

*Muhammad* > Mahomate personal name  
*Amad* > Hamete personal name  
*masjid* > mesquita “mosque”  
*ar-rubb* > *arope* “syrup concentrated by boiling”

### The Arabic Definite Article al-:

A large percentage of the Arabic nouns borrowed into Spanish were borrowed with a prefixed definite article, *al-*. *Al-* means “the” in Arabic. For example, *bayt* is “a house” *al-bayt* is “the house”. Unlike English, where “the” is an independent word, *al-* in Arabic is a prefix attached directly to the word it modifies. (Definite article means a word that means “the”. Indefinite article means a word that means “a”. Arabic does not have an indefinite article.) For this reason, there is a high concentration of Arabic borrowings under the letter A in a Spanish dictionary. The following are some examples:

*al-jawhar* > *aljófar*  
*al-quḥn* > *algodón*  
*al-buḥayra* > *albuhera, albufera*  
*al-kuḥl* > *alcohol*  
*al-fawwara* > *al-faguara*  
*al-kir* > *alquiler*

The definite article in Arabic has a number of other forms in addition to *al-*, depending on the first letter of the word to which it is prefixed. In front of dentals, sibilants, alveolars, it assimilates to the following letter. This means that the *-l-* of *al-* changes to match the following letter, producing a doubled letter. The following are some examples.

*al-* + *zayt* = *az-zayt* > *aceite*  
*al-* + *zaytūna* = *az-zaytūna* > *aceituna*  
*al-* + *sukkar* = *as-sukkar* > *azucar adobe*  
*al-* + *ḥūb* = *aḥ-ḥūb* > *adobe*  
*al-* + *naqqal* = *an-naqqal* > *añacal arrabal* <  
*al-* + *rabaḥ* = *ar-rabaḥ* > *arrabal*

This does not mean that all Arabic nouns borrowed into Spanish were borrowed with the definite article attached. Words adopted without the article include the following:

*b•dhinj•n* > *berenjena*  
*q•fila* > *cáfila*  
*ḍayfa* > *daiifa*  
*jabalī* > *jabalí*  
*rakūba* > *recua*  
*ḥaqr* > *sacre*  
*ḥ•fia* > *taha*

Some words were adopted in two forms, one without the definite article and one with:

*baṭṭikh* > *badea* “inferior watermelon”  
*al-baṭṭikh* > *albudega* “inferior watermelon”

It is estimated that 60% of the nouns borrowed into Spanish include the Arabic definite article. It must be kept in mind, though, that no sense of the original meaning of the article is retained. In other words, while *az-zaytūna* means “the olive” in Arabic, Spanish *aceituna* merely means “olive” without “the”, even though the latter derives from the former. “The olive” in Spanish is *la aceituna*.

### **Vocabulary of Arabic Origin:**

A look at the types of Spanish words that derive from Arabic gives some idea of the extent and variety of Arabic influence in the local culture in Iberia.

#### **Food:**

*aceite* < *az-zayt* (olive) oil  
*aceituna* < *az-zaytuna* olive  
*albaricoque* “apricot” < *al-barquq* “plum”  
*arroz* < *ar-ruzz* “rice”  
*azúcar* < *as-sukkar* “sugar”  
*berenjena* < *b•dhinj•n* “eggplant”  
*escabeche* < *as-sikb•j*  
*jabalí* “wild boar” < *jabalí* “mountain-, wild”  
*res* “cow, beef” < *r•s* “head (of cattle)”

#### **Architecture:**

*adobe* < *aṭ-ṭūb* mud-bricks  
*alcova* “bedroom” < *al-qubba* “dome”  
*alacena* < *al-khiz•na* “closet, pantry”  
*almacén* < *al-makhzan* “storehouse”  
*alamud* “bar for doors or windows” < *al-famūd* “column”  
*alcántara* < *al-qanṭara* “bridge”  
*alcalá* < *al-qalfia* “fortress, citadel”  
*alcázar* < *al-qaṣr* “fortress, palace”

