

*Which is most informative: archaeology or historical tradition?*

**Examples drawn from towns in the Comoros islands, Madagascar and Polynesia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries**

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The subject of this chapter might appear, given the wording used, somewhat provocative, particularly in the context of an international archaeological volume. Indeed we know how much archaeologists feel themselves duty-bound to confine themselves exclusively to interpretation of archaeological evidence and in so doing be sure that they are engaged in what can legitimately be called scientific work. The considerable development of archaeology in the islands of the Indian Ocean in recent years has shown that researchers, considering the ancient past, did not often have the opportunity to refer to written or oral sources, but for more recent periods, in particular the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was possible for them to avail themselves of such sources.

Moreover, we are well aware of the great mistrust with which oral tradition is viewed, and often with good reason (Vansina 1961; Hobsbawm 1983; Triulzi 1987). In view of such misgivings archaeologists would happily have confined themselves to materials resulting from archaeological investigations, if they had not rapidly had to change their tune after establishing that results obtained from excavation on a limited scale and in areas where there were few standing buildings were difficult to interpret and did not, as originally hoped, shed light on unsolved problems. Soon, it became necessary to turn to written sources left behind by Europeans, but these, in their turn, were very limited in number and provided very little information about the functions of the villages or towns described. The oral tradition, on the other hand, had often preserved memories of the position of ancient places to which old people had been able to lead us. It would have been unimaginative to turn our back on this tradition, even though we realize how much anthropologists need to be on their guard when it comes to the rewriting or reinterpretation of such accounts.

We all know, however, that an oral tradition is not without foundation, bearing in mind the famous experiment carried out by Garanger (1975) at Vanuatu (formerly known as the New Hebrides), which made it possible for archaeologists investigating the prehistory of Oceania to confirm a mythological tradition going back six centuries when they unearthed the group burial of Roy Mata at Retoka.

Using a similar approach, one of us (Allibert & Inzouddine 1987), after starting out from an oral tradition backed up by the existence of a manuscript of unknown age, was able to discover all the major sites on the island of Mayotte of the Mafani period, dating from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> One might have thought that knowledge of the ancient sites was none other than the result of agricultural activity. Yet it quickly came to light that what we had at our disposal was knowledge going back a long way in time supported by written evidence and, more recently, by cult practices, namely those of the so-called *ziara* holy places, which are situated precisely at the sites of ancient mosques. It has also been demonstrated in the Comoros islands that ancestral accounts based on oral tradition that has since been written down, albeit at an unspecified date, demonstrate authentic knowledge going back five centuries (Allibert Forthcoming).

Nevertheless, establishing the locality of a site does not always make it possible to specify its function in the past. The insufficient extent of excavated areas on one hand and the failure, on the other hand, to differentiate units within groups of structures that have been investigated have often made it difficult to establish criteria for identifying function. It also emerged that it was a mistake to ignore traditional knowledge or that handed down via ancestors and this study is aimed at focusing upon these sources.

First of all, it is necessary to define what we mean by historical tradition. In our field of study, regardless of whether we are concerned with the western part of the Indian Ocean or Polynesia, it is important to bear in mind that 'tradition' can assume various forms:

- (1) The pure oral tradition to which one is exposed while carrying out archaeological excavations. This method of working is still possible despite the erasure of memories resulting from the passage of time and the weakening of that tradition under the influence of European cultures. It is this tradition involving the direct transmission of information by word of mouth (*lovantsofina*, heritage via the ear) which the archaeologists of Madagascar and the Comoros islands have attempted to record, as, for example, Raharijaona in the valley of the Manandona (Raharijaona 1983; Raharijaona 1988).
- (2) Written chronicles based on an oral tradition and recorded some time ago (for example the *Comoros Chronicles* collected in both Arabic script and either the language of the Comoros islands or Swahili by French administrators at the beginning of the century, and in the case of Madagascar the famous *Tantaran'ny Andriana*, edited by R. P. Callet). We are confronted in these cases by a historical

oral tradition recorded in written form and these chronicles can be approached as archives and documents, which need to be used with the utmost circumspection.

