

NUMBER SYMBOLISM (NOS.1, 4, 7 AND 1,000) IN SWAHILI POETRY: THE CASE OF *UTENZI WA FATUMAH*

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Abstract

This paper¹ seeks to address itself to archetypal symbolism of numbers in Kiswahili poetry with a focus on numbers 1, 4, 7 and 1,000 in Utenzi wa Fatumah (The Epic of Princess Fatuma). The term "archetype" refers to basic, general or universal patterns of one sort or another. It is a universal symbol and if a given pattern in a poem is archetypal, then too it is a universal symbol (Wamutiso, 1996). I also discuss symbolism of these numbers in different cultures.

1.0 Introduction

Numbers are both sacred and mysterious and numerology is said to be the first cousin of astrology. Numbers are not only mystical, but also archetypal. In the folklore of many peoples number symbolism play a major role. It is full of superstitions about lucky and unlucky days. Numbers are regarded as giving the idea of completeness. Some of these numbers are 7, 10, 12, 40, 70 and 100.

There is a special relationship between numbers and memory, based upon the endless capacity of numbers in any context, music, games, cosmology, commerce, etc. At one time, many people had numbers which today exist only in rhymes sung by children, but known to old and young alike. These numbers are never used in any other context, and to remember the numbers we must sing rhyme through.

Symbolism and numbers have played a very important part in the proclamation of all religions, and there is no known society which does not have superstitions about numbers. All religions are full of superstitions because man is superstitious in nature. Numbers have been given divine qualities. We talk of the ten (10) commandments. The days of the week are seven (7) and not more or less. Numbers are also widely used in magic spells, religious repetitive formulas, divination. In Swahili, *siku za mwizi ni arobaini*, the days of a thief are forty (they are numbered).

Taboos on counting are found throughout the world and throughout the ages and that many relating to the celestial. There is a widespread fear among Africans that the counting of human beings, domestic animals and valuable possessions lead to their destruction.

In many communities of the world even numbers symbolize the feminine, negative, earthly or passive principle and the uneven or odd numbers express the positive, active or celestial ideas.

Numbers are used in oral and even written literature formulas. They play a major role in African literature. They have a customary importance in the proverbs, folk-myths, modes of divination and seasonal ritual observances of traditional African societies, and as such the numerological neatness of much West African writing comes as no surprise. The days of the week, months of the year, or years in a given period may acquire magical significance and correspondences in drama and fiction in the light of numerological traditions.

A good example is the Wole Soyinka's early tradition-oriented play, *The Strong Breed* (1963), where the hero, Eman, is guilty of twelve-year dereliction of his ancestral duty as hereditary carrier of the village's sins of twelve months, which it becomes his fated task to remove and to which events lead him inescapably back. Thus the annulment of the time of a single year and it may be, of many years of ritual malpractice in the corrupt society of the play-simultaneously effaces his own twelve-year apostasy.

Numbers have the same fatalistic propensities in the parallel circular return to a lost self and a forsaken obligation by the protagonist Amamu in the more modern setting of Kofi Awoonor's poetic novel, *The Earth, My Brother* (1972). Amimia reasumes symbolically the burden of suffering of his childhood cousin Dede, whose death from malnutrition in 1944 is made to mark exactly the centenary of the colonial invasion of Ghana and to serve as the culmination of a century of imperial pillage and neglect: thus the personal and historical burdens borne by Amimia and Independent Ghana become one and the same. In Soyinka's adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* (1973), the old year which is violently purged by the sufferings of an aged slave, in the role of carrier, is symbolically equated with the whole political era of King Penthouse' evil reign (Wright, 1991:31-37).

