

W.E. Taylor (1856-1927):

England's greatest Swahili scholar

(being a revised and expanded version of the 1993 article in the Supplement to the *South African Journal of African Languages*)¹

P.J.L. Frankl

Bwana Tela (1856-1927) alikuja Afrika ya mashriki kutoka Ulaya katika mwaka 1297 wa hijri (mwaka 1880 wa miladi), akakaa kwa muda wa myaka khamustaashara takriban. Ingawa alikuja kutangaza dini ya kiNasara, kazi aliyofanya zaidi Mambasa ilikuwa ni ya mambo ya utaalamu wa lugha ya kiSawahili, na mashairi yake, na utamaduni wa waSawahili. Alipata baha ya kuwa na marafiki wataalamu wa kiMvita, khaswa Mwalimu Sikujuwa al-Batawi, na Bwana Hemedi al-Mambasi. Nyimbo zake za kiMisheni alizotunga kwa kiSawahili hazikutiwa maanani, lakini mahadhi aliokuwa akiimbiya yalibakiya kwa myaka mingi kwa jina la 'mahadhi ya Tela'. Bwana Tela alisaidiana na Mwalimu Sikujuwa kuhifadhi t'ungo za washairi wengi wa kale zisipotee, khaswa t'ungo za Bwana Muyaka. Kadhalika alikusanya mithali ya kiSawahili, zaidi ya sita-mia. Karatasi zake alizoandika mambo ya kiSawahili, nyingi sasa ziko maktaba ya SOAS, London, na ni muhimu katika kutusaidiwa kufahamu kiSawahili cha kiSawahili. Si makosa kusema kuwa Bwana Tela ndiye mtaalamu mkubwa wa kiSawahili katika wataalamu wote wa kiNgereza.

William Ernest Taylor (1856-1927),² Swahili scholar, was born on 25 January 1856 at 26 The Cross, Worcester,³ 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

¹ 'W.E. Taylor (1856-1927): Swahili scholar extraordinary'. In: *South African Journal of African Languages* (Supplement 2), 1993, 37-41; a photographic portrait of Taylor is reproduced on page 37. I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to the Editor for permission to reproduce material from this article

² Notices in:
The Times, 4.x.1927;
BSOAS iv, 1926-28, by Alice Werner;
ZES xix, 1928-29, by Alice Werner;
DNB: Missing Persons (ed. C.S. Nicholls), Oxford 1993, by P.J.L. Frankl, 665.
New DNB (ed. Colin Matthew), Oxford (forthcoming), by P.J.L. Frankl.

³ Parish of St Nicholas, Worcester (Birth Certificate).

more than one year.⁴ Nevertheless, the medical knowledge which he acquired at the university and at the Cowgate dispensary was not wasted in that, during his first East African tour, he acted as the CMS medical officer at Frere Town.⁵

First East African Tour: 1880-1884

After being made a deacon⁶ in London on 4 July 1880,⁷ 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 soujourn in the town of the greatest benefit in improving my knowledge of Swahili'.⁸

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-Baṭawī (obiit 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 Hemedi bin Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Shaykh al-Mambasī (obiit 1309 AH / AD 1892) who was a great authority for prose. It was chiefly owing to the quick ear of Bwana Hemedi 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

⁴ Information kindly supplied by Edinburgh University Archives.

⁵ Taylor to Wigram, CMS Archives, G3 A5/1882/6, dated Frere Town 3:vi:1882.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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:vii:1880.

⁸ 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:

For convenience in acquiring the Swahili and Arab languages he [Taylor] has cut himself adrift from the [CMS] settlement and lives separately in the town where 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:

He 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

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 Giriama (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 Giriama (a Bantu language, closely related to Swahili) resulted in *Giriama 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 'Giriama - 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-Harthi 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

¹¹ CMS Archives, Z13, now in Birmingham University Library.

¹² For Taylor's personal, annotated copy see: SOAS Bantu MS 20264.

¹³ W.E. Taylor, Annual letter to CMS Frere Town, Mombasa, 14.ii:1889; Zanzibar National Archives, Taylor to Euan-Smith 28.iv:1889 AA 1/64/202 (enclosure).

