

From Andalusia to Yemen

The origin of the Swahili stanzaic metres

Emiliano Minerba

In this paper I will propose a prosodic analysis of three important metres of the Swahili literary tradition, which are *utenzi*, *shairi* and *wimbo*. Despite the great difference between them concerning usage and context of composition, in fact, their metrical and prosodic features show that they have a common historical development. The origin of these three metres is to be found in the Arabic poetic tradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry, a Yemeni development of the genre of *muwaššaha*, that was developed in the Omayyad Andalusia and then spread all over the Arabic world. Some common features between *ḥumaynī* poetry and the three aforementioned Swahili metres will be outlined, concerning both the prosody of the verses and rhyme patterns: in conclusion of the analysis, I will claim that *utenzi*, *shairi* and *wimbo* are the result of an hybridization between the forms of *ḥumaynī* poetry and the local, and probably pre-existent, prosodic tradition of *utumbuizo*, carried out willingly by the intellectual class of the beginnings of the classical period of Swahili literature.

Keywords: Swahili, poetry, *utenzi*, *shairi*, *wimbo*, prosody, Yemen, *muwashshaha*, *utumbuizo*, *humayni*

1. Introduction

In this paper the expression stanzaic metre is used as a wrapper expression for those structures of Swahili poetry which present not only a definite stanzaic structure, such as *shairi*, *utenzi* and *wimbo*, but also a definite metre, based on the number of syllables in each verse (this is less valid for *wimbo*, which nevertheless retains isosyllabism as a fundamental feature in any of its variants).

Aim of this paper is to investigate the origins of the three aforementioned Swahili stanzaic metres.¹ These genres² are different from each other in many ways, including from an etymological point of view: the word *shairi* clearly derives from the Arabic word *šī'r* “poetry,” while *wimbo* (literally “song”) is a Bantu-derived word, related to the Swahili verb *-imba* (“to sing”), like *utenzi* which is related to verb *-tenda* “to act.” One could assume, then, that *shairi* as structure and genre derives from the Arabic tradition, while *wimbo* and *utenzi* are indigenous elaborations. However, the conclusions we reach from these etymological considerations are contradicted by the historical data: in fact, *wimbo* has often been the base stanza of popular compositions, while *utenzi*, despite the non-Arabic origin of the name, is the metre of the great Islamic epics. On the other hand, *shairi* has always been part of the high tradition of Swahili poetry, since the father of this genre, Muyaka (c. 1776-1840), is considered one of the greatest authors of Swahili literature (Abdulaziz 1979: ix); but this metre is also used in popular compositions and it is the most common in Swahili poetry (Bertoncini 2000: 9).

A prosodic analysis can shed light on the development of these metres, demonstrating that, despite the great distance between them in usage, they share a common origin, which can be traced back to *ḥumaynī* poetry. This is a genre of popular and vernacular poetry which originated in Yemen between 1200 and 1400 (Wagner 2009: 11-13), and is remarkable because its stanzaic forms are almost identical to those of Swahili classical literature. A further step back in time can be taken by assuming that *ḥumaynī* poetry is derived from the poetic genre of *muwaššaha*, a genre of strophic poetry that developed in Islamic Andalusia in the late 9th century (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 563). Even if developed as a single genre, *muwaššaha* spread all over the Arabic world already in its early stages (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 565), evolving into a great variety of derived genres and metres. The derivation of *ḥumaynī* poetry from *muwaššaha* has been theorized by several scholars, such as Wagner (2009: 11-13), but here this idea will be considered as a hypothesis rather than a fact, as will be explained later. The Andalusian *muwaššaha*, however, will be mentioned and employed for comparison purposes, together with *ḥumaynī* poetry, given the possibility of this connection.

¹ It is true that the two other great metres of Swahili classical literature, namely *ukawafi* and *kisarambe*, match as well as the others the definition of “stanzaic metre” that I have given; however, they will not be included in this analysis, since I suppose that they have a different historical origin than that of *shairi*, *utenzi* and *wimbo*. I plan to present my theory on the historical development of *ukawafi* and *kisarambe* in a future publication.

² Swahili poetry allows for interchangeable use of the concepts of *metre* and *genre*. Each metre is usually employed for a specific range of topics and arguments: religious lyrics are often in *ukawafi* and *kisarambe* (Bertoncini 2000: 3-5), but narrative and epic poetry is in *utenzi* (Bertoncini 2000: 6); *wimbo* is the genre of popular compositions (even if this term also has the broader sense of “song”); while *shairi* is the genre of lyric poems about any topic, from love to politics (Bertoncini 2000: 9). Thus, in Swahili literature each metre corresponds to a specific subgroup of poetry and to a specific expertise.

In the first section of this paper, the structure of *muwaššaha* as it originated in Andalusia will be described; then the derived genre of popular Yemeni poetry, the *ḥumaynī* poetry, will be presented. My hypothesis is that *ḥumaynī* poetry is the variety of *muwaššaha* that arrived on the Swahili coast and was re-elaborated in the genres of *wimbo* and *shairi*. After presenting these metres, I will give a brief overview of the structures of *shairi*, *wimbo* and *utenzi* in the second part of the first section. In the second section, I will link the previously presented structures of the Swahili stanzaic metres to those structures of *ḥumaynī* poetry that I assume they are derived from. This section will be divided into two subsections: in the first, I will analyse the rhyme pattern of *wimbo* and *shairi*, while in the second, the metres, and in particular their syllabic length, will be analysed.

2. Stanzaic structures in Arabic and Swahili literatures

Even if the contacts between Swahili and Arabic speakers have involved above all the Arabs of the Gulf, the great extent of cultural and politic interrelations between the various parts of the Arabic and Islamic world in history have made it possible for literary traditions from any zone to circulate and spread in the rest of the world. A good example of this is the diffusion of the Andalusian genre of *muwaššaha*, whose spread and development from al-Andalus reached North Africa and the Middle East in the mid-twelfth century (Menocal *et al.* 2006: 166).

2.1. The development of *muwaššaha*

Arabic tradition claims that *muwaššaha* was invented by Muqaddam ibn Mu‘afa al-Qabrī in the late ninth century (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 563). Although many celebrated poets are known to have composed *muwaššaha* poems, such compositions are not included in their collections: as a post-classical innovation, *muwaššaha* was not thought to share the same space and prestige as the *qaṣīda*, and was intended mainly for oral performance and for publication in specific collections (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 563).

A *muwaššaha* composition is usually composed of five stanzas. Each stanza was composed of two parts: the *ḡuṣn*, a group of rhyming verses, and the *simṭ* or *qufl*, a couplet which concludes the stanza. The *qufls* of all the stanzas rhyme with each other. The *qufl* of the last stanza, in particular, has a distinctive name and role: it is the *ḥarḡa* (literally “exit”) and, differently from the other parts of the composition which were in Classical Arabic, was composed in colloquial Arabic or in Romance dialects. Often the poems could also be opened with a couplet similar to the *qufls* in both metre and rhyme: this

segment is called *maṭlaʿ* (“beginning”). Here is a schema of the structure (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 563):

..... ab	<i>maṭlaʿ</i>	First to fourth stanza
..... c	<i>ḡuṣn</i>	
..... c		
..... c		
..... ab	<i>qufl</i>	Last stanza
..... g	<i>ḡuṣn</i>	
..... g		
..... g		
..... ab	<i>ḥarḡa</i>	

The *ḥarḡa* is considered the nucleus of the composition, since it resumes in two lines the content of the poem as a sort of refrain (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 563). Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk (d. 608/1211) defined the *ḥarḡa* as the most remarkable feature of the *muwaššaha* (Rosen 2000: 168). The genesis of this peculiar feature is at the centre of a great debate: some scholars, such as García Gómez (1956: 314), have theorized that the *muwaššaha* itself was born as a genre in order to enframe (*encuadrar*) Romance *ḥarḡas* alien and anterior to it. Others, such as Abu-Haidar (2001: 112-113) claim instead that *ḥarḡa* was an external feature added to the original structure of *muwaššaha*, in order to introduce an element of humour and merriment (*hazl*) into a high genre, written in Classical Arabic (and therefore defined *muʿrab*), in a process that has often taken place in Arabic literature and that is called *iḥmāḍ*. Its importance as stylema in the frame of *muwaššaha*, however, is generally accepted (Meisami and Stark 1998: 564-565).

