W.E. Taylor (1856-1927):

England's greatest Swahili scholar

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William Ernest Taylor (1856-1927), a Swahili scholar, was born on 25 January 1856 at 26 The Cross, Worcester, the first of at least five children of Samuel Taylor (1822-1884) of Frome in Somerset, perfumer, and his wife Harriette (1827-1907), daughter of William Fussell, draper, also of Frome. From King's School, Worcester, he won a scholarship to Hertford College, Oxford, obtaining a third class in classical honour moderations in 1876. He may have had some idea of becoming a doctor, since he enrolled in the Medical Faculty of Edinburgh University for the session 1879/80, but he does not appear to have stayed for
more than one year. Nevertheless, the medical knowledge which he acquired at the university and at the Cowgate dispensery was not wasted in that, during his first East African tour, he acted as the CMS medical officer at Frere Town.

First East African Tour: 1880-1884

After being made a deacon in London on 4 July 1880, Taylor sailed on 29 July from Southampton for Zanzibar, and remained in East Africa (with two furloughs) until 1896, under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Almost immediately he began to learn Swahili. In a letter from Frere Town he wrote:

'My chief business there [Mombasa] has been hitherto confined to the study of the language. From my experience at Freretown, I can assure you that it is almost impossible to learn correct Swahili there, where all one hears is bad English, bad Swahili and (what from analogy I shd consider to be) bad Hindustani. ... I have found my sojourn in the town of the greatest benefit in improving my knowledge of Swahili'.

He was fortunate in being taught Swahili by two of Mombasa's foremost scholars, both of whom belonged to the miji tisiya 'the nine tribes', one of Swahili Mombasa's two amphictyonic groupings. The first scholar was Mwalimu Sikujuwa bin Abdallah al-Batawi (obit 1307 AH / AD 1890), an amiable and accomplished poet by whose aid Taylor formed a large collection of the best Swahili poetry both ancient and modern (Taylor 1891: x); the other was Bwana Hemeqi bin Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Shaykh al-Mambasi (obit 1309 AH / AD 1892) who was a great authority for prose. It was chiefly owing to the quick ear of Bwana Hemeqi that Taylor's attention was first directed to the mistakes Europeans commonly make in pronunciation and orthography and to the discovery of the distinction in the 't' and 'd' sounds (Taylor 1891: x).

That Taylor became a minor celebrity amongst Europeans in Mombasa is

Information kindly supplied by Edinburgh University Archives.

Taylor to Wigram, CMS Archives, G3 A5/1882/6, dated Frere Town 3:vi:1882.

Taylor's parents were married in Frome according to the rites and ceremonies of the Baptists, but it is far from certain that Taylor was brought up as a Baptist. What is certain is that throughout his adult life he was a Protestant extremist within the Church of England.

Taylor was made deacon by the Bishop of Mauritius (P.S. Royston), for the Bishop of London, at Holy Trinity, Finchley Road, Hampstead, on 4:vi:1880.

Taylor to Lang, CMS Archives, G3 A5/1883/70, dated Frere Town 19:v:1883.
clear from the three following excerpts. Joseph Thomson, visiting the island in 1883 wrote:

'The convenience in acquiring the Swahili and Arab languages he [Taylor] has cut himself adrift from the [CMS] settlement and lives separately in the town wherein he has nightly levees with the Arabs and Waswahili and has deservedly become popular' (Thomson 1885: 41).

Sir Arthur Hardinge who, as the British Consul-General in Zanzibar, paid an official visit to Mombasa in July 1895 wrote that he had met 'an able and active clergyman named Taylor, whom I knew very well and liked, for he was a learned Arabic [sic] scholar' (Hardinge 1928: 168). Sir Frederick Jackson refers to Taylor in his memoirs thus:

'The was very studious, and became the authority on classical Swahili. I many times later on saw him at his work, from early morning to night, sitting in a stuffy room with two or three old Swahili scholars from Mombasa. He ate practically nothing, was of course a teetotaller and he simply lived for, and apparently on, his work' (Jackson 1930: 110).