- (3) The written record that stems from a fairly distant past and consists of accounts of travels by European authors. Flacourt is the best example in connection with Madagascar and in particular regarding the region of Anosy. When it comes to coastal areas, whether it be a question of the eastern coast of Africa or the coast of Madagascar, attention should be turned to the texts compiled by Portuguese travellers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while not overlooking the Sorabe accounts describing the southeast coast of the Grande Ile that were written in Arabic characters but in the Malagasy language.

These different kinds of historical tradition are not of the same type and it might appear at first glance, when comparing a historical tradition that is purely oral with written accounts in chronicles (even if we need to be on our guard against ideologically biased rewriting, distortions or telescoping as a result of time), that the second form should be regarded as more probable. Such chronicles can go back a very long way to ancient times, as in the case of the *Kilwa Kisiwani*, an anonymous text written about 1520, the details of which were borne out by a Portuguese version edited by Barros towards the middle of the sixteenth century.

Yet these traditional texts, chronicles and oral accounts do not always bring us first and foremost information regarding the function of a particular site, but rather genealogies. The accounts of conflicts between groups that the genealogies provide, while often reducing the role played by a particular clan, sometimes help us to explain, as we shall see below, certain aspects of civilization such as the presence of fortifications on the Comoros islands.

### **The difficulty of obtaining relevant criteria for directing excavation work**

One example which is significant in our opinion is the difficulty in mastering the total spatial extent of an archaeological site. It should nevertheless be noted that recent electromagnetic surveying techniques will facilitate wider and more rapid investigation of the total surface of the sites within the region. This means that the danger of leaving whole sectors unsurveyed will be steadily reduced and, for example, identification of walls, enclosed areas, dwellings, hearths etc. will be carried out as soon as it has been established that a site is extensive. Such techniques need to be used quickly in order to survey all the sites of the so-called classical period and also to survey sites of the more ancient periods such as the Dembeni period in the Comoros islands.

## **Is the existence of relevant criteria sufficient?**

On the basis of existing evidence the principal criterion for determining the function of an ancient site is clearly the existence of pertinent attributes in the whole archaeological ensemble under investigation. For example, the presence of a mosque testifies to the religious function of the urbanized zone, and also a village pattern exhibiting a distinction between houses built of durable materials and houses built of pisé indicates a clear social hierarchy, as does proximity to the mosque. Such was the case in the villages of the Comoros islands (Tsingoni on Maore and Ntsaweni on Ngazidja: Fig. 1).

The oral tradition confirms that there had been an underground tunnel linking the house nearest to the mosque (the house referred to as the Sultan's palace) with the mosque itself, which the Sultan was able to borrow when necessary. This tradition is particularly well entrenched at Mzamboro to the north of Mayotte where it is claimed that the underground tunnel is still visible but cannot be shown to the *muzungu*. It is probable that other villages or cities in the Comoros islands keep a similar tradition alive.

In other circumstances the proximity of a landing-stage and port infrastructures as was the case in Manda or in Kilwa (but probably equally so at Bagamoyo (Mayotte), although in an earlier period) makes it highly likely that the towns had entered into trading relations. In this respect it is important to make sure that we do not overlook the contribution of toponymy. R. P. Sacleux informs us, for example, that Bagamayo means 'rest your soul (here)' according to the words attributed to the chief who settled in Bagamayo on the *mrina* coast opposite the city of Zanzibar (de Sacleux 1939, p. 85). The site probably acquired this name as an allusion to the suffering of the slaves who were transferred from the African coast to the Mozambique channel, either to populate Madagascar or while waiting to be sent off to Arabia and the Persian Gulf. It goes without saying that the cities of the Comoros islands, and also similar cities on the western and southern coasts of Madagascar grew up mainly as a result of plans for commercial exchange. These towns provided a double magnet – religious as well as commercial. The religious attraction probably followed the commerce that, at least in part, was in the hands of those converted to Islam. Remains of such towns reveal architectural structures of a hierarchical society, with houses built of durable materials near the mosque and on the outskirts, further away from the centre, the small dwellings would be more likely to be made of pisé. It is also to be observed that the well preserved remains of certain mosques demonstrate that the Islamic society was strictly hierarchical (the sectors occupied by the faithful inside the mosque and in particular down the sides of the building are identified with specific social categories). In these