A similar strophic structure was that of the *zaḡal*, which also originated in Andalusia. *Zaḡals* can have the same organization of *muwaššaha* or a simple form, in which the two lines of the *maṭlaʿ* rhyme and the *qufls* of the stanzas are composed of just one verse, rhyming with the *maṭlaʿ* (A,A b,b,b,A c,c,c,A

d,d,d,A)³. More important differences are that the *zağals* often contain more than five stanzas and, above all, that they are composed entirely in vernacular Arabic (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 818).

While possessing a strict stanzaic structure, *muwaššaha* presents a huge variety of prosodic forms. The metre of these compositions does not conform to the Ḥalīlian prosodic system, which was adopted in the major genres of Classical Arabic poetry. The origin of this metre is still under debate: some scholars suggest that it is based on syllabic-stress patterns, and thus propose an Ibero-Romance origin, while others see it as an extension of al-Ḥalīl's system (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 565). A third, and much debated, interpretation is that of Corriente (1982: 76): he states that the prosody of *muwaššaha* is a re-elaboration of the Ḥalīlian system based on syllabic stress and no longer on syllable length. Such re-elaboration is due to the choice of vernacular Arabic as the language of composition: in fact, Andalusian Arabic, as well as other Arabic dialects, substituted a quantitative distinction between vowels with syllabic stress, and this compelled poets to adapt the Ḥalīlian prosody to their new linguistic context.

Both *muwaššaha* and *zağal* developed in Andalusia as a consistent tradition; however, when they spread to the other zones of the Arabic world, they underwent several modifications, giving birth to a variety of local traditions. This is particularly evident for the *zağal*: nowadays, in many Arabic-speaking countries this term refers generically to colloquial poetry (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 819). Poetic genres referred to as *zağal* in the Arabic world can thus be very different in metre and structure, both from each other and from the Andalusian *zağal*. In several cases, however, derivation of these genres from the classical *zağal* is evident. This is the case of the Yemeni genre of *šīr ḥumaynī* (“*ḥumaynī* poetry”).

The genre of *ḥumaynī* poetry is thought to have been born between the 13th and 14th centuries in Rasūlid Yemen. Rasūlids, originally slave soldiers of the Ayyūbid dynasty ruling in Egypt, established a culturally efflorescent court in Lower Yemen. Their cultural link with Egypt was probably the channel through which Andalusian strophic genres arrived and were taken up by Yemeni *hommes de lettres* (Wagner 2009: 11-13): *muwaššaha* and *zağal* were certainly known in Egypt, where Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's (d. 608/1211) work *Dār al-Ṭirāz* can be considered a poetics of the genre (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 564). Like *zağal*, *ḥumaynī* poetry is composed in vernacular Arabic (Wagner 2009: 14), although its language is far from pure dialect, being rather a variety of middle Arabic (Dufour 2012: 2).

³ In this and the following rhyme schemas I will use the slash (/) to separate stanzas, and the comma (,) to separate verses. If two or more letters are attached, this means that they represent the rhymes of different cola of the same verse.

Stylistically speaking, *ḥumaynī* poetry presents two distinct strophic structures: *mubayyat* and *muwaššah*. The *mubayyat* is a composition of quatrains (*bayt*) with a rhyme scheme “a,a,a,a/b,b,b,b/a/c,c,c,a...” (similar to the rhyme scheme of *musammaṭ*⁴); its lines however can be bipartite, and consequently the rhyme scheme becomes “ab,ab,ab,ab/cd,cd,cd,ab/...” or even “aa,aa,aa,aa/bb,bb,bb,bb/...”. An example of *mubayyat* of the first kind is reported in Dufour (2012: 19; translation into French by Dufour, *ibidem*). Here I report it showing its rhyme scheme:

<i>Fadayt° rūḥvk bi-rūḥī °ayyuhā l-fattān</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Matā tazūr fi maqām al-rawḥ° wa-l-rayḥān</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Matā °a stami° mink° naǧmah tuzriy al-°alḥān</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>Matā tabāt lī nadīm fi ǧaflat al-ḥurrās</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>Matā °uṣāhid ǧabīnvk fi l-maqām yazhar</i>	<i>b</i>
<i>Wa-°ant° ka-l-badr° bayn al-ka°s° wa-l-mizhar</i>	<i>b</i>
<i>Ṭamil tu°arbid °alayyā ṭarfvk al-°aḥwar</i>	<i>b</i>
<i>Našwān° ya°qud lisānvk salsabīl al-kās°</i>	<i>x</i>

Text 1. *mubayyat* of the base type

Je donnerais ma vie pour la tienne, tentatrice.

Quand me rendras-tu visite là où sont le zéphyr et le basilic ?

Quand t'entendrai-je chanter un air qui éclipse toutes les mélodies ?

⁴ *Tasmīṭ* or *musammaṭ* developed as an innovation of the *muḥdaṭūna* (“modern”) Arabic poets of the Abbasid period. It consists in the expansion of the classic verse in a structure formed by more than two cola: all the cola except the final one rhyme, while the last colon rhymes with all the last cola of the other stanzas. Once *tasmīṭ* is applied, therefore, verses become actual stanzas, and cola can be considered as the lines of the composition (Ferrando 1999: 78). *Tasmīṭ* as a poetic form spread in all the Islamic countries, from Persia to Andalusia (Zwartjes 1997: 25 and Ferrando 1999: 80), and it has been suggested that it might be the ancestor of Andalusian *muwaššaha* and *zaǧal* (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 563).

⁵ Dufour (2012: 1, note 1) explains his orthography of the *ṣanʿānī* dialect as follows: “le signe ° note la voyelle de disjonction; la lettre v note une voyelle dont la nature est douteuse mais dont la scansion révèle la présence ; par convention, et pour faciliter la lecture, on a ici ailleurs qu’en finale de mot suivi la vocalisation de l’arabe classique dans la mesure où cela ne perturbait pas la métrique, bien que la prononciation moderne du *ḥumaynī*, au moins dans le chant de Sanaa, diffère sur certains points de cette notation.” While avoiding using special markers such as ° and v, I have used the same approach to vocalization in the texts mentioned in this paper which are not reported by Dufour, but come from other sources in Arabic script.

Quand passeras-tu la nuit en ma compagnie, trompant la vigilance des gardiens ?

