

The Typology of Arabic Proper Nouns

الأَسْمَاءُ الْعَرَبِيَّةُ وَطُرُقُ صَيَاغَتِهَا

Hatim Omer

Department of the Arabic Resources
The CJK Dictionary Institute, Inc

Revised: July 14, 2005

An in-depth analysis of the etymology, structure, and typology of Arabic proper nouns.

This document contains Arabic text; please make sure that you have the suitable software for Arabic script viewing installed in your system. For the purposes of this document, English equivalent for the Arabic personal names and some place names were transcribed using ordinary italicized Latin script, [Buckwalter](#) transliteration is used for more pronunciation accuracy where needed. Buckwalter transliteration is put between square brackets to clarify Arabic pronunciation.

[Ism](#) [Gender](#) [Surname](#) [Nomenclature](#) [Laqab](#) [Kunya](#) [Nasab](#) [Nisba](#) [Titles](#) [Diminution](#)
[Ellipsis](#) [Structure](#) [Parsing](#) [Nuances](#) [Types](#) [Non-Arabic](#) [Traditional](#) [Tanwiin](#) [Diacritics](#)
[Hamza](#) [Summary](#) [Buckwalter](#) [Sources](#) [Sun Letters](#) [Appendixes](#) [Dictionary](#) [References](#)

The two English words noun and name are both translated to the Arabic word *Ism* but however, the fact that the “name” in English can be considered as special kind of proper nouns is also true in the case for *Ism* in Arabic; in fact, *Ism* is one of the three major parts of speech in the Arabic language i.e. nouns, verbs and particles (*Ism*, *Fi'l* and *Harf* respectively in Arabic). *Ism* is divided to many subdivisions from which we will focus only on three, '*alam* [Ealam] “personal name” and *Masdar* [maSodar] “infinitive” and *Sifah* [Sifap] “adjective” as well as considering the *Ism* of being equivalent to “name” of a thing; refer to the [dictionary](#) page for more details.

In this document, the following subjects will be discussed:

- A. [Arabic Personal Names](#)
- B. [Gender of Arabic Proper Nouns](#)
- C. [Definition Particle, Titles, Ellipsis and Nicknames](#)
- D. [Surnames](#)
- E. [Diminution of Arabic Proper Nouns](#)
- F. [Summary](#)

Arabic Personal Names

The sources of the Arabic names

Names Structure

Name Parsing

Sources of Arabic Personal Names

Personal names (anthroponyms), which are part of proper names in general, occur in any language. Basically, names change, develop, and die out, and thus have a life cycle similar to that of the other lexical items of the language. Yet, personal names form a special group within the vocabulary of a language since they obey most but not all its numerous rules, whether phonological, morphological, syntactic, orthographic or semantic.

Since names reveal many preferences of their owners (or givers) in terms of real life objects, actions, features and beliefs, they reflect to some extent the structure of the dictionary of their specific languages; some names are considered within the realm of word-power as taboo or magical elements and thus reflect the communities' beliefs. More details on [names sources](#) in the [appendixes](#).

Structure of Arabic Personal Names

In the pre-Islamic times and in the early beginnings of Islam, it was not uncommon to call a person using his (or her) first name, or the [ism](#). But if a person should introduce himself, he would ordinarily give his Ism followed by his [Nasab](#): the latter is a genealogical chain in the form 'son of A, son of B, son of C, etc. These chains were no doubt historically correct statements of ancestry for some half-dozen or so links above the individual in question, but beyond that they tended to verge into the realm of the legendary; and they always end with the theoretical ancestor of the whole tribe.

In referring to a third persons, the common practice was to mention the Ism plus the tribal designation; on occasion, there might be inserted between these two the patronymic i.e. the first member of the Nasab chain, the Ism of the individual's own father. In this type of nomenclature, the tribal designation commonly takes the form of a [Nisba](#) (terminated with -ii). Hence a man who would usually say in response to an inquiry, 'I am *al-Harith ibn Asad ibn Zayd ibn Thabit ibn Aws* (etc., etc.) *ibn Bakr*' (*Bakr* being the legendary ancestor of the *Bakr* tribe), would ordinarily be referred to by others as *al-Harith al-Bakrii* or *al-Harith ibn Asad al-Bakrii*.

According to what mentioned above, Arabic personal name may be divided into five main categories, with the last category "[Nisba](#)" having several sub-categories:

[Ism](#)
[Kunya](#)
[Nasab](#)
[Laqab](#)
[Nisba](#)

Ism

A personal, proper noun given shortly after birth, in many Arabic countries, usually on the third day, but sometimes on the seventh day after birth. Examples of such names are *Muhammad*, *Ali*, *Musa* "Moses" and *Ibrahim* "Abraham". Adults are seldom called by their Ism; socially, this is considered slight to address or refer to an elder or parent by their Ism directly.

In addition to his personal Ism, an individual might have also a nickname, or [Laqab](#). This is still commonly used to refer to a third person instead of using his Ism. Biographical notices therefore usually begin by stating what such a person's 'real' name was; one will read that the poet ordinarily spoken of by his Laqab of *al-Shanfarii* was properly *Thabit Ibn Aws al-Azdii* (his own Ism being *Thabit*, his father's Ism *Aws*, and he belonged to the tribe of *Azd*). The tribal [Nisba](#) might be added to the Laqab for further clarity if needed; one has to distinguish between several poets all having the Laqab *al-Nabigha* as *al-Nabigha al-Dhubyanii*, *al-Nabigha al-Ja'dii*, etc.

[Top Page](#)

Kunya

Another type of names which, is also in a sense a nickname, since it is an addition to the personal Ism. This is a compound form in which the first element is *Abu* "father of" (or, in the case of a woman, *Um* 'mother of') and the second element may be either another Ism or a noun refers to some abstract idea or physical object associated with the person (e.g. *Abu Burda* 'father of a cloak', or 'the cloaked one'). *Kunya* can also be considered an honorific name or surname, as the father or mother of someone; e.g., *abu Da'ud* "the father of David", *Um Salim* "the mother of Salim". It is meant as a prefix of respect or reverence. Married persons (especially married ladies) are, as a general rule, simply called by their *Kunya* (*abu* or *Um* + the name of their first son). When denoting father of X or mother of X, *Kunya* does not necessarily indicate a real parental relationship, sometimes it can be metaphorical, as *Abu al-Fadl* "father of merit" or even a nickname, as *Abu al-Dawaniq* (father of pennies, a name given to Caliph *al-Mansur*).

When referring to a person's full name, the Kunya usually precedes the personal name: *Abu Yusuf Hasan* “the father of Joseph, Hasan”, *Um Ja’far Aminah* “the mother of Ja’far, Aminah”. Other possibilities of Kunya’s first element are *Akhu* “brother”, *Ukht* “sister”, *Khal* “uncle (mother’s brother)”, *Khalah* “aunt (mother’s sister)”, *'aam* [Eam] “uncle”, *'aammah* “aunt”. Recently, Kunya is seldom used or expected in formal documents except for judicial petitions, however, the degree of usage is still depends on the geographical region.

It can be presumed that the “*Abu + Ism*” format of Kunya had its origin in actual realities and indeed meant that the person in question had a son who’s Ism was incorporated in his own Kunya. One of the Muslims’ Prophet uncles, whose Ism was *Abd al-Uzza*, had two Kunyas, *Abu Lahab* ‘father of a flame’ given to him because of his flame-like handsomeness, and *Abu Utba* since *Utba* was the Ism of his eldest son (though he is always known in history as *Abu Lahab*). After the time of the Prophet Muhammad, however, the *Abu + Ism* style of Kunya became a pure convention, which did not necessarily imply that the bearer of the Kunya had a son so named. The Kunya was often bestowed at an early age, before the individual had begotten any sons at all, nor when he did have children was he obliged to name one in conformity with his own Kunya. It is not uncommon for such a person to be referred to by mention of both his Kunya and his own Ism, and in such cases the Kunya usually precedes the Ism.

There is one curious anomaly in this system. *Bakr*, the name of the legendary ancestor of the Bakr tribe, has never in historical times been given to an individual as his Ism; it functions exclusively as a tribal designation. The style *Abu Bakr* therefore cannot imply possession of a son named *Bakr*. Nevertheless, the style *Abu Bakr* is employed both as a Kunya (as in a form such as *Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zayd*), and even more commonly as an Ism, so that a man could be e.g. *Abu Muhammad Abu Bakr ibn Zayd*, where his Ism is *Abu Bakr* and his Kunya *Abu Muhammad*.

Nasab

A pedigree, as the son or daughter of someone e.g. *ibn Omar* “the son of ‘Omar”, *bint Abbas* “the daughter of Abbas”. The Nasab follows the Ism in usage: *Hasan ibn Faraj* “Hasan the son of Faraj”, *Sumayya bint Khayyat* “Sumayya the daughter of Khayyat”. Many historical personages are more familiar to us by their Nasab than by their Ism e.g., the historian *ibn Khaldun*, the traveler *ibn Battuta*, and the philosopher *ibn Siina* “Avicenna”.

Nasabs may be extended for several generations, as may be noted in some of the [examples](#) set forth below. However, the vast majority of Nasabs found in period sources are only one or two generations long. It is uncommon to find a Nasab which extends three generations back (considering the father of the individual as the first generation), and there are a very few

examples which extend to four generations, such as *Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn al-Haddad*. *Bin* "son", *Ibnat* "daughter", *Bint* "daughter", *Akhu* "brother", *Ukht* "sister" and *bani* "sons" are also prefixes used in Nasab. When parent in Nasab is referred to by his Kunya, the word *abu* becomes *abi*, e.g., *Muhammad's* son-in-law was *Ali ibn Abi Talib*, "Ali the son of *Abu Talib*", or "Ali, the son of the father of *Talib*".

What was true for Kunya can also be true for Nasab too, i.e. Nasab does not necessarily indicate a real pedigree relationship, sometimes it can be metaphorical, as *Bint Al-Shaatii* "daughter of the coast" a name of a famous female scholar in Egypt.

[Top Page](#)

Laqab

An honorific or descriptive epithet, sometimes a nickname but often a title, usually religious, relating to nature, a descriptive, or of some admirable quality the person had (or would like to have); e.g., *al-Rashid* "the Upright", *al-Fadl* "the Prominent". Laqabs follow the Ism: *Harun al-Rashid* "Aaron the upright". Classification can be detailed as (a) physical qualities, *al-Tawiiil* "the tall", *al-Jahiz* "the goggle-eyed"; (b) virtues, *al-Rashid* "the upright", *al-Mansuur* "the victorious"; (c) professions, *al-Hallaj* "the carder", *al-Khayyam* "the tentmaker" and (d) compounds of *Din* (religion) and other words, *Jalal al-Din* "majesty of religion", *Sayf al-Dawlah* (sword of the state), *Sayf al-Islam* "sword of Islam".

The latter type emerged around the end of the second century of Islam onwards, the caliphs (and later the sultans) began bestowing on distinguished individuals as marks of honour (similar functionally to "honours" in the western world) titles compounded with *al-Din*, *al-Dawla* or *al-Mulk*, such as *Majd al-Din* "glory of the faith", *Sayf al-Dawla* "sword of the state", *Nizam al-Mulk* "orderer of the realm", etc.; Before very long, the use of such a title ceased to be necessarily an officially conferred honour, and became something claimed by everyone with any social pretensions. The term Laqab is also applied to a name of this kind, so that for the Islamic age it is an honorific rather than a nickname. In the full citation of a person's nomenclature the honorific Laqab comes most often right at the beginning, i.e. preceding Kunya and Ism, though occasionally it will be mentioned right at the end, after the [Nisba](#) and sometimes replacing the personal name.

One particular form of Laqab is formed on the pattern of *Abd* "servant of" plus one of the 99 names of Allah – a bit less than that number- e.g. *Abd Allah* (*Abdullah*) "the servant of God", *Abd al-Aziz* "servant of the Almighty", *Abd al-Rahman* "servant of the Merciful". These Laqabs are used as, and in the place of, an Ism: '*Abd al-Mun'im ibn Idris ibn Sinan*. The feminine form of this type of Laqab is *Amat al-X*, for example, *Amat Allah* (or *Amatullah*), (female) servant of Allah.

