

Naming in Arabic

by

Samir A. Hawana

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

When Benjamin L. Whorf said that speech is the best show man ever puts on,¹ he could have modified his statement by adding that personal names are the cleverest manifestations of that show. Many of us tend to accept our names as bestowed by our parents and exert little effort, if any, to understand their significance or even their literal meaning. The writer's wife has a rather rhythmical name, Mahā,² and many friends expressed their admiration of its musical tone. When asked about the meaning of her name, Maha will always answer "it means the eyes of the wild cow." It was a surprise to her husband to find out that Mahā, in Arabic, means simply "the wild cow." Such instances of misunderstanding of one's own name lead the writer to assume a widespread lack of awareness on this topic.

As a fully bilingual Arab student in the United States, the writer has encountered many curious questions by American colleagues about the meaning of different personal names. Clearly, the topic is worth exploring in order to add to the body of knowledge about Arabic and the Arabs.

The old Arabic saying "strive to have a part of your name," suggests that in the Arab tradition personal names are projected attributes desired for the offspring when the parents bestow the names on their children. Names are im-

portant. Psychologists can look at a name as a source for exploring the person's family background since names are auspicious. In old China, for example, the child was given a name that connoted a grand meaning or attribute. But the name was kept secret and replaced by another common name until the child was old enough not to be affected by the "evil eye." Sociologists and anthropologists can benefit in studying personal names and their significance within the context of a given culture. In the case of the Arab culture the pious say "if you have a hundred sons, call them all Muhammad." Hence, this name is the most common name in the Islamic world. The name of the Prophet is an indicator of a degree of religiousness in that part of the world, or of the salient effect of religion on that culture, a theme which preoccupies sociology and other kindred disciplines.

Names are labels of differentiation and identification. One always starts, when introducing himself, by stating his name. The family name, where it exists, might give a good indication of locations, trades, and occupations. A name may often be a clue to the nationality, religion, or race of its bearer. If a researcher is interested in Islam and/or Arab culture he can reach important references concerning these topics by studying the ninety-nine divine names of God in Arabic and their usage as personal names.

Before probing into this subject a brief linguistic description of Arabic is in order.³

The Arabic language is a semitic language used by more than one hundred million people in what is known as the Arab World (all of North Africa, most of the Arabian peninsula, and parts of the Middle East). Classical Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, is the religious language of Moslems and is uniform throughout the Arabic speaking world since the Qur'an has maintained only one version. Encyclopaedia Britannica⁴ reports that "the earliest known written Arabic is a royal funerary inscription dating from AD 328." Arabic has six vowels, three long and three short ([a] ; [i] ; [u] ; -- [ā] ; [ī] ; [ū]). As a rule, words begin with a single consonant followed by a vowel, and usually long vowels are followed by a single consonant. An Arabic word is composed of two parts: the root (three consonants) which provides the lexical meaning of the word and the pattern (vowels) which gives its grammatical meaning. Hence the consonants "sh-r-b" combined with [-[a]-[ā]-) gives sharāb "a drink" and with (-[ā]-[i]-) becomes shārib "one who drinks." Arabic uses grammatical markers extensively to denote the subject, object, and tense. Affixes are used for similar purposes as the markers as well as for denoting pronouns, definite articles, and prepositions. Dual form

and gender differentiation are not used for the first person. Gender differentiation is not found in the second person. The cases in which an Arabic noun appears are three: nominative, genitive, and accusative. Feminine can be generated usually from any word by adding an open, long [-ā] at the end written as t (ت), or h (ه). Hence Zaki (a male's name) becomes zakiyā (a female's name).

Colloquial Arabic has many dialects, usually mutually comprehensible. The chief dialect groups are those of Arabia, Egypt, North Africa, and the Fertile Crescent. The increase of literacy rate in the Arab world has helped to make the influence of the classical Arabic more apparent and more tangible.

Arabic and Islam are so much tangled together that it is impossible to deal with one without dealing with the other. As noted above, Arabic is the language of the Qur'an. Except for the heart of Arabia, the rest of the region was introduced to Arabic through Islam. Hence, the synonymity is always taken for granted in the Arab world. Even in the Moslem, non-Arabic speaking regions, Arabic is the religious language. Regardless of the native tongue of the Moslem, he or she is expected to pray and read the Qur'an in Arabic. Needless to say, however, Islam does not render all its followers conversant in Arabic. Nor does it confine the

understanding of Islam to native speakers. Personal names derived from the Qur'an are used by all types of Moslems, whether or not they speak Arabic. Likewise all Moslems place a high importance on personal names, especially those which express the divine attributes of God.

CHAPTER II. WHAT'S IN A NAME?⁵

Before dealing in details with the subject of personal names in Arabic, it is proper to ponder some aspects of the most common theories about naming in general.

Juliet of Capulet, lamenting her lover's name, asked Romeo:

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy; Thou art thyself, though not a Montague. What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part Belonging to a man. O, be some other name! What's in a name?⁶

Shakespeare summed up the issue of names and their relationship to the future or fate of their bearers in the previous quotation.

