

Living Letters: The Arabic Script as a Redemptive Bridge in Reaching Muslims

by Murray Decker and Abdu Injiiru

Abdullah, a 45 year-old African man with a wife and two children, comes from a completely Muslim family. He was an Islamic leader among his people, and well supported financially by an organization from a strongly Islamic Asian nation. One day last year as he was studying the Qur'an, he read about the Prophet Isa (Jesus) and felt prompted to ask God to show him the truth. By God's sovereign grace, Abdullah had a dream in which he was running away from a fire. As he came to a wall he could not climb, he could see Christians on the other side of the wall. Through that dream he realized that God was answering his prayer.

In the days that followed Abdullah committed himself to Jesus Christ as Lord. He left his employment as an Islamic preacher and moved his family to the capital city, where he sought out several Christian workers he knew. These workers showed him 35 pages of Scripture selections in his own language, a West African tongue spoken by several million people written in the only form he could read: Arabic script. Although the translators had already translated a great deal of Scripture into Abdullah's native African language, they had done it in Roman script and had, for testing purposes, only just recently transliterated these 35 pages into the appropriate script, the right-to-left cursive calligraphy that Abdullah knew from his Qur'anic studies. Thankfully, a newly developed computer program would help them morph the English ABCs of the text into the "Abjad" of the Arabic alphabet. After reading more Scripture in the familiar Arabic script, Abdullah was baptized and moved back to his hometown to spread the good news about Jesus. The critical catalyst in this story was a Scripture fragment, translated into this man's heart language, and equally significant, one he could read in his heart script.

Murray Decker, PhD, is an Associate Professor at Cook School of Intercultural Studies, Biola University. He has served in West Africa and most recently in the Middle East, training nationals for ministry in least reached contexts. Abdu Injiiru (pseudonym) has been involved in Scripture engagement across multiple countries of West Africa for 26 years.

Introduction

Over 100 years ago, missionaries to the Sahel region of West Africa arrived to discover that in many Muslim peoples there were already some individuals who had been trained to read the Qur'an in Arabic. As is true in much of the Muslim world today, they found people who could reproduce—with phonetic perfection—the sounds of the Arabic language text without understanding a single word they were reading. But what if the text had been in their language? Because there are no practical limits to what can be written using Arabic script, those early workers began translating the Bible into African mother tongues using the Arabic letters the local peoples already knew how to read. Today we use the term “Ajami” to refer to indigenous languages written in Arabic script.¹

The use of Ajami in mother tongue translation was not unique to Africa. History is replete with examples of enterprising workers who found that using a script people already knew made it much easier for them to learn to read their own language. In the nineteenth century, Englishman Henry Martyn chose Ajami for his translations of Scripture into Persian and Urdu. Had he chosen the Roman script used back home, Persian or Urdu speakers wanting to read the Scriptures in their own language would have had to learn their ABCs first. Now, as in Martyn's time, it makes sense to utilize a script that people already know, thus avoiding the long, tedious labor of doing literacy just so people can read *their* language using *our* letters.²

As we fast-forward to today, one might expect that cross-cultural workers are already using the Ajami script so widely known throughout the Muslim world. Further, one might expect that Bible translators, church planters, development workers, and others are harnessing this socio-linguistic phenomenon to advance their work,

taking advantage of the literacy efforts of Islamic scholars across the centuries. In the area of Bible translation, dozens of translation projects have been completed and hundreds of others are in process. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone (from Senegal to Somalia and down the eastern coast), there are over six hundred Muslim Majority Languages (hereafter called MMLs). Additional MMLs exist in northern Africa, the Middle East, and across Asia, bringing the total to over one thousand worldwide. Local people, if given a tract or Scripture portion written in Arabic letters, could read it in their own tongue. Surely these completed translations and new works all utilize Ajami.



Unfortunately, this is not the case. The early use of Ajami in the Sahel was discontinued for various reasons, including: colonial political pressure, ethnocentric linguistic bias, the difficulty of learning to write and type the Arabic alphabet from right to left, and the desire to provide a “Western-style” education. Subsequent work was completed using Roman script, which has been the situation with MMLs for decades.

