Islamic Names

A member recently wrote for guidance concerning Islamic names. We consulted Brigadier E. E. G. L. Searight and print his reply as we think it may be useful to our readers.

The presentation of Islamic names gives the indexer a rare headache. This is understandable when one remembers that the Islamic world stretches from Indonesia to Mauritania and embraces countries of very different races and at varying stages of culture and sophistication.

The Cataloguing rules—author and title entries published by the Library Association lays down in para. 52: ‘Arabic and other writers living in Mohammedan countries and following Mohammedan practice, are to be entered under the personal name, followed by the names ex-

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pressing relationships . . . References are to be made from each of the various names . . . Exceptions are to be made where a name other than the personal name more readily distinguishes the author or where a particular form of the name has become established . . . ‘

This is all right as far as it goes, but it must be remembered that these are cataloguing rules, not indexing rules and no indexer could afford the space for ‘references from each of the various names.’

Let us deal with the easy ones. First the Indonesian names: the operative word is nearly always an Indonesian name such as Sukarno, Nasution, etc., sometimes with a Mohammedan name (such as Ahmed or Abdul) prefixed but which should always be subordinated.

Then there are the Persian and Turkish names. These are nearly always a personal name followed by a surname, and should be indexed under the surname, e.g., Aram, Abbas; Mansur, Hassan Ali; Akdogan, Ismail Hakki; Sancar, Ilhami.

The Mohammedans of India and Pakistan can be tricky. Most start off life with a personal name only but find it necessary or desirable to adopt a surname. For example: Khan Bahadur (an honorific) Sharbat Khan was always Sharbat Khan, but his son Monawar Khan adopted his tribal name of Afridi as a surname and is correctly indexed as Afridi, Col. Monawar Khan. Similarly Ayub Khan should be indexed or referred to as Ayub Khan, but Mohammed Ali Vakil as Vakil, Mohammed Ali. (Vakil means lawyer and is an adopted surname.) Experience will soon enable one to pick out a surname.

(Incidentally, to digress for a moment to draw an analogy from Western names. In early days people had a personal name only, such as Eric, William, etc. Later, to distinguish them from other Erics, Williams, etc., they added another name denoting a relationship or characteristic and these added names became surnames, e.g., Eric the Red, Henry le Wake (the wakeful), John the Smith, Richard Scriven, Paul Smithson, etc.)

The Malay keeps to his personal name, qualifying it by a relationship. For example Abdul Razak bin Hussein, i.e. son of Hussein. Index Malays under their personal names.

Now for the Arabs, who vary from the less sophisticated Arabs of Arabia to the more westernized inhabitants of Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, etc. (The classic example of an Islamic name is probably Omar ibn Ibrahim al Khayyami, i.e., Omar, the son of Ibrahim, the Tentmaker. In his day he was probably known as Omar al Khayyami. Nowadays we would probably read ‘The Celebrated Persian poet Mr. Kayyam arrived at Heath Row today!’)

The pure Arabs should be indexed under their personal names, e.g., Faisal ibn Abdul Aziz, H.M. King of Saudi Arabia, or Faisal ibn Hussein, H.R.H. Prince. But there are exceptions—the Imam of the Yemen is always known as ‘al Badr’ and should be indexed as ‘Badr, Mohammed al, Imam of the Yemen’.

Generally speaking, the more sophisticated Arabs should be indexed under their last name, e.g., Bella, Ahmed Ben; Nasser, Gamal Abdel; Aref, Abdul Salam Mohammed; Hafez, Amin el; Boumédiene, Col. Houari; Karami, Rashid; Oweini, Hussein; Abboud, Gen. Ferik Ibrahim; Mufti, Ibrahim el. But there are, again, exceptions, for example, that stormy petrel of Iraqi politics, Rashid Ali al Gailani, was always known as Rashid Ali and should be indexed as ‘Rashid Ali al Gailani’.

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