Perhaps the most controversial interpretation of names has been John S. Mill's. Personal names, Mill contended, are signs, i.e., intentional manifestations of sounds or letters. He insisted that names are meaningless or non-connotative marks. They only help distinguish individuals as a mark of a chalk would distinguish a house. He said:

When we predicate of anything its proper name, when we say, pointing to a man, this is Brown or Smith, or pointing to a city, that is a York, we do not merely by so doing convey to the reader any information about them, except that they are their names.⁷

One need only examine John S. Mill's name per se to discover that his interpretation of names falls short of the

mark. The name John suggests that its bearer is not by any means a Moslem or a Hindu. It does, however, indicate a rather high probability of being a Christian. The surname Mill may shed light on his ancestral occupation or location. Hence, names may indicate several things (religion, occupation, and even race). Some names connote the place of origin. A vivid example would be Muldauer which carries the name of a region now part of the Soviet Union, Moldavia. Furthermore, it shows that persons with this surname have some relation to German speaking countries, as Muldauer in German means "one who is from Moldavia." So is the case with the Arabic surname Al-Miṣri which means literally "the Egyptian."

John S. Mill was not the only logician who concluded that names are meaningless. Frege, Russell, and Strawson also subscribed to this belief.⁸

Renowned linguists, however, have endorsed a different point of view. A. Gardiner argues that personal names are words and not noises. He writes, "A proper name is a word, and being a word partakes of the fundamental two-sidedness of words as possessing both sound and meaning."⁹ H. Sorensen has accepted Gardiner's analogy but questions the existence of meaning in proper names like Paris which obviously once had a meaning currently known to nobody. He also rejects Mill's argument regarding the arbitrariness

of names by observing, for example, that "a child should have its father's surname."¹⁰

The most comprehensive work about European names is Elsdon Smith's book entitled The Story of Our Names.¹¹ Smith tries to give a history of the origin of naming patterns in the West. His scholarship deals vividly with the surnames and how they originated. However, his coverage falls short of including non-Western patterns.

A book similar to Smith's is Our Names,¹² by Lambert and Pei. The latter authors have preoccupied themselves too much with examples and not with the theory. Their unique contribution to the field can be identified in their treatment of the names originating in Western mythology and religion. Extensive references up to 1952 on the topic can be located in Personal Names: A Bibliography.¹³

It seems that there is an overall pattern of objectives in selecting a name.¹⁴ The following is a discussion of those objectives. However, they are by no means exclusive. One is always aware of names that are unique.

Honoring another person by using his name as part of the name for one's child is the most common objective. Usually the name is derived from a given name of a grandparent or more distant ancestor, a parent, uncle or an aunt, or from a given name of a friend. It follows that the name may be derived from a name of a famous person and used for

admiration and honor. Some names were once chosen for their descriptive denotations, like Rufus (red-haired), Calvin (bald), Paul (small), and Ursula (little she-bear). The attributes found in an object (usually favorable) may be used as names. Examples on this type of names are, Leo (lion), Pearl, Ruby, and Daisy. Names that have religious associations are very common in the Western world. Names like John (gracious gift of God), Hope, Grace, David, Elizabeth, and Joseph are very common among Christians and/or Jews. Some names appear in an odd spelling like Libertine (liberty), and Ethyle (Ethel).

Surnames display more genealogical significance than personal names. The etymology of the surname of a given family usually reflects the history and the evolution of that family. The most common type of surnames in the West are the patronymic names ending in son or sen, a Scandinavian pattern that influenced Western Europe and the United States. Examples on this type are numerous, Johnson, Fredrickson, Robertson, Christiansen, Jensen, and Olsen. An old verse says:

By Mac and O,
 You'll always know
 True Irishmen they say;
 for if they lack
 Both O and Mac
 No Irishmen are they.¹⁵

Surnames may indicate the place from which the family

bearing the name came, or where they lived. Place names eventually become surnames, often after the family has moved elsewhere. Hence Morttām to denote the town of Mortham in Cheshire; Smalleys from the town bearing the same name in Derbyshire. It is impossible not to quote the verse pertaining to this topic:

In ford, in ham, in ley, in ton 16
The most of English surnames run.

Surnames may identify occupations held by the family at one time (even currently). Examples on this pattern are Smith, Miller, Weavers, Clark (from clerk), Lorrimer (one who made bits for horses), Baker and Barker (not one who shouted for customers but one who worked with bark which was used in the processes of preparing leather).

At least part of the answer, then, to Juliet's question is that naming practices once examined reveal much about a people. To some degree, understanding of names supports understanding across cultures.

CHAPTER III. RELIGIOUS NAMES

The Old Testament provides a never-ending source of Hebrew and Aramaic names for the languages of the world. Almost every name that ends in -el is of Hebrew origin (the -el suffix is Hebrew for "God" or "of God"). Names such as Michael (he who is like God), Gabriel (God has healed), and Joel (the Lord is God) have maintained a high degree of preference among conservative religious families of both convictions (Christianity and Judaism). The affix el may appear as a prefix in names like Elizabeth (consecrated to God), and Elihu (the Lord is Jehovah) as well as in many other names. The name of Jehovah or Jahweh in Hebrew appears in disguised, subtle form in such names as Zachary or Zachariah (Jehovah has remembered), where z-ch-r (remember) is the root of the verb and the ending -ah denotes Jehovah, also in Uriah (Flame of Jehovah), Matthew (gift of Jehovah), Jeremiah (exalted of Jehovah), Joseph (will increase), Simeon or Simon (granted by God in answer to a prayer), and in Ezra (help).