circumstances, it is archaeology – or archaeological surveys of preserved sites – that will make it possible to determine forms of influence and the structuring of society.

Traditions concerning exchange, particularly in the coastal region of northwestern Madagascar, explain better than archaeologists often do the part played by certain groups such as the Karana who comprise a population of Pakistanis or Islamicized Indians, whose introduction to Madagascar goes back to at least the eighteenth century and probably well before. Indeed, recent work carried out at sites dating back to an earlier age (twelfth–thirteenth centuries), such as Mahilaka, have shown that craftsmen were working there with gold and quartz (Vérin 1975; Radimilahy 1993) and that the functioning of that city clearly depended on commercial exchange. Results of this type have required several years of excavation, labour-intensive techniques and yet, despite all the efforts, we are still a long way from having understood everything that there is to learn from that site.

It is no secret that pertinent features can be overlooked in the course of analysis, even if this merely applies to the type of commercial relations in operation. Regardless of whether we are working in zones that consist mainly of dwellings or those that are set aside for productive or commercial activities, it is not always easy to extract the basic information that would indicate the social conditions in which the inhabitants in question were living. Studies by contemporary anthropologists have shown that identical commercial activities can be engaged in by successive groups of inhabitants as with the replacement of the Antalaoste by the Karana at Majunga during the early part of the nineteenth century (Rafidison 1993), and we would be ill-advised not to turn to the oral tradition to seek information of this kind, even when the information available cannot be taken literally.

Yet these sources are not enough in themselves, because often an interpretation such as the above is not the only one possible, as is clearly shown by the following document which brought to light an unexpected function and one which had not been detected during excavation work. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Turkish admiral Piri Re'is brought certain pieces of information on the western Indian Ocean and in particular on the Comoros islands and Madagascar in his *Kitab-i Barhije*.

There are four islands which are all called Kumur ...

One of the islands ... is called Muali [Mwali, Moheli] ...

The second island is called Magota [Maore, Mayotte] ...

It has a town called Chin Kuni [Tsingoni, capital city of Mayotte as known to the Portuguese who set fire to it and may even have slaughtered its inhabitants.] ...

The island which is the third ...

is called Zwani [Nzuani, Anjouan] ...

We are going to speak to you of the fourth island ...  
It is known as Karidja [Ngazidja (Grande Comore)] ...  
They raise slaves like lambs and sheep  
They have owned some of these slaves for a long time  
and others for not very long  
Sometimes one person can own a thousand of them  
Females and males are raised like animals  
... their daughters and sons  
are continually being sold  
Seafarers come and take them away  
in ships and carry them off  
You need to know that they sell them in Yemen  
They go as far as Jeddah (Allibert 1988, pp. 26–7)

Who could have imagined such an activity in the Comoros islands in the sixteenth century on the basis of the investigation of archaeological sites from the Tsingoni period, if we had not had this text of Piri Re'is to point out to us this important phenomenon? How could one possibly discover evidence of 'man-breeding' through excavation alone?

