

OMANICA IN OMANI PROVERBS AND SAYINGS  
THE MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT:  
(1) POTTERIES AND KITCHEN UTENSILS

Kinga Dévényi

Budapest

بوفلتدر ينطبعه الميلاس / الميصراف

(Omani proverb / al-Humaydī 1986-94: I, 155, No. 176)

Oman is country which places special emphasis on the preservation of her heritage. Different local crafts are being continued and preserved. Pottery making is one of these crafts. The town of Bahla in central Oman has been the main centre of pottery in the area. Bahla wares occur on almost all the Islamic archaeological sites of the region and on many of the pre-Islamic sites. Though the date of the beginnings of the Bahla industry is still to be determined, it has been established that the forms of the Bahla wares are directly inspired by south-east Asian pottery. Today Bahla is known as the 'pottery capital of Oman'. Its fine white dust is ideally suited to pot-making. Potters still create a variety of earthenware for practical purposes, like storing dates, cooling water, cooking or burning incense<sup>1</sup>.

This continuing industry permeates people's everyday life, so it is little wonder that earthenware products are mentioned in a wide variety of proverbs. The present article is the continuation of our previous investigations (Dévényi 1996, 2001) where the representation of the living environment – fauna and flora – in Omani proverbs was treated. The material environment, however, is also well attested in proverbs. In the analysis of Omani proverbs the following broad groups of objects can be defined:

- (a) potteries and kitchen utensils;
- (b) baskets, mats etc. made of palm leaf and other material;
- (c) food;
- (d) clothing;
- (e) the house and its surroundings;
- (f) fishing & sailing;
- (g) tools of agriculture & animal husbandry;
- (h) the well;
- (i) other utensils and miscellaneous objects.

<sup>1</sup> For the significance of the Bahla wares for the history of Oman, see Whitcomb 1975:129. For a vivid description of the potters of Bahla at work, see St Albans 1980:128-129.

The following proverbs show the infiltration into the proverbs of objects belonging to group (a) from among the material environment, *i.e.* potteries and kitchen utensils. These proverbs – which reflect people's awareness of the objects that surround them – are, naturally, interpreted in a way which is relevant to the people's behaviour. Reading them, however, we get a glimpse of everyday life and we get to know how these utensils should be used<sup>2</sup>.

i.

بِرْمَة / بُرْمَة an earthen cooking vessel, a medium-size pottery, smaller than جَحْلَة<sup>3</sup>, used for water, honey and boiling coffee<sup>4</sup>

No. 131 (I, 125)<sup>5</sup>; J 38<sup>6</sup>

(١) بِرْمَة الشَّرِكِ مَا تَنْثُورُ

"A pot in partnership does not boil". 'A pot that belongs to many is ill stirred and worse boiled'. It is so because everybody considers it someone else's duty to attend to the pot. Similar in content to (13) and (28).

<sup>2</sup> A highly interesting volume combining potteries and proverbs had been published by N. H. Henein in 1992. In 1979, on the occasion of the 2nd International Congress of Egyptologists, Henein was asked to exhibit present day potteries he had collected all over Egypt. Nine years later he came across a collection of 20,000 Egyptian proverbs and sayings. This corpus gave him an impetus to look for proverbs that mention names of potteries. His investigation resulted in a study which presents the objects of the exhibition together with a collection of 149 'pottery proverbs'. From this number 112 are contained in the manuscript collection of 20,000 proverbs. This proportion may become significant if compared to other collections. The corpus of 1,200 proverbs collected by Al Sudaï in the Nağd contains only five 'pottery proverbs'. The collection of 2749 Omani proverbs contain 22 pottery proverbs (not counting other kitchen utensils). The proportion of pottery proverbs in these three collections are as follows: Nağd 0.416%, Egypt 0.56% and Oman 0.8%.

<sup>3</sup> See proverbs 9 and 10 below.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Henein 1992:34, 40, 41, potteries Nos 40, 48, 51: *borma* "marmite, récipient pour la cuisson (au four / sur réchaud)". The potteries presented by Henein are not similar to those used in Oman. Proverbs are not connected to this word by Henein. It is worth noting that Vollers (1895:512) saw in the simultaneous existence of this word in Oman and Egypt a proof for the early appearance of south Arabian population in the Nile valley. According to Landberg (1901-13: II, 597) "*la burmah est, chez les Bédouins, une grande marmite en marbre vert, tandis qu'à Aden et dans le Yéman, c'est une petite marmite en terre cuite*".