This article will explore the critical importance of Ajami in communicating God's love to Muslims. We outline six primary reasons why those involved in Bible translation and other literature programs among Muslim peoples should strongly consider using

“these strange letters” of the Arabic alphabet—this sacred script—in their work. We also highlight hindrances to adopting Ajami. The authors are convinced that using Ajami has far-reaching missiological implications for Scripture use, discipleship, and church-planting movements.

Reasons for Using Ajami Among Muslim Peoples

1. Many Muslims are already literate in the Arabic script.

In Muslim Africa, literacy rates in Ajami are significantly higher than in Roman script. In many MMLs, 30 to 50 percent of the adult population is already literate in the Arabic script. Because most countries measure literacy only in their official European Roman script language (predominantly French or English), accurate statistics for Arabic or Ajami literacy are hard to come by. When a census worker enters a village and asks, “How many people know how to read?” the question is understood to mean, “How many of you can read French (or English)?” Ironically, villagers may report that no one in the village can read, even as a group of children sits under a tree practicing their Arabic letters on a board.

This constitutes a blind spot within the statistical data. For example, *Operation World* (2010 ed.) appears to underestimate how widespread Ajami literacy actually is within MMLs.³ For example, the entry on the Republic of Mali reports a 19 percent literacy rate for that country (p. 564). Yet on the next page we read that more than three thousand Qur'anic schools—taught by individual “marabouts” (Islamic teachers)—enroll some 40 percent of the children in Bamako, the capital (thanks to funding from Libya and Saudi Arabia). In missiology we speak of *hidden peoples*; can we not also speak of millions of *hidden literates*?

Teaching these people to read their own language in Ajami requires almost

no effort. It takes only minutes to show them the few letters they may not be familiar with, then they are off and running, reading in their own tongue. Mik Enoch,⁴ cross-cultural worker with the Evangelical Free Church, notes that there is always someone in every village who can read Ajami. He says: “Historically in Africa, we had to teach reading before we could hand out a Bible. But to my astonishment, I suddenly realized that using Ajami script meant Islam had already done this onerous task for us.”⁵

Numerous Islamic organizations and governments are funding extensive Arabic-script literacy work. Al-Ahzar University in Egypt—reportedly the largest Islamic school in the world—sends students throughout the world, and to Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, to start Qur’anic schools and teach the fundamentals of Islam. Nothing, of course, is more foundational to this endeavor than teaching children to read Arabic. And Al-Azhar is only one institution among many that supplies teachers. Libya and Saudi Arabia use their considerable oil wealth to fund such schools and missionaries, while Pakistan and other Asian nations also offer funding and personnel.

Travel anywhere in Muslim sub-Saharan Africa and you will find these Franco-Arabic or Anglo-Arabic schools. In Nigeria, the fundamentalist Izala movement has built hundreds of schools to propagate Islam. In county after county, village after village, you will find children learning to read and memorize the Qur’an, again often with no understanding of what they are reading. Is there a gift from God in all this? In the sovereignty of the Lord, many children in Muslim people groups are being taught to read. Are we willing to walk through this “wide door for effective work” that has been opened to us? (1 Cor. 19:9) Will we put the good news into the hands of these newly literate populations in a form that they can already read?

Historically in Africa, we had to teach reading before we could hand out the Bible. But to my astonishment, I suddenly realized . . .

2. The Ajami Bible is considered sacred.

Contrary to what many believe, most Muslims do not hate the Bible. The *Tawrat* (Torah), *Zabur* (Psalms) and *Injil* (New Testament) are recognized within the Qur’an as holy books. When a Fulani, Hausa, Chadian Arab, or Wolof reader receives a copy of Genesis, the Psalms or the Gospels, he regards it as sacred literature, given by God as absolute truth. The tremendously warm and receptive response to the Bible in Ajami goes far beyond the fact that they just like the look of the letters. They attribute these books to the very hand of God, divinely scripted and sacred in all they teach.⁶

One man tells the story of a Muslim friend who came to his home for a visit.⁷ Lying on the coffee table was an Ajami copy of Luke in his guest’s language. As the host began to share the story of the Prodigal Son, his Muslim friend interrupted him. “I know this story,” he said. “Our imam told us this at the mosque last Friday.” Curious, the man asked, “So how does he know this story?” Pointing to the Ajami book lying on the table, his friend explained, “He is preaching to us from this holy book.”

