OMANI PROVERBS: DATE PALMS AND DATES

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(النخلة عطية ... 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 hadīth¹.

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 Basrān philologist Abū ‘Amr b. al-Ṣālā (d. 154/770). According to which he met one day a Bedouin in Mekka who turned out to be from Oman. When Abū ‘Amr 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 māl³ ever since in Oman. This is, however, not the only appellation


² For the whole anecdote, in which the fasāha of the Omani bedouin is also given great emphasis, see al-Qālī, Deyl 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 columns 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 Suda‘i (1993:146, No. 993) ‘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
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 Sida’s (d. 458/1066) Muhassas, where in every chapter of the Kitāb an-Nahj – on the basis of his sources – he calls our attention to the special terminology used in Oman (as, for example, ʿarwāna ʿarwān ‘a tall palm’ /III, 215.12/), also mentioning some species of date palms cultivated in Oman (like the Fard-palm and its date of the same name, in connection with which 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 proverbs4. Their major source is al-Humaydī’s collection where 2749 proverbs are to be found (al-Humaydī 1986-94). This comprehensive collection has been supplemented with proverbs from three other, much smaller, sources (Reinhartd 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 proverbs5 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 collections6. 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 (Dévéni 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, Halifa al-Humaydī, used written sources as well. For the list of informants and other sources, see al-Humaydī 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 transcription considering the great differences in pronunciation from one Omani region to another.

6 According to the data given by Al Sudais (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 Tikriti’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 Saudîs (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 meanings7. 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 likened8, the proverbs containing references to date (palms) refer – through observation9 in the majority of the proverbs – to correct and incorrect behaviour and to the norms to be followed in everyday life.

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-Ḥumaydî 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.


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:

No. 38 (I, 63); J 5
(1) إذا سحَّب النتاهات حيث يندَّاب الليل ياب
“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.

No. 2735 (IV, 210)
(2) يُوم المُبْنَتِين والستِّين الرَّبَت فَنِيد كلْ مَسْكِن
“On the 260th day [of the year] 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:

B 11
(3) كل نَبَتة بنياتها
“Every female date palm needs its own [particular quantity] of male flower”. Things are not stereotyped.

2.1.2.2 Proper soil and climate:

No. 1749 (III, 182)  
(4) ما فاَسِلِئُها فنسْبَحْة
“We have not planted it [the date palm] in a salt marsh”. Pride in one’s aptitude; self-reliance.

No. 1779 (III, 193); J 260
(5) مَلَّ الَّذِي راَخ من طَاح راَخ
“Date palms planted in sand, when they fall down, are lost”. A weak foundation destroys the superstructure.

No. 1252 (III, 23)
(6) لا تَزْرَع النَّاجِيل في صَمْحار ولا الفَرْض في ظَفار
“Do not plant coconut palms in Şohār nor Fard-date palms in Zofār”. Do not waist your time and effort.

2.1.2.3 To be propped up:

No. 543 (II, 20); J 130
(7) سجِلْهَا ولا تفَنْسِلْها
“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:

J 259
(8) مَال الجَبَل حال الْجَمْل وَمَال الْيَحْمَب سَيْأَة ذَهاب
“The date palms of a mountainous country belong to the camel, 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 qeṣf – is considered to signal the commencement of the last stage of the ripening of the dates (qeyz) when fully ripe dates become available in large quantities.

11 A variant with reference to other plants is No. 1634 (III, 145)

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)
"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)
"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)
"The date palm cultivation of the Muhāmara" Ignorant, foolish behaviour.

2.1.4 Places where the dates are dropped:
No. 2340 (IV, 40)
"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)
"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)
"The date palm of ‘Abāya does not drop its fruit under itself/to its stump".

No. 2339 (IV, 40)
"The date palm of Misfāt shoots far away".

21 "The date palm’s goods go to others."

2.1.5 The falling down of the palm:
No. 2179 (III, 310)
"If a Qisṭ-palm falls down, we are relieved of it."

No. 2180 (III, 311)
"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)
"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 Muhāmara, a coastal tribe of Oman. According to the anecdote, some members of this tribe took part in the collection of ripe dates (gāyza) and planted young palm cuttings (garn). 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:
No. 692 (II, 95)
"There are crows on his Šallāni-palm". This proverb is applied to persons who betray those who are closest to them.

