

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MALTESE AND EGYPTIAN PROVERBS

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THIS is a collection of Egyptian proverbs which I know personally as they are spoken in various parts of Egypt. I am a native of the district of *Sharqiyya*, and it is from this area that I have drawn the larger number of Egyptian proverbs. This is not intended to be a complete collection of Egyptian proverbs, but only of such as are found also in Maltese, sometimes literally and sometimes less so, but otherwise substantially equal in usage. For Maltese proverbs, I have based myself on the COMPARATIVE DICTIONARY OF MALTESE PROVERBS, the largest collection so far, compiled by Professor J. Aquilina and published by the Royal University of Malta in 1972. The Maltese proverbs are given with their sections and numbers as they occur in this work.

Professor Aquilina has included Arabic comparisons from various parts of the Arab world; my Egyptian proverbs are intended as a supplement to the comparative section of his paremiological surveys.

So far, my list covers the first eleven sections which are the following:

- I GOD AND RELIGION
- II THE DEVIL
- III DEATH
- IV CRAFT AND EVIL
- V HYPOCRISY AND FALSE APPEARANCES
- VI TRUTH, HONESTY AND PIETY
- VII HOPE AND PATIENCE
- VIII RETRIBUTION AND RECOMPENSE
- IX REMEDIES
- X LIFE
- XI TROUBLES, WORRIES AND ANXIETIES

1. M. Fl-ahħar mill-ahħar hemm Alla. (I, 1)
Ar. Rab'bina maw'gūd
Our God is found.

2. M. Alla jsebbah; Alla jibghat. (I, 2)
 Ar. 'Rabbak 'yib'at
 (May) your God provide (send).
3. M. Alla biss jaf il-bniedem x'ikollu f'qalbu. (I, 5)
 Ar. Rab'bina ' 'ālim bil-'u'lūb
 Our God knows the hearts.
4. M. Li gej Alla biss jafu. (I, 6)
 Ar. Rab'bina ' 'ālim 'billi gāy
 Our God knows what is coming.
5. M. Alla biss jagħmel is-sewwa. (I, 8)
 Ar. Rab'bina ysā' wīha
 (May) our God put it right.
6. M. Alla biss (waħdu) isewwi. (I, 9)
 Ar. Rab'bina yi 'ad'dilha
 (May) our God make it right.
7. M. Afda f'Alla u thabbilx rasek. (I, 13)
 Ar. 'Sibha lil'lāh
 Leave it to God.
8. M. Alla fettieħi u Alla ħanin. (I, 20)
 Ar. 'rabbak ħi 'nayyin
 God (lit. your Lord) is merciful.
9. M. Alla jħabbrek. (I, 26)
 Ar. Al'lah yiṭam'minak
 (May) God send you good news. (As in Maltese, it is hardly a proverb, but rather an optative expression).
10. M. Fuq Alla ma hemm ħadd. (I, 27)
 Ar. 'Rabbak ki'bīr
 God is great (Hence, unjust people will be punished sooner or later).
11. M. Alla (Il-Bambin) lill-bniedem iħallsu (jagħtih) skond qalbu. (I, 32)
 Ar. Rab'bina 'yiddi 'kullī 'wāħid ' 'ala ' 'addī ḍa'mīru
 God treats (lit. gives) everyone according to his conscience.
12. M. Alla jagħti 'l kulħadd li ħaqqu. (I, 35)
 Ar. Rab'bina 'yiddi kullī 'wāħid 'ħa' u
 God gives everyone what he deserves.
13. M. Alla jħarisna minn dan. (I, 36)
 Ar. Rab'bina yik'fīna š-šarr
 May God deliver us from evil.

