

Note on transliteration and dates

When I teach courses on Islam in my English-speaking university setting, I tell my students: ‘This is not an Arabic course, but you cannot study Islam without learning some Arabic vocabulary along the way’. Similarly, although this book has been written in order to be accessible to general readers with no background in Arabic or Islam, it unavoidably cites Arabic sources and uses some Arabic terms – there is even an Arabic word in the book’s title! A few terms from other ‘Islamicate’ languages, like Persian and Urdu, also make appearances. With respect to this book’s approach to transliteration (how terms and phrases from languages using non-Roman alphabets are represented in English), the reader might find it helpful to keep two categories in mind. First, there are many Arabic and other non-English words which are not fully transliterated – they are written without diacritical marks and may not be italicised. Words which are well-known in English usage are unitalicised and follow normal conventions (for instance, Qur’an, Sufi, shaykh, Sunni, Shi‘ite). Other common key words (words which are somewhat familiar to English speakers or which appear often in the book) may be written in italics but without diacritics (for instance, *da‘wa*, *shari‘a*, *‘ulama*, *jihad*, *tawhid*). Proper names are written without any diacritics – for instance, Muhammad (not Muḥammad), ‘Ali (not ‘Alī), Ishaq (not Ishāq), Isma‘il (not Ismā‘īl), Bukhara (not Bukhārā), Sa‘ud (not Sa‘ūd) – although some names appear with diacritics in the endnotes and bibliography. In simplified transliterations and in proper names, the Arabic letters *‘ayn* (indicated by a forward apostrophe, as in ‘Ali and *‘ulama*) and sometimes *hamza* (represented by an apostrophe as in Qur’an) are still included. The more technical symbols for *‘ayn* (°) and *hamza* (ʔ) are reserved for fully transliterated terms.

The second category consists of Arabic (and other) words and phrases which are fully transliterated (italicised with diacritics where applicable). My hope is that including these in various places adds richness to the text and benefits those who know some Arabic, without impeding general readers. To illustrate, in *‘darūra* (Arabic for ‘necessity’), ‘ḍ’ represents the ‘thudding’ ‘ḍ’ of the Arabic alphabet (Arabic also has a softer, dental ‘ḍ’), ‘a’ is a short vowel, ‘r’ is pronounced like the English ‘r’, and ‘ū’ is a long vowel. When transliterating words which have the Arabic feminine singular ending (or *tā’ marbū‘a*), I usually do not include a final ‘h’ (*da‘wa* not *da‘wah*, *hijra* not *hijrah*). Exceptions include

words which are commonly represented in English with ‘h’, like *surah* and *ayah* (qur’anic chapter and verse). I write the Arabic definite article as ‘al-’ even when it is connected to the so-called solar letters. The Arabic diphthongs are generally ‘*ay*’ and ‘*aw*’. For simplicity, certain Arabic plurals are represented by simply adding ‘s’ to the singular form (*dā’īs* or *da’īs* instead of *du‘ā*). A few final pointers: (1) This book uses the English ‘God’ rather than the Arabic ‘Allah’ (or ‘Allāh’), except in some quotations. (2) ‘Middle East’ (rather than ‘Near East’) is used throughout. (3) ‘Qur’an’ is capitalised, but the adjective ‘qur’anic’ is not. (4) For the Arabic letter *waw*, I generally prefer ‘w’ over ‘v’ (Ahmad Yasawi not Ahmad Yasavi, Mawlawiyya not Mevleviyya). (5) Names from Turkic and Mongol languages are represented in their familiar English forms (Genghis not Chinggis, Hulegu not Hülegü).

This book uses Gregorian, or common era, dates throughout. The reader should keep in mind, however, that the Islamic or *hijri* calendar is a lunar calendar that pivots on the Prophet’s migration (*hijra*) to Medina in 622 CE. In a few cases, *hijri* dates are included when relevant. Finally, regarding English usage: this book follows British conventions, for instance, ‘favour’ instead of ‘favor’, ‘Islamisation’ instead of ‘Islamization’. When I quote another author who uses American instead of British spelling, I retain that author’s usage.