*Quand verrai-je ton front briller en notre séjour...
Comme la pleine lune entre la coupe et le luth,
Enivrée, tes grands yeux sombres me cherchent des noises,
Grisée, la langue alourdie par la liqueur du hanap.*

And, for the bipartite kind, one finds an example in Ġānim (1987: 227; my translation):

<i>Maʿšūq al-ġamāl</i>	<i>nahab fuʿādī ġamāluh</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>bayt</i>
<i>fi haġrī aṭāl</i>	<i>wa-aḍāba qalbī miṭṭāluh</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>lā kāna ʿl-miṭṭāl</i>	<i>li-mah taqūlū aṭāluh</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>abadi li ʿl-milāl</i>	<i>waylāhu min dā amāluh</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	
[...]				
<i>Qalbī multahib</i>	<i>yā fātinī min ḥiġābak</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>bayt</i>
<i>damʿi munsakib</i>	<i>min yawm fātin ġinābak</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	
<i>yā qalbī ʿktasib</i>	<i>wa-šbir ʿalā mā ašābak</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	
<i>wa-qnaʿ bi-l-ḥayāl</i>	<i>in kāna yanfaʿ ḥayāluh</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>Ṭūlat al-biʿād</i>	<i>al-Lāh baynī wa-baynak</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>bayt</i>
<i>qalbī fi ʿttiqād</i>	<i>yā qalb ġarrayt ḥaynak</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f</i>	
<i>ġāwabanī l-fuʿād</i>	<i>mā qātīlī ġayr ʿaynak</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f</i>	
<i>qāla ṭarfī muḥāl</i>	<i>ʿinda l-qadar ayš ḥāluh</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	

Text 2. mubayyat with bipartite lines

<i>He who is beloved for his beauty, he has abandoned me for long may the absence not last! It is eternal tiredness for me [...]</i>	<i>his beauty has ransacked my heart and my heart pines away for its long absence Why do you all say that he himself is making it such long? troubles come from that hope.</i>
<i>My heart is burning my tears are poured out my heart, fight for and be content of your fantasy</i>	<i>oh my seducer through your veil since the day of His Lordship and endure for what has befallen upon you if the fantasy of Him is of benefit.</i>

The distance has been made long, God is between me and you
 my heart is in a burst oh, heart, you attire your own destruction
 my heart answered me: “Nothing kills me but your eye.”
 and said: “My gaze is impossible, before the Doom everything is subjugated”

In *ḥumaynī* poetry, *muwaššah* is a more complex stanzaic structure: each stanza is formed by a *bayt* quatrain, then by a *tawšīḥ* (a sequence of three simple or bipartite lines, often shorter than those of the *bayt*) and finally by a *taqfil* (a section formed by half the verses of the *bayt*, but with the same metre and rhymes of its last verses). The general schema of a *muwaššah* with bipartite lines is therefore “ab,ab,ab,ab, c,c,c, ab,ab/de,de,de,ab, f,f,f, ab,ab”. It is worth noting that also in *muwaššah* there is a rhyme shared by all the stanzas (Wagner 2009: 311). Such a scheme is employed, for example, in a *muwaššah* by Ibn Šaraf al-Dīn (938/1532-1010/1601) from his *dīwān* titled *Mubayyatāt wa-Muwaššahāt* (which is our most comprehensive source for ancient *ḥumaynī* poetry; Dufour 2012: 6), quoted by Dufour (2012: 17; in this particular stanza, the rhyme of the *tawšīḥ* coincides with that of the first hemistichs of the *bayt* and the *taqfil*):

Šaqīq al-qamar ʾasfar	bi-dayğūr° faynānvh	a	b	bayt
Ġamaʿ ḥaddvh al-ʾazhar	min al-zahr° ʾalwānvh	a	b	
ʾAmūt kull°mā fattar	wa-ḥawwam bi-ʾağfānvh	a	b	
Fa-subḥān° man ṣawwar	ğamālvh wa-man zānvh	a	b	
Yu[ğ]āzil bi-ṭarf° aḥwar		a		tawšīḥ
Wa-yaftarr° ʿan ġawhar		a		
Nabat fi ʿaqīq ʾaḥmar		a		
ʿAğab mantiqvh yaṣḥar	kamā taṣḥar ʾaʿyānvh	a	b	taqfil
Wa-mā nağmat al-mizhar	siwā rağʿat ʾalḥānvh	a	b	

Text 3. *ḥumaynī* poetry: *muwaššah*

La sœur de la lune a paru dans la nuit de sa chevelure.
 De toutes fleurs sa joue éclatante a fait un bouquet de couleurs.
 Je meurs à chaque fois qu'elle cligne de ses paupières alanguies.
 Gloire à Celui qui a créé tant de beauté et d'atours !
 Elle envoûte de ses yeux noirs,

*Son sourire révèle des pierreries
Apparues parmi la cornaline.
La merveille de sa voix ensorcelle autant que ses yeux ont de charmes,
Et le son du luth n'égale pas le refrain de ses mélodies.*

An important element for comparison with Swahili prosody is metre. Differently from Andalusian *muwaššah* and *zağal*, *ḥumaynī* poetry follows strict prosodic rules in versification (Dafari 1966: 302). Among the metres of Classical Arabic poetry, the most frequently used is *basīṭ*, followed by *rağaz* and *sarīʿ* (Wagner 2009: 313). These three metres present the following basic structures:⁶

<i>basīṭ</i>	— U — — U — — — U — — U — — — U — — U — — — U — — U —
<i>rağaz</i>	— — U — — — U — — — U — — — U — — — U — — — U —
<i>sarīʿ</i>	— — U — — — U — — — — U — — U — — — U — — — — U ⁷

Rağaz also has a reduced version, in which the two cola of the verse are composed of two feet instead of three; however, it can also be used in its base form. The form shown here for *sarīʿ* is purely theoretical, since in versification the last feet of both the cola of this metre are reduced to three, more rarely two, syllables (possible forms are — U —, — —, — — —).

Dufour (2012: 14-15) reports many examples of metrical structures of *ḥumaynī* composition, noting that one poem can present more than one metre in its stanzas; in particular, in each poem the *bayt* sections, the *tawšīḥ*s and the *taqfīl*s can each have their own prosodic scansion. He reports the following examples:⁸

<i>bayt</i>	— U — — U — U — — U — —	<i>ḥafīf sālīm</i>
<i>tawšīḥ</i>	— U — — U — U —	<i>ḥafīf mağzūʿ</i>
<i>taqfīl</i>	— U — — U — U — — U — —	<i>ḥafīf sālīm</i>

⁶ In the following schemas, U stands for a short syllable. For a long one, a single vertical bar | separates two feet from each other, and a double vertical bar || indicates an internal caesura of the verse.

⁷ The schemes are given by Frolov (2000: 178), who, noticing a great degree of similarity between these three metres, theorizes a common ancestor in what he calls the “archaic *rağaz*” (*ibidem*). Another related metre is *muğtatṭ*, which is mentioned later in this section.

⁸ In the third column of the following tables, I give the name of the Ḥalilian metres which these prosodic sequences can be traced back to. While the succession of short and long syllables is copied from Dufour’s work, I have added the separations between feet (|) for scansion purposes, referring to al-Ḥalil’s theorization.

Here the *bayts* and the *taqfils* are composed of an “entire” (*sālim*) *ḥafif*, that is, a *ḥafif* metre which presents all the three feet of its base form, whereas the *tawšīḥs* are in the “cut off” (*mağzū*) form of the *ḥafif*, since their last foot is dropped. The only difference between these forms of *ḥafif* and the metre as theorized by al-Ḥalīl is that the second foot of the verse is U – U – instead of – – U –; the shortening of the first syllable is a variation occasionally permitted in the Ḥalīlian system, but not a normative form as here (Capezio 2013: 159).

A second example from Dufour (2012: 15) is the following:

<i>bayt</i>	– – U – – U – – – – U – – U – –	<i>muğtatt</i>
<i>tawšīḥ</i>	– – U – – – U – U – –	<i>sarīʿ/rağaz</i>
<i>taqfīl</i>	– – U – – U – – – – U – – U – –	<i>muğtatt</i>

The only noticeable difference between this scansion and al-Ḥalīl’s system is that here the verses of the *tawšīḥ* can be scanned either as *sarīʿ* or as *rağaz* verses. This is not uncommon in *ḥumaynī* poetry, where several patterns can be considered as belonging to more than one metre (Dafari 1966: 338-339). Such ambiguity is due to the ending of this verse pattern with a foot of structure U – –. This form is not possible in the scansion either of *rağaz* or of *sarīʿ* in al-Ḥalīl’s theory. The closest Ḥalīlian form to this is – – –: here one notices a shortening of the first syllable that would not be normative in the theoretical form, similarly to what is observed with *ḥafif* in the preceding example.

