ROMANIZATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC

BGN/PCGN 1956 System

This System was adopted by the BGN in 1946 and by the PCGN in 1956 and is applied in the systematic romanization of geographic names in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Uniform results in the romanization of Arabic are difficult to obtain, since vowel points and diacritical marks are generally omitted from both manual and machine writing. It follows that for correct identification of the words which appear in any particular name, knowledge of its standard Arabic-script spelling including proper pointing, and recognition of dialectal and idiosyncratic deviations are essential.

In order to bring about uniformity in the Roman-script spelling of geographic names in Arabic-language areas, the system is based insofar as possible on fully pointed modern standard Arabic. In the interest of clarity, vowel pointing has been applied to the examples below. Arabic is written from right to left, and does not make a distinction between upper and lower case.

CONSONANT CHARACTERS

	Arabic			Romanization	Examples and Remarks	
	Final	Medial	Initial	Independent		
1.		ء			*not romanized in word-initial position*	أبو كَمَالْ	Abū Kamāl
					' *in all other positions*	بِئْر زَيتْ	Bi'r Zayt [2]
						صَنعَاءْ	Şan'ā'
2.	ـا			ا	*not romanized in word-initial position*	أم العَمَدْ	Umm al 'Amad [3]
3.	ـب	ـبـ	بـ	ب	b	البَحرَينْ	Al Baḥrayn
4.	ـت	ـتـ	تـ	ت	t	الكوتْ	Al Kūt
5.	ـث	ـثـ	ثـ	ث	th	الثَّلِيثُوَاتْ	Ath Thulaythuwāt
6.	ـج	ـجـ	جـ	ج	j	الجَزِيرَة	Al Jazīrah
7.	ـح	ـحـ	حـ	ح	ḥ	المَحْمُودِيَة	Al Maḥmūdīyah
8.	ـخ	ـخـ	خـ	خ	kh	خَيبَرْ	Khaybar
9.	ـد			د	d	دَمَنهُورْ	Damanhūr
10.	ـذ			ذ	dh	دَهَبْ	Dhahab
11.	ـر			ر	r	الرَوْضَة	Ar Rawḍah
12.	ـز			ز	z	الزَاوِيَة	Az Zāwīyah
13.	ـس	ـسـ	سـ	س	s	سُلَيمَانِيَة	Sulaymānīyah
14.	ـش	ـشـ	شـ	ش	sh	الشَامْ	Ash Shām
15.	ـص	ـصـ	صـ	ص	ş	قَيصُومَة	Qayşūmah

	Arabic				Romanization	Examples and Remarks	
	Final	Medial	Initial	Independent			
16.	ض	ـضـ	ضـ	ض	ḍ	ضَوْرْ	Ḍawr
17.	ـط	ـطـ	طـ	ط	ṭ	الْقُنَيْطِرَة	Al Qunayṭirah
18.	ـظ	ـظـ	ظـ	ظ	ẓ	أَبو ظَبِي	Abū Ẓaby
19.	ـع	ـعـ	عـ	ع	'	أَبو عَرِيَشْ	Abū 'Arīsh
20.	ـغ	ـغـ	غـ	غ	gh	بَغْدَادْ	Baghdād
21.	ـف	ـفـ	فـ	ف	f	الْفَراتْ	Al Furāt
22.	ـق	ـقـ	قـ	ق	q	قَطَرْ	Qaṭar
23.	ـك	ـكـ	كـ	ك	k	الْكُوَيْتْ	Al Kuwayt
24.	ـل	ـلـ	لـ	ل	l	حَلَبْ	Ḥalab
25.	ـم	ـمـ	مـ	م	m	مَكَّة	Makkah
26.	ـن	ـنـ	نـ	ن	n	نَخْلْ	Nakhl
27.	ـه	ـهـ/ـهـ	هـ	ه	h	جَبَلْ هَارُونْ	Jabal Hārūn
28.	ـو			و	w	وَادِي غَضا	Wādī Ghaḍā
29.	ـي	ـيـ	يـ	ي	y	الْيَمَنْ	Al Yaman

VOWEL CHARACTERS AND DIACRITICAL MARKS

	Arabic	Romanization	Examples and Remarks	
1.	◌َ	a	الْبَصْرَة	Al Baṣrah
2.	◌ِ	i	الرِياضْ	Ar Riyāḍ
3.	◌ُ	u	الْقُدْسْ	Al Quds
4.	◌َ ا	ā	بَاب الْمَنْدَبْ	Bāb al Mandab [3]
5.	◌ِ ي	ī	الْمَدِينَة	Al Madīnah
6.	◌ُ و	ū	صُورْ	Ṣūr
7.	◌َ ىٰ، ىٰ	á	مَرْسىٰ مَطْرُوحْ	Marsá Maṭrūḥ [7]
8.	◌ْ	not romanized	Indicates absence of a short vowel.	
9.	◌َ يْ	ay	صَيْدا	Ṣaydā
10.	◌َ وْ	aw	الدَوْحَة	Ad Dawḥah
11.	◌ً	a^n	See note 8	
12.	◌ٍ	i^n	See note 8	
13.	◌ٌ	u^n	See note 8	
14.	◌ّ	doubling of consonant letter	See note 9	
15.	أ	'	See note 10	
16.	آ	ā in word-initial position	آلْبُومُعَيْطْ	Ālbū Mu'ayṭ [3,11]
		'ā in word-medial position	قُرآن	Qur'ān [3]

2

NUMERALS									
١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩	٠
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0

Although Perso-Arabic script is written from right to left, numerical expressions, e.g., 1956 - ١٩٥٦ are written from left to right.