<sup>5</sup> The 'Nos.' followed by volume and page numbers refer to al-Ḥumaydi 1986-94. The following abbreviations are used throughout the article: B = Brockett 1985; J = Jayakar 1904; and R = Reinhardt 1894. When proverbs are quoted, the numerals after these abbreviations refer to the number of the proverb in the given collection. When words are quoted from Brockett 1985, the numeral after B refers to the number of the lexical entry.

<sup>6</sup> A different version of this proverb is: *qador šūrke mā tūr brāha* (Reinhardt 1894:400, No. 35), where another pottery is mentioned making no difference to the purport of the proverb. Another variant of this proverb has been collected by al-Akwa' in the Tihāma (1984: I, 276, No. 913): *birnat aš-šarāka mā tiḥmad*, and by al-ʿUbūdi in the Nağd (1959:215, No. 546): *qidr aš-šūrke mā yufūb*.

No. 1392 (I, 125); J 232

(٢) لَنْعَمَةٌ .. وَلَا بَرْمَةٌ  
 "Better a morsel [ready cooked] than an [empty] pot". 'A bird in a hand is worth two in the bush'.

بِرَامِ (the plural of *burma*)<sup>7</sup>

No. 1429 (III, 78)

(٣) لَوْلَا الْحَرَامُ .. مَا اشْتَرَسِبْتَ لِبِرَامِ  
 "If there was no sin, the pots would not fill"<sup>8</sup>. Refers to the behaviour of those who – out of greediness – use unlawful ways to gain wealth.

ii.

تَائِيَةٌ (تَوَائِي) a stone or sg. else on which the cauldron (قدر، مرجل) is put; B 170 *tawētī*  
 "fireplace-stones" for cooking on

No. 968 (II, 246)

(٤) الْقِدْرُ مَا يَرْكُوبُ إِلَّا عَلَى تَائِيَتَيْنِ / ثَلَاثِ تَوَائِي  
 "A cauldron can only be put on two/three stones". Used to express indispensability.

Same as (33), cf. also (42).

iii.

تَنْوْرُ baking oven<sup>9</sup>

No. 392 (I, 281)<sup>10</sup>

(٥) خَافَ مِثْوْرٌ وَلَوْ رَاسُهُ فِيتَنْوْرٍ  
 "Be afraid of a bull even if its head be in the oven".

No. 1235 (III, 18); J: 227<sup>11</sup>

(٦) لَا تَأْمَنْ الثَّوْرَ وَلَوْ رَاسُهُ فِي التَّنْوْرِ  
 "Do not trust a bull even if its head be in the oven".

No. 655 (II, 74)

(٧) شَيْءٌ فِيتَنْوْرٍ ... وَشَيْءٌ فِلِجْتَنْوْرِ  
 "Something in the oven and something on the threshing floor". Weakness caused by the scattering of efforts.

iv.

تَاوِهٌ<sup>12</sup> bread baking tin plate — B 189 *tāwa* 'a vessel' for cooking over a fire; cf. Persian *tāwā* frying pan, skillet

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the singular form *beram* as attested by Henein 1992:27, pottery No. 33 "marmite: plat pour la cuisson au four", and 46, pottery No. 59 "jarre: récipient pour le lait, les poivrons, les navets salés, etc". The shape of this latter slightly resembles the shape of the Omani pottery. Proverbs are not cited by Henein.

<sup>8</sup> For the meaning and variants of the root *t-r-s*, see Rhodokanakis 1908-11: II, 5 and Reinhardt 1894:151.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed description of the *tannūr*, see e.g. Landberg 1883:14 and Abela 1981-85: I, 465.

<sup>10</sup> This proverb and its variant (6) are animal proverbs mentioned here only because of the reference to utensils.

<sup>11</sup> This proverb has also been collected by Reinhardt (1894:400, No. 31) in the following variant: *mā te-ēmmin mittōr ulau rāso fittennōr*.

<sup>12</sup> A Turkish word of Persian origin, meaning (a) a frying pan, (b) a pan or a sheet of iron on which bread or cakes are baked (cf. Redhouse 1884-90:482).



