

SHAIRI LA WASHONA-NGUO WA MAMBASA  
"The tailors of Mombasa"  
A nineteenth century satire from central Swahili-land  
by  
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MUKHTASARI

Shairi la washona-nguo wa Mambasa, shairi lililo tamu kabisa, ni moja katika mashairi miya kadha wa kadha aliyokusanya Bwana Tela kwa Mwalimu Sikujuwa mwisho wa karne tilitashara ya hijri (karne ya tishatashara ya miladi). Zilipotungwa nyimbo hizi, Mambasa kulikuwa na mafundi wa kiSawahili wa kulla namna kwa ungi - washona-viatu, wahunzi, wawashi, na haswa washona-k'anzu. Washoni waliyotajwa na Ali wa Udi katika beti hizi walikuwa wakijuwana na walikuwa ni masahibu wapendanao. Ukisoma beti hizi utaona kuwa wakaṭi huu Mambasa kulikuwa na washona-k'anzu kama thalathini hivi. Leo, ingawa washoni wa nguo wako tele Mambasa, washoni wa kiSawahili wanmalizika.

INTRODUCTION

This lively poem, one of several hundred collected in Mombasa at the end of the nineteenth century by W.E. TAYLOR thanks to Mwalimu SIKUJUWA bin ABDALLAH al-BATAWI (Frankl, 1993), is preserved in Volume III of the Taylor Papers, now in the library of the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS) in London. It consists of two versions - both in Arabic script (SOAS MS 47754); the first (Section X, page 4) is probably in the hand of ABDALLAH bin RASHID and has fifteen stanzas, while the second (Section Z, page 161) is in the hand of Mwalimu SIKUJUWA (one of TAYLOR's two Swahili teachers) and has twenty-one stanzas. The entire text of version X is to be found in Z, although not in the same order. Version Z has thus six additional stanzas, and we have had no hesitation in selecting it as the text for this article (the manuscript having been most probably commissioned by TAYLOR).

Nothing is known about ALI wa UDI, the author of the poem (UDI may well be the hypocoristic form of Mahmudi). Apart from this solitary item his work does not appear in archival material, nor in printed books, nor is anything recalled in the oral tradition. The late Shaykh MBARAK ALI HINAWY (obit Mombasa 1379/1959) went to immense lengths to glean facts regarding the Swahili poets, so it is possible that he had information about ALI wa UDI. Shaykh MBARAK handed over these precious notes (or a large part of them) to WILLIAM HICHENS). Subsequently they were acquired by the SOAS library but are now, along with other Swahili archival material, described as "missing" ("Notes on people named in Swahili literature" SOAS MS 54342).

The tailors mentioned in the poem would have known one another and been friends with one another. Swahili Mombasa was then geographically compact and all, adults and children, were known to all. Indeed the term "Swahili Mombasa" is tautologous, for the nineteenth century town was overwhelmingly Swahili - a century later the *waMiji*, the indigenous twelve Swahili tribes of Mombasa, have disappeared as a structured, cohesive community. A century ago the town had Swahili craftsmen in plenty: masons, blacksmiths, sandal-makers and, of course, tailors - according to the text of the poem Mombasa had more than thirty Swahili tailors. Virtually every Swahili male in Mombasa would then have possessed at least one *k'anzu*, some would have had many more and all would have been tailored by hand (a *k'anzu* is a long-sleeved tunic made of thin calico, usually white, and reaching from the neck to the ankles - varieties of this garment are worn in most parts of Arabia and North Africa). Today, approaching the end of the twentieth century, the *k'anzu* is infrequently worn in Mombasa, except during the month of Ramadhan, during the two great annual Islamic feasts, and during prayers (especially mid-day prayer on Fridays). Today, on the eve of the twenty-first century, Mombasa still has innumerable tailors, but Swahili tailors have all but vanished from the town.