1.1 The Concept of Number Four: Number 4 as an Archetype (VSS 4, 27, 57-61, 63, 65-66, 69, 71, 73, 75, 77, 81, 84-85 and 443)

This number brings order into the chaos and it is a material and cosmic number. The four phases of the moon and the 4 cardinal points of the earth offer such ordering; so do the 4 elements (Earth, Air, Fire and Water) and the 4 humours, and on the mythical

plane, in Islam, the 4 rivers in Paradise and, in the Vedic tradition, the 4 milk streams that flow from the udder of the heavenly cow. As a number of cosmic order, 4 often divides the time: the 4 seasons, Hesiod's 4 ages of man, the Hindu concept of 4 world epochs (yugas), and the Zoroastrian idea of 4 periods. Chinese religion and Islam know 4 sacred scriptures. Christianity accepts only 4 gospels (by the 4 Evangelists), as authoritative. For the Christian, the cross, with its 4 right angles, is "the rightest figure of all," extending over the 4 corners of the world, while the Jewish tradition emphasizes the mystery of the tetragrammaton, YHWH.

Cirlot (1981:235), too, observes that 4, as a kind of double division (2 and 2), no longer signifies separation (like the number 2) but the orderly arrangement of what is separate, hence, it is a symbol of order in space and, by analogy, of every other well-ordered structure.

An Islamic folklore says, God created all things in sets of 4. There are 4 female Ashab who memorized the *al-Qur'an* completely. These were Hadhrat Aisha binti Abu Bakr, Hadhrat Umm Salma, Hadhrat Hafsa bint `Umar, and Hadhrat Umm Warga ibn Nawfal. Muslim theologians have also argued that excluding a few revelations in form of epistle (Sahifas), the revealed books of Allah are only 4.

Four (4), according to the Kambas, is a bad number for a man but it is good for a woman. The Fon say that God's assistant set up 4 pillars (East, South, West and North), to support the sky. Some of the Fon tribe in Dahomey, have a 4 day week.

According to the Lodagaa, the liars are made to sit in the scorching sun in the land of the departed for 4 months. The Kikuyu father cuts 4 sugarcanes to celebrate the birth of a girl, the mother and the child are secluded for 4 days and in the case of a boy, the number is five; the juice of sugarcane is fed to both the mother and the child (to ensure their good health. During the Kikuyu initiation ceremony rite into the ukuru grade of elders, the candidate has to present to the elders the following things: 4 gourds of honey beer, 4 gourds of sugar-cane beer, 4 gourds of gruel and 4 bowls of cooked njahi (pigeon peas).

In his *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe describes the medicine man's ceremonial objects: 4 small yams, 4 pieces of white chalk, and 4 palm leaflets. The young man's mother counts out 4 groups of six cowries, as she would and gives them to the diviner.

Among the Kamba rites connected with the building of a hut, there is cooking of some food when the work is being done. If the cooked food is ngima (*ugali*), 4 small pieces are thrown on the floor for the spirits. In the second initiation 4 men carry the symbolic mbusya (rhinoceros), 4 men build the hut etc. Among the Zulus it symbolizes strong and harmonious unity by powerful people working together for a common cause. 'Let us unite' is symbolized by a chief when he sends 4 sticks closely tied to a neighbouring chief.

This number represents the cosmic totality which is also in the background of the 4 living creatures (in *Ezek.1:5* and *Ap.4:4,6*), everything which has a character of plenitude (4 beatitudes in *Lk 6:20ff* and 4 scourges in *Ezek: 14:21*).

In the *Old Testament* the concubine left her husband to return to her father's house for 4 months (*Judg.xix:2*), her husband was prevailed upon to stay there for 4 days (*Judg. xix: 5-7*) and the fugitive Benjamin spent 4 months at the rock of Rimmon (*Judg. xx:47*).

We have the 4 rivers of Paradise, the 4 days of lamentation (*Judg: xi:40*), the 4 barrels of water (1 *Kings xviii:33*), the beasts with 4 faces and 4 wings *Ezek. i:3*), the 4 men in the fire, the 4 beasts, the 4 Kings, the 4 horns, the 4 carpenters (*Zech 1:20*) and in the *New Testament* (*Acts xxviii:29*), we have the 4 anchors and although a name of God YH contains 2 letters, the Great and Most Holy Name YHWH contains 4. As soon as the Muslim child is able to talk or when he has attained the age of 4 years, 4 months, and 4 days, he is taught the Bismillah (to recite the inscription which occurs at the commencement of the *Holy Qur'an*), when Allah intended creation, he divided Muhammad's Nur into 4 and created Kalam from the first, Lawh from the second and Arsh from the third and subdivided the 4th into 4 and created from there Kursi, angels, heaven, worlds, paradises and hells. Muhammad's coffin is said to have remained suspended in space held by 4 angels of the cardinal points.