No. 1763 (III, 186); J 258<sup>17</sup>

(١٢) مَا كَلَّ مَرَّةً تَسْلَمَ الْجَرَّةُ

"Not every time is the jar saved". 'A pitcher goes often to the well but is broken at last'.

No. 2005 (III, 259)

(١٣) الْبِئْرُ كَرِهَ مَضْرَبَهُ .. وَلَوْ كَانَتْ قَصْفُ جَرَّةٍ

See (28) below.

viii.

جَوْنَةٌ half of a coconut used for drinking water

No. 1798 (III, 199)

(١٤) مَا مَرَّكَبِينَ مَرَّجَلْنَا عَلَى جَوْنَةٍ

See (44) below.

ix.

خُرْسٌ big earthenware jar; B 410 *bars* (*brūs*) an earthenware pot for storing *subh*, smaller than a *hill*; Reinhardt (1894:184 § 308) big water-jar

No. 1025 (II, 274)

(١٥) كَسَّرَ الْخُرْسُ بِكَشَفِ السَّمَةِ

"The [date-]jar is broken [only] if the [folden] mat is spread out".

No. 2324 (IV, 31)<sup>19</sup>

(١٦) نَاقَصٌ مِنْ خُرْسَةٍ دَلَّةٌ

"A handful of pressed dates is missing from the jar". Disapproval of greed and envy. "That puts the lid on it!"

x.

دَبَّةٌ tin container, tank — B 463 *debbe* a plastic water-container holding at least a gallon

No. 231 (I, 183)<sup>20</sup>

(١٧) بُوَ يَخْتَمُ دَبَّةً مَا تَعْقُرُهُ حَبِيَّةٌ

"Who can go down into /jump into/<sup>21</sup> a tank would not be stupefied by a grain".

xi.

دَسْتٌ a copper bowl, three to four feet in diameter, for preparing and serving *halwa*;  
B 499 *dest*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Abela (1981-85: I, 261, No. 823) lists the following variant: *مَنْ كُلَّ مَرَّةً بِسَامِ الْجَرَّةِ*, and explains it as: 'Il ne faut pas trop tôt applaudir quelqu'un à qui les choses réussissent.' In a version given by Feghali (1938: No. 1184) we find: *الجرّة ما بتتألش هالبيير كل ساعة وبتطلع سالمة*.

<sup>18</sup> In CA it means a jar, especially when black and coated with pitch.

<sup>19</sup> A proverb similar in content but different in wording has been collected by Abela (1981-85: I, 373, No. 1479): *ناقص الدست كرمونة* "Il ne manquait plus à la marmite qu'un pied de mouton".

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Reinhardt 1894:400, no. 26: *keme bū jorqot l habbe u jukfyh bi debbe* 'Wie derjenige, der ein Korn aufhebt und (dabei) ein Blechgefäß umstößt.'

<sup>21</sup> For the meaning of the root *q-h-m*, see Brockett 1985:176, No. 1277.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Henein 1992:59, No. 80 a vessel also made of copper, but quite different in use and shape: 'marmite: récipient destiné à la cuisson des aliments sur le réchaud; généralement en cuivre'. Nine proverbs contain this word according to Henein (1992:59-61).

No. 1170 (II, 338)

(١٨) كَمَا حَلَوَاهُ فَدَسْت

"Like [hot] *halwa* in the *dest*". Said of a person who moves or talks too much.

xii.

رحى hand mill

No. 1456 (III, 86)<sup>23</sup>

(١٩) اللّٰي تَحْتِ الرَّحَى يُعْتَبِرُ عَلَى تَجْرِ جَارِهَا

"What is under the mill has to bear patiently its work".

xiii.

سِكِّين knife

No. 560 (II, 29)

(٢٠) السِّكِّينُ مَا تَأْكُلُ إِلَّا مِنْ قُوَّةِ صَاحِبِهَا

"A knife can only cut if its handle is strong".

Same as (60).

No. 723 (II, 111); J:169<sup>24</sup>

(٢١) ضِرْسِي سِكِّينِي وَبَطْنِي مَخْضِي

"My tooth is my knife and my stomach is my store basket". Though this proverb is usually applied to one who possesses nothing, it also expresses the capability of a person to rely exclusively upon himself.