2.1.8 Tall and elegant tree:
No. 767 (II, 133)
"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:
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:
No. 1793 (III, 196)
"It is not tied together with the leaf of a Qiš Sunawī palm". Pride in one’s aptitude; self-reliance.

2.1.9.3 A palm the dates of which ripen very early:
No. 1928 (III, 235)
"Like the Mīznaq-palm in a field". Orphanhood, loneliness; peculiar situation.

2.2 Human activities in connection with the date palm
2.2.1 Ceremonies:
No. 425 (I, 303); J 106
"Music around the Nağāl-palm". Flattery, its use and abuse.

2.2.2 Plantation:
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.

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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 waqada fa'inda tamarat al-ğurāb, i.e. he found something better than he had expected (cf. Ya'qūb 1995: V, 645). Another proverb may also be quoted: al-ğurāb d'rafu bī-tamnr (Qūṭāniš 1988:433).

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

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

A classical version of this proverb seems to be the following: tarā l-fitīn ka-n-nahl wa-mā yudrīka mā d-dāhl (cf. Qūṭāniš 1988:431).

18 In Jayakar’s version the last word is naqālu. His translation and explanation are also different: “All the drumming for a date of the kind called naqāl”; (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
No. 1302 (III, 41)
(77) لا سرقة الناقة ولا رغبة نحلة بالذكوٰن
“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:
No. 1241 (III, 19)
(78) لا تَُحبم العُروق مع العَروق
“Do not bring the roots with the raceme”. Incompatibility.

2.2.4 Selling the crop:
No. ad 1664 (III, 157)
(79) أنا وأنا ونراج حالتنا
“Here I am, here I am, and a Miznāq—palm’[s crop] for the auction”. (a) Rare qualities, good repute; (b) Disdain for a concealed person.

2.2.5 ‘Cleaning’ the palm:
No. 2712 (IV, 202); J 316
(80) يَتَمَسُّ الْشََرَاةَ مَا شَيْبَانَ لِيَف
“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:
J 9
(81) إذا ما سَدَرَ عضَتها وَلاً مِن عَرَقَتها
“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:
No. 1783 (III, 194); J 263
(82) المَالُ مَالُ أبْوَاهَا وَرَأيْتُنَا دَرَها فَسُبْحَانَه
“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
No. 159 (I, 144)
(83) بو تَغْصَةِ الخوَصْةِ ما يَبْغَالهُ ميِشَار
“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.

No. 1024 (II, 273)
(84) الكَوْرُ ما يَجَأَرْعِم
“The bases of palm branches cannot be tied together”. Non-cooperation.

No. 1211 (II, 357)
(85) كَمَا كَرْبَةُ شالِيّينَا مَسْيَعَبَها وادي
“Like a palm branch base carried away by a wadi”. Like (55).

No. 1853 (III, 215)
(86) ما يَسْتَنْوَيِ حَالُ زَقْنَةِ وَلا حَالٍ دَعَن
“It is not good to any kind of palm-frond-sheeting”. Good-for-nothing.

No. 1917 (III, 231)
(87) مَتَعْلمَتْهُ فَخْوَصَهُ وَتَأَرَّسَهُ الدَّنَا حُصْوَصَهُ
“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.

and children, though emphasising in its second part the preeminence of good deeds: al-māl wa-l-banūn
zinat al-hayāt ad-dunyā (wa-l-baqīyat as-sālibhā hasr iinda rabbika tawāban wa-hayr amalan).
2.4 Human and animal activity in connection with the parts of the date palm

No. 1021 (II, 272)  
“Work hard, small camel, and palm fibre will cover you”. Contempt, disdain\(^\text{20}\) for a useless effort.

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.

No. 1585 (III, 124)  
“Who steals the fibre of the stump, will steal the [whole] stump”. Warning against the possible consequences of covetousness.

No. 1925 (III, 233); J 207\(^\text{21}\)  
“Like the blind man of Biyāq\(^\text{22}\) who is always replenishing his hookah with water and waving the date-stalk about (to kindle a fire)”. Idleness and its disapproval.

