

# The Baha'i System of Transliteration

Exported from Holy-Writings.com on 2026-07-05 — 1 clipping

The Bahá'í system of transliteration<sup>1</sup>

Bahá'í Studies Bulletin "##", %/"-(  
pp. "+-%%

Moojan Momen

Source of the Bahá 'i transliteration system..

.....  
..... 78

Some problems of the Bahá 'i transliteration system..

..... 7;

Some peculiarities of the Bahá 'i transliteration system..

..... 7;

Addenda..

.....  
..... 7>

On @A March @CAD, Shoghi Effendi sent to the Bahá 'is of America a listing of oriental terms and phrases spelled according a standard system of transliteration. He asked them henceforward to keep

to this system in place of the previous arbitrary spellings that had been in use in Bahá 'i publications.<sup>2</sup>

It was also sent to the British National Assembly in a letter dated AD April @CAN;<sup>3</sup> and to the German

National Spiritual Assembly on N November @CAN.<sup>4</sup> This listing appeared in the Bahá'í Year Book in

@CAR (see Addendum @5). The list as published in the Bahá'í Year Book is not, however, exactly the

present system as it contains no underlined pairs of letters (e.g. sh, ch, etc.) and no dots under any

letters. This was however, probably for typographical reasons, since books appearing as early as @CAD

did use the full system (see below). In Volume A of the Bahá'í World, @CAR-@CAX, all of the features are

present (see Addendum A6). The listing as given in Volume A of the Bahá'í World remains substantially

the same in every subsequent volume with the exception of a few words added to the list over the

years. Also from Bahá'í World, Volume A onwards, a statement appears on the reverse of the title page

to the effect that 'The spelling of Oriental words and proper names in this issue of The Bahá'í World is

according to the system of transliteration established at one of the

International Oriental Congresses."

From the June @CAD issue of Star of the West, we see attempts being made to introduce the system although these are at first very patchy. The first books that appear to be trying to put the system into use are Esslemont's Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era and Herrick's Unity Triumphant (the latter not entirely consistently), both published in @CAD.<sup>7</sup> Although some books appearing in @CA\_ did not follow the system,<sup>8</sup> from this time on, books and other printed material published under Bahá 'i auspices have followed this system.

Shoghi Effendi used a system of transcription, NOT transliteration.—M.W. Thomas (?@?A)

Bahá'í Administration, Bahá 'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Ill., JKLM, p. NO; see also p. NM and p. AL, which seems to indicate that the original list was later slightly amended.

Cited in Addendum Four below. See also letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, JJ November JK?A, Unfolding Destiny, Bahá 'i Publishing Trust, London, JKMJ, p. OK; there is also a note regarding accents on pp. NL–X.

The Light of Divine Guidance: the messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria,

Bahá 'i-Verlag, Hofheim-Langenhain, JKM?, p. ?X.

Bahá'í Year Book vol. J (April JK?A–April JK?L), Bahá 'i Publishing Committee, New York, JK?L, p. JOJ.

Bahá'í World, vol. ? (JK?L–JK?M), Bahá 'i Publishing Committee, New York, JK?L, p. JOJ.

J. E. Esslemont, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era (George Allen and Unwin, London) and Elizabeth Herrick, Unity Triumphant:

the call of the Kingdom (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, London). A

pamphlet Bahá'í Manuscripts privately published

by Charles Mason Remey in JK?O also appears to be using the new system.

However, Mohammed Ali Alkany, Lessons in

Religion (Boston: Tudor Press, JK?O) and Baha'i Scriptures (Brentano's, New York), both also published in JK?O, do not use

the system.

See for example The Wisdom of Abdul Baha, Baha'i Publishing Committee, New York.

!"

Source of the Bahá'í transliteration system

Although the statement that the system is one "established at one of the International Oriental

Congresses" has appeared in Bahá 'i publications since @CAX, it was for a long time not clear exactly

which of the International Oriental Congresses was meant. It would appear that

Shoghi Effendi, on whose instructions the statement was inserted, never specified which Oriental Congress was being referred to.

Recently, I made an exhaustive search of the proceedings of the International Oriental Congresses and found what I presumed Shoghi Effendi must have been referring to. The Congress concerned was the 10th International Congress of Orientalists held at Geneva in 1913. The Royal Asiatic Society had been giving attention to the question of a uniform transliteration system for some time. In May 1913, a committee of the Society had been set up to consider the matter. They looked at a number of the systems then current:

1. That used by F. Max Muller and the Oxford University Press for the Sacred Books of the East series;

A. That adopted by the Government of India on the recommendation of Sir W. W. Hunter;

D. That suggested by Sir M. Monier-Williams and published in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1891; also presented to the Berlin Congress of Orientalists;

2. That adopted by the Société asiatique of France;

N. That adopted by the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft;

R. That adopted by the Bengal Asiatic Society;

i. That adopted by the Pali Text Society.

This committee presented its report to the Royal Asiatic Society and it was adopted by the Council of the Society in May 1913. It was published in an Addendum to the Society's Journal in July 1913.

The Tenth International Congress of Orientalists was held September 1913, at Geneva. During the opening session of the Congress, on 1 September, on the motion of Lord Reay, president of the Royal Asiatic Society and acting on behalf of it, a representative commission was appointed to look at the subject of transliteration.

The Commission consisted of a number of very eminent figures: Professor Charles-Adrien-Casimir Barbier de Maynard, who had occupied the chair in Turkish at the École spéciale des langues orientales; then the Professor of Persian at the Collège de France (1891-1900); and was at this time occupying the chair in Arabic of the Collège de France as well as being deputy administrator of the École des langues orientales and President of the Société asiatique;

Professor Dr Georg Bühler, a German specialist on Sanskrit and India at the University of Vienna;

Professor Michael Jan De Goeje, specialist in Arabic and Islam at the University of Leiden;

Professor Albert Socin, specialist in Arabic and Kurdish at the University of Leipzig; Professor Ernst

Windisch, Sanskrit and Pali scholar from the University of Leipzig;

!\$

As well as a number of less eminent persons who had taken a special interest in the subject of transliteration:

Emile Senart, a French orientalist with a special interest in India;

James Burgess, who had been Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India and who

had published a paper on the subject of transliteration of Indian languages;

Lt-Col. George T. Plunkett, Director of the Science and Art Institutions, Dublin, who had been

on the Royal Asiatic Society committee on transliteration.

H. Thomson Lyon, a member of the Royal Asiatic Society and the author of an article on

transliteration of Arabic in the Society's journal for 7pqr.

As much work had already been done on the subject of transliteration by the Royal Asiatic Society,

the system that this commission recommended was very similar to the system already devised by the

Society. The report of this commission was presented to the Congress at its final session on @A

September @XC\_ and was adopted by the Congress.

An addendum to the proceedings of the Congress (published by E.J. Brill, Leiden, @XCi) contains the

report of the Committee on Transliteration. This report suggests a transliteration system for Arabic,

Sanskrit and Pali (see Addendum Three for the English translation of this report published in Journal

of the Royal Asiatic Society, October @XCN, pp. XiC–XXA; the original is published in French; I have also

included the report of the sub-committee for the transliteration of the Arabic alphabet, pp. XXX–XXC).<sup>1</sup>

Although the system adopted by the @XC\_ Congress is not identical to the Bahá'í system, there are

sufficient points of similarity to make it likely that this is the system to which Shoghi Effendi was

referring. Shoghi Effendi has evidently used the permissible alternatives in every case where they

recommend single letters (e.g. sh instead of s; except for j where the alternative dj is primarily for the

French). The only major ways in which Shoghi Effendi has deviated from this system is that it recommends al- in all cases for the Arabic definite article whereas Shoghi Effendi uses the double consonant in the case of the "Sun letters": as-, ash-, ar-, etc. Also Shoghi Effendi uses v instead of w for the Persian letter vá v.

I sent a report of my finding to the Universal House of Justice and received a reply dated AA October @CXi (see Addendum Four). About a year later, I received a further letter dated @R October @CXX, enclosing a copy of a page from a notebook kept by Shoghi Effendi at Oxford (see Addendum Five).

This notebook clearly indicates that Shoghi Effendi had considered a number of alternatives in formulating the Bahá'í system and also confirms that it is indeed the @XC\_ International Congress of Orientalists that he was referring to.

On this page from Shoghi Effendi's notebook, there is also reference to a Council meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society in October @XCR. This refers to an addendum to the October @XCR issue of the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society in which the system adopted by the @CX\_ International Congress of Orientalists is approved by the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society with a few minor emendations.

These emendations were principally to avoid any overlap between the Sanskrit and Arabic transliteration systems (Addendum Six contains the system proposed by the Geneva Congress together with the emendations suggested by the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society). It will be seen that the emendations include allowing for the Persian letter váv.

For further information regarding the workings of the transliteration committee, see the report by G. T. Plunkett in Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, October JMKA, pp. MK@-K?.

