

Arabic Romanization at the Library of Congress

Sources

There are three primary sources for determining Arabic romanization at the Library of Congress – the Library of Congress Arabic romanization tables; *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* by Hans Wehr; and *al-Munjid fī Al-lughah wa-al-i ʿlām*. The Library of Congress romanization table provides a comprehensive treatment of Arabic romanization, while *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* is widely used for the study of the Arabic language by western audiences and is considered the standard Arabic-English dictionary of its genre. In the Arab world *al-Munjid* is the standard Arabic-Arabic dictionary used.

Normally when romanizing Arabic, LC follows the table, and in doing so adheres as closely as possible to classical Arabic. If there is still some doubt as to how a word should be romanized, we first consult *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (1971 rev. ed.). Occasionally this source will supply two possibilities for romanizing the word. If so, our next step is to consult *al-Munjid*, accepting the first form provided there if there is more than one form. Hence, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* is used as the basis for most romanization decisions that are not settled by the table, with *al-Munjid* serving as the final arbiter for persisting ambiguities.

Observations

In romanization, the article al- (“the”) is always lowercased and attached to the following word with a hyphen. It should not be confused (in romanization) with Āl which is always uppercased with a macron over the vowel. This Āl is not a form of the article; normally it represents part of a compound name and indicates kinship. The connective wa- (“and”) is always lowercased and attached to the following word with a hyphen.

Arabic names often include the use of an inseparable prefix such as Abū, Ibn, Bint, Āl. These are always capitalized wherever they appear except for Ibn and Bint. When used as the initial elements (including entry elements) of a name, Ibn and Bint are capitalized; otherwise, they are lowercased. Example:

Ibn al-Firkāḥ Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, 1262-1329

Bint al-Hudá

Raqayyah bint ‘Alī ibn Alī Ṭālib, 7th cent.

Some regional variants of Abū and Ibn occur, particularly in North Africa: Abū becomes Bū; Ibn becomes Bin:

Bū Ṭabbah, Aḥmad al-Tihāmī, 1937-

Bin Sharīfah, Maḥammad

When romanizing words of foreign origin, LC follows rule 22 of the “Rules of Application” appended to the table, keeping as close to the original pronunciation as the Arabic orthography permits. For example, in an imprint statement the romanization is as follows:

Niyū Yūrġ : Wāylī, 1988

(New York : Wiley, 1988)

Foreign words often appear in several different orthographic versions. For example, “geology” can appear written in Arabic in at least three different ways:

juyūljūjiyā

zhiyūljūzhiyā

jjiyūljūjiyah

In these cases the romanization reflects the Arabic orthography and the form it dictates.

The policy for romanizing colloquial Arabic is, again, to follow the classical language as closely as possible. For example: السيد وراته في باريس

becomes al-Sayyid wa-marātuh fī Bārīs

Vocalization

Representing Arabic vowels in romanization represents a special problem, inasmuch as short vowels normally do not appear in Arabic orthography. For a short list of words and names, the Library of Congress has found that (1) these words and name appear frequently in sources that are to be transcribed in cataloging, and (2) catalogers have varied in selecting those vowels that have to be supplied in the romanization of these words and names. For a greater degree of consistency, these words and names are listed below showing the preferred vocalization based on a full consideration of dictionaries, expert opinions, etc.