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Orthography of Geographical Names

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few doves and several *Oriolus galbula*. One of the latter was caught by one of the Cossacks; it was so cold that it could not fly. Farther on we found a big flock of ducks and other aquatic birds rising from a little pond by the lateral moraine. As we approached the main chain we found more and more corpses and skeletons of various species of birds scattered over the glacier, while at the very foot of the chain the surface of the ice looked like a battle-field; corpses and skeletons were seen in all directions. I stayed by this glacier till the 13th of September, and every day I saw numbers of various birds. They were most numerous in foggy weather."

Orthography of Geographical Names.

THE following revised and somewhat amplified statement of the system of orthography for the native names of places, devised by the Council of the Society in 1885,* has been recently circulated among all to whom it is likely to prove of service:—

1, SAVILE ROW, BURLINGTON GARDENS, W.
December 11th, 1891.

In 1885 the Council of the R.G.S., impressed with the necessity of endeavouring to reduce the confusion existing in British maps with regard to the spelling of geographical names, in consequence of the variety of systems of orthography used by travellers and others to represent the sound of native place-names in different parts of the world, formally adopted the general principle which had been long used by many, and the recognition of which had been steadily gaining ground, viz. that in writing geographical native names vowels should have their Italian significance and consonants that which they have in the English language.

This broad principle required elucidation in its details, and a system based upon it was consequently drawn up with the intention of representing the principal syllabic sounds.

It will be evident to all who consider the subject, that to ensure a fairly correct pronunciation of geographical names by an English-speaking person an arbitrary system of orthography is a necessity. It is hardly too much to say that in the English language every possible combination of letters has more than one possible pronunciation. A strange word, or name, even in our own language is frequently mispronounced. How much more with words of languages utterly unknown to the reader.

The same necessity does not arise in most Continental languages. In them a definite combination of letters indicates a definite sound, and each nation consequently has spelt foreign words in accordance with the orthographic rules of its own language.

It was therefore not anticipated that foreign nations would effect

* 'Proceedings,' 1885, p. 535.

any change in the form of orthography used in their maps, and the needs of the English-speaking communities were alone considered.

The object aimed at was to provide a system which should be simple enough for any educated person to master with the minimum of trouble, and which at the same time would afford an approximation to the sound of a place-name such as a native might recognise. No attempt was made to represent the numberless delicate inflexions of sound and tone which belong to every language, often to different dialects of the same language. For it was felt not only that such a task would be impossible, but that an attempt to provide for such niceties would defeat the object.

The adoption by others of the system thus settled has been more general than the Council ventured to hope.

The charts and maps issued by the Admiralty and War Office have been, since 1885, compiled and extensively revised in accordance with it. The Foreign and Colonial Offices have accepted it, and the latter has communicated with the Colonies requesting them to carry it out in respect to names of native origin.

Even more important, however, than these adhesions is the recent action of the Government of the United States of America, which, after an exhaustive inquiry, has adopted a system in close conformity with that of the R.G.S., and has directed that the spelling of all names in their vast territories should, in cases where the orthography is at present doubtful, be settled authoritatively by a Committee appointed for the purpose.

The two great English-speaking nations are thus working in harmony.

Contrary to expectation, but highly satisfactory, is the news that France and Germany have both formulated systems of orthography for foreign words, which in many details agree with the English system.

The Council of the R.G.S., by printing the Rules in 'Hints to Travellers,' and by other means, have endeavoured to ensure that all travellers connected with the Society should be made aware of them; but as it is possible that some bodies and persons interested in the question may still be in ignorance of their existence and general acceptance, they feel that the time has come to again publish them as widely as possible, and to take every means in their power to aid the progress of the reform.

To this end, and with a view to still closer uniformity in geographical nomenclature in revisions of editions of published maps—a gigantic task requiring many years to carry out—the Council have decided to take steps to commence tentatively indexes of a few regions, in which the place-names will be recorded in the accepted form.

M. E. GRANT DUFF,

President.

RULES.

The Rules referred to are as follows:—

1. No change is made in the orthography of foreign names in countries which use Roman letters: thus Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, &c., names will be spelt as by the respective nations.

2. Neither is change made in the spelling of such names in languages which are not written in Roman character as have become by long usage familiar to English readers: thus Calcutta, Cutch, Celebes, Mecca, &c., will be retained in their present form.

3. The true sound of the word as locally pronounced will be taken as the basis of the spelling.

4. An approximation, however, to the sound is alone aimed at. A system which would attempt to represent the more delicate inflexions of sound and accent would be so complicated as only to defeat itself. Those who desire a more accurate pronunciation of the written name must learn it on the spot by a study of local accent and peculiarities.

5. *The broad features of the system* are:—

(a) That vowels are pronounced as in Italian and consonants as in English.