No. 1464 (III, 89)

(٢٢) اللّٰي تَخْمَعُ الْخَوْصَةَ مَا يَبْتَغَاهُ سِكِّينٌ

"What can be cut by a palm leaf does not need a knife". There is no need to exaggerate the difficulties when there are none.

xiv.

شَتِيْت (diminutive from شَت palm-leaf lid; B 808 *sett* "a conical, woven palm-leaf date-cover"

No. 614 (II, 57)

(٢٣) شَتِيْت أَخُو نَجِيْتَر

"Š. is the brother of M.<sup>25</sup> / The date cover is just like the censer". 'Six of one and half a dozen of the other'.

Same as (42).

xv.

صَحْن (صَحُون) plate(s)

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the Yemeni proverb مِنْ يَدِهِ تَحْتِ الرَّحَى مَا جَرَّهَا (as-Saqqaf 1997:125, No. 403). This proverb, however, connecting the person to the utensil, expresses that if somebody feels himself/herself in danger, he/she would not further expose himself/herself.

On the *masdar* form *t(i)gīrār*, common in Omani Arabic, see Rhodokanakis 1908-11: II, 154, § 54 (d) and Reinhardt 1894:256, § 400.

<sup>24</sup> The version given by Jayakar is somewhat different: ظَرْفُهُ خَصِيْتُهُ وَبَطْنُهُ مَخْضِيْتُهُ. A proverb with the same meaning but different wording has been collected by Al Suda'is (1993:59, No. 379): *sāhati rāhātī bajni grābi*.

<sup>25</sup> Š. and M. can be interpreted as proper names.

No. 678 (II, 88)<sup>26</sup> صُحُونِ فِئْبَيْتٍ وَتَشْقُرْطَعِ (٢٤)  
 "Plates in the [same] house and make noise by knocking against one another". This proverb entices people to live in harmony and mutual understanding, without quarrelling constantly.

No. 2243 (III, 330) مِنَ الْهَرَيْسِ نَبِيغَى الصُّحُونِ (٢٥)  
 "From the *haris*<sup>27</sup> we [only] want the plate". Expresses resignation and the capability of renunciation.

xvi.

طُوبِجٌ<sup>28</sup> bread baking tool

No. 766 (II, 132)<sup>29</sup> الطُوبِجُ إِذَا مَدَحْتَهُ حَرَقَ وَالسُّنُورُ إِذَا مَدَحْتَهُ سَرَقَ (٢٦)  
 "If you praise the *tūbağ* it will burn, and if you praise the cat it will steal". To blame somebody for not living up to expectations. An interesting feature of the Omani proverb is that in contrast to the other variants, it suggests that an inanimate object can 'behave' and that its behaviour can be affected by what is said to it. Other similar proverbs limit the observation to an animal, be it the cat or the dog.

xvii.

عِيَانَةٌ earthenware milk jug<sup>30</sup>

No. 243 (I, 191) الْبَيْتُ الَّذِي فِيهِ عِيَانَةٌ مَا تَلْحَقُهُ هَيَانَةٌ (٢٧)  
 "The house in which there is a milk jug will not be overtaken by contempt". The importance of keeping cattle.

xviii.

قَحْفٌ earthenware lid — B 1276 *qahf* "antique shards"; Reinhardt (1894:75 § 131)  
*qahf* (*qhāfe*) "fragments"; Harsūsi "coconut-shell", etc.

No. 2005 (III, 259)<sup>31</sup> الْمِشَارِكَةُ مَضْرُوبَةٌ .. وَلَوْ كَانَتْ قَحْفًا جَرَّةً (٢٨)  
 "The co-wife can be harmful even if she were as the lid of a jar", i.e. even if there is harmony between her and her husband.

<sup>26</sup> On the formation of a four-radical verb with *r*, i.e. *qarta'* from *qata'*, see Reinhardt 1894:254, § 396.

<sup>27</sup> Cooked meat and wheat pounded together.

<sup>28</sup> A word of Turkish origin, where طُوبِجٌ *topaj* means, among others, 'round, globose' as an adjective, and 'a top' as a noun (cf. Redhouse 1884-90:1249).

<sup>29</sup> A proverb similar in meaning has been collected by Abela (1981-85: I, 12, No. 43): مَدَحْنَا الْقَطَّ حَرِي. The same proverb has been collected by Al Suda'i in the wording: *lā mdeh al-bess zagg hat-tehin* (1993:119, No. 782) where other corresponding proverbs are also cited.