Introducing Ajami to a New Community

When you bring the Ajami Scriptures into a MML community, we suggest that you first formally approach the local leaders and present them with a copy. Most leaders will graciously accept the gift with great fanfare and appreciation. Often they will make a public speech, expressing words of gratitude. As opinion leaders, their acceptance of these books gives permission to the rest of the community to purchase their

own copy, if they wish. It is rare to encounter hostility when one presents the Scriptures in a culturally appropriate manner. Workers usually do not have to sneak around as though they have something to hide or are doing something subversive. Even if the rest of the community cannot read Ajami, the leaders most likely will be literate or know someone in the village who reads well. In African culture it would be rude to refuse such a gift.

After the distribution ceremony, the rest of the village will often line up and wait patiently for their turn to purchase a portion of Scripture for themselves and their family. Far from being resistant to the Bible, they eagerly want to own one. You will often sell every piece of literature you bring. As you walk through the village at night, you will see, in home after home, people gathered to read the Bible in their own language for the first time. Of course, anyone who has worked in the Muslim world knows that there is no one “golden key” that will open the hearts of Muslims. However, many recognize the power of the Word of God, put into a form that people can read, as *one of the keys* that God is using to bring many to faith.

3. Muslim Majority Language populations highly respect Ajami writing.

Arabic script is held in high esteem throughout the Islamic world. When a Muslim looks at the Arabic script, he views it with reverence and deep affection. It is for him a holy script—the very script handed down from heaven to Muhammad in the Qur’an.⁸ In essence, it is God’s font; God writes from right to left.

To illustrate the esteem people have for this script, a woman once approached us to show us how she had memorized an AIDS tract produced by a local language committee. She memorized it, not for its content or message, but because it was written in the holy script. Word for word, she proudly recited the brochure from memory. More significantly, even those who do not follow Christ regard Scripture memorization from Ajami texts to be highly valuable. Some men who receive an Ajami copy of, say, Genesis or Psalms will memorize the whole book!

Contrast this with the strong, negative feelings that Muslims often have toward Roman script. Parents may not even want to send their children to a school that teaches this script, believing that anyone using an immoral script must himself be immoral (in fact, the Fulani call the Roman alphabet *karfeeji kefero* “pagan script.”) How, they ask, could anyone take something as sacred as the word of God and print it in those ugly, disdainful Roman letters? One Muslim leader crudely put it this way: “We use paper with Roman script on it for toilet paper, but we would never do that with something printed in Ajami.”

Such negative reactions to our Roman script should be easy for North Americans to understand, for we see the opposite taking place in our culture. Look at this sample text in Arabic script. What emotions do we experience?

عَدَسٌ لَوْ دُونَ بَثِّ وَرِلْدٍ.

Where Muslim peoples see comfort, beauty and blessing, many Westerners experience confusion, suspicion and fear. North Americans often see Arabic writing and associate it with radical Islam, terrorism and violence. While the above Ajami sentence is simply the transliterated *English* phrase “God so loved the world,” some

may become anxious just looking at these unfamiliar letters. Indeed, something as innocuous as a “No Parking” sign in Arabic script can become a subversive religious message. Putting the shoe on the other foot, if we want people to willingly read the Scriptures or other literature, why use a script that they essentially distrust and find objectionable?⁹

Is Ajami Too Islamic?

One concern that deserves careful consideration is that Ajami is too Islamic and that using it amounts to tacit acceptance of Islam. It is fair to ask, however, whether a script can be by its very nature Christian, Islamic or Hindu. For example, the Korean



language is mainly written in *Hangul*, a syllabic alphabet promulgated in 1446 by Sejong the Great. Although Sejong was not a Christian, few see 예수는 주님 이시다 and associate this script with the spread of Buddhism or Confucianism. Korean language Bibles, hymn books, theology texts, and children’s literature all use the above phrase in *Hangul* without fear of communicating anything other than “Jesus is Lord” (as the above text proclaims). *Hangul* is seen as neutral, not Buddhist, and is equally appropriate for writing Scripture as for writing restaurant menus or billboards.

The church has wrestled with matters of contextualization since the earliest

chapters of Acts. Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, for example, tackle one contextual issue after another. The question whether some indigenous cultural forms are too tainted by the culture to be used by the church is one that Christians have wrestled with for centuries and have often answered in the affirmative. Throughout mission history “pagan” drums and other instruments have been burned, dance or other expressions of art forbidden, and Western forms substituted for the arts, architecture, celebrations and lifestyles of emerging Christ-following communities in “foreign” cultures.

