

DATES

THE GENUS *PHOENIX*

A study of the palm genus *Phoenix* with the emphasis on the date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) and its relation to man.



Several date palms grow within the walled village
on this trial color die proof with blank value tablet.

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1. CLASSIFICATION AND DISTRIBUTION

Let us give our due to Carl von Linné who developed the binomial system of nomenclature for living things - boring, maybe, but quite necessary.



This method uniquely identifies our palms:

KINGDOM: Plantae (plants)

DIVISION: Tracheophytes (vascular plants)

CLASS: Bilopsida (vascular plants)

ORDER: Principe - the prince of plants

FAMILY: Palmae - i.e. Palms

SUB FAMILY: Coryphoideae

TRIBE: Phoeniceae

GENUS: Phoenix

SPECIES: Approximately 17

The sharp spines at the base of the fronds are an easy recognition feature - clearly visible on this postal card's *Phoenix* sp.



The palm on the indicium is an African Oil Palm (*Elaeis guineensis*).



DISTRIBUTION : Palms in the genus *Phoenix* are strictly Old World palms. Their natural range is from the -

Canary Islands
in the West

through North Africa
and the Middle East

Eastward
to a few
Pacific
Islands

and South
into Africa



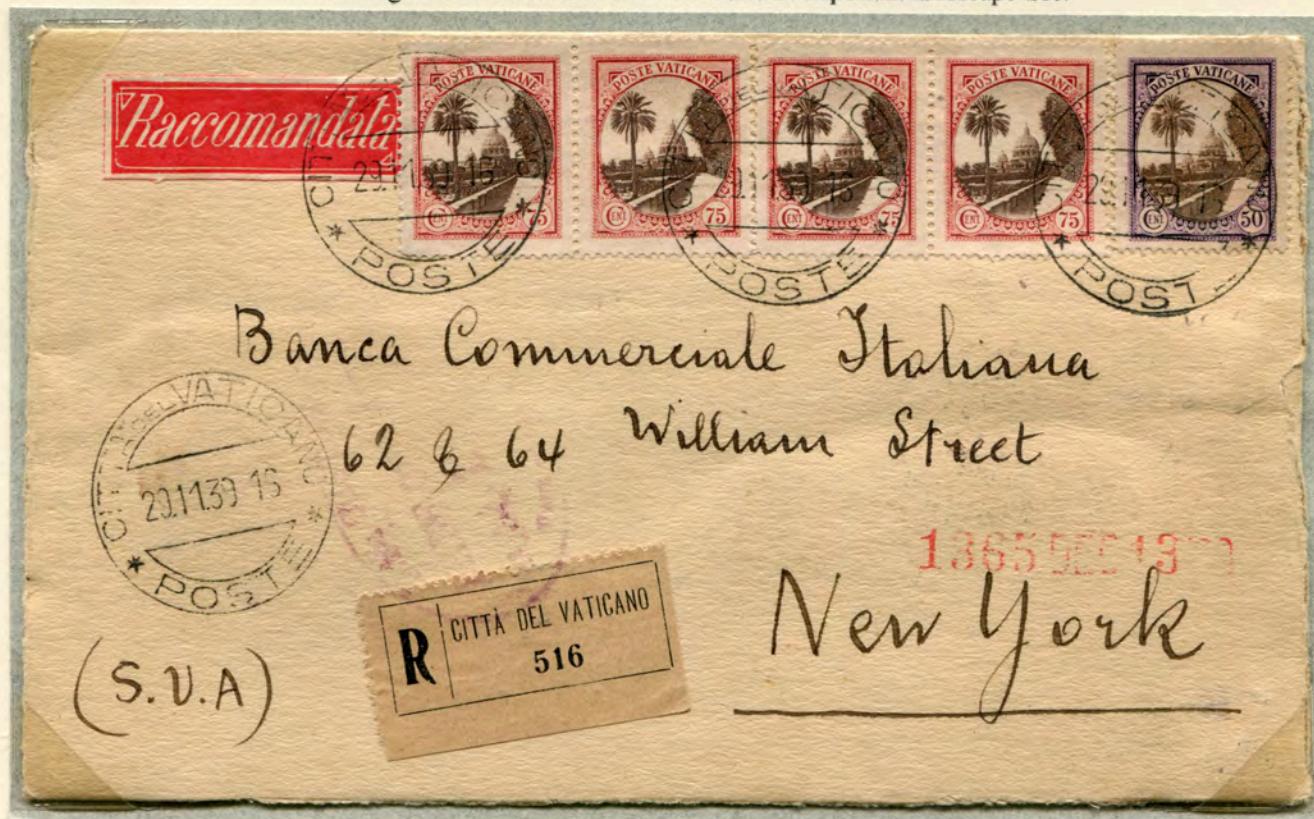
2. VARIETIES OF PHOENIX

A stylized date palm graces the town seal of Palma Nova (Lombardy-Venetia)



1 April 1858 Palma Nova to Conigliano, both under Austrian administration. Town seal justifies free franking.

The Canary Island Date Palm (*Phoenix canariensis*) is very cold hardy and is found throughout the Mediterranean where it is an important landscape tree.



50 centissimi UPU Letter Rate + 2 lira Registry Fee

2. VARIETIES OF PHOENIX

The Reclinata Palm (*Phoenix reclinata*), a African native and a vigorous clumping palm, has been introduced throughout the temperate world...

as a landscape specimen



with colorful but inedible fruit.