A last example from Dufour (2012: 15) is:

<i>bayt</i>	– – U – – U – – – – U – – U – –	<i>muğtatt sālim</i>
<i>tawšīḥ</i>	– – U – – U – – – U – – U –	<i>basīt</i>
<i>taqfīl</i>	– – U – – U – – – – U – – U – –	<i>muğtatt sālim</i>

Here, too, we can observe a *tawšīḥ* that is prosodically shorter than the *bayt* and *taqfīl*; we can scan it as a particular form of *basīt*, presenting just four feet instead of eight. This variety is not envisaged in the classical Ḥalīlian system, but it has been observed in *ḥumaynī* poetry (Dafari 1966: 345).

Another scholar who has extensively investigated *ḥumaynī* poetry is Dafari. His PhD thesis includes a section where the metres used in this genre are listed. In Appendix I report only those that Dafari (1966: 342-366) notes as “very popular.” For our analysis, however, it is useful to remark that all

these metres are constituted by trisyllabic or tetrasyllabic feet: out of a total of 178 feet, just 8 (4%) are bisyllabic, while 108 (60%) and 62 (34%) feet are trisyllabic and tetrasyllabic respectively.

Dafari also notes further features of the relationship between the metres of the verses and the stanzaic structures in *ḥumaynī* poetry. Among the *mubayyat* poems, he identifies three categories of prosodic organization. A *mubayyat* poem can thus have:

- verses whose hemistichs belong to the same metre and are equal in length (Dafari 1966: 321);
- verses whose hemistichs belong to the same metre, but are not equal in length (when the base verse is composed of four feet, the preponderant tendency is to drop half of the second hemistich: Dafari 1966: 322);
- verses whose first hemistich is composed of just one foot (Dafari 1966: 325).

Muwaššah poems, instead, present some metrical variations in the *tawšīḥ*. In fact, while *bayt* and *taqfil* are always identical in metre (Dafari 1966: 326), *tawšīḥ* can be patterned in several ways. In the first of the categories listed earlier (that is, when a *muwaššah* poem presents verses in its *bayts* whose hemistichs are of the same metre and equal in length), each of the three verses of the *tawšīḥ* can be patterned as follows:

- reproducing entirely the prosodic structure of one hemistich of the *bayt* (Dafari 1966: 326);
- reproducing partially (especially half of) the prosodic structure of one hemistich of the *bayt* (Dafari 1966: 327);
- presenting a totally different metre from that of the *bayt* (Dafari 1966: 328).

In the second category (namely, where the *bayts* of the poem are composed of hemistichs of the same metre but of unequal length), each of the three verses of the *tawšīḥ* can be patterned as follows:

- reproducing only one of the forms of the hemistichs of the *bayt* (Dafari 1966: 330);
- more rarely, presenting a totally different metre (Dafari 1966: 328)

In the third category (that is, in poems whose *bayts* present the two hemistichs of each verse composed of two different metres), the usual practice is to reproduce one of them, wholly or partly, in each hemistich of the *tawšīḥ* (Dafari 1966: 331-333); less frequently, the *tawšīḥ* can have a different metre (Dafari 1966: 333).

Some points of similarity between the stanzas of *ḥumaynī* poetry and the Swahili stanzaic metres are probably already noticeable. At this point a brief summary of the structures of *utenzi*, *shairi* and *wimbo* may help to reconstruct their links with this Yemeni genre.

2.2. Swahili stanzaic metres

The structure and employment of the three Swahili metres in which we are interested have been widely debated by scholars; here I will just outline the principal prosodic features in order to make my exposition clearer.

It will be useful to give the definition of some elements that are common to all three genres: the first is *mizani* (from the Arabic term *mīzān*, “measure”), which in Swahili prosody refers to syllables.⁹ Swahili classical metres are all based on *urari wa mizani*, namely isosyllabism: each verse of a poem as a definite and not variable number of syllables. The second element to be mentioned here is *kina* “rhyme:” differently from both the Western and the Arabic traditions, in Swahili rhyme is defined as the identity, between two verses or cola, of their last syllables. Words such as *paka* “cat” and *toka* “go out”, for example, rhyme, even if this would not be considered a rhyme in other traditions (such as the Italian one).

The first metre to be examined is *utenzi* (or *utendi*, in Northern Swahili dialects). *Utenzi* compositions are formed by an indefinite number of *baiti* or *ubeti*, a recurrent structure that has been seen by Western scholars as a stanza. A *baiti* is divided into four *kipande* (“piece”, equivalent to lines) of eight *mizani* each. These four *kipande* are usually grouped in two couples called *mshororo*: the first *mshororo* of a *baiti* contains its two first *kipande*, while the second *mshororo* is formed by the last two (Vierke 2011: 25). It is worth noting that the equivalence *baiti* = stanza and *kipande* = verse, even if affirmed today in modern Swahili editions of *utenzi* poems in Roman script (Vierke 2011: 26), was not that of the classical period: in the manuscripts written in *ajami* (Swahili in Arabic script), each *baiti* was written on a single row as a line (in fact, the word itself comes from the Arabic term *bayt* “verse”), and the four *kipande* were considered as four cola of the line, separated by internal caesurae (that are rendered graphically: see Vierke 2014: 327). However, both descriptions are practically equivalent when it comes to prosodic and metrical analysis.¹⁰ A fundamental feature of *utendi* is its rhyme pattern: a,a,a,x/b,b,b,x/.../n,n,n,x. Namely, the first three *kipande* of each *baiti* rhyme with each other, while the final *kipande* of all the *baiti* within the composition share a separate rhyme. Vierke (2014: 329) gives an

⁹ Such is the definition of *mizani* provided by Amri Abedi (1953: 1) in his book *Sheria za Kutunga Mashairi na Diwani ya Amri* (“Rules of composing poems and collection of Amri”), which is still considered a reference book for Swahili prosody: *Kila silabi moja ni mizani moja* (“Each single syllable is a single *mizani*”).

¹⁰ In order to avoid confusion, I shall use here the Swahili terms for the parts of the *utenzi* composition, namely *baiti* (or *ubeti*), *mshororo* and *kipande*. In representing the rhyme schemes of *utenzi* “/” will be used as a separator between *baiti*, while “,” will be employed for separating *kipande*.

example of the *utenzi* stanza (#122 from the *Utendi wa Haudaji* “*Utenzi of the Palanquin*”) written in both scripts (her translation):

	مُحَمَّدٍ مَفْطَأً	كُونُومِ وَنَبِيَّ	مَكَ كِتْ نِمِغِي	أُوْبِي نِمِغِي
<i>Uwambie, nimekuya</i>		<i>a</i>		<i>baiti</i>
<i>Maka kwethu nimengiya</i>		<i>a</i>		
<i>kwa utume wa nabiya,</i>		<i>a</i>		
<i>Muhamad¹¹i mfadhaa</i>		<i>x</i>		

Text 4. *utenzi* stanzaic structure

*Tell them, that I have come
I have entered our home Mecca,
on an errand of the prophet,
the excellent Muhammad*

The graphical layout of the two versions shows the two different conceptions of *utenzi* stanzaic structure.

