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0521839351 - An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750-1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire

Gwyn Campbell

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An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750–1895

The first comprehensive economic history of precolonial Madagascar, this study examines the island's role from 1750 to 1895 in the context of a burgeoning international economy and the rise of modern European imperialism. Challenging conventional portrayals of nineteenth-century Madagascar as a unified and progressive kingdom, this study reveals that the Merina of the central highlands attempted to found an island empire and through the exploitation of its human and natural resources build the economic and military might to challenge British and French pretensions in the region. Ultimately, the Merina failed due to imperial forced labor policies and natural disasters, the nefarious consequences of which (disease, depopulation, ethnic enmity) have in traditional histories been imputed to external capitalist and French colonial policies. Although by 1890, Madagascar was firmly integrated into a regional trade network stretching from South Africa to India, dominated by British Indians, Britain acknowledged French claims to Madagascar. France took 13 years to conquer Madagascar, finally succeeding only due to the internal collapse of Merina power.

GWYN CAMPBELL is a professor in the Department of History at McGill University. He is the editor of *Southern Africa and Regional Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Regions* (2003) and *The Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (2004). He is also the author of numerous articles, in such scholarly journals as the *Journal of African History* and *International Journal of African Historical Studies*.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521839358

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First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Campbell, Gwyn, 1952–

An economic history of Imperial Madagascar 1750–1895, or, The rise and fall of an island
empire / Gwyn Campbell.

p. cm. – (African studies series ; 106)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-83935-1

1. Madagascar – Economic conditions. 2. Madagascar – History.
3. Madagascar – Colonization. 4. Merina (Malagasy people) – History.
I. Title : Rise and fall of an island empire. II. Title. III. Series.

HC895.C36 2004

330.9691'01 – dc22

2003069667

ISBN-13 978-0-521-83935-8 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-83935-1 hardback

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TO MY MOTHER, EILEEN
AND THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER, JOHN

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I owe a debt of gratitude to many colleagues and students, past and present, who have helped to shape the structure of this book. Also to the Leverhulme Trust, the British Academy, Ernest Oppenheimer Foundation, DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst – German Academic Exchange Service), the International Institute for Asian Studies (Leiden), and the University of the Witwatersrand for research grants, and finally to Marianne for her steadfast support and editorial skills.