Sometimes what appear to be regularly-formed Laqabs are found used instead of, or in the place of, an Ism, e.g., *al-Dahhak ibn Ajlan*, *Abu Talib al-Mufaddal ibn Salamah*. (Such Laqabs might also be found used in the "normal" fashion for a Laqab: *Muhammad ibn Ya'la al-Dabbi al-Mufaddal*.) . Yet, no general rule is found by which Laqabs are used in the place of an [Ism](#); the only reliable guide for proper usage right now is to look at actual period examples. One may notice that Laqab is always prefixed by the definition article "al" and usually comes before the given name or Ism but in many cases it comes after as in *Fariid al-Atrash* "Fariid the deaf" or *Mustafa al-Jazzar* "Mustafa the butcher". Moreover, one seldom mentions his Laqab because Laqab is either honorific or degradative; recently, Laqab is used in spoken rather than written language unless the person gained some reputation in some field or profession in which case Laqab can also be written.

Some may use a Kunya-like Laqab e.g. *Abu Raas* (the big headed); or a kind of compound names to reflect some conception or attributes that only related to the God e.g. knowledge, reverence, obedience, reliance, sufficiency, and forcefulness; but in general these Laqabs are describing their holders and most of these are historic.

Example	Transcription	Reference
العارف بالله	al-`aarif billah	Knowledge
المعز لدين الله	al-mu`iz lidiin allah	Reverence
الحاكم بأمر الله	al-Haakim bi `amr allah	Ruling
المعتضد بالله	al-Mu`tatid billah	Reliance
المستكفي بالله	al-Mustakfi billah	Destiny
المنتصر بالله	al-Muntasir billah	Victory
المستعصم بالله	al-Mustasim billah	Reliance
أبو راس	Abu Raas	big head
أبو سيف	Abu Sayf	sword
أبو تراب	Abu Turab	earth

[Top Page](#)

Nisba

An adjective derived from place of birth, origin, or residence, sometimes from a sect, tribe, or family, and occasionally from a trade or profession as *al-Misri* "the Egyptian", *al-Isfahani* "from Isfahan", *al-Wahhabi* "of Wahhabis", often inherited and proudly multiplied. Nisbas follow the Ism or, if the name contains a Nasab (of howmany generations), generally follow the Nasab. The three primary types of Nisba are:

- 1) Occupational, derived from a person's trade or profession; e.g., *Muhammad al-Hallaj* "Muhammad, the dresser of cotton".
- 2) Of descent or tribal, derived from the name of a person's tribe of birth or family lineage; *Mughirah al-Kalbii* "Mughirah of the tribe of Kalb"; *Yusuf al-Ayyubi* "Joseph the Ayyubid, Joseph of the family line of Ayyub".
- 3) Geographic, derived from the place of residence or birth; *Yaqub al-Dimashqii* "Jacob of Damascus". As is the case with Nasab, we know some persons in history primarily by their Nisba e.g. *Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari*, the author of an early collection of *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) is better known from his place of birth, Bukhara, simply as *al-Bukharii*.

These familial names not uncommonly reflect the variation in form which occurs in tribal designations, and so may appear as Ibn XXX rather than al-XXXii. There was thus a family known as the *Banu al-Assal*, each member of the family being *A ibn B Ibn al-Assal* "Honeyman". Many individuals have more than one Nisba e.g. geographic + Madhhab, Madhhab + familial, etc. A fully evolved nomenclature consists of (in this order) Laqab, Kunya, Ism, patronymic (with or without further Nasab), Nisba(s), as with *Fakhr al-Din Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Omar ibn al-Husayn Ibn al-Khatb al-Razii*, where *Ibn al-Khatab* "descendant of the preacher" is a familial name, and *Razii* is a geographic Nisba.

Sometimes what may look like a regularly formed Nisba is found instead used in the place of an Ism, e.g., *Ali ibn al-Massisi*, *Abu Ishaq al-Tabari*. (Such Nisbas might also sometimes be found used in the "normal" fashion for a Nisba: *Ya'qub ibn Muhammad al-Massisi*.); no general rule can be formulated to describe which Nisbas can be used in the place of an Ism and which can not; the only reliable guide for proper usage is to look at actual period examples. Where more than one Nisba is used, as a general rule the geographic Nisba comes last, preceded by either the occupational Nisba or the tribal Nisba. Examples of names that use all three types of Nisba are not frequently encountered. Sometimes, Nisba is used for Laqab but this is generally found in the circles of artists.

You may not be surprised to know that Nisba is often taken for a [Surname](#) especially when denoting a place (geographic Nisba) or tribe (tribal Nisba) and where the person is considered unique as the in the case for immigrants to remote palces or even to another place within the same country, as in *Saddam al-Tikritii*, *Hasan al-Basrii*, *Ishaq al-Mosulii*; all words begin with "al-

“ are in fact place names currently exist in Iraq and those surnames are currently being used as surnames for some families; an example for tribal Nisba is *Mahmoud al-Hawarii*, *Hawarii* refers to (Hawawiir) a big tribe of which people spread from Southern Egypt to middle of Sudan.

Urbanization and the decay of the tribal system led to the growth, alongside the old tribal Nisbas, of Nisbas based on geography (*al-Halabii* “of Aleppo”, *al-Basrii* “of Basra”, etc.), or sect “Madhhab” (e.g. *al-Shi’ii*, *al-Malikii*, etc.), or having reference to a profession or trade. Obviously a tribal Nisba has the characteristic of a family name in that it presumably continues from father to son through successive generations; the same is true for Nisba denoting one’s sect since it is not common for a man to adopt a Madhhab or join a sect other than that of his father or his tribe.

Geographic Nisba, on the other hand, normally reflects the bearer’s own place of birth or current place of residence, but professional Nisba in the medieval times prove a strong tendency to evolve into [family names](#) transmitted through several generations irrespective to the bearer’s actual profession (as what has happened in the West with names like Fowler, Baker, Butcher). All of these different name elements can be, and often were, as we may have already noticed in some of the above examples, combined in the name of a single individual, sometimes to an excessive degree (though usually only in formal occasions). How do Arabic naming conventions work in actual practice? The following are historical examples of common forms, from very simple to the most complex. As a general rule, women’s names tended to use the less complex forms.

[Top Page](#)

Examples of Arabic Names Structures:

Name example
Structure
Yusuf ibn Ayyub
Ism son of Ism [one generation Nasab]
Yazid ibn Abi Hakim
Ism son of the father of Hakim [one generation Nasab where the father’s name is a Kunya]
Ayyub al-Sakhtiyani [masculine] , Mariyah al-Qibtiyah [feminine]
Ism + Nisba
Abu Muhammad Wahb
Kunya [the father of Muhammad] + Ism
Um Ja’far Zubaydah
Kunya [the mother of Ja’far] + Ism
Ahmad ibn Sa’id al-Bahili
Ism son of Ism [one generation Nasab] + Nisba

Ahmad ibn Abi Fanan al-Katib
Ism son of the "father of Fanan" [one generation Nasab, where name of father is a Kunya] + occupational Nisba
Umamah bint Hamdun ibn Isma'il
Ism + two generation Nasab
Layla bint Zuhayr ibn Yazid al-Nahdiyah
Ism + two generation Nasab + [feminine form of] Nisba
Abu Bishr al-Yaman ibn Abi al-Yaman al-Bandaniji
Kunya + Laqab/Ism + one generation Nasab [where name of father is a Kunya] + Nisba
Abu al-Tayyib 'Abd al-Rahim ibn Ahmad al-Harrani
Kunya [where name of son is Laqab/Ism] + Laqab/Ism + one generation Nasab + geographic Nisba
Abu Muqatil al-Nadr ibn al-Munqadi al-Daylami
Kunya + Laqab/Ism + one generation Nasab [where name of father is Laqab] + Nisba
Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Sahl ibn Rabal al-Tabari
Kunya + Ism + two generation Nasab + Nisba
Abu al-'Abbas Muhammad ibn Ya'qub ibn Yusuf al-Asamm al-Naysaburi
Kunya + Ism + two generation Nasab + Nisba [occupational? Or Laqab?] + geographic Nisba
Abu al-Qasim Mansur ibn al-Zabriqan ibn Salamah al-Namari
Kunya [where name of son is Laqab/Ism] + Ism + two generation Nasab [where name of father is Laqab/Ism] + Nisba
Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Ishaq ibn Ibrahim ibn Bashir al-Harbi
Kunya + Ism + three generation Nasab + Nisba
'Ubayd ibn Mu'awiyah ibn Zayd ibn Thabit ibn al-Dahhak
Ism + four generation Nasab
Sulaiman al-Halabi
Ism + Nisba
Farid the Deaf (Egyptian singer)
Ism + Laqab
<i>al-Mutanabbi</i> (an old poet)
Laqab
abu Hafs al-Misri (a radicalist)
Kunya + Nisba
al-Bukhari (the Prophet Muhammad's Hadith collector)
Nisba
<i>Usama bin Ladin</i> (a radicalist)

Possible Structures of Arabic Personal Names

To summarize the table above, an Arabic name usually follows the structure *Kunya + Ism/Laqab + Nasab + Nisba*; *Laqab* normally leading the short form of a name while *Nisba* can be used alone in many cases; *Kunya* is now used only for famous figures and as alias name; *Nasab* is now limited to some Arabic geographic regions.

Over a long time many names followed the pattern of *Kunya + Ism + Laqab* (*Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Mustansir*), or *Kunya + Ism + Nasab* (*Abu Muhammad Hamid ibn al-'Abbas*), even by peoples who adopted Islam (and Arabic naming practices) like the *Seljuk Turks* (*Abu'l-Qasim Mahmud ibn Zengi ibn Aqsunqur*).

To the best of my knowledge, the prefixes (Abu, Ibn, Bin, Um) are often inseparable from the following word. Such as "Abd Allah", a person should never be called "Allah". For this reason one important rule when parsing data is to parse these prefixes: Abu, Ibn, Bin, Um, Abd, Ubaid, Al, Bint, Bany, Banw with the words that follow them, whether a space or a hyphen is separating them.

One more thing to finalize this, there are some naming practices that cannot be used for Arabic names such as:

- No double given names; in which an *Ism* (or *Abd al-X*, which is always used as an *Ism*) follows an *Ism* (or *Abd al-X*). For instance, if a *Laqab* or *Nisba* is being used in place of *Ism* and is followed immediately by another *Laqab* or *Nisba*. In such cases, the second *Laqab* or *Nisba* is not also being used in place of an *Ism*: *al-'Alawii al-Basrii* is *al-'Alawii* of *Basra*, not double given name.
- No unmarked patronymics; In some languages, what appears to be two given names in a line is actually a name of an individual immediately followed by that of his or her father, without using any of the usual "markers" which indicate that the name is patronymic, such as *-son*, *mac*, *ap*, etc. This does not occur in Arabic; instead one often find the elements *ibn* (son of) or *bint* (daughter of) in the *Nasab*.
- Almost no metronymics; that is whether a *Nasab* includes the name of one's mother, although there are a few; the best-known is that of *'Isa ibn Maryam* "Jesus the son of Mary". This is clearly a "special case", and not a general historical precedent. A second instance is the name of *'Amr ibn Muhammad ibn Sulayman ibn Rashid*, called *ibn Banah*. "They called him 'the son of Banah' after his mother." Here, it was basically a nickname, not a part of his "real" name. Finally, "Ensign has one example of a metronymic apparently based on the mother's occupational byname." No much female-based [Kunya](#), where a parent was named after the name of his or her eldest daughter. *Kunya* normally formed on the name of the eldest son.

- Titular names such as *Sayf al-Din* “The Sword of the Faith” and *Sayf al-Dawlah* “The Sword of the State” were bestowed by the caliph on military and political leaders and were very highly valued. Thus, names consisting of “X + *al-Din*” (the most famous examples being *Salah al-Din* “Rectitude of the Faith”, *Nur al-Din* “Light of the Faith” and *Alaa al-Din* “Aladdin”, “X + *al-Dawla*” *Nasir al-Dawlah* “Defender of the State”, and “X + *al-Islam Sayf al-Islam* “Sword of Islam” were generally an indication of status or rank. More details on this and other subject can be found in [Names Types](#) in the appendixes.

