

## **Contrastive Analyses of a Beja Song**

Klaus Wedekind - Journal of Eritrean Studies - IV 1 & 2 May & December 2005

*Version with Sound File Links*

### **Abstract**

After some introductory remarks about terms and conventions, the second part of this article provides an overview of the song, where its poetry and its musical performance are considered and exemplified. Part 3 compares this song with the poetry and the music of other song types from the Beja culture. The focus is on three prominent types of Beja dance-songs: *kehani*, *akikt* and *birirt*. In part 4, different poetic and musical characteristics of love songs from other N.E. African cultures are compared with the Beja love song, to profile typical Beja features. The final section briefly summarizes what is true to the Beja tradition and what is innovative and attractive about this particular song.

## **1. Introductory Remarks**

### **1.1 The choice**

This article<sup>1</sup> is about the Beja song *Bitlibaabneek eeshuun*<sup>2</sup> as sung by Mohammed Al Badri.<sup>3</sup> The choice of this song implies that it does in fact deserve special attention.

It deserves attention because, on the one hand, it represents valued Beja traditions while, on the other hand, it differs from comparable songs with its special blend of features: choice of rhythm, poetry, lute technique, vocal timbre, musical scale, and the overall professional quality of the presentation.

The song is in the Beja language [*bidhaawyeet*, *tubdhaawi*], a language spoken by large numbers of speakers which however are considered "minorities" in three countries: Eritrea, Sudan and Egypt. There are dialect differences but, given the semi-nomadic Beja life style, they do not present communication problems across the borders. And as far as songs of famous Beja singers are concerned - they easily spread across these countries not only by means of the traditional Beja communication,<sup>4</sup> but also by means of the modern media.

### **1.2 The terminology**

The words "songs, singing" will be used in an inclusive sense. They cover not only the musical event, but also the words (poems) and the movements (dances) that go with it. Likewise, the Beja term *habayt* "poem" does not just refer to words, but to poetry that is sung.

As far as the nouns for related concepts are concerned, Table 1 shows that there is some terminological overlap both across concepts and across languages. But the Beja terms do not include cognates or loans from neighbouring languages.<sup>5</sup> Like other aspects of Beja life, the intimate aspects of Beja songs also seem to have been shielded from the rest of the world.

**TABLE 1 Terminology: Nouns**

Nouns	Beja	Tigre	Arabic	Tigrigna	Amharic
song	kafaat (kwal)	ሐልዮት (ካሊድ)	غنا	መዝሙር (ደርፊ)	መዝሙር (ዘፈን)
dance	malag (kwal...)	ስሰዲት	راقص	ትልሂት (ሳዕስዲት)	ዘፈን
poem, saying	habayt	ሸዕር (ስምዕት)	شعري	ግጥሚ (ስምዲት)	ግጥም

As far as Beja verbs for "singing" etc. are concerned, Table 2 adds a few general expressions; but terms for specific dances and songs are given in Appendix I. The verb glossed as "to dance, sing," for instance, can be translated as "to throw out a dance song," the verb "to recite, present a poem" can be translated as "to let out, say a poem," and "to make a poem" as "to throw out, cast a poem."

**TABLE 2 Terminology: Verbs**

Verbs	Beja
to dance, sing	lag-, kaf-, kwal gid-
to recite, present a poem	habayt fir'-, habayt diy-
to make a poem	habayt gid-

### 1.3 The conventions

In the following sections, "song" always refers to the love song "bitlibaabneek" as performed by Mohammed Al Badri.

To speak about "songs," different "types" or "genres" of songs will be distinguished.

Each genre will be illustrated by a number of songs which differ in their linguistic and musical form, their contents and their social function. But the focus in this paper will be on the linguistic and musical form. All of them, however, are governed by the following conventions:

(a) Each song has different "sections" (2 to 10),<sup>6</sup> such as "introductory" and "main" sections. In terms of its music, the song also has instrumental "preludes," "interludes," and "postludes;" (b) Each section consists of several "stanzas" or "refrains" (2 to 15), and one *habayt* always is one stanza. In terms of its music, a section consists of several "periods" (5 to 10); (c) Each stanza, refrain and *habayt* has small a number of "lines" or *girmaab* "heads" (2 to 4), and one *habayt* has four lines. In terms of its music, each period consists of a certain number of musical "bars" (4 to 20); (d) Each poetic line or *girma* "head" is built of a well-defined number of "syllables" or "morae" (4 to 10) according to particular patterns or meters or *arjaaz* (أرجاز). In terms of its music, each bar consists of a definite number of beats (2 to 8). The number of beats may be the same throughout the entire section, or it may vary, depending on the genre of the "song"; (e) Each syllable, finally, is characterized either by its size or "mora" (single vs. double) and its "stress" (stressed vs. unstressed). In terms of its music, each beat is characterized by its weight (heavy vs. light, down-beat or up-beat).

## 2. Overview of the song

An overview of the entire song (with its introduction) will be provided by means of an English translation which represents the actual performance, in Table 3. The main item of the paper, however, is not the "introduction", but the "love song" which follows it. It should be noted that the "introduction" is of a very general character. It is not really a part of the song, in spite of the fact that a transition joins the two, and both of them employ the same musical scale (*maqaaam*).

Rather, an "introduction" of this kind will introduce not just one song (such as the "love song" here below), but one entire session, a series of songs, an evening, a cassette, or a radio programme. The introduction has the character of *akikt* (historical, ethical song), while the main song is of the genre *kehani* / *kehanoob* (love song).

In this paper, the "introductory song" has also been included for another reason: It provides one more piece of context against which the "love song" can be contrasted.

In Table 3, the first column identifies the different sections, the central column has the English translation, and the last column

provides a measure of the relative sizes of each section. The measurements can be read as "seconds", or "heartbeats" or "steps of a camel" - in any case the musical tempo is 60 M.M. (i.e. 60 beats per second).

The overall structure is as follows: Prelude, Interludes and Postlude are played by the lute only and they hold the entire performance together. The Introductory Song consists of 3 four-liners (*habayt* 1-3), and in the main section, the 15 one-line stanzas (the syllables *heebeeba wheeb* have no meaning) with 4 different refrains - all of which are repeated in the final section, as an elegant way of forming a coda (see the end of Table 3).

**TABLE 3 Overview of introduction and song**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Gloss</b>	<b>Sec.</b>
Prelude A	<i>LUTE</i>	18
<b>Introductory Song</b>		
Call	<i>Oh you!</i>	8
Habayt 1	<i>When you do good to someone and in return he rewards you badly, if he is a man whom your goodness does not cure, stay away from him, my heart!</i>	16
Interlude B	<i>LUTE</i>	8
Habayt 2	<i>Unless you give away what you love, unless you are generous - silent about what you do unless you endure your hardship no one will find courage in you.</i>	16
Interlude C	<i>LUTE</i>	8
Habayt 3	<i>When a friend joins me, anything he asks me - I do it; still: Don't accuse me of boasting - because my motives are quite different.</i>	16
Interlude D	<i>LUTE</i>	10
<b>Main Song</b>		
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	27
Stanza 1	<i>Knowing that the day dawns, we stay till the morning.</i>	8
Refrain 1	<i>If you don't want to gird your loins, Heebeeba wheeb!</i>	6
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	10
Stanza 2	<i>Drinking and yet thirsty, eating and yet unsatisfied</i>	
Refrain 1	<i>If you don't want to gird your loins. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 3	<i>Cut and beaten, bitten, and dripping,</i>	24

