Librarian's Lobby
By Daniel D. Stuhlman

Transliteration of Hebrew
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For the past couple of weeks I have been investigating the transliteration of Hebrew words into English. The challenge is now I know enough to talk about the subject, but not enough to write a documented scholarly article. I am still looking for enough sources.

Transliteration is the representation of a word in one language script with the letters in another script. Romanization is the representation of words in Latin characters. All alphabets represent sounds of words as language was oral before if was written. Children learn to speak many years before they can learn to read and write. Each letters of each alphabet represent sounds, but some sounds require more than one letter for representation. For example "th," "ch," and "sh" are diagraphs for single sounds. "Ee" and "ie" represent one vowel sound each. English has more sounds than Hebrew partly because English integrated words from more linguistic sources. English has sounds that did not exist in Latin. Latin did not have a "J[1]" or "W."

From the time the Romans entered ancient Israel they needed to write some Hebrew words in Latin characters. My research challenge was to find some of these early inscriptions. I found Roman coins with the word, "IUDEO" meaning "Yehudah" as the name of the country. So far that is the only word I found. I couldn't find any pictures of Latin inscriptions.

The Latin translation of the Bible, The Vulgate of Jerome, dates from the early 5th century. That is at least 6 hundred years after Romans first entered the land of Judea. The Vulgate was based on the Greek Septuagint translation. It is possible that Jerome did not even use the Hebrew text for much of his translation. Jerome transliterated places and people from the Greek. For example "Gaza" and "Gemorah" are used for, עזה ועמורה. Since most people today do not pronounce the "aiyin ע " and the cities are "Aza" and "Amorah." The "aiyin ע" is a guttural letter pronounced with the throat. In ancient times the letter had the sound similar to a throaty "ng" as in "sang." The Greeks heard the /g/ sound and used a "gamma."

The English letter "Q" is a descended from the Hebrew "kuf ק" Since the sound is the same as a "k" most people use a "K" for the "kuf" of "Kaddosh קדוש" etc. In Israel there is an interesting situation with this letter. Highway directional signs are mandated to use "Q" but cites are free to spell the words as they wish.

Here's a picture of a railroad station sign.

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[1] For a fuller discussion on the "J" in English see my Librarian's Lobby from May 2004, "Why Start Jacob and Joseph With a "J"? http://home.earthlink.net/~ddstuhlman/crc71.htm.

| Here are two highway signs |

A couple of weeks ago a colleague asked on a listserv about the transliteration of "Judeo-Hebraic" words used by another list member, Yaakov (who does not use a "Q" in his name).

The questioner listed the following words:
1. Anshé Motele
2. Qiddush
3. brov `am hadrat melekh
4. k-yad hammelekh
5. xalav yisrael
6. Shabbat

He wanted an explanation of the methodology for choosing this transliteration. Before answering there are several questions to investigate. 1) Why is transliteration needed? and 2) What is a Judeo language?

The simple answer is Judeo languages are those language used by Jews. Of course Hebrew, לשון הקודש is the first Judeo language. Later Aramaic became Judeo language. As Jews moved to Rome, France, Germany, Spain and other places they took the local vernacular and wrote it in Hebrew letters. Yiddish with its mix of Hebrew ritual and liturgical words became a full fledged language. Sarah Bunin Benor in her 2009 article, "Do American Jews Speak a "Jewish Language?: A Model of Jewish Linguistic Distinctiveness" [2] examines linguistic history of Judeo languages. She says that American Jewish English usage exhibits eleven features of diaspora Jewish languages. However some of the big differences are that English used by Jews is not written with Hebrew characters and Jews can speak standard English as well as the non-Jews. Israeli Hebrew also has a strong influence on American Jewish vocabulary. For the study of transliteration all of these non-English words create a need in the written language for representing "Jewish" words.. However, written works tend to follow standard English more closely than spoken language.

Certain names of people and places have acquired conventional Romanization. This has occurred not just for Hebrew words used in English but also for Chinese and Cyrillic scripts. Some of these

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[2] *Jewish Quarterly Review* - Volume 99, Number 2, Spring 2009, pp. 230-269

Hebrew words are so well known in their English forms that they have become English words. Examples are Jacob, Joseph, and Shabbat. If one was using systematic Romanization based on Library of Congress and Anglo-American cataloging rules the words would be spelled more closely to how they are pronounced in modern Israeli Hebrew.   However, Hebrew has two major accents, Ashkenazi and Sefardi. The Modern Israeli Hebrew accent actually has some elements of both. There are also Hebrew words that have entered English from Yiddish. (For example *mavan*, and *minyan*) which have a slightly different meaning in the English and Yiddish usage.

