

## AGRICULTURE

### ZIRĀʿA

This article comprises the following sections: i. Usage and Etymology; ii. Creedal Connections; iii. Historical References in Prophets' Lives; iv. Parables and Similes; v. Levy on Harvest (*'ushr*); vi. Celestial References; vii. Bibliography.

#### Usage and Etymology

Human cultivation of land to yield crops. This entry surveys Qurʾānic references to human agriculture proper; for vegetation more generally, see PLANTS AND VEGETATION.

Various Qurʾānic passages refer to the growth of plants and trees, the regeneration of earth after its being barren, the descent of rain to nourish plants and to rejuvenate the earth, and the sudden destruction of standing fields and orchards. All of these are linked to fundamental themes of the Qurʾān such as the Oneness of Allah (see TAWHĪD), His Justice (*q.v.*), His Omnipotence (see POWER), His Generosity, the accountability of human beings for their actions, human stewardship of the earth (see CALIPH), and Resurrection (*q.v.*). In addition, references to vegetation occur in the context of the history of past nations, alluding to the transitory nature of the life of this world (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) (*q.v.*) compared to the eternity of the Hereafter (*al-ākhirā*) (*q.v.*), and comparing the symbolic harvests of this and the next worlds (Q 42:20).

The Qurʾān uses words derived from five roots in literal (*ḥaqīqī*) as well as figurative (*majāzī*) senses to encapsulate themes related to vegetation, plants, and cultivation of land: (I) *ḥ-r-th*; (II) *z-r-ʿ*; (III) *th-w-r*; (IV) *n-b-t*; and (V) *ḥ-ṣ-d*. Semantic fields covered by these roots provide insights into Qurʾānic usage.

I. *ḥ-r-th*: Of this root, two forms occur fourteen times: the noun *ḥarth* (planted land, field) appears thirteen times (Q 2:71, 205, 223 twice; 3:14, 117; 6:136, 138; 21:78; 42:20 twice; 68:22 twice); and the imperfect verb *tahṛuthūn* (you till/cultivate/sow/plant) occurs once (Q 56:63). Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1005) says that the root has two basic meanings: “to earn” and “to make an animal gaunt” (*Maqāyīs*). Its other meanings include “to till land for crops” and “to plant trees,” and it is considered a synonym of *zaraʿa* (Farāhīdī; Ibn Fāris; Fayrūzābādī; Zabīdī; Ibn Manẓūr). Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (d. ca.502/1108) lists additional meanings and examples of its usage in the Qurʾān:

To sow seeds; to make land ready for seedling; the tith or plantation (*al-maḥrūth*) itself (as in Q 68:22, *go to your field early in the morning if you want to harvest the fruit*); the world, for it is a tith that humans cultivate (as in the hadith, “sow in this world of yours for [what you shall reap in] your Hereafter” (*uḥruth fī dunyāka li-ākhiratika*); to exert oneself (as it is said *uḥruth al-Qurʾān*, that is, “exert [yourself] frequently and regularly in Qurʾānic recitation”); to work an animal lean (as in the response of the Anṣār (*q.v.*) to Muʿāwiya when he asked them what happened to their water-drawing camels: “we made them lean (*ḥarathnāhā*) [through battle] on the Day of Badr”); and, its usage by way of simile (*tashbīh*) in Q 2:223, *your women are your tith; go, then, unto your tith as you desire*, for women are the tith in which lies the survival of humankind as in the plantation of earth lies the survival of people.

*Mufradāt*

II. *z-r-ʿ*: Four forms of this root occur fourteen times: the collective noun *zarʿ* along with its plural *zurūʿ* (plants, herbage) occurs ten times (*zarʿ*: Q 6:141; 13:4; 14:37; 16:11; 18:32; 32:27; 39:21; 48:29; *zurūʿ*: Q 26:148; 44:26); the verbal form *zaraʿa* (to plant, to sow, to till, to cause to grow) three times (Q 12:47; 56:64 twice); and *zurraʿ*, the plural of *zārīʿ* (planters, sowers, tillers of the land), occurs once (Q 48:29). It is considered a synonym of *imbāt*, meaning “to cause to grow” (Azharī; Farāhīdī; Ibn Fāris; Rāghib). Al-Rāghib explains that *zarʿ* is properly used only for the action of Allah Most High, for the growth of plants

is among those matters which are in the hands of Allah and not under human control. That is why Allah has ascribed sowing (*ḥarth*) to human beings and denied [the use of] *zarʿ* for them; [He] reserved it for Himself exclusively, which is why He said: [*Have you ever considered that which you sow?*] *Is it you who cause it to grow, or are We the Growers?* (Q 56:63-64). Hence, if growth is ever ascribed to man it is only because he becomes the agent for the means of vegetal growth, as when you say, “I grew this” whereas you were only a cause of its growth.

*Mufradāt*

III. *th-w-r*: Of this root, the verbal form *athāra* occurs five times in the Qurʾān (Q 2:71; 30:9, 48; 35:9;