<sup>30</sup> A variant of this word (*awn*) appears in the same meaning in J 278: مِنْ بَغِيْتٍ مَعُونَهَا بَرَقَ فِي لُونِهَا. "If you want the milk a pot full, examine her [the cow's] state".

<sup>31</sup> Cf. in Abela's collection (1981-85: I, 393, No. 1564): الْمَضْرُوبَةُ مَضْرُوبَةٌ وَلَوْ كَانَتْ دِهْنَةً جَرَّةً, where *dayna* is the handle of a jar.

No. 2042 (III, 270)<sup>32</sup>

(٢٩) البتغبرة غطاما قحف

"The date-fodder pot's cover is a crock". 'Like cup like cover'. This proverb on the one hand expresses harmony and congruity between things and implies that a person has found his/her equal. On the other hand, however, when referring to couples, this proverb most often has a pejorative undertone.

Same as (48).

This proverb and its variants seem to be the colloquial equivalents of the well-known and well-attested classical proverb: *wāfaqa šann tabaqa* (e.g. Maydāni, *Amṭal* No. 4340). This proverb has been interpreted in different ways, since the original meaning of *šann* and *tabaqa* had already become obscure by the time of the explanations which are now extant. According to one interpretation to which a long story is connected (Maydāni, *Amṭal* II, 423-424), Šann was a person famous for his wit who was looking for an equally intelligent bride until he found Tabāqa who won his heart by her wisdom. Irrespective of the given explanation, however, the classical proverb was always used in a positive sense, to describe harmony and congruity. It is, therefore, interesting to observe how the negative, pejorative sense has infiltrated into the meaning.

No. 2047 (III, 272)

(٣٠) مغطاة الكوز قحف

"The ewer's cover is a crock". Same as (35). It has the same meaning as (29) and can be considered its variant.

xix.

قِدْر pot

No. 176 (I, 155)<sup>33</sup>

(٣١) بو فلقدر ينطاعه الميلاس / الميعراف

"[Only] what is in the pot can be taken out by the spoon".

On the one hand, the above saying recommends the use of proper utensils in order not to leave anything in the pot, thereby implying the necessity to choose the most appropriate means in solving problems. On the other hand, it also implies that one can only express his own thoughts and feelings.

Same as (49, 54).

No. 256 (I, 200)

(٣٢) التاوه ثعب علقدر

See (8) above.

No. 968 (II, 246)

(٣٣) القدر ما يتركب إلا على تاشيتين / ثلاث ثواني

See (4) above, and cf. also (14) above.

<sup>32</sup> A similar proverb to this and the next one has been collected by Feghali (1938: No. 1200) and Abela (1981-85: I, 22, No. 82): قدرة ولعت/ولعت غطاما. The version collected by Al Sudaīs (1993:39, No. 264) is: *heggen wāfaq tbuguh*, where *heqq* (*huqq*) means 'a little tin'.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. in Abela's collection (1981-85: I, 45, No. 178): ما يطاع بالمعرفة إلا من الحلة/القدرة. The different grammatical construction of the proverb, especially the use of the exceptive particle *illa*, resulted in a shift in the meaning, which led Abela to evoke the somewhat similar Biblical passage: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mt. 12.34). Cf. also: *mā bal-bir yaddih al-megrāf* (Al Sudaīs 1993:123, No. 819). And cf. also the classical proverb: *kull inā' yarsāh bimā fihī* (al-Maydāni, *Amṭal* No. 3159).

xx.

كوز (كيزان) earthen ewer, an earthenware container to store and cool water in it for domestic use<sup>34</sup>

No. 95 (I, 102); J 25

(٣٤) أنا شايء منسقط وكيتاشها ما مستتقرب من دار سبت وكيزانها

"I have seen Muscat and its forts, so I am not amazed by (the village of) Dar Sayt and its earthen ewers"<sup>35</sup>.

No. 2047 (III, 272)

(٣٥) منقطاة الكوز .. فتنف

See (30) above.

No. 2348 (IV, 44)

(٣٦) نستيقك من كوز بارد

"We give you a drink from a cold earthen ewer".

No. 2349 (IV, 44)

(٣٧) نستيقك من كوز خلى

"We give you a drink from an empty (!) earthen ewer".