<b>Section</b>	<b>Gloss</b>	<b>Sec.</b>
Refrain 1	<i>If you don't want to gird your loins. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 4	<i>Her white shoulders recede like a flood ebbing away.</i>	24
Refrain 2	<i>We are close to you. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 5	<i>We are sad about love which does not find love in response</i>	24
Refrain 1	<i>If you don't want to gird your loins. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 6	<i>Her shoulders are moving, led on by her neck,</i>	24
Refrain 3	<i>Your friends exalt you. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 7	<i>At night the cushion reminds me of her scent.</i>	24
Refrain 1	<i>If you don't want to gird your loins. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 8	<i>Her shoulders are moving, led on by her neck</i>	24
Refrain 3	<i>Your friends exalt you. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 9	<i>Oh the mountains - where the Atimur trees stand</i>	24
Refrain 3	<i>Your friends exalt you. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 10	<i>Oh her hands so tender - with blisters from a handshake</i>	24
Refrain 1	<i>If you don't want to gird your loins..</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 11	<i>Oh the graceful bow of her teeth, as they come closer</i>	24
Refrain 3	<i>Your friends exalt you</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 12	<i>And her brows, echoing the bow of her teeth,</i>	24
Refrain 1	<i>If you don't want to gird your loins.</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 13	<i>Oh my heart, even as you hurt, never sleep!</i>	24
Refrain 2	<i>We are close to you. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 14	<i>Her locks unstrung as she dances,</i>	24
Refrain 1	<i>If you don't want to gird your loins.</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
Stanza 15	<i>Sing your song - sing it into the mountains.</i>	24
Refrain 3	<i>Your friends exalt you. ...</i>	
Interlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	
<b>Final Section</b>		
Refrain 1	<i>If you don't want to gird your loins</i>	4
Refrain 2	<i>We are close to you</i>	4
Refrain 4	<i>Live the life you have studied!</i>	4
Postlude E	<i>LUTE</i>	5

## 2.1 The words

A closer analysis of the Beja text is given here below, followed by a selective musical transcription. Both the linguistic and musical transcriptions are "emic".<sup>7</sup> The linguistic tables below are organized as follows: "phon." gives the Beja text as it is pronounced in normal speech; "mus." gives the text as it is sung; "mph." gives the morphological analysis; and "gloss" and "free" give the morphological and free translations. The right hand column indicates the number of syllables both for the phonological version and the musical version.

### 2.1.1 The introductory song

phon.	Hee hee, naanaa.	4
mus.	Hee hee, naanaa.	4
mph.	0 0, 0	
gloss	Oh ... (hey ...)	
free	Hey (shout of rallying)	

For these words, no morphological analysis is possible.

phon.	Tudaayiinaay tiweerihoob,	8
mus.	Tudaayiinaay tiweerihoob,	8
mph.	tu-daayiinaay ti-weer-i-hoob,	
gloss	DEF-goodness you-do-F-when	
free	When you do good to someone	

Syllables: 8, stressed syllables: 3, morae: 13

phon.	naafti toomaag jazaayihook,	8
mus.	naafti toomaag jazaayihook,	8
mph.	naafti too-maag jazaa-yi-hook,	
gloss	return DEF-badness reward-he-youSG	
free	and in return he rewards you with badness,	

Syllables: 8, stressed syllables: 4, morae 13

phon.	tuushbuub bitmheelayeeb ootak,	8
mus.	tuushibuub bitimheelayeeb ootak,	10
mph.	tuu-shbuub bi-t-mheel-ay-eeb oo-tak,	
gloss	DEF-goodness NEG-you-cure-PTCP-WH DEF-man	
free	if he is a man whom your goodness does not cure	

Syllables: 8 (but 10 when sung), stressed syllables: 5, morae: 13

phon.	whaafu, igiigi gaanaayu!	8
mus.	w(i)haafu, (i)giigi gaanaayu!	9
mph.	w-haaf-u, i-giigi gaanaa-yu!	
gloss	DEF-inside-my DEF-go satisfied-is	
free	be satisfied to stay away from him, my heart!	

Syllables: 8 (but 9 when sung), stressed syllables: 3, morae: 13

There are two more statements of 5 lines each. They will be skipped here. Their English version is given in the overview, Table 3. After this introduction follows the love song.

### 2.1.2 The love song stanzas and refrains

<b>Stanza 1</b>		
phon.	Yaa, oomha oomhook kane e mhasnay. (Eeyaa eeyaa.)	9+4
mus.	Yaa, oomha oomhook kane e mhas(i)nay. (Eeyaa eeyaa.)	10+4
mph.	Yaa, oo-mha oo-mhook kan-ee mhas-nay. 0 0	
gloss	Yaa, DEF-morning WH-dawn know-PTCP spendMorning-wePRES 0 0	
free	Knowing that the day dawns, we await the morning (eeyaa ...)	

<b>Refrain 1</b>		
phon.	Bitlibaabneek eeshuun. (Heebeeba wheeb.)	6+4
mus.	Bitlibaabneek eeshuun. (Heebeeba wheeb.)	6+4
mph.	Bi-t-libaabn-eek eeshuun. 0 0	
gloss	NEG-you-gird-if 0 0 0	
free	If you don't want to gird your loins (heebeeba ...)	

In the musical version, each of the stanzas has 10 syllables, of which 5 are stressed. The stressed syllables are indicated by bold letters, such as **a o o e a** in stanza 1 above.

Note that refrains and nonsense syllables like "heebeeba wheeb" are not counted as part of the stanzas. Stanzas 2 to 14 and their refrains will be skipped here. Their English translation is given in the overview, Table 3. The last is stanza no. 15. Its analysis is supplied here below. Again, the number of syllables is 10, and the number of stressed syllables, 5.

<b>Stanza 15</b>		
phon.	Yaa, ookw <del>al</del> ook diina, w'eerbaayeeb. (Eeyaa eeyaa.)	9+4
music	Yaa, ookw <del>al</del> ook diina, w(i)'eerbaayeeb. (Eeyaa eeyaa.)	10+4
mph.	Yaa, oo-kwal-ook diin-a! w-ee-rb-aa- yeeb.	
gloss	Yaa, DEF-song-your sing-IMPV, WH-DEF-hill-PL-at 0 0	
free	Sing your song - sing it into the mountains! (eeyaa ...)	

<b>Refrain 3</b>		
phon.	Unadiirook s'alnhook. Heebeeba wheeb.	6+4
mus.	Unadiirook s'alnhook. Heebeeba wheeb.	6+4
mph.	U-nadiir-ook s-al-n-hook. 0 0	
gloss	DEF-peer-your CAUS-dear-PL-you. 0 0	
free	Your friends exalt you. (heebeeba ...)	

## 2.2 The music

### 2.2.1 The preludes

#### *The lute prelude*

Instrumental preludes are usually performed by chords on the *basinkoob*. But in this song, the lute modifies the usual introduction: Instead of chords, there are fast repetitions of octaves and other intervals (see the transcription in sample 1).

#### *Sample 1*

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE01.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE01.mp3)

The image shows a musical score for a lute prelude. It consists of four staves of music written in 7/8 time. The notation is a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups. There are several accents (>) and slurs over the notes. The first staff starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The second staff has a repeat sign at the beginning. The third and fourth staves continue the melodic line with similar rhythmic patterns.