Many clumps in habitat line the Molindi River below.



60 centimes Printed matter Rate to Switzerland
Leopoldville (11-April 1939) to Schinznach-Dorf (10-May 1939)

The Wild Date Palm (*Phoenix sylvestris*) is found in Africa and the Indian sub-continent where it is an important source of sugar, thatch, and lumber.



Die Proof without denomination



Booklet Pane

3. THE DATE PALM (*Phoenix dactylifera*)

Within the genus *Phoenix*, the most important palm, economically and historically, is the Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*).

3.1 ORIGINS AND DISPERSAL

The Date Palm originated in the Middle East at least 6000 years ago as man developed agriculture.

The importance of the palm was recognized in the Code of Hammurabi ...



... and by frequent references in the Bible ...



... and later in the Koran.



Date palms were well known to the ancient Greeks as evidenced by references in Homer's *Odyssey*. A date grows in the shadow of the Acropolis even today.



Indicium

Homer



3.1 ORIGINS AND DISPERSAL

Date palms are a design element in the capitals of this temple at Thebes.

The ancient Phoenicians gave us the Greek word *Phoenix* & spread the tree on their expeditions.

Darius of Persia featured date palms on his royal seal over 2500 years ago.



Date palms were cultivated in pharaonic times as far south as modern Sudan, and they can still be seen around General Gordon's statue in Khartoum.



Plate Proofs

The scene on the stamps below has changed little in over 3000 years.



Port Sudan Mails 13 Nov 1942
Khartoum 16 Nov 1942

Sudanese Civil Censorship △
Nigerian Censorship □

3.1 ORIGINS AND DISPERSAL

With the Muslim conquest of North Africa came new date cultivars,



Essay

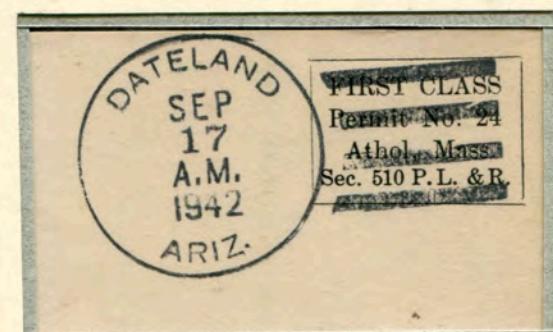
... which can be seen today by a modern concrete arch bridge at El Kantara Gorge.



...and which were later established in Southern Spain. Even today, Elche remains the center of the Spanish date industry.