!%

Some problems of the Bahá'í transliteration system In @CiX, I entered into correspondence with the Universal House of Justice over some problems relating to the Bahá'í System of Transliteration. These problems which will be familiar to those who have ever tried to use the Bahá'í system extensively are outlined in the text of my letter dated @N August @CiX. This and the reply of the Universal House of Justice dated Ab October @CiX is given in

Addendum Seven. This led on to a further interchange of correspondence with a letter of mine dated A November @CiX and a reply dated X March @CiC (Addendum Eight). A reading of this correspondence reveals that a number of useful principles and amendments are

approved:

there is no need to transliterate the names of well-known places;  
the use of -a to indicate the Arabic final h;  
the freedom to choose Arabic or Persian forms of words and names;  
the freedom to choose flat accents if desired, etc.

Some peculiarities of the Bahá'í transliteration system

One of the peculiarities of the Bahá'í transliteration system which is briefly alluded to in my letter

of @N August @CiX is the propensity to use the short vowel i in many situations where the standard

Persian pronunciation would be a. Examples of this are: siyyid, Karbilá , Mazindará n, and As dhirbá yjá n

where the normal pronunciation would give sayyid, Karbalá , Má zarandá n, and As dharbá yjá n.

This matter continued to puzzle me until one day I heard the late Hand of the Cause Mr Dhikru'llah

Khadem say that Shoghi Effendi spoke Persian with an Is fahá ni accent.

This was the result of Munirih

Khá num's marriage to 'Abdu'l-Bahá . Munirih Khá num was from Isfahan.

She had passed on her

Is fahá ni accent to her four daughters and they to their children. And so presumably all of 'Abdu'l-

Bahá 's grandchildren, including Shoghi Effendi, spoke with Is fahá ni accents. I later asked a number of

other Iranians who had met Shoghi Effendi, including Mr Abu'l-Qá sim Afná n and Mr 'Ali Nakhjavá ni,

and they also confirmed that Shoghi Effendi had an Is fahá ni accent. It struck me that this was the

answer to the puzzle over this particular peculiarity. The substitution of an i for an a in the above

examples would lead precisely to an Is fahá ni accent. Shoghi Effendi had written these words exactly

as he spoke them.

A number of other peculiarities remain unexplained. For example the persistent use of -iyyi- in

such words as Bahiyyih, Bá biyyih, etc. The original Persian has a doubled y, whereas the

transliteration seems to indicate three ys: i y, y. Consistency would demand that either the accent on

the first for else one of the two ys should be omitted. A number of much-used words and phrases also

appear to be inconsistent: Allá h-u-Abhá , which should surely be Allá hu

Abhá ; Shi'ih which in this form is a collective noun but is often used as though it were an adjective (which should really be Shi'i). This in fact accords with Iranian pronunciation although incorrect grammatically.

!&

Addenda

7. Transliteration system outlined in Bahá'í Year Book 7qvw-7qv;...  
..... 7p

v. Transliteration system outlined in Bahá'í World, vol. v, 7qv;-7qvp..  
..... .vI

x. Report of Committee on Transliteration of 7rth International Congress of Orientalists, Geneva in 7pq8.....

.....  
..... vV

8. Universal House of Justice: Letter and Memorandum of Research Department, vv October 7qp>..... v>  
Moojan Momen..

.....  
.....  
. v>

The Universal House of Justice, vv October 7qp>..  
.....  
..... vp

w. Universal House of Justice, enclosing a copy of a page from Shoghi Effendi's notebook, 7; October 7qpp.....

.....  
..... xv

; The Geneva Congress system as amended by the Royal Asiatic Society..  
..... x8

>. First Interchange of correspondence with the Universal House of Justice on transliteration, vr October 7q>p..

.....  
.....  
..... 87

Moojan Momen, 7w August 7q>p..

.....  
..... 87

The Universal House of Justice, vr October 7q>p..  
.....  
..... 8x

p. Second interchange of correspondence with the Universal House of Justice on transliteration, p March 7q>q..

.....  
.....  
..... 8>

Moojan momen, v November, 7q>p..

.....  
..... 8>  
The Universal House of Justice, p March 7q>q..

..... wR  
q. 'Abdu'l-Bahá on transliteration..

..... wx

!  
..

Transliteration system outlined in Bahá'í Year Book :=>?-:=>A1  
[@D@]

List of oriental terms frequently used in Bahá'í literature, with modern transliteration and arranged alphabetically

'Abá dih	Dhabih	Kitá b-i-Aqdas	
Rahim			
'Abbá s	Duzdá b	Kurdistá n	Rahmá n
'Abdu'l-Bahá	Fará n	Lá hijá n	Rahmat
'Abdu'l-Hamid	Fá rs	Lá r	Rasht
'Abdul-Husayn	Firdawsi	Lawh	Rawhá
ni			
'Abdu'llá h	Ganjih	Luristá n	Ridvá n
Abu'l-Fadl	Gilá n	Mahbú bu'sh-	Rú
hu'llá h			
Shuhadá			
'Adasiyyih	Gul	Mahmú d	
Sabzivá r			
As dhirbá yjá n	Gulastá n	Maqá m	
Sadratul-Muntahá			
Afná n	Habib	Má kú	
Samarqand			
Aghsá n	Hadith	Malá yir	
Sangsar			
'Abd	Há ji	Mará ghih	Sá
ri			
Ahmad	Hamadá n	Marhabá	Shá h
Ahsá 'i	Haydar 'Ali	Marv	
Shahid			
Ahvá z	Haykal	Masá 'il	
Shahmirzá d			
'Akká	Himmat-As bá d	Mashhad	Shá

hrú d			
'Ali	Husayn	Mashiyyat	
Sharaf			
Allá h-u-Abhá	Huvaydar	Mashriqul-Adhká r	Shaykh
Alvá h	Ibrá him	Má zindará n	
Shi'ih			
Alvá h-i-Salá tin	'Ilm	Mihdi	
Shirá z			
Amin	Imá m	Milá n	
Shushtar			
Amru'llá h	Isqá n	Mirzá	Simná
n			
Anzali	Isrá n	Mishkin-Qalam	
Sisá n			
As qá	'Irá q	Muhammad	
Sistá n			
Aqdas	'Irá q-i-'Ajam	Muhammarih	Siyyid
'Arabistá n	Isfá há n	Mujtahid	Sú
fi			
Asmá	'Ishqá bá d	Mulk	Sulaymá
n			
'Avá shiq	'Ishrá qá t	Mullá	Sultá n
Ayá di	Ishtihá rd	Munirih	Sultá
n-As bá d			
Azal	Islá m	Mustaghá th	Sultá
nu'sh-Shuhadá '			
'Azamat	Ismá 'iliyyih	Nabil	
Sunni			
'Aziz	Istará bá d	Najaf	Sú
ratu'l-Haykal			
Bá b	'Izzat	Najaf-As bá d	
Tabriz			
Bá bu'l-Bá b	Jalá l	Ná qidin	Tá
hirih			
Baghdá d	Jamá l	Ná siru'd-Din	
Tajalliyá t			
Bahá	Jamá l-i-Mubá rak	Nawrú z	Taki
Bahá 'i	Já sb	Nayriz	Tá
kur			
Bahá 'u'llá h	Ka'bih	Nishá bú r	Tará
zá t			
Bahiyyih	Kalimá t	Nú r	
Tarbiyat			
Bahji	Kamá l	Pahlavi	Tá
shkand			
Balú chistá n	Karand	Qá diyá n	Tawhid
Bandar-'Abbá s	Karbilá	Qahqahih	

Thurayyá

Bá rfurú sh      Ká shá n      Qá 'im      Tihrá n  
Basrih      Kaamu's-Sa'á yidih Qamsar      'Ulá

Bahá'í Year Book, JK?A–JK?L, p. JOJ.

!(

Bá tú m      Kawthar      Qasr-i-Shirin      'Ulamá  
Bayá n      Ká zim      Qawl      Urú miyyih  
Bayt      Ká zimayn      Qayyú m      Vahid  
Birjand      Kirmá n      Qazvin      Vá hid  
Bismi'llá h      Kirmá nshá h      Qú chá n      Vali  
Bukhá rá      Khalkhá l      Quddú s      Varqá  
Burú jird      Khá nigayn      Qudrat      Vazir  
Bú shir      Khayli-Khú b      Qum      Yá -Bahá 'u'l-Abhá  
Bushrú yih      Khurá sá n      Qur'á n      Yahyá  
Bushrú 'i      Khuy      Qurratu'l-'Ayn      Yazd  
Chihriq      Kitá b-i-'Ahd      Rafsinjá n      Zanjá n  
Dawlat-As bá d      Zaynu'l-Muquarrabin

!)

