

Gudrun Mieke and Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg 2004. Liyongo Songs. Poems attributed to Fumo Liyongo. Collected and edited by the Liyongo Working Group. Archiv afrikanistischer Manuskripte Band VII. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag

Uschi Drolc (Köln, 2006)

<1>

The edition is an excellent prove of a possible and successful cooperation of various leading scholars in Swahili linguistics, literature, and poetry with local experts on Swahili tradition. The Liyongo Working Group consists of Bi. Zeina Mahmoud Fadhil Al-Bakary (London), Sheikh Yahya Ali Omar (London), Sheikh Ahmed Nabahany (Mombasa), Mohamed H. Abdulaziz (Nairobi), Sheikh Ahmad Nassir Juma Bhalo (Mombasa), Farouk Topan (London), Angelica Baschiera (London), Abdilatif Abdalla (Leipzig), Gudrun Mieke (Bayreuth), Said Khamis (Bayreuth), Clarissa Dittmer (Bayreuth). The Liyongo Working Group has achieved the great and difficult task to preserve a very important piece of Swahili cultural heritage and make it accessible.

<2>

Fumo Liyongo represents one of the most remarkable figures in Swahili culture. He is not only a legendary hero of the Swahili coast, but also a bard, who created own songs and poems. Consequently, the songs attributed to Fumo Liyongo are defined as poetry by and on Liyongo. The eighteen poems and songs chosen as core of the edition originate from different sources: Taylor and Werner/Hichens Collection of the SOAS Archives (London) or Nabahany collection (Mombasa) also some manuscript collected by Dammann from the State Libraries in Berlin and Hamburg and the Library of the Institute of Asian and African Studies in Hamburg. Most of the unpublished manuscripts are in Arabic, only few are in Roman letters. Some anonymous writers of the Arabic script even developed specific diacritics for dental *t*, which is a typical feature of the Northern Swahili dialects. Hence, the difficulty in analysing these songs consisted not only of the interpretation of the Arabic script but also of the documentation of the ancient language used in the poems. The northern dialects of Swahili are considered more archaic than the southern dialects kiMrima or kiUnguja on the phonological level. Therefore the problem was to decide whether a specific feature of the text is part of the archaic language or whether it simply represents a typical feature of the northern dialects. An outline of the phonology and morphology of the language used in the poems is given in the introduction. The stylistic and cultural aspects of the poems are also dealt with.

<3>

The canon of the Liyongo songs are presented in two parts. Part A contains a user-friendly presentation of the 'songs' which is the English translation of the Swahili term *utumbuizo*. The Swahili texts are given on the pages with the even numbers. Their English translation can be found on the opposite page. The lines are numbered to indicate the corresponding phrases. Fortunately, a too close and often misleading word-by-word translation has been avoided, e.g. 17-4 *mwanamke ni mwenye mumewe* was not translated as "woman is the property of the husband" but as "a woman who has a husband".

<4>

The first song (1) tells the heroic legend of Fumo Liyongo, who was put into prison and managed to escape with the help of his mother. Most of the songs deal with the great skills

and adventures of the hero (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 16, 18). However, the most voluminous and detailed songs praise the beauty of the noble lady Mwana Manga (12) or the kindness of lady Mwana Nazi (13). Others contain useful information on early Swahili culture and tradition like marriage customs (3, 17), the custom of palm-wine-serving (9), or the gungu dance (11). Others describe the form and the use of the coconut tree (14) and the doum palm (15). The songs are easily comprehensible for everybody who is interested in Swahili culture and should be highly recommended as teaching material in East African schools.

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Part B satisfies the academic needs of a critical edition of the texts. For each song or poem the sources including the editor and the original title of the poem is given. The basis for the reconstruction of the poem may consist out of up to 15 different sources (e.g. text 12 Mwana Manga). The critical apparatus gives a detailed explanation for every line. Comparing the sources, the presence and omission of lines are mentioned and the difference and variation of linguistic forms of the verses are listed. In addition comments and remarks on specific items are given. A table following the apparatus presents an overview of the occurrence of the lines in the different sources. If available, the Arabic script is added at the end of the section.

<6>

Unfortunately, the introduction of Part B which explains the analysis of the sources and the criteria for the reconstruction does not even fill a page. Therefore some questions concerning the use of numbers with small Roman letters are left open, e.g. 1a and 1b, which occur frequently in the tables. A short explanation can be found in the introduction: "Different lines of a stanza in Roman script are distinguished by small letters (81)." What is meant by stanza? A group of lines in a repeated pattern forming part of a poem or simply a line interrupted by a rhombus, e.g. (82):

1-1 Kiyakazi Sada ♦ nakutumama ♦ huyatumika

<7>

Would this be represented by 1a, 1b, and 1c? Another question concerns the line correspondences of the sources to the reconstructed text called 'New'. The column of the source Harries (1962) in the table (86) exhibits the following line correspondences: line 1 of 'New' corresponds to line 1a in Harries; line 2 to 1b, line 3 to 2a; line 4 to 2b. Does this mean that the corresponding poem of Harries consists only of line 1 and 2 whereas line 3 or 4 are missing? Why is 1a corresponding to 1 and 1b to 2 and not 1a and 1b to 1 etc.?

<8>

I highly appreciate the very complicated endeavour of the reconstruction of the Liyongo canon out of many varying sources and suppose that there must be a good reason for the use of the small letters. However, the criteria of the analysis and the reconstruction should be better explained so that even non-members of the Liyongo Working group might understand it. A more comprehensible explanation could be achieved by giving a detailed example that demonstrates how a line was reconstructed.

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The "Appendix" (165-222) contains an additional text and translations of two articles which originally appeared in German. Some introductory lines would have been helpful to avoid the reader being urged to page up and down to find the content of the appendix explained in the introduction (4). The Appendix is subdivided into three parts:

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I. *Hadithi ya Liongo* 'Liyongo Story' in Swahili as edited by Edward Steere (1870).

II. The *Takhamisi ya Liyongo* as critically edited by Meinhof (1924/25). This article first appeared as 'Das Lied des Liongo' in *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenensprachen* 15: 241-265. It contains the German translation of the song, some critical comments of the author and Steere's original text with many footnotes. The whole article was translated into English by Ruth Schubert, who is mentioned only in a small footnote.

III. *Takhamisi ya Liongo*: Remarks on manuscripts and translation. The author of the article is Gudrun Mieke (1994) 'Takhamisi ya Liongo: Anmerkungen zu Überlieferung und Übersetzung'. The article appeared 1994 in *Sprachen und Sprachzeugnisse in Afrika* ed. by Geider, Thomas and Raimund Kastenholz, Cologne: Köppe: 281-302. The translator is not even mentioned here.

<11>

Errata: The headlines of the odd numbers in Part B sometimes contain 'Part B' and sometimes 'critical apparatus' without a comprehensible reason. I have not found any orthographic mistake except on p. 170 *german* is written in minuscules.