### *Techniques of phrasing*

The staccato signs in the transcription indicate the stopping of vibrations for giving shape to the musical periods or "phrases". With the lute, it is the right hand which articulates the phrasing and the left hand changes the pitches. With the *basinkoob*, however - the North African successor of the antique "lyra" or "kithara"<sup>8</sup> - it is the left hand which articulates the phrasing. The left hand does not change the pitches of the (empty) strings. The illustration of Table 4 shows that the position of the hands is the same both for the antique kithara and the present-day *basinkoob*.<sup>9</sup> Although in the illustration the Beja player happens to rest his instrument on his knees, the upright position (as in the Roman mosaic) is also common today, especially when the player stands.

**TABLE 4** *Technique of Roman kithara and Beja basinkoob*



### *The rallying call*

The introductory song starts with a rallying shout "yaa, naanaa!" on a short, expressive phrase (sample 2, 1st line).

### Sample 2

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE02.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE02.mp3)



#### 2.2.2 Introductory song

The first four lines (a habayt) of the introductory song start with high pitched tenor phrases, and there is no regular beat. The structure and function of such introductory *akikt* passages is comparable to a recitativo that introduces an aria: both use free rhythm and both serve to introduce a piece of regular rhythm (sample 3).

### Sample 3

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE03.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE03.mp3)



#### *The lute interlude*

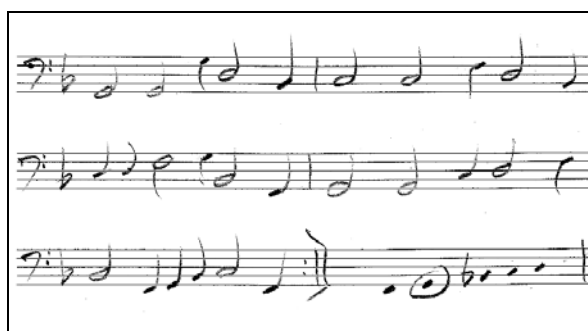
The transcription below represents the interlude, which is basically the same in all the repetitions. (Sample 4. The embellishments such as grace notes, trills, upglides, or tremolo repetitions differ slightly every time. They have not been transcribed.)

The interlude also serves as accompaniment for every stanza that is sung.

Each interlude consists of a period of 5 bars, and each bar has 2+3+3 beats. This constellation is typical of Beja rhythms and musical periods. (This is very much unlike all Western music, where the numbers of bars in a period are multiples of 4, and the numbers of beats in a bar symmetrical and divisible by 3 or 2.)

#### *Sample 4*

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE04.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE04.mp3)

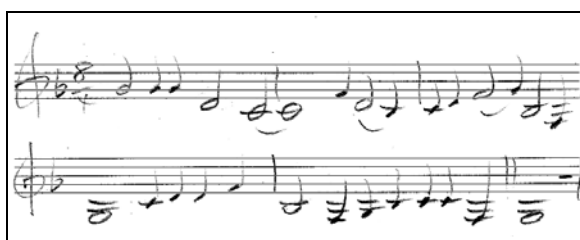


#### **2.2.3 Love song stanzas**

The melody of the stanzas, as sung by Mohammed Al Badri, is a free variation of the lute "interlude" (compare sample 4 and 5). They differ in the choice of octaves and embellishments.

#### *Sample 5*

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE05.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE05.mp3)



### **3. Contrasts within Beja culture**

In this section, the text and the music of the love song will be contrasted with other songs from the same culture in terms of language, song type, musical rhythm, use of instruments, and relation between different performers.

### 3.1 The words

The prose of Beja narratives may serve as a first point of comparison. Narratives are characterized by sequences of subordinated clauses and a slow change of subjects or topics. The temporal and logical connection of clauses is common, especially by means of the ending *-it / -yit* "and". This suffix can be translated as "after having done this, then ...", and it is attached to every non-final verb until the subject changes or until the last verb closes the paragraph with a full verb form.

This can be exemplified with the following passage (Table 5) from a narrative about two women. In this passage, the subject "*she*" is kept the same over several clauses.

**TABLE 5** *Prose of narratives*

<p>Igwiweeshaa-yeet ankwana yak-ta-yi ti-yiha-yit  bracelets-PL owner arisen-she-and she-complete-and  <i>The owner of the bracelets (she) started and,</i>  too-raaw sas-a tii-yid-ayit  the-other incite-to she-meant-because-and  <i>because she wanted to make the other one envious,</i>  ti-heetaat-eeh riigam-taa-yit,  the-wall-PL stretched-she-and  <i>she looked over the wall and</i>  "Misrafaat ti-barii-na?"  "fan you-have-PL?"  "Do you have a fan?"  ti-di.  she-said  <i>she said.</i></p>
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In contrast to this, the poetic language of the song does not use these chains of connected clauses, and the subject is not kept the same over several clauses. In poems, the clauses are coordinated, and the subjects change frequently. This may be illustrated with a few lines of the song (Table 6).

**TABLE 6 Poetic language of a song**

<p>Yaa, oonga w'eeraay yameet fandiin.          "The white shoulders recede like a flood ebbing away."          Yaa, ookwalook diina, w'eerbaayeeb.          "Sing your song, (sing it) to the mountains"</p>
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The song is full of metonymies, similes, and metaphors. Thus, in Table 6 the first line refers to shoulders that move (a metonymy for the woman who moves her shoulders). The shoulders, in turn, are compared to waves which move. There is no mention of the person. Likewise, "your song" (Table 6, line 2) is addressed to the "mountain" rather than the woman who lives there. In this way every line uses elevated language, which is rich in metaphors, similes and allusions. Allusions are especially frequent because of the cultural prohibition against direct reference to women or to whatever is dear and beloved, and therefore in need of protection. To circumvent this Beja taboo, the names of places, animals, trees etc. are substituted.

The song can also be contrasted with the poetic genre of proverbs and sayings. Proverbs may briefly be illustrated with the following items (Table 7):

**TABLE 7 Poetic language of proverbs**

<p>Aagwsir huduud kiibaruun.          "Lies have no end".</p> <p>Ootak umiimaashuuh gaalu, ifaala gwidaaba.          "A man's grave is one, his deeds are many."</p>
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The language of proverbs resembles the language of the songs in that both of them use a terse, loaded non-prose with brief statements, parallel structures, and abrupt change of subjects. But proverbs and sayings differ from Beja songs in several ways: reference is made to abstracts and truths rather than feelings; the parallels are semantic rather than rhythmic; the form is terse but not metrically organized, and the proverbs - unlike the stanzas of a song - are simply too short to allow for a dominant rhythm to start flowing.

The poetic language of the Beja songs is characterized by terse clauses of a strict meter. All stanzas of the song "Bitlibaabneek", for instance, have strictly the same number of syllables per line and strictly the same number of stressed syllables per line. Some of the Beja songs also have rhyme, but the present song does not have it.<sup>10</sup>

The present song has characteristics that Roper listed as early as 1927: "The style is terse, though high-flown poetical words and expressions occur frequently." - "The metaphors used to describe their women are such as might be expected from a hill people and their descriptions offer ... ruggedness and vigour" (148) - "Topography is the motive of many verses" (149) - "A Hadendiwa may praise a spot either because it is his favourite dwelling place or because a lady in whom he is interested lives near by" (1927:149).

For most of these claims, more examples can easily be found in the English translation of the song (Table 3 above), such as the following: "Drinking and yet thirsty, eating and yet unsatisfied" - an allusion to unfulfilled love. "Like a flood ebbing away" - a simile from the Beja seashore. "The shoulders are moving, led on by her neck" - appeal to the graceful, delicate curve of the camel's neck and its perfect movements.

