

## OF PLANTS AND WOMEN. A WORKING EDITION OF TWO SWAHILI PLANT POEMS<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

The songs attributed to Fumo Liyongo, the Swahili hero and master bard, depict scenarios taken from the cultural environment of the Swahili coast emanating the idea of being deeply embedded in Swahili culture. Probably it is also this kind of depiction that contributes to the impression of archaism already evoked by the language of the poems. In contrast to the ‘classical Islamic *tendi*’ where the action as well as the setting is commonly detached from the environmental context of the Swahili coast, the Liyongo poems show an abundance of detailed descriptions and enumerative reviews of material items crucial and characteristic of the particular East African shares of Swahili culture. Frequently reference is also made to the natural environment as plants and their fruits play a prominent role as requisites of both the Swahili natural and cultural setting: Liyongo chews betel leaves with *t<sup>h</sup>eweyu* fruits and wild areca nuts (“Uṭumbuizo wa Kikowa”<sup>2</sup>, “Uṭumbuizo wa Mwana Mnazi”); he aims with his bow at the fruit bundles of the dum palm tree (“Uṭumbuizo wa Kikowa”); his bow is made of ebony (“Uṭumbuizo wa Uta”); the handle of his hoe is made of *mtupa* wood (“Uṭumbuizo wa Uchi na Embekungu”); clothes are put on the bamboo rail (“Uṭumbuizo wa Mwana Mnazi”); and the stick that is beaten at the beginning of the “Utendi wa Mwana Manga” is made of wood from the *mtatusi* or the arcacia.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from being exploited as central requisite and being referred to as material source in the poems, plants are also extensively used for similes: In the “Utendi wa Mwana Manga” a woman’s eyebrows are compared to the sprouts of the acacia, her mouth smells like *mkadi*,

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this article were presented at the colloquium on the occasion of Gudrun Mieke’s 65<sup>th</sup> birthday which was held on 5 July 2006 in Bayreuth. Afterwards, during fieldwork in Mombasa and Lamu in July and August 2006 I found time to clarify some obscure passages in the manuscripts with the help of Ahmed Sheikh Nabahany, Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo and Amira M. Salem. I am most grateful for all their support. I came across most of the manuscripts that this article is based on when working through the papers left to Gudrun Mieke by Ernst Dammann who died in 2004. The copies of the manuscripts in Arabic script (the originals are kept in Hamburg or Berlin) were used by Ernst Dammann and Ahmed Nabahany in preparation of the catalogue of manuscripts in African Languages in German (cf. Dammann 1993). I am indebted to Gudrun Mieke who granted me free access to the manuscript copies and the few transliterations by Dammann and Nabahany. I also have to thank Said A. M. Khamis and Thomas Geider for their valuable comments and suggestions. I followed Dammann’s way of transcription marking aspiration (e.g. t<sup>h</sup>) as well as the dental plosives commonly found in the Northern Swahili dialects (t/d). In intervocalic positions, the glides -w- and -y- are commonly written (differently from standard Swahili, abbreviated as Std. Sw henceforth) following the preferences of Ahmed S. Nabahany and Ahmad Nassir. The rhotacism (nd<sup>h</sup>) common in the Northern dialects is also marked. Other abbreviations used within the texts (especially in the synoptical schemes) are: “Sac” referring to Sacleux’ dictionary (1939), “Jhn” referring to Johnson’s dictionary (1939), “stz.” as an abbreviation for “stanza”; “/” marks a caesura.

<sup>2</sup> For all the Liyongo Songs referred to, cf. Mieke et al. 2004.

<sup>3</sup> The Swahili name of a plant is given if no English name is mentioned in the publication referred to and/or if an unequivocal identification of the botanical species is not possible.

her chin is compared to the nutmeg tree. Especially in the “Utendi wa Mwana Manga”, the description of a woman from head to toe which in part acquires a very erotic tone, the more transparent similes shade into less transparent metaphors in the course of the poem, so that e.g. a man’s manhood is depicted as “the seedling of the *mpakanga*” (cf. stz. 30).

The Liyongo poems are full of culturally specific metaphors which are context-dependent and sometimes render the texts rather obscure.<sup>4</sup> A common symbol of fertility and, by extension, the fertile, beautiful woman of virtue is the highly venerated coconut tree, which also occurs widely in the Liyongo poems (“Uṭumbuizo wa Mnazi”, “Uṭumbuizo wa Wasiya wa Kuolewa”<sup>5</sup>, “Uṭumbuizo wa Mwana Mnazi”). Although the praise of the coconut tree in “Uṭumbuizo wa Mnazi” seems to refer literally to the tree, figuratively, it could also be the praise of a woman – a reading on two levels that could also apply to the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mkoma”. As depicted in this small fragmentary poem, the dum palm comes close to the coconut tree in terms of its status as venerated tree (cf. “Uṭumbuizo wa Wasiya wa Kuolewa”; see also Harries 1962: 184, 185), but is commonly not regarded as equal to it.

This hierarchy is also reflected by poems outside the “Liyongo Canon”, like in the well-known poem or song “Mnazi Wangu Siwati kwa Mkoma”, in which the author, the renowned Mwenyi Mansab, describes “the benefits of the properly betrothed wife (the coconut tree) to the meager returns of a non-marital relationship (the dum palm).”<sup>6</sup> A very similar verse that employs different trees called “Siwati mtondoo” is attributed to Muyaka bin Haji al-Ghassaniy (Hichens 1940: 85 and Abdulaziz 1979: 272).<sup>7</sup>

In fact going beyond the corpus of Liyongo poems and taking a broader look at Swahili poetry, it seems that in general trees or plants play an important role.<sup>8</sup> Hence one could differentiate between poems in which plants and trees are merely mentioned, poems in which plants

<sup>4</sup> By “context-dependent” I do not only mean the cultural context of specific items and established symbolisms, but also the pragmatic context of actual communication and performance.

<sup>5</sup> In the “Uṭumbuizo wa Wasiya wa Kuolewa” a woman is given the advice to give birth which is metaphorically described as planting the fruit-bearing coconut tree or dum palm tree instead of “planting fruitless, wild trees: the *mtapa*, *mvule*, *mnga* and *mtuwa*” (cf. Miede et al. 2004: 75).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the liner notes to Werner Graebner’s recording of “Mnazi Wangu Siwati kwa Mkoma” as performed by Zein l’Abdin (Dizim Records 1999). There are other poems with the same subject comparing the coconut palm and the dum palm see Shariff (1988: 101), Knappert (1979: 97) and Knappert (1967: 163). There is also a poem by Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo “Mnazi”, in which he extols the virtues of the physical tree without further apparent allusions. The recurrent last line of every stanza nevertheless is reminiscent of the poem by Mwenyi Mansabu: “Sitouwata mnazi, mti wa faida nami” (Ahmad Nassir 1983: 95ff.). As already mentioned poems in praise of the coconut palm are rather abundant (cf. Geider 1992: 179ff).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. In this poem the faithful wife is depicted by the *mtondoo* (Alexandrian Laurel Tree) and the concubine by the *mwananina* (Acacia) (which Abdulaziz translates differently, namely as “new bird”). There are other Muyaka poems in which trees play a different, but major role as metaphor or simile (cf. Hichens 1940: 40, 66).

<sup>8</sup> Mbele (1996: 78): “Trees figure prominently in Swahili poetry, both as botanical entities and as literary metaphors.” It goes without saying that imagery taken from the flora also plays an important role in *taarab* songs (cf. Aiello Traore’s article in this issue of the Swahili Forum). Although in the following I attempt to exemplify the prominence of plants in Swahili poetry this introduction far from being exhaustive, but only shows tendencies and provides the background for the two poems that will be examined more closely in this treatise.

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are praised and poems in which plants are used metaphorically. In the following I am going to focus mostly on the latter.<sup>9</sup>

As seen in the few examples given above, plants figure frequently as metaphors of human beings and – as we shall see – especially of women.<sup>10</sup> For a long time plants have been used as *mafumbo*, often not only with an aesthetic intention, but with the aim of conveying artistically what is not to be said openly. The achieved effects can be various: jovial, playful, ironic, sarcastic or erotic.

In a number of old Swahili songs, like in the “Wimbo wa Miti”, a song from Lamu, human characteristics, virtues, malices and outward appearances are mirrored by plants and their respective characteristics.<sup>11</sup> The song is said to have been composed to be sung at a wedding so as to serve as a comment on an actual fight between several women who are all depicted as different trees putting the matter into an ironic tone with the ultimate aim of reconciliation. The association of a tree with a certain woman is based on prominent characteristics that are assumedly shared by both the tree and the woman: A hot-tempered woman, for example, is compared to the pepper plant which is supposedly equally hot.<sup>12</sup> At the same time the trees in the poem assume, through their personification, some human characteristics, like e.g. their ability to speak. In the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” and the “Shairi la Mṭambuu” (see below) other characteristics shared by plants and women are highlighted: the fact that the plant grows slowly and only after a while starts to bear fruits is commonly compared to a girl who slowly becomes a woman. Especially if the tree is a cultivated plant its development depends on the care of the gardener who is compared to the one who brings up a child by taking good care of it.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The poem “Umbuji wa Mnazi”, an encyclopedic poem in praise of the coconut palm composed by Ahmad Nabahany who himself had worked in the agricultural sector, is a good example of a poem in which the plant is the subject-matter per se (Nabahany 1985; cf. Geider 1992 for a comprehensive examination of the poem). However, as we have already seen and as we shall see later in the case of the “Shairi la Mṭambuu” the line between poems in praise of plants on the one side and poems in which plants are used metaphorically on the other is often blurred.

<sup>10</sup> Plants are not exclusively used as metaphors for human beings (see e.g. one poem by Muyaka bin Haji al-Ghassaniy in which the tree metaphorically represents a fortress and its fruits are the people locked in it (Hichens 1940: 14); cf. also “Dunia mti mkavu” (Hichens 1940: 60). Nor are they exclusively used as metaphors for women. In the poem “Mkoko” by Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo both a man and a woman could be meant, as the narrator compares himself or herself with the mangrove which people wrongly despise ignoring the merits of the tree (cf. Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo (1983: 32) and also Knappert (1979: 303); Knappert has considerably altered the text). As Ahmad Nassir told me, the poem was also turned into a popular taarab song repeatedly performed by his cousin, the famous Mombasan taarab singer Muhammed Kh. Juma Bhalo.

<sup>11</sup> “Wimbo wa Miti” was edited by Joseph Mbele (1996) with the help of Zaharia Binti Maimun who dictated the song to her daughter reading it from an Arabic manuscript (entitled “Utendi wa Miti”).

<sup>12</sup> Shariff (1988: 107) also gives the “Wimbo wa Miti”, slightly deviating from Mbele, as an example of “*kueleza jambo kimaṭumbo*”.

<sup>13</sup> The metaphor of the growing tree as a child who develops into a full human being under the care of the gardener is quite close to the one used by the European pioneers of pedagogy like, for instance, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi.

Apparently also the anthropomorphic shape of a tree fosters the association with a human being.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, parts of plants are commonly associated with body parts, like the female genitals which are depicted as *ua* (“blossom, flower”) and the female breasts which are often associated with fruits, more specifically with pomegranates, mangoes or apples.<sup>15</sup> The association of fruits and blossoms with sexual organs is probably also cognitively fostered through the broader metaphorical link between two domains of experience, the domain of eating and the domain of having sex: The (male) experiencer sensually tastes and smells “fruits” and “blossoms” in a literal and figurative sense.<sup>16</sup>

It goes without saying, that blossoms and flowers are of course among the central metaphors used to depict women in their beauty, sensuality and attractiveness in Swahili poetry – as probably all over the world.<sup>17</sup> In this article, I just want to mention this in passing, while I mostly concentrate on two examples of plants, that could be classified as useful plants, and in which cases the metaphorical link between the plant and the woman – especially for the cultural outsider – is rather peculiar.

Without denying that there is, of course, also contemporary poetry employing plants as subject matter or metaphors, in this article I focus on two thematically close poems which we vaguely have to classify as “old” while not being able to give exact dates.<sup>18</sup> Although the article suggests to be a thematic view on Swahili poetry, it is primarily a text edition of two poems, the “Song of the *Mjemje*” and the “Shairi la Mṭambuu”, which are both presented together with a critical apparatus.

## 2. The Song of the *Mjemje*

In the following, I am going to present different versions of a poem called “Uṭumbuizo wa *Mjemje*”. As there are versions which can be grouped together more closely than others due

<sup>14</sup> Shariff (1988: 107) renders the baobab as an example for someone with an enormous body. In his classes, Said A. M. Khamis often gives the following poem from Pemba as an example for metaphoric language, in which a mango tree might refer to the female body: *Mwembe wangu mdodo we / Popo wanawinamia / Hata mwamu na we* (“My mango tree, of the best type, bats have raided it, even my sister-in-law”) (translation CV).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. “Utendi wa Mwana Manga”. See the following poems in Knappert (1972), in which, according to Knappert, fruits are used to symbolise the female body as a whole: “Zabibu” (“the grape”), “Tini, tunda la tamasha” (“The fig is the fruit of love”), “Tufaha” (“The apple”) (see also Jahadhmy 1975: 90), “Ndimu” (“The Lemon”), “Zambarau” (“The rose-apple”). For a poem by Muyaka in which the woman is symbolised by a coconut see Abdulaziz (1979: 192). Flowers are also used as metaphors for the whole female body or femininity in a broader sense (see below).

<sup>16</sup> The verb *kula* (“to eat”) is frequently used with the metaphorical meaning of having sexual intercourse with a woman (from a male perspective), which highlights the semantic diffusion between the two domains (cf. Sheikh and Wolff (1981: 133ff.) who analyse *kula* in this respect as polysemic).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. for example “Ua langu” (“My flower”) in Knappert (1972: 27). For a taarab song, in which in an uncommon way *ua* refers to a man, see Aiello Traore’s article in this issue.

<sup>18</sup> “Kadhia ya Mti” in Said Ahmed Mohamed’s anthology “Jicho la ndani” (2002: 34) can be taken as an example of a contemporary poem. An example for a poem transgressing the prosodic conventions of traditional Swahili poetry is “Boga” by Kithaka wa Mberia (1997: 2). Of course, also the poems by Ahmed Nabahany and Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo mentioned above are of a much younger date whereby in their language, prosody and mostly also thematic choice they strictly follow the “rules of traditional Swahili poetry”, as the poets claim straight away. There is one (unpublished) poem by Ahmed S. Nabahany entitled “Mloza” which actually shows striking thematic and structural resemblances to the two poems presented in this article.

to their similarities in wording and order of the stanzas, I am going to present five versions as reflexes of one text (cf. 2.1.). Two other poems which deviate more substantially will be examined separately (cf. 2.2.). In section (3) I shall conclude with some reflections on the variability of Swahili poems which are based on the observations made in this section (2).

## 2.1. The “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”

### 2.1.1. *An introduction to the poem*

The “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” is a lament of a gardener who planted a sprout of a *mjemje* with great care and, after it had grown, was then forced by others to surrender his claims on the plant. The second part of the poem is a kind of a flashback in which the narrator remembers the beauty and the benefits of the noble plant that he used to enjoy so much.

According to Ernst Dammann’s interpretation which he gives in his catalogue of manuscripts in African Languages, the *mjemje* represents a child who is given away by its parents to be brought up in another household which is a common strategy among the Swahili to strengthen ties of friendship or distant family relations. The child is brought up with great care and love by its social mother so that it comes as a shock when the biological parents want their child back. The “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” is the cry of the hurt woman who can not get over the loss of her foster child (Dammann 1993: 47).<sup>19</sup>

Going through the first part of the poem I could well understand Dammann’s interpretation, but it did not seem very plausible to me with regard to its second part, because of the many erotic sub tones which do not suggest a mother-child but a man-woman relationship.

In fact Hichens, in whose unpublished manuscript “Liyongo, the Spear-Lord” we find yet another version of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” interprets the relationship between the object of desire, the *mjemje*, and the deceived narrator of the poem as a relationship between a suitor and a lady, whom he longs to marry whereby he gets disappointed now crying about his loss.<sup>20</sup> This interpretation given in Hichens’ short introduction appeared to me to be more in accordance with the second part of the poem, but it also lacked one important point given in the first part.

Working through the poem with Ahmed Nabahany and Amira M. Salem I asked for their interpretation which Amira M. Salem finally wrote down for me. Their interpretation reads like a synthesis of Hichens’ and Dammann’s interpretations: the suitor was the one who had adopted the child, had brought it up and had waited until it became a woman to marry her in accordance to a common Swahili practice:<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Of course, Dammann must have based his interpretation not only on his own view, but he heavily relied on Ahmed Sheikh Nabahany as an interpreter of the poem, when Nabahany assisted him to prepare the catalogue.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. MS 205000, Archives of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

<sup>21</sup> Horton and Middleton (2000: 147) describe the adoption of a girl chosen because of her descent with the future prospect of marrying her as a common strategy among the Swahili to ensure the cohesion of important clans and families, “although the practice is today falling into disuse”.

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“(…) Na inawezekana kuwa ikiwa umemleya mtoto si wako utakapo kuwa waweza kumuowa kwa mujibu ya shariya ya kiislamu. Bwana yule aliingiwa na mahaba ya kuwa mkewe lakini hakuweza kutamka bali alinyamza kimya mpaka akamjibu mwengine akamuowa yule mwanamke lakini bwana huyu alibaki kutowa swifa za yule mwanamke.”

“And if you have brought up a girl who is not your own child it is possible for you to marry her according to Islamic law. That man fell in love so that he wanted her to be his wife. But he did not express his wish and instead he kept quiet till she consented to someone else, so that he (=the other man) married that woman. But the man was left praising that woman.”

Interestingly, there are also quite different renderings of the plant *mjemje* which generally does not seem to be well-known.<sup>22</sup> Dammann does not mention a botanic name of the plant, but only states that it is an ornamental tree whose seeds were brought from Arabia (Dammann 1993: 47). Hichens who gives the spelling *mujimuji* translates it as “Lotus Tree”, a translation that was taken over by Knappert without further comment.<sup>23</sup> When I asked people in Mombasa about *mjemje*, it turned out that no one had ever heard the name of the plant.<sup>24</sup> Finally a small herb with small lilac blossoms was brought to me from Pate while I was staying on Lamu.<sup>25</sup> This small herb whose botanical name is unknown to me grows widely on Pate and Lamu.<sup>26</sup> It is used as an aphrodisiac and a remedy against impotence which is especially given to the bridegroom in the wedding night.<sup>27</sup> Probably the usage and its association with the *prima nox* could have also been one of the driving motifs to use the *mjemje* as central metaphor in this poem that is otherwise full of further erotic allusions.

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<sup>22</sup> The plant is neither mentioned in Neuhaus (1889), Greenway (1937), Sacleux (1939) nor in Heine and Legère (1995). Krapf (1882: 230) gives the following entry (followed by a question mark): “mjémje, s., a thorn-bush?”.

<sup>23</sup> Knappert follows Hichens in writing *mujimuji*, which appears to be a different reading of the Arabic script. This pronunciation *mujimuji*, however, was unacceptable for the people from Pate and Lamu who were familiar with the plant. Neither did I find anybody in Mombasa who knew a plant called *mujimuji* (cf. my comment to the first stanza in the synopsis below).

<sup>24</sup> I asked a number of people, among them Ahmad Nassir who is not only an expert of old Swahili (and a poet himself), but also a traditional healer, who would most probably have heard of the plant if it existed under this name in Mombasa. Nabahany told me that the plant indeed also grew in Mombasa. Probably it is named differently due to dialectal differences.

