Unipe wino mwensi
So, give me now of good black ink
na ya Shamu karatasi
and Syrian paper, fine and white
Na kalamu ya unyasi
From reeds, plucked at the marsh's brink
nipate kuyandikiya
a stylus cut, that

I may write...
Swahili Manuscripts from SOAS
Consultant Editor: Farouk Topan, SOAS

Swahili is the official language of DR-Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, and spoken by more than 100 million people; yet there is a lack of resources for its historical study. This new publication offers fantastic research opportunities for anyone interested in the cultural and literary history of the Swahili language and the people of the East Africa coast.

Much of the material in this collection is in Arabic, and there is plenty of poetry written in northern Swahili dialects. There are also letters, stories, notes, essays on history and culture and drafts of published and unpublished books. These manuscripts are organised into seven distinctive groupings, named for the scholars who collected them.

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Another notable manuscript is the Liyongo saga, dating back to the 12th century. It is an account of the life and works of Liongo Fumo wa Ba-Urui, prince, poet and warrior – a “dramatic account of heroism, wit and strength… believable and identifiable with contemporary socio-political set-up” (Makokha 2000).

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Angelica Baschiera
Research Assistant, Swahili Manuscripts Cataloguing Project

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