In Swahili culture, during the ceremony of sending the money for the bride's clothing, a big lunch is given to friends and others. This lunch amounts to at least 4 bags of rice and 4 bullocks and is called maridadi (dandiness).

In Swahili literature number 4 is frequently mentioned: *Katika ulimwengu he ni nne tu, zimeondoka mbili na mbili zimesalia: Haya hakuna, na Huruma hakuna, zimesalia Hila na Hadaa* (In the world there are only 4 'Hs' 2 (of which) have departed and 2

have remained behind; Honour (lit. shame) and Humanity there are none, there remain Humbug and Hocus-pocus). It is mentioned in *Kasida ya Burudai* (vs. 121) with respect to the four Holy months of Muslims:

*Siku zikipita kwa hamu zao
hisabu hakuna aiyuwao
illa nyezi mine hiyo yambao
nyezi za sharafu zita kukoma*

Four (4) is symbolic of the earth, of terrestrial space, of the human situation, of the external, natural limits of the 'minimum' awareness of totality, and of rational organization. It is equated with the square, the 4 seasons and the points of the compass. A great material and spiritual forms are modelled after quaternary. It is the number associated with tangible achievements and with Elements (Cirlot *ibid*: 231-233).

In summary, 4 is the first solid figure produced. It is spatial scheme of or order of manifestation, the static as opposed to the circular and dynamic. In its wholeness it is a totality, completion and solidarity; the Earth, order, the rational measurement, relativity and justice. There are 4 cardinal points, seasons, winds, sides of the square, arms of the cross, rivers of Paradise and of the infernal regions, seas, sacred mountains, watches of the night and day and quarters of the moon. The Divine quaternity is in contrast to the Trinity. Four (4) is an emblematic number in the *Old Testament*.

For the Muslims the 4 terms of quaternary are the Principle: The Creator, Universal Spirit, Universal Soul, and the Primordial matter. These correspond to the 4 worlds of Cabalism. There are also 4 houses of death.

2.0 Number four in *Utenzi wa Fatumah* (VSS. 27, 57-62, 64-88 and 443)

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There are Four Quarters, four corners of a building, four sides of the square, four winds, 4 elements (Earth, Air, Fire and Water), 4 humours, four Rivers of Paradise and of the infernal regions, seas, sacred mountains and watches of the night. In Islamic mythology, there are 4 rivers in Paradise and, in the Vedic tradition, the 4 milk streams that flow from the udder of the heavenly cow. In Christianity, we have the 4 Rivers of Paradise, the 4 days of lamentation (*Judg*: xi : 40), the 4 barrels of water (1 *Kings* xviii : 33), the beasts with 4 faces and 4 wings (*Ezek*. i:3), the 4 men in the fire, the 4 beasts, the 4 Kings, the 4 horns, the 4 carpenters (*Zech* 1:20) and in the *New Testament* (*Acts* xxviii : 29), we have the 4 anchors and although a name of God YH contains 2 letters, the Great and Most Holy Name YHWH contains. It is equated with the square.

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The Divine quatercentenary is in contrast to the Trinity. Four (4) is an emblematic number in the *Old Testament*. In the *Old Testament* the concubine left her husband to return to her father's house for 4 months (*Judg*.xix:2), her husband was prevailed upon to stay there for 4 days (*Judg*. xix: 5-7) and the fugitive Benjamin spent 4 months at the rock of Rimmon (*Judg*. xx:47).

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Number four features prominently in *Utenzi wa Fatumah*(64-88). It is no coincidence that this number is mentioned many times in the epic.

It is no surprise that whenever the fourth character in the epic is mentioned more he also happens to be the most important as compared to there three mentioned before. The preceding three characters are not complete until the last one, the fourth. Prophethood is not complete until the fourth and last Propeht, Prophet Muhammad, follows. Caliphhood was not complete until Ali became the fourth Caliph. Number four is an important number in Islam.

