# Scripted History: Hebrew Romanization in Interwar British Mandate Palestine

Benjamin Arenstein
Undergraduate Thesis
Department of History
Columbia University
List College, Jewish Theological Seminary

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Seminar Advisor: Matthew Connelly, Columbia University
Second Reader: Michael Stanislawski, Columbia University
Advisor: Barbara Mann, Jewish Theological Seminary

For Professor Alan Mintz ז״ל. Your intellect astonished us, your passion humbled us, and your knowledge sustained us. May our memories sustain you.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1881, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda emigrated from his birthplace in the Russian Empire to Jerusalem, which was then part of Ottoman Palestine. In essence, this emigration was a rebirth. Ben-Yehuda shed his European name (Eliezer Yitzhak Perlman), his diasporic identity, and, perhaps most importantly, his mother tongue. From that point onward, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda began the project of reviving Hebrew as a modern language.[1]

As part of this project, Ben-Yehuda was determined to live his own life as a Hebrew speaker. Ben-Yehuda carried his family with him on this quest, only allowing them to speak Hebrew in their Jerusalem home. His son, Itamar Ben-Avi, would be reared exclusively in Hebrew. With no other Hebrew speaking children alive, this also meant that Ben-Avi would grow up largely in social isolation. Yet, however cruelly, Ben-Yehuda had achieved his goal. He fathered the first native Hebrew speaker in over two thousand years, raised in the first exclusively Hebrew speaking household in modern Palestine.[2]

During Ben-Yehuda's arrival in Palestine, the first wave of Jewish immigration was just beginning. Participants in the First Aliyah (wave of Zionist immigration to Palestine) spoke a plethora of languages including Yiddish, Ladino, and German— all of which comprised the diverse linguistic environment of the Yishuv (Jewish community in Palestine).[3] Hebrew, at this point, was not viable as a modern spoken language. While appropriate for discussions about

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[1] Robert St. John, *Tongue of the Prophets* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1952) 76.
[2] Fellman, Jack. *The Revival of a Classical Tongue Eliezer Ben Yehuda and the Modern Hebrew Language*. (The Hague: Mouton, 1973) 37-38.
[3] Hoffman, Joel M, *In the Beginning : A Short History of the Hebrew Language*, (New York: New York University Press, 2004) 189.

literature and philosophy, the classical tongue lacked basic terms to describe the phenomena of everyday life.[4]

Thus, key to the successful revival of Modern Hebrew was the invention of copious amounts of new vocabulary, which Ben-Yehuda recorded in a comprehensive Hebrew dictionary. The Hebrew Language Council was established as a formal body to oversee Hebrew's development and Ben-Yehuda stood at its helm[5]. Nonetheless, while spoken Hebrew was being developed in Palestine, the center of Hebrew literary production remained in Eastern Europe. It was there, and not in Palestine, that Hebrew newspapers and literature were being printed and distributed.

Although a mass of Jewish settlers began learning Hebrew in the years since Ben-Yehuda's arrival in Palestine, the official place of Hebrew in the linguistic framework of the Yishuv remained largely ambiguous. Other languages such as Yiddish and German were in constant competition with Hebrew to establish linguistic hegemony over the Yishuv. Proponents of these respective language used official conventions and cultural gatherings in order to stimulate enthusiasm and support for their cause. During the Czernowitz Conference in 1908, various prominent politicians and Yiddish authors declared Yiddish as a national Jewish language. In response, a conference in Vienna five years later called for Hebrew to be made the official language of the Zionist movement.

In 1913 controversy over Hebrew's official status boiled over as a German aid society attempted to construct the first Jewish post-secondary institution in Palestine. The debate— later

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[4] Hoffman, 189.
[5] Harshav, Benjamin, *Language in Time of Revolution*, (Los Angeles, Calif: University of California Press, 1993) 143.

called the War of the Languages— centered around whether instruction at the new university should be conducted in Hebrew or German. After a ferocious public forum and a strike by the teachers union, the pro-German camp eventually conceded, setting an important precedent for the use of Hebrew in formal educational settings.[6]

By 1920 any ambiguity as to the official status of Hebrew in the Yishuv was eliminated. Article 22 of the British mandate made Hebrew the official language of the Yishuv and one of the three official languages of Palestine alongside Arabic and English.[7] Although Hebrew's official place in the Mandate Government did not necessarily reflect its actual spoken usage at the time, the terms of the mandate meant that Hebrew would now be both an official language of communication in the territory and the language in which Jewish schools educated their pupils.