Joseph and John are among the most common names in use today. The Hebrew form of John is Yōhānān (Jahweh has been gracious) the root being h-n-n. Its popularity is "attested by the list in the calendar of Christian saints of no fewer than one hundred Saint Johns, with John the Baptist and John

the Evangelist heading the list,"¹⁷ and John Neumann being the most recently canonized.

Jesus is not a common name among English speakers, but in the Spanish-speaking world it is much favored as a name. Christianity gives a long list of Christian names starting with Christ. We hear of Christian, Christina (Kirsten as a Scandinavian variant), Christopher, or (Christ bearer). The name Christ itself is not Hebrew, but Greek; the Hebrew form is Messiah and the Arabic Masiḥ. The three forms mean "anointed." Jesus on the other hand is the Hebrew Joshua, and Arabic Yasū⁴, and means "God is deliverance."

Greek Christian names are numerous. Baptiste, a very popular French name, means "he who baptizes," and Anastasia is "pertaining to the Resurrection." "Gifts of the Lord" in Greek range from Theodore and Theodora or Theodosia to Dorothea, Dorothy, and plain Dora.

Latin also contributes in this field. It supplies Dominic (pertaining to the Lord) derived from Dominus which has relatives in the Romance words for "Sunday" (the day of the Lord): Dimanche in French, Domingo in Spanish, Domenica in Italian. Noël, sometimes anglicized into Newell is Natalis (pertaining to the birth of Christ); it also is the French word for Christmas. Benedict is "blessed" and Pius is "devoted."

Spain and Italy have typical Christian feminine names, which coincide with forms of Catholic belief. Concepción in Spanish, Concetta in Italian, remind their bearers of the Immaculate Conception. The Italian Rosario and Rosaria are the rosary, and Annunziata, often incorrectly rendered in English as Nancy, is a reminder of the Annunciation; the Spanish Mercedes is the "mercies of God," Consuelo is "consolation," Dolores is "sorrows" (of the virgin). The Spanish Carmen, feminine, and the Italian Carmine (masculine) and Carmela (feminine), refer to "Our Lady of Mount Carmel."

Protestant countries have similar practices as evident from several English and puritan names still around (Prudence, Faith, Hope, Charity, Piety, even Justice, Silence and True Love). Germanic names that extol God are relatively few, as against the many that extol prowess in warfare or strength and leadership. Still, we can encounter Godfrey (or Gottfried, in its German version, or Geoffrey, Jeffrey in the later French development), which means "God's peace," along with Godwin, "God's friend" and Goddard, "God's strength." The os- of Oscar, Osmond, Oswald, is also a reference to God.

Religious names abound in countries whose faith does not come from the Old or New Testaments. Krishna (Hindu

God), is a common first name among Hindus in India, Hsitata has a reference to Buddha, the religious name of Gautama, founder of the Buddhist faith. Similarly, religious concepts and practices are primary sources for the names of Moslems and Arabs. Once westerns recognize the substantial part which religion has played in their own European naming practices, then they can better appreciate and understand some of the major conventions and complexities of Arab naming, since these too flow from religious principles.

CHAPTER IV. NAMING IN ARABIC

It is safe to generalize and say that the onomastic practice in Modern Arabic does not follow closely that of the Western World. For the sake of simplicity the discussion of this point will be confined to the Arabic personal names. Surnames will be touched upon at the end of this chapter.

Religion plays a significant part in the Arab parent's choice of personal names. Christian Arabs are not likely to choose Muhammad for a name. Moslems would never pick George either. In some instances, one can be reasonably certain that a person is not a member of a specific sect of Islam because of his name. It is most unlikely to find, for example, a person with a name of 'umar to be a Shi'i.¹⁸

Christian Arabs tend to employ Arabic names that are descriptive in nature depending on the orthodoxy of their conviction. Names like Samir (the narrator), Walid (the new born), Nabīl (noble), and As'ad (the happier) are commonplace among Christians living in a Moslem dominated country. In countries like Lebanon where Christians are not a minority, names like George, William, Tony, Antoine, Michael, and René (notice the French influence) are widespread. Female Christian names follow the same pattern as the males. Hence we encounter Georgette, Antoinette, Michaëlle,

Marie, and Christine, also Rose, Maha (the wild cow), Rabab (a musical instrument), and Su^ʿād (happiness). Biblical references in personal names among Christians are apparent in names like Ḥanā (John), Yūsif (Joseph), ʿLyās (Elias), Dawūd (David), Yacqūb (Jacob), ʿBrāhīm (Abraham), īsa (Jesus), and Iṣḥāq (Isaac).