Shairi is similar to *utenzi* in several aspects. Even if the term is different from *ushairi* “poetry”, it shares with it a common etymology, being derived from the Arabic *šīr* (“poetry” or “poem”), probably because of its great popularity. The base form of a *shairi* stanza is that of a quatrain of verses of sixteen *mizani* separated into two cola of eight syllables by an internal caesura (Knappert 1979: 59). This is the most common form (Shariff 1988: 49), but there are other varieties of *shairi* verses that are not of sixteen syllables, or are not divided internally into two equal halves. Examples are the 6+6 verse (that is, verses whose first colon is of six syllables, as well as the second one), the 4+8 verse and the 6+8 verse (Shariff 1988: 50-51).

The Swahili term for the quatrain is again *ubeti* or *baiti*; each of the four lines of the *ubeti* is a *mshororo* (Shariff 1988: 49). *Shairi* has developed several rhyme patterns (Shariff 1988: 49-50), for example:

¹¹ In some Swahili dialects (such as Kiamu, the dialect of the *Utendi wa Haudaji* – see Vierke 2011: xiii) the graphemes *t* and *d* represent respectively the voiceless and voiced retroflex plosive consonants. Differently from Standard Swahili, they are phonematically distinguished from the correspondent dental plosives, which are usually transliterated in Latin script as *t̪* and *d̪* (Vierke 2011: 478). In Swahili texts, therefore, *t̪* and *d̪* must not be read as interdental fricatives as is the case for the Arabic transliteration adopted here, but as simple dental consonants.

1. ab,ab,ab,bx/cd,cd,cd,dx/.../yz,yz,yz,zx. As with *utenzi*, a final rhyme is shared by all the last *mshororo* of each *baiti*;
2. ab,ab,ab,ab/ab,ab,ab,ab/.../ab,ab,ab,ab;
3. ab,ab,ab,ba for each *baiti*;
4. ab,ab,ab,ab/cb,cb,cb,bb/.../yb,yb,yb,ab. The last *mshororo* of each *baiti* is a refrain (*mkarara* or *kipokeo*) that is repeated throughout the poem.

It is worth noting that in all these rhyme schemes, the last *mshororo* of each *ubeti* are linked together at least by a final rhyme; in rhyme scheme 4. all the last verses are identical, constituting a refrain; there are, however, also cases in which the last verses share only one identical colon (Abedi 1953: 6).

The presence of a refrain can be considered a prestigious stylistic feature, because it has been employed since Muyaka bin Hajj al-Ghassaniy (1776-1840), the father of the genre and one of the most celebrated poets of Swahili classic literature (Abdulaziz 1979: ix). One of his most known and imitated poems is *Kimya* (“Silence”), which reproduces the rhyme scheme 4 (Abdulaziz 1979: 194; his translation):

<i>Kimya mshindo mkuu</i> ¹²	<i>ndivyo wambavyo wavyele,</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>baiti</i>
<i>Kimya chataka k'umbuu</i>	<i>viunoni mtatile,</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>Kimya msikidharau</i>	<i>nami sikidharawile.</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>Kimya kina mambo mbele</i>	<i>tahadharini na kimya!</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>x</i>	
<i>Kimya ni kinga kizushi</i>	<i>kuzukia wale-wale,</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>baiti</i>
<i>Kimya kitazua moshi</i>	<i>mato msiyafumbule.</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>Kimya kina mshawishi</i>	<i>kwa daima na milele;</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>Kimya kina mambo mbele</i>	<i>tahadharini na kimya!</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>x</i>	
<i>Kimya vuani maozi</i>	<i>vuani maṭo muole!</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>baiti</i>
<i>Kimya kitangusha mwanzi</i>	<i>mwendako msjikule;</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>Kimya chatunda p'umuzi</i>	<i>kiumbizi kiumbile.</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>Kimya kina mambo mbele</i>	<i>tahadharini na kimya!</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>x</i>	

Text 1. shairi stanzaic structure

*Silence makes a mighty thump, that's what the elders say.
Silence warns that you tie your girdles
Silence do not belittle it, and I won't ignore it either
Silence presages much, beware of it.*

*Silence is a sudden rocket, appearing unexpectedly.
Silence raises smoke, so that you can't keep your eyes open.
Silence always makes you uneasy.
Silence has big affairs, beware of it.*

*Silence! Open your eyes wide so that you may see...
This silence will spark off a fire, do not be overconfident.
Silence is taking a deep breath, the war game is at its height.*

¹² In syllable counting, the reader must take into consideration that in some cases the consonants *m* and *n* have a vocalic value and thus form an independent syllable: this is the case in this hemistich, which must be scanned as “*ki-myā m-shi-ndo m-ku-u*”. In Abdulaziz’s version, this half-verse is *Kimya kina mshindo mkuu* (literally: “Silence has got a mighty thump”). This form would be prosodically incorrect, since it would count ten syllables instead of eight. I asked the Swahili poet Abdilatif Abdalla about this irregularity on 15/06/2019, and he explained it as a mistake in the editing process, specifying that the correct version is *Kimya mshindo mkuu* (“Silence is a mighty thump”).

Silence has big affairs, beware of it.

Among the stanzaic metres taken into consideration, *wimbo* is probably that with most variations. Shariff (1988: 45) defines this structure on the basis of the only common feature these compositions share: a *wimbo* is a composition whose stanzas (*baiti*, or *ubeti*) are composed of three lines (*mshororo*). *Mshororo* may or may not have internal caesurae. The commonest form of *mshororo* is again that of 8+8 syllables. Other forms are 4+8, 8+4, 6+6, 2+8, 6+4, 8+5 Shariff (1988: 45-47). In *wimbo*, all the first cola of each verse rhyme, as well as the second ones and all the others up to the last. Shariff (1988: 46), gives among various examples one of a *wimbo* with lines of 4 + 8 syllables:

<i>Sina hali</i>	<i>moyo wangu nidengene</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>baiti</i>
<i>Sihimili</i>	<i>wala sipendi mngine</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	
<i>Tafadhali</i>	<i>nakuomba tuonane</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	

Text 2. *wimbo* stanzaic structure

<i>I have no rest</i>	<i>I have cheated my own heart</i>
<i>I can't resist</i>	<i>and I don't love anyone else</i>
<i>Please</i>	<i>I beg you, let us meet</i>

The points of contact between these structures and the forms of *ḥumaynī* poetry are in many cases evident, especially with regard to the stanzaic structures. They are the subject of the next section of this paper.

3. Swahili stanzaic structures as developed from *ḥumaynī* poetry

This section will attempt to demonstrate that the three Swahili stanzaic metres discussed above derive from a decomposition of the *ḥumaynī* structure of *muwaššah*. This process had already started in Yemen, with the form of *mubayyat*, but it seems to have continued independently in the Swahili world. The evolution of the Arabic metres in verse patterns with different numbers of syllables and cola, on the other hand, is a more delicate matter to investigate, and requires a confrontation with the verse forms of *utumbuizo*, which were probably pre-existent.

3.1. The decomposition of *ḥumaynī muwašṣaḥ*

The perception of stanzas in Arabic poetry as a composition of distinct elements is common in the traditions developed from *muwašṣaḥa*. The Andalusian type presented itself as a combination of more elements, namely *ḡuṣn* and *qufl*; the derived, homonymic *ḥumaynī* structure is composed of *bayt*, *tawšīḥ* and *taqfil*. A constant in the history of classical Arabic literature is that innovation in poetry has always been achieved by isolating and recombining the basic elements of the pre-existing form. The pre-Islamic genre of *qaṣīda* was a poem composed of many sections: a *nasīb* (the separation of the poet from his lover, due to the nomadic migration of their tribes), then a *raḥīl* (an account of the poet's travels), a section that can contain several descriptions (*waṣf*) of the desert landscape. Finally, the praise (*madīḥ*) of an eminent person to whom the poem is dedicated concludes the poem (Amaldi 2004: 21-22).¹³ In the Omayyad period, and above all in the Abbasid period, many of these sections developed into independent genres, and love poems (*ḡazal*), descriptions (*waṣf*), and poems on wine (*ḥamriyya*) became independent compositions (Amaldi 2004: 87).

