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**The  A`LÂM Data Base of the Institut du Monde Arabe Library in Paris**
# Authority File

The library of theInstitut du monde arabe has been compiling a name authority file since 1994 the content of which is over 9000 records by now. It consists of Arab classical authors (> 2500); modern and contemporary authors (> 6500), where  < 1800 are non Arab authors specializing in the Arab and/or Muslim world.

For each author, a double heading, in Arabic and in Roman script, is created in a unique record. The language of the main heading is selected according to pre-established rules.

The main heading of *classical authors* is always in Arabic script, a parallel entry in romanized form being created according to the ISO 233-2 standard, as far as the present library software, based on Minisis, allows to do.

The main heading is built on the form of a name most widely known, as attested in Western and Arabic sources. Any other form of a name, found in reference tools or in critical literature is registered as a rejected entry. So, all the existing forms of a name we know at a time are indexed and searchable in the authority file, which can be enhanced any time.

Heading for *modern and contemporary authors* generally consists of :  surname, first name and sometimes  father's name to avoid homonymy.

In both cases, classic or contemporary, biographical data are added : birth and death dates, nationality and gender for contemporary authors, qualifications…  The sources used for establishing the main or rejected Arabic or Latin-script entries, or for collecting biographical data are recorded.

Use of dual-script brings raises some problems related to standardizations.  This is particularly true of  *romanizing contemporary Arab names* and  *transliterating Western names in Arabic*.

We know there is a tendancy to romanize contemporary names the same way names of the classical period are romanized. But this does not fit, mainly because the name is pronounced differently depending on the region where the author lives. To by-pass this problem, we find it useful to introduce vowelization in Arabic thanks to which pronunciation of contemporary names can be coherent.   But this is not that simple – in spite of many experiments – due to the limits of the library software where displaying or printing vowellized data is concerned.

The form of contemporary Arabic names may significantly vary depending on the region (Maghreb, Machrek, Gulf).  Also, the spelling of a name is subject to the influence of on dialectal pronunciation. Several Arabic letters are pronounced differently according to the region, which requires "phonetic transliteration" to render their local pronunciation
correctly.

Romanization proves helpful in harmonizing the multiple spellings of an author's name. In no way, should it replace its form in Arabic script. Both forms, Arabic and Latin, can usefully coexist inside the same record.

The same kind of difficulties as mentioned before appear when transliterating Western names in Arabic script. Our position is to transcribe a Latin letter to Arabic on a purely phonetic basis, the same way English names are transcribed according to Anglo-American rules.

Different forms of a Western name can result from translating books in Arabic. Where a Western author writes in Arabic, we simply adopt the transliterated form he uses. We apply the same principle when an Arab author writes in a Western language.

Our Arabic / Latin name authority file, with its detailed structure, may be used outside the Institut du monde arabe. We are prepared to cooperate with specialized libraries and information centres to discuss the problem of romanizing / transliterating the names of contemporary authors in order to find a common solution that we may all agree upon as "accurate" and use as refential standards.

The authority file has given way to four sub-products :
- the Orema database : a bio-bibliographical dictionary of learned Orientalists ;
- a bio-bibliographic dictionary, the first volume of which is dedicated to Palestinian writers  (published in 1999);
- a dual-script geographical index, to give access to ancient and modern city names ;
- Arabic and Latin index of authors

*Important* : please see the many examples in original script given in the French version of this paper and the ten authority records from our authority file at the end of it.
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