

ROMANIZATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC  
BGN/PCGN 1956 System

This system was adopted by the BGN in 1946 and by the PCGN in 1956 and has been applied in the systematic romanization of geographic names in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, all of which have been covered by published BGN gazetteers.

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 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.

CONSONANT CHARACTERS

	Arabic				Romanization	Examples and Remarks	
	Final	Medial	Initial	Independent			
1				ء	not romanized in word-initial position	أبو كمال	Abū Kamāl
					' in all other positions	بئر زيت	Bi'r Zayt <sup>2</sup>
						صنعاء	Ṣan'ā'
2	ل			ل	not romanized in word-initial position	أم العمد	Umm al 'Amad <sup>3</sup>
3	ب	بـ	بـ	بـ	b	البحرين	Al Baḥrayn
4	ت	تـ	تـ	تـ	t	الكوت	Al Kūt <sup>4, 5</sup>
5	ث	ثـ	ثـ	ثـ	th	الثليثوات	Ath Thulaythuwāt <sup>5</sup>
6	ج	جـ	جـ	جـ	j	الجزيرة	Al Jazīrah
7	ح	حـ	حـ	حـ	ḥ	المحمودية	Al Maḥmūdīyah <sup>6</sup>
8	خ	خـ	خـ	خـ	kh	خيبر	Khaybar <sup>5</sup>
9	د			د	d	دمنهور	Damanhūr <sup>5</sup>

	Arabic				Romanization	Examples and Remarks	
	Final	Medial	Initial	Independent			
10	ذ			ذ	dh	ذهب	Dhahab <sup>5</sup>
11	ر			ر	r	الروضة	Ar Rawḍah
12	ز			ز	z	الزاوية	Az Zāwīyah
13	س	سد	سد	س	s	سليمانية	Sulaymānīyah <sup>5</sup>
14	ش	شد	شد	ش	sh	الشام	Ash Shām <sup>5</sup>
15	ص	صد	صد	ص	ṣ	قيصومة	Qayṣūmah <sup>6</sup>
16	ض	ضد	ضد	ض	ḍ	ضور	Ḍawr <sup>6</sup>
17	ط	ط	ط	ط	ṭ	القنيطرة	Al Qunayṭirah <sup>6</sup>
18	ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ	ẓ	ابو ظبي	Abū Ṣaby <sup>6</sup>
19	ع	ع	ع	ع	ʿ	ابو عريش	Abū ‘Arīsh
20	غ	غ	غ	غ	gh	بغداد	Baghdād
21	ف	ف	ف	ف	f	الفرات	Al Furāt
22	ق	ق	ق	ق	q	قطر	Qaṭar
23	ك	ك	ك	ك	k	الكويت	Al Kuwayt <sup>5</sup>
24	ل	ل	ل	ل	l	حلب	Ḥalab
25	م	م	م	م	m	مكة	Makkah
26	ن	ن	ن	ن	n	نخل	Nakhḷ
27	ه	هـ	هـ	هـ	h	جبل هارون	Jabal Hārūn <sup>4, 5</sup>
28	و			و	w	وادي غضا	Wādī Ghaḍā
29	ي	يـ	يـ	يـ	y	اليمن	Al Yaman <sup>2, 7</sup>

# VOWEL CHARACTERS AND DIACRITICAL MARKS

	Arabic	Romanization	Examples and Remarks
1	أ	a	البصرة Al Baṣrah
2	إ	i	الرياض Ar Riyāḍ
3	و	u	القدس Al Quds
4	أ	ā	باب المندب Bāb al Mandab <sup>3</sup>
5	ي	ī	المدينة Al Madīnah
6	و	ū	صور Ṣūr
7	ى	á	مرسى مطروح Marsá Maṭrūḥ
8	ة	not romanized	
9	ي	ay	صيدا Ṣaydā
10	و	aw	الدوحة Ad Dawḥah
11	ة	a <sup>n</sup>	See note 8.
12	ة	i <sup>n</sup>	See note 8.
13	ة	u <sup>n</sup>	See note 8.
14	ة	doubling of consonant letter	See note 9.
15	ء	,	See note 10.
16	آ	ā in word-initial position	ألبو معيط Ālbū Mu‘ayṭ <sup>11</sup>
		‘ā in word-medial position	قرآن Qur’ān

# NUMERALS

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

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

## NOTES

1. The symbol □ represents any Arabic consonant character.
2. *Hamzah* ( ء ) is written in Arabic over all initial *alifs* except those which belong to the definite article **al** or bear a *maddah*. (See note 10.) When the purpose is to indicate the presence of a glottal stop, *hamzah* is written over medial and final *alif* ( ا ), *wāw* ( و ), and *yā'* without dots ( ي ). *Hamzah* following *kasrah* ( □ ) is written ة. Almost always the *yā'* is in the initial or medial form and the dots are omitted. Example: بشر. *Hamzah* following *dammah* ( □ ) is written ؓ. *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* ( ʿ ).
3. *Alif* as such is not romanized when it is a bearer of *hamzah*, but see *fathah alif* ( ا □ ) and *alif maddah* ( آ ) in the vowel table. See also note 1 above and note 10.
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 of feminine nouns, where it is romanized **t**, instead. Example: *hamzah*, *hamzat al qat'*. The ending *fathah hā'* ( ه ) may be romanized **a·h** when the character *hā'* ( ه ) is not silent. Example: **Muntaza·h**. See also note 4.
5. Occasionally, the character sequences تـهـ , كهـ , دهـ , and سهـ occur. They may be romanized **t·h**, **k·h**, **d·h**, and **s·h** in order to differentiate those romanizations from the digraphs **th**, **kh**, **dh**, and **sh**. See also note 3.
6. Where special considerations are paramount, the sub-dot ( ِ ) may be used in place of the cedilla.
7. The character *yā'* ( ي ) is also used in writing *alif maqṣūrah*, in which the dots are omitted. See *alif maqṣūrah* ( ى ) in the vowel table.
8. The classical Arabic grammatical endings written with the nunation symbols (*tanwīn*) may be romanized, when necessary, by **a<sup>n</sup>**, **i<sup>n</sup>**, **u<sup>n</sup>**. In modern Arabic, these endings have become silent and should not be romanized: classical *alifit<sup>n</sup>*, 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. When the definite article **al** precedes a word beginning with one of the "sun letters" — **t**, **th**, **d**, **dh**, **r**, **z**, **s**, **sh**, **ṣ**, **ḍ**, **ṭ**, **ẓ**, **l**, or **n** — the **l** is assimilated in the pronunciation, thus yielding **tt**, **thth**, etc., in romanization. Example: **An Nīl**, not **Al Nīl**.



10. *Hamzat al waṣl* ( ِ ), which is utilized only in the pointing of classical Arabic, is romanized ' , as illustrated in the classical form of its name *hamzatu 'l waṣli*.
11. Since *maddah* ( ~ ), 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 *fathah alif* ( اُ ) .

#### 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 Laḥm**.
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**.
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 Raḥmān, Dhū al Faqār.
5. The Arabic word بن should be romanized **Bin** rather than **Ibn** wherever 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** where written بيك .
7. The modern colloquial word **Sīdī** should be given 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. Romanized place names of Aramaic origin in Lebanon and 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.