14. M. Alla jahseb. (I, 37)
Ar. Rab'bina mabin'saš 'abdu
God does not forget his slave (ie. anyone).
15. M. Alla tal-ħniena (ħanin). (I, 40)
Ar. 'Raħmit rab'bina 'was'a
The mercy of God is bountiful.
16. M. Alla jaf x'inhu l-aħjar. (I, 43)
Ar. Il-'kīra 'fima 'ktarahu-llāh.
What God has chosen is best.
17. M. Ikollok titqanna (toqgħod) b'li Alla jibgħat (b'li jigik). (I, 45)
Ar. 'Irġa 'billi rab'bina yi'si'mūlak
Be satisfied with (or accept) what God sends.
18. M. Kollox minn Alla. (I, 46)
Ar. 'Kullu mn-'alla
Everything comes from God.
19. M. Dak li jagħmel Alla kollox sew. (I, 47)
Ar. Kull 'illi yi'gību rab'bina 'kwayyis
Whatever God sends is good.
20. M. Alla jara kollox. (I, 49)
Ar. Rab'bina 'šāyif kull 'ħāga
God sees everything.
21. M. Alla jista' kollox. (I, 50)
Ar. Rab'bina ''ādir.' 'ala 'kullⁱ 'šey'
God can (i.e. is able to) do everything.
22. M. Mulejja, niżżikhajr. (I, 59)
Ar. Aš'kurak ya rabb.
I thank you, Lord. (As in Maltese, this is hardly a proverb, but is mainly used to comment on something which has happened, good or bad, to show that we are in accordance with God's will).
23. M. Alla lill-muntanja jagħtiha s-silg skond ma tiflah. (I, 78)
Ar. Rab'bina bi 'yiddi l-bard 'ala ''addⁱ l-'gāga
God gives cold according to the covering (blanket).
24. M. Alla ta u Alla ħa: niżziħajr 'l Alla. (I, 80)
Ar. ''Alla gāb, ''alla kād, ''alla 'a' leyhⁱ l-'awaḡ
God gives and God takes, God alone is responsible for restoring (what he takes).

25. M. L-aħjar min imut (żgħir għax jistrieħ). (III, 1)
 Ar. 'Illī y(i)'mūt biyis'trayyah
 He who dies, rests.
26. M. Il-mewt u l-ħajja f'idejn Alla. (III, 4)
 Ar. 'Il-ħa'yah wil-'mōt bi-''īd rab'bina
 Life and death are in the hands of God.
27. M. Darba mmutu. (III, 8)
 Ar. 'Il-mōt 'wāhid wir-'rabb^ī 'wāhid
 Death comes once and God is one.
28. M. Hadd ma jiehu xejn miegħu (ħlief il-libsa ta' fuqu) (III, 18)
 Ar. Ma 'ħadd^īš 'wākid 'minha ('m'āh) 'ħāga.
 No one takes from it (i.e. life) anything.
29. M. Hadd ma mar u ġie (reġa'). (III, 19)
 Ar. ''Illī yi'rūh ma byir'ga'š
 What (i.e. Whoever) goes, does not return.
30. M. Hadd ma miet wara ħadd. (III, 20)
 Ar. Ma 'ħadd^īš māt 'wara ħadd
 No one has died after another (through sadness)
31. M. Hadd m'hu għal hawn. (III, 22)
 Ar. Ma 'ħadd^īš mi''abbid 'fīha
 No one stays for ever (in life)
32. M. Il-mewt ma taħfirha (gġib riġpet) lil ħadd. (III, 23)
 Ar. 'Il'mōt ma biy'sibš ħadd
 Death leaves no one (Death is for all)
33. M. Tibni u tghalli (Tgeddes kemm tgeddes), tmur u tħalli. (III, 27).
 Ar. Yā 'bānī wi'm'alli 'nsīrak tmurr wi-'tħalli
 You who build high (houses) sooner or later you will go and leave (everything)
34. M. Siequ għall-hofra. (III, 29)
 Ar. 'Riġlu wil-'abr
 His foot is near the grave (i.e. He is very old and has not long to live)
35. M. Imut il-ghani, imut il-fqir; it-mejn jitmellhu għal ġewwa l-bir. (III, 45)
 Ar. 'Il ġani biy'mūt wil-fa'' īr biy'mūt
 The rich man dies and the poor man dies (Death does not distinguish between the poor and the rich)
36. M. Wara l-qabar jidhol is-sabar. (III, 62)

