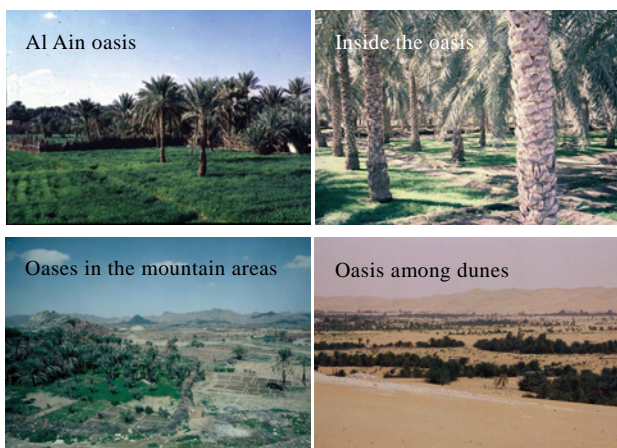


Facts about dry land vegetation <Part 5>

In this fifth part of the series, I would like to introduce the date palm. It is a plant which may not be so well known in Japan. However in the Arabian region, oasis and date palms are almost synonymous and very tightly linked. When one says oasis everybody thinks about date palms and vice versa!

In AAINews, I have introduced several times the old capital Al Ain in the interior of the UAE. Al Ain means 'spring' and there are actually a number of oases around the town. In oases there are always groves of date palms. Inside the oases the surrounding date palms shield inhabitants from high temperature, dryness and strong winds, and fodder such as alfalfa and fruits are planted in the shade of the sheltering date palms. Date palms are also planted in oases in the Hajar mountains along the border with Oman, and oases are dotted among the shifting dunes in the Rub' al Khali Desert.



In the mid-1970s when I started working in UAE, I often saw Bedouin tents in the deserts. When I visited some of the tents, people welcomed me serving a little bit bitter coffee with cardamom. While I was drinking coffee, they usually also served dates in a plastic bag. The combination of bitter coffee and sweet dates was exquisite! I used to feel Bedouin's unique culture of hospitality directly from these experiences.



The fruits of date palms are called dates in English. In Arabic, they use different names for different stages of ripeness. Dried fully ripened fruits are called Tamar. In Japan, these are used as an ingredient for *Otafuku* source. There are many different varieties of date palms with fruit ranging in color from yellow to red. While I was in the Gulf region, I particularly liked a variety called *Khalas* and often ate these dates. I also liked the variety

Lulu because its name means 'pearl' in Arabic and that appealed to me.



One day I found a very strange thing while exploring the vegetable souk (market) in Nizwa oasis in Oman. As seen in the photo below, there was a sword shaped item along with other vegetables. As already introduced in AAINews No. 13, this is the stamen of date palm. The scene of people climbing date palms and conducting pollination work is a seasonal event.



Recently I have been participating in agricultural extension projects in Palestine. The west bank of the Jordan Valley areas is highly suitable for date palm cultivation and the cultivation areas have expanded rapidly in recent years. The main variety is called *Medjool* and fruits are one size bigger compared to the *Khalas* and *Lulu* which I so often encountered in the Gulf region. Initially, I did not really like their big size and did not eat these dates very much. However once you become accustomed to eating them, their taste grows on you and is actually very good! I now take them back to Japan as souvenirs which are very popular. Just the other day when I visited a farmer in the Jordan Valley, I coincidentally came across a pollination operation. The accompanying driver received some stamens from the farmer, and took them back with him carefully wrapped in a plastic bag. I thought he also had some date palms at home and asked about it. Apparently stamens work for the "night life". Next time, I will ask him about the cooking method!

