

Archaeologist as Anthropologist: Much Ado About Something After All?

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It has been said that "archaeology is anthropology or it is nothing." And so archaeologists have become conversant in and contributors to cultural theory. Other archaeologists have undertaken ethnoarchaeological studies on material culture when ethnographers have not supplied the data needed. Yet archaeologists might undertake more traditional participant-observation fieldwork to help nuance the cultural questions we ask and to render our tales of the past more convincing, in particular, when we purport to speak of the sensuous and meaningful experience of the "prehistoric other." This article discusses the venturing of one archaeologist in Madagascar tracking aspects of the classic problem of state origins across archaeology, oral history, ethnoarchaeology, and ethnography.

KEY WORDS: oral history; state origins; Madagascar; ethnography.

This process of joining objective analysis to lived experience is perhaps the most proper task of anthropology, the one that distinguishes it from other social science. . . .

(Merleau-Ponty, 1974, p. 116)

INTRODUCTION

A good number of archaeologists take seriously the proposition that "archaeology is anthropology or it is nothing" (Willey and Phillips, 1958, p. 2). Certainly, this minimally implies that we are interested in the same

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questions that intrigue and frustrate cultural anthropologists, regardless of how we may phrase these questions according to our theoretical or age-grade allegiances. Further, a number of us have taken to the field as ethnoarchaeologists when ethnographers have failed to appreciate our interests and our insights, and failed to realize our actual as well as potential contributions to the general field of anthropology. Often, however, our forays into ethnography are limited in time and controlled in focus, cluttered with specific questions to ask and measurements to be taken. What I want to argue here is that there is something to be said for a fuller ethnographic experience that includes moments to pause and to be edified by aspects of those “thousand kinds of life” we could have lived (Geertz, 1973, p. 45): kinds of life that our cultural imaginations are initially so ill equipped to understand, let alone appreciate. I agree with Scheper-Hughes “that it is in the practice of ethnography that the vitality of anthropology resides” (1992, p. 222).

Of course, such experience might offer us potentially new and interesting questions. Yet such experience also can bring about an intellectual humility allowing us to appreciate the complexity of other lives. In particular, it might allow us to move away from impoverished versions of “the other” in our telling of archaeological tales, versions that often are arrived at by some combination of a Marxist-like notion of our gullibility in the face of blinding ideology and a Freudian peeling-off of the successive layers of our cultural repression and sophistication.

As a student of early states, I have always been fascinated by the recurrent observation that people can come to accept as the “normal state” of affairs an order that justifies the monopolization of wealth and coercive force on the part of a few and results in the impoverishment and exploitation of most everyone else. However, neither our fascination with nor our repulsion by such an observation seemed to be adequately captured by earlier explanations invoking evolutionary imperatives and illustrated in flowcharts, or by more recent understandings of the forces of economic production and political coercion. The powerful, yet dry and often lifeless, explanations of abstract “high theory” can leave one with a sense of indifference or resignation—the appropriate attitude, I suppose, for the “objective” observer. Part of the problem here is that the processes of long-term development (*la longue durée*) understandably have often taken precedent in archaeological explanations over the blood, guts, and experiences of the short-term context (see Knapp, 1992). Yet when we do supply details at the level of the short-term context, I argue that we archaeologists have a serious theoretical void in the area of human agency as it is inserted into culture and history. I have always felt uneasy about historical and theoretical explanations that make reference to the religiously gullible, the easily

awestruck, the opiated poor, and even the comfortably conservative (ex-Catholic child of the middle-class that I am) to explain why people go along with the state, a state most often portrayed as headed by omniscient and self-serving ideological manipulators. Certainly, on the other hand, not every commoner and slave member of a state is an ethical philosopher or a sophisticated social critic. There have to be some better conceptualizations available to help understand the complex mixes of belief and skepticism, of desire, voluntarism, habit, and coercion, that bring people to act with both mind and body within the context of a state society.

I am lucky to work in central Madagascar, an area that not only is archaeologically rich and engaging for those interested in early state development, but also has recorded indigenous histories from the 19th century to complement the archaeological data. It is an area where I have been able to carry out both ethnoarchaeological work and ethnographic research. What I have to say here is certainly qualified and does not apply across the board to all archaeological questions and all archaeologists. It is perhaps most relevant to those of us who work close to our cultural selves in historic time and political space, and who seek to know about, and who may eventually come to speak about, others and their engagements with state societies.