First the poetess narrates about four holy women: Hawa, the first woman to be created by God and the mother of all human beings, Aminah, Mariamu (Mary), Fatumah (the Prophet's daughter). She also mentions the four Caliphs- Abubakar, 'Uthman, Ali and 'Umar.

God created twelve but chose only four holy months.

The poetess also tells us that the Prophet Muhammad's journey from Makkah to Jerusalem took four days, although that of Miiraji and Israi took only one day. She also says that it is a must for a Muslim fast for four days. During the time for fasting, it is the time of prayer, submission and repentance.

She uses four verses of her epic to explain the beauty of the Holy Prophet's daughter, Fatumah. She compare her to houris(nymphs?). These are te most beatiful women in

Paradise who will be married only to holy men. The wedding will take place in heaven but, in only four verses, Fatumah is compared to these beauties while she is still on earth.

2.1 The four chosen Angels (VSS. 57-60)

Among the creatures Allah created many creatures and among each kind chose four of them. Among the angels, according to Mwana Sayyid, he chose four angels: Israfil, Michael and Gabriel and the famous Azrael, who is best known for taking away people's spirits, after they die. angel of Death. He is mentioned in the *Holy Qur'an* under the title of Malaku 'l-Maut, Surah xxxii 11, "The angel of death who is charged with you shalt cause you to die.") . Gabriel is Allah's best messenger. He sent him to the Prophet Muhammad with the message about the wedding of Fatuma to Ali. The other three angels are also Allah's servants. Gabriel is mentioned only twice in the *Holy Qur'an* by name Suratu i-Baqarah ii 91 and Suratu 'i-Tahrim lxvi 4. He is, however, supposed to be spoken of in Surahs ii 81, 254; v 109; xvi 104, as "the Holy Spirit," Ruhu l-Quaus; in Surah xxvi 193, as "the Faithful Spirit", ar-Ruhu 'l-Amin; and in liii 5 as "one terrible in power." Shadulu 'l-Quwa.

When Ali returns with three dinars he meets three beggars whom he gives the three dinars (each a dinar). The three beggars in the epic are none other than angels. Later he meets a man with a camel. This person gives Ali his camel, free of charge. This person also happens to be Allah's angel. As such Ali meets four angels of Allah.

2.2 Four Angels testify at the wedding of Fatumah in Heaven (VSS. 234-237)

All the angels participated in the wedding of Fatumah in heaven but it is four of them who testified in her Celestial wedding

**233 Ba'adae Jabaruti, kavuwata yakwe sauti
Ayukum malaikati, wane, wenye shuhudia!**

After that the Omnipotence, let His voice out and said:
"O you four angels, will be the bearers of the testimony!"

**234. Shuhudiani, wayuzi, hakika ni ndangu ezi
Thamuoza kijakazi, mwana wa hilalia**

Testify, you knowledgeable ones, that mine is truly the power

I will marry off the handmaid, the girl who is just making her appearance.

They testify that Allah, the Almighty, is marrying off, in absentia, His beloved female servant, with the best name, here referred to as the radiant Fatumah, the best of womenkind and the daughter of the Prophet, His Beloved; that He is to marry off the aforementioned servant to the person His other servant best known, all over the world, as Ali and that the said person is the son of Abu Talib, etc (vss. 233-237).

2.3 The four holy books (VSS. 61-62)

Allah made many great Books but he only chose four, viz: the *Torah*, the *Gospel*, the *Psalms* is and finally the greatest of all - the *Holy Qur'an*.

2.4 The four chosen prophets (VSS. 63-65)

We are told of the four chosen Prophets. These are Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Ibrahim, Jesus and Moses are also recognized as Allah's prophets. The four prophets are the pillars of Allah's religion - Islam. Muhammad is the last Prophet with the lasting Message, the intercessor of humankind and the founder of the Islamic religion and is the one who sealed all prophethood.

2.5 The four chosen Caliphs (VSS. 66-70)

The four chosen Companions of the Holy Prophet, who later became Caliphs, are mentioned in the epic. These Companions also happen to be the Holy Prophet's relatives. They are Abubakr Siddique, Omar Faruq, Uthman and Ali. The fourth one, Ali, is Muhamad's beloved, the greatest of them all and the strongest. He was so faithful to the Holy Prophet that Muhammad later married his daughter to him. He is also the one who led the Muslim armies in religious battles, as is also seen in *Siri li Asirali* and in *Kasida ya Hamziyyah* .