Sites from this period are numerous because they correspond to the Mafani period to which we have just referred. It is possible that in the future we shall find indications of such practices (perhaps ankle chains and enclosed areas clearly distinct from traditional habitats of the period). In all honesty we do not really know how such 'raising' was carried on. Were there special villages that it will be necessary to look for or identify, or perhaps each family of free men and women 'raised' its quota of slaves? How can we hope to establish through excavation the existence of these populations, the presence of which in the Comoros islands is borne out by the Turkish admiral's testimony? One possibility is the discovery of cemeteries containing tombs that are not in keeping with Islamic tradition, as in the necropolis at Bagamayo (Mirandole) in the thirteenth century (Allibert 1992). Another possibility is the possible discovery of habitats of different qualities – if we suppose that careful excavation could achieve that, which is by no means certain in a tropical context, in sites with only mediocre stratigraphy and with only negligible habitation levels and where generations of farmers have been using the 'scratching' technique (scratching the surface with a blunt tool known as a *shombo*). Such archaeological success is not a foregone conclusion and would anyway not provide any proof that the populations concerned had consisted of slaves.

**The existence of ambiguous data which can be interpreted differently**

In the Madagascar uplands (Hautes Terres) clan groupings provided the original nuclei for the villages. The raising of cattle led to the layout of villages encircled by ditches of varying depths (Fig. 3). Simultaneously, or at different periods these ditches were adapted for defence against armed attack. How should such walls and ditches be analysed? Should they at times be interpreted as walls to provide protection against enemies (and if so, which enemies?)? Should they be seen as protection against cattle-thieves or as the clan's protection against the enemy, or even both at once, i.e. installations aimed at preventing cattle from getting out and men from entering?

With regard to some sites from the Imerina region (Fig. 2) the historical tradition recorded on the spot can be added to the findings resulting from archaeological investigations. Recent work carried out by Wright and Kus (1976) following on from the major research carried out by Mille (Mille & Vérin 1967; Mille 1969; Mille 1970) and some high-quality smaller-scale studies of these sites, have enabled us to gain a clearer understanding of the installations in the Hautes Terres dating between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries AD.

In the Imerina region archaeological investigations are pre-dated by oral traditions that were recorded by Father Callet in *Tantaran'ny Andriana*, widely recognized as an important work (Délivré 1974). If we also accept that it was a vehicle first and foremost for ideological and political information, which is, after all, not free from ambiguity, it can provide a source of reference with regard to the Merina culture.

We are particularly interested in two areas of the Hautes Terres. The first lies in the vicinity of Antananarivo and was the scene of the rise of the Merina monarchy, the second, which has been studied more recently, is in the valley of the Manandona, the zone of the Hauts Plateaux (High Plateaux) in the southern part of the Imerina region.

Three sites were earmarked for a study of the traditional past of the Imerina region: (1) Ambohitsitakady (Vérin 1970; Fig. 4), (2) Ambohitsitakatra (Brissaud 1975; Figs 5, 6) and (3) Ambohidehilahy (Potier & Potier 1970; Fig. 2): all three were particularly representative of the settlements on the hills of the Imerina region and they were surrounded by double ditches laid out in zigzags, look-out posts, earth ramparts between the ditches (see e.g. Fig. 6, depicting Ambohitsitakatra). These three sites were characteristic of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as is borne out by the associated pottery sherds. The sites have yielded the typical standing stone of the *kianja* (small rectangular area), one or more tombs, rice stores (which indicate which areas were inhabited) and, in the case of Ambohidehilahy, ditches designed to prevent cattle leaving the settlement.

A painstaking archaeological study of Ambohitsitakatra undertaken by Brissaud enabled him to compile the following description:

The overall shape of the site is that of an irregular oval approximately 120 x 80 metres. The double ditch which surrounds it forms a corner in the northeast. There are two entrances at an angle. On the basis of the visible remains it can be assumed that the group of dwellings itself had been erected on the two upper terraces, which had been specially laid out for that purpose: the southern part of the top terrace was laid out in such a way that there was a small rectangular space (*kianja*) in the middle of it with a standing stone in the centre. The rest of the site consisted of a series of terraces on a north–south and an east–west axis ... The site is well defended by its own natural features and only the southern side is easily accessible: it should however be noted that even that side can only be reached by way of a ridge. On the west side there is a steep slope, while the north and east sides are slightly less steep. (Brissaud 1975, pp. 37–9).

