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**National standardization: Field collection of names**

**The Efforts of the National Survey Authority in the standardization of  
Omani geographical name**

Submitted by Oman\*\*

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# THE EFFORTS OF THE NATIONAL SURVEY AUTHORITY IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF OMANI GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The interest of the Sultanate of Oman in geographic names is as old as the time and place of this country. This can be clearly seen in narration of the historic events of several books, in addition to the issue of a number of encyclopedia, dictionary of the Omani Arabic place names, as well as the poet books that incorporate description to some of Omani places and locations. Nowadays, in the reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, who built Oman as a constitutional state, the National Survey Authority (NSA) was established as one of these organized institutions via a ministerial decision passed in 1983 bestowing to it responsibilities of setting up Oman's geographic policy and providing technical support and advice on all activities related to surveying and mapping.

A map contains a number of important information, geographic names represent one element of this map and without it the map would look dull and lose a vital part of its identity. Because of this, NSA has introduced a specialized section concerned with geographic names which was later upgraded to the level of branch in 2015 with the following duties:

- A. Arabize all types of Omani maps.
- B. Review and check in the field all Omani geographic names.
- C. Collect and determine Omani geographic names which are not available in NSA sources and references.
- D. Maintain the Omani geographic identity, standardize it and transfer to foreign languages in a way that ensures not to be distorted, deviated from and keep its originality, further to preserve its homogeneity on national, regional and international levels. NSA has represented the Sultanate of Oman in many conferences as well as in regional and international committees pertaining to geographic names.
- E. Establish and maintain a geographic database for the Sultanate.

## 2. OMANI GEOGRAPHIC NAMES DATABASE

This database is created by NSA and it incorporates information about the geographic names such as name of a place, phenomenon type, its coordinates and the administrative division it belongs to, its transliteration into foreign languages using a standardized Arabic system for names transfer, reference to the body authorized the name and all its related documents. The database encompasses more than 9,000 approved geographic names.

## 3. COLLECTING, ADMINISTRATING & APPROVING THE GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

NSA shall draw up the approved names which shall be received from the competent official authorities on the various maps; these names are kept in paper and digital forms, which are referred to when designing a map or requesting specific names from NSA. The most important sources are:

### 3.1 The Geographical Dictionaries

The geographical dictionaries are considered one of geographical names sources. Some countries seek to produce dictionaries, which is an appeal by the United Nations for the standardization of geographical names, and the Sultanate of Oman has issued some encyclopedias that deal with geographical names, such as Sultan Qaboos Encyclopedia of the names of Arabs and the Encyclopedia of the Land of Oman. NSA is seeking to issue a lexicon of Omani geographical names after the completion of the topographic survey of the scale 1: 50,000.

### 3.2 Maps

Maps that have been developed, published and used are sources of access to places' names and are considered to be the most accurate documents. Because in addition to their indication for the name of the phenomenon or the landmark, they specify this name accurately by the coordinates drawn on the map.

### 3.3 Official and Statistical Reports

The official and statistical reports are equally important to the other documentary sources because they are officially approved and used in the economic and planning studies such as population, construction and agricultural surveys. An example of this is the report published by the Ministry of Economy in Oman on population, housing, households and population size, according to the results of

the general census of population and establishments for the periods 1993, 2003 and 2010.

### 3.4 Royal Orders & Directions, Resolutions and Official Letters

It refers to those that are concerned with launching new names on websites or changing some of the names mentioned previously. This is a document and reference for use whenever necessary.

## 4. FIELD WORK

However, in the absence of the name in any of the above references and in the production of a new map, the Department of Geographical Names is developing a plan to collect the name from the field, so there must be a scientific system for the collection, revision, adoption and management of the name which is stated in the following stages:

### 4.1 Field Work

The task of the field work is to verify existing names, collect non-existent names and identify unnamed areas. Those collecting names from the field must have special characteristics such as familiarity with the culture of the place, the customs and traditions of the population and its knowledge of Arabic in terms of grammar and spelling and the ability to act, solve problems and difficulties. The field work is divided into stages, including:

**4.1.1 Office Preparation** It is the pre-field stage where the initial preparation of the field is done by searching for some information from various sources and analyzing this information; as well as, preparing the forms used in the field.

#### 4.1.2 Field Verification

All the names, as well as the collection of new and changing names are checked here. GPS devices must be used to enter data and names with their coordinates. Older people are targeted to be interviewed for their experience and knowledge of the place more than others. The pronunciation of the name is recorded according to their pronunciation and then the data is unloaded in special forms prepared for that.

### 4.2 Post Field Work

These names are reviewed here to distinguish the different phenomena from each other by giving those symbols and indications that facilitate the process of checking and confirming them. These lists are sent to the competent authorities of the regions where the names are collected. These are three entities (Ministry of the Interior, in which nine governorates are under its authority, as well as Muscat Governorate and Dhofar Governorate) which in turn verify these names through the offices of the governors of the province. After their return from the three parties, approval, adoption and ratification, they are placed in maps or other uses.

