A HANDBOOK OF

MALAY SCRIPT

With passages for reading and a list
of commonly-used Arabic words

by
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SECTION I

THE ALPHABET

Ial ay script is an adaptation of Arabic script. It is written from right to left, with most of the letters joined. There arc no capita l letters, and there is not much difference between print and manu cript. Until recent times no pu.ictuation marks were used.

Every letter (with a few exceptions) has a full form which is used only in isolation or as a final, and a much shortened form whi ch is used as an initial or medial letter.
T here are thirty-five letters in the alphabet give n on p. 3, but of these one (lam-alif o, 32) is merely a combination of two lcuei s, and another ihamrali No. 33) is an indication of pronun cia-tion rath er tha n a lett er. These letters are set out on pp. 4 and 5, bu t you would do wel l to learn to say the alp habet by heart before you begin to study the forms of the letters.
O ut of the thirty-five le tters there are some which are found on ly in wo rds of Arabic origin.! You will no t be using them while you are in the practising stage. The information given below is intended merely to tide you over the initial difficulty of pro-nouncing the names of these letters while you are learning them by heart. If it is possible, get a Malay to go over the alphabet with you a few times before you begin committing it to memory.

L ttcrs 2 found only in Arabic words:

o. 7· {w c

as in Thalatha, but usually pro-
nounced s.

as in hakim; a strong Ii with the
back of the tongue pr essed well
down, Malays call this letter ha
bisar, to distinguish it from ha
kichil, NO.3 1.

- - - - - - - - 1 A list of Arabic loan words commonly used in Malay is given on pp. 60-7 1 •
2 For the pronunciation of these letters in Arabic see Teach Tourself Arabic by A. S. Tritton (E.U.P.). In the first chapter you will find the a lphabet set out with the appropriate phonetic symbols at tached. For an introduction to Arabic calligraphy sec Writing Arabic by T. F. Mitchell (O.V.P.). Malay pronuncia-tion does not always conform to Arabic pronunciation nor docs Malay writing exactly correspond to Arabic writing.

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o. 8. Aha

No. 10. dzal

No. 1'2. r ai ov r a

O. 15. sad

No. 16. dad or diad

• o. 18.?a or tla

No. 19. 'ain

No. 2 0. ghain

c

oJ

j

t.

as in khabar; a scra ped throaty sound like the eli in loch, but popularly pronounced k,

as in dzikir; pronounced dth, but popularly changed to j as e.g. drarali or jaralt.

as ir; zaman; popularly changed to j as e.g. Zainab becomes]enab. as in sabar; an s pronounced with the tip of the tongue behind th e lower teeth. I n the names of this and the next three letters the
a is sounded almost like a short 0 pronounced gutturally.

as in kadri; a d pronounced with the tip of the tongue behi nd the lower teeth. In Malay it some-times has a susp icion of a n I sound after it.

as in tabib; a t pronounced with the tip of th e ton gu e behind the lower teeth.

as in dralim; pronounced dth (tit as in tltis) or dz or tl, and sometimes popularly I as e.g. drahir or lahir. as in 'adat, 'ilmu, 'umcr; an in-determinate sound with the oack

of the tongue well clown. In the middle of a word (e.g. the name Sa'ad) it is like the ' broken ' sound of ' a ' in a lamb' ' baa '. Jt is the voic ed partner ofstrong It (o. 5). T he name of th e letter is pronounced rather like Ger-man ein pushed well back into the throa t.

as in ghaib; it is th e voiced partner of kha (No.8), both being pro-nounced with the back of the tongue. One Persian di ctionary d e cribes it as ' the noise made in

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THE ALPH ABET

1 0.22. fa

3

gargling '. Popularly pronounced

as a ba ck r as c.g. ghaib or raip. The nam e of the letter is pro-
nounced in the same way as 'ain
(No. 19) with th e gh sound in front of it.

as ui faham; popularly pronounced JJ as c.g. jikir or pikir.

: as in kaum; a deep k produced by pressing th e root of the tongue against the throat, but in com-mon words frequently p ro-nounced as an ordinary k (kaf
N o. 25) as e.g. in kuat. (See also p. 45.) In the pronuncia-tion of the name of the let ter the
throat consonant gives th e a a
guttural 0 sound, as in Nos. 15 to
18. Malays call this lett er kaf
bisar to distingui sh it from kaf
kechil (.5" No. 25).