2.5 Observation of the date

2.5.1 Very nutritive:

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.

No. 377 (I, 270)  
“The sheep (or goat) is sick, still it was given date fodder”. They made things worse. Counsel to avoid recklessness.

No. 544 (II, 21)  
“The dates of the Fard-palm are the support of the earth”. Pride in the palm; preference of a species.

2.5.2 Bad dates:

No. 352 (I, 259)  
“Dry date will not stick to dry date”. Incompatibility of views.

No. 1714 (III, 173); J 250  
“There is no heap of dates without dry and shrivelled ones”. ‘There are black sheep in every flock’.

No. 2198 (III, 317); J 305; R 27\(^\text{23}\)  
“Selected out of the heap [of dates], it rotted in the bag”. Applied to a favourite thing or person not answering one’s expectations.

No. 330 (I, 248)  
“The sour [date] finds fault with the [dry] rotten one”. Odd, unjustifiable disapproval. ‘The pot calling the kettle black’.

\(^{20}\) It is also expressed by the use of feminine forms.

\(^{21}\) In Jayakar’s version: كَخْوَرُ بِيَأْقَرُ رُهْبِتَهُ وَيَلْوَحُ مِسْتَفَتَهُ.

\(^{22}\) An Omani village in the wilāya of Samā’il.

\(^{23}\) Reinhardt gives the following version: mnaaggāi miṣsūbbe fessēt fimmaddīd.
2.5.3 Good dates:
No. 1690 (III, 165) مَا دَأْيِمَ إِلَّا ِسُبُحُ ِبَاطِنَة

2.6 Human activity in connection with dates
2.6.1 Buying and selling:
No. 115 (I, 115) بَاغُ ِالسَّحَةِ وَشِيَّرِيْ مَتَشينِدٍ (50)
"He sold the dates, then bought the same". Foolish behaviour25.

2.6.2 Storing (for future use):
No. 359 (I, 262) حَفْظُ لَحْجَاتٍ عَلَىٰ يَوْلُكَ الزَّمَانُ هاَت (51)
"Preserve the fallen dates26 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) دَافِقُ مِنْ خَرْسَةٍ سَلِيْمَة (52)
"A handful of pressed dates is missing from the pot". Disapproval of greed and envy.

No. 548 (II, 23) سَحَة أَحْوَلْكَ مَا تَسْكَنْ وَلْدَكَ (53)
"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) َكَحْمٌ دُوْسَّ طَابُحٍ فُلْوَسَةٌ/فُلْوَسَةٌ بِهِ (54)
"Like one who stamps down dates and falls into them". Fulfilment of desire.

No. 1166 (II, 336) َكَحْمٌ حَبْبَةٍ مِنْ خَلاَةٍ فَمْوَحُ (55)
"Like a seed/a date in a sieve". Unsteadiness, constant move; getting into trouble, experiencing difficulties.

No. 1218 (II, 360) َكَحْمٌ مَكْفَلُ السَّحَة (56)
"Like the tool used to separate stored dates". Constant move (like 35 & 55); hard work.

No. 1940 (III, 239) مَذْبَحَةُ ِمَ حَسَلٍ مِنْ السَّحَة (57)
"The love of date syrup depends on the dates". Friendship; flattery; deception.

2.6.4 Eating dates:
No. 942 (II, 332) فَنَوَادُهُ فَلْيَسْمَحْهُ وَفَنَوَادُهُ فِنْدَ حَةٍ (58)
"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 hadith 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:
No. 691 (II, 94)
“А 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:
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.
2.7.1.3 Baskets:
No. 1180 (II, 342)
“Like a small basket with holes in it”. Said of someone who cannot keep a secret.
R 18528
“Is this a palm leaf basket, and palm leaf baskets do not keep butter”. Incompatibility.
R 17
“All the seed [comes] only from the basket”. We are all alike.
2.7.1.4 Cover:
No. 614 (II, 57)
“S. is the brother of M. / The date cover is just like the censer”. ‘Six of one and half a dozen of the other’.
2.7.1.5 Mats:
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’.
No. 572 (II, 36)
“A simple mat (simma) will not turn into a richly decorated one (fizaf)”. ‘You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear’. ‘You cannot turn chalk into cheese’.
No. 573 (II, 37); J 135
“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:
No. 2042 (III, 270)
“The date-fodder pot’s cover is a crock”. Harmony; congruity. Same as (65).