<sup>25</sup> It was brought to me by Ustadh Harub Mohamed Yunus (Badumiyah), who also remembered some lines of the “Uṭumbuizo wa mjemje”. I am very grateful to him. Other people on Lamu also confirmed that the plant brought to me was in fact named *mjemje*. Among them was Ahmed S. Nabahany who had made some inquiries among his relatives who had told him in the first place that it was a water lily only to correct this notion later.

<sup>26</sup> I thank Marianne Lauderer from the Botanical Garden of Bayreuth University, who could not identify the plant when I showed it to her, but roughly classified it as belonging to the family of *lamiaceae*. A rendering as “lotus tree” as given by Hichens and Knappert was ruled out by her, as firstly no species which in common language is called “lotus tree” resembles the plant that I showed to her and as secondly at least one species called “lotus tree” (*nitraria*) does not grow in tropical climate. Probably Hichens only used the name “lotus tree”, because of its mystical nimbus (perhaps being associated with the “lotophages” in book nine of Homer’s *Odyssey*).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Nabahany (1978: 111): “Mti huu ni dawa ambayo waswahili wautumia na hususan wakati wa mtu amewo kwa kuchelea kuwa hatofaulu yaani kumfunguwa mke wake kwa sababu ya kukosa nguvu za uume kwa hivyo akipewa dawa ya mti huu hupata nguvu za kiume kuweza kufunguwa njia.”

2.1.2. Five versions the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”

I came across several versions of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”. Five share so many common characteristics and parallel each other nearly line by line deviating mostly only with respect to the choice of words or grammatical renderings that I have grouped them together treating them as “off-springs” of the same text. In the following, I will shortly present these manuscripts that my synopsis (see below) is based on before I come to the presentation of two versions which show deviation to a much higher degree.

The reference version which forms the core of the synopsis is an unpublished manuscript in Arabic script which is kept in Hamburg.<sup>28</sup> Its text counts 23 lines. This version (carrying the abbreviation “HH” in the synopsis below) is the last one of a number of poems written on sheets of paper put together (what is commonly called *loho*). This makes Dammann assume that the poems were written on commission (Dammann 1993: 42). Furthermore, he assumes that Alice Werner was the one asking the unknown scribe without giving further evidence for his claim. If this is true, the manuscript was presumably written between 1911 when Alice Werner first came to Lamu and 1935 when she died. For the synopsis I could additionally rely on the transcription which Nabhany provided in preparing the catalogue of manuscripts in African languages.

One of the two oldest manuscripts (abbreviated as “Tay” below) is part of the Taylor Collection.<sup>29</sup> It must have been written before William Taylor left East Africa to return to England in 1899. It was written by the same scribe who also produced other manuscripts of Liyongo Songs.<sup>30</sup> The text is given in the same length as in Hichens’, Knappert’s, and Dammann’s manuscripts. In the last lines of the manuscript some lines of the middle of the text are repeated; they resemble a chorus. The text ends abruptly in the middle of one metric line. Probably the manuscript had originally been longer.

The third old manuscript in Arabic script (called “Nab” in the synopsis) is of the Nabahany Collection. It is the shortest version just counting eight lines, in which many lines that can be found in the other versions are missing and some lines are repeated. The poem is written in a crude way; some lines are even crossed out. It has the heading *qala Liyongo* and was probably also part of a compilation of poems in a *loho*.<sup>31</sup> Judging from the handwriting the scribe most probably was Mwalimu Sikujua bin Abdalla bin Batawi, Taylor’s chief informant who made use of diacritics in Arabic script which were introduced by Taylor.<sup>32</sup> As Sikujua died in 1889, the manuscript must have been written before (Chiraghdin 1987: 63). Mwalimu Sikujua lived

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<sup>28</sup> Ms. 3552 H 117, Institute of Asian and African Studies, University of Hamburg.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ms 47754 SOAS, University of London.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. “Uṭumbuizo wa Kumwongoa Mtoto” in Mieke et al. (2004: 108).

<sup>31</sup> Some of the poems which belong to the same compilation were used as a basis for the edition of Liyongo Songs (see, for example, the manuscript of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Uchi na Embekungu” in Mieke et al. (2004: 118)).

<sup>32</sup> For specimens of Sikujua’s handwriting see Abdulaziz (1979: 72,73) and Mieke et al. (2004: 111).

in Mombasa which can be taken as a hint for the dissemination of the poem which must have been facilitated through Sikujua's links to Pate, where he had family relations.<sup>33</sup> As an eager scholar of Swahili poetry he seems to have widely taken notice of poetry coming from the Lamu archipelago.<sup>34</sup>

In Hichens' unpublished anthology of Liyongo Poems "Liyongo the Spearlord" we find one typescript version of the "Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje" ("The Song of the Lotus-Tree") in Roman script (cf. "Hi" below).<sup>35</sup> Most probably this is a transcription based on a manuscript in Arabic script, as a lot of the variations that we find in Hichens' version must apparently be attributed to different readings of the Arabic script. As sometimes the transcription does not provide any meaningful wordings, it seems that Hichens had not finished working on the poem. Furthermore he does not provide a translation which he usually added to the poems of his anthology.

Knappert also enclosed the "The Song of the Lotus-Tree" (as he calls it by taking Hichens' title) in his anthology "Four Centuries of Swahili Verse" (called "Kn" below) (Knappert 1979: 95ff.). He seems to depend exclusively on Hichens' version as he does not mention any other source. Going through his version one finds that Knappert more than once must have altered the actual wording as the deviation frequently can neither be attributed to an alternative reading of Hichens' text version nor substantiated by findings in any of the other manuscripts. His translation often appears rather far-fetched. Knappert is not explicit on the dating of the poem in his commentary, but concluding from the chapter's title under which the poem is issued ("The Seventeenth Century: The Birth of Swahili Poetry") he classifies it as 17<sup>th</sup> century poetry without any further explanation.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, in his introduction to the chapter he ascribes all the poetry included therein to Liyongo without mentioning Liyongo as such in his commentary to "The Song of the Lotus-Tree".<sup>37</sup>

Looking at the prosodic structure of these written poems one easily recognizes the general *tumbuizo*-structure each metric line is closed by an end rhyme – in this case *-ni* – which runs through the whole poem. There is a caesura in the middle of each line, while the number of syllables (*mizani*) within each hemistich may vary. Likewise the *mizani* show some variation per line, although their number almost always approaches 20 *mizani*.<sup>38</sup> I shall come back to

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<sup>33</sup> Nabhany told me about Sikujua's close links to Pate (cf. also Chiraghdin 1987: 63).

<sup>34</sup> Cf., for example, the manuscript of the "Southern version" of Al-Inkishafi scribed by Sikujua (Hichens 1939: 108 and 136). Indeed most of the manuscripts of Liyongo songs coming from the Nabahany Collection seem to have been scribed by Sikujua (cf. Mieke et al. 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Hichens ms 205000 SOAS (ms 151).

<sup>36</sup> "The Seventeenth Century: The Birth of Swahili Poetry" (Knappert 1979: 66).

<sup>37</sup> He only attributes its prosody to Liyongo (Knappert 1979: 95). For Knappert's association of prosodic features with Liyongo, see footnote 39 below.

<sup>38</sup> The caesura is not marked by rhyme, but is audible as prosodically marked in the recording (see below), as the last vowel is strongly prolonged or a "haooooo" is added. Furthermore the caesura is also one between grammatical, i.e. phrasal units. Even though the number of syllables is irregular, in general the *mizani* within a halfline often come close to ten syllables.



this question of *mizani* further below when talking about the other two versions of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”.

In terms of its prosody Knappert classifies the poem differently. Basically he talks of *gungu* as the poem’s metre.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore he subdivides the poem differently by putting together two prosodic lines (ending in *-ni*) to what he calls a stanza of four hemstitches. This is not merely a different graphic presentation of the poem but a different interpretation of prosody. Knappert does not give any reason for structuring the poem the way he does it by putting two lines (four hemstitches) together to form a stanza. However, the idea of a basic metrical unit that comprises more than one line (two hemstiches) also seems to be substantiated by the recorded version (see below), in which stanza-like blocks become audibly discernible.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Knappert sees a further *caesura* (“4 + 6 syllables”) within each hemistich.<sup>41</sup> The further subdivision of the hemistich seems to be also confirmed by the sung version, where these *caesurae* are clearly marked (see below).

### 2.1.3. Textual synopsis with comment and translation

In the following, all the versions of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” are presented in a synopsis. Each line of the poem is followed by a rough translation which tries to follow the Swahili text very closely, so that it may serve as a guideline for the reader. Furthermore, all the variations in the complementary versions are given. My comments occasionally dwell upon an evaluation of a variation, an explanation of a mentioned items, a clarification of certain allusions and references to other poems. In the established reference version which is mostly based on Dammann’s version, I mark aspiration as well as the dental plosives which are typical of the Northern Swahili Dialects. The exponents accompanying words or phrases of the reference line refer to the third line in which the corresponding variations found in the other versions are given.

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<sup>39</sup> Knappert regards *gungu* as a metrically defined category (Knappert 1979: 54); he even goes as far as ascribing this specifically to Fumo Liyongo (Knappert 1979: 95). Without developing this matter any further at this point I want to stress that taking *gungu* as a metrically defined category in Swahili poetry is more than doubtful. Even though there is regional variation on the Swahili coast Nabahany and Ahmad Nassir agree that a *gungu* first and foremost is a dancing ceremony on Lamu and Pate which also involves competitions in enigmatic verses (cf. also Steere (1889: xi). In Mombasa *gungu* must have been associated with the New Year’s celebration (cf. Sacleux 1939: *sub verbo*). The performance gives the name to songs sung at its occasion without defining the song metrically (cf. Harries (1962: 172 ff.), who likewise stresses the performative aspect).

<sup>40</sup> Still, the entangled structure in the audio-version which contradicts the idea of autonomous stanzas is very different from the one suggested by Knappert. What both have in common – in contrast to other presentations of *tumbuizo* – is merely the idea that there is a basic metrical unit that comprises more than one metrical line (with a final rhyme *-ni*).

<sup>41</sup> This also evokes the idea that there is no variation of *mizani* within the lines, which actually does not even hold for the version presented by Knappert.

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1 Mjemje<sup>1</sup> m̄te<sup>2</sup> wali wangu<sup>3</sup> t<sup>h</sup>uliyeo<sup>4</sup> kwa mani uwani<sup>5</sup>

*Mjemje*, the seedling, was mine, which I planted in the backyard with a hoe of heavy weight.

1 Hi, Kn: *mujimuji*; 2 Tay: *mt<sup>h</sup>u* 3 Nab: *wangu mwema* 4 Kn: *'tiliyeo*, Tay: *tuliyao* 5 Hi, Nab, Kn: *kwa mwana ziwani*, Tay: *kwa maniyo*

*mani* “weight”; here metonymically used for hoe.

Hi and Kn constantly give *mujimuji* which seems to come from a different reading of the Arabic script; actually in Tay the Arabic script reads *mujimuji/mujemuje*. The scribe of the manuscript from the Taylor Collection often writes the vowel in prefix *m(u)-*, which is commonly done in many manuscripts in Arabic script (cf. Büttner 1892: 166). The recording leaves no doubt that the correct reading is *mjemje*. As it occurs throughout both manuscripts Kn and Hi I will not give *mujimuji* separately as variation.

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2 T<sup>h</sup>uliyeo<sup>1</sup> kwa embe la chuma<sup>2</sup> / na m̄tanga mwema wa ziwani<sup>3</sup>

Which I planted with an iron hoe and good sand from the lake.

1 missing in Hi, Tay; HH: *utuliyeo* 2 Kn: *katika la mwembe-chuma wingu*; 3 Hi, Kn: *uwani*

---

3 Mjemje ukisa<sup>1</sup> kumeya<sup>2</sup> / t̄tumo<sup>3</sup> simo shirikani

When the *mjemje* had grown (to bear fruits), in the harvest I did no longer have a share.

1 Tay: *wakisa* 2 Hi, Kn, Nab: *Muji muji/mjemje kwimakwe kukuwa* 3 Hi: *tumwoziwe*, Kn: *tumuoze*, Nab: *t̄t̄omozewe*; Tay: *(tomozewa)*

*t̄t̄umo* = *pato*; *t̄t̄omozewe* (< *-toma*; Std.Sw.-*choma*) = Std. Sw. *nimetolewa* (cf. Jhn (p. 59) *-choma* “hurt, provoke”;

*-chomoa* “draw out, take out”)

---

4 T̄t̄omozewe<sup>1</sup> pasipo<sup>2</sup> sababu / huwepuka<sup>3</sup> nili<sup>4</sup> na huzuni

I have been taken out without a reason, abstaining from it, I am so sad.

1 HH: *tumeziwa*; Hi: *tumwozewe*; Kn: *tumuoze* 2 Hi, Kn, Nab: *pasina* 3 Hi: *hawembuka*; Kn: *'kawepuka*; Nab: *sababuye nisiambiwe(?) kwani* 4 Hi, Kn: *nali*

In Nab the line is hardly readable, as it is crossed out.

---

5 Pasi mumeuza sababu<sup>1</sup> / shamba yenye<sup>2</sup> mwatowa<sup>3</sup> kwani

Without anyone of you having asked for the reason: why do you take it from the field (where it had been planted)?

1 Hi: *pasi mume mwoza amba(y)e*; Kn: *Pasi mume ambaye muuza*; Nab: *pasi mt<sup>h</sup>u muuza ambae*; Tay: *pasimwe mwona (mumemwona) sababu* 2 Hi, Nab: *sababuwe*; Kn: *sababuye* 3 Kn, Tay: *mwamtoa*

*shamba yenye* = short for *shamba yenyewe*

After this line we find two additional lines in Nab, which are in fact a repetition of line 4 and line 5:

*t̄t̄omozewe pasina sababu hawepuka nali na huzuni / pasi mt<sup>h</sup>u muuza ambae hawepuka nili na huzuni*

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6 Mumempoka<sup>1</sup> kwa umoya wenu<sup>2</sup> / sababuye nauza n'nini<sup>3</sup>

You have snatched her in unison and the reason for it, I ask (you), what is it?

1 Hi: *mwamepoke*; Tay: *mwamepoka*; Kn: *mwanepuka* 2 Nab: *hawepuka pasina sababu* 3 HH: (*sayayo*) *nawaza nini*

Interestingly, there is a switch in grammatically marked reference (reflecting the (unconscious (?) switch between the figurative and the literal level of the text): the object prefix (-*m-*) in *mumempoka* refers to class 1 and thus to the woman who is represented by the plant in the rest of the text (cf. also line 14 and 20).

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7 Mjemje mbwangu wa asili<sup>1</sup> / nipozewe ni<sup>2</sup> Mola<sup>3</sup> Manani

The *mjemje* is mine by its origin; it was given to me by the Lord, the Beneficent.

1 Hi: *muji muji bwangu wa siali* 2 Kn: *na* 3 Hi: *nimuola*

*nipozewe* (< -*pa*) = Std. Sw. *nimepewa*

---

8 Nipozewe ni wangu / wali hayi<sup>1</sup> wote duniani<sup>2</sup>

I was given it by all my (people) who were alive on earth.

1 Hi: *ni wangu waliya*; 2 Kn: *nipozewe naye wangu wali Mwanza Mukwa wote duniani*

The relationship of the narrator and the “*mjemje*” was not only justified due to their decent (that qualifies them as marriage partners) (cf. line 7), but furthermore, all the (living) relatives had agreed to the relationship.

---

9 Sikizani niuswifu mte<sup>1</sup> / mbeu yake<sup>2</sup> yaṭoka mangani

Listen, let me praise the sapling. Its seed comes from Arabia (the North).

1 Hi, Kn: *mti* 2 Hi, Kn: *yakwe*

Coming from the North (from Arabia) is a sign of noble descent (cf. “Utendi wa Mwana Manga” in Miehle et al. 2004: 56).

---

10 Hiyo mbeu yaṭoka °Inaṭi na Ṭarimu<sup>1</sup> ya Yamani<sup>2</sup>

This seed comes from °Inati and Tarimu in Yemen.

1 Hi, Tay: *Terema*; Kn: *katerema* 2 HH: *ya Amani*; Hi: *ya anani*; Kn: *nti ya Yamani*; Tay: *ya Amani*

*Yamani* is the reading preferred by Nabahany which is also supported by the context. *Amani/ Anani* are scribing errors according to him.

Her noble decent is stressed by giving °*Inaṭi* and Ṭarimu, important towns in the North of Hadhramaut in Yemen (cf. Tariim and °Aynat (°Inat)) as the place of origin, where according to Nabahany a lot of *ma-sharifu* come from (cf. Le Guennec-Coppens (1997: 164ff.)).

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11 Shamba nani<sup>1</sup> mwenye nipatiya / kaya na ukamba thamani

Who gets the field for me? He had a piece of fertile land to offer (lit. he came with an acre of valuable soil).

1 Hi: *nane*

*Ukamba* = (acc. to Nabahany) *ukambaa* = *kipimo cha ardhi*; cf. Nabahany (1978: 126): “*kipimo cha kupimia k’onde au mashamba wakati wa kulima nacho huwa na hatuwa 200 urefu na 40 upana.*” Following Nabahany’s description one *ukambaa* corresponds approximately to one acre.

This stanza and the following one allude to the bridewealth which is paid in advance. Probably the narrator talks about his adversary who had the same intention, namely to marry the “*mjemje*”; he could also reflect about his own plans. A change of perspective – in this case the change to third person singular – is very common in *tumbuizo*.

---

12 Akatwaa fedha na dhahabu / na thaubu katiya kashani

He took silver and gold and fine attire and put them into a casket.

---

13 Sikizani niuswifu mte<sup>1</sup> / na mbeuye<sup>2</sup> yaṭoka mangani

Listen, let me praise the seedling; its seeds come from Arabia.

1 Kn: *mti* 2 Kn: *mbeu yakwe*

This line is in fact a repetition of line 9. It thematically closes the preceding excursus (on the bridewealth) and reminds of the main topic: the praise of the noble lady.

---

14 Swifa zake nduza mbwaswifye<sup>1</sup> / yu mbee<sup>2</sup> mkuu<sup>3</sup> wa<sup>4</sup> shani

Her praises, my brothers, let me sing them for you; she surpasses everything, the queen of elegance.

1 Hi, Tay: *mbwasifia* 2 Hi, Tay: *yuwambie* (*yuu mbee*); Kn: *huwa mbee* 3 Kn: *ukuu* 4 Hi, Kn: *na*

*mbwaswifye* = *niwasifite*

---

15 Aswiliye humeteza<sup>1</sup> nuru<sup>2</sup> / ja kamari iliyo mbinguni

Her noble descent radiates light like the moon in the sky.

1 Kn: *huiteza* 2 Hi: *na ondo*

---

16 Hupendeza miye kuwaa<sup>1</sup> / akaruḍi ali furahani

She pleases through her glittering radiance, when he came back (from her), he was in joy.

1 Hi, Tay: *mwenye kuowa*; Kn: *mwenye kumuoa*

According to Nabahany *miye* = Std. Sw. *miangaza*. Etymology uncertain; probably derived from *-re/-le* (cf. Std. Sw. *-refu*) “long”.

The reference of the subject prefix *a-* is unclear. There could be a change in the narrator’s perspective (from a first person to a third person narrator). Likewise the temporal setting of the whole line is not quite clear. Here it is interpreted to be a flashback.

