

## One Text – Many Forms: A Comparative View on the Variability of Swahili Manuscripts

A workshop at the *Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures*  
Warburgstraße 26, Hamburg

21-22 April 2017

### Programme

#### Friday, 21 April 2017 (room 0001)

**2:00 pm Welcome & Introduction**

Roland Kießling & Clarissa Vierke

**Session I Chair: Ridder Samsom**

2.30 pm Mohamed Abdulaziz, Nairobi

*On the Variable Nature of Kiswahili in Arabic Script*

3.15 pm Alessandro Gori, Copenhagen & Ahmed Parkar, Hamburg

*The Arabic-Swahili Hamziyya: Observations on Two Uncommon Testimonies of the Text*

4.00 pm *Coffee Break*

**Session II Chair: Clarissa Vierke**

4.30 pm Ann Biersteker, Michigan

*Early Swahili Manuscripts and the History of East African Writing*

5.15 pm Annachiara Raia, Bayreuth/Naples

*Visually Pleasant Texts or Imperfect Copies? The Many Ways to Copy the Story of Yusuf*

#### Saturday, 22 April 2017 (room 0001)

**Session III Chair: Farouk Topan**

9.15 am Chapane Mutiua, Maputo

*Northern Mozambique Swahili Manuscripts: A General View*

10.00 am Eugeniusz Rzewuski, Warsaw

*Recurrency and Variability in "Shirazian" Sagas. Swahili Chronicles of Tungi in Comparative Perspective.*

10.45 am *Coffee Break*

**Session VI Chair: Eugeniusz Rzewuski**

11.15 am Mahmoud A. A. Abdulatif, Lamu

*Kuhusu mitindo tofauti za kuandika Khati za Kiarabu katika tungo za Kiswahili.  
On the Various Styles of Writing Swahili Poetry in Arabic Script*

12.00 pm *Lunch Break*

1.00 pm Clarissa Vierke, Bayreuth

*Writing Songs, Singing Texts: What Does Textual Variability Teach us About Performance?*

1.45 pm *Final Discussion*

## Abstracts

**Mahmoud A. A. Abdulatif, Lamu**

***Kuhusu mitindo tofauti za kuandika Khati za Kiarabu katika tungo za Kiswahili – On the Various Styles of Writing Swahili Poetry in Arabic Script***

Looking at the large body of Swahili poetry written in Arabic script, the variability in representing not only the letters of Swahili but also in arranging poetic lines is vast. In this presentation, I will give examples of the variability in writing poetry but also in stanza arrangement by drawing examples from various genres.

**Mohamed Abdulaziz, Nairobi**

***On the Variable Nature of Kiswahili in Arabic Script***

Differently from Arabic, there is no standard orthography for writing Kiswahili in Arabic script. Accordingly, there are many idiosyncratic ways of writing it. My presentation will show a spectrum of varieties. The script very much depends on a knowing audience. I will also explore the limits of such a huge variability and raise the question why a standard orthography was never implemented. As I will argue, script was never forced to abide to a set of rules, since the audience did not feel the need to do so. The texts written and copied were largely known to the audience, who could hence cope with variability in writing.

**Ann Biersteker, Michigan**

***Early Swahili Manuscripts and the History of East African Writing***

We know that there were collections of manuscripts along the East African coast in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Presumably most of these were in Arabic, but to the best of our knowledge there are no surviving manuscripts until nearly two centuries later. Our evidence for writing during this two century gap is found in extensive wood and stone carvings still extant along the East African coast. The question of this paper is whether consideration of these carvings might contribute to our understanding of "the variability in design, layout and phrasing found" in later Swahili manuscripts.

**Alessandro Gori, Copenhagen and Ahmed Parkar, Hamburg**

***The Arabic-Swahili Hamziyya: Observations on Two Uncommon Testimonies of the Text***

The translation of Muḥammad al-Buṣīrī's (d. 1296) Arabic poem rhyming in *hamza* "al-Qaṣīda al-hamziyya fī al-madā'ih al-nabawiyya" (actually entitled "Umm al-qurā fī madḥ ḥayr al-warā") is very well represented in the Swahili manuscript tradition. The translation of the Arabic text into Swahili is attributed to 'Aydārūs b. 'Uṭmān b. 'Alī of Pate and according to Knappert ("The Hamziyya deciphered" ALS 9 [1968]: 54-55) should have been completed in 1652. The oldest available codex containing the work (London, SOAS 53823) can be dated to 14 *dū al-ḥiġġa* 1257 A.H. or 1207 A.H. (27.01.1842 or 23.07.1793: colophon f. 33r).

During the field work conducted in East Africa for phase I and II of the SFB 950, C07 Swahili project, a corpus of 14 manuscripts of the *Hamziyya* was identified and collected.

Seven of these codices, including the oldest one, are bilingual, that is they contain the Arabic original and an interlinear Swahili translation. Interlinear translations in the Islamic world are not rare while their diffusion in the Swahili tradition remains to be fully assessed.

In our presentation, we are going to focus on two manuscripts featuring a very peculiar text constellation within the Swahili *Hamziyya* corpus.

1) Manuscript Mombasa Island, al-Husaynī 01 (images by Ridder Samsom), containing a monolingual Arabic *Hamziyya* with interlinear explicatory notes (but a not full-fledged translation) in Swahili and Arabic.

