

This glossary of words and phrases used in the Silk & Iron series emphasizes medieval usage, not modern usage, and is not a replacement for an Arabic Dictionary!

Words

Abu : father of

Abuya : my father

Ajal : Indeed (yes)

Al : the

Alfils : elephants

Allah : god, (pre-Islam) the ultimate sovereign of the gods, (see *ilah*)

Am : a good year containing prosperity, ease or good events

Amānah

: a trust, as in a sacred trust

Anshid : Sing or chant

Ayn : Eye

Baba : father

Badani : physique

Bahr al-Qulzum

: The Red Sea

Banu : descendants / descendants of

Bayt : house

Bint : daughter

Bintī : my daughter

Caravanserai

: Romanized version of the Persian word composed of *kārvān* (caravan) and *sarāy* (building with enclosed courts), an inn that provided lodging for travelers, merchants, and caravans throughout North Africa and the Middle East.

Also known as *khan*, *fundūq* and *wikala* in Arabic.

Dhahab

: Gold

- Daff : The daff is a traditional frame drum used in Middle Eastern music, particularly in Persian, Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish cultures.
- Djinn : supernatural spirit made from smokeless fire. See the Author's commentary for more detail.
- Dhirā : cubit, roughly 2' 6". The long cubit (60 cm) was used to measure longer distances. See the Guide to Ancient Arabian Weights and Measures for more detail.
- Dirham
: Introduced by the Byzantine Empire, the drachma (*dirham* in Arabic) was a silver coin weighing approximately 3 grams. Because of the coin's usefulness, many Arabic states minted their own *dirham* and by the 7th century it was also used as a common unit of measure for silver, exchangeable to gold via 10 *dirham* equaling 7 *mithqal*.
- Fakk : to unravel, to untie, to unfasten, to loosen, to break apart. As in "to unravel a knot"
- Farzin : Counselor or Vizier
- Fas : utility axe, not to be confused with a war axe (*tabar*), or the carpenter's axe (*qadūm*).
- Fitra : innate nature, or the state of creation
- Furūsiyya
: Chivalry, as in the expression of a knight's honor
- Ghassāl / Ghassālah
: Washer of the Dead (male and female versions since males washed only males and females only females)
- Ghurfa
: upper floor
- Habibah
: beloved
- Haiba : (male) commanding presence that inspires respect
- Hawl : circle or cycle, referring to the cycle of the seasons, the passing of a year. In the Hejaz a year was the lunar cycle of 354 to 355 days which differed from the Persian solar cycle of 365 to 366 years
- Hajah : pleading
- Hayba : (female) a beauty that inspires both awe and a touch of fear
- Hejaz : colloquial term for al-Hijaz, the ancient Arabic region between the Red Sea and the Sarawat Mountains containing the cities of Tabuk, Medina, Mecca and Ta'if,

Himāyah

: a sacred pledge of protection that elevates a vow into a moral duty to defend to the death.
See the Author's Commentary.

Himl : camel load

Idhn : permission, authorization

Ilāh : diety, Allah is derived from *al-ilāh*, literally meaning “the God”

Ilahāh : goddess

‘I Rab : a way of speaking, specifically, the declension system of nominal, adjectival, or verbal suffixes of Classical Arabic to mark grammatical case. These suffixes are written in fully vocalized Arabic texts, notably the Qur’ān or texts written for children or Arabic learners, and they are articulated when a text is formally read aloud, but they do not survive in any modern spoken dialect of Arabic.

Isba‘ : finger width, approx. 2.25 cm. See the Guide to Ancient Arabian Weights and Measures for more detail.

‘Ird : honor

Jabāl : Mountain

Jāhili : the era in Arabian history pre-dating the rise of Islam

Jāhiliyya

: The era of ignorance

Jinni : mountain spirit, see the Author's Commentary for more detail.

Kaduh : toil, chores

Kafa’ah

: Compatibility. See the Author's Commentary for more detail.

Khalas : it is finished

Khayma

: bridal tent

Khubz : pita

Kilims : tapestry woven rugs

Labwah

: lioness

Magran

: cave or vagina

Mahlaj : Anvil

Mahr : dowry

Majlis : sitting room

Māma : mama, mommy

Mann : a unit of weight, approx. 1 kg, see the Guide to Ancient Arabic Weights & Measures

Marḥalah

: the distance a caravan can travel in a day. See the Guide to Ancient Arabic Weights & Measures

Marq al-lahm

: traditional meat broth made with lamb bones

Mashrabiya

: latticed window

Masnad : formal negotiation rug

Mawlātī

: My lady / My mistress

Mighfar : chainmail veil used to protect the face from cuts

Mithqāl

: a unit of weight that is approximately 4.25 grams, commonly used for weighing precious metals such as gold and commodities such as saffron. After the introduction of the gold dinar coin of Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan in the 7th century, which had a weight of almost 1 mithqāl, the term also became synonymous with the dinar.

Mizan : scales used to measure the weight of goods

Mudd : a unit of volume, a double handful (approx. 1L in ancient times, 0.75 L in modern use). See the Guide to Ancient Arabic Weights & Measures

Muru'ah

: manly virtue, masculinity

Musa'ara

: wrestling – see Author's Commentary for more detail.

Muwafaqa

: voluntary agreement, approval, or concurrence with a proposal, action, or decision. Along with *rida* (satisfaction), it is the closest word to "consent" in Arabic.