Spanish colonizers introduced the date palm to the dry South West - which produced town and city names as -



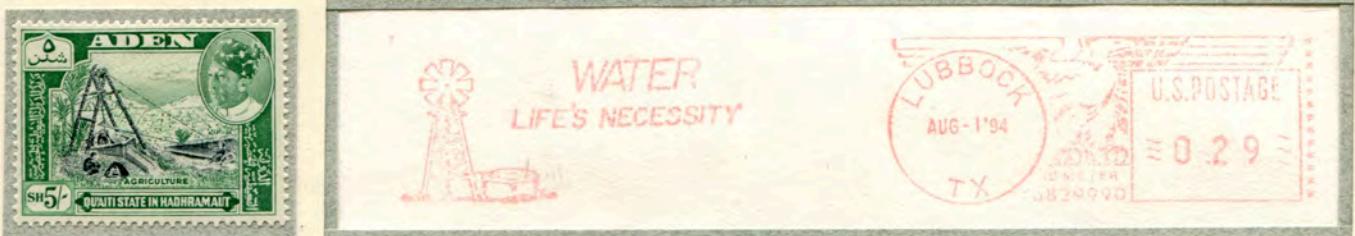
3.2 CULTIVATION

Successful cultivation of the Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) requires a climate that is -

hot
sunny
&
dry



and with an abundant supply of ground water or irrigation from local wells...



or from an oasis



or from aqueducts



...since tropical humidity causes the fruit to rot before maturing.



3.2 CULTIVATION

Date palms produce fruit most prolifically when planted in groves where one male tree can easily fertilize one hundred female trees.



Suckers from mature trees are used for propagation.



Note the many young trees on the air letter sheet.

3.2 CULTIVATION

Once the inflorescences are pollinated, the fruit matures to a golden tan in the summer heat...



... and is ready for packing and transport to world and local markets.



Back Cover, 1935 George V Silver Jubilee Booklet

Unlikely you will see this brand at the grocery store today.



This is not good marketing - a pig around a date palm - even if dates are nutritious.
Neither laweh of the Torah nor Allah of the Koran liked pork.

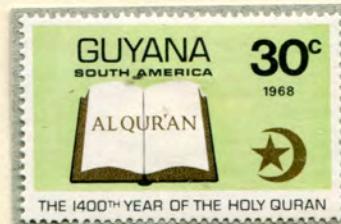


3.3 PALM OF LIFE

The Holy Family pauses in a date palm grove on the flight into Egypt.



Of the 26 references to palms or dates in the Koran, sixteen mention them as evidence of Allah's bounty.



Dates have sustained travelers throughout the ages, whether going by ...

foot



camel



motorcycle



land rover



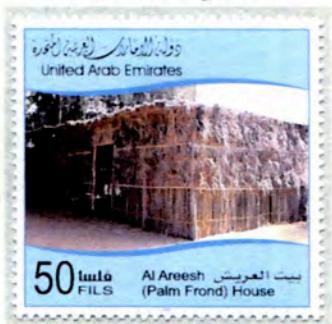
The Government of Persia urged us to:
EAT MORE DATES, THEY NOURISH AND PROMOTE HEALTH



Cancelled: Woonsocket, RI April 16, 1934 5 cent UPU Rate
 Transit: Karachi May 3, 1934
 Received: Bushire, Persia May 10, 1934 & Auxiliary Marking Applied
 Internally Redirected: Ahwaz, Persia May 15, 1934
 Externally Redirected: Bombay GPO and D.L.O. June 5, 1934
 Returned to Woonsocket, RI July 5, 1934

3.3 PALM OF LIFE

a house near a grove ...



In SE Asia the inflorescences are tapped for their sweet sap used as a natural or fermented drink.



The fronds of the date palm can be used for ...

and a wide variety of decorative and utilitarian handicrafts.



Bats infected with Nipah virus are also attracted to the sweet sap.



Sap Sucking Bat

See BAMBOO Fr 4

A simple screen of bamboo keeps the bats from urinating in the sap.



3.3.1 THE ARTS

Byzantine era mosaic



the Palm Fountain
Fontana della Palma



Dürer's woodblock print
The Entry into Jerusalem



N.B. Botanically correct Christians would use fronds from date palms (*Phoenix* sp.) and preferably *P. dactylifera* on Palm Sunday.

