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A CULTURAL POLITICS OF BEDCHAMBER
CONSTRUCTION AND PROGRESSIVE DINING IN
ANTANANARIVO: RITUAL INVERSIONS
DURING THE *FANDROANA* OF 1817*

BY

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Introduction: Western Indian Ocean Politics and Narrative Positioning

During the second week of August 1817 James Hastie, a British envoy to the Merina kingdom of highland central Madagascar, participated in an innovative and politically significant royal ritual.¹ The practices and festivities that accompanied that ritual—the *fandroana* or new year according to the lunar calendar of Arabic origin employed by the people of highland central Madagascar—were centered on the royal court (the *rova*, located in the highland capital of Antananarivo) and on the king, Radama I.² This article explores the political and cultural symbolism of Hastie's participation in the *fandroana* of 1817. I argue that Radama choreographed Hastie's participation in the ritual to invert customary ritual sequence and to thereby communicate to his subjects both his intentions for political alliance with Britain and his administrative independence as a young ruler who languished within the shadows of a popular predecessor and father, Andrianampoinimerina.³ The significance of the culturally inventive *fandroana* of 1817 is most fully appreciated when situated within the context of politics in the western Indian Ocean during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Let us begin this inquiry, then, with the primary and secondary participants in the ritual.

An Irishman, Hastie was a sergeant in the British Indian army at Mauritius who came to the attention of that colony's governor, Sir Robert Farquhar, quite by accident when in 1816 he played a key role in dousing flames that threatened to consume a government house in Port Louis. Impressed by services Hastie subsequently rendered to him,

Farquhar nominated the sergeant in mid-1817 as his ambassador to king Radama of highland central Madagascar. In his capacity as ambassador of Britain, Hastie was instructed to enter into an agreement with Radama, with whom Farquhar had only months before concluded a political alliance through a temporary envoy, to end the export trade in slaves to the Mascarene islands from central Madagascar.⁴ Since Britain acquired the Mascarenes in 1810 from its rival, France, the trade in slaves which flourished from both Madagascar and East Africa to the Mascarene islands had been technically illegal but never effectively interdicted. Fearful that an end to the importation of slaves would wreak havoc on Mascarene economies, Farquhar was nevertheless under pressure from London to end the trade.⁵ Sending Hastie to Antananarivo to negotiate a treaty with Radama to sever the flow of highland Malagasy slaves at its source seemed a concrete anti-slaving measure that Farquhar could justify to his superiors. An alliance with Radama proffered the further merit of solidifying British alliance with a growing polity in central Madagascar and edging the French, who maintained trading settlements along Madagascar's east coast, out of the western Indian Ocean altogether.

Most scholarly narratives of the arrival of James Hastie in Antananarivo have tended to situate the diplomatic event within the foregoing familiar scheme of British imperial expansion.⁶ The events, however, can be equally and perhaps more convincingly interpreted with reference to Radama's political strategies. Hastie's arrival in Antananarivo represented a political triumph for Radama, for it marked the fruition of a strategic political alliance he wished to conduct with Britain—then the dominant European imperial power in the Indian Ocean—to rid himself of his predecessor's powerful advisors and to expand his kingdom across the island of Madagascar. When Radama ascended to the kingship in 1810 upon the death of his father Andrianampoinimerina he was only fifteen. As he matured he sought to extricate himself from the powerful commercial, military, and political interests of Andrianampoinimerina's well established advisors and army generals. Collectively known as the *namana* (friends), these men ruled the realm during the first years of Radama's kingship. They were the organizers and leaders of his armies, which generated a large number of prisoners of war and expanded the kingdom outward from Antananarivo. Partially because of their control over war captives who could be sold as slaves, the *namana* were the primary highland Malagasy beneficiaries of the slave trade. Andrianampoinimerina had granted them privileges in the slave trade. After his death, they continued to expand their networks

of kingdom-wide influence through the capture and sale of more prisoners and through strategic distributions of wealth derived from the slave trade. If Radama were to thrust aside his inherited *namana* advisors and replace them with counselors possessing less authority within his dominions, he would have to erode the material basis of their influence by ending the slave trade. In this ambitious goal, Radama was increasingly cognizant that Governor Farquhar of Mauritius could be of significant assistance.

Even as a youth Radama was not unfamiliar with the complex international politics of the Western Indian Ocean. A consummate diplomat and well schooled in Mascarene culture and diplomacy, Andrianampoinimerina had attended to Radama's practical education in European ways at the feet of the French slave traders who had ventured into highland Madagascar well before Radama's birth.⁷ As a child Radama frequently conversed with these men of commerce about the aims and positions of France and Britain in his corner of the world. As Radama approached the age of twenty in about 1814, he began to seriously consider a relationship with Governor Farquhar of Mauritius. Farquhar himself was in the process of gathering a variety of information about Madagascar, but at that time his trade representatives on Madagascar's east coast shunned Radama's diplomatic overtures.⁸ When Farquhar later came under considerable pressure from London to stem the illegal flow of slaves into the Mascarenes, he eventually took Radama's bait. After dispatching two separate envoys in 1816 and early 1817 to explore Radama's intentions and to conclude an alliance of friendship, Farquhar sent James Hastie to Antananarivo in mid-1817 to negotiate an end to the export trade in slaves.⁹

Throughout the *fandroana* of August 1817 Hastie remained a guest of Radama and a confidant to members of the king's immediate family. Hastie's movements and activities from his entry into Antananarivo on August 7 to the end of the primary *fandroana* ceremonies on about August 11 were largely choreographed by Radama. The highland Malagasy king arranged Hastie's schedule to coincide with and meaningfully address the various cultural significances of the new year ritual. While Hastie became aware that something extraordinary was occurring during his first days in Antananarivo and cultivated his intimacy with Radama and his family to further British diplomatic objectives, his journal demonstrates that he failed to grasp precisely what the *fandroana* was or the significance of his participation in some of its ritual practices. Careful to 'conform' his diplomatic behavior to his own perception of 'their [highland Malagasy] customs,' Hastie was cognizant

that his mission was a diplomatic success. Yet due to his ignorance of both the Malagasy language and the practices commemorating the highland Malagasy new year, the British envoy miscomprehended the deeper symbolic significance (for highland Malagasy) of his and Radama's activities in Antananarivo.¹⁰ Someone explained to Hastie that the *fandroana* was like a celebration of Radama's birthday, which was how Hastie mistakenly described the ritual in his diary.¹¹ Largely unaware of the emic significance of his role in the *fandroana* of 1817, Hastie unwittingly played a ritually meaningful part in Radama's cultural stage management of international alliance.

The court celebration of the 1817 *fandroana* bears the marks of a prototypical early modern cultural encounter: a meeting between Europeans of expanding empire and 'natives' at the periphery of the imperium.¹² While studies of such cultural encounters are frequently anchored in European-centered narratives, what is key to interpreting the *fandroana* of August 1817 is that although Hastie was successfully pursuing British diplomatic policy, the cultural engagement was neither directed nor choreographed by Hastie but by his Malagasy host. If we are to understand what Radama's subjects felt their king was attempting to achieve by his hosting of Hastie during the *fandroana* of 1817, we must attempt to read the meanings of the encounter through their eyes. The task is beset with practical and theoretical difficulties. The only direct evidence concerning the *fandroana* festivities of 1817 is the diary of James Hastie. How can we purport to divine the significance of this cultural encounter for highland Malagasy if the only documents available to us are the writings of the British envoy, a man who did not speak Malagasy and who was visiting Madagascar for the first time?

The answer, of course, is that we cannot know exactly what the encounter meant for any highlanders in particular. On the other hand we can raise trenchant questions about what cultural significances Radama sought to invoke and what his subjects might have learned through Hastie's handling at the *rova* during early August 1817. This article is an interpretation of highland Malagasy political culture. While it is a study of cultural encounter at the highland Malagasy court as enacted during the *fandroana* in 1817, it is also a reflection upon the possible meanings of ritual politics internal to the Merina kingdom, of Radama's communication with his public. The inquiry additionally provides us with insights into the personal character of Radama and his disposition toward productions of royal ritual. The possibilities for exploring the above historical questions through the available evidence are counter-intuitive. Although documentation for the 1817 *fandroana* is provided by

Hastie, when the evidence is ‘read’ with reference to the symbolic structures of the *fandroana* we can learn more about the ritual predilections of Radama and about the cultural politics of international alliance than we can about the British envoy himself.

What I am proposing here is more than counterintuitive, it runs contrary to much modern cultural theory. Modern European propensities to observe, report, organize and represent the doings and sayings of ‘native’ others—to produce texts and discourses symbolized here by the writings of an imperial envoy—are commonly interpreted as techniques of imperial rule, of narrative appropriation. Such European produced knowledge, it is argued, is primarily representative of European-metropolitan-elite-dominant discourses and cannot be fruitfully employed to understand ‘native’ or subaltern consciousness with any integrity. This intellectual position is not universally held, of course, but it has gained considerable currency amongst postcolonial theorists, many scholars working in Foucaultian traditions, and proponents of cultural studies who work on issues of imperialism and colonization. Designed to draw scholars’ attention to how histories of the ‘other’ are at the same time reflections of the historian’s own consciousness, these propositions suggest that it is impossible to uncover the meanings and intentions of historical subjects in times and places other than one’s own.