---

17 Akaruḍi kuno akiteka / kasabihi Mungu Manani

Then he came back to her, laughing and praising God, the Beneficent.

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Nabahany states that *kuno* is a mistake of transmission, as it is Kimvita (cf. Mieke 1979: 139) and not Kipate. He then admits that poets often switch between different dialects.

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18 Kasabihi aketa<sup>1</sup> himḍi / ṭakibirize<sup>2</sup> kanwani<sup>3</sup>

He prayed and extolled praises, “God is great” in his mouth.

1 Hi: *akatwaa* 2 Tay: *ṭakabirize* 3 Hi: *takapendezee kwa nani*; Kn: *Kahimidi Mola furahani wakateka kupendezekani*

---

19 Karejeya<sup>1</sup> aṭabasamiye<sup>2</sup> / na sururiye<sup>3</sup> moyoni<sup>4</sup>.

He came back and smiled with joy in the heart

1 Hi: *karidhia* 2 Kn: *na basamu iwe miomoni* 3 Hi, Tay: *sururu iye*; Kn: *sururu iyee* 4 Kn: *nyoyoni*

*sururi* (<Arab. *ṣuur*), *sururiye* (= *sururi yake*) lit. “his joy”, cf. Sac (p. 1085): “joie, contentement, allégresse.”

---

20 Akiomba<sup>1</sup> Mngu ampe / amjaze<sup>2</sup> mṭe<sup>3</sup> wa p<sup>h</sup>eponi<sup>4</sup>

Praying that God may grant her (blessings), may he reward her, the sapling of paradise.

1 Hi: *akiona* 2 HH: *mjazi* 3 Hi, Kn: *mti* 4 Hi: *wa mbibuni*

*-jaza*, cf. Sac (p. 183): “récompenser”; Sac (p. 540): *mdyazi* “Mungu m., Dieu rémunérateur”

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21 Na<sup>1</sup> tanḍu<sup>2</sup> zake ni kama mvinḍe<sup>3</sup> / na ṭamthiliye<sup>4</sup> kushabihi shani<sup>5</sup>

And her branches are like the whistling pine, and she resembles it in its grace.

1 missing in Hi, Kn 2 Hi; Kn: *tunda* 3 Hi: *mḥidi*, Kn: *mgidi* 4 Hi: *tamithiyele*; Tay: *ṭamthiyele* 5 Kn: *mishimishi au murumani*

*mvinḍe* = Std. Sw. *mvinje* “Horsetail tree, *Casuarina aequisetifolia*”; cf. Heine & Legère (1995: 250): “Whistling Pine, Beefwood”; Jhn (p. 316): “whistling Willow, Beef-wood, (...), a tall fir-like tree used for masts for dhows etc.” Acc. to Amira M. Salem the *mvinḍe* is a tree associated with power and authority.

---

22 Ivumapo ya mande<sup>1</sup> / hunemka kama<sup>2</sup> hinzirani

When the morning breeze blows, she sways like cane.

1 Kn: *pepe ya umande*; Hi, Tay: *ivumapo ya mmande* 2 Kn: *hunyemuka kaka*

*mande*, cf. Sac (p. 574): “*mmande* (Mv.). Syn. inus. de *umande*”; Sac (p. 952): “*umande* 1. Sing. et coll. Vapeur qui s’élève de terre le matin ou le soir, serein, humidité de la nuit, rosée. 2. *umande*, ou pl. Coll. *mande* ou *pepo za mande*, vent de terre.”

*hinzirani*, Sac (p. 277): “*henzerani* (Mv. *henzirani*, P. DN. *hinzirani*) rotin, canne de rotin ou de jonc; manière de rotin.”

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23 Na maniye nḍa zabarijuḍi<sup>1</sup> / ahdhari isiyo kifani

And her leaves are of chrysolite green colour that has no alike.

1 Hi: *barihudi*; HH: *barujuḍi*

*mani* = Std. Sw. *majani* (cf. also Sac (p. 502)). Nabahany suggests a reading as *mani* (= *uzito*) (cf. line 2

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of this poem), which seems to be ruled out by the context of the sentence. cf. also stz.5, “Sifa za Mṭambuu” (see below).

*zabarijuḍi*, cf. Sac (p. 1034): “*zabardyudi* = chrysolithe”; chrysolite (olivine) is a mineral of green colour which can be found in best gem-quality on Zabarajad island (justifying its Arabic or Swahili name) in the Red Sea.

---

24 Uwa lake landapo<sup>1</sup> kutoka / jauhari huwa kiṭo dond<sup>f</sup>oni<sup>2</sup>

When her blossom begins to come out, (her) jewel becomes a gemstone in a shell.

1 Hi, Kn, Tay: *lanzapo* 2 Hi, Kn: *kitu duni*

---

25 Ling’aa<sup>1</sup> kama nyota ya makungu / ya zuhura<sup>2</sup> iwapo kutwani<sup>3</sup>

It shines like the morning star, (the star) of Venus when it sets.

1 Hi, Kn, Tay: *linga* 2 Hi: *yanzo hwonda* 3 Hi: *kuthani*; Kn: *kuchani*

*makungu*, cf. Krapf (1882: 198): “the reddening sky before daybreak.” (cf. also Mieke 1977: 1447). According to Nabahany *makungu* means “in the middle of the night, at around 2 a.m.”, but the other sources as well as the association with the morning star Venus seem to suggest that the time meant is more towards dawn.

For an association of *zuhura* (“*ua la mahaba*”) with love, see Knappert (1971: 96).

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26 Na tund<sup>f</sup>a liliwapo<sup>1</sup> kuṭosha<sup>2</sup> / hupendeza kwangaliyani<sup>3</sup>

And when the fruit is sufficiently relished, it pleases the eye to look at it.

1 Hi: *tundale liwepo*; Kn: *tundale liwapo* 2 Kn: *kuṭosha* 3 Hi: *kuwa ghaliyani*, Kn: *limo ghaliyani*

As mentioned in the introduction, fruits are commonly used as metaphor for female breasts (cf. also “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” (Knappert 1972/1973: 188).

The form *kwangaliyani* can be explained by the rigid end rhyme.

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27 Si kuu<sup>1</sup> si toto kamuono<sup>2</sup> / lingine<sup>3</sup> katika wizani

It is neither big nor small; you don’t see another one that resembles her in weight.

1 Hi: *situkuo*; Tay: *si tukuu* 2 Hi, Tay: *kamuona*; Kn: *kimuona* 3 Hi: *liligene*, Tay: *lilingene*

For the use of *toto* as an adjective in old Swahili texts cf. Mieke (1977: 1445).

For Nabahany *kamuono* is obviously in a form of negation; even though one could have also thought of the second sets of singular pronouns in certain Southern Swahili dialects, like Kipemba, Kivumba or Kimtang’ata, that are also used to inflect predicates with an affirmative meaning (cf. the homophone *ka-* in other lines of the poem, e.g. line 18) and that can likewise show vowel harmony (cf. Heepe 1918/19; Lambert 1953; Whiteley 1956: 22ff.). The feature of vowel harmony in *kamuono* is very interesting, as it could either be a feature of the Southern dialects playfully inserted by the poet, who commonly makes use of different dialectal forms, or a very old Bantu feature that therefore once must have even occurred in the Northern Swahili dialects (and not only in the Southern ones) (cf. Heepe (1918/19) who examines vowel harmonisation linking it to a wider Bantu context).

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28 Na gand<sup>f</sup>ale<sup>1</sup> ni kama sulami / na maniye nguo ya nyuni<sup>2</sup>

And its peel is like a soft plant and its leaves are a bird’s suit.

1 Hi: *ghadali*; HH: *shada ili* 2 Hi: *maniye nguu ya nyuni*; HH: *na maniyo ya p<sup>h</sup>eponi*

The meaning of *sulami* is very doubtful; nobody of the people I asked knew it. Together with Nabahany I tried to find other readings of the Arabic script (the graphic representation is the same in all the Arabic manuscripts I have), but we could not find a convincing one either. Knappert gives “soft doe-skin” as translation, which I can not confirm (I found neither evidence for it nor an alternative rendering in modern Arabic or Swahili dictionaries). According to Ayman Shahin (Arabic, Bayreuth University) *al-salim* could be meant, which was a fine, green plant in classical Arabic.

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**29** Arufuye nḡa uwale / si<sup>1</sup> misiki si zaafarani

Her scent is that of her blossom; it is neither musk nor saffron.

1 Hi: *arufuye tunda maua lisi*; Kn, Tay: *arufuye tunda na uwale*

Musk and saffron are highly valued scents that are commonly used together (cf. Allen 1981: 117) and referred to in a lot of poems (“Uṭumbuizo wa Liyongo Harusini” (stz. 13); “Uṭumbuizo wa Mwana Mnazi” (stz. 14) (both in Miehe et al. 2004)).

As mentioned in the introduction *ua* is commonly used as a metaphor for the female genitals (cf. *kiaua cha manga* and *ua la muchungwa* in “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” (Knappert 1972/73); *ua la manga* is also used in a poem by Muyaka bin Haji al-Ghassaniy (Hichens 1940: 66).

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**30** Kalibusu<sup>1</sup> mwenye kulitunḡa / kiifunga<sup>2</sup> hungiya shioni

He kissed it, the one who took great care of it, tying it, he entered silence.

1 Hi, Kn, Tay: *kulibusu* 2 Kn: *kujifunga* 3 HH: *shingoni*; Kn: *shiuni*

Acc. to Nabahany *shio* = Std. Sw. *utulivu*.

The object pronoun *-li-* refers to *ua* “blossom, flower” in the preceding line. According to Nabahany there is another alternative reading of the second hemistich - taking the variation given in HH into account: *kii-funga hungiya shingoni* “tying it to put the neck through”. *-i-* is this time interpreted as object pronoun (cl. 9) referring to *koja* “neck ornament”. Metaphorically the line alludes to the act of penetration. There is probably a semantic parallel in the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” (cf. *K’autjia mkono wa shingo* in Knappert 1972/1973: 192).

For *-funga* in this metaphorical sense, cf. also “Utendi wa Mwana Manga” (stz. 43) (in Miehe et al. 2004).

Amira Salem explains metaphorically: “*Anapozama ngamani huingiya ndani mzimamzima.*” (“When he goes down to the sinkhole, he enters into it completely.”)

---

**31** Alilapo<sup>1</sup> mwenye kulipata / humwepuka<sup>2</sup> hamu na huzuni

When the one who gets it eats it, he evades yearning and sorrow.

1 Hi: *alelapo* 2 Hi: *humenyoka*

Amira Salem explains this line as follows: “*Na aliyekula kizinda cha huyo mwanamke basi huondoka hamu na huzuni.*” (“And the one who enjoyed the *pudendum femininum* of that woman is afterwards freed from (all kinds of) longings and sadness.”)

The broad semantic field covered by *kula* has already been mentioned in the introduction.

---

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32 Kalishumu<sup>1</sup> muiliwe<sup>2</sup> kitwa / huwambuza<sup>3</sup> la<sup>4</sup> majinuni

He kissed it and it seperated his body and head, (the flower) of madness.

1 HH: *kalishuma*; Hi: *kile shuma*; Kn: *kilichuma*; Tay: *kilishuma* 2 Hi, Tay: *muwili wa*, Kn: *muelewa* 3 HH: *huwambao*; Kn: *humwambuza* 4 Kn: *mila*

Although we find *-shuma* in all the manuscripts, Nabahany insists that this is a mistake of transmission.

One could translate more freely: “it infects his body and head with madness.”

Amira Salem: “*Akawa kumshumu na kumpapasa. Na mwanamume huingiwa na wazimu anapompapasa huyo mwanamke.*” (“He was kissing and fondling her. And the man was driven crazy when he touched that woman.”)

---

33 Ladha yake hupita haluwa / yaliyoetwa Yamani<sup>1</sup>

Its taste surpasses sweet meat that was brought (from) Yemen.

1 Hi, Tay: *yanazoweni ya manani*; Kn: *nazuweni hiba ya manani*

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34 Hufadhili sukari nabaṭi<sup>1</sup> / ya mswiri<sup>2</sup> kuburuḍishani

It coddles (the senses like) sweet syrup. The lover’s (taste) offers great refreshment.

1 Hi: *na napate* 2 Hi: *ya mairi*; Kn: *yamsiri*

According to Nabahany *sukari nabaṭi* was a kind of syrup on a stick similar to a lollipop which was a very popular sweet.

*mswiri* “an intimate friend”; acc. to Khamis it can designate someone one is intimate with (a lover).

*ya* refers to *ladha* (cf. stz. 33).

The form *kuburuḍisha(ni)* might again be explained by the rigidity of the rhyme.

---

35 Nikomele kuuswifu mṭe / nayo haipatikani<sup>1</sup>

I have finished praising the seedling, (of all seedlings) which are out of reach.

1 Hi, Tay: *nilionye (nalionye) hayapatikani*; Kn: *ule mti nau wa p<sup>h</sup>eponi kama huo haipatikani*

According to Nabahany the last hemistich should be *nao haupatikani* instead.

In Kn there seems to be a merger of this line and the last line.

*nikomele* (< *-koma*) = Std. Sw. *nimekoma*

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36 Wema wake kaupata / kawa nao mṭe wa p<sup>h</sup>eponi

Her amenities he got them when he was with it, the seedling from paradise.

After this closing line several lines (from the second hemistich of line 14 to the first hemistich of line 20) are repeated in Tay without further variation.

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2.1.4. Schematic overview of the order of stanzas

The following table gives a schematic overview of the variation concerning the order of stanzas in the different versions. HH is the central version that all the others are referred to. Whole



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numbers correspond to lines. To further subdivide the line small letters are inserted.<sup>42</sup> A relation of doubt or strong variation is indicated by putting the number into italics. Repetition is indicated through exponents.

| <b>HH</b> | <b>Nab</b>                   | <b>Tay</b>                                       | <b>Kn<sup>43</sup></b> | <b>Hi</b> |
|-----------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|-----------|
| 1-3       | 1-3                          | 1-3  | 1-2a                   | 1-3       |
| 4         | 4a,6b                        | 4  | 2b                     | 4         |
| 5         | 6a,5b                        | 5  | 3a                     | 5         |
| 6         | 5a,4b                        | 6  | 3b                     | 6         |
| 7-10      | -                            | 7-10   | 4,5                    | 7-10      |
| 11-12     | -                            | 11-12  | -                      | 11-12     |
| 13        | -                            | 13   | 6a                     | -         |
| 14-34     | -                            | 14-34  | 6b-16a                 | 13-33     |
| 35        | -                            | 35   | 16b,c                  | 34        |
| 36        | -                            | 36   |                        | -         |
|           |                              | 14b <sup>I</sup> -20a <sup>I</sup> <sup>44</sup> |                        |           |
|           | 4 <sup>I</sup> <sup>45</sup> |  |                        |           |
|           | 5 <sup>I</sup>               |  |                        |           |

## 2.2. Two different versions of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”

When working on the five versions mentioned above, I came across another manuscript in Arabic script and a recording. Both echo the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” as presented above; however, on the other hand, they also show considerable differences. Therefore they are treated separately in this section.

### 2.2.1. Another manuscript from the Dammann Collection

The manuscript in Arabic script which was scribed by an unknown writer is also part of the Dammann Collection (abbreviated Da27 in the following).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Note that in the case of Kn counting is different (cf. footnote 43).

<sup>43</sup> I kept the numbering and ordering that Knappert (1979: 93) used. Two lines in the reference version (HH) correspond to one stanza (i.e. one whole number) in Knappert’s counting. To further subdivide Knappert’s stanzas in units that correspond to the lines in the reference version, I introduced small letters.

<sup>44</sup> Line 14b till line 20a (of the reference version based on HH) are repeated at the end of Tay.

<sup>45</sup> Line four and five (of the reference version HH) are repeated at the end of the manuscript Nab.

At the beginning this *utumbuizo* strongly resembles the above mentioned versions of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”, but slowly shades into a different kind of narration – or better different kinds of narrations – with some recurring slight resemblances to the other versions that faint away in the course of the text. Reading through the text one gets the impression that it consists of different pieces or different narrative sequences that were loosely put together. The following is an attempt to summarize the text which roughly falls into five parts<sup>47</sup>:

The narrator starts by talking of the *mjemje* which he planted with much care, yet finally he became deprived of all claims on the plant. To pay revenge, he swears an oath to cut the plant, so that it shall not bear any fruits, likewise depriving the opponents of all the benefits and profits that the *mjemje* may bring. He wants to make them pay for the valuable fruits (cf. below line 12,13).

The next part starts with a question (asking why one should talk to an inferior (line 14)). It might be a rhetorical one that is in fact an expression of disdain stressing the narrator’s decision to cut all ties of friendship with those who took the *mjemje* away from him. But he has a well dug which can be interpreted as a plan to take revenge and to play a trick on those who betrayed him. There is a decision made to seal the well and to take the child out which seems to point to a conflict resolution or even the narrator’s victory.

In the third part, the principal (line 24) sends someone of equal social rank (probably the former would-be husband of the *mjemje*) to fetch different items (a ring, a toothbrush, clothes, a rosary, utensils used for betel chewing and weapons) for him that seem to stress his high social standing and seem to allude to preparations he makes to get ready for a certain event (to get married?, to go out into battle?).

Subsequently, in a next part, certain preparations or orders are described (cf. line 31ff.): the gates are locked, there is drinking water for the healers and Islamic scholars, the pathways and wells are not to be used and the boats are not supposed to leave the harbour. What seems like a cut in the narration could actually follow up with the previous thematic unit: a state of emergency seems to be described. The narrator gives further orders reacting to the catastrophe described above.

Finally in the last section (cf. line 35ff.), taking up the rumours in the neighbourhood, a girl is asked whom she sinned with. It turns out that the girl was deflowered by a man called Makame who is of much lower social standing – causing a big shame to her that she seems to

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<sup>46</sup> The manuscript (Hs. or. 9921) is kept at the State Library in Berlin. On the same sheet of paper one finds a *shairi* in praise of a woman which starts with the same entrance formula (cf. Dammann 1993: 193). For a manuscript of the same handwriting see Miehe et al. (2004: 102).

<sup>47</sup> The subdivision into five parts is not a rigid one; the text could probably even be subdivided into more parts. The units that the text falls into cannot only be defined thematically. Formal characteristics, like syntactic parallels (cf. line 25ff.), also help to identify a passage. Treating all these passages as a coherent text necessarily implies some interpretations that are of a vague nature. The abstract should be regarded as a mere suggestion, an approach to the original text which is thereby regarded as a sequence of linked intratextual themes and events. But the lines might also be reflections of the actual context of performance, retrieving its meaning from a broader communicative context, which is not feasible to me.

lament about in the last few lines of this version. There is a constant change of narrator(s) in the last part of the poem which is in fact a dialogue. The voice of the girl talking about the sin she committed is clearly discernible.<sup>48</sup>

According to Nabahany the last part presented in this manuscript, in which the girl is asked about her failure, was originally part of the ancient “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame”.<sup>49</sup> The “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” is a long narrative, dramatic poem about the extra-marital seduction of a noble girl through a man, Makame, who is of lower social standing which puts shame on her and her family. The scene starts with the deflowered girl lying in bed, evidently suffering, so that her mother comes to ask her why she is ill. Through a flashback the listener gets to know how the man, who seduced her, fell in love with her, found a way to approach her and deflowered her. The narration is artistically presented through the eyes of the different protagonists, so that we hear a lot of different voices talking.<sup>50</sup>

But the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” was, according to Nabahany, not the only *uṭumbuizo* which was integrated into this version of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”. The scene of the well (line 15-17) that interestingly also figures in the recorded version (see below) and the scene(s) in the palace (line 24-34) were most probably also taken from other *ṭumbuizo*.<sup>51</sup>

### 2.2.2. A recorded audio-version of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”

When I was working with Ahmed Sheikh Nabahany on several passages of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”, he remembered that he made a recording of it in 1965, when he travelled to Pate with the special purpose of doing recordings of songs that were about to disappear.<sup>52</sup> The singer of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” was Fatma Athman from Pate who died two or three

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<sup>48</sup> Another formal feature that clearly sets apart the section at the end from the rest of the version is the loss of the end rhyme. That is also why the presentation of the text in the synopsis stops to be a line-by-line presentation starting from line 35, but follows the turns of the different narrators.