The four holy mountains are also mentioned. These are Kaf, Sinai, Uhud and Arafat. At Mount Arafat, the entire assembly of Muslim pilgrims stands from noon to sunset on the ninth day of the Hajj pilgrimage. This collective act of standing, before God and around Arafat, is considered by many to be the most powerful moment of the Hajj.

It is in these holy mountains where the holy wars were fought and it is at the same mountains where the Holy Prophet used to pray and get revelation. All the other Arabian mountains are the meeting point of heaven and earth. It is the same case with all the mountains of the world. Qaf or Kaf in the Muslim-Arabic mythology is the mountain range, made of emerald, that encircles the outside the ring of the ocean. It is the abode of the Jinn and other supernatural creatures.

The cosmic mountain is a sacred centre. It is the celestial archetype, the Centre of the World linking Heaven and the Earth and anchoring the cardinal direction. It is the Axis Mundi or the Centre post of the World. The summit of the cosmic mountain is not only the highest point of the earth, but it is also the earth's navel, the point at which creation began. This highest point of the earth is regarded as central, the summit of paradise, the meeting place in the clouds of Heavens and Earth reaching up 'on high'. It is the support and abode of gods. Every temple, palace, sacred city or royal residence is the Centre of the World because it is a Sacred Mountain. This Axis Mundi is not only the meeting point of the Earth and Heaven but to also of Hell. The Jinns (Geniis) have to ascend to Heaven and descend to the Earth in the Holy Mountain (Mount Hujun).

The mountain symbolizes constancy, eternity, firmness, stillness, rain, thunder gods, celestial realm, attainment, empire, life of man, pregnancy, woman, wisdom, climbing tranquillity, resurrection, retreat, meditation, mystical realm and light. The summit is the scene of eternal youth, joyous repose, place for worship, site of waters of health and a place of heavenly communication. The sacred mountain is also the 'navel of the waters,' since the fountain of all waters springs from it.

In the *Holy Qur'an*, Safa and Marwah are said to be the 'beacons of God' and pilgrims are advised to compass them about. Formerly, idols stood upon them and were worshipped, but Muhammad ordered their destruction although the visitation of the mountains is an important part of the Hajj rites. In the Islamic Tradition, it was Mount Hira, on the outskirts of Makkah that Muhammad heard the revealed word of the *Holy Qur'an*.

According to an Islamic Tradition, Muhammad began his Night Journey at Moriah, the Mount of the Temple in Jerusalem or The Dome of the Rock. Together with the Alhambra and the Taj Mahal, this dome of the rock, as it is best known, is the best known monument of the Islamic architecture and is visited every year by thousands of tourists. It is said that the Ka'bah in Makkah will join the Rock in Jerusalem at the

Doom's day. It is at this Dome, during Miraji and Israi, where Buraq knelt and waited for the Holy Prophet. It is also the spot where the Prophet Muhammad prayed. From the very time it was built, the Dome of the Rock has been a 'recording' building in that there is much of Islamic history written on it. This Dome stands on the most sacred spots on earth, a spot hallowed by Jewish, Heathen, Christians and Muslims and is considered by Tradition the place where Abraham intended to sacrifice his son Isaac. It is the oldest Muslim monument surviving and is the shrine of which the Aqsa Mosque is the sanctuary.

The mountains of Qaf which bound the great sea Muhit, form a circular barrier round the whole earth. The general opinion is that these mountains bound our earth, but some say there are countries beyond, each country being a thousand years' journey. Mt. Hira is called Jabal an-Nur (the Mountain of light) because it was the scene of the first revelation. Among the Eastern Arabs, saint's tombs are frequently found on the summits of mountains, a survival of ancient nature-worship.

The Ka`bah, according to an Islamic Tradition, is the highest point on earth. A Muslim Tradition maintain that it was originally built by Adam, according to a celestial prototype and after the Deluge it was rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael (*Holy Qur'an* 2: 11 & 121).