### 3.1.1 Topics and moods

The poetic topic of the song text is love, a very guarded expression of feelings towards the woman. She is only referred to in vaguely allusive terms by means of metonymy, metaphor and courteous, indirect language. Beja ethics has it that whatever is dear - this includes the herds and the home - must not be exposed to the vulgar public. To refer to a particular girl, to even pronounce her name, is unthinkable!

By contrast, the songs termed *birirt* (bravery) use strong masculine and threateningly direct language. Their tone is vigorous, full of ardent praise of heroes or great historical events, which are clearly named.

The songs termed *akikt* (history, ethics) thoughtfully or authoritatively sing about the truths of ethics, about exemplary behaviour, or disturbing insights about mankind.

### 3.1 2 Meter of the love song

The lines of the song follow a strict meter. If the dummy syllables like *eeyaa* are ignored, the different metrical patterns can be summarized as in Table 8.

**TABLE 8 Meter**

Song Section	Syllables	of these, stressed	Morae
Introductory song (habayt)	about 8	about 4	exactly 13
Stanza lines	exactly 10	exactly 5	about 17

In the introductory song, the number of syllables varies with every line - but the number of the morae is the same throughout: 13.

In the stanzas of the main song, the number of morae varies with every line, but the number of syllables and stresses is the same throughout: 10 and 5.

In general, Beja poetry is based on the quantity of syllables (which is true for some neighbouring languages). But it is conceivable that some of the Beja poetry is mora-based (which is true for Somali).<sup>11</sup>

### 3.1.3 Meter vs. musical beat

The musical beat in the song coincides with linguistically stressed syllables, except for the ones that have no musical beat.

In the stanzas, the numbers of 10 syllables per line and 5 beats per line are fixed. Usually, a line is composed in such a way that these conditions are fulfilled by the phonological structure, even in a normal everyday pronunciation.

If the normal "prose" reading of a particular line does not match the "poetic" meter, the number of syllables will be adjusted. This is done by inserting the vowel "i" (the Beja "schwa mobile"), as in the following lines:

<p>Yaa, oomha oomhook kanee mhasnay.  Yaa, oomha oomhook kanee mhas[i]nay.  "Knowing that the day dawns, we await the morning"  Yaa, ookwalook diina, w'eerbaayeeb.  Yaa, ookwalook diina, w[i]'eerbaayeeb.  "Sing your song - sing it into the mountains!"</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In the first example, the first line represents the normal everyday pronunciation, and the second line is adjusted to match the correct number of 10 syllables. The same seems to be true of the second example, where another [i] is inserted.

### 3.2 The music

The most frequent and most prominent song types are (1) *kehani* or *kehanoob* (about love), (2) *birirt* (bravery) and (3) *akikt* (about history and ethics). Each of them is characterized by its particular choice of rhythm, tempo, instrument, and the grouping of performers.

#### 3.2.1 Musical metre and rhythm

The main section of the present song (see the stanzas in Table 3) has a non-symmetrical rhythm: 2+3+3 beats. Many Beja songs do have a symmetrical 2/4 or 3/4 beat, but compared with other musical cultures, the number of non-symmetrical bars - including the present love song and songs of 5/4 bars - is remarkably high: 19%.

Based on an overview of 90 Beja songs of different genres, Table 9 provides more details on them. All of these songs were performed by Beja solo singers whose names are listed in Appendix 2. The songs with "free rhythm" (11%) belong to the genre of *akikt* "history / ethics" songs, which is represented in the "introductory song" above.

**TABLE 9 Metre and rhythm**

Rhythm	Percentage	Metre	Number of songs
Symmetry	70%	2/4	24
		4/4	24
		3/4	11
		3/8 + 3/8	6
Asymmetry	19 %	2+3+3 /8 (8/8)	8
		2 +3 /4 (5/4)	7
Free	11 %	none	10

#### *Samples from other love songs*

Short illustrations from other songs of the same type (*kehani*, "love song") are provided to indicate the variations within one genre. The "love song" of the following example starts with a few bars of *basinkoob* chords that establish rhythm and tempo. Then, in the 3rd bar, a group of girls join in with the typical women's trill (c" to e").

### Sample 6

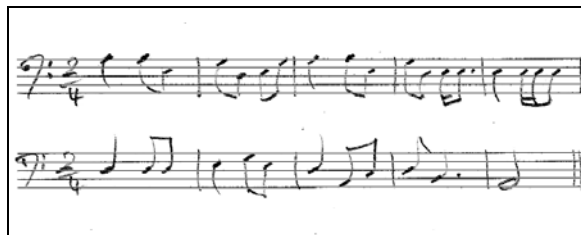
[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE06.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE06.mp3)



It is only after the instrumental introduction (sample 6) that the first stanza begins (Sample 7). In this example the period has 10 bars with regular beats of 2/4 per bar.

### Sample 7

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE07.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE07.mp3)



The example from yet another love song shows that the *basinkoob* not only establishes a rhythm but also provides the chords for a harmonic frame for the pentatonic melody (sample 8).

In this example, the rhythm is a punctuated 4/4 beat, the chords are based on A and G,<sup>12</sup> and the melody moves within this scope.

### Sample 8



The *basinkoob* is used to establish a rhythm, but the five strings also support pentatonic phrases (sample 9, 2nd bar).

**Sample 9**

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE09.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE09.mp3)



In all songs of this genre, the *basinkoob* (or the lute) establishes the rhythmic and tonal frame. Sometimes hand claps join in, as in this example from the first bars of a love song (sample 10, last bar).

**Sample 10**

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE10.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE10.mp3)



**3.2.2 Tempo and rhythm**

The general attitudinal differences between these three song types also determine the musical characteristics of the songs.

The *kehani* "love songs" move with a regular beat of about 100 MM or less, and their general gestus is gentle, relaxed, or outright happy. The present love song has a rhythm which is an inversion of the Arabic beat pattern (*iqa'at*) known as "Sa'idi", namely the division of 8 beats into groups of 2 and 3 beats.<sup>13</sup>

**TABLE 10 Rhythms: Beja, Sa'idi, and S.American**

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/TABLE10.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/TABLE10.mp3)

Beja	Sa'idi	S. American
		
$\begin{array}{c} > \\ 1\ 2 \end{array} \mid \begin{array}{c} > \\ 1\ 2\ 3 \end{array} \mid \begin{array}{c} > \\ 1\ 2\ 3 \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{c} > \\ 1\ 2\ 3 \end{array} \mid \begin{array}{c} > \\ 1\ 2\ 3 \end{array} \mid \begin{array}{c} > \\ 1\ 2 \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{c} > \\ 1\ 2\ 3 \end{array} \mid \begin{array}{c} > \\ 1\ 2\ 3 \end{array} \mid \begin{array}{c} > \\ 1\ 2 \end{array}$

Most of the other Beja kehani (love) songs, however, have 2/4 or 4/4 rhythms or non-symmetrical rhythms such as 5/4.

### **Love song in 5/4 rhythm**

Several other songs of Mohammed Al Badri's flow in a 5/4 rhythm. The next example (sample 11) shows how the stressed beats of the singer (1st line), the instrumental phrases of the band (2nd), and the 5/4 clapping by a group of males (3rd) go together throughout one musical period.