MADAGASCAR AND EARLY STATE FORMATION

In some situations of early state formation we are lucky to have access to oral traditions. Often these are official traditions of defenders of elite privilege and we are easily tempted to read them as straightforward political propaganda. Sometimes we come to believe that others actually fell for the message we find at our simple level of reading of these tales. Other times we see such oral traditions as a form of the empty rhetoric we have so recently become accustomed to from our own politicians. I suggest that these traditions, particularly those from early periods of state formation, signal important domains of real struggle involving the cooptation of local symbols and customs and the usurpation of local histories into the service of the state and the defense of elite privilege. Let me continue my argument with a concrete example from my own research.

In the middle of the 19th century Père Callet, a French Jesuit missionary, was assigned to the region of Imerina in the central highlands area of Madagascar. In his zealotry he not only learned the local dialect but sought to understand local beliefs and history so as to intellectually engage, and thus persuade, elders and traditionalists to convert to Catholicism. His further aspirations as an historian led him to record a series of historical traditions in

the Malagasy language. His work now constitutes a printed text of over 1000 pages and is titled the *Tantara ny Andriana eto Madagascar* (Callet, 1908), or *History of the Sovereigns of Madagascar*. Much of this text was collected from keepers of the “royal” histories not only in the region of the capital city of Antananarivo but also at Ambohimanga, a site which, at the time of Callet’s sojourn on the island, served as the necropolis of the sovereigns of Imerina. These traditions tell the tale of the origins of the Merina state in the central highlands of the island. At its inception this state occupied the area of approximately a 15-km radius around the present-day capital of Antananarivo. This state came to fuller form in the late 18th century under the sovereign, Andrianampoinimerina, whose name might be translated as “The-Noble-Desired-in-the-Heart-of-Imerina.” While this state, under the reign of Andrianampoinimerina’s son, Radama, eventually incorporated two-thirds of the island, it is the tale of Andrianampoinimerina’s reign (usually assigned the span 1787–1810 A.D.) that fills the bulk of the text. Many of the informants of Père Callet were immediate descendants of the “companions” of Andrianampoinimerina who brought him to power and then went on to serve him in high political office and in advisory capacity (Delivré, 1974, pp. 60–61).

In a first reading of this text it is easy to see in it the propaganda of the dominator speaking to the captive audience of the dominated. In the finely crafted poetry of the texts of the sovereign’s speeches and in the concrete metaphors of the sovereign’s public and private acts, the critical theme of Andrianampoinimerina’s claim to power is understood to involve the following logic: the political singularity (or uniqueness) of the sovereign guarantees political unification and peace, and this in turn guarantees the well-being of the people (Kus and Raharijaona, 1986).

In order to understand the sociopolitical “rhetoric” of these official oral histories concerning Andrianampoinimerina’s rise to power, it is necessary to look at the earlier historical scenario presented in these tales. Some four generations or so previous to Andrianampoinimerina’s rise to power, the Merina state was unified by the then reigning sovereign, “The-Noble-Finely-Enveloped-by-Sanctity/Grace” (Andriamasinavalona). Despite the work of the Merina population under several generations of sovereigns that had brought vast marshlands to the south and west of Antananarivo (the present-day capital of the country) into rice production, famine still haunted the land. Under the reign of “The-Noble-Finely-Enveloped-by-Sanctity/Grace” the country suffered 7 years of famine, and names were given to these terrible periods of suffering (Firaketana, 1937–1970, Vol. A, Bk. 1, p. 582, Vol. B, p. 194). One was called “To Assuage [the Hunger of] Children with Promises,” another “The Many Who Turned their Backs [died],” another “To Eat Without Making the Effort to Peel

Off the Skin,” and still another “Sunken Eyes.” Such names testified to the suffering endured by the people of Imerina.

