OMANI PROVERBS: DATE PALMS AND DATES

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النخلة عطيها ... تعطيك
(Omani proverb)

1. Introduction

1.1 Date palms and their fruit have from ancient times occupied a central part in Arab culture. The date palm is mentioned several times in the Qur'ān and the value of dates is also given emphasis by a *ḥadīṯ*[1].

Within Arabia, Oman had for a long time been established as a major area of palm date cultivation. Pliny – who not only landed on the coasts of Oman but also ventured somewhat into the country – claimed that he could list forty-nine different varieties of the date palm if only he could remember their outlandish names (Pliny, *Natural History*, VI, 28). The importance of this plant for the inhabitants of this territory is well illustrated by a story of the Baṣran philologian Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlā' (d. 154/770). According to which he met one day a Bedouin in Mekka who turned out to be from Oman. When Abū ʿAmr asked him about the source of their wealth (*māl*), he answered that it comes from the date palms and added that the fruit of the date palm can be eaten, its boughs [when lit] shed light, its stump is used in building, the bases of its branches give warmth when burnt, its fibres are good ropes, its leaves drinking cups, and the bowl made from its stump is a vessel (for making date wine)[2].

Date palms are in themselves of lasting economic value, and as such, they have been termed *māl*[3] ever since in Oman. This is, however, not the only appellation

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[1] *Man taṣabbaḥa kulla yawmin sabʿa tamarātin ʿaǧwatan lam yaḍurrahu fī ḏālika l-yawmi summun wa-lā siḥrun* (al-Buḫārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*: *al-Aṭʿima*, Nr. 5025).

[2] For the whole anecdote, in which the *faṣāḥa* of the Omani bedouin is also given great emphasis, see al-Qālī, *Ḏayl* 19. In Oman, apart from traditionally providing a major foodstuff, the date palm was until recently used to make all kinds of useful items. Its trunk was used to make colums and ceilings for houses while its fronds were used to make roofs and walls. The palm frond was, and still is, used to make bags, mats, boats, shelters, brooms and fans. Livestock were fed with its seeds and it was burned as fuel.

[3] That by *māl* date palms are often to be understood outside Oman as well, is stated explicitly by a proverb in the collection of Al Sudaïs (1993:146, No. 993) المغنيات الخيل والمال النخل 'Horses bring wealth, but date palms constitute true property'. Before the discovery of oil in the 1960s and the subsequent change in the economy, property in Oman had also been composed principally of date palms, and *māl* was usually employed in this sense. In the 19th century dates were Oman's biggest export. By the early 1970s the situation has changed dramatically. As a result of rapid inflation, labor shortage and

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of date palms in Oman. On the contrary, date cultivation – together with a relative linguistic isolation – has led to a variegated vocabulary which is apparent already in Ibn Sīda's (d. 458/1066) *Muḫaṣṣaṣ*, where in every chapter of the *Kitāb an-Naḫl* – on the basis of his sources – he calls our attention to the special terminology used in Oman (as, for example, *ʿawāna* (*ʿawān*) 'a tall palm' /III, 215.12/), also mentioning some species of date palms cultivated in Oman (like the Farḍ-palm and its date of the same name, in connection with wich even a line of poetry is cited /III, 228.16-17/).

1.2 The principal aim of this article is to present the knowledge about date palms and dates as presented by Omani proverbs[4]. Their major source is al-Ḥumaydī's collection where 2749 proverbs are to be found (al-Ḥumaydī 1986-94). This comprehensive collection has been supplemented with proverbs from three other, much smaller, sources (Reinhardt 1894, Jayakar 1904, and Brockett 1985) where a total of 546 (200, 320, and 26) proverbs are to be found.

The exceptional standing of the date palm and its fruit among Omani people is well reflected by the high frequency of proverbs containing references to them, to artifacts woven from palm leaves, or to different tools used in connection with dates or date palms. Though the date palm is well represented in the classical and colloquial proverb collections alike, it is far less frequent in any of those than among the Omani proverbs. From among the 2749 Omani proverbs[5] that form the basis of the present investigation 78 can, in some way or another, be connected to the date palm or its fruit. This amounts to c. 2.84% of the proverbs, which is quite impressive if compared to the occurrence of similar material in other proverb collections[6]. The

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the costs of such labor, the costs of local agricultural products have risen sharply. At that time "a foreign expert adviser on date cultivation abandoned his mission when he discovered that American-grown dates could be supplied to Sohar at competitive prices with those required to pay for the production from the date groves adjoining the marketplace" (Barth 1983:154). Since that time the situation has changed again, and today agriculture is the second largest sector of Omani economy. The potential lying in date production is being reconsidered as part of ongoing efforts to wean the country away from oil. There are some 10 million date palms, occupying around 60% of cultivable land, and annual production is estimated at 150,000-175,000 tons. Of the several date processing factories, that of Rustāq, for example, processes 800 tonnes of dates a year.

[4] In this respect it is also a continuation of our previous article (Dévényi 1996) where the animal world of Omani proverbs has been dealt with.

[5] These were collected from a great variety of informants who represent all the tribes and regions of Oman. The collector of the proverbs, Ḫalīfa al-Ḥumaydī, used written sources as well. For the list of informants and other sources, see al-Ḥumaydī 1986-94: IV, 216-221. In the statistical survey only this collection was taken into account. Since the collector does not mention the exact provenance of the proverbs, it would be misleading to present them in the present article in transliteration considering the great differences in pronunciation from one Omani region to another.

[6] According to the data given by Al Sudaïs (1993:259) it occurs in 10 out of the 1200 Najdi proverbs of his collection (c. 0.8%), whereas it occurs only in about 0.2% of Taymūr's collection of Egyptian proverbs, and in about 0.15% of Tikrītī's collection of proverbs current in Baghdad. In the case of Iraqi

percentage remains significant even if only direct references to the date palm or its parts are counted. There are altogether 38 such instances, which is c. 1.38% of the proverbs; while the percentage of proverbs about dates is more than 0.7%; and to these occurrences can be added those proverbs where artifacts woven from date palm leaves or utensils used in connection with the date are mentioned.

