
United Nations
Group of Experts on
Geographical Names

Working Paper
No. 86

Eighteenth Session
Geneva, 12-23 August 1996

Item 5
of the Provisional Agenda

REPORTS OF THE DIVISIONS

Activities in Jordan on the
Standardization of Geographical Names

Submitted by Mr. Ibrahim Al-Zogurti, Chairman of the Geographical
Names Committee, Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre

**Eighteenth Session of the U. N. Group of Experts
on Geographical Names
Geneva 12 - 23/8/1996**

**Country Paper / Jordan
Summary**

During its long history, Jordan has witnessed several civilizations which have left their imprints on geographical names. Most of these names are Arabic, but few are of Aramaic, Nabataean, Greek or Roman origins .

During the three decades before 1965 several series of maps were produced in English by Great Britain and the American AMS (Army Map Service). In 1971 the U.S. Army Topographic Command published the "Official Standard Names Gazetteer for Jordan" .

Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre (RJGC) was established in 1975. It took on its charge the production of topographic maps in English and Arabic depending on the original English versions and field works.

In 1981 RJGC adopted a transliteration system based upon the Bayrut Modified System. RJGC is currently working on producing a computerized name register based on the aforementioned standard names gazetteer, updated and modified according to the official transliteration system .

Collecting geographical names for maps is carried out using different sources: old maps, Lands and Surveys Department plans and field work .

Collecting names in the desert, which is about 75% of the total area of Jordan is not easy since most parts of this area are uninhabited .

Office treatment of names is carried out by the Geographical Names Committee. A national Geographical Names Committee was formed in 1984. It was active for about three years.

In 1988 RJGC published a school atlas in Arabic and was confronted by problem of choosing the right form of names of cities and even countries of the world. It was noted that most general atlases in Arabic do not agree on the same form of exonyms .

A new edition of the school atlas in Arabic is under printing, we did our best to choose the right names, by writing to the foreign embassies in Jordan and consulting the Jordanians who have studied abroad .

**Eighteenth Session of the U. N Group
of Experts on Geographical Names
Geneva 12-23/8/1996
Country Paper/ Jordan**

* **Historical Background:-**

Geographical names are strongly related to the history of a country, and Jordan is not an exception to that case. A short look at the history of Jordan and the civilizations and peoples who have lived on its land apparently shows the link between these peoples and the names of the cities and towns that are still keeping these names for thousands of years. These peoples include the Edmoites, Moabites, Ammonites, Nabataeans, Greeks and Romans. Islam came to the country in the 7th. century AD and its effect has been clearly left on the majority of names of towns and villages and almost all the names of natural topographic features .

* **Cartographic Background:-**

Jordan was put under the British mandate directly after world war-1 . The British government produced maps at various scales in English for Jordan and Palestine . In the early 1960's the American AMS (Army Map Service) produced a Complete cover for the Kingdom at a scale of 1 : 50,000 . In 1980 The French produced 30 sheets at scale 1 : 25,000 for the north region (Irbid District), the quality of names in these maps was excellent .

Those maps were in English and the system adopted came from BGN/PCGN systems. The Americans also published in 1972 an official Standard Names Gazetteer for Jordan . The Lands and Surveys Department transliterated some small scale maps. But the greatest part of this work was accomplished at the Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre.

The Arabic names on these translated maps have suffered from some mistakes for various reasons . The most important of those was the ignorance of some of those who did this work of the transliteration system which the Americans and British have adopted. This is in addition to the existence of some mistakes made on these maps when they were originally produced, and the inconsistency in following the transliteration system adopted . Then in the early 1980's the Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre (RJGC) adopted a special transliteration system based on the Modified Bayrut System with little amendments made . (see Annex).

* **Achievements Regarding Geographical Names:-**

First, the Government of Jordan formed a National Committee for Geographical Names . That committee was active for 3 years in the early 1980's .

Another committee was also formed at the RJGC for the same purpose, and is still active today. Some of its activities include the checking and verifying of the name registers of field completion and the choosing of names in their final form. A gazetteer for towns and villages in Arabic was produced and it has been recently entered into the computer. It includes various information about these villages such as coordinates, population, altitude and the administrative location as such.

Working has already begun in producing a new names gazetteer of Jordan depending on several sources :-

- 1- The official Standard Names Gazetteer produced by AMS .
- 2- The new and updated topographic maps at scales 1 : 25,000... 1:50,000 .
- 3- Field completion names registers .

Jordan Geographic Encyclopedia : to be achieved and edited in separate parts each for a different administrative division of the first order (Muhafadha). Three parts are ready for printing. Each town, village and agglomeration was visited. Field work included interviewing people about history, names, services ... etc in their village. Topographic maps (1 : 50,000, 1 : 25,000) and governmental registers were consulted . The Encyclopedia contains also vital statistics concerning the Muhafadha and the villages .

* Goals and National Programmes:-

- 1- Forming a new national committee for geographical names and activating its role .
- 2- Producing a computerized names register which will help in updating the official Standard Names Gazetteer.
- 3- Solving the problem of different places having the same name, a situation that causes confusion .
- 4- Publicizing the official geographical names system including the transliteration system used in RJGC .
- 5- Preparing an Arabic index of all names of major geographical features in the world in cooperation with embassies in Jordan .