According to the oral traditions “The-Noble-Finely-Enveloped-by-Sanctity/Grace” realized that even after uniting Imerina famine was still his rival, and he called the people together to reinforce the old canals and dig new ones as his ramparts against his remaining rival (Callet, 1908, p. 297). And so, for a moment, peace and prosperity were brought to Imerina. As the historical tale runs, “The-Noble-Finely-Enveloped-by-Sanctity/Grace” could not and would not choose a successor from among his four favored sons. And so, stubbornly refusing to designate a single heir, and instead dividing the kingdom into four provinces among those sons, it came to pass that war and famine continuously plagued the divided state (Callet, 1908, pp. 395, 404–405). The dikes that had served as ramparts against famine were used to wage war (Malzac, 1930, p. 66) and to divide the people among themselves. Famine haunted the land once again. Tradition recalls that during these times of famine rice was so scarce that it was sold in secret and even a fine woven silk cloth would purchase little. Those who had rice would hide it from the view of others and cook it in secret at night, for if others happened to smell the aroma of cooked rice, they would fight to have it (Callet, 1908, p. 405). Years later “The-Noble-of-Everlasting-Sanctity/Grace” (Andriambelomasina), ruler of the northeastern province of Imerina and the grandson of “The-Noble-Finely-Enveloped-by-Sanctity/Grace,” literally took measures to save the people by fixing the price of a measure of rice and punishing those who challenged this ordinance (Callet, 1908, p. 404). Thus the cycles of abundance and famine in Imerina were tied not only to the diking and draining of marshlands, but to the political order of the country—dissension and internecine warfare brought famine in its wake; peace and unification brought rich harvests. This close association of political order and productivity is acknowledged in the phrase *ny tany sy ny fanjakana*, “the land and the governance,” the phrase traditionally used to designate the heritage of the sovereign, the Merina state.

Several generations after “The-Noble-Finely-Enveloped-by-Sanctity/Grace” had divided Imerina, Andrianampoinimerina, the grandson and heir of “The-Noble-of-Everlasting-Sanctity/Grace,” laid claim not only to the northeastern province of Imerina, but to the other three provinces of the divided state, though it took him years to fight his way to a reunification of the divided states. Yet despite the extensive fighting and the resistance he met, he claimed to have no enemies except famine or other natural disasters (e.g., flood, fire, wind, and hail). As the oral histories state, people were not his ultimate enemy, but they could become accomplices to these real enemies when they perpetuated chaos by supporting a political rival or when they refused to act in united social effort to support the welfare

of the state (Kus and Raharijaona, 1986). Peace and prosperity were attendant upon unification. Without unification chaos and insecurity reigned. Fear of brigands and continuous fighting between petty "kingdoms" kept people from working in the fields and rice paddies and kept them away from markets. Political insecurity induced famine. United under the sovereign in grand projects such as the continued draining and diking of the vast marshlands surrounding Antananarivo, the land was rendered fruitful. According to oral tradition Andrianampoinimerina remarked,

. . . The core of the state ultimately is based on the work that renders the land productive since this is the way to insure the well-being of the populace. I am happy to see your bright faces and foreheads without wrinkles because you are well-nourished, I am happy to see that you are healthy and strong: my desire has found its realization. (free translation of Callet, 1908, p. 808)

Under the reign of Andrianampoinimerina the prosperity of the land continually was linked in discourse and in state projects of social labor to the pacification of Imerina under its singular sovereign, "Who-Rules-Not-as-Two," "The-Bull-that-Is-Not-Two-in-the-Cattle-Pen," and "The-Sun-that-Is-Not-Two" (Razafintsalama, 1981, p. 82, footnote 17).

According to the oral traditions not only were peoples' bellies full with daily nourishment of rice under the reign of Andrianampoinimerina, but on occasion they feasted on "rice with much grease," *vary be menaka*.

The flesh of most animals is cooked with the skin and hair on; which (excepting at festivals) is invariably the case with their beef: the skin is so peculiarly palatable, that square pieces of it, with a portion of fat adhering to them, are frequently boiled till they form one gelid or glutinous mass, when they constitute a dish in high repute with the Malagasy epicures. The thickest parts of the skin are the greatest delicacies. (Ellis, 1838, p. 206)

When public works such as the renewing of the defensive moats of the natal village of Andrianampoinimerina or political rituals of the New Year were undertaken, there were many fatted cattle that were sacrificed and eaten by the populace.