>:

Transliteration system outlined in Bahá'í World, vol. >, :=>A–:=>E1  
[A@D]

Transliteration of oriental terms frequently used in Bahá 'i literature  
Arranged alphabetically

As bá dih      Balú chistá n      'Ilm  
Lá hijá n  
'Abbá s      Bandar-'Abbá s      Imá m  
Lá r  
'Abdu'l-Bahá      Bá rfurú sh      Isqá n  
Lawh  
'Abdu'l-Hamid      Bas rih      Isrá n  
Luristá n  
'Abdu'l-Husayn      Bá túm      'Irá q  
'Abdu'llá h      Bayá n      'Irá q-i-'Ajam  
Mah bú bu'sh-Shuhadá '  
Abu'l-Fad l      Bayt      Is fahá n  
Mah mú d  
'Adasiyyih      Birjand      'Ishqá bá d  
Maqá m  
As dhirbá yjá n      Bismi'llá h      Ishrá qá t  
Má kú  
Afná n      Bukhá rá      Ishtihá rd  
Malá yir  
Aghs án      Burú jird      Islá m  
Mará ghih

'Ahd	Bú shir Marh abá	Ismá 'iliyyih
Ah mad	Bushrú yih Marv	Istará bá d
Ah sá 'i	Bushrú 'i Masá 'il	'Izzat
Ahvá z	Mashhad	
'Akká	Chihriq Mashiyyat	Jalá l
'Ali	Mashriqul-Adhká r	Jamá l
Allá h-u-Abhá	Dawlat-As bá d	Jamá l-i-Mubá rak
Alvá h	Má zindará n Dhabih Mihdi	Já sb
Alvá h -i-Salá tin	Duzdá b	
Milá n		
Amin		Ka'bih
Amru'llá h	Mirzá Fá rá n Mishkin-Qalam	Kalimá t
Anzali	Fá rs Muh ammad	Kamá l
As qá	Firdawsi Muh ammarih	Karand
Aqdas	Mujtahid	Karbilá
'Arabistá n	Ganjih Mulk	Ká shá n
Asmá 'yidih	Gilá n Mullá	Kawmu's -S a'á
'Avá shiq	Gul Munirih	Kawthar
Ayá di	Gulastá n Mustaghá th	Ká z im
Azal		Ká z imayn
'Az amat	Habib Nabil	Kirmá n
'Aziz	Hadith Najaf	Kirmá nshá h
Há ji bá d	Khalkhá l	Najaf-As
Bá b	Hamadá n Ná qid in	Khá niqayn
Bá bu'l-Bá b	Haydar-'Ali	Khayli-Khú b

	Ná s iru'd-Din	
Baghdá d	Haykal	Khurá sá n
	Nawrú z	
Bahá	Himmat-As bá d	Khuy
	Nayriz	
Bahá 'i	Husayn	Kitá b-i-'Ahd
	Nishá bú r	
Bahá 'u'llá h	Huvaydar	Kitá b-i-Aqdas
	Nú r	
Bahiyyih		Kurdistá n
Bahji	Ibrá him	

The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, vol. II, JK?L–JK?M, pp. ?JO–N. The spelling [often the Persian forms] of the Oriental words and proper names used in this book and The Dawn-Breakers is as used by Shoghi Effendi.

\*+

[A@\_]

Pahlavi	Rasht	Sisá n
	Thurayyá	
Rawhá ni	Sistá n	T ihrá n
Qá diyá n	Rid vá n	Siyid
Qahqahih	Rú h u'llá h	S ú fi
	'Ulá	
Qá 'im		Sulaymá n
	'Ulamá	
Qamsar	Sabzivá r	Sultán
	Urú miyyih	
Qasr-i-Shirin	Sadratu'l-Muntahá	
Sultán-As bá d	Vah id	
Qawl Qayyú m	Samarqand	
Sultánu'sh-Shuhadá '	Vá h id	
Qazvin	Sangsar	Sunni
	Vali	
Qú chá n	Sá ri	Sú
ratu'l-Haykal	Varqá	
Quddú s	Shá h	
	Vazir	
Qudrat	Shahid	Tabriz
Qum	Shahmirzá d	T á
hirih	Yá -Bahá 'u'l-Abhá	
Qur'á n	Shá hrú d	Tajalliyá
t	Yah yá	
Qurratu'l-'Ayn	Sharaf	Tá kur
	Yazd	
Shaykh	Taqi	
Rafsinjá n	Shi'ih	T ará

zá t	Zanjá n	
Rah im	Shirá z	
Tarbiyat	Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin	
Rah má n	Shushtar	Tá shkand
Rah mat	Simná n	Tawh id

#### Guide to the transliteration and pronunciation of the Persian alphabet

???	á	???	kh	???	s
???	k				
???	b	???	d	???	d
???	g				
???	p	???	dh	???	t
???	l				
???	t	???	r	???	z
???	m				
???	th	???	z	???	'
???	n				
???	j	???	zh	???	gh
???	v/w				
???	ch	???	s	???	f
???	y				
???	h	???	sh	???	q
???					

(Hamza)

th	pronounced as s	a as	in account
dh	pronounced as z	á as	in arm
zh	pronounced as j (French)	i as e	in best
s	pronounced as s	i as ee	in meet
d	pronounced as z	u as o	in short
t	pronounced as t	ú as oo	in moon
z	pronounced as z	aw as	in mown

See also The Dawn-Breakers, p. LXO.

\*!

H:

Report of Committee on transliteration of  
:Kth International Congress of Orientalists  
held at Geneva in :E=O1

[XiC]

Tenth International Congress of Orientalists,  
held at Geneva.

Report of the Transliteration Committee.

(Translation)

The Committee appointed by the Congress to select a system for the  
transliteration of the Sanskrit

and Arabic Alphabets has held several meetings. After having examined and discussed the systems which have hitherto been used, and taken note of the various improvements which have been suggested by members of the Congress and other savants, the Committee submit for the approval of the Congress, and with a view to general adoption by Orientalists, the systems shown in the two tabular forms annexed to this report.

They have taken as a basis for their work the report presented by a special committee appointed by the Royal Asiatic Society of London, and the systems of transliteration usually adopted in France, in Germany, and by the Bengal Asiatic Society. They do not pretend to have discovered a perfectly scientific system; it was necessary to give weight to established usages, and also to take into consideration the varying pronunciations which the letters of the Arabic alphabet have received in different Muhammadan countries. This is one reason for the alternative modes of transliteration

proposed for certain letters, but the number

[Page XXb]

for which these alternative methods are suggested has been kept as small as possible, and it is hoped that the Orientalists of every country will endeavour to still further reduce this number by conforming as much as possible to the system recommended by the Committee.

As regards the transliteration of Sanskrit, the differences of opinion have been much less, and only in the case of a very small number of letters has any difficulty arisen. In these instances the

Committee have chosen from among the various equivalents proposed those which on the whole seem best suited for practical use.

To obtain uniformity each country and each society must make some concessions, and the

Committee hope that the systems now proposed will be unanimously adopted and brought into general use.

Barbier de Meynard, G. T. Plunkett,

G. Bühler, Emile Senart,

J. Burgess, Socin

M. J. de Goeje, Windisch

H. Thompson Lyon,

Geneva, @b September, @XC\_.

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, October JMKA, pp. MXK–MM@, MM? & MMM–K. The page with the Sanskrit and Pali alphabets has been omitted.

\*\*

[XXb]

Transliteration of the Sanskrit and Pali alphabets

...

[XX@]

\*

[XXA]

Transliteration of Arabic alphabet1

Recommended

Recommended

? ??at beginning of word omit; hamza elsewhere '      ?'??

???b      ? ??g

(D underdots) permissible gh

???t      ???f

? ??t (D underdots) permissible th      ???q

? ??j permissible dj      ???k

???h      ???l

? ??t (D underdots) permissible kh      ???m

???d      ???n

? ??d (D underdots) permissible dh      ???w

???r      ???h

???z

vowels a, i, u

???s

lengthened ? ??a , ???, i, ? ??ú

? ??s (D underdots) permissible sh

diphthongs ? ???ay and ? ???aw

? ??s

e and o may be used in place of i and u

? ??d

... ü and ö in Turkish

? ??t (A underdots) or t

? ??of article ? ???to be always l.

? ??z (A underdots) z

Additional in Persian

???p

? ??c (D underdots) permissible ch

? ??z (D underdots) permissible zh

???g

...

Only information regarding Arabic and Persian, and some Turkish, has been included.

\*\$

[XXX]

Proposals of the Sub-committee for  
the transliteration of the Arabic alphabet

@. The Committee agree upon the following:

? ??b — ? ??t — ? ??h — ? ??d — ? ??r — ?

??z — ? ??s — ? ??s — ? ??f — ? ??q — ?

??k — ? ??l — ? ??m — ? ??n — ? ??h — ?

??p

A. For ? ??they recommend j, but will allow dj to be used as a substitute,

D. For ???d , but allow z in India.

\_. For ? ??t and for ? ??z . This is to avoid upsetting the

Indian accepted system—elsewhere t and z will

suffice,

N. For ? ??y whenever ? ??is a consonant. Whilst fully appreciating

the reasons why German

Orientalists have preferred j the Committee feel obliged to adopt the character  
accepted

throughout India and by English, French, and many other writers and scholars.

R. ? ??at the commencement of a word need not be transliterated, hamzah in  
the middle or at the end

of a word to be represented by ' above the line.

i. For ? ' ??above the line (a comma reversed).

\*%

[XXC]

X. For ?? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

t h d s g z c (all with D underdots)

but agree that th kh dh sh gh zh ch may be used as substitutes for the above.

