



### Sub-project C07

## The place of Swahili Manuscripts in East African Collections The role of Manuscripts in the organization of Swahili knowledge: their material design & relation to performance

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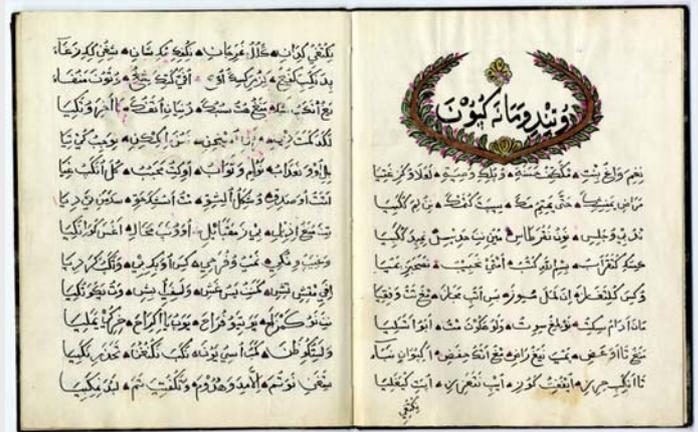
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#### Description of the project

This sub-project is devoted to the study of Swahili manuscripts written in Swahili-Arabic script which belong in East African collections compiled by Swahili scholars, poets or their heirs, or by libraries, archives and mosques. The implementation of this sub-project involves the identification, description and analysis of a number of East African collections containing Swahili manuscripts. Information about the organization, usage and historical development of these collections will be gathered in interviews with their owners in order to offer further insights into their internal structure, their overall function in the transmission of knowledge and into specific functions of Swahili manuscripts alongside the Arabic mss included in these collections.

#### Objectives

This sub-project seeks to clarify the roles Swahili manuscripts play or have played in the organization and transmission of Swahili knowledge in the domains of history, religion, law, philosophy, language and literature. Inventories of the contents of these collections will be made and their genesis and history reconstructed and interpreted following interviews with their owners. The manuscripts will be digitized and subjected to material analysis. The results of this reconstruction will provide a basis for comparison with collections in other sub-projects.



First 20 verses of a didactic poem composed by Mwana Kupona (1810 – 1860); MS H 58 written by the scribe Muh'd Kijuma ±1915, Asia-Africa-Institute, UHH.

In a society such as the Swahili society, where literacy is restricted and orality emphasized, the manuscripts expected to be found will have to be considered in relation to the oral performance of the composition; thus a further objective of this sub-project is to study the relation between manuscripts and oral practices. The popular poem Utendi wa Mwana Kupona (±1858) will serve as a case study to explain the existence of a large number of copies of this classical poem, which, to this day, is recited at various Swahili ceremonies.

#### Swahili Manuscript Culture

With the arrival of Islam in the 8th century, literacy in Arabic and the Arabic script reached the East African coast. By the end of the 17th century writing Swahili in the Arabic script was well-established and had given rise to a deep-rooted literary tradition, producing a considerable number of manuscripts. Despite the sizeable corpus and critical text editions of various literary achievements such as Hamziyya, Al-Inkishafi, Fumo Liyongo, Muyaka and Mwana Kupona, there are, as yet, no established conventions of codicological research. In most cases the contexts of manuscript production and of manuscript usage remain unclear. Swahili manuscript studies are still in their initial stages: most of the scientific tools and data that are standard in other disciplines still have to be developed.



Part of a bilingual Swahili-Arabic MS (±1880) in the collection of Moh'd Idris M. Saleh (Zanzibar, 1934?–2012), written by 'Abd al-'Aziz b. 'Abdu'l-Ghany al-Amawy (1838-1896). Originally found in the collection of Sh. Burhan Muh'd M'kelle (1884 – 1949).