## SHAIRI LA WASHONA-NGUO WA MAMBASA

The order of stanzas is as in version Z [figures within square brackets refer to stanzas in version X].

- |      |                         |                          |
|------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1    | enyi mushonao nguo      | * ujira upunguzeni       |
| [1]  | musitake visutuo        | * yamepita [kwa] zamani  |
|      | tutaandika mifuo        | * tusegeme viwandani     |
|      | kwa ndaa ilo mjini      | * p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo |
| 2    | Khamisi bin Salimu      | * ndiye mkuu kiwanda     |
| [2]  | bafuta hii ni ngumu     | * itakuumiza vyanda      |
|      | waMiji wakushutumumu    | * ata mpeo na inda       |
|      | nt'i usijeivunda        | * p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo |
| 3    | Alii bin Rashidi        | * na Khamisi mkubwayo    |
| [-]  | ndiyo washoni wa jadi   | * ela mutenda siyo       |
|      | ujira hauna budi        | * mwataka na visutiyo    |
|      | atani muliyo nayo       | * p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo |
| 4    | Nagi na Ufunguo         | * na Kombo wa Si-Mtovu   |
| [7]  | ndiyo washoni kikao     | * hawaoni maumivu        |
|      | hushika p'anga na ngao  | * yadhihiripo maovu      |
|      | waume pindani mbavu     | * p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo |
| 5    | Khamisi Juge rijali     | * hiwa na yangu simpi    |
| [6]  | himpa k'anzu kamili     | * ghalibu hunipa fupi    |
|      | tena ametanakali        | * simjuwi akaapi         |
|      | leo ni siku ya ngapi    | * p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo |
| 6    | Mwinyi Kombo wa Mwijuma | * mara hino ni ya pili   |
| [10] | hushona k'anzu nzima    | * akapawa pesa mbili     |
|      | ndaa ilipomuuma         | * aliruk'wa na akili     |
|      | achamba hili na hili    | * p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo |

- |            |  |  |
|------------|--|--|
| 7<br>[11]  | kuna na Mwinyi Hamadi<br>jirani na bin Dadi<br>apatacho huhimidi<br>asiye akenda deni      | * yuwashona Kibok'oni<br>* mkizitinda mpeni<br>* hata tungi mkononi<br>* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo      |
| 8<br>[9]   | na Bwana 'I-Farisi<br>p'ote hazitii kasi<br>natushonee rahisi<br>yuwajuwa kuna ndaa        | * ni mshoni wa mtaa<br>* wat'u wot'e wamwambaa<br>* atapata manufaa<br>* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo      |
| 9<br>[-]   | Muhammadi wa Maraha<br>kwenu twataka samaha<br>hamushoni kwa furaha<br>mwaona kuna kisasa  | * na Bwana Nasiri Dusa<br>* mwatushoneya bakhasa<br>* kazi mwazikosakosa<br>* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo |
| 10<br>[15] | Bwana Abdallah Kheri<br>k'anzu k'ayendi shahari<br>mikono haina bari<br>takhafifu twaitaka | * yuwashona kwa kikaka<br>* isije ikafumuka<br>* kwa kutumiya sadaka<br>* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo     |
| 11<br>[-]  | Saidi wa Muhammadi<br>wamesimika juhudi<br>wataukidhi muradi<br>nt'i iwele majonzi         | * na Abdalazizi<br>* kuzitoronya darizi<br>* ujira hawapunguzi<br>* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo           |
| 12<br>[-]  | Kwale na yeye "Kishingo"<br>k'awazitii vifungo<br>wamekithiri uwongo<br>punguzani usingizi | * wamejalumu kazi<br>* wala ziki na vitanzi<br>* kwa kushika utembezi<br>* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo    |