Such re-elaborations also occurred in the stylistic domain, for example in the aforementioned case of *musammaṭ*. Therefore, it is not unexpected that in Yemen *mubayyat* developed as an independent genre from *ḥumaynī muwašṣaḥ*, since *bayt* was originally just the first of the three parts of the *muwašṣaḥ* stanzas. The hypothesis sustained here is that the Swahili genres of *utenzi* and *shairi* are direct developments of the *ḥumaynī mubayyat*. Several considerations serve to support this theory: first of all, the identity of the stanzaic structure of the *mubayyat*'s *bayt* and *shairi*'s and *utenzi*'s *baiti*¹⁴. The simplest form of *mubayyat*, a,a,a,x/b,b,b,x/c,c,c,x/.../z,z,z,x, corresponds exactly to the *utenzi*'s rhyme scheme, while its bipartite form, ab,ab,ab,ab,/cd,cd,cd,ab/.../yz,yz,yz,ab is a possible rhyme scheme for *shairi*. The similarity between these stanzaic structures is evident if one compares the rhyme schemes of the texts numbered 1 and 4 in this paper, on the one hand, and 2 and 5 on the other. The other rhyme

¹³ According to Jacobi (1996: 22-23) two main theories have been advanced to explain the polythematic nature of the *qaṣīda*: the first claims that the original examples from pre-Islamic production have been lost, and only fragments have survived up to our time, while the second assumes that *qaṣīda* pieces were remodelled in the Islamic period in a more regular form. Jacobi (*ivi*) advances a third theory, arguing that the polythematicity of *qaṣīda* is the result of a long process of historical development which was already in an advanced state at the end of the pre-Islamic period.

¹⁴ The term *baiti* is clearly a loanword based on *bayt*; the fact that it possesses a variant, *ubeti*, showing the evolution of the diphthong **ay* to *e*, characteristic of several dialects in the Arabian Peninsula, witnesses to the participation of the vernacular language and literature in this cultural exchange. Concerning the realization of diphthongs in Arabic, Swahili was exposed to a range of different influences from the Peninsula: diphthongs are conserved in the Yemeni dialects such as that of Ṣan'ā' (Watson 2002: 22), but underwent monophthongization in the Omani linguistic area (Edzard 2011: 479). Contacts with the whole southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, involving the territories of present-day Yemen and Oman, took place before the advent of Islām (Collins and Burns 2014: 99), so that influence from a plurality of Arabic dialects is not astonishing.

schemes mentioned for *shairi* were probably local innovations: it is likely that the Swahili poets who received these metres from the Arabic world had a great knowledge of Arabic language and culture; they would have known that these poetic forms had a colloquial and vernacular dimension, and therefore allowed innovations and changes more easily than high poetry.

There are several reasons why we can exclude the idea that these forms came from other traditions that were different from *ḥumaynī* poetry. Knappert (1979: 61), for example, sees in the Persian stanza of *rubāʿī* the origin of *shairi*. However, the only common feature that he sees between *shairi* and *rubāʿī* is that their stanzas are quatrains; but *rubāʿī* verses are not bipartite, nor do they have an internal rhyme, and the final rhyme shared by all the stanzas of the composition is not in the fourth line, but in the third. On the other hand, it is true that the Andalusian *muwaššaha* could present internally divided verses, but this happened most frequently in the *qufl* and *ḥarǧa*; the *ǧuṣn* was sometimes divided into two segments, but not as frequently as in Yemeni *mubayyat* (Meisami and Starkey 1998: 564).

With regard to *wimbo*, I maintain that this stanza of three rhyming verses originated from the *tawšīḥ* of the *ḥumaynī muwaššah*, taken from the original structure as an independent element. The rhyme scheme of *wimbo* is *a,a,a/b,b/b/c,c,c*, which matches perfectly that of *tawšīḥ* (for an example of confrontation, see text 6 and the *tawšīḥ* in text 3). In this case, too, for several reasons I tend to exclude the idea that, despite the etymology of its name, *wimbo* has an origin other than the tradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry, such as a Bantu origin. The fact that *utenzi*, a metre clearly derived from the Arabic tradition and devoted to the narration of Islamic epics, has a Bantu name is in my opinion a good example of how the Swahili poets who received these stanzaic structures were interested in remaking them as a local tradition: etymological considerations, therefore, are surely of use in this investigation, but they cannot be taken as direct evidence. Besides, a stylistic comparison of *wimbo* and *utumbuizo*, the metre of Fumo Liyongo's saga, whose origin probably dates back to before the development of Swahili classical prosody, shows that these two metres are not interrelated. Some of the basic prosodic features of *utumbuizo*, with some exceptions probably due to further modifications, are that *utumbuizo* compositions are never stanzaic and, even when composed of verses with internal caesurae, normally do not present internal rhyme (Miehe *et al.* 2006: 24), in contrast to *wimbo*. *Utumbuizo*, moreover, is not subjected to the constraint of isosyllabism (Miehe *et al.* 2006: 24), while in *wimbo*, as for the other classical metres, all the verses have the same number of syllables and caesurae always fall in the same positions. A third remark concerns the position of the internal caesura in the verses: even if *utumbuizo* lines are not subjected to maintaining a fixed number of syllables, one can observe that in general the verses with one internal caesura have the second colon either of equal length or longer than the first

(as in the poems contained in Miehe *et al.* 2006, *passim*). This can also happen in *wimbo*, but this metre presents cases of verses of 8+4, 8+4 or 6+5 syllables that find no equivalent in *utumbuizo*. It is customary, instead, for *humaynī* poetry to shorten the second colon of the verse to a half, as seen above. Further differences between *utumbuizo* and *wimbo* are strictly in the domain of metrics, and will be discussed in the next subsection, where the metrical patterns employed in the constructions of the verses (*mshororo* for *wimbo* and *shairi*; *kipande* for *utendi*) will be analysed.

3.2. Tetrasyllabic feet: an Arab heritage

An important common point between the three Swahili metres studied here is that their syllabic length is often a multiple of 4. The *kipande* of *utenzi* has 8 syllables, while the *shairi* presents a redoubled form of the *kipande* of the *utenzi* itself, so that they are both based on the number four (in the line as whole and in each colon); in the case of *wimbo*, not only the length of the verse is a multiple of four, but also the caesura falls in a position that strengthens this division, forming an 8+4 or 8+4 syllable structure. It is true that each of these stanzaic metres allows variations which do not depend on the number four as a multiple: in these cases, one can observe the pre-eminence of the number six in syllable counting. These minority cases are discussed below.

In the survey of the metres of *humaynī* poetry in the previous section, we noted that, of all the feet that compose them, 60% are trisyllabic, while 34% is tetrasyllabic. And of the 35 metres listed, 4 are entirely composed of tetrasyllabic feet, while 10 have only trisyllabic feet. Unlike the patterns with quantitative schemes, which are not reproducible in Swahili since it does not distinguish between short and long vowels, the foot was in all likelihood an easily receivable element for Swahili poets at the beginning of the classical period.

