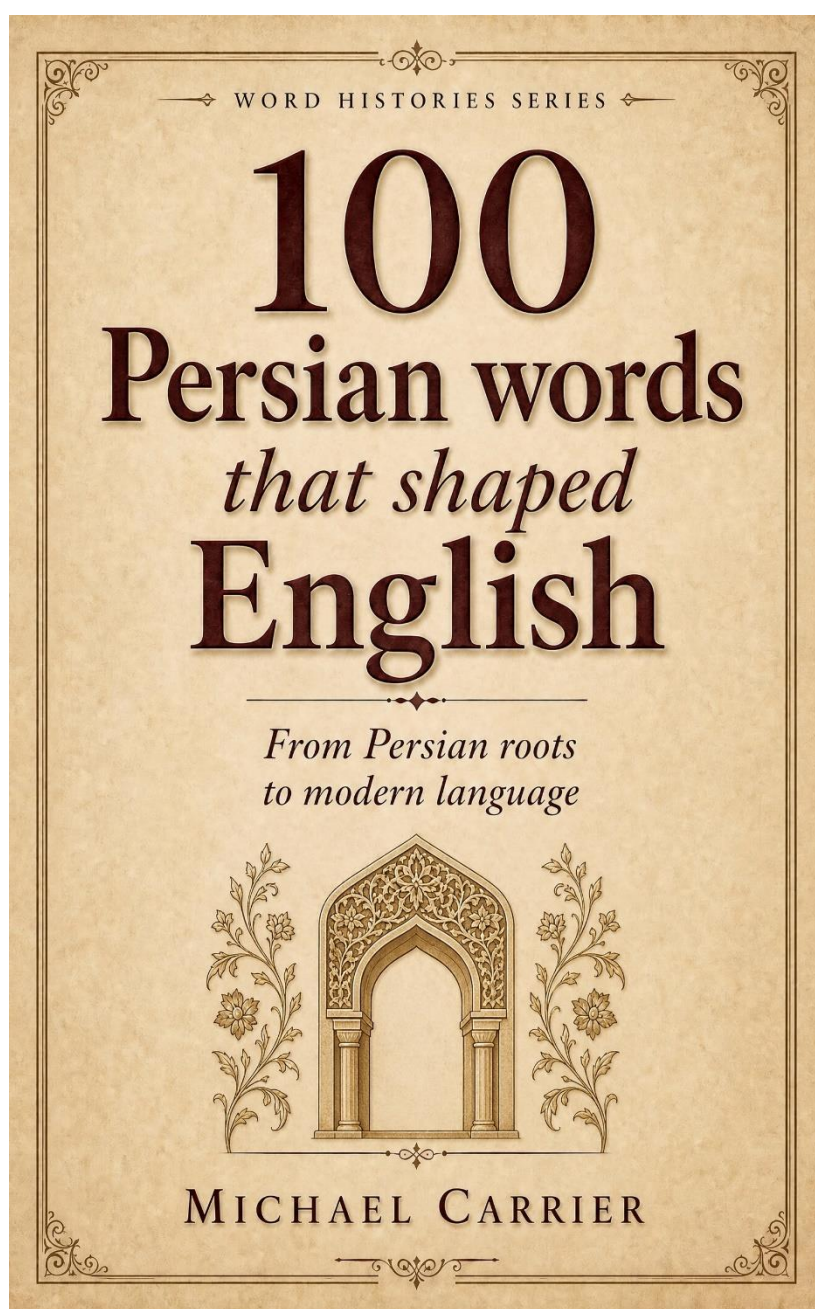


Other books from Highdale Press
in the '100 Words' series

100 Persian words that shaped English



Improve your communication with Persian vocabulary

English owes a surprising debt to Persian. Because of the Silk Road and the later British presence in India, many Persian words travelled through Greek, Latin, or Hindi before landing in English. These words often carry a sense of exoticism, antiquity, or high-level craftsmanship.

Sample items in the Dictionary

Azure (لاژورد - Lâjvard)

Modern Meaning:

A bright blue colour, like that of a clear, cloudless sky.

Etymology:

Derived from the Persian *lâjvard*, the name for **lapis lazuli**. The 'l' was mistaken for an article in Romance languages (*l'azure*), eventually leaving us with just *azure*.

How we use it now:

Used in heraldry, high-end design, and poetic descriptions of the Mediterranean or the atmosphere.

Sample Sentence:

The Mediterranean stretched out before us, a vast expanse of **azure** that met the horizon seamlessly.

Quotation:

"The **azure** gloom of an Italian night." — Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

Bazaar (بازار - Bâzâr)

Modern Meaning:

A marketplace or shopping quarter; a sale of miscellaneous goods for charity.

