



Latin and Muslim

Faith, language and shared history

An invitation to explore faith and value your roots.

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Faith and belonging

You can be Latin and Muslim. Being Latin describes heritage and cultural identity; being Muslim describes faith. Learning about Islam does not require you to erase your family history or become Arab. There is room to explore faith while valuing your language, family ties and heritage.

Roots and diversity

Latin America brings together Indigenous, African, European and many other histories. Latin people do not all speak Spanish or share one religion. LMA's English and Spanish editions are a way to make these resources available to readers, rather than a definition of who belongs.

Your place today

You do not need to demonstrate a particular ancestry to explore Islam. Historical and language connections can spark curiosity; your own exploration does not depend on them.

Words for God

God, Dios and Allah

Dios in Spanish, God in English and Allah in Arabic are different words in different languages for the one God. Allah is not only a Muslim word: Arabic-speaking Christians in the Middle East also say Allah when they speak of God, and Catholics in Malta, whose language is close to Arabic, pray to Alla. Many Arab families who settled in Latin America from the late 19th century were Christian. Chile's Palestinian community, estimated at more than 500,000 people, is one of the largest outside the Middle East, and its own federation says most of its members are Christian.

Sources: S06, S07

Allah and ilāh

Allah is the Arabic word for God, or Dios in Spanish. The Arabic word ilāh means a god or deity. A common explanation connects Allah with al-ilāh, 'the God'. The difference between 'God' and 'a god', or Dios and un dios, can help explain the distinction, but Arabic has no capital and lowercase letters.

Sources: S02, S03

A familiar word

Ojalá

A familiar Spanish word carries a connection to Arabic. The Royal Spanish Academy traces ojalá to Andalusí Arabic *wa šá lláh*, glossed as ‘and God has willed’. Today, Spanish speakers use ojalá to express a strong wish or hope. Its history is a small example of contact between languages.

Sources: S01

What a word can tell us

Words travel between communities and change over time. The history of ojalá offers a small window into contact between Spanish and Arabic. It does not establish the ancestry of the person using it, or mean that they are making a religious declaration.

A useful distinction

The etymology given by the RAE is *wa šá lláh*. It should not be silently replaced with the Arabic expression in *shā’ Allāh*, usually translated as “if God wills”.

Sources: S01

A shared history

From 711 to 1492, Muslim-ruled territories existed in parts of the Iberian Peninsula, with borders and rulers changing over time. Muslims, Christians and Jews lived in these societies. There were periods of exchange and cooperation, alongside unequal status, conflict and persecution. This history helped shape a shared cultural inheritance, but it was not eight centuries of uninterrupted peace.

Sources: S04, S05

Reading history carefully

These dates describe changing territories, rather than continuous rule over all of modern Spain or Portugal. Historical al-Andalus is also different from today's Andalucía. An honest account recognises cultural exchange alongside inequality and conflict.

Sources: S04, S05

Keep exploring

You can value this shared inheritance without making it a condition of belonging. For an introduction to beliefs and practices, read LMA's Exploring Islam or Questions about Islam.

Sources and reading

S01 · RAE / ASALE

Diccionario de la lengua española: «ojalá». [Open source](#)

S02 · Hassim & Cole-Adams

Learning from One Another, University of Melbourne. [Open source](#)

S03 · Oxford University Research Archive

Allāh = the God (al-ilāh)? [Open source](#)

S04 · Jane S. Gerber

“Ornament of the World” and the Jews of Spain, NEH. [Open source](#)

S05 · Janina M. Safran

Defining Boundaries in al-Andalus, Cornell University Press. [Open source](#)

S06 · Society of Saint John Chrysostom

The use of the word Allah by Christians in history and today. [Open source](#)

S07 · BBC News Mundo / T13

Cómo llegó Chile a tener la mayor comunidad de palestinos fuera del mundo árabe. [Open source](#)

S03: bibliographic details and full text remain unverified. S05: the publisher summary was consulted, rather than the full book. S07: BBC reporting republished by T13; the population figure is an estimate.

latinmuslimassociation.org.uk/discover/

latinmuslimassociation.org.uk/contact/