

Tricoire, Damien: *Der koloniale Traum. Imperiales Wissen und die französisch-madagassischen Begegnungen im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*. Köln: Böhlau Verlag 2018. ISBN: 978-3-412-51131-9; 408 S.

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1st of October 1895: with the conquest of the island accomplished, Madagascar becomes a French protectorate. As such, the French Republic realizes the *Colonial Dream* of the French Kingdom that dominated a part of the intellectual and political elite during more than 150 years. It is exactly this period that „Der koloniale Traum“ by Damien Tricoire analyses. Even before reading this work, it merits congratulations to the author, who’s academic background is quite far from French colonial history. Indeed, Tricoire, after having concentrated on East European History during the Modern Age, has decided to study the French History of Madagascar. And this has not stopped him in delivering a remarkable study.

This publication aims at understanding the importance of the Island of Madagascar in the conceptualization of the colonial adventure by the French élite in the eighteenth century: „Seine Geschichte ist nicht nur für eine Analyse der Letzt gescheiterten Versuche einer Kolonialexpansion auf der Großen Insel relevant, sondern liefert auch Einblicke in die Aufklärungsgeschichte, die Französische Eliten auf der Welt in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts zuschrieben. (pp. 16-17)“. It wants to make a meaningful contribution to both colonial and global history as well as to the history of science and Enlightenment. Tricoire proposes an approach at three levels: micro, a case study on Madagascar, meso, its place within the French colonial empire, and finally macro, the role of Enlightenment in colonial history (p. 17).

The book is divided in two parts, the first provides a detailed, chronological account of the French colonization attempts on Madagascar from 1643 to 1823. Here it focuses notably on the interactions between the French and the Malagasy, especially the Maudave and Beniovsky expeditions. This is continu-

ally put in perspective of the political and scientific situation in the metropole. In the second part, the theoretical background of the colonization process is further developed and analysed. With specific attention to the production of knowledge on Madagascar and its diffusion within the French government influencing the colonization attempts.

In an effective way, Tricoire shows that there was a very wide gap between the imaginary plans of the colonizers and the existing reality of Madagascar during the French colonization. A military and political presence was doomed to fail, mostly due to the Malagasy opposition and the unhealthy climate (p. 228), leaving only commercial outposts to subsist. He gives a detailed analysis of what he called the „Madagaskardiskurs“, which represents the reports in favour of a French colonization of Madagascar (p. 324-328). As such, it underlines the role of Enlightenment and its link with political elite who heard what they wanted to hear (p. 284).

This study is based on extensive archival research analysing a multitude of poorly known documents, especially the journal of Maudave and the individual files in the *Archives nationales d’outre-mer*. The list of manuscript reports is impressive, but it would have been interesting to see the connections between the different documents: do they repeat themselves? Are some better diffused than others? Do the manuscripts found in the *dépôt des colonies* have had more influence than those that circulated outside of the political elite. What does the presence of multiple copies by the same author says?

His conclusion states that all the five colonization attempts of the French on Madagascar, faced the same reticence from the local Malagasy elite who embraced commerce with Europeans, but feared their military presence (p. 355). The „Madagaskardiskurs“, which followed similar lines through the period studied, is strongly linked to the Enlightenment Age, especially after the takeover by the French Crown of the Mascarene Islands after the demise of the *Compagnie des Indes* (pp. 358-359). The question rises concerning the originality of Tricoires’ work in the field of Madagascar studies. The author states that Madagascar has been largely neglected in re-

cent research. While this is certainly true in general, several excellent studies exist. Especially the PhD thesis of Gilbert Ratsivalaka, well known among *malgachisants*, focuses on the same abortive French colonization attempts analysed by Tricoire, and is also based on a large number of archival documents.[1] Thus, it is well known how and why the five French colonization attempts between the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century failed. And while the comparative aspect is certainly innovative, one might ask if the different regions and time periods can really be compared. It might have been better to concentrate even more on the real contribution of this study: placing the colonization of Madagascar within the larger context of the French Enlightenment and colonization theory of the Modern Age. Another reflection imposes itself: we regret the use of often dated literature concerning the history of Madagascar, by Kent, Vérin and Lombard, whose analyses has been surpassed since by new insights from Larson, Berger, Sanchez.¹ This might be due to his new arrival in the field of Madagascar studies. He also makes some small factual errors. The date of the massacre of the French on Nosy Bohara, for example, is known (p. 82): it happened on September 14th 1750.² Also the successor of Zakavola (p. 197), Sasy, is well documented in Madagascar history.³ Furthermore: the exact role of La Bigorne remains unknown and has been subject to much speculation.

Furthermore, Tricoire might have overestimated the political role in the colonization attempts of the Big Island: the economic importance and continuous commercial link with the French Mascarenes is crucial in the attitude of the French towards Madagascar. As such, the history of Madagascar cannot be dissociated from the French Mascarenes, especially the role of its colonial elite. We should not forget that these philosophes like Poivre and Maudave were also involved in the slave trade. Because trade was the principal motive for the French to interact with Madagascar, it would have been appreciated if the author would have invested a bit more time in the commercial interactions between the French Mascarenes and the Big Island; also the changes of political regimes on the Mas-

carene Islands changed the attitude.

To resume, Tricoire has provided a remarkable study of French colonialization in one of the corners of the world. It is one of the few and precious books in German that deals with the island of Madagascar during the Modern Age. As such he convincingly shows the reasons which were at the basis of the costly failures of so many colonisation attempts. In the process he also underlines the blindness of the French elite and their consequent confidence in expeditions that were doomed to fail from the beginning. In 1776, one of the French commissaries that evaluated the ailing colony of Benyowsky, suggested that the King should write above the door of his cabinet: «*Celui qui entrera icy avec le projet de former une colonie de mes sujets à Madagascar et qui osera me le présenter sera exilé sur ladite Isle le reste de ses jours*». ⁴

Rafaël THIÉBAUT über Tricoire, Damien: *Der koloniale Traum. Imperiales Wissen und die französisch-madagassischen Begegnungen im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*. Köln 2018, in: H-Soz-Kult 11.09.2020.

¹ Pier M. Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement. Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822*, Oxford 2000; Laurant Berger, *Les raisons de la colère des ancêtres Zafinifotsy (Ankaraña, Madagascar)*. *L'anthropologie au défi de la mondialisation*, PhD Thesis, Paris EHESS 2006; Samuel F. Sanchez, *Le long XIXe siècle de Nosy Be et de la baie d'Ampasindava (Nord-Ouest de Madagascar)*. *Dynamiques malgaches et mondialisations dans un comptoir du Sud-Ouest de l'océan Indien*, PhD Thesis, Université Paris VII 2013.

² Christian G. Mantoux / Harold Adolphe, *Documents officiels inédits sur Élisabeth Marie Sobobie Betia. Reine de Sainte-Marie de Madagascar et du royaume de Foulpointe*, in: *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache* 50 (1972) 1, p. 78.

³ Rafael Thiebaut, *Traite des esclaves et commerce néerlandais et français à Madagascar (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, PhD Thesis, Université Paris 1 & Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam 2017.

⁴ Lettre de Bellecombe au Ministre, Foulpointe, 15.10.1776; Note sur la mort de Benyowsky, s.d.n.l. Archives nationales d'outre-mer, COL, C3/17, #18 & C5A/8, p. 248.