- 13 Jumaa bin Salimi \* Alii na Muhammadi  
 [12] Abdallah na Maalimu \* na Khamisi "Maridadi"  
 nao wapeni salamu \* kushona ni masitadi  
 k'anzu kwao k'azirudi \* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo
- 14 Mwinyi Haji na Mwichande \* washoni wetu wagizi  
 [-] mwenye k'anzuye natunde \* k'awashoni kwa ajizi  
 musitaradhie k'ande \* yale nda jana na juzi  
 nt'i iwele simanzi \* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo
- 15 Bwana Alii Muiji \* na Alii mNgazija  
 [-] amkani kwa wakati \* atani kujikongoja  
 mwaona hali ya nt'i \* siombe kukosa haja  
 natujifunge mikaja \* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo
- 16 BaNgome na BaMbwana \* wapapo msikitini  
 [5] tukipita twawaona \* nyuso wazinika t'ini  
 wanajipinda kushona \* mkono kwenda kanwani  
 ujira upunguzeni \* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo
- 17 Bwana Idi t'akwambiya \* wewe na Bwana Huseni  
 [13] mbiyu munaisikiya \* Allah Allah ishikeni  
 roboo zina udhiya \* tuoneeni imani  
 ujira upunguzeni \* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo
- 18 na Mwijaa wa BaHindi \* na mwanawe Bwana Shibu  
 [14] wayapigapo mabandi \* hushikiza kwa kulabu  
 wamekithiri ufundi \* wala hawana jawabu  
 nt'i imengiya tabu \* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| 19  | Tawfiqi na Bwana Kheri  | * na Selemani Kisiwa   |
| [8] | wanunuapo hariri<br>hukupijiya uk'ari<br>nao nt'i waiuwe      | * ukisimama ni daawa<br>* na maṭo wakakodowa<br>* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo       |
| 20  | Bwana Hamadi wa Bai   | * na BaSaidi "Kidezi"  |
| [4] | ndiyo waliyojidai<br>walipo k'awanyamai<br>ongezani wanafunzi | * kuzitiya shingo kazi<br>* kwa nyimbo na tumbuizi<br>* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo |
| 21  | Babu na Bwana Mataka  | * na Abdallah BaHadira   |
| [3] | hao ni watega nyoka<br>wamezoweya viraka<br>nawapunguze ujira | * kushona si maskhara<br>* nguo zikenda mpera<br>* p'ishi t'atu kwa roboo      |

## An English Translation

1 [1] O tailors, reduce your charges; don't ask for snacks [from your customers], [such customs] are dead and gone; we shall draw boundary lines [on the ground], and we [your customers] shall not come anywhere near your workshops; for there is famine in the town - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

2 [2] Khamisi bin Salimu is the foreman of the workshop; this cotton cloth is hard, it will hurt your fingers [if you sew it]; the people of Mombasa reproach you, stop behaving in this disgraceful and tiresome way; may you not bring about the destruction of Mombasa - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

3 [-] Ali bin Rashidi and Khamisi your elder brother, you are tailors and descendants of tailors, but what both of you are doing is improper; charges are inescapable, [yet] you want snacks [in addition to payment]; stop it - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

4 [7] Nagi and Ufunguo and Kombo wa Si-Mtovu are the tailors who sit as a group [all day], not feeling cramped; they brandish swords and shields when evil appears; [O customers] stiffen your sinews - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

5 [6] Khamisi Juge is a cunning man, if I have my [*k'anzu*] I shall not give it to him; if I give him [cloth] to make up an entire *k'anzu*, as a rule when he returns it [made up] it will be short; furthermore he has disappeared and I don't know where he lives; how many days is it since I last saw him? Three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

6 [10] This is now the second time that [it has happened to] Mwinyi Kombo wa Mwijuma; he makes an entire *k'anzu* but is only given two copper coins; when racked by hunger pangs he became mad; he kept saying different things - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

7 [11] There is someone else, Mwinyi Hamadi, he sews at Kibok'oni and is one of bin Dadi's neighbours, if you buy [material to be made up as a *k'anzu*] give it to him; whatever he gets [however superfluous], even if it is a large water-pot, he thanks God; may he not fall into debt - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

