

**Malagasy music and musical
instruments: an alternative key to
linguistic and cultural history**

**MRAC, Tervuren,
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Kay Williamson Educational Foundation

Introduction I

- Madagascar has a wide range of musical practices and musical instruments which can be linked to a history of peopling and contact
- These start with the remarkable vocal polyphony of the Vazimba/Mikea
- Austronesian instruments and musical styles still predominate
- but trade and settlement have brought further elements from the East African coast, beginning with coastal Bantu and reflecting the specifically Swahili maritime era
- trade contacts also reflect Indian, Arab and European instruments and practice
- the mixed musical culture has also been carried to other Indian Ocean islands



Methodological issues

- Musical instruments are a highly conservative form of material culture; musical practice often so.
- Analytically they resemble zoogeography as a tool for analysis of prehistory
- Musical instruments diffusing from one culture to another often retain names and performance styles of the source culture
- Geographically bounded regions, such as islands, are often easier to unpick than contiguous mainland. Hence the importance of island biogeography
- As a consequence, musical cultures in Madagascar can be used to create a chronostratigraphic map of the culture layers that compose its present-day society
- The presentation will link these distributions and where possible, their names, to the putative origins to show how cultural layers and chronostratigraphy can illuminate prehistory from different perspectives.

Chronostratigraphy

Culture layer	Approx. date
Vazimba/Mikea/Beosi	400 BC ?
Austronesian	5 th century AD
Coastal Bantu/Swahili	5 th century AD
India?	?
Arab	10 th century AD
European	16 th century AD

An early classic

UNIVERSITÉ DE PARIS.
MEMOIRES DE L'INSTITUT D'ETHNOLOGIE. — XXVIII.

CURT SACHS.

ANCIEN PROFESSEUR À L'UNIVERSITÉ DE BERLIN.
CHARGÉ DE MISSION AU MUSÉE D'ETHNOLOGIE DE PARIS.
PROFESSEUR À L'UNIVERSITÉ DE NEW YORK.

Instruments de Musique de Madagascar.



PARIS
INSTITUT D'ETHNOLOGIE
191, RUE SAINT-JACQUES (5^e)