[Top Page](#)

Parsing the Arabic Personal Name

Up to this point, we have only presented detailed information about the elements of the Arabic personal name. In the reality, Arabic text does not contain markers for the proper nouns; only contextual information can help to tag a constituent as a proper noun. To parse personal names in an Arabic text, one can develop a small grammatical rulesr of potential proper noun markers.

The main proplem can be divided into the following four steps:

- Extracting nouns from the ordinary Arabic text, which often includes (nouns, verbs and articles).
- Extracting proper nouns from the nouns (abstract nouns, pronouns, proper nouns, adjectives).
- Extracting personal names from the proper nouns (place names, personal names).
- Parsing the personal names to (Laqab, Kunya, Ism, Nasab and Nisba).

Here we assume that the main process to do is parsing i.e. we have already prepared lists of personal names.

There is no general rule for distinguishing personal names from the other nouns. But there are some heuristics that one can use to distinguish personal names in general. In this section we will use confidence measures such as: (U) Unlikely=20%, (P) Possible=50%, (V) Very likely=80% and (D) Definite=100%.

We will first describe the name elements in more precise way:

Isim (I)	Begin with	End with/Followed by	Position	Confidence
Always	Title		Initial, next to title	D
Exception	Directories			V
Never			Final, next to Nasab	U
Exception				
Variants	Abu, Um			P

Kunya (K)	Begin with	End with/Followed by	Position	Confidence
Always	Abu, Aba, Abi, Um		Initial	D
Exception	Abu Bakr, Abu 'aqilah			P
Never	Intitials, Ibn, Bin, Bani, Banu, Al, Abd, Ubaid	Laqab		U
Exception				
Variants	Ba, Bu, Um			P

Laqab (L)	Begin with	End with/Followed by	Position	Confidence
Always	Al	Bin, bint, Akhu, Ukht	Second to Ism	D
Exception				
Never	Initials		Medial	U
Exception				
Variants				

Nasab (N)	Begin with	End with/Followed by	Position	Confidence
Always	Ibn, Bin		Medial	D
Exception	Binsalim, Binsaeed			P
Never	Abu, Um		Intitial	U
Exception				
Variants	Bani, Banu, Aal			V

Nisba (S)	Begin with	End with/Followed by	Position	Confidence
Always	Al	i, ii, y, iiah, yya, yyah	Final	D

Exception				
Never	Initials, Abu, Um		Initial	U
Exception			When written alone	P
Variants		awi, awiyah, awia		V

[Top Page](#)

Second, regardless of the name elements Ism, Kunya...etc. we take any part of those as a token; we also define the following symbols and naming styles:

Symbol	Meaning	Reference	Reading	Remarks
=	Equivalent	Laqab	Known as	
?	Who	Ism	Called	
<	Descendant	Nasab	Son of	
>	Ancestor	Kunya	Father of	
@	Association	Nisba	Belong to	
	Optional		-	Token inside may be dropped
[]	Iteration		-	Token inside may be repeated
()	Initial		-	Token inside is an initial letter

Style type	Possible Sources	Characteristics
Plain	Phone directories	Only lineal Ism
Modern	Media	Lineal Ism + Family name
Historical	Historical themes	Kunya+Ism+Nasab+Nisba+Laqab
Western	Web, Academic thesis	Ism + Middle name + Surname
Custom	Media	Depend on the geographic area

To clarify the usage of the symbols and styles above, take my full name for example; in plain style it is written as *Hatim Ibrahim Abd al-Malik Omer*, using these four tokens with the parsing symbols my name can be formed as “?Hatim<Ibrahim<Abd al-Malik<Omer”, thus the template is “? [<]”. Using the western style the same name will be ?Hatim<I.<A.<Omer and the common template is then “?[[(<)]<” where *Hatim Omer*, *Hatim I. Omer* and *Hatim A. Omer* are possible forms using the same template. So, the name string can be divided into tokens with the symbols above used as place holders and/modifiers to describe the type and function of each token.

More examples on using our new parsing symbols are given below:

Style	Possible Templates	Example
-------	--------------------	---------

Modern	?<@	Saddam Husein al-Tikritii
	?=	Sulayman al-Tawiil
	?@	Hasan al-Basrii
	?<	Usama bin Ladin
Western	?[(<)]<	Hatim I. A. Omer
	(?)@	M. al-Misrii
	(?)(<)@	S. H. al-Tikritii
Historical	>?<=	Abu Othman Amro ibn Bahr al-Jahiz
	?<@	al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafii
	=>?<@	Sayf al-Din Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Omar al-Razii
	>?<[@]=	Abu Omar Hashim ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi al-Hallaj
	@	Al-Bukhari
	>@	Abu Thabit al-Kuwaitii
	=@	al-Nabigha al-Dhubyanii
	=	al-Atrash
Plain	?[<]	Hatim Ibrahim Abd al-Malik Omer
Custom		

Parsing a family name is not straight forward, because this “surname” can be mapped to more than Arabic one personal name element. However, plain, historical and custom styles are not expected to include such constituent or at least not targeted for parsing the family names at this stage; Ism and Laqab are also unlikely be taken as family names in modern and western styles; thus, we have the two styles (Modern, Western) with only three name tokens parsed to Nisba (S), Nasab (N) and Kunya (K).

The table below shows the probabilities of each token (or name element) to occupy the position of surname; the name element that takes (D) is definitely a surname.

Modern Style				Western Style			
Template	S	N	K	Template	S	N	K
?<@	D	U		?[(<)]<		D	
?@	D			(?)@	D		
?<		P		(?)(<)@	D		

Table key:

S: Nisba; N: Nasab, K: Kunya

D: Definitely
P: Possibly
U: Unknown

Surnames

Origins

Using Nisba, Nasab and Kunya as Surname

A surname, or family name, can be defined as a legal identification tag, which is transmitted by family members from generation to generation. The use of a surname in the Arabic communities is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Surnames were adopted in order to officially distinguish two individuals with the same given name.

Origins of Surnames

Surnames are generally derived from one of four possible sources: the name of the person's father (patronymic), the person's location, the person's occupation, or a descriptive nickname for the person. When created, they answered one of the following questions: Who is the person's father? Where did the person come from? What kind of work he does? What his or her most prominent feature?

Generally speaking, Arabs do not use surnames; instead they use [Nisba](#) and [Nasab](#) both can be considered as the Arabic equivalent for the surname. As a matter of practice, all male personal names can be used as surnames while female names can not except in some cases when referring to ancestors especially those related with the Prophet Muhammad like Fatimah (Prophet Muhammad's daughter) and Zubaida (the wife of the Caliph Harun al-Rashiid).

In modern times the elaborate form of classical nomenclature has fallen out of use. The educated classes use names modeled on the European pattern, consisting simply of given name(s) plus surname. With this development, Laqab has acquired yet another connotation, being now applied to a surname in the European sense. But there are indications that the development has not yet achieved a thorough going victory. The European habit of abbreviating given name(s) to initials is rarely encountered in Arabic script, and a man who will not hesitate to call himself '*M. M. Qadri*' in a European context will still normally sign himself, and be referred to, in Arabic script as *Muhammad Mustafa al-Qadri*. The Cairo telephone directory is not alphabetized by surnames, but by given names, so that it is impossible to look up *M. M. Qadri* unless one knows what the initials stand for. In most cases, all unknown types that appear between the first and last name can be considered to be "Optional Middle Names" if can not be identified; note that in some cases the first name is dropped as in *Husni Mubarak* the president of Egypt; his full name is "*Muhammad Husni Mubarak*", here the middle name "Husni" is considered "Optional First Name".

Place names were often taken as a surname. They were derived from the name of the place where one located e.g. *Saddam al-Tikritii* is from the town of Tikrit in Iraq. The majority of the Arabic surnames used today are derived from tribal and geographic Nisbas, such as *al-Dawsarii*, *al-Halabii*. Occupations also helped distinguish one person from another. *al-Qattan* may have worked as cotton seller in the same town where *Ali al-Haddad* was the local blacksmith. *al-‘Askarii* was the policeman of the village; *al-Sayyaf* was the sword-maker. You will often find names that describe ancestors' vocations, such as *al-Khabbaz* "the baker", *al-Ra’ii* "the shepherd" and *al-Najjar* "the carpenter". Sometimes nicknames became surnames. These types of surnames were often used to describe something unusual about an ancestor's physique. *al-Tawiiil* "the tall" and *al-Saghiir* "the small" are obvious examples.

[Top Page](#)

Using Nisba, Nasab and Kunya as Surname

These three categories can generally be considered as the Arabic equivalent for the surname; the percentage of their usage as surname can roughly be estimated to (50-30-10) for [Nisba](#), [Nasab](#) and [Kunya](#) respectively. The curtailed ratio (10%) is randomly distributed between the other name elements [Isim](#) and [Laqab](#) and depends on the region. Nisba is often used as surname in all Arab countries, but in many countries Nasab surname is dominating, the same is true for Kunya which differs in some countries. Abu (*Father of*) for example has other five synonyms *ba*, *bu*, *aba*, *abi* and *b*. Regardless of the grammatical complexities of the Arabic language, they all refer to the same meaning. As a matter of fact, *bu* and *b* is used exclusively in Algeria and Morocco while *ba* is used in the Gulf area and mainly in Yemen; *aba*, *abi* and *abu* are found in the rest of all Arab countries including those already mentioned.

Surnames starting with *Bu* are a special case and found largely in Algeria and Tunis where Abu has been changed to Bu; this was not the case before the French colonization to Moroccan region; French officials could hardly spell "Abu" the right way, they enforce Algerians to adopt their own copy of this Kunya prefix i.e. "*Bu*". Today, family names like *bu-Tafliqah*, *bu-Darbalah* or *bu-Midyan* are common and they normally have the structure *Isim + son of Isim + surname* e.g. *Ali Salih bu-Darbalah*; *Salih* is the father of *Ali*; for the father, the name is a bit different e.g. *Salih Muhammad bu-Darbalah*; note that the grandfather's *Isim* is dropped in the case of the son's name. The table below depicts some examples of surnames derived from Nisba, Nasab and Kunya.

Example	Structure
Yusuf Ahmed Ibrahim al-Ramlawi	Ism son of Ism son of Ism + Surname (Geographic Nisba)
Sadam Husein al-Tikritii	Ism son of Ism + Surname (Geographic Nisba)
Yusuf al-Ramlawii	Ism + Surname (Geographic Nisba)
al-Ramlawii	Surname (Geographic Nisba)
abu Hamza al-Misrii	Kunya + Surname (Geographic Nisba)
Yaquub al-Fatimii	Ism + Surname (Tribal Nisba)
Ahmad bin Fliis	Ism + Surname (Nasab)
Abd al-Aziiz bu Tafliiqah	Ism + Surname (Kunya)

Sudan and Mauritania have developed their own surname element styles from Nasab; they have another modified copies of *bin* "son of"; namely "*walad*"; which has the same meaning like *bin*, in Mauritania the pronunciation is "*wald*" while in Sudan it is even shorter "*wad*".

To conclude:

- It is unwise to treat the last name as surname because the last name may possibly be a Laqab.
- The middle names are often belong to the father, the grandfather etc. so we consider them as optional middle names.
- The prefixes (Abu, Aba, Abi, Bu, Ibn, Bin, Um) of a name are inseparable from the following word. Such as "Abd Allah" a person could never be called "Allah".

For example:

Take the full name: "Ahmed Ibrahiim Othman Abu Shower"

"Ahmed" is the given (first) name.

"Abu Shower" is the surname.

The names in between - "Ibrahiim" and "Othman" are optional middle names. This person's name can also be written in two more ways: "Ahmed Abu Shower" and "Abu Shower". For more on this please refer to [parsing](#) the personal name.