- Ar. Ba'd il- 'abr 'yīgi ṣ-ṣabr
After the grave, comes patience.
37. M. Il-mewt il-mixtieqa taqbez (toħrog) mit-tieqa. (III, 75)
Ar. 'Umr iš-'ša'i 'ba'i
The life of the wicked is long (those whom we wish to see dead usually live longer)
38. M. Alla jħarsek minn min ibejtek f'qalbu. (IV, 4)
Ar. Rab'bina yik'fik šarri wlād il-ħa'rām.
May God keep you from the harm of evil-doers.
39. M. Min jagħmel bixkilla (jaf) jagħmel qartalla. (IV, 7)
Ar. 'Illī 'yisra' il-'bēyda 'yisra' ig-'gamal
He who steals the egg (may also) steal the camel.
40. M. Tagħmilx ġid biex ma tarax deni. (IV, 14)
Ar. 'kē^yrin 'ti'mil 'šarrin 'til'a.
The good you do will be returned by evil.
41. M. Laringa (tuffieħa) ħazīna tħassar barkata (qartalla). (IV, 29)
Ar. It-tif faħa l-kastrana bit'kassar 'afax b'ħalu.
The rotten apple rots a whole basketful.
42. M. Il-ħazin li ħaraft min hu, aħjar mit-tajjed li ma tafx min hu.
(IV, 39)
Ar. 'Illī ni 'rafu 'aħsan 'milli ma ni'ra'fūš
(Who) what we know is better than what we don't know
43. M. Il-hell wiż-żena ma jdumux fil-ħabi (ma jistahbewx) sena. (IV, 45).
Ar. 'bukra l-misti'kabbi ybān
Tomorrow (In the near future) what is hidden will be disclosed.
44. M. Bl-imghawweg ma tasal imkien. (IV, 59)
Ar. 'Il-'mašy il-'iwig ma yin'fa'š
Crooked means are useless.
45. M. Jekk il-pest irid fils minnek, tnejn aħtiħ inkella jieħdok.
(IV, 62)
Ar. Il-bāb 'illī 'yġīlak 'minnu r-rīħ 'siddu wišta'rīħ.
The door from which the wind (i.e. troubles) comes, shut it and set your mind at rest.
46. M. Il-bajtar tax-xewk ma jagħmilx ħawħ. (IV, 77)
Ar. 'Ilħid'dāya ma tir'miš kata'kīt
The kite does not throw chickens.

47. M. Wiehed jixhet (ixewlaħ, jitfa') il-ġebbla (ħaġra) u jaħbi idu. (V, 13)
 Ar. Bi'yil'ab min 'taħt il taħt.
 He engages in underhand play (i.e. He causes troubles to others but hides himself).
48. M. Hadd ma jara ħotobtu (kruhitu). (V, 19)
 Ar. Ma 'ħadd¹š biy' šūf 'uyūbu
 No one sees his own faults.
49. M. 'Il-Ġaħan il-libsa ġhamlitu nies. (V, 24)
 Ar. 'Labbas il-'būša 'reb'a 'a'rūsa.
 Let a cane dress up, and it will look like a bride.
50. M. Il-ġhajb iġhajjeb, u l-ġħar iġhajjar. (V, 29)
 Ar. 'Il-ma 'yūb biy' 'ayyib 'ġē^yru.
 Disgrace disgraces others.
51. M. Ma tistax isservi 'l Alla u x-xitan, (V, 35)
 Ar. 'šāhib bā'lēyn kad'dāb.
 He who keeps thinking of two (different) matters is a liar (The idea is that no one can do two things at one time).
52. M. Daqqa fuq ġhonq b'zewġt ucuħ, tarmi zewġt irjus. (V, 37)
 Ar. Fil-'wišš nraġa w-fil-' 'afa sel'lāya.
 Mirror in the face, thorn in the neck. (The idea is that a double-faced man appears to act normally in front of you, and behaves badly behind your back).
53. M. Minn fommok ġħal Alla. (VII, 1)
 Ar. Min 'bo'' ak (fommak) li bab is-sama
 From your mouth to the gate of Heaven.
54. M. Min ħalaqna jaf bina. (VII, 2)
 Ar. 'Illī ka'la'na miš na'sīna
 He who has created us will not forget us.
55. M. Min jorqod bil-ġuħ joħlom bil-ftajjar. (VII, 3)
 Ar. 'il-ga' 'ān 'yiħlam bi su' il-'ēyš
 He, who is hungry dreams of the bread market.
56. M. Min ikun se jegħreq jaqbad imqar ma' tibna (bičča ġħuda, laqxa). (VII, 6)
 Ar. 'Il-ġar 'ān yit 'alla' fi'aš-šāya
 A drowning man clutches a straw.
57. M. Timliex rasek bir-riħ li ġħaddej. (VII, 9)
 Ar. 'Illī 'ħašal 'ħašal.