1938

Not a classic

Mireille Mialy RAKOTOMALALA

MADAGASCAR LA MUSIQUE DANS L'HISTOIRE



ANAKO Editions

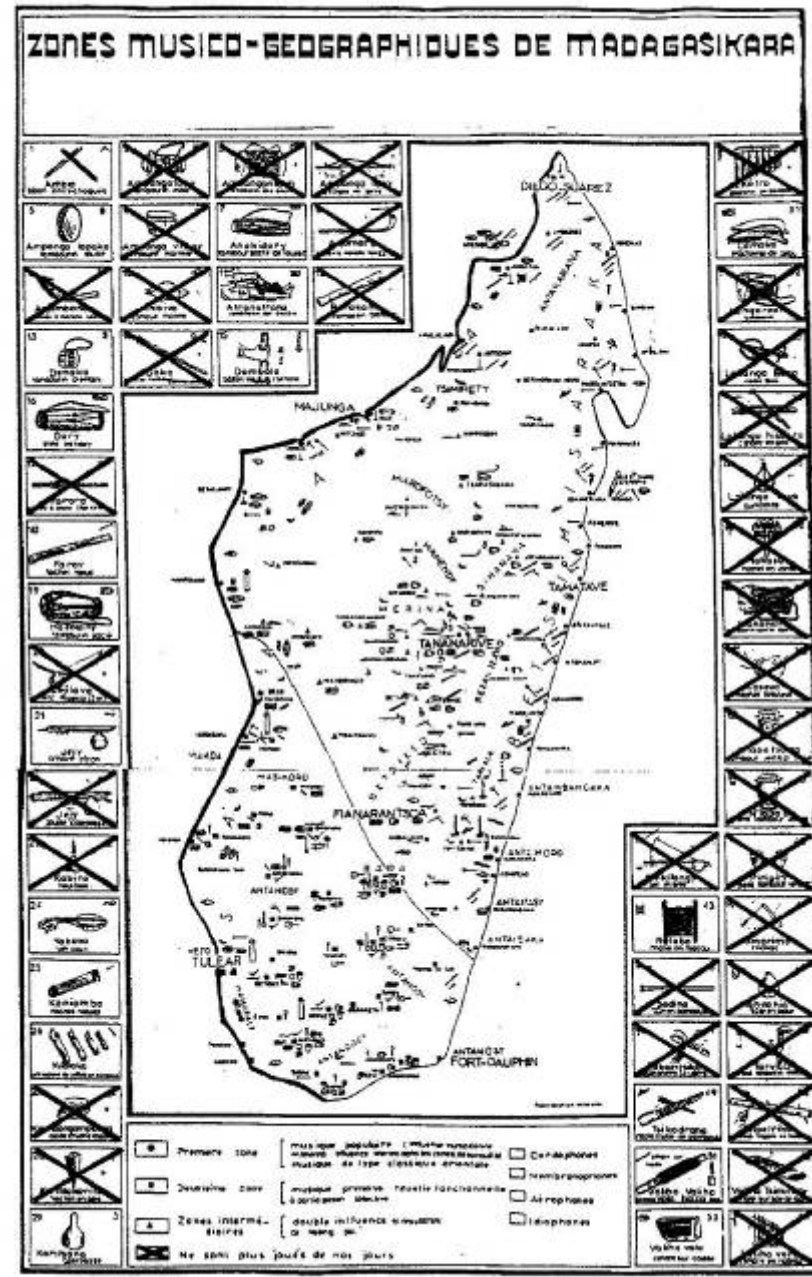
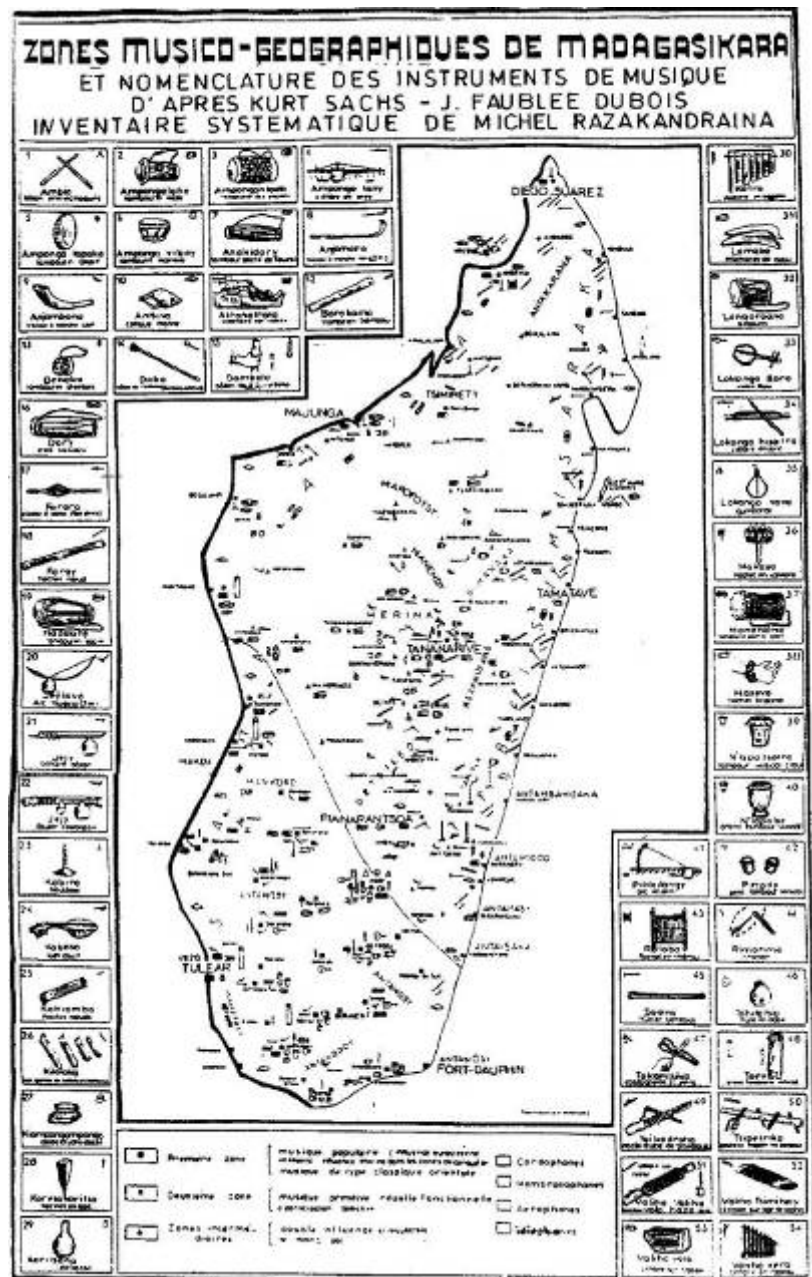
Characteristic instruments

Culture layer	Examples
Vazimba/Mikea /Beosi	Vocal polyphony, floating gourd
Austronesian	tube-zither, stick-zither, box-zither transverse conch, Y-laced drum
Coastal Bantu/Swahili	tube-rattle [?], gourd-rattle, earth-bow
India?	clay drum [?], double-headed drum
Arab	shawm, vertical flute, lute, viol
European	spoons, Jews' harp, asses' jawbone

The Indian Ocean



Musical heritage in danger



Vazimba/Mikea/Beosi

The Vazimba may be the descendants of early foragers reaching Madagascar (see previous talk) although some may also be outgroups who have returned to hunting-gathering

Most of their music is similar to that of their neighbours; however, they have a type of polyphonic vocal music which is quite distinctive and resembles more closely the music of African rainforest pygmies

Sachs reports the Vazimba use sets of upturned calabashes (*hazolahimbazimba*) floating in water to accompany songs 'not understood by the Sakalava'. There are no modern recordings. This instrument occurs in West Africa, but is not recorded anywhere in East Africa.