One way to sum up the lesson or argument of these official oral traditions is in the proverb, "When there are three lords there is famine and hunger, when there are two lords wives and children are lost as slaves, but when there is one sovereign children are chubby" (Veyrières and Méritens, 1967, p. 36).

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The archaeological evidence for Imerina lends much support for the general scenario presented in the *History of the Sovereigns of Madagascar*

(Callet, 1908)—a scenario of political unification and pacification leading to increased productivity and population growth. Imerina is an area of considerable relief. River valleys and former marshland plains (now in irrigated rice production) lie about 1250 m above sea level. The numerous ridges and hills formed from granite outcrops that striate and punctuate the valleys and plains can reach above 1450 m. The most current evidence available dates the initial occupation of Imerina to the 12th or 13th century A.D. (Wright, 1992). Based primarily on ceramic chronology (Wright, 1979; Kus and Wright, 1986), the settlement history for the area has been divided initially into six cultural periods (Wright and Kus, 1976, 1977, 1979) and more recently into seven periods (Kus and Wright, 1986). In the earliest period settlements are small villages (less than 1 ha) lying close to streams and marshy areas. These sites show no evidence of hierarchy internally or in relationship to each other. The next phase (14th–early 16th century) shows a number of slightly larger, higher-placed, ditched sites along with scattered hamlets close to valley floors. Ceramic and mortuary evidence suggests some social differentiation. In the next two periods (15th–16th century) there is an abandonment of most settlements of the previous period and new sites are placed higher up slopes or on ridge tops, suggesting political and/or symbolic concerns with respect to site location. These periods show no significant population increase and suggest in their settlement placements a period of social dissolution and conflict (Henry Wright, personal communication, 1996). The following two periods (17th–18th century), which bring us into the time frame of Andrianampoinimerina and his immediate predecessors, are characterized by a population increase and an initial proliferation of high-placed sites with complex defensive ditching (averaging 1.8–2.6 ha, with the site of Ambohimanga covering 6 ha). The clustering of smaller fortified towns surrounding these sites and the buffer zones between them suggest regional centers. This pattern gives way to a reorganization of defensive lines, with larger central towns surrounded by massive and complex fortifications and these towns in turn surrounded by defensively positioned villages, and the establishment of numerous small settlements on hills near irrigable fields. In the next period (19th century) there is population proliferation, an abandonment or reduced occupation of some of the major fortified towns of the previous period that did not subsequently become regional administrative centers of the unified Merina state, and a displacement of population to lower slopes near the rice fields in valley floors. Additionally new settlements are established around the 16,000-ha plain surrounding the capital city of Antananarivo. Fourteen thousand hectares of this former marshland was placed in rice cultivation at that time. Indigenous traditions as well as European historical sources (Bourdiec, 1974, pp. 61–62) credit Andrianampoinimerina not only with

the reparation of previously existing hydraulic works but with the additional reclamation of 8000 ha of that area. Not only was this additional marshland brought into agricultural production, but it permitted a second yearly crop of rice. This crop nearly doubled the productivity of the plain surrounding Antananarivo, and its harvest came at a time when the stocks of the traditional crop of rice were running low (Bourdieu, 1974, pp. 360–362). One might be tempted to say that Andrianampoinimerina's propaganda of full bellies, fattened cattle, and a peaceful countryside was well crafted indeed.

SENSUOUS HUMAN PRACTICE

I once playfully subtitled a paper: "Towards an Archaeology of Bread and Circuses" (Kus, 1989), suggesting how political submission to the state was ideologically confounded with the well-being of the populace literally at their "gut level." But with recent ethnographic fieldwork, the tongue-in-cheek tone of that original phrasing now seems to me highly inappropriate. Let me explain.