The question then is which of the several methodologies and reasons for Romanization or transliteration of non-Latin alphabets does one use? All languages make compromises between the written and the spoken word. The Latin alphabet which is based on the Greek alphabet which is based on the Phonecian (which is almost like Biblical Hebrew) are no exceptions.   Do we Romanize based on how we hear the word or how it is spelled? Do we transliterate based on a convention or do we use a representation that will allow one to figure out the original Hebrew?

There are at least three levels of Hebrew Romanization -- 1) Popular; 2) Academic; and 3) One to one correspondence. In the third level the letters are reversible. That is one Latin character always represents the same Hebrew letter.   Most non-academics never use level three transliterations. Most printed works use a combination of strictly academic and common popular transliterations. Some organizations set up strict rules for transliteration. For example American Library Association and Library of Congress have rules for transliteration of Hebrew for use in bibliographic descriptions. There are rules for transcribing names and places used by the United States government. People choose the way they want to represent their own name. That is why one person is "Yosef" and another is "Joseph."

Yaakov choose level three Romanization, which is quite clear to those who know the system and others can learn it in less than 5 minutes.

One may ask why is a *chet* represented with a "X?" The *chet* became a "chi" in Greek. The "chi" looks exactly like a Latin "X." He is much more correct using an "X" for a "chet" than those who use an "H" or an "h" with a dot underneath. The only problem is the "X" in English is not pronounced as a Greek "chi" or Hebrew "chet."

Vowels are harder to Romanize than consonants because they are more dependent on how one hears the word. Hearing is less precise than reading. Regional accents differ more in the vowels than consonants and these differences are hard to represent in the written language. For example how does one represent for non linguists the differences between a mid-western pronunciation of "car" and "park" and a Bostonian version? One would instantly hear the difference. The Masorites of the 8th century vocalized the Hebrew text of the Bible. We do not know how closely the vowels represent how they heard Hebrew compared to how Hebrew was pronounced in Biblical times. For ancient Semitic languages such as Akkadian and Ugraritic, we have no vowels. How the words are pronounced is a guess based on what we know from Hebrew.

The way French, Spanish, German and other speakers transliterate Hebrew words is based on their sound values to the letters. For the /sh/ sound as in "shut" or "shoot" the sound may be spelled "ch" in French, "sch" in German or "sz" in other languages. If systematic Romanization were really systematic French and German speakers would use the same system.   Much of the English transliteration before the *Encyclopedia Judaica* of 1972 was based on the *Jewish*

Encyclopedia (New York 1901). [3] For personal names found in the Bible they used the King James Bible for personal names as there was no Jewish English translation of the Bible.

Here is their system of transliteration used for Hebrew and Aramaic:

א	*Not noted at the beginning or the end of a word; otherwise' or by dieresis; e.g., pe'er or Miïr.*								
ב	*b*	ז	*z*	ל	*l*	פ	*(with dagesh), p*	שׁ	*sh*
ג	*g*	ח	*ḥ*	מ	*m*	פ	*(without dagesh), f*	שׂ	*s*
דד	*d*	ט	*ṭ*	נ	*n*	צ	*ẕ*	ת	*t*
הה	*h*	י	*y*	ם	*s*	ק	*ḳ*		
ו	*w*	כ	*k*	ע	‛	ר	*r*		

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They used a "b" for ב even when there was no dagesh. This means "אבות" was transliterated as "abot." The dots under the letters are very helpful in reading the entries in the encyclopedia, but when someone is typing an article they are hard to add. Even when using a word processor, adding diacritics is more time consuming than touch typing. The Encyclopedia Judaica (1972) has two transliteration choices, general and scientific. The scientific includes more Latin letters with diacritics and vowel options than the general option. For example the scientific uses **š** (s with a caron accent) for the sound of the first letter of שלום. The general list uses "sh" The **š** is more language independent than the English "sh."

The transliteration that you use depends on your purpose. If you are writing informally, then you are more likely to use a general Romanization system based on how you hear the words. If you are writing for publication a formal system is needed. If you want the reader to be able to figure out the exact Hebrew spelled then a one-to-one letter representation is needed. If you are a librarian establishing a correct name heading the rules are more complex and you will need a much longer article and training to pick the correct form than can be offered here.

Ugaritic alphabet

Daniel D. Stuhlman is president of **Stuhlman Management Consultants,** Chicago, IL, a firm helping organizations turn knowledge into wisdom. We are looking for new clients and opportunities. Visit the web site at Stuhlman.info to learn more about knowledge management and what our firm can do for you. Previous issues of Librarian's Lobby can be found at: http://home.earthlink.net/~DDStuhlman/liblob.htm.   E-mail author.   Last revised September 14, 2009

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[3] Available on line http://jewishencyclopedia.com/ for free. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* is in the public domain; *Encyclopedia Judaica* is not.