Najd : the high plateau east of the Sarawat Mountains, currently central Saudi Arabia.

Nas'a : Feast of the Firstlings

Oud : an ancient guitar.

: a fragrant resin. Oud is not a uniquely Arabian word; it is a resin derived from the heartwood of the Aquilaria tree. This resin, known as agarwood, is used in perfumes and incense for its distinctive aroma and is still highly valued in several cultures for its unique scent.

Qamat : the height of the average man, also spelled Qamah. See the Guide to Ancient Arabic Weights & Measures

Qadar : destiny

Qata : curtain

Rida : satisfaction with a situation, it can also mean consent in some contexts

Rukhh : Rook in chess

Rami al-warak

: hip-toss in wrestling

Sa' : a unit of measurement used for volume, roughly equal to a bushel (4 L). See the Guide to Ancient Arabic Weights & Measures

Sabt : Sabbath, the last day of the week

Sakina : the path to spiritual peace

Samtī : dignified presence

Sanah` : a bad year containing hardship, drought or famine

Sayyidatī

: My lady

Shah : King, a word borrowed from the Persians since Arabs living north of present day Yemen had no kings.

Shatranj

: an ancient form of chess

Shaykh : Sheikh / Shiek / Leader

Shibr : a unit of measurement used for distance, approximately equal to a hand span with fingers extended. See the Guide to Ancient Arabic Weights & Measures.

Shukran

: thank you

Souq : market or bazaar

Sujud : to become humble (pre-Islamic) by placing your forehead on the ground or on the foot of your Master. See the Author's Commentary.

Tabban

: a harsh curse word employed by warriors, meaning damn it or blast it, directed at things or situations.

Tihamah

: the plains west of the Sarawat Mountains next to the Red Sea

Tīrsi : my shield

Tuḥan : Ancient word for a person who behaves as a little lion (pre-Islamic meaning). See the Author's Commentary

Ukaz : poetic proclamation, also the name of a famous poetry competition near Mecca

Umm : mother

Ummī : my mother

Wadi : a dry riverbed

Wālida : she who gives birth

Wālidatī

: My Mother (formal settings)

Yummā / yumḡāh

: mommy, mama (pre-Islamic era usage)

Zubr : colloquial term for rod or penis

Expressions

A-fahimt

: Is that understood?

Alā al-ra'si wa-al-'ayn

: Upon my head and my eye.

Al-dhahab al-mawlūd min al-jibāl

: The gold born of the mountains

Al-'uyun al-niliya

: The Indigo Eyes

Al-Musta'an

: (colloquial expression) Lord help me

Amruki mutā'

: Your command is obeyed

Anshid lī

: Sing to me [your poetry]

Anti ni'matu 'aynī

: You are the blessing of my eye.

Anti qurratu 'aynī

: You are the coolness of my eye

Arju min fadliki

: I hope for your favor and bounty

A-sam'an wa-ta'ah

: Do you hear and obey?

Banu Tayy

: descendants of an ancient Arabic tribe originally based in what is now Yemen but migrated to northern Arabia in the late 2nd century. They largely lived among the north Arabian mountain ranges of Aja and Salma north of Medina. In the 7th century, the Tayyid clans of Jabal Tayy lived closest to Medina and Mecca, maintaining close contact with them.

Bayt al-sha'ar

: House of hair

Bayt al-Tijara

: House of trade

Bayna-na 'ahd

: Is there a covenant between us?

Bi-idhni

: By the leave of. In the 7th-century, this phrase was a common way of positioning the role of the messenger as the instrument of the sender. For example, in the Qu'ran (2:97), it is used to affirm the angel Gabriel's role in conveying the will of God to his Prophet (pbuh). A tacit reminder that opposing the messenger is to oppose the sender, regardless of who the messenger is.

Dahabat adraaj al-riyah

: It went with the paths of the wind / my plan is ruined.

Dhāt al-Nīl

: She of the Indigo

Dhi'āb al-ʿār

: Wolves of Shame

Ghafalat 'an bali

: It slipped my mind

Fikratun dhakiyyah

: an intelligent idea

Hadhihi fikratun badi'ah

: This is such an innovative / great idea

Hāla al-ḥawl

: The year has passed

Hal 'aqalt

: Do you truly grasp what I am saying?

Illa liqaa

: until we meet again

Jazāka Allāhu khayran ‘alā du‘ā’ik

: May God reward you with goodness for your blessing

Kayfa ghab 'anni hatha

: How did this escape me?

Kilāb al-Rimāl

: Dogs of the Sand

Labbayk

: I am here, responding to you

Laqad qulta al-ṣawāb

: you have spoken the truth

Lillāhi darruk

: To God belongs your milk / That is a great idea / You are a great person

Ma hadha al-hamaq

: What is this foolishness?

Qudiya al-Amr

: It is decided. More accurately, the decision is sealed.

Teslam

: May your hands be safe, a way of warmly thanking a friend for a favor

Umm al-Bayt

: mother of the house

Umm al-Hadīd

: Mother of Iron

Ummī al-Hanū

: My tender mother

Umm al-Qawm

: O Mother of the People (head woman)

Ya Himāyati

: O My Sanctuary

Ya Tīrsi

: O My Shield

Ya Waylah

: O my Woe

Ya taj ra'si

: O Crown of my head

Yā Ummāh

: O Mother

Yā Ummī al-Habībah

: O my Beloved Mother