In summary, the cosmic mountain is a World Centre. The highest point of the earth is regarded as Central, the summit of Paradise, the meeting place in the clouds of heaven and earth, reaching up "on high". It is the embodiment of cosmic forces and life. As axial and central, it provides passage from one plane to another and communion with the gods. The rocks are bones, the streams blood, the vegetation the hair and the clouds the breath. The mountain symbolizes constancy, eternity, firmness and stillness. Mountain tops are associated with sun, rain and thunder gods and, in early traditions of the feminine godhead, the mountain was the earth and female, with the sky, clouds, thunder and lighting as the fecundating male. On the spiritual level mountain tops represent the state of full consciousness. Pilgrimages up sacred mountains symbolize aspiration, renunciations of worldly desires, attaining to the highest states and ascent from the partial and limited to the whole and unlimited. The sacred mountain is also 'the navel of waters' since the fountain of all waters springs from it. Passing between closing or clashing mountains represents passing to new spiritual planes, the passing being possible only in the spirit and in the 'timeless moment'.

2.6 The four holy months (VSS. 74 –79)

God created twelve months and of the twelve he chose four. These are holy months of Muharram, Rajab, Shaaban and Ramadhan. The last month, accordingly is the greatest. It is the month of fasting and prayer for all Muslims. It is regarded as a divine institution, being enjoined in the *Holy Qur'an* (Surah ii, 180) and is therefore compulsory. In the Traditions, the Prophet Muhammad is said:

"Every good act that a man does shall receive from ten to seven hundred rewards, but the rewards of fasting are beyond bounds, for fasting is for God alone, and He will give its rewards".

Ashura (lit. "the tenth"), a voluntary fast day seldom observed on the tenth day of the month of Muharram, is generally observed by all Muslims. The month of Sha'ban, is in the present day, but 'Ayishah relates that "the Prophet used sometimes to fast part of this month and sometimes the whole." It is related that Muhammad observed it, and said it was a day respected by Jews and Christians (*Mishkat. vii. vol. I.*). This is the only day of Muharram observed by the Sunni Muslims, being the day on which it is said God created Adam and Eve, heaven and hell, the tablet of decrees, the pen, life, and death. It is kept by the Sunnis as a fast.

2.7 The four holy days/days of prayer (VSS. 78-82)

There are four Holy Days: Two days for 'Idd (Idu 'l-Fitr and the 'Idu 'l-Azha), Friday and the Hajji, Day of Pilgrimage. These four days have been blessed by Allah. They are the days when Muslims should dedicate themselves to serving Allah. Friday (Arabic, Jum'ah, The Day of Assembly) is the Muslim Sabbath, on which they assemble in the Jami Masjid, or chief mosque, and recite two rik'ahs or prayers and listen to the oration, or khutbah at the time of mid-day prayer.

2.8 The four holy nights (VSS 83 – 86)

Four Holy Nights are mentioned in the epic. These are the Night of Pilgrimage, the two Nights of Idd and the Night of Ascension. The Night of Ascension is very important because, it is the Night when Muhammad met all the previous Prophets and Messengers of Allah and led them in prayer. It is also the Night when he met Allah personally and was given the prayers for Muslims and is called the Night of Power. It is the hero's journey, also known as the quest.

2.9 The four chosen women (VSS. 87-90)

Four chosen and most blessed and most respected women are mentioned in the epic. These women are related to the Prophet Muhammad. Number four, like all even number has the feminine qualities. The four women are Eve, the first woman to be created and the mother of mankind; Sarah, the wife of Abraham; Mary the mother of Jesus and Fatumah, the beloved daughter of the Holy Prophet and the heroine of the epic. Of the four women she has been blessed with praying for forgiveness of sins for other women (see also in *Kasida ya Hamziyyah*). As the eldest daughter of the Holy Prophet she has become the model of perfect behaviour for all Muslim women. None of the other daughters of the Prophet ever gained comparable prominence in Islamic literature. The poetess says that she is the best woman, compared to the other three.