¹⁴ The Taylor Papers, SOAS MS 47752

copy of this opusculé? 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶ On 21 April 1892 Taylor, now aged 36, married Catherine Tesseyman in Hull,¹⁷ a few months after the publication of *African Aphorisms*. Soon afterwards the newly wedded couple sailed for Mombasa. Their house in Ndiya 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 Ndiya K'uu ak'etiyo Bwana Tela sasa (1896)* 'Rāshid bin Sālim [al-Mazru'i] used to live in the house in Ndiya K'uu where Mr Taylor now lives (1896)'.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ Much

¹⁵ Estate of J.W.T. Allen, undated letter (possibly 1977) from Nairobi.

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 *qāḍī* of Mombasa, who resented the printed attacks made by Christian missionaries upon Islam (al-Mazru'ī 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.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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,²² 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.²³

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 '*ulamā*' 'religious scholars'. To give some substance to this claim there is the anecdote that one evening Taylor went to call on the *qāḍī* of Mombasa, Shaykh Ali bin Abdallah al-Mazru'ī (obiit

or dental stops.

²⁰ W.E. Taylor, Annual letter to CMS. Mombasa 25:xi:1893.

²¹ Ibid., Mombasa 1894.

²² Sir John Gray's statement that Taylor 'never composed poems in the old *kiMvita* style' requires considerable modification (letter to the editor- 'A Mombasa Worthy, the Reverend W.E. Taylor'. In: *The Mombasa Times*, 15:iii:1955).

²³ I am indebted to the late Nasoro wa Khalfan mKilindini (obiit 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 *qāḍī* 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.

²⁷ On 23:xi:1895 (information in 'CMS Register of Missionaries', interleaved and annotated volume in CMS library, London).

²⁸ *Afrika und Übersee* lxxiii, 1 1990, 101-128.

took up much of Taylor's energies, and little time was found for Swahili translation.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,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 Abdalaziz al-Amawi (obit 1354 AH / AD 1935)³¹ whose father, Shaykh Abdalaziz bin Abdalghani (obit 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.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'ān 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 *kiMvita*).³³

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

²⁹ W.E. Taylor, Annual Letter to CMS. Cairo, February 1900.

³⁰ *Crockfords Clerical Directory*.

While Taylor was a curate in Swansea his widowed mother, Harriette, died on 23 September 1907, in Chesterfield, Derbyshire, aged 80 (Death Certificate).

³¹ Ibid., Frere Town, 14:ii:1889.

³² BFBS, Editorial sub-committee minutes of 2:ix:1903, Vol. xxx, 48.

³³ Darlow & Moule ii, 1911, Central Swahili, Item 8733; for other translations by Taylor into central Swahili see Items 8725-8732 & 8734.

³⁴ The SPCK archives in London no longer possess the correspondence relating to this publication.

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.

³⁷ Ledger 1928, vol. T-Z, 35 at Probate Department, High Holborn, London.

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.⁴⁰ As far as Swahili studies are concerned, 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.⁴¹ 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;⁴² 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.⁴³

⁴⁰ SOAS MS 253028, f 43; Mrs Taylor's receipt is dated 28.xi.1936.

⁴¹ Ledger 1947, vol. H-J, 339 at Probate Department, High Holborn, London.

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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:

i a study of one stanza by Bwana Muyaka: *leo p'a wala mala-mbi* (ZDMG cxli/1, 1991, 131-138).

ii a study of five stanzas entitled *wanawake watano* 'five women' (AuU lxxvi/2, 1993, 289-298).

iii 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;⁴⁴ 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).⁴⁵

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, & AuÜ lxxvi/2, 1993).⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ In 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 ability⁴⁸ - 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')

⁴⁴ Klingenheben to Hichens, Hamburg 12:xii:1936. In: SOAS MS 253028, f. 44.

⁴⁵ When I reviewed Dammann's masterly *Afrikanische Handschriften* in 1994 I was myself unaware of this fact.

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 'Swahili letters from the Taylor Papers: being a study of SOAS MS 47769 & MS 47782'. In: *SAJAL* xiv, Supplement 1, 2-11.