The majority of these proverbs stand alone, *i.e.* they rarely have a correlative either among classical or other colloquial proverbs. A reason for this might be what has been observed by Al Sudaïs (1993:182) in connection with Najd and Oman, namely that contact between these territories has been virtually non-existent for the greater part of the last three centuries. Another reason may be in close connection with the prominent position of the date palms and dates in Omani society, since they are observed in minute detail, and this observation, as will be seen later, finds its way into the proverbs.

1.3 In the following presentation, the proverbs have been grouped according to their lexical contents and concrete meanings[7]. Since, in order to orient the reader as far as possible, several subdivisions were made according to the above principles, it seems unnecessary to present them here in detail. In summary, it should, however, be noted that these 84 proverbs do not speak about the date palm or the date in general, but differentiate their types, the cycles of the palm, the steps of cultivation, the tools used in connection with the date and the date palm, and those which are woven from palm leaf, they even distinguish between the regions of Oman from the aspect of the date and the date palm, all in all they almost provide sufficient information for a handbook on this topic.

It was not our aim to analyse the proverbs according to what they are used for, these applications, however, are mentioned at the individual proverbs. One thing is apparent, *i.e.* that contrary to animals to which, as rational beings, humans are often likened[8], the proverbs containing references to date (palms) refer – through observation[9] in the majority of the proverbs – to correct and incorrect behaviour and to the norms to be followed in everyday life.

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proverbs, the frequency of such proverbs would certainly be much higher had the proverbs been collected from rural areas.

[7] The 'Nos.' followed by volume and page numbers refer to al-Ḥumaydī 1986-94. If a proverb can be found in any of the other three sources, it is always mentioned. The following abbreviations are used: B = Brockett 1985; J = Jayakar 1904; and R = Reinhardt 1894. Numbers after these three letters always refer to the number of the proverb in the given collection.

[8] Cf. Dévényi 1996 and Fahd 1971-78.

[9] Altogether 48 proverbs contain observation as opposed to 36 featuring some kind of activity. The proportion of observation is even greater in the case of the date palm and its parts (29 observational *vs.* 12 activity proverbs).

At the end of the article, a vocabulary of date palm related terminology collected from the proverbs supplies the readers with additional information.

2. The Proverbs

2.1 Observation of the date palm

2.1.1 Cycles:

(١) إذا ساح النبات حيت يَدّيك الليل بات

No. 38 (I, 63); J 5

"When the pollen is all gone [*i.e.* when the male date palm fertilised the females], sleep wherever the night overtakes you". According to local observation it signals the beginning of warmer weather when people can sleep under the open sky.

(٢) يَوم المِيتين والسِّتين الرُّطَب فيد كُل مسكين

No. 2735 (IV, 210)

"On the 260th day [of the year][10] fully ripe dates are in the hands of the poor".

2.1.2 The needs of the date palm:

2.1.2.1 Male flower:

(٣) كِل نَخْلة بِنباتها

B 11

"Every female date palm needs its own [particular quantity] of male flower". Things are not stereotyped.

2.1.2.2 Proper soil and climate:

(٤) ما فاسْلِنْها فْسَبْخة

No. 1749 (III, 182)[11]

"We have not planted it [the date palm] in a salt marsh". Pride in one's aptitude; self-reliance.

(٥) مال القْراح مِن طاح راح

No. 1779 (III, 193); J 260

"Date palms planted in sand, when they fall down, are lost". A weak foundation destroys the superstructure.

(٦) لا تزْرَع النّارجيل في صْحار ولا الفَّرْض في ظفار

No. 1252 (III, 23)

"Do not plant coconut palms in Ṣohār nor Farḍ-date palms in Ẓofār". Do not waist your time and effort.

2.1.2.3 To be propped up:

(٧) سْجِلَهْا ولا تِفْسِلْها

No. 543 (II, 20); J 130

"Prop it up [a female date palm] and do not plant a new one [in its place]". One should be patient and try to solve problems. Used mainly in reference to somebody who is impatient with his wife.

2.1.2.4 Water:

(٨) مال الجَبَل حال الجَمَل ومال اليحاب ماواة ذهاب

J 259

"The date palms of a mountainous country belong to the camel[12], and the date palms watered with a leathern bucket are in danger of perishing". Applied to labour without profits, and also to a person between two misfortunes.

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[10] This day – which is called *qufl* – is considered to signal the commencement of the last stage of the ripening of the dates (*qayẓ*) when fully ripe dates become available in large quantities.

[11] A variant with reference to other plants is No. 1634 (III, 145): ما باذْرِنْها فْسَبْخة

[12] Because the great expense of bringing down the produce on camel-back does not allow any profit.

2.1.2.5 Care:

No. 2341 (IV, 40) (٩) النَّخْلة عْطيها تِعْطيك

"Give to the date palm, it will (also) give you".

2.1.3 Young palm-cuttings might not turn into real date palms:

No. 1275 (III, 32) (١٠) لا تِفْسِلْ الصَّريمة وْلا تأخُذْ الحْريمة

"Do not plant the young palm-cuttings and do not marry an under age woman". Advice against taking unnecessary risks. Like (6).

No. 920 (II, 221) (١١) فَسِلْ مْخامْرة

"The date palm cultivation of the Muḥāmara[13]"! Ignorant, foolish behaviour.

2.1.4 Places where the dates are dropped:

No. 2340 (IV, 40) (١٢) النَّخْلة تْحِتْ تَحتْ جُوسْها

"The date palm drops its fruit to its stump". This observation is valid generally for date palms. The exceptions, however, are also mentioned in the following three proverbs.