[Top Page](#)

Diminution of Arabic Proper Nouns

Diminution or “*TaSghii*” in Arabic, is used for two purposes, indulgence and degradation; both are used with personal names in many cases as with the name *Omair* which is diminutive form of the name *Omar*. In composite names, the prefix *Abd* is changed to *Ubaid*, note that the second part of the name is left intact when diminishing [composite names](#) having this prefix, so *Abd Allah* becomes *Ubaid Allah*. Also note that in [Nisba](#), [Nasab](#) and [Kunya](#) the prefixes are both left intact. Noun diminution goes deep into Arabic nouns inflectional system; the examples shown in the table below do not cover but a small part of this subject. Some names or Ism are used only in their diminutive form like *Umaiya* the normal form is *Ummah* “nation” is seldom used for Ism.

Name	Transcription	Diminutive form	Transcription	Category/Gender
عمر	Omar	عمير	Omair	Ism
خالد	Khalid	خويلد	Khuwailid	Ism
سلمى	Salma	سليمة	Sulayma	Ism
صالح	Salih	صويلح	Suwailih	Ism
عبد الله	Abd-allah	عبيد الله	Ubaid-Allah	Ism
القرشي	al-Qurashi	القريشي	al-Quraishi	Nasab
البصري	al-Basri	البصيري	al-Busairi	Nisba
الرمحي	al-Ramahi	الرميحي	al-Rumaihi	Nisba
أبو راشد	Abu-Rashid	أبو رويشد	Abu-Ruwaishid	Kunya
أم راشد	Um-Rashid	أم رويشد	Um-Ruwaishid	Kunya

The examples below are for names that usually given in their diminutive form and seldom used in their normal form for Ism.

Name	Transcription	Normal form	Transcription	Category/Gender
أمية	Umaiya	أمة	Umah	Ism /f
بثينة	Buthaina	بثنة	Bathnah	Ism /f
رقية	Ruqaiyah	رقية	Ruqiah	Ism /f
سمية	Sumaiyah	سمة	Simah	Ism /f
أميمة	Umaimah	أم	Um	Ism /f
سلمى	Sulaima	سلمى	Salma	Ism /f

In addition, diminution is largely applied to place names; in fact the majority of denominated examples are classified as place names. Recently, diminished names are mostly found in the Bedouins communities in KSA, Egypt, Libya, Jordan and the rest Arabic Gulf countries.

[Top Page](#)

Summary

The Arabic name system includes five parts of a person's name: the personal name (*'alam*), the agnomen (*Kunya* — *'abu*), the lineage (*Nasab* — *ibn*), the lineation (*Nisba* place of origin-usually) and the nickname (*Laqab*). The order of their occurrence is usually *Laqab-Kunya-Ism-Nasab-Nisba*, but often some of these parts are missing and often a person is called just by his/her *Laqab* or *Kunya*. Recently, the style *Ism-Nasab-Nisba* is dominating. Most of the names in Arabic are comprised of one word. Several patterns are two-word compounds. Such names are mainly theophoric (i.e., related to the Deity's name or descriptions). These include names mainly of the *Abd-X* pattern, which are comprised of two separate words and seem to be restricted to male individuals.

Common name-elements are family member names, mainly “father” and “son” noted above *Abu*, *Ibn*. Arabic names with *Abu* and *Ibn* are *Kunya*, *Nasab* or *Laqab*, however, and thus usually not personal names. The function of such Arabic names is usually to express respect to the person carrying this name, for calling a person by his real name is usually considered an insult. Arabic uses this pattern, though sparingly also for females ('Mother of X').

Certain modern Arabic names take the broken plural forms as in *Afkar* “ideas”, *Ahlam* “dreams” *Tahani* “congratulations”. The most numerous name types are the one-word general nouns, referring to physical and geographic phenomena and to objects as well as plants and animals. Not every object in nature is used as a person's name in the present (and in the past).

Modern Arabic names include first names and surnames, as in the West, which is a basic difference from names in old Arabic inscriptions. Yet the Arab community very much retains the *Laqab* and *Nasab* type appellations.

Morphology	Syntax	Semantics	Community
Singular Noun Fahd, Haytham	One word Ali, Salwa	Theophoric Abd al-Rahman	Civilian Muhammad
Plural Noun Ahlam	Two words Fadl-Allah	Plants Zaynab, Yasmin	Bedouin <i>Sweilim</i> (diminutive)
Verbal Noun Taysiir, Ibtisam	Nexus Abd al-Kariim	Animals Saqr, Maha	
Adjectives Hatim, Hasan	Noun + Attribute Al-Muntasir bi-Allah	Natural Phenomena Ra'd, Shuruq	
Noun + Female Suffix Khaliifah, Alaa'		Features Jamiil, Anwar	

Active Verb Ahmad, Yahya		Abstract Features Jamal, Wijdan	
Passive Verb Muhammad, Mustafa		Nationalistic Nasr, Kifah , Nidal	

The following facts and trends are revealed from this document:

Conventional or traditional names are still very frequent in Arabic language (used by Muslims and Christians).

Personal names usually comprise of a single semantic element, but can also include compound elements (e.g., two words). These may be two free lexemes (e.g. in the construct state) or include a bound morpheme (e.g. a prefix). Among these names we find typically the Deity's names or attributes, names of family members and prepositions.

Modern innovations, i.e. lexical items (and patterns) newly used as personal names, occur in Arabic language.

Name modernization trends in the Arabic names refer to historical personalities (often called after plants and animals), traditional adjectives, verbal nouns and broken plural forms of words.

Appendixes:

[More on Names Sources](#)

[Names Types](#)

[Gender of Arabic Proper Nouns](#)

[More on Hamza](#)

[Sun/Moon Letters](#)

[More on Nisba](#)

[Pronunciation and Writing Nuances](#)

[Buckwalter Transliteration](#)

[Dictionary](#)

[Top Page](#)

[More on Arabic Personal Names Sources](#)

Most of Arabic personal names origins can be traced back to common sources that shared between all the Arabic countries; some of these sources may seem trivial but, for many centuries, this triviality remains a matter of inevitable practice; However, we can not give exact answers since no statistical researches were available at the time this paper was edited. We can say that most of Arab parents would give their baby a name derived from one of the following:

[The Religion](#)

[Abstract Nouns and Adjectives](#)

[Nature and Objects](#)

[Honor of Persons](#)

[Inherent Features, Time and Environment](#)

[Vows and Hopes](#)

[Animal and Plant Names](#)

[Charm, Affinity and Memory](#)

Generally speaking, Arabs in ancient times would choose names for their babies from the surrounding environment or nature; names of animals and other things, including insects, rocks and trees were not uncommon. Before Islam, Arabs used to give their babies names that apparently reflect their way of living i.e. continuous antagonism against each other so, names of war arms and beasts like lion, fox and eagle were preferred among tribes known for their antagonism and aggressiveness. One reason for this is that they would reserve their babies for their non-stop war battles so, in the course of preparation, a baby would be “armed” with a frightening name. Another reason is to avert the evil eye or the unwanted attention of *jinn* “genies” and other evil spirits. As a matter of fact, the whole tribe would have such a *bad* name; known examples in this concern are *Kalb* “dog”, *Fahd* “panther”, *Asd* “lion”, *Namr* “leopard”, *Tha’lab* “fox”, *Hisan* “horse” and *Anzah* “goat” although the last two would not help in war cases; for along time these tribal names constitute the main source for one of the Arabic names categories called [Nisba](#) which we discussed previously.

It should be mentioned that not only the degree of “badness” that makes the desired effect of a name but, another reason for giving a baby such a name was that the father would wish if his son grow as close as possible to the meaning of his *ism*. In contrast, female, slaves and baby slaves would be given nice names, normally derived from abstract nouns like peace, success or blessing. A well known reason behind this practice is that Arabs used to reserve their male babies for warfare life, so the more ugly the name is the better impression it will leave on the enemies; they would believe of a name as front line of defense but things are totally different with females and slaves because they were kept for other “civilian” services and other good aspects of life. Note that many African ethnic groups are still following the same practice. However, no specific criteria can be described to show which style belong to which country but some countries are known to prefer one or two of the categories listed above.

In the Arabic Gulf area for example, familial, place and profession names prevail in the naming practices while in North Africa borrowed names, honorific names and other coined western names are common. The table below may give a little idea about names origins and their geographic distribution.

Criteria	Geographic area
The religion	All Arabic region
Tribe and kinship	Gulf area, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya
Places and professions	Gulf countries, Iraq, Palestine, Syria
Honor of persons	Sudan, Egypt
Western and borrowed	North Africa, Egypt, Lebanon
Charm and affinity	North Africa
Vows and Hopes	Sudan, Egypt, Yemen
Animal and Plant names	Egypt, Yemen, Qatar, KSA, Oman

Religion

Names of this origin are shared by all Muslims around the world whether Arab or not. In modern centuries, one can easily evaluate to what extent does Islam affected Arab beliefs and way of life because this is always reflected in their babies’ names; names like *Abdullah*, *Abd al-Rahman* both mean (Servant of God) always help in proving this. Moreover, names like *Omar*, *Abu-Bakr* (the names of Caliphs) may prove the sect *Madhhab* of the family as *Sunni* Muslim while names like *Ali* should not necessarily be taken to refer to the family as *Shii’ah* Muslim unless the whole family reside in a places where Shi’ah Muslims dominate e.g. Iran, Syria, southern parts of KSA and Iraq.

Abstract Nouns and Adjectives

Most of Arabic names belong to this category; names of virtues like *Nasr* “victory”, *Salah* “rightness”, *Sa’d* “felithity”, *Farah* “happiness”, *Najah* “success” and *Jamal* “beauty” to mention a few, are common male names. For female there are *Wafa’* “devotion”, *Ula* “highness”, *Wa’d* “promise” and *Sana’* “brilliance”. This category is also the main source of the Arabic names but other sources have their valuable shares, as we will discuss this later in the [types of personal names](#). Names derived from adjectives include names like *Khalid* “immortal”, *Saiid* “happy”, *Abbas* “frowning” and *Jamiil* “handsome”. Superlative names are also existing and usually derived from nouns of virtues like *Faris* “knight”, *Fawwaz* “winner”, *Ghalib* “conqueror” and *Saddam* “striker”.

Nature and Objects

This category is considered for a long time (before Islam) one of the important sources of names; *Ra’d* “thunder”, *Shams* “sun”, *Hajar* “stone”, *Sakhr* “rock”, *Hilal* “crescent” and *Shihab* “comet” are examples for male names while *Qamar* “full moon”, *Badr* “full moon”, *Nur* “light” are common for females; this category also includes objects used by people e.g. *Sayf* “sword” and *Hizam* “belt”.

Honor of persons

This include naming after a famous religious, political, scholar or artist; for example, many families in the Arab world would give the names *Jamal* or *Nasir* or even *Jamal Abd al-Nasir* to their babies after the Egyptian war leader *Jamal Abd al-Nasir* won the war in the late sixties. Recently, many Arab countries follow similar practice in naming. Another known case in this concern is giving a name after a person who helped in giving the parents the ability to give birth; those persons are likely either the so called “domestic doctors” (religious doctors) or true doctors although the formers do not fully (or truly) assist in this matters but some Arab do believe in their ability to do such miracles.

[Top Page](#)

Inherent Features, Time and Environment

Names of this origins are rare, they include for example, *Samra’* “brunette”, *Shaqra’* “blond” or names like *Khadiijah* “prematurely born”; this name was often given to the babies experienced such situation but recently, the name changed to be just an *Ism* and does not necessarily denote a similar medical situation. Time and environment include the occasions, events occurred at the time of birth; a baby born on Thursday may likely be given the name *Khamiis* or Arabic month

names like *Ramadan*, *Rajab*, *Sha'ban* or days like *Jum'a* "Friday"; sometimes seasons like *Rabii'* "spring" or occasions like *Eid* "festival"; this practice is still being followed.

Vows and Hopes

In many cases, vows and wishes constitute substantial element in giving a name to the baby; In North Africa for example, some people deeply believe in swindlers who convince the naïves of their blessed magic abilities to give them what they like to have; in many occasions, their ability found to be just a kind of satanic dealing or juggling; however, some parents would give the juggler's *Ism* to their baby, that because they may have vowed to do this during the time of despair.

Some fathers, especially those belong to the *Sufi* religious groups, are practicing a similar way. After a long waiting for a baby, the father may give the baby the *Sufi* leader's *Ism* or *Laqab* this practice is obvious and very common in North African countries (Sudan, Egypt, Tunis, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania); one of those fathers would possibly claim that he has been inspired by a dream or advised by someone (likely the *Sufi Sheikh*) he believes in.