8 [9] Bwana al-Farsi is the tailor of the neighbourhood; he doesn't twist the twine together firmly enough, [so] every [potential customer] avoids him; let him sew for us at cheaper rates which will bring him some gain; he knows that there is famine - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

9 [-] Muhammadi wa Maraha and Bwana Nasiri Dusa, we want your forgiveness [for what we are about to say], your sewing for us is extremely bad; you are not sewing with enthusiasm, your work is full of faults; you can see see how things are today - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

10 [15] Bwana Abdallah Kheri sews in a hurry; a *k'anzu* [sewn by him] does not last a month before it comes apart [at the seams]; his arms have no stamina because he lives on [food provided as] charity; we want a reduction in [his] fees - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

11 [-] Saidi wa Muhammadi and Abdalazizi have set to work with determination to sew on the braid in a straight line; they will get what they want, they will not reduce their charges; Mombasa has become sad - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

12 [-] Kwale and "Kishingo" have learnt how to tailor; they put on neither buttons, nor braid, nor loops; they have become shameless liars, because they go strolling [around the town]; don't sleep so much - three measures of grain now cost a shilling!

13 [12] Give Jumaa bin Salimu, Ali and Muhammadi, Abdallah, Maalimu and Khamisi the Dandy [our] greetings, sewing is work for real craftsmen; their *k'anzus* are not brought back [for adjustments] - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

14 [-] Our Mwinyi Haji and Mwichande are imitators; let every one who has [left] a *k'anzu* [with them] retrieve it; they do not sew because they are lazy; you [tailors] are not to ask for supplies of food, such [customs] have passed away; Mombasa has become sorrowful - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

15 [-] Bwana Ali "Muiti" and Ali mNgazija, get up in time! Stop walking like old men! You can see the [wretched] state Mombasa is in, to lack the necessities of life is a grim prospect; let us tighten our belts - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

16 [5] BaNgome and are always there at the mosque; when we pass by we see them with their heads bent [over their work]; they exert themselves in order to obtain their daily bread; reduce your charges- three measures of grain now cost one shilling!



17 [13] Bwana Idi, I'm going to tell you [something], you and Bwana Huseni; you have heard the town-crier, so don't forget to comply with [his announcement]; shillings are in short supply, [so] be kind to us; reduce your charges - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

18 [14] When Mwijaa wa BaHindi and Bwana Shibu's son run a hem they steady the work with hooks; adding [such] techniques [to their craftsmanship] does not bring any benefit; there is famine in Mombasa - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

19 [8] If you stop when Tawfiki, Bwana Kheri and Selemani Kisiwa are buying silk, they will quarrel with you; [and] glare at you while speaking abruptly; they are killing Mombasa - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

20 [4] Bwana Hamadi wa Bai and BaSaidi "Kidezi" are the ones who have made an attempt at ornamental stitching around the k'anzu necks; there where the group sit they are never silent, singing songs while they work; increase [the number of your] apprentices - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

21 [3] Babu and Bwana Mataka and Abdallah BaHadira were not born to sew k'anzus, sewing is not a simple task; what they are good at is sewing on patches when the clothes have become tattered; let them reduce their charges - three measures of grain now cost one shilling!

## NOTES

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Unless otherwise stated the Swahili of this article is in *kiMvita*, the Swahili of Mombasa.

## STANZA 1

1a enyi: O ye ..., a contraction of *ee nyinyi*; the singular is *ewe*, i.e. *ee wewe*.

1a [washona] *nguo*: tailors

1b *ujira*: the charges demanded by a craftsman for his labours.

2a *visuṭuo*: snacks; food which is given to labourers during or after work in order to sustain and encourage them (Krapf, 1882: 157).

2b [mambo] *yamepita*: the *ya-* refers to *mambo* which is understood.