All good anthropologists know that the house in most traditional societies represents and reproduces the cosmos, and in so doing it is one of the most critical symbols of cultural order, sources of socialization into that order, and the domain where that order is appropriated and sometimes reworked. This is an anthropological insight we can recite but that we most often take for granted. In central Madagascar one has only to assist at rituals of house orientation and house dedication or to discuss such issues with ritual specialists (Kus and Raharijaona, 1990) to be able to collect an incredible array of gestures, language, and material symbols underlining a central theme of the Malagasy worldview—life is to be fostered so that the family might grow and prosper and continue to perpetuate itself; "Life is [ultimately] sweet" (*mamy ny aina*), the Malagasy say. For instance, one form of dedication of houses involves the symbolic marking of the four corners of the residence with prayers and materials to guarantee (1) the family's health (*fahasalama*), (2) the family's wealth (*harena*), (3) growth in terms of offspring (*marokilonga*), and (4) the family's continuity through time (*fiavelomana*). The central pillar of the house, as *axis mundi*, not only comes to order items, individuals, and activities in the house, but comes to represent the support and strength of the family. And when the construction of the house is done, the extended family and neighbors are invited to partake of a meal that consists of rice, honey, and milk. Not only is the sharing of a meal ritually significant but the foods chosen involve plays on words and evocations of taste—"good rice" or *vary soa* (a dish of rice cooked with much water to make it smooth), the sweetness of honey,

and the richness of milk. And one can go on for pages presenting an exegesis of the symbolism of gestures, metaphors, plays on words, etc., in ritual activity that evoke and reinforce this theme of the "sweetness of life" (*mamy ny aina*), the security of the family, and the comfort of home.

Yet, doing ethnography not only helps one to appreciate the potency of cultural meaning in ritual activity, but also allows one to understand how such meaning is dependent upon the taken-for-grantedness of daily activities and how it is firmly rooted in personal experience. The house is comfort and refuge and order. The family is the source of identity and ultimate source of both support and obligation. One comes to understand the intense pride and satisfaction, as well as relief, of the extended family as they view the fruits of their arduous labor in the slowly accumulating piles of rice at harvest time, and how the sense of family well-being is linked to such cooperative ventures that exhaust the body physically but fill the senses. With the end of the harvest season come festivities of marriage and of thanksgiving to the ancestors for intercessions in the health and well-being of the family. There is not only music and company at such celebrations, but also copious servings of "rice with much grease." Through ethnographic fieldwork that demands patience and participation, one comes to have some appreciation of the positive sensuality and poetry of other lives (cf. Paulhan, 1970).

But over the past field seasons, including a recent 7-month ethnographic season (January–July 1995), I have come to understand other aspects of these lives as well. At the start of that field season, we were offered a meal by the family who would be our hosts for that season. It was a "winter meal" (*andro varatra*—literally, "days of thunder"), a meal for the lean season, a serving of rice with meatless greens already dished out. Normally, guests are offered heaping servings of rice, and the food that accompanies this staple is placed in a separate bowl that is quickly replenished when depleted. But in the lean season one does not ask for seconds. A young child, a chubby child, a member of the branch of the extended family who now lives in France, was an embarrassment to his parents when he asked for more food. He was a city child who was growing up to know little of the ways of the countryside and of the ancestors. As the field season continued we learned that not only were food resources meager, but also food was also being stolen from the fields. Manioc roots, far from ripe and no thicker than a large carrot, were stolen from fields as people tried to assuage their hunger. As a countermeasure the local alliance of villages organized a swearing ceremony (*mitsitsika*). Three stones were arranged as a tripod, and on the ground in the center of this tripod was placed the metal blade of a spade, the essential farming tool. A fire was built and over this fire in a pot was cooked a mixture of every crop

grown and susceptible to theft (e.g., rice, manioc, potatoes) and some rum (the drink that marks ritual occasions and invocations to the ancestors) as well as some scrapings from a piece of sacred wood (*hazomanga*). An invocation was sworn over this mixture by senior members of the community. All members of the village over the age of 15 were required to drink of the mixture and to swear that they be cursed should they be guilty of stealing from family or friends. Those who could not attend the ceremony, such as youths tending the cattle, had their share brought to them by family members. Now such serious measures might be effective for small groups of family, friends, and villages that are in regular social contact, but unfortunately the sources of insecurity in the countryside also came from brigands from beyond local village networks, as was probably the case in the times of “more than one lord” described in the royal traditions. And so in the late evening of one dark, moonless night there was a cry in the distance; at first it seemed to be a wail, perhaps of the grief of family members stricken by death in the night. But the cry traveled, and as it got nearer it was identified as an alert (*koka*) announcing cattle thieves in a nearby village. And my stomach twisted with fear as I sat there in the candle-lit room with my 4-year-old daughter, for cattle thieves can be ruthless with fire and machetes, and we were a strenuous 2-hr walk, during daylight hours, from the regional capital.

