

“Symbolic use” In this sense plants are used in proverbs and tales as well as for names of locations (for example, the name “Ndagoni”, a village where field research was done, means “at the nut-grass”).

The lexical part of the book resembles the dictionary of Greenway in the presentation of the plant names. There is a listing of the Swahili plant names and in addition a botanical-Swahili list. But the perspective adopted is different. While Greenway as a botanist describes the botanical characteristics of the plants, the present lexicon concentrates on the uses of plants. Furthermore, it mentions additional names of one plant as well as other botanical species which are labelled by the same name. Most of the data presented are based on the author’s field research. These are supplemented by other material especially from Greenway (first edition 1937), R. O. Williams (*The useful and ornamental plants in Zanzibar and Pemba*. Zanzibar 1949). Therefore the lexicon provides a rich source of really detailed information.

Uta Reuster-Jahn

MARIA VALTORTA: *INJILI KAMA NILIVYOFUNULIWA*. (TRANSLATED FROM ITALIAN BY GIANLUIGI MARTINI). 1996. ISOLA DEL LIRI (FR), CENTRO EDITORIALE VALTORTIANO.

An important editorial achievement has been the recent translation into Swahili of the first volume of the monumental work on the life of Jesus Christ in ten volumes, *L’Evangelo come mi Š stato rivelato* (the title of the English version is *The Poem of the Man-God*) by the Italian mystic Maria Valtorta (1897-1961)

The only daughter of a hard-hearted mother and a good but too submissive father, Maria revealed soon her profound spirituality. She had a difficult life, suffering many vexations from her mother who destroyed twice her love bonds with young men. In 1920, while she was walking on a street, Maria’s spine was struck with a blow that later was to be the cause of her lifelong infirmity. In fact, from 1934 she was no longer able to get out of her bed. She had twenty-eight years of illness, bedridden for the rest of her life.

Maria Valtorta was introduced to her extraordinary mission of writer by her spiritual director. For him she wrote her autobiography in 1943 and to him she handed over about fifteen thousand copy-book pages, written amid sufferings and discomfort, while she was sitting in her bed. These writings include her masterpiece on the life of Jesus Christ and other minor works, comprising doctrinal lessons, biblical commentaries, narratives on early Christians and martyrs, and devotional compositions, all written, according to the author, by a divine revelation.

Valtorta's major work, which has been translated (or is in the process of being translated) into English, French, Spanish and other languages, encompasses the period from the birth of Mary to the Passion and glorification of Christ. It has been defined, by a well-known Bible scholar G.M. Allegra, as a completion of the four Gospels and a long explanation of them. Leaving out of consideration its divine origin, it is a fascinating work, describing landscapes, people and events with a 'cinematographic' vividness as if the episodes took place under our eyes. The apostles, for instance, are presented as 'round characters', with their sincere faith and self-denial, but also with all their human failings. In spite of its large proportions, it is a very readable work.

The translator of the first volume, Gianluigi Martini, studied Swahili in Turin with Father Vittorio Merlo Pick. After a long stay abroad (in East Africa and elsewhere) he collaborated with Merlo Pick in teaching Swahili and revising his Swahili-Italian Vocabulary and his Swahili Grammar. He also compiled a presentation of Swahili language and culture for Italians (*Kiswahili, una lingua per l'Africa di domani*, 1984).

The translation of this first volume of over 400 pages took him about two years. In it is narrated in vivid scenes the hidden life of Jesus - the birth of Mary, the birth and childhood of Jesus himself - and the beginning of His public life. The translator has chosen to respect the involved and sometimes obscure style of the original, even taking biblical quotations from a previous version of Swahili Bible, and so the resulting text is somewhat heavy and occasionally even awkward. It is unavoidable that many errors and misprints have slipped into such a large work, given also the fact that it has been printed in Italy. A suggestion for the second volume, besides more careful proof-reading and a revision by a native speaker, would be to add an introduction directed towards African readers, as the present introduction, translated from the Italian original, is of little help for those who are unfamiliar with the Italian situation.

Our critique, however, does not want to belittle the importance of this translation. Martini did a remarkable job in finding Swahili equivalents of a profusion of colours, plants, birds and various other items which are foreign to East African culture. *Heko kwa mfasiri*. We offer our congratulations also to the publishing house which made this translation possible.

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