

LESSON 1

CONSONANTS. ج JĪM, س SĪN, ل LĀM

AND م MĪM. THE VOWEL SIGN FATĤAH

Arabic is written from right to left. The alphabet consists of twenty-nine letters. The script is a cursive one, in which most of the letters are written in slightly different forms according to whether they stand alone or are joined to a following or preceding letter. The basic part of the letter remains unchanged.

There are no capital letters in Arabic.

In our first lesson we shall learn four letters.

ج (jīm). It is pronounced like English *j* in *joy* and *judge*.

س (sīn). It is pronounced like English *s* in *six* and *sea*, but with a slight difference. In Arabic the 'hiss' is stronger and clearer. It is produced with the tip of the tongue at the upper teeth.

ل (lām). It is pronounced more or less as English *l*.

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م (mīm). It is pronounced exactly like English *m*.

These letters are linked together by ligatures or connecting strokes, as in English handwriting. In conjunction with a following letter they lose their tails and retain the basic part of the letter. In the following examples the basic part of the letter is indicated in black and the tail by dots:

Jīm ج, sīn س, lām ل and mīm م. Mīm has almost no tail.

There is a variant of م which we shall take up in a subsequent lesson.

At the end of a word these letters retain their tails.

Observe the following combinations. All examples are from right to left:

js	جس	چس	س	ج
jl	جل	چل	ل	ج
jm	جم	چم	م	ج
sj	سج	سچ	ج	س

Note how the basic part of س is joined to the following ج by a ligature: س ج .

There is not much difference between the ligatures joining various letters in Arabic. Once you have mastered the basic form of a letter a ligature should not be difficult to recognize. Note the following combinations.

sl	سل	ل	س
sm	سم	م	س
lj	لج	ج	ل

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ls	لس	س	ل
lm	لم	م	ل
mj	مج	ج	م
ms	مس	س	م
mm	مم	م	م
jj	جج	ج	ج
ll	لل	ل	ل
ss	سس	س	س

THE VOWEL SIGN *FATHAH*

Now that we have done four consonant sounds we shall introduce a vowel sound. In Arabic, vowel signs are written above or below the consonant they follow. The first vowel is *fathah*. It is the sound of English *nun* and *but*. It ranges between the first and the last *a* sound of *cathedral*. It should never be pronounced as *a* in *man* (too long). The *fathah* sign is expressed by a small diagonal stroke above a consonant, e.g. جَ .

We shall now try some meaningful combinations.

1. jamala	جَمَلًا	لَ	مَ	جَ
2. jalasa	جَلَسَ	سَ	لَ	جَ
3. sajala	سَجَلًا	لَ	جَ	سَ
4. lamasa	لَمَسَ	سَ	مَ	لَ

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Since each lesson in this book is an exercise in learning the Arabic script in a meaningful way it is essential to bear in mind that in Arabic most verbs are derived from roots made of three consonants called 'radicals'. The *fathah* sign on all the three consonants of a verb signifies the third person masculine singular of the perfect form of a simple verb.

ILLUSTRATIVE TEXT

جَلَسَ (jalasa) He sat.

سَجَلَ *(sajala) He dropped

جَمَلَ *(jamala) He summed up.

لَمَسَ (lamasa) He touched.

The two words *سَجَلَ* and *جَمَلَ* do not occur in the Qur'an as verbs. Consequently they are marked by an asterisk. In all subsequent lessons words not used in the Qur'an will be marked by an asterisk. There being no infinitive in Arabic a root idea and its derivatives are arranged in the dictionary under the heading of the third person masculine singular of a perfect verb, thus:

جَلَسَ to sit. Actually, it means 'He sat'.

In the following lessons we shall follow the dictionary convention and the meanings will be given in the infinitive.

لَمَسَ

LAMASA