As the number of native Hebrew speakers grew rapidly with the onset of the early mandate period, so too did the number of Hebrew publications which were produced in Palestine. In the 1920s the center of Hebrew literary production began shifting from Eastern Europe to Palestine. *Davar* and *Haaretz*, two of the longest running publications in modern-day Israel, were founded during this period.[8]

With the vigorous growth of the Hebrew press, it is no surprise that Ben-Yehuda's son, Itamar Ben-Avi, decided to begin a publication. However, his publication, entitled *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini* (the Palestine Weekly), was distinct from the other Hebrew periodicals of the time.

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[6] Harshav, 151.
[7] "The Palestine Mandate," The Avalon Project, April 4, 2018, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp.
[8] Dulzin, Arieh L., and World Zionist Organization Organization and Information Dept. *Three Hundred Years of the World Jewish Press, 1675-1975*. (World Zionist Organization, Organization and Information Dept., 1975) 73.

Rather than using traditional Hebrew script, *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini* was published in Latin letters.

Ben-Avi's periodical tested a new idea in the world of Hebrew publication: that modern Hebrew could be popularly consumed in a script which was different from the Hebrew block letters standardized over 1,000 years prior. Specifically, the script with which Ben-Avi chose to replace traditional Hebrew orthography was a derivative of the alphabet used by such western European languages as English and German. A number of prominent members of the Yishuv such as Ze'ev Jabotinsky— the Revisionist Zionist Leader— and Gershon Agronsky— journalist and mayor of Jerusalem from 1955 to 1959— stood in support of moving away from the traditional Hebrew script.

Yet, while Ben-Avi's project elicited some positive responses and produced several romanized Hebrew texts, it did not succeed in generating a full-scale romanization of modern Hebrew. While the idea for Hebrew romanization persisted after Ben-Avi's death through peripheral groups like the Canaanites, its implementation was never undertaken with any seriousness. Nonetheless, through romanization, Itamar Ben Avi had challenged a fundamental assumption held by the vast majority of Hebrew revivalists that the Hebrew script used in historical Jewish texts would continue to carry the language into the modern era.

This thesis will explore the phenomenon of Hebrew romanization during the interwar period in Mandate Palestine. What were the primary aims of Hebrew romanization? How does Hebrew romanization enhance our understanding about the use of language as a political tool? How did Hebrew romanization differ from other romanization efforts of the period?

Within the historiography of Hebrew development, discussion of Hebrew romanization has largely been confined to a footnote. In his book *Language in the Time of Revolution*, Benjamin Harshav states that his mission is to tell the "dramatic story" of "the revival of the ancient Hebrew language"[9] Yet, in telling this story, Harshav only includes one sentence on the romanization of Hebrew. Similarly, other major works of Hebrew historiography such as Ilan Steven's *Resurrecting Hebrew*, Itamar Even-Zohar's *The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine*, and Yig'al Schwartz's *The Rebirth of Hebrew Literature* only tangentially allude to Hebrew romanization, never devoting more than several sentences to a discussion of the topic. Indeed, these brief allusions to Hebrew romanization are themselves nothing more than descriptive notes stating that orthographic changes to the Hebrew alphabet were once considered. They do not go into further depth to describe the ways in which this orthographic change was actualized or the impetus that spurred it. Rather, they present a monolithic version of the Hebrew development narrative in which Hebrew developed with a singular and unified vision under the leadership of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and through his continued legacy in the Yishuv.

Beyond a general historiography of Hebrew development, there is a limited amount of scholarship which discusses Hebrew romanization specifically. One of the few authors to provide a detailed account of Hebrew romanization is Joseph Nedava in his article "Projects for the Latinization of the Hebrew Script." While Nedava vividly recreates the story of the Hebrew romanization project, his essay is largely descriptive and does not provide an in depth

[9] Harshav, 1.

exploration of the motivations for Hebrew romanization nor how romanization efforts fit within their political and social context.[10]

Within the remaining body of academic work on Hebrew romanization, scholars have primarily focused on why romanization failed. Shlomit Shraybom Shivtiel in the article "The Question of Romanization of the Script and the Emergence of Nationalism in the Middle East" blames the ultimate failure of romanization on the fact that Hebrew script "occupied a vital symbolic role in the perception and definition of national identity of Jews"[11]. She argues that the rise of Hebrew romanization is not unique. Rather, Shivtiel believes that Hebrew romanization, like those romanization efforts in Egypt and Turkey, was a "by-product of emergent nationalism."[12]

