

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

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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 ġej Alla biss jafu. (I, 6)
Ar. Rab'bina ' 'ālim 'billi ġāy
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 fettiehi 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 'kullⁱ 'wāḥid ' 'ala ' 'addⁱ 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 kullⁱ 'wāḥid 'ḥa'' 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'sāš '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. Ikkollok titqanna (toqghod) b'li Alla jibghat (b'li jīgik). (I, 45)
Ar. 'Irda '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 tiflaħ. (I, 78)
Ar. Rab'bina bi 'yiddi l-bard ''ala ''addⁱ l-'gāṭa
God gives cold according to the covering (blanket).
24. M. Alla ta u Alla ħa: niżżikhajr 'l Alla. (I, 80)
Ar. ''Alla gāb, ''alla kād, ''alla 'a' leyhⁱ l-''awad
God gives and God takes, God alone is responsible for restoring (what he takes).

25. M. L-ahjar min imut (żghir ghax jistrieħ). (III, 1)
Ar. 'Illi y(i)'mūt biyis'trayyaħ
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 mmuru. (III, 8)
Ar. 'Il-mōt 'wāħid wir-'rabbī 'wāħid
Death comes once and God is one.
28. M. Hadd ma jieħu xejn miegħu (ħlief il-libsa ta' fuqu) (III, 18)
Ar. Ma 'ħadd¹š 'wāķid 'minha ('m'āh) 'ħāga.
No one takes from it (i.e. life) anything.
29. M. Hadd ma mar u ġie (reġa'). (III, 19)
Ar. 'Illi yi'rūħ ma byir'ga'š
What (i.e. Whoever) goes, does not return.
30. M. Hadd ma miet wara ħadd. (III, 20)
Ar. Ma 'ħadd¹š māt 'wara ħadd
No one has died after another (through sadness)
31. M. Hadd m'ħu għal hawn. (III, 22)
Ar. Ma 'ħadd¹š mi''abbid 'fīha
No one stays for ever (in life)
32. M. Il-mewt ma taħfirha (ġġib rispert) 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-'tķalli
You who build high (houses) sooner or later you will go and leave (everything)
34. M. Siequ għall-ħofra. (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-ġhani, imut il-fqir; it-tnejn 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 jidħol is-sabar. (III, 62)

- Ar. Ba'd il-' 'abr 'yīgi ṣ-ṣabr
After the grave, comes patience.
37. M. Il-mewt il-mixtieqa taqbez (tohrog) 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 jharsek minn min ibejtek f'qalbu. (IV, 4)
Ar. Rab'bina yik'fīk šarri wlād il-ḥa'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-'bēyḍa 'yisra' ig-'gamal
He who steals the egg (may also) steal the camel.
40. M. Tagħmilx gid 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) hazina ḥassar barkata (qartalla). (IV, 29)
Ar. It-tif faħa l-kasrana bit'kassar 'afaṣ b'ḥalu.
The rotten apple rots a whole basketful.
42. M. Il-hazin li għaraft min hu, aħjar mit-tajjeb li ma tafx min hu.
(IV, 39)
Ar. 'Illī nī 'rafu 'aḥsan 'milli ma nī'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 jistaħbewx) sena. (IV, 45).
Ar. 'bukra l-misti'kabbī 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 fijs minnek, tnejn aghth inkella jiehdok.
(IV, 62)
Ar. Il-bāb 'illī 'yḡlāk 'minnu r-rīḥ 'siddu wista'rīḥ.
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 hawh. (IV, 77)
Ar. 'Ilḥid'dāya ma tir'mīš kata'kīt
The kite does not throw chickens.

47. M. Wiehed jixhet (ixewlah, 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 'ħadd'š biy'šūf 'uyūbu
 No one sees his own faults.
49. M. 'Il-Ġaħan il-libsa ġhamlitu nies. (V, 24)
 Ar. 'Labbas il-'būša 'teb'a 'a'rūsa.
 Let a cane dress up, and it will look like a bride.
50. M. Il-ġħajb iġħajjeb, u l-ġħar iġħajjar. (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. 'šāħib 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. 'Illi ġa'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-ġa' '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 (biċċa 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. 'Illi 'ħašal 'ħašal.

