

Role of Date Palms in Middle East’s Civilization



LONDON (NHM) -- The date palm, *Phoenix dactylifera*, is an evergreen tree that belongs to the large and diverse palm family. It grows up to 23 meters tall, lives in hot, arid conditions and can survive for up to around 100 years.

It is often said that the date palm grows with its feet in water and head on fire. It requires access to a water source below ground, such as an underground river, and hot temperatures of more than 50°C above ground to bear fruits.

Despite its need for heat, this resilient plant can survive cold temperatures below 0°C and even withstand some frost, but only for a short periods. If cold temperatures persist, the tree will stop growing and its leaves will become damaged.

Shahina Ghazanfar, a Science Research Leader at Kew Gardens, has been researching the possible origins of the date palm. She says, “Date palms are an important feature of the landscape of all Middle Eastern countries, both as a useful plant and as a landscape tree.”

As a keystone species of oases agrosystems, the date palm can alter the microclimate of its desert environment. Its roots are long and deep, allowing space for other plants to grow around it, and its robust body protects them from sand blown by the wind. The date palm provides food and shelter for many creatures and people, whether that be local residents or those travelling through.

A pale yellow date plant flower on a tree.

The date palm has been in existence for around 50 million years. “Stone tools and rock carvings discovered in the Nefud Desert in Northern Arabia show humans have been eating dates since the Middle Stone Age, which was about 200,000 years ago,” says Shahina.

One of the most important events in human history is when people changed from hunting and gathering food to growing their own crops around 11,000 years ago. The date palm was one of the first plants to be cultivated and therefore plays a significant role in the start of modern civilization.

“The date palm’s fruits are sweet and nutritious - and ripe dates don’t rot - making them one of the foods that ancient people could use and transport easily,” adds Shahina.

Based on archaeological findings, the plant was most likely first domesticated in the Persian Gulf around 6,000 years ago, probably from wild populations found in Oman.

“Archaeobotanical evidence shows that date palms probably grew wild in several parts of the Near East, but these original populations have long been displaced by agriculture,” explains Shahina. “Genetic evidence suggests that wild date palms still survive in Oman, and that the Arabian Peninsula was the region where date palms were first taken into cultivation.”

Since then, the date palm has become the foundation of agriculture in the Middle East and North Africa. It’s also been successfully introduced to other parts of the world, from Mexico and California to Pakistan and Turkey.

The tree is an important source of food, material and commerce in desert life. Cultivating the plant has offered stable wealth and economic growth for populations living in hot climates for thousands of years.

Today, Egypt is the world’s largest producer of the fruit, exporting 1.7 million tonnes of dates in 2021. Other Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran follow closely.

“The fact that date palms can withstand a hot and dry climate and moderately saline soils and produce an abundance of sugary fruit that can be stored, has contributed much to the success of this species in the Middle East and North Africa,” says Shahina.

Dates hold significance in all three major religions. In Islam, Prophet Muhammad considered dates to be a superior fruit and encouraged people to break their fasts with them. The date palm is mentioned 22 times in the Qur’an - the most a fruit tree is stated in the holy book. This includes the story

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‘Paper Dream’ Awarded by Hungarian Festival

TEHRAN -- Iranian feature ‘Paper Dream’ has won an award at the Black Hat Film Festival in Hungary.

In its 43rd international screening, the film directed by Ali Atshani grabbed the best feature film award at the latest edition of the Hungarian event, iFilm reported.

The story of the film is based on an idea by Atshani, but the film’s screenplay is written by Jaber Qassem-Ali.

The film is about an Albino teenage who has been out of public eye because of his appearance.

The boy falls in love with a young girl who has taken advantage of his pure heart and made him a social media influencer.

‘Paper Dream’ is starring Kamran Tafti and Mina Vahid.

The Black Hat Film Festival is a festival dedicated to films from around the world.

The aim of the event is to truly reflect the international filmmaking community as well as showcasing fresh talent from all filmmakers.

The latest edition of the event was held in early April.