3.0 Number one as an archetypal number (VSS 48, 356)

Cirlot (1981:232) argues that number 1 is equivalent to the 'Centre', to the non-manifest point, to creative power or the 'removed mover'. One (1) is also equated with light and also with unity and unity is the symbol of divinity. God in Christianity (*vide Deut. vi:4, Mark xii:29*), Islam (*vide Surah cxii*) and in Judaism is 1. The Babylonians considered 1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 12 and 13 to be unlucky numbers.

Number 1 is a primordial unity, the sum of all possibilities, the Creator, the First Mover, the Centre, the indivisible, the germinal, isolation, an upsurging and an uprising, the principle which gives rise to duality and thence to multiplicity and back to the final unity. In Islam, one (1) symbolizes God Unity, the Absolute from whom all things rise, the Essence etc. According to a Tradition God is odd, he loves the odd.

It is not a number in the normal meaning of the word since it points to the all-embracing unit that incorporates the possibility of multiplicity. Geometrically, 1 is represented by the dot, out of which forms and figures are developed. To the Zulus it is the holiest of all. It represents the combining of all created things - the Oneness or the Whole, which is God. Since it is absolute, it has no rival. The number is also the symbol of freedom.

It alludes to the Paradisiac state which preceded good and evil that is, dualism. The numerals 1 and 8 appear in various combinations in virtually all Eastern religions: 18, 81, 108, 1,008. Among the Muslim mystics the numbers 18 and 81 "read" in the left and right palms add to 99, the number of Beautiful Names of Allah. The numerals 1, 0, and 8 permeate much of Asian religious practice and belief.

In Kiswahili literature, especially in epics, it features prominently. In *Kasida ya Hamziyyah*, for example, it is mentioned in the following verses: 1, 16, 169, 186, 203, 233, 314 and 347) and in *Kasida ya Burudai* it occurs in verse 40. In *Utenzi wa Rasilghuli*, it occurs in verses 327, 338, etc.

The following proverbs are good examples on the prominent role number one plays in Kiswahili society: *Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa* (One (1) finger does not kill a louse), *Mzigo wa t'ungu ni t'embe moja ya mtele* (The load of an emmet is 1 grain of rice), *Nia zikiwa moja kilicho mbali huja* (When people have the same intention, that which is far comes near), *Samaki mmoja akioza huoza wote* (If one (1) fish rots, it spoils them all), *Kinga kimoja hakiwaki* (One (1) firebrand does not lit), *Kinga na kinga ndipo moto huwaka* (Firebrand on firebrand is when fire burns), *Mkono mmoja haufungi kuni* (One (1) hand does not tie firewood), *Baa haimpati mmoja* (Calamity does not get just 1 person), *Figa moja halitegemezi chungu* (One (1) stone cannot build a house), *Mmoja hashui chombo* (One (1) cannot launch a vessel), *Mkono mmoja hauchinji ng'ombe* (A single hand cannot slaughter a cow) and *Kosa moja haliachi mke* (One (1) mistake does not warrant the divorce of a wife).

4.0 Number (one) thousand

Number 1,000 is symbolically endless as exemplified in the following verse:

Wenye ndaa kala wachu kwikwi kwa sai moja
Pakesa manyota kwa hiyo sai alifu dhama (vide Utendi wa Hamziyyah vs.169).

After the archetypal wedding ceremony in heaven conducted by Allah, Gabriel was charged with the task of informing the Prophet that his daughter had been married to his cousin, and 70, 000 angels were ordered to follow Gabriel to earth, carrying each a load of jewels, silken garments and other presents as dowry for the bride. Here again, Jiburili acted as the bridegroom's representative by paying his bride-price for him. In *Utenzi wa Rasilghuli*, it occurs in verses 815, etc.

In *Utenzi wa Rasilghuli*, it occurs in verses 161, 736, The Zulus call it "he great-great" and Muhamad's **Nur** had been in the presence of the almighty for a 1000 years.

This paper is an adaptation of “Number Symbolism (Nos.1, 4,7&1,000) in Swahili Poetry: The case of Utenzi wa Fatuma”, a paper read on 13th February, 2003 at the Institut Fur Afrikanistik, Univesität Koln, GERMANY.

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