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

58. M. Min jistenna jithenna. (VII, 13)
Ar. 'Illī yistanna yit'hanna
He who waits (has patience) will rejoice.
59. M. Min jagħmel Alla jħallsu. (VIII, 4)
Ar. Rab'bina 'huwwa l-mi'kallaṣ
It is God who will punish.
60. M. Meta raqa' 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. 'Illī y 'dawwar yi'lā'i
He who seeks, finds.
62. M. Aħfer biex jaħfrulek. (VIII, 35)
Ar. 'Iḡfir 'aṣān rab'bina yiḡ firlak
Forgive so that God will forgive you.
63. M. Dak li (kif) tizra' taḥsad. (VIII, 47)
Ar. Min 'yizra' 'yuhṣud
He who sows, mows.
64. M. Min jiekol il-laħma jeħtieglu jqaxqax (imexmex, jiekol) l-ghadma.
Ar. Ma fiṣ ḥa'lāwa min ḡē^yr nār
There is no sweetness without fire.
65. M. Min jikser iḡhammar. (VIII, 57)
Ar. 'Illī kasar yi'ṣallah.
He who broke must repair.
66. M. Mar biex ikitref u ħareḡ imnitref. (VIII, 58)
Ar. 'Tīḡi 'tṣīdu 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 jidhaq l-ahħar jidhaq tajjeb. (IX, 2)
Ar. 'yadhak ka' ħīran man 'yadhak 'a' k'īran.
He laughs best who laughs last.
70. M. Hajt tas-sejjieh la jaqa' jistrieh. (IX, 6)
Ar. il-ħē^yta 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 ħallāl
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' šību.
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 (għawg). (X, 38)
Ar. Id-'dinya kul' laha 'ta'ab
The whole world is weariness (i.e. Sadness is everywhere).
80. M. Wiehed jaqla' u l-iehor ihawwel. (X, 49)

- Ar. Nās 'takul il-'balaḥ wi nās tin'dirib bišama'rīku
Some eat dates, and some are beaten with their stalks.
81. M. M'hemmx warda bla xewk. (X, 57)
Ar. Ma'fīš ward min ḡē^yr šūk
There is no rose without thorns.
82. M. Kull baḥar jiplaka. (XI, 3)
Ar. 'kull^l nar 'tiṣbaḥ ra'mād
Every fire will turn to ashes.
83. M. Min jidḥol bejn il-basla u qoxritha jibqa' b'riḥitha. (XI, 5)
Ar. 'Illī 'yidḡul bē^yn il-'baṣala w-'iṣ'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 tliera toqḡhod. (XI, 10)
Ar. 'It-'talta 'tabta
The third is the last.
85. M. Id-dinja mlaḥḥqa (tilḥaq) ma' kulḥadd. (XI, 13)
Ar. 'Kull 'wāḥid ' 'andu l-imkaf'fih
Everyone has his fill (of troubles).
86. M. Min jaḥseb f'hemmu jinsa ta' l-oḥrajn. (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. Il-ḥabs mimli bl-innoċenti u l-kannierja bil-kaguni. (XI, 41)
Ar. 'yama fil-ḥabs maṣa'līm.
In the prison there are many innocent people.
88. M. Logḥob u ḥlieqa ḡlied iḡibu. (XI, 46)
Ar. 'Il-hi'zar ' '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. Kulḥadd hu jaf fiex inhu.
Ar. kull 'wāḥid ' 'adra 'b-ḥālu
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. Māfīš 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. Tagħbija mqassma sewwa theff. (XI, 84)

Ar. Il-'ħiml it-ti'īl yišī' lūh it'nē^yn

The heavy burden is carried by two.

94. M. F'dar (F'bieb) l-imghallaq la ddendilx wired (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.