The relevant questions to raise concerning the project of ascertaining from texts produced by James Hastie what cultural meanings the *fandroana* of 1817 might have suggested themselves to highland Malagasy are *how* and *for whom* were imperial discourses (diaries) a powerful technology of rule? and *how* do we define, substantiate, and measure the ‘power’ or dominance of such discourses? The answers to these critical questions can move in various directions, and they depend largely upon which broader narrative or narratives one chooses to illuminate with the historical data at hand, or within which (or whose) historical narratives Malagasy and British actors are placed. The foregoing questions evoke persistent methodological problems that postcolonial theorists have appropriately termed an author’s or a subject’s ‘positionality.’¹³ What follows is a positioned attempt to utilize an imperial envoy’s diaries along with some limited Malagasy language texts to set the *fandroana* of 1817 within a larger narrative of highland Malagasy cultural politics.

James Hastie’s Narrative

Radama first encountered James Hastie in July 1817 at the eastern coastal port of Tamatave.¹⁴ Hastie was accompanied by Radama’s two

half-brothers, Ratafika and Rahovy, who were returning to Antananarivo after having spent several months in Mauritius with Hastie as a statement of diplomatic intent on the part of both Radama and the governor of Mauritius. Radama was himself at the east coast with an army attempting to submit the primary trade entrepôts of Foulpointe and Tamatave to his direct sovereignty. During late July and early August Radama, his half-brothers and their escorts, Hastie, and the highland Malagasy army struggled through Madagascar's eastern rain forest and into the highlands of Imerina. As the party drew near to Antananarivo, Radama hurried ahead of Hastie and his entourage. The British envoy approached the highland capital on August 5 and was greeted by a messenger from Radama who requested that he sleep in a small house at the bottom of the hill for two nights, after which he would be allowed to enter the city. To welcome Hastie below Antananarivo that day (August 5), Radama ordered that eleven guns be fired and offered the envoy a fattened ox. On August 7 a second messenger informed Hastie that he should enter the city that afternoon and be officially received by the king at exactly 3 o'clock p.m.—by Hastie's pocketwatch! This is significant for Radama had begun to coordinate his European diplomacy according to the mechanical clock. One of the gifts Hastie offered Radama in mid-1817 was a large chiming pendulum timepiece. British missionaries later explained Radama's reaction to the gift in the following terms.

Amongst the presents sent to Radama by the governor of Mauritius, one of those which afforded him the most pleasure was a clock. It was at first a little deranged, and he could not conceal his chagrin on hearing it strike while the minute-hand was at the half-hour. While he was absent from the house, Mr. Hastie fortunately discovered the cause of the clock's going wrong, and rectified it; and when the king returned, his joy was unbounded. The clock was placed upon a block, at the distance of four feet from a fire large enough to roast a bullock. The monarch sat on the ground beside it for a whole hour, and, forgetful of his regal dignity, danced when it struck.¹⁵

Beyond Radama's personal fascination with the mechanical instruments of time measurement, the king employed European time-measurement as a cultural resource to lend innovative pomp to Hastie's arrival and, possibly, to put the British envoy at ease. But European time-measurement was juxtaposed against the longer-term understructure of the highland Malagasy lunar calendar. While Radama utilized his clock coordinated with Hastie's pocketwatch to choreograph the British envoy's entrance into Antananarivo, he timed that entrance to coincide with the last days of Alohotsy, the final month of the highland Malagasy lunar calendar. Because of this purposeful coordination, Hastie was to participate

in the royal rituals of the new year during his first days and nights in Antananarivo.¹⁶

At 2:30 p.m. by the clock on August 7, the third to the last day of Alohotsy, cannon were fired from the heights of Antananarivo to notify Hastie to begin his ascent into the city. Winding his way toward the *rova*, Hastie passed through an impressive line of armed soldiers. He was preceded by Ratafika and Rahovy, both of them mounted on horses offered as gifts to the king by the British envoy. The arriving party found Radama in the *rova* seated on an elevated stage and dressed in an eclectic European outfit consisting of a scarlet coat, a military hat from Mauritius, blue pantaloons, and green boots. The king took Hastie's hand in a warm greeting, laughing heartily. Radama then commanded silence and presented a *kabary*, or speech, to those of his subjects crowded about. He 'brought to their attention all the people, particularly the English, who passed through their country to come and see him.' After the public reception, Radama and his entourage repaired to Hastie's personal quarters within the *rova* where Radama 'removed the most embarrassing parts of his clothing,' Hastie recalls, and while sipping brandy entered into an informal discussion with the British envoy concerning the state of roads in Imerina. Dinner was eventually served by twenty female servants. Radama retired to his personal quarters after sharing a bottle of imported white wine with Hastie and a few other Europeans resident at Antananarivo.

The next morning, August 8 and the second to the last day of Alohotsy, Hastie was awakened early to attend a distribution of 400 cattle from the royal court to the people of the kingdom. It was at this point that Hastie must have sought an explanation for the public proceedings at the *rova* because he notes here that the distribution was on occasion of the 'anniversary of Radama's birthday.' When the distribution was complete, Radama accompanied Hastie to the British envoy's personal quarters within the *rova*. There Radama discovered that Hastie's servant was unsuccessfully attempting to hang a temporary division in the one-room house so that Hastie's bed would be hidden from the main space of the single room (although many royal houses in Antananarivo were double storied, none of the floors was partitioned into separate rooms). Realizing that Hastie was attempting to separate the space of his quarters into sleeping and public rooms in the European fashion, Radama called for his 'captains' to fetch bamboo and woven mats out of which a makeshift bedchamber could be partitioned. Pleased at Radama's intervention, Hastie himself supervised construction of the enclosure. Within two hours a private sleeping room of some twelve

square feet had been set apart from the main public space immediately about the door.

Later in the day Radama and Hastie, along with several of Radama's advisors, employed considerable time and energy discussing slavery and politics in the western Indian Ocean. Having himself initiated the process of alliance, Radama was no doubt aware that Hastie carried instructions from Governor Farquhar authorizing him to enter into an agreement on behalf of Britain to end the export of slaves from Radama's dominions. In the meeting, Hastie reasoned (no doubt for the primary benefit of Radama's reticent advisors) that highland Malagasy slaves would offer greater ongoing benefit to Radama's kingdom and to their owners if they were employed in productive tasks within the island rather than exported from there across the sea. Radama replied that he had personally resolved to terminate the export of slaves from his kingdom but that contrary to the public climate in Europe the slave trade was generally considered an honorable business within his kingdom (i.e. he would face considerable opposition attempting to do so). Radama's revelatory statement of intent is reported by Hastie without further comment, yet it was of principal political significance and assists us in understanding Radama's management of Hastie during the 1817 *fandroana*. Radama's ritual choreography of Hastie at the *rova*, we can hypothesize, was scripted to publicly communicate the king's intentions for British alliance and an end to the slave trade, to comment upon what cultural impact such an alliance might hold for his people, and to test the public reaction to his new departure in royal politics. Known to Radama and his entourage, Hastie's intentions were not concealed from highland Malagasy who had for decades both endured the deprivations of the slave trade and participated in it. Radama employed the remainder of his day receiving representatives from the various districts of his kingdom, a number of people Hastie reckoned at about 150. Each of them offered very small pieces of cut silver coin to Radama (the significance of this and other elements of the *fandroana* are discussed below).

On the last day of Alohotsy, August 9, Radama occupied most of his day receiving visitors and their offerings of money, as he had at the end of the previous day. Sometime during the day, Hastie attended to some problems with the pendulum clock that Governor Farquhar had sent to Radama. He also met with Radama long enough to present him with a compass and unfold for him some world maps upon which were indicated the principal kingdoms of the time. Like Radama, who sought to chart Hastie into the cultural and political consciousness of

highland Malagasy by incorporating him into the various performances of the *fandroana*, Hastie would orient Radama within the political spaces of European cartography. 'I found it necessary [also] to conform to the customs of the country,' writes Hastie, 'and some time after he left me I sent to him a red outfit that I received of Pye [a British naval captain].' (Wearing red clothing was a privilege reserved for the sovereign and his family.) The evening of August 9 marked the end of the old highland Malagasy year and the beginning of the new one. Radama was preoccupied with ritual procedure as explained by Hastie:

At the setting of the sun about 500 persons were admitted inside the Palace court [the *rova*]. I asked permission to watch the ceremony that was happening there and Radama soon consented. He undressed in one of his large houses and put on a piece of cloth of local manufacture, changed the black headband that he had about his head for a white one, and went to the house of one of his wives followed by 25 spear carriers and 10 men blowing on shells. Hot water had been prepared and two men began to clean him. As soon as the water touched him, he let out a piercing cry, which was repeated by the crowd outside. When his attendants began to rub him dry he again called out loudly, and that was also repeated. He then reclined himself and exited while spraying his bath water on the assembled people. He stopped for a moment, commanded silence (which was observed), gave a short speech, sprayed still more water, and entered the house. The people having dispersed, the singers and the shell blowers rested.¹⁷

Later that night Radama visited Hastie for two hours before retiring to sleep with one of his wives, 'which does not happen very often,' Hastie curiously noted.

