The Arabic writing system

March 17, 2023

1. The Alphabet

Name	Trans.	Isolated	Final	Medial	Initial
alif	*ā*	ا	ـا	ـا	ا
bāʾ	*b*	ب	ـب	ـبـ	بـ
tāʾ	*t*	ت	ـت	ـتـ	تـ
thāʾ	*th*	ث	ـث	ـثـ	ثـ
jīm	*j*	ج	ـج	ـجـ	جـ
ḥāʾ	*ḥ*	ح	ـح	ـحـ	حـ
xāʾ	*x*	خ	ـخ	ـخـ	خـ
dāl	*d*	د	ـد	ـد	د
ḏāl	*ḏ*	ذ	ـذ	ـذ	ذ
rāʾ	*r*	ر	ـر	ـر	ر
zāy	*z*	ز	ـز	ـز	ز
sīn	*s*	س	ـس	ـسـ	سـ
šīn	*š*	ش	ـش	ـشـ	شـ
ṣād	*ṣ*	ص	ـص	ـصـ	صـ
ḍād	*ḍ*	ض	ـض	ـضـ	ضـ
ṭāʾ	*ṭ*	ط	ـط	ـطـ	طـ
ẓāʾ	*ẓ*	ظ	ـظ	ـظـ	ظـ
ʿayn	*ʿ*	ع	ـع	ـعـ	عـ
ġayn	*ġ*	غ	ـغ	ـغـ	غـ
fāʾ	*f*	ف	ـف	ـفـ	فـ
qāf	*q*	ق	ـق	ـقـ	قـ
kāf	*k*	ك	ـك	ـكـ	كـ
lām	*l*	ل	ـل	ـلـ	لـ
mīm	*m*	م	ـم	ـمـ	مـ
nūn	*n*	ن	ـن	ـنـ	نـ
hāʾ	*h*	ه	ـه	ـهـ	هـ
wāw	*w/ū*	و	ـو	ـو	و
yāʾ	*y/ī*	ي	ـي	ـيـ	يـ

Gray background marks letters that do not connect forward. A following letter takes the initial or isolated form.

The baseline is marked with a red line on descending letter forms.

ص, ض, ط and ظ are the so called emphatic letters and affect the quality of nearby vowels.

Common ligatures

لا → لـا *لا	*salām* سلام
لم → لـم	*al-muslim* المسلم
في → فـي	*fī* في
يحـ → يـحـ	*yaḥyā* يحيا
تجـ → تـجـ	*tijāra* تجارة
محـ → مـحـ	*maḥall* محل
مـمـ → مـمـ	*mumill* ممل
الله → الله	*allāh* الله

* Non-optional

The letters و and ي represent either a consonant or a long vowel and are transcribed accordingly.

2. Other Letters

Name	Trans.	Isolated	Final	Medial	Initial
hamza	ʾ	أ	أ	أ	أ
		إ			إ
		ؤ	ؤ	ؤ	ؤ
		ئ	ئ	ئ	ئ
		ء	ء	ء	ء
madda	ʾā	آ	آ	آ	آ
tāʾ marbūṭa	a/at	ة	ة		
alif maqṣūra	ā	ى	ى		

Hamza is written with different "chairs" depending on surrounding vowels and its position in the word.

Hamza in the form of ء does not connect to surrounding letters.

The letters ة and ى only occur in word-final position. In words with possessive pronouns they transform to ت and ل respectively.

3. Vowels

Name	Short	Long	Nunation
fatḥa	a َ	ā َا	an ً / ًا
ḍamma	u ُ	ū ُو	un ٌ
kasra	i ِ	ī ِي	in ٍ
alif xanjariyya	ā ٰ		

The ل in ًا is silent.

Alif xanjariyya is only used in the words هٰذا, لٰكِن, الله, ذٰلِك and هٰذِهِ. Usually not printed even in voweled text.

4. Miscellaneous

sukūn	ْ	Marks the absence of a vowel after a consonant. Not transcribed (دَرْس dars).
šadda	ّ	Marks doubling of a consonant. Vowel markers are written above or below šadda rather than above or below the letter (ً ُ ٍ). Transcribed as double consonant (مُدَرِّس mudarris).

Sukūn and šadda are only printed in voweled text.