Moslem's personal names may be categorized into two broad divisions: religious and nonreligious names. The latter includes a myriad of names pertaining to objects and animals, descriptive connotations, and abstracts. As noted above, depending on the conservativeness of religion in the Arab countries, personal names that fit those subcategories may be attributed to one group or the other. Akram (more generous) is traditionally an Arabic name for a conservative family male Moslem. As^ʿad (the happier) is common for followers of both religions. Generally speaking, in the category of objects and animals, Moslems of all persuasions use names like Ḥusām (a sword), and Suhayl (little plain), and Nasīm (breeze), Dīb (wolf), Nimir (tiger), and Fahid (leopard). Descriptive names are very broad and difficult to handle in any research since there are no regulations or traditions that govern their formations. They run from Jamīl (beautiful), ʿadil (fair or just), and Ṣadiq (truthful) to Tariq (the knocker), Na^ʿīl (the obtainer), and T^ʿān (the stabber). Modern Arabs are fond of abstrac-

tions in personal names. One can safely assume that in every Arab family there is a name that signifies an idea like Kamāl (perfection), Jamāl (beauty), Ḥasan (goodness), Ḥusayn (little goodness), Iḥsān (charity), and even Ighrā' (seduction). Some Arabic names have their roots in different languages. Persian contributed Surān (happiness), Thurayā (a necklace), Shirin (sweet), and Fayrūz (a rare stone).

Hebrew loaned some of its biblical names like Sara (Sarah), Braḥīm (Abraham), and Ya'qūb (Jacob). Consequently Europeans are sometimes confused when they meet Arabs with Hebrew names.

Religious names are not as complex to categorize as secular ones. These names can be classified into two types: Those pertaining to the attributes and names of God (with some modifications), and those pertaining to the names of the Prophet Muhammad, his disciples, and the known pious. The teaching of the Prophet very greatly influenced the personal nomenclature of the early Moslems, as is evident from the widespread usage of names he liked. Names in the early Islamic era were very auspicious and important to the person's religious status. The Prophet said:

You must not name your slaves Yasār (abundance), Raḥāb (gain), Najīh (prosperous), Aflaḥ (felicitous), because if you ask after one of these your domestic

servants, and he be not present, the negative reply will express that abundance, or gain, or prosperity, or felicity, are not in your dwelling.¹⁹

And the Prophet also said: "Call your children after your Prophet,"²⁰ hence the popularity of the name in the Arab World. Muḥammad (highest praise) appears in many different forms all akin to "praise" like ḥmad, Ḥamdān, Maḥmūd, and Ḥamīd. In some countries, like Egypt, the name is used in a dual form Muḥammadayn (two Muhammads) to express a double blessing. In the same country the name is used to precede any personal name. Thus, if a person is named Sāmī he is listed as Muḥammad Sāmī although he usually goes by his original, i.e., second, name.

The compound given name employing Muḥammad as the first component added to the name of his cousin Ali is very common among both major factions of Islam (Shi'a and Sunna). This type of name was introduced to Arabic through foreign influence mainly Persian.²¹

The pivotal religious name in Islam is Allāh (the name of the Creator of the Universe). The name is derived from ilāh (god) with the addition of the definitive article al. Various theories suggest that the root of the name Allāh comes from Lāh (the secret one).

The most common type of compound names is that which is prefixed with abd- meaning "servant or slave." Islam

discourages its followers to use this prefix before any name except the names of God. Thus there is the well-known Abdullāh (servant of God) equivalent to the German Gottschalk or the Irish Gilchrist or Abdulmasīh (servant of Christ). For the sake of variety the name Abdullāh may be modified by substituting one of God's standard names of which there are ninety-nine known in Islam.²² Thus one man may be Abdulrahmān (servant of the merciful), another Abdulazīz (servant of the praised), or Abdulkarīm (servant of the bountiful).

The attributes of God as expressed in the ninety-nine names are divided into the asmā ul-jalaliyah, or the glorious attributes, and the asmā ul-jamaliyah, or the terrible attributes. Such names as ar-Rahim (the merciful), al-Karīm (the generous), and al-Quddūs (the holy) belong to the former; and al-Qawī (the strong), al-Muntaqim (the avenger), and al-Qādir (the powerful), to the latter.

Linguistically the ninety-nine names may be roughly divided into three types: adjectives, nouns, and phrases. The divine names that are considered adjectives connote superlative or exaggerated attributes. The mechanism by which such adjectives are formed in Arabic is fairly complex, though it can be classified into five major categories. It is important to remember that the root of most verbs in Arabic is a three-consonant structure that is

susceptible to any change through employing the proper affixes. Hence the root f-ʿ-l (read faʿal) means merely "to act". By substituting the needed consonants in the root f-ʿ-l one can accomplish the generation of profuse new words. An example of this mechanism follows:

abstract root f-ʿ-l (to act)
 generated root q-t-l (to kill)

In generating the exaggerated or "superlative" adjectives in the names of God, Arabic has used five rules of derivation. The reader should note the vowel patterns in these derivations:

- a) from faʿīl as in al-ʿazīz (the mighty), and al-Karīm (the generous),
- b) from faʿūl (as in al-ṣabūr (the patient), and al-Ghafūr (the forgiver),
- c) from faʿāl as in al-Qaḥḥār (the dominant), and al-Jabbār (the repairer),
- d) from faʿlān as in Raḥmān (the merciful).
- e) from faʿil as in az-Zaḥir (the evident), and al-Baṭīn (the hidden).