Mikea vocal music



The Bantu-Swahili contribution

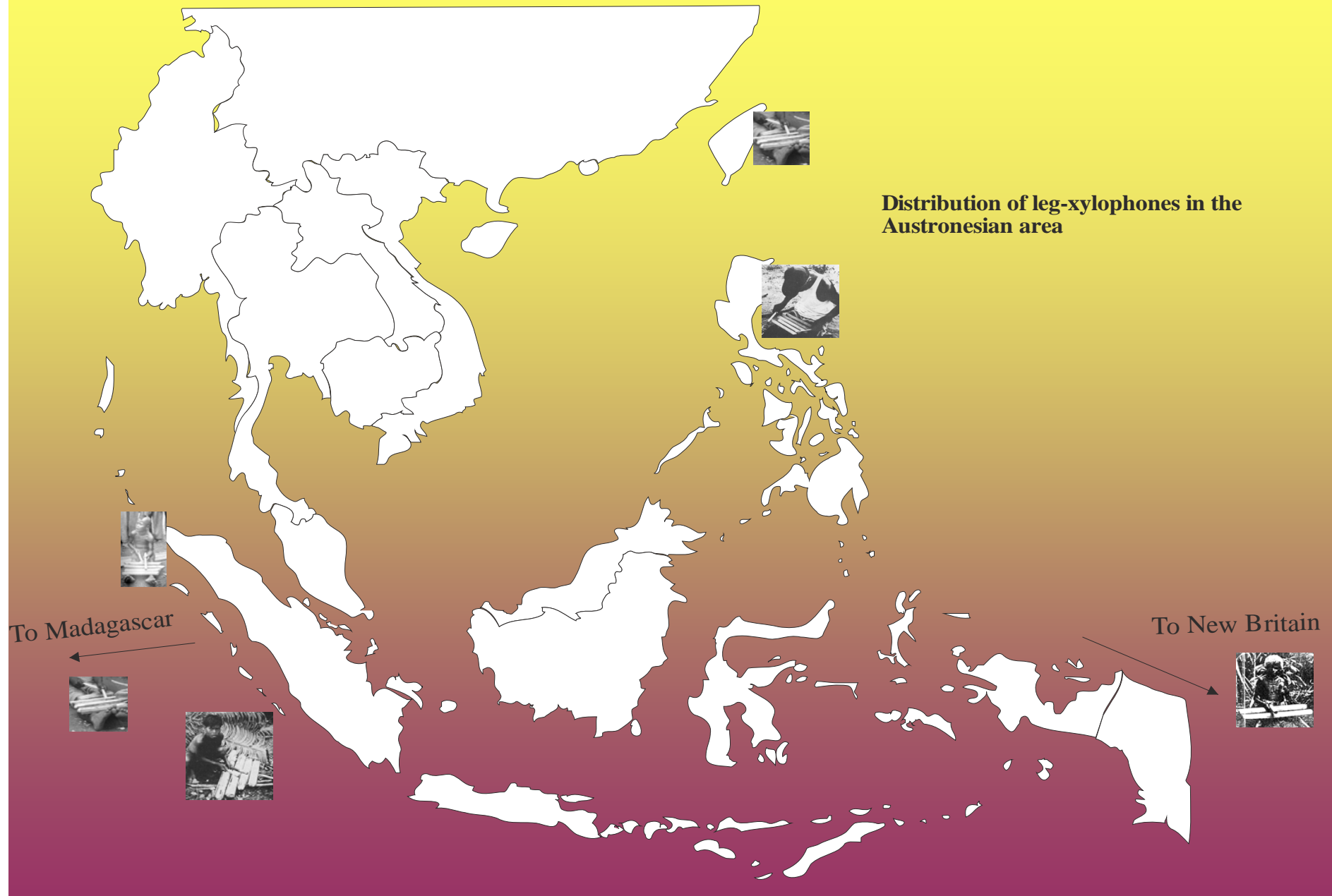
- Bullroarer
- Scraped tube
- Long struck tube
- Transverse antelope horn
- Clay ocarina
- Tube-rattle
- Raft-zither
- Earth-zither/earth-bow

Some queries I

- Leg-xylophone;
- This is recorded in parts of island SE Asia (Mentawai, Sulawesi) as well as on mainland Africa
- The 'two-player' style looks very like African mainland performance
- Vernacular names do not provide a clue



The Austronesian leg-xylophone



Some queries II

- Earth-zither
- The Merina *amponga tany* is a long cord stretched between two pegs in the ground and passing over a stick acting as a bridge, fixed a resonating pit
- Merina herdboys pluck the strings to amuse themselves while herding
- Earthbows are recorded in various places in Africa, though not in adjacent East Africa
- They are also known in much of SE Asia, and give rise to the national instrument of Vietnam
- However, Sachs claims that the only place where earth-zithers have this exact morphology is Madura
- We need to know more about this intriguing instrument; a recording made in 2000 shows it is still played

The Austronesian contribution

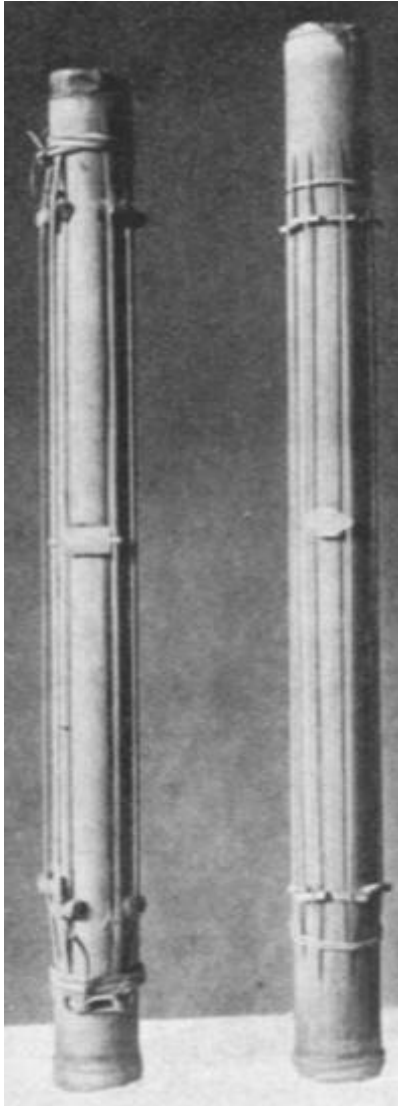
- Tube-zither
- Box-zither [?]
- Stick-zither
- Hanging tubes [bird-scarer]
- Transverse conch
- Suspended drum struck with three sticks
- Small struck bamboo [?]

