

## MANUSCRIPTS IN SWAHILI AND OTHER AFRICAN LANGUAGES

ERNST DAMMANN, *AFRIKANISCHE HANDSCHRIFTEN, TEIL 1: HANDSCHRIFTEN IN SWAHILI UND ANDEREN SPRACHEN AFRIKAS*, (Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Band XXIV, 1), Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993. 398 pp. ISBN 3-515-02444-1 DM 180.-

A bibliography usually demarcates a working field. Dammann's *Verzeichnis* attains this in two ways: on the one side it presents sources of literary, historical, cultural or linguistic value, which scholars may analyze accordingly. On the other side it raises practical questions of what should or could be done with these 687 sources existing exclusively in manuscript form. 548 of these sources were written in Swahili (in Part 1 of the book), the remaining 139 sources record testimonies in other African languages (Part 2).

The catalogue records manuscripts, which Dammann was able to trace as holdings of various libraries, archives and mission headquarters in Germany. The majority of the manuscripts are housed in institutions in Hamburg, Berlin and Halle, a smaller number being kept in other towns (addresses of the fourteen institutional holders are given). Individuals as well are mentioned as manuscript holders. Among them we find abundant reference to Dammann's personal collection, which was recently handed over to the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz*.

The manuscripts are numbered and grouped according to their library or archive, which are briefly introduced. The Swahili-written manuscripts are further grouped into those written in the Arabic and those written in the Roman script. In all the groups we find rather trite or curious specimens as well as highly interesting and important 'pearls'. Indices conclude the book. They organize the manuscripts with 1) Swahili poetry listed in alphabetic order of their titles, 2) the collections per holding institutions and private persons, 3) the names of the authors and editors, and 4) the receivers of the letters.

The present editor of the VOHS-series, Hartmut-Ortwin Feistel, mentions in his foreword, that the idea of the African volume already emerged in 1957, when orientalist circles in Germany initiated a DFG-project of publishing catalogues of oriental manuscripts in German possession. A publisher's list at the end of the reviewed *Verzeichnis* lists 41 printed and forthcoming volumes, of which many have 2 and more (up to 11) separate parts, while a supplement series counts 34 volumes. In that year Dammann informed the orientalists of the existence of manuscripts in African languages written in the Arabic script and instant agreement was reached that he himself should be their bibliographer. One may remember that at around the same time Swahili-manuscripts were also collected, catalogued and edited by the African and European members of the East African Swahili Committee.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>One major catalogue of that period, J.W.I. Allen's *The Swahili and Arabic Manuscripts and Tapes in the Library of the University College Dar-es-Salaam. A Catalogue*, Leiden 1970, was reviewed by Ernst Dammann in *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 69, 3/4, 1974: 213.

Dammann's African inventory differs from the oriental volumes in at least two points: during the search for documents written in Arabic letters a larger number of documents written in the Roman script was found. Dammann considered these to be equally worth of being brought to scholarly attention. He therefore extended the conventional orientalist definition of 'manuscript' to include also this type of writing, which is neither 'classical' nor really old enough from today's perspective, but important enough for an earlier stage of the modern cultural history of Africa (p.14). For the African volume this extension also includes the 'typescript', which technically differs from the 'manuscript', though scholars do not always distinguish between the two.<sup>2</sup>

Another deviation from the oriental *Verzeichnisse* is Dammann's rather personal way of presenting the documents, which are not only described in textological terms, but also in comprehensive summaries of their contents including personal reminiscences and judgements on the production, acquisition and qualities of the papers. One gets a strong sense of Dammann's acquaintance with the East African coast and many of its intellectuals and researchers since the early 1930s. The expertise and knowledge of Sheikh Muhamadi Kidjumwa Masihii and Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany, who assisted Dammann in organizing the understanding of the Swahili documents in the 1930s resp. 1970-80s are ever present, in personal references as well as in documents. Dammann's diction is lucid and appears well intelligible also for readers with little knowledge of German.

#### Swahili documents written in Arabic letters (pp.28-218)

Particularly impressive are the descriptions of the various *tenzi*, *mashairi* and *hadithi*, of which the most important ones as e.g. the *Chuo cha Herkal*, *Utendi wa Mwana Kupona*, *Utendi wa Mkunumbi* and *Kitabu Mauludi* were already published in scholarly editions, though in Roman transliterations and not in the original Arabic spelling. The catalogue describes their material conditions in minute details, as the content summaries of the poems and prose works serve a quick overview, which might be useful for coursework or comparative analysis. Dammann's casual remarks on poetological questions furthermore help in introducing to Swahili poetry as a whole. The number of secular poems - quite many of them are rather amorous in character - creates the impression that the religious character of the Swahili poetry was perhaps overemphasized for some time. Beside long poems Dammann does not hesitate to describe fragments of merely a few stanzas' length. Certainly worth an edition and study seem to be the *gungu*-song texts kept in Berlin (Nos 101-253), as these combine allegory and symbolism with the dynamism of social competition and performative reflexivity. Quite many of these poems are connected with the legendary hero Liongo Fumo. Other documents are letters, which release information on the communication of the German colonial administration of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Quite a number of such texts relate to issues of

<sup>2</sup>More than in the *Verzeichnis* Dammann reflects upon these points in two other publications: (1) "Zur Definition einer afrikanischen Handschrift". In: *Folia Rara. Wolfgang Voigt. LXV. diem natalem celebranti ab amicis et catalogorum codicum orientalium conscribendorum collegis dedicata*, edited by H. Franke, W. Heissig & W. Treue, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976, pp.16-21. (2) *Afrikanische Handschriften in Deutschland*, (Abhandlungen der Marburger Gelehrten Gesellschaft, Nr.23), München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1990 (27 pp.).

the formerly practiced slavery. Documentary literature is given with No.433 *Habari ya Pate*, which was presumably written by Mbarak bin Ali Hinawy. At least one folktale text was noted down in Arabic letters (No.373, a variant of AaTh 670 *The Animal Languages*).

