TRANSCRIPTION RULES

for

Arabic

Required in essays, papers and theses at

The Section for Middle Eastern Studies
Department of Asian, Middle Eastern
and Turkish Studies
Stockholm University

prepared by

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Transcribing Arabic texts
Some principles and strategies

The main and essential question when deciding on transcription is:

*Why do I need a transcription?*

The answer decides the rest.

1. The purpose of transcription:

To present the reader (knowledgeable in Arabic or not) with an appropriate reading of the text

NB! Any “reading” of a text is also a “commentary”

Ultimately, the transcription is a presentation of YOUR reading and understanding of a text

Therefore, in a thesis or essay you present a transcription in order to clarify:

• **THAT** you have understood the text
• and more essentially **HOW** you have understood

E.g. ضرب الولد
     َذَرَبَعَ الْوَلَادُ
     َذَرَبَا الْوَلَادَا
     ُذُرِبَةَ الْوَلَادُ

*The overarching principles both for the purpose and the actual transcription should be, the transcription is:*

  a. Necessary
  b. Relevant
  c. Adequate
  d. Consistent

No more no less!
### 2. Transcription Table

#### The consonants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ء</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ب</td>
<td>... ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>ت</td>
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<td>ل</td>
<td>... ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>م</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The vowels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ـَـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ـَـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>ـِـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>ـِـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
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<td>ـُـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>ـُـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ـِـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The diphthongs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>يَـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>وَـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The tanwin:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ـًـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ـاًـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ـِـ</td>
<td>... ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Required transcription rules

You are required to use the rules for transcription as outlined in the present document.

Nevertheless, be aware of and learn the other systems of transcription

E.g. among others:
• Encyclopaedia of Islam:
https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2

• Library Congress:
http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/roman.html

4. Phonemic transcription

Phonemic representation or phonemic interpretation (if the vowels in the Arabic word are NOT explicitly presented) of the Arabic text.

e.g. كتب kataba, kutub, kattaba, etc.; كتب kútub, kutiba, etc.

NB: Unless it is of specific interest, phonetic transcription is to be avoided for Fuṣḥā.

5. Dialect different from Fuṣḥā

While transcribing a certain spoken variant of Arabic, a dialect, it is important to reproduce characteristics that are specific to this dialect.

e.g. Syrian Arabic: lubnān ‘Lebanon’ vs Lebanese Arabic: lbnēn;
Lebanese Arabic: jamal ‘camel’ vs Egyptian Arabic: gamal

NB: In many cases, transcription of a spoken variant requires a phonetic transcription. A broad phonetic transcription is to be preferred to a narrow one, this means that the strict minimum of necessary detail is to be preferred.
6. Fonts:

For best compatibility between programs and operating systems, use modern UNICODE- fonts; *Baskerville* is a good choice.

7. Main rules

- Hamzat al-waṣl ٰ is transcribed as a hamza only when it is pronounced
  e.g. ِبِن ‘son’;
  ُكتِب ‘write’ (imperative);
  yet ِنْجَاكِن ِبِن ِنْجَاكِن ‘a man, son of a man’;
  َقَتِلَت ِلَكِ أَكْتِب ُقَتَلَت ِلَكِ أَكْتِب ‘I said to you write’ (imperative)

- In spoken Arabic ә (sometimes other values) is inserted where appropriate to break consonantal clusters that are not allowed;
  e.g. ُمَدْرَسَة ُصُلْوَة ‘school’; ُكِتَب ُنَجَاكِن ُكِتَب ‘the pupil’s book’

- In Fuṣṣāl, the definite article ِلْا is either consistently transcribed as *al*; or
  regularly transcribed as (a)r-, (a)r-, (a)t-, etc. assimilated to sun consonants;
  the vowels ә or i are written only when appropriate

  e.g. without assimilation of *the definite article* to *sun consonants*:
  ِبِتْ ‘the house’;
  ِتْل ‘the snow’

  e.g. with assimilation of *the definite article* to *sun consonants*:
  ُشْمَس ‘the sun’;
  ُقَم ‘the moon’
  ُقَرْأَت ُكِتَب ‘I read the book’
  ُقَرْأَت ُتْل ‘she saw the snow’