On the morning of August 10, the first day of the new year, Hastie reports that Radama awoke at 7 o'clock and entered a house where he dressed himself in a scarlet cloth decorated with silver beads and returned to the doorway of the house in which he had slept. The ceremonies continued:

The Palace court was filled with cattle. Radama sat himself on a mat and asked me to sit beside him. He said some words and a poor young heifer was brought. The king having raised his voice, it was immediately overturned by five strong men and its throat cut in an instant. Before the heifer finished bleeding, a large piece of its hump was cut off and all the cattle except 50 were pushed out of the court. I entered with him into the house where he slept and he sent for eight of his wives who came out: each woman made a fire at the tomb of each of his eight ancestors (the women had a bit of boiled rice on their heads) and roasted a piece of the hump. This finished, he returned again to his house and sat on the mat. Rice was boiled and a piece of the hump roasted. He ate of them in a silver plate and gave me some in a porcelain plate. He put some grains of rice on my head and said some words: their meaning was a prayer to the All-Powerful (who he called Eanrenemanetta,¹⁸ or the perfumed) that I should not be sick in his country. He introduced his wives, 11 in number. He had 12, but one had died, and he accompanied me then to see the houses. I returned with him and ate a morsel of the roasted hump with the skin attached. It was very good. . . .

He was very tired and retired into a small house where he usually sleeps. I stayed with his wives, who were all beautiful and accompanied them inside several houses. They performed the same ceremony with me that the king had at noon; my head was covered with rice. In some houses we ate boiled blood and liver without salt: it did not taste good but I conformed to their customs. While entering the palace court, the oldest of the wives said to me that the king had placed her under my guard and that in the evening she was to visit at my quarters. I consented and they each savored a glass of cognac with even greater pleasure than all the things they had eaten.¹⁹

With these words Hastie ends his description of the ceremonial festivities of the *fandroana*. Later that day Hastie occupied some time with Radama discussing politics at Madagascar's east coast and attending to some sick horses belonging to the king. The gift of 300 cattle that Radama informed Hastie on August 13 he would send to Governor Farquhar and the bull fights that the king presided over two days later were probably also part of the gift giving and celebration that accompanied the new year, but Hastie does not link these events to the rituals performed at the *rova* some days earlier.

Establishing an Interpretive Framework: The Symbolism of Fandroana

Hastie's narrative of the 1817 *fandroana* is the earliest known written account of the ceremony, which like other rituals of highland Malagasy royalty probably originated as a domestic or corporate kin rite but was later appropriated by royalty. By the late nineteenth century the *fandroana* had evolved into a grand cultural production at the *rova* and was described in writing by both foreigners and highland Malagasy. Anthropologist Maurice Bloch has employed an extensive compilation of such written accounts (most of them originating from the period after 1860) to construct a model of the ritual sequences of the *fandroana* and to propose an interpretation of the rich symbolism that structures them.²⁰ While Bloch's account and interpretation of the *fandroana* problematically collapses multiple historical performances into a composite ritual that was never performed exactly as described, it presents historians with an opportunity to 'read' Hastie's narrative of the *fandroana* of 1817 against the possible meanings of an 'ideal' *fandroana* and thereby to assess the extent to which it 'played' with ritual symbolism. Bloch's ideal *fandroana* serves as a template, a menu of symbolism and cultural resources that we can conceptualize Radama as having drawn upon in 1817 as he elected to organize the ceremony in a particular manner and to ritually position Hastie within its sequence of performances. The following paragraphs summarize Bloch's interpretation of the *fandroana*, drawing attention to those performances relevant to understanding

Hastie’s movements in Antananarivo while omitting others; readers interested in greater detail are referred to the text of Bloch’s article.

In English *fandroana* translates as ‘the bathing’ and refers to the primary royal ceremony of the new year, the sovereign’s bath in warm water at the royal court as the old year gave way to the new. According to Bloch, at the simplest level the *fandroana* was a classic highland Malagasy ritual of blessing, signified by the sovereign’s act of spraying the *fandroana* bath water on people assembled in the royal court yard. He writes:

The word blessing is here a translation of the Malagasy word *tsodrano* which literally means to blow on water, since the most ordinary blessing, from a father to his child, as well as the most elaborate, as here, involves the scattering of water onto those blessed.²¹

A complex of associated rituals and performances, the *fandroana* was structured into two primary contrasting segments. The first segment corresponded to the end of the old year, the last days of Alohotsy, and the second to the beginning of the new year, the first days of Alahamady. These two segments and the chronological arrangement of their related ceremonies are depicted graphically in Figure 1, which is adopted with permission from Bloch’s article.²² The enactment of *fandroana* ceremonies at the turning of the year invoked a symbolic opposition between the ending of the old year during the ‘weak’ and generally unpropitious month of Alohotsy (commonly associated with decline, degeneration and death) and the beginning of the new one during the ‘strong,’ fertile, life-giving and propitious month of Alahamady. The first day of Alahamady was considered the most auspicious day for a sovereign’s birth, and this is probably why the 1817 *fandroana* was explained to Hastie as a celebration of Radama’s birthday (it is highly unlikely that Radama was born on the first day of Alahamady).²³

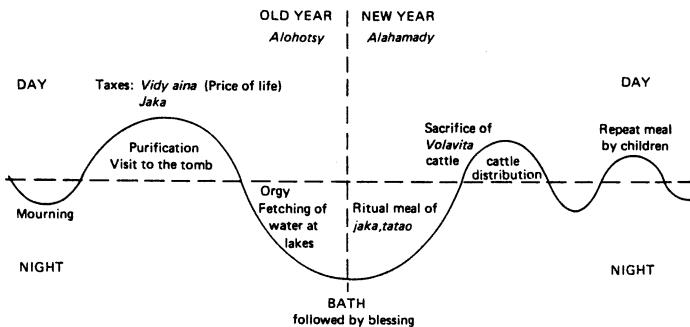


Figure 1

The *fandroana* was normally announced in a formal declaration some two weeks before the end of Alohotsy. By royal decree all incomplete work was to be concluded and no new projects commenced. Alohotsy was a month of decline, unpropitious for the initiation of new enterprises. No unfinished project was to be carried over into Alahamady. By similar reasoning, no animal was to be slaughtered until the first day of the new year, and all funerals were prohibited during the festivities. Additionally, both the convening of markets and complete bathing of the body were forbidden for they implied the fulfillment of cycles, one weekly, the other daily. The night before the last full day of Alohotsy people publicly and loudly mourned their dead. The next day they similarly gathered at family tombs to pay their respects to the dead. During that day, the last of Alohotsy, people presented symbolic taxes called the *vidy aina* (the 'price of life') to the sovereign. Finally, on the eve of the new year a symbolic social disorder was produced by human actions during the *alin-dratsy* (the bad night) in which sexual activity across social lines was tolerated where normally it was more vigilantly regulated. This was a night of 'orgy' that symbolically vanished with the dawning of the new year and the royal regeneration of order. Ideally the sovereign's bath would take place at midnight, just as Alohotsy gave way to Alahamady, social chaos to social order.²⁴

Here Bloch's account faces a contradiction and requires modification. In 1817, as at other times, the sovereign's bath took place just after sunset on the last day of Alohotsy, not at or after midnight. This produced a sort of ritual middle ground between the two segments of the *fandroana*, for the last night of Alohotsy—after the sovereign's bath—was also the *alin-dratsy* when men and women could seek lovers of different social statuses and enjoy that normally forbidden sexual encounter with impunity. The *alin-dratsy* was the last phase of the social chaos sequence that was to disappear in the morning as everyone returned home to their respective social and domestic units. The evening of the bathing (August 9 to August 10) can therefore be seen as a time of transition between the two primary phases of the *fandroana* in which chaos reached its climax, so to speak, while the fresh order symbolically brought by the sovereign's bath began to take hold, banishing the vestiges of social chaos only with the rising sun on 1 Alahamady (10 August).²⁵

As the contrasting second segment of the *fandroana* cycle (I return here to Bloch's interpretation), the new year was inaugurated with the royal bath and the blessing of representatives gathered inside the *rova*. Water for the sovereign's bath was fetched from specified lakes by

youths 'whose parents are still living.'²⁶ As the sovereign disrobed and touched the water, he or she yelled *masina aho* (may I be sacred), which when heard by those assembled at the court to witness the occasion was responded to with *masina hianao* (may you be sacred).²⁷ At the conclusion of the bath, the bathing water, or *rano masina* (sacred water), was sprayed by the sovereign upon the assembled as a blessing. The bathing and blessing sequence was later repeated in individual households by those senior kin who had attended ceremonies within the royal court yard. Human and agricultural fertility and order secured for the kingdom through the king's bath were thus symbolically extended from the *rova* to domestic units across the realm. At the dawn of the new year, all were to return home to their proper social stations, including slaves to the households of their masters and those who had enjoyed the *alin-dratsy* with illicit lovers to their respective spouses of allowable social status. In contrast to the previous night of 'orgy' across social lines sexual order was restored, as was social order with the resumption of markets, funerals, bathing and butchering.

Following the royal bath and its domestic replications,²⁸ a special ritual meal called *tatao* consisting of boiled rice, milk and honey—culinary symbols of sweetness, fertility and order—was usually prepared for and eaten by the sovereign and within individual households across the kingdom. Elders customarily placed grains of *tatao* rice upon the heads of their subordinates as symbols of their authoritative blessings and prayers for fertility. As food, *Tatao* was accompanied by *jaka*, a mixture of fresh beef and dried beef preserved from the preceding *fandroana*. At daybreak, the sovereign released masses of gift cattle from the *rova* into Antananarivo's joyful streets and sacrificed a *volavita* heifer within the palace enclosure (*volavita* refers to a specific and symbolic body color-marking). Spatially, the ritual focus of the first day of Alahamady was upon the tombs of ancestors, where women sojourned to pray and to burn the hump fat of the butchered *volavita* heifer (like water, fat signified wealth and fertility, both of which were conceptualized as tangible outcomes of social order). Ceremonies performed at ancestral tombs during the first day of Alahamady were symbolically contrasted to the public mourning conducted two evenings earlier. The chaos and loss of death were juxtaposed with the life and fertility that social order and properly remembered ancestors obtained for the living. The *fandroana* ritual of the new year was a key performance articulating a highland Malagasy ideology of royalty. The core elements of that ideology included a depiction of the sovereign as the ultimate source of social order and fertility, and a naturalization of those royal

powers through a conceptual linking of political power to the inevitable rhythms of nature.