NOTES

1. The symbol ○ represents any Arabic consonant character.

2. *Hamzah* (ء) is written in Arabic in association with most instances of initial *alif*, except those which belong to the definite article **al** or which bear a *maddah* (see note 11). *Hamzah* is written above the *alif* if the accompanying short vowel is a *fatḥah* (أ) or ḍammah (أ) and below the *alif* if the accompanying short vowel is a *kasrah* (إ). When the purpose is to indicate the presence of a glottal stop, *hamzah* is written over medial and final *alif* (أ), *wāw* (ؤ) and *yā'* without dots (ئ). *Hamzah* following *kasrah* (◌) is written (ئ). Almost always the *yā'* is in the initial or medial form and the dots are omitted: example: (بئر). *Hamzah* following *ḍammah* (◌) is written (ؤ). *Hamzah* following a long vowel is written without a bearer and is positioned on the line of print like a regular character. The romanization of *hamzah* (') should always be carefully distinguished from that of *'ayn* (').

3. *Alif* as such is not romanized when it is a bearer of *hamzah*, but see *fatḥah alif* (◌ا) and *alif maddah* (آ) in the vowel table. See also note 2 and 11 above.

4. In certain endings, an original *tā'* (ت) is written (ة), i.e., like *hā'* with two dots, and is known as *tā marbūṭah*. It is romanized **h**, except in the construct form, where it is romanized **t** instead. Example: *hamzah, hamzat al qaṭ'*. The ending *fatḥah hā'* (◌ه) may be romanized **a·h** when the character *hā'* (ه) is not silent. Example: **Muntaza·h**. See also note 5.

5. Occasionally, the character sequences كه, ته, ده and سه occur. They may be romanized **k·h, t·h, d·h, and s·h** in order to differentiate those romanizations from the digraphs **kh, th, dh, and sh**. See also note 4.

6. Where special considerations are paramount, the sub-dot (̣) may be used in place of the cedilla.

7. The character *yā'* (in final form but without dots) preceded by the vowel point *fatḥah* is a combination known as *alif maqṣūrah*. See character 7 in the vowel table.

8. The classical Arabic grammatical endings written with the nunation symbols (*tanwīn*) may be romanized, when necessary, by **aⁿ, iⁿ, uⁿ**. In modern Arabic, these endings have become silent and should not be romanized: classical *alifuⁿ* modern *alif*.

9. Doubled consonant sounds are represented in Arabic script by placing a *shaddah* (◌ّ) over a consonant character. In romanization the letter should be doubled. However, the combination of the consonant character yā' with a *shaddah* preceded by a *kasrah* (ـِيّ) is romanized **īy** rather than iyy. e.g., (ـِيّة) is romanized (**īyah**) and not (**iyyah**).

3

When the definite article (al) precedes a word beginning with one of the "sun letters" t, th, d, dh, r, z, s, sh, ş, ḍ, ṭ, ẓ , l, or n – the l is assimilated in pronunciation and romanization, thus yielding **tt, thth**, etc., in romanization. Example, **An Nīl**, not **Al Nīl**.

10. *Hamzat al waşl* (ٱ), which is utilized only in the pointing of classical Arabic, is romanized ' as illustrated in the classical form of its name *hamzatu'l waşli.*

11. Since *maddah* (آ), which is placed over *alif* (ا), nearly always occurs in word-initial position, no confusion results from the use of **ā** for *alif maddah* (آ) as well as for *fatḥah alif* (◌).

12. The ligatures لا and ڸ represent *lām- alif*, and should be romanized **lā**.

SPECIAL RULES

1. Initial definite articles and prepositions should be capitalized and hyphens should not be used to connect parts of names, e.g., **Ash Shāriqah** and **Tall al La□m**.

2. If any evidence is found for the use of the definite article in a name, the article should be used in the name chosen.

3. The Arabic word for God should be written **Allāh** (الله).

4. Names which consist of noun phrases should be written as separate words. The definite article within such names should be romanized **al**, not **ul**, e.g., ‘**Abd Allāh**, ‘**Abd ar Ra□mān**, **Dhū al Faqār**.

5. The Arabic word بن should be romanized **Bin** rather than **Ibn** whenever written without *alif*, that is between two proper nouns, e.g., **‘Umar Bin al Khaṭṭāb**.

6. The Turkish word **Paşa** should be romanized from Arabic script as **Bāshā**. The Turkish word **Bey** should be romanized as **Bey** in Egyptian names, no matter how it is written in Arabic-language sources, but in other Arabic areas it should be romanized as **Bak** where written بك and as **Bayk** when written بيك.

7. The modern colloquial word **Sīdī** should be give precedence over the classical form **Sayyidī**. This does not preclude the spelling **Sayyidī** if the latter is indicated by the Arabic script or other evidence – for instance, if the *yā'* is written with a *shaddah* (◌ّ).

8. The colloquial word **Bū** should not be changed to the standard form **Abū**.

9. The colloquial word for water, written مية on Arabic maps, should be romanized **Mayyat**.

10. Place names of Aramaic origin in Syria often contain initial consonant clusters consisting of **b**

plus another consonant such as **l or h**. In romanization, the clusters **bl, bh,** etc., should be so represented.

11. In names containing the Arabic word for back, ridge, or hill, appearing as either ظهر or ضهر in Arabic sources, the word should be romanized to reflect the particular Arabic spelling shown.