Not surprisingly, we love and cherish our cultural expressions of the faith. Sadly, too many churches split over issues that others would dismiss as relatively inconsequential cultural preference. Some Christians find it difficult to believe that the gospel can be communicated in any form other than the one they hold most dear. The argument that Ajami is too Islamic (or that using it suggests tacit approval of Islam) comes, in our view, from a faulty premise. This premise is based more on cultural preference than on objective evidence that Ajami encourages syncretism or helps strengthen Islam. While Ajami is clearly a new form for many, it has actually been in use for hundreds of years in the Sahel and elsewhere.¹⁰ In our experience, Ajami is a powerfully useful contextual form that does not change the message in any inappropriate or syncretistic way. When Muslim Background Believers gather to study the New Testament in Ajami and read about the life of Isa (Jesus) in their mother tongue, they do not think, “This will lead me back into Islam,” but rather, “Jesus is amazing! I must know more about him. Thank God I have this information in a form that I can understand!”

4. Ajami is perceived as “blessed” and powerful.

Many Muslims believe that simply being in the presence of the Arabic

script is inherently valuable. They ascribe an intrinsic mystical power to the very letters of the Arabic alphabet and believe that one is blessed by merely holding the text and looking at it. From their perspective, one does not have to understand the words to receive a blessing. We believe that blessing comes from understanding and doing what the Scriptures say (James 1:25), but we need to start where our Muslim friends are.

Striking examples of this common Muslim view can be seen throughout sub-Saharan Africa. When children begin Qur'anic school, they obtain a small wooden board upon which they will write their lessons for the first few years of study. These lessons include verses from the Qur'an. After years of use, this Qur'anic board, which is often kept for life, becomes a talisman whose power derives from all of the sacred Arabic letters that have been written on it.

But it is not just the boards themselves that are considered powerful. Some years ago, during our first encounter with children writing on their Qur'anic boards, we saw a man take a board, wash the ink off of it, catch the run-off, and then drink the murky liquid like one would drink medicine. This "liquid Arabic" is actually sold in the markets, where it is bought for its healing and protective properties.¹¹ Among Muslim peoples who engage in animal husbandry, Arabic blessings, which are frequently written on edible leaves and fed to cattle or other animals, serve as medicine or a protective charm.

The flowing calligraphy of the Qur'an—which is often used as a border along the top of the wall of a room—decorates homes, businesses, and mosques. More than mere ornamentation, you receive a blessing every time you walk through that room and see those letters and words, which protect your home and children. Again, you don't need to

W*e saw a man take a Qur'anic board, wash the ink off of it, catch the run-off, and drink the murky liquid like medicine.*

know what these words mean; you are blessed just being in the presence of this sacred script.

Because of this belief, it is important to distribute Ajami literature wisely. Our goal must be to get it into the hands of those who can actually read it, and not just treat it as an amulet. Once, while getting into a taxi in a predominately Muslim city, I (Abdu) noticed the Ajami book of Luke taped to the ceiling of the cab. "Can you read this?" I asked the driver. "No," he replied. "Then why do you have this book taped to the ceiling of your car?" I continued. "Baraka (blessing)," he responded. Somehow he had gotten his hands on this portion of Scripture and was using it to ward off evil and to attract blessing to his car. Since we do not want the Bible to be reduced to a good luck charm, we will have to show discernment in how we distribute it.

Even if some do treat the Ajami Scriptures in this way, is this a reason not to use it? Will we be guilty of promoting a mystical regard for the script beyond what is associated with the actual translated verses themselves? In our opinion, the danger of this is no greater than the reverence some might feel in the presence of a first-edition Gutenberg Bible. If the danger of creating a "Nehush-tan"¹² develops (Num. 21:4-9, 2 Kings 18:4), church leaders will need to address this concern directly. But this does not override the many excellent reasons for adopting this script.

5. Governments and international Islamic organizations are promoting Ajami.

Many African nations are increasingly showing support for native language translation using Ajami. Niger, Senegal and Chad all have governmental

departments promoting Ajami, and are working to standardize its use in their respective countries. Not only are government officials and agencies endorsing the script, but international Islamic organizations as well. ISESCO (the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) actively promotes the Qur'an in several languages using Ajami. ISESCO recognizes what many Christian agencies have been slow to accept—Ajami is the most powerful tool they have to encourage literacy and to communicate effectively with MML peoples.