In these derived names one can observe the derivational specification of the concept of action conveyed by the tri-consonantal root. There appears a sense of verb process

in the previous examples that distinguishes them from those which suggest the agent of the action. Such names are evident in al-Muṣṭi (the giver), and al-Mani (the withholder). Names may include abstract nouns to suggest the epitomy of the specific attribute. Hence one encounters as-Salām (the peace), al-Ḍal (the just), and al-Haqq (the truth).

Although names of God like Mālikl-Mulk (the ruler of the kingdom) and Zūl-Jalāliwal-Ikrām (the Lord of majesty and liberality), are not used as personal names with the addition of abd- for stylist reasons, yet one component of the phrase is used. Thus we have Abdujalāl (the servant of majesty) and Abdulmālik (the servant of the ruler).

Followers of a major sect of Islam, "Shī'a", use abd- before names that are considered divine in their belief but not attributes of God. Those semi-divine names belong to the twelve Immams (saints)²³ who are all considered descendents of Imam Ali Bin Abiṭalib (the cousin of the Prophet). Hence we hear names like AbdulḤasan (the servant of Ḥasan), AbdulḤusayn (the servant of Ḥusayn), and AbdulRiḍā (the servant of Riḍa).

Before we leave off the discussion of personal names a brief notation on Arab female names is in order. In the Moslem tradition women are named in honor of the daughters

and wives of the Prophet or his disciples, the most common names being Khadija (the Prophet's first wife), ‘aishā (the Prophet's last wife), Zaynab (the Prophet's daughter), and Faṭimā (the Prophet's daughter). Linguistically feminine names can be formed by adding [-ā] written as t or h. So names like (m) Samīr is (f) Samirā, (m) Jamīl is (f) Jamīlā, and (m) Latīf is (f) Latifā. Hence it is a rule of thumb in Arabic to identify the feminine names by their long-voweled endings. However there are names like Riyāḍ, Bahjat, Ṣahāh, Iḥsān, and ‘usmat that are common for both sexes.

Another feature of Arab naming is the use of the Kunya, a type of metonymy which produces nicknames and epithets. In old Arabia, and to some extent in modern conservative Arab countries, the Kunya is used with a boy's name as a sort of lucky augury, wishing him to have a son, and a person is named in anticipation of the son with abu- (father of) and a given name, hence AbuMaḥammad (the father of Muhammad). But the Arab grammarians generally count the Kunya with "name," "title," and as one of the forms of the proper noun, and that is always used in the possessive case, being consistently formed by prefixes abu (father of), ‘umm- (mother of), ‘ibn- (son of) and bint- (daughter of). The use of Kunya seems to have originated in the tribal, habitual rallying-cry of the Arab warrior in the battlefield. One

can readily picture the daring indefatigable warrior advancing into the field shouting: "I'm so and so, the son of so and so!" and meeting with a reply of the same nature from the other side. So the warrior was not only able to terrify his enemies by mentioning to them names that spelled awe and terror like ʿabs (frowning), Taʿān (stabber), and alʿās (the difficult), but also to identify himself correctly to persons belonging to different tribes, who could attest his account of himself. The Kunya is thus bound up with genealogy. Generally speaking, it was employed as a means of elevation and exaltation of a person's name. Also it was regarded as a good substitute for the name, as Abū Lahab had substituted a regular name for Abdul-ʿuzzā.²⁴ So much importance was given to it that not unfrequently people were known by their Kunyas far better than by their names. Hence famous persons in the history of Islam like Abuhurayra (one of the Prophet's disciples), Ibnsinā (the father of medicine in old Arabia), and Abutamman (a major poet), are all known by their Kunyas rather than their own names. The old Arabic proverb: "The kunyas are warners and the names are reducers" well mirrors the Arab's belief in the importance of using patronyms, matronyms, and technonyms as against the use of their real proper names. The reason is not difficult to understand for the whole thing

depends upon the Arabs' keen sense of honor and their enormous pride not only in their own personal achievements but also in the greatness and glory that they have inherited from their ancestors. The Arabic (and especially the pre-Islamic) poetry is full of long, drawn out expressions of this pride. In fact, quite a library full of poetry has been collected and designated as the Fayhriyyāt (self-laudatory poems).

When honorific titles came into use in Arabic, they exhibited a tendency to displace the original name; thus the title Saladin took the place of the warrior's original name, Yūsuf-BinAyyūb (as a matter of fact, Saladin is pronounced Salaḥiddīn (the good of the religion) but western pronunciation distorted its form). -Dīn (religion) has been used as a suffix with many names with its first component signifying its glory and welfare. Names like ʿizzdīn (the strength of religion), Fakhriddīn (the pride of religion), and Sayfuddīn (the sword of religion) are quite common in modern Arabic names.