<sup>49</sup> Knappert (1972/73) edited one version of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” that I refer to in the synopsis (abbreviated as “Kn”) (for a reedition of the poem without any textual differences, see Knappert 2004: 519-535). In general, the version given by Knappert differs from the segment found in this version of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” with respect to its wording and the order of sequences. The last part given in the synopsis (cf. 40 below) is not given in Knappert’s edition. There is another unpublished version of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” in the Yahya Ali Omar Collection at the SOAS archives (MS 380741; abbreviated as “YAO” in the following) which differs from the section found in Da27 (see below) as well as from the version presented in Knappert’s article. It shows many more Kitikuu features than the other two. A thorough comparison – which could also include the recording of the Nabahany collection kept in the UCLA archive of ethnomusicology – is beyond the scope of this paper, but I will refer to the lines found in these two versions that are echoed in this version of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”.

<sup>50</sup> The fragment that became part of this version of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” is in fact a dialogue between the mother inquiring about the daughter’s misconduct (cf. line 35,37,39,40) and her daughter regretfully admitting her misdeeds (line 36,38,41).

<sup>51</sup> In Da27 the well also figures in line 23 and 24 which seem to function as a bridge to the following passage.

<sup>52</sup> The “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” as well as the other songs were originally recorded on reels and finally transformed onto cassettes. Besides Nabahany the Fort Jesus Museum, Mombasa, has copies of some of the recordings – although some got lost – as well as the UCLA archive of ethnomusicology. The cassette that Nabahany gave to me was in a very bad shape and some songs had faded totally. I am indebted to Andrew Eisenberg who digitalised the cassette for me, so that at least the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” became clearly audible.

years ago and was very renowned for her beautiful voice. When they did the recording, she sang the *utumbuizo* by heart not relying on any written version. The recording does not seem to be complete, as she stops singing abruptly. Either some lines became inaudible due to the deterioration of the cassette tape – which also happened in the case of other songs – or the singer did not remember the exact wording and hence stopped singing. Some other lines in the middle of the text were also apparently lost.

According to Nabahany Fatma Athman used the typical *utumbuizo* melody to sing the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”.<sup>53</sup> Lacking the expertise in musicology, I did not transcribe the music, but I tried to mark some prosodic features in the text. I also transcribed the text with all the “repetitions” that could be heard on the recording, as they show the intricate weaving of the text and can not be found in the written versions of the *utumbuizo*.<sup>54</sup> Listening to the *utumbuizo* one recognizes stanza-like sections which are prosodically subdivided into four parts or hemistiches.<sup>55</sup> The singer puts each prosodically marked hemistich into one breath and concludes it with the catching of new breath.<sup>56</sup> The vowel of the last word in each hemistich is slightly prolonged and the voice goes down, becoming extra-low in the last hemistich of the “stanza” marking its closure.<sup>57</sup> But the prolongation of the final vowel does not only occur at the end of each hemistich, but also in the middle of the first two ones subdividing them mostly into one part of six syllables and another part of four syllables.<sup>58</sup> This prosodically marked division does not cut through words, neither are phrase units torn apart. In this case the prolongation does not go together with a lowering of the voice. The voice is raised again at the beginning of each hemistich producing what I transcribed (in brackets) as “eee”, “aaaa”, “haaaaaooo” and the like.

The first two hemistiches link the “stanza” with the preceding one, as the last hemistich of the preceding stanza is in fact repeated. Thereby the prosodically marked subparts of the hemistich often occur in reversed order. In the second hemistich another parameter is changed

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<sup>53</sup> According to Nabahany there is only one type of melody that is characteristic of the *utumbuizo*. An *utumbuizo* is sung without further instrumental accompaniment.

<sup>54</sup> From the point of view of the recording one can not actually speak of repetitions, as the same wording is never repeated in the same prosodic way.

<sup>55</sup> This is not always the case. Sometimes the “stanza” also consists of a tripartite structure (cf. line 1 and 19). Nevertheless, the subdivision into four units seems to be the norm; any deviation from it is audibly accompanied by hesitation: the singer seems to get lost looking for the text or the melody.

<sup>56</sup> The end of one hemistich and the catching of breath is marked by “/” in the synopsis.

<sup>57</sup> The length of the prolonged vowels seems to vary depending on the *mizani* of the words. Nabahany describes breath as a central factor in the *tumbuizo*: “Mahadhi au sauti ya tumbuizo inafuata sana pumzi za huyo mtu anayetunga na kuimba.” (cf. Shariff 1988: 52). But still breath is not supposed to destroy the meaningful unit and the rhyme (which is supposed to close one meaningful unit): “Na iwapo mtungaji-mwimbaji ameishiwa na pumzi kabla hajafika kwenye kina, basi hurudi nyuma kidogo na kuendelea kuimba mpaka afike kwenye kina chake” (ibd.).

<sup>58</sup> This cut is marked by “/” in the synopsis. The prolongation of the vowels is put in brackets in the transcription.

slowly leading to the introduction of a new thought: the second subpart frequently consisting of four syllables is altered.<sup>59</sup>

With respect to the content this version shares common characteristics with the manuscript Da27 from the Dammann collection, but is much shorter than it. At the beginning, the narrations of the two versions are in accordance; although there are some lines in the manuscript which do not appear in the recording (line 4-7). Afterwards in both versions the narrator takes revenge by causing devastation preventing the family who betrayed him from prospering (verse 10-13). A well (full of devils to prevent people from taking water out of it) is dug in both versions (line 15-17). But the narration continues differently, approaching the end of the recording: The narrator talks about the jealousy of high-ranked people of noble decent (sharifs) and Islamic scholars, who did not want him to profit (from the *mjemje*?) (*nipate ridhiki, nichie kanwani* (cf. verse 18 and 19)). Probably, finally he got the *mjemje* back that was given to him by God, as he states in the last line triumphantly (verse 22). He tells his opponents to stop crying with jealousy, (generously or sarcastically overcoming rivalry) offering: “mine is also yours.”

Features of the Northern Swahili dialects can be found in both versions, but none of the versions contains features exclusively diagnostic of one dialect and different forms coexist. Furthermore fragments that can be recognized on thematic and certain formal grounds can not be differentiated according to linguistic features. Old perfect forms are abundant in both versions. Phonological features of Kipate/Kisiu/Kitikuu (especially /ch/ corresponding to /t/ in Std. Sw.) occur in both versions, but are more prominent in the sung version, probably hinting at the origin of the singer.<sup>60</sup> In general, the two versions show more specific Kipate/Kisiu/Kitikuu features than the five versions presented above, which seem to show more Kiamu features of all Northern Swahili dialects.

### 2.2.3. Textual synopsis with comment and translation

In the following the two versions are presented together in one synopsis, but as variation occurs to a much higher degree than in the other five versions presented in the synopsis above, I give the text of each version separately with a separate translation and comment following each stanza.<sup>61</sup> Some parts of the song do neither have any corresponding lines nor verses in the respective variant version; so that these are given as single lines, interrupting the parallel presentation of the two versions (cf. e.g. line 4-7 which only occur in Da27).

<sup>59</sup> As the number of syllables is a relative measure, as stated above, I can only mark tendencies. In general, the smallest units of a “stanza”, i.e. the subparts of a hemistich, in the recorded version have a tendency of consisting of either four or six syllables. Differently from the strict scheme (4+6) suggested by Knappert (1979: 95), the order of the parts is variable.

<sup>60</sup> But cf. /dh/ in *dhake* in line 7 of Da27, a typical Kipate/Kisiu/Kitikuu-feature (corresponding to /z/ in Std. Sw.). Nevertheless, this feature of Kipate/Kisiu/Kitikuu does not occur regularly in Da27 (cf. line 18,19,20 of the recording). For example, the section taken from the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” that is full of Kisiu features in the version found in the Yahya Ali Omar Collection, lacks some diagnostic phonological features of Kisiu/Kipate/Kitikuu in Da27.

<sup>61</sup> It goes without saying that in some cases, the explanations given for one version are valid for both of them.

As the texture of the recorded version differs from the lines given in the manuscript in that one stanza of the recorded version actually corresponds to two interwoven lines of the manuscript, the reader has to consider not only the line of Da27 given parallel to the recorded stanza, but in most cases also the following one in Da27.

| Da27  | Sung version by Fatma Athman <sup>62</sup>   |
|---|--|
| <p>1 P<sup>h</sup>ani kiti nikalie kaṭi / niusifu mjemje shani</p> <p>Give me a chair, that I may sit down and praise the <i>mjemje</i> in terms of its elegance.</p> <p><i>kaṭi</i> “on the ground, ‘earthward’” (cf. <i>nṭi</i> Std. Sw. <i>nchi</i> “earth”) is here considered to exemplify the adverbial use of class 12 (cf. <i>kamwe</i>, <i>katiti</i> etc.). Another possible reading of the Arabic script is <i>kati</i> “in the middle”.</p> |  |
| <p>2 Mjemje kaye wali wangu / k<sup>h</sup>itulia kwa Mwana Uwani</p> <p>In former times the <i>mjemje</i> was mine, when I was planting it for Mwana Uwani.</p>  | <p>Kaye wali wanguuu / mjemje(eee) // kaye wali wangu(uu) / nikinoshaza(a) // (aaaa) kwa Mwana Uwani //<sup>63</sup></p> <p>In former times it was mine, the <i>mjemje</i>. In former times, it was mine when I was watering it for Mwana Uwani.</p> <p>The verse is incomplete and the voice of the singer stammering. It obviously takes her some time to find the right tune and wording.</p> |
| <p>3 K<sup>h</sup>itulia kwa embe la chuma / na mṭanga mwema wa ziwani</p> <p>Planting it with an iron hoe and good soil from the lake.</p>   | <p>Kwa Mwana Uwani(ii) / k<sup>h</sup>inosheza (eeee) // kwa Mwana Uwani(ii) / k<sup>h</sup>ilimia(aa) // (aaa) kwa embe la chuma(aa) // (haweeee) na mṭanga(aaa) / k<sup>h</sup>itia k<sup>h</sup>ononi(iiii)</p> <p>For Mwana Uwani I was watering it. For Mwana Uwani I was cultivating it with an iron hoe putting soil onto the shoot.</p>  |

<sup>62</sup> Before starting to sing the singer announces the *utumbuizo*: *Na hunu ni utumbuizo wa mjemje*.

<sup>63</sup> “/” marks the caesura between hemistiches; “//” marks the end of a metric line.

The following lines (4-7) can only be found in **Da 27**:

**4** K<sup>h</sup>itulia kwa wasimamizi / zipotoke zili mafuzini

I was planting (it) for the supervisors and (the branches) on the shoulders were twisted.

*mafuzi* = Std. Sw. *mabega* (cf. “Utendi wa Mwana Manga” (stz. 27) (in Mieke et al. 2004))

*zipotoke*, cf. Sac (p. 760): “-*potoka* se tordre; fig. s’entêter, se pervertir; être obstiné.”

The meaning of the second hemistich is unclear. Nabahany suggests the reading given above even though the manuscript reads *na p<sup>h</sup>otoke* (“and so that I was obstinate”). The subject prefix *zi-* may refer to *zitanḡu* “twigs”. According to him the line alludes to pruning.

**5** K<sup>h</sup>itulia usiku makungu / na mḡana chepulua yani

I was planting it during night time and at day time a leave was sprouting.

*chepulua*, cf. Sac (p. 143): “-*chipua* donner un germe, un bourgeon, un rejeton, une ou des feuilles.”

Instead of /ch/ one would expect /t/ in correspondence to the phonological properties of the Northern dialects (cf. also *kutepuza* below).

**6** Nipisiye wazee wachamba / hasira hasara mno / mno hasarani

I passed by when the old people were saying that anger meant too big a loss, too big a loss.

*nipisiye* = Std. Sw. *nimepita*

acc. to Nabahany *hasira hasara* is a common proverbial saying.

The division into hemistiches might be different in this line and the next one. No caesurae are marked in the manuscript and I follow Nabahany in subdividing the line. Evidently, compared to the other lines, there is a change in the prosodic make-up which could be a hint for the fragmentary nature of this part.

**7** Kwa dhake hasira / k<sup>h</sup>atend<sup>r</sup>a mnazi / k<sup>h</sup>atulia mti uso yani

To make him angry (lit. “for his anger”) I planted a coconut tree. I planted a tree without leaves.

*dhake* = Std. Sw. *zake*; *kutenda mnazi* = *kupanda mnazi*

The narrator probably talks about his adversary and his anger.

The following part is reflected in both versions:

| Da27  | Sung version by Fatma Athman   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>8</b> K<sup>h</sup>atulia makungu adhimu / mjemje humeya nyikani</p> <p>I planted in the middle of the night; the <i>mjemje</i> grows in the bush.</p> <p><i>makungu adhimu</i> means acc. to Nabahany <i>makungu makubwa</i> “in the middle of the night”.</p> | <p>K<sup>h</sup>itia khononi(iii) / na mḡanga(awee) // k<sup>h</sup>itia k<sup>h</sup>ononi(iii) / mjemje(ee) // (eeee) ukisa kukuwa(aa) / (haweee) k<sup>h</sup>atolewa(aa) // simo sehemuni(iii).</p> <p>I put it on the sprout; and sand, I put it on the sprout. When the <i>mjemje</i> had grown I was yanked out. I am no longer part of it.</p> |

| Da27  | Sung version by Fatma Athman   |
|---|--|
| <p>9 Mjemje ukisa kuambata / t<sup>h</sup>omozewe simo shirikani</p> <p>When the <i>mjemje</i> had spread its roots, I was drawn out, I do no longer have a share in it.</p> <p>An alternative reading to <i>kuambata</i> could be <i>k<sup>h</sup>apata/kupata</i> “I got it”.</p> <p>For t<sup>h</sup>omozewe cf. comment to line 3 of the synopsis given above (under 2.1.3.).</p> | <p>Simo sehemuni(ii) / k<sup>h</sup>aṭolewa(aaee) // si-mo sehemuni(ii) / mi niukat<sup>h</sup>e(ee) // (eee) niukat<sup>h</sup>e shina(aa) // (hawooo) mi niuwase(ee) / kuṭepuza yani(ii)</p> <p>I am no longer part of it, I was yanked out / I am no longer part of it; so that I cut, I cut the root stock, so that I prevent it from sprouting.</p> <p>-(w)asa = <i>kukosesha</i>, cf. Sac (p. 72): “faire prohiber qqch. à qqn.”</p>   |
| <p>10 T<sup>h</sup>aupata niukat<sup>h</sup>e shina / niuwase kuṭepuza yani</p> <p>I will get hold of it to cut the root stock so that I prevent it from sprouting.</p>   |  |
| <p>11 Niuwase kupanga machund<sup>f</sup>a / wake nd<sup>f</sup>uza wasiyaṭamani</p> <p>I prevent it from bearing fruits, so that her people, my brothers, cannot long for them.</p> <p><i>Nd<sup>f</sup>uza = nd<sup>f</sup>uzangu</i></p>   | <p>Kuṭepuza yani(ii) / niuwase(ee) // kuchend<sup>f</sup>a machund<sup>f</sup>a // (haaa) ili wake nd<sup>f</sup>uza / wasiyaṭamani</p> <p>I prevent it from sprouting and to bear fruits that her people, my brothers, cannot long for them.</p> <p>The second hemistich is obviously missing. Probably the singer made a mistake, as also from her voice one can tell that she suddenly realizes her mistake in the third hemistich – starting the hemistich melodically as singing the second one and abruptly changing to the tune of the third one.</p> |
| <p>12 Wake nd<sup>f</sup>uza wayaṭamanipo / t<sup>h</sup>awaliza kwa k<sup>h</sup>uu thamani</p> <p>When her people, my brothers, want them I will sell them for a high price.</p> <p><i>t<sup>h</sup>awaliza = nitawauliza = Std. Sw. nitawauzia</i></p>   | <p>Wasiyaṭamani(iii) / wake nd<sup>f</sup>uza(aee) // wasiyaṭamani(ii) / wake nd<sup>f</sup>uza(a) // (aaa) wayaṭamanipo(oo) // (haaaooo) niwalize / kwa k<sup>h</sup>uu thamani(iii)</p> <p>So that her people, my brothers, may not want it; so that her people, my brothers, may not want it; if they want them I may sell them for a high price.</p>   |



OF PLANTS AND WOMEN

| Da27  | Sung version by Fatma Athman   |
|---|--|
| <p>13 T<sup>h</sup>awaliza kwa dhahabu t<sup>h</sup>imbe / lulu mambe au marijani</p> <p>I will sell it for nugget gold, shining pearls or red coral.</p> <p><i>dhahabu t<sup>h</sup>imbe</i>, cf. stz 70 of “Al-Inkishafi” (Hichens 1939: 98).</p> <p><i>mambe</i> is according to Nabahany an attribute of the pearl stressing its beauty, but he was not sure which quality of the pearl is actually underlined. He said that it might be its shining, glittering nature. The etymology (of this past participle?) is also unknown (&lt; -pamba?).</p> | <p>Kwa k<sup>h</sup>uu thamani(iii) / niwalize(ee) // kwa k<sup>h</sup>uu thamani(ii) / mi niwalize(ee) / (eeee) kwa dhahabu fuwe //(haooo) au lulu(uu) / fedha marijani(ii).</p> <p>For a high price, I may sell them for a high price; I may sell them for gold fine-drest or pearls, silver, red coral.</p> <p><i>dhahabu fuwe</i>, cf. stz. 70 of “Al-Inkishafi” (Hichens 1939: 98).</p>   |
| <p>14 Mt<sup>h</sup>u chamba hwamba mtumwangu / hwamba naye kwani</p> <p>If one talks, does one talk to my slave? Why should he talk to him?</p> <p><i>mtumwangu = mtumwa wangu</i></p> <p>Someone from a high social class would never talk to someone from a low social class. In an extended sense <i>mtumwa</i> is anyone who suffers from some insufficiency.</p>  | <p>Fedha marijani(ii) / au lulu(uu) // fedha marijani(ii) / mchu kwamba(ee) // (eee) kwamba(aa) / hamba na mwangufu(uu) // (haoooo) mchumwangu(uu) / hamba naye kwani(ii)</p> <p>Silver, red coral, pearls; silver, red coral. (If someone (is) talking, (if it comes to) talking I (only) talk to a noble man. Why should I talk to my slave?</p> <p><i>mwangufu = Std. Sw. muungwana</i></p> <p><i>hamba = Std. Sw. nikaamba</i></p> |
| <p>15 Mtumwangu alipoiona / waliṭimba kisima ndḡiani</p> <p>When my slave saw it, they (he?) dug a well in the pathway.</p>   | <p>Hamba naye kwani(ii) / mchumwangu(u) // hamba naye kwani(ii) / mchumwangu(weee) // (eeee) alipoiona(aa) / (haoo) aliṭimba(aa) / kisima ndḡiani(iii)</p> <p>Why should I talk to him, my slave? Why should I talk to him, my slave? When he saw it, he dug a well in the pathway.</p>  |

| Da27  | Sung version by Fatma Athman  |
|---|---|
| <p>16 Kisimache hakiṭoweki mai / uṭimbiye kisima kikuu cha majini na masheṭani</p> <p>His well contains no water; he dug a big well of genies and devils.</p> | <p>Kisima nḡiani(iii) / aliṭimba(ee) // kisima nḡiani / akaṭimba(aaa) // (aaaa) kisima kikuu / (haoooo) cha majini(ii) / na masheṭani(ii)</p> <p>A well in the pathway, he dug a well in the pathway. He dug a big well in the pathway, (full) of genies and devils.</p>  |
| <p>17 Kisimache hakiṭoweki mai / cha waganga na wanazuoni</p> <p>His well contains no water; (the well) of healers and Islamic scholars.</p>                  | <p>Na masheṭani(ii) / cha majini(ii) // na masheṭani kadhiriya(eee) // (eee) wachu kunywa mai(iii) // (haooo) masharifu(u) / na wanadhuoniii</p> <p>(Of) devils, of genies and devils. He prevented the people from drinking water, the sharifs and Islamic scholars.</p> <p><i>kadhiria</i> cf. Std. Sw. <i>kuzuia</i><br/> <i>wanadhuoni</i> = Std. Sw. <i>wanavyuoni</i></p> |

