

§ 6 PROVERBS

The following may be added to the collections of Omani proverbs made by Jayakar and Reinhardt. After each one there is a literal translation, sometimes followed by explanations and comparable English proverbs. They are arranged in Arabic alphabetical order, discounting the definite article.

Most of them were told to me in conversations specifically about proverbs. I had asked informants 7 and 26 what certain proverbs meant, and subsequently they would both tell me other ones. Finally they were kind enough to record whole sequences of them on tape.

Numbers 5, 6, 11, 14, 18 and 25 initially cropped up in the course of everyday conversation as pithy observations on life. These and their like were often rhyming and brief.

Others, notably number 26, and some already recorded by Jayakar or Reinhardt, formed the punch line to stories, and were not properly understandable without first being told the story.

- 1 *il- arba' illi mā dor kūn 'anhe ḥaddor* 7,19*,26 ... "Be extra wary of the Wednesday that doesn't come round again". Do not begin anything major on the last Wednesday of the month (cf. our superstition about Friday the thirteenth).
- 2 *ila slimet nāqti mā 'alayya min nāqat rifāqti* 26 "If my she-camel escapes, my friends' she-camel isn't my obligation". Said of someone with an "I'm-all-right-Jack" attitude.
- 3 *illi yistahyu mētu* 26 "The shy die". Fortune favours the brave.
- 4 *taht is-sawēhi dawēhi* 7 "Beneath quiet men are disasters". A fair face may hide a foul heart.
- 5 *ḥad fīh zayn uḥad fīh ṣayn, ḥad fīh 'āli uḥad fīh dēni* 1 "There's someone good and someone bad, someone high and someone low". cf. number 20, below.
- 6 *ḫāli mēli* 3,19* "Empty, full". Said to be a characteristic of Aquarians, whose symbol is the well-bucket. One day, for instance, they have no money, then they suddenly get it, yet they spend it as quickly and then have none again.

- 7 *ħalli l-murr taħt wel-ħelu foq* 7,26 "Let the bitter [go] down and the sweet [come] up". Look on the bright side.
- 8 *šabruk 'ale nefšuk we lē šabr in-nēs 'alayk* 7,26 "Patience by you over yourself and not by people over you". Better to stay at home broke than borrow to have a night out.
- 9 *šabr sē'a we lē way' dom* 26 "An hour's patience and not pain for ever". A little self-control is better than a lifetime of regret.
- 10 *il-kazayz ħašīm nefšuh* 26 "The chatterbox is his own adversary".
- 11 *kill tayr blaġūh* 26, *kill ħad blaġūh* 15 "Every bird/person has their own idiom". This is heard frequently in reply to questions about dialects or accents. The formula is also used in numerous other contexts always saying that things are not stereotyped, e.g. *kull tāyfa b'azilħa* 19,22, *kill tāyfe bwasiħme* 23 "Each clan has its own mark/brand"; *kull makēn bru'ātuh* 28 "Each place to its own inhabitants"; *kull naym bdarrah* 1 "Each star has its own season"; *kill naħla binebētha* 25 "Every female date-palm needs its own particular quantity of male flower".
- 12 *kilmit il-ata aħsan mil-'ata* 26 "A slow word is better than a gift". Jc 477 and R 408 have *wata* in place of *ata*, "A humble word ..."
- 13 *allah yuħluq weblīs yuħsif* 7,26 "God creates, the Devil messes up." Said of someone who has made a mess of something.
- 14 *lē yistwi šayy illa taħt šok* 7*,11* "Nothing grows except beneath thorns". Nothing comes easily, or, if you want to be rich, you have to be a miser.
- 15 *lē tzīd il-baħr gaħle* 7,26 "Don't increase the sea by a pot[-ful]". It is already full so the effort will make no difference, like flogging a dead horse.
- 16 *lē tzīd il-grūħ wsūm* 7 "Don't increase the wounds with brandings". Two wrongs won't make a right.

- 17 *lë tzīd it-ṭīn mā* 26 "Don't increase the clay's water". Know where to stop. For a brick to be good it needs a definite quantity of water, and no more.
- 18 *il-mēl mēlak wirkab 'aḍ-dayl* 16 "The beast is yours, ride behind !" Others profit from your hard-earned possessions.
- 19 *el-musta'gil mēkil šobe niyy* 7,26 "The hurried man ate the pancake half-cooked", then indigestion slowed him down. More haste, less speed.
- 20 *in-nēs agnēs* 17* "Mankind is [of many] kinds". There is good and bad in every race. cf. number 5, above.
- 21 *en-naḫle ḫayrhe ḫāl ḡayrhe* 26 "The palm's goods go to others". Said of someone bequeathing to a non-relative.
- 22 *il-'atššene kēsre l-ḥoḍ* 7,26 "The thirsty [she-goat] breaks the cistern". Jc 470 and R 412 give pejorative interpretations, the former "a hungry man, an angry man", and the latter "haste makes waste". But 26 disagreed and said that the point is not condemnation of the breakage, but that need overcomes obstacles. A she-goat not finding water anywhere, except in a cistern whose walls are too high for her to reach over, should break the walls down rather than die of thirst. In other words, Bedr wants to borrow money from Adam, but is either too proud or afraid to ask him directly, so he tells Sayf to go and ask for it as though it were for himself. Adam realises that it is in fact Bedr who wants it and says to Sayf "I'm not giving it to you. Bedr will only get it if he comes himself, the thirsty she-goat breaks the cistern". If a need is really pressing, pride or fear or whatever will be conquered.
- 23 *qāl tays qāl leh ḫelbuh* 7,26 "He said, it's a he-goat. He answered him, milk it !" Said of someone making an irrelevant or inane reply.
- 24 *īdin mā tnēlhe šimmhe* 26 "A hand you don't [often] get, kiss". When you are only seldom introduced to a ruler, kiss his hand in respect. Value the rare.

- 25 *yu'bur iz-zēd qurb il-blēd* 17*,19*,26*. "The travelling provisions have finished near the town". Said when something lasts just right without waste or shortage.
- 26 *yo Ramḍān dok grābak* 7,17*,26 "Hey Ramadān ! Take your date-sack !" Said to someone who has done something stupid. 26's explanation went : A husband brings home a sack of the best dates and tells his wife, "This is for Ramadān", meaning for the evenings of Ramadān, the coming month. A few days later, when the husband is out, a man called Ramadān comes to the door. After greetings, he asks the wife where the husband is. She says he is out, and asks who she should say called. When she hears that he is Ramadān she says, "Ah ! You must have come for your sack of dates". Pleasantly surprised, Ramadān shoulders the sack and leaves. Later the husband returns, notices the sack missing and asks his wife where it is. "Ramadān came and collected it". Her husband looks at her aghast. "But you said it was for Ramadān, didn't you ?" she says, "he sends his greetings".

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