

SAFFRON / כרכום (Karkom) / Azafrán

"A pinch of gold in the pot turns every meal into a feast of kings." – Sephardic proverb

Scent Profile: Earthy, honey-like, slightly metallic

Medieval Context: Saffron was cultivated in parts of Aragon and La Mancha. In cookbooks like *"Kitāb al-Ṭabīkh"* (The Book of Dishes, 13th-century Andalusian Arab cookbook), recipes include black pepper, often with cinnamon, saffron, and other spices. In Jewish communities, it was used both for its coloring and subtle flavor in rice, soups, festive breads (*pan de azafrán*) and Passover dishes.

Symbolic Association: Kashrut observance and the economic agency of Jewish spice merchants. Jewish legal authorities, such as Maimonides and Rashba (Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet of Barcelona) warned against saffron adulterated with wine-soaked threats or meat fibers. Still, it was prized in small doses to brighten the complexion, improve digestion, and elevate mood.

Literary Reference: Song of Songs 4:14: "Nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree."