

Desert Plants and Arabic Names

The prevailing environment in which the Arab heritage grew is the desert environment. The Bedouins are experienced with their environment, and during their travels there is room for sight-seeing and observation.

It is interesting that some Arabs have been named after plants and animals. They have many names that relate solely to acacia trees (bite), such as Salma, named after Salam (*Acacia ehrenbergiana*), Talha derives from Talh (*A. seyal*, *A. raddeana*), and Sumra comes from Sumr (*A. tortilis*).

Thus, we see that the Salam plant is honored by bearing the name of the Mother of the Believers Um Salamah, the wife of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace. Names of ancient Muslims derived from plant names include: Arvaja, from the Arfaj plant, Hanzala, from the bitter gourd, and Qatada, from the *Astragalus* plant.

Al-Arfaj *Rhanterium epapposum*

Of his names (Zu Noon) Al-Azhari, a linguist, said: “And the fire of the Al Arfaj is called by the Arabs the fire of the two creeps, because when they kindle it they creep to it, and when it is lit up, creep away from it.”

It is a dendritic plant. It grows in the plains and mountains and is characterized by its pleasant fragrance, dusty green color, coarse, thistle-like fruits, and yellow flowers. It has neither seeds nor thorns.

Al-Arfaj has a wide origin; it takes a piece of land and has no significant leaves, with its slender, branch-like leaves used in making brooms. Along their edges are sutures that appear in their heads as very like yellow and white hairs when dried, and which bees like very much.

Al-Arfaj is an unassuming, perennial plant that grows in the north of the Arabian Peninsula in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iraq. It makes for good pasture, as camels and sheep eat it wet and dry. The members of Al-Arfaj's family form a plant clan of great pastoral value.

The woody stems of Al Arfaj are good for miswaks and makes the mouth hot. Alarfaj is quick to burn, and its flame is very red. It does not burn unless it is dry, and it is one of the best woods in terms of its scent.

The Arabs' descriptions of the plant were accurate. They even described the dry plant's response to rain and the stages of its response until its flowering is complete. Ibn Khalawiyyah (Al-Batanuni 1983) mentioned Al Arfaj and the appearance of Khosha at the beginning of the rains and the emergence of young branches after rainfall.

Of the proverbs of the Arabs about Al-Arfaj, one is of particular note:

“Like the blessing of the rain on Al Arfaj.”

The proverb means that once the Al Arfaj plant receives the rain, it will become green even if it was dry beforehand.

Citrullus colocynthis

Bitter gourd: Of the bitter tree, Abu Hanifa said: “It is one of the “Aghlath” (plants that grow in the wilderness mixed with each other), and one of its varieties is a hanzala. Al Jawhari: Al Hanzal Al Sharri, when it is said that “the camel has Hazil” it means it has eaten too much bitter gourd (Citrullus Colocynthis) – the camel becomes a “Hazil” camel.

Al-Asma'i said: “The bitter gourd is Shara, the singular of which is Sharyah. If the bitter gourd comes out, its young ones are called Jiraa and are outstretched. The singular of it is a Jiru. The tree is called Ajra. If bitter gourd grows and becomes stiff and dry, it is called Hadaj. The tree is Hadjah. If the bitter gourd develops green lines, they call it Khatban and Akhtab if it shows green “robes”. If it becomes yellow it is called Sarra; the singular of which Sarayah and the plural Saraya.

The ostrich eats bitter gourd without being affected by its bitterness. The poet said:

“The Ostrich remains poking bitter gourd and is not bothered by its bitterness.”

Hazalah is a male name derived from that of bitter gourd). Hazalah is also a name of a tribe. Al-Jawhari said: “Hanzalah is the most honorable tribe in

Tamim. They are called Hanzalah the honourable, and their father is Hanzalah bin Malik bin Amr Ibn Tamim.”

Al Barouq *Asphodelus fistulosus*

Abu Hanifa (the sheikh of botanists) said: “Barouq is a weak tree with fruit that has small black seeds. He said: An Arab to me: Barouq is a weak, springy, feathery plant, with excrescences in its heads, small like chickpeas. It has black seeds. No animal can graze on it, and is not eaten alone because it causes irritation.

Among the proverbs of the Arabs:

The Arabs say: “Someone is more thankful than Barouq”, which means he lives on the lowest dew from the sky. This was said because the plant becomes green if it “sees” clouds.

Camels and sheep are said to have become “barouq” if their stomachs complain at eating the plant. And, when describing things lack strength, it is said that they are “weaker than a barouq.”