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The Ideal of the Good Life

As Crystallized by
Tanzanian Meru Proverbs

by
Raimo Harjula

HELSINKI 1997

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Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy

Saarijärvi 1997

Kita ili kutuṛa nrwe tuṛa kisia kya rembo.

Kuliko kukosa kichwa ni heri kukosa matako ya kuketi.

Better to lack buttocks than a head.

PREFACE

Every scholar probably has some research material lying year after year in his or her desk-drawer. This has happened to me also. The proverbs analysed in this study were already collected during my ethnomedicinal fieldwork in 1973–1974. The book completes the series of my Meru studies (see Bibliography) in the sense that there is no more empirical Meru material lying unanalysed in my drawer.

After all these years, I am still most indebted to my informants, to Mr. Manase Indiaeli, Mr. Ezekiel Leema, Mr. Simion Nderingo and Mr. Manase Ngeteu. Sitting together with these honourable men, listening to them and learning African and common human wisdom from them is one of the unforgettable experiences of my eight years in Tanzania. My gratitude is also due to Mr. John K. Mbise, my trustworthy research assistant from the time of my first Meru study.

During the process of analysing the proverbs and writing the book, I have received scholarly advice from Professor Lauri Honko (University of Turku) and Professor Arvi Hurskainen (University of Helsinki). I am grateful for their encouragement, too. My special thanks are due to Reverend Abdiel T. Ndosi, who has helped me in Meru orthography as well as in many details of the proverbs.

The English language of the book has been checked and finalized by Margot Stout Whiting. Her role has not been that of a language editor only, but we have had many inspiring discussions on the substance of the study also. I am grateful for her inspiring cooperation during the process.

Photos 1, 2, 17, 20, 23 and 25 have been taken by Sinikka Harjula, Special Education Teacher. I thank her for her kind contribution. The maps and drawing 12 are from my Mirau study (Harjula 1980).

Last but not least, I thank my wife Eva. Without her encouragement the proverbs would still lie unanalysed in my desk-drawer.