#### **Irrigation/Water:**

*asequia* < *as-s•qiya* water-wheel  
*noría* < *an-n•fūira* machine/wheel for lifting water  
*arcaduz* < *al-q•dūs* bucket on pole for lifting water  
*albufera* “lagoon” < *al-bu,ayra* “lake”

#### **People:**

*alcaide* “mayor” < *al-q•ḥid* “leader, commander”  
*alcalde* “judge, municipal official” < *al-q•ḥi* “judge”  
*alguacil* < *al-wazir* “vizier”

*Mozarabe* < *mustafirib* “Arabized (Christians)”  
*alférez* “standard-bearer” < *al-f•ris* “knight, mounted fighter”

### Topography (Place names):

*Guadalquivir* < *(al-)W•dī al-kabir* = “the Big River”

Other river names such as Guadalupe, Guadix, etc.

*Alcalá* < *al-qalfiah* “citadel, fortress”

*Alcázar* < *al-qaṣr* “castle, palace”

*Almodóvar* < *al-mudawwar* “the round (hill), circle”

*Medina* < *(al-)madīna* “town”

*Algaba* < *al-gh•ba* “the woods, forest”

*Albufera* “lagoon” < *al-bu•ayra* “lake”

*Alberca* “reservoir” < *al-birka* “pool, pond”

### Miscellaneous:

As mentioned above, not only the number but also the nature of Arabic borrowings into Spanish indicate a particularly long or intense linguistic contact that occurred in the Iberian peninsula. The adjective *baladí* derives from the Arabic adjective *baladī*. The Spanish conjunction *hasta* “until” derives from the Arabic conjunction *ḥatt•* “until”. The expression used to designate an unknown person, the equivalent of “So-and-so” or “What’s-his-name” in English, is *fulano* in Spanish for a man, and *fulana* for a woman. These clearly derive from Arabic *ful•n* and *ful•na*, which are used in identical circumstances. The expanded expression *fulano de tal* “So-and-so of such-and-such (place)” may be understood as a translation of sorts of the Arabic expression *ful•n al-ful•ni*, where *al-ful•ni* takes the form and place of a denominal adjective indicating a place of origin.

The formal term of address *Usted*—meaning something like “Mr.” “Sir,” “Ma’am”—sets Spanish apart from French and Italian. In many Spanish dialects it has completely replace the second person pronouns. While it has been argued that this word derives from the expression *vuestra merced* “your mercy,” it is likely that Arabic *ust•dh* “Master, Mr., Sir” ultimately from Persian, also played a role in its etymology.

The expression *ojalá* “I wish (that)” “would that” etc. clearly derives from Arabic, most probably from the common Islamic expression *in sh•√ All•h*, literally “if God wants” and functionally “God willing.” While there is consensus that the expression is of Arabic origin, some scholars consider it unlikely that the form *ojalá* can be traced back to *in sh•√ all•h*, for phonetic reasons, and suggest alternative etymons, such as *wa-sh•√ all•h* “and God wants” or *law sh•√ all•h* “if God were to want”. The problem with both of these suggestions is that neither phrases are common in known Arabic dialects, whereas *in sh•√ all•h* is a standard expression in all Arabic dialects, not to mention other “Islamic” languages like Persian, Urdu, and so on.

Spanish has a particular usage of the preposition *a*, ordinarily “to” that sets it apart from French and Italian which is called “personal *a*” in the grammar books. When a direct object is a person, it is preceded by the preposition *a* “to”. For example, one says *vi a*

*Raúl* “I saw (to) Raúl” (personal direct object) as opposed to *vi el gato* “I saw the cat” (ordinary direct object). One may also use an extra indirect object pronoun, as is “le ví a

el” “to him I saw (to him)”. This particular usage resembles very closely a similar use of the preposition li- in the Levantine dialects of Arabic, such as Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian, where one says, for example, *shuft il-b`it* “I saw the house” but *shuftu li-Muhammad* “I saw (him) (to) Muhammad.” Not found in classical Arabic, this usage appears to be the result of Aramaic influence on Arabic in the Syrian region specifically. It may be that the Spanish usage is the result of influence from Andalusian Arabic dialects, which, as we have mentioned, shared certain features with Levantine Arabic dialects.