No. 858 (II, 185) (١٣) العْوّانة ما تْحِتْ تَحْتَها / تَحْت جُوسْها

"The very tall palm does not drop its fruit under itself/to its stump". A reproaching remark made to a person who prefers strangers to his relatives, or said of someone bequeathing to a non-relative.

No. 2338 (IV, 40) (١٤) نَخْلِة عْباية ما تْحِتْ تَحْتها

"The date palm of ʿAbāya[14] does not drop its fruit under itself/to its stump".

No. 2339 (IV, 40) (١٥) نَخْلِة المْسفاة تَعق بْعيد

"The date palm of Misfāt[15] shoots far away".

B 21 (١٦) النَّخْلة خَيْرها حالْ غَيْرها

"The date palm's goods go to others".

2.1.5 The falling down of the palm:

No. 2179 (III, 310) (١٧) مِنْ طاحْ قِشّْ سِتْرحْنا مِنّه

"If a Qiššš-palm falls down, we are relieved of it".

No. 2180 (III, 311) (١٨) مِنْ طاحِتْ عْوّانة سِتْرِحْنا مِنْ رْقاطْها

"If a very tall palm falls down, we are relieved of collecting its fallen fruit". Undesirability; wish to get rid of something. Same as (17).

2.1.6 Inflammability:

No. 343 (I, 254) (١٩) حْرِقْها بْليفة

"It [the palm] can catch fire by a fibre". Threat. 'Add fuel to the fire'.

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[13] The advice given in proverb (10) was not obeyed by the Muḥāmara, a coastal tribe of Oman. According to the anecdote, some members of this tribe took part in the collection of ripe dates (*qayẓ*) and planted young palm cuttings (*ṣarm*). In the evening, however, when they returned home, they uprooted them and took them home. Then the next morning, they planted the cuttings again. And this went on and on, until their curious behaviour became proverbial.

[14] An Omani village.

[15] An Omani village.

2.1.7 Animals and the palm:

(٢٠) صِلّانيتَهْ عليها غِرْبان

No. 692 (II, 95)

"There are crows[16] on his Ṣallāni-palm". This proverb is applied to persons who betray those who are closest to them.

2.1.8 Tall and elegant tree:

(٢١) الطُّول طول نَخْلة والْعَقْل عَقِلْ سِخْلة

No. 767 (II, 133)[17]

"The height is that of a date palm, but the brain is that of a kid". Appearances can be deceptive.

2.1.9 Differences between the types:

2.1.9.1 Male palm vs. self-seeded palm:

(٢٢) طيحَهْ مِنْ عْدرْ فْحَلْ وْلا طيحَهْ مِنْ نَشْو

No. 771 (II, 137)

"He fell from the top of a male palm, and not from a date palm which grew in itself". Esteem (for descent).

2.1.9.2 A palm of feeble leaves:

(٢٣) ما مِتْحِزّق بْخُوصة قشْ سْويح

No. 1793 (III, 196)

"It is not tied together with the leaf of a Qišš Suwayḥ palm". Pride in one's aptitude; self-reliance.

2.1.9.3 A palm the dates of which ripen very early:

(٢٤) مْثِلْ مِزْناجْ فْعابْية

No. 1928 (III, 235)

"Like the Miznāğ-palm in a field". Orphanhood, loneliness; peculiar situation.

2.2 Human activities in connection with the date palm

2.2.1 Ceremonies:

(٢٥) دانْ دانِ عْلَى النَّغال

No. 425 (I, 303); J 106

"Music around the Naġāl-palm"[18]. Flattery, its use and abuse.

2.2.2 Plantation:

(٢٦) الفَسِلْ والنَّسِلْ لَمْحة

No. 921 (II, 221)

"To plant a date palm or to beget a child is but a minute". The importance to increase property and children[19].

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[16] It has been observed that crows like date very much and they eat the best ones. This observation is reflected by the classical proverb *waǧada/ʿindahu tamrat al-ġurāb*, *i.e.* he found something better than he had expected (cf. Yaʿqūb 1995: V, 645). Another proverb may also be quoted: *al-ġurāb aʿrafu bi-t-tamr* (Quṭāmiš 1988:433).

[17] Cf. this proverb with some variation in its wording as quoted by J 202:

كِبْرُه كِبْر نَخْلة وعَقْله عَقْل سَخْلة

A variant of this proverb with a somewhat different meaning can be found in Taymūr No. 1811:

إلطُّول عَ النَّخْلْ والتُّخْنْ عَ الْجِمَيْزْ

A classical version of this proverb seems to be the following: *tarā l-fityān ka-n-naḫl wa-mā yudrīka mā d-daḫl* (cf. Quṭāmiš 1988:431).

[18] In Jayakar's version the last word is *naġāla*. His translation and explanation are also different: "All the drumming for a date of the kind called *naġāl*"; (a) 'There is no smoke without a fire'; (b) 'Much ado about nothing'.

[19] This saying seems to echo the first part of Q 18.46 which acknowledges the importance of wealth

(٢٧) لا سَرَقْنا السُوقْ وْلا زَرَعْنا نَخْلة بْلا عْذوقْ
No. 1302 (III, 41)
"We did not steal from the market nor did we plant a date palm without raceme". Everybody was satisfied. 'They ate the cake and had it as well'.

2.2.3 Harvesting the raceme:

(٢٨) لا تْجيبْ اِلعْروقْ معْ اِلعْزوقْ
No. 1241 (III, 19)
"Do not bring the roots with the raceme". Incompatibility.

2.2.4 Selling the crop:

(٢٩) أنا وأنا ومزناج حالطنا
No. *ad* 1664 (III, 157)
"Here I am, here I am, and a Miznāğ-palm['s crop] for the auction". (a) Rare qualities, good repute; (b) Disdain for a conceited person.