This was also to be a season of deaths—in particular, a number of children’s deaths. Some deaths were from lack of medicines, simple medicines that people could not afford to buy despite their arduous labor day after day; some deaths were from malnutrition. Most of these deaths were to be blamed on some combination of political corruption, misdirectives from “experts” (e.g., World Bank officials), and lack of local security.

During this field season we were also lent a notebook by a ritual specialist in which he had kept notes from 1981 onward concerning not only his craft but also local happenings. During some years there were numerous entries of “very bad news” (*vaovao ratsibe*)—of cattle stolen, house break-ins, and people injured or killed by thieves. Some of the entries covered a time I had spent in the field during an earlier field season. It was during that archaeological field season in the 1980s that I witnessed first-hand a situation of political insecurity in a rural area of the highlands of the island. Inflation and cattle thievery were rampant, as well as theft of local crops of rice and manioc. People reduced their cattle herds and the amount of land they cultivated to minimize their losses, and so food shortages occurred and prices rose. Still the thefts continued; there were large-scale organized thefts that took advantage of minimal security in the countryside, but there were also thefts by the desperately poor involving a handful of manioc roots and the like. Local areas organized nightly patrols to discour-

age cattle and crop theft. In the area of my fieldwork all able-bodied men spent every third night awake, cold, and undernourished on patrol, and still they were responsible for full-time labor in the fields or manual labor jobs in a nearby town the next day. Life was anything but "sweet" (*mamy*). The sight of undernourished children on their way to school, the sight of peasants transporting materials on foot for 5 to 10 km to sell in the market, where every day the prices they received never kept pace with the price increases of the candles, kerosene, medicine, etc., that they purchased, and the sight of faces troubled by fatigue, worry, and illness allowed me to understand the power of the images contained in the official royal traditions, images of fat-cheeked babies, wrinkle-free faces, and a home to which one can return in peace. It also allowed me to appreciate how a sovereign can portray his ultimate enemy as famine despite bloody battlefields.

To be sure, the official oral traditions of Imerina and Andrianampoinimerina's reign are well-crafted ideology, but it is not a gratuitous or an easily configured ideology. Such "official" traditions can be seen to signal relevant issues of material and ideational experience and struggle within a given cultural context. Ethnographic research might help us appreciate the intertwining of the symbolic and the pragmatic, for the pragmatic, through material culture and through the cultural crafting of senses and emotions, becomes the source of an aestheticologic upon which action and conviction in a given worldview are based. In state societies that aestheticologic of local knowledge and experience becomes an important domain of struggle in attempts not only to resist the state but also legitimate the state in "official" word and deed [see Kus and Raharijaona (1994) for a fuller treatment of this argument].

CONCLUSION

I recognize that I am in a privileged position with access to ethnohistorical and ethnographic materials. Clearly a bout with ethnography is neither possible nor necessary for everyone. Yet those of us who are interested in issues of meaning (or *mentalité*), symbol, ideology, and historical contextualization might benefit from such experience. In particular, in the field as an ethnographer I have come to appreciate how praxis might better be understood as "sensuous human practice" (see also Kus, 1989), and how meaning is embedded in cultural materials, is crafted by experience, both ordinary and extraordinary, and is grafted onto body and soul. This material nature of symbols whose meaning for the individual is produced, at least in part, by a slow and persistent sedimentation of experience, means that such symbols are not easily coopted. Such symbols are based on a powerful

mix, if not imbroglia, of abundant and redundant metonyms of daily routine and dramatic metaphors of ritual and personal experiences that carry further entailments for thought and action. Consequently issues of local knowledge are not trivial and the ideological manipulation of symbols and experience in early state formation is neither easy nor straightforward but, once manipulated, can become incredibly persuasive.

