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English only

**Eighth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**
Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of
geographical names since the Seventh Conference**

National report of Israel

Submitted by Israel**

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Romanization of Hebrew

In a paper presented at the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names [1] it was reported that steps had been taken to propose amendments to the current official romanization system for Hebrew, which was ratified by the Academy of the Hebrew Language in 1956 and endorsed for use in Hebrew geographical names by the Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in Athens, 1977. A further paper [2] reported on an experiment in testing the efficiency and utility of an amended romanization system as compared with the existing one.

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 in May 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. Therefore the romanization system for Hebrew geographical names approved by the Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names [3] is still in force, with the single change (reported already to the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization) that instead of an apostrophe and an inverted comma representing the mute letters א and ע, respectively, the apostrophe will serve in both roles.

Hebrew-to-Arabic transliteration

The new transliteration rules from Hebrew into Arabic for Hebrew geographical names, reported to the twentieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, New York, January 2000 [4], is now being applied to road signs in Israel produced by the competent authority, the Public Works Department (PWD). This system had to solve the problem of certain Hebrew consonants as well as vowels not having any direct formal equivalent in Arabic. In the case of most Hebrew consonant letters there is no problem, because the majority of Hebrew letters have a direct and precise equivalent in Arabic. However, there are several exceptions. Thus, Hebrew has letters for the /g/ phoneme as well as for /p/ and /v/, all of which are non-existent in the classical Arabic alphabet as used in Arabic in Israel. This is distinct from e.g. Egyptian Arabic in which the letter *gim* is the equivalent of Hebrew *gimmel* (/g/). However, some Persian and Malay consonant letters are already being widely used in the Arabic transliteration of western words, among others in the Arabic press in Israel, and the Committee proposed to incorporate in the new rules those representing the three Hebrew consonant letters for *g, p* and *v*. Thus, Hebrew *gimmel* (/g/) is represented by Persian *ch* (Arabic *g* but with three dots below it); Hebrew *pe* (/p/) by Persian *p* (Arabic *b* but with three dots below); and Hebrew undotted *bet* (/v/) which has no equivalent in Arabic, and its Persian equivalent is the Arabic letter for /w/ (*waw*), is represented by the Malay letter for /p/, i.e. Arabic /f/ but with three dots above it.

Both Hebrew and Arabic are defective alphabetic scripts; vowels are mostly represented by markers. But whereas Hebrew has five basic vowel sounds (*a, e, i, o, u*) with some modifications, Arabic has three – fat'ha, dammah and kasra (*a, u, i*). Adequate approximation to Hebrew *e* and *o* had to

be introduced. Stress, too, has to be accounted for, often introducing an additional *alif, ya* or *waw*. Word endings, too, have to be adapted, and in certain cases *fat'ha-alif* substitute for Hebrew *qammaz-he*.

The national toponymic database; bi- and tri-scriptual maps

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.

The latest bilingual and bi-scriptual map to be produced by the Survey of Israel is the 1:20,000 scalenautical chart of Herzliyya. In the range of 1:25,000 scale topographic maps a first bi-scriptual map sheet, namely that of 'Akko (Acre) is now being prepared.

As a result of the new transliteration system from Hebrew into Arabic employed by the Survey of Israel (as well as by the road signs administering authority in the Public Works Department (PWD), work is now being done towards incorporating the names of all Arab towns and villages in Israel in the toponymic database in Arabic characters. This would, by all accounts, be the first digital tri-scriptual database in the world; the bi-scriptual digital database of Israel (Hebrew and romanized) was also the first of its kind in the world [5].

Bi-scriptual maps (Hebrew and romanized/English) are being produced also by private mapping firms in Israel. However, some of these use transliteration system which deviate somewhat from the official romanization, as reported already to the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names [6]. While the official romanization system for Hebrew geographical names is binding on Government institutions and many other public bodies, various other systems are being used by different private and even public institutions. 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.

Tertiary education and toponymic literature

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Department of Geography, offers an annual course under the name "Toponymy".

Since the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, 1998, The new textbook "Toponymy – the lore, laws and language of geographical names" has been published by the Vantage Press of New York [7]. This is described in a separate paper to the Eighth Conference.

The paper "Ptolemy – the first UNGEGN toponymist" presented by Israel at the special commemoration session of the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, 1998, has been printed full-length in vol. 35 of ONOMA at the invitation of the editor of this volume [8].

A three-dimensional cadastre

A cadastre usually refers to geographical items on the surface of the Earth. But there exist also well-defined subterranean features such as caves – natural and man-made such as mines, subways or underground hangars – as well as geographical entities above the surface, such as airline corridors and

flight levels. A trypical cadastre is defined by plane (two-dimensional) coordinates of border points on the spheroid.

However, the need has been felt for a precise numerical definition of spatial features either below or above ground, for example in order to precisely legalize claims for underground resources or constructions. In such cases geographical names have often to be associated with these features. Israel has now begun to construct its spatial, three-dimensional cadastre, which includes the relevant toponyms.

<u>Notes</u>

[1]   Considerations for and against the revision of a romanization system – the case of Hebrew. E/CONF.91/L.11, 7 November 1997.

[2]   A phonetic sample survey towards improvement of a romanization system. E/CONF.91/L12, 7 November 1997.

[3]   Romanization of the Hebrew alphabet. Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Athens, 1977, resolution 13. E/CONF.69/4, pp. 33-34.

[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]   "The legal status of official endonyms in Israel". Sixth U.N. Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, 1992, conference paper E/CONF.85/L.4.

[7]   N. Kadmon, *Toponymy – the lore, laws and language of geographical names*. Vantage Press, New York, 2000, ISBN 0-533-13531-1, 333 pp.

[8]   N. Kadmon, "Ptolemy – the first UNGEGN toponymist. Commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the first United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names". ONOMA, Vol. 35, Louvain, 2000, pp. 123-143.

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