

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.

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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 'kull<sup>i</sup> 'wāḥid ' 'ala ' 'add<sup>i</sup> ḡa'mīru  
God treats (lit. gives) everyone according to his conscience.
12. M. Alla jagħti 'l kulħadd li ħaqqu. (I, 35)  
Ar. Rab'bina 'yiddi kull<sup>i</sup> 'wāḥid 'ḡa'' 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 jaħseb. (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 jigik). (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 'kull<sup>i</sup> 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-silġ skond ma tiflaħ. (I, 78)  
Ar. Rab'bina bi 'yiddi l-bard ''ala ''add<sup>i</sup> 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' leyh<sup>i</sup> l-''awad  
God gives and God takes, God alone is responsible for restoring (what he takes).

25. M. L-ahjar min imut (żghir għax jistrieħ). (III, 1)  
Ar. 'Illī 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 mmutu. (III, 8)  
Ar. 'Il-'mōt 'wāḥid wir-'rabbī 'wāḥid  
Death comes once and God is one.
28. M. Hadd ma jieħu xejn miegħu (ħlief il-libsa ta' fuqu) (III, 18)  
Ar. Ma 'ħadd<sup>ī</sup>š 'wāḳid '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'rūḥ ma byir'ga'š  
What (i.e. Whoever) goes, does not return.
30. M. Hadd ma miet wara ħadd. (III, 20)  
Ar. Ma 'ħadd<sup>ī</sup>š māt 'wara ħadd  
No one has died after another (through sadness)
31. M. Hadd m'hu għal hawn. (III, 22)  
Ar. Ma 'ħadd<sup>ī</sup>š 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-'tḳalli  
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-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<sup>y</sup>rin 'ti'mil 'šarrin 'til'a.  
The good you do will be returned by evil.
41. M. Laringa (tuffieħa) ḥazina 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-ḥazin 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-habi (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 fils minnek, tnejn aghth inkella jiehdok.  
(IV, 62)  
Ar. Il-bāb 'illī 'ygīlak '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'šuf '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<sup>y</sup>ru.  
 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-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 (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 skikienna). (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. 'Igfir 'aṣān rab'bina yiḡ firlak  
Forgive so that God will forgive you.
63. M. Dak li (kif) tiżra' 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<sup>y</sup>r 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 ikittref 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<sup>y</sup>n.  
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 tajjeb. (IX, 2)  
 Ar. 'yaḍħak ka' ċīran man 'yaḍħak 'a' kīran.  
 He laughs best who laughs last.
70. M. Hajt tas-sejjieħ la jaqa' jistrieħ. (IX, 6)  
 Ar. il-ħē<sup>y</sup>ṭa l-mā<sup>y</sup>la n' sirħa 'tu'a'  
 The slanting wall will surely fall.
71. M. Kull kobba fiha t-tarf tagħha. (IX, 10)  
 Ar. Kull 'u'da w' laħa 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 fīh 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 'tiḍħak 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. Kull<sup>1</sup> wāħid bi' yaḡud 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' laħa 'ta'ab  
 The whole world is weariness (i.e. Sadness is everywhere).
80. M. Wieħed 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<sup>y</sup>r šūk  
There is no rose without thorns.
82. M. Kull baḥar jiplaka. (XI, 3)  
Ar. 'kull<sup>l</sup> 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 'yidkūl bē<sup>y</sup>n 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 tlieta 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<sup>y</sup>h, 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 maḥa'līm.  
In the prison there are many innocent people.
88. M. Logħob u ḥlieqa 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. 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<sup>y</sup>r'a' sās

There is no talk without foundation.

also Ar. Māfīš dukkān min ġē<sup>y</sup>r 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'īl yiš'i lūh it'nē<sup>y</sup>n

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.