N.B. We may eventually have to consider contrasting Malay with 'island' instruments and even different islands (some Malagasy instruments not found on Borneo)

Valiha, the idiochord tube-zither



Idiochord tube-zithers from Sulawesi



- A tube-zither corresponding to the Malagasy *valiha* does not occur in Borneo, whereas instruments of this type are found in Sulawesi and Timor
- Struck idiochord tube-zithers occur in Borneo and Sumatra
- The classic explanation of the name *valiha* is < Sanskrit *vaadya* (वाद्य).
- Adelaar (p.c.) has proposed *balikan* which is a term for another stringed instrument in Borneo
- But this instrument seems to have come from Sulawesi

Tube-zither, rattle and viol



Box-resonated tube-zither



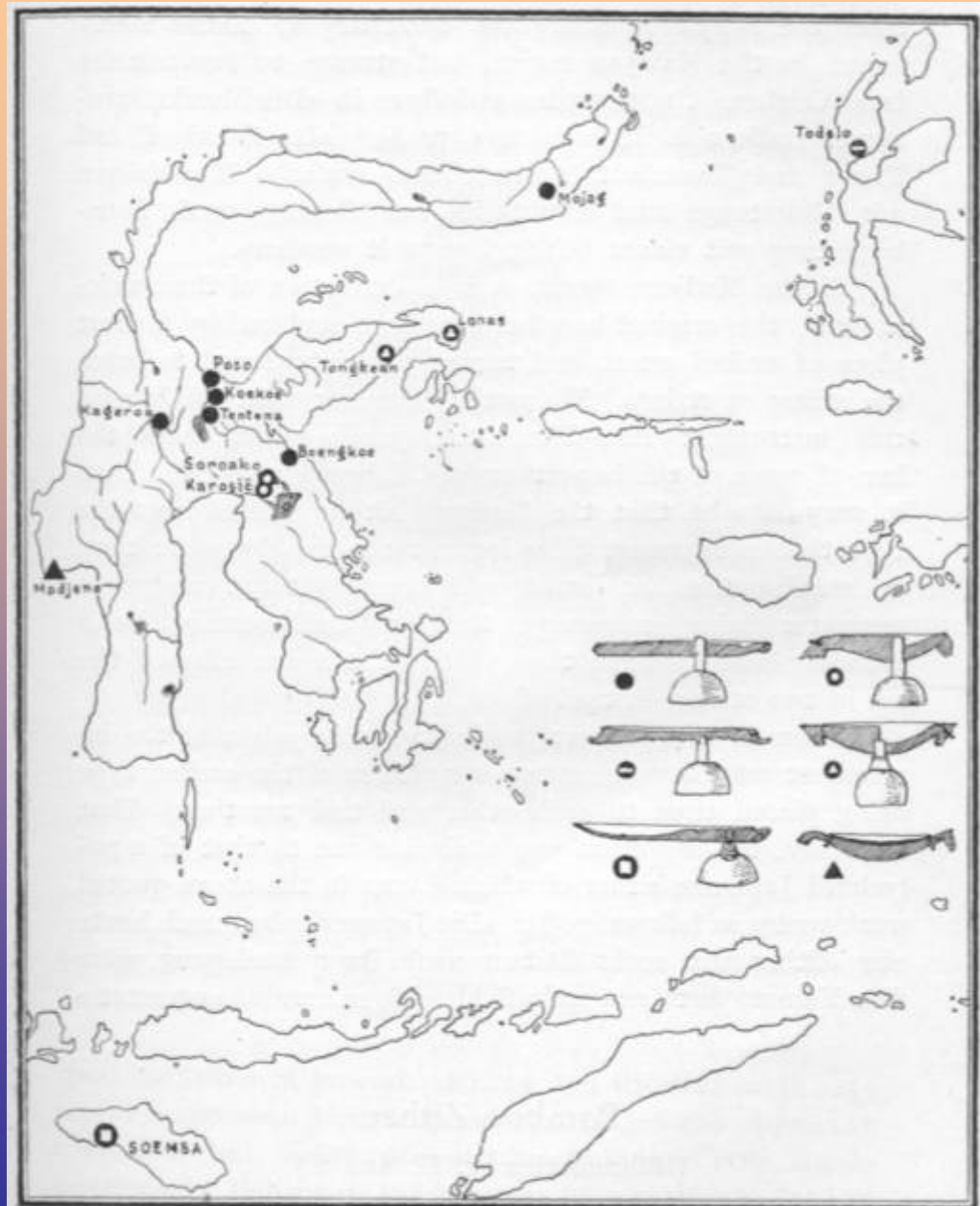
The struck idiochord tube-zither



Karo zither ensemble, Sumatra

The stick-zither

- The stick-zither is a flat stick with projections on one end, and one or two strings are stretched along its length. The strings are strummed and then the projections used like frets to alter the pitch of the string.
- This instrument was first mapped by Kaudern (1927) for Toraja. The stick-zither is unknown in the Philippines, but widespread in Sulawesi, Sumba and was also carried to Madagascar and the East African coast.