They consider that t, h, etc., (with D underdots) are better than [the same  
letters with D overdots],

or any others in which the mark is placed above the consonant, as in this  
position the mark may

be taken for the accent of a vowel, the cross of a t, etc.

...

C. For ? ??as a consonant w.

@b. For ? ??in Persian, Hindustani, and Turkish g.

That in Turkish books for beginners, if it be thought necessary to mark when  
the ? ??is to be

pronounced as y, the sign k should be used.

@@. ...

@A. ...

@D. The ? ??of the article ? ???to be transliterated l.

@\_. That the vowel-points be a, i, u

The Lengthened vowels ? ??a , ???, i, ? ??ú . That e

and o may be used in place of i and u in these

languages in which it may be necessary. That ü and ö may be also used in Turkish, ....

That the so-called diphthongs ? ??ay and ? ??aw.

G. T. Plunket

\*&

O:

Universal House of Justice:

Letter and memorandum of Research Department, >> October :=EV

Wixamtree, Sand Lane

Northill

Biggleswade

Beds. SG@X CAD

England

Dear Baha'i friends,

In @CiX, I conducted some correspondence with you regarding the question of the Bahá 'i system of

transliteration. At that time I wrote to you that I had been unable to find which Congress of

Orientalists it was that Shoghi Effendi had been referring to when he stated that the Bahá 'is should

use the system approved by the International Congress of Orientalists. As I had some time to spare in

the Library of the School of African and Oriental Languages recently, I had another look through the

reports of the various annual congresses and on this occasion. I went back further than I had done

previously. I believe I have now found the Congress to which Shoghi Effendi was referring.

The tenth International Congress of Orientalists was held in Geneva in @XC\_. In the published

proceedings of this Congress, there is an addendum giving the result of the proceedings of a

Commission charged with finding a transcription system. The enclosed photocopies show their

recommendations. You will see that Shoghi Effendi has used this system utilising their permissible

alternatives in all cases where they recommend single letters. The only ways in which Shoghi Effendi

has deviated from this system is that it recommends "al-" in all cases for the Arabic definite article,

whereas Shoghi Effendi uses the doubled consonant in the case of the Sun letters—"as-", "ash-", "ar-",

etc., also Shoghi Effendi uses "v" instead of "w" for the Persian letter "vav".

You will also note that the

recommendation, is for flat accents [macrons] rather than accute.

Unfortunately, the brief description  
on these pages gives no indication of what should be done with respect to the  
Persian idafa [id á fa] and  
other difficult situations which I highlighted in my previous correspondence.  
Shoghi Effendi  
presumably devised his own solutions to these cases.  
With warmest Baha'i greetings,  
Dr Moojan Momen

\*'

The Universal House of Justice  
Bahá 'i World Centre

Department of the Secretariat  
AA October @CXi  
Dr Moojan Momen  
Wixamtree; Sand Lane  
Northill,  
Biggleswade  
Beds. SG@X CAD  
England

Dear Bahá 'i Friend,  
The Universal House of Justice read with great interest your letter of @C July  
@CXi about your  
discovery of further information in connection with the Bahá 'i system of  
transliteration, and referred  
the matter to the Research Department. We are now directed to send you the  
enclosed copy of the  
memorandum prepared by that Department in response.  
The House of Justice hopes that the results of the research done at the World  
Centre will be of  
assistance to you in your endeavours to solve the riddle of the source of the  
transliteration system on  
which Shoghi Effendi based the method now in use in Bahá 'i texts.

With loving Bahá 'i greetings,  
[signed Ethna Archibald]  
For Department of the Secretariat  
Enclosure

\*(

Memorandum

[@]

To: The Universal House of Justice Date: AA October @CXi  
From: The Research Department  
The Bahá'í transliteration system  
With his letter dated @C July @CXi, Dr Moojan Momen forwarded the report of a  
Commission

"charged by the [Tenth International] Congress of Orientalists] to adopt a system of transliteration for the Sanskrit and Arabic languages", which includes a transliteration system for Arabic upon which Shoghi Effendi may have based the method now used in Bahá'í texts. The Research Department has compared the system proposed by the Transcription Commission with that described in The Bahá'í World volumes and agrees with Dr Momen's observation that the two systems are very similar. It is indeed possible that the beloved Guardian adapted the Commission's proposal for his use. His secretary wrote in response to a query from an individual believer:

As to the origin of the transliteration used by Shoghi Effendi, this was decided upon by an international congress of orientalist and is now adhered to by the most eminent scholars. (@C

June @CD@)

The variations between the Commission's transliteration system and that used in Bahá'í texts could be explained by postulating that, where the Commission permitted alternative transliterations, Shoghi Effendi adopted the variant which was easiest to reproduce on the typewriters of the day, e.g., th instead of t [D underdots] for ???, j instead of dj for ???, t instead of t for ???.

With regard to the use of an acute accent (´) instead of a macron (¯) on long vowels, it is interesting to note that carbon copies of early letters typewritten by Shoghi Effendi or on his behalf held in the World Centre Archives show that the accent on long vowels was generally made by typing a straight apostrophe above the letter in question. This involved only backspacing, rather than the backspacing and movement of the platen required to place a dash above the letter. On AD April @CAN, the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles regarding the revision of a folder as follows:

... Shoghi Effendi is desirous that the horizontal accents over the long vowels in the Persian and

Arabic transliterated words should be replaced by vertical or nearly vertical ones, if possible,

thus:

Bah ' or Bahá 'í instead of Baha 'í

\*)

[A]

and again, on AD January @CAR:

With regard to the accent on the letter a in the transliteration of Persian names and words and the difficulty of the publishers in having a vertical mark, Shoghi Effendi feels that in case having the regular vertical mark means too much trouble and expense it would be justified to replace it by the horizontal dash on the a, but if the trouble and expense would not be much, for the sake of uniformity throughout transliterations everywhere, it would be best to have the regular vertical mark.

Other variations between Bahá 'i transliteration and the system offered by the Commission occur, as is pointed out by Dr Momen: whereas the Commission recommends that the Lám of the Arabic definite article always be "l", the Guardian chose to assimilate the Lám of the definite article of the following consonant, when this is one of the "sun" letters, resulting in a doubling of that consonant.

Furthermore, w is transliterated as w when it occurs as an element of a diphthong, as in "Naw-Rú z", but generally as a v when it occurs as a consonant, e.g., "Rid vá n".

Examples of consonantal vá vs represented by w are rare, but do occur: "An-Nú ru'l-Abhá -Fi-Mufá wadá t-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá " (The Bahá'í World, vol. N (New York: Bahá 'i Publishing Committee, @CDR), p. \_i\_) and "waqf property" (God Passes By, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Bahá 'i Publishing Trust, @CXi), p. DNi).

Shoghi Effendi enclosed a "list of the best known and most current Bahá 'i terms, and other Oriental names and expressions, all properly and accurately transliterated" with his letter to the Western believers dated @A March @CAD. (The letter is published in Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages MNOO–MNQO, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Bahá 'i Publishing Trust, @Ci\_), pages D\_–\_D.) The "full code" mentioned in the postscript to this letter was included with a letter dated C April @CAD addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada. This indicates that the system upon which the Bahá 'i system is based existed prior to @CAD.

It is our understanding that, according to the proceedings of succeeding International Congresses, the problem of transliteration was not discussed again until the Thirteenth

Congress in Leyden, @CD@,  
which was after the Bahá 'i transliteration system had been promulgated.  
In this connection, the choice of language in the note regarding  
transliteration on the verso of the  
title page in The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, vol. A,  
"April @CAR–April @CAX"(New  
York, Bahá 'i Publishing Committee, @CAX) is also of interest:  
NOTE: The spelling of the Oriental words and proper names used in this issue of  
The Bahá'í  
World is according to the system of transliteration established at one of the  
International  
Oriental Congresses.  
This note states that the system was "established" at one of the International  
Oriental Congresses,  
not "adopted". As we have no record that the Transcription Commission's  
recommendation was  
endorsed or adopted by the Tenth Congress, or by later Congresses, this may be  
an additional support  
for the hypothesis that the transliteration system adopted by Shoghi Effendi is  
based on this  
recommendation.

"+

[D]

In support of the above hypothesis, it would be of value to ascertain, if  
possible:  
Whether the Tenth, or a later, International Congress dealt with the system put  
forward by the  
Transcription Commission.  
The membership of the Commission, since the universality and practicality of  
the system was  
emphasized by the Guardian's secretaries.

---

"!

?:

Universal House of Justice:  
Enclosing a copy of a page from Shoghi Effendi's notebook

The Universal House of Justice  
Bahá 'i World Centre

Department of the Secretariat

@R October @CXX

Dr Moojan Momen

Wixamtree, Sand Lane

Northill, Biggleswade

Beds. SG@X CAD

England

Dear Bahá 'i Friend,

We wrote to you on AA October @CXi on behalf of the Universal House of Justice concerning the

Bahá 'i system of transliteration, and enclosed a memorandum from the Research Department on this

subject. We are now directed by the House of Justice to send you the enclosed copy of a page copied

from a notebook kept by Shoghi Effendi when he was at Oxford University.

