BIBLIOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX


MADAGASCAR

by

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1992
INTRODUCTION

In Madagascar, long before the official adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1823 to transcribe the Malagasy language, a system of writing based on adaptations of the Arabic alphabet was used in the south-east and the north-west. This heritage left by the first Muslims who came to the Great Island from the eleventh to the thirteenth century was used on the south-east coast to record a literary tradition preserved secretly by the tribes of the region, notably the Antaimoro. In every generation initiation to knowledge of the Arabico-Malagasy script was reserved for men of certain noble clans. Manuscripts recording this tradition are known as Sora-be (Great Writings). They are linked to the clans and not always considered private property. Copies of originals made by individual members of the clan are considered personal property, and can leave the original territory of the group. The Arabico-Malagasy alphabet spread through the island with the influence of the literate Antaimoro soothsayers reputed for their magic. On the north-west coast, which had close links with Swahili culture, the script used is akin to the one used for writing Swahili in Arabic script. Already in the seventeenth century, Europeans making contacts with the Malagasy speak of their familiarity with the Arabic script which was used not only for transmitting religious tradition but also for practical purposes. The earliest detailed account for the south-east is that of Flacourt (1638), French governor of Fort-Dauphin, who learnt to read the Arabico-Malagasy script. He reports the existence of several volumes of manuscripts written on paper manufactured locally. This is also the period when the first Arabico-Malagasy manuscripts from the south-east region of Madagascar came to Europe, France in particular.

Adapting the Arabic alphabet to transcribe phonemes of Malagasy dialects causes particular problems of deciphering Arabico-Malagasy manuscripts. Special descriptive studies of the script and phonology, dealing with problems of deciphering manuscripts, have been published: see especially:

1902. Notes sur la transcription arabico-malagache d’après les

Later Sora-be, mostly composed after the 1860s, give historical accounts: see survey by Ferrand (1891–1902), under Union Catalogues below; also:


Translation and commentary of historical accounts from an Arabico-Malagasy manuscript acquired in the province of Farafangana in 1912.


Texts, transcriptions & translations of Arabico-Malagasy MSS.

Currently the Arabico-Malagasy manuscript tradition is still alive on the south-eastern coast. It is difficult to estimate exactly the number of manuscripts extant in various private tribal collections dispersed throughout the region of the Mattanana. An aura of mystery which surrounds these manuscripts has generated all sorts of taboos. Thus even today the lettered of one clan are not quite aware of manuscripts held by the other clans of their own tribe. Outside the domain of the clans, private collectors have included European travellers, colonial administrators, Christian missionaries and individual scholars. Most of their collections now lie in private hands.
or in institutions outside Madagascar, particularly in France, Norway and England. Some manuscripts have found their way back to Madagascar, either the originals or photocopies from which individuals have made further copies. The oldest institutional collection in Madagascar is housed at the Malagasy Academy (see below).

As for the north-west coast, the ancient literature in Arabic script has not come down to us. However, there is contemporary Muslim literature in Arabic script, associated with the propagation of Islam and Muslim fraternities. See the survey by Guenier (1986) under Union Catalogues below; also:


The Arabico-Malagasy corpus constitutes an invaluable source for the study of the evolution of the Malagasy language and the interface of Islam with the primitive Malagasy religion. It is a rich source for the study of the history and the belief system of the Antaimoro in particular and their relations with other tribes of Madagascar. It assumes broader, international horizons when it deals with Anglo-Malagasy and Franco-Malagasy relations.

UNION CATALOGUES & SURVEYS


Incl. studies of several manuscripts with texts, transcriptions, translations and detailed notes.


Historical survey of the discovery and study of Arabico-Malagasy manuscripts.


Monograph on Malagasy tribes of the south-east; contains a description of their manuscripts, pp. 33–39.


Exhibition catalogue of artifacts, manuscripts and early printed books containing a description of 14 Arabico-Malagasy MSS. Codicological details include: serial number, geographical origin, date of acquisition, ownership, type of paper, binding, physical condition, subject, number of folios, type of ink and dimensions.


Incl. survey of collections in Madagascar and elsewhere.


Descriptive survey of Arabico-Malagasy manuscript collections in Madagascar, France, Norway and England.

