

Transliteration is not the Arabic language

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة والسلام على عبده ورسوله نبينا محمد بن عبدالله. أما بعد

The ability to understand the Arabic language is a tremendous favor from Allah which requires gratitude and humility. Some linguists say Mandarin Chinese and Arabic are the two most difficult languages to learn in the world.

I also understand that there are some Arabic words that we will inescapably write in transliteration for example the word “Arabic”, proper names like Muhammad and Rasheed, and words like Islam, Quran, and Ramadan.

The Latin script often referred to as transliteration or Romanization, can sometimes be a tool for those who have difficulty reading the Arabic letters, however, it is important to know that Latin script is not Arabic nor is it a substitute to learning the Arabic language.

It seems today—among the Muslims—too much emphasis is placed on the Latin script such that we place transliteration tables in English books, we debate the proper transliteration of words, is it Madeenah, Medina, or Madīnah? We sometimes send full emails and long text messages using the Latin script. There are even online Arabic romanization keyboards for typing Arabic text with the Latin script.

❖ **Transliteration is a plot against the Arabic language and Islam**

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk - who in 1924 abolished the caliphate and the call to prayer; passed a law removing the Arabic language and imposed the usage of Latin alphabet in all public communications and the education system.

Salama Moussa (1887-1958) an Egyptian secularist, who introduced the writings of Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud to Egyptian readers, pushed for an Egyptianization of the Arabic language in which the formal Arabic and the colloquial Arabic would be combined into one language and the Latin alphabet would be used¹.

¹ The Question of Romanization of the Script and The Emergence of Nationalism in the Middle East. Mediterranean Language Review. pp. 179–196.

Anastas Al-Karmali (1866 –1947), a Lebanese Christian priest and linguist said: And we see that a day will come when one language will spread throughout the world, and this language will be the tongue of the mighty dominate nation. Therefore, Arabic must be written in Latin letters, whether we like it or not².”

Louis Massignon (1883-1963) a French Catholic orientalist gave a lecture to a group of Arab youth in 1929, in which he said: “The Arabic language has no life unless it is written in Latin letters³.”

❖ Writing the Quran in Latin Script is not permissible

The Permanent Committee of Scholars said in summary:

After studying the topic, discussing it, and exchanging opinions concerning it, the Committee unanimously agreed that it is prohibited to write the Quran in Latin script or the letters of any other language, for the following reasons:

1. The Quran was revealed in a clear Arabic tongue, both letters and meanings. Allah the Exalted said:



And thus, We have sent it down as a Quran in Arabic (Surah Taha 20:113)

What is written in Latin letters cannot be called Quran.

2. The Quran was written down when it was revealed, and when it was compiled by Abu Bakr and Uthman (may Allah be pleased with them), in Arabic letters. All the companions agreed to that, as did all the second generation, and those who came after them, until the present day, even though there were those who did not speak Arabic. And the Prophet (ﷺ) said: “You must adhere to my Sunnah and the way of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs after me”
3. Writing the Quran in letters other than Arabic will discourage the Muslims from learning the Arabic language, in which they worship their Lord and learn and understand their religion⁴.

The above verdict refers to writing the Quran in Latin script, this is **not** a prohibition on translating the meaning of the Quran into other languages. Shaykh Uthaymeen said writing the

² Muhammad Muhammad Husayn, 1956, Part Two, pp. 357-363

³ “Writing Arabic in Latin letters” Muhammad Sawi

⁴ Prohibition on writing the Holy Qur’an in non-Arabic letters – 1/36

Quran in other scripts is not permissible but translating the meanings of the Quran into other languages is permissible, rather it is sometimes obligatory⁵.

❖ Writing Hadith in Latin script

Question: O noble Shaykh, what is the ruling on writing Prophetic narrations and statements of remembrance in Latin script?

Shaykh Abdul Muhsin al-Badr: Translate the meanings, there is no problem with translating the meanings. As for writing it in another script, this will not be accurate, because Arabic is not written like other languages⁶.

I suggest we put forth efforts to teach the Muslims the basics of how to read the Arabic alphabet. A course restricted to learning the Arabic alphabet and basic reading **without** teaching grammar or morphology will give us the ability to read our morning and evening supplications in Arabic within a few months, with the permission of Allah. And we can use the English translation to comprehend the meaning. Additional study with a teacher proficient in Quran recitation will give us the ability to recite from the Mushaf, by the permission of Allah.

As for dedicating hours of study to learn transliteration or Latin script, this is counterproductive. Transliteration is not Arabic. Thus, if you were to write to a native Arabic speaker “Ya Shaykh Kafa Haaluka?” He will not be able to read this nor understand it.

May Allah grant us success to what He loves and is pleased with.

⁵ An open sitting with Shaykh Uthaymeen in the Science of the Quran

⁶ Explanation of Tirmidhi in the Chapter *The Virtue of the Quran*