Etymology:

From Middle Persian *wāzār*. It travelled through Italian and French before entering English.

How we use it now:

Used to describe a chaotic but vibrant exchange of ideas or a specific style of disorganized commerce.

Sample Sentence:

The internet has become a global **bazaar** where data is the most valuable currency.

Quotation:

*"The whole city was a **bazaar** of vice and vanity."* — William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*.

Caravan (كاروان - Kârvân)

Modern Meaning:

A group of people, especially traders or pilgrims, traveling together across a desert or through hostile territory.

Etymology:

From the Persian *kârvân*. It traditionally referred to the organized groups of camels and merchants on the Silk Road.

How we use it now:

Often used metaphorically for a procession of ideas, a mobile artistic troupe, or a slow-moving political movement.

Sample Sentence:

A **caravan** of aid trucks waited at the border, a lifeline for the besieged city.

Quotation:

*"The **caravan** moves on, while the dogs bark."* — A traditional proverb (often associated with Persian/Turkish origins) cited by various diplomats.

Checkmate (شاه مات - Shâh Mât)

Modern Meaning:

A position in chess where the king is in check and there is no way to get out of it; a complete defeat.

Etymology:

From *shâh* (king) + *mât* (helpless/stunned). Contrary to popular belief, it doesn't mean 'the king is dead,' but rather 'the king is cornered.'

How we use it now:

Applied to geopolitical manoeuvres or high-stakes negotiations where one party has left the other with no moves.

Sample Sentence:

By securing the patent first, the startup delivered a literal **checkmate** to its global competitors.

Quotation:

*"Love has a thousand ways to **checkmate** us."* — Attributed to various translations of Rumi's poetry.

Divan (دیوان - Divân)

Modern Meaning:

A long low sofa without a back or arms, typically placed against a wall.

Etymology:

Originally meant a 'bundle of written sheets,' then a 'book of poems,' then a 'government office' or 'council,' and finally the 'cushioned benches' found in those offices.

How we use it now:

Evokes an atmosphere of 19th-century intellectualism or Middle Eastern hospitality.

Sample Sentence:

He reclined on the **divan**, surrounded by leather-bound books and the scent of tobacco.

Quotation:

*"She was sitting on a **divan**, her hands clasped round her knees."* — Katherine Mansfield, *Bliss and Other Stories*.

Khaki (خاکی - Khâki)

Modern Meaning:

A textile fabric of a brownish-yellow colour, used for military uniforms.

Etymology:

From *khâk* (dust/earth). It entered English via the British Indian Army in the mid-19th century as camouflage.

How we use it now:

Used in sociological discussions regarding the 'militarization' of civilian fashion or the history of utilitarianism.

Sample Sentence:

The safari party was dressed in crisp **khaki**, blending into the arid landscape.

Quotation:

"A man in **khaki**...looked out from the shadows of the porch." — Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills*.

Pajama(s) (پای جامه - Pây-jâme)

Modern Meaning:

A suit of loose-fitting clothes worn for sleeping.

Etymology:

From *pây* (leg) + *jâme* (garment). It originally referred to the loose trousers worn in India and Persia, adopted by the British in the 18th century.

How we use it now:

While common now, the word is still used in fashion history to discuss the 'orientalist' influence on Western loungewear.

Sample Sentence:

The silk **pajamas** were a nod to the decadent leisure wear of the 1920s.

Quotation:

"The **pajama** is the uniform of the man who has retired from the world." — Humorously noted in early 20th-century social columns.

Paradisiacal (پردیس - Pardis)

Modern Meaning:

Relating to or resembling paradise; blissful.

Etymology:

From *pairi* (around) + *daeza* (wall). It literally meant an 'enclosed garden' or royal hunting park. The *pairi* root is the same as the Greek *peri* in 'periphery', also meaning 'around'.

How we use it now:

An elevated alternative to 'heavenly,' used to describe pristine landscapes or moments of perfect peace.

Sample Sentence:

The valley was a **paradisiacal** retreat, untouched by the industrialization of the coast.

Quotation:

"The **paradisiacal** state of the first couple." — John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Serendipity (سرندیب - Sarandib)

Modern Meaning:

The occurrence of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way.

Etymology:

Coined by Horace Walpole in 1754 from the Persian fairy tale *The Three Princes of Serendip*. *Sarandib* was the Old Persian name for **Sri Lanka**.

How we use it now:

Used in scientific discourse to describe accidental discoveries (like penicillin) or in philosophy to discuss the nature of luck.

Sample Sentence:

The discovery of the ancient manuscript was pure **serendipity**, found inside the lining of an old trunk.

Quotation:

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