3a *mifuo*: -*piga mifuo* draw lines, on the ground or on the sand; the Arabic-derived word *mistari* implies lines drawn on paper.

*tusegeme*: i.e. *tusiegeme*, which has one syllable too many for the metre; the Arabic-derived version would be *tusikaribie*.

4b *p'ishi*: a dry goods measure, e.g. grain, equal to two *visaga* or four *vibaba*.

*roboo*: a quarter of a rupee. In 1921 the rupee was finally withdrawn from circulation in East Africa, having been replaced by the East African shilling, which was worth a quarter of a rupee. Thus the translation "one shilling" is anachronistic, for the poem was composed some thirty or forty years before the introduction of that coin.

## STANZA 2

1b *kiwanda*: the end-rhyme is in *-da* so that, strictly speaking, *kiwanda* (ending in *-da*) is technically defective.

2a *bafuṭa*: cotton cloth from India, used for making *k'anzus*, or shrouds.

2b *vyanda*: either fingers or toes; in the context "fingers" are meant; *vyanda* is heard in northern and central Swahili, *vidole* in central and southern.

3a *waMiji*: members of Mombasa's twelve Swahili tribes; in Ali wa Udi's time the *waMiji* and other Swahili-speaking Muslims comprised almost the entire population of the town.

3b *mpeo*: disgrace; the most comprehensive of all the Swahili lexicons avers that this rare word derives from the Comoro Islands (Sacleux, 1939: 585).

4a *nt'i*: the town [of Mombasa].

usijeivunda: may you not come to destroy it (i.e. Mombasa). Such idiomatic usage of auxiliary verbs, *usije-ivunda*, has been ignored by most grammarians and by the standardisers - for all that, the usage is authentic. It seems that this negative use of *-ja* "come" (and of *-enda* "go") suggests that the idea expressed (here, the destruction of Mombasa) is undesirable.

### STANZA 3

2a jaḡi: descendants; the meaning of this Arabic-derived word differs from the Arabic *jaḡd* "grandfather".

3b visuṭiyo: see Stanza 1, 2a.

### STANZA 4

Si-Mṭovu: this name derives from the proverb *mtegemeya Mngu si mṭovu* "the person who depends upon God will not want".

mbavu: literally "sides".

### STANZA 5

1a rijali: a man, but connoting "a cunning man"; a word of Arabic origin, derived through the colloquial Hadhrami form *riḡāl* but without the doubled second consonant.

1b hiwa na: if I have - this form is now obsolete, having been superseded by *nkiwa*; *hiwa* (without *na*) "if I am".

yangu: my [*k'anzu*] - *k'anzu* is understood.

*k'anzu*: the aspiration (a substitute for an effaced "n", i.e. *nkanzu*) signals that Swahili assigns the word to the "N Class", Class 9/10; *kanzu* (without the aspiration, with the noun assigned to Class 5) implies "a large *k'anzu*".

The following four suggestions have been made concerning the derivation of this word:

i from the Arabic *kisa'* "clothing" (see under *khansu* in: *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition 1989).

ii from the Arabic *qandūra* "longue chemise des Arabes" (Sacleux, 1939: 328). Sacleux also draws attention to the French word *canzou* "a kind of blouse", etymology unknown; admitted by the Académie Française in 1835, the word was probably imported after the French conquest of Algeria in 1830.

iii from the Arabic *qamīṣ* c.f. French *chemise* (Johnson, 1939: 173).

iv from the Portuguese *casula* "a chasuble" (in a pencilled note by Shaykh Mbarak Ali Hinawy, dated 1932)

2b In order that he be not led into temptation "the tailor in the East [e.g. Khamisi wa Juge] is made to cut out the cloth in the presence of its owner to prevent 'cabbaging'" (Burton, 1885, I, 321, footnote 3) The word "cabbaging" is used of a tailor appropriating part of the cloth given to him to make up into garments.