Beyond merely promoting literacy, ISESCO also seeks to advance Islam. Wolof, Fulfulde, and Swahili editions of the Qur'an were recently released in Ajami.¹³ This is a relatively recent phenomenon in Africa, one that is likely to grow in the future.

Islam is not a religion that readily embraces contextualization; often the opposite is true. Sacrosanct Arab forms and doctrines from the Middle East are stressed in cultures where they don't fit. For this reason, it is stunning to see these Ajami translations of the Qur'an now coming off the presses. ISESCO, which functions in the genre of UNESCO, is involved in influencing Sub-Saharan governments toward certain forms of Ajami. This organization, or some other, might become the premier Qur'an translation society of the Muslim world. They value the importance of Ajami, if only to lead people to the most important language from their perspective: Arabic.

6. Significant social prestige is associated with Arabic and Ajami literacy.

In MML cultures, tremendously high social regard is given to those

who are literate in Arabic (and therefore can read Ajami). You cannot be an opinion leader in most Muslim societies without being able to read the Qur'an in Arabic. In these status-conscious cultures, even basic literacy in Arabic is critical if you are to be perceived as a person of significance. A young man can have a PhD from a prestigious "pagan" university, but if he cannot read the Arabic script, he will be deprived of status among his people and his spirituality will be suspect.

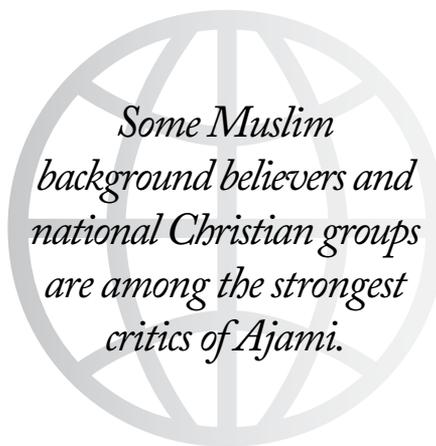
Often the first Christ-followers in a new people group are precisely these educated young men (rarely women) who attend such schools and universities. By getting exposed to the world outside of Islam they become open to hearing the good news and following Christ. If they do not know how to read Arabic, however, they will struggle to influence others when they return to their societies. Thus it is especially critical for believers from MMLs to learn to read Ajami in order to maximize their influence in their home culture. In fact, a workshop and primer have been developed for this very purpose.¹⁴

In light of this crucial social factor, we believe that church-planting movements among MMLs are significantly hindered without Ajami.¹⁵ This statement may strike some as extreme, but we have witnessed this reality in Muslim cultures across Africa. The credibility needed to fuel these kinds of movements must not only be embedded in the Scriptures we distribute, but in the reputations of the messengers. Therefore we would urge every Christian college seeking to prepare students for ministry in the Muslim world to offer Arabic. Because of the importance of Arabic in the Muslim world, all such students should take at least one semester, even if they do not plan to work among Arabic speakers. Messengers need to be equipped to use the alphabet

and phonetically read the script. We consider this an essential investment in their credibility.

Resistance and Hindrances

Muslim background believers and national Christian groups have proven to be the strongest critics of Ajami. For many, Ajami isn't a "neutral" script, but is so tainted with the Islam they knew prior to following Christ that they do not believe it should be used. Where did they acquire such a perspective? Western workers have taught new followers of Christ to leave behind their old ways, including, often, the writing system they were taught as Muslim children. Today, some of the



greatest resistance to Ajami comes from national believers and their church organizations. New "pro-Ajami" workers should be prepared to take criticism from fellow followers of Christ as much as from Muslims.

Ajami is a widely used writing system. Advances in categorizing the languages that need Ajami can be found at sites such as www.ScriptSource.org. Over 150 languages that use the Arabic script are listed at this site. The history, use, fonts, keyboards and several other needs related to each language's script are also noted. We are grateful for these tools, which are useful for the mission enterprise.

As a rule, national Bible societies will not publish a Bible unless someone is willing to dedicate it and use it. If church planters, mission organizations or national Christian groups are not going to use it, why publish it? The historic resistance to Ajami described earlier can still be found within some mission organizations and national denominations, or more accurately, among certain leaders who still hold these fears and reservations.