Iranians, Iraqis Hold 1000-Meter Iftar Table

TEHRAN -- Iranians and Iraqis residing in the Iranian capital have broken their fast together at a 1000-meter-long iftar table in a show of love and bond between the two neighboring nations.

The iftar table was laid out at Tehran’s southern Dolat Abad neighborhood this week, on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Imam Hassan, the grandson of Islam’s Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) and the second Shia Imam.

It was the second year that the event was held at Dolat Abad’s Quds Boulevard.

The iftar ceremony was organized by Iraqi tents and special stands, called Moukeb in Arabic, in an attempt to create friendship among the fasting people.

Tehran’s Dolat Abad is home to many Iraqis who have immigrated to Iran over the past years.

During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims



abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. They break their fast after an evening prayer with a meal called Iftar, usually a communal event with friends and family.

Worshippers also engage in activities such as increased prayer and giving more to charity.

3,000-Year-Old Remains of Children Discovered in Qazvin

TEHRAN -- Iranian archaeologists have discovered the remains of children dating back to 3,000 years ago.

A group of archaeological researchers from University of Tehran discovered the remains of some children along with babies and fetuses in excavations at Qareh Tepe of Segzabad in Qazvin Province.

The excavations, conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mustafa Deh Pahlavan, also found the remains of two horses, two goats, and a sheep.



The discovery was made in a five-square-meter area.

Pahlavan told the media that among the discovered collection, there was a burial of a child along with the faunal remains.

He said the funerary objects found in the burial included the clay dishes that indicate the child’s special social rank.

The remains of the children were transported to the Segzabad City Municipality, where they will be preserved and displayed as museum pieces in accordance with conservation and restoration standards.

Japanese Muslim Explains Human Rights in Nahj al-Balagha

TEHRAN -- A forum titled “Nahj al-Balagha; Book of Life” was held at the 30th Tehran International Holy Quran Exhibition and addressed by Japanese Muslim convert Fatemeh Etsuko Hoshino who highlighted important points about human rights in Imam Ali (AS)’s letter to Malik Ashtar.

She said Imam Ali in this letter underlines the need for respecting the rights of everyone, even one’s enemies.

He sees all human beings as God’s servants and makes no distinction when it comes to their humanity, she said.

“Imam Ali (AS)’s letter to Malik Ashtar is filled with Ikhlas (purity of intention).”

Nahj-ul-Balagha is a collection of Imam Ali (AS)’s sermons, letters and sayings compiled by Muslim scholar Sayyid Radhi.

Elsewhere in her remarks, she referred to her conversion to Islam, saying she had been raised as a Buddhist but started to study about other religions to find answers to her questions about life, the world and spirituality.

After the 9/11 attack in the U.S., she began learning about Islam and finally found the answers in Shia Islam and converted to the faith.

Hoshino referred to the enemies’ attempts to tarnish the image of Islam and said the efforts only backfire and draw more people to the religion.

Hoshino, who has been in Iran for 13 years, has translated a number of books about Shia Islam into Japanese.

She said she is keen on introducing the Shia culture to the people

of Japan.

Another speaker at the Friday forum was Sheikh Bahaeddin Naqshbandi, a Sunni scholar from the Iraqi Kurdistan region, who underlined the eloquence of Nahj al-Balagha, which has inspired people throughout centuries.

The 30th edition of the Tehran International Holy Qur’an Exhibition was launched at the Imam Khomeini Mosalla (prayer hall) in Tehran last Saturday.

Qur’an translations, poetry and literature, civilization-making



mosques, family and Qur’anic lifestyle, children, Qur’an-based consultations, grassroots Qur’anic institutes, Qur’anic education, promotion of the culture of Nahj al-Balagha, promotion of Sahifeh Sajjadiyeh, Qur’anic innovations, religious arts, and religious publications are among the disciplines covered in the exhibition.

Picture of the Day



Imad Doulah Mosque of Kermanshah dates back to the Qajar period. It is currently used as a school of religious sciences.

Photo by Tansim