**Sheikh**

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*For other uses, see* [*Sheikh (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheikh_(disambiguation))*.*

*Not to be confused with* [*Sikh*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikh)*.*

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| * [Ulema](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulema) * [Faqīh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faq%C4%ABh) * [Grand Imam of Al-Azhar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Imam_of_Al-Azhar) * [Grand Mufti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Mufti) * [Hafiz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hafiz_(Quran)) * [Hujja](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hujja) * [Hakim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hakim_(title)) * [Imam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imam) * [Imam (Shia Islam)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imam_(Shia_Islam)) * [Marja'](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marja%27) * [Mawlānā](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawl%C4%81n%C4%81) * [Mawlawi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawlawi_(Islamic_title)) * [Mufassir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mufassir) * [Mufti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mufti) * [Muhaddith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhaddith) * [Mujaddid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mujaddid) * [Mujtahid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mujtahid) * [Mullah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mullah) * [Qadi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qadi) * **Sheikh** * [Shaykh al-Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaykh_al-Islam) * [Ustad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ustad) |

Sheikh (pronounced pron.: [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ˈʃiːk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English) [*SHEEK*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Pronunciation_respelling_key) or [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ˈʃeɪk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English) [*SHAYK*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Pronunciation_respelling_key); [Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language): شيخ‎ *šayḫ*, mostly pronounced [[ʃeːx]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:IPA_for_Arabic), [plural](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plural) شيوخ *šuyūḫ*)—also spelled Sheik or Shaikh or Shekh, or transliterated as Shaykh—is an [honorific](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honorific) in the [Arabic language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language) that literally means "elder" and carries the meaning "leader and/or governor". It is commonly used to designate the front man of a [tribe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribe) who got this title after his father, or an [Islamic scholar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulama) who got this title after graduating from the basic Islamic school. Sheikha is the female equivalent of the term. A sheikh who is wise is called *ḥakīm* adjective (wise) حكيم‎, *ḥākim* noun (governor) حاكم‎, *yaḥkum* verb (govern) يحكم‎; and can govern. The scholar sheikh here can govern but cannot lead directly because the leader is the [imam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imam) which is based upon the [Qur'an](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qur%27an) and authentic [Sunnah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunnah); on the other hand the family sheikh can always lead but cannot govern unless he is wise. Although the title generally refers to a male, a very small number of female sheikhs have also existed.

It also refers generally to a man over forty years of age. While even a new [Muslim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim) can be called a sheikh if he is diligent in seeking the knowledge of [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam) based upon the [Qur'an](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qur%27an) and authentic [Sunnah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunnah), he can be referred to as such by those he teaches. Usually, a person is known as a sheikh when he has completed his undergraduate university studies in [Islamic studies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_studies) and is trained in giving lectures. The word *sheikh* under this meaning is a synonym of *Alim*, plural *Ulama* (a learned person in Islam, a scholar), [Mawlawi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawlawi_(Islamic_title)), [Mawlānā](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawl%C4%81n%C4%81), [Muhaddith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_of_hadith#Muhaddith), [Faqīh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faq%C4%ABh), [Qadi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qadi), [Mufti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mufti), [Hadhrat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadrat) or [Hafiz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hafiz_(Qur%27an)).

**Etymology and meaning**



The classical image of a 'sheikh': Sheikh [Sattam de Haddadin](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sattam_de_Haddadin&action=edit&redlink=1) of [Palmyra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palmyra), by [Russian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia) painter [Alexandr Evgenievich Yacovleff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandre_Jacovleff).

The word in Arabic stems from a [triliteral root](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semitic_root) connected with age and aging: ش-ي-خ, *shīn-yā'-khā'*. The term literally means a man of old age, and it is used in that sense of all men in [Qur'anic Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Arabic). Later it came to be a title meaning leader, [elder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elder_(administrative_title)), or [noble](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobility), especially in the [Arabian Peninsula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabian_Peninsula), where *shaikh* became a traditional title of a [Bedouin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bedouin) tribal leader in recent centuries. Due to the cultural impact of [Arab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_people) civilization, and especially through the spread of Islam, the word has gained currency as a religious term or general honorific in many other parts of the world as well, notably in [Muslim cultures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_culture) in [Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa) and [Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia).

While the title can be used religiously by Muslims to designate a learned person, as an Arabic word it is essentially independent of religion. It is notably used by [Druze](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Druze) for their [religious men](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Druze#.CA.BBUqq.C4.81l_and_Juhh.C4.81l), but also by [Arab Christians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Christians_and_Arabic-speaking_Christians) for elder men of stature. Its usage and meaning is similar to the [Latin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin) [*senex*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wise_old_man) meaning "old [man]", from which the Latin (and English) "senator" is derived. Accordingly, the Arabic term for most legislative bodies termed [Senate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senate) (e.g. the [United States Senate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Senate)) is *majlis al-shuyūkh*, literally meaning "Council of Senators."

**Regional usage**

The title is sometimes more informally used with regard to people who have a certain financial or political influence, but especially in relation to [royalty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_family) and other nobility.

The term is also often used by Muslims to address learned men of various [Islamic sciences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_in_medieval_Islam), such as faqihs, muftis, and muhaddiths, and more generally to convey respect for religious authorities.

**Arabian Peninsula**

In the Arabian Peninsula, the title is used for men of stature, whether they are managers in high posts, wealthy business owners, or local rulers. For example, it was the term used in the West to refer to the [leaders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarch) of [Kuwait](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuwait)'s ruling [al-Sabah dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Al-Sabah), even though the monarchic style was actually [*Hakim*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hakim_(title)) (Arabic 'ruler') until June 19, 1961, when Kuwait joined the [Arab League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_League), and the title [Emir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emir) was adopted. The same applied to [Bahrain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahrain) and [Qatar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qatar). The term is used by almost every male member of all [the Gulf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_Gulf) royal houses with the exception of [Saudi Arabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabia) and [Oman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oman).