'Reading' the Fandroana of 1817

Several of the ritual sequences described by Maurice Bloch are present in Hastie's account of the August 1817 *fandroana*; others are not. This may be due either to the fact that Hastie was not aware they were occurring or because they did not take place. Royal development of the *fandroana* was still underway in 1817 so it is not surprising that all the sequences described by Bloch from documents relating to the late nineteenth century do not appear in Hastie's narrative. At the same time we would not expect Hastie, especially on his first visit to highland Madagascar, to have been aware of the complex happenings and preparations associated with the *fandroana*. Nevertheless, if we take Bloch's graphic model for the *fandroana* (Figure 1) and transpose onto it the historical events as reported by Hastie (Figure 2), we can identify considerable similarity between the historical *fandroana* of 1817 and Bloch's ideal *fandroana*.

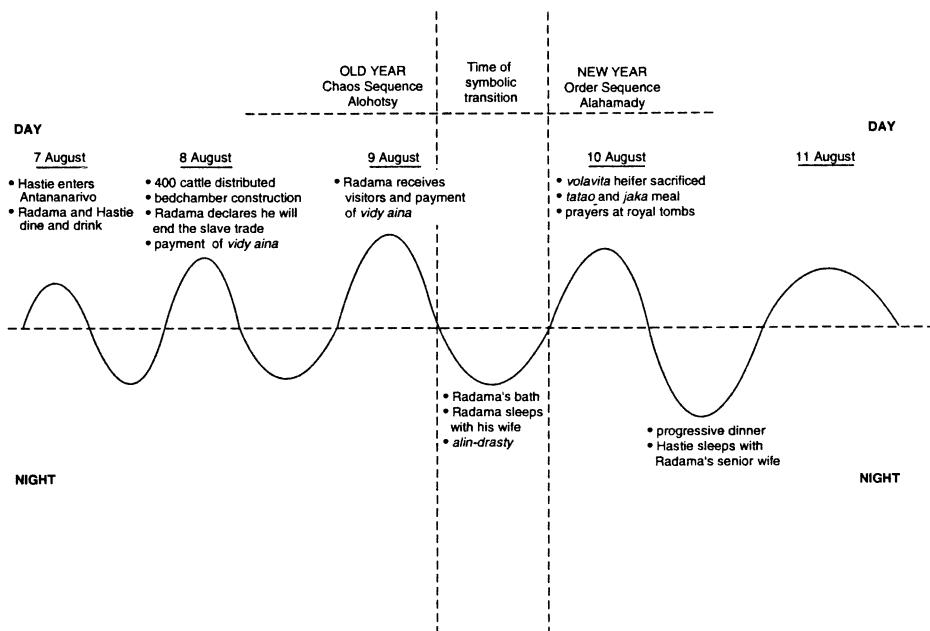


Figure 2

The visitors that Hastie observed occupying much of Radama's time during the last two days of Alohotsy were no doubt coming to render their *vidy aina*, for they were offering the small sums of money (typically a *voamena*) characteristically presented to the sovereign during the days preceding the bath. The bulk of Hastie's narrative as it intersects with the composite account of *fandroana* produced by Bloch describes the principal ceremonies of the sovereign's bath on the eve of the new year: the sacrificing of the heifer, the release of masses of cattle from the royal court yard into the town, the *tatao* ritual meal, the placing of rice upon heads, and the prayers offered by Radama's wives at the tombs of the sovereign's deceased predecessors. In its broad outlines, the *fandroana* of 1817 substantially reproduced the recognizable symbolic structures of the late nineteenth century.

The silences, deviations, and embellishments in the choreography of the 1817 *fandroana* as compared to Bloch's ideal *fandroana*, however, call attention to the potential cultural and political meanings of this particular performance. Some of those differences are not especially important. For example, Hastie observed some 400 cattle being distributed from the *rova* on the morning of August 8, the second to the last day of Alohotsy. Such a distribution was not a remarkable feature of *fandroana* performances later in the century and is not therefore described by Bloch. We can surmise that the king provided cattle to his people from which the *jaka* meat eaten during the ritual meal following the sovereign's bath was obtained. It is possible, therefore, that despite a theoretical cessation of butchering during the last weeks of Alohotsy, beef to be employed in the festivities was slaughtered during the first part of the ritual cycle. On the other hand, the cattle distributed on August 8 may have been somehow linked to the gift cattle released to the people of the kingdom from the *rova* on August 10.

What was most unique about the *fandroana* of August 1817 was Hastie's presence and intimacy with the royal family. Radama timed Hastie's entrance into Antananarivo for maximum public exposure, epitomized by the pomp with which the British envoy describes he was received in Antananarivo. The political import of such a reception certainly did not escape the 'captains' of Radama, the *namana*, who stood much to lose by the alliance Radama desired with Britain. Recall that many *namana* were merchants who had been favored by Andrianampoinimerina with privileges in the export slave trade and who continued to enjoy their commercial interests during the first decade of Radama's reign. If Radama's political intentions toward the British were unclear

on August 7, his profession to a party of *namana* and to Hastie during the evening of August 8 that he would sign a treaty to end the trade in slaves from Imerina must have considerably clarified his position. From what we know of the porousness of the walls that surrounded the *rova*, Radama's revelations could not have remained privy only to an inner circle.²⁹

It was within the expectant atmosphere of Antananarivo at the turn of the new year, 1817, that modification of ritual symbolism in the performance of the *fandroana* assumed potent political meaning. The ritual innovations—performances out of sequence or, effectively, inversions of ritual sequence—were presaged by Radama's hospitality and conviviality during the private hours he spent with Hastie. In the accepted fashion of European diplomacy, Radama lubricated social deliberations with bottles of (imported) brandy and white wine. This venerable ritual of alliance in an emerging globalized political culture represented a significant departure from the court procedures of Andrianampoinimerina, who had prohibited both the production and consumption of alcohol within the kingdom.³⁰ Under Andrianampoinimerina's regime of teetotalism Radama and his brothers had learned to sip wine and *eau de vie* on the sly with the slave traders who visited their father's court.³¹ Perhaps under the excuse of a foreign diplomatic encounter and an emerging adulthood, Radama was consuming spirits within the *rova* itself. By savoring cocktails within the comfort of the royal court, Radama was symbolically contrasting himself to Andrianampoinimerina, registering his newfound adulthood and suggesting an independent political philosophy.

The first significant sequence inversion in *fandroana* performance commenced serendipitously on August 8 as a result of Hastie's discomfort with the arrangement of his domestic space. When Radama noticed Hastie attempting to separate a private bedchamber from the single-roomed space in his royal quarters, he called for bamboo and woven mats to be fetched and commanded his 'captains' to conduct the labor themselves. This incident represented more than an amusing cultural encounter, for it transpired during the first sequence of the *fandroana*, the period of decline at the end of Alohotsy during which no new projects or productive labor were to be undertaken. What was more, the persons commanded to conduct the work under Hastie's supervision were not described as court servants but rather as the 'captains' of Radama—most likely *namana* themselves!³² Here we find Radama far from a scrupulous observer of his father's ritual traditions

and court etiquette. He suffered the esteemed advisors of his father, men whose political situation was already precarious, to undertake the potentially harmful labor of ritual sequence inversion for him. These insights into Radama's manipulation of symbolic politics on the fly help to explain why he was so effective at communicating his political intentions, on the one hand, and why the cultural feeling that later mobilized against him ran so deeply, on the other.³³

A second inversion in the proper ritual sequence of the *fandroana*, one of capital importance, was premeditated by Radama. Like the first inversion, the second bore a symbolic significance of which Hastie appeared oblivious. I am referring to Hastie's progressive dinner with Radama's wives inside the *rova* during the first day of Alahamady and the visit that night by Radama's senior wife—very probably Ramavo, the future Queen Ranavalona I—to Hastie's personal quarters under instructions from Radama. The sequence inversion derived from the timing of Hastie's libidinous intimacy with Radama's wives precisely when the symbolic order of the kingdom was to be reinvoked by the sovereign during the second half of the ritual sequence. This reinvocation of order required that the bath and other ceremonies be performed at the *rova* and that sexual relationships across social lines—and in this case we can surmise even more so across language and national lines—come to an end and that all domestic unit members repair to their respective households.³⁴ The potential meaning of the sequence inversion becomes clearer when we examine the sexual chaos-to-order sequence of the new year more closely.

Conspicuously absent from Hastie's description of the 1817 *fandroana* is specific mention of the activities of the *alin-dratsy*, the ritual event during the first half of the *fandroana* that Bloch describes as an 'orgy' and that typically occurred during the last night of Alohotsy. One presumes that the activities of the *alin-dratsy* occurred quietly beyond Hastie's observation. With its connotations of sexual excess rather than sexual intercourse across social lines, 'orgy' does not properly describe the activities of the *alin-dratsy*. In Malagasy language narratives the *alin-dratsy* is described as both an *andro tsy maty* (literally 'day-of-no-death') during which the social rules governing sexual intercourse were suspended and transgressors, if they remained discreet, could not be prosecuted (i.e. would not 'die'), or as a *valabe* (literally a 'vast [rice] field' or 'unpartitioned [rice] field') in which social distinctions were effaced by the erasure of water retaining boundaries.³⁵

English TranslationText of *Tantara ny Andriana*

Day-of-no-death, the day of bathing, says old Mister R. Everyone does as they please, except that which is against the government law that makes guilty.

