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Copy of the *Dalâ'il
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(Xavier Luffin).

The Arabic Script in Congo from the Years 1880 Until Today. An Invisible Legacy

The documents written in Arabic and Ajami Swahili (Swahili in Arabic characters) which have been produced in Congo since the last decades of the 19th century — the oldest preserved examples date back to the 1880s — until the contemporary period constitute a rich and understudied heritage. These documents — correspondence, treaties, contracts, but also books and decorated artifacts — are valuable for several reasons. First, they demonstrate that the use of writing precedes the arrival of Europeans in certain regions of the Congo, particularly in its Eastern part, questioning the exclusivity of the oral tradition in the region. Then, their content pushes us to review our vision of the precolonial and colonial history of the Congo. Furthermore, it is not only a legacy of the past: in the Muslim communities of DRC, Arabic writing continues to be used, and certain works that are read today on certain occasions were already circulating in the country at the end of the 19th century, revealing the continuity of this heritage over almost a century and a half.

Xavier Luffin is professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium), where he teaches Arabic language and literature. One of his research fields is the development of literacy in Arabic script (Arabic and Ajami Swahili) in Congo and the neighboring countries, from the 19th century until nowadays. His last book regarding this topic is: *Un autre regard sur l'Histoire congolaise. Les documents arabes et swahilis dans les archives belges (1880-1899)*, Bruxelles, Fontes Historiae africanae, 2020, 395 p. He is currently preparing another work on the subject, entitled: *Arabic and Ajami Swahili Literacy in Congo. An Invisible Heritage*. He has recently launched a website regarding the Arabic Script in Congo: <https://kalamunawino.org/>

Weitere Informationen: www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de