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Abstracts

Claude Allibert

Austronesian Migration and the Establishment of the Malagasy Civilisation: Contrasted Readings in Linguistics, Archaeology, Genetics and Cultural Anthropology

This article reviews and contrasts research findings in a variety of disciplines seeking corroboration for theories of settlement in Madagascar. Evidence is considered from the fields of linguistics, archaeology (studies of pottery), cultural anthropology and genetic analysis, leading to conclusions broadly supporting the thesis of Austronesian migrations directly to Madagascar from Kalimantan and Sulawesi around the 5th and 7th centuries CE, which combined with a Bantu group originating from the region of Mozambique. The article nevertheless warns against attributing too much to individual discipline studies, concluding that only genetic analysis can provide conclusive proof, and this only when informed by prior anthropological and historical indicators.

Jean Baubérot

Cultural Transfer and National Identity in French Laicity

This article examines the development of the concept of laicity and its specific application within the French political, social and cultural context. In doing so it contends that, far from being a 'French exception' as is sometimes perceived in the media, laicity in France drew on concepts and practices already in place in other countries at the time of the 1905 legislation separating church and state. The article concludes by asserting a distinction between laicity and secularism, whereby the former emphasises the separation of the roles of state and religion within a nation, whereas the latter refers to the progressive loss of relevance of religion within a culture. The specific definition of laicity has been enshrined in a recent *International Declaration of Laicity in the 21st Century*.

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Mansura Haidar
Medical Works of the Medieval Period from India and Central Asia

Medical sciences have developed in India from time immemorial. This paper presents a detailed outlook of the development of these techniques in medieval India and Indo-Central Asia. The different authors, works and techniques of that time are recalled and compared in order to provide an overall view of this barely known tradition.

André Lemaire
The Spread of Alphabetic Scripts (*c.* 1700–500 BCE)

This article considers the origins of alphabetic writing, tracing its probable source to ancient Egypt, southern Levant or the Sinai during the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (17th century BCE). It supports the view that the earliest scripts were acrophonic representations of a West-Semitic language, whose use developed under the rule of the Hyksos in Egypt but was arrested there with the expulsion of this foreign dynasty at the end of the 16th century BCE. The development is then traced through the Levant, with particular attention given to the emergence of cuneiform alphabetic scripts in Ugarit (*c.* 1300 BCE). This form of writing disappeared with the fall of Ugarit, but linear alphabetic scripts were preserved in a variety of Near-Eastern languages, notably Aramaic and Phoenician. These two languages, by becoming *linguae francae* respectively of the Syria-northern Mesopotamia and the Anatolia-Eastern Mediterranean regions, brought about the spread of alphabetic writing up until the 8th century BCE. The article concludes by examining the influence of the Phoenician script on Greek, Etruscan and ultimately Latin forms of writing.

Chiwaki Shinoda
Melusine and Toyotamahime: Dissemination of a Culture by Sea

Japan's founding myth tells the story of a crocodile princess called Toyotamahime, wife of Prince Hoori. She asks her husband not to look at her as she gives birth, but he disobeys her and so sees that his wife is a crocodile. Finding out that she has been seen, the princess goes back to her country, that is, the bottom of the sea. The tale can be compared to the one about Melusine: in both stories there are common motifs such as the command not to look and disobeying the command, as well as the transformation into a reptile. Both stories are also tales about the founding of a royal house. This paper shows how Japanese myths, closely connected to maritime traditions, are at the crossroad of a cultural circulation extending from China and Korea to Indonesia, India, Arabia and Egypt. The chief actors in these stories are monkeys, hares, crocodiles or turtles.

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Jacques Michaux
The Mouse, Endemic Rodents and Human Settlement in the Canary Islands

This article postulates a method of determining the date of human settlement in the Canary Islands by establishing when species of mice, which are commensal with human beings and hence in all likelihood migrated with them, arrived in the archipelago. At the same time, the extinction of several species of endemic rodents may also correlate with such arrivals. The study establishes the outer limits for the arrival of the mouse species, between the 5th millennium BCE and the 15th century CE, but, while indicative archaeological evidence indicates human settlement was established by around the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, the absence of conclusive dating of fossil mice remains leaves a definitive conclusion for the start of such settlement still open.

John Rogister
Transmitting Knowledge in the 18th Century: The Case of Président de Brosses and Abate Antonio Niccolini

The 18th century in Europe is the ideal period to study the interaction of traditional beliefs and new ideas stemming from scientific observation and philosophical rationalization. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role played by Charles de Brosses and Antonio Niccolini in the process of transmission of knowledge coming through influential members of a European aristocracy that remained attached to traditional values. In fact, the rediscovery of the Classical heritage and its dissemination in print, albeit an expensive enterprise, was not deemed by men such as Niccolini and de Brosses as incompatible with their traditional religious beliefs. The unpublished correspondence between these two men provides the evidence for this claim. The two men exchanged information about the continental nature of Australasia, about the latest mathematical discoveries, about the origin of languages and on oriental religions. At the same time, their religious and political convictions remained firmly based on the received notions about religion and society.

Yu Liu
Transplanting a Different Gardening Style into England: Matteo Ripa and His Visit to London in 1724

In the second half of the 18th century, the naturalistically planted pleasure ground of England came to be known in France as *le jardin anglo-chinois*. What the French saw as the Oriental connection of the English landscaping revolution has been denied by English garden historians since Horace Walpole. By way of Matteo Ripa's 1724 visit to London, this paper takes a close look at the issues involved and tries to determine not only whether China was involved at all in the initial change of English gardening taste, but also how specific and crucial that involvement was.

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Jacques Legrand
Migrations or Nomadism: How Glaciation Reveals Historical Models of Mobility

This paper forms part of a project to describe and analyse historically and anthropologically nomadic pastoralism. It reflects on mobility, its forms and scale, and more especially on the critique of predominant classical, even banal ideas which assimilate nomadism to mobility. Nomadic pastoral mobility occurs in a context that separates it radically from migratory movement. In fact, nomadic mobility constitutes a strategy that stabilizes resources and populations and whose basic foundation is the appropriation of a territorial base that is established as durably as possible. Just as, and following sedentary settlement, nomadic pastoralism puts an end to migratory mobility. Thus it seems that a single idea of mobility is inappropriate to describe the two fundamentally independent phenomena represented by transcontinental migration, partly arising from the effects of the ice age, and nomadic pastoralism.

Michael Palencia-Roth
The Presidential Addresses of Sir William Jones: The Asiatick Society of Bengal and the ISCSC

The Asiatick Society of Bengal, founded by Sir William Jones in Calcutta in 1784, blazed the trails and mapped them for subsequent travellers in the discipline now called the comparative study of civilizations. This paper analyzes Jones' Presidential addresses to show how the founding of the Asiatick Society reflected and at the same time influenced a new conception of human history, whose cultural and political manifestations had to encompass much more than the Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian world. This essay brings Jones' works to our attention and should make us more aware of the importance of his work for the comparative study of civilizations and cultures.

Maurice Aymard
Civilizations over the Long Term: Past Realities, Present Challenges

The last few decades have upset the old balance that had long been the inspiration of historians. Historians and others who recorded their thoughts and research with the long term in mind, thinking of permanence and continuity, were encouraged to place emphasis on communication and circulation. In their eyes both of these were questioning the fragmentations of the local, changing acquired habits, requiring dialogue and exchange – in the peaceful mode of commercial trade or the violent one of war and looting. This paper claims that today's view is fundamentally different, since the threat has changed place and nature: standardization has replaced isolation. So the question facing us today with particular force is: can history and knowledge of the past still claim to help us understand the present?

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