

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
announces a Lecture

by

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**When the “Kaiser” Came to Mozambique. The Adaptation and
Circulation of Swahili Writing(s) along the East African Coast**

While Arabic literary networks in the Indian Ocean and their adaptation into various local contexts have recently inspired research, the transregional circulation of manuscripts and writing practices in African languages and their local adaptation have hardly been considered. Drawing on recent fieldwork on Swahili manuscripts in Northern Mozambique, my aim is to sketch out a transregional Swahili literary network as well as to consider different practices of adaptation along the East African coast. I will start by considering the adaptation and effect of writing in Northern Kenya of the 18th and 19th century, a period of increased manuscript production. Concentrating on the *utenzi*, a written, narrative poem, which particularly flourished at that time, I will highlight how much the genre is linked to written form in terms of both its poetic gestalt as well its narrative content. Writteness allows the texts to travel more than any other genre at that time: In the second part of my presentation, I will follow *utenzi* manuscripts from Northern Kenya to Northern Mozambique. Historically, the Mozambican coast used to be part of the same Swahili “cultural complex”, taking part in the same Indian Ocean network, regularly communicating and exchanging trade goods with other city states along the East African coast. In the 19th century, Swahili used to be the most important transregional lingua franca along the coast, which figured in written correspondence as well as in poetry. I will consider the local adaptation of Swahili manuscript writing in the local context of Northern Mozambique and explore some of the differences between manuscript practices in Mozambique and Kenya.

28 January 2016 at 6 pm
Room 0001, CSMC