Early in 1884, towards the end of his first tour, Taylor obtained a complete manuscript roll of the poem *Utenzi wa Fumo Liyongo*, described as 'gut geschrieben und gut erhalten' (Meinhof 1924-25: 241); this was acquired by the British Museum - now in the British Library - their first and, so far, their oldest Swahili manuscript (MS BL Or.4534). Although the roll is undated, the language is described as *kiNgozi* 'Old Swahili', and the composer may well be related to the author of the *Inkishafi*, a famous eighteenth century poem from northern Swahili-land (see below). Fumo Liyongo (*fumo* 'spear' being a title) is the legendary hero of the Swahili people, the poem having a special significance since 'die Sage von Liongo ist für den Suaheli von ähnlicher Bedeutung wie für den Deutschen die Siegfriedsage' (Meinhof 1924-25: 243); in English history and literature Fumo Liyongo may be compared with the legendary King Arthur.

**Second East African tour: 1885-1889**

On 5 November 1884 Taylor left England once again, in the company of Bishop James Hannington (1847-1885), and during this voyage Taylor’s father died in Chesterfield.\(^9\) Once back in East Africa, Hannington ordained Taylor a priest at Frere-town, Mombasa, on 31 May 1885,\(^10\) and thereafter Taylor was

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\(^9\) Samuel Taylor died in Chesterfield on 8:xi:1884, aged 62 (Death Certificate).

\(^10\) *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, August 1885, 619 (the bishop’s first ordination).
sent on long journeys amongst the Giryama (north of Mombasa). Even here, as his diary reveals, he would visit Swahili friends from Mombasa who were engaged in trading.\(^{11}\)

His study of Giryama (a Bantu language, closely related to Swahili) resulted in *Giryama Vocabulary and Collections* (Taylor 1890), a publication which has retained its interest over the years;\(^{12}\) and it was to Taylor that Hardinge turned when he penned ‘Giryama - Account of Country and People’ (Hardinge 1896). An altogether slighter work was *A Vocabulary of the Languages of Chaga and Taveta*, 1891-95 (of which only 25 copies were printed). In Chagga-land, where he was stationed for almost six months in 1888, he was on excellent terms with Chief Mandara of Moshi (who had welcomed the CMS in 1885); in April 1889 he was in touch with Bushiri bin Salim al-Harthy who later that year was captured and hanged in Pangani by the Germans.\(^{13}\)

Although Taylor was a prolific writer, his printed work was scarcely proportionate to his knowledge. He was back in England, on leave, for the publication of his *African Aphorisms or Saws from Swahili-land* (Taylor 1891 [2nd impression 1924]); it was probably this book - ‘das vortreffliche Buch von W.E. Taylor’ (Meinhof 1940: v) - rather than any other of his works which had the widest circulation and which made the most impact. It contains more than six hundred proverbs in the Swahili of Mombasa, interlaced with comments and notes which are frequently instructive, often delightful, sometimes both. In her *BSOAS* obituary of Taylor Alice Werner wrote that the *Aphorisms* ‘should never have been allowed to go out of print, both for the sake of the proverbs themselves and the notes, which besides elucidating many obscure points in Bantu grammar are full of interest from other points of view’.

For as long as there are those who take a serious interest in the Swahili people and their language *African Aphorisms* will be read, and read again.

Taylor’s own copy of the printed edition contains a wealth of manuscript addenda; some of the marginalia are pencilled and faint, but there is much here which is of absorbing interest for the Swahili scholar.\(^{14}\) Did he annotate a second

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11 CMS Archives, Z13, now in Birmingham University Library
12 For Taylor’s personal, annotated copy see: SOAS Bantu MS 20264
14 The Taylor Papers, SOAS MS 47752
copy of this opuscule? In an undated letter, J.W.T. Allen refers to Taylor's 'personal copy' of the book, describing it as 'bound in soft scarlet leather'; according to Allen, this copy formed part of the Dar-es-Salaam University collection of Swahili manuscripts (Allen 1971: MS 598). Allen wrote:

'It contained a vast amount of additional material in his handwriting and was of such value that I asked for it to be kept in a specially safe place. Hence it was not photographed with the rest of the DSM [Dar es-Salaam] collection and it cannot now be found.'