Animal and Plant Names

This practice persisted in the period before Islam and to some extent in current days. The names *Haytham* and *Layth* are synonyms for the lion; both are given as *Ism*. Birds and their attributes were preferred among other species, names like *Saqr* "eagle", *Shahiin* "eagle" and *al-Baaz* "eagle" still being used for males while *Yamamah* "dove", *Bulbul* "Bulbul", *Taghriid* "warbling", and *Hadiil* "coo" are examples for female names. Plant names are more encountered; the name *Zaynab* for example is a name for a plant with dark-green leaves; only at past times Arabs were aware of what does such name mean; nowadays, many families contribute to this practice but without any background knowledge; many parents do not know exactly what their baby's name means if it happen to fall within this category. Some names are clear because of their common usage like *Dalia* "vine flower", *Yasmin* "Jasmin", *Wardah* "rose". Generally, aromatic or domestic plants (used for construction and medical uses) are preferred for Bedouins. The following table depicts some of the recently used names belongs to this category.

Given Name	Transcription	Meaning	
مها	Maha	synonym for the wild cow	
غزال	Ghazal	gazelle	
بلبل	Bulbul	bulbul, a singing bird	
ليث	Layth	synonym for the lion	
حمزة	Hamza	synonym for the lion	
أسامة	Usama	synonym for the lion	

الأسد	al-Asad	lion	
القط	al-Qit	cat	
الفأر	al-Fa'r	mouse	
عصفور	Usfuur	bird	
الوحش	al-Wihsh	beast	
الجمل	al-Jamal	camel	
هديل	Hadiil	coo of pigeons	
تغريد	Taghriid	warbling of birds	
جدية	Jadyah	"she" goat	

Using such names may look strange but usually such names are related to some features exclusive to the animal. The main purpose is to refer to some preferred characteristics inherent in the animal (eye shape, color, power), but some may have not any reasonable causes to give their baby a name that has no pleasant features at all (e.g. *Al-Far* "the mouse", *Al-Wahsh* "the beast").

Charm, Affinity and Memory

Names belong to this category were often meant to avert the envy or evil eye or the unwanted attention of bad spirits. Names like *Harb* "war" and *Hanzalah* "colocynth" are historical examples. Affinity and solidarity are clearly obvious in the practice of keeping one source for all family members' names; *Salim*, *Saliim*, *Sulayman*, *Salamah*, *Sallam*, *Musallam*, *Suwaylim*, *Musaylamah*, and *Salman* can be found in one family, all those names are derived from one orthographic root [slm], or the noun *Silm* "peace or safety". Other examples are *Omar*, *Omayri*, *Omran*, *Omair*, and *Ahmad*, *Hamad*, *Hamdan*, *Hamid*, *Hamiid*, *Hamdi*, *Hammad*, *Mahmuud* and *Muhammad*. This practice sometimes is followed only to keep a uniform "rhythm" between brothers and sisters in one family.

Another case of this category is giving the baby his grandfather or grandmother's name or even his father's name; doubly tagged names like *Ali Muhammad Ali* and *Muhammad Muhammad Hasan* are not uncommon; normally, this practice is occasionally done to preserve the memory of the deceased.

An interesting case of this kind is giving names like *Muntaha*, *Khitam* both mean "termination", this happens with parents suffered from serial birth of females and decided to discontinue giving birth. The reverse case is also possible, parents may give the name *Bakri* "first son" for their first born child; *Hibah* "gift" or *Hadiyah* "gift" for their long time waiting anticipated female baby.

[Top Page](#)

Types of Arabic Personal Names

From the above discussed subjects, we can sum-up the general features of Arabic personal names:

Personal names are based on the daily vocabulary.

They are usually limited to basic morphological and semantic categories of this vocabulary.

They belong mainly to the categories of nouns, adjectives (less frequent) and verbs (rarer still).

Noun names usually denote natural objects and phenomena, geographic elements, animal and plants names, abstract (human) characteristics and a few tools.

Verb forms used as names describe certain activities, conditions or states of the agent.

They may also be in passive mode or participle verb forms.

Adjectives denote natural or human (usually positive) characteristics (or virtues).

From the native Arabic speaker's viewpoint, all Arabic personal names can be either non-Arabic origins or [traditional names](#); we will generally discuss these in brief.

[Top Page](#)

Names of Non-Arabic Origins

Non-Arabic origins personal names can be further divided to the following types:

Foreign (Arabized) Personal Names

Borrowed Personal Names

Foreign (Arabized) personal names:

Many names of this type are well known all over the world; many of them are thought of being of Arabic origins while they are not because they are in fact can be one the following:

Biblical names in their Quranic forms, as *Harun* "Aaron", *Ibrahim* "Abraham", *Sulayman* "Solomon".

Persian (*Jamshid*, *Rustam*), Turkish (*Timur*, *Buri*), and other names.

The table below depicts some of those:

Example	Transcription	Equivalent
إسماعيل	Ismail	Ishmael
إبراهيم	Ibrahiim	Abraham
سارة	Sarah	Sara
إيلياء	Elyaa'	
موسى	Muusa	Moses
راحيل	Rahiil	Rachel
هارون	Haruun	Aaron
عيسى	Eisa	Jesus
الياس	Alyas	Aliaho
يحيى	Yahya	John
يعقوب	Ya'qub	Jacob
يوسف	Yusuf	Joseph
سليمان	Sulayman	Solomon

Borrowed Personal Names:

Names of this type are not Arabic of course but are often used in some countries which were either subjected to imperial annexation by the old empires (Rome and Ottoman) or colonial annexation made by Britain and France e.g. Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, and Syria or have affected by its vicinity to other non-Arab countries like Sudan, Libya and Iraq.

There are another reasons of adopting such names, in KSA, Kuwait Bahrain and UAE, vast historic movement of Asian immigrants relocated for work opportunities and trade or for *Hajj* "pilgrimage" practice, this resulted in changing the demographic construction of these countries. Some may have completely different reasons like Oman in which African races were forced –in a course of slavery- and brought few hundreds years ago to the country. Innovations in the names inventory also add new strange names to the language vocabulary, Arabs -like others- tend to innovate names, but due to native speakers' different cultural and social structures, the results in each geographic areas differs in several aspects, below are some examples.

Example	English	Origin
ديانا	Diana	
جورج	George	
سوزان	Suzan	
ميشيل	Michael	
نانسي	Nancy	

نورهان	Norhan	Turkish
شيراز	Sheraz	Persian

Traditional Arabic Personal Names

Arabic nouns that used for personal names include many of the aspects of life and nature; professions, animals, places, plants and others are more likely found in given personal names; part of these are said to be absolute Arabic names that is, never borrowed from or by any other people the other is two-word names or compound names. Traditional names can be classified lexically into two subcategories:

True (absolute) Arabic Personal Names

Composite Personal Names

True or Absolute Arabic Names

These names are characterized by being composed of only three letters with the medial letter been diacritized with *Sukuun*; these names are rare and some of them went obsolete now; the other are still being used and common, the table below lists some:

Name	Transcription	Meaning	Usage
حرب	Harb	War	Obsolete
حفص	Hafs		
دعد	Da`d		Obsolete
رعد	Ra`d	Thunder	
زيد	Zayd	Surplus	
سعد	Sa`d	Felicity	
سيف	Sayf	Sword	
شعث	Sha`th		
سهل	Sahl		
شهد	Shahd	Honey	
صقر	Saqr	Eagle	
عمر	Amr		
فضل	Fadl	Surplus	
قيس	Qais		
ليث	Laith	Lion	
نجد	Najd		
نوف	Nowf		
هند	Hind		
ورد	Ward		Obsolete
وهاب	Wahb		

Composite Personal Names

These may be two separate lexemes (e.g. in the noun construct state) or include a bound morpheme i.e. a prefix. Among these names we find typically the Deity's names or attributes, names of family members and prepositions. This type can further be divided into three subdivisions (Blended, Additive and Relative). Composite names can be divided to three subdivisions blended, additive and relative.

Blended Personal Names

Names of two words mixed together in one word and usually written as such.

Example	Transcription	Origin
معديكرب	Ma`dikaarib	Persian
بزرجمهر	Bazrjamhar	Persian
يزدجرد	Yazdajard	Persian
خورشيد	Khorshiid	Turkish

Additive Personal Names

These are compound names, often a combination of Abd "slave" with one of the divine attributes, as al-Aziz "the Mighty", *al-Karim* "the Generous", or simply *Allah* "God".

Name	Transcription
عبد الله	Abdallah
عبد الرحمن	Abd al-Rahman
عبد الكريم	Abd al-Kariim

Relative Personal Names

Two words combination, sometimes the first word can be given as separate Ism.

Name	Transcription	Meaning
جاد الرب	Jad al-Rab	
سيف الدولة	Sayf al-Dawlah	The sword of the state
سيف الإسلام	Sayf al-Islam	The sword of Islam
قلب الدين	Qalb al-Din	The heart of faith
برهان الدين	Burhan al-Din	The proof of God
إحسان الله	Ehsan Allah	The beneficence of God
أسد الله	Asad Allah	The lion of Allah

Sometimes, double-naming is used i.e. giving two individual Isms for the baby; both are treated as one given name. Note that the name *Muhammad* dominates in most cases of this type

revealing that Muslim parents believe in the blessings that will be brought to the baby if named as such.

Given name	Transcription	Meaning
أحمد المصطفى	Ahmad al-Mustafa	Ahmad the God-selected
محمد أحمد	Muhammad Ahmad	
محمد خير	Muhammad Khair	Muhammad is blessing
محمد صالح	Muhammad Salih	Muhammad is good
محمد بشير	Muhammad Bashiir	Muhammad is herald
محمد الأمين	Muhammad al-Amiin	Muhammad the honest
محمد الفاتح	Muhammad al-Faatih	Muhammad the conqueror
محمد الخاتم	Muhammad al-Khaatim	Muhammad the last
محمد المجتبي	Muhammad al-Mujtaba	Muhammad the God-selected
محمد عمر	Muhammad Omar	
محمد علي	Muhammad Ali	
محمد طاهر	Muhammad Tahir	Muhammad is pure
محمد ثاني	Muhammad Thani	Muhammad the second

For some resident colonies in Sudan and KSA like the “Folany” groups of Nigeria and Niger, they are known of deeply believing and reverencing the prophet Muhammad since they used to give their babies a single name “Muhammad” for all of them, that is, the first son is named “Muhammad”, the second son will get (Muhammad the 2nd) and so forth, it is not surprising for any one in Sudan or even in Nigeria to hear that somebody is named “Muhammad the 10th” although it is somewhat misleading to the names of royal lineage in Jordan and Morocco.

[Top Page](#)

Special case is (Mohammed the 2nd) “Thani”; in Arabic “Thani” is changed to be “Sani” as spelled by Folany peoples in West African countries, *Sani* is now a popular name in Nigeria like *Sani Apacha*. Folani groups accept Islam and live in Sudan and KSA over decades of years, the pilgrimage convoys (Hajij) from the old African kingdoms Mali and Ghana used to pass across the Sudan lands to *Sawakin* seaport and then across the Red Sea to Mecca.

Arabic personal names whether true or composite are sometimes used without prior knowledge of their meanings, as in the case of my name *Hatim* this is a noun means “ruler/judge” and also an adjective “strict” but I am sure my father did not mean the noun or the adjective, instead he

might meant another adjective adhered to some ancient Arabic individual with the same name i.e. *Hatim al-Tayii* this is (Ism + Nisba); *Hatim* was known of his generosity and other less important attributes like being a poet and brave.

Definition particle, Titles, Ellipsis and Nicknames

Adding the definition article to the personal names

As a general rule, names prefixed with the definition article (al) are possible surnames, but they may refer also to a place name or tribal Nisba. In some cases the definition article may be added to a given female name with another suffix (yaa') as in *Fatimah* and *Zubaidah* which will become *al-Fatimii* and *al-Zubaidii* i.e. the names are changed to Nisbas, this Nisba in turn can be [used as surname](#). Adding the definition article is often used in Arabic Gulf and North African countries. Some people may be confused between the morpheme (ii) in Nisbas like *al-Jabalii* and (awii) as in *al-Jabalawii*, they are identical, adding the part (awii) is just a variant to the standard formula.