In her work on *utenzi*, Vierke (2011: 28-32) shows that the eight-syllable structure of the *kipande* of *utenzi* can be split into two segments, or feet, depending on the position of the two principal stresses in the verse. Since in Swahili stress always occurs on the penultimate syllable, the second of the two principal stresses of a *kipande* always falls on its seventh syllable, which must be the stressed syllable of the last word; the metrical effect of this stress, therefore, is to generate a rhythmic core formed by the last two syllables of the *kipande*, namely the seventh, stressed, and the eighth, unstressed. The other principal stress of the *kipande*, the first one, has a variable position, as it may fall on any syllable from

the first to the fifth of the *kipande*, forming another rhythmic core, built on a stressed syllable and the following unstressed one. These combinations are possible¹⁵:

$\Sigma \sigma \sigma \sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma$	<i>póza la nafusi yángu</i>
$\sigma \Sigma \sigma \sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma$	<i>Kitúzo cha maṭo yángu</i>
$\sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma \sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma$	<i>nambiáni, nambiáni</i>
$\sigma \sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma$	<i>ya mfalúme mkúu</i>
$\sigma \sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma$	<i>kuṭowakhalífu móya</i>

Thus, in any *kipande* of *utenzi* we can identify two feet, of variable length (but always such that their total length is eight syllables), each ending with a rhythmic core built on the sequence of a stressed syllable and the unstressed one which follows.

Vierke (2011: 35) goes on to make an important remark: even if all the previous listed forms are possible and acceptable for a *kipande*, the ideal prosodic pattern in *utenzi* is that of the four-syllable foot ($\sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma | \sigma \sigma \Sigma \sigma$), because of its symmetry and balance. She defines it the *Grenzschema* of *utenzi* lines.

The absence of this *Grenzschema* in *utumbuizo* compositions is in my opinion an interesting element of comparison. In a forthcoming paper on the prosodic patterns of *utumbuizo*, I have noted that the foot described by Vierke, based on a rhythmic core which involves its two last syllables, is also the prosodic base of the *utumbuizo* verse and cola, with the fundamental difference that *utumbuizo* is constrained neither to isosyllabism nor to the fixed number of two feet per verse. I have come to this conclusion by analysing the eighteen compositions included in the work *Nyimbo za Liyongo* (Miehe *et al.* 2006), which is one of the richest collections of *utumbuizo*, and admirable for its detailed philological criticism of the texts. It is worth noting that, after scanning the verses of these compositions to identify their rhythmic cores and feet, we see that the majority of them are of four and three syllables. In particular, if we group all the feet by their syllabic length, we obtain these numbers:

¹⁵ In the following schema, the lower-case sigma “σ” indicates an unstressed syllable, and the upper-case correspondent “Σ” a stressed one; the vertical slash “|” indicates a boundary between feet; the letters in bold are the syllables that form the rhythmic core. The examples are from Vierke (2011: 28-32).

tetrasyllabic feet:	553
trisyllabic feet:	542
bisyllabic feet:	299
pentasyllabic feet:	110

Thus, feet of three and four syllables are the most frequent, similar to *ḥumaynī* poetry. However, it is rare in *utumbuizo* for a colon or verse to be entirely formed by tetrasyllabic feet: the only example of this is the fragmentary poem *Uṭumbuizo wa Kumwawia Liyongo* (Miehe *et al.* 2006: 46), which contains only two verses of 8 + 8 syllables and a third one of 916. In all the poems there are only 42 occurrences of two tetrasyllabic feet next to each other (with the exception of the aforementioned composition *Uṭumbuizo wa Kumwawia Liyongo*, all of them are part of verses or cola of more than two feet). On the other hand, there are 252 occurrences of two trisyllabic feet next to each other, among which 124 pairs form independent cola. It is thus clear that verses formed by adjacent tetrasyllabic feet were not the norm in the Swahili pre-classical literary tradition that is represented by *utumbuizo*, differently from the case of Arabic literature. Metres with tetrasyllabic feet can be found not only in the *ḥumaynī* prosodic tradition, but also in classical literature: many popular metres, such as *rağaz* and *ramal*, are composed of tetrasyllabic feet. *Rağaz* in particular, known in the pre-Islamic period as a metre for popular poetry, had gained itself a higher position in the Omayyad and Abbasid periods, being used for didactic poems, such as Ibn Mālik's (d. 1274) Arabic grammar, the *Alfiyya* (Amaldi 2004: 123); in all likelihood the intellectual class of Swahili poets that was entering into contact with the Islamic world at the beginning of the classical period knew these works and studied them. It is therefore probable that the adoption of a metric pattern based on tetrasyllabic feet for the new classical metres of *utenzi*, *shairi* and *wimbo* was not due to the adoption of a particular metre (that was impossible to reproduce in Swahili, due to the absence of distinction between long and short vowels), but to perception of the metric patterns based on tetrasyllabic feet as having an Arabic "flavour." The *Grenzschema* of *utenzi* therefore, and the fact that the cola of *shairi* and *wimbo* lines are multiples of 4, are the historical consequence of an original perception of these metres as being composed of tetrasyllabic groups. The

¹⁶ Two other cases are the poems *Uṭumbuizo wa Dhiki* (Miehe *et al.* 2006: 34) and *Uṭumbuizo wa Kumwongo Mtoto* (Miehe *et al.* 2006: 44), which present verses of three cola each, where the second one is composed of just one foot of four syllables. In my forthcoming study of the prosody of *utumbuizo*, I argue that that colon, which is shown as such in the graphical layout of the poems, is actually the first foot of the original second colon of the verse (which grouped what in the graphical layout are two different cola). I have therefore not taken these two poems into account here.

fact that, in the less frequent variants of these metres, cola of 6 syllables are pre-eminent, probably indicates that in the past other compromises between the Arabic and the Swahili traditions were attempted, such as the usage of six-syllable cola that can be scanned as a sequence of two trisyllabic feet (or of a bisyllabic foot and a tetrasyllabic one), being closer to the *utumbuizo*, together with the Arabic rhyme schemes. The historical datum is thus that, in the classical period of Swahili literature, the tetrasyllabic foot finally became the mainstream option.

4. Conclusion

In this study, the structure of Swahili “stanzaic metres,” namely metres that are characterized both by a definite metric pattern and a fixed rhyme pattern, are analysed, with the aim of reconstructing their historical development. In particular, the three metres of *utenzi*, *shairi* and *wimbo* have been taken into consideration. The starting assumption is that such metres derive from an Arabic prototype, linked to the literary tradition of Andalusian *muwaššaha*, which spread all over the Arabic world. More specifically, this prototype has been identified in the Yemeni tradition of *ḥumaynī* poetry, derived from *muwaššaha*, which, among its different stanzaic structures, developed some that were practically identical to the Swahili *utenzi* and *shairi*. I have demonstrated that the stanzaic structure of *wimbo*, far from being of Bantu origin, is also derived from this literary tradition.

Beside the stanzaic structures and rhyme schemes, an element inherited from Arabic literature (in this case including not only *ḥumaynī* poetry, but also, in all likelihood, other literary dimensions, such as poetry in Classical Arabic) is the verse composed of tetrasyllabic feet. These feet, despite being abundant in *utumbuizo* production, rarely occurred next to each other, and were almost never used alone to build an entire verse or colon. The stanzaic metres of *utenzi*, *shairi* and *wimbo* present a contrasting situation, since their internal division into cola whose syllabic lengths are multiples of 4 suggest that they were originally thought as of sequences of tetrasyllabic feet. The explanation that has been advanced here is that this recurrence of tetrasyllabic feet is not a direct heritage from a particular Arabic metre, but the reproduction of a structural type that was perceived as generically and exotically Arabic.