1982. La tradition arabico-malgache vue à travers le manuscrit A-6 d’Oslo et d’autres manuscrits disponibles. By L. Munthe [Antananarivo].

Comprehensive overview of the Arabico-Malagasy tradition, obtained after studying more than 7,000 pages of Sora-he available to the author. The work includes a descriptive survey of Arabico-
Malagasy manuscripts found in institutions in Madagascar, France, Norway and England. Codicological details include: serial number, physical condition, ownership, number of folios/pages, dimensions, date and place of acquisition and copying, geographical origin, summary of content, name of donor.

A survey of Arabico-Malagasy manuscripts found in institutional and private collections in France, Madagascar, Norway and England. Codicological details include: serial number, ownership, number of folios/pages, dimensions, date and place of acquisition and copying, geographical origin, subject, name of donor.


Survey of Arabico-Malagasy (Sora-be) MSS.

INDIVIDUAL COLLECTIONS

ANTANANARIVO

Académie Malgache
BP 6217, Tsimbazaza, Antananarivo
Tel.: 210-84
Date of establishment: 1902
Status: Academic library
Total number of Islamic MSS: 35 (Arabico-Malagasy, including about 10 photocopies from Norway).
Description of collection: The Arabico-Malagasy manuscripts, of varying importance, are mostly copies dating from the beginning of the century donated to the Academy by individual travellers. The Academy was offered, in 1979, by the Norwegian government, photocopies of Arabico-Malagasy manuscripts (832 pages) housed in Norway. The collection of the Academy (more than 3,700 pages, including the copies from Norway) covers the following subjects: history, religion, magic, divination and astrology. The historical matter consists of genealogies and accounts of the arrival of Arab ancestors of the Antaimoro in Madagascar, their settlement and early adventures in the south-east in the region of the Matianana. They also deal with French military activity in the region in the seventeenth century.

Published catalogues:

1977. Article by Munthe, pp. 98-100, describes the whole collection. (See under Union Catalogues & Surveys above.)

1982. Monograph by Munthe, pp. 29-35 & 52-75, describes the whole collection. (See under Union Catalogues & Surveys above.)

1983. Monograph by Dez, pp. 19-25 & 29-30, describes the whole collection. (See under Union Catalogues & Surveys above.)

Unpublished catalogues:

Musée du Palais de la Reine

Antananarivo
Date of establishment: 19th century
Status: National museum
Total number of Islamic MSS: 1 (Arabico-Malagasy & French).
Description of collection: The unique manuscript is the autograph copy of the exercise book of King Radama I (1810-1828), by whose decree the Latin alphabet was adopted to transcribe the Malagasy
language. It was discovered in 1897 after the Merina queen was banished.

Published catalogues:


1982. See MUNTHE, pp. 21 – 22 & 52 (under Union Catalogues & Surveys above).


Université d’Antananarivo

BP 566, Ambohitsaina, Antananarivo
Tel.: 211-03, 241-14
Date of establishment: 1960
Total number of Islamic MSS: ca. 30 (Arabico-Malagasy).
Description of collection: Religious texts, magic, charms, spirits, talismans, astrology, healing, geomancy, genealogy and agriculture. The university acquired in 1965 the library of CHARLES POIRIER (d. 1963), former administrator of colonies, whose collection included at one time 26 Arabico-Malagasy manuscripts.

Published catalogues:
1960. Madagasikara pp. 113 sqq., describes four items from the POIRIER collection: 3 Arabico-Malagasy MSS on magic, and one wooden tablet used by the Antaimoro for teaching the alphabet. (See under Union Catalogues & Surveys above.)

1977. MUNTHE, pp. 100 – 102, describes 7 MSS (see under Union Catalogues & Surveys above).

1982. MUNTHE, pp. 47 – 52, describes 7 MSS (see under Union Catalogues & Surveys above).

1983. DEZ, pp. 24 – 28, describes 9 MSS of the collection of the university (7 MSS under the Département de Langue et de Littérature malgaches and 2 MSS under the Centre d’Anthropologie sociale et culturelle) and reproduces the complete inventory of the POIRIER collection made by CHARLES POIRIER himself, dated 18 June 1947. (See under Union Catalogues & Surveys above.)

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL APPENDIX


Comprehensive bibliography of printed works, manuscripts and archives relating to Madagascar.
