

**THE HISTORY OF THE SWAHILI LITERATURE UNTIL
THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. PH.D.
THESIS (1982)**

ABDULLAH NAGIB MUSA

I have attempted to present a thesis in the history of Swahili Literature, until the end of the nineteenth century.

The thesis has a preface and three chapters.

Preface:

In this preface I have discussed, The previous studies in Swahili Literature, The Bantu People and their civilization and the spread of Swahili Language and reasons underlying that.

Chapter one:

The heading of this chapter is "Recorded Swahili folklore".

This Folklore consists of - Songs and tales of historic events, of wonder and imagination, of wit as well as animal fables, Proverbs and Riddles.

The Songs are used to accompany a dance or during performances of rites, rituals and ceremonies, these are more or less devoid of Islamic influence.

Some of Swahili rituals are of Bantu origin, and most of them are of Arabic origin.

Chapter:

The heading of this chapter is "The features of Swahili Literature in the 18 & 19th century, Early Swahili Literature was written in Arabic script, which has given way to the Roman script. Most of whatever is written today in the Arabic script consists of private personal letters and Islamic poems.

Swahili literature began, probably in the 13th century A.D., in the northern Kenya coast, in Pate and Lamu; it flourished in Momabasa with the poet Myuaka bin Haji at the end of the 18th century; a few later it began in Zanzibar.

Swahili literature of the 18th and 19th century is almost entirely Islamic, the literature of this period is all in poetry.

One of the oldest Swahili poems is the "Hamziya" (1928) its language is essentially older. "Hearkali" an epic of 1145 stanzas is dated 1728. To up till now there is no Arabic epic known that can have served as the original which the Swahili poet used for his Swahili version.

The kasida poems (Maulidi hymns) in Swahili are however, derived from Arabic through Islam, Swahili literature has much in common with the literature of other Islamic cultures as regard the beliefs, concepts and literary styles. However, a close look at early Swahili didactic poetry will show existence of originality at an early stage during its development, it would therefore be absolutely wrong to assume that Swahili poetry is completely derived from Arabic Poetry.

Chapter three :

I have given the following heading to this chapter "Analytical studies"

In this chapter I have tried to show the Arabic influence in subjects forms and ideas, on the other hand I did my best to show the origin of the Bantu culture in the Swahili literature.

I have attempted also to show the special elements of the culture of the Swahili people and the influence of the local environment on the formation of that culture.