After a precise description of the site as it appears today, Brissaud attempted a social interpretation:

We have been able to unearth approximately 35 rice-stores: on the basis of what we have seen so far, these rice-stores can be divided into three groups: those which had definitely been inside a dwelling; those in connection with which this is harder to establish and those about which one can only guess ... If we calculate on the basis of one rice-store per dwelling, we arrive at the figure of 35 dwellings. It would seem difficult to assess the size of the population given that number of dwellings ... (Brissaud 1975, p. 42)

This raises a whole range of questions: did some kind of social segregation exist, given that it has been established that the dwellings were divided into three distinct groups (one round the *kianja*, the second in the northern part of the terrace and the third on the lower terrace)? Are we confronted here by a social division into Andriana, Hova and Andevo groups? Such a division would indicate that there was rigid hierarchy running through the society, from nobles through to slaves. It is possible that the original settlement was erected round the *kianja*, while successive generations set up their dwellings on terrain not previously built upon.

Meanwhile, one informant has provided an interpretation of the rectangular structure to the south of the *kianja*:

When the king, or more simply the chief of the Andriana (a noble) made a speech, he would take up position at the foot of the standing stone in the *kianja*, to which only the Andriana had access on such an occasion. If the

speech interested the people, they would then assemble to the south of the *kianja* and one of the Andriana would be called upon to report the words uttered by the leader. In order to do this he had to place himself inside this rectangular arrangement. (Brissaud 1975, p. 49)

The *Tantaran'ny Andriana* indicate that it was at this site that Andriandravindravina would have installed himself ... This would have been the first Vazimba king of Ambohitsitakatra and his tomb would have been at the site ... According to Monsieur Rainitovo, quoted in the *Firaketana*, it would have been at this location that the Vazimba and the Malays would have mingled. (Brissaud 1975, p. 50)

Brissaud tries to match up archaeological evidence and oral tradition and establishes that there would have been an ancient settlement that would have been founded by Andriandravindravina and a more recent settlement, whose inhabitants would have been dislodged by the soldiers of Andrianampoinimerina.

We are obliged to recognize that while oral traditions provide us with varying information, they bring us knowledge that archaeology is not in a position to provide. Archaeological evidence can show us where the *kianja* was situated, but not what it was for. In the final analysis we would do well to 'listen' to what that tradition suggests. As soon as we leave the capital it is more than ever important to turn to oral tradition, as did Raharijaona (1983) in his thesis on Manandona, devoting a supplementary volume to this information that had not yet been recorded.

Vohimasina (in the Manandona valley) may be of the same date as Ambohitsitakatra in the Imerina region. Here too we find ditches being dug at a high altitude during the same period. The erection of villages high up at that period reflects preoccupation with considerations of defence, but Raharijaona points out with every justification that terrace-building of the kind we find here necessitated at least a minimum of authority to ensure that it took place and that a class- or rank-based ideology would have had to be central to the life of the populations concerned.

The oral tradition provides in this context two other pieces of information of primary importance. While archaeology proves that after the first period of occupation of the Imerina region (known as Fiekena) it became an arena for fratricidal war in the course of which the high terrain was occupied and it is definitely traditional accounts of the events concerned that give us a chance to understand what happened, recalling that this era was known as *Fanjakan'i Baroa*, a term which is still used by the Malagasy in speaking about anarchy.

Popular tradition also suggests three possible functions for the *vatolahy* (standing stones) in the Manandona region: either that of a boundary of a territory, for which the site investigated might be the central point. Otherwise it might serve to commemorate an ancestor who founded the site in question, or to mark the existence of a settlement.