One final hindrance to more widespread use of Ajami among unreached MMLs is the fact that mission organizations do not emphasize the importance of learning Arabic when it will not be the worker's language of ministry. Naturally, workers who don't know any Arabic cannot read Ajami. We are not saying they need to learn to *speak* Arabic; they just need to be able to read and write in Ajami,¹⁶ critical skills that can normally be acquired, at a most basic level, in a one-week seminar. But agencies need to make sure their workers have the time and resources required to become equipped with these skills. And when veteran workers are resistant—"I don't need to learn Ajami; I've been doing this for 20 years!"—they should be encouraged to see the tremendous potential in this old "new" tool.

Summary Thoughts

I (Abdu) first realized the significance of Ajami in 1995. Fatima (a woman from the people group we serve) had come to faith and strongly desired to read the Scriptures. The Bible had been translated into her language in Roman script, and so my wife began the arduous process of teaching her to read her ABCs. After twenty-six hours of instruction, Fatima was still only at an elementary level. Then one day (while my wife and Fatima were struggling through yet another long session), I visited some colleagues, who gave me the book of Luke in Ajami. Returning home, I approached

the weary pair as they labored over their lesson and asked Fatima if she had been taught to read Arabic as a girl. “Yes,” she stated proudly, “during four years of school.” I handed her the Ajami book of Luke and asked, “Can you read this?” Without a moment of hesitation, she picked it up and began reading aloud.

“This is in my language!” she cried.

My wife turned to me and said (in English), “What have I been wasting my time for?” Frustration soon yielded to rejoicing as we celebrated with Fatima, who was thrilled to be reading God’s word in her own tongue, and began to explain to her the meaning of the text. Now instead of needing to teach her Roman script, we needed to learn Ajami.

For the past 15 years, we have shifted more and more of our attention toward producing Ajami literature for the growing church in the people group we are serving. Our hearts are still in the village, but the work of transliterating Bible translations into the Ajami script is so significant that it now demands most of our time. And we are beginning to see unprecedented fruit among this strategic people group—God is moving among them.

As members of a generation influenced by Don Richardson’s concept of *redemptive analogies*,¹⁷ we have been slow to recognize that one way God has placed eternity in the hearts of MML peoples is through their profound regard for Arabic orthography. We might call it a *redemptive script*. The implications for Bible translation, intercultural training, field practice and publishing are significant. Further research into the use of Ajami is critically necessary. We believe that reaching hidden literates is a key pathway to reaching hidden peoples, as faith comes by hearing (but also reading) the Word of God. May God grant us the wisdom to maximize

My wife turned to me and said (in English), “What have I been wasting my time for?” Frustration soon yielded to rejoicing ...

the benefit of this redemptive script for His glory among those who wait to read the good news for the first time.

If you are interested in learning more about Ajami transliteration, please contact Abdu Injiiru at s2c@eurasiainmail.com to find a workshop where you can learn to read and use this script. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Ajami is a term primarily used in Africa. However, historically Arabic script was used to write mother-tongues in many countries, including Spain (called Aljamiado), Bosnia, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and even China. For the purposes of this article, we use the term Ajami in reference to the use of Arabic script in African contexts. For a historical overview of this script in Africa see: Warren-Rothlin, Andy. 2009. “Script Choice, Politics, and Bible Agencies in West Africa.” *The Bible Translator: Technical Papers* 60(1):50–66.

² On the larger subject of linguistic history and scripts, the Old Testament illustrates the significance of this cross-cultural communication factor, as it records how letters and decrees were often sent to different groups in their own languages *and scripts* (see, for example, Ezra 4:7 and Esther 1:22, 3:12, and 8:9).

³ Jason Mandryk, ed. 2010. *Operation World*. Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing. We deeply respect the work done by *Operation World*’s editors. In no way is this observation a criticism of this well written and thoughtfully compiled prayer guide.

⁴ All personal names cited in this article are pseudonyms used for their protection.

⁵ Private correspondence, used with permission.

⁶ Granted, some Muslims contend that these texts have been corrupted. In our experience, when these same people are asked if God would allow His word to be changed, most will strongly deny that this is possible.

⁷ Personal communication.

⁸ Some Muslims attribute the Arabic alphabet and the actual verses of the

Qur’an to the very hand of God, divinely scripted. Most believe the Qur’an was dictated to Muhammad, and since Muhammad was said to be illiterate, the Scriptures were written down by others as he recited to them.