ceramic tiles



Monet's *Palm Trees at Bordighera*



4. SYMBOLISM

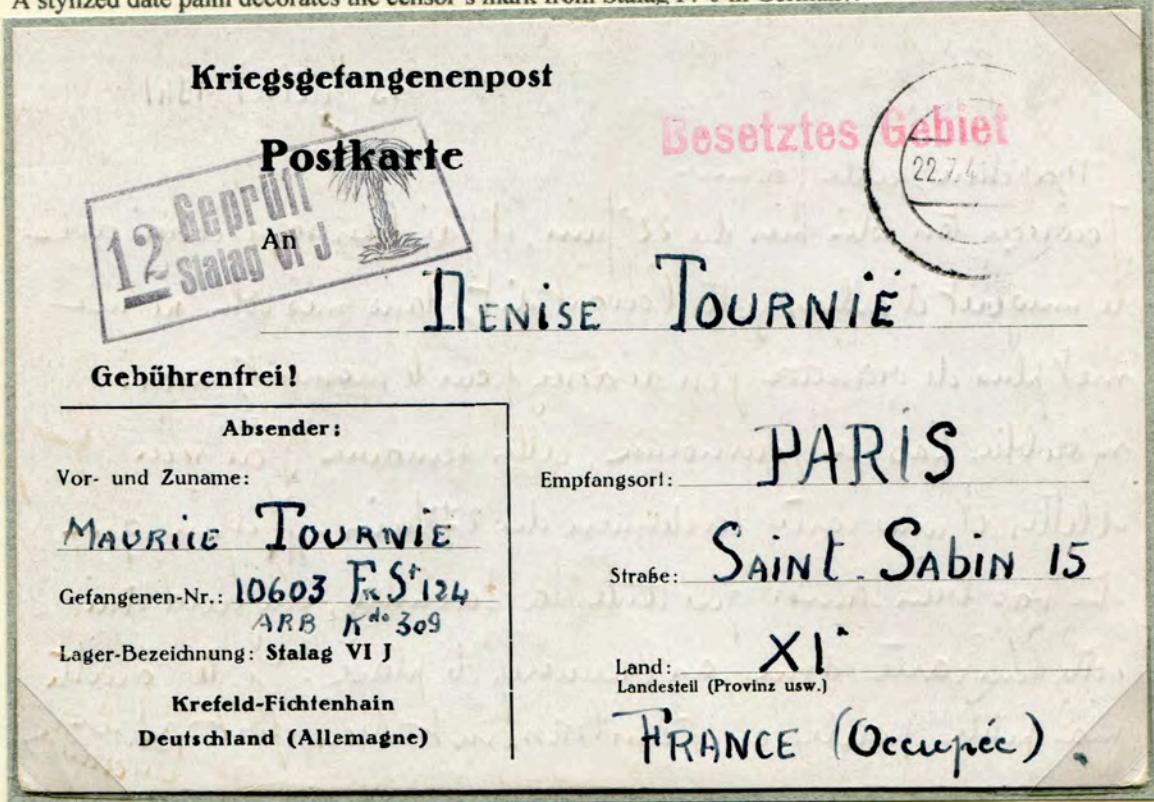
4.1 WAR AND PEACE

The hated swastika appears over a date palm on this Afrika Corps parcel stamp.



(Forgery)

The Third Reich used the date palm in a variety of ways
A stylized date palm decorates the censor's mark from Stalag IV J in Germany.



Two small date palms (by the camel's posterior) are seen on this...



1976 postmark used by the Polish contingent of the U.N. Emergency Force in Egypt.

Many North African battles were fought in the vicinity of date palm groves.



Crossed date palms symbolize the 1994 Israel Jordan peace talks at Elat.



4. SYMBOLISM

4.2 COMMERCIAL

Date palms have been used to advertise all sorts of products including...
German cigars...