As you will note, the annotation made by Shoghi Effendi confirms your own conclusion about the

International Congress of Orientalists of @XC\_. Shoghi Effendi also makes reference to the Council of

the Royal Asiatic Society held in October @XCR.

With loving Bahá 'i greetings,

[signed Ethna Archibald]

For Department of the Secretariat

Enclosure

"\*

Handwritten copy of a page from Shoghi Effendi's notebook has been omitted.

""

A:

The Geneva Congress system

as amended by the Royal Asiatic Society

[N]

Table II

Transliteration of the Arabic alphabet

Adopted by the Geneva Congress.

[Notes in square brackets refer to pp. R, i.]

? ??at beginning of word omit; hamza elsewhere ' [' ? ??g (D

underdots) permissible gh

or, Note X]

???f

???b

???q

???t

???k

? ??t (D underdots) permissible th

???l

? ??j permissible dj

???m

? ??h

???n

? ??h (D underdots) kh

???w

???d

???h

? ??d (D underdots) dh

???y

???r

???z

????????

???s

vowels a, i, u

??s (D underdots) permissible sh  
lengthened ??a , ??, i, ? ??ú  
??s [see Note @]  
diphthongs ??ay and ??aw  
??d [see Note A]  
e and o may be used in place of i and u  
??d  
... ü and ö in Turkish  
??t or t [only t, Note D]  
??of article ???to be always l.  
??z or z  
???

---

"\$

Persian

[R]

Opening words of the Gulista n:

Minnat huda ira 'azza wa jalla kih tu'atas mu jili-i-qurbatast. Wa  
bis ukr andaras mazid-i-ni'mat. Har  
nafa-i-kih faru mira vad mumidd-i-hiyu tast. Wa c un bar  
niaya-i-mufarriq-i-z at. Pas dar har nafzai du  
ni'mat mauju da: Wa bar har ni'mati s ukri wa jib.1

(@@@)

The Council would take this opportunity of suggesting the following scheme for  
the transliteration  
of Hebrew.

...

Overdots used for O underdots.

"%

[R]

Additional in Persian, Hindi, and Pashtu

??p

??c (D underdots) permissible ch

??z (D underdots) permissible zh

??g

...

The above scheme contains, it will be seen, two schemes: one for the  
transliteration of Sanskrit,

Pa li, and the allied alphabets, and one for the transliteration of Arabic and  
the allied alphabets. These

two tables are inconsistent with one another on several points. In applying the  
Congress scheme,

therefore, to the transliteration of Hindi \*which is written both with Sanskrit  
and Arabic letters) the

same word would have to be transliterated differently according to the alphabet before the

transliterator. These points are as follows

@. The sound represented in English by sh is represented in the first table by s, and in the second by

s (D underdots) (sh being permissible). On the other hand, the s is used in the first table for the

Sanskrit (ś) (sh) and in the second for (śz). The practical

difficulties arising from this

discrepancy are, however, so small that the Council would merely point out the discrepancy.

A. The sign d is used in the Sanskrit table for (ḍ), (the cerebral d), and in the Arabic table for (ḍ)

(ḍaḍ). This discrepancy could be avoided by selecting d for the da d,

"&

[i]

D. The alternative transliteration t allowed for (ṭ) in the second table clashes with the use of the same

sign in the first table. This alternative transliteration might be dropped out of Table II.

\_. The diphthongs ai and au in the first table are replaced by ay and aw in the second. It would be

better to adhere to the first table.

N. The transliteration w for the (w) in the Arabic table clashes with that proposed for the (w) in the

Sanskrit table. Both v and w might be allowed for each of these letters.

R. The sound represented by ch in the English orthography is transliterated c in the Sanskrit table,

and c (D underdots) (ch being permissible) in the second table. It would be more consistent to

adopt c throughout.

There are also one or two other matters which are worthy of notice.

i. The signs z and z, and d and z are each of them used in Table II as the transliteration of two

different letters.

X. No sign has been suggested in the Arabic table for the transliteration of the was la. The comma

above the line ' used in the table to represent the hamza might be used for the was la, and either a

stroke or a circle above the line (' or °) might be used for the hamza.

C. No sign has been suggested in the Arabic table for the silent t. The sign h might be used to

represent this letter.

@b. A stroke beneath the line (thus k or m) might be suggested to signify that a letter written in any

alphabet to be transliterated is not to be pronounced.

"

[X]

Subject to the suggestions above made, which will, the Council hopes, meet with the approval of Continental scholars, the following passages would illustrate the scheme as adopted by the Congress.

Sanskrit

...

"(

[C]

Pali

...

Arabic

Opening chapter of the Qur'a n:

? ????????

????????T???? ???

Bismi'lla

hi'l-rah ma ni'l-rah imi

?? ????????? ?

??T?????? ??

al-h amdu lilla hi

rabbi-'l-'a lamin

????????? ????????

al-rah ma ni'l-rah imi

????? ?? ? ? ???

ma liki yawmi'l-dini

?????? ??? ?????? ???

?????

iyya ka na'budu wa-iyya ka nasta'inu

?? ?????? ??? ???? ?

?????? ???

Ihdina 'l-s ira ta'l-mustaqima

??? ???? ?

?? ?????? ?? ?? ?? ???? ?

?? ?????? ??? ?????? ?

?? ?????? ? ???? ?

?????

s ira ta'llad ina an'amta 'alaih

ghairi'l-maghd u bi

'alaih wa la 'l-d a lina

Qur'a n C:@

????? ?? ??? ???????

????? ?? ?? ??????????

? ?????????? ?? ???

Bara 'atun mina'llahi wa rasu lihi ila

alladhina

'a hadtum mina 'l-mush'rikin

Qur'a n @b:i\_1

??? ? ? ? ? ?

??????? ???? ???? ?

? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

? ? ? ?

????? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? thumma

ba'athna min ba'dihi rusulan ila

Û;

? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

???? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

??? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

????

qawmihim faja 'u hum

bi'l-bayina ti fama ka nu

liyu'minu bima kadhabu bihi min qablu kadha lika

natba'u 'ala qulu bi l-mu?tadin2

[@b]

Notes:

Hamza at the beginning of a word is omitted, as prescribed on p. N. Only the vowel is written. Ex.

asad, a lion; plural usad. Insan, a humen being.

Hamza elsewhere = a stroke ' or circle °.

Was la is represented by an apostrophe. See Note X, p. i. The diphthongs have been written ai and

au, not ay and aw. See Note \_, p. i.

The Arabic quoted text appeared to contain errors and the source is not Qur'á n J@:JN. Only Qur'á n X:J@J and J@:XN

resembled the quoted text.—M.W.T.

Transliteration may not match the original.—M.W.T.

")

[Repeat of page DX]

\$+

V:

First interchange of correspondence with the Universal House of Justice on transliteration

The Universal House of Justice

P.O. Box @NN

Haifa, Israel

@N August @CiX

Dear Bahá 'i Friends,

I am in the process of editing a book to be published by George Ronald. This will be a collection of

essays by Prof. F. Kazemzadeh, Denis MacEoin, Peter Smith and myself, and is provisionally entitled

Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History. It is hoped that it will stimulate some interest in the academic

community and the essays are being written with this in mind.

In connection with this book, a problem has arisen over the matter of transliteration. As you are no

doubt aware, the system of transliteration at present in general use in the academic community is

somewhat different to that used in Bahá'í books. No system of transliteration is completely

satisfactory but the present Bahá'í system suffers from great inconsistencies and it is these

inconsistencies which have been the principle cause of criticism such as that levelled by Elwell-Sutton

at Balyuzi's Muhammad and the Course of Islám in a recent issue of the Journal of the Royal Asiatic

Society (a copy is enclosed for your information). The Bahá'í system is said to be based on a system

worked out at one of the Congress of Orientalists. However I have been unable to find any such

system in the Proceedings of these Congresses. In any case, it is not so much in the basic system as in

its application that inconsistencies arise in present Bahá'í usage.

The principal problems are as follows:

@. The system ought to be consistent as to whether it is a system of transcription of pronunciation

(i.e. it conveys the information of how a word sounds) or a system of transliteration (i.e. it

conveys the information of how a word is written). The main problem of the Bahá'í system lies in

the fact that it has taken a system that was designed for the transliteration of Arabic words and

has applied it to the transcription of Persian pronunciation. In making this transformation, the

Bahá'í system has fallen between the two stools and is at present neither entirely a system of

transliteration (thus you have Abu'l-Qasim and Dhi'l-Hijjih rather than Abú 'l-Qá sim and Dhú 'l-

Hijjih) nor a system of transcription of the Persian pronunciation (thus the letters

\$!

d, dh, and th have no resemblance to the Persian pronunciation which is z, z and s respectively;

Mazindará n is pronounced Mazandará n etc.).

A. The Bahá'í system uses Persian pronunciation and usage even in Arabic

expressions and the names of Arabs and Arabic books. Thus Ibnu'l-'Arabi wrote al-Futuhátu'l-Makkíya and not Futúhat-i-Makkíyyih as it appears in Bahá 'i books. Similarly Shaykh Ah mad was an Arab and should be called al-Ah sá 'i and not i-Ah sá 'i. But there are inconsistencies even in this usage in Bahá 'i books; thus we have Kitá b-i-Aqdas but Kitá bu'r-Rú h (both of which are Arabic books).

