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**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of
geographical names since the Eighth Conference.**

National Report of Israel

Submitted by Israel**

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National report of Israel

Romanization of Hebrew

Modifying or amending an existing transliteration system is not something to be approached lightly, but has been done by several countries in relation to U.N.-approved scripts. In the case of Israel, pronunciation habits have somewhat changed over the past fifty years as a result of changes in the composition of the Israeli population – and the (“simple”) romanization system is intended chiefly to enable road and map users to ask for directions.

Already in a paper presented to the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names [1] it was reported that steps were being taken to propose amendments to the then current official “simple” romanization system for Hebrew, which had been ratified by the Academy of the Hebrew Language in 1956 and endorsed for use in Hebrew geographical names by the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in Athens, 1977 [2]. A further paper [3] reported on an experiment in testing the efficiency and utility of an amended romanization system as compared with the existing one, by interviewing and acoustically recording 220 non-Hebrew reading tourists entering Israel, and analyzing the 5500 name readings. To the best of our knowledge this was the first (and only?) time that a Romanization system was tested via a scientific survey.

The conclusions were presented to a plenary session of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, national authority on Hebrew transliteration systems in Israel, and further talks were held chiefly between representatives of the *Survey of Israel*, the Public Works Department (PWD) and the Government Names Commission on the one hand, and members of the Academy on the other. The Director-General of the *Survey of Israel*, national authority for geodesy, mapping and geographical information, who led the negotiations with the Academy of the Hebrew Language, was killed (together with his two children) in 2002 by a Palestinian suicide bomber. As a result, the talks were temporarily suspended and the Academy decided for the present not to introduce any changes in the existing romanization system, but did not rule out doing so in the future.

After further discussions, serious negotiations were taken up again in 2005, with the Government Names Commission taking the lead together with the Academy of the Hebrew Language. In September 2006, fifty years since the “old” Romanization of Hebrew was officially adopted in Israel (and accepted by the Third Conference in 1977), the amendments to this (so-called “simplified”) system were officially ratified under the general heading of simplified transliteration rules for the rendering of Hebrew geographical names. The precise or scientific romanization system of 1956 (see [2]) remains unchanged. The relatively few changes are being presented to the Ninth Conference in a separate paper under item 16 (a) of the provisional agenda. They are now in the early stages of being implemented in road signs by the National Roads Authority (the former Public Works Department, PWD) and in maps of the Survey of Israel, and in the future in all Government publications (see below, a new gazetteer).

Hebrew-to-Arabic transliteration

New transliteration rules from Hebrew into Arabic for Hebrew geographical names, presented in a preliminary report to the twentieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, New York, January 2000 [4], were officially ratified in May 2007. They are being applied to road signs in Israel produced by the competent authority, the National Roads Authority, and in maps of the Survey of Israel. In concise form they are being presented to this conference in a separate paper under item 16 (b).

Arabic-to-Hebrew Transliteration

This system has been in operation since 1990, though not applied uniformly. Many Arabic consonant letters have their equivalent in Hebrew, but six (ث, ج, خ, ص, ذ, غ) require an apostrophe after the Hebrew letter (respectively 'ה, 'ג, 'ח, 'ד, 'ס, 'ע). In consultation with the new Academy of the Arabic Language in Israel the system has now been amended by a single consonant letter, namely غ, ghain (the sixth above), being transliterated by Hebrew 'ר, i.e. ר (r) with a diacritic. The transliteration system was formally ratified in November 2006.

Romanization of Arabic in Israel

This system, too, has been adopted after consultations with the new Academy of the Arabic Language in Israel. It is in general identical with the amended Beirut system, except that in order to reduce the number of diacritics, the underscore of the Roman consonant letters representing ح, ط, ظ, ض, ص, ص (respectively h, s, d, t, z) has been omitted. Reversibility is not being aimed at in a system designed primarily to serve “western” users who are unfamiliar with these particular Arabic sounds. The system was ratified in May 2007.

A tri-scriptual national toponymic database

The majority of the digital mapping projects carried out by the Survey of Israel, both in topographic as well as in urban cartography, are based on the national geographic information system (GIS). The national toponymic database is, as yet, a separate entity.

As a result of the amended transliteration systems outlined above, work is now beginning on a new database of all populated places in Israel, as well as the names on all official road signs, in all three scripts – Hebrew, Arabic and Roman. This would, by all accounts, be the first digital tri-scriptual (and bi-directional) database in the world; the bi-scriptual bi-directional digital database of Israel (Hebrew and romanized) was also the first of its kind in the world [5].