An interesting category is resulted when naming places names, that results by adding the feminine suffix (ah) to the Nisba as in *al-Faisaliyah* that is, "The town of Faisal"; this is a place name, it is very much like "Louisville" and "Jacksonville" in the West or "Petersburg" and "Leningrad" in the East. It worth saying that the same style is applicable for [tribal Nisba](#), that is, *al-Faisaliyah* can also means "*The people whose ancestor is Faisal*". The examples below show how adding the definition article can change names into several categories.

Name	Transcription	Category
الفَيْصَل	al-Faisal	Ism
الصَّبَاح	al-Subah	Surname
الدَّوسَرِي	al-Dowsarii	Surname/ Geographic Nisba
الرَّمَلِي	al-Ramlaii	Surname / Tribal Nisba
الرَّمَلَاوِي	al-Ramlawi	Surname / Geographic Nisba
السَّعُودِي	al-Saudii	Surname / Familial Nisba
القَذَافِي	al-Qazzafii	Surname / Tribal Nisba
الْفَاطِمِي	al-Fatimii	Surname / Tribal Nisba
الزُّبَيْدِي	al-Zubaidii	Surname / Tribal Nisba
العَلَوِي	al-Alawii	Surname / Nisba
الْحَوَامِدِيَّة	al-Hawamdiyah	Place Name
الْحُسَيْنِيَّة	al-Huseiniyah	Place Name
الْجَمَالِيَّة	al-Jammaliyah	Place Name
الْعَبَّاسِيَّة	al-Abbasiyah	Place Name

Adding Titles

The Arabic titles are different according to the place they use in, In North Africa the system is based mainly on the age and the religious status of the person while in the Arabic Gulf countries, the system is just a kind of prestige practice, for example *al-Sheikh* and *al-Sheikhah* are given to elders as well as to children specially if they are members of some royal families or have relation to that family or just members of some wealthy family. In North Africa *al-Haj* and *al-Hajjah* are given to people who have done the pilgrimage practice or Hajj service (one of Islam pillar practices), but they are also used with elders above 60 years old.

The table below depicts some titles found in classical Arabic (the Arabic of the Quran and that used among the educated classes). Where a medieval Arabic form differs from the classical Arabic, it is given in parentheses either is appropriate for use. When written as part of the name, the article "*al-*" precedes the title, which itself precedes the given name. Landed titles may have the titles followed by "*al-*" and the place name. Thus, for example, if *Abdullah*, son of *Husein* is known as the king of Jordan, his Arabic name and title in full will be written as *al-Malik Abdullah bin Husein*.

Male Titles of Nobility		Female Titles of Nobility	
King	Malik/Sultan	Queen	Malikah / Sultanah
Prince	Amir	Princess	Amirah
Duke	Mushir (Musaitir)	Duchess	Mushirah (Musaitirah)
Count	Qadi	Countess	Qadiyah
Viscount	Naquib (Naqib)	Viscountess	Naquibah (Naqibah)
Baron	Shaykh (Sheikh)	Baroness	Shaykhah (Sheikhah)
Knight	Faris	Knight	Farisah
Master	Mu'allim (Mawlana)	Mistress	Mu'allimah (Mawlanah)
Lord	Sayyid	Lady	Sayyidah

Arabic equivalents of Western titles of nobility

Referring to the Western titles, one can find some Arabic equivalents especially for those of common use in daily life; the table below lists some.

Title transcription	Title Transcription	Equivalent/Meaning
الشيخ جابر	al-Sheikh	Sheikh X
الشيخة حسينة	al-Sheikhah	Sheikhah X (female)
فضيلة الشيخ/	Fdhiilat al-Sheikh	Reverence Sheikh X
سماحة الشيخ/	Samahat al-Sheikh	Reverend Sheikh X
نيافة/ البابا	Niyafat	Reverend Pop X
حضرة المدير	Hadrat	His Excellency The Manager of X
سعادة السفير	Sa'adat	His Excellency The Ambassador of X
فخامة الرئيس	Fakhamat al-Raiis	His Excellency President of X
دولة/ رئيس الوزراء	Dowlat	His Highness The Prime Minister
جلالة/ الملك فهد	Jalalat	His Majesty Knig X
سمو الشيخ	Sumu al-Sheikh	His Highness Shiekh X
صاحب سمو	Sahib al-Sumu	His Highness X
صاحب سمو الملكي	Sahib al-Sumu al-Malaki	His Royal Highness X
الوالي	al-Wali	The Governor X
ال خليفة هارون الرشيد	al-Khaliifah	The Caliph X
الدكتور	al-Doktor	Dr. X
أستاذ دكتور	Ustaz Doktor	Proff. X
المهندس	al-Muhandis	Engineer X
مولاي حسن	Molay	Master X
سيدي عباس	Sidi	Lord X
الحاج/ علي	al-Haj	Haj X
الحاجة/ زينب	al-Hajjah	Hajjah X (female)
السيد/ حاتم	al-Sayid	Mr. X
السيدة/ زينب	al-Sayidah	Mrs. X
الأستاذ/ عمر	al-Ustaz	Mr. X
الآنسة/ إيمان	al-Aanisah	Miss X
الأخ/ طلال	al-Akh	Brother Xl
الأخت/ أميرة	al-Ukht	Sister X
الرفيق/ حسن	al-Rafiiq	Comrade X
الشاب/ خالد	al-Shab	Singer X

In Sudan, al-Haj and al-Sheikh titles are often used as given names i.e. *Ism* as well as titles before names and that presumably reflects the father's hope of his son being a brilliant religious scholar or so. Another longer title is *Fadheelat al-Sheikh* is used with Muslim religious scholars only, for other religions *Samahat* and *Niyafat* are often used. In Morocco, Tunis and Algeria, they have more specialized two titles, *Sidi* "my lord" and *Shab* "singer"; *Sidi* is used for religious figures and royal members and to some extent with some famous politician, this title is slightly used in Libya and Egypt for religious figures e.g. *Sidi al-Husein*. The second title is *Shab* is an

interesting title dedicated for singers, *Shab* means (*young*), but in Algeria they pronounce it as *Sheb* e.g. *Sheb Khalid* and *Sheb Mami* world famous Algerian *Ray* singers. It worth saying that *al-Sheikh*, *al-Sheikhah* and *Sidi* are mostly vocal and seldom used in formal letters; the slash “/” is likely dropped in newspapers and publication.

[Top Page](#)

Ellipsis in Arabic Personal Names

The short forms of many personal names do not vary very much from the given names, as it is a practice often found in many Arabic countries. Ellipsis is normally done with composite names, it is important to mention that abbreviation for composite names related to God like *Abd-allah* and *abd al-Rahman* can not be abbreviated for the first part (*abd*) elimination is strictly forbidden, because the remained part will inevitably be a name or attribute exclusively belongs to the God.

The early *Abbasid* Caliphs initiated (somewhat sporadically at first) a practice of adopting on their accession to the caliphate a regnal title, also termed a *Laqab*, signifying the claim to supreme authority in the Muslim state. This practice became standard subsequently, right down to the early modern period, with all caliphs of whatever dynasty, and even with pretenders to caliphial authority, however limited the actual sphere of their power. In the form as it ultimately developed (the earliest examples do not always exactly conform to the pattern) the title has a pietistic implication and in its proper form always includes the name of the God. Historians, however, normally abbreviate these titles by the omission of God’s name; hence *al-Mutawakkil ala Allah* “who relies on God”, *al-Mustansir billah* “who seeks victory in God”, *al-Da’i ila Allah* “who summons to God” are commonly referred to as *al-Mutawakkil*, *al-Mustansir*, *al-Da’i*. The *Ayyubid* and *Mamluk* sultans similarly adopted, on their accession to the sultanate, regnal *Laqabs* of which the first element was *al-Malik* “the king” and the second a laudatory epithet, such as *al-Malik al-Salih*. “the good king”, *al-Malik al-Afdal* “the excellent king”, etc. Here too, historians usually abbreviate by omitting the common element and write simply of *al-Salih* , *al-Afdal*, etc. Clients (*mawali*) ordinarily used the same *Nisba* as their patrons. Below, more examples on this:

Given name	Transcription	Short form	Transcription
عبد الله	Abdullah	عبد	Abdu
مجيب الرحمن	Mujiib al-Rahman	مجيب	Mujiib
فتح الرحمن	Fath al-Rahman	فتحي	Fathi
مجد الدين	Majd al-Din	مجدي	Majdi
سيف الدين	Sayf al-Din	سيف	Sayf
قمر الدين	Qamar al-Din	قمر	Qamar
صباح الخير	Sabah al-Khair	صباح	Sabah
قمر الدولة	Qamar al-Dowlah	قمر	Qamar
المعز لدين الله	al-mu`iz li Din allah	المعز	al-mu`iz
الحاكم بأمر الله	al-Haakim bi `amr allah	الحاكم	al-Hakim

المستكفي بالله	al-Mustakfi bi allah	المستكفي	al-Mustakfi
المنتصر بالله	al-Muntasir bi allah	المنتصر	al-Muntasir
المعتصم بالله	al-Mutasim bi allah	المعتصم	al-Mutasim

Gender in Arabic Proper Nouns

The gender indication in Arabic language:

Virtually, there seems to be a strict rules to indicate gender in the Arabic language, there is a well-built definitions found in Arabic grammar books state how and when the feminine suffix (taa') should be added at the end of a noun to switch to female case for a specific noun or adjective; but actually these rules are of no help for identifying personal names because almost less than half of male names end with that (feminine taa') although it is not real feminine suffix as we will see soon; how an lsm can be said to belong to male or female? Consider the following examples:

A		B		C	
Male	Transcription	Female	Transcription	Common	Transcription
خليفة	Khaliifah	عسجد	`asjad	تيسير	Taysiir
بشارة	Bisharah	جلنار	Jullanar	إحسان	Ehsan
علقة	Algamah	وعد	Wa`d	سنا	Sana'
عكرمة	Ekrimah	عهد	'ahd	ربيعة	Rabii'ah
سنادة	Sinadah	نوف	Nof	صباح	Sabah
قتادة	Qatadah	خيزران	Khaizaran	جهاد	Jihad
معاوية	Mu'awiah	دعاء	Duaa'	طرفة	Tarfah

You will notice that the feminine suffixes (taa') or "taa' marbuuTa" appeared in column A is virtual because all names therein are for males. It is actually pronounced (ah); it can only be pronounced as (ta) when the name/noun is followed by another name/noun or adjective. In fact, it is always written with two dots above to make it different so not be mistaken as (haa') "the third person marker"; e.g. (كتابه) is pronounced "kitaabuhu" means (his book), but the same word is pronounced "kitabah" if written as (كتابة) which means (writing); please note that this has nothing with gerund in English, the double-dot here is just to discriminate between the possessive case and the abstract noun; the native speaker knows that names can never be derived from a possessive form of noun but others may likely misread the name without such marker.

All the first six names in column A are ended with feminine suffix (taa') -or more strictly (feminine haa')- but they are exclusive male names. Another feminine marker is ('alif madda) found in the last example in column B. all names in the column B are female names although they seem belong to males, however, how to be able to discriminate between genders is a matter of mother tongue rather than practice. Column C comprises the "unisex" or both male and female names; here no one can tell whether the name is for a male or female unless more data is supplied or

from the context since it is not always possible to tell the gender of a name from the presence of an "a" or "ah" ending.

Feminine given names are normally shorter than men's given names. However, many of the masculine given names can be feminized by the addition of "a" or "ah" to the end (for example, the masculine *Khalid* can be found feminized as *Khalida(h)*). Masculine cognomens ending in "i" may generally be feminized by changing the final "i" to "iyya" or "iyyah". (Cognomens, as such term is used herein, consist primarily of Laqabs and Nisbas.

