

**ARCHETYPAL MOTIFS IN  
SWAHILI ISLAMIC POETRY:  
*KASIDA YA BURUDAI***

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**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study is two-fold: to translate *Kasida ya Burudai* into English and analyse it using the theoretical model of archetypal criticism. This Swahili paregyric was originally composed in Arabic and later translated into Swahili. *Kasida ya Burudai* is not only venerated by the Swahilis but also by Muslims worldwide. It is recited during *Maulidi* (Nativity) celebrations and its verses are said to have magical powers. Although it is a masterpiece in the Muslim World, no scholar has looked into the archetypal motifs in it. There is only one English version of the Swahili text. The focal points of the six chapters are the archetypal motifs in *Kasida ya Burudai*.

The study also disputes the view that a translation is a mechanical production. Contrary to a common belief that translation is impossible, it can be an exercise in creative imagination. It has also been argued that Swahili Islamic literature is foreign. Basing our arguments on what experts of psychoanalysis, literature, linguistics, religion, culture, anthropology, translation and mysticism say, we argue on the contrary.

The first chapter is an introductory chapter and the last is the conclusion. It has the summary of findings and recommendations for further research.

Chapter two deals with Swahili Islamic literature. The chapter attempts to answer the question on whether Swahili Islamic literature is Swahili or foreign. There is an outline of Swahili Islamic poetry and a discussion on another famous *kasida*, *Kasida ya Hamziyyah*, which is a detailed biography of the Prophet Muhammad, and is also recited during *Maulidi* festival. This outline of the Swahili Islamic poetry puts *Kasida ya Burudai* into a broad perspective.

Chapter three is on al-Busiri, the original composer of *Kasida ya Burudai*, and Sheikh Muhammad bin Athman Hajji al-Hilali(Mshela), the Swahili translator. We give

a biographical sketch of both al-Busiri and Sheikh Muhammad and discuss their works to show how they share the same world view concerning Sufi Philosophy and Islam in particular. The Chapter highlights the mystical experience the two poets share in their adoration of their Prophet.

Chapter four deals with the origin and nature of the *kasida* and of both the title *Burudai* and the literary conventions associated with the *kasida* genre. We argue that in order to understand *Kasida ya Burudai*, it is important to have some knowledge about the nature of the archetypal pre-Islamic *kasida*. We also compare and contrast the literary conventions of both classical Swahili Islamic poetry and classical Arabic poetry. The Swahili *kasida* and its stylistic features is traced to the pre-Islamic archetypal Arabic *kasida*. The summary of the whole text is given, dividing it into ten-sections (excluding the translator's prologue and epilogue), according to its themes, for convenience. The chapter ends with a discussion on the style of the *kasida* and the translation of the whole text, verse by verse. The themes in each verse are also discussed and the difficult words explained. Wherever an archetypal idea is encountered, it is pointed out.

Chapter five is on archetypal motifs in *Kasida ya Burudai*. Some of the motifs discussed are: *Nur Muhammad* (the Archetypal Light), *Isra'i* and *Miraji* (The Archetypal Journey), *Umm al-Kitab* (The Holy *Qur'an* as an Archetypal Book), Euphrates and Kauthar (The archetypal Rivers); the birth of a Divine Child archetypes, cave (the Archetypal Home), the archetypes of numbers, Arabesque (the archetypal Art), Mountains (the Celestial archetypes of Territories, Temples and Cities), the archetypal love, tree as an archetype, *Haqiqa Muhammadiyyah* (The Archetypal Hero), sacred time and the myths of eternal renewal, Names as archetypes, archetype of Paradise and Hades or Heaven and Hell, Water and Waters motif, the Sun motif, the sacred stone motif, *Sunnat al-Nabi* (The custom of the

Prophet as exemplary History), *Burudai* (The Archetypal Dress) and *Burudai* (The Archetypal Talisman and Amulet).

The results of the study has led us to reach five conclusions: *Kasida ya Burudai* is not a mere mechanical translation but a composition like the original Arabic model, 2. The perso-Arabian prosodic forms were adopted by the *Wanajadi* or *Wanamapokeo* (Swahili traditionalists), 3. The language used in the epic is mystical hence mythical. 4. Since *Kasida ya Burudai* is a famous religious poem, it is most likely that it was one of the very first works to be translated into Swahili and lastly the mythological archetypes cut across the boundaries of all spheres of culture and are not confined to one culture, hence the archetypal motifs in *Kasida ya Burudai* are universal.

Each chapter has an introduction, a conclusion and footnotes. There is also key to the abbreviations used in the study.

There are five appendices. Appendix **a** is the list of the key informants, appendix **b** is the list of experts the researcher interviewed. Most of the experts sent the researcher valuable and relevant information. Appendix **c** is the list of the names of Nairobi *Burdah* recitation and discussion group with whom the researcher participated and had discussions on *Kasida ya Burudai*. Appendices **d** and **e** are some of the twenty Swahili manuscripts in Arabic script the researcher collected in the field. Twenty seven Arabic manuscripts Arabic were purchased in Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Malaysia, India, Canada and in the US. Appendix **d** (hereafter MA) is a manuscript obtained from Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad Umar al-Amudy of Shela. He 'inherited' it from Sheikh Muhammad bin Amin and appendix **e** (hereafter UD) was obtained from the University of Dar-es-Salaam Library and is catalogued as Manuscript No.161.

I transcribed into Roman characters Mss.UD, MA and KB (a manuscript Sheikh Mohamed Said Matano got from an old man in Siyu). I used the last manuscript for my English translation. Sheikh Matano was kind enough to transcribe for me from Arabic to Roman characters two other manuscripts not included here. One of these two manuscripts is similar to UD and I got it from the University of Dar-es-Salaam Library. It is catalogued as Ms. No.131, pp.86-113, 20 x 16 cm. The other one is a manuscript I obtained from Ahmed Sheikh Nabhamy which he obtained from Faraj Bwana Mkuu.