

# ACCESS AMERICA

## Arabic in the Saddle



*A typical cowboy herds cattle in Wyoming ©AP Images/Jasper Ingalls*

Half a world away from where they originated, Arabic terms for horses, horsemen, and the tack that links them have found a new home in the desert Southwest of the United States. These terms came from Arabic into Spanish, and then into American English when the Spanish and the “Anglo” traditions met.

In the early eighth century, a Muslim army of Arabs and North African Berbers

conquered much of the Iberian Peninsula. In its south, a region the Arabs called al-Andalus, a Syrian Umayyad prince whose dynasty had been replaced by the Abbasids established a kingdom and a burgeoning civilization around the year 750. In 1492 came two important events: the discovery of the New World—opening a whole new hemisphere to Spanish and Portuguese colonization—and the final expulsion of the

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Muslims and Jews from Spain, who left a deep and permanent cultural imprint on the Spanish people.

As they colonized the New World, Spaniards—including Arab and Berber refugees—took along their horses, and the Arabic-origin words they brought with them for managing them are now deeply lodged in “cowboy lingo,” the vernacular English and Mexican

Spanish of the desert borderlands of the United States and Mexico.

I began listening to cowboy lingo after I moved to one of the great old ranching communities of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in 1975. My wife and I now keep horses, sheep, and turkeys, and we have frequent contact with

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### FROM THE AMBASSADOR

“Language is the archives of history,” said American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson. If we are prepared to listen to a language, it tells us a story of the people and cultures that influenced it. The influence of languages on one another bespeaks a common history, the memory of which may be long forgotten.

This month we take a look at how Arabic influenced Spanish, which in turn influenced English in the United States. As we travel the globe and engage with different people and their cultures, we will, like the languages we speak, be influenced by those things too. In the process, we make ourselves more knowledgeable and better able to build the bridges between nations that will take us all to a better future. —Robert F. Godec

## From the IRC

Visit the IRC to find resources on this and other topics.

### Find English Words of Arabic Origin on the Net

[www.bookhooks.com/resource/s/avocabo\\_11\\_63.pdf](http://www.bookhooks.com/resource/s/avocabo_11_63.pdf)

[www.al-bab.com/arab/language/words.htm](http://www.al-bab.com/arab/language/words.htm)

[www.icons.org.uk/nom/nominations/arabicwords](http://www.icons.org.uk/nom/nominations/arabicwords)

[www.outreachworld.org/Files/Curriculum/ArabicEnglish.pdf](http://www.outreachworld.org/Files/Curriculum/ArabicEnglish.pdf)

<http://help.berberber.com/forum22/14201-english-words-arabic-origins.html>

<http://en.allexperts.com/q/Etymology-Meaning-Words-1474/Arabic-language-took-words.htm>

### Articles about the Influence of Arabic on the English Language

MED Magazine - Issue 39 - June 2006 "Arabic and English: Four hundred ways of describing a camel," by Jeremy Bale

<http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/med-magazine/June2006/39-Arabic-English-false-friends.htm>

"Arabic Influences in the English Language," by Habeeb Salloum

[www.captiveminds.org/history/engarab.htm](http://www.captiveminds.org/history/engarab.htm)

— Director Khaled Ben Bhouzid & the IRC team

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working cowboys, ranchers, and large-animal veterinarians, all of whom use Arabic-derived terms, introduced into the region more than four-and-a-half centuries ago, as casually and nonchalantly as my children use computerspeak.

For instance, they refer to a rider of exceptional skill as "one damn fine jinete," a term that once referred to a fluid style of riding developed in North Africa for the battlefield and which now refers to the rider himself. The word came from the Sonoran Spanish *xinete*, which was in turn derived from the Andalusian *zanati*, an echo of the name of the Zanatah tribe of what is now Algeria.

Sonoran vaqueros and the horsemen who've worked with them may still call their saddle

an *albarda*, derived from the Iberian term *albarda*, which now means packsaddle and which came from the Arabic *al-barda'a*. Among the other tack such cowboys use is a leather belt they call an *acion*, from the Arabic *as-siyur*. A whip they call an *azote a €*" from the Arabic *as-sut*.

Ringed straps are called *argollas*, from the Arabic *allgulla*. Perhaps my favorite Arabic-derived tack term is a widely used word for a headstall or rope halter: *hackamore*. It came straight from the Andalusian *jaquima*, which echoes the Arabic *sakima*, something worn on the head.