### **Swahili documents written in Roman letters (pp.219-277)**

Among the documents in Roman script we find letters, religious tracts and documentary texts written by christianized authors. The latter type seems to be the most interesting source material for ethnographers, historians and text researchers, though some letters, which mainly depict the relationship between certain German missionaries and their East African personnel, apparently show interconnections with this genre (e.g. in describing habitual life circumstances). Among these writings the following numbers appear to be worth a closer examination: No.474 *Habari ya vita kuu* (Report of the Great War 1914/15 in Tanzania, by Paulo Mbewe), No.476 on Digo ethnography, Nos.478-479 as autobiographical texts of Paulo Mbewe, No.488 *Safari ya Bukoba* (a travel diary by Yakobo Lumwe), No.507 *Masimulizi makuu ya Uzaramo* (Old Reports on Uzaramo, by Simson Samatta, 1945), No.546 *Historiya ndogo za inchi ya Bungu* (A Short History of the Country of Bungu, by a certain Stafano). The topics of these essays, which are compatible with articles from the monthly *Mambo Leo* of the 1920-30s, are issues of the coastal history and culture and/or the life histories of the christianized authors. Some of these were typically created upon Dammann's or other missionaries' requests. No.546 was produced in 1946 under the auspices of the British administration of Korogwe.

It escaped Dammann's notice that the separate folder found within the first exercise book of No.470 (a German-Swahili vocabulary), which produces an undated synoptic glossary of Swahili, Pokomo, "Galla", "Sanye" and Boni words, was published as the particular description of the document exactly fits Gustav A. Fischer's "Die Sprachen im südlichen Gala-Lande", *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 10, 1878: 141-144. Fischer was a medical doctor - Dammann read an unclear and faint inscription on the document somehow as "Dr. Fuchs" -, who participated in the Tana River expedition of the Denhardt Brothers in 1878, where he met speakers of the languages mentioned. Though Johann L. Krapf had edited a similar synopsis including Swahili, Pokomo and "Galla" in 1850, he cannot be held as the originator of this wordlist, as Dammann assumes (p.221); Fischer rather appears to have created an independent glossary, as I do not find any direct reference in Fischer's and Denhardt's writings to Krapf's *Vocabulary of Six East African Languages* (1850), which also differs in certain Swahili and Pokomo spellings from Fischer's list.

### **Manuscripts in other African Languages (pp.278-363)**

Other documents are recorded for 33 further languages, namely Ambo (with 5 sub-units), Asu, Bena, Berber, Bondei, Chaga, Digo, Haya, Herero, Inamwanga, Kamba, Khoesan (sic; with sub-units), Kwangali, three Kwa languages, Luguru, Maasai, Mbandza, Ngumba, Nyakyusa, Nyamwezi, Nyiha, Pokomo, Rwanda, Safwa, Shambala, Sotho, Tswana, Urbantu (sic), Xhosa, Yao, Yaunde, Zaramo, Zigula and Zulu. Again some of the documents originate from

Dammann's own researches in Tanzania and Namibia, of which some were published by him. Beside texts of the mentioned genres the researcher will here find a number of folktale texts. Church songs are mentioned, too. Apart from African authors Part 2 also records European scholars with some of their research papers, which eventually give insights into their working procedures, with which Damman again deviates from the orientalist volumes of the VOHD.

One manuscript, Ferdinand Würtz's synopsis of German, Kiunguja, Kiamu, Kitikuu and Kipokomo lexemes from 1892, is classified twice: as No 525 under Swahili and No 621 under Pokomo. A comparison of this manuscript with the Pokomo glossaries published by Würtz in 1889/90 and 1895, which Dammann recommends on p 326 and which I exercised in 1986 in the course of my work on *A Pokomo-English Dictionary*, did not show any significant differences, except that the manuscript version of 1892 has two lexemes, which were not transferred to the publications (*kiindo* 'bunch of fruits', *yufwa* 'crack, cleft').

The *Verzeichnis* is a unique compilation of manuscripts, which are only accessible in the holding institutions (apart from certain published parts). Some of the documents deserve to be edited in their original language (eventually in facsimile) with translations preferably in English. Annotations and comments, which eventually require further research in archives, libraries and/or the original places of the documents, necessarily have to be added. Interest and the necessity for this have repeatedly been expressed in East Africa, Europe and the USA. A prerequisite for this are catalogues like Dammann's *Verzeichnis* and the already published inventories, as further archives, particularly also in East Africa, have still to be visited for similar work. Ernst Dammann has produced without doubt a great contribution, perhaps setting a monument to the respective writers and researchers, of whom many belonged to Dammann's scholarly networks. Its bias and subjectivisms derive from Dammann's ecclesiastical background and age-old authority and expertise. Part 2 of Vol. XXIV of the VOHD-series is scheduled as forthcoming under the editorship of Herrmann Jungraithmayr; the languages included will be Hausa, Fulfulde, Vai, Nile Nubian and others (Dammann, p 15).

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