

Greek kokkos, kernel, kermes

The Ancient Greek word **κόκκος** (*kókkos*) translates literally to "**grain**", "**seed**", or "**kernel**". [Click here](#) for its use in Scripture. [Kokkinos](#) was its related Greek word, translated as "scarlet" in Scripture

It is thus the direct etymological ancestor of words associated with **kermes**, an ancient crimson dye.

[Click here](#) to read the Wikipedia article on "Kermes (crimson) dye". It mentions the Sanskrit word *kṛmija* (meaning "worm-made"), the Persian / Arabic word *qermez*, the French term *kermès*, and thus the modern English word "[crimson](#)".

[Kernel](#) comes from the words "grain", and "corn".

This linguistic intersection arose from a historical biological misunderstanding:

The "Berry" That Was an Insect

In the ancient Mediterranean, a highly prized red dye was harvested from pregnant female scale insects (*Kermes vermilio*) that infested the **kermes oak** (*Quercus coccifera*). When these female insects are full of eggs, they lose their limbs, anchor themselves immovably to the tree branches, and swell into small, round, red spheres.

Because they were completely stationary and shaped like peas, the ancient Greeks mistook these insects for the tree's own seeds or berries, calling them **κόκκος** (*kókkos*, grain/seed). The Romans later adopted this term into Latin as **coccum**, meaning "berry yielding a scarlet dye" or simply "scarlet cloth".

Linguistic Legacy

This single Greek word for "kernel" ultimately shaped several modern words across different disciplines:

- **Colour terms:** Because the *kokkos* insect was used to dye luxury textiles, it gave rise to the Greek adjective *kokkinos* (κόκκινος), which is the standard modern Greek word for "**red**".
- **English derivatives:** Through Latin *coccum*, we get words like **cochineal** (another insect-derived red dye) and **cocoon**.
- **Biology:** In modern medicine and microbiology, **-coccus** is used as a suffix to describe spherical, berry-shaped bacteria (such as *Staphylococcus* or *Streptococcus*).

The word **kermes** itself comes from a different linguistic path—originating from the Sanskrit *kṛmi-ja* ("worm-made") and passing through Persian (*qermez*) and Arabic—but it describes the exact same "grain" that the Greeks named *kokkos*.

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