The following part can only be found in the sung version (**Fa**):

- 18 Na wanadhuoni(iii) / masharifu(uu) // na wanadhuoni waja(aa) // makhuluki(ii) / hilo hawaṭaki(eee) // (haooo) nipate ridhiki(ii) / nichie kanwani
- Islamic scholars, sharifs and Islamic scholars, slaves, creatures did not give their consent that I get (my) maintenance to put into my mouth.
- ridhiki* = Std Sw. *riziki*; *nichie* = Std. Sw. *nitie*
- 
- 19 Waja makhuluki(ii) / hilo hawaṭaki(ii) // (haweee) nipate ridhiki(ii) / nichie kanwani(ii).
- Slaves, creatures. They don't want that, that I get maintenance to put into my mouth.
- There is a rupture in the recording and there seems to be something missing at the beginning of this line.
- 
- 20 Nichie kanwani(iii) / nipate ridhiki(eeee) // nichie kanwani / waṭani // dhitunu / kunaba (?) kwa vinu(uu) // (haooo) yangu ndiyo yenu(uu) / ngowa silieni(ii).
- That I can put it into my mouth; that I get maintenance; that I can put into my mouth. Stop grumbling in bitterness: mine is yours. Don't cry with jealousy.
- kunaba* (?); Nabahany could not give me its meaning and skipped it. I left it untranslated. (< Arab. *naba'a* "to inform, to overwhelm, to retreat" (?))
- Acc. to Nabahany *dhitunu* (Std. Sw. *vitunu*) = Std. Sw. *uchungu* (in the sense of 'grumbling'); cf. Sac (p. 416): "*kitunu* grognement consistant à faire hē."

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Acc. to Nabahany *vinu* “bitterness” (one could possibly also transcribe it as the demonstrative *vino*).  
*zitunu kwa vinu*, acc. to Nabahany *uchungu juu ya chungu* “utmost bitterness”; this kind of pleonasm is a common feature in old Swahili poems, especially *tendi*, where they do not only serve the function of highlighting a matter, but also seem to be applied for metric requirements.

Acc. to Nabahany *ngowa* “jealousy” (cf. Sac p. 679).

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- 21 Ngowa silieni(ii) / yangu nd<sup>r</sup>iyo yenu(uu) // ngowa silieni(ii) / silieni(iii) // ngowa(aa) / kwa mimi kupowa (eee) // (haoo) naliitunukiwa / na Mola Manani(ii).

Don't cry with jealousy: mine is yours. Don't cry with jealousy. Don't cry with jealousy because I was given it. I got it as a present from God, the Beneficent.

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- 22 Na Mola Manani(iii) / naliitunukiwa(aa) // na Mola Manani(ii) // mkaja(?)

From God the Beneficent I got it, from God the Beneficent.

Here the recording ends abruptly. I leave the last word untranslated, as the context is missing.

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This last part of the text can only be found in **Da27**:

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- 23 Wazee wachamba tukiziwe / chumtowe mwana haṭa iyon

The old men were saying: “we should plug it (= the well) up, we should take the child out till the evening.”

*tukiziwe* = Std Sw. *tukizibe*

*haṭa iyon* suggested by Nabahany is a very doubtful reading; actually the manuscript reads as follows: *atayuni/atayoni/aṭa nyuni* (?)

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- 24 Kisimache kisa kukiziwa / nende yumbe kakae kitini

When his well is plugged up, I may go and the principal may take a seat there (to give orders).

*Yumbe* could probably also be interpreted as “parliament” or “palace”; cf. Mische et al. (2004: 56): “*jumba la ukoo (ukolo) linalohusishwa na ufalme mara nyingine.*”

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- 25 Nakutuma mkuu kanami / wend<sup>r</sup>e kwangu utwaliye t<sup>h</sup>uni

I send you, a noble man like me, go to my place and take a present.

t<sup>h</sup>uni < t<sup>h</sup>unu (vowel variation due to the rhyme)

One can assume that it is the principle (*yumbe*) talking in this and the following lines.

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- 26 Katwalie p<sup>h</sup>ete yaqiqi / uye nayo nitie chandani

Fetch a ruby ring come with it, that I may put it on my finger.

*chanda* (Kiamu) = Std. Sw. *kidole*

acc. to Nabahany *yaqiqi* is a kind of gemstone, red in colour.

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- 27 Katwaliye kikombe cha mai / mswaki upo kitand<sup>r</sup>ani

Fetch a glass of water, the toothbrush is on the bed.

---

28 Katwaliye ṭasa la ṭambu / na uliyo papo chanoni

Fetch the betel spittoon and the chalk box there on the wooden tray.

*uliyo*, acc. to Nabahany *kikebe cha ṭambu*, a small box for limestone chalk; mineral lime is put into the betel quid; cf. Sac (p. 950): “Boîte a chaux pour le bétel.”

*chano* acc. to Nabahany “a *sinia* made of wood”

*ṭasa* is a basin used as a spittoon for the residue of the betel quid

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29 Katwaliye kanḡu na kiyemba / ṭasbihi ipo beserani

Fetch the robe and the turban, the rosary is (hanging) on the bed frame.

*besera*, frame to put the mosquito net on; cf. Sac (p. 104): “bois de lit, dont les pieds sont prolongés par des montants supportant un cadre pour la moustiquaire.”

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30 Katwaliye upanga na ngao / na mkuki papo changoni

Fetch the sword and the shield and the spear there on the peg.

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31 Kasiria milango ya kupaa / wa mchaa wasend<sup>f</sup>e zingoni

There were gates with a lock, so that the people of the neighbourhood may not rebel.

*mchaa* = Std. Sw. *mtaa*

Acc. to Nabahany *kasiria* < Arab. *-siri* = Std. Sw. *-kuwa*; cf. Sac (p. 1084): “*-siri* être ou devenir tel ou tel, finir par être tel ou tel.” To establish the reference of the predicate is very difficult as there might be a rupture in the transmission again. Nabahany gives *ikawa* (with a dummy subject pronoun of class 9) as equivalent to *kasiria*. There could be other interpretations possible as well: Said A. M. Khamis suggests a different reading *kasri ya* “castle of”. Probably also *kasiria* < *kasiri* “annoy, irritate” (cf. also Sac p. 332). As the text is so sketchy it is hard to evaluate these various readings. The translation is merely a suggestion.

*kupaa* “lock, latch” (cf. Sac p. 454). Said A. M. Khamis suggests an alternative reading: *milango ya kumba* “doors made of invaluable material, like coconut leaves”.

Acc. to Nabahany *wasend<sup>f</sup>e zingoni* (< *-zinga*, cf. Jhn (p. 542): “to turn around, move in a circle”) = *wasiende kinyume*

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32 Kasiria k<sup>h</sup>asi kunywa mai / masharifu na wanazuoni

There was a dipper to drink water for the sharifs and Islamic scholars.

acc. to Nabahany *k<sup>h</sup>asi* is a ladle made of a coconut shell to fetch water (cf. Sac p. 331).

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33 Kasiria nḡia zisipitwe / na zisima zisitekwe mai

There were ways which could not be passed and from the wells no water could be drawn

In ms *zisima zitekwe mai*; but Nabahany suggests the given reading which according to him is the correct one.

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34 Kasiria miṭepe mikuu / na minuna isend<sup>f</sup>e mwend<sup>f</sup>owe

There were big and small sewn boats that did not set sail.

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*mtepe*, the so-called “sewn boat”, a sailing vessel constructed solely with wooden pegs and cord at the Northern Swahili coast where it was in use till the 1930s. Thus, *mtepe* can be taken as a hint of the text’s antiquity.

-*nuna* (Kiamu) “small”

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35 Waṭokapi<sup>1</sup> mwezi<sup>2</sup> waṭokapi<sup>3</sup> / wa mchaa wali wakikwamba

Where do you come from, moon, where do you come from? The people of the neighbourhood were slandering you.

1 Kn<sup>64</sup>: *uṭokapi*; YAO<sup>65</sup>: *hutokapi* 2 Kn, YAO: *midhe* 3 Kn: *uṭokapi*; YAO: *hutokapi*

cf. Knappert 1972/1973: 193; MS YAO: p. 4.

The reading *midhe* suggested by Kn and Yao that Knappert renders as “young woman” (cf. Sac (p. 556, 640) “nom de femme”; acc. to Nabahany “queen”) is not possible in ms DA27, as one definitely reads an alveolar fricative.

*kwamba* with direct object has a pejorative meaning (cf. Std. Sw. *kumsema mtu*).

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36 Hunambani wa mchaa hunambani<sup>1</sup> / chenda lipi<sup>2</sup> lisotend<sup>f</sup>wa<sup>3</sup>

What do they say about me? What do the people of the neighbourhood say about me? What do I do what is not to be done?

1 Kn: *hunambani watju wa mtjaa*; YAO: *hunambani wamchaa* 2 one reads *liyi* (?) in Da27 which is a mistake acc. to Nabahany 3 Kn: *T<sup>h</sup>ende lipi lisiloyachendwa*; YAO: *Ch<sup>h</sup>ende lipi lisilo chendwa?*

cf. Knappert 1972/1973: 193; MS YAO: p. 4.

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37 Uvunḍiyepi mwezi<sup>1</sup> uvunḍiyepi<sup>2</sup> / uvunḍiye kwa mchu kamawe?<sup>3</sup>

Where did you sin, moon, where did you sin? Did you sin with a man like you?

1 YAO: *midhe* 2 missing in Kn 3 YAO: *Ngaa uvunḍie kwa nch<sup>h</sup>u kamawe*

cf. Knappert 1972/1973: 193; MS YAO: p. 4.

*uvunḍiye* = Std. Sw. *umevunja*;

The mother asks her daughter about her misstep. Furthermore, she asks her whether she slept with a man of equal social standing. In this case it would have been possible to legalize the relationship afterwards by marrying the daughter to him. But sleeping with a man of low social standing is a disaster for the whole family.

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38 Nazipata k<sup>h</sup>aziungaunga<sup>1</sup> / nivunḍiye kwa Makame nd<sup>f</sup>uya.<sup>2</sup>

I get them and then I put them together. I sinned with Makame, my brother.

1 Kn: *chudhipache chudhiungeunge* 2 YAO: *Nch<sup>h</sup>u kadhipacha kadhiunga-unga*

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<sup>64</sup> Refers to Knappert 1972/1973.

<sup>65</sup> Abbreviation used for the manuscript in Roman script of the Yahya Ali Omar Collection (Ms 380741 s. above).

cf. Knappert 1972/1973: 193; MS YAO: p. 4.

In YAO it is still the mother talking, asking her whether she sinned with a donkey-driver (*au uvundie, kwa ntunga p<sup>h</sup>unda*; cf. Kn p. 194, where an additional halfline is given), a line that is missing in Da27.

Nabahany explains that *-zi-* refers to “what has been broken in the lines before.” He uses *mafumbo* to explain the meaning: if a *jahazi* gets broken and leaks, one also tries to fix it as properly as possible and puts the planks together again.”

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39 Mke nganu mume mpunga / uvundiye kwa Makame<sup>1</sup> / mpowa<sup>2</sup> muyukuu wa wātunga p<sup>h</sup>unda

The woman is wheat and the man is rice. You sinned with Makame, (you are) the one who is given a grand-child of the donkey drivers.

1 Kn, YAO: *uvundiye kwa Makame soyo* 2 missing in Kn and YAO

cf. Knappert 1972/1973: 195; MS YAO: p. 5.

In YAO as well as Kn *nivundiye kwa Makame, nduya. Mke nganu, mume mpunga* is part of the girl’s utterance. According to YAO’s and Kn’s rendering it is the girl’s father who then talks to her, making reproaches to her. In YAO he concludes by asking her, how she could undo it by putting it together again (*utapachapi kudhiunga-unga?*), reacting to her comment given in stanza 38 above (cf. also Knappert (1972/1973: 195) where the perspective is slightly different).

According to Nabahany the association of the woman with wheat and of the man with rice stresses the nobility of the girl’s parents, as both wheat and rice are highly valued grains (cf. also Knappert 1972/1973: 194; cf. also stz. 95 in the “Utendi wa Mwana Kupona” (Werner and Hichens 1934: 74, 86). In contrast to her parents, Makame’s parents are of low social status just being donkey drivers.

Rice could also be regarded as a symbol of male fertility (cf. Knappert (1979: 54)) and wheat of female fertility. It cannot be excluded that the association of the woman and wheat has something to do with the status of wheat as it is a forbidden fruit according to Muslim beliefs; this is mentioned by Sacleux (p. 678) as well as Taylor (1891: 5): “(*Fulani*) *amekula nganu, imemtoa p’eponi* So-and-so has eaten wheat, it has turned him out of Paradise. The Mohammedans believe that the forbidden fruit was wheat.” (cf. also Krapf 1882: 278).

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40 Kiyakazi Saḡa<sup>1</sup> mwand<sup>r</sup>ikiye mai moto haba<sup>2</sup> / akipije kiuwa cha manga / nd<sup>r</sup>iyo aḡa ya mke mwand<sup>r</sup>a

Maiden Saḡa, prepare for her some warm water that she can put on the little Arabian flower. This is the custom of a deflowered woman.

1 missing in YAO and Kn 2 Kn, YAO: *mai mocho p<sup>h</sup>unde*

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cf. Knappert 1972/1973: 196; MS YAO: p. 5.

The maiden seems to be conventionally called Saḍa in Swahili *tumbuizo* (cf. e.g. “Uṭumbuizo wa Dhiki”, “Uṭumbuizo wa Mnazi” in Miehe et al. 2004).

*mke mwandʼa* is according to Nabahany a woman who has just lost her virginity. Warm water is commonly used to wash the newly deflowered woman.

According to YAO it is still the father who is speaking; in Kn where some additional lines which are neither in YAO nor in Da27 precede this paragraph it is the mother talking.

There is a further halfline in YAO describing chili as a remedy used (“*au pilipili pʼunde*”) (cf. also Knappert p. 196). Knappert (ibid.) explains that it is a common abortifacient agent. As the child can not be legitimized due to the difference of social classes, it will be aborted.

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- 41 Niṭoshee usiku wa mwezi / niruḍiye usiku wa kiza // niṭoshee nilina furaha / niruḍiye nilina msiba // niṭoshee kikasiki ṭele / niruḍiye kimekuwa shindʼa // niṭoshee weusi wa dume / niruḍiye wekundu wa kʼamba // yamekwisa

I went out in a night of moonshine and I came back in a night of darkness. I went out in joy and I came back in sorrow. I went out with a small full jar and when I came back it had become half-empty. I went out into the blackness of virility. And I came back in the redness of misfortune. It is over.

These lines of the girl talking are neither in YAO nor in Kn (but they resemble two lines that occur in other parts in Kn (cf. Kn p. 193).

*niṭoshee* = Std. Sw. *nimetoka*; *niruḍiye* = Std. Sw. *nimerudi*

acc. to Nabahany *kikasiki ṭele* “a jar which is full to the brim”; *kikasiki shindʼa* “jar which is half-full” (cf. also Sac p. 839).

All the juxtapositions highlight the contrast between the intact, safe and sound state of virginity and the state of misfortune and loss of virginity.

According to Nabahany *kʼamba* means “danger” (cf. Sacleux (p. 322,142) treats *kʼamba* as a synonym of *chimvi* “child of misfortune, misfortune”).

The colour red is in Nabahany’s view also a sign of danger;<sup>66</sup> black is a sign of harm and evil.

The last *Yamekwisa* seems more likely to be a comment of the poet/scribe concluding his oeuvre than a statement by the protagonist of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”.

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### 3. The elusiveness of the correct version

When I went with Nabahany through the two versions of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” mentioned above, he said that it was not worth examining them, since both contained parts of other *tumbuizo* and were consequently not “the correct versions” of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”. He was obviously angry that both the scribe of the manuscript and Fatma Athman “had spoiled” the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” by mixing up traditions that were to be kept purely apart. I asked him whether these cases of intermingling texts occurred frequently and he told me that very often singers who did not remember the text correctly switched into another text without interruption while singing, thereby contributing to the erosion of tradition.

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Geider (pers. communication) added that red also symbolised uncontrolled emotions, like anger.

Others boastful of their own creativity added their own lines, illegitimately appropriating the text.<sup>67</sup> He said it was the same case with the recording of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” which was also sung by Fatma Athman: the singer suddenly switched into another text, but fortunately he realized it, stopped her and looked for someone more reliable to continue the recording, as he said.<sup>68</sup>

Nabahany’s statement shows that even though there seems to be the normative idea of one correct, authoritative version, in practice there is a lot of performative variation: lines, stanzas and sections of texts are replaced, exchanged, left out or added. So far, in many editions, the variations have mostly been assessed negatively; they have been attributed to the lack of good memory and faithfulness to the text and have been discarded. The version purified of all those disturbing elements that was established thereby consequently acquired the nimbus of an unchanging monolith, a relic of ancient times that gained a lot of authority through its ascribed antiquity.

I am far from trying to debase the efforts and merits of the pioneers and important scholars in the field of Swahili philology, but what I would merely like to add some reflections on the variable nature of even “old” Swahili poetic texts. I am thereby trying to shift the focus on their variability – an important feature which has hitherto been neglected – be it consciously or unconsciously.

Taking a look at the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”, one realizes that all the versions can be subdivided into different blocks that are thematically closed units. All the versions start with the depiction of the planting and the growing of the *mjemje* and the treason against its planter.<sup>69</sup> In the five versions that I grouped together as variants of one text, the narrator continues praising the benefits of the *mjemje*. In the sung version and the version from the Dammann collection (Da27) completely different thematic blocks are added which are taken partly from other *ṭumbuizo*. But even though the reader or listener realizes cuts, an impression of continuity in the narrative sequence cannot be denied: one can see a thematic thread running through these patchwork texts.<sup>70</sup> The singer and poet artistically extracted parts from various

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<sup>67</sup> He gave the “Utendi wa Mwana Kupona” as an example. He had worked on the poem in commission of J.W.T. Allen and it was only after working through a lot of different versions that his grandmother finally handed the correct one over to him.