3a *ametanakali*: he disappeared; the Arabic form of the verb means to move or to transfer from one place to another.

3b *akaapi* (i.e. *akaa wapi*): where he lives; the verbal stem *-kaa* means both "sit" and also "live" in the sense of "reside"; standardised Swahili uses *-ishi* for "live" as in "where does he live?", but this is merely an English calque; first-language speakers of Swahili employ *-ishi* as the antonym of *-fa* "die".

## STANZA 6

1a *Mwijuma*: this remains a common Swahili name in the Changamwe area of Mombasa

1b *hino*: the *-no* suffix (e.g. *hilino*, *huyuno*, *hichino*) is now obsolete in *kiMvita*, the Swahili speech of Mombasa

2b *pesa mbili*: two copper coins; derived from Hindi *paisa* (1 *pesa* was the equivalent of 2 cents, 2 *pesa* of three cents).

The *pesa* was "a small copper coin of India, since 1845 introduced to the Suahili coast" (Krapf, 1882: 302). When Ali wa Udi composed his poem, in the reign of Sayyid Barghash bin Sultan, Swahili-land had its own copper currency (struck in England at the Birmingham mint) with a 1-*pesa* coin issued in 1299/1882, and a second issue in 1304/1887. The Barghash *pesa* circulated in Mombasa until well into the twentieth century.

4a *achamba* (i.e. *akiamba*): he said.

4a *hili na hili*: this [thing] and that - *neni* or *jambo* is understood.

## STANZA 7

1a *kuna na*: there is [someone else] - *mt'u mwingine* is understood.

1b *Kibok'oni*: a district with the Kavani area of Mombasa, in the vicinity of the maHuru mosque.

2a *Dadi*: *Mwidadi* is a more Swahili version of this name.

2b *-tinda*: to have *k'anzu* material cut [by a draper, before having it made up by a tailor]; the verbal stem *-tinda* is used in northern Swahili, central Swahili has *-kata*.

3a *apatacho*: whatever [thing] he gets - *kit'u* is understood.

*huhimidi*: he praises God - by saying *al-hamdulillah* - meaning that Mwinyi Hamadi is satisfied with his reward however small it be.

3b *tungi*: a large *mtungi* "an earthenware waterpot".

4a *deni*: debt; in Swahili there is no Bantu noun equivalent to the Arabic-derived *deni*

#### STANZA 8

2a *p'ote* (with the "t" alveolar): twine - sing. *upote* (unaspirated); the verbal stem is *-pota* "twist cotton-threads, etc" (also "string a bow").

3a *natushonee*: let him sew for us; the initial *na* introduces the hortative subjunctive (Burt, 1910: 112) - not used, apparently, in the standardised language.

#### STANZA 9

2b *bakhasa*: the word as here used presents a problem since its meaning "at a paltry price" is not its meaning in the stanza.

#### STANZA 10

1b *kwa kikaka*: in a hurry. There is an instance of a reduplicated *kaka* in the *diwani* "complete works" of Bwana Muyaka:

*ulipogeuka nondo* \* *nguo ukazingiliya*

*kakakaka kwa vishindo* \* *usisaze hata moya* (Hichens, 1940:91) "when you turned into a moth, you started to attack [your own] clothes, hurriedly and excitedly, leaving nothing - not a single garment".

2a *k'ayendi*: does not last [version X has *hayendi*]; the *k'a-* form is a characteristic of *chi-Jomvu*, a sub-dialect of the Mombasa area (Lambert, 1958: 50 & 51), but it should not therefore be assumed that the poet Ali wa Udi necessarily came from Jomvu.

Since Lambert wrote his fine study of *chi-Jomvu* a number of 12th/18th century Swahili letters have come to light in the Goa archives. One of these letters (MR 77-78, fl. 102) written by the Ruler of Kilwa Kisiwani (far to the south of Jomvu) attests to the *k'a-* form: *k'apana mnyang'anya mt'u kit'u* "there is nobody [here in Kilwa Kisiwani] who can rob someone of their possessions"; this example is one of three such occurrences in the letter.