2.2.5 'Cleaning' the palm:

(٣٠) يَومْ الشَّراطة ما شِبْعانْ لِيفْ
No. 2712 (IV, 202); J 316
"Even on the day of cleaning the date palms, he is not satisfied with their fibres". Applied to a discontented man who is not satisfied even when he has plenty.

2.2.6 Uprooting the palm:

(٣١) إذا ما سَدّ عِضْقَها وَلاّ مِن عَرْقَها
J 9
"If its [date palm's] produce is not enough, have it out of its roots". On the advisability of uprooting or selling off a thing which entails profitless labour.

2.2.7 Ownership:

(٣٢) المَّالْ مالْ أبوها وِيْزَوَّدوها فْسيعِنَّة
No. 1783 (III, 194); J 263
"The property [date palms] are his father's, and yet they give her food for the journey only in a small basket". Applied to one who has no control over his/her own affairs and is treated unjustly.

2.3 Observation of the parts of the date palm

(٣٣) بو تْقصهْ الخوصَة ما يِبْغالَهْ ميشارْ
No. 159 (I, 144)
"What can be cut by a palm leaf, does not necessitate a saw". There is no need to exaggerate the difficulties when there are none.

(٣٤) الكَرْب ما يِنْحزِمْ
No. 1024 (II, 273)
"The bases of palm branches cannot be tied together". Non-cooperation.

(٣٥) كْما كَرْبة شالَّنْها/مْسَيْحِنْها وادي
No. 1211 (II, 357)
"Like a palm branch base carried away by a wadi". Like (55).

(٣٦) ما يِسْتوي حالْ زِفْنة وْلا حالْ دْعَنْ
No. 1853 (III, 215)
"It is not good to any kind of palm-frond-sheeting". Good-for-nothing.

(٣٧) مِتْعَلْمِنَّه فْخوصَه وْتارْسِبَّه الدُّنْيا حْصُوصَه
No. 1917 (III, 231)
"He knows it [*i.e.* that it sheds its bits] about his palm leaf, still fills the earth with its bits". Incorrect behaviour due to conceit and irresponsibility.

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and children, though emphasising in its second part the preeminence of good deeds: *al-māl wa-l-banūn zīnat al-ḥayāt ad-dunyā (wa-l-bāqiyāt aṣ-ṣāliḥāt ḫayr 'inda rabbika ṯawāban wa-ḫayr amalan).*

2.4 Human and animal activity in connection with the parts of the date palm

(٣٨) كِدّي يا جْميلوه وكْساش ليفوه
No. 1021 (II, 272)
"Work hard, small camel, and palm fibre will cover you". Contempt, disdain[20] for a useless effort.

(٣٩) كْما قَحْبة يْجِدُ ولْها
No. 1207 (II, 355)
"Like a whore for whom the whole raceme of dates is cut". Overflowing joy; but at the same time used to express disdain because of incorrect behaviour.

(٤٠) اللّي يِسْرِق الشّيزة يِسْرِق الجْذِع
No. 1585 (III, 124)
"Who steals the fibre of the stump, will steal the [whole] stump". Warning against the possible consequences of covetousness.

(٤١) مْثِل عْوَر بْياق يِبْكِر رْشْبَه ويْلوح عِسْقَه
No. 1925 (III, 233); J 207[21]
"Like the blind man of Biyāq[22] who is always replenishing his hookah with water and wawing the date-stalk about (to kindle a fire)". Idleness and its disapproval.

2.5 Observation of the date

2.5.1 Very nutritive:

(٤٢) التّمْر مِسْمار الرّكْعة / السّحْ مِسْمار الرّكْعة
No. 280 (I, 213); 545 (II, 21)
"Dates are the pegs of the knee". Emphasizes the importance of the date and stresses its nutritional value.

(٤٣) حِمْرانة وزْادوها/غَرْوها مْريس
No. 377 (I, 270)
"The sheep (or goat) is sick, still it was given date fodder". They made things worse. Counsel to avoid recklessness.

(٤٤) سحْ الفَرْض عْمود الأرض
No. 544 (II, 21)
"The dates of the Farḍ-palm are the support of the earth". Pride in the palm; preference of a species.

2.5.2 Bad dates:

(٤٥) الحْشْفة عْلْحْشْفة ما تِلْصَق
No. 352 (I, 259)
"Dry date will not stick to dry date". Incompatibility of views.

(٤٦) ماشي صْبّة نْجَتْ مِنْ حْشَف
No. 1714 (III, 173); J 250
"There is no heap of dates without dry and shrivelled ones". 'There are black sheep in every flock'.

(٤٧) مْنَقّاي في الصّبّة فَسّ في النّضَد
No. 2198 (III, 317); J 305; R 27[23]
"Selected out of the heap [of dates], it rotted in the bag". Applied to a favourite thing or person not answering one's expectations.

(٤٨) الحامْضة تْعايِب الفاسّة
No. 330 (I, 248)
"The sour [date] finds fault with the [dry] rotten one". Odd, unjustifiable disapproval. 'The pot calling the kettle black'.

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[20] It is also expressed by the use of feminine forms.

[21] In Jayakar's version: كْعَوَر بِياق يْبَكّر رْشِبْتَه ويْلَوّح عِسْقْتَه

[22] An Omani village in the *wilāya* of Samā'il.

[23] Reinhardt gives the following version: *mnaqqāi mişşubbe fessēt finnaḍid.*

2.5.3 Good dates:

No. 1690 (III, 165) (٤٩) ما دايِمْ إلاّ سِيَّ الباطْنة

Nothing remains except the dates of Bāṭina[24]. Affection, esteem; satisfaction.

2.6 Human activity in connection with dates

2.6.1 Buying and selling:

No. 115 (I, 115) (٥٠) باعْ السِّحْ وْشِتْري مْتينْدي

"He sold the dates, then bought the same". Foolish behaviour[25].