2) Manuscript (Dar-es-salaam, UDSM, Ms 541; Allen, *Catalogue*, Leiden: Brill, 1970: 32) which contains a partial copy (until verse 49) of the Arabic *taḥmīs* of the *Hamziyya* by ‘Abd al-Bāqī b. Sulaymān al-Fārūqī (d. 1861) with an interlinear Swahili version of al-Buṣīrī’s *Hamziyya* basic text (*matn*) but not of the *taḥmīs*. From verse 50 onwards only the *Hamziyya* and its Swahili translation are copied in this codex.

Beside a description of the two codices and of the way the different texts and their glosses are arranged in the folios, we will try to assess the origin of their composition and the function they played in the transmission of the al-Buṣīrī’s *Hamziyya* text in the Swahili literary and cultural landscape.

## Chapane Mutiua, Maputo

### ***Northern Mozambique Swahili Manuscripts: A General View***

With the focus on ajami correspondence and utenzi literature, this paper aims at analyzing the main features of northern Mozambique Swahili manuscripts. Through comparative and historical approach, it explores by one side, its specificities and peculiarities that make them local; and by the other side, it explores links to the East African manuscript culture.

The paper argues that the long lasting connection of northern Mozambique to East African sociocultural networks was the main vehicle for the establishment of a Swahili literary tradition in northern Mozambique. However, the Mozambicans have adapted the genres, texts and practices to their own context and contents. Thus, the analysis of some ajami correspondence and utenzi literature of northern Mozambique may help to show that although the manuscript culture in northern Mozambique is a Swahili one, it presents its own peculiarities that emphasize its local component.

## Annachiara Raia, Bayreuth/Naples

### ***Visually Pleasant Texts or Imperfect Copies? The Many Ways to Copy the Story of Yusuf.***

It was particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century that Swahili manuscript texts circulated and got appropriated, in a complete or fragmentary form, torn or well-shaped, within the hands of local scribes and poets at the Coast. In this paper, I will focus on aspects of variability in copying featuring in the disseminated manuscript copies of the *Qissatil Yusuf*, a recurring Swahili-Muslim text penned down in the *utendi* verse form. The popularity of the poem is attested by the number of manuscripts which are now part of collections in Dar es Salaam, London, Berlin and Hamburg. The existing manuscripts referring to “Yusufu” differ from each other in several regards, as for instance, script adaptation and dialect variants (i), colophons and verse layout (ii), phrasing of stanzas and embedded quotations (iii). Within similar recensions do these manuscripts share a set of conventions in style and script? And how do variations in text and layout shape the *utendi* differently? Looking at the various copies of the *utendi* by the known scribe Muhamadi Kijuma, how much liberty did he take in copying, arranging and embellishing the text? How do his copies differ in comparison to those of other copyists who arranged the same story within a different layout? Do ideas of faithfulness to a historical source and aesthetic considerations compete with each other?

## **Eugeniusz Rzewuski (Warsaw)**

### ***Recurrency and Variability in "Shirazian" Sagas. Swahili Chronicles of Tungi in Comparative Perspective.***

Genealogical local chronicles (habari, nasaba genres) of the old centres of the Swahili world in Mozambique contain, predictably, traditions of their founders coming from a mythified Shiraz. Founding towns, travelling and striving for preserving the 'Shirazi blood' is the 'mission' of their protagonists - the recurrent leitmotif of such stories. A founding prototext charter. Chronicles of Tungi (Cabo Delgado, Mozambique) do reveal affinities as concerns kinship ties, rules of power descent, local and trans-Uswahili alliances and conflicts. This paper examines variability of social and spatial landscapes, linear content, motifs, style and language in two unpublished Swahili manuscripts in Arabic script. Under investigation is intertextual or narratological connectivity echoing known historical ties of Tungi, Angoche, Sudi and the Comoro Arquipelago. The manuscripts were found and copies collected by the author in Palma and Kiwiya, Cabo Delgado, Mozambique in 1988.

## **Clarissa Vierke (Bayreuth/Hamburg)**

### ***Writing Songs, singing texts: What does textual variability teach us about performance?***

In this presentation, I would like to explore the variability in writing in historical Swahili poetic genres, which are strongly linked to a context of oral performance. While most of written Swahili texts from the 18th and 19th century are poems, a large variety of poetic genres can be found in Swahili manuscripts, whose differences have not been adequately studied: They differ in terms of how the poems are arranged in the manuscripts and how manuscripts relate to performances (for instance, as aide-mémoire, report, documentary or teaching manual). In contrast to some Swahili genres, which are more inclined towards the written, I will concentrate on genres, like the mashairi and tumbuizo, which have been described as being so strongly related to performances that manuscripts convey but a shady idea of the text's aesthetics. Furthermore, to complicate my task, very little is known about how these poems, which date back to the 18th and 19th century, were performed nor how manuscripts were used to "entextualize" them. Thus, my "archeological" project seeks to read manuscripts as a mirror of performative practices. Primarily taking examples from the corpus of the 19th century poetry ascribed to Bwana Zahidi Mngumi, I will show the variability of textual arrangement and reflect upon their implications for performance.