

Enrich your vocabulary through Spanish the Arabic connection



A little bit of history Did you know that the word "orange" comes from Arabic? As a matter of fact, the English language contains many common words of Arabic origin. Why is this? Again, let us turn to the history of Spain.

At the beginning of the seventh century A.D. a new religion appeared in the Middle East. This religion, Islam, was founded by Mohammed (570-632), a well-to-do Arab merchant born in Mecca. The success of Islam, the Moslem religion, was phenomenal. Less than one hundred years after Mohammed's death it had spread across the entire Arabian peninsula into Persia, Turkestan, Egypt and North Africa. In 711 an army of Moors, an Arabic tribe from North Africa, crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and invaded Spain.

The Moors were to occupy most of Spain for

nearly eight centuries, bringing with them a sophisticated civilization. Learning and culture flourished in Islamic Spain, especially around Toledo, Granada, Córdoba and Sevilla. This period witnessed great achievements in architecture, medicine, mathematics, chemistry, philosophy and literature.

However, the Moors did not impose their religion on the Spanish people, who remained Christians. Little by little the Christian princes reconquered Spain, until the last Moslem king was defeated in 1492 (the year Columbus landed in America!).

The Moslems departed from Spain, but left behind many reminders of their 800-year occupation. The Spanish language, for example, absorbed many Arabic words which subsequently passed into other European languages such as French, Italian and English.



Arabic words in English

The English words defined below are of Arabic origin. Can you identify them? To help you, these words are listed alphabetically at the bottom of the page with their Spanish and Arabic equivalents.

1. foods
 - a. a tropical fruit which grows in Florida and California:

 - b. a product used to sweeten tea and coffee: _____
 - c. a reddish-yellow fruit which may be eaten dry: _____
 - d. a substance found in wine, beer and whisky: _____
 - e. a yellow spice used in oriental cooking: _____
 - f. you nibble the leaves and eat the heart of this vegetable:

2. science and geography
 - g. a field of mathematics which uses symbols such as x and y:

 - h. a number which alone is nothing, but which can increase another number by a factor of ten:

 - i. a large rock at the southern tip of Spain: _____
3. other words
 - j. a chemical base which may contain potassium or sodium:

 - k. a medieval science whose aim was to transform lead into gold:

 - l. the highest point in the sky:

 - m. the top rank in the navy:

 - n. a natural textile used in making shirts and dresses:

 - o. a container for storing honey or cookies: _____
 - p. what you say to end a game of chess:

 - q. a deep red color:

 - r. a clover-type plant which is fed to cows: _____
 - s. a system which lets you code a secret message: _____

WORD LIST

English	Spanish	Arabic	English	Spanish	Arabic
admiral	almirante	al-amir-al	cotton	algodón	al-qutn
alchemy	alquimia	al-kimiya	crimson	carmesí	quirmizi
alcohol	alcohol	al-kuhl	Gibraltar	Gibraltar	Djebel-Tarik
alfalfa	alfalfa	al-fasfasah	jar	jarra	jarrah
algebra	álgebra	al-jabr	orange	naranja	naranj
alkali	álcali	al-qaliy	saffron	azafrán	zafaran
apricot	albaricoque	al-birquq	sugar	azúcar	sukkar
artichoke	alcachofa	al-kharshof	zenith	cenit	samt
checkmate	jaque mate	shah mat	zero	cero	sifr
cipher	cifra	sifr			