Andro-tsy-maty, ny andro androan-drano, hoy rangahy R, samy manao izay tia'ny, afatsy ny lalam-panjakana mahameloka.

All prisoners are excepted from this.

Ny migadra rehetra afaka amy ny izany.

The 'vast field' almost becomes a reality on that day-of-no-death. Everyone can go to whom they wish on that day, the *havanandriana* can go to the *hova*, the *hova* can go to the *andriana* and even to the *andevo*—that is what is called the 'vast field.'³⁶ But it is a hidden 'vast field' that no one observes with their eyes; they follow the unseen bad with their hearts.

Ka saikia manao valabe amy ny io androtsimaty io: dia mahazo mandeha amy ny izay tia'ny aleha ny olona rehetra amy ny io andro io, ny havanandriana mahazo mandeha amy ny hova, ny hova mahazo mandeha amy ny andriana na ny andevo aza, k'izany no atao hoe *valabe*, kanefa valabe *takona*: tsy misy mpijery ny maso, dia mpanam-pò amy ny tsy hita ny ratsy.

The water in a marsh makes a 'vast field.' If the water is drawn off, the [social] analogy becomes apparent. There are borders, elevated divisions, mud with which to make the barriers for shunting fish into carefully placed nets. So what lesson can we learn from the land? The government is not lawless and anarchical, it makes things go in their order, it binds every descent group. Each person takes their own part, because each takes [accepts] that which characterizes their descent group. That is what keeps the land from becoming a 'vast field.' Everything has a purpose. Those who have problems with each other are shown to the knowers of the law and the judges.

Vala be ny rano an-keniheny, ary raha misintona ny rano dia miseho ny ohatra: misy valavala, misy valamparihy, misy valam-bovo anaovana tanambovo: ary aiza izany fahazavana ny tany? tsy atao rabantsahona ny fanjakana, fa ampandehanina amy ny tsipiriana, ampitadidina isampirenena, samy maka ny anjara'ny tsy ampifanandohina fa samy maka izay tandrify ny tera-drazana; izany no tsy mahavalabe amy ny tany, fa manana tonia ny avokoa ny zavatra rehetra. Fa izay mifanolana aterina amy ny mpahalala ny fitsarana sy ny mpitsara[.]

[Paragraph elided]

[Paragraph elided]

This is what makes the 'vast field' hidden away from watching eyes. They follow the unseen bad with their hearts.

Izao no anaovana ny valabe takona tsy misy mpijery ny maso, dia manaram-po amy ny tsy hita ny ratsy. Ary

As for the ‘vast field,’ it is not the land that becomes a ‘vast field,’ but the people who break social taboos by sleeping with those who are not of the same ancestry as themselves, that is what makes it a ‘vast field.’ As for the ‘vast palace’ [another term for the *alindratsy*], it is like the side of the hearth without enough *andriana* [i.e. nobility], anyone sleeps in the area that is open, and we call such a common bed the ‘vast palace,’ ‘you on the east side and us on the west side.’

[Paragraph elided]

And according to old Mister—‘When the day-of-no-death arrives: the bad things are not spoken of, whether people can sleep with others’ spouses, for example, or whether they can sleep taboo (*mandry fady*). There is a clarification in the words used to describe it in the past: as the custom of ‘the-heart-not-enduring.’³⁷ Whether the black and the white sleep,³⁸ whether slaves and the nobles sleep, they follow the words of the kings and the people of old, and they say day-of-no-death, heart-not-enduring. This is the origin of the heart-not-enduring: it is not only the eating of food that is the heart-not-enduring. Those who desire each others’ countenances must unite, that is what makes it said that the day is the ‘day-of-no-death,’ and those who transgress at that time are not lectured.

[Paragraphs elided]

Hidden [sexual] stealing, hidden sleeping, hidden loving when no one is looking or seeing: these are what make the day-of-no-death. For those who

ny valabe: tsy ny tany no valabe, fa ny olona manao otafady mandry aman’olona tsy mitovy razana amy ny, izany no mahavalabe azy. Ary ny lapabe: lafimpatana tsy ampy andriana izay malalaka iaraha-mandry, dia atao hoe lapabe ny filaza ny fandriana, ‘hianareo an’indrana ary atsinanana, izahay aty an’indrana andrefana.’

[Paragraph elided]

Ary hoy ity Rangahy—‘Ny nisehoany ny andro tsy maty: tsy mba itenenana ny zava-dratsy, na azo maka vady n’olona na azo mandry fady. Misy fahazavana ny teny lazainy ny tao aloha ho fomba ny fo-tsi-aritra: na ny mainty sy ny fotsy mandry, na ny andevo sy ny andriana mandry, dia manaraka ny teny n’andriana sy ny olona teo aloha, dia milaza andro-tsy-maty: fo tsy aritra, izao nisehoany ny fo tsy aritra; tsy dia ny fihinanan-kanina hiangy no fo tsy aritra: fa izay mifaniry tarehy, dia tsy maintsy miray, izany no ilazana androtsimaty ny andro, dia tsy anaovana kabary izay manota.

[Paragraphs elided]

‘Mangalatra takona, mandry takona, fitia takona tsy misy mpijery tsy misy mpahita, izany no anaovan’azy andro-tsi-maty; fa izay mpanota amy ny

transgress the law, if they are seen, they are bound by the law and condemned by it. But the followers of the heart, on the other hand, the hidden, they sleep without being illegitimate. Taking something that is not one's own, wealth not from one's own feet and hands, and tearing what belongs to someone else, if one is not seen at this, it is called day-of-no-death. But if one is caught by people doing this, one jumps over the protected [i.e. forbidden] grass, it is within the law as agreed upon by the sovereign and the people. They [who do so] travel the road that will kill them, for the land has rulers and the government has a lord.

lalàna, raha hita: dia anaty ny lalàna, dia maty ny lalàna; ary ny mpanarampò kosa, ny takona, mandry tsy mifankaheny, maka zavatra tsy hari'ny tsy harin-tongotra tsy harin-tànana fa mandriatra ny an'olona dia raha tsy hita amy ny'zao, dia milaza ny andro-tsimaty; ary raha azo n'olona amy ny zao izy, dia mandingana ny ahitra arovana, anaty ny lalàna nifankaheny ny Mpanjaka sy ny ambanilanitra, ankaharany ny lalàna hahafaty azy izy, fa ny tany manana andriana ny fanjakana misy tompo ny.'

These passages from the *Tantara* stress that the permissiveness associated with the *alin-dratsy* was specifically limited to sexual liaisons ('the heart-not-enduring'; 'those who desire each other's countenances must unite') and that the liaisons themselves were to be conducted with discretion, not flaunted before the public eye ('it is a hidden "vast field" that no one observes with their eyes'; 'they follow the unseen bad with their hearts'). The passages confirm the symbolic importance of the *alin-dratsy* as a *mise en relief* of the distinctions highland Malagasy drew among different social categories of ancestry ('the people who break social taboos by sleeping with those who are not of the same ancestry as themselves') and of the social ideology that sustained such distinctions ('So what lesson can we learn from the land? The government is not lawless and anarchical, it makes things go in their order, it binds every descent group').

It is curious in light of this symbolism that on the night of the *alin-dratsy* in 1817—the evening of August 9 to the morning of August 10—Hastie remembers Radama to have retired to sleep with one of his wives rather than with some socially forbidden lover. With a paucity of evidence and given the fact that the evening of August 9 represented the overlapping time of transition between two opposing symbolic segments, it is difficult to interpret this action with precision. We might argue that the sovereign was himself exempted from the permissiveness of the *alin-dratsy* and therefore constrained to sleep with one of his own

wives during that night, as he would normally have been supposed to do. On the other hand, Hastie notes that Radama's choice of bed partner that night represented something out of the ordinary (it 'does not happen very often'), a curious remark for him to make (having just recently arrived in Antananarivo) and the closest Hastie came in his journal to supplying any evidence about the *alin-dratsy*. It could be that Radama chose to participate in the chaos symbolism of the *alin-dratsy* by laying with a wife with whom he did not normally sleep or whose ancestry was most dissimilar to his, and yet there was no reason to believe that any of his wives was considered illegitimate. Could it be, on the other hand, that Radama was purposely inverting the sequence of the *alin-dratsy* by sleeping with the permitted rather than the forbidden? Or was he simply choosing not to participate in the *alin-dratsy* or comment upon the chaos sequence and merely slumbered at the side of one of his lawful wives on the night after his bath restored sexual order to the kingdom?