What has happened has happened (because you will not be able to change it).

58. M. Min jistenna jithenna. (VII, 13)
Ar. 'Illi yistanna yit'hanna
He who waits (has patience) will rejoice.
59. M. Min jagħmel Alla jħallsu. (VIII, 4)
Ar. Rab'bina 'huwwa l-mi'kallaş
It is God who will punish.
60. M. Mera taqa' l-baqra jaqghu s-skieken (jaqghu għaliha skikienha). (VIII, 9)
Ar. 'In 'wi' 'it il-ba'ara 'kitrit saka'kinha.
When the cow falls many knives will appear.
61. M. Min ifittex isib. (VIII, 26)
Ar. 'Illi y 'dawwar yi'lā'i
He who seeks, finds.
62. M. Aħfer biex jaħfrulek. (VIII, 35)
Ar. 'Iğfir 'ašān rab'bina yiğ firlak
Forgive so that God will forgive you.
63. M. Dak li (kif) tiżra' taħsad. (VIII, 47)
Ar. Min 'yizra' 'yuhşud
He who sows, mows.
64. M. Min jiekol il-laħma jeħtieglu jqaxqax (imexmex, jiekol) l-għadma.
Ar. Ma fiş ħa'lāwa min ġē^Yr nār
There is no sweetness without fire.
65. M. Min jikser iğħammar. (VIII, 57)
Ar. 'Illi kasar yi'şallah.
He who broke must repair.
66. M. Mar biex ikittef u ħareġ imnittef. (VIII, 58)
Ar. 'Tīgi 'tşīdu y 'sidak
You go to hunt him and he hunts you down.
67. M. Kif tagħmel jagħmlulek. (VIII, 74).
Ar. 'Kullu 'salaf wi dē^Yn.
All is lending and borrowing (i.e. As you treat others, so you shall be treated).
68. M. Kull min jagħmel qabar għal sieħbu jindifen fih. (VIII, 77)
Ar. Man 'ħafara 'ħufratan li 'a'kihi 'waqa'a 'fiha.
Whoever digs a hole for his brother (i.e. neighbour) will fall in it.

69. M. Min jidħaq l-aħħar jidħaq rajjeb. (IX, 2)
 Ar. 'yaḍħak ka'ṭīran man 'yaḍħak 'a'kīran.
 He laughs best who laughs last.
70. M. Hajt tas-sejjieh la jaqa' jistrieħ. (IX, 6)
 Ar. il-ħē^yṭa l-mā^yla n'sirha 'tu'a'
 The slanting wall will surely fall.
71. M. Kull kobba fiha t-tarf tagħha. (IX, 10)
 Ar. Kull 'u'da w' laha ḥallāl
 For every knot there is someone who can loosen it. (i.e. Any problem can be solved).
72. M. Kull qawwi hawn iehor għalih. (IX, 17)
 Ar. 'Il-' 'awi fih l-a'wa 'minnu
 For every strong man there is someone who is stronger.
73. M. Min jibki u min jidħak. (X, 1)
 Ar. Nās bi 'tidħak wi nās bit' 'ayyaṭ
 While some people laugh, others are crying.
74. M. Dinja din. (X, 8)
 Ar. 'Id-'dinya 'kida
 Such is the world.
75. M. Id-dinja hekk imqassma: lil dan is-sliem, lil dak il-ħrieb u lil-na l-ħemm. (X, 10)
 Ar. Kull¹ wāħid bi' yaḳud na' ṣību.
 Everyone takes his share (from both good and bad).
76. M. Min ma jgarrabx ma jemminx. (X, 21)
 Ar. 'Illī ma dā'š ma yi'rafš
 He who did not taste (i.e. experience) something does not (really) know it.
77. M. Ġebel ma' ġebel ma jiltaqa', iżda wiċċ ma' wiċċ jiltaqa'. (X, 22)
 Ar. Nisīr il-ħayy yit'la' a.
 The living will surely meet.
78. M. Daqqa fil-gawdjuż, daqqa fid-doloruż. (X, 26)
 Ar. Id-'dinya 'a'lādi 'wi-di
 Life is made of this (i.e. troubles) and that (i.e. joy)
79. M. Id-dinja kollha kuntlarju (għawġ). (X, 38)
 Ar. Id-'dinya kul' laha 'ta'ab
 The whole world is weariness (i.e. Sadness is everywhere).
80. M. Wieħed jaql'a' u l-iehor ihawwel. (X, 49)

