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at 16:15 Studer Auditorium, 2 OG

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“ A geologist at Teniky: an enigmatic archaeological site in southern Madagascar”

Teniky is located within the Isalo massif in southern Madagascar, over 200 km from the nearest coast. The core of this isolated site has been known for well over a century and includes man-made terraces, rock-cut niches in cliff walls and cut sandstone walls delimiting a rock shelter. Research by a Malagasy-Swiss research team since 2021 has revealed the existence of more structures extending well beyond the initially known site. These structures include further terraces, rock-cut niches, stone basins, and cut sandstone walls on a hill about 2.5 km further west, as well as sandstone quarries and dry stone walls in the valley in between. ¹⁴C AMS radiocarbon dating on charcoal indicates that the rock-cut niches and sandstone walls were constructed in the late first millennium / early second millennium (c. 10th-12th century AD). Besides a few pottery sherds of Middle Eastern origin, most imported pottery sherds are of Chinese and Southeast Asian origin, and date to the 10th-13th century AD, consistent with the radiocarbon ages. The assemblage of archaeological structures at Teniky is unique within Madagascar. No similar rock-cut architecture is known elsewhere on the island, nor has it been documented on the East African coast. The closest stylistic parallels to the enigmatic rock-cut architecture at Teniky are found in present-day Iran, particularly in the Fars region, where rock-cut niches dating to the first millennium AD or earlier have been attributed to Zoroastrian communities. Independent of the origin, culture and religion of the community that once lived at Teniky, the presence of imported ceramics indicates that it participated in the Indian Ocean trade network. Our on-going research addresses open questions such as: where and when did these settlers first arrive on the coast of Madagascar; why and when did they move inland; how did they live and how did they interact with other populations on the island; and why and when was the site deserted?