### **Alfonso X and the Translation School in Toledo:**

Toledo was one of the first major Muslim capitals to be taken permanently by Christian powers. It became a major Spanish capital (in many ways it is the precursor of modern Madrid), and was particularly important as a conduit of Arabo-Islamic cultural material into a Latin, Christian environment. Under the patronage of such rulers as Alfonso X, known as Alfonso the Wise, it became a major center for translation. Among the most famous works he had translated were, *Calila e Dimna*, a collection of animal-fables similar to Aesop’s Fables which had its origin in an Indian work called the *Panchatantra* (Sanskrit, ca. 300 C.E.). That work was translated into Persian by Burzuwayh before the advent of Islam (ca. 70 C.E.). The Persian secretary Ibn al-Muqaffafi translated it into Arabic in the eighth century. Alfonso had it translated into Spanish 1251 or 1261 C.E., and it became extremely popular. Another popular work was *El Libro de los Engaños*, which was a translation of the Sindbad cycle of stories from Arabic. Alfonso had a number of non-fictional works written which likely drew on Arabic sources as well, including a book on chess and other games, a book on precious stones, and a history of the world.

### ***El Cid***

*El Poema de Mio Cid*, written by an anonymous author ca. 1140, has long been recognized as one of the foundational texts of Spanish literature. It is an epic poem describing the feats of the great warrior and commander Rodrigo (or Ruy) Díaz, who conquered Valencia and held it a short time before his death in the later eleventh century. One interesting feature about this commander and the epic poem which describes him is the title applied to him, *El Cid*. This is the Arabic title *Sayyid* “Mister, Master, Sir, Lord” rendered into Spanish. In the epic poem, and in actual history, *El Cid* interacts freely with his Muslim counterparts, such as the Abbadid rulers of Seville, and even allies himself with them on occasion. It seems ironic, now, after the Reconquista, that Spain’s national hero had an Arabic title!

### ***El Conde Lucanor***

*El Conde Lucanor* is a well-known work from the thirteenth century written by Don Juan Manuel (1282-1348), a noble and nephew of Alfonso X. *El Conde Lucanor*, after 1326 A.D. In this collection of 51 “Exemplos” or tales of advice, three are explicitly presented as Arabic in origin, others are demonstrably so, and others portray action in the Middle East. The explicitly Arab tales are each based on an Arabic proverb.

Each of the three ends with the original proverb presented in transliterated dialectal Arabic and translated into Spanish. Other stories are clearly of eastern origin though they do not include any actual Arabic phrases. One story depicts Saladin's attempt to have an affair with a noblewoman and how she deters him. Another story is famous throughout Arab lands as a story featuring Ju'a, an Arab folkloric character who often plays the part of a wise fool. A man and his son are going to market and have brought their donkey along to carry the goods they will buy home. People pass by them and remark that they are stupid, since both of them are walking and neither is riding the donkey. Then the father tells his son to get on the donkey. Another group of passers-by remarks that it is wrong for the son to ride and let his poor old father walk. So they switch places. Then, another passer-by comments that it is mean of the father to ride while his poor, tired son walks. Then they both get on the donkey. Yet another passer-by remarks that it is cruel for both of them to ride the donkey, when they are so heavy. The father uses this experience to teach his son not to base one's actions on what people say. The following is part of one of the tales based on an Andalusian Arabic proverb.