While answers to the foregoing questions will likely elude us, Radama's arrangement of an intimate evening between Hastie and his senior wife must have spoken to highland Malagasy with greater clarity because it was timed to coincide with the first evening of the new year (10 August), which was unambiguously inside the social order segment of the *fandroana*. The symbolism of order associated with the first night of the new year, 1 Alahamady (10 August), required all domestic members to be properly distributed within their publicly recognized households and for sexual activity to conform to principles of descent order and social status. Yet on the evening of 1 Alahamady (10 August) Radama abandoned Hastie to all eleven of his wives and retired into a house within the *rova* while the convivial party progressed from royal house to house (these were apparently the houses of Radama's wives) partaking of a local delicacy, blood-boiled liver, and sipping cognac. While Radama presumably slumbered alone, Hastie bedded with the king's senior wife. It was a ritualized scandal, for it flipped the chaos and order sequences of the *fandroana*. Let us return to the *Tantara* texts to more fully appreciate this inversion of ritual sequence. The following passages refer to the transition in the *fandroana* from the old year and the *alin-dratsy* (the chaos sequence) to the new year and the necessity of returning to one's household (the order sequence) simply as 'the bathing' or 'the bathing of the people.' Recall that 'the bathing of the people' was performed the morning after the sovereign's bath within individual households and that it brought domestic members back from a night of social-sexual license.³⁹

For the customs of the ancestors of old [i.e. the *fandroana* customs] have a name: there is a day called the 'day of purchasing' for there are none who do not return home.⁴⁰ Whether people have offended, whether a spouse has run away, one does not disregard the bathing of the people, for the 'bad night' arrives and everyone awakes and runs away again in the morning, afraid of the place where living is not endured; the 'relationship' is no longer endured so it is parted from.⁴¹

If the bathing is disregarded on the day of purchasing, according to the rulers of old, it will be counted among the twelve crimes, among the crimes that killed one according to the transgressions of old.

Fa misy anarana ny fomba ny ntaolo taloha, fa misy atao hoe andro vidina, fa tsy misy tsy mody any an-trano; na olona manankeloka, na vady misintaka, tsy manary fandroan'olona, fa avy ny fanaovan'alin-dratsy miaramifo ha ka mandositra indray izy raha maraina, atahorana toerana tsy zaka ny fonenana, efa tsy zaka intsony ny fanambadiana ka ialana:

'Raha toa manary fandroana amy ny andro vidina, hoy ny andriana taloha, atao ko isa ny heloka 12, isa ny mahafaty azy amy ny heloka tsy tiany ny teo aloha.'

These *Tantara* texts are remarkably articulate about the importance of observing 'the bathing of the people' through a return of wayward spouses and other individuals to their socially recognized households. In light of this sensitivity to the sexual-social ethic of the *fandroana*, the otherwise unremarkable action of Radama leaving a court visitor to be entertained by his wives assumes especial significance. Retiring alone while arranging for Hastie to publicly visit his wives on the first night of the new year (it is ambiguous from Hastie's journal language but the progressive dinner may have taken place outside the walls of the *rova*),⁴² Radama organized a party maladapted to the symbolic and practical requirements of the ritual. When 'read' against the symbolic structures of an 'ideal' *fandroana*, the progressive party arranged by the king invoked the sexual disorder sequence a full day after Radama had performed the bath and restored order to the kingdom. It was a notable inversion of ritual sequence, an innovation. Yet Radama had not abandoned the ritual expectations his subjects anticipated from him, he had merely performed the *fandroana* in an innovative fashion. Through his ritual choreography Radama had held the equivalent of a modern press conference, informing his subjects of late breaking diplomatic news. Hastie's intimacy with Radama's wives—and his senior wife in particular—was a ritually meaningful 'sign in action.'⁴³ It is unlikely that Radama's

purpose in organizing the sequence inversion was simply innovation for the sake of demonstrating a disrespect for royal ritual. It was a creative public demonstration of how seriously he sought an international alliance and revealed how generously he intended to entertain foreign envoys at his court. The alliance with Britain would turn certain of Andrianampoinimerina's recently invented customs on their head and entail transformations, or inversions, of existing cultural practice. It was no coincidence that Hastie's participation in the 1817 *fandroana* scripted the envoy's intimacy with highland Malagasy royalty, for despite his nationality Hastie soon became Radama's most trusted and familiar advisor.

Radama's choreography of the 1817 *fandroana* can also be read as a cautious means by which Radama continued to publicly float his new politics of international alliance and his plans for replacing the *namana* with his own advisors and military leaders (a sort of political inversion). Although we have little evidence of resistance beyond the close circle of the *namana* to Radama's new politics in 1817, it is clear from Hastie's reports and from those of British missionaries who lived in Antananarivo beginning in 1820 that the young sovereign faced widespread popular opposition to many of the transformations he effectuated between 1820 and his untimely death in 1828.⁴⁴ Radama was cognizant of these challenges and was particularly skillful at finding a way to test the political waters before proceeding with his initiatives. Micromanagement of ritual symbolism such as that of the 1817 *fandroana* was part of Radama's public communication and royal politics. Unafraid to apply force when publicly challenged (as by the women who opposed his newfangled hair-cutting practices in April 1822), Radama nevertheless preferred to proceed in his transformations of highland society and politics without soliciting the open disapproval of his public. In the end Radama stripped the *namana* from his entourage, a success attributable to his skill at navigating treacherous waters with cultural tact and political dexterity. Along with Hastie, he replaced the *namana* with European and Malagasy counselors, most of whom had little political standing within central Imerina. By doing so Radama matured into a reign of his own. He was successful not because he abandoned highland Malagasy cultural traditions for a bourgeois modernity but because, like his father, he skillfully employed highland Malagasy cultural symbolism and ritual to set his politics firmly within a highland Malagasy cultural logic.

'The King Himself is But a Ceremony': Radama and Highland Malagasy Culture

Both French and English historians have interpreted Radama as a Malagasy sovereign particularly keen for things European. In this understanding of the young monarch, the cultural choices facing Radama have been perceived as 'all or nothing' prospects in which the king chose to replace outmoded highland Malagasy practices with modern European ones. This historiographic tradition began to crystallize even before the death of Radama in 1828 and emerged from the writings of the king's European admirers and contemporaries who saw in Radama an instrument by which they might 'civilize' (i.e. Europeanize) the highland Malagasy. The portrait they painted of Radama was one of a ruler openly skeptical of much highland Malagasy religious and cultural practice. Some concluded that Radama had abandoned his cultural heritage, claiming that he disbelieved and even despised fundamental highland concepts of kingship, blessing, and fertility. After a seven-month residence at Antananarivo, for example, LMS missionary David Jones commented optimistically in one of his letters that

Radama says that he does not believe in the superstitions and fooleries of his people, but that he conforms to some of them as they are the customs of the country over which he is king, and that he does not wish to encourage them by any means; also that it is very difficult to make his people to leave off divination, polygamy &c., &c. at once: but that these things will be done away by degrees as their minds are enlightened; and says he, I hope that a great change will be seen among my people in twenty years longer.⁴⁵

André Coppalle, a French painter who lived for some time in Antananarivo, noted in his travel diary that Radama cynically commented one day that royal rituals were but bothersome 'political institutions fit to govern children of all ages.'⁴⁶

Drawing upon the same evidence, nineteenth and twentieth century scholars have similarly portrayed Radama as a progressive monarch struggling against the religious, social, and cultural traditions of his people to install a western-style modernization.⁴⁷ The *Tantara ny Andriana*, an edition of Malagasy language historical and ethnographic texts collected by a French Jesuit priest in the mid-nineteenth century, even suggest that Radama did not believe in the power of the *sampy*, or royal talismen. Criticized one day by the keeper of *sampy* Rakelimalaza, Radama is recounted to have been furious and to have publicly shouted that only he was *andriamanitra* (god) and not the *sampy*.⁴⁸

There is a grain of truth in this historiographic tradition. Although the international sophistication of Andrianampoinimerina is seldom

appreciated by *malgachisants*, Radama was more interested and adept than his father was in conducting himself among the intellectual and material cultures of Europe. As a result of Andrianampoinimerina's international training of Radama and the young man's frequent interactions with French slave traders at his father's court, Radama was at ease and predisposed to adopt elements of the increasingly globalized culture of enlightenment Europe, especially if such adoptions would effectively contribute to his quest for personal power. Radama did make occasional comments to his European acquaintances questioning the logic of highland cultural and religious practices, but his abandonment of things Malagasy has been overdrawn. While European missionaries, merchants, and political emissaries wanted to claim a sense of shared bourgeois rationality with Radama or to see him as an instrument of their designs for the so-called 'civilization' of Madagascar, Radama had his own aims and a domestic constituency to please, negotiate with, and rule. Despite his assistance to British missionaries as a condition of the political alliance he concluded with Governor Farquhar's agents, for example, and his desire to claim the technology of writing for his army, Radama never expressed a personal interest in Christianity. Throughout his reign, Radama consulted frequently with diviners (the *sikidy*) and healers at his court.⁴⁹ He was careful to perform royal rituals at the appointed times, demonstrated by his elaborate thanksgivings at the tomb of his father at Ambohimanga on 12 January 1818, as reported by Hastie who accompanied him on that occasion.⁵⁰

Hastie similarly reports that Radama responded to the ritual expectations of a king at times of crisis by distributing charms (*ody*). This, for example, he did in early 1818 when a smallpox epidemic ravaged Antananarivo and its environs.⁵¹ The *tangena* poison ordeal that Radama supposedly abolished was in fact employed at the king's orders away from European eyes.⁵² A history of royalty and religion during highland Madagascar's early nineteenth century must therefore consider the nature of Radama's participation in rituals of royalty rather than his abandonment of them. For Radama, as for his father, ceremony was a defining feature of kingship. Emissaries of the London Missionary Society resident in Antananarivo after 1820 conceded this fact when they observed of the young monarch in a collective publication that he believed 'no ceremony should be deemed a trifle, since the king himself is but a ceremony.'⁵³

Radama was an adroit cultural broker, a man in the social middle who sought new directions for his kingdom in alignment with European imperial powers. At the same time he was constrained to employ cultural

languages and symbols that his subjects understood. Despite a common perception to the contrary, this was not a role altogether foreign to his father Andrianampoinimerina. Usually conceptualized as a traditionalist who would admit of no European influence among his people, the founder king was the most successful of highland Malagasy rulers of the late eighteenth century at attracting and retaining alliances with Europeans from Madagascar's east coast and in modifying royal ritual. If in comparison to Andrianampoinimerina Radama was cynical about rituals of royalty, he was equally skillful at employing them to strategic purposes as his father had been.⁵⁴ Radama seized and transformed the available ritual symbolism of his day. By doing so he was not abandoning Malagasy culture but creatively charting elements of the European cultures closing in about him into highland Malagasy consciousnesses. These cultural initiatives were understood—although not necessarily approved—by his subjects. Radama foundered in highland Malagasy opinion following the British alliance not because he tampered with immutable highland Malagasy cultural traditions nor because he brokered Malagasy and European cultures, but because he cleverly and effectively communicated an increasingly exploitative and unpopular politics through royal ritual symbolism.