### **Sample 11**

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE11.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE11.mp3)



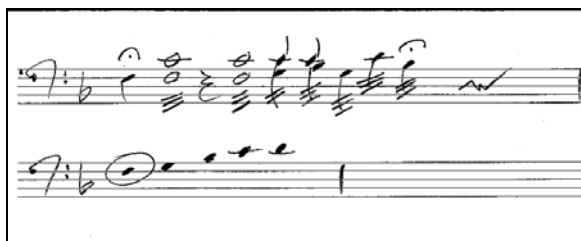
### ***Introduction of the "birirt" character***

The *birirt* (bravery) songs come with a more aggressive and faster tempo of about 120 MM, corresponding to their excited and inciting mood. The rhythm is a regular beat of 2/4 or 4/4 pulses per bar.

Other examples (samples 12 and 13) show how for the mood of the *birirt*, the *basinkoob* is used as a dramatic percussion instrument to set some fortissimo tremolos and emphatic fermates and pauses before the song starts. (The tuning of the strings is shown in the 2nd line: f g bb c' d')

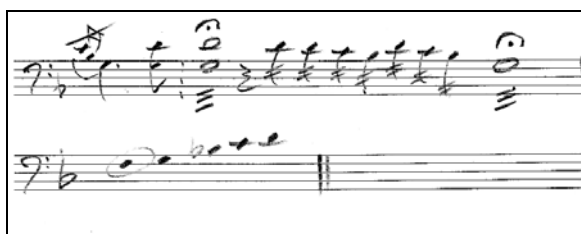
#### ***Sample 12***

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE12.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE12.mp3)



#### ***Sample 13***

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE13.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE13.mp3)



### ***Akikt song***

The *akikt* (history / ethics) songs are, generally, even faster (130 MM). Like the introductory song (see Table 3), they start with a free rhythm or an introductory tremolo which has no recognizable beat pattern. The main section may use a 2/4 or 3/4 meter.

### **3.2.3 Singer and instruments**

In the present song, the singer accompanies his voice with a lute. Usually, however, a *masinkoob* will be used. On festive occasions there may be a full band of musicians: flute, percussion, keyboard,

and groups clapping hands or singing responses. The introduction is always performed only with instruments.

This is also true of the *birirt* (bravery) songs.

In the *akikt* (history / ethics) songs, however, after a few introductory tremolos, the singer commands the scene like an authoritative bard, by presenting the challenges from a great past.

In all these three song types, whether there is a band or a choir or an instrumentalist, the singer is always a prominent figure, even in the somewhat egalitarian society of Beja males.

### 3.3.3 Instruments and scales (maqamaat)

Although the same songs can be performed both on the lute and the *masinko*, the results may vary:

While the lute player, as in the love song of this paper, does not use chords (he very rarely plucks several strings simultaneously), the *basinkoob* player often does so, as, for example, in the introductory section of a song. While the lute player changes the string's pitches with the left hand and uses more than three octaves, the *basinkoob* player, by contrast, uses only the five notes to which the five strings of his instrument are tuned, and the scope does not go beyond one octave. While the lute player sometimes stops the vibrations with his right hand, the *basinkoob* player may muffle the vibrations with the right or the left hand for special rhythmic effects. While the lute lends itself to gentle, melodic passages, the *basinkoob*, by contrast, is used for producing strong and harsh effects like a percussion instrument.

In the present song, the lute player selects his notes from the limited repertoire (*maqam*, scale) of 5 notes spread over 2 octaves (F G Bb c d f g). This scale is not at all typical for Egyptian lutists who employ a large variety of scales with semitones and quarter tones. Like the *basinkoob* player, a lutist also has to tune 5 strings or pairs of strings,<sup>14</sup> but lute tuning is more rigid and therefore closer to diatonic tuning. In this regard, the lute tuning for this song differs from the traditional ways of tuning a Beja *masinkoob*.<sup>15</sup> On the lute, the sequence of intervals of seconds is widened. In the *masinkoob* tuning, it is narrowed down.

To illustrate the differences in pentatonic scales, Table 11 displays the tuning of different instruments. L1 is the lute of the present song,

while B1 - B4 are *basinkoob* instruments tuned by different players.<sup>16</sup> The top row shows the frequencies of international tuning, both natural and tempered. The plus and the minus signs indicate the differences against the natural scales. Thus, the *f#-* is lower and the *b+* is higher than they would be in a natural diatonic scale.

**TABLE 11** *Lute scales and basinkoob tuning*

Lute maqaam (scale)											
Note	f	f#	g	g#	a	a#	b	c'	c'#	d'	d'#
nat.	176	184	198	211	220	238	248	264	275	297	317
tmp.	175	185	196	208	220	233	247	262	277	294	311
<b>L 1</b>	f+		g+								
	179		202								
	F+		G+			Bb-		c+		d	
	90		100			118		133		149	

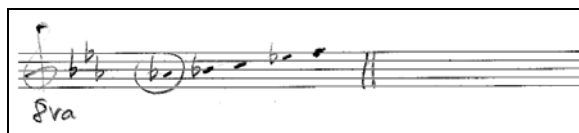
Basinkoob tuning											
Note	f	f#	g	g#	a	a#	b	c'	c'#	d'	d'#
nat.	176	184	198	211	220	238	248	264	275	297	317
tmp.	175	185	196	208	220	233	247	262	277	294	311
<b>B 1</b>		f#-		g#			b+		c#+	d'+	
		190		207			256		279	303	
<b>B 2</b>		f#-	g+		a+				c#	d'+	
		183	200		225				275	298	
<b>B 3</b>		f#	g+		a				c#	d'+	
		184	200		222				275	300	
<b>B 4</b>	f'-				a'+				c#-	d'+	d'+
	340				452				272	308	322

### *Birirt samples*

Finally, some examples from a *birirt* (bravery) song are given to illustrate the pentatonic tuning of a particular *basinkoob* - with its "tonus finalis" (sample 14, encircled) - with the resulting chords and harmonies (sample 15) - and with a typical melodic phrase (sample 16).

#### *Sample 14*

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE14.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE14.mp3)



**Sample 15**

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE15.mp3

**Sample 16**

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE16.mp3

**3.3.4 Solo / group relations**

The present *kehani* (love) song is recorded as a solo performance, where Mohammed Al Badri (tenor) accompanies his voice on the lute. Other songs of the same genre (*kehani*) are often performed with a band or a group of singers. But where other love songs have responses from a group of young men or girls, the present song has delicate lute interludes instead. (See the interludes of Table 3 and Sample 4 above.) With songs of this type (*kehani*), group responses seem to be the norm, and there are also frequent interchanges between the soloist and the group, both in the form of echoes or overlaps. In addition, there may be a group clapping hands on the main beats, or women's trills after certain passages (as has been shown above, sample 6).

By contrast, the *birirt* (bravery) songs have responses only from male groups.

The *akikt* (history) songs are performed without group responses. Possibly the appropriate response of the audience is silent meditation on the glorious events that the bard has recited.

**4 Contrasts outside the Beja culture**

In the following section, the comparison goes beyond the musical items of the Beja culture, in order to assess likenesses and differences with comparable items in related or neighbouring cultures (Cushitic, N.E. African).

The categories that allow for close comparisons are the musical scale, meter and rhyme, the musical rhythm, the general song style with its timbre, speed, and dynamics of performance, and finally the relation between the words and the music that goes with them.

## **4.1 The words**

### **4.1.1 Poetic meter, rhyme and alliteration**

The poetic traditions of Tigrigna, Amharic, Somali, and especially Egyptian Arabic have received much attention, and no attempt is made here to add to previous studies. However, some major differences of the Beja poetry will be pointed out. It was already shown that the meter of the Beja song is quantity-oriented, because it allows for exactly 10 syllables and 5 stressed syllables per line. (It was also said that possibly the introductory song is mora-based, with 13 morae per line.) But Beja songs have no alliteration and no rhyme. The differences against neighbouring traditions are substantial:

The Sudanese Arabic music employs meter, accent, some rhyme, but no alliteration.

