo. McMahon reported that not only did he "speak a little Hova [the Merina dialect of Malagasy]" but that he had "accompanied Rasalima, a Sakalava princess, who was one of the wives of the old king of Imerina" (McMahon 1890b: 210-11). McMahon appears to have missed the significance of this for the local landscape through which he traveled. Rasalimo(a) the wife of Radama I, was a descendent of the noble who left Andrantsay to found a Sakalava lineage, described previously. Radama I's expedition against Betsiriry had failed. This together with his marriage to a woman from an important lineage in Betsiriry symbolized (at least locally), an equal relationship between ruling lineages, rather than one of subjugation[7]. Without entirely realizing it, McMahon had himself probably been accepted by Ilehikibobo because of older kin connections that were maintained across the *efitra*, between the highland Vakinankaratra and Betsiriry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bloch, Maurice
1971 *Placing the Dead: Tombs, Ancestral Villages and Kinship Organization in Madagascar.* London: Seminar Press.
1979 The Social Implications of Freedom for Merina and Zafimaniry Slaves. In *Madagascar in History*, edited by R. Kent. Pp. 269-297. Albany CA: Foundation for Malagasy Studies.

Callet, Francois
1974 [1908] *Tantaran' ny Andriana.* Antananarivo: Editions de la Librarie de Madagascar.

Charles, Clément Sévérin
1990 Radama I et le Menabe. *Omaly Sy Anio* 29-30:237-255.

Crossland, Zoë
2001a Ny Tany sy Ny Fanjakana (The Land and the State). Ph.D. Dissertation, Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan.
2001b Time and the Ancestors. Landscape Survey in the Andrantsay Region of Madagascar, *Antiquity* 75(290):825-836.

Delivré, Alain
1974 *L'Histoire des Rois d'Imerina. Interprétation d'une Tradition Orale.* Paris: Klincksieck.

Dez, Jacques
1967 Le Vakinankaratra - Equisse d'une Histoire Régionale. *Bulletin de Madagascar* 256:657-702.
1971 Essai sur le Concept de Vazimba. *Bulletin de l'Academie Malgache* 49(2):11-20.

Evers, Sandra
1999 The construction of history and culture in the southern highlands: tombs, slaves and ancestors. In *Ancestors, Power and History in Madagascar*, edited by K. Middleton, pp. 257-282. Leiden: Brill.

[7] Charles discusses (1990: 242-3), however, perspectives on the politics of the marriage varied widely between accounts from Imerina and Sakalava depending on who was asked.

Herbert Smith, Rev. G.
1896 *Among the Menabe, or Thirteen Months on the west coast of Madagascar.* Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, New York: E and J.B. Young and Co.

Larson, Pier M.
1992 Making ethnic tradition in a pre-colonial society: culture, gender, and protest in the early Merina kingdom, 1750-1822. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Madison Wisconsin.

McMahon, E. O.
1890a Mr. McMahon's first journey to the Betsiriy. *Mission Field* (April 1st):125-133.
1890b Mr McMahon's second journey to the Betsiriry. *Mission Field* (May 1st):165-171, 207-212.
1891 First visit of a European to the Betsiriry tribe. *Antananarivo Annual* IV(3):273-280.
1892 The Sakalava and their customs. *Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine* IV:385-393.

Marchal, Jean.-Yves
1967 Contribution a l'Etude Historique du Vakinankaratra - Evolution du Peuplement dans la Cuvette d'Ambohimanambola, Sous-Préfecture de Betafo. *Bulletin de Madagascar* 250(mars):241-280.

Mayeur, Nicolas
1913a [1777] Voyage au Pays d'Ancove, reprinted. *Bulletin de l'Academie Malgache* 12(1):139-76

Mille, Adrian
1970 Contribution à l'Etude des Vllages Fortifiées de l'Imerina Ancien. *Traveaux et Documents II.* Antananarivo: Museé d'Art et d'Archéologie de la Université de Tananarive.

Raharijaona, Victor
1988 Etude de Peuplement de l'Espace d'une Vallée des Hautes-Terres Centrales de Madagascar: Archéologie de la Manandona (XVè-XIXème siècle). Thèse de IIIème Cycle, University of Paris, Paris.

Raison, J-P.
1984 *Les Hautes Terres de Madagascar.* Paris: Karthala

Richardson, J.
1885. *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary.* Antananarivo, The London Missionary Society.

Wright, Henry T. and Susan Kus
1977 Reconnaissances archéologiques dans le Centre de l'Imerina. (Translated by P. Verin.) *Taloha* 7:19-47.
1979 An Archaeological Reconnaissance of Ancient Imerina. In *Madagascar in History*, edited by R. Kent. Pp. 1-31. Albany CA.: Foundation for Malagasy Studies.

This volume was produced using Microsoft Word XP. The text is set in Garamond.

Cover and typographical design by James Herron.

ISBN 1-889480-00-2

Michigan Discussions in Anthropology
Department of Anthropology
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Lova/Inheritance: Past and Present in Madagascar

Edited by

Zoë Crossland
Genese Sodikoff
Will Griffin

MDIA General Editors

Mike Ferguson
Ann-Elise Lewallen

MICHIGAN DISCUSSIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGY

VOLUME 14 2003