By way of contrast, surnames in Arabic, at least in the form in which we know them, are latecomers. The pattern of surnames in Arabic follows that of the Western World except in the employment of patronymics. While in the West the name Johnson is commonly used as a surname, its Arabic

equivalent is very rare in pattern and meaning.²⁵

Arabs use names connoting occupation in their family names. Such names range from alḤaddād (the blacksmith), allahḥām (the butcher), alḤalwani (the confectioner), and alkhayāt (the tailor) to alKhūrī (the bishop), Ashaykh (the chief). Names ending in -jī (Turkish for "owner of") refer to specific occupations. Such names with the Turkish ending reveal a general chronological fact about the family bearing the name since the Turks occupied the Arab world between 1516-1914 A.D.

References to natural objects and animals are very common in modern Arabic surnames. So we encounter Tayarā (airplane), Baḥr (sea), ḏhahab (gold), and Dik (rooster), Sabi (lion), Ḥūt (whale). Family names may reflect names of regions, cities, and even villages in the Arab world. The intercultural phenomena among the Arabs are apparent in the fact that most countries have within their borders families with names of cities and regions in other Arab countries. Hence we have Maṣrī (the Egyptian), Bayrūtī (from Beirut), Nabulsī (akin to Nablus in the West bank), Ṣidawī (from Sidon in Lebanon), Qudsī (from Jerusalem), Fayūmī (from al-Fayūm in Egypt), and Hijāzī (from Hġāz in Saudi Arabia). Some surnames may go further as to suggest ethnicity like Kurdī (akin to the Kurds), Turk, and Hindi.

Descriptive or attributive names are probably the most common. Indeed surnames like asSayid (the master), alMansūr (the victorious), and assaghir (the small) constitute the major bulk of surnames in Arabic. Eccentric surnames can be listed under this category. Such names as fār (mouse, Sūs (chick), Nisf (one-half), or Talatwā (three ounces) do occur in Arabic although very rarely.

Turkish and Persian have influenced some of the surnames in Arabic. The Turks have left behind in the Arab countries families bearing names like Aghā and Yakan. Persian participated in forming the names Maktabi (akin to Lyceum in Persian), Khān (master), Bahbahāni (from Bahbahān, a city in Iran), and Bahnām (Persian for December).

The influence of the different cultures that came in contact with the Arabs was not detrimental in shaping a new pattern of their naming. As a matter of fact the contrary is true. With the spread of Islam to non-Arabic speaking regions Arabic names have had a great impact on those non-Arab cultures in the matter of choosing personal names. The increasing practice of American Blacks selecting Arabic names is probably the most striking example of the productivity of those names in the West.

FOOTNOTES

¹John B. Carroll, ed., Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf (New York: Wiley Series, 1956), p. 249.

²Transliteration of Arabic alphabet will follow henceforth the system used by Library of Congress, 1976 as presented in Appendix A, with two variations: a dot (.) will replace the omitted value in the first letter of the chart of the Library of Congress, and mark (<) will appear instead of (·) for the seventeenth letter in the same chart.

³For further reading on Arabic grammar, see W. Wright, A Grammar of the Arabic Language (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967); John A. Haywood, Arabic Lexicography: Its History, and its Place in the General History of Lexicography, 2nd ed. (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1965), A. F. L. Beeston, The Arabic Language Today (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1970).

⁴Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. I, 1977, p. 469.

⁵William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene I, 43; see G. B. Harrison, Shakespeare The Complete Works (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1952).

⁶Ibid., ll. 36-43.

⁷John S. Mill, A System of Logic, 7th ed. (London: Longmans, Greene Co., 1868), p. 37.

⁸For references on the arguments of the logicians see Farhang Zabeeh, What is in a Name? (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), pp. 9-38.

⁹Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 44.

¹¹Elsdon Smith, The Story of Our Names (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950).

¹²Eloise Lambert and Mario Pei, Our Names: Where They Come from and What They Mean (New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Co., Inc., 1960).

¹³Eldson Smith, Personal Names: A Bibliography (New York: The New York Public Library, 1952).

¹⁴For more comprehensive discussion on the general pattern of naming see Eldson Smith, The Story of Our Names, Chapter I (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950).

¹⁵James Pennethorne Hughes, How You Got Your Name (London: Phoenix House, 1959), p. 20.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁷Eloise Lambert and Mario Pei, p. 43.

¹⁸One of the two major sects of Islam. The origin of the word "Shi'a" is "shaya'a" meaning "to side with." Followers of Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib were called "Shi'a" since they sided with him in his attempt to defend his right to inherit the top position in the Islamic world, i.e., "Khilafa."

¹⁹Thomas Patrick Hughes, A Dictionary of Islam (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1895), p. 429.

²⁰Ibid., p. 429.

²¹T. E. Colebrooke, "On the proper names of Mohammedans," The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 13 (1881), 253.

²²See Appendix B for a list of the ninety-nine divine names of Allah.

²³See the genealogical chart of the twelve Imams in Appendix C.

²⁴ Abdul-ʿuzzā was one of the numerous uncles of Prophet Muhammad. He was his archenemy, too. He was nicknamed Abū-Lahab, confirmed as his own true name in the Qur'an.

²⁵ Unlike European practices, Arabs rarely employ patronymics as family names. Patronymics in Arabic are commonly nicknames.

