

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER NOMINATION FORM

Tanzania – Collection of Arabic Manuscripts and Books

PART A - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1. SUMMARY

The Collection of more than 800 local and printed manuscripts under the custody of the National Archives is unique material to the study of the social and cultural heritage of Zanzibar and the Eastern African region. Some of these go back to 300 years providing data of all kinds and they are of great interest to the study of various aspects of Islam, Arabic literature and rhetoric, history of ideas in Zanzibar and the Eastern African. In addition to cultural content, the manuscripts represent good artistic works showing the art of calligraphy, the arrangement to margins and other points connected with artistic embellishment.

2. DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name (person or organisation)

Zanzibar National Archives

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

2.3 Contact person

Hamad H. Omar

3.4 Contact details

Department of Archives
Museums and Antiquities
Box 116
Zanzibar
Tel: 0255 024 2230342
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3. IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification of the items being nominated

The Arabic Manuscripts under the custody of Zanzibar National Archives can be found under the following provenance.

- The Arabic Manuscripts and Books – (ZA: Group)
- The Arabic Manuscripts of dormant EACROTANAL (EAC: Group)
- The Sultans' Arabic Correspondence (AA5: Class)
- Other Arabic Correspondence – (AL, HD AM Groups)

3.2 Description

In view of Zanzibar's importance in the 19th Century as a commercial empire and centre of administration for the whole of East Africa, Zanzibar developed as a seat of learning and a centre of Swahili culture, a fountainhead of Swahili language and Islam from which the language and the religion were disseminated over a vast region of middle of Africa. This is the enduring cultural contribution of Zanzibar to the history not only of East Africa of human kind in general.

In this context, many records were created by many institutions and individuals over a period of years. Most of these have been systematically collected and preserved in the Zanzibar National Archives. The Archives is therefore endowed with the oldest richest Archives in the East African region including that of Arabic manuscripts that covers not only the history of Zanzibar but also the neighbouring countries. Basically there are two categories of Arabic Manuscripts under the custody of the National Archives: those which are purely religious and which are secular in orientation. There is also a new unpublished list of Sultans' Arabic correspondence as well as Arabic correspondence from the Germany Records collection.

In particular the Arabic manuscripts provide data of all kinds and they are of great interest to those who study the various aspects of Islam, Arabic literature and rhetoric, history of ideas as well as that of eastern African. There are also manuscripts on Islamic Sharia and Theology, the interpretation of Holy Quran and the Prophet Muhammad Hadiths, Arabic language and Grammar, diseases, treatment, local medicine and witchcraft, Astronomy, navigation, Sufism, slavery, divination, diaries, poetry, memoirs, Arabic magazine etc.

4. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Is authenticity established ?

Yes, the authenticity is well established. The original manuscript is under the custody of the Zanzibar National Archives.

4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established ?

The collection is of regional importance which is uniquely available in the Zanzibar Archives only.

4.3 Is one or more of the criteria satisfied ?

The collection meets the following criteria: c) People d) Subject and theme and e) Form and style.

c) People

The Collection of Arabic Manuscripts under the custody of the National Archives is unique sources depicting the rich cultural heritage of Swahili civilisation ("across Swahili corridor" from Mozambique to Mogadishu) based on interaction between African and Indian Ocean peoples with complex and overlapping economic, social and cultural networks. This is one of the largest and rare single collections to be preserved in one location. The authors of the manuscripts were from various parts of Swahili Coast including Zanzibar, Brawa, the

Comoros, etc. There are also a number of rare early editions of printed books from Zanzibar and other presses.

d) Subject and theme

As literary and cultural documents, the manuscripts played a significant role to the study of the social and cultural heritage of Zanzibar and the region. Some of them discuss various aspects of Islamic religion and others are oral narratives which had been exchanged amongst the people and written down in various times.

e) Form and style

In addition to cultural content, the manuscripts represent good artistic works showing the art of calligraphy, the arrangement of margins and other points connected with artistic embellishment. They also draw attention to the existence of a class of artistic calligraphers, copyists as well as the extension of a good tradition which resulted in writing, copying and exchange of books within the Eastern African region.

4.4 Are these issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that related to this nomination ?

The Arabic manuscripts under the custody of Zanzibar National Archives is a rare collection in the East African regions which progressively documents the social and cultural life of the people.

In recent years, the National Archives has embarked on a special programme to preserve the collection and make it accessible to the users. In collaboration with the University of Bergen in Norway, the Archives established a project to properly study the collection and catalogue it. In addition, the Archives under the sponsorship of the Ford Foundation in Nairobi, has started a computerisation project of some of the documents as a strategy to preserve and make them accessible to general public.

5. LEGAL INFORMATION

5.1 Owner of the documentary heritage

The Zanzibar Government, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports.

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage

Zanzibar National Archives
P.O.Box 116
Zanzibar
Fax: 024 2235241
E-mail: dama@zitec.org

5.3 Legal status:

- (a) Category of ownership: Government / Public
- (b) Accessibility: Public Organization
- (c) Copyright status: The Archives is legally preserved under Archives Act of 1988.

- (d) Responsible administration: The Zanzibar Department of Archives, Museums and Antiquities
- (e) Other factors: Preserved by Law

6. MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage?

The collection forms an integral part of Zanzibar National Archives collection. The Archives has proper storage area for the Arabic collection. However, due to environmental factors some of the old papers are endangered; become so brittle hence there is a wear and tear to some of them.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with the owner of the heritage, the custodian, your national or regional Memory of the World Committee:

As the above

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8. ASSESSMENT OF RISK

8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage:

Due to environmental factors and age some of the papers are so brittle and are prone to damage.

9. ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION

9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage:

The Archives has preservation facilities for the collection such as air conditioners and dehumidifiers. However constant power-cuts and fluctuations create more threats to paper documents.

PART C – LODGMENT

This nomination is lodged by

HAMAD HASSAN OMAR

20/02/2003