No. 2630 (IV, 172)

(٣٨) يستيقك من كوز بارد

"He gives you a drink from a cold earthen ewer".

No. 2631 (IV, 172)

(٣٩) يستيقك من كوز خلى

"He gives you a drink from an empty (!) earthen ewer".

The above four proverbs express disapproval of postponement and delay.

xxi.

ماعون utensil; vessel<sup>36</sup>

No. 1860 (III, 218)

(٤٠) ما يفتي عنبره من الماعون

"He does not give a drink from the vessel". The description of a miser.

No. 2523 (IV, 123)<sup>37</sup>

(٤١) ياكل في الماعون ويخري فيه

"He eats in the vessel and fouls it". 'It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest.'

xxii.

مجيمر<sup>38</sup> (earthenware) censer

No. 614 (II, 57)

(٤٢) شئت اذو مجيمر

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Landberg (1901-13: I, 706): *kūz*, pl. *kuwāz* 'gargoulette'. For the explanation of the word and a Yemeni proverb in which it is used, see al-Akwa' (1984: II, 1054, No. 4480): *mā fi ḡahannam kūz bārd*.

<sup>35</sup> In Jayakar's version: أنا شايء منسقط وكيتاشها ما مستتقرب من دار سبت وكيزانها

<sup>36</sup> Henein (1992:66, Nos. 141-144) cites other proverbs containing this word.

<sup>37</sup> A similar proverb is attested by Landberg (1883:50, No. xxix: أكل الهدية وخري في الزبدية). Though it is said to be generally applied to an ungrateful person, Landberg (1883:51) mentions that he knows of incidents when the action to which the proverb refers to was carried out literally. A proverb – less rude, but similar in meaning – has been collected by Abela (1981-85: I, 262, No. 1016): *يهاكل الهدية وينكسر الزبدية*. Other dialectal variants are also known. Cf. also the saying attributed to 'Abdallāh ibn az-Zubayr: *akaltum lamri wa'asaytum amri* (Maydāni, *Amṭāl* I, 115, No. 399).

<sup>38</sup> A diminutive from *miḡmar(a)*.

See (23) above.

xxiii.

big cooking kettle, cauldron made of copper

No. 968 (II, 246)

(٤٢) المَرَجَلُ مَا يَرْكَبُ إِلَّا عَلَى تَائِيْتَيْنِ / ثَلَاثُ تَوَائِي

Variant of (4).

No. 1797 (III, 198)

(٤٤) مَا مَرْكَبُ مَرْجَلِهِ عَلَى سَدِسٍ

"He does not put his cauldron on a *sdis*<sup>39</sup> bowl".

No. 1798 (III, 199)

(٤٥) مَا مَرْكَبِينَ مَرْجَلَنَا عَلَى جَوْتِهِ

"We do not put our cauldron on a coconut cup."

These last two proverbs describe, on the one hand, the impossibility of securing something if its foundation is unstable. While on the other hand, they assert that no such foolishness has been committed.

No. 2663 (IV, 182)

(٤٦) يَغْلِي كَمَا الْمَرْجَلُ

"It boils like the cauldron".

xxiv.

baking/frying place<sup>40</sup>

No. 2544 (IV, 134)

(٤٧) يَنْحُجُونَ الْمَضْبِئَةَ وَالتَّيْسُ فِي الْجَبَلِ

"The baking place is being prepared but the billy goat is still in the mountains". Expresses disapproval of unthoughtful behaviour.

xxv.

fodder and the earthenware vessel in which it is made<sup>41</sup>

No. 2042 (III, 270)

(٤٨) الْمَغْبِرَةُ غَطَا مَا فَحَفَ

See (29) above.

xxvi.

ladle<sup>42</sup>

No. 176 (I, 155)

(٤٩) بُو فِلْتَقِيرٌ يَطْلَعُهُ الْمِغْرَافُ

See (31) above.

<sup>39</sup> *Sdis* (*suds*) is an Omani unit of capacity for measuring dry commodities. It is a subdivision of the *mikyāl*, and is equivalent approximately to one litre. According to Donaldson (1993:90) "the *mikyāl* of al-Khābūrah and the *mikyāl* of 'Ibri, and also their subdivisions, took the physical form of carved wooden bowls". For further explanation on this appellation, see Donaldson 1993:107, fn 27. Reinhardt (1894:406, No. 90) has also collected a proverb containing this unit of capacity.