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APPENDIX

ARABIC

Letters of the Alphabet

Initial	Medial	Final	Alone	Value	Initial	Medial	Final	Alone	Value
ا	ا	ا	ا	omit ¹	ض	ض	ض	ض	d
ب	ب	ب	ب	b	ط	ط	ط	ط	t
ت	ت	ت	ت	t	ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ	z
ث	ث	ث	ث	th	ع	ع	ع	ع	·
ج	ج	ج	ج	j	غ	غ	غ	غ	gh
ح	ح	ح	ح	h	ف	ف	ف	ف	f ²
خ	خ	خ	خ	kh	ق	ق	ق	ق	q ²
د	د	د	د	d	ك	ك	ك	ك	k
ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ	dh	ل	ل	ل	ل	l
ر	ر	ر	ر	r	م	م	م	م	m
ز	ز	ز	ز	z	ن	ن	ن	ن	n
س	س	س	س	s	ه	ه	ه	ه	h ²
ش	ش	ش	ش	sh	و	و	و	و	w
ص	ص	ص	ص	s	ي	ي	ي	ي	y

Vowels and Diphthongs

ا	a	آ	ā	ي	i
و	u	أ	á	أو	aw
ي	i	و	ū	أى	ay

Letters Representing Non-Arabic Consonants⁴

ك	} g	چ	ch	ف	} r
ك		ج	zh	ف	
پ	p	ز	z	ف	

¹ For the use of ا (alif) to support a (hamzah), see rule 2. For the romanization of a by the consonantal sign, see rule 8(a). For other orthographic uses of ا see rules 3-5.

² The Maghribi variations ب and ف are romanized f and q, respectively.

³ i in a word in the construct state is romanized t. See rule 7(b).

⁴ See rule 5.

⁵ See rule 6(a).

⁶ This list is not exhaustive. It should be noted that a letter in this group may have more than one phonetic value, depending on the country or area where it is used, and that the romanization will vary accordingly.

Figure 1. Transliteration of Arabic alphabet (Source: Library of Congress, 1976, p. 15);

1.	Ar-Rahmān	The Merciful
2.	Ar-Rahīm	The Compassionate
3.	Al-Malik	The King
4.	Al-Quddūs	The Holy
5.	As-Salām	The Peace
6.	Al-Mu'min	The Faithful
7.	Al-Muhaiman	The Protector
8.	Al-'Aziz	The Mighty
9.	Al-Jabbar	The Repairer
10.	Al-Mutakabbir	The Great
11.	Alb-Khālig	The Creator
12.	Al-Barī	The Maker
13.	Al-Musawwir	The Fashioner
14.	Al-Ghaffār	The Forgiver
15.	Al-Qahhār	The Dominant
16.	Al-Wahhāb	The Bestower
17.	Ar-Razzaq	The Provider
18.	Al-Fattāh	The Opener
19.	Al-'Alīm	The Knower
20.	Al-Qābiz	The Restrainer
21.	Al-Basit	The Spreader
22.	Al-Khafiz	The Abaser
23.	Ar-Rafi	The Exalter
24.	Al-Muizz	The Honourer
25.	Al-Muzil	The Destroyer
26.	As-Sami	The Hearer
27.	Al-Basir	The Seer
28.	Al-Hakim	The Ruler
29.	Al-'Adl	The Just
30.	Al-Latif	The Subtle
31.	Al-Khabir	The Aware
32.	Al-Halim	The Clement
33.	Al-'Azim	The Grand
34.	Al-Ghafur	The Forgiving
35.	Ash-Shakur	The Grateful
36.	Al-'Alī	The Exalted
37.	Al-Kabir	The Great
38.	Al-Hafiz	The Guardian
39.	Al-Muqīt	The Strengthened
40.	Al-Hasib	The Reckoner
41.	Al-Jalīl	The Majestic
42.	Al-Karīm	The Generous
43.	Ar-Raqīb	The Watcher

Figure 2. Divine attributes of Allah (Source: Dictionary of Islam, 1895, pp. 141-142)

44.	Al-Mujib	The Approver
45.	Al-Wasi	The Comprehensive
46.	Al-Hakim	The Wise
47.	Al-Wadud	The Loving
48.	Al-Majid	The Glorious
49.	Al Bais	The Raiser
50.	Ash-Shahid	The Witness
51.	Al-Haqq	The Truth
52.	Al-Wakil	The Advocate
53.	Al-Qawi	The Strong
54.	Al-Matin	The Firm
55.	Al-Wali	The Patron
56.	Al-Hamid	The Laudable
57.	Al-Muhsi	The Counter
58.	Al-Mubdi	The Beginner
59.	Al-Mu'id	The Restorer
60.	Al-Muhyi	The Quickener
61.	Al-Mumit	The Killer
62.	Al-Haiy	The Living
63.	Al-Qaiyum	The Subsisting
64.	Al-Wajid	The Finder
65.	Al-Majid	The Glorious
66.	Al-Wahid	The One
67.	Ab-Samad	The Eternal
68.	Al-Qadir	The Powerful
69.	Al-Muqtadir	The Prevailing
70.	Al-Muqaddim	The Bringing forward
71.	Al-Mu'akklar	The Deferrer
72.	Al-Awwal	The First
73.	Al-Akhir	The Last
74.	Az-Zahir	The Evident
75.	Al-Batin	The Hidden
76.	Al-Wali	The Governor
77.	Al-Muta'ali	The Exalted
78.	Al-Barr	The Righeous
79.	At-Tauwab	The Acceptor of Repentance
80.	Al-Muntaqim	The Avenger
81.	Al-'Afuw	The Pardoner
82.	Ar-Ra'uf	The Kind
83.	Maliku 'l-Mulk	The Ruler of the Kingdom
84.	Zu'l-Jalali wa'l Ikram	The Lord of Majesty and Liberality
85.	Al-Muqsit	The Equitable
86.	Al-Jami'	The Collector
87.	Al-Ghani	The Independent
88.	Al-Mughni	The Enriched
89.	Al-Mu'ti	The Giver