NOTES

* I would like to thank Jennifer Cole, Sheryl McCurdy, Karen Middleton and Amy Stambach for invaluable comments on previous drafts of this article. Abbreviations utilized in this article: *Tantara* = François Callet (ed.) *Tantara ny Andriana eto Madagascar: Documents historiques d'après les manuscrits malgaches* Deuxième Édition (Antananarivo: Trano Pirintim-Pirenena, 1981). *HOM* = William Ellis (ed.) *History of Madagascar, Comprising also The Progress of the Christian Mission Established in 1818 and an Authentic Account of the Persecution and Recent Martyrdom of the Native Christians* (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1838), 2 vols. MNA/HB/10/2/27-28 = Mauritius National Archives (Coromandel), Series HB, Volume 10, Number 2, pp. 27-28. LMS/1/2/C = Archives of the Council for World Mission (former London Missionary Society), Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (London), Madagascar, Incoming Letters, Box 1, Folder 2, Jacket C. BL/MD/Add.Mss./18137/16r = British Library, Manuscripts Division, Additional Manuscript 18137, folio 16r.

1. Highland Madagascar, central Madagascar and Imerina are employed synonymously throughout this article. Imerina once comprised only a small area around Antananarivo (before the very late eighteenth century), but now designates the entire modern Province of Antananarivo. I employ the modern definition of Imerina throughout this article. Similarly, by 'highland Malagasy' I designate the ancestors of people now known as Merina. The highland Malagasy kingdom in question, then, is conventionally known by the ethnonym of its people—the Merina kingdom. For a history of Imerina as toponym and Merina as ethnonym see Pier M. Larson, 'Desperately Seeking "The Merina"' (Central Madagascar): Reading Ethnonyms and their Semantic Fields in African Identity Histories' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22,4 (1996). For a general introduction

to the history of central Madagascar during the early nineteenth century see Mervyn Brown, *Madagascar Rediscovered: A History from Early Times to Independence* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1979), and Michel Prou, *Malagasy 'Un Pas de plus': Vers l'histoire du 'Royaume de Madagascar' au XIX^e siècle*, I, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987).

2. Radama I reigned from 1810 until his death in 1828. I heretofore refer to him simply as Radama, distinguishing him from king Radama II, who ruled from 1861 until his assassination in 1863.

3. For histories of Andrianampoinimerina, the founder of Radama's kingdom, see Jean Valette, 'Pour une histoire du règne d'Andrianampoinimerina (1787-1810),' *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* 52,2 (1965), No. 187, 277-285; Hubert Deschamps, 'Andrianampoinimerina, ou la raison d'état au service de l'unité malgache' in C.-A. Julien (ed.) *Les Africains* (Paris: Editions Jeune Afrique, 1977), II, 77-97; Hubert Deschamps, 'Tradition and Change in Madagascar, 1790-1870' in J.E. Flint (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Africa* Volume 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 393-417. Histories of Radama conventionally begin in about 1816 with the British alliance and ignore Radama's early years of struggle for influence at his own court between 1810 and that time.

4. The Mascarene islands were comprised of two principal islands, Mauritius and Bourbon (now Réunion), each lying some 900 kilometers east of the central coast of Madagascar. Since the first European occupation of the islands (there was no indigenous population) Madagascar was an important source of both food and slave labor. For a history of the economic relationships between Madagascar and the Mascarenes see Auguste Toussaint, *Histoire des îles Mascariques* (Paris: Berger-Levrault 1972). For the slave trade specifically see J.M. Filliot, *La traite des esclaves vers les Mascariques au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: ORSTOM, 1974).

5. See Anthony J. Barker, *Slavery and Anti-Slavery in Mauritius, 1810-33: The Conflict Between Economic Expansion and Humanitarian Reform Under British Rule* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

6. For examples of such narratives see *HOM*, II, 144-198; Jean Valette, *Études sur le règne de Radama I^{er}* (Tananarive: Imprimerie Nationale, 1962); Hubert Deschamps, *Histoire de Madagascar* (Paris: Berger Levrault, 1972); Hubert Deschamps, 'Tradition and Change in Madagascar, 1790-1870' in *Cambridge History of Africa* Volume 5 (1976), 393-417; Ludvig Munthe, Charles Ravoajanahary and Simon Ayache, 'Radama I et les Anglais: les négociations de 1817 d'après les sources malgaches ("sorabe" inédits)' *Omalv sy Anio* No. 3-4 (1976), 9-102; Jean Valette, 'Radama I, The Unification of Madagascar and the Modernization of Imerina (1810-1828)' in Raymond K. Kent (ed.) *Madagascar in History: Essays from the 1970s* (Albany: The Foundation for Malagasy Studies, 1979), 168-196; Michel Prou, *Malagasy un pas de plus: le royaume de Madagascar au XIX^e siècle*, (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1987), 43-45; Françoise Raison-Jourde, *Bible et pouvoir à Madagascar au XIX^e siècle: invention d'une identité chrétienne et construction de l'état (1780-1880)* (Paris: Karthala, 1991), 113-126; Pierre Vérin, *Madagascar* (Paris: Karthala, 1994), 91-99.

7. Gilbert Ratsivalaka has recently revealed that Andrianampoinimerina is likely to have sojourned in Mauritius as a child. Gilbert Ratsivalaka, *Madagascar dans le sud-ouest de l'Océan Indien (circa 1500-1824): pour une relecture de l'histoire de Madagascar* Thèse pour l'obtention du doctorat d'état, Université de Nice, 1995, I, 153-155.

8. Journal of Chardenoux, BL/MD/18129/157-76. The citation is from Jean Valette's published version of this journal: 'La mission de Chardenoux auprès de Radama I^{er} (1816)' *Bulletin de Madagascar* No. 207 (1963), 691-692. Evidence of Farquhar's early interest in Madagascar can be found in the collection of the Governor's papers relating to the history, culture, language, politics, economy and natural resources of Madagascar now located in the British Library Manuscripts Division (Additional Manuscripts 18117-18141—the Farquhar Papers).

9. The preceding two paragraphs are based on chapter six of my forthcoming book: Pier M. Larson, *Identities of a Crisis: The Slave Trade, Gender and the Rise of Merina Ethnic Identity in central Madagascar, 1770-1822*. For a mid-nineteenth century narrative of these events consult *HOM*, II, 144-256.

10. The foregoing conclusions are based upon what James Hastie wrote in his journal, an account of his perceptions and activities kept both for his own interest and for the purpose of documenting his activities in Madagascar for Governor Farquhar of Mauritius. James Hastie's journals from Madagascar were written in English. Copies of fragments of these journals, each covering a period of a few to several months, can be found in various places in the Public Record Office (London) among the dispatches of the Governor of Mauritius to the Colonial Office and in the National Archives of Mauritius (Coromandel). The version of James Hastie's diary that covers the period of the *fandroana* of 1817 (this particular journal fragment runs from 6 August 1817 through 1 September 1817) is a French translation from an English language manuscript that I have been unable to locate (Gwyn Campbell footnotes an English language 1817 journal of Hastie in the Public Record Office, series CO/167/34, but I have been unable to locate such a journal in that volume or verify its precise dates: Gwyn Campbell, 'The Structure of Trade in Madagascar, 1750-1810' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26,1 (1993), 118, n. 18). The French translation employed in this article was published by the Académie Malgache in 1903 for the interest of its members but without indication of who was in possession of the original manuscript: James Hastie, 'Le voyage de Tananarive en 1817: Manuscrit de James Hastie' *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache* vol. 2, 3^e trimestre (1903), 173-178. Quotations pertaining to dates other than 6 August 1817 through 1 September 1817 are from English manuscript versions of Hastie's diaries and are fully cited where employed. Hereafter specific pages of the 1817 journal published by the Académie Malgache are cited only where lengthy or particularly important quotations from it are placed in the text. For criticisms of the methods and procedures employed by the Académie Malgache to publish French versions of Hastie's English journals see Jean Valette, 'Etude sur les journaux de James Hastie (1816-1826)' *Bulletin de Madagascar* No. 259 (1967), 977-986, and Jean Vallette, 'Réflexions pour une édition des journaux d'Hastie' *Bulletin de Madagascar* No. 264 (1968), 472-474.

11. Entry for 8 August 1817, p. 174. His informant may well have been one of Radama's two younger brothers who had spent several months with Hastie in Mauritius during 1817. These young men, Ratafika and Rahovy, are mentioned below in the text.