Bi- and tri-scriptual digital maps

Bi-scriptual maps (Hebrew and romanized/English) as well as Arabic ones are being produced also by private mapping firms in Israel. While the official romanization system for Hebrew geographical names had been binding on Government institutions and many other public bodies since 1957, various other systems were and still are being used by different private and even public institutions, as reported in the past. This fact is a result of the different linguistic background of the bodies employing the names, most often in transcription and not in transliteration. Thus, touristic texts (e.g. brochures, guidebooks etc.) in the languages spoken by tourists make use of different transcriptions into these languages. With the emerging new toponymic tri-lingual database, and with the new list of exonyms or rather traditional historical names in Israel (see separate paper on donor-recommended exonyms under item 10 of the provisional agenda), it is intended that all Israeli toponymy will be uniform and standardized in all three scripts.

Problems with digital vocalization, Plene script)

In the past, all official Israeli maps in Hebrew carried full vocalization, i.e. with all vowel points. Until recently, the computer system of the *Survey of Israel* employed in producing new digital maps was unable to cope with the vowel points. This resulted in the adoption of "plene" script (ktiv malé; see paper on the romanization of Hebrew under item 16 (a) of the provisional agenda)/ which replaces certain vowel points by consonant letters, described already in the past. The new system of the Survey of Israel is intended to overcome these problems, using a plene system with auxiliary or partial vocalization, as found in the printed media in Israel.

Toponymic education

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Department of Geography, offers an annual course under the name "Toponymy – the study of geographical names". Particulars of this course and its textbook (*Toponymy – the lore, laws and language of geographical names*, [6]) were presented at the Eighth Conference in 2002 [7].

The Academy of the Hebrew Language has recently been holding a workshop on the new transliteration systems, spread over four weeks, for representatives of the mapping and road-signing institutions as well as for journalists and for some other representatives of the public media

The three-dimensional cadastre

This subject was mentioned already in Israel's previous national report for 2002. A cadastre usually refers to geographical items on the surface of the Earth. A typical cadastre is defined by plane (two-dimensional) coordinates of border points on the spheroid. But there exist also well-defined subterranean features, not only natural such as caves but man-made ones, e.g. mines, tunnels, subways and other underground installations.

However, as reported in the past, the need has been felt for a precise numerical definition of spatial features below ground, for example in order to legalize claims for underground resources or constructions. In the new Israeli three-dimensional cadastre now being developed, the definitions of such entities are being uniquely based only on numerical values related to the relevant surface cadastral units, i.e. blocks and parcels of land. In such cases geographical names are only indirectly involved, because blocks of land are tied to named topographic features, whether man-made or natural.

Nautical charts

All Israeli nautical charts, small- and large-scale, both of the Mediterranean Sea and of the Gulf of Eilat, are being produced in bilingual versions, namely Hebrew and English, with toponyms romanized.

Notes

- [1] Considerations for and against the revision of a romanization system – the case of Hebrew. E/CONF.91/L.11, 7 November 1997.
- [2] Romanization of the Hebrew alphabet. Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Athens, 1977, resolution 13. E/CONF.69/4, p. 33-34.
- [3] A phonetic sample survey towards improvement of a romanization system.. E/CONF.91/L12, 7 November 1997.
- [4] A new transliteration system from Hebrew into Arabic. United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, twentieth session, New York, 2000, Working Paper No. 54.
- [5] "A bi-scriptual gazetteer of place names in Israel produced by computer". ONOMA, Bulletin of the International Committee of Onomastic Science, Vol. 24, No. 1-3, Louvain, 1980, pp. 98-102.
- [6] N. Kadmon, *Toponymy – the lore, laws and language of geographical names*. Vantage Press, New York, 2000, ISBN 0-533-13531-1; 333 pp.
- [7] A new general textbook on geographical names. E/CONF.94CRP.87 and Add.1.

Summary

The proposed amendments in the romanization of Hebrew, reported in the past, have now been approved by the competent authority, as have the other three relevant transliteration methods, viz. Hebrew to Arabic, Arabic to Hebrew and Arabic to Roman script. All are now in the early state of implementation by government road-signing, mapping and other institutions. The paper reports on the work performed in producing digital maps, including nautical charts, based on the national GIS (geographic information system) in mono- and bilingual versions and on the tri-lingual digital toponymic database being developed. As distinct from the previous report, toponyms are only indirectly involved. Finally, education in toponymy is mentioned, including a workshop for representatives of the bodies involved in carrying out and applying the new transliteration systems.