Third East African tour: 1892-1896

Taylor was now engaged to be married, and news of his engagement had reached his Swahili friends in Mombasa. Husayn bin Khamis al-Mundhry who was, on the surviving evidence, one of Taylor's most prolific Swahili correspondents, wrote to him in England saying that when the couple returned to Mombasa they could, if they so wished, live in his refurbished house in Kisauni, and that his wife and Mrs Taylor would be intimate friends. On 21 April 1892 Taylor, now aged 36, married Catherine Tesseyman in Hull, a few months after the publication of *African Aphorisms*. Soon afterwards the newly wedded couple sailed for Mombasa. Their house in N'diya K'uu was rented for the Taylors by the CMS (the house still stands). Of it Taylor wrote - *Rashidi bin Salimu [al-Mazru'i] alikuwa akik'eti nyumba ya N'dia K'uu ak'etiyo Bwana Tela sasa (1896)* 'Rāshīdī bin Sālim [al-Mazru'i] used to live in the house in N'diya K'uu where Mr Taylor now lives (1896)'.

In 1893, in the CMS compound at Kisauni, Taylor printed a polemical tract intended for Muslim readers which he entitled *Raha isiyo Karaha* 'Unhampered Happiness' - of bibliographical interest since this was probably the first Swahili book in Arabic script to be printed and published in East Africa. It was subsequently published in London (twice) and, later still, in Nairobi. Much

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16 This Swahili letter (in Arabic script) is at present a loose and unnumbered item in SOAS MS 53826.
17 Catherine, daughter of William Tesseyman, currier, of Hull, was then aged 28 (Marriage Certificate).
18 SOAS MS 54343, vol. A.
19 *Raha isiyo Karaha* 'Unhampered Happiness', Kisauni 1893 (printed by W.E. Taylor); reprinted in London for the Church Missionary Society's Mission in Swahili-land, 1897, and 1902; there was a fourth printing in Nairobi, possibly 1940, in romanised script only, and without any diacritics to indicate aspiration.
later, a criticism of this, and of other polemical tracts, was made by Shaykh al-Amin bin Ali, a notable qâdî of Mombasa, who resented the printed attacks made by Christian missionaries upon Islam (al-Mazru'i 1939: 1).

Another of Taylor's achievements is that he was the unwitting cause of a new genre of Swahili poetry known as mahadhi ya Tela 'Taylor's tune'. Taylor often went to what was then Mombasa's market-place (now called Pigott Place); in a shed devoted to barbers and razor grinders he would sing Christian hymns in Swahili which he had composed or translated. The response of the wat'u wa mji 'the Swahili people of Mombasa' is summed up in a snatch of doggerel, current in Mombasa at that time: ibada ya Mola * haiko sokoni 'the worship of the Lord is not (to be found) in the market-place'. Even when the Taylors were on holiday in Amu early in 1894, travelling there and back by steamship, he inaugurated market services similar to those at Mombasa. As a result of Taylor's hymn-writing and hymn-singing activities (which generated animosity amongst the Swahili population of both Mombasa and Amu) the nyimbo 'songs', composed by the wat'u wa mji in response to the hymns composed or translated by Taylor, became an accepted literary innovation, the words of his opponents fitting Taylor's mahadhi 'tune' - and, in due course, other tunes too - rather than the mizani 'metre', as was the custom. Thus were new criteria introduced to Swahili prosody, so that it was no longer unacceptable for a Swahili poet to compose poems that include guni 'metrical defects'. Mahadhi ya Tela survived in Mombasa until the 1950s.

Taylor was very much persona grata amongst the small circle of Mombasa's Swahili literati. Christian missionary though he was, he also seems to have been welcome amongst some at least of Mombasa's 'ulama' 'religious scholars'. To give some substance to this claim there is the anecdote that one evening Taylor went to call on the qâdî of Mombasa, Shaykh Ali bin Abdallah al-Mazru'i (obit

or dental stops.

21 Ibid., Mombasa 1894
23 I am indebted to the late Nasoro wa Khalfan mKilindini (obit 1418 AH / AD 1997) for a specimen recording of mahadhi ya Tela (Mombasa, September 1992); it is in accord with another made some twenty years earlier by Mwana P'eponi mFamao. I am grateful to Yahya Ali Omar for enabling me to listen to the latter.
1312 AH / AD 1894) and found him reading by candle-light; concerned that the inadequate light would damage his friend’s eyesight, Taylor went back to his own house in Ndiya K’uu, collected a pressure lamp and returned to illuminate his learned friend.