The Ethio-Semitic meter, too, is quantity oriented. It counts syllables, provides for rhymes, but there is no alliteration.

The Somali poetry, too, is quantity-oriented but mora-based. Alliteration however - so far not encountered in Beja poetry - is a decisive feature in Somali.

## **4.2 The music**

### **4.2.1 Instruments and scales (maqamaat, modes)**

It has been shown that the present song employs a pentatonic scale which is adjusted to the modern diatonic scale (see Table 11). This sets Beja songs apart from the mainstream Arabic lute music.

By contrast, many of the Sudanese and Egyptian Arabic songs are intoned in heptatonic, non-diatonic scales (maqamaat). Among these Arabic maqamaat, the most frequent or most popular ones are "bayyaati" (بياتي), "hajaaz" (حجاز), and "raast" (راست). Bayyaati and raast include quarter notes, hajaaz does not. Thus the scale of the Beja song is closest to the Egyptian hajaaz - but it uses only 5 notes of the total hajaaz scale.

As far as the modes or scales of North African Semitic traditions are concerned (Tigrigna, Geez, Amharic), they include diatonic pentatonic modes as well as other scales with semitones. Among these, the mode used frequently in popular music is the "tizzita" (ቲዝታ) mode.<sup>17</sup> In this regard, the scale of the Beja song is closest to the tizzita mode. The tizzita mode should not be confused with the "baati" (ባቲ) mode,<sup>18</sup> and it should be noted that the Ge'ez "ba'ati" and the Egyptian "bayyaati" agree in the main intervals. Table 12 shows that only d, g, a (or b) and c correspond to each other.<sup>19</sup>

**TABLE 12 Tizzita, Baati and Bayyati**

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/TABLE12A.mp3

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/TABLE12B.mp3

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/TABLE12C.mp3

Eritrean and Ethiopian Tizzita ቲዝታ (Tizzita tuning of the 6 krar strings)							
1	2	3	4	5	6	(octave of strings 1, 2)	
a	c	d	e	g	a	(c	d)
		-	-	-	-	-	-
Eritrean and Ethiopian Ba'ati ባቲ (Baati tuning of the 6 krar strings)							
1	2	3	4	5	6	(octave of strings 1, 2, 3)	
g	<b	c	d	>f	g	(<b	c d)
		-	-	-	-	-	-
Egyptian and Sudanese بَيَاتِي (Bayyati maqaam played on an Egyptian lute)							
	d	<e	f	g	a<b	c	d
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 8
		!					
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: Here the signs "<" and ">" signify "lower" or "higher" pitches than natural pitches.

Different again are the scales of the Somali tradition (East Cushitic). This music employs a pentatonic inventory with a spacing of intervals that is different from the spacing of intervals in Beja (North Cushitic). Giorgio Banti has analyzed a song which is comparable to the Beja song discussed in this paper: It is also performed by a male singer who accompanies himself on the lute.

The scale of the Somali song is also pentatonic, but the difference between the Beja and Somali scales is displayed in Table 13 (Beja F G Bb c d f g, Somali G Bb c d# e f g bb c' d#).

L1 shows the scale in the Beja love song, and L2 shows the scale used in the Somali song. Double figures like 237-241 show the variations of pitches for the same note in a lute vibrato - the vibratos are very wide indeed. The voice of the singer intones the same intervals as the lute, but without vibrato.

**TABLE 13 Lute maqaam<sup>20</sup>**

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/TABLE13A.mp3

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/TABLE13B.mp3

Note	f	f#	g	g#	a	a#	b	c'	c'#	d'	d'#	e'
har.	176	184	198	211	220	238	248	264	275	297	317	330
tmp.	175	185	196	208	220	233	247	262	277	294	311	330
<b>L 1</b>	f+		g+									
	179		202									
	\	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\		
	F+		G+			Bb-		c+		d		
	90		100			118		133		149		
<b>L 2</b>	f		g			bb		c'			d#	
	176		198			237		264			317	
	181		200			241		269			318	
	\	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\
			G			Bb		c			d#	e
			100			121		132			159	161
								135				164

### **Somali samples and melodic formula**

In the analysis of a Somali song by Banti and Giannattasio (1996) there is a recurrent melodic formula that is copied below<sup>21</sup>, namely: an ascending third and second followed by a descending third and second. Sample 17 displays the formula. The same formula characterizes the Somali lute song that has been analyzed for the present paper and found in some of the Beja songs above.

### Sample 17

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE17.mp3



The same melody type is found in the Somali lute song transcribed for this paper. Its scale is given in Sample 18, where the "tonus finalis" has been encircled.

### Sample 18

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE18.mp3



#### 4.2.2 Musical rhythms (iqa') and periods

In the Beja love song discussed above, the musical periods flow in a regular but non-symmetrical rhythm characterized by bars of 2+3+3 beats.<sup>22</sup> The period for one stanza consists of 5 bars.<sup>23</sup> The non-symmetry is an important feature of Beja music: Bars of 2+3 or 2+3+3 beats and periods of 5 or 10 bars are among the most charming properties of Beja music.<sup>24</sup>

The example of a popular Sudanese Arabic love song by Hashim Mergani, by contrast, flows in regular, symmetrical rhythms and periods.

#### *Samples from a Sudanese Arabic love song*

The following paragraphs describe an Arabic song sung by Hashim Mergani, a widely appreciated singer of Sudan. Like the Beja singer,

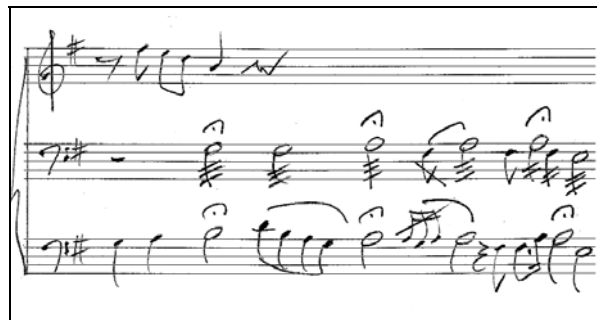
he too sings about love, and accompanies himself on the lute. However, in the background there is a band including flutes, keyboard and percussion. (1st line of Sample 19, played by a flute.)

Like the Beja singer, he too starts with a slow, thoughtful introduction which has the pauses and lute tremolos of Beja preludes (2nd line of Sample 19).

The singer, however (3rd line) uses a large number of fast, artistic embellishments such as trills, grace notes, scales gliding up and down - artistry that is not found in Beja songs.

### *Sample 19*

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE19.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE19.mp3)



### *Sudanese Arabic, introductory song*

For a comparison with the mood of the Beja text, the first lines of the introductory song have been added below.

#### **اعود في ليلٍ تفصّد**

I return from a night that satisfied its thirst at the front of my face,  
I return to writing. What remains is time for silence where birds would sing ...

### *Sudanese Arabic, love song*

Then the love song begins in a different mood.

In the 2nd and 3rd line of the transcription, the band and its percussion start with a symmetrical, repetitive rhythm, and in the 3rd bar the singer joins in. He does not move along with the syllables of the language, but stretches the syllables over several notes, in the Arabic tradition of rich and artful melisma.

