

Joseph John Freeman an Wilhelm von Humboldt, 30.01.1833

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Challan, Claude Bernard Drury, Robert Flacourt, Étienne de Oberlin, Johann Friedrich Rochon, Alexis-Marie de Challan, Claude Bernard: Vocabulaire Malgache (Ile de France [Mauritius]: L’Imprimerie Royale 1773) Drury, Robert: Madagascar: or, Robert Drury’s Journal during fifteen years captivity on that island (London: Meadows u.a. 1729) Fihirana, natao ny Hihira’ny ny Abaniandro, hiderana an’ andriamanitra (Antananarivo: Mission Press 1833) Flacourt, Étienne de: Dictionnaire de la langue de Madagascar avec un petit recueil de noms & dictions propres des choses qui sont d’une mesme espèce. Plus quelques mot du langage des sauvages de la baye de Saldagne au Cap de Bonne Espérance. Un petit catéchisme & des prières du matin & du soir que les missionnaires font & enseignent aux néophytes & catéchumènes de cette isle, le tout en françois & en cette langue (Paris: Jossé 1658) Flacourt, Étienne de: Histoire de la Grande Isle de Madagascar (Paris: Gervais Clouzier 1661) Ny taratasy voalohany atao oe, Jenesisy (Antananarivo: Missionary Press 1831) Ny teny n’andriamanitra, atao hoe, testamenta ’ny Jesosy Kraisty (An-Tananarivo 1830) Rochon, Alexis-Marie de: Voyages à Madagascar, à Maroc, et aux Indes orientales: ouvrage en trois volumes, accompagné ... d’un vocabulaire madégasse, de tables astronomiques, et d’une table générale des matières (Paris: Prault 1791) Taranta ’ny Obelina (Antananarivo: Mission Press 1831)

[132r]

Antananarivo

30 Jan |uar| y 1833

To Baron Will.^m Humbolt

&^c &^c &^c

Sir,

I extremely regret that it has not been in my power to forward, at <a> much earlier period for your perusal & use, the accompanying documents.

I have copied the principal part of the Gram.^r I drew up some time ago on the

Malagasy language. I need not say, it is far from being perfect. It was drawn up with a vein of condensing & embodying the various rules & illustrations I had collected from time to time, – some of which were scattered about or fragments of paper as they occurred at the moment – and a great part was entrusted to my own memory with the intention of supplying illustrations wherever a convenient opportunity should present itself. I regard the Grammar at present as an outline – to be corrected confirmed, – illustrated or altered as may seem requisite, from future investigations. Such as it is, however, it may possibly afford some guidance & aid in your important & highly <valuable> theories on the comparison of the Malay languages or Dialects. I am not without the hope, that you will find further confirmation of the vein you have entertained of the relative subsistence between the Malagasy language & the original Malay. It is a point I am most anxious to see illustrated and I shall eagerly avail myself of the publication you refer to on the subject – & which I trust is by this time, issuing from the press, as I judge it to have been in a considerable state of forwardness at the time of the date of your last favor, Sep.^r 1830.

[132v] You have most diligently availed yourself Sir of the few means which you possessed *[sic]* for the Study of the Malagasy. You had not I suppose seen a narrative of a fourteen years residence on the Island by [Drury](#), a shipwrecked mariner. It was written several years ago, – but I think it bears internal marks of authenticity. It has no pretensions to science or to any value as a Literary Composition, but you would have found there also another Vocabulary which would have assisted a little – with those you have named. [Drury](#) was a shipwrecked on the S. W. coast of [Madagascar](#) & his vocabulary relates principally to words used in that part of the Islands.

I have prepared to forward with this communication the Grammar as already mentioned – from the Verbs to the End – not however containing Syntax – for two reasons first, that various remarks occur on the course of the parts now sent illustrative of the leading principles on the Syntax of the language; – but secondly – I have not yet drawn out the Rules systematically. I have preferred making a pretty extensive collection of native compositions examining these & drawing up the rules – of I may be allowed the term, by induction, from those facts. [Madagascar](#) has been, 'till within the past four years without a written language. The few words who have written occasionally in the Malagasy language with the Arabic character, have been too few and I apprehend too unimportant to be considered exceptions to the remark. At any rate they could not be entitled to the