* Problems and Solutions:-

- 1- Collecting of geographical names in the desert:
Existing topographical maps show very few names of the features in the desert region. Collecting of these names is not easy since many parts in the desert are uninhabited.
Field collection of names in the desert should be made in the spring time with the help of the bedouins when they can be seen there with their herds of sheep and camels. Features which do not have names could be given ones by the National Names Committee when it comes into existence .
- 2- Standard and Dialectal Forms of Names:
One of the main differences Between standard and dialectal Arabic is the short vowels. This does not show big difference in written Arabic since these vowels are not normally represented in writing. But the problem arises when transliterating these names into Roman letters where these short vowels have to be represented. This could lead to confusion when writing the names of these locations in Roman letters, unless the exact pronunciation of these names is known .
- 3- Publicizing the Transliteration System:
The transliteration system used by RJGC is not yet known or used by other governmental departments or by the public in Jordan . Steps are being taken to publicize the system and make it known and used by other potential users through conferences, symposia and public information media .

The Department of Antiquities has already adopted this system and had a number of its employees trained to use this system .

*

Conclusions and Recommendations :-

- 1- It is essential to form a national geographical names committee for the standardization of names of locations.
- 2- It is very important to update the Official Standard Names Gazetteer through cooperation with international organizations that have good experience in this field .
- 3- The necessity for a unified transliteration system on the Arab World level, through exchange of advice and information and cooperation with public information media.
- 4- Arabic countries should be encouraged to produce updated geographical names gazetteers and to exchange these gazetteers among themselves .

Annex

* Transliteration System for Arabic Geographic Names:-

The transliteration (romanization) system adopted and used by the RJGC since 1980 is practically the same as that of the BGN/PCGN used in " The Official Standard Names Gazetteer of Jordan, ed. 1971" and as it appears in " The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, ed. 1981 "with 2 main modifications :-

1- **ظ** is transliterated as dh and not as z- (mainly because dh is the form that was used on 1 : 50,000 maps of Jordan produced by the American AMS) .

ة (tā' marbūta) is transliterated as "a" and not as h (or ah).

The basic rule for transliterating Arabic geographic names is to consider the standard (formal) form of the word as it is pronounced, regardless of the actual spelling of the word .

Transliteration System for Arabic Geographic Names .

1) Arabic Consonants .

<u>Arabic Letter</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Examples</u>
ع	,	بئر bir
ب	b	بيت bayt
ت	t	تل tall
ث	th	ثغره thaghra
ج	j	جبل jabal
ح	h	حره harra
خ	kh	خربة khirba

<u>ArabicLetter</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Examples</u>
د	d	دير dayr
ذ	dh	ذيان dhībān
ر	r	رجم rujm
ز	z	زمله zumla
س	s	سيل sayl
ش	sh	شلال shallāl
ص	s	صخره ṣakhra
ض	ḍ	ضبعه ḍaba
ط	t	طاحونه tāhūna
ظ	ḍh	ظهرة ḍahra
ع	‘	عين ‘ayn
غ	gh	غور ghawr
ف	f	فج fajj
ق	q	قاع qā‘
ك	k	كرم karm
ل	L	لواء Liwā‘
م	m	مطار maṭār
ن	n	نبيع nab‘
هـ	h	هضبه haḍaba
و	w	وادي wādī
ي	y	يرقا yarqā

Most of the examples given are generic terms which explains using small letters .

2) Arabic vowels , diphthongs , and special diacritical marks ,

(fatha)	a	سهل	sahl
(kasra)	i	جسر	jisr
(damma)	u	جرف	jurf
(fatha alif)	ā	باب	bāb
(kasra yā')	ī	سبيل	sīq
(damma wāw)	ū	سوح	sūh
(alif maqṣūra)	a'	بصري	Buṣra'
(shadda)	doubling	تلة	talla

Notes

1) Hamza (ء) is not transliterated in the beginning of words ; e.g., :

Ard : أرض

hamzat al madd is equivalent to ء (hamza alif) and is transliterated as

a :e.g., قرآن. قرآن

2) Tā' marbuta (ة) occurs at the end of many words, usually feminine;

it is represented a , (e.g., خربة : Khirba) which is shorter than ,

and preferable to "ah" (khirbah) because "h" represents the letter هـ

(ha') which is different from tā' marbūṭa, and also because transliterating it as "a" does not cause any confusion .

However if tā' marbūṭa is preceded by (alif) (which occurs in very few words) it should be represented by "ah", (e.g., صفاه : Ṣafāh)

if tā' marbūṭa is followed by another word in a unitary expression, it is

transliterated as "t" e.g., Ghazzat Hāshim : غَزَّة هاشم (according to the basic rule aforementioned) .

- 3) The definite article (أل) is transliterated (according to the basic rule) as "al" if the "l" is pronounced ; that is , before the so - called " moon letters " but when the definite article precedes a word beginning with t , th , d , dh , r , z , s , sh , ṣ , ḍ , : ṭ, dḥ, l, n, (the : so - called " sun letters ") the "l" is assimilated in pronunciation , giving "t t" , "th th" ,
etc , e.g. , al jabal , السَّهْل الجبل as sahl السَّهْل .
- 4) Hyphens should not be used to connect parts of names ; e.g. ;
Bayt Ra's الكرك بيت رأس Al Karak .
- 5) The word ابن is always transliterated as Ibn even if it is written بن as is the case when it comes between two proper names e.g.
عثمان بن عفان 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān , since it is always pronounced as Ibn .