**Maghreb**

During the [Almohad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almohad) dynasty, the Caliph was also counseled by a body of Shaykhs, representing all the different tribes under their rules, including [Berbers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berbers), [Arabs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabs), [Bedouins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bedouins) and [Andalusians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andalusians), they were also responsible for mobilizing their kinsmen in the event of war.

**Horn of Africa**

Main articles: [Somali aristocratic and court titles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somali_aristocratic_and_court_titles) and [Ethiopian aristocratic and court titles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_aristocratic_and_court_titles)

In the Muslim parts of the [Horn of Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horn_of_Africa), Sheikh is often used as a noble title. In [Somali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somali_people) society, it is reserved as an honorific for senior Muslim leaders and clerics (*wadaad*), and is often abbreviated to "Sh". Famous local Sheikhs include [Abdirahman bin Isma'il al-Jabarti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdirahman_bin_Isma%27il_al-Jabarti), an early Muslim leader in northern [Somalia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somalia); [Abadir Umar Ar-Rida](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abadir_Umar_Ar-Rida), the patron saint of [Harar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harar); [Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd_al-Rahman_al-Jabarti), Sheikh of the [riwaq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riwaq_(arcade)) in [Cairo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo) who recorded the [Napoleonic invasion of Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_campaign_in_Egypt_and_Syria); [Abd Al-Rahman bin Ahmad al-Zayla'i](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd_Al-Rahman_bin_Ahmad_al-Zayla%27i), scholar who played a crucial role in the spread of the [Qadiriyyah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qadiriyyah) movement in Somalia and East Africa; [Shaykh Sufi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaykh_Sufi), 19th century scholar, poet, reformist and astrologist; [Abdallah al-Qutbi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdallah_al-Qutbi), polemicist, theologian and philosopher best known for his five-part *Al-Majmu'at al-mubaraka* ("The Blessed Collection"); and [Muhammad Al-Sumaalee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Al-Sumaalee), teacher in the [Masjid al-Haram](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masjid_al-Haram) in [Mecca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mecca) who influenced many of the prominent Islamic scholars of today.

**Lebanon**

In [Lebanon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanon), the title and its equivalent female form (*shaykha*) are commonly used when addressing members of the traditional noble [Christian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian) [feudal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudal) families such as, in chronological order of the [Maronite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maronite) families who first had this title bestowed upon them: [El-Hachem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El-Hachem) ([Hashemite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hashemite)) of Akoura who are initially known as "souyyad" the plural form of [Sayyid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayyid) (since 1523, ruled the current [Jbeil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jbeil) casa and the north till the Sir El Donnieh region), [El-Khazen](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=El-Khazen&action=edit&redlink=1) (since 1545, ruled the [Kiserwan](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kiserwan&action=edit&redlink=1) area) and [El Douaihy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douaihy) of [Zgharta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zgharta). The term sheikh is known to have been bestowed upon the families who battled with the Emir [Fakhr al-Din](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fakhr_al-Din)in the historical battle of [Anjar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anjar). Note that the term is not used for the seven traditional [Beiruti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beirut) families, but primarily for the above-mentioned three families. The other families that have this term (such as El-Dahdah, Gemayel, El-Khoury, El-Daher (Akkar), Tarabay and Harb (Tannourine).....) did not rule any territory in previous ages. Instead, they were high-ranking employees or makhatir or secretaries (kouttab) (such as Al-Hobeich (since 1567) of [Ghazir](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ghazir&action=edit&redlink=1)) in the [Ottoman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Empire), or political 'allies' of the rulers at that time, which provided them a certain financial status and extensive land ownership.

Sheikhs were also considered as the political representatives and allies of the Prince, they recruited soldiers in times of war and commanded sections of the Prince army; their prestigious titles allowed them also to own large pieces of lands in the areas they represented. However, it was notable that ordinary people in the Emirate did have the right to land ownership and therefore economical autonomy, while many worked in the large lands of the Sheikhs.

**South Asia**

Main article: [Sheikh (caste)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheikh_(caste))

In [Bangladesh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh), [Pakistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan), [Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan), [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India) and other parts of [South Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Asia), the title Sheikh signifies Arab descent and comes under high [class](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_class) of society. The Muslims of the [Middle East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_East) and [Central Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Asia) have historically, traveled to South Asia as [Sufis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sufism) during the [Islamic Sultanates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_rulers_in_India) and [Mughal Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mughal_Empire) and settled permanently and assumed Shaikh status. In India, the majority are the local [brahmins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahmins), [rajput](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajput) or [gujjar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gujjar) communities who used the title of Sheikh after conversion to [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam). In Delhi it was used by the [Persian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_people) Magi descendants who migrate from Persia because of Safavid persecution in 16th century.

**For women**

A daughter or wife of a sheikh is sometimes called *shaykhah* (Arabic: شيخة‎). Currently, the term *shaykhah* is commonly used for females of rich families, especially ruling families, in Arab countries. A shaykhah is also the female version of a sheikh.

**Surname**

In Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, "Sheikh" is a common surname among Muslims, and generally indicates Arab ancestry.

**See also**

* [Kashmiri Shaikh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmiri_Shaikh)
* [Khawaja Shaikh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khawaja_Shaikh)
* [Punjabi Shaikh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjabi_Shaikh)
* [Qallu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qallu)
* [Qanungoh Shaikh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qanungoh_Shaikh)
* [Quraishi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quraishi)
* [Shaikhs in South Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaikhs_in_South_Asia)
* [Sindhi Shaikh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sindhi_Shaikh)

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