There are also many terms for the colors of animals that can be traced back to Arabic origins. Because I am color-blind, it took me a while before I even began to listen to the terms cowboys use

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## PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENTS

### The 2008 Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Student Leaders Program

(formerly Study of the United States Institutes) is now open and students aged 18-22 may apply. These institutes are intensive six-week summer courses at American universities designed to develop and enhance the students' leadership and collective problem solving skills, exploring U.S. history and culture and expanding leadership skills and knowledge. Educational travel throughout the United States and volunteer opportunities will complement classroom activity and coursework. Applications must be received **no later than February 8, 2008**.

### The Near East and South Asia Undergraduate Exchange Program (NE SA UGRAD)

strongly appeals to undergraduate students and students in their final high school year who are after an exciting program that combines studying at a U.S. university, community service and internship. Outstanding students, across all disciplines, who demonstrate leadership potential and cross-cultural interests and whose applications respond to the criteria listed in the announcement, are invited to submit their applications **no later than March 7, 2008**.

For more information please contact Faouzia Ben Kheder, Cultural Affairs Specialist for Exchanges at 71-107-438 or [benkhedherf@state.gov](mailto:benkhedherf@state.gov).



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for the hide colors of horses, cattle, and even sheep. But I could certainly pick out an almagre, a rust-colored stallion, and I knew that the term came from the Arabic al-magra, “red earth.”

The color term that most puzzled me, however, was the use of the name Alice-Ann for a sorrel, a horse that is rusty brown from nose to tail. It took me some time to realize that it came from the Arabic al-azan, a kind of reddish wood, via the Spanish alaz in. Recently, I read a limerick by a man named Jac that played on the apparent double meaning of “Alice-Ann”:

**On the frontier a cowboy’s best gal**

**Was called Alice Ann, and not Sal.**

**The trick is, of course, that this friend was a horse**

**So an Alice could be a male pal.**

*Author Gary Paul Nabhan is the author of 20 books, including Why Some Like It Hot (Island Press, 2004), on the co-evolution of communities and their native foods, and What Flows Between Dry Worlds: Culture, Agriculture and Cuisine in Arabian and American Deserts.*

*The complete article can be found at <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/0807/ijse/nabhan.htm>.*



*A young American girl prepares to ride her Arabian horse. © AP Images/Eric Draper*

## INNOVATIVE MUSICAL GROUP PERFORMS IN TUNISIA

As part of the U.S. Embassy’s continuing efforts to bring original and creative cultural program to Tunisia, U.S. Ambassador Robert F. Godec is pleased to announce that Universes, a Poetic Theatre Ensemble from New York, will perform at the Centre Culturel et Sportif in El Menzah on February 2, and at the Palais des Sciences in Monastir on February 4.



New York’s The Village Voice describes this group as, “An effervescent, racially mixed group who call themselves UNIVERSES... they are as likely to kick some poetry as break out into acapella singing, to orchestrate a vocal exercise as they are to burst into a step show... Their energy and realness is unmatched.”

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



### Mabrouk Sirine

#### Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program (FLTA)

#### Home in the United States

Washington, DC

#### Home in Tunisia

Bizerte

#### Fondest memory of the U.S.

I was interviewed by the Washington Post and the article was published January 1; I also appreciated my contact with my students and my supervisor.

#### Briefly describe your experience

I was in DC teaching Koranic Arabic at Catholic University of America. I was living in a house run by catholic sisters with 30 other girls. I made so many friends. I travelled a lot--I have

been to LA, San Diego , New York , Miami , Philadelphia; Baltimore , and Virginia.

I made so many friends I was open to all different kinds of people . I learnt how to be a tolerant girl. I tried to give a good image of the Arab world--especially Muslim world--and I think I succeeded. Since my return to Tunisia I have received three American friends who were living with me so I think that I was a good representative of Tunisia.

#### Lessons learned

Actually I learned many things: I am more independent, more tolerant, more ambitious, and happier.

#### Advice for others

Well, go for it, don't hesitate, it is really a great program and it is only once in your life. It is a huge honor to be a Fulbright scholar.

#### What I miss most about the U.S.

Oh That's a hard question: I miss everything--the malls, the capitol, my friends, supervisor, Starbucks coffee....



## Calendar

### Universes Concert

**Saturday, February 2**

Centre Culturel et Sportif

El Menzah

5:00 PM

See article PAGE 3.

### Free English Conversation

**Every Thursday**

American Corner at AMIDEAST

4:00 PM

*Weekly discussions on topics from films and music to religion.*

### Study in the USA Consultations

**Every Tuesday-Friday**

AMIDEAST Advising Resource

Library

9:00 AM-4:00 PM

*Browse materials from U.S. universities and other resources on applications and scholarships.*

### Open Access

**Every Monday-Friday**

American Corner at AMIDEAST

10:00 AM-6:00 PM

*Peruse materials in English on topics from history to pop culture and more.*

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