

Swahili Manuscripts

FROM THE SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL & AFRICAN STUDIES



The Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London holds the largest collection of Swahili manuscripts in Britain. Dating from the 1790's to the 1970's, these record a literary tradition dating back at least to the 12th century. Many are in Arabic and many contain poetry composed in northern Swahili dialects. Letters, stories, notes, essays on history and culture and drafts of published and unpublished books number among the collection's offerings.

These are of prime importance to all those interested in:

- ◆ African culture and history
- ◆ The Swahili language
- ◆ The literature and thought of the people of East Africa
- ◆ Relations between Arabic and African writers and scholars

The manuscripts are organised into seven distinctive groupings, named for the scholars who collected them.

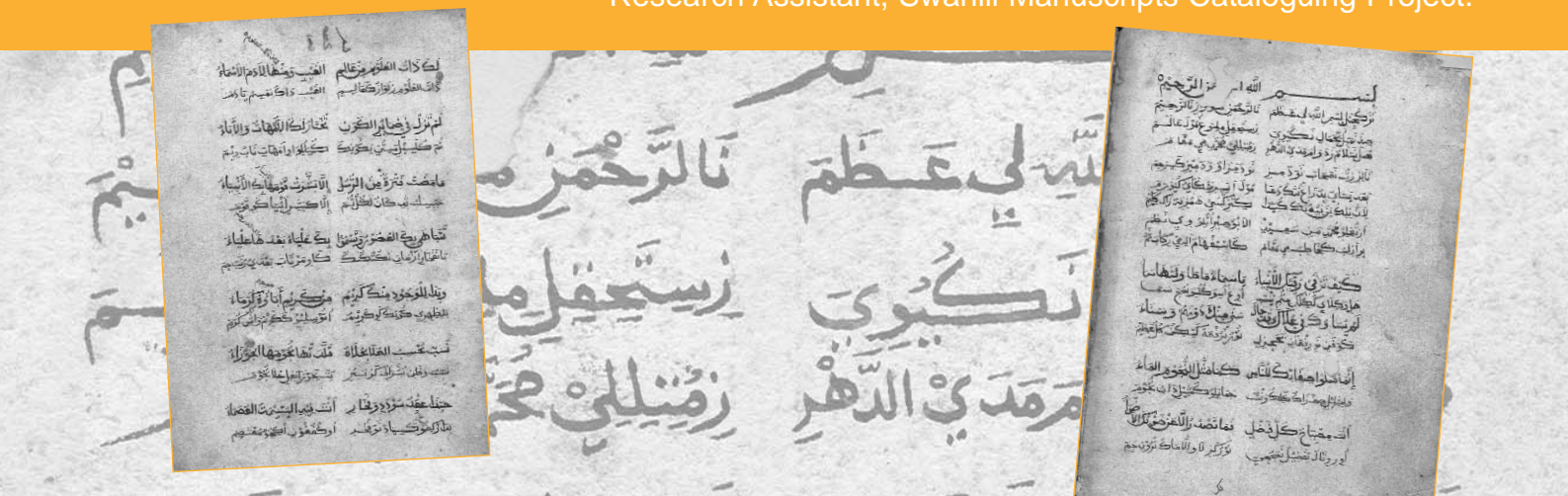


Adam Matthew Publications

"These collections are the prime research resource for the writing of the cultural and literary history of Swahili language and culture, and more generally, about the history, literature and thought of the people of East Africa, coast and hinterland."

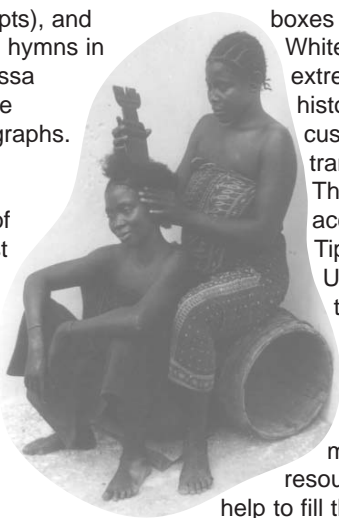
Angelica Baschiera,

Research Assistant, Swahili Manuscripts Cataloguing Project.



Part 1 covers the collections of W E Taylor, William Hichens and Alice Werner in their entirety (81 manuscripts), and includes African aphorisms, Giriama proverbs, hymns in Swahili, Folk tales, Swahili verses, the Mombassa Chronicle, the Liyongo Saga, the Hamziyya, the history of Pate, notes on language, and photographs.

The version of the Hamziyya featured in the Hichens collection is said to be the only copy of the Swahili Hamziyya in Europe, and the oldest Swahili manuscript in any collection. This epic Islamic poem tells the story of the Prophet Muhammad's life. It was translated into Swahili by Sayyid Aidarus bin Athman Al Sheikh Ali in 1792. There are a number of important manuscripts relating to the Liyongo saga, which dates back to the 12th century. It is an account of the life and works of Liongo Fumo wa Ba-Uryi, prince, poet and warrior - a "dramatic account of heroism, wit and strength... believable and identifiable with contemporary and socio-political set-up" (Makokha, 2000).



Part 2 covers the Knappert, Yahya Ali Omar, and Miscellaneous collections (86 manuscripts) in their entirety with items ranging in size from individual poems and stories to collections of love poetry. Some individual items include:

- ◆ Versions of the Al-Inkishafi.
- ◆ the Utenzi wa Isubani (describing a battle in the Wadi Isban between the Prophet Mohammed's army and the army of an unbeliever, Katrifu).
- ◆ Mke na Mume (a poem in which a wife eagerly awaits the return of her husband, only to find that he has a new, young wife).
- ◆ A letter from the King of Pate (describing war, colonialism, and the struggle between the Portuguese and Arabs for control of Pate)
- ◆ a collection of Kimai and Wawe (songs of fishermen and farmers)

We also feature 25 boxes of material from the Allen and Whiteley collections. The material in these collections is extremely varied, with much on socio-linguistics, the history of the Swahili language, African life and customs, literary forms, the oral tradition, the transmission of culture, myths, religion, art and dance. There are also many fine individual items, such as an account of the life of the famous Zanzibar slave trader, Tippu Tip, a collection of Tanzanian folk tales, the Utendi wa Kutawafu Nabii (concerning the death of the Prophet Mohammed in Medina) and The Story of the Old Kerebe: traditional customs and mores.

Swahili is the official language of DR-Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, and is spoken by more than 100 million people, yet there is a lack of resources for its historical study. This new publication will help to fill that gap and will fuel much new scholarship across a variety of disciplines.

"Swahili is the most widely spoken African language in Africa with an estimated 100 million speakers. Swahili is also the Islamic African language with the most highly developed literary tradition, inviting comparison, particularly in regard to its poetry, with Farsi (Iran), Urdu (India) and Turkish."

Sean O'Fahey,
writing in 'Accessing the Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Africa.'

The collection is supported by a comprehensive online catalogue and database prepared by SOAS. This can be reached at www.swahilimanuscripts.soas.ac.uk

Swahili Manuscripts

FROM THE SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL & AFRICAN STUDIES

PART 1: THE TAYLOR, HICHENS AND WERNER COLLECTIONS

PART 2: THE KNAPPERT, WHITELEY, ALLEN, MISCELLANEOUS AND YAHYA ALI OMAR COLLECTIONS

Orders or Enquiries: ☎ +44 (0)1672 511921 ✉ info@ampltd.co.uk 🌐 www.ampltd.co.uk