phrase "Native compositions". – But [Madagascar](#) cannot be considered wholly destitute of materials. Its language is rich, extensive & philosophical, – and there around are the language innumerable native compositions – tho' [|133r|](#) not hitherto reduced to writing; – they are traditional; – consisting of Legendary Rules, – historical reminiscences – Songs, – Proverbs – Repartees, – Salutations – Modes of addressing the Sovereign, – Solemn Oaths – &c &c These form the Stock, the material of the National unwritten literature. To rescue a portion of this, permits present fallacious & fugitive modes of perpetuation, is, I think a "pretium operis." Much that is more trash, – in an intellectual & moral view, – ~~but~~ may thus be amassed, – but some literary curiosities may be found also – & as the natives themselves say on such occasions, when a selection is made, – what pleases cannot you keep – & what displeases cannot you reject? At any rate, it is not to bring the native compositions to a Literary, so much as to a Grammatical test, that I collect and examine them. They are the people's own mode of thinking, and of expressing themselves – & from therefor [|sic|](#), good criteria, on the case requiring their assistance. Should I be able to reduce the rules to Syntax within a reasonable time – so as to be likely to afford you any further aid on the prosecution of your Studies, it will afford me pleasure to transmit a copy of it, to place by the side of the Grammar.

I have endeavoured also to answer the various questions you were free enough to propose for Solution. Some of the answers are less fully illustrate than they might have been, had I not been aware at the time, that the Grammar would supersede such additional illustrating. The same remark may apply to the Observations made of the Analysis of a few verses from Matthew & a passage from [Flacourt](#). [Flacourts](#) "Voyage" I have by me – with Rochon^[a].

[|133v|](#) I copied off for your amusement one or two pages of Native compositions. I think you will be able to construe them without difficulty.

With regard to the publication of a reimpression of Flacourts & Challans Vocabularies, it strikes me, with all reference to your own judgement, Sir, that such a work could be regarded only as a Literary curiosity – or may I say – Illustration of the Past state of <the> Malagasy language. I do not think it exists now, as in the time of [Flacourt](#). The lapse of 150 or 180 yrs is very considerable in the

a) [|Editor|](#) [Rochons](#) Werk, 1791 erschienen, wurde bereits 1792 ins Englische und Deutsche übersetzt – und erschien um einen Reisebericht nach Marokko ergänzt als dreibändiges Werk: Alexis Rochon (1801): *Voyages à Madagascar, à Maroc, et aux Indes Orientales. Ouvrage en trois volumes, accompagné d'une Carte géographique de Madagascar, d'une Carte de l'Inde orientale, d'un Vocabulaire Madégaſse, de Tables astronomiques, et d'une Table générale des matières*, Paris: Prault, Levrault. [FZ]

progress of a language – the changes incidentally & unintentionally introduced are numerous; – still more so where the custom has prevailed – & it has done in **Madagascar** and still does in some of its provinces – of changing names – of places – persons & things on great & special occasions. I rely on your kindness & candour therefor *|sic|* to forgive me on suggesting – & I do not for a moment presume to do more than suggest, – that the publication of the above named vocabularies would but be of extensive practical utility in assisting any person to allow a knowledge of the language now existing, I will not say only on Imerena^[b] but prevailing extensively through the Island, & likely to become the one metropolitan language of **Madagascar**. The above vocabularies bear no comparison (I have examined them in **Mauritius**,) with the collection we have made, – and which may lay the foundation of a Dictionary at some, not very distant period.

I purpose forwarding with this, a copy of all that we have issued from our Press since my last communication. Of the Scriptures – you will find All the New Testament & a part of the Old – up to 1 Samuel – a few new Tracts and a hymnBk *|sic|*^[c] – which we use in the Native Congregation – who now assemble for Christian worship. Of the excellent "**Oberlin**" of the **Ban de la Roche** I presume you may have heard – it may interest you to see a Sketch of him which I drew up in this language, & is now circulated <here> as a Tract. So eminent a character I see <him> a fair specimen of the Religion we wish to teach this people.

|134r| I have the honor to remain

Sir

Your most obliged & faithful Ser.^t

J. J. Freeman

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To Baron William Humbolt *|sic|* –
Berlin.

b) *|Editor|* Imerina, die zentrale Hochlandregion Madagaskars. [FZ]

c) *|Editor|* D.h. "hymn book".