D. In the Persian idáfa construction after a word ending in -ih or the long vowels, -ú , -á , -i, the yi sound follows the ending and is not a part of it; thus rishiy-i-dirakht implies that rishih has had an h changed to a y, whereas the h has gone and the buffer sound yi has been added. Rishi-yi-dirakht conveys the structure of this construct better. Similarly, one would have 'Ali-yi-Bastámi.

\_. Normal Bahá 'i usage is inconsistent as regards the use of final hamza; thus we have Qayyú mu'l-Asmá ' and Siyyidu'sh-Shuhadá ' but 'Abdu'l-Bahá and 'Ulamá (with no final hamza indicated).

N. The Bahá 'i system looks somewhat strange and antiquated with oblique accent marks instead of flat ones which are almost universal now, e.g. Bá b instead of Ba b. Thus the present Bahá 'i system has many inconsistencies, and while this is acceptable in the corpus of books that exist at present, it presents great problems and confusion to a writer who wishes to transliterate a word that has not previously been transliterated in a Bahá 'i publication. Thus this system which was originally introduced in order to eliminate variation and confusion in transliteration in Bahá 'i books may in fact in the long run itself create variation and confusion. This is not to say however that the Bahá 'i system does not have some advantages over the system currently in use among orientalists; thus, for example, the use of underlining sh, dh, etc., is more scientific than omitting this as orientalists do and of course the Bahá 'i system is a better guide to Persian pronunciation than the system used by orientalists. If it is desired, however, to have a system that transcribes Persian pronunciation, there is in existence a much better, more consistent system,

\$\*

see H. Busse's History of Persia under Qajar Rule. On the other hand it would

involve fewer changes in the present system and be more in keeping with the present trend among orientalist if the Bahá'í system were to be altered so as to become consistently a system of transliteration.

Consequently, for the book that I am now editing, and for any future books aimed at the non-Bahá'í academic community, I would like to propose using the present Bahá'í system but with the following alterations made so as to make it a system of transliteration, to eliminate inconsistencies, and to bring it more into line with the system currently in use as far as the format is concerned.

@. To standardize all names and expressions using the Arabic id á fa construction so that they are connected by u (which is what the Arabic grammatical form requires). This would only affect a very few names such as Ná s iru'd-Din (instead of Ná s iri'd-Din).

A. To transliterate all Arabic names and expressions according to Arabic usage and grammar and not Persian, e.g. Shaykh Ah mad al-Ah sá 'i, Yá S á hiba'z-Zamá n (instead of S á hibu'z-Zamá n).

D. In words and names derived from Arabic which end in o in Arabic and o in Persian, to be transliterated -a where an Arabic name or expression is intended (e.g. Madina) and -ih for Persian names (e.g. Rú zbih).

\_ . To keep more closely to grammatical form in Arabic names and expressions, e.g. Mu'tamadu'd-Dawlih (instead of Mu'tamidu'd-Dawlih), Abu-Badi' (instead of Aba-Badi').

N. To use flat accents [macrons] instead of acute, e.g. Ba b instead of Bá b.

R. To separate more clearly the components of a Persian id á fa construction in which the first component ends in -ih, -á , -ú , -i. e.g. 'Ali-yi-Kani rather than 'Aliy-i-Kani.

i. To eliminate certain usages such as Mazandará n (rather than Mazindará n).

X. Common place-names such as Baghdad and Shiraz require no transliteration.

\$"

C. To drop the final hamza in all cases, e.g. Qayyú mu'l-Asmá .

@b. To use w for the silent ???, e.g. Khwá razm.

This seems a very large list of alterations but in practical terms, the effects that it will have on

Bahá'í texts would be very slight. The suggested change in accenting would not alter the appearance

of the text greatly and the other changes occur relatively infrequently. Thus for example, I counted only AN changes (other than accenting) in the Prologue and first three chapters (NC pages) of Balyuzi's The Báb.

Thus with comparatively minor changes in form, one can remove most of the problems and inconsistencies in the present Bahá 'i system and bring the system more into line with that followed by most other publications in this field. This is particularly important in a work of the nature of that which I am editing since it is our intention to send the book to a number of learned journals for review and it would be regrettable if this and other books published were to be met with the same sort of criticism as that which has been levelled by Ellwell-Sutton.

If you desire any clarification of the points raised in this letter, I will be in Haifa during the summer,

Warmest Bahá 'i greetings,

M. Momen

\$\*b

The Universal House of Justice  
Bahá 'i World Centre

Department of the Secretariat  
Ab October @CiX

Dr Moojan Momen  
@\_/@N Shelby Row  
Cambridge  
England

Dear Bahá 'i Friend,

Your letter of @N August @CiX making various recommendations about the transliteration of Arabic and Persian terms into the Roman alphabet was referred by the Universal House of Justice to an ad hoc committee.

The report of that committee has now been presented and the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to send you the enclosed copy for your comments, which it will be glad to receive.

For Department of the Secretariat

Enclosure

With loving Bahá 'i greetings,

[signed Loraine Kerfoot]

\$"

Memorandum

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: @D October @CiX

From: Ad hoc Committee

Subject: Transliteration—Dr Moojan Momen's letter of @N August @CiX

There is no doubt that a number of inconsistencies and anomalies have crept into the practice of

Bahá 'is in transliteration [of] Arabic and Persian terms. We feel Dr

Momen's letter presents a very

helpful approach to overcoming these, although we differ with him in a number of his specific

recommendations. We shall make a few general observations first on the matter of transliteration and

shall then comment on the recommendations listed on page D of his letter.

@. It is of great practical value to Bahá 'is to have a system that can transliterate both Arabic and

Persian. Our Holy Writings are in both languages and thus the same term sometimes appears in

Persian and sometimes in Arabic. While, therefore, the system is basically one of transliteration,

we feel that it is an advantage rather than otherwise for it to be able to indicate in various minor

ways the difference between Persian and Arabic usages, especially in the pronunciation of vowels.

A. It must be remembered that the system is for use not merely for English publications, but for

publications in all those languages using the Roman alphabet, except for Turkish. If, therefore, we

are to consider the current usage of orientalists, we should consider that of orientalists writing in

German, French, Spanish, Italian, etc., as well as those writing in English.

D. The primary purpose, however, is not for scholarly works, but to provide a system which can be

used by all Bahá 'is writing in the Roman alphabet. In other words, while it should be possible for

scholars to know immediately from the transliterated form how a word was written in the

original text, the system is primarily intended for use by laymen. This influences our views in a

number of ways, which will be apparent in our specific comments below. It is for this reason, for

example, that we favour showing the assimilation of the Arabic definite article in the spelling, as

the present system does, although this is a departure from strict "transliteration".

\_. An important factor is continuity. The present system is now well known to those Bahá 'is who

use the Roman alphabet, therefore any changes should be minimal.

N. On Dr Momen's ten specific recommendations we have the following comments.

w.7 We do not see the virtue in standardising the spelling of names as suggested. This is one of the instances where we value the ability of the present system to indicate the Persian pronunciation of what is otherwise an Arabic word. The Persians say "Ná s iri'd-Din" and we prefer it to be spelt that way.

\$\$

[Memorandum: Dr Momen's letter @N.X.iX, Page A]

w.v Here again, the same applies, as Persians generally, when pronouncing Arabic words, do not normally observe Arabic grammatical rules.

w.x We agree with this recommendation: to use the ending -a when the word is in an Arabic context and -ih when it is in a Persian one.

w.8 Our comment is the same as in w.7 above.

w.w Here we refer to our point x above. The system is intended for day-to-day use by ordinary

Bahá 'is, and only secondarily by orientalists. Far more typewriters use the acute accent than the flat accent [macron]. Although the acute accents may look strange and antiquated to orientalists, they are much more familiar and natural to the average reader. Here, however, since the purpose of the accent is merely to indicate a long vowel, we see no objection to permitting Bahá 'i orientalists to use the horizontal accent [macron] (or indeed a circumflex or any other accent) in their scholarly works if they so wish, although, as stated above, we prefer the acute accent and this should be retained for general Bahá 'i usage.

w.; We do not agree with this recommendation, but perhaps Dr Momen would like to discuss it

with his publishers. We feel that the effect on the average reader of spelling 'Aliy-i-Kani as

'Ali-yi-Kani might be to cause him to stress the 'yi' unconsciously.

w.> We see no reason to eliminate certain usages in transliterating place-names, as some are pronounced in two ways and both are good usage. A similar case in English is the alternate spellings 'farther' and 'further'.

w.p The Guardian himself left untransliterated place-names such as Mecca which have a well-

established English usage. Others, such as Baghdád, Shiráz and 'Akká he did transliterate.

We feel this is a matter of judgement that must be left to the author and publisher and may well vary from country to country, or even from book to book depending upon the context

and the audience for which it is written.

w.q The hamza is dropped in Persian but not in Arabic. Thus, Qayyú m'l-Asmá', being an Arabic form, needs a hamza at the end, but the Persian form, Qayyú m-i-Asmá does not require it.