[Top Page](#)

More on Hamza

An important rule in the Arabic language is (A noun should not begin with [letter]-sukkuun or end in a [letter]-diacritic) that is, the last letter in every noun (name) should not have Damma, fatHa or kasra but it should have sukuun. The rule is for separate or tand-alone nouns only because every noun's ending letter MUST have been diacritized according to the noun's position within the sentence or the syntax of the phrase.

In adjectival case, most of names may have some format (كَرِيمًا), (سَلِيمًا) or (عَالٍ), this is just a type of nuun-sukuun ending those words and the doubled diacritics are just a symbol to stand for both the diacritic on the last letter and that virtual nuun-sukuun.

Example + Transcription		Meaning + Remarks	
كَرِيمًا	kareemun	Generous	Dammatain
سَلِيمًا	saleeman	Intact	FatHatain
عَالٍ	`aalin	High	kasratain

(1) `alif [ا]

In cases where the letter is followed by an 'alif, this letter must have fatHa even there is no way to pronounce it other than the way set by the added fatHa. This type of 'alif is called "elongation 'alif"

Example + Transcription		Meaning + Remarks	
سِهَامٌ	sihaam	Arrows	
مَنْأَلٌ	manaal	Need	

(2) Hamza [ء]

The hamza itself has two types:

(hamza waSl) [همزة وصل] (connective hamza)

(hamza qat') [همزة قطع] (disconnective hamza)

These two new lexemes deal mainly with the phonetics, *hamza waSl* is a light voiced hamza leading the name it is voiced but not written in most cases and if written, it is just like the “alif-fatHa” but not “alif-hamza”. Hamza qat' is a discrete, harsh spelled, uttered clearly hamza found in nouns and verbs as well, hamza qat' is always written mounted over an 'alif. As a rule, all nouns but those listed in column (A) below should have hamza qat' if the hamza was intrinsically beginning the structure of the noun. Column (b) depicts names where hamza qat' is an obligatory starting letter.

A	Meaning	B	Transcription
ابن	Son	أحمد	'aHmad
اسم	Name	أميرة	'ameera
امرؤ	Person (man)	إبراهيم	'ibraheem
امرأة	Woman	إدریس	'idrees
اثنان	Two (masculine)	إمام	'imaam
اثنتان	Two (feminine)	أسماء	'asmaa'
اسنت	Anus	إلهام	'ilham
		إعتماد	'i`timad

Other cases of hamza are:

(3) Hamza on waaw [ءِ ، ءُ]

Hamza over waw is found in our -now famous- da'auud and similar names or verbs like the names (عَبْدُ الرَّؤُوفِ) [`bdur-ra'uuf] and (مُؤْتَمَن) [mu'-taman]. In the case of da'auud, one should say that there are two styles for writing contemporary style and the Ottman style. Please see the table below:

Contemporary Inscription Style		Ottmanic Inscription Style	
داؤود	da'auud	دَاعُود	da'auud
عَبْدُ الرَّؤُوفِ	`bdur-ra'auuf	عَبْدُ الرَّؤُوفِ	`bdur-ra'auuf
مُؤْتَمَن	m'u-taman		
لُؤَي	L'uai		
جَاؤُوا	ja'uu	جَاءُوا	ja'uu

The highlighted example above is a past verb means “they came”

As you see what is meant by Ottman style is the style of writing used in the time of Caliph Othman (third Caliph to prophet moHam-mad), this style is now used mainly in the Holly Qur'aan scripting, more details in my research now being tuned.

(4) Hamza on the line [ء]

Found in many cases, we depicted only the names ending the hamza-on-the-line:

Example + Transcription		Meaning + Remarks	
سَنَاء	sanaa'	Light	Female name
شَقْرَاء	shaq-raa'	Blonde	Female name
عَلِيَاء	'l-yaa'	High	Female name

[Top Page](#)

(5) Hamza on yaa' [ئ، يُ، ي]

Also called hamza over *nabira* (or yaa'). The rule is (if the hamza has kasra, i.e. hamza-kasra, then it must not be written on the line, instead, it should be laid in yaa') as given below:

Example + Transcription		Remarks	
وَأَيْل	wa'il	Personal name	
حَائِل	Ha'il	Place name in KSA	
فَائِز	faa'iz	Personal name	

If the hamza-on-the-line have fatHa or Damma, then it is possible to write as it is described, that is, on-the-line most cases are verbs:

Example + Transcription		Meaning + Remarks	
سَاءَتْ	sa'at	(it) got worse	
جَاءَتْ	ja'at	(she) came	
مَرْءُوس	mar'uus	Employee	

(6) Hamza on 'alif [أ]

Also named (hamza qat'). All nouns beginning with 'alif hamza are said to begin with (hamza qat') except for the seven nouns in column (A) set forth.

The position of the hamza over 'alif is subject to change in one optional case. If the noun should have a diacritic like Damma or fatHa, this diacritic should be mounted over the hamza which is

must be put over the 'alif. In case the diacritic is kasra, it can be under the hamza which is in turn should be over the 'alif. Another way is to put the hamza below the 'alif in this case it is optional to add kasra under the hamza or not. See examples below:

Example + Transcription		Other ways	
أُمَيْمَةَ	'umayma		
أُوَيْسَ	'uways		
أَحْمَدَ	'aHmad		
أَمْجَدَ	'amjad		
إِنْتِصَارَ	'intiSaar	إِنْتِصَارَ	
إِنْصَافَ	'inSaaf	إِنْصَافَ	
N.B. Although shown below the 'alif, the kasra in the last two highlighted names must be exactly under the hamza . My software can not do so.			

[Top Page](#)

(7) 'alif-laam [ال]

Laam is a consonant letter, it should have the sukuun, but as stated earlier no letter-sukuun should have begun a separate noun in the Arabic language so, Arabs added the 'alif which is in fact a Hamza Wasl before the Laam. Because hamza waSl has fatHa by default so, the rule is kept valid for the separate noun begin with an *unsukuuned* letter. This validity justifies why a name like (عَبْدُ الْكَرِيمِ) is pronounced and so transcribed as (`bdulkariim) not (`bdu-alkariim), notice that no 'alif is pronounced at all, that is the right way the name should be transcribed and pronounced. You may want to review subject (2) to justify this but it is simple, the rule of Hamza Wasl is applied here on the 'alif of the noun (الكريم). Consider the following examples:

Example + Transcription			
عَبْدُ الْكَرِيمِ	`bdul kariim		
مُحَمَّدُ الْفَاتِحِ	MuhammadulfaatiH		
عَبْدُ اللَّهِ	`bdullah		

It is a convention of classical Arabic spelling that ibn should be spelt with an alif in all cases except when it immediately follows the Ism: one should therefore write the ibn of *Abu Ali Ibn Sina* with alif, but the ibn in *Mahmud ibn Zayd* without one.

Also, the ‘alif (or hamza wasl) beginning a separate noun is written but not voiced, (those nouns are only seven). In case those nouns are found within the structure of any phrase, the ‘alif (or hamza waSl) should neither be written nor voiced, that of course justify why nouns like (ابن) and (اسم) which belong to the seven nouns listed in column (A) above appear as if been front-letter-cropped. Examples below will clarify this rule:

Example + Transcription		Original form
أَسَامَةَ يِن لَادِن	'usama bil-ladin	أَسَامَةُ ابْن لَادِن
بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ	bismil-lahir-raHmanir-raHeem	بِاسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Note that in the first example how the nuun in (بن) is converted to laam and the two laams are joined together due to diphthong. More over, the kasra under meem in (بسم) is a true diacritic, it is there because of the baa' in front of the noun (بسم) and its natural for the noun because it is now not separated, no more details available about that now.

(8) Sun or Moon letters added to "alif-laam" [ال]

In case the 'alif-laam is followed by a moon letter, the laam must have sukuun as shown below:

Example		Meaning + Remarks	
اليَابَان	al-yaban	Japan	
الْخُرْتُوم	al-khurTuum	Khartoum	
المِصْرِي	al-miSri	(the) Egyptian	

Sun/Moon Letters

When adding the definition article (al) to nouns in general, some vocalization changes may occur, the Laam in (al) is voiced completely different due to diphthong with the following letter and another pronunciation of the word is resulted; those letters known as *Shamsiyah* "Sun Letters" the rest of Arabic letters known as *Qamariyah* "Moon Letters", of course there is nothing to do with astronomy here but, the two words *Shams* "Sun" and *Qamar* "Moon" are just two famous examples to show the difference in pronunciation between the two groups of letters.

For native Arabic speakers, one can spell the letter “Laam” in *al-Qamar* easily but some difficulty is found when spelling it in the word *al-Shams* so, the Laam becomes identical to the following letter i.e. “Shiin” and the whole word become *ash-shams*. Below are the two groups of letters.

Sun Letters	Moon Letters
ت، ث، د، ذ، ر، ز، س، ش، ص، ض، ط، ظ، ن	أ، ب، ج، ح، خ، ع، غ، ف، ق، ك، ل، م، ه، و، ي

More on Nisba

A name ending with with "-iyyun" or "-iyyatun" or "-iyya" is always Nisba; "-iyyun" for masculine as in (Sudaniyyun) "Sudanese"; "-iyyatun" for feminine as in (Sudaniyyatun). Note that these examples are transcribed following the formal way for pronunciation in Arabic i.e. using *Tanwiin* (adding Dammatayn to the last letter) this addition change the sound of the last letter to that of “Nuun” but without actually being written. As we discussed in [Nisba](#) “Sudanii” is lexically correct but symantically should be pronounced as “Sudaniyun” the same is applicable to all singular male names, the other possibilities are as follows:

Example	Buckwalter	Transcription	Meaning	Category
سوداني	[swdAny~N]	sudaniyyun	Sudanese	Singular male
سودانية	[swdAny~pN]	sudaniyyatun	“	Singular female
سودانيون	[swdAny~wn]	sudaniyyuun	“	Plural male
سودانيات	[swdAny~At]	sudaniyyatun	“	Plural female
ياباني	[yAbAny~N]	yabaniyyun	Japanese	Singular male
يابانية	[yabAny~pN]	yabaniyyatun	“	Singular female
يابانيون	[yabAny~wn]	yabaniyyuun	“	Plural male
يابانيات	[yabAny~At]	yabaniyyatun	“	Plural female

Further more, an Ism that in full vocalization ends with *Tanwiin* (terminating ism with two Dammas “Dammatyn”) loses the *tanwiin* when an Ism immediately follows: (*laqitu Mahmudan*) “I met Mahmud” contrasts with “*laqitu Mahmuda bna Zaydin*”.

The Ism *Amr* is spelt with a conventional and unpronounced waw at the end in the nominative and genitive (Amrun and Amrin) in order to distinguish it from *Omar*, with which it would otherwise be graphically identical in unvowelled script.

[Top Page](#)

Pronunciation and Writing Nuances

Historical Background

Nuances exist in any language spoken or written; the Arabic language is not an exception. In fact, the Arabic language is born with its nuances that is, ancient ethnic groups in “al-Sham” (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine) and Arabic peninsula in northern parts or “*Najd*” which currently dominated by KSA and in the southern parts “Hijaz” (currently dominated by Yemen and Oman) would speak in many dialects; many would develop their own way of language usage not only the spoken but also the style of writing. It worth saying that this anarchy -so to speak was involving more than thirty of Arab groups, each is known to have a unique style in both vocal and editorial skills of the Arabic language.

Writing styles were the most to be evolved, and while the West developed its Serif, Sans, Courier and Gothic, Arabs developed some very beautiful writing styles or fonts currently being used like *Farisi*, *Kufi*, *Naskh*, *Thuluth* and *Dewani*.

It is not surprising to know that Arabic letters would have not been “dotted” until the mid of seventh century (650 ac) in the years before this date Arabs would figure out the written word instinctively. The diacritics which are known in Arabic as (*Harakat al-e`rab*) “Syntactical Symbols” were evolved later by the brilliant philologist *Abu al-Aswad*, the notion behind diacritics was to control pronunciation of verses of the Quran, it is critical to miss or add any of them to a word because this may completely alter the meaning which may sometimes result in a fatal consequences.