⁹ The socio-linguistic issues here go far beyond the script and involve such issues as the color of sacred books, page layout, etc. Hill and Hill state: “Finally, [Muslims] feel that since Scripture is holy, it shouldn’t have illustrations on the cover or inside. The cover itself should be elegant, not black, and not made of paper. The text of Scripture should be on off-white paper surrounded by a frame, and the introductions, footnotes, section headings, and cross-references should be outside the frame” (2008, 173). Since many cultures regard black as a color of death, what message is received when the Bible is printed with a black cover? Those elaborate borders that take so much space on the pages of the Qur’an are actually a critical part of the presentation. The beauty of the book should foretell the beauty of the message found therein.

¹⁰ See Ajami Scripts in the Senegalese Speech Community by Fallou Ngom www.lancs.ac.uk/jais/volume/index.htm

¹¹ For many of the scholars who teach Arabic to children, this becomes an important source of income.

¹² Nehushtan was the name given to Moses’ old bronze serpent, ascribed with talismanic powers years after it had served its purpose. King Hezekiah ultimately broke it to pieces rather than let it remain an object of veneration.

¹³ <http://www.isesco.org.ma/english/news/news.php?n=1341>

¹⁴ See contact information at the end of this article regarding this primer or how to attend an Ajami workshop.

¹⁵ Perhaps we should soften this statement since a) nothing is outside the power of God, and b) some Islamic peoples in Africa are largely illiterate as no Qur’anic training exists among them. God can work when and where He wishes, but we minimize the deep social significance of Ajami literacy among these people to the detriment of our ministries.

¹⁶ See Awede, Nicholas, and Putros Samano. 1986. *The Arabic Alphabet: How to read and write it*. New Jersey: Lyle Stuart Inc. This is an excellent way to learn the Arabic system quickly.

¹⁷ Richardson, Don. 1999. "Redemptive Analogy." In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 285–289. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

References

Heibert, Paul G.

- 1985 *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. See sections on "Cultural Differences and the Message, and Critical Contextualization," 61–110.

Hill, Harriet, and Margaret Hill

- 2008 *Translating the Bible into Action: How the Bible can be relevant in all languages and cultures*. Carlisle, UK: Piquant Editions. See section on "How Muslims use the Bible."

Johnstone, Patrick

"Bible Translation and the Cross Cultural DNA of the Church." <http://www.worldview.edu.au/?p=62>.

Philips, J.

- 2000 "Spurious Arabic: Hausa and Colonial Nigeria." University of Wisconsin African Studies Center.

Smith, Donald

- 1992 *Creating Understanding*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. See section on signal systems, 144–165.

Warren-Rothlin, Andrew

- 2009 "Script Choice, Politics, and Bible Agencies in West Africa." *The Bible Translator: Technical Papers* 60(1):50–66.

Anonymous

- 2010 "West African Ajami Orthographies in Socio-Political Context." Paper presented at *The Arabic Script in Africa: Diffusion, Usage, Diversity and Dynamics of a Writing System (a Workshop funded by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung)*, University of Cologne, Germany, April 6–7.

Mumin, M., ed.

"West African Scripts and Arabic-Script Orthographies in Socio-Political Context." In *The Arabic Script in Africa*. New York: Brill, f.c.

Blench, R., and S. McGill, eds.

- 2009 "Arabic Script in modern Nigeria." In *Current Research in Nigerian Languages: Papers from the Jos Linguistic Circle*. Cambridge: Kay Williamson Educational Foundation, f.c.

Operation World:
The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation

ISBN-13: 978-1-85078-8621
Author: Jason Mandryk
Publisher: Biblica
1024 pages
Paperback 2010

CARTON of 10
Our Price: ~~\$119.90~~ \$100
(~~\$11.99 each~~) (\$10 each)

OPERATION WORLD
THE DEFINITIVE PRAYER GUIDE TO EVERY NATION
JASON MANDRYK
Completely Revised, 7th Edition

OPERATION WORLD
THE DEFINITIVE PRAYER GUIDE TO EVERY NATION
DVD

Our Price: ~~\$12.49~~ \$10.00

Our Price: ~~\$29.99~~ \$26.95

www.missionbooks.org • 1-800-MISSION