⁴⁸ Frankl, P.J.L. Forthcoming. Entries for J.L. Krapf, Charles Sacleux and H.E. Lambert in *New Dictionary of National Biography* (ed. by Colin Matthew). Oxford: OUP.

will shortly be published in a Supplement to the *South African Journal of African Languages*.

Thanks to his teacher Bwana Hemedi, 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 /t^h/ and dental /t^h/. 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 /d/ and /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;⁹ 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 Suaheli-Konsonanten, 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 "r"' (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)! With due

⁹ SOAS archives, Tucker Collection, PP MS 43, file 29.

respect some of the written evidence suggests otherwise.

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.⁵⁰ 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).⁵¹

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.

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ There are two major publications concerning the Mombasa poet Bwana Muyaka:
 i Hichens, W. (ed.). *Diwani ya Muyaka*. Johannesburg 1940.
 ii Mohammed H[asan] Abdulaziz [mKilifi]. *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.

References

- Allen, J.W.T. *A catalogue of the Swahili and Arabic manuscripts and tapes in University College, Dar es-Salaam*. Leiden 1971.
- Burt, F. *Swahili Grammar and Vocabulary*. London 1910.
- Church Missionary Society. 'Register of Missionaries from 1804 to 1904' - List I, Item 905. London.
- Dammann, E. *Afrikanische Handschriften. Teil I: Handschriften in Swahili und anderen Sprachen Afrikas (Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Band XXIV)*. Stuttgart 1993.
- Darlow, T.H. & H.F. Moule. *Historical catalogue of the printed editions of Holy Scripture in the Library of the British & Foreign Bible Society*, vol. ii. London 1911.
- Frankl, P.J.L. 'W.E. Taylor (1856-1927): Swahili scholar extraordinary'. *South African Journal of African Languages / Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Afrikatale* xiii (Supplement / Byblad 2), 1993, 37-41.
- Frankl, P.J.L., in consultation with Yahya Ali Omar. 'The nature of aspiration in Swahili', *ZDMG* cxli/2 1991, 366-375.
- Frankl, P.J.L. 'W.E. Taylor (1856-1927), Swahili scholar'. In: *New Dictionary of National Biography* (ed. Colin Matthew), Oxford (forthcoming).
- Hardinge, A.H. 'Correspondence respecting the recent rebellion in British East Africa'; Mr A. Hardinge to Marquess of Salisbury, *Parliamentary Papers*, lix/41 of 1896 Africa No 6, Item 59. London 1896.
- Hardinge, A.H. *A diplomat in the East*. London 1928.
- Hichens, W. *Diwani ya Muyaka*. Johannesburg 1940.
- Jackson, F. *Early Days in East Africa*. London 1930.
- Lambert, H.E. *Chi-Jomvu and Ki-Ngare*, Studies in Swahili dialect III. Kampala 1958.
- [al-Mazru'i], al-Amin bin Aly. *Dini ya Islamu* ('The Religion of Islam'). Mambasa 1939.
- Meinhof, C. *Grundriß einer Lautlehre der Bantusprachen*. Berlin 1910.
- Meinhof, C. 'Das Lied des Lioŋo', *ZES*, xv 1924/25, 241-265.
- Meinhof, C. *Der Sprache der Suaheli*³ (Deutsche Kolonial-sprachen, II). Berlin 1940.
- Mohammed H[asan] Abdulaziz [mKilifi]. *Muyaka*. Nairobi 1979.
- Sacleux, C. *Dictionnaire swahili-français*. Paris 1939.
- Stigand, C.H. *A grammar of dialectal change in the Swahili Language*. Cambridge 1915.
- Taylor, W.E. *Giryama vocabulary and collections*. London 1890.
- Taylor, W.E. *African Aphorisms or Saws from Swahili-land*. London 1891.
- Taylor, W.E. *Groundwork of the Swahili language* (Chart on linen). London 1897.
- [Taylor, W.E.]. *Zaburi za Davidi*. London 1904.
- Thomson, J. *Through Masai Land*. London 1885.
- Yahya Ali Omar & P.J.L. Frankl. 'Swahili letters from the Taylor Papers (being a study of SOAS MS 47769 & MS 47782)'. *South African Journal of African Languages / Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Afrikatale* xiv (Supplement / Byblad 2), 1994, 1-11.