**Exercise II. Read the following excerpt from Exemplo XLI of *El Conde Lucanor* and answer the following questions.**

“There was in Cordova a Moorish king named al-Hakam, who governed the kingdom well. He strove to act honorably on his own part and to be just with others. Indeed, he did all that was required of good kings, not only in guarding their kingdoms, but in augmenting their territories, with the view that they might receive the praises of their people and be remembered after death for their good deeds. Yet this king gave himself up to a life of luxury and enjoyment; vice and disorder reigned in his palace.

“It so happened that when they played before him on an instrument which the Moors liked very much, and which they called *Albogon*, the king perceived that it did not sound as good as it ought, so he took the instrument and made a hole at the bottom, in line with the other holes. Since that time, the *Albogon* has given a much better sound than before.

“This must certainly be considered an improvement, but it was not an act suited to the dignity of a king, and so thought the people. When they heard that the improvement was made by the king, they exclaimed in a ridiculing manner in Arabic, *v.a he de ziat Alhaquim (wa-h•di ziyadt al-akam)*, which means “This is the addition of al-Hakam.” This saying became so common all over the country that it at last reached the ears of the king, who begged to know why the people always used this saying, but his attendants took pains to avoid answering his question. He, however, insisted on being told the truth and the meaning of the expression, so they were compelled to tell him. When he heard it he was very much grieved, but instead of punishing those who related the origin of the saying, he resolved to do some worthy deed, in order that the people might be compelled to praise him deservedly.

“At this time the mosque of Cordova was not yet finished, so King al-Hakam did all that was necessary for its completion. In this way it became one of the most beautiful mosques the Moors had in Spain. Glory be to God! It is now a church, called “Saint Mary of Cordova” and it was dedicated by the good King Ferdinand to Saint Mary after he had taken Cordova from the Moors.

“Now, when the Moorish king had done so good a work as that of finishing the mosque, he said to him self, ‘The people have hitherto made fun of me for the addition I made to the Albogon (one of which instruments he then held vbefore him), but now they have reason for praising me, for have I not completed the mosque of Cordova? From this time the Moors ceased to make fun of him; and to this day, when they wish to extol a good act, they say, ‘This is like the addition of the King al-Hakam.’” ...

**Notes:**

The King Alhaquem of the story is probably the Umayyad Caliph al-~akam II, who ruled from 961 to 976.

Fernando III of Castile conquered Cordova in 1236.

The Mosque of Cordova, which has been converted into a church, is still standing. The main structure of the church has been built inside the mosque. This leaves a great deal of the original structure intact, but disrupts the space and view considerably.

**Questions:**

1. What are the two “additions of al-~akam”?
  
2. Why was the first “addition” inappropriate or undignified?
  
3. What is the moral of this story? Is it relevant in today’s world?

**Exercise III: Read the following excerpt from the Exemplo XXIV of *El Conde Lucanor* and answer the following questions.**

“My lord,” said Patronio, “there was a Moorish (= Muslim) king who had three sons. He had the power to appoint whichever of them he pleased to reign after him. When he had reached a good old age, the leading men of his kingdom came before him, asking to be informed which of his sons he would like to name as his successor. The king replied that he would give them an answer in one month.

“After eight or ten days the king said to his eldest son, “Tomorrow I will go out riding, and I want you to accompany me.”

“The son came to the king as asked, but not as early as the time appointed. When he arrived, the king said that he wished to dress, and asked that he bring him his clothes. His son when to the Lord of the Bedchamber, and asked him to bring the king his clothes. The attendant inquired what suit he desired, and the son returned to ask his father, who replied, his state robe. The young man went and told the attendant to bring the state robe. Now, for every article of the king’s clothing it was necessary to go back and forth, carrying answers and questions, till at last the attended had dressed and shod the king. The same repetition went on when the king called for his horse, spurs, bridle, saddle, sword, and so forth. Then, all prepared after some trouble and difficulty, the king changed his mind, decideing that he would not ride out. Instead he wanted his son, the