2.6.2 Storing (for future use):

No. 359 (I, 262) (٥١) حِفْظْ لِحْتاتْ عْلِينْ يقولكْ الزّْمان هاتْ

"Preserve the fallen dates[26] until time says to you: out with them [*i.e.* until you need it]". The necessity and importance of saving things for possible future use.

No. 2324 (IV, 31) (٥٢) ناقْصْ مِنْ خَرْسة دَلْكة

"A handful of pressed dates is missing from the pot". Disapproval of greed and envy.

No. 548 (II, 23) (٥٣) سحّة أخوكْ ما تْسِكّتْ وَلْدك

"A date from your brother will not silence your son". It is not advisable to be dependent upon others.

2.6.3 Date processing:

No. 1178 (II, 342) (٥٤) كْما دَوّاسْ طايِحْ فدُّوسة/فِلْهمْبارة

"Like one who stamps down dates and falls into them". Fulfilment of desire.

No. 1166 (II, 336) (٥٥) كْما حَبّة/خْلالة فْموخَلْ

"Like a seed/a date in a sieve". Unsteadiness, constant move; getting into trouble, experiencing difficulties.

No. 1218 (II, 360) (٥٦) كْما مِقْلاعْ السِّحْ

"Like the tool used to separate stored dates". Constant move (like 35 & 55); hard work.

No. 1940 (III, 239) (٥٧) مْحَبّة العَسَلْ مِنْ السِّحْ

"The love of date syrup depends on the dates". Friendship; flattery; deception.

2.6.4 Eating dates:

No. 942 (II, 232) (٥٨) فْوادّه فْلِمْبَحّة وفْوادَهْ فِنْدَحّة

"His heart's desire is the fish and the date alike". Helplessness and confusion because of greed and disability to renounce. 'He would if he could but he can't'.

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[24] A fertile plain in northern Oman where several types of excellent date palms are cultivated.

[25] This proverb, however, may also have another meaning, in echoing those traditions which give voice to the prohibition of usury by Islamic law. Dates are among the six commodities expressly stated in the *ḥadīṯs* dealing with usury. On the differences between the schools concerning usury, see Goldziher 1971:40-42.

[26] During the ripening of dates, it is usual for the children to go several times a day and collect the dates that have fallen down from the palm trees and to put them away for winter. Similarly to the owners of palm trees who generally collect the fallen dates separately.

2.7 Observation of tools

2.7.1 Palm leaf tools:

2.7.1.1 Door:

(٥٩) صَفَّةْ وْبابْها زَورْ

No. 691 (II, 94)

"A room [built from lasting material] but its door is made of palm leaves". It is unacceptable to use such different materials together. Similar in its application to (65).

2.7.1.2 Fence:

(٦٠) العِشِبْ يِتْرَبّي تَحتْ لْحِظارْ

No. 810 (II, 161)

"The grass grows under the palm leaf fence". It is so, because the fence protects the grass from direct sunshine and the tread of animals, but at the same time the animals cannot graze on it. Protection, but of small avail. Like the property of a miser[27].

2.7.1.3 Baskets:

(٦١) كْما زْبيلْ مَخْبوقْ

No. 1180 (II, 342)

"Like a small basket with holes in it". Said of someone who cannot keep a secret.

(٦٢) هو مُخْرافة والمخاريف يضُمّْنْشِ سَمِن

R 185[28]

"This is a palm leaf basket, and palm leaf baskets do not keep butter". Incompatibility.

(٦٣) الحَبّْ إلاّ مِن ظَرْفة

R 17

"[All] the seed [comes] only from the basket". We are all alike.

2.7.1.4 Cover:

(٦٤) شْتيتْ أخو مْجيمَرْ

No. 614 (II, 57)

"Š. is the brother of M.[29] / The date cover is just like the censer". 'Six of one and half a dozen of the other'.

2.7.1.5 Mats:

(٦٥) رِقْعة السِّمة خْصَفْ / السّمّْةْ رِقْعتْها خْصَفْ

No. 496 (I, 346); 571 (II, 36); J 134

"The [proper] patch of a palm mat is [made of] palm leaves". It expresses the approval of marriage between relatives, especially if they are of the same social standing, because they harmonize the best. 'Every Jack will get his Jill'.

(٦٦) السّمّْةْ ما تِنْقلِبْ عْزافْ

No. 572 (II, 36)

"A simple mat (*simma*) will not turn into a richly decorated one (*ʿizāf*)". 'You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear'. 'You cannot turn chalk into cheese'.

(٦٧) سمّْةْ ومْحْجانْ قالوا ضْعَنْ وْبيتْ لْجْعاريفْ قالوا حْصُنْ

No. 573 (II, 37); J 135

"A palm leaf mat and a staff with a hooked head – they said: household furniture. A nest of black ants – they said: a fort". Everyone has things in proportion to his position and capacity.

2.7.2 Other tools and places:

(٦٨) المْغَبْرة غطاها قَحَفْ

No. 2042 (III, 270)

"The date-fodder pot's cover is a crock". Harmony; congruity. Same as (65).

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[27] Similar in meaning to the classical proverb: *ʿušb wa-lā baʿīr* (Yaʿqūb 1995: IV, 365).

[28] In Rheinhardt's transcription: *hūwe muḫrāfe ulumḫārīf ydumménši semin*.

[29] These can be proper names.

(٦٩) ما وْرا المساطيح حَبَّة

No. 1816 (III, 204)

There is not one date outside the date drying area. Disappointment; futility.

2.8 Activity in connection with tools

2.8.1 Palm leaf baskets:

(٧٠) الله ما يِنْزِلْ بِزْبيلْ

No. 86 (I, 95)

"God does not provide by baskets". (a) You have to work hard for everything; (b) What is given by God is not measured, but is given bountifully.

(٧١) بو يِقْحَمْ جِبَّة/دَبَّة ما تْكَفْرَه/تعقْرَه حَبَّة

No. 231 (I, 183)

"Who can tackle a basket/tin [full of dates] will not be frightened by one". Capability of doing great things.