On 2 December 1894 the Taylors’ first child, Bernard William, was born in Mombasa.24 As is made plain in the congratulatory letters which Taylor received from some of the wat’u wa mji, the event delighted the Swahili gentry, whose slaves took time off for a ngoma ‘a dance’ to celebrate the occasion;25 the proud father also received a letter of congratulations from the Mombasa-born qādī of Zanzibar.26 Taylor was known and loved by a large circle of Mombasa’s Swahili literati (in the 1880s Mombasa was still a small but overwhelmingly Swahili town). Shortly after the birth Mrs Taylor returned to England, presumably with her infant son.27

In 1896 Taylor asked for a History of Mombasa to be dictated, and this he wrote down in a book now deposited in the library of the School of Oriental & African Studies in London (SOAS MS 54343, vol.A). This version of the history of Mombasa is most useful for an understanding of SOAS MS 373394, ‘The Mombasa Chronicle’.28

In 1896 his third East African tour came to an end. It was decreed in London that he should not return to East Africa, and he sailed for England on 10 October 1896. Even today, a century after his final departure, a small number of wat’u wa mji ‘the Swahili people of Mombasa’ remember the name of Bwana Tela.

Remaining years and later publications

In 1898 Taylor was posted to Cairo to do translation into Swahili. Travelling via Naples he arrived in December, renting a house in the northern suburb of al-Zāhir, and hiring a language teacher (a Copt). The exacting study of Arabic

24 Birth certificate, issued by H.M Consul, Zanzibar (Ernest Berkeley, 1857-1932), by virtue of a letter from Taylor, dated Mombasa 9:i:1895 Despite a thorough search in the Zanzibar National Archives Taylor’s letter has not been found.

25 The Taylor Papers, SOAS MS 47782, Swahili Letters, Item 5 (recto, upper portion); ibid, Item 72.

26 Ibid, SOAS MS 47769, Swahili Letters, Item 8.


28 Afrika und Übersee lxxiii./1 1990, 101-128.
took up much of Taylor's energies, and little time was found for Swahili translation.\textsuperscript{29} It is clear, however, that while in Cairo he nourished the hope that the CMS would enable him to return to Mombasa - but it was not to be, for he returned to England on 4 September 1900. On 10 April 1903 he was sent to Khartoum as a chaplain, but on 3 October he was sent back to England on medical grounds, and on 4 October 1904 his connection with the CMS closed.

He then held a succession of clerical appointments,\textsuperscript{30} the last of which was the benefice of Halton Holgate in Lincolnshire. It is clear that during the last thirty years of Taylor's life he could not settle anywhere for more than a few years, nor could he dismiss Mombasa from his heart and mind.

While in Mombasa, Taylor had received help in his attempt to translate portions of the Bible into Swahili, notable in this respect was Shaykh Burhan bin Abدلالزیز al-Amawi (obiit 1354 AH / AD 1935)\textsuperscript{31} whose father, Shaykh Abدلالزیز bin Abdalghani (obiit 1314 AH / AD 1896) had attempted translation work for Edward Steere in Zanzibar. Possibly Taylor's finest Bible translation was his rendering of the Psalms (Taylor 1904). This tiny tome, published in 1904 by the British & Foreign Bible Society, with a subvention provided by his brothers in Chesterfield, rightly makes no mention of a translator, although the translation was assuredly Taylor's.\textsuperscript{32} Like the Coverdale Psalter, Taylor's Psalter is both an accurate translation and also a work of literary merit.

Unlike Coverdale's Psalter, the work has never been reprinted - partly because it has been of no interest to Swahili-speaking Muslims (even though the Holy Qur'an makes half a dozen references to the Psalms), and partly because it has been of little or no interest to Swahili-speaking Christians (whose mother-tongue, for the most part, is not Swahili - or, if Swahili, not kiMwi'ta)\textsuperscript{33}.

