

Somali literature

Somali oral literature

Data on Somali literary traditions were published already in the second half of the 19th cent. by explorers such as ↗Burton and ↗Robecchi Bricchetti, geographers such as ↗Paulitschke, and linguists such as Hunter (1880), ↗Reinisch and others. These early sources are reviewed in Andrzejewski (1983). Significantly, Burton (1856:115f.) wrote: “The country teems with ‘poets, poetasters, poetitos, poetaccios’: every man has his recognized position in literature as accurately defined as though he had been reviewed in a century of magazines – the fine ear of this people causing them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetic expressions, whereas a false quantity or a prosaic phrase excites their violent indignation”.

This major type of oral poetry is discussed under the entry ↗*maanso*, as it is called by Somali scholars such as *šeeh* Ğaama^c (Jaamac Cumar Ciise 1974:ivf.), Yaasiin °Ismaan (Yaasiin Cismaan Keenadiid 1984:62f.) and Mahamed °Abdi (Maxamed Cabdi Maxamed 1989:3). It includes different genres, is always authorial (s. also Orwin 2005) and, before the spread of literacy, it was always sung, not recited. Little is known about the equivalents of *maanso* in the interriverine area such as, e.g., the tradition of praise poetry in Afgooye on the lower Šabeelle River (↗Wabi Šabälle).

Poetic style and sung performances characterize several other genres, such as (i) dance songs, that are frequently accompanied by hand clapping, feet stamping or drums, and (ii) work songs. Such genres are generally not authorial and much shorter than *maanso* poems. Dance songs vary regionally, e.g., the *daanto* is traditionally widespread in the northern and western Somali-speaking areas, the *širib* in the coastal areas to the north of Mogadishu, and the *saar* in the south-west. On particular occasions, dance songs are improvised in poetic contests between talented youths. Work songs accompany different traditional activities, and can be divided into (a) male work songs such as camel-watering songs or camel-loading songs, and (b) female work songs such as shepherd songs, songs for grinding cereals, churning butter, weaving mats etc. (s. Maxamed Cabdi Maxamed 1989:176ff.; Banti – Giannattasio 1996:103ff., 116–22). Particular castes like the hunters have their own gen-

res such as the *maanyo* songs (s. Ciise Maxamed Siyaad 1988).

After World War II the modern Somali song developed from different genres of dance songs through various stages like the *balwo* and the *heello* (s. Andrzejewski – Lewis 1964:49ff.; Johnson 1974). It merges traditional poetry with popular culture, its themes ranging from politics to social critique and love.

Oral texts not necessarily marked by poetic style are, e.g., genealogies that are pervasive among the Somali (↗genealogy in social life). Complete recitations of one’s genealogy (*abtirsiinyo*) often involve dozens of names, from the nearest forefathers to the legendary ancestors of all Somali. In a well known *masafo* poem *šeeh* °Ali °Abdirahmaan, also known as *šeeh* °Ali “Mağeerteen” or *šeeh* °Ali “Duulaa” in ↗Merka, traced his ancestry to Adam and Noah, before his clan’s forefather. Here are its fist five lines in Somali orthography:

Ummadda Eebbahay badane, banii-Aadan baan ahay
Nuuxii baddiyo doonta, ku bilowday baan ahay
Haddii lays bahobaheeyana, bab-ina-Haajaraan ahay
Bin-Caqayl biyaha Jabarti, nin ka beermay baan ahay
Daarood boggüsiyo, beerkiyo laftaan ahay

‘God’s creatures are many, but I am a son of Adam,
 I am from Noah who procreated after the flood and
 the boat,
 And dividing people into families, I am from Haağar’s
 family,
 I am a son of °Aqayl, a man from the semen of Ismaa°iil
 Gabarti,
 I am from the chest, the liver and the bones of Daarood’.

Genealogies and historical narratives about the history of particular clans or sub-clans were collected systematically by European scholars during the early 20th cent. (s. CerSom I, 51ff.; Colucci 1924), more rarely in recent times. Also oral texts of ↗customary law (↗Law: Traditional legal institutions) have been published (e.g., by Cerulli in CerSom II, 75ff.), even though they have been studied more in their legal aspects than as oral literary texts. Famous sentences passed by well-known traditional judges like *ina* Sanweyne are the subject of many traditional narratives s., e.g., Muuse Galaal (1956:31f.; for folktales s. the sub-article on “Folktales and modern written literature”).

Proverbs are pervasive in Somali speech and are given much importance by Somalis. Frequently they display metrical parallelism and complex patterns of alliteration like the following one, about failing to solve a difficult problem:

Waraabe ulna lala gaari waa, erayna wax lagaga guri waa

'You didn't get at the hyena with a rod, nor did you get anything back from it with your words'.

Parallel syllables in the two halves of this proverb have identical vocalic lengths with the only exception of *gaa* and *gu*, while *waraabe* 'hyena' alliterates with the two occurrences of *waa* 'didn't', *ul* 'rod' with *eray* 'word', and *gaari* 'get at' with *guri* 'get back'.