Pronunciation Nuances

Another track of name studies is the general problem of names when transplanted into another language. The transcription of Arabic names into English or another language may lead to several orthographic renditions. T.E. Lawrence (*Lawrence of Arabia*), who lived among the Arabs for a number of years before and during World War I and who spoke not only standard Arabic but a number of local dialects, probably summed it up more concisely than anyone else in an answer to some queries from his publisher about inconsistent spellings of Arabic names in his manuscript *Revolt in the Desert*. “Arabic names won't go into English, exactly, for their consonants are not the same as ours, and their words, like ours, vary from district to district. There are some “scientific systems” of transliteration, helpful to people who know enough Arabic not to need helping, but a wash-out for the world. I spell my names anyhow, to show what rot the systems are.”

So the problem is, and remains, "how do you spell "Khaddafi" (*Gadhafi*, *Qadafi*, etc., etc., etc.)?" many systems of transliteration were developed, most of them proved to be adequate, if not necessarily consistent with each other. What it comes down to is that there are usually a number of ways to spell an Arabic name in Roman letters; consider [\[dA&wd\]](#), one may find *Da'ud*, *Daud*, *Dawud*, *Daoud*, *Dawood*, *Daood* and *Da'oud*. However, there are some limits to the variability of transliterations of Arabic names. One cannot simply replace one vowel with another: e.g., *Duad* is not an acceptable transliteration of *Daud*. The pronunciation is too different to be a reasonable transliteration. One may borrow a phrase from *Harpy Herald*: Transliteration from Arabic may be "complex, but complexity is not anarchy." Any transliteration used must be pronounced reasonably close to the Arabic original.

As a note of historical interest, Arabic names have often become corrupted when used by Europeans. Examples, many from old periods, include: Averroes, from *ibn Rushd*; Avicenna from *ibn Sina*; Achmed from *Ahmad*; Amurath from *al-Murad*; Saladin from *Salah al-Din*; Nureddin from *Nur al-Din*; Almanzor from *al-Mansur*; Rhases from *Razi*; and Avenzoar from *ibn Zuhr*. The only two "rules" that seem to be generally consistent (at least in books published since a little before World War II) in transliterating Arabic names are:

"*Abu al* + cognomen, whether *Laqab* or *Nisba*" is frequently transliterated as "*Abu'l* + cognomen", in keeping with the actual "slur" in pronunciation; and

The Arabic "the" ("*al*"), when used in a cognomen is always hyphenated to the word following it, as in "*Harun al-Rashid*".

A brief note on the pronunciation of some *Laqabs* and *Nisbas*: the "l" in *al-* is elided and the first letter of the following word is substituted for the following consonants: d (*ad-Duri*), n (*an-Najmi*), r (*ar-Razi*), s (*as-Salim*), sh (*ash-Shanfari*), t (*at-Tayyib*), th (*ath-Thaqafi*), and z (*az-Zubair*). These are, however, generally still written as *al-*; only the pronunciation is changed. Please refer to [Sun letters](#) and Moon letters in the [appendixes](#) for more information.

Now, aside from the above long introductory paragraphs; any Arabic name is pronounced in many ways depending on who spell it and where; according to the geographic area and Arabic sub-ethnic (tribal) group, minimal variation may slightly change the pronunciation of the name but this variation may result in dramatic pronunciation changes if the sub-ethnic groups are far apart. The quotaion below is to show some of the possible differences:

Letter	Arabi	Buckwalter	Change to	Remarks
thaa'	ث	v	taa'	In Sudan, Egypt and Libya
jiim	ج	j	Qaaf, yaa'	Egyptians, always spell it as (qaaf) but as (jiim) in south Egypt and Sudan while Iraqis, Kuwaitis convert it completely to (yaa'), Syria and Jordan have it changed to (چ) which is sometimes called "Saturated jiim", Algerians spell it as (qaaf)
dhal	ذ	*	dal	Sudanese and Egyptians and spell it (daal); Syrians, Iraqis, Mauritians spell it the right way, some people in Sudan and KSA convert it to (Daad)
Daad	ض	D	Zaa'	Iraq, KSA and Gulf countries spell this letter very close to the letter (Zaa')
Zaa'	ظ	Z	Daad	almost all Arabs spell it the right way, Sudanese and Egyptians may have it changed slightly to Daad
qaaf	ق	q	'alif	Egyptians change it to 'lif; some Syrian also do
kaaf	ك	k	ch	Kuwait, KSA and Iraq seem to spell this letter very much like (ch) as in "charge", "chess" and "chalk", other Arabs spell it the right way.

People in Egypt have a mysterious practice; they always pronounce (qaaf) as ('alif) except when talking about their capital *al-Qahira* "Cairo" and some other cases, they pronounce it the right way.

People from Sudanese, Kuwait, Libya, and KSA spell (qaaf) as in "Garden", "Gift" and "Gold". Saudis also spell (qaaf) as (jiim) in so many cases. Sudanese also spell (qaaf) as (kaaf) for some words.

Sudanese people always fall in error when spelling (qaaf) as (ghain) just like the French “R”; Iraqis, Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians spell (qaaf) the right way.

[Top Page](#)

Writing Nuances

Generally speaking, all Arabs seem to use the same writing system, nuances mainly found in borrowed names or coined words like Taxi; again, this is originally affected by the pronunciation so, many writing nuances stem from that situation; for example, Egyptians do spell (qaaf) as (‘alif) so, they will probably transcribe each occurrence of this letter in a way suitable for their spelling; e.g. words like *Mango* and *goal* will be *manjo* and *joal* respectively; because they will inevitably have it spelled at last as the correct *mango* and *goal*; but if they wrote them as *mango* and *goal*, they are definitely going to spell them *man’o* and *oo!*.

Others may do the same thing for no clear reasons, take for example the word *digital* almost all Arabs write it as *dijital* so as to spell it at the end as *digital*; they all do this except for Sudanese, they will read *dijital* exactly the way it written i.e. *dijital*. To transcribe the same word for Sudanese you have to write it in Arabic as *digital* (dal+yaa’+qaf+yaa’+taa’+’lif+laam) i.e. using (qaaf) instead of (jiim); only in this way Sudanese will read it the right way.

It is implicitly agreed-upon that letters may be written in the plain format i.e. no diacritics added unless the meaning is not clear from the context. A simple example is the case when referring to the passive voice, converting a verb from the active voice to passive voice does not require any changes in the word lexical format; only adding Damma to the initial letter. Even if Damma is not added, any native Arab speaker will not go into error reading the passage. Although no valuable changes are required, this practice is of course not correct. The correct way is to use the diacritics whenever needed.

Some writing styles are very complicated, e.g. *Dewani* and *Farsi* font styles, the written text or calligraphy designs may look nothing more than Spaghetti-like mess for any non-Arab reader and it is even difficult for native Arabic to catch the start of the text. Professional calligraphers of Arabic normally add small decoration in a form of tiny scattering guide letters below or above the passage to show what the inscriptions mean.

There is some styles still used exclusively in the Quran in some traditional Islamic schools, these are of unique characteristics; being a Muslim, I should not delve into this without giving much

information about the Quran which is beyond the scope of this research and, frankly, beyond my qualifications in this field.

For a long time the (hamza) was used by itself i.e. not mounted on a bare ('lif) the way which still being used in the Qoran scripts and other Arabic script languages like Urdu and Farisi. Many people do not used to read such inscriptions but calligraphers and lexicographers. It must be said that the common position for the hamza –if one prefers mounting- is on the top of a bare ('lif), other diacritics can be put either above the *Hamza* like *Fatha*, *Sukuun* and *Damma* or beneath the hamza like *kasra*, elimination of the diacritics is a kind of abbreviation that is, if no ambiguity will be present then no diacritics are needed; however, one should always pertain the correct usage of them. Further [details on Hamza](#) are in appendixes.

[Top Page](#)

Buckwalter Transliteration

The [Buckwalter Transliteration](#) is a [strict transliteration](#) of Modern Standard Arabic orthographical symbols using only 7-bit ASCII characters. It is used for representing exact orthographical strings of Arabic in email and other environments where the display of real Arabic script is impractical or impossible. There is a strict one-to-one mapping back and forth from UNICODE to Buckwalter Transliteration, without gain or loss of ambiguity. Arabic text in ASMO 449 and ISO-8859-6 can also be translated into Buckwalter Transliteration (or UNICODE), but the reverse mapping is hindered by the lack of a couple of (rare) characters in the 7-bit and 8-bit encodings.

Letter	Letter's Name	UNICODE	Buckwalter	ASMO 449
ء	hamza-on-the-line	u0621	'	A
آ	madda-on-'alif	u0622		B
أ	hamza-on-'alif	u0623	>	C
ؤ	hamza-on-waaw	u0624	&	D
إ	hamza-under-'alif	u0625	<	E
ئ	hamza-on-yaa'	u0626	}	F
ا	bare 'alif	u0627	A	G
ب	baa'	u0628	b	H
ة	taa' marbuuTa	u0629	p	I
ف	taa'	u062A	t	J
ث	thaa'	u062B	v	K
ج	jiim	u062C	j	L

ح	Haa'	u062D	H	M
خ	khaa'	u062E	x	N
د	daal	u062F	d	O
ذ	dhaal	u0630	*	P
ر	raa'	u0631	r	Q
ز	zaay	u0632	z	R
س	siin	u0633	s	S
ش	shiin	u0634	\$	T
ص	Saad	u0635	S	U
ض	Daad	u0636	D	V
ط	Taa'	u0637	T	W
ظ	Zaa' (DHaa')	u0638	Z	X
ع	Cayn	u0639	E	Y
غ	Ghayn	u063A	G	Z
-	TaTwiil	u0640	_	0x60
ب	faa'	u0641	F	a
ق	Qaaf	u0642	q	b
ك	Kaaf	u0643	k	c
ل	Laam	u0644	l	d
م	Miim	u0645	m	e
ن	Nuun	u0646	n	f
هـ	haa'	u0647	h	g
و	Waaw	u0648	w	h
ى	'alif maqSuura	u0649	Y	i
ي	yaa'	u064A	Y	j
ً	FatHatayn	u064B	f	k
ء	Dammatayn	u064C	N	l
ِ	Kasratayn	u064D	k	m
َ	FatHa	u064E	a	n
ُ	Damma	u064F	U	o
ِ	Kasra	u0650	I	p
ّ	Shaddah	u0651	~	q
°	Sukuun	u0652	o	r
	dagger 'alif	u0670	`	(missing)
	waSla-on-alif	u0671	{	(missing)

[Top Page](#)

Dictionary

[Top Page](#)

Word	Arabic	Meaning
'alam	علم	personal name
Fi'l	فعل	verb
Haj	حج	pilgrimage
Hamza	همزة	glottal stop
lsm	اسم	noun, name
Kunya	كنية	nickname
Laqab	لقب	nickname, epithet
Madhhab	مذهب	creed
Masdar	مصدر	abstract noun
Nasab	نسب	pedigree, lineage
Nisba	نسبة	relation
Shiih	شيعة	Muslim religious sect who deny the first three Caliphs
Sifah	صفة	adjective
Sunnah	سنة	Muslim religious sect
Tanwiin	تنوين	nunation
Tasghiiir	تصغير	diminution

References and Sources

This document is based on the former Proper Nouns edited by UBunka Publishing House as well as the following documents:

Period Arabic names and naming practices; by Da'ud ibn Auda (David B. Appleton) ©2003; <http://www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/names/arabic-naming2.htm>.

Arabic nomenclature; a summary guide for beginners; A. F. L. BEESTON.

Xerox Arabic Morphological Analysis and Generation, [Buckwalter Transliteration](#)

Anatomy of a Surname, Suzanne McVetty; www.last-names.net/Articles/Anatomy.asp

Islamic Proper Names; <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~rs143/Resources/ail.html>

Sample of Arabic-to-Latin Transcription; ©2003 The CJK Dictionary Institute, Inc.

Arabic Name Variants; ©2003 The CJK Dictionary Institute, Inc.

Personal Names in Hebrew and Arabic; Modern trends compared to the past; Judith Rosenhouse; Journal of Semitic Studies XLVII/I Spring 2002; ©2002 The University of Manchester.

Concise Oxford Dictionary, Ninth Edition.

Tokenizing an Arabic Script Language; Siamak Rezaei; siamak@cs.mcgill.ca; School of Computer Science, McGill University.

[Top Page](#)