Below a re given the names of letters of the Malay alpha bet. T hey are gro uped to correspond to the page divisions on p. 9 to P: 17. The re sult is a sort of jingle which may help you to memorize th em more quickly.

The lett ers of the Malay alphabet:

1. alif 2. ba 3. fa
4. tha 5. jim G. cha
7. ha 1 8. kha g. rial 10. deal I I. ra
12. zal (za) 13· Sill 14. shill
15. sad 16. dad (diad) 17. ia 18. ea (-tla)
19. 'oin 20. ghain 2 I. nga 22. fa 23.!Ja
24. I;af(or gaf) 25· kaf 26. ga
27- lam 28. mim 29· nun 30. toau 31. Ita
32. lam-alif 33 · hamzali 34· ya 35· uya.

The letters arc givcn in their isolated form on pages 4 and 5. ------ ---- 1 The do t below the lr ucrs num b-red 7, 15,,6, 17, 13, a nd 24 is used in

the early pages only, to hel p you to d istinguish between these Ara bic sounds and the more commonly used letters nu mb ered respectively 3 1, 13, 9, 3, 12, and 25.

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4 A HANDBOOK OF MALAY SCRIPT THE ALPHABET
Readfrom right to left

) 2

D fa '--' ba , alif

•

6 4
•

c.. j im

e" tha

cr ella
9 8 7

.) •
dal z. klta z lza
12 11 10

• d:::.al V:::.ai' (or:::.a) /

ra

15 14 13
•

if sad shin if sin
18 17 16

.lit;;.a (or Ita).), fa

• if {lad (or dIad)

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THE ALPHABET 5 T HE ALPHABET (continued)

21 20 19
..

• •

Lnga t: gllOin t: cain

24 23 22

.. ..

• •

'-' af c» jJa c» fa

27 26 2';

J lam S ga J kaf
30 29 28

J wau 6 nUll
,

mZnI

33 32 31

hamzah lam-ali] ha

35 34
..

•

u tryCl V ya

••

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G A HANDBOOK OF MALAY SCRIPT

Pages 9 to 17 show the formation of the letters 1Jl the three positions, initial, medial, and final.
But before yo u turn to those pages learn to reel off the alp ha bet. It will pay you to do so before you begin wrestling with difficulties of 'writing and spelling.

If you look up the Arabic alphabet you wi11 not find in it the letters numbered 6, 21, 23, 26, and 35, i.e. cha, nga, pa, ga, an d nya.
Islam came to the Malays largely through the agency of Indian merchants, and it was Persian merchants who, in the main, had brought it to India. In adapting the script of the Kor'an to fit their own language the Persians had added four letters to repre ent the sounds eli, g, p, and zli (as in 'vision '). When this script in its turn was adapted lor Malay it was necessary to add two further sounds, ng (No.2 I) and ny1 (No. 35) and to discard the <.Iz sound. You will notice when you come to examine the shapes of the letters that all the new ones were created by the device of adding dots to already existing forms.

The method of formation of the letters in each po ition is shown by numbered a rrows. Do not spend much time on these pages at the first reading. Come back to them for reference when you begin practising the writing of the complete words in the next section.

These arc the chief points to be noted:

I. The letters are written from right to Icfi.

2. Each of them mu st be joined to a lett er whi ch precedes it, unless that letter is alif, dal, dzal, ra, rai or wall.

3. All c. ccp t six of them must be joined to a succeeding letter, i.c. a letter on the left. '1he six letters which are not joined to followi ng letters arc: alif I (No.1); dal.) (No ·9); dzal j

(TO. 10); ra.J (TO. 1I); zai j (1 '0. 12); and wau J (1 '0. 30). Since deal and zai are the same in formation as dal and ra respec-tively, they need not be memorized. Remember the other lour as RODA (wheel). As soon as you begin to practise writing you

I The letter which is used for the T!JI (medial) sound had already been
adopted in Persi an for the p sound. For this sound Ialay took the Arabic f (usually pronounced /J by Malay) and added two dots.

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