### Sample 20

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE20.mp3

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Sample 20. It consists of three systems of staves. The top system has a vocal line in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time, starting with a 'Gra' marking. Below it is a krar accompaniment line with rhythmic notation. The middle system continues the vocal line and accompaniment. The bottom system shows a single vocal line.

The song and the refrain start with the following words:

### Sample 21

**اقول أشبلك في احباب عيوني**

Stanza: I say I carry you inside my eyes ...

**أدسك ان وين**

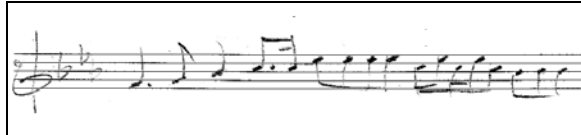
Refrain: Where could I hide you?

### *An Ethiopian love song*

A comparable example of Ethio-Semitic music is provided from the repertoire of Muluken Mellese: a love song presented by a tenor and accompanied by a krar, the Ethiopian version of the Beja *basinkoob*, which plays a free rhythm introduction (see Sample 22).

**Sample 22**

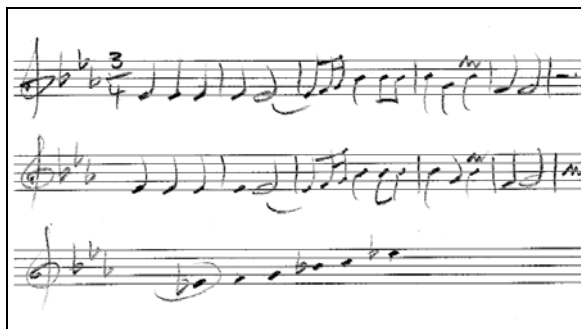
www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE22.mp3



Like the Egyptian love song, the Ethiopian song too has a regular, symmetrical rhythm and even numbers of bars per period. The transcription (Sample 23) shows the first musical period.<sup>25</sup> The musical scale and its finalis note are given in line 3.

**Sample 23**

www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE23.mp3



The text starts in a slow, rolling movement as follows:

**የወብትዋ ፡ ግርማ ፡ ከሩቅ ፡ የሚትለው**

yāwubätwa girma kâruk' yâmmitt'iläw ...

"The radiance of her beauty makes a man fall down even when far away ..."

**Samples from an Oromo singer**

A song performed by an Oromo (East Cushitic) singer is characterized by the polyrhythm<sup>26</sup> which is typical for most of Africa: the bars simultaneously beat in rhythms of 2/4 and 3/4. The periods however are composed of even numbers of bars. The singer is also accompanied by the Ethiopian basinkoob (called krar ክራር in Eritrea, not to be confused with the Ethiopian masinqo ማስንቆ.)

The rhythmical scheme can be abstracted as in Table 14 which shows the first bar of sample 24.

**TABLE 14: Polyrhythm of Oromo singer**

First bar of sample 24 (The accent sign ">" marks the heavy beats)					
>				>	1st line: singer
>				>	2nd line: krar
>				>	3rd line: band, brass
>				>	4th line: percussion

The transcription of sample 24 shows how different performers have different numbers of beats per bar: In the first bar of sample 24, the singer has 3 beats (line 1), the krar 4 beats (line 2), the instruments of the band 3 beats (line 3), and the percussion 2 beats (line 4).

### Sample 24

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE24.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE24.mp3)

The image shows a musical score for Sample 24, consisting of four staves. The top staff is the singer's melody, featuring a 3-beat pattern with triplets. The second staff is the krar accompaniment, also featuring a 4-beat pattern with triplets. The third staff is the band and brass accompaniment, featuring a 3-beat pattern with triplets. The bottom staff is the percussion accompaniment, featuring a 2-beat pattern with a 4/4 time signature.

The text of the polyrhythmic passage (1st line) starts as follows:

በፀሀይ ፣ በርሀን ፣ ደምቃ ፣ ክረምትና ፣ በጋ  
 bäs 'ähay bīrhan däm̄k 'a krämtinna bāga,  
 "Brought to life by sunlight in all seasons ..."

#### 4.2.3 Song style and vocal timbre

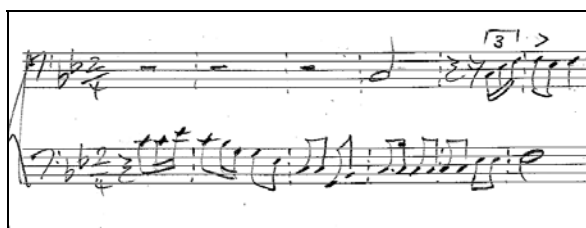
As far as the psycho-physiological attitude of the singers is concerned, and the song style which determines the timbre of the voice, the Beja song is characterized by a relaxed progression and a clear, warm timbre. There is no stress or pressure of a tense throat, and there are none of the narrow and fast, forced embellishments of some of the mediterranean cultures. Even though the song is performed by a soloist, the voice is open to integration with a group. Egyptian Arabic music, by contrast, exhibits a tense, strong and pressured high chest voice, which does not lend itself to collective singing. Similarly, the Ethiopian song style of the Oromo singer has the tense, controlled, individualistic timbre that characterizes vocal attitudes prevalent in Arabic music.

#### *Somali voice*

The Somali singer is closer to the song style of the Beja singer: it is soft and relaxed, solo but integrative. In the sample below, the lute starts with a soft prelude, and the singer comes in with the formula presented above. Unfortunately, the voice quality cannot be adequately transcribed.

#### *Sample 25*

[www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE25.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/SAMPLE25.mp3)



#### 4.3 Word / music relations

The Beja song uses one note per syllable. There is no melisma except in phrase final down-glides, where occasionally two

descending notes may share the last syllable. In these terms, the music is artless and allows for non-professionals to join in easily.

In contrast to this, the Egyptian Arabic songs have many notes per syllable. They are full of melisma, embellishments and vocal artistry: the movements of the voice are fast and follow well-defined fixed formulae; the singer's training resembles the vocal training for Western coloratura.

Some song types of the Ethio-Semitic music have a similar melisma. In most songs, there are many musical notes for any syllable of text.

The Somali singer (East Cushitic) resembles the Beja singer in that he consistently uses one note per syllable. From an ethnomusicological perspective, Lomax<sup>27</sup> claims that this is typical for mono-stratal societies where an integrative attitude makes the singer part of the chain of tradition, and part of the social collective.

## 5. Closure

On the one hand, the present song is true to the Beja tradition because it has certain traditional features. Among these are the intimate use of the lute and the shunning of trendy instruments such as keyboard, rhythm machine, or saxophone. The singer accompanies himself on a string instrument. The scale is pentatonic. The rhythm is asymmetric. The musical periods of 5 bars. The poetry, the choice of the topic and its treatment are in keeping with the Beja oral tradition.

On the other hand, the present song also is "modern" because it employs the following features: The scale is adjusted to a diatonic scale. The prestigious and respectable lute is used instead of the more common and more "rustic" *masinkoob*. The music is recorded in a studio and made available to non-Beja audience. The performance and the recording are of high professional quality. The voice and the entire performance are free from expressive mannerisms. The subtle emotional hints and intimations are appropriate to the guarded wording of Beja poetry.

## Appendix I: Types of Beja Songs

According to different publications and sources (Abuzaynab M., Ali S., Almkvist, Hudson, Mahmud M., Reinisch and Roper), there are various types and groups of Beja "songs". In the present paper, only the terms with asterisks (\*) receive special attention.

