



Médecine et magie dans le Sud-Est de Madagascar - a book review

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Book Review

Médecine et magie dans le Sud-Est de Madagascar - Les devins-guérisseurs et l'usage des plantes. Philippe Beaujard. Ediciones SÉPIA, Paris 2024. 648 pp. Price: € 40.-, ISBN 979-10-334-0605-1, French.

Médecine et magie dans le Sud-Est de Madagascar - Les devins-guérisseurs et l'usage des plantes.. - "Medicine and magic in the South-East of Madagascar - Diviners-healers and the use of plants" presents the results of over twenty years of fieldwork of the author in the South-East of Madagascar, focusing especially on medicinal and magic plants of the region, but going far beyond a classical ethnobotanical study by analyzing the ritual context of plant use, and detailing herbal charms and preparations provided by local divine healers in two very distinct local ethnic groups, the Antemoro and Tañala. As such the volume does not only focus on ethnomedicinal treatments, but the entire social and ritual sphere of the local societies and the respective healers.

The work is divided into nine excellent chapters, and a very detailed glossary and index.

Chapter one provides the reader with a detailed description of the Antemoro and Tañala societies, their social and ritual systems, societal structure, geography, and a small outlook on societal changes during the long research period. Chapters two and three then provide the framework of status and function of the ritual healers in both societies and give an excellent context on ritual practices, while very importantly, chapter four introduces in detail into the system of nomenclature of maladies and ailments in both ethnic groups, allowing the reader a detailed knowledge of local terminology and its relation to the western medicinal terminology.

Chapter five could be described as the first "plant chapter". Here the author details all plant species used in remedies and for charms, providing local terminology for respective ailments, charms, preparations and the plants used in them, which can easily be referenced to the provided glossary and species list. Although very complete, here it would have been helpful to actually already mention the scientific names of all plant species to avoid the need to constantly searching the index, although it is understandable that this was avoided likely in order to make the volume shorter.

The following Chapters six and seven provide very detailed and separate descriptions of the charms used by divine healers in both ethnic groups, as well as a detailed description of the application, and the rituals involved. This does in fact represent tremendous work, detailing 547 charms for the Tañala, and 330 for the Antemoro, highlighting the surprising diversity of different indications, applications and employed materials, and underlining the tremendous diversity of religio-magic practice in Madagascar.

Chapter eight finally might be termed the "ethnobotanical" chapter where the author details all plant species employed. The list is alphabetical using local vernacular names and then references to scientific names and family names for all plant species. In addition, the exact use / application for each species is provided. To complete the overview, Beaujard also provides an additional list of animal species, some human parts (bones of infants that dies, nails, hair), and other substances employed in both societies.

Finally, a short chapter nine focuses on "witchcraft - the hidden violence" in the region, providing a short overview on practices deemed black magic and their space and application in society.

In his Epilogue Beaujard puts the practices into modern context and also highlights the Islamic and Christian traditions that over the decades have contributed to syncretic rituals not only in the research region but in all of Madagascar.

A comprehensive bibliography, a detailed glossary of local terms, and lists of scientific and vernacular names, the index of the volume, and photographs of important plants and practices complete the volume.

In **Médecine et magie dans le Sud-Est de Madagascar** Philippe Beaujard provides a very detailed overview on important plant use practices in Madagascar and also shows that anthropological research on the island has a very long tradition. One of the great strengths of the volume is the very careful and detailed combination of anthropological and ethnobotanical observation, also reflected in up-to-date botanical terminology. It is excellent to see that the volume is actually published in French, given that this is the lingua franca of Madagascar, one effect of the many local Malagasy dialects that are not always understandable to local societies in different parts of Madagascar. Thus, the volume not only repatriates local knowledge, but also can serve as a guidebook with which younger and older generations can interact. The non-francophone reader can easily translate the volume, given that it is available as pdf, and online translation tools are now commonplace.

Overall an excellent contribution to anthropology and ethnobotany not only for Madagascar, but the African continent in general, that should be part of many a reference collection.