

TRANSCRIPTION RULES

for

Arabic

Required in essays, papers and theses at

The Section for Middle Eastern Studies

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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
ḍaraba al-waladu
ḍaraba al-walada
ḍuriba al-waladu

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 !

Arabic TRANSCRIPTION

2. Transcription Table

The consonants:

ء	...	...	ʾ
ب	...	...	b
ت	...	...	t
ث	...	...	t̤
ج	...	...	j
...	...	...	g
ح	...	...	ħ
خ	...	...	ħ̤
د	...	...	d
ذ	...	...	d̤
ر	...	...	r
ز	...	...	z
س	...	...	s
ش	...	...	ʃ
ص	...	...	s̤
ط	...	...	t̤
ظ	...	...	d̤
...	...	...	z̤
ع	...	...	ʕ
غ	...	...	g̤
ف	...	...	f
...	...	...	p
ق	...	...	q
ك	...	...	k
ل	...	...	l
م	...	...	m

ن	...	...	n
هـ	...	...	h
و	...	...	w
...	...	...	v
ي	...	...	y

The vowels:

اَ	...	...	a
اَ	...	...	ā
...	...	...	e
...	...	...	ē
اِ	...	...	i
اِي	...	...	ī
...	...	...	ə
...	...	...	o
...	...	...	ō
اُ	...	...	u
اُو	...	...	ū

The diphthongs:

اِي	...	...	ay
اُو	...	...	aw

The tanwīn:

ـُ	...	...	un
ـَ	...	...	an
ـِ	...	...	in

Characters in red represent phonemes that are not found in Fuṣḥā, but in spoken Arabic variants. Some Arabic dialects have phonemes not represented in this table.

Arabic TRANSCRIPTION

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/cpsol/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. كَتَبَ *kataba, kutub, kattaba*, etc.; كُتِبَ *kutub, 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: *lābnān*;
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.

Arabic TRANSCRIPTION

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 اِ is transcribed as a hamza only when it is pronounced
e.g. ابن *'ibn* 'son';
اكتب *'uktub* 'write' (imperative);
yet رجل ابن رجل *rajulun ibnu rajulin* 'a man, son of a man';
قلت لك اكتب *qultu laka ktub* 'I said to you write' (imperative)
- In spoken Arabic ə (sometimes other values) is inserted where appropriate to break consonantal clusters that are not allowed;
e.g. *madārese* 'school'; *ktēb at-tālmīz* 'the pupil's book'
- In Fuṣḥā, the definite article ال is either consistently transcribed as *al-*; or regularly transcribed as *(a)r-*, *(a)s-*, *(a)t-*, etc. assimilated to sun consonants; the vowels *a* or *i* are written only when appropriate

e.g. without assimilation of definite article to sun consonants:

البيت *al-bayt* 'the house';
الثلج *al-talj* 'the snow'

e.g. with assimilation of the definite article to sun consonants:

الشمس *aš-šams* 'the sun';
القمر *al-qamar* 'the moon'
قرأت الكتاب *qara'tu l-kitāba* 'I read the book'
رأت الثلج *ra'at it-talj* 'she saw the snow'

- In spoken Arabic, the definite article is always transcribed as *l-*, *r-*, *s-*, *t-*, etc. assimilated to sun consonants
e.g. *r-rajjēl* 'the man';
'a-t-tāwle 'on the table';
l-bard 'the cold'