With regard to the Comoros archipelago, we have good grounds to ask ourselves whether steps were being taken to protect the population from an external enemy (as in the case of the Malagasy raids against the Comoros islands between 1790 and 1820 (Hébert 1983) or from internal ones as such as the confrontations between Sultans in the same archipelago. We refer here to the chronicle of Said Bakari (Ahmed Chamanga & Gueunier 1979) – one of the fundamental documents – which brings out clearly the internal struggles in the Grand Comoros (Ngazidja) between the Sultans, which went on before the nineteenth century. If we did not have at our disposal local accounts such as the Moussafoumou chronicle and testimony left behind by European travellers, we would not be able to make any pronouncements on such issues. Ntsaweni (Fig. 1) still has a wall along its coastal edge which demonstrates that the inhabitants must have been more afraid of those who might come by sea than those who came by land. The fortress and the ramparts of Itsandra at Ngazidja (Figs 7, 8) are better known thanks to the explanation for their construction that has been handed down by oral tradition. The fortifications at Iconi, the story of which is related with great enthusiasm, were erected first and foremost in order to protect the inhabitants from the Malagasy. Yet it would be wrong to generalize on the basis of this example and assume that any village built on an elevation necessarily constituted a form of protection against the Malagassy. A tradition still alive today concerning Domweli, ancient Sada (or Sada Hale) on Mayotte would have us believe that that city had been at war with the people of Anjouan who had stolen the *minbar* from the mosque, the ruins of which can still be seen today.

### **Pseudo-criteria for relevance**

The lack of differentiation to be observed in the structure of dwellings does not automatically imply that there was no social hierarchy.

It will be interesting to investigate a similar Malay-Polynesian context in this regard. While the Malagasy village in the uplands was organized round the *kianja* and the foundation stone and the houses were sometimes arranged in lines that were almost parallel, in Polynesia there was a virtually total absence of differentiation to be observed, or at least so it seemed. This made it difficult to establish any differentiation in an environment, where dwellings for the most part were similar (Fig. 9). The houses were all of the same type. The house of the King and that of the High Priest did not differ from those of their subjects: they were rectangular and built on platforms. Only

the presence of religious buildings near the house of the High Priest made it clear which was his: this was a society in which strong authority found expression in the way the houses were arranged at the level of village layout (see Fig. 10 for the layout of non-differentiated dwellings). Even excavations over a very large area would have not have provided proof for the existence of hierarchical structures within that society and still less for the functions performed by that human community, whose main activity consisted in cultivating the *taro* fields situated a long way from the village

It is important above all to make use of this tradition so as to take note of aspects of an ancient culture that archaeologists cannot grasp or even put forward ... Without oral traditions it would have been impossible to understand the function of sites, such as those of the *'are ario'i de Vitaria et de Papara'i*, where warriors dwelt, or that of the *'are patiri de Vitaria* where decisions were taken as to whether to engage in war and how wars should be conducted. (Vérin 1969, p. 156)

It is evident that the hierarchy inherent in a human community is not necessarily reflected in the dwellings used. This can be the case in places like the Comoros islands, where the Sultan's palace built of stone was near the mosque. Power does not always find expression through material might. This, incidentally, is why it is dangerous to conclude, with reference to the fact that the first Comoros period – the Dembeni period – does not provide the field archaeologist with any obvious or tangible proof of social differentiation, that the society in question was egalitarian. Vitaria in its oral tradition brings us evidence for precisely the opposite. Western culture has associated material power and social power for too long, and researchers should not fall into the trap of judging other cultures by the hallmarks of their own.

## **Conclusion**

It is important at the end of this chapter to recognize that the oral tradition provides real support for historical knowledge with regard to recent periods, and that it is insufficiently backed up by archaeological records. Not only has the oral tradition often enabled us to discover sites from the second half of the second millennium, but it has also often made analysis and interpretation of that period easier for archaeologists.