- In spoken Arabic, the definite article ِلْا is always transcribed as ِ, ُ, ُ, ُ, etc.
  assimilated to sun consonants
  e.g. ِرْجَل ِتْل ‘the man’;
  ‘اُتْتَنْلِإ ‘on the table’;
  ُلْبَر ‘the cold’
• In Fushā words that in the Arabic script are connected to the following word, e.g. prepositions بـ bi-; لـ li-; etc. conjunctions وـ wa-; فـ fa- etc. are transcribed connected to the following word separated by a hyphen; e.g. بيده bi-yadihi ‘in his hand’;
لرجل li-rajulun ‘to a man’;
قال wa-qāla ‘and he said’;
فقال fa-qāla ‘then he said’; etc.

• Feminine marker ة is transcribed as -a; yet as -at when the case ending is added or in the construct state
  e.g. مدرسة madrasa ‘school’
  مدرسة كبيرة madrasatun kabīratun ‘a large school’
  مدرسة التلميذ madrasat al-tīlmīd ‘the school of the pupil’

• The default case is the nominative case
  e.g. الإخوان المسلمون al-ʾīḥwān al-muslimūn ‘The Muslim Brothers’

• Long /ā/ is transcribed as -ā irrespective how it is written in the Arabic script
  e.g. الله ʾallāh ‘God’;
  نال dālika ‘that’;
  على ʿalā ‘on’;
  إفريقيا ʾifrīqyā ‘Africa’

• The nisba ending is -īyy; the pausal form of the masculine singular is -ī
  e.g. مصري misrī ‘Egyptian’ or misrīyyun;
  مصرية misrīyya or misrīyyatun
Arabic TRANSCRIPTION

• Double (or long) consonants are written twice
e.g. كَذَّبُ ‘liar’

• Final double consonants are written as a single consonant
e.g. تَمُّ ‘important’

8. Presentation

• While you are required to use the transcription rules as outlined in the present
study, you will have to make choices. Always use one system per
variant/ language consistently. Make your choices and do not mix
systems for the same variant/ language in the same essay, paper or thesis.

• Always explain explicitly and clearly the transcription system you are using and
why you have chosen this specific one.

• Present the whole table of signs to help the reader

• Transcribed text should as a rule be in italics; excepting proper names when
presented as such. Proper names and Arabic terms with conventional
spellings in a different language should be written when possible with the
conventional spelling in the language used. It could be desirable that
proper names and Arabic terms be presented in the Arabic script and
transcription the first time they appear in a text, even when there is an
accepted conventional spelling.
e.g. Baghdad (بغداد)
Hadith (حديث ‘collection of sayings of the prophet’)

• Longer passages in Fuṣḥā are not transcribed. They are quoted in the Arabic
script exactly as they occur in the sources and only translated, they are
separated into an indented paragraph.

• In-line quotes, that is shorter quotes that are not set apart in a paragraph, but
quoted in the running text, are transcribed and translated, but not quoted
with the Arabic script.

• All quotes from spoken variants must be transcribed, irrespective if they are
longer passages, and thus separated into a paragraph, or quoted in-line.
9. Some examples

Words

_Fuṣḥā_:  
Word(s) in Arabic script, transcribe, translate, comment;  
e.g. َـَكتب َـَ‘book’, something written.  
كتب الرجل َـَ ‘the man’s book’, the book which belongs to the man.

_Lebanese Arabic_:  
Transcribe, translate, comment;  
e.g. لَـَكتَِ ‘book’, something written.  
كتَِ الـَـِلََِْ ‘the man’s book’, the book which belongs to the man.