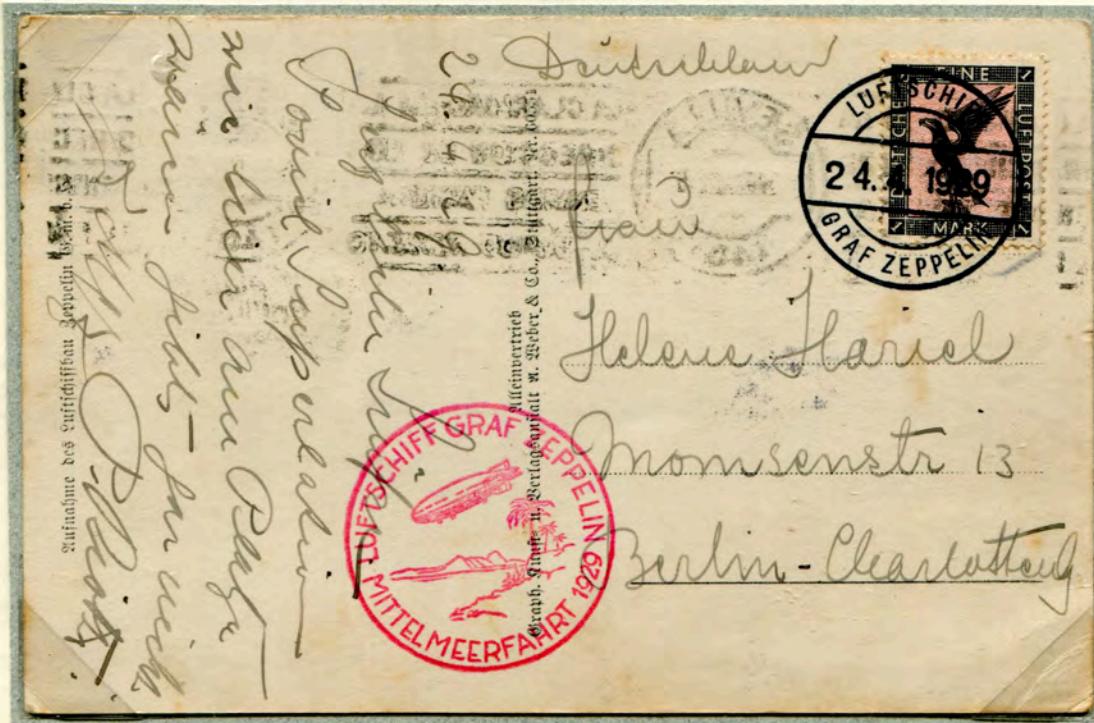
a radio station in sunny Monaco...



a Grade B adventure movie...



and the 1929 Mediterranean Flight of the Graf Zeppelin.



4. SYMBOLISM

4.3 TRAVEL

The date palm suggests warmth and a subtropical Mediterranean climate
So join us on the M.S. Monte Rosa for a voyage to...



a palm festival in Hyères...



or the beach at Cannes



Those of us in N. America may prefer to spend winter by the date palms in Death Valley, California or...



... in sunny Tucson, Arizona.



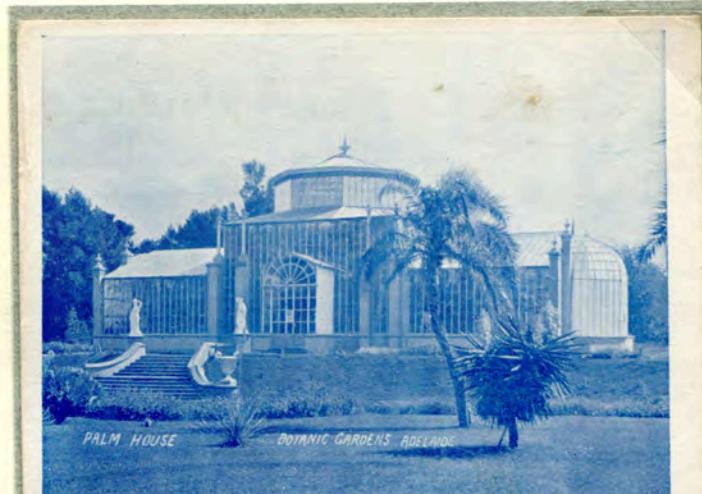
5. EDUCATION

To learn more about palm trees and especially date palms, may we suggest you -

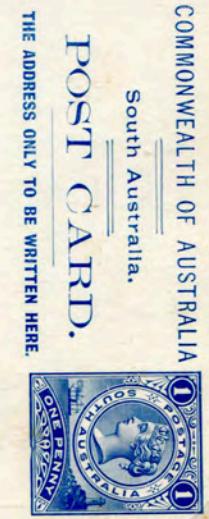
... contact the California Date Growers Association,



... visit the Palm House at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Adelaide, S. Australia where a Pygmy Date Palm (*Phoenix roebelinii*) graces the lawn...



... or the Jardin de Nouzha in Alexandria, Egypt with its tall *Phoenix dactylifera* in the background ...



...and when in England be sure to visit the Palm House at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.



E7 4p for airmail postage of large book on palms