In 1910 a missionary colleague, Mrs F. Burt (Alice Elsie Wyatt), published a Swahili Grammar & Vocabulary (SPCK, London).\textsuperscript{34} In the preface Mrs Burt

\begin{footnotes}
\item W.E. Taylor, Annual Letter to CMS. Cairo, February 1900.
\item Crockfords Clerical Directory.
\item While Taylor was a curate in Swansea his widowed mother, Harriette, died on 23 September 1907, in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, aged 80 (Death Certificate).
\item Ibid., Frere Town, 14:i:i:1889.
\item BFBS, Editorial sub-committee minutes of 2:i:x:1903, Vol. xxx, 48.
\item Darlow & Moule ii, 1911, Central Swahili, Item 8733; for other translations by Taylor into central Swahili see Items 8725-8732 & 8734
\item The SPCK archives in London no longer possess the correspondence relating to this publication.
\end{footnotes}
writes that 'the standard of Swahili adopted is that set by Taylor', who also
‘furnished the Syllabary and Part I of the work'; indeed, Taylor's imprint is
apparent on almost every page. It is curious, therefore, that the work was not
published under joint authorship. Be that as it may, some eighty years later this
work remains, despite defects, and despite considerable developments in linguistic
science, the unrivalled grammatical introduction to the Swahili of Mombasa.

One of the many interesting items included in the Swahili Grammar &
Vocabulary, and in Taylor's Groundwork which preceded it, is the subtle distinction
between a Swahili 'monster' class and the more common augmentative. The
'monster' class (but not the augmentative) is largely, possibly entirely, absent in
the standardised language. The present writer hopes to consider semantic and
other features of the Swahili 'monster' class in a future article.

In 1915 Taylor published the Mombasa version of a much loved Swahili
classic, the Inkishafi 'The Soul's Awakening'; his poetic rendering which
accompanied the recension (he was assisted in the work by a distinguished group
of Mombasa's literati who are named on page 81) was the first printed English
translation of a major Swahili poem (Stigand 1915: Introduction and 80-105).

Taylor retained his interest in Swahili to the end of his life, examining
for the War Office, and translating for the Salvation Army. He died of a heart
attack in Bath on 2 October, 1927, aged 71 years,35 and there he was buried, in a
paupers' grave.36

The Taylor Papers and other material

Taylor had made provision for the disposal of his unique collection, Item 3
of his Will reading: 'I bequeath all my linguistic books including note-books and
manuscripts to be found collected together in cases labelled "Linguistic" to the
Trustees of the British Museum'.37 Three weeks after her husband's death, Taylor's
widow,38 Catherine, offered the bequest of books and 'about sixteen note books'
to the Museum;39 the bequest was declined. Taylor's widow sold some of the
printed books to the Library of the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS)

35 Death Certificate.
36 Lyncombe and Widcombe and St James's Cemetery Register of Graves Entry No
18665 of 7:x:1927.
38 Catherine survived her husband by thirty-two years, dying in Reigate, Surrey, on
8 June 1959, aged 95. (Death Certificate).
39 Mrs Catherine Taylor's letter, written from Halton Holgate Rectory on 26:x:1927,
is in the central archives of the British Museum.
in London for ten pounds. At about the same time she sold Hichens her husband's Swahili note-books and papers to Hichens for sixty shillings.\(^4\) As far as Swahili studies are concened, that must surely have been the bargain of the century. After Hichens's death in Mombasa on 2 October 1944, the estate was bequeathed to his son Grahaeme.\(^4\) Subsequently a part of the Swahili collection (of which the Taylor papers were a component) was sold to a London bookseller, while a part was presented to the SOAS library. Furthermore, shortly after Alice Werner died at home in Welwyn Garden City in 1935, Hichens approached her sister Mary, who was Alice's executrix, and purchased some thirty Swahili items pertaining to Taylor;\(^2\) it is now difficult to say whether all or even some of these items eventually reached the SOAS library. At any rate a substantial portion of the Taylor Papers was lodged in the School's library by chance rather than by design. The Taylor Papers (and, indeed, the entire Swahili manuscript collection in the SOAS library) remain without an accurate, detailed catalogue; and it is sad to relate that due to a combination of negligence and dishonesty many of the choicest items are now 'missing'. J.W.T. Allen wrote:

'I consider it of very great importance that any of his [i.e. Taylor's] work that can be recovered should be edited and published, while there are people alive who can understand it' (typescript letter from Nairobi, undated).

The present writer is in agreement with that opinion, and would only add that he considers that now (1998) there is one and only one person alive in possession of the requisite scholarship.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) SOAS MS 253028, f 43; Mrs Taylor's receipt is dated 28:xi:1936.