(٧٢) بو ما يَدّي فْقَفِعْتَه ما تْهِمْني صْفِعتَه

No. 194 (I, 164)

"Whose date basket I do not put my hand in, I do not worry about his slap". 'Least said soonest mended'.

(٧٣) كَلْناشْ يَسّاعِنَّة وْعَقّيناشْ وْرا العُنَّة

No. 1114 (II, 314); J 16; R 50[30]

"We have eaten [dates from] you, O basket, and thrown you behind the collapsing tent". Said of an ungrateful person.

(٧٤) يَومْ النّاس تْخيطْ ثوبْ أنا ضْرَبْت تْكارِيرْ فِلْمَرحْلة [31]

No. 2736 (IV, 210); J 320

"When people sew [fine] cloth, I have been braiding the edges of a date basket". Inappropriate behaviour.

2.8.2 Palm leaf mats:

(٧٥) كَسْر الخَرْس بْكَشْف السّمَّة

No. 1025 (II, 274)

"The pot is broken [only] if the mat is unfolded". Mutual exchange; condition; also revenge.

(٧٦) كَثيرْ فْلِعْزافْ غَمْ فْلِبْطن

No. 1019 (II, 271); J 204

"Plenty on the food mat, but sadness in the stomach". A plentiful but profitless thing; quantity without quality.

(٧٧) ما يِشْتَلْ لِعْزافْ إلاّ مِنْ يِشْبَعْ لِعْيال

No. 1863 (III, 219)

"The food mat is removed only if the children satisfy their appetite". Advice to provide ample opportunity and to act according to the norms (eating).

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[30] The beginning of the proverb according to Jayakar is: *kilnā minniš yā sīinna*, whereas Reinhardt gives the following version: *yā sēínne kelēne mmā fiš ʿaqqēnābiš qafe lʿínne.*

[31] *takārīr*: a braid made from two silk strings of different colours, generally sewn to the neck or front of a shirt.

2.8.3 Palm leaf sacks:

(٧٨) يا رمضان دُوكْ جْرابك

No. 2508 (IV, 116); B 26 (38)[32]

"Hey Ramaḍān! Take your date-sack"! Foolishness; disapproval of incorrect behaviour; acquiescence.

(٧٩) جَرو وْطايِحْ مِنْ خْصَفة

No. 309 (I, 233)

"A puppy falling out of a sack". Indifference, unconcern.

(٨٠) ما رامِتْ حَلِجْراب دارِتْ على الجِزْلة[33]

No. 1695 (III, 166)

"When she [a she-camel] could not carry a large sack of dates, she turned to a half one". Everyone must work according to his capacity.

(٨١) يُوم ما رامِتْ على الْجراب دارَتْ عَلَى الجزل/ الجِزْلة

No. 2729 (IV, 208); J 318

A version of (80).

2.8.4 Palm frond sheets:

(٨٢) وَحْدة تِنْسبْ وْوَحْدة تْسَفْ

No. 2451 (IV, 94)

"One lays the foundations of a sheet made palm fronds, the other makes the sheet". Cooperation.

(٨٣) يُومْ النّاس طَوَتْ دْعونْها جا لِغْراب يْسَطَّح

No. 2737 (IV, 210)

"When people folded up their sheets [on which they dried the dates], came the crows to spread out [the dates on the *masāṭiḥ*]". Misdemeanour. The crow embodies negative values[34].

2.8.5 Catchment-hole for date syrup:

(٨٤) ما يودِعْها الطَّلَلْ

No. 1909 (III, 229)

"He does not throw it [the date] into the catchment-hole". He has nothing to hide.

3. Terms related to the date and the date palm[35]

3.1 Dates

تَمْر (42) dates; equivalent of سح

حَبَّة (69; 71) one date

حامْضة (48) sour date

حَشَف (حْشَف) (45; 46) dry, shrivelled date which can only be used as fodder; SA *ḥašaf* dates of inferior quality

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[32] For the probable origin of the word *dok*, see Reinhardt 1894:31 and Jayakar 1889:872. The story behind the saying is the following: A husband brought home a sack of dates and told his wife: 'This is for Ramaḍān', meaning the month. A few days later, when the husband was out, somebody came to the house looking for the husband (or according to another version, asking for alms). The wife asked his name, and when he said that his name was Ramaḍān, she gave him the sack of dates. When the husband returned, and was informed of what had happened, he was aghast but could do nothing.

[33] يروم، رام "to be able".

[34] On the observation of crows in connection with dates, see the note to proverb (20).

[35] Numbers in brackets refer to the serial number of proverbs as appear above. The term's occurrence in Brockett 1985 has always been marked. References are to entry numbers in Brockett's Vocabulary. Owing to the small amount of words, the entries are arranged in strict alphabetical order under the headings. SA stands for Standard Arabic.

خَلالَة (55); B 454 *xalēl*; one *xalēle* dates in the second of the five stages of ripening, green but edible

دَلْكَة (52) a handful of pressed dates (without pits); cf. B 513 *delek, yidlik* to squeeze rice into a ball in the palm of the hand while eating; and B 514 *madlūke/medlūk* spiced, kneaded dates with the stones removed

رُطَب (2) fully ripe dates; cf. B 280 *ṛtab* the fifth stage of ripening; and B 605 to produce ripe dates

سِح (49; 50) / سُح (57) / سح (42; 44; 56) / one: سحّة (53); B 719 *suḥḥ/seḥḥ* preserved, semi-dried, ripe dates = pan-Arabic *tamr*; also cf. B 280: the five stages of ripening: *ḥbaybu, ḫalēl, bisr, qārīn, ṛtab/qayẓ*

صَبَّة (46; 47) heap of dates before they are packed; J 250 *ṣubba*

عَسَل (57) date honey, syrup derived from pressed dates; also called *dibis*

فاسَّة (48) rotten, shrivelled date (assimilation from فاسدة); the verb فَسّ (47) means in connection with dates: to dry rot, shrivel