4.3 Administrating the Geographical Names After the adoption of the geographical names of the official authorities, they are kept in official records and then entered in the base of geographical names. These data include the Arabic name, the name after the transfer to Latin, the type of phenomenon, the coordinates, type and scale of the map contained, and the reason for naming, if found.

## 5. NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES OF OMAN (PROPOSAL)

NSA is currently preparing a proposal to establish a national committee for geographical names in Oman. These are some of the reasons for the establishment of this committee: -

- Strengthening and supporting the efforts of NSA to assist the standardization of Omani geographical names.
- The absence of the coordination between the various entities concerned with geographical names in the writing of geographical names in Latin, especially on the signs of cities, villages, neighborhoods and roads, created significant differences of these names when transferred to other languages.
- The appearance of errors when writing the geographical names due to the adoption of the writing of these names on calligraphers who are not native

speakers of Arabic, the lack of knowledge of local dialects and the appropriate configuration of these names.

- The existence of several images to write the name, which is a result of a disagreement on a unified system, leads to distracting and confusing the name user, especially entrant and tourist.
- The existence of several writings of the name works on the non-transfer of the name of several images (writings) from governmental institutions to foreign and international organizations and institutions.
- In addition, the establishment of the National Committee for Geographical Names is a demand of the United Nations in this field and we hope that it will soon be published.

## 6. NSA'S PARTICIPATION IN CONFERENCES, SESSIONS AND SCIENTIFIC SEMINARS RELATED TO GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

In its endeavor to achieve the above objective, NSA has been diligently trying to apply the scientific systems used to collect, approve and transfer geographic names from Arabic language into Latin languages. To do so, it started by using the Permanent Committee for Geographic Names (PCGN) system followed by the Beirut system which then changed (2007) to become The Arab Standardized System for transfer of names. As a result, NSA was very keen to take part in almost all meetings conducted by the Arab Division for geographic names under the umbrella of the Arab League. The NSA has also become one of the United Nations (UN) experts in geographic names which gave it an opportunity to greatly benefit from the UN technical expertise in this field.

### 6.1 UN Conferences

- 7th Conference from 14-27 Jan 1998 (NY)
- 8th Conference from 27th Aug – 5th Sept 2002 (Berlin)
- 9th Conference from 21st – 30th Aug 2007 (NY)
- 10th Conference from 31st Jul – 9th Aug 2012 (NY)

### 6.2 UN SESSIONS

- 17th SESSION from 13th -24th Jun, 1994 (NY)-Presenting paper
- 19th SESSION from 12th -23rd Jan, 1998 (NY)
- 20th SESSION from 17th -28th Jan, 2000 (NY)
- 24th SESSION from 20th – 31st Aug, 2007 (NY)
- 25th SESSION from 5th – 12th May, 2009, Nairobi(Kenya)
- 26th SESSION from 2nd – 6th May, 2011, Vienna /Austria
- 27th SESSION from 30th Jul – 10th Aug, 2012 (NY)
- 28th SESSION from 28th April- 2nd May, 2014 (NY)
- 29th SESSION from 25th -29th April, 2016, Bangkok (Thailand)

### 6.3 UN Workshops Related to Geographic Names

- Workshop relevant to geographic names supervised by the UN and held in Indonesia – 2012

### 6.4 Arabic Division's Sessions and Conferences for Arabic Geographic names

- 3rd Conference from 30th – 31st May, 2007 (Beirut)
- 5th Conference from 26th – 29th May, 2010 (Beirut)
- 6th Conference from 10th -13th July, 2012 (Amman)- presenting paper
- 7th Conference from 10th -13th Nov, 2014 (Amman)
- 1st Conference on Survey& geographic names - October, 2013

Annual Meetings and coordination with the GCC state in maps and geographic Information field.

Presenting work paper titled “Geographic names and its importance in society” at the GIS forum held in Sultan Qaboos University, Oman in May, 2009.

### 6.5 National Projects Related to Geographic Names

- Take part in the revision of maps of the Omani encyclopedia in 2009
- Take part in the project of producing Muscat map at scale 1:75000 in 2009 (both Arabic & English versions)

- Take part in the project of producing Suhar map at scale 1:20000 in 2013- Bilingual Arabic/English
- Take part in the project of producing Nizwa map at scale 1:20000 in 2015- Bilingual Arabic/English.
- Take part in the project of producing 3D Sultanate map on the occasion of the 45th National Day Anniversary at scale 1:1,300,000, in 2015- Bilingual Arabic/English.
- Take part in the project of producing topographic map at scale 1:50000 covering the Sultanate (498 maps) in 2015- Bilingual Arabic/English
- Take part in the project of producing topographic maps at scale 1:100,000 covering the Sultanate (136 maps) in 2015- Bilingual Arabic/English.
- Wrote an article entitled “Sultanate of Oman’s Geographical Names Achievements” in the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) INFORMATION BULLETION NO. 51 November 2016.
- Wrote an article in the Geographical Names Magazine of the Arab Division of Experts on Geographical Names No 4 dated April 2017.

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