\(^2\) The list of items purchased from Alice Werner's estate in 1936 appears as a typescript of three unnumbered pages in SOAS MS 53491; the list has been included in the wrong file, and should probably have been included in SOAS MS 253028.

\(^4\) Apart from the poetry of Bwana Muyaka, there has been little work on the Taylor Papers deposited in the SOAS library. Three relevant articles are:

- a study of one stanza by Bwana Muyaka: *leo p' a wala mala-mbi* (*ZDMG* cxli/1, 1991, 131-138)
- a study of five stanzas entitled *wanawake watano* 'five women' (*AuÜ* lxxvi/2, 1993, 289-298)
- a study of *shairi la washonao-nguo wa Mambasa* 'the poem about the tailors of Mombasa' (*Swahili Forum* I, 1994, 29-46)

Sadly, most of the Taylor Papers remain unedited; it is possible that within a generation there will be no-one with sufficient knowledge to perform this task.
In Germany, the Seminar für Afrikanische Sprache (now the Institut für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik) purchased five items from Taylor's widow, probably in the early 1930s. This was confirmed by Professor August Klingenheben (1886-1967) writing from the Hansische Universität (now Universität Hamburg) to Hichens in 1936; the material consists of MSS 3552 to 3556 inclusive. Professor Ernst Dammann, makes no reference to their provenance in his superb catalogue of Swahili manuscripts in Germany (Dammann 1993).

Charles Sacleux (1856-1943) described Taylor as 'une autorité incontestée' (Sacleux 1939:11), while Carl Meinof (1857-1944) and Alice Werner (1859-1935) considered Taylor's linguistic ability to be exceptional; such opinions would have been based largely on the exiguous evidence of Taylor's published material. Yet even the most cursory examination of the Taylor Papers serves to enhance such considered opinions, and elsewhere attempts have been made to demonstrate that the Taylor Papers are worthy of serious study by all who have a scholarly interest in the language and literature of central Swahili-land (for example ZDMG cxli/1, 1991, & AnU lxxvi/2, 1993).

Of the greatest possible interest are two files containing ninety-seven letters (and four envelopes), mainly in Swahili, mainly in Arabic script, and mainly to Taylor. These letters - which comprise, as it were, a window opening out onto Swahili Mombasa at the end of the nineteenth century - may be found some of the evidence for the thesis that Taylor successfully entered into the Swahili mind. Others also possessed this ability - notably Charles Sacleux (greatest of Swahili lexicographers), H.E. Lambert (whom J.W.T. Allen considered to be 'outstandingly the greatest European scholar of Swahili in this century') and, possibly, J.L. Krapf (the father of Swahili studies) - but Taylor has the pre-eminence.

It is hoped that a further article studying fifteen items from SOAS MS 53826 ('14th / 19th century Swahili letters from the Taylor Papers')

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41 Klingeneheben to Hichens, Hamburg 12xii:1936. In: SOAS MS 253028, f. 44.
42 When I reviewed Dammann's masterly Afrikanische Handschriften in 1994 I was myself unaware of this fact.
43 Taylor's last surviving child, Mary Ruth Fussell Taylor, recalls a large box of her father's papers being sent to Southwell some time after the second World War, but the indexes of the Minster library do not record a relevant accession.
44 'Swahili letters from the Taylor Papers: being a study of SOAS MS 47769 & MS 47782'. In: SAJAL xiv, Supplement 1, 2-11.
will shortly be published in a Supplement to the *South African Journal of African Languages*.

Thanks to his teacher Bwana Hemeği, Taylor's enquiring mind and sensitive ear were attuned to the phonemic riches of the Swahili alphabet (both Arabic and romanised orthography as generally used are inadequate for the writing of Swahili). Indeed he devised characters which indicate the presence of aspiration in the five unvoiced stops /ch^h/, /k^h/, /p^h/, alveolar /\textipa{tʰ}/ and dental /\textipa{tʰ}/. These are all phonemes in Swahili (or more precisely, in all the Swahili dialects save one); in English, by contrast, aspiration in plosives is not phonemic, merely allophonic. He also devised characters to distinguish between alveolar /d/ and /t/ and dental /\textipa{d}/ and /\textipa{t}/; again, the distinctions are phonemic in Swahili. Indeed Taylor was hoping to publish materials for a justification of the diacritical printing of Swahili in romanised script; "it was intended that the materials, dated 1887/88, would be printed at Kisauni, where the CMS had a press. While there is no known surviving example of the proposed leaflet much of the material was, in fact, published elsewhere (Burt 1910: 149-151). Of these efforts in Swahili phonology Meinhof wrote that ‘Taylor fand die feinste Unterschiede der Suahelikonsonanten, die bis jetzt entdeckt ist’ (Meinhof 1910: 88).

