Médicine et Magie dans le Sud-Est de Madagascar: Les Devins-Guérisseurs et l'Usage des Plantes. By Philippe Beaujard. 2024. Sépia, Paris. 619 pp.

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Philippe Beaujard has generated something close to a "five-foot shelf" of books on Madagascar, its international contexts, and its ethnobiology. Readers may recall my review (Anderson 2018) of his book on Madagascar's early agriculture (Beaujard 2017). He has now produced another enormous work. In translation, the title reads: "Medicine and magic in Southeast Madagascar: The diviner-healers and uses of plants." Like his other books, this is a magnificent work of scholarship, worth seeking out even if your French is limited; most of the book consists of lists of the plants (and a few animals) and their uses, with scientific names appended in the back of the book, so reference is easy.

The book concerns two societies in southeast Madagascar: the Antemoro and the Ikongo Tañala. They live southeast of the well-known Ranomafana National Park, with its many lemur species. The Antemoro comprise a very small and local kingdom. The Tañala (of whom the Ikongo are one branch) are a large, widely-dispersed group of *tavy* (swidden) cultivators; the Ikongo Tañala center on Fort-Carnot, inland from the Antemoro's coastal realm. The "Tanala" (so spelled) were studied almost a century ago by the anthropologist Ralph Linton, who collected an incredible amount of material culture for American museums but did not describe the society in detail (Linton 1933). The Antemoro live by rice farming, with small-scale local irrigation. Tañala swiddening involves widespread burning without firebreaks or much concern about escaped fires, leading to massive deforestation of the hills. Partly as a result, many of the plants used in medicine are cultivated species. (see Anderson 2004 for ecology and related debates in Tanala country and elsewhere in east Madagascar, and a bibliography of related studies; see Harper 2002 for a sad story of bullying the Tanala in the name of conservation.)

Crucial to their lives are the *ombiasy* (singular *ombiasa*), the diviner-healers. These practice healing, magic, sorcery, astronomy, astrology, and related skills. They oversee sacrifices and prayers and are the keepers of all types of knowledge, especially esoteric knowledge of both Arabic and local forms. It should be noted that the "sea people," theoretically Arabs in Madagascar historical telling, are actually a more diverse lot, including other Islamic travelers of the Indian Ocean (Beaujard 2009, 2012). *Ombiasy* draw on *hasina,* divine or sacred power, which seems to this reviewer to be more or less a fusion of Arab *baraka* (divinely bestowed power or blessing), and the widespread Austronesian concept anthropologically known as *mana* (generalized spirit power). The book ends with a tribute to them: they "still preserve a critical role in the cohesion of the communities" (p. 578; my translation).

The book begins with a long and detailed introduction to the societies in question. The Antemoro have a stratified social system, which Beaujard describes as made up of three "pseudo-castes." First is the royalty, the clan of Anteoñy. Second are the nobles, *antalaotra*. Among them are the

kitabo, the literate ones (from Arabic *kitab*, book). They keep a vast array of *sorabe:* manuscripts in Arabic script that incorporate Islamic religion, Arab lore, and local medicinal, astronomical, astrological (vintaña), and other knowledge. Beaujard managed to photocopy some 5000 pages of these (p. 564), surely a monumental accomplishment given Madagascar field conditions. Below these are the *fañarivoana*, commoners. Descendents of former enslaved persons and pariahs are sometimes recognized. The aristocrats maintain they are descended from "sea people," while the commoners are local.

The Tañala are basically egalitarian, though status differences inevitably exist. They consider themselves Indigenous. They lack *kitabo* and *sorabe* but have large numbers of *ombiasy*. Ombiasy have become rapidly more numerous in recent decades, tracking the disruption of traditional society by increasingly aggressive colonialism and then postcolonial traumas and upheavals. Militantly "pure" or "proper" Christianity and Islam have also become social forces, inevitably opposed to everything local and Indigenous, especially the *ombiasy* and their knowledge. Sorcery has increased and with it the need for *ombiasy* to counter this with proper rituals. Crime has also thrived, including massive environmental looting, and the *ombiasy* try to cope.

These social accounts are followed by a list of locally recognized diseases, with Malagasy names and French translations or approximations. Then comes the actual data: almost 500 pages of dense, richly detailed plant lore. It defies summary; suffice it to say that plant knowledge and ritual include both local and introduced plants, including flowers, spices, fruits, barks, leaves, and other plant parts. Some animals are used, especially in sorcery. Excellent color photographs document the major plants used and show *ombiasy* at work. Beaujard studied these groups off and on for more than 20 years and has detailed knowledge of Madagascar and its botany.

Like Beaujard's other books, this is a magnificent scholarly achievement—thorough, insightful, beautifully done and set forth, and critically important in preserving data from a vanishing world. Madagascar is undergoing profound changes, not always for the better, as poverty and ecological chaos ravage the island.

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