<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, his own cassette copy of the recording that was equally materialised in 1965, had faded so much, that it has become inaudible, so that I did not have the chance to listen to it. Still I thank Andrew Eisenberg who tried to “revive” the cassette. But, as mentioned above, there must be a copy of the recording in the archives of the UCLA archive of ethnomusicology that might be very helpful for further research.

<sup>69</sup> That the beginning is much less liable to variability can also be confirmed by the Liyongo songs treated in the edition “Songs attributed Fumo Liyongo” (cf. Mische et al. 2004).

<sup>70</sup> That is at least what my attempt to summarise the text shows. Nabahany also agrees and sees a thread running through the text. To Amira Salem who did not know the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” and consequently did not even think of treating this version of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” as a text consisting of different texts, the text made perfect sense. The same associations that help the reader to cognitively bridge the gap between the different sections may also have been the guiding lines for the poet who put all the pieces together in a creative way.



sources and put them together, by probably also adding some new elements, thus developing an alternative story, which is according to the singer still the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”.

Regarding a text as composed around different literary “brick stones”, themes, formulae that can be put together to sections and paragraphs and be variably extended is definitely not a new approach, especially to oral texts. I am going to argue that this perspective is worth applying to old Swahili poetry oscillating between the oral and the written sphere, as it takes the variability of the texts and its production by poets, singers and scribes more seriously into consideration.

Especially the poems which are less often put down in manuscripts, like the *tumbuizo*, seem to show a high degree of textual variation.<sup>71</sup> The exchange of lines, stanzas, sections appears as a common feature in these texts; the stanzas and lines variably figure in different constellations.<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly, the independence of sections seems to be also reflected by the way the poems are ‘stored’ in manuscripts. In the introduction to the compilation of poems (*loho*) which includes the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”, Dammann writes that most of the poems are incomplete, consisting very often of just single stanzas. But as Dammann writes, as the poems normally do not contain a continuous narration, the meaning of the whole text as a unit is not destroyed – a statement that stresses the variability of the texts and its parts that are of certain independence (Dammann 1993: 42).<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Dammann states that the poems do not bear individual titles, but merely have *qala al-shairi* as a heading. This may lead to some fuzziness in distinguishing one poem from the other, so that even in scribing and copying text mergers might occur.<sup>74</sup>

In this perspective that underlines variability, each individual text becomes a temporary linkage of variable literary elements. Moreover, from that point of view, the fact that the text might have been written down in a manuscript is misleading, as it suggests a fixity of the ele-

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<sup>71</sup> The degree of text variability certainly also depends on the age of the text: the older the text, the more variation one can expect. And the *tumbuizo* as already mentioned above, seem to be of quite some age.

<sup>72</sup> For instance, one stanza that occurs in Knappert’s version of the “Utungo wa Ndoto”, is also part of the “Naṭani Niliye” (Miehe et al. 2004: 114); Werner’s version of the “Utungo wa Ndoto” is much longer which stresses the impression of variability. In “Naṭani Niliye” (Miehe et al. 2004: 120), which is another example of what I call “textual crossing”, there is also considerable variation with respect to length: Furthermore Hichens’ and Harries’ versions of the text put together correspond to the one of Nabahany, which could also be the product of a textual merger. Text passages are variably put into contexts: Knappert (1979: 72) gives two lines of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Kikowa” (cf. Miehe et al. 2004: 91, 92) in a separate poem.

<sup>73</sup> It would be interesting to have a look at a *loho* and all its poetry as a whole, because it seems to me that often a *loho* is far from showing a random choice of texts. There is probably more often a common thread running through all the poems that one *loho* contains or at least there are – thematic, prosodic or linguistic – shared features that occur in all the poems.

<sup>74</sup> A fact that was also confirmed by Ahmed S. Nabahany. Examples of texts which in some editions and manuscripts appear as one text, and in some as separate entities have already been given (see above). The loss of manuscript pages or the attachment of pages are taken from another manuscript, that I have often witnessed myself, might also be the start of a new text version. In the case of Da27 one could even ask, whether the last part (taken from the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame”) did not originally belong to another manuscript, as the thematic rupture in Da27 in this case coincides with a turn of pages.

ments that is contradicted especially by the actual performances of it (as well as by the process of copying it, as many changes found its way into the text through copying).

Taking this perspective a bit further, the question of whether a text belongs to a canon of, for example, Liyongo songs cannot be answered simply with “yes” or “no”, as this suggests the unequivocal unity of the text.<sup>75</sup> But as we have seen especially old texts can consist of so many different layers, fragments, and additions that the question of belonging to a certain group of texts, like the Liyongo songs, is more a matter of degree. There is a core of Liyongo episodes and fixed lines – like the “Uṭumbuizo wa Kikowa” and the “Uṭumbuizo wa Dhiki” – which are unequivocally attributed to Liyongo.<sup>76</sup> In other cases the attribution to Liyongo is more ambiguous: there are songs which hardly show any obvious hint at Liyongo, that are still attributed to him by some sources but not by all of them – which is also the case with the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”. Others are so fragmentary, as for example the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mayi” (Miehe et al. 2004: 50), that they might have been part of songs that clearly referred to Liyongo, but have now lost their coherence and strict reference to Liyongo.<sup>77</sup> They are not only remains of older texts, but also the core segments that can easily be integrated into new texts. All these songs might once have been part of one epic on Fumo Liyongo (Miehe et al. 2004: 25).<sup>78</sup>

From this perspective, it is not only the fixed text which is elusive, but also the canon of texts. Taking the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” as an example the interlinkage of texts becomes evident: One text can shade into another, so that the edges get fuzzy and the texts are linked to each other like a chain.<sup>79</sup>

Linguistic features also do not help to solve the problem by objectifying the age and the origin of texts or parts of texts. Most of the texts display a range of linguistic features most commonly echo different Swahili dialects or varieties. Furthermore, rather than being stable, the language of the poems is constantly reshaped according to the dialect and the idiosyncrasies of the performer, the poet or the scribe.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>75</sup> This is not an attempt to discard the texts established by the Fumo Liyongo Working Group. On the contrary, it is an attempt to take them as “common texts” (in analogy to Guthrie’s Bantuist terminology) and to throw a differently accentuated perspective on them – regarding them as layered, variable texts.

<sup>76</sup> Still also these *tumbuizo* show considerable variation.

<sup>77</sup> A further complication is the fact that these fragments and sections might have also come from a text that once had nothing to do with Liyongo, but were inserted into a Liyongo song thence getting associated with Liyongo. If we hypothetically transfer the scenario onto the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”, we could imagine the following: after a while people start taking the section of “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame” that appears at the end of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”, as a core element of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”. And if the rest of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” gets lost, the element which was once part of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Makame”, gets *the* “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”.

<sup>78</sup> Interestingly there have been some attempts to “rebuild” the Liyongo epic (cf. the “Hadithi ya Liyongo” (Steere 1870) and the “Utendi wa Liyongo” by Muhamadi Kijuma (cf. Kijum(w)a 1973), which shows the cyclic nature of some text elements that become parts of texts that might finally disintegrate again.

<sup>79</sup> If a text is attributed to Liyongo by only some sources, this fuzziness becomes evident.

<sup>80</sup> For instance, Amri Abedi’s advice of how to give poetic language an archaic appearance (cf. Abedi 1979) shows how misleading archaisms (as designators of age) can be. Furthermore, the linguistic features of the Li-

Coming back to the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”, it seems most improbable that it contains a lot of Liyongo features, but there are at least some indicators: It is an *uṭumbuizo*, like many Liyongo songs; it shows likewise many features of the Northern Swahili dialects; it most probably comes – at least in parts – from Pate; it is attributed by one manuscript (Nab) to Liyongo; it is part of one *loho* which contains a lot of other Liyongo songs (HH), and it is also put in the context of other Liyongo songs by Hichens and Knappert.<sup>81</sup> These are not really sufficient features to characterise the text unequivocally as part of the Liyongo tradition, but as this categorisation is probably likewise elusive, we could come to the following conclusion: There are some elements in the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” that could be taken as hints to the Liyongo tradition and parts of the text might have once even been part of a longer Liyongo song.<sup>82</sup>

In this section I wanted to present some sketchy reflections on the architecture of Swahili poetry, by putting the emphasis on the variability of texts. I am fully aware that my view is limited through the sheer nature of the texts: a manuscript is per se a fixed and one-dimensional entity lacking the context of performance. To yet another degree even the recorded sung version is limited in its depiction of the whole performance. Still, even historical documents reflect the flexibility and variability of the text – a view that has so far mostly been neglected in Swahili philological studies. One could even go one step further and state that it is high time to start (new) reflections on philological methodology and textual criticism in Swahili text studies.

## 4. The poem of the betel pepper

### 4.1. The “Shairi la Mṭambuu”

The following poem resembles the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” as it likewise depicts the eager efforts of a narrator who plants a sprout, in this case of betel pepper, watches it grow and then at the end has to find out that someone else, in this case a monster, has taken possession of the plant. At the end the narrator curses the adversary wanting him to die in the white men’s land. The place names given vary in the different versions of the poem, but they all seem to refer to territories under Portuguese rule in India or East Africa. Other references to the Portuguese are made, which may be taken as a hint of the old age of the poem.

The betel pepper (*mṭambuu*) is a plant of great cultural importance as its leaves (*tambuu*) are filled with a mixture of lime, spices and nutmegs or betel nuts and are commonly

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yongo songs presented in the introduction of the edition are not exclusive, setting the Liyongo songs apart from other old Swahili poetry.

<sup>81</sup> For the parameters of evaluation and categorisation as “Liyongo text” see Miehe et al. (2004: 12).

<sup>82</sup> In fact, it is the insufficiency of the features that made the Liyongo Working Group heuristically categorise the “Uṭumbuizo wa mjemje” as “C” or “improbable text of the Liyongo tradition” (cf. Miehe et al. 2004: 14). In this part of the article, I have tried to give some arguments against a rigid categorisation and alternatively suggested the concept of a continuum of texts.

chewed as a stimulant on the Swahili coast.<sup>83</sup> Its cultural significance is furthermore reflected by its frequent occurrence in Swahili poetry (cf. Mieke et al. 2004, e.g. “Uṭumbuizo wa Mnazi” (stz. 30), “Uṭumbuizo wa Kikowa” (stz. 14))<sup>84</sup>.

Prosodically, the poem is a *shairi*: each stanza consists of four lines with eight hemistiches of eight syllables each. There is a rhyme at the end and in the middle of each line that varies from stanza to stanza.

#### 4.1.2. The manuscript and recordings of the “Shairi la Mṭambuu”

The synopsis (see below) is based on four manuscripts and part of a recording which, however, was in a very bad physical state.

“Da23” is a one-page manuscript in Arabic script which is kept in the State Library in Berlin (Hs or. 9917).<sup>85</sup> It contains six stanzas of the poem. Dammann received the manuscript after his departure from Lamu in around 1937. According to him, the compilation of songs that this version of the poem is part of, was most probably scribed on commission of Sayyid Ahmed (She), an important authority from Lamu, who supplied Dammann with a number of manuscripts (Dammann (1993: 187)).<sup>86</sup> Most of the songs are incomplete; some explanatory lines are normally added to the songs. Likewise there is a line added to this version: *maana yake ni kijana mwanamwali kuwa hayapata mume ndiyo kuwa ukali mzima...haya* (“this means an adolescent, a girl, who had not had a husband so that she/it was still intact”).<sup>87</sup>

“Da24” is a manuscript in Arabic script that equally consists of six stanzas and furthermore closely resembles Da23 in all its variations.<sup>88</sup> Dammann notes that he also must have obtained it from Sayyid Ahmed in 1937 (Dammann 1993: 190). In the manuscript there is a comment added to the poem: *mashairi ya mṭambuu ya kaye sana* (“the poem of the betel pepper is very old”).

Together with other songs from Lamu Dammann published “Da92” in 1940/1941 as an example of a cursing song (Dammann 1940/1941: 167). It consists of only two stanzas: the first and the last one of the “Shairi la Mṭambuu”. The manuscript in Arabic script was written by Muhamadi Kijuma and handed over to Dammann in October 1936 when Dammann was

<sup>83</sup> The occurrence of the plant and the practice of chewing it reflect the trade networks within the Indian Ocean area: It is also much consumed in other areas abutting the Indian Ocean and was brought to East Africa from the Indian sub-continent. It is grown a lot on Lamu, Pate and Siu and I was told, that the leaves were also imported to the Arab countries, hence being an important economic factor.

<sup>84</sup> cf. also the poem “Tambuu” by Muyaka (Hichens 1940: 95). Another poem/song in praise of *tambuu* can be found in Zein L’Abdin’s unpublished songbook that Andrew Eisenberg showed to me. Cf. also “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” (s.a. line 28). Ahmad Nassir and Ahmed Nabahany likewise confirmed that there are many songs in praise of the betel pepper.

<sup>85</sup> For a facsimile, see the appendix of this article.

<sup>86</sup> Concerning Sayyid Ahmed, see Dammann 1999: 64.

<sup>87</sup> Nabahany suggests *akali* (referring to the girl) instead of *ukali* (referring to her virginity). *haya* is somehow separated from the rest of the line; its meaning is unclear in this context.

<sup>88</sup> It is kept in the State Library Berlin (Hs. or. 9918). The scribe seems to be the same as the one who scribed the “Uṭumbuizo wa Liyongo Harusini” (in Mieke et al. 2004: 102,103).

still on Lamu. Kijuma did not write this poem and the compilation on commission but occasionally on his own (Dammann 1993: 71). According to Dammann, like other writers, Kijuma used to write down poetic fragments, spontaneously following his ideas, memories and reflections. Dammann, who calls Kijuma's compilation a "mini-anthology" ("Kleinstanthologie"), attributes the fragmentary and variable nature of the texts, a common feature of many *loho* (s.a.), to the spontaneous and highly context-dependent noting of the texts (Dammann 1993: 71). This stresses again the variability of texts, even in writing, and especially of the note-book-like *loho*.

"Da45" was likewise written by Muhamadi Kijuma in Arabic script.<sup>89</sup> It is the longest version of the "Shairi la Mṭambuu", containing 12 stanzas in 24 lines.<sup>90</sup> Preparing the catalogue of manuscripts in African languages kept in Germany in the 1980s, Dammann transcribed this version of the poem with the help of Ahmed Nabahany and also added a German translation. Of course, for me Dammann's transcription, translation and comment much facilitated working on the poem. The following synopsis is mostly based on this unpublished transliterated version.

The same cassette that contained a version of the "Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje", also had a version of the "Shairi la Mṭambuu". It was recorded by Ahmed Nabahany in 1965 as well and also sung by Fatma Athman, which accounts for the phonological features of Kipate in this version ("Fa").<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately, the tape has deteriorated so much that one can hardly hear more than the two initial stanzas, even though there might have been a lot more. In this version there might even be two additional stanzas preceding the common corpus of the poem that can be found in all the other versions, but I could only catch single words and phrases.<sup>92</sup>

In Knappert's "Four Centuries of Swahili Verse" only the first stanza of the poem below is given in a completely different context, namely as last stanza of a *shairi* that Knappert entitled "Poem in Praise of my Wife" (cf. Knappert 1979: 195,196).<sup>93</sup> Actually, it is a poem in which the narrator praises his four wives concluding by "comparing a good wife to a piece of good land for cultivation", as Knappert (1979: 195) puts it. I do not give all the stanzas of the poem, but merely take the stanza that resembles the first one of the "Shairi la Mṭambuu" into consideration ("Kn"). It displays the most Standard Swahili features and comes closest to Da92.

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Institute of Asian and African Studies, Hamburg, 3555 H 120.

<sup>90</sup> The fact that Muhamadi Kijuma scribed two different manuscripts (Da92 and Da45) which are much different in length can either be taken as a hint that Muhamadi Kijuma knew two different versions (cf. Dammann 1993: 54), or might furthermore be taken as another evidence for variability. In fact, Kijuma wrote a lot of texts several times, often varying the length or the content.

<sup>91</sup> In general, the "Shairi la Mṭambuu" shows many Kiamu features in all the other versions.

<sup>92</sup> As their wording is too doubtful and their relation to the "Shairi la Mṭambuu" uncertain, I have decided to leave these very sketchy stanzas out. It needs further investigation (with the help of a better recording from the UCLA archives).

<sup>93</sup> This can again be taken as a hint of textual variability. Unfortunately, Knappert does neither mention the source of the poem nor does he provide any information about the poet.

## 4.1.3. Textual synopsis with comment and translation

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1 Nipete n̄ti<sup>1</sup> kiwambo / unyika usiyameya<sup>2</sup><br/> k<sup>h</sup>afungata<sup>3</sup> masombo<sup>4</sup> / mno k<sup>h</sup>aipotoleya<sup>5</sup><br/> k<sup>h</sup>aṭimba<sup>6</sup> kwa miṭimbo / haṭa yaliporegeya<br/> mti<sup>7</sup> mwema k<sup>h</sup>atuliya / ukono<sup>8</sup> wa<sup>9</sup> mṭambu<sup>10</sup></p> | <p>I got a strip of land that spreads out, where the bush had not yet grown. Then I girded my belt and tightened it. I dug with a spate until it loosened. I planted a good plant, the twine of a betel pepper.</p> |
|--|---|

1 Da23, Da24: *mti*; Kn: *nchi* 2 Kn: *usijamea* 3 Da23, Da24: *k<sup>h</sup>ajitungata*; Da45: *k<sup>h</sup>aifungama*; Fa: *naliifungama*; Kn: *nikajifungata* 4 Da92, Kn: *sombo* 5 Da23, Da24: *k<sup>h</sup>ajipotoleya* 6 Da92, Kn: *k<sup>h</sup>aipija* 7 Kn: *mche* 8 Da23, Da24, Fa: *mkono* 9 missing in Da23 10 Da92, Kn: *mṭambu na mtini*

*nipete* = Std. Sw. *nimepata*; Dammann marks a dental plosive: *nipeṭe*.

Dammann gives *n̄ti* in the first hemistich even though one also reads *mti* in Da45 (cf. also Da23, Da24). In his introduction to Da24 he assumes that the scribe writing *mti* must have probably confounded it with the beginning of the second stanza (*mti mwema k<sup>h</sup>atulia*) (Dammann 1993: 190). Nabahany also opts for *n̄ti* as the better reading. The “common mistake” of *mti* could be regarded as a hint for common tradition of the text.

Dammann translates *kiwambo* as “spread” (cf. Sac (p. 421) “applique, ce qui couvre à la manière d’une applique.”). Nabahany agrees with this translation: the land spreads out and, after burning down the bush, is ready for cultivation in front of the farmer after burning down the bush. Metaphorically, acc. to Nabahany, this stanza alludes to the virginity of the girl.

Dammann adds that one can multiply the betel pepper by using saplings. However, a method more commonly applied with respect to pepper plants is the use of cuttings: a piece of the source plant is put into soil until it delivers roots – this process of striking also seems to be described in this poem (cf. the following stanza *haṭa walipoambata*).

Dammann translates *k<sup>h</sup>aipotoleya* as “I spun around” (“ich drehte mich sehr”). Interestingly, Sacleux gives a very similar sentence to exemplify the usage of *potolea* (< *potoa* “tordre”: “*Nidyifungato masombo, Mno hadyipotolea* que je me ceigne bien d’une écharpe, En la bien serrant, litt. en tordant” (p. 760). The sentence that Sacleux used for illustration can have either been taken from the poem or again shows the variable nature of text fragments.