There is also the matter of speaking about the histories of others. During the course of several field seasons I undertook, with a colleague (V. Raharijaona), an inquiry concerning oral traditions in the Betsileo area, a region in the central highlands of the island that lies to the south of Imerina and surrounds the provincial capital of Fianarantsoa. The Betsileo culture is quite similar to Merina culture, but traditionally the Betsileo were much more resistant to extensive centralized state authority. We collected not only oral traditions from those responsible for their preservation and recounting (*mpitantara*) but also information about the context of the recitation of such histories and commentaries about the indigenous Betsileo philosophy of history. The right to speak of the history of a group or of an historical site was a grave responsibility, for as one local historian said, "History touches the heart and the spirit of a people;" it is "history that makes a human being." Not everyone is in a position, however, to recite history and there are several qualifications a local group historian should possess. Not only does one need the skills of an orator, but one should be an elder who has had the opportunity when younger to have listened to and learned from one's elders. Because "the history of a people is inseparable from the land," residence is an important criterion of an historian. One needs not only to have witnessed the events that will become part of one's recitation of history, but also to have heard of and seen the place (and the various physical memorials) where events that form the earlier content of history have taken place. Responsible elder historians who spoke to us, despite their having the authority to speak of their history, were still required to propitiate the ancestors for exercising this right. To accomplish their propitiatory act we gave them nominal amounts of the local currency. This gift of money was never seen as monetary remuneration for their information. As one elderly informant put it, "*Tsy mba mety arivo anie ny vavako*" "I do not sell my mouth for 1000" (*ariary*). (The number 1000 signifies invincibility, force, and innumerableness.) However, a coin of 100 *ariary* would allow these elders to speak. That coin of 100 *ariary* is a circular silver coin symbolically appropriate for propitiatory acts. Traditional Malagasy culture has taken coins since their appearance on the island and seen, in their uncut, circular form (*vola tsy vaky*), an image of completeness, of perfection, of beginning and end, and seen in them, literally, a gift befitting a sovereign. This offering of 100 *ariary* was used as a *tandrava* (*tandra*

+ *vava*). *Vava* translates as "mouth." *Tandra* translates as "esteem," "a rendering of homage," or as "recognition," according to our informants. The *tandrambava* is a ritual to the ancestors that acknowledges their honor and sanctity. This recognition is also critical in order to avoid unfavorable consequences that might come from inappropriately having presumed to speak to or of them.

History also is understood by the Betsileo to have an order and a "sense." One elder used the poetic image of a string of pearls to explain this "sense." History is not just a series of unrelated incidents to be recited out of order and out of context; these pearls must be strung with care to do justice and honor to history. Those who know how to listen to and to tell history will understand this "sense;" those who do not will do it dishonor; (*ny mahay mandray mamono, ny tsy mahay mandray mamona.*) (The verb *mamono* comes from the root word *fono*, which means "to envelope protectively" or "to handle with care." The verb *mamona* comes from the root word *voina*. The term *voina* may be translated not only as "dishonor" but also as "defilement" or as "malediction.")

Perhaps I am not bringing much more than a cautionary tale to our tale tellings as archaeologists and anthropologists. Perhaps our offering of "honor" or *tandrambava* to the history of others should minimally be attention to our vocabulary in the "official" histories we recount. We need to wield carefully the vocabulary of "*la longue duree*" so it does not encompass the entirety of causality or wield too cavalierly the authority of explanation. Perhaps more importantly we also need to be careful of the vocabulary of "*la courte duree*." The "midrange" vocabulary of "power," "belief," "custom," and "ideology," for instance, is of a "contentlessness" and categorical abstraction so uncharacteristic of the "science of the concrete" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, pp. 1-33) that it underestimates and potentially simplifies other cultural realities. To approach other cultural realities in terms of "sensuous human practice" is evocative in a way that "meaning" and "symbol" are not, because meaning and symbol reflectively distance themselves from experience and from the "materiality" of the senses and emotions. But I also argue that "sensuous human practice" should be understood not only as a concept, but also as practice. As the Betsileo choose their historians from those who live close to the land and close to the traditional practices and paths of the ancestors, so might we learn something as prehistorians.

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