Arabic TRANSCRIPTION

- In Fuṣḥā words that in the Arabic script are connected to the following word, e.g. prepositions بِـ *bi-*; لِـ *li-*; etc. conjunctions وَ *wa-*; فَ *fa-* etc. are transcribed connected to the following word separated by a hyphen; e.g. بيده *bi-yadihi* ‘in his hand’;
لرجل *li-rajulin* ‘to a man’;
وقال *wa-qāla* ‘and he said’;
فقال *fa-qāla* ‘then he said’; etc.
- In spoken Arabic the prepositions *b-*; *a-*; *l-* and the conjunction *w-* are written connected to the following words separated by a hyphen; the preposition *l-* is not separated from dependant pronouns by a hyphen, nor is it separated by a hyphen from a preceding word to which it is attached e.g. *b-al-bayt* ‘at home/ in the house’;
a-t-tāwle ‘on the table’;
l-ar-rājēl ‘to the man’;
yet *qallo* ‘he told him’
- 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-tilmīd* ‘the school of the pupil’
- The case endings and short verbal endings should be either consistently transcribed or not at all e.g. أكل الولد التفاحة *’akala al-waladu al-tuffāḥata*
or *’akal al-walad al-tuffāḥa* ‘the child ate the apple’
- The default case is the nominative case e.g. الإخوان المسلمون *al-’iḥwān al-muslimūn* ‘The Muslim Brothers’
- Long /ā/ is transcribed as *-ā* irrespective how it is written in the Arabic script e.g. الله *’allāh* ‘God’;
ذلك *dālika* ‘that’;
على *’alā* ‘on’;
إفريقيا *’ifrīqyā* ‘Africa’
- The nisba ending is *-iyy*; the pausal form of the masculine singular is *-ī* e.g. مصري *miṣrī* ‘Egyptian’ or *miṣriyyun*;
مصرية *miṣriyya* or *miṣriyyatun*

Arabic TRANSCRIPTION

- Double (or long) consonants are written twice
e.g. كَذَّابٌ *kaddāb* ‘liar’
- Final double consonants are written as a single consonant
e.g. تامٌ *tām* ‘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) *baġdād*
Hadith (حديث) *ḥadīṭ* ‘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. كتاب *kitāb* ‘book’, something written.

كتاب الرجل *kitābu al-raǧūli* ‘the man’s book’, the book which belongs to the man.

Lebanese Arabic:

Transcribe, translate, comment;

e.g. *ktēb* ‘book’, something written

ktēbo l-ar-raǧǧēl ‘the man’s book’, the book which belongs to the man.

Longer Passages

Fuṣḥā:

Text in Arabic script, transcribe, translate, comment;

الفاطحة *al-fātiḥa*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

‘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,

Arabic TRANSCRIPTION

The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.' [Pickthall]

Text 1, chapter 21, Schulz p.292

الأنظمة السياسية في العالم العربي
نجد في العالم العربي حتى اليوم دولاً ذات أنظمة سياسية مختلفة كالجُمهوريات والممالك
والسلطانات والمشايخ 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 shaykdoms. 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-l-knēyes uw-fiya ḥamsə knēyes 'a-'asm əs-sayde, wə-ḥsūšan
saydet əl-gēbe mašhūra b-l-'jēyeb uw-fiya ndūrētə ktīr. b-iḥabrūna l-'adma 'anno kəl
biyyē' kēn yeje 'a-d-day'a kēn yəndor ši mən əlle ma'o.*

Bayt Shabeb 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

Arabic TRANSCRIPTION

book’, where as Lebanese Arabic could express the same phrase as follows *ktēbo l-ar-rajjel* ‘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-ismi l-lāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm

ʾal-ḥamdu li-l-lāhi rabbi l-ʿālamīn

ʾar-raḥmāni r-raḥīm

mālīki yawmi d-dīn

ʾiyyāka nāʿbudu wa-ʾiyyāka nastaʿīn

ʾihdīnā ṣ-ṣirāṭa l-mustaqīm

ṣirāṭa l-ladīna ʾanʿamta ʿalayhim ġayri l-maġdūbi ʿalayhim wa-lā d-dāllīn

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

al-ʾandīma al-siyāsīyya fī al-ʿālam al-ʿarabī

najīd fī al-ʿālam al-ʿarabī ḥattā al-yawm duwal dāt ʾandīma siyāsīyya muḥtalifa ka-

al-jumhūrīyyāt wa-al-mamālīk wa-al-saltanāt wa-al-mašāyih wa-qad qāmat hādīhi

al-duwal ʿalā ʾasās al-taqīmāt al-siyāsīyya al-latī ḥaṣalat baʿd ʾinhiyār al-

ʾimbarātūrīyya al-ʿuṭmāniyya wa-al-nidām al-ʾistiʿmārī fī ifrīqyā wa-al-šarq al-

ʾawsat.