In quotations from the Writings one should use the Arabic or Persian forms of such names

in accordance with the original. If the original uses Arabic, one should transliterate

accordingly, and so with Persian. In original writing an author, we feel, should be free to

use either as he wishes, as both are current in Bahá'í literature. Thus, although the Most

Holy Book is written in Arabic, it is much more common to refer to it in other places by the

Persian variant of its name, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and this, we feel, is entirely permissible.

\$%

[Memorandum: Dr Momen's letter @N.X.iX, Page D]

w.7r As such silent letters are very rare we feel it can be left to the decision of individual authors

and publishers whether or not they should be transliterated. Our preference is to omit them.

---

\$&

E: Second interchange of correspondence with the Universal House of Justice on transliteration

NX Birdwood

Road

Cambridge

CB@ DSU

A November

@CiX

Universal House of Justice

P.O. Box @NN Haifa

Israel

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Thank you for your letter of Abth October @CiX forwarding the report of the ad

hoc committee on  
transliteration.

It is somewhat difficult for me to comment on this report since the whole of the report is based on premises which differ from those of my original letter. My primary consideration in drafting this letter was to eliminate the inconsistencies which arise from the fact that the present Bahá 'i system is neither wholly a system of transliteration of the written word nor wholly a system of transcription of pronunciation; it is perched somewhere between the two stools and must inevitably fall between them on occasion (as is pointed out, in the review by Elwell-Sutton of Mr Balyuzi's book *Muhammad and the Course of Islám*). I feel that as there is unquestionably going to be a great growth in the volume of literature produced by Bahá 'i scholars and as this will involve increasing use of names and terms borrowed from Persian and Arabic sources, it is important to eliminate inconsistencies at this stage rather than have to do it later.

The ad hoc committee, on the other hand, seems to regard the ability of the present system to include elements of Persian pronunciation as being of greater importance despite the inconsistencies that such a flexibility entails. The ad hoc committee also considers that the present system aids the layman although I must admit that when the inconsistencies of the present system allow for example both Futú h á t-i-Makkivvih (*God Passes By*, p. @AA) and Futú h á ta'l-Makkiyyah (Balyuzi, *Muhammad and the Course of Islám*, p. AXb) and even Mará ghihi and Maraghi'i in the same book (*The Dawn-Breakers*, Wilmette @CRA, pp. ARb, \_A\_, \_D@ and RXN), I wonder whether the present system is being of service even to the layman.

Having made these general comments, I will now pass on to consider the specific points made by the committee.

@. See above.

A. The systems in general use among French and German orientalists are even further removed from the Bahá 'i system than the system used by English-speaking orientalists. The proposals of my original letter would tend to close the gap a little.

\$'

D. I have made no objection to showing the assimilation of the Arabic definite article since the correct form in the Arabic is to place a shadda over the first letter of the word the definite article of which is to be assimilated, in my opinion both al-Shams and ash-Shams are correct transliterations of ??????and since the Bahá 'i system has favoured the latter, I see no objection to continuing it.

\_. I have borne in mind the factor of continuity in putting forward these proposals, in that I have kept them to the minimum necessary to ensure consistency. Otherwise there would have been a large number of other points I would like to have raised: for example, I doubt whether there is any benefit in indicating the idáfa in Persian names. Why not just Mullá Husayn Bushrú 'i? After all you do not write T ará z u'llá h-yi-Samandari, although this is how Persians would pronounce the name.

N.@ In fact neither i nor u correctly transcribes the sound made by Persians in the middle of Ná s iru'd-Din. Most Persians elide this vowel into a very short indistinguishable sound. The point is made clear by referring to a title that has not previously been transliterated. If one were to take the title ????? ??????, Persians would disagree as to whether this should be transliterated S á rimu'd-Dawlih or S á rimi'd-Daulih. Whereas the truth is that the connecting vowel is an intermediate sound and either u or i would do. Thus inconsistencies will inevitably arise and both forms may turn up in different writers' works. Lastly, may I point out that the voluminous encyclopaedic dictionary 'Ali Akbar Dihkhudá 's Lughat Náma1 points this word thus: Ná s iru'd-Din, in over @bb entries under this name including Ná s iru'd-Din Shá h (Volume for pp. @NX-@RR).

N.A The committee's comment on this point was: "Here again, the same applies, as Persians generally, when pronouncing Arabic words, do not normally observe Arabic grammatical rules." I would ask the question why when transliterating a word from Arabic into Latin characters for an English book we are obliged to approach the matter from the point of view of how a Persian would have pronounced the Arabic word. I realise that the Bahá 'i Faith originated in

Persia but I wonder to what extent we are justified in Persianising everything. Shaykh Ah mad was an Arab and undoubtedly called himself Shaykh Ah mad al-Ah sá 'i. Similarly we have Persianised Turkish names. Thus I doubt whether Kibrisi Mehmed Pasa knew any Persian at all but his name has been Persianised to Muh ammad Pá shá y-i-Qibrisi. The logical extension of this would be to have Luvá y-i-Gitsingir and Hippulit-i-Dirayfú s. Moreover I wonder how Arabs and Turks feel about this Persianisation of their language and their names. If the aim is to bring everything to the way Persians would pronounce it, why not adopt a system designed particularly for that. There is in existence a very good system which transliterates d as z , i as e, u as o, etc., much closer to the Persian pronunciation than the present Bahá 'i system.

???? ???? ??? ???? ??????, "Dictionary of 'Ali Akbar Dihkhudá ".

\$(

N.N I query the statement that "Far more typewriters use the acute accent than the flat accent".

Typewriters in England and America are certainly not sold with an acute accent mark, whereas all typewriters have a hyphen mark which can be moved up to form a horizontal accent.

N.R This point is fully explained in point D on page A of my previous letter.

Despite the committee's

comment, I feel that the greater clarity of Mullá 'Ali-yi-Kani overrides the advantages of Mullá

'Aliy-i-Kani. For example I wonder how many lay Bahá 'is will, immediately recognize that the

first component of, Qibliy-i-'As lam is the word Qiblih with which they are probably familiar.

N.i I would accept the committee's point that both usages occur. But once again some degree of

definition and consistency is required. A useful standard would be Dihkhudá 's Lughat-Náma

(despite its incompleteness) or for geographical names

Farhang-i-Jugráfiyá 'i-yi-Írán (published

by the Geographical Committee of the Iranian Army General Staff). The latter work gives

Mazandaran incidentally.

In conclusion, I can only repeat the point made at the beginning of this letter: the principal point is

whether we are interested in eliminating inconsistencies or maintaining some degree of flexibility with regard to pronunciation. I think the point regarding Persianisation is also worth further consideration as it affects other areas also.

With loving Bahá 'i greetings

M. Momen

---

\$)

The Universal House of Justice

Bahá 'i World Centre

Department of the Secretariat

X March @CiC

Dr Moojan Momen

@\_@N Shelby Row

Cambridge

England

Dear Bahá 'i Friend,

Consideration of your letter of A November @CiX was delayed due to pressures of the work load at

the World Centre, but the Universal House of Justice now instructs us to send you the enclosed copy of

the report of the ad hoc committee.

With loving Bahá 'i greetings,

[signed Loraine Kerfoot]

For Department of the Secretariat

Enclosure

%+

Memorandum

To: The Universal House of Justice Date: Ai February @CiC

From: Ad Hoc Committee

Subject: Transliteration—Dr Moojan Momen's letter of A November @CiX

The committee found it helpful to receive Dr Momen's further comments and agrees that our

earlier report, being based on premises different from those on which his letter of @N August @CiX was

based, brings us to different conclusions which we hope we set out clearly in our report of @D October.

It is our feeling, however, that we are not too far apart in our thinking and that the .results to which

our premises necessarily lead offer a considerable amount of leeway to scholars.

With respect to obvious errors, such as the erroneous transliteration of Mará

ghihi in the third

paragraph of Dr Momen's letter of A November @CiX, these require correction and it would be very,

useful if Dr Momen would draw to the attention of the World Centre any such errors which appear in

basic Bahá 'i works.

We wish to comment on a few of the numbered points in Dr Momen's letter:

No. 2: We feel that Dr Momen has illustrated perfectly the type of flexibility which the Committee

regards as desirable and which the Universal House of Justice has permitted;

e.g.

- Place names and other words that have a current form in a western language do not have to

be transliterated—for instance, Mecca, Islam, etc.

- In many cases we use personal names as the individuals transliterate them;

e.g. Zikru'lláh

Khá dem, Jalá l Khá zeh, etc.

- It is useful to leave the id á fa in such cases as Mullá

Husayn-i-Bushrú 'i, where the id á fa

designates the geographical area from which he came. In the second example Dr Momen

gives, the id á fa may be dropped, since "Samandari" is not merely a descriptive word but is Mr

Samandari's surname.