On the subject of Swahili phonology, Lambert records that Taylor often visited Miritini, in the Changamwe area west of Mombasa, where he was always surrounded by children.

‘On one such occasion he distributed small coins among his little friends. Just afterwards a child who was visiting relations there went to him and said *Rela, mbona sipari nami?* “Taylor, why don’t I get a coin too”? Taylor then asked where the child came from and was told that he was a visitor from Vumba, and this was the first occasion on which Taylor came across [unaspirated] alveolar “t” of Mombasa Swahili replaced by “t”’ (Lambert 1958: 105).

**Conclusion**

An American researcher recently attributed the name of the distinguished historian ‘Rev [sic] A.J.P. Taylor’ [1906-1990] to the Reverend W.E. Taylor, associating it with the names of other students of Swahili of that era, in order to express the opinion that their contributions to Swahili studies ‘mostly took the form of uncritical collections of folk history and literature’, and implying that trained Swahili scholars now know better (*IJAHS* xxv/2, 1992, 262)!

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*SOAS archives, Tucker Collection, PP MS 43, file 29.*
The existing evidence suggests that throughout his life Taylor found it difficult to relate to other people - the literati of Swahili Mombasa being the exception.\textsuperscript{60} Concerning Swahili scholarship, only three Englishmen, all amateurs, have earned the respect of the Swahili people for competence in the Swahili language: W.E. Taylor, H.E. Lambert (1893-1967), who described Taylor as 'the famous linguist, to whom students of the Swahili language are so much indebted' (Lambert 1958: 88), and J.W.T. Allen (1904-1979), who considered Taylor to be 'a man of exceptional scholarship' (typescript letter from Nairobi, undated). The greatest of the three is Taylor. He was the first foreigner fully to appreciate the nature of aspiration and other linguistic phenomena in Swahili; he was the first to realise that, philologically, Swahili-land should be studied as three main regions - northern, central and southern; he was the first and the only foreigner (apart from H.E. Lambert) to compose and publish Swahili poetry stylistically acceptable to the Swahili people - and provoking a new genre of Swahili poetry in the process; together with his teacher Mwalimu Sikujuwa (in his time acknowledged the best Swahili antiquary in Mombasa to whom Taylor was indebted for almost all he had collected in old Swahili poetry) Taylor was the agent by which the compositions of many of the Swahili poets, notably the Mombasa poet Bwana Muyaka bin Haji, were salvaged from oblivion (Taylor 1891: 82).\textsuperscript{a}

Had Swahili never been standardised by the colonial power, or had the basis of standardisation been the Swahili of Mombasa rather than that of Zanzibar, or had Mombasa remained the capital of an independent state then, undoubtedly, the value of Taylor's contribution to Swahili studies would have been more readily recognised. It was Taylor's fate that, for a concatenation of factors, lesser scholars were to receive greater acclaim; moreover, the Swahili of Mombasa was, and continues to be, ignored in Nairobi, Dar es-Salaam and Zanzibar, and the Swahili way of life, which still flourished in the Mombasa of the 1890s, was to wither and decay.

\textsuperscript{a} It is not the intention of this article to attempt an analysis of Taylor's exceedingly complex character, but rather to concentrate on his contribution to Swahili studies.

\textsuperscript{b} There are two major publications concerning the Mombasa poet Bwana Muyaka: i Hichens, W. (ed.). \textit{Diwani ya Muyaka}. Johannesburg 1940. ii Mohammed H[asan] Abdulaziz [mKilifi]. \textit{Muyaka}. Nairobi 1979. Neither work is entirely satisfactory, but for different reasons. The Introduction to the Hichens volume is remarkable in that it makes no reference to Taylor.
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