Sleepyheads Day 1997

Raimo Harjula
University of Helsinki

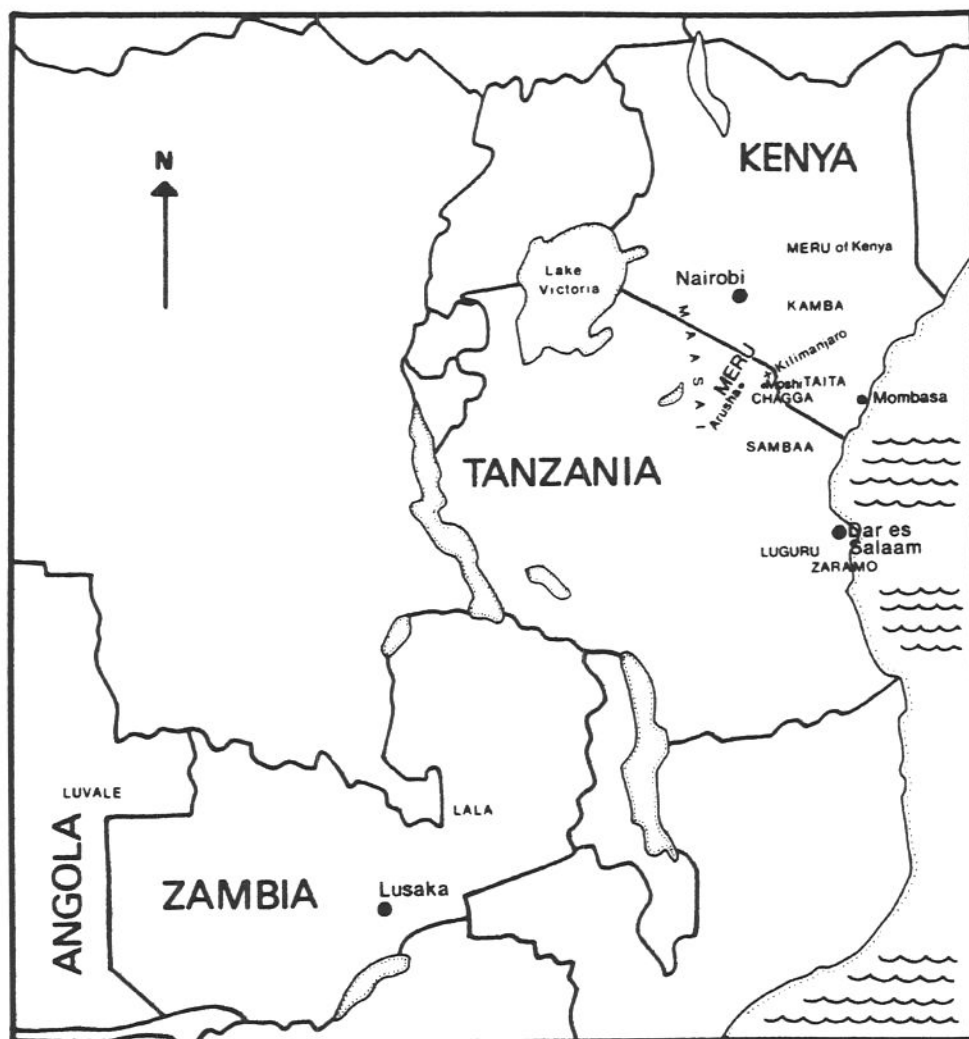
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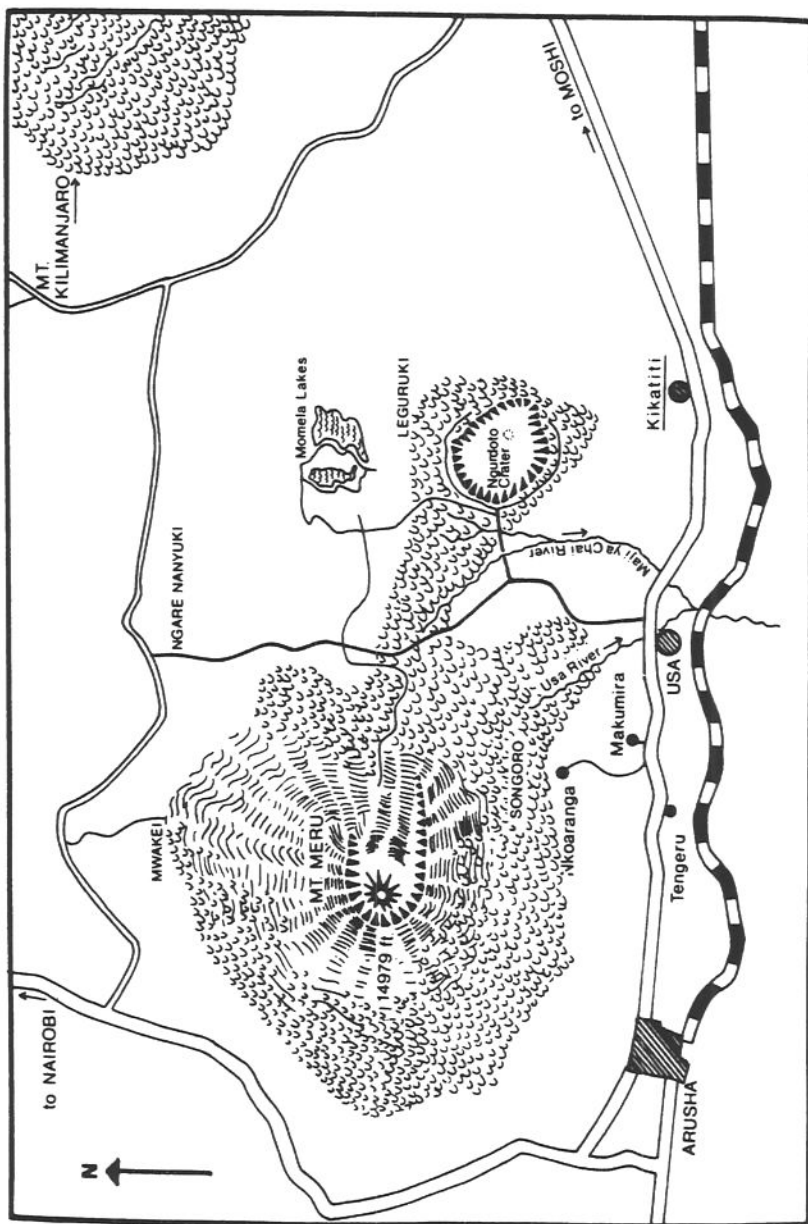
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MAPS



Map I

The area inhabited by the Meru in Northern Tanzania



Map II: Meru-Kikati area