In conclusion, we can say that these genres, especially in prosody, show several levels of compromise with the prosody of *utumbuizo*, suggesting that the Arabic poetic forms were received in East Africa by a class of literates already existent and developed, with great expertise in their own poetic tradition. This class of poets must necessarily have had a minimal theoretical training, since they must have been able to scan the verses they composed into prosodic feet, in order to adapt them to the new structure. So, for them the structure of the poem was independent of, or at least not totally

dependent on, performance, which, as in the case of *utumbuizo*, we can assume was musical (Miehe *et al.* 2006: 24): the development of *utenzi*, *shairi* and *wimbo*, then, was the result of an active process of hybridization of Swahili and Arabic traditions, performed by an intellectual class conscious of its literary heritage.

Appendix: the most popular metres in *ḥumaynī* poetry (from Dafari 1966: 342-366)

In the following table I italicize only the names of metres that are not among the fifteen described by al-Ḥalīl. When the same verse has several variants, its name is written with a different number for each variant.

<i>bālbāl</i>	– U – – U – – – U – – U – – U – – – U –
<i>basīṭ-1</i> ¹⁷	– – U – – U – U – – – – U – – U – U – –
<i>basīṭ-2</i>	– – U – – U – – – U – – U –
<i>mustaṭīl-1</i>	U – – – U – – U – U – – – U – – U –
<i>mustaṭīl-2</i>	U – – – U – – U – – – U – –
<i>mumtadd</i>	– U – – U – – – U – – U – –
<i>hazaġ-1</i>	U – – – U – – – U – – U – – – U – – – U – –
<i>hazaġ-2</i>	U – – – U – – – U – – – U – – –
<i>mustadrak</i>	– U – – U – U – – – U – – U – U – –
<i>raġaz-1</i>	– – U – – – U – – – – – – U – – – U – – – –
<i>raġaz-2</i>	– – U – – – U – U – – – – U – – – U – U – –
<i>raġaz-3</i>	– – U – – – U – – – U – – – U –
<i>raġaz-4</i>	– – U – U – – – – U – U – –
<i>mudrak-1</i>	– U – – U – – U – – – U – – U – – U – – U – – – U –
<i>mudrak-2</i>	– U – – U – – U – U – – – U – – U – – U – U – –

¹⁷ This particular form of *basīṭ*, not envisaged in the classical Ḥalīlian system, is called *muḥallaʿ al-basīṭ* or *basīṭ makhbūl*, and was very popular in Andalusian *muwašṣahāt*. Alternative last feet for the cola of this metre are U – or U – – – (Dafari 1966: 344-345).

<i>al-ṭawīl</i>	U – – U – – – U – – U – – –
<i>mustaṭrad</i>	– U – – U – U – – – – U – – U – U – – –
<i>sarīḥ</i>	– – U – – – U – – U – – – U – – – U – – U –
<i>ramal-1</i>	– U – – – U – – – U – – U – – – U – – – U –
<i>ramal-2</i>	– U – – – U – – – U – – – U – –
<i>ramal-3</i>	– U – – – U – – U – – – U –
<i>duwayni</i>	– – U – – U – – – – – U – – U – – –
<i>munbaṣiṭ-1</i>	– U – – – U – – U – – U – – – U – – U –
<i>munbaṣiṭ-2</i>	– U – – – U – – U – – – U –
<i>munbaṣiṭ-3</i>	– U – U – – – U – U – –
<i>muḡtaṭṭ</i>	– – U – – U – –
<i>mutaqārib-1</i>	U – – U – – U – – U – – U – – U – – U – – U – –
<i>mutaqārib-2</i>	U – – U – – U – – U – – U – – U – –
<i>mutaqārib-3</i>	U – – U – – – U – – U – – –
<i>mutaqārib-2</i>	U – – U – – U – – U – –
<i>murtaḡaz-1</i>	– – – U – – U – – – – – U – – U – –
<i>murtaḡaz-2</i>	– – – U – – – – – U – –
<i>murtaḡaz-3</i>	– – – U – – – – U –
<i>mutadārik-1</i>	– U – – U – – U – – U – – U – – U –
<i>mutadārik-2</i>	– U – – U – – U – – U –

References

- Abdulaziz, Mohamed Hassan. 1979. *Muyaka. Swahili popular poetry*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.
- Abedi, Kaluta Amri. 1953. *Sheria za kutunga mashairi na Diwani ya Amri*. Dar es Salaam: Eagle Press.
- Abu Haidar, Jareer Amin. 2001. *Hispano-Arabic Literature and the Early Provençal Lyrics*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Amaldi, Daniela. 2004. *Storia della letteratura araba classica*. Bologna: Zanichelli.

- Bertoncini-Zúbková, Elena. 2000. *Poesia Classica Swahili*. Napoli, unpublished ms.
- Capezio, Oriana. 2013. *La metrica araba. Studio della tradizione antica*. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari.
- Collins, Robert O. and James M. Burns. 2014. "East Africa and the Indian Ocean World". In: *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, edited by Robert O. Collins and James M. Burns, 96-113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Corriente, Francisco. 1982. "The Metres of the Muwaššah, an Andalusian Adaptation of 'Arūḍ: A Bridging Hypothesis." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13: 76-82.
- Dafari, Ja'far Abduh. 1966. *Ḥumaynī poetry in South Arabia*. PhD Thesis presented at the University of London.
- Dufour, Julien. 2012. "«J'ai oui chanter l'oiseau»: Musique, chant, danse et poésie ḥumaynī." *Quaderni di studi Arabi. Nuova Serie* 7: 11-46.
- Edzard, Lutz. 2011. "Omani Arabic." In: *The Encyclopedia of Arabic language and linguistics*, vol. 3, edited by Kees Versteegh et al., 478-491. Leiden: Brill.
- Ferrando, Ignacio. 1999. "Andalusi musammaṭ. Some remarks on its stanzaic and metrical structure." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 30: 78-89.
- Ġānim, Muḥammad 'Abduh. 1987. *Ši'r al-ġinā' al-šan'ānī*. Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwdah.
- García, Gomez. 1975 [1956]. *Las Jarchas romances de la serie árabe en su marco*. Barcelona: Seix Barral.
- Jacobi, Renate. 1996. "The origins of the Qasida form." In: *Qasida poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa. Volume one: classical traditions and modern meanings*, edited by Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, 21-34. Leiden: Brill.
- Knappert, Jan. 1979. *Four centuries of Swahili verse*. London: Heinemann.
- Meisami, Julie Scott and Paul Starkey (eds.). 1998. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature. Volume 2, K-Z*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Menocal, María Rosa et al. 2006. *The literature of Al-Andalus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miehe, Gudrun et al. 2006. *Nyimbo za Liyongo. Poems attributed to Fumo Liyongo*. Dar es Salaam: TUKI.
- Rosen, Tova. 2000. "The Muwashshah." In: *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, edited by María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells, 165-189. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shariff, Ibrahim Noor. 1988. "Tungo zetu. Msingi wa mashairi na tungo nyinginezo." Trenton: The Red Sea Press.
- Vierke, Clarissa. 2011. *On the Poetics of the Utendi*. Berlin: Lit Verlag.
- Vierke, Clarissa. 2014. "Akhi patia kalamu: Writing Swahili poetry in Arabic script." In: *The Arabic script in Africa*, edited by Meikal Mumin and Kees Versteegh, 319-339. Leiden: Brill.
- Wagner, Mark S. 2009. *Like Joseph in Beauty. Yemeni vernacular poetry and Arab-Jewish symbiosis*. Leiden: Brill.
- Zwarties, Otto. 1997. *Love songs from al-Andalus: History, Structure, and Meaning of the Kharja*. Leiden: Brill.

Emiliano Minerba graduated at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” and is currently working at his PhD research on the comparative historical analysis of Swahili and Wolof metrical systems. Besides Swahili and Wolof prosodies and classical literatures, his other research interests are modern Swahili literature, particularly theatre.
He can be reached at: emi.nerba@gmail.com