Stick –zither on Madagascar

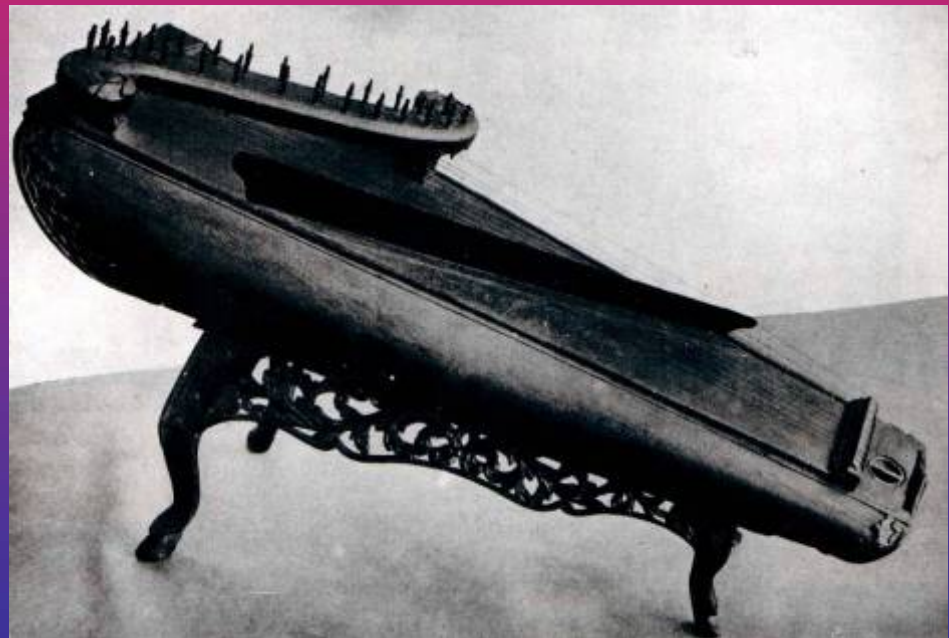


Stick –zither in island SE Asia

- The stick-zither may well have come from Sulawesi
- The Malagasy name (*lokanga voatavo*) appears to be a later calque suggesting it may have been introduced *from* the coast, rather than the other way around.
- We can safely say that Swahili *jeje* is not a loan from Ancient Egyptian *dede*, as suggested by Sachs, but its origin is so far unknown

Some queries I

- The box-zither, *marovany*
- The box-resonated zither is similar to the tube-zither but is common on the east side of Madagascar
- Sachs considered it was copy of the Eastern and northern European box-zithers but it is structurally very different
- A more likely origin could be the Javanese box-zithers, *celumpung*



Betsimisaraka box-zither, *marovany*



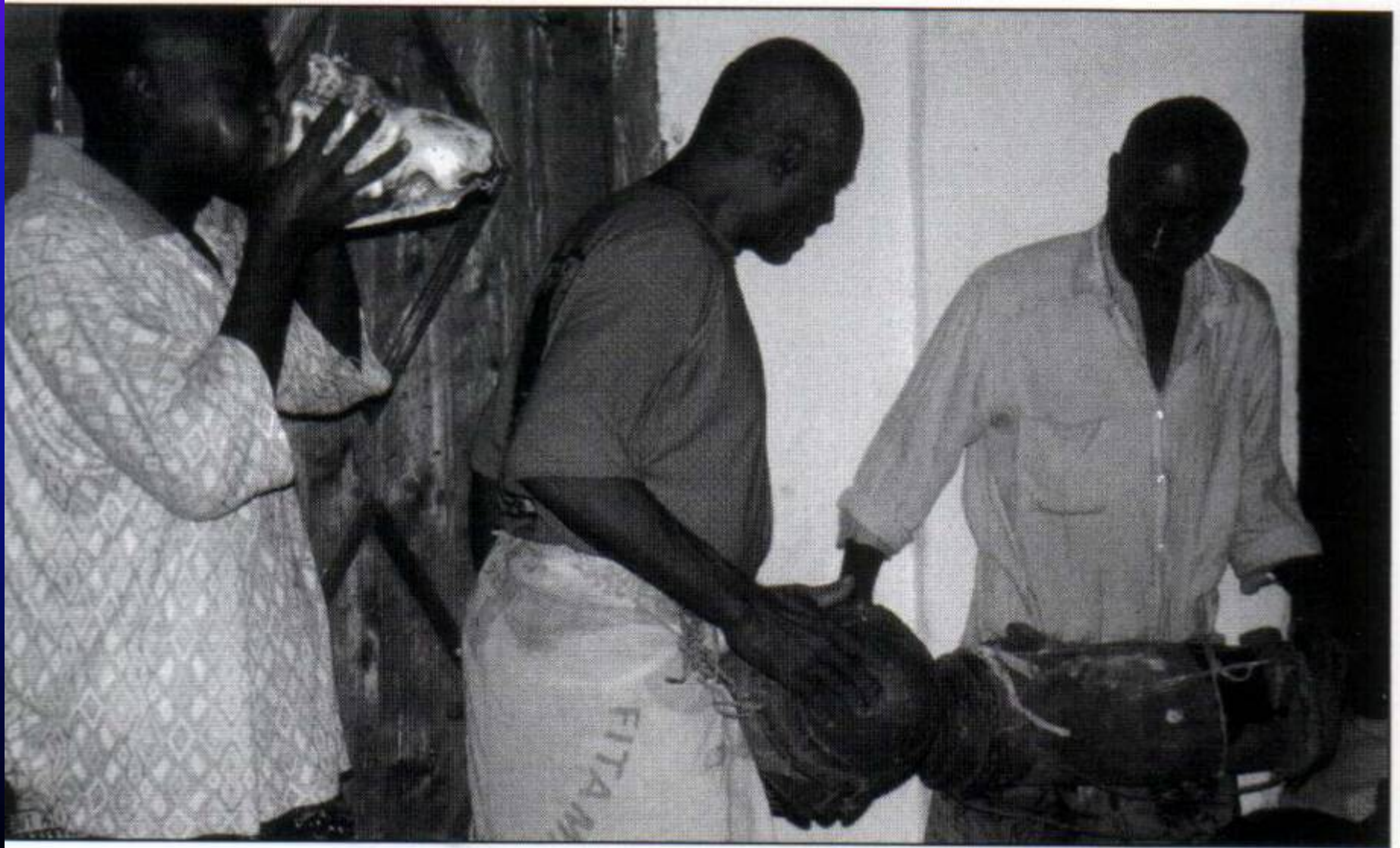
The Indian contribution

- Most controversial; not envisaged by Sachs
- Double-headed suspended drum played with the palms
- Ground kettledrum struck by seated player