(b) Every letter is pronounced, and no redundant letters are introduced. When two vowels come together, each one is sounded, though the result, when spoken quickly, is sometimes scarcely to be distinguished from a single sound, as in *ai*, *au*, *ei*.

(c) One accent only is used, the acute, to denote the syllable on which stress is laid. This is very important, as the sounds of many names are entirely altered by the misplacement of this “stress.”

6. Indian names are accepted as spelt in Hunter's Gazetteer of India, 1881.

The following amplification of these rules explains their application.

Letters.	Pronunciation and Remarks.	Examples.
a	<i>ah</i> , <i>a</i> as in <i>father</i>	Java, Banána, Somáli, Bari.
e	<i>eh</i> , <i>a</i> as in <i>fate</i>	Tel-el-Kebír, Oléleh, Yezo, Medina, Levúka, Peru.
i	English <i>e</i> ; <i>i</i> as in <i>ravine</i> ; the sound of <i>ee</i> in <i>beet</i> . Thus, not <i>Feejee</i> , but	Fiji, Hindi
o	<i>o</i> as in <i>mote</i>	Tokyo.
u	long <i>u</i> as in <i>flute</i> ; the sound of <i>oo</i> in <i>boot</i> . <i>oo</i> or <i>ou</i> should never be employed for this sound. Thus, not <i>Zooloo</i> , but	Zulu, Sumatra.
	<i>All vowels are shortened in sound by doubling the following consonant</i>	Yarra, Tanna, Mecca, Jidda, Bonny.*

* The *y* is retained as a terminal in this word under Rule 2 above. The word is given a familiar example of the alteration in sound caused by the second consonant.

Letters.	Pronunciation and Remarks.	Examples.
	Doubling of a vowel is only necessary where there is a distinct repetition of the single sound.	Nuulúa, Oosima.
ai	English <i>i</i> as in <i>ice</i>	Shanghai.
au	<i>ow</i> as in <i>how</i> Thus, not <i>Foochoo</i> , but	Fuchau.
ao	is slightly different from above	Macao.
aw	as in <i>law</i> .	
ei	is the sound of the two Italian vowels, but is frequently slurred over, when it is scarcely to be distinguished from <i>ey</i> in the English <i>they</i> .	Beirút, Beilúl.
b	English <i>b</i> .	
c	is always soft, but is so nearly the sound of <i>s</i> that it should be seldom used. If <i>Celébes</i> were not already recognised it would be written <i>Selébes</i> .	Celébes.
ch	is always soft as in <i>church</i>	Chingchin.
d	English <i>d</i> .	
f	English <i>f</i> . <i>ph</i> should not be used for the sound of <i>f</i> . Thus, not <i>Haiphong</i> , but	Haifong, Nafa.
g	is always hard. (Soft <i>g</i> is given by <i>j</i>)	Galápagos.
h	is always pronounced when inserted.	
hw	as in <i>what</i> ; better rendered by <i>hw</i> than by <i>wh</i> , or <i>h</i> followed by a vowel, thus <i>Hwang ho</i> , not <i>Whang ho</i> , or <i>Hoang ho</i> .	Hwang ho, Ngan hwi.
j	English <i>j</i> . <i>Dj</i> should never be put for this sound ..	Japan, Jinchuen.
k	English <i>k</i> . It should always be put for the hard <i>c</i> . Thus, not <i>Corea</i> , but	Korea.
kh	The Oriental guttural	Khan.
gh	is another guttural, as in the Turkish	Dagh, Ghazi.
l	As in English.	
m		
n		
ng		has two separate sounds, the one hard as in the English word <i>finger</i> , the other as in <i>singer</i> . As these two sounds are rarely employed in the same locality, no attempt is made to distinguish between them.
p	As in English.	
ph	As in <i>loophole</i>	Chemulpho, Mokpho.
th	stands both for its sound in <i>thing</i> , and as in <i>this</i> . The former is most common.	Bethlehem.
q	should never be employed; <i>qu</i> (in <i>quiver</i>) is given as <i>kw</i> When <i>qu</i> has the sound of <i>k</i> as in <i>quoit</i> , it should be given by <i>k</i> .	Kwangtung.
r	As in English.	
s		
sh		
t		
v		
w		Sawákin
x		
y	is always a consonant, as in <i>yard</i> , and therefore should never be used as a terminal, <i>i</i> or <i>e</i> being substituted as the sound may require. Thus, not <i>Mikindány</i> , but not <i>Kwaly</i> , but	Kikúyú
z	English <i>z</i>	Mikindáni.
zh	The French <i>j</i> , or as <i>s</i> in <i>treasure</i> Accents should not generally be used, but where there is a very decided emphatic syllable or stress, which affects the sound of the word, it should be marked by an <i>acute accent</i> .	Kwale. Zulu. Muzhdaha. Tongatábu, Galápagos, Paláwan, Saráwak.