A particular genre that is very popular among Somali, are the numerical sayings, i.e., proverbs organized in series of three, seven, etc. (s. CerSom II, 213ff.). They hark back to a very old tradition, since they are pervasive in the Old Harari *Kiāb al-farā'id* (s. CerStud I, 282–343), occur in several other parts of the Medieval Islamic world, and are already attested in the Bible (Prov 30; s. also Banti 1996: 180ff.). Here is a numerical saying in Benaadir Somali (in Somali orthography), alliterated in *d*, whose first two half lines are 8-syllable *širib* lines with their typical iambic rhythm:

Siddax walxaato waa dadaal, siddaxna Daayimaa yu-waad

Duful samey waa dadaal, daruurna Daayimaa yuwaad

Dugsi ood waa dadaal, diinna Daayimaa yuwaad

Dahabo guuri waa dadaal, dadna Daayimaa yuwaad

'Three things depend upon your effort, three only

God can give:
Sowing depends upon your effort, rain only God can give,

Building a home depends upon your effort, religion only God can give,

Marrying a woman depends upon your effort, children only God can give'.

Like other peoples of the Horn of Africa, the Somali have highly formalized riddles that are generally alliterated. In north-eastern Somalia they are called *googgale*; who asks the riddle first says *googgaa*, who answers says *adale* or *wah kale* 'another thing', then the actual riddle is asked.

Extensive collections of oral literature, such as anthologies of *maanso* poetry by different poets or *diirwaan*'s of the major poets, collections of proverbs, sayings and folk stories were among the first texts that were published by educated Somalis, and many have appeared also in recent years.

Src.: *Sheekh JAAMAC CUMAR CIISE, Diirwaanka gabayadii Sayid Maxamad Cabdulle Xasan* ('Collected Poems of Sayid Mahamad 'Abdulle Hasan'), Mogadishu 1974 (Djibouti 2005); MAXAMED CABDI MAXAMED, *Ururin qoraallo la xulay 2: Tix - Recueil de textes choisis 2 - Vers*, n.p. 1989; MUUSE HAAJI ISMAA'IL GALAAL, *Hikmad Soomaali* ('Somali wisdom'), ed. by BOGUMIL W. ANDRZEJEWSKI, London - Cape Town 1956.

Lit.: BOGUMIL W. ANDRZEJEWSKI, "The 19th Century Documentation of Somali Oral Literature", in: MARIA CAVAGLIOS (ed.), *L'Africa ai tempi di Daniele Comboni*, Roma 1983, 316–35; BOGUMIL W. ANDRZEJEWSKI - IOAN MYRDDIN LEWIS, *Somali Poetry: an Introduction*, Oxford 1964; GIORGIO BANTI, "Tradizione e innovazione nella letteratura orale dei Somali", *Africa* 51, 1996, 174–202; GIORGIO BANTI - FRANCESCO GIANNATTASIO, "Music and Metre in Somali Poetry", in: RICHARD J. HAYWARD - IOAN MYRDDIN LEWIS (eds.), *Voice and Power: Essays in Honour of B.W. Andrzejewski*, London 1996 (African Languages and Cultures, supplement 3), 83–127; RICHARD F. BURTON, *First Footsteps in East Africa or an Exploration of Harar*, London 1856; CerStud I; CerSom I–III; CIISE MAXAMED SIYAAD, "Primi ragguagli sulla maanyo: genesi e struttura dei canti per la caccia", in: ANNARITA PUGLIELLI, *Proceedings of the Third International Congress of Somali Studies*, Rome 1988, 149–57; MASSIMO COLUCCI, *Principi di diritto consuetudinario della Somalia Italiana meridionale*, Firenze 1924; JOHN W. JOHNSON, *Heellooy beellelloy - The Development of the Genre 'beello' in Modern Somali Poetry*, Bloomington, IN 1974; MARTIN ORWIN, "On the Concept of 'Definitive Text' in Somali Poetry", *Oral Tradition* 20, 2005, 278–99; YAASIIN CISMAAN KEENADIID, *Ina Cabdille Xasan e la sua attività letteraria*, Napoli 1984.

Giorgio Banti

Somali religious literature

Schleicher (ed. by Reinisch 1900), Cerulli (CerStud I, CerSom II, 177–220, CerSom III), Andrzejewski (1983), Andrzejewski - Lewis (1994), Kapteijns - O'Fahey (2003), Mohamed M. Kassim - O'Fahey - Reese (2003) and Gori (2003) provide evidence of the antiquity and wide circulation of Arab religious literature among bilingual Somalis. This literature first circulated among the religious orders (*tariqa*; ↗ Islamic brotherhoods), mainly the Qādirīya (the most ancient and popular), Aḥmadiya, Šāliḥīya, and Rifā'īya (originating from Mukallā, Ḥaḍramawt. Thanks to them, the Somalis developed close links with the Sunnite communities of the Arabic Peninsula along with other Muslim communities in the Sudan, Eritrea (Massawa), and southwestern Ethiopia where these religious orders had missionaries (TrIslam 233–56). ↗ Harār, where the Qādirīya was established in the 15th cent. by šarīf Abū Bakr b. 'Abdallāh al-'Aydārūs (d. 1503, Aden), played an important role in diffusing ↗ Islam among the Somalis, along with the coastal towns of Arab-Persian - if not earlier - foundation (↗ Iran). From these centres Islam reached the agro-pastoralists of the interior. Religious agricultural settlements (*ḡama'āt*), like those in the fertile region between the Šabeelle (↗ Wabi Šāballe) and Ġuba (↗ Ganaalee) rivers, played also an important role in rallying followers among the somalized Bantu,