- Ar. Nās 'takul il-'balaḥ wi nās tin'ḍirib bišama'rīḳu
Some eat dates, and some are beaten with their stalks.
81. M. M'hemmx warda bla xewk. (X, 57)
Ar. Ma'fīš^v ward min ḡē^yr šūk
There is no rose without thorns.
82. M. Kull baḥar jiplaka. (XI, 3)
Ar. 'kullⁱ nar 'tiṣbaḥ ra'mād
Every fire will turn to ashes.
83. M. Min jidhol bejn il-basla u qoxritha jibqa' b'riḥitha. (XI, 5)
Ar. 'Illī 'yidḳul bē^yn il-'bašala w-'iš'ritha ma 'ynūbu 'illa ḥāra'ritha.
He who enters between the onion and its skin gains nothing except its smell.
84. M. Il-borma fuq tlieta toqḡhod. (XI, 10)
Ar. 'It-'talta 'tabta
The third is the last.
85. M. Id-dinja mlahḡḡa (tilḡḡa) ma' kulḡhadd. (XI, 13)
Ar. 'Kull 'wāḡid ' 'andu l-imka^ffīh
Everyone has his fill (of troubles).
86. M. Min jaḡseb f'hemmu jinsa ta' l-oḡrajn. (XI, 37)
Ar. Min šāf ba'lāwi n-nās 'hanit 'alē^yh, bal'witu
He who sees the troubles of others will find his own troubles easy.
87. M. Ilḡhabs mimli bl-innocenti u l-kannierja bil-kaguni. (XI, 41)
Ar. 'yama fil-ḡhabs maḡa'līm.
In the prison there are many innocent people.
88. M. Logḡob u ḡlieqa ḡlied iḡibu. (XI, 46)
Ar. 'Il-hi'ḡar ' 'aḡru 'nakad.
Joking ends with sadness (i.e. because it gradually leads to quarrelling).
89. M. Fid-dinja (ta' did-dinja) kollox iḡhaddi. (XI, 63)
Ar. 'kullu bi 'y'addi
Everything passes (No trouble continues for ever).
90. M. Kulḡhadd hu ja^f fiex inhu.
Ar. kull 'wāḡid ' 'adra 'b-ḡālu
Everyone knows his condition best.
91. M. Sqieni kies l-imrar. (XI, 79)
Ar. Sa' 'āni kas il-ma' rār

He made me drink the chalice of bitterness (As in Maltese, it is no more than a figurative saying).

92. M. In-nar italla' l-fwar. (XI, 82)

Ar. Ma'fīš ka'lām min ġē^yr'a' sās

There is no talk without foundation.

also Ar. Māfiš dukkān min ġē^yr nār

There is no smoke without fire.

(Both proverbs mean that in every rumour there must be an element of truth).

93. M. Taghbija mqassma sewwa theff. (XI, 84)

Ar. Il-'ħiml it-ti'ṭl yiš'i lūh it'ne^yn

The heavy burden is carried by two.

94. M. F'dar (F'bieb) l-imghallaq la ddendilx wited (kus). (XI, 95)

Ar. Ma tbi'š il-'mayya f-ħart is-sa''a'yīn

Do not sell water in the lane where water carriers live.