No. N.@: The standardization of "u" rather than "i", as in the examples given by Dr Momen, could be

recommended to the Universal House of Justice as it is admittedly inconsistent in Bahá 'i

books at present. In all such cases the Committee recommends following the vowel pointing

used in some reasonably authoritative Persian dictionary such as Dihkhudá 's Lughat-Náma.

No. N.A: The Committee's recommendation was, not to Persianize indiscriminately, but to leave

Bahá 'i free to use either the Arabic or Persian form as they prefer and, in translations, to use

whatever is the form used in the original. The original Writings of the Faith, in Persian, are

permeated with Arabic to the point where the two languages at times seem inter-laced.

%!

To: The Universal House of Justice February Ai, @CiC

Page A

No. N.A (cont'd.):

Turkish, of course, presents a special case, as that language now has its own official Romanized

spelling.

As to the transliteration of the Persian form of western names, this would not be relevant in cases where the correct western name is known beyond doubt, but it might be an excellent safeguard in the many instances where it is uncertain. In instances of ambiguity perhaps the transliteration of the original could be given in a footnote if not set out in the body of the text.

No. N.N: The Committee referred not only to English and American usage but to usage of all western languages having the Roman alphabet. It is felt that to acquire in English-speaking countries a typewriter with an acute accent does not present a real difficulty.  
No. N.i: The Committee gratefully acknowledges Dr Momen's recommendation concerning reference works to establish standards and increase consistency.

---

%\*

=: 'Abdu'l-Bahá on transliteration

I am grateful to Stephen Lambden for drawing my attention to an important preliminary to the development of the Bahá 'i transliteration system. This was a statement by 'Abdu'l-Bahá regarding the spelling of the name of "Bahá 'u'llá h" and of "Mashriqu'l-Adhká r". This was published in the Star of the West shortly before 'Abdu'l-Bahá 's passing (George Ronald reprint, vol. i), Star of the West, XII:@b, X September @CA@, pp. @RX-@ib).

STAR OF THE WEST

Tablet from Abdul-Baha regarding spelling of Sacred Name

To the maid-servant of God, Miss Jean Masson (Chicago)—Unto her be the Glory of God, the Most

Glorious!—Care of his honor, Mr. Roy Wilhelm (New York):

He is God!

O thou harbinger of the Kingdom!

Thy letter has been received. Its contents indicate that thou art occupied in writing a book in

answer to the one who has written against the Truth. Thou asked as to how ye should spell in English

the blessed name of His Holiness, BAHA 'ULLAH and also Mashreq 'Ul-Azkar. Ye should spell them

thus: BAHA 'ULLAH and Mashreq 'Ul-Azkar.

It is my hope that in writing this book thou wilt be confirmed. The language, however, must be

very lenient and mild. Thou shouldst write it with the utmost politeness. Thou

shouldst not look at  
the expressions of that hostile person, because he was a man full of prejudice  
and very impolite.

Anybody who is endowed with a slight sense of fairness understands that what  
this person has

written is based on the utmost self-interestedness and enmity. This very fact  
is a sufficient proof  
showing his fallacy.

Unto thee be the Glory of Abha!

(Signed) ABDUL-BAHA ABBAS

(Translated by Aziz 'Ullah Khan S. Bahadur, Haifa, Palestine, April AC, @CA@.)

---

Haifa,

Palestine,

May @i, @CA@.

Miss Jean Masson,

My dear Bahai sister:

I am sorry your letter to the Master was kept so long unanswered. It was due  
partly to the sickness  
of the Beloved and partly to his thousand-sided occupation. However, I am glad  
at last there offered  
some opportunity when your letter was presented and a Tablet was revealed.

% "

[Star of the West, p. @RC]

As to the spelling of the two names, BAHA 'ULLAH and Mashreq 'Ul-Azkar, the  
standard is given by  
the Master in this same Tablet of yours. The explanation is that BAHA 'ULLAH is  
composed of two  
words, Baha and Allah (Glory and God). BAHA 'ULLAH means the Glory of God. Now  
the U signifies of.

This vowel, when introduced between these two words, joins them together, but  
in pronunciation the

A of Allah is dropped and replaced by the same U-vowel. We put an apostrophe  
between the two

words in order to show that a letter, i.e., A, is dropped and we capitalize the  
U because it replaces the A  
of Allah which is in capital.

Mashreq 'Ul-Azkar is also composed of two words, Mashreq and El-Azkar  
(Mashreq—dawning

place; El—the; Azkar—mentions or prayers or communes). Again U signifies  
of. When we put these

two words together the E of El is dropped in pronunciation and so that U-vowel  
takes its place. We

put an apostrophe to show that the letter E is dropped and we capitalize the  
U-vowel because it

replaces the E of El which is in capital.

I had the pleasure of reading your pamphlet on the Mashreq 'Ul-Azkar. I admired the style of your writing and the tactfulness you have exhibited in it. It is sanctioned by the Master. You will kindly send us many copies for distribution. It is written in a way that will not arouse jealousy in the outside readers.

Will you kindly remember me to our revered sisters, Mrs True, Arna True, Dr Appel and Mrs

Houser? Also to our dear brother, Dr Bagdadi.

With Bahai love and greeting, I remain,

Your brother in the Covenant of God,

Aziz 'Ullah S. Bahadur.

---

The Tablet above concerning the spelling of the sacred name, BAHA 'ULLAH, and of Mashreq 'Ul-

Azkar, settles conclusively a matter that has long created among American believers a friendly divergence of opinion.

The original spelling of the name of the Blessed Perfection, as given to Americans, was, as we know,

BAHA ULLAH, sometimes BEHA ULLAH. Some of us, in the early days of the Cause in the West, found

difficulty in its correct pronunciation. We did not seem to understand, some of us, that 'a' and 'u' have

other sounds in the English language besides long 'a' and long 'u', hence that most sacred name was

often, out of our ignorance, pronounced incorrectly and sometimes irreligiously.

If there is one name that is the perfection of the beautiful, the musical, pronounced, enunciated

correctly and sacredly, it is BAHA 'ULLAH. Pronounced incorrectly, irreverently, it is sacrilegious. So

to aid us in our ignorance, our difficulty in the enunciation of Arabic letters, one of the friends, Mr Roy

Wilhelm, I believe, supplicated Abdul-Baha to settle the difficulty, suggesting that the letter 'o' instead

of 'u' would aid Americans in arriving at the correct pronunciation.

Abdul-Baha responded to the effect that the name of the Blessed Beauty should be spelled

BAHA'O'LLAH. This Command has been adhered to religiously by most of the friends in America,

though some have always regarded the original spelling, BAHA ULLAH, with deepest reverence and

longing.

European Bahais seem never to have adopted the American spelling, nor have European scholars

outside the Bahai ranks. Manifestly the new spelling was given only to Americans to aid us in our immaturity, our Bahai childhood. Today, however, we have passed beyond the period of our infancy in the Bahai Cause. Persian and Arabic terms and words have grown singularly and beautifully familiar to us. And many of us have felt for long that we have

¥\$

[Star of the West, p. 10]

matured sufficiently to be given the correct spelling, at least of BAHA 'ULLAH.

We have felt also that a unified spelling of the sacred names throughout the Bahai world would make for the universal

unification, which is one of the basic principles of the Bahai Cause. We have felt, also, not only that

there should be a standardized spelling in all Bahai literature, but that Bahai literature should be the

most perfect literature in the world, so elevating it above all criticism by scholars and the unfriendly.

Being engaged upon a most important work in the interest of the Bahai Cause, a work which, when

completed, must compete scholastically, as well as historically, with all literature inimical to the Cause,

I supplicated Abdul-Baha for the correct spelling of BAHA 'ULLAH and Mashreq 'UI-Azkar. Mashreq

'UI-Azkar has also passed through various etymological changes in our American terminology in our

effort to arrive at its correct spelling.

In response to this supplication came the Tablet above, with the very clear letter of explanation by

Aziz 'Ullah S. Bahadur, stating explicitly the correct spelling of both words.

"Ye should spell them thus: BAHA 'ULLAH and Mashreq 'UI-Azkar."

The Star of the West, standing as it does for the pure Teachings, the pure creative Word, is the

logical medium for the dissemination throughout the Bahai world of this explicit instruction as to the

spelling of the two names. It is vastly important that we should have a standardized spelling of all

oriental Bahai terminologies and at some future date, through this same medium, a list will be given

with the correct spelling from the pen of the supreme Authority, Abdul-Baha.

As to the pronunciation of BAHA 'ULLAH and Mashreq 'UI-Azkar, not much need be said. But let us

remind ourselves that by accenting the final syllables of the words we express in our voice somewhat

of the reverence that is in our hearts.

Let us remind ourselves also that the first 'a' in Baha corresponds in sound most closely to the 'a' in 'ask', and the 'U' in 'Ullah' to the 'u' in 'full'.

Divided into syllables, then, we have:

BA-HA' 'UL-LAH'.

Mash-req' 'Ul-Az-kar'.

I am sure it is as deep a satisfaction to every American Bahai, as to myself, to have revealed the authorized spelling of these two names, that of the Manifestation of God and the great Bahai Institution.

Jean Masson

%%

— The Baha'i System of Transliteration (Used by permission of the curator)