Figure 2 (Continued)

90.	Al-Mānī'	The Withholder
91.	Az-Zārr	The Distresser
92.	An-Nāfi'	The Profiter
93.	An-Nur	The Light
94.	Al-Hādī	The Guide
95.	Al-Badī'	The Incomparable
96.	Al-Baqī	The Enduring
97.	Al-Wārith	The Inheritor
98.	Ar-Rashīd	The Director
99.	As-Sabūr	The Patient

Figure 2 (Continued)

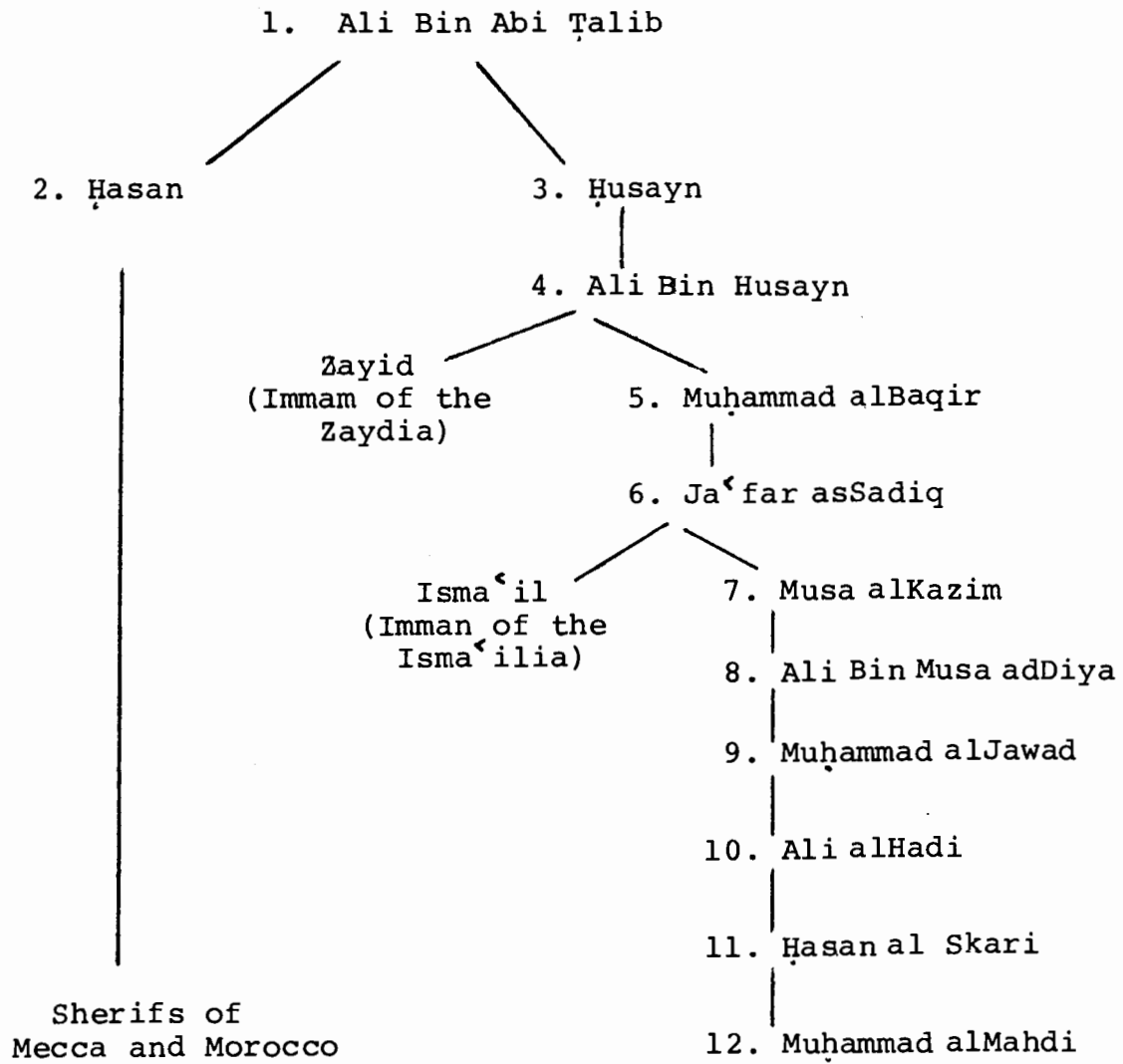


Figure 3. Genealogical chart of the twelve Imams