Longer Passages

_Fuṣḥā_:  
Text in Arabic script, transcribe, translate, comment;  
الفاتحة َـَ ‘In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.  
Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,  
The Beneficent, the Merciful.  
Master of the Day of Judgment,  
Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help.  
Show us the straight path,

َـَسَِمِمَ َـَللَـَّهََ الرَـَحْمَـَنََ الرَـَحِيمَ َـَالَـَحْمَـَدََ للَـَّهََ رَبَّ َـَ全世界ََ َـَالَـَرَْحَـَمَـَنََ الرَـَحِيمَ َـَمَـَلِكََ يَوْمَ الَـَذِينَ َـَإِيََّاكََ نَـَعِبَدَُ وَإِيََّاكََ نَـَسْتَـَعِينَ َـَأَهْـَرُونَا الصَـَرَـَاطََ السَّـَتِّيِّمَ َـَصَـَرَـَاطََ الَذِينََ أَنْـَعِمَتَْ عَلَيْهِمَْ غَيْرَ ِضَـَعُوبٍ عَلَيْهِمَْ وَلَا ِالْـَصَـَلَّيْنَ

َـَبِسْمِ َـَاللَـَّهِ َـَالرَـَحْمَـَنِ َـَالرَـَحِيمِ َـَالَـَحْمَـَدِ َـَللَـَّهِ َـَرَبِّ َـَ全世界ِ َـَالَـَرَْحَـَمَـَنِ َـَالرَـَحِيمِ َـَمَـَلِكِ ِيَوْمِ َـَذِينَ َـَإِيََّاكَِ نَـَعِبَدَُ وَإِيََّاكَِ نَـَسْتَـَعِينَ َـَأَهْـَرُونَا الصَـَرَـَاطَِ السَّـَتِّيِّمَ َـَصَـَرَـَاطَِ الَذِينََ أَنْـَعِمَتَْ عَلَيْهِمَْ غَيْرَ ِضَـَعُوبٍ عَلَيْهِمَْ وَلَا ِالْـَصَـَلَّيْنَ
The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.’ [Pickthall]

الأنظمة السياسية في العالم العربي
نجد في العالم العربي حتى اليوم دولًا ذات أنظمة سياسية مختلفة كالجمهورية والملك والسلطات والمشيخة وقد قامت هذه الدول على أساس التقسيمات السياسية التي حصلت بعد انهيار الإمبراطورية العثمانية والنظام الاستعماري في إفريقيا والشرق الأوسط

‘The political systems in the Arab world
We find in the Arab world, up to the present, countries that have different political systems, such as republics, kingdoms, sultanates and shaykhdoms. These countries are based on the political divisions that occurred after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the colonial regime in Africa and the Middle East.’ [my translation]

Lebanese Arabic:
Transcribe, translate, comment;

bayt šabēb mašhūra b-lī-knēyes uw-fiyya ḥamsa knēyes ‘a-ʾāsm ʾs-sayde, ʿū-ḥṣūsan saydet ʾl-ġēbe mašhūra b-lī-ʾjēyeb uw-fiyya ndūrētā kūrit. b-iḥabrūna l-ʾādmaʾsno kūl biyyē‘ kēn yēje ‘a-d-ṭayʿā kēn yandor šī mān ʾalle maʿā.

Bayt Shabeel is famous for its churches. It has five churches dedicated to Our Lady. Our Lady of the Forest is especially known for its miracles and it contains many offerings. The elders tell us that each merchant who used to come to the village would offer something from that which he had with him. [my translation]

In-Line Quotes

Fuṣḥā:
Text in transcription, translate, comment;

The spoken variants of Arabic differ from Fuṣḥā in several ways. One example is the way they express possession. In Fuṣḥā one would say kitābu al-rajuli ‘the man’s
book’, where as Lebanese Arabic could express the same phrase as follows *ktēbo l-ar-rajjēl* ‘the man’s book’, the book which belongs to the man.

**Example Transcriptions**

(of the texts cited above)

**Fuṣḥā:**

Text in Arabic script, transcribe, translate, comment;

NB: definite article assimilated to sun consonants, with case endings and final pause.

b-īsmi l-lāhi r-raḥmānī r-raḥīm

‘al-ḥamdu li-l-lāhi rabbi l-ʿālamīn

‘ar-raḥmānī r-raḥīm

mālikī yawmī d-dīn

‘iyyāka naʿbudu wa-‘iyyāka nastaʿīn

‘iḥdinā ẓ-sirāṭa l-mustaqīm

širāṭa l-laḍīna ‘anʿamta ʿalayhim ġayri l-maḏūbī ʿalayhim wa-lā d-ḍāllin

NB: definite article not assimilated to sun consonants, no case endings.

al-ʿanḏima al-siyāsiyya fi al-ʿālam al-ʿarabī