12. Approaches to cultural encounter in European expansion take a variety of forms and operate through different paradigms. See, for example, Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987); Ranajit Guha & Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981); Stuart B. Schwartz, 'Expansion, Diaspora, and Encounter in the Early Modern South Atlantic' *Itinerario* 19,2 (1995), 48-59; Stuart B. Schwartz (ed.), *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

13. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 197-221; Gyan Prakash, 'Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism' *American Historical Review* 99,5 (1994), 1475-1490.

14. Unless otherwise noted, all information in this section comes from the previously cited Académie Malgache edition of Hastie's 1817 diary.

15. *HOM*, II, 173-4. This scene is also described, although with less color, in Hastie's journal, 9 August 1817, p. 175. Because none of the missionaries accompanied Hastie in 1817 this passage and others treating Hastie's sojourn in Antananarivo in 1817 printed in *HOM* (principally *HOM*, II, 159-201) most plausibly derive from some version of Hastie's journal, not an independent source or third party.

16. Information for the first two paragraphs of this section comes from James Hastie, 'Le voyage de Tananarive en 1817: Manuscrits de James Hastie,' *Bulletin de l'Académie*

Malgache 2, 2^e trimestre (1903), 91-114. This journal fragment covers 19 July 1817 through 5 August 1817.

17. Hastie journal, 9 August 1817, pp. 175-176.

18. Modern orthography: Andriamanitra.

19. Hastie journal, 10 August 1817, pp. 176-177.

20. Maurice Bloch, 'The Ritual of the Royal Bath in Madagascar: The Dissolution of Death, Birth and Fertility into Authority' in David Cannadine and Simon Price, (eds.) *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 271-297.

21. Bloch, 'Ritual of the Royal Bath,' 284.

22. Bloch, 'Ritual of the Royal Bath,' 293. I have omitted Bloch's designation of 'funeral,' 'blessing,' and 'resolution' sequences from the illustration because they are not relevant to the present argument.

23. Because of the day's salutary associations, Andrianampoinimerina, Radama, and Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony all claimed to have been born on 1 Alahamady.

24. 'Then, in the middle of the night, came the bath itself at the very moment of the turn of the year.' Bloch, 'Ritual of the Royal Bath,' 280.

25. In this way the ritual symbolism of the new year paralleled the symbolism of the rise of a new king. Historical traditions hold that on the evening Andrianampoinimerina felt his death to be near he issued orders for Radama to be confined in the royal house called *Masoandro* (the sun) inside the court at Antananarivo. Only at daybreak, after a night of mourning, did Radama emerge from *Masoandro* to reign as a new sun over the kingdom. See *HOM*, I, 100.

26. Unmarried adolescents, conceptualized as those who are in between generations, vital yet lacking domestic commitments. See Maurice Bloch, *From Blessing to Violence: History and Ideology in the Circumcision Ritual of the Merina of Madagascar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 56-57.

27. *Masina* is a word of complex and multiple significances. For a critique of the historiography of *masina* and its substantive, *hasina*, see Pier M. Larson, 'Multiple Histories, Gendered Voices: Remembering the Past in Highland Central Madagascar' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 28,2 (1995), 305-309.

28. Bloch suggests (p. 282) that this occurred the same night following the sovereign's bath but in practice it usually took place during the following day, the first day of Alahamady.

29. Many people moved in and out of the walls of the *rova* daily. The tremendous influence that 'private' events within the *rova* could have for the people of the kingdom is perhaps best illustrated by the 'secret' baptism of Queen Ranaivalona II and Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony in 1869. Details of the baptism became widely known, and the event touched off a mass of conversions to Christianity during the ensuing months. Raison-Jourde, *Bible et pouvoir à Madagascar*, 296-306.

30. *Tantara*, 673, 760, 932.

31. B. Hugon, 'Aperçu de mon dernier voyage à ANCOVA de l'an 1808,' BL/MD/Add.Mss./18137/16r.

32. Hastie employs the term 'captain' in his journal to refer specifically to Radama's highest military officers. See, for example, Hastie's entry for 7 August 1817 where the British envoy explains that Brady, a British officer serving Radama, was no longer a soldier but had been promoted to a 'captain.' (Brady was considered a 'general' of the army and was in charge of training elite troops in European military techniques.) Later in the entry for that day, Hastie indicates that the deliberations about the slave trade in the western Indian Ocean took place in Hastie's quarters, which were full of people, 'among which were all his captains.' It is clear from this passage that by the term 'captains' Hastie meant to distinguish Radama's highest officers and counselors from lower level members of his entourage.

33. A particularly poignant example of opposition to Radama's cultural politics

occurred when in mid-April 1822 thousands of women from Avaradrano protested Radama's decision to shear off his plaits and wear his hair short in the European military fashion. Radama put an end to the protest by shaving the hair of several women he identified as protest leaders, having them publicly executed, and leaving their bodies to be devoured by wild dogs. See Larson, *Identities of a Crisis*, chapter seven.

34. European slave traders who traveled and conducted their business in Madagascar commonly entered into sexual and commercial relationships with Malagasy women, often called *vadim-bazaha* (European spouses). It was not the fact of sexual contact that was remarkable about Hastie's tryst with Radama's senior wife, but the timing of that relationship during the *fandroana*, the differing social and national statuses of the sexual partners (in that ritual context), and the fact that it is the only documented case in which the wife of a highland Malagasy king ever bedded with a foreigner.

35. All quotations from this document below are from *Tantara*, 167-168.

36. *Andriana*, *havanandriana*, *hova* and *andevo* were each distinct social classes or castes of highland Malagasy who were—ideally—not to intermarry or to have sexual inter-relationships.

37. The phrase 'heart not enduring' here refers to the weeks of prohibition on slaughtering livestock during the last part of Alohotsy. Although most highland Malagasy did not regularly eat beef during the early nineteenth century, the ban was considered a symbolic and physical deprivation that the heart could scarcely endure, to be contrasted with the generosity of the sovereign with the gift of beef during the morning of the first day of Alahamady. The narrator here draws a parallel between deprivation of rich foods as part of the *fandroana* ritual sequence and deprivation of cross-social group sexual appetite that can only be fulfilled during the *alin-dratsy*.

38. The color symbolism in this sentence refers to the common association of people of low status (principally but not exclusively *andevo*, slaves) with black and those of high status (principally *hova* and *andriana*) with white.

39. These passages are among the 'elided paragraphs' in the texts presented above.

40. I translate *andro vidina* here as the 'day of purchasing,' for the phrase (properly translated 'the purchased day') most likely refers to the fact that the last day of Alohotsy was, as we have seen, the day during which highland Malagasy rendered small payments of silver called *vidy aina* (the price of life) to the sovereign. It is likely that the orthography *vidina* employed here simply assumed the de-emphasized 'a' sound inserted between the final 'i' and the 'n' in *vidiana*. The most likely interpretation here is that the author is emphasizing that it is following the day of paying *vidy aina*, the last day of Alohotsy, that lovers must return to their socially recognized domestic units.

41. The Malagasy word translated as 'relationship' here is *fanambadiana*. While *fanambadiana* today designates the legal marital relationship between a man and a woman, its nineteenth century connotations were considerably less tied to legal definitions and referred more to a range of loving and cohabiting relationships.

42. At the conclusion of the progressive dinner, Hastie writes: 'While entering the palace court, the oldest of the wives said to me that the king had placed her under my guard and that in the evening she was to visit at my quarters.' By 'while entering the palace court,' Hastie may either be referring to entering a certain part of the *rova* from Radama's wives' houses also inside the enclosure, or he may mean that the party entered the *rova* after having spent the afternoon-evening outside of it. It is unlikely that all of Radama's wives lived within the *rova*.

43. Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*.

44. Larson, *Identities of a Crisis*, chapter six.

45. David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Antananarivo, 3 May 1821: LMS/1/2/C.

46. A. Coppalle, *Voyage à la capitale du roi Radama 1825-1826* (Tanarive: Association Malgache d'Archéologie), 1970, 56.

47. See citations in note 6.

48. Tsy misy andriamanitra fa izaho no andriamanitra, hoy izy. *Tantara*, 1104.

49. See, for example, Journal of Barnsley from 12 December 1821 to 30 June 1822: MNA/HB/7/87/205. Barnsley's entry for 11 January 1822 indicates that he (as temporary British envoy to Antananarivo) attempted to see Radama that day but that Radama was busily engaged with diviners all day long. See also *HOM*, II, 251.

50. Journal of James Hastie from 14 November 1817 to 19 May 1818: Entry for 12 January 1818: MNA/HB/10/2/19-23.

51. Journal of James Hastie from 14 November 1817 to 19 May 1818: Entry for 9 January 1818: MNA/HB/10/2/19-23.

52. Journal of James Hastie from 14 November 1817 to 19 May 1818: Entries for 17 February 1818 and 18 February 1818: MNA/HB/10/2/27-28.

53. *HOM*, I, 101-2.

54. For the little we know, Andrianampoinimerina could have been of similar personal disposition toward royal ritual. For excellent studies of Andrianampoinimerina's innovation and management of royal ritual see Gerald Berg, 'The Sacred Musket: Tactics, Technology, and Power in Eighteenth-Century Madagascar' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27,2 (1985), 261-279, and Gerald Berg, 'Sacred Acquisition: Andrianampoinimerina at Ambohimanga, 1777-1790' *Journal of African History* 29,2 (1988), 191-211.