Double-headed drum



Double-headed drum and end-blown conch



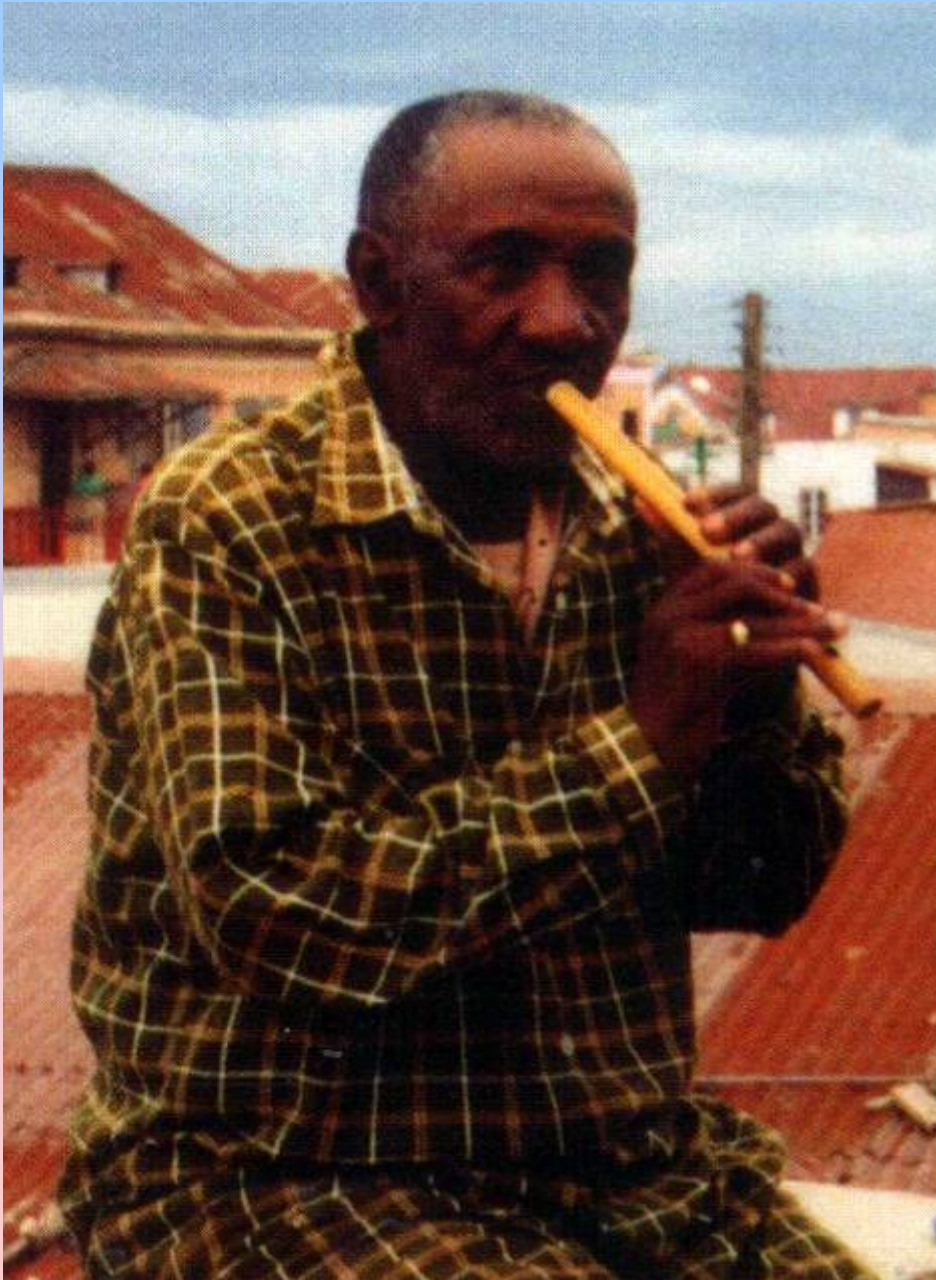
Antandroy fiddle and kettledrum



The Arab contribution

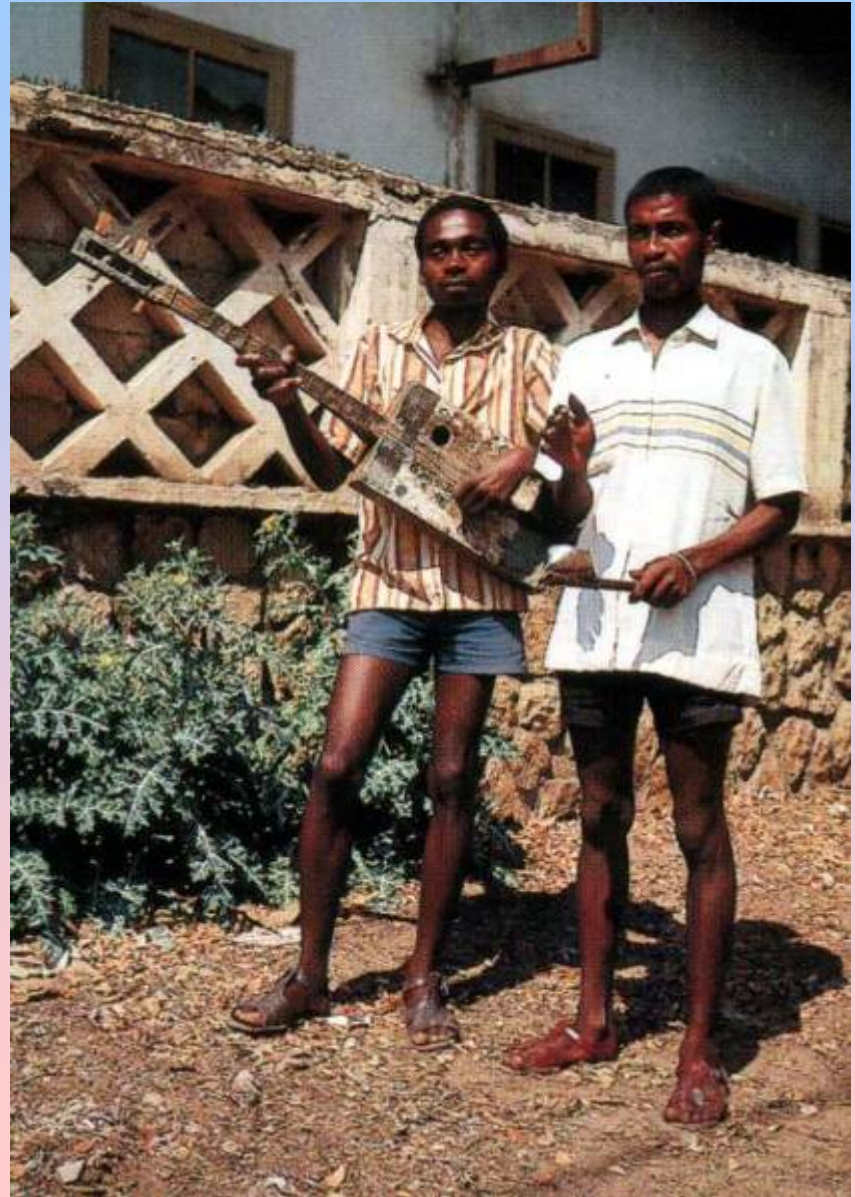
- Lute (originally folk-lutes corresponding to the Arabic *gambus*) (= Romanian *cobza*) but cross-fertilised with the *ud* and later the guitar and perhaps other plucked lutes
- Spike fiddle (almost entirely replaced by European-inspired box-fiddles) and then the violin
- Vertical flutes (edge-blown)

Vertical flute, *sodina*



- The vertical flute, *sodina*, is played by blowing directly across the edge, rather than through a duct, typical of Indonesian island flutes
- Despite this, the name *sodina* appears to be cognate with the Indonesian *suling* and not with *ney* or *sabbaba*, the usual Arabic/Persian terms
- It is likely the duct-flute survived in Madagascar until medieval times, when it was ousted by the vertical flute, but the name was retained

