

FOREWORD

Mogens Thøgersen, Director, Vendsyssel Historical Museum
and Archives

Vendsyssel Historical Museum in Hjørring is a local museum in Northern Jutland, Denmark, founded in 1889. As other local museums the main task is to preserve the local or regional heritage. This more or less begs the question why a collection of weapons and other artefacts from German East Africa, today's Tanzania, ended up in our museum and why it was accepted by the curators of the museum?

A very pragmatic reason was that the museum in the first years was run by a group of interested citizens, not professional museum-people of today that may have asked questions like whether it was our job to preserve these artefacts or they should go into another collection. The leading figure and first foreman of the group of enthusiasts who founded the museum and constituted its first board was the local dentist Lønborg Friis. Christian Lautherborn's brother in law, Vilhelm Carlsen, who played an essential role in social and cultural life of the rather small provincial town was also among the backers and of course new Lønborg Friis, and Christian Lautherborn knew him too. It was therefore a rather natural thought for this group of people that the artefacts Christian Lautherborn had sent from East Africa should go into the museum.

The board, however, also answered the question why in an announcement of the acceptance of the first part of the artefacts collected by Christian Lautherborn in Vendsyssel Tidende in 1892: 'These artefacts do not directly tell us about Danish history. On the other hand it is important for the museum to collect such items because they can illuminate the life of our forefathers who once used similar weapons.'

The acceptance of the collection was in accord with the once very popular stage-thinking, where each society was supposed to go through a number of stages and thus move from a less to a more civilised stage. The artefacts from East Africa were thus supposed to supplement the collection of items from pre-historic Denmark. The artefacts from East Africa, however, were never displayed according to the original intent. When displayed for the first time in the 1960's it was to add an exotic touch to an exhibition of aid to the third world.

The artefacts were taken out of their hiding for the second time in 2001 in order to make an exhibit which focused on German East Africa in Christian Lautherborn's time, seen through his letters and photographs. The exhibi-

tion was based on the work done by Anna Marie Knudsen, first as a trainee later as a temporary employee at the museum.

The exhibition was shown during the summer of 2001, where Dr. Eginald Mihanjo, Professor, Department of History, University of Dar es Salaam, and secretary general of the Historical Association of Tanzania, happened to come by Aalborg University, serving as a member of a Ph.D. evaluation committee at the university in Aalborg. It was of course an obvious idea for Marianne Rostgaard and Anna Marie Knudsen to inform him about the exhibition and escort him to Hjørring.

Very little material from the early part of the German colonial period can today be found in Tanzania and thus be used to study the social and cultural history of early colonialism in Tanzania, and what has survived has normally survived in archives in Germany—both linguistic and economic difficulties will make it hard for a student in Tanzania today to get a chance to study the original sources. Dr. Eginald Mihanjo therefore showed a keen interest in having the letters translated and the exhibition transferred to Dar es Salaam. As the first part of this scheme was easier to realise than the last it was decided to start with the translation of the letters into English. Dr. Mihanjo would thereafter try to get the letters translated into Kiswahili as well.

Our museum was happy to receive a small but nevertheless very welcome donation from Danida which helped us to finance translation of the letters, copying of photos etc. We are also happy to see that the translated letters are now going into print. In this way the little bits and pieces of a part of the history of Denmark, Germany and Tanzania now has the chance of being weaved together to what is in fact part a common history. Christian Lautherborn was a Dane and it significantly impacted his thinking and doings, but the history, or parts of history told through his letters are also German and Tanzanian. The real story can therefore only be told as a transnational history of which we are proud to have contributed one piece in a vast jig-saw puzzle.

Hjørring 10th April 2005
Mogens Thøgersen