<sup>40</sup> A fireplace made of a few stones where the slaughtered animals are fried.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. B 1150 *gubār* "a fodder" given to livestock on the coast, mainly composed of banana-leaves, date-stones, burnt *kereb*, etc.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Landberg 1901-13: I, 670 'recueillir un liquide avec une cuiller ou un ustensile creux': *mugraf* 'gobelet'; *magrafa* 'pelle'.

No. 2043 (III, 370) (٥٠) مِغْرَافٌ حَالِي .. وَمِغْرَافٌ حَالٌ غَيْبِيَّةٌ<sup>43</sup>  
 "My ladle ... and that of G." Expresses disapproval of greed.

No. 2446 (IV, 92) (٥١) التَّوَجُّهُ مِغْرَافُ الْقُرْوَادِ

"The face is the ladle of the heart".

Somewhat similar in meaning to (48).

xxvii.

مِكْيَال measure<sup>44</sup>

No. 2633 (IV, 173) (٥٢) يَنْسُوِي لِتَحْشِفِ مِكْيَالِ

"He measures /makes a measure for/ the dates of inferior quality". Exaggeration; mockery of those who devote special attention to trivial things.

No. 1812 (III, 202) (٥٣) مَا نَسُوِي حَالِ السَّبُوسِ مَوْخَلٌ وَلَا حَالِ الْعَلَسِ مِكْيَالِ

"We are not making a sieve for the straw, nor a measure for barley". Used to express indifference or even contempt.

Same as (58).

xxviii.

مِلاَس flat spoon, used especially for rice

No. 176 (I, 155)

See (31, 49) above.

(٥٤) بُو فَيْلَقِدِرُ يَطْبَعَةُ الْمِلاَسِ

xxix.

مَوْخَل sieve — B 1679 *mohal* [sic!]; Reinhardt (1894:50, § 61) and Jayakar (1889:867) *mohal*

No. 167 (I, 148); J 58<sup>45</sup> (٥٥) بُو شَاةِ الشَّلُولِ كَلْتَهُ مَا يَغْلِبُهَا مَوْخَلٌ

"A she-camel which carries a whole load is not overcome by [the weight of a] sieve". A person accustomed to great responsibilities will not be overburdened by a little more.

No. 363 (I, 264)<sup>46</sup> (٥٦) الْحَقِيقَةُ مَا يَفْطِيهَا مَوْخَلٌ

"The truth cannot be hidden with a sieve". It is also similar in meaning to the next proverb.

<sup>43</sup> Diminutive of *Gubša*, a woman's name.

<sup>44</sup> According to Donaldson (1993:89-91), *mikyāl* is the name of a wooden bowl by which grains and other dry commodities are measured out. It has been used in Oman with at least two standards, that of al-*Hābūra* and 'Ibrī.

<sup>45</sup> Proverbs similar in meaning but not in wording have been collected e.g. by Al Sudai's (1993:16, No. 103) and Feghali (1938: No. 540).

<sup>46</sup> A proverb similar in meaning but different in form has been collected by Landberg (1883:199, No. cviii): *النَّصِي مَا يَشُوْفُ مِنْ طَارَةِ الْقِرْمَالِ بِكُونِ أَعْمَى*.



Summing up, it can be established that a wide variety of information can be gathered from the proverbs that refer to potteries and kitchen utensils. We get to know these utensils, their appellations, what they are used for (e.g. 34-39) and how they should be used (e.g. 4).

The concrete observation of the use or misuse of these artefacts gave birth to the proverbs, which, on their turn, often became used in a more general sense. As can be seen from the above proverbs, whatever be the observation, the proverb is used to assess people's good or bad traits, and their behaviour. On the level of family life and relatives, we get a glimpse, for example, of the complications arising from the existence of co-wives (28), of the general pejorative view concerning in-laws (11). We also get to know some of the values within Omani society (e.g. 27). The everyday life of Omani people becomes apparent from these proverbs which absorbed the utensils. The proverbs, naturally, are also relevant from the point of view of the study of the Omani Arabic dialect. Apart from a few notes, however, the linguistic analysis of the proverbs should be the object of future research. The rapid disappearance of traditional crafts also highlights the importance of the preservation and study of these proverbs which preserve the names and functions of utensils that might soon fall into disuse.

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