Kabosy lutes



The European contribution

- Guitar
- Accordion
- Spoons [?]
- Ass's jawbone [?]
- Jews' harp
- Violin

Merina folk-theatre: *hira gasy*

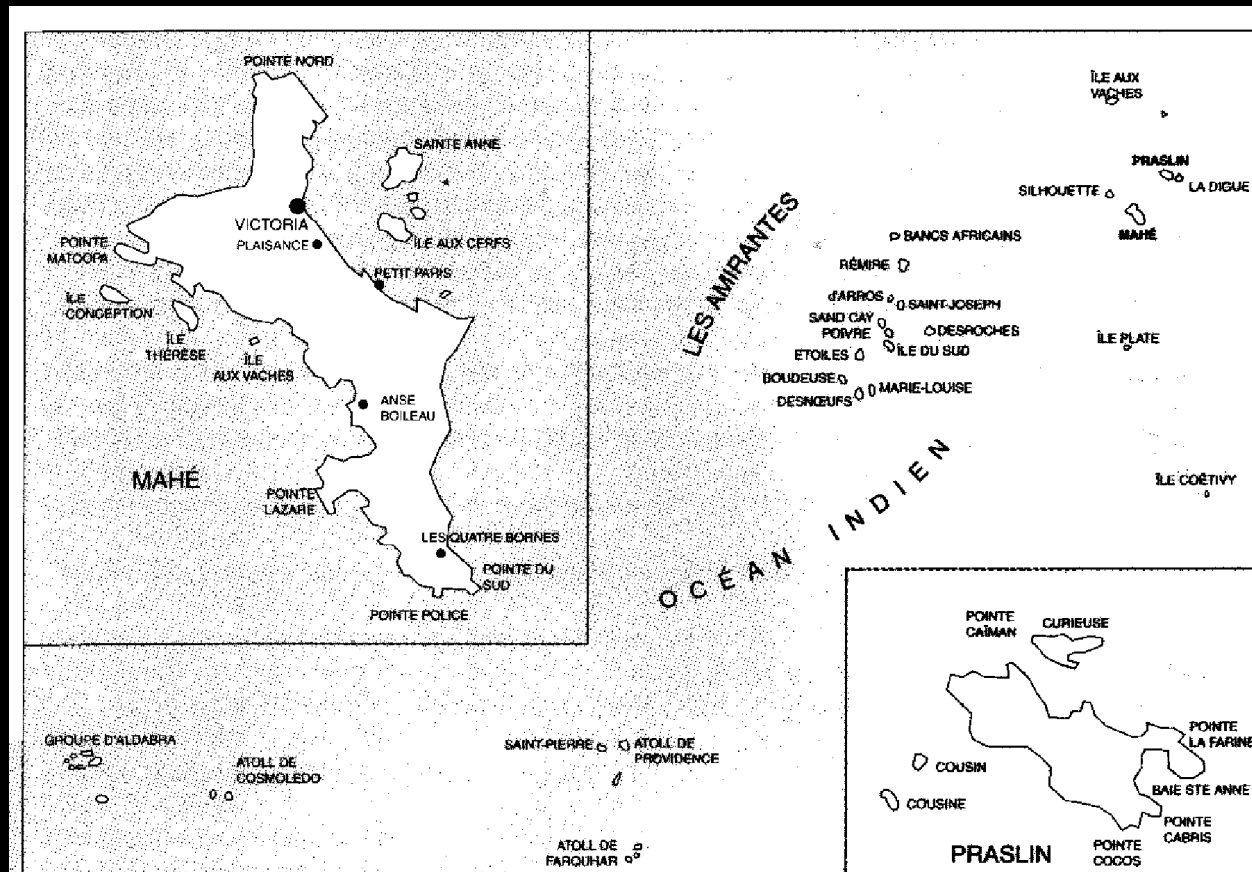


Guitar and valiha

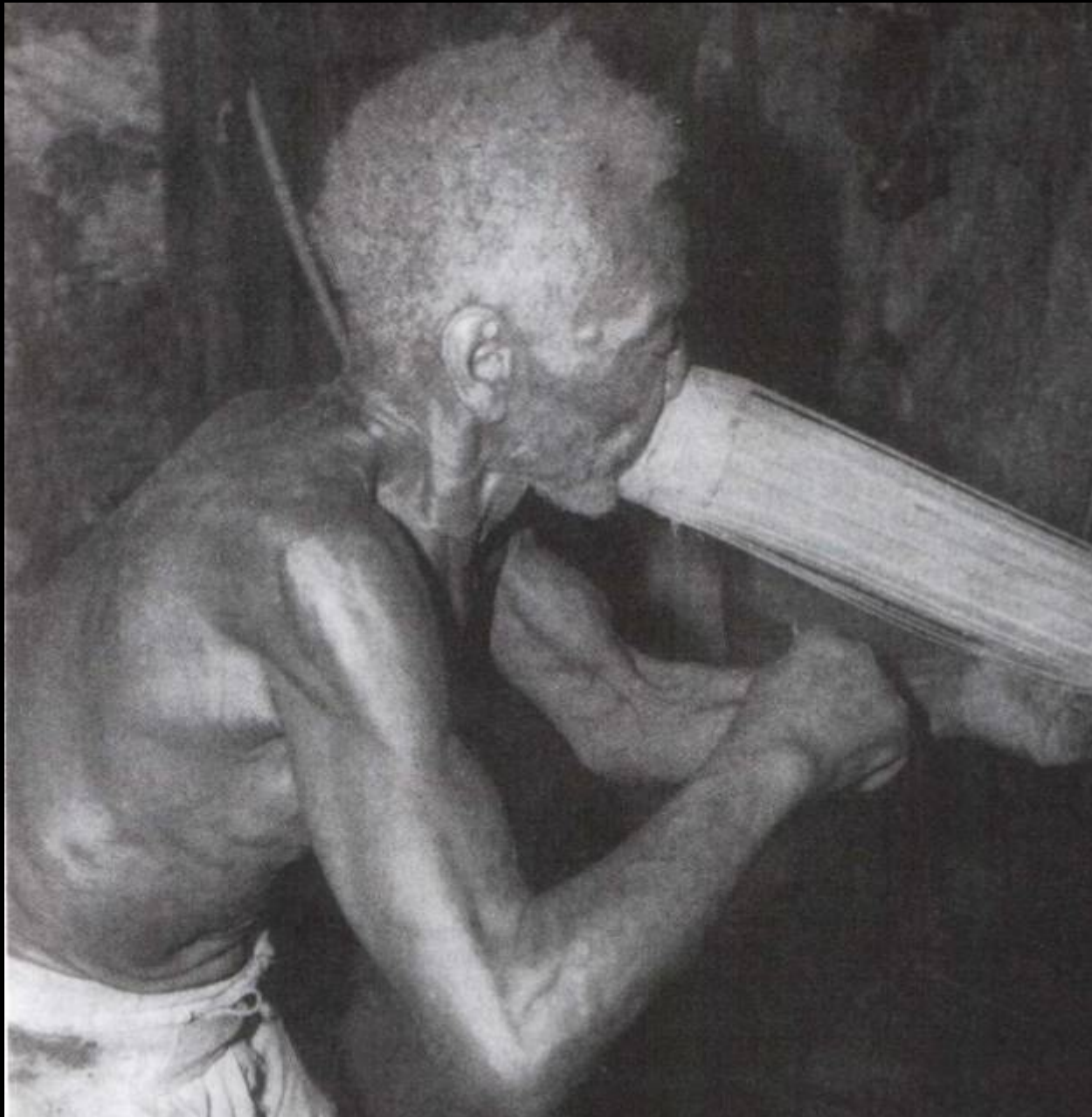


Diffusing onwards from Madagascar

- ❖ The Seychelles are not usually considered part of the Austronesian zone, but some evidence suggests a link, probably with Madagascar, presumably through the slave trade.



Seychelles



A remarkable Seychellois tube-zither, *mulumba*, one of the disappearing *anciens instruments*, which is now used as a type of end-blown horn with simultaneously scraped strings. The instrument retains the organological properties of the Austronesian tube-zither but these are no longer understood by the players.

Seychelles



Similarly with the monochord chest-bow, a typical African mainland instrument (though not Swahili) has been reconfigured in performance as if it were a stick-zither (and has the name *zez*, cognate with *jeje*)

THANKS

- To Kay Williamson Educational Foundation for supporting fieldwork
- To MRAC for my presence at this meeting
- To a wide variety of scholars for discussions over the years