مَتيندي (50) the exact equivalent of سح; from Swahili *mtende*

مَريس (43) date syrup made of water and dates, of very high nutritional value

مَغْبَرَة (68) (a) fodder for cattle, cooked in an earthenware pot and containing dates or date pits and fish (b) see below under the tools; B 1150 *ġubār* a fodder given to livestock on the coast, mainly composed of banana-leaves; date stones; burnt *kereb*, palm-thorns and -fibre; and sometimes anchovies

نَدَحَّة (58) date; the same as *tamra*; cf. SA دح, اِنْدَحَّ to fill (the belly: food); to be swollen (belly)

3.2 The date palm

نَخْلَة (3; 9; 12; 14; 15; 16; 21) a date palm; B 1525 *naḫl/naḫal* date palms; palm garden, by synechdoche

مال (5; 8; 32) date palms (cf. the introduction of the present article and esp. fn 3)

3.2.1 Its species

صِلّانية (20) an excellent kind, frequently cultivated at the coastal regions of Oman; cf. B 605 *yerṭab iṣ-Ṣallāni* the Ṣallāni-palm's dates are ripe

فَرْض (6; 44) a date palm giving dates of good quality; emblem of the *wilāya* of Samā'il; the main centres of this species are Nizwa and Rustāq; its dates are also exported

قِش [قشوش] (17) a species of date palms to which several sub-species belong; B 1295 *qaššˇ (qšūš)* a self-seeded young date-palm. An inland word. The Bāṭina-equivalent is *nešu*, *Gešš* being a particular species of Bāṭina date palm. Cf. also B 1339, where two other species, *Qašš Zebed* and *Ummusille* are mentioned.

قش سويح (23) a species common in the Ẓāhira region; its leaves are very feeble and thin

مِزناج (24; 29) the ripening of its red dates just precedes the season of *qayẓ*

نَغال (25) its delicious dates ripen at the beginning of *qayẓ*; this type has been chosen as an emblem of the *wilāya* of Damā' wa-ṭ-Ṭā'iyyīn; B 1238 *tifqi in-Naġāl* the Naġāl-palm's flowers are opening; according to Jayakar (J 106) its dates are the commonest variety of dates in Oman

3.2.2 Its types

صَرِيمة (10) (diminutive of صرمة) young palm-cutting; B 929 *ṣarm*; *ṣarme* one; a palm-garden, by synechdoche

عـوّانة (13; 18) very tall palm; B 1143 *ʿawěn* tall, untended old palms; *ʿawěna* one; Reinhardt (1894:119) *ʿwāne* a tall palm[36]

فـحـل (22) male palm (capable of fertilising); B 1207 *faḥal*

نـشـو (22) a date palm which grows in itself without being planted and which does not belong to any of the known species; B 1549 *nešu (nešwēn)* a self-seeded young date palm; cf. B 1295 *qaśś (qšūš)* an inland word for *nešu* (while the latter is used in the Bāṭina)

3.2.3 Its parts

جـذ ع (40) stem, stump

جوس (12; 13) the bottom of the stem/stump closest to the earth

خـصـف (65) palm leaves; cf. B 428 *ḥṣāfe (ḥaṣaf/ḥṣaf)* an empty sack woven from palm leaves, for *suḥḥ*

خوصة (23; 33; 37) palm leaf; SA (*ḥūs, ḥūṣa*)

زور (59) palm leaf midribs; B 692 *zor*

شيزة (40) part of the bast/fibre of the stump

عـذوق (27) / عـزوق (28) bunch of dates; date-raceme; B 1077 *ʿiḏiq/ʿiḏq/ʿuḏq (ʿuḏūq)* the whole date-raceme, whether only a little more advanced than the flower stage, or bearing fully ripened *suḥḥ*

عـسـقة (41) date-stalk; date-raceme; B 1092 *ʿasq (ʿasaq), ʿasqa* one; (a) the stalks of the female palm-flowers, and later of the racemes (b) the raceme itself, once the dates are removed; J 207 عـسـقة

عـضـقة (31) a cluster of dates on the stalk; cf. *ʿiḏq* of which it seems to be a variant

غـدر (22); B 1160 *ġudr/ġadr* the newest leaves in the centre

عـرق (31) / عـروق (28) root

كـرب (34) / كـربـة (35) bases of palm branches; B 1358 *kereb/karb* [they can be] left on the trunk during *qušēbe*, or cut off during *ḥlēbe*. Used for fuel; fodder; net-floats.

ليف (30) / ليفة (19) / ليفوه (38) diminutive of ليفة fibre

نبات (1; 3) pollen obtained from the flowers of the male date palm; B 1503 *nabēt/nebēt* male date-palm-flowers

3.2.4 Its cultivation

[جدّ ، يـجـدّ] (لـها) يـجـدّ و (39) they cut for her the date raceme; B 219 *gedd, ygidd* to harvest the whole raceme of dates (*ʿiḏq*) by cutting its stalk (*ʿasqa*)

[حتّ] يـحـتّ (12, 13, 14) / حـتّات (51) drop, droop, fall (fruit); B 282 *ḥitt/yḥitt, il-ḥatēt*; cf. Reinhardt 1894:260

دوّاس (54) one who stamps down dates; cf. B 538 *id-dūs/id-dawēs(e)* stamping down

دوسـة (54) stamping down of dates until they become pressed

سجل (7) to support a falling palm with a prop سـجـلة generally made of the trunk of a date palm and a cross stick

شراطة (30) to cut off the bases of palm branches and fibre from the palm trunk; B 825 *šarāṭa*, a mountain-synonym of *ḥlēbe*; J 316 removing palm branch bases from the trunk with a *maḥlab* and tearing off the fibre and throwing it down

طنا (29) the selling of the date-crop at an auction; B 1036 *ṭana, yiṭna, iṭ-ṭani*

[عـقّ] يـعـقّ (15) to shoot; to drop (fruit); cf. B 1112 *ʿaqq, yʿuqq*; SA *aʿaqqa*

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[36] Cf. Ibn Sīda III,215.18, as quoted above on p. 30.