We should recognize that we are dealing here with two different techniques that are not mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, complementary. At the same time, let us remember that the application of oral tradition demands considerable caution, especially if the archaeologist does not have an adequate background in local tradition. Let us take by way of example the town of Mwali Mdjini (Moheli in the Comoros islands) which was occupied without interruption from the fourteenth to the eighteenth

century – after an initial occupation that lasted from the eighth/ninth century to the thirteenth, but about which we to this day know very little (see Chanudet & Vérin 1983). The layout of the houses does not make it possible for us to make progress when it comes to establishing the function of this city and neither do stratigraphical investigations. Admittedly ‘the existence of public squares (*pangahari*), of mosques and, possibly, of a palace implies an intense social life and (new) structured social organization involving at least two classes: patricians or eminent citizens and those who serve them’ (Chanudet 1991, p 16). Yet the author cannot establish anything further and does not put forward any hypothesis concerning the function of this city which appears to be none other than a ‘continuation of the ancient society’. Chanudet, without being able to refer to an oral tradition, is reduced to stating that: ‘We do not at present possess any evidence that enables us to reach conclusions ... Was it active or passive trade that was pursued here? Were the people of Mwali-Mdjini seafarers or simply settled fishermen? Did they trade directly with the Swahili colonies or was Mwali-Mdjini, on the contrary, a trading-post for the Swahili or even for a Swahili colony?’ (Chanudet 1991, p. 15).

After his long investigations, Chanudet, in his turn, also directed his attention towards the oral tradition and only succeeded in obtaining two pieces of information, the unsatisfactory nature of which he himself readily admits (Chanudet 1991, pp. 118–19). The city had been founded by an Arab and is assumed to have been abandoned after a dysentery or cholera epidemic. Chanudet adds that the site remained ‘functional’ at least until the end of the eighteenth century. Unfortunately if it *did* remain functional, we know nothing about this and it is not definite that continued work at this site scheduled to be undertaken soon on a larger scale than before by our friends and colleagues from the Comoros islands will lead to answers that the oral tradition was unable to provide. While there is no oral tradition relating to very distant periods (Dembeni of the ninth–thirteenth centuries for example), written accounts recorded later than they were originally handed down, such as those concerning the Mafani, will always be at the scholar’s disposal.

The reasons leading up to the eventual creation of a village can often be numerous and they can often be of various kinds and all inter-linked. Identical features can be interpreted in different ways as we have seen above. When it comes to more recent periods we are well advised to use the two approaches in conjunction with one another.

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## Captions for illustrations

Figure 1: Ntsaweni on Ngazidja (after Vérin & Wright 1980).

Figure 2: Map of fortified villages in Imerina. The map shows the distribution of sites studied by Mille (1970), presented in this chapter (after Mille 1970, p. 103).

Figure 3: Plan of the fortifications and cattle ditches of the village of Ambohidehilahy (after Potier & Potier 1970, p. 130).

Figure 4: The site of Ambohitsitakatra (after Vérin 1970, p. 148, after a map drawn by Mille 1969).

Figure 5: The site of Ambohisitakatra (after Brissaud 1975).

Figure 6: The site of Ambohisitakatra (after Brissaud 1975).

Figure 7: Plan of Itsandra-Mdjini (after Blanchy n.d.)

Figure 8: The fortress of Itsandra (after Blanchy n.d.)

Figure 9: Excavation of Tuituiaroa 8 (after Vérin 1969, p. 56).

Figure 10: Part of the plan of Vitaria (after Vérin 1969, p. 88).

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<sup>1</sup>While we are not talking here of defining the function of the villages in question with help of the oral tradition, it is important nevertheless to emphasize the reality of the influence of knowledge passed down from ancestors, the ancient nature of which is demonstrated through the fact that it has proved possible to find all the named sites, and imported pottery from the fifteenth–eighteenth centuries was duly found there as well. On the other hand, it should be noted that nobody knew anything about the sites of the Beja period that had preceded it. This lack of knowledge was moreover illustrated by a total absence of traces of religious rites at those sites.