
As Claude Allibert points out in his introduction to this re-edition of a book first published in 1658, there are still many documents on the earlier history of Madagascar waiting to be discovered, or at least to be systematically exploited by historians (p. 15). By the same token, there is a great deal to be discovered about the early history of Madagascar (and no doubt other parts of Africa) by a careful re-reading of some early travellers’ accounts, especially if they are edited with attention to the minutiae of the text and original maps and illustrations, due regard for the early orthography of proper names, and so forth. Such is the case with this new edition of the history of Madagascar written by ÉTIENNE DE FLACOURT, the governor of a French colony at the southern tip of the island, who lived in Madagascar from 1648 to 1655 and died at sea, en route to Madagascar, in 1660.

FLACOURT’s text has long been well-known to scholars of Madagascar. Twice published in the seventeenth century, reprinted as part of a nine-volume anthology by Granddier père et fils in 1913, it has been widely used, and sometimes plagiarised, by other writers. But these earlier editions of FLACOURT have become difficult to find. It is thus most welcome to have a new edition, and even more so presented with such meticulous scholarship as this version which contains an introductory essay of 80-odd pages, 180 pages of notes and bibliography, and no less than six indexes. The introduction alone constitutes an important essay on Madagascar’s place in the maritime history of the seventeenth century. M. ALLIBERT is to be congratulated on an achievement which must have taken years of painstaking toil.

The book which FLACOURT wrote after his return to France was divided into two parts, one dealing with the history, geography, ethnography and flora and fauna of Madagascar, the second dealing with the troubled history of the settlement at Fort Dauphin which he governed on behalf of the Compagnie des Indes. The whole is a mine of information. FLACOURT is a major source on the early history of royal dynasties in Madagascar, most notably the ZafiRaminina, and also of ethnographic data. His book also constitutes a major source for those interested in environmental history, and, of course, for historians of French maritime endeavour.

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Slave Captain relates the story of Captain James Irving, a Scot in the Liverpool slave trade, who, along with ten crew (including his cousin and namesake), was shipwrecked and enslaved in Morocco for 14 months in 1786-90. While in captivity, Irving wrote a 10,000-word journal of his experiences, a transcription of which was deposited anonymously in the Lancashire Record Office in 1977. Suzanne Schwarz reproduces this manuscript in section two, and corroborates its details through careful examination of shipping documents, the Irving’s personal correspondence and Foreign Office papers in the Public Record Office relating to British attempts to negotiate their freedom. The letters regarding Captain Irving’s slave-trade career and his later African captivity are reproduced in section three.

Schwarz’s introduction first places Irving’s career in the context of the late eighteenth-century British slave trade. We learn that Irving worked as surgeon on five Liverpool slave voyages before attaining command of a small slaving schooner