*shahari*: a month; this Arabic-derived word with three syllables has been used rather than the Bantu word *mwezi* which has only two.

2b *ikafumuka*: it comes undone; the *-ka* suffix implies that stitches sewn by

3a haina bari: have no stamina; *bari* seems to be almost always used in connection with *mikono* "arms"; the word is not synonymous with *nguvu* "strength" - which, unlike *bari*, may be verified by a mere glance.

3b kutumiya sadaka: to eat food which has been provided as an act of charity; the Swahili believe that such free food - food not obtained by the sweat of one's brow (and which is not the same as *karamu* "a feast", or *takrima* "a meal to honour a guest") - does not sustain the one who eats it.

#### STANZA 11

1b na Abdalazizi: the scansion of this hemistich is a problem - or perhaps it is just "technically imperfect".

2b -toronya: straighten; this verb is rare and seems not to be included in any lexicon - not even Sacleux.; it appears to be synonymous with *-nyosha*.

#### STANZA 12

1a Kwale: the name of a person; elsewhere the name of a bird and of a place.

"Kishingo": a nickname for someone whose head is permanently inclined to one side - the *ki-* prefix suggesting a physical defect.

2a k'awazitii: see Note on Stanza 10, 2a.

2b ziki: the narrow silk upper border on the *lisani* of a *k'anzu* (*lisani*: the flap opposite the neck-opening on the front of a *k'anzu*).

vitanzi: loops - the traditional *k'anzu* has no button-holes.

3b utembezi: strolling; in Swahili society this is regarded as an enjoyable activity, for it is associated with nattering and chattering.

#### STANZA 13

3a nao: a contraction of *na wao*

4a k'azirudi: [version X has *hazirudi*]; see Note on Stanza 10, 2a.

#### STANZA 14

1b wagizi: a contraction for *waigizi* (which has one syllable too many for the metre).

2a k'anzuye: i.e. *k'anzu yake*.

na-: see Note on Stanza 8, 3a.

-tunde: take [it back]; *-tunda* in northern Swahili, *-twaa* in central; in central Swahili *-tunda* means "pick" a fruit or a flower.

2b k'awashoni: i.e. *hawashoni* ; see Note on Stanza 10, 2a.

ajizi: laziness; an Arabic-derived word for the Bantu *uvivu* ; the Arabic consonantal root carries the meaning "inability", a meaning not present in the Swahili.

3b yale: those [habits] - *mambo* is understood.

nda: a northern Swahili contraction of *ni ya* .

jana na juzi: "literally "yesterday and the day before yesterday".

4a iwele: the old past tense of the verb -wa "be" (Taylor, 1891: 166; Lambert, 1955: 61-90.

### STANZA 15

1a "Muiti": i.e. "Mbiti" - an unripe person.

1b mNgazija: originally the family came from the Comoro Islands.

2b -kongoja: walk like a *mkongwe* "an old person" (possibly grasping a *mkongojo* "a long thin staff).

3b siombe: literally "do not pray [to God that ...]".

4a na-: see Note on Stanza 8, 3a,

mikaja: belts of any material bound tight round the waist to compress the abdomen when one is very hungry and has no food with which to appease one's pangs.

### STANZA 16

1b msikitini: outside the mosque; the context makes it plain that the tailors are not working inside the mosque itself, but in an annex visible from the street. Unlike the mosques of Mombasa's Indian communities which are used for worship only, Swahili mosques are also used for secular activities such as sleeping, wedding feasts and even washing clothes.

2b nyuso: literally "faces".

wazinika: the full form *wameziinika* has two syllables too many for the metre.

3c mkono kwenda kanwani: literally "the hand goes to the mouth".

