

NOTE ON ARABIC AND HEBREW TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATIONS

Language is a crucial but nonetheless confounding element to any researcher or writer who seeks to work in the Arab World. As those who are familiar with the Middle East well know, there are numerous ways to transliterate the Arabic and Hebrew languages into Roman letters. Diacritical marks often help, yet, at times, may hinder the ability to pronounce words, which, in truth, are best read in the original form. “Kh,” “Ch,” “Q,” and the like are often used in an attempt to compensate for letters that do not have easy equivalents in English. The result is usually less than ideal.

For the purposes of simplicity, I have attempted throughout this work to minimize such distractions. For the most part, whenever possible, Arabic and Hebrew terms are used only when the English versions simply will not do (the names of towns or people, Israeli concepts, and so on). In these instances, I attempt to use a relatively “easy” transliteration system, whereby what one reads is, more or less, what the word would sound like in the actual language. For example, *ayins*, *alefs*, *kafs*, and other challenging letters are Anglicized wherever possible to facilitate reading and comprehension.

Similarly, Arabic and Hebrew terms are used at a minimum and are translated into English whenever possible. My translations of quotes, in many instances aided by a fluent speaker, are as honest and in keeping with the spirit of the informants as possible. But this is always a challenge; how to translate a term like “*davka*,” for example? Readers of English not familiar with the term will not fully appreciate the “in your face” attitude that usually attends its usage.

But then, that is the point, is it not? For just as there is often a communication gap between English readers and the subjects of this study, so too is there a gap between Israeli Jews, most of whom do not speak Arabic, and bedouin Israelis, most of whom do speak Hebrew (males above a certain age most especially), but who prefer Arabic, even if every other word seems to be the Hebrew word “*b’seder*” (OK?). And, of course, the gap between and among the subjects of the study is not merely linguistic, but is also one of ideas, beliefs, thoughts, and ideals as well.

There are, of course, scholarly books available concerning the Negev bedouin Arabic dialect, and its very unique history and qualities. This is not one of them. The goal here is to use transliterations and translations that make the work as readable as possible, yet also preserve the “flavor” of the region, and of its peoples. I hope I have succeeded in this effort.