27 Similar in meaning to the classical proverb: ‘siš al-lā be’t (Ya’qūb 1995: IV, 365).
28 In Rheinhardt’s transcription: biwe mulāfeito ulumārif ydsamānā semin.
29 These can be proper names.
2.8 Activity in connection with tools

2.8.1 Palm leaf baskets:

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.

No. 231 (I, 183)  
"Who can tackle a basket/tin [full of dates] will not be frightened by one". Capability of doing great things.

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'.

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

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

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:

No. 1025 (II, 274)  
"The pot is broken [only] if the mat is unfolded". Mutual exchange; condition; also revenge.

No. 1019 (II, 271); J 204  
"Plenty on the food mat, but sadness in the stomach". A plentiful but profitless thing; quantity without quality.

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 (of eating).

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30 The beginning of the proverb according to Jaykar is: kilnā mimmīs yā sīnna, whereas Reinhardt gives the following version: yā sēţīne keleme mmā fis s'aggēniš qafe līnne.

31 takāris: 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:
No. 2508 (IV, 116); B 26 (38)١٣٢
"Hey Ramada! Take your date-sack"! Foolishness; disapproval of incorrect behaviour; acquiescence.
No. 309 (I, 233)١٣٨
"A puppy falling out of a sack". Indifference, unconcern.
No. 1695 (III, 166)١٣١
"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.
No. 2729 (IV, 208); J 318١٣١
A version of (80).
2.8.4 Palm frond sheets:
No. 2451 (IV, 94)١٣٢
“One lays the foundations of a sheet made palm fronds, the other makes the sheet”. Cooperation.
No. 2737 (IV, 210)١٣٢
"When people folded up their sheets [on which they dried the dates], came the crows to spread out [the dates on the masā‘ib]. Misdemeanour. The crow embodies negative values١٣٤.
2.8.5 Catchment-hole for date syrup:
No. 1909 (III, 229)١٣٤
"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 palm١٣٥

3.1 Dates
١٣٢ 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 Ramada’, 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 Ramada, 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.
١٣٣ On the observation of crows in connection with dates, see the note to proverb (20).
١٣٥ Numbers in brackets refer to the serial number of proverbs as 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.
3.2 The date palm

3.2.1 Its species

(a) (20) an excellent kind, frequently cultivated at the coastal regions of Oman; cf. B 605 yertab is-Ṣallānī the Šallānī-palm's dates are ripe

(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 Rustām; its dates are also exported

(17) a species of date palms to which several sub-species belong; B 1295 qalī (qāsiṣ) a self-seeded young date-palm. An inland word. The Bāṭina-equivalent is nāṣu, Gehr being a particular species of Bāṭina date palm. Cf. also B 1339, where two other species, Qaṣṣ Zebed and Ummusālī are mentioned.

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

(24; 29) the ripening of its red dates just precedes the season of qayz

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

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

(49; 50) / (57) / (53); B 719 suḥh/ṣuḥh preserved, semi-dried, ripe dates = pan-Arabic tamr; also cf. B 280: the five stages of ripening: ḥšybn, ṣalāl, bṣr, ḍārīn, rtab/qayz

(46; 47) heap of dates before they are packed; J 250 suḥb

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

(48) rotten, shrivelled date (assimilation from Fāsda); the verb FNS (47) means in connection with dates: to dry, shrivel

(50) the exact equivalent of ṣalāl from Swahili ntende

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

(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 gūbər a fodder given to livestock on the coast, mainly composed of banana-leaves; date stones; burnt kereb, palm-thorns and -fibre; and sometimes anchovies

(58) date; the same as tamra; cf. SA ḍh, to fill (the belly: food); to be swollen (belly)
(13; 18) very tall palm; B 1143 ʾawwēn tall, untended old palms; ʾawwēnā one; Reinhardt (1894:119) ʾwānē a tall palm

(22) male palm (capable of fertilising); B 1207 fahal

(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 qaṣṣ (qāṣṣ) an inland word for nešu (while the latter is used in the Bāṭina)