\*akikt "epic song" (preferred mode: dawarbaay tuning)  
 ardaat "dance"  
 biiboob "singing, dancing and jumping of a male group"  
 \*birirt "war song" (preferred mode: beesaay tuning)  
 habayt "poem consisting of 4 lines, sung about camels, sheep, or cattle"  
 habuul "funeral song" (derived from habil- "to mourn")  
 halil "chanting at a burial"  
 hamaad "praise song"  
 kafti "dancing and clapping hands"  
 \*khani, khaanob "love song" (preferred mode: shambar tuning)  
 kwaayraab "dancing"  
 kwal, kwaliit "song, folklore, performed with group response"  
 malag "dancing"  
 milig "dirge dance"  
 nawaat, nawi "song in praise of a deceased, dirge, elegy"  
 niin "humming"  
 samooyt, simaayeet "naming ceremony song"  
 tookway "dance in slow movements of a camel's neck"

## Appendix II: Sources and Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the help provided by Abuzeinab Musa of the Keren Language School, Giorgio Banti of Rome University, Friedmann Eissler of Tuebingen University, Mahmud Mohammed of the Eritrean Ministry of Education, and Mohammed Duruf of the Eritrean National Band.

In addition to the publications listed among the references, information was also received from various other sources. The music pieces quoted in this paper were recorded at various occasions (informal meetings, seminars, meetings, studio recordings), but recordings by Arka, Sidi Doshka and Moh. Al Badri are available in major cities as well as Shalatayn (see the references). The music is by the following musicians: (1) Beja Musicians - Abuzaynab Musa; Ali Uuleel; Anonymous young singer from Halayb; Arka

Mohammed Sabir; Mahmud Mohammed; Maryam Kasala; Mohammed Al Badri; Mohammed Duruf; Musa Adam; Sidi Doshka. (2) Non-Beja Musicians - Ala Mohammed (Eg. Ar.); Alemayehu Fanta (Amh.); Dave Brubeck, Hashim Mergani (Sud. Ar.); Muluken Mellese, Peter Tchaikowski, Tilahun Gessese (Or.); Xamar Axuud Naaji (Somali, courtesy Giorgio Banti).

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<sup>1</sup> The article is based on a presentation at the 2004 "Conference on African Languages and Linguists (CALL)" at Leiden University. Both the contents and the character of the oral presentation have largely been maintained - but the musical recordings obviously had to be reduced to two-dimensional transcriptions to be put on paper. Some of the examples which were presented at the CALL conference have been replaced by examples which are more easily accessible to the general public in the form of cassettes or CDs.

NB An audio-CD with all of the music samples is available with the publishers of this article. The intention is to put the music samples on the publisher's website. The numbering of samples in the written version is the same as in the audio-version.

<sup>2</sup> The transcription of Beja words follows the Latin transcription used by the Eritrean Ministry of Education since about 2000. The digraphs *dh* and *th* stand for retroflex *t* and *d*. Vowels should be read as IPA vowels.


<sup>3</sup> A short time after the Eritrean National Radio had started to broadcast in the Beja language, the song "Bitlibaabneek" was also chosen to close an interview with the author (19 August 2000).

<sup>4</sup> For the Beja people and their herds, efficient and accurate long-distance communication (*sakanaab*) has always been a vital means of survival.

<sup>5</sup> The poetic metalanguage of Beja uses a few loan translations or Arabic terms. So in Beja, the couplets and "lines" are "houses" and "heads" (*gawaab*, *girmaab*), and the meters are *arjaaz*.

<sup>6</sup> These are rough figures.

<sup>7</sup> The aim is to provide a transcription which is "emic" in the sense that non-essentials and culturally irrelevant properties (the "etic" variants) are ignored.

<sup>8</sup> These instruments and their techniques have survived in conservative cultures of N.E. Africa, but not in Mediterranean cultures. The present day *krar* () of the highlands and the *basinkoob* of the Beja lowlands are similar to each other in shape, and the technique of playing is the same. The *krar* differs in that in some areas it has a 6th string (adding the octave of the 5th string), and in Eritrea the resonance body may be a box rather than a bowl covered with skin. In spite of its phonological similarities, the term *krar* / *kīrar* is not derived from the Greek noun "kithára" (κίθάρᾱ), but from the Semitic verb "to twist".

<sup>9</sup> The picture of the classical harp (kithara, lyre) played by Orpheus is from a mosaic in a Roman villa of Rottweil (about 200 A.D.). The picture of the modern *basinkoob* is taken from a CD cover produced by Colophon records (about 2000).

<sup>10</sup> In the short collection of four-liners that Roper published in 1927, only 10% use rhymes.

<sup>11</sup> The fact that Somali poetry is mora based was recognized only recently. See Banti 1999.

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<sup>12</sup> The *basinkoob* frequently uses alternating chords of empty fifths, here: "A-e" as well as "G-d".

<sup>13</sup> Mathematically (but not in its musical character), these rhythms resemble the South or Central American "rumba."

<sup>14</sup> N. African lutes don't have strings for the 6th pair, which would be f.

<sup>15</sup> With the Beja musicians of Eritrea, the following three "modes" or conventions of *masinkoob* tuning are common: (1) *shambar* for love songs, (2) *beesaay* for war songs, and (3) *dawarbaay* for others. With reference to the international diatonic scale, these three can be roughly be characterized as (1) f c a d g, (2) e h a d f, and (3) e c a d g. The pitches which are underlined represent the harmonic basis when the *masinkoob* is played in the "dirdira" technique. Note that the pitches "a" and "d" are common to all three modes.

<sup>16</sup> The L1 and B4 pitches have been telescoped to save space and to make the scales comparable. Lower and higher octaves are displayed in the same columns.

<sup>17</sup> Anne Wedekind (1988: 36) has identified the "Tizzita" inventory (a a' g' e' d' c') as the one that is most frequently used in modern popular songs.

<sup>18</sup> Powne (1968: 12-58) erroneously uses the term "Baati" for the "Tizzita" mode. According to the Ethiopian traditional terminology and authorities such as Alemayehu Fanta, what Powne presents as "Baati" is the inventory of the "Tizzita" scale.

<sup>19</sup> Studies which enlarge on this relationship are scarce.

<sup>20</sup> As with the Table 11, in Table 13 pitches have been telescoped to save space.

<sup>21</sup> From pages 97 and 101.

<sup>22</sup> In Western music, there are only few specimens of non-symmetrical division of an 8 beat bar, such as Beja 2+3+3. And there are hardly any specimens of the other non-symmetrical patterns that are common in Beja songs, such as the the 2+3 bar. One symphony movement by Tchaikowsky and one experimental piece of jazz music by Dave Brubeck are among the known exceptions. Both of these are included with the audio-samples.

Tchaikowsky: [www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/FOOTN22A.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/FOOTN22A.mp3)

Dave Brubeck: [www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/FOOTN22B.mp3](http://www.kwedekind/Eingang1/BejaSong/FOOTN22B.mp3)

<sup>23</sup> For Western music, periods of 5 bars are quite unusual.

<sup>24</sup> Beja music is highly regarded by neighbouring cultures, even by tribes that otherwise are not positively disposed towards the Beja people.

<sup>25</sup> The transcription is based on the analysis of Anne Wedekind.

<sup>26</sup> In the rhythms of Western music, simultaneity of two mathematical relations is rare (simultaneously two and three beats, as Brahms likes it). However, in the harmonies of Western music, it is omnipresent (chords with fifths, fourths or octaves).

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<sup>27</sup> Lomax compares features of ethno-musical styles across many cultures ("cantometrics").