Dammann *-regeya* = Std. Sw. *-legea*

Probably, *mti* could also be transcribed as *m̄te* (Std. Sw. *mche*) in accordance with the context as well as the Arabic script (cf. also the variation *mti/ m̄te* in line 9 of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” (see 2.1.3.)). If *mti* was really meant, this would hint at a conceptual difference between *mti* and “tree” – as it is commonly rendered in English – as according to Western understanding *mṭambu* is a creeper but not a “tree”. Going through the taxonomic research findings of Heine and Legère (1995) and checking the distinguishing properties of the two life forms *mti* and *mmea* (cf. p. 27), *mṭambu*, a ranking plant, seems to fit more into the category *mmea* or more precisely *mmea wa kutambaa* (cf. p. 30). Also a look at the Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu (2004) seems to rule out the classification of *mṭambu* as *mti*, as *mti* is described as a plant with a hard trunk. Furthermore, Nabahany opted for a transcription as *m̄te*, as the categorisation of *mṭambu* as *mti* was not without ambiguity for him.

But there are some hints, that *mti* has a wider semantic scope than “tree”, so that *mṭambu* (and *mjemje*) could indeed be regarded as *mti* (cf. e.g. Sac p. 612). In some Bantu languages (cf. CD-ROM “Bantu Lexical Reconstructions”), “*t*” metonymically designates medicine.<sup>94</sup> Even though this is not attested for Swa-

<sup>94</sup> I thank Gerlind Scheckenback for that hint.

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hili, the semantic motivation could be the same (cf. also the lexeme *miti-shamba* “herbs, medicine” in Swahili). Its affiliation to the noun class pair 3/4, the so-called “tree-class”, makes its categorisation as “*mti*” even more likely (Heine & Legère 1995: 49). (But still, one also has to keep in mind, that neither the lexeme nor the plant *mṭambuu* are of East African (Bantu) origin which can yet lead to other criteria of categorisation).

- 2 Mti mwema k<sup>h</sup>autuliya<sup>1</sup> / k<sup>h</sup>iunosheza<sup>2</sup> kwa k<sup>h</sup>ata<sup>3</sup> I planted a good plant watering it with a coconut shell. I swept around it, and with my own hands, I weeded, while the tree was weak, till it finally spread and took roots. Worry took hold of me, desire for the betel plant.
- k<sup>h</sup>iupeleyapeleya / kwa mikono k<sup>h</sup>iokota<sup>4</sup>  
 ukisingiyasingiya / haṭa walipoambata<sup>5</sup>  
 shughuli ikanipata / hawaa ya mṭambuu<sup>6</sup>

1 Da23, Da24: k<sup>h</sup>atulia mti mwema 2 Da24: k<sup>h</sup>aunosheza 3 Fa: k<sup>h</sup>acha 4 Fa: k<sup>h</sup>iokocha 5 Fa: walipoambacha 6 Da23: kwa huu mṭambuu; Da24, Fa: kwa huba ya mṭambuu

Dammann explains that the roots of the betel pepper first have to spread in the earth as a precondition for further growth.

- 3 Shughuli ikanipata / sikuwa nao usono<sup>1</sup> Worry took hold of me, I did not find peace; I had no hunger and had no thirst, out of love I went to such lengths, without sleeping and dreaming, without covering my teeth, out of desire for the betel plant.
- nisi ndaa nisi nyota / kwa mahaba k<sup>h</sup>enda mno  
 nisikulala k<sup>h</sup>aota / kupelekwa<sup>2</sup> mikono  
 nisikufinika meno / kwa hawaa ya mṭambuu<sup>3</sup>

1 Da23, Da24: nisikuwa na usono 2 Da23, Da24: k<sup>h</sup>ipekeleya 3 Da23, Da24, kwa huba ya mṭambuu

Following Dammann’s und Nabahany’s explanation “without covering the teeth” means that the gardener was constantly smiling showing his teeth.

- 4 Nisikufinika<sup>1</sup> meno / ila p<sup>h</sup>indi za kuswali I did not cover my teeth, expect during the times of praying, prayers, five times a day, within separate periods of time. I raised my hands and because of it (the betel plant) I prayed to the Almighty: “Quickly, have mercy on me.” Then I visited the betel plant.
- swala zipindi zitano / kula p<sup>h</sup>indi<sup>2</sup> mbali mbali  
 k<sup>h</sup>iwimuliya<sup>3</sup> mikono / k<sup>h</sup>iuwombeya jalali<sup>4</sup>  
 nirehemu ṭasihili<sup>5</sup> / k<sup>h</sup>auzuru mṭambuu

1 Da23, Da24: nisikufinika 2 Da23, Da24: kwa wakati 3 Da23, Da24: k<sup>h</sup>iunuliya 4 Da45: halali 5 Da23, Da24: rabbi nend<sup>e</sup> ṭasihili

Dammann adds that the poet is talking about the five obligatory Muslim prayers.

- 5 Nirehemu ṭasihili<sup>1</sup> / k<sup>h</sup>aufungalize nyapo<sup>2</sup>  
 nisikuwa na shughuli / na shughuli lingawapo<sup>3</sup>  
 nd<sup>r</sup>uza wakiṭuma<sup>4</sup> mali / mimi k<sup>h</sup>iṭuma<sup>5</sup> upepo  
 nisiione<sup>6</sup> nend<sup>r</sup>apo / kwa huba ya mṭambuu
- “Quickly, have mercy on me.” I fastened supports. I did not care about any other business, even if there was one of importance. While my brothers were gaining possession, I was gaining wind without seeing where I was going out of love for the betel pepper.

1 Da23, Da24: *rabbi nend<sup>r</sup>e ṭasihili* 2 Da23, Da24: *k<sup>h</sup>aufungaliye papo* 3 Da23, Da24: *lingawepo* 4 Da23, Da24: *wendangu huṭuma* 5 Da23, Da24: *hutunga* 6 Da23, Da24: *nisikuone*

Dammann explains that acc. to Nabahany *nyapo* are wooden sticks, which are fastened together and put into the earth as a support of the plant.

-ṭuma, cf. Sac (p. 909) “faire du profit”; acc. to Nabahany (cf. Dammann’s manuscript) -ṭuma is the better reading, even though in his manuscript Kijuma originally wrote *k<sup>h</sup>itunga*.

*lingawapo* suggests that the governing noun (*shughuli*) has been moved to class 5 to derive an augmentative reading. It could also be a mistake of transmission (cf. *shughuli zingawapo* (stz. 6 of “Sifa za Mṭambuu”).

- 6 Nisikuona nend<sup>r</sup>apo / kutwa na kucha kikaka  
 k<sup>h</sup>iufungaliza papo / abaḍi k<sup>h</sup>iumunika  
 kula niuumunikapo / sikupenda kuwepuka  
 nisikupenda kond<sup>r</sup>oka / kwa hawaa ya mṭambuu
- I did not see where I was going, day and night in hurry, tying it there, always watching it. Every time I watched it, I did not want to leave it. I did not want to go away, out of desire for the betel pepper.

Dammann comments on the stanza: The difference between the first hemistich in this stanza and the last but one hemistich in the preceding stanza can probably be attributed to a mistake in copying.

- 7 Nisikupenda kond<sup>r</sup>oka / kuwepuka mara moya  
 na ayao kuniṭaka / k<sup>h</sup>iuona ni udhiya  
 akali sikwepuka / ya miezi kuningiliya  
 k<sup>h</sup>autiya na zipoya / kuwenda mṭambuu
- I did not want to go away, to leave it even for a moment, and when someone came and wanted (to see) me, (I was in) trouble to see it (= the betel pepper). I did not leave it for a short time: a few months passed by. I even put it on supports, so that the betel pepper could go on (climbing).

As the betel pepper is a ranking plant it needs supports to climb. In Dammann’s manuscript one reads that acc. to Nabahany *zipoya* are supports for the twigs. Furthermore, acc. to Nabahany *kuwenda* = *kuwendeleza*

Dammann obviously wanted to comment on *akali*, but finally left a gap where an explanation was supposed to follow. In his translation, he seems to interpret *akali* as coming from Arabic *qalla* “(to be) little, few, some” (cf. Sac p. 48, Krapf 1882: 6).

My translation slightly deviates from Dammann’s: “I went away only for a short time. When months had passed, I also...” (“Nur kurze Zeit entfernte ich mich. Als Monate vergangen waren,...”).

*ya* refers to *akali* (cf. also Dammann’s translation). Probably, a different noun of reference (e.g. *hawaa*,



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*huba*) could also be possible.

Probably there is also an alternative interpretation of *akali* possible, taking it as subject pronoun (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular) + *-kali* (< copula *-li* “to be”) with a continuative (counter expectative) meaning (implying that an action is still continuing) (cf. Miehe 1979: 236).

- 8 K<sup>h</sup>autiya na zipoya / nafasi ya kutambaa  
 haṭa siku zichongeya / k<sup>h</sup>auwakiya na taa  
 siku moya k<sup>h</sup>atembeya / k<sup>h</sup>alimatiya k<sup>h</sup>akaa  
 k<sup>h</sup>iya mbwene mnyangaa / si mnani mwa  
 mṭambuu
- I even put up supports, a possibility to rank. After some time, I also put up an arbour. One day I strolled and I delayed staying (somewhere else). Coming I saw a monster: Is there not someone in the betel pepper?

*taa*, cf. Sac (p. 851): “*taa la mtambuu* tonnelle de bétel”

Acc. to Nabahany *mnyangaa* = *joka*, i.e. a snake-like monster. Dammann notes this explanation given by Nabahany as well and refers to *-nyangalika*. Sacleux (p. 695) gives *-nyangaa* as synonymous and gives “Un je ne sais quoi” as meaning (cf. Krapf (1882: 281): *kitu kiniangalika* “a sort of a thing”) expressing the ignorance of the speaker or his effort to avoid naming it.

My translation of the last hemistich deviates from Dammann’s: “Who are you in the betel pepper?” (“Wer bist Du da im Betelstrauch?”).

- 9 K<sup>h</sup>iya mbwene mnyangaa / usakiniye shinani  
 uwashiye na utaa / ufanyiye masakani  
 moyo ukanishangaa / ukapatwa na huzuni  
 k<sup>h</sup>amba: akhi nitend<sup>r</sup>eni / nepuke na mṭambuu
- When I came I saw the monster sitting at the root stock. It had also put up an arbour. It had built a dwelling. My heart was shocked and sadness fell upon it. I said: brother, what can I do; shall I separate from the betel pepper?

Acc. to Nabahany “sitting at the root stock” means that the intruder has already taken possession of the whole house or has gained the favour of her whole family.

- 10 K<sup>h</sup>amba: akhi nitend<sup>r</sup>eni / ambalo ndawekeya  
 moyowa ukaamini / nafusi yangu ikuya  
 k<sup>h</sup>angiya ṭafakurini / ṭafakuri mno ghaya  
 k<sup>h</sup>aponyoka k<sup>h</sup>amwaṭiya / kuwenda mṭambuu
- I said: “Brother, what can I do given the matter I am facing?” My heart was faithful, my soul hoping, I plunged into reflections, too many reflections, I slipped away, leaving it to him to watch the betel pepper.

In Dammann’s manuscript we read *ndawekeya* = *liliolekeya* (acc. to Nabahany). The equivalent given by Nabahany may be one of meaning (in the context of the sentence), but not very likely one of etymology. Probably < *niliwelekeya/n’liwelekeya*. Possibly also *ndawekeya* < *niyawelekeya* or < *nḍo* + *elekeya* (cf. Stigand (1915: 67), who gives it as the Kitikuu equivalent to *-me-* perfect). (It seems unlikely, but *nda* could also be a grammaticalized future marker originating from the verb *kwenda*, as described by Whiteley for Kimtang’ata (1956: 30). The alveolar reading would be equally in accordance with the Arabic script. The fact that the poem most probably comes from the Lamu archipelago, does not completely rule out this feature of the Southern dialects, but makes it unlikely, as it does not exist in (present) Kiamu, Kipate, Kisiu.)

acc. to Nabahany *ikuya* “to hope” (cf. Dammann/Nabahany: < *-uya* “return”);. Probably, there is another reading *ikoya* (< *-oya* “to have a rest” (cf. Sac p. 718).

For *-wenḡa* Dammann writes: “acc. to Nabahany “to watch”.” Probably derived from *-(w)enga* “to look at” (cf. Sac p. 1021, 207).

Dammann’s translation of the last line is slightly different: “I slipped away and left him, to watch the betel pepper” (“Ich entschlüpfte und ließ ihn, um den Betelstrauch zu beobachten”).

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| <p><b>11</b> K<sup>h</sup>aponyoka k<sup>h</sup>amwaṭiya / ili kuṭaka imara<br/>mkuu wa zitwa niya / na arubaṭa’ashara<br/>ningatenda haṭa piya / ili kondowa madhara<br/>uziḡiye mihayara / fisaḡi wa mṭambuu</p> | <p>I slipped away and left it to him, to collect my strength (against) the giant with one hundred and fourteen heads. Even though I tried very hard to eliminate all harm, he increased the damage, the destroyer of the betel pepper.</p> |
|--|--|

My translation of the last hemistich differs from Dammann’s: “The destruction of the betel pepper” (“die Zerstörung des Betelstrauches”).

*uziḡiye* = Std. Sw. *amezidi*

Lacking other evidence, I follow the translation of Nabahany (given by Dammann) of *mihayara*.

The 114 heads are acc. to Nabahany a sign of power, wealth and influence.

- 
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>12</b> Mwizi<sup>1</sup> alongiya<sup>2</sup> kwangu / kafasiḡi<sup>3</sup> mṭambuu<br/>ngwampa fumo la Mungu / nalo nd<sup>r</sup>ilo fumo kuu<br/>afe nṭi za wazungu / ya Diu na Damao<br/>afufuwe na chepeo / ufiṭo mkononi</p> | <p>The thief, who entered my place, violated the betel pepper. May God throw his spear at him! It is an enormous spear. May he die in the regions of the whites, of Diu and Damao, may he resurrect with a hat (on his head) and a stick in his hand.</p> |
|--|---|

1 Da92: *nyani* 2 Da23, Da24: *alokuya* 3 Da23, Da24: *akajipa* 4 Da23, Da24: *end<sup>r</sup>e mti* 5 Da23: *zaadina adinau(?)*; Da24: *zaudina adinau(?)*; Da92: *akazikwe za Mgau*

For *ngwa-*, probably a corruption of *M<sup>n</sup>gu a-* “May God” cf. e.g. Taylor (1891: 165).

The man who took the betel pepper is cursed in this stanza. The narrator wants him to die in white man’s land, to prevent him from being buried according to Islamic rites which means condemning him to hell (cf. also Dammann (1940/41: 168)). He may consequently resurrect as a white man, with a hat and stick in his hand – the attributes of a white man (cf. e.g. Sac p. 140) or, more precisely, a Portuguese (cf. also *chepeo* < Portuguese *chapéu* “hat”). This is a view that is also expressed by Dammann in his comment on the stanza. According to Nabahany, any white man could be meant, there is according to him, no strong indicator for reference to a Portuguese. However, also the place names given seem to allude to the Portuguese sphere and the time of Portuguese dominion: Dammann transcribes the place names as *Ndeo* and *Ndamao* and assumes that these may allude to Portuguese India. I do not follow his transcription, but his assumption as there is an alternative reading of *Ndeo* and *Ndamao* that alludes to two coastal enclaves under Portuguese dominion on the Indian subcontinent: the island Diu and the coastal region Damão (Daman) that fell under Portuguese dominion during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and grew into important centers of Portuguese hegemony in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Marques 2003). Given the scarcity of sources, the historical connection between Diu and Damão and the Northern Swahili coast is hard to evaluate. Still, there is at least some fairly early historical evidence: Gaspar de Santo Bernadino, a Franciscan Italian friar who came to Siu in 1606 mentions in his account “two heathen merchants” from Diu who acted as interpreters mediating between the sultan of Siu and the Portuguese-speaking delegation of monks (cf. Freeman-Grenville 1962: 161,162).

The place name *Mgao* given in Da92 refers according to Muhamadi Kijuma to a place in the south of Kil-

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wa where the Portuguese also got established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Dammann 1940/41: 167). Probably, Mgao could also be a corruption (through copying by writing or oral transmission) of Goa, not only an important area of Portuguese dominion, but also often used as a cover term for the Portuguese spheres of influence and rule in India (or is it a corruption of the Goan town Margão (Madgaon)?).

I could not identify the place names given in Da23 and Da24 nor could anybody of the people I asked (Ahmad Nassir, Ahmed Nabahany and Zahara Ali). Probably, they are also corruptions of *Diu na Damao*. Zahara Ali, an elderly woman from Pate, who also used to know the poems presented here by heart, could only remember one place name mentioned in still another version of this poem, namely Rome. Unfortunately, I did not have the possibility to record this version from her.

### 4.1.4. Schematic overview of the order of stanzas

The following table gives a schematic overview of the variation concerning the order of stanzas in the different versions. Da45 is the version that all the others are put in comparison to.

| Da45 | Da23 | Da24 | Da92 | Fa |
|------|------|------|------|----|
| 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1  |
| 2    | 2    | 2    | -    | 2  |
| 3-5  | 3-5  | 3-5  | -    | -  |
| 6-11 | -    | -    | -    | -  |
| 12   | 6    | 6    | 2    | -  |

### 4.2. In praise of the betel pepper: “Sifa za Mṭambuu”

As in the case of the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje”, I could also get hold of another version of the “Shairi la Mṭambuu”, that deviates so substantially from the other versions grouped together in the synopsis above, that I have decided to treat it separately. In fact, only the wording of the first and the fourth stanza of this version are clearly reminiscent of the versions presented above showing again the versatile nature of Swahili poems.<sup>95</sup> In general, the poem seems to be stripped of its metaphoric dimension, praising the betel plant – without allusions to a lady – and all the benefits it has.

#### 4.2.1. The manuscript from the Hichens’ papers

The version presented below is taken from a book manuscript by William Hichens and Sheikh Mbarak Ali Hinawy, the former *liwali* of Mombasa, with the title “Diwani ya Malenga wa Sawahili”, that has never been printed.<sup>96</sup> It was obviously meant as an anthology of Swahili

<sup>95</sup> But, of course, the whole theme of planting the sprout recalls the “Shairi la Mṭambuu”.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. MS 53491a, Hichens Collection, SOAS. The manuscript carries the date 1939. In the SOAS archive one finds several manuscripts in typescript by Hichens that were obviously meant to be printed (like e.g. “Liyongo, the Spearlord” dated 1938 (MS 205000)), but Hichens did not manage to have them published before his death in 1944. After having printed the first two volumes of “The Azania Classics” series on a hand press at home (The “Hadithi ya Mikidadi na Mayasa” edited by Alice Werner in 1932 and the “Utendi wa Mwana Kupona” edited together with Alice Werner in 1934), Hichens tried very hard – and often in vain – to find publishers, as

poetry and another part of the “Azania Classics” series. Apart from an introduction written by Sheikh Mbarak Hinawy, the book is subdivided into different sections attributed to different Swahili poets. Furthermore, other poems whose authors are unknown – like the following “Sifa za M̄tambuu” – are categorized according to their place of origin or the language.<sup>97</sup> The poems are in typescript; no manuscript in Arabic script that most of the transliterations must be based on has been added. Some corrections have obviously been made by hand, but still there are some mistakes in the typescript and other interpretations of the transliteration are possible taking the Arabic script and all the variants it allows in mind.<sup>98</sup> It was probably also Sheikh Mbarak Hinawy, who added a date to the poem: 1810 A.D./1225 A.H.).<sup>99</sup>

In the following I am going to give the version as presented in Hichens’ and Sheikh Mbarak A. Hinawy’s manuscript. Where I have altered the wording, as I find another reading more plausible, I give the original transliteration separately. I also added diacritics and a translation which is missing in the book manuscript. Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo helped me to understand some difficult words and obscure passages. Going through the poem, he also classified it vaguely as old (*shairi la zamani*).