[فسل] يفسل (7; 10) / فاسلنها (4) to plant a palm[37]
فسل (11; 26) the cultivation, planting of palms; cf. *fasīla* 'palm seedling, palm shoot' (Ibn Sīda, *Muḫaṣṣaṣ* III, 210.6 and also 210.7-8 */iftasaltu l-fasīla/*)
همبارة (54) = دوسة. A word of Persian origin, cf. انبار *anbār* 'full to the brim'; reservoir, etc.

3.3 Baskets, mats and other utensils woven from palm leaves

جبة (71) basket for the storage of dates and other fruit
جراب (78; 80; 81) date sack; B 227 *yrāb/grāb* (*gurbān*) a sack containing *suḥḥ/temr*; without contents it is called *ḥsāfe* or *kse*
جزلة (جزل) (80; 81) date sack, half the size of جراب; according to J 318 it can also mean any piece cut off from a جراب
حظار (60) fence
خصفة (79) large sack for the storage of dates cf. خصف; B 428 *ḫsāfe* an empty sack for *suḥḥ*
دعون (دعون) (36; 83); B 506 *daʿn/dʿan* (*dʿūn*) sheeting, made from midribs of palm leaves tied into lengths and used for housing, drying dates on, etc.
زفنة (36); cf. B 678 *zefen, yizfin, iz-zufūn* to tie clipped palm fronds into sheets; SA *zifn* palm frond sheeting
زبيل (61; 70) small basket used for dates and other fruit; B 657 *zabīl*
ساعنة (73) / سيعنة (32) small basket made of green palm leaves and used for dates; usually it is used only once
[سفّ] [or rather صف] تسفف (82) to make sheets سفة/صفة (generally from palm fronds)[38]; B 935 *ṣuff, yṣuff, aṣ-ṣfif* to stamp down newly cropped *suḥḥ* and/or pack them into bags
سمة (65; 66; 67; 75) mat made for different purposes (sitting, travel, praying) and in different patterns; B 126 *simme*; J 134, 135 *summa*
شتيت (64) (diminutive from شت) conical lid for covering dates; B 808 *šett*
صفة (82) palm frond sheet
ظرفة (63) basket, very narrow at the top
عزاف (66; 76; 77) richly decorated, round mat for bowls of food at a meal; B 1089 *ʿizāf*
قفنعة (72) big, round basket for dates, large at the bottom, narrow at the top; SA *qafʿa*
مخرافة (مخاريف) (62) basket; cf. SA *miḫraf* (*maḫārif*) 'basket for picking out the best dates'
مرحلة (74) basket
[نسب] تنسب (82) to lay the foundations of a sheet made of palm fronds

3.4 Other tools, containers, and places used in connection with dates

خرس (75) / خرسة (52) large, earthenware pot for storing dates; B 410 *ḫars* (*ḫrūs*) smaller than a *ḥill*

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[37] Cf. Brockett 1985:17-19, § 4.1.2 where the presence of *nūn* before the objective suffix of an active participles is being dealt with in some detail.

[38] It has already been noted by Jayakar (1889:652) that in Omani written material the letters *sīn* and *ṣād* sometimes take the place of each other.

طَلَل (84) cathcment-hole[39]; B 1031 *ṭlāl* a catchment-hole for date-syrup (*dibs, ʿasal*) in the floor of a room; the cropped *suḫḫ* are piled on matting (*gfāra*) over the *ṭlāl*, left to secrete for a week, and then stamped and packed into *ḥṣāf*

[سطّح] يَسْطَّح (83) to put the dates on the مساطيح

مساطيح (69) (sing. مسطاح) a flattened area where dates are spread out for drying; it is surrounded by thorny fences to protect the dates; B 738 *mistāḥ*

مَغْبَرَة (68) (a) see above under 'dates' (b) earthenware pot in which the fodder of the same name is cooked and given to the cattle

مِقلاع (56) a tool used to separate stored dates

نضَد (47) place for the piling up of dates; also a heap of date bags arranged one over another with the object of draining off the treacle which oozes out of the dates; SA *naḍad* pile

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[39] Not only houses, but most forts in Oman have a date storage room with channels for collecting the date syrup (or date honey).

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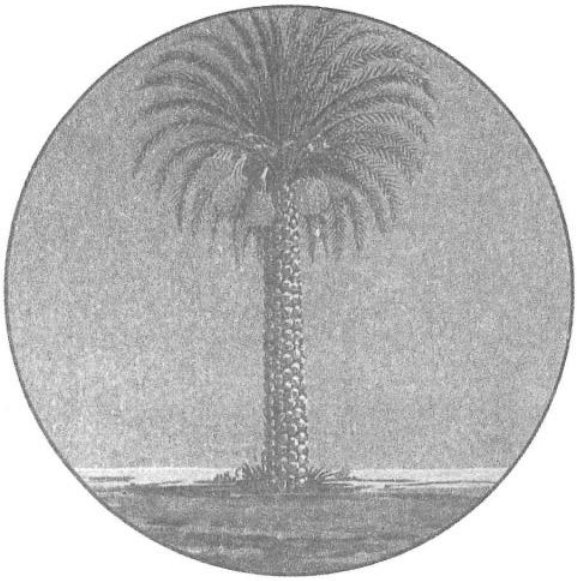
The Mbessilī date palm, emblem of the *wilāya* of Bidya.



The Naġāl date palm, emblem of the *wilāya* of Damā' wa-ṭ-Ṭā'iyyīn.

The Farḍ date palm, emblem of the *wilāya* of Samā'il.