### STANZA 17

1a ũ'akwambiya: I'm going to tell you; this form is northern Swahili, central Swahili has *nŕakwambiya* (with five syllables) and so, for the sake of the metre, the poet uses the northern form.

2a mbiyu: the buffalo horn beaten, not blown, by the town crier before making a proclamation.

3a udhiya: in short supply; literally "trouble".

3b *tuoneeni imani*: be kind to us - i.e. supply a *k'anzu* at an affordable price, not only because money is in short supply but also because the *k'anzu* is the outdoor dress of every Swahili male. A century later the American domination of the sartorial world has changed all that.

The Arabic-derived Swahili verbal stem *-amini* has the same meaning as the Arabic verb, i.e. "believe"; however for first-language speakers the noun *imani* (from the Arabic *īmān*) means "kindness" - not "belief" as in Arabic. In this connection European-Christian missionaries to East Africa imitated Arabic usage and it is this meaning which *imani* carries for second-language speakers. The Swahili (who are unable to conceive of an absence of "belief" (in Almighty God) continue to use *imani* as it is used in this stanza. A more recent example is:

*na ndugu hawapendani \* hakuna tena imani* (al-Husni, n.d., 6) "and brethren no longer love one another, there is no kindness any more".

#### STANZA 18

1b *mwanawe*: his son; in theory *mwana* may here mean either "son" or "daughter", but in the context "son" is intended since Swahili tailors are customarily male - the contracted form *mwanawe* is always used in this sense (his/her son/daughter) since the full form *mwana wake* has an altogether different connotation.

4a *ṭabu*: famine (here a synonym for *nda*).

*nṭ'i imengiya ṭabu*: literally "the country has entered famine"; this is a syntactical curiosity in which the object becomes the active agent. An excellent example of the genre (not employed by second-language speakers) was spotted and has been remembered by Yahya Ali Omar in the Taylor Papers (in one of many priceless Swahili archival items now "missing" from the SOAS library): *chakula kikala wat'u wa mji mzima* "the food fed the people of the entire town".

#### STANZA 19

2b *daawa*: a quarrel; the equivalent in Arabic means "a legal dispute".

3a *hukupijiya uk'ari*: they utter argumentative words; the noun is derived from the Arabic consonantal root *n k r* "be ignorant of something" and, in derived Form IV "dispute"; the first radical, "n", is effaced in the Swahili and aspiration is introduced as compensation.

4a *nao*: see Note on Stanza 13, 3a



## STANZA 20

1b BaSaidi "Kidezi": Ba- is an honorific for *Baba* "Father"; "Kidezi" is a nickname implying that Saidi was little of stature - *dezi* is here a corruption of *t'ezi* "a tumour". In the 1990s there were great-grandchildren of Saidi al-Qumri (whose forefathers came from the Comoro Islands) living in Mombasa.

2b *kuzitiya shingo kazi*: to sew an elaborate border (*kazi*) round the neck (*shingo*) of a *k'anzu*; *k'anzu ya kazi* is a *k'anzu* with an elaborately worked border round the neck, round the cuffs and down the front.

3a *k'awanyamai*: *hawanyamai* - see Note on Stanza 10, 2a

3b *tumbuizi*: the word is *tumbuizo*, but *tumbuizi* has been written for the sake of the rhyme in *-zi*; *tumbuizo* is a song sung while one works - here the words *nyimbo na* are otiose from a semantic point of view, and are included only in order to make up the eight syllables of the hemistich.

## STANZA 21

1a *Bwana Mataka*: the name suggests that this tailor may have come from Siyu (in northern Swahili-land).

2a *hao ni watega nyoka*: literally "they are snake catchers"; the idiom has fallen into desuetude and the meaning is here unclear - possibly "sewing is not their trade" is intended.

3c *mpera*: *aller à la dérive, de droite et de gauche en trébuchant* (Sacleux, 1939: 586).

4a *na-*: see Note on Stanza 8, 3a.

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