3.2.3 Its parts

(40) stem, stump

(65) palm leaves; cf. B 428 ḥṣaf (ḥṣaf/ḥṣaf) an empty sack woven from palm leaves, for ṣṣḥ

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

(59) palm leaf midribs; B 692 zor

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

(27) / (28) bunch of dates; date-raceme; B 1077 ʾidāq/ʾidāq/udāq (udāq) the whole date-raceme, whether only a little more advanced than the flower stage, or bearing fully ripened

(41) date-stalk; date-raceme; B 1092 ḍṣq (ṭṣq), ṣṣq 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 ṣṣʿd sṣʿt

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

(22); B 1160 ґdr/ґdr the newest leaves in the centre

(28) root

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

(19) / (38) diminutive of fibre

(30) / (38) diminutive of fibre

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

3.2.4 Its cultivation

(39) they cut for her the date raceme; B 219 gedd, ygidd to harvest the whole raceme of dates (ʾidāq) by cutting its stalk (ṭṣq)

(12, 13, 14) / (51) drop, droop, fall (fruit); B 282 ḥitt/yḥitt, il-hatēt; cf. Reinhardt 1894:260

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

(54) stamping down of dates until they become pressed

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

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

(29) the selling of the date-crop at an auction; B 1036 ťana, yṭna, iṭṭanī

(15) to shoot; to drop (fruit); cf. B 1112 ʾagg, yʾagg; SA dʾagg

3.3 Baskets, mats and other utensils woven from palm leaves

\(\) basket for the storage of dates and other fruit

\(\) date sack; B 227 yrāb/grāb (gurbān) a sack containing suh/hemr; without contents it is called hāfe or kse

\(\) date sack, half the size of ; according to J 318 it can also mean any piece cut off from a

\(\) fence

\(\) large sack for the storage of dates cf. B 428 hāfe an empty sack for suh

\(\) sheeting, made from midribs of palm leaves tied into lengths and used for housing, drying dates on, etc.

\(\) to tie clipped palm fronds into sheets; SA zifn palm frond sheeting

\(\) small basket used for dates and other fruit; B 657 zabīl

\(\) small basket made of green palm leaves and used for dates; usually it is used only once

\(\) to make sheets (generally from palm fronds)

\(\) to stamp down newly cropped suh and/or pack them into bags

\(\) mat made for different purposes (sitting, teaching, praying) and in different patterns; B 126 simme; J 134, 135 summa

\(\) (diminutive from ) conical lid for covering dates; B 808 ṣett

\(\) palm frond sheet

\(\) basket, very narrow at the top

\(\) richly decorated, round mat for bowls of food at a meal; B 1089 ‘izāf

\(\) big, round basket for dates, large at the bottom, narrow at the top; SA qaf’a

\(\) (mukhafīf) ‘basket for picking out the best dates’

\(\) basket

\(\) (82) to lay the foundations of a sheet made of palm fronds

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

\(\) large, earthenware pot for storing dates; B 410 hars (hrūs) smaller than a hill

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

38 It has already been noted by Jaykar (1889:652) that in Omani written material the letters sīn and sād sometimes take the place of each other.
cathcment-hole\(^39\); B 1031 tlāl a cathcment-hole for date-syrup (dīb, ‘asad) in the floor of a room; the cropped subh are piled on matting (qāra) over the tlāl, left to secrete for a week, and then stamped and packed into ḫāṣ

لاكو (83) to put the dates on the مسطح (سبطخ) مسطح (89) sing. مسطح a flattened area where dates are spread out for drying; it is surrounded by thorny fences to protect the dates; B 738 mistāḥ مسطح (68) a see above under ‘dates’ (b) earthenware pot in which the fodder of the same name is cooked and given to the cattle مطلاع (56) a tool used to separate stored dates مصمم (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 nāḍād pile

REFERENCES

A. Primary sources


B. Secondary sources


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


The Mbewili date palm, emblem of the wilāya of Bidya.
The Nağāl date palm, emblem of the wilāya of Dama‘ wa-Ṭā’īyyīn.

The Farḑ date palm, emblem of the wilāya of Samā‘īl.