#### 4.2.2 Textual synopsis with comment and translation

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Nipete n̄ti ṭayibu<sup>1</sup> / ardhi imetengeya<br/>nalekeza hitharibu / kuilimia-limia<sup>2</sup><br/>N’na yangu maṭulubu / n’liyoyaaazia<br/>naṭaka kuutulia / ukono wa m̄tambuu</p> | <p>I got good land, the soil had been well-<br/>arranged. I turned it tilling it, constantly<br/>cultivating on it. I have a plan that I have<br/>decided, I want to plant a sprout of the<br/>betel pepper.</p> |
|--|--|

1 Hi: *taibu* 2 Hi: *kulemea-lemea*

*maṭulubu*, cf. Sac (p. 515): “*maṭilaba* désir, intention, demande.”

*-tengea*, cf. Sac (p. 883): “être en meilleure situation, arrangé, bien arrangé.”

*ṭayibu* < Arab. *ṭayyib* good, well (cf. Sac p. 1088).

*-tharibu* acc. to Ahmad Nassir < Arab. *-ḍarab* “to hit”.

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one can conclude from his correspondence with different publishers and scholars (that is now kept at the SOAS archives). Finding a publisher for the *Al-Inkishafi* took him several years (cf. also his “Diwani ya Muyaka Bin Haji al-Ghassaniy”, which came out in Johannesburg in 1940).

<sup>97</sup> With respect to poems in praise of trees there is another one in the manuscript called “Sifa za msaji” (p. 114).

<sup>98</sup> In the SOAS online catalogue we read that “some errors were identified probably by Hinawy” which seems very plausible (<http://mercury.soas.ac.uk/perl/Project/showSwahiliItem.pl?ref=MS%2053491a> (27.9.06)).

<sup>99</sup> In terms of date of composition we can vaguely attest that this poem seems to come close to the estimated date of composition of the “Wimbo wa Miti”. In this respect Mbele writes: “Zaharia said that Wimbo wa miti is very old, much older than the time of her own grandmother” (cf. Mbele 1996: 73). According to my estimation Zaharia, whom I have met on Lamu twice, was born at around 1920. Therefore the “Wimbo wa Miti” might have been composed during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or even shortly before.

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- 2 Kula alo mraibu / milele huhitajia  
na sikuye humswibu / myini akiṭokea<sup>1</sup>  
hiwa na wangu karibu / nimepunguza udhia  
nd<sup>f</sup>ipo haṭaka tulia / ukono wa mṭambuu
- Everyone who is used to it needs it permanently. And the day it takes hold of him, he roams the town. When I have mine nearby, I have reduced my pain, that's why I want to plant the sprout of a betel plant.

1 Hi: *akitukia*

*mraibu*, cf. Jhn (p. 505): “*Uraibu*: strictly anything one is accustomed to and cannot do without, but only applied to a chewing mixture very popular at the coast and commonly called tambuu, from the betel leaf in which it is wrapped an chewed.” (cf. also Sac (p. 968) “*uraibu* bol (chique) de bétel, préparé avec noix d’arec, tabac et chaux.”)

*-swibu* acc. to Ahmad Nassir = *-pata* (cf. Sac (p. 801) “*-sibu* atteindre (*-pata*), frapper”).

- 3 T<sup>h</sup>apata siku nizike / nimekwisha jenga uwa  
Uṭowe ṭambuu nyike / zenye nuru na siṭawa  
shimoni mwakwe ushike / laala tukalimbua  
henda moyo ukatuwa, / upatapo mṭambuu
- I will find a day to put it into the soil; I have already built a backyard, so that it may bring out fresh betel – shiny and abundant. In its hole it may take roots, so that we might (soon) harvest (for the first time). If I go (planting), my heart will calm down, when it gets the betel pepper.

*ṭambuu nyike* acc. to Ahmad Nassir “*sifa ya ṭambuu*”, i.e. betel leaves of best quality: they are fine, fresh and of light yellowish colour.

*siṭawa* cf. Sac (p. 810) prospérité, abundance; *-enye nuru na siṭawa* is a formulaic epithet that is often used in old Swahili poetry in praise of something or someone.

*laala* = pengine

*-limbua* acc. to Ahmad Nassir *kupata, kufanikiwa* (cf. Sac (p. 474): “percevoir ou cueillir les prémices, l’étérenne, les premiers fruits.”).

- 4 Moyo huona makini / mti haujaambata;  
siond<sup>f</sup>okee shinani / huunosheza<sup>1</sup> kwa k<sup>h</sup>ata.  
Chakula<sup>2</sup> sikuṭamani, / sina nḍaa, sina nyota.  
Shughuli imenipata / kwa huba ya mṭambuu
- In my heart I am careful, because the tree has not yet taken root, so that I can't leave the root stock. I water it with a coconut shell. Food – I don't long for it, I am neither hungry nor thirsty. Worry has taken hold of me out of love for the betel pepper.

1 Hi: *huunwesheza* 2 Hi: *shakula*

- 5 Mngu ṭatia<sup>1</sup> baraka / usimike unawiri,  
 ndiwe mwenye kuuweka / hautumia ḍahari;  
 Mani yakwe memetuka / pasiwe kuṭaghayari  
 Hima, nend<sup>r</sup>e ṭaisiri / hauzuru mṭambuu
- God will grant (his) blessings, so that it may stand upright and glitter. You are the one who puts it, that I can always make use of it. Its leaves glitter without changing. Quick, let me hurry and visit the betel pepper.

1 Hi: *telea/tatia*

*ḍahari* acc. to Ahmad Nassir *miaka mingi* (< Arab. *dahar*) (cf. Sac (p. 1061) “temps (...) toujours”).

*ṭaisiri* acc. to Ahmad Nassir *haraka* (cf. Sac (p. 1086) sub *tahisiri*)

- 6 Hima, nend<sup>r</sup>a ṭasihili / nikaukalia papo;  
 Nisikuwa na shughuli, / na shughuli zingawapo.  
 Nd<sup>r</sup>uza na waṭume<sup>1</sup> mali / mimi ṭ<sup>h</sup>apunga upepo,  
 sina popoṭ<sup>h</sup>e end<sup>r</sup>apo / kwa huba ya mṭambuu
- Quick, I go in a hurry that I sit at the plant there. I do not care about any duties, even though there are (a lot of) things to do. My brothers, let them make profit, while I will enjoy a breeze of fresh air. I have nowhere else to go, out of love for the betel pepper.

1 Hi: *watumi*

*-punga upepo* acc. to Ahmad Nassir “to take a breeze of fresh air, relax”

- 7 Uṭafunapo huṭoka / hamu moyoni na ghamu  
 hutakata kama shuka / kalibi huṭabasamu  
 Ukawa mwenye kuṭeka / na kusema na hirimu.  
 Siaṭi kwenda ḍawamu / kuuzuru mṭambuu
- If you chew it, anxiety and sorrow leave your heart. You become pure like a (white) loin-cloth, the heart smiles. You become someone who laughs and talks with his mates. I never omit going to visit the betel pepper.

*shuka* acc. to Ahmad Nassir “*nguo nyeupe*”

*kalibi* < Arab. *qalb* “heart”

*hirimu* acc. to Ahmad Nassir “age mates” (cf. Sac (p. 278): “*herimu* adolescent du même age”).

- 8 Ukisha kula chakula, / nd<sup>r</sup>uza, niwape khabari,  
 msipateni<sup>1</sup> ghafula / iṭake iwe ṭayari,  
 huja mangi masiala / maneno mazuri-zuri  
 nd<sup>r</sup>ipo nisiṭafakhari / haupenda mṭambuu
- When you have finished eating, my friends, let me tell you, don’t be taken by surprise, it should be ready. Many matters come up, some nice talking. That’s when I am supposed not to be boastful and I love the betel pepper.

1 Hi: *msipate ni*

Acc. to A. Nassir in this stanza the narrator advises his friends to prepare the betel bite before eating, so that one can enjoy it at once after finishing one’s meal. In this case, the poet alludes to the use of the betel bite as a digestion aid as well as a stimulant which makes people talkative.

- 9 Kahawa nda wa Arabu / wa Hejazi na Yamani  
 kwet<sup>h</sup>u ni kit<sup>h</sup>u gharibu / t<sup>h</sup>aipendani mgeni?  
 na twambe ni mahabubu / tusiitowe<sup>1</sup> funguni,  
 tungiapo faraghani / ifaayo ni t̄ambuu
- Coffee is of the Arabs, (the people) from Hijaz and Yemen. For us it is a foreign thing. How am I supposed to love a stranger? And if we agree that it is liked, we shouldn't put it away; when we enter privacy, betel is most appropriate.

1 Hi: *tusiyitowe*

Acc. to A. Nassir *tusiitowe funguni* = *tusiiweke kando*

Interestingly betel is in this stanza defined as a plant central to Swahili culture – its importance is comparable to that of coffee in the Arab countries.

The translation of t<sup>h</sup>aipendani mgeni given above is very doubtful, especially because of the lacking agreement between mgeni and the object pronoun -i- (referring to kahawa?). Khamis suggests a different translation: “How can a guest love it?” In this case the rhetorical question would stress the impossibility of offering coffee, a foreign thing, to one's guest (in this case a mgeni-mwenyeji, who is a Swahili as well and is likewise not used to drinking coffee).

- 10 T̄ambuu haina jura / ipatapo mraibu,  
 mwenye hila na busara / kend<sup>f</sup>a nayo t̄araṭibu.  
 Huṭoa<sup>1</sup> mt<sup>h</sup>u hasira / imjiyapo<sup>2</sup> karibu,  
 kwa raha<sup>3</sup> si kwa sulubu<sup>4</sup> / una mambo m̄tambuu
- Betel does not make a fool (out of the one consuming it) if it falls into the hands of someone who is used to it, someone with wisdom and shrewdness handling it with care. It removes the anger of the one, it comes close to, in joy not by force; there is a lot (to say) about the betel pepper.

1 Hi: *hutua* 2 Hi: *i mjiyapo* 3 Hi: *karaha* 4 Hi: *si kwa sulubu*

*ṣulubu*, cf. Sac (p. 821): “endurcissement au travail.”

In this stanza, the narrator seems to object to the alleged negative intoxicating effects of betel (which is also said to be slightly addictive). From the poet's point of view, it only needs a careful consumer. But if consumed with moderation it does not lead to amentia and merely has an exhilarating effect.

## 5. Conclusion

Even though I started with a broader and cursory look at the occurrence of plants and particularly at their usage as metaphors in Swahili poetry, this article primarily focuses on a more technical treatment of two specific poems (and their variants) on the betel pepper and on a plant called *mjemje*. Both poems show linguistic and textual traces of a long period of transmission and alternation. The “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” seems to branch into two different main transmissions of the text, whereas one is more or less coherently represented by different versions (2.1.), another (2.2.) seems to have integrated a lot of different text layers and parts of other *tumbuizo*. In the case of the “Shairi la M̄tambuu” and the “Sifa za M̄tambuu” one should probably better speak of two different, independent poems which do not represent one common text whose “off-springs” they are, as not too many parallel lines and themes are

found. Still, as I have tried to stress in the reflections on the versatile nature of Swahili poetry (cf. 3), texts commonly shade into each other without having a clear-cut boundary line. The idealistic pleading for a view on the actual performance, the suggested solution for the above stated insufficiency, is not echoed very well in this article which is still in its core an edition of manuscripts, although I have also tried to show that even in manuscripts there is some potential for change and creation of new texts. However, the recording of the “*Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje*” gives at least in some respects an idea how misleading a concentration on the written form alone can be: The prosody of an *uṭumbuizo*, especially its subdivision into lines and other metrical subparts which has mostly been characterized following text traditions appears differently in the audio version that also puts the *uṭumbuizo* closer to songs than to narrative *ṭenzi*. Before closing the article, I want to add some reflections on the *uṭumbuizo* as weak indicator of place and time of origin.

The *uṭumbuizo*, probably one of the oldest Swahili prosodic patterns that most of the Liyongo songs, the “*Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje*” as well as some other “archaic” Swahili poems were composed in can be regarded as a hint for the age of the motif of the tree. This does not mean that poems exploring trees and other plants as motifs have exclusively been composed in the *uṭumbuizo* meter – we have already seen a number of counter examples – neither do I want to suggest a fixed relationship between prosodic form and content, but I merely want to mention it as a possible rough hint at its old age. Harries (1962: 183) – even though giving only one example, namely “*Sifa ya Mnazi*” that is equivalent to “*Uṭumbuizo wa mnazi*” (in Mieke et al. 2004) – insists on exclusiveness: “Songs in praise of trees have been written in long-measure (...)”.<sup>100</sup>

Furthermore he is eager to give an absolute date and even goes a step further by stating that there is evidence from the Pate chronicle that as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century Sultan Ahmed I of Shagga promoted agriculture which could have been an impetus to “songs in praise of trees”.<sup>101</sup> Harries’ argument concerning the date that he does not really try to back up is too vague to accept, but at least it is noteworthy that, firstly, Harries is also struck by the sheer number of “poems in praise of trees” (Harries 1962: 183) and, secondly, that he locates the poems written in the *uṭumbuizo* meter geographically on Pate.<sup>102</sup> Even though the connection between the *uṭumbuizo* in praise of trees and Pate is very vague, it should be noted that accord-

<sup>100</sup> Poems/songs in long-measure is a term of categorisation (on the basis of prosody) used by Harries (1962) (but most probably introduced by Hinawy/Hichens) that largely corresponds to *uṭumbuizo*.

<sup>101</sup> Harries (1962: 183): “To this end poems were written extolling the virtues of the pomegranate (*kuthmani*), the betel palm supplying the areca-nut (*mtambu*), the teak-wood tree (*msaji*) and, of course, the coconut.” Let me add that Harries made a mistake: the areca nut grows on the *mpopoo*. Harries must have copied the idea from the Hichens’ Papers (without giving it as a reference), as one reads the same idea in Hichens’ manuscript “Liyongo, the Spear lord”.

<sup>102</sup> Of course, “Songs in praise of trees” have been composed throughout the centuries - as even the few examples in the introduction show and thus are not an exclusive feature of mediaeval times. There are, for example, also a number of “Songs in praise of trees” in *Mambo Leo*, which were also composed in the context of a campaign to promote agriculture, but this time at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Khamis 1928, Pacha 1928). I thank Thomas Geider for drawing my attention to *Mambo Leo* (cf. also Geider 1992: 180).



ing to Nabahany Pate was once the centre of the *utumbuizo* genre and to a lesser degree still is. A lot of *tumbuizo* were composed during the “golden age” of Pate which came definitely to an end at the last at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century accompanying the definite shift of the economic, political and cultural hegemony from North to South on the Swahili Coast. Some Kipate features in the Liyongo Songs as well as in the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” could also hint at Pate as the place of origin and probably – because of its “archaic” make-up – also to the époque of its cultural heydays – although one still has to stress that language is not a very rigid indicator in the poems. Still, taking the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” as an example and assuming – on the grounds of language, prosodic form and probably also theme – that a core part of it was composed on Pate, we have seen how at least parts of the poem have spread beyond Pate, probably to Lamu and also to Mombasa, while the poem most obviously was constantly altered through space and time, as we can see from the different dialect features which can hardly be attributed to a specific time or place.

Thus, in a geographical perspective, the poems presented above are also far from being unchangeable, homogeneous monoliths: Thematically the “Uṭumbuizo wa Mjemje” as well as the “Shairi la Mṭambuu” show a lot of hints to Arabia as well as India reflecting the embeddedness of the East African Coast in the Indian Ocean networks, and consequently, the elusiveness of a “pure Swahili culture”, even or especially in a historical perspective. There is constant exchange of goods and ideas, that people take possession of, adapting them to their own culture. The case of betel as such is very striking, as the plant – originating in India – and the habit of chewing the betel bite, got an important part or even an emblem of Swahili culture that is also reflected in the poem.<sup>103</sup> Likewise, the concept of the plant as a metaphor especially for women might have been adopted by Swahili poets taking it from Arabic or even Indian poetry, making it their own, creatively exploring and developing it – which likewise hints at the dynamics of Swahili poetry.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> The poet even stresses its association with Swahili identity in the poem, by contrasting it with coffee that was foreign to him (cf. stz. 9 above).

<sup>104</sup> I have not done research on that, but at least the images and metaphors used in King Salomon’s Song in the Old Testament (e.g. chapter 2/3; chapter 5/15; chapter 7/8) seem to hint at a wider usage of these kinds of metaphors on the Asian continent.

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Appendix: Facsimile “Shairi la Mṭambuu” (Da 24)

Manuscript (Hs or. 9918) from the Dammann Collection (Dammann 24) kept in the State Library Berlin.

نَبِيَتْ مَتِ كُوْمِيْ اِيْلَ اِيْسِيْ ۞ كُتُّتْ مَسِيْ مِنْ كُجِيْلِ يِ ۞  
 كَيْتِيْ كَيْتِيْ حَتِيْ يِلِ بَرِيْ مَتِ مِيْمِ كُتِيْ مَكْنِ وَهْتَبُوْ ۞  
 كُتِيْ مَتِ مِيْمِ كُوْنَشِرْ كُكْتِ كُوْبِيْ يِ يِ يِ كِيْمِ كِيْ كُوْ كُوْ ۞  
 وَكِيْسِ يِ يِ حَتِيْ وَلِيْ اَيْتِ شُغْلِ اِكْنِيْتِ كُتِ يَمْتَبُوْ ۞  
 شُغْلِ اِكْنِيْتِ يِيسِ كُوْنُوْسِيْ نِيْدَا اِسْتُوْ كُتِ رَحَبِ كُوْمِنِ ۞  
 نِيْسِ كُذَلْ كُوْنِ كِيْسِيْ مَكُوْنِ نِيْسِ كَفِيْتِ مِنْ كُتِ يَمْتَبُوْ ۞  
 نِيْسِ كَفِيْتِ مِنْ اِيْلِ بَرِيْ كُفَالِ صُدُرِ بَرِيْ تَانِ كُوْقَاتِ يِلِ يِلِ ۞  
 كُوْنِيْ مَكُوْنِ كُوْ وَرِيْ جَلَالِ رِيْ نِيْسِ كُوْرِ مَتِيْ ۞  
 رِيْ نِيْسِ كُوْفُغْلِ يِ يِ يِ نِيْسِ كُوْ نَشُغْلِ نَشُغْلِ لِيْصُوْبِ ۞  
 وَدَاغِ هَتْمِ مَالِ يِيْمِ هَتْمِ وَوِيْ يِيْصُوْنِ نَرَابِ كُتِ يَمْتَبُوْ ۞  
 يِيْزَالِ كِيْ كُغِ اِكِيْ مَتَبُوْ عُوْمِبْ هَتْمِ نَدِرِ يِلِ فَمِ كُوْ ۞  
 اِرْمِيْ زُوْرُوْعِ رَاْدِنِ اِدِ نُوْ كُفَلِ وَنِيْ نُوْفِيْ مَكْرُوْنِ ۞  
 مَشْعَرِ يَمْتَبُوْ يِكِيْ سَانِ