As an alternative explanation for Hebrew's failure to romanize, Ilker Ayturk's article "Attempts at romanizing the Hebrew script and their failure: Nationalism, religion and alphabet reform in the Yishuv" postulates that the failure of Hebrew romanization was the result of two factors: opposition on the part of the religious establishment and a lack of support from secular Zionists. Ayturk argues that as Jews raised in a secular tradition, Jabotinsky and Ben-Avi were fundamentally distrusted by the religious establishment. Hebrew script had been used as the exclusive means of writing Hebrew since the approximately 70 CE. Any attempt to change the script was seen by the religious establishment as an attempt to break with tradition. Thus, the

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[10] Nedava, Joseph, "Projects for the Latinization of the Hebrew Script," *Hebrew Studies* 26 (1985): 137–46.
[11] Shivtiel, Shlomit Shraybom, "The Question of Romanisation of the Script and the Emergence of Nationalism in the Middle East," *Mediterranean Language Review* 10 (1998): 194.
[12] Ibid.

religious establishment opposed romanization.[13] Conversely, secular Zionists opposed romanization for reasons similar to those stated by Shivtiel. In forming a national identity in Palestine, secular Zionists sought to negate their European diasporic identities. For them, using the Latin alphabet would be a return to the very identity they sought to escape.[14]

Esther Raizen's dissertation "Romanization of the Hebrew script: Ideology, attempts, and failure" blames the failure of romanization on the inability of the romanizers to convince the public of the need for a change to the Hebrew alphabet, in addition to a general lack of cooperation on the part of supporters of romanization. She remarks that "the Hebrew branch of the Romanization movement… is marked by a conceptual as well as political unfulfillment."[15] Unlike Ayturk and Shivtiel, Raizen does go beyond explaining the failure of romanization to demonstrate how romanizing Hebrew calls attention to the problems with Hebrew orthography. Her approach, however, is rooted primarily in linguistics rather than history.

By looking merely to explain the failure of Hebrew romanization, these scholars— like those more general works on Hebrew development— treat romanization efforts as a blip in the chronicle of Zionist history. Shivtiel, specifically, views Hebrew romanization as a byproduct of larger global ideological shifts.

This thesis will build upon the work of existing scholarship to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Hebrew romanization efforts and how they fit within the socio-political context of interwar Mandate Palestine. Although the works on Hebrew

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[13] Aytürk, İlker, "Attempts at Romanizing the Hebrew Script and Their Failure: Nationalism, Religion and Alphabet Reform in the Yishuv," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 4 (2007): 640.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Raizen, Esther, "Romanization of the Hebrew Script: Ideology, Attempts and Failure," Ph.D., The University of Texas at Austin, 1987, 78.

romanization by Shlomit Shivtiel and Ilker Ayturk do discuss the way in which Ben-Avi's romanization efforts were motivated by his political views on Jewish nationalism, these articles overlook the role of Ben-Avi's newspapers within the traditional model of the Hebrew press as a tool for stoking national sentiment. They also fail to compare the relationship between Hebrew romanization and nationalism to the relationship between nationalism and romanization in other historical contexts.

While current scholarship discusses Hebrew romanization as it relates to Jewish nationalism, it does not place such romanization efforts within the context of Mandatory Palestine or provide a comprehensive comparison between Hebrew romanization and romanization movements elsewhere. Indeed, this necessary work of contextualization can provide valuable insight into the ways in which the Hebrew language served a political function not only for the Zionist movement, but also for the British Mandatory Administration. Through a comparative approach with other romanization movements this thesis will demonstrate that the way in which Hebrew romanization was approached in the British Mandatory context was indeed unique. Whereas other romanization movement were conducted through the apparati of a heavily centralized government, attempts to romanize Hebrew occurred from the bottom-up. Yet, within the structure of a Mandatory government administration, this bottom-up attempt to romanize Hebrew was also manipulated and regulated from the top-down. So while the context of most other romanization movements indicates a unidirectional attempt to implement the Latin alphabet as a linguistic norm, Hebrew romanization occurred against the backdrop of political conflict.

As its theoretical foundation, this thesis will rest on the discussion of language and nationalism presented in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. In his work, Anderson points to the fact that "'national print-languages' were of central ideological and political importance" [16]. As Anderson explains, a shared print language can reinforce the development of a national consciousness. This paper will explore how the project of Hebrew romanization fits within Anderson's paradigm or deviates from it. How does the alphabet contribute to the accessibility of Hebrew texts and how does increasing or decreasing the accessibility of a print language alter the role of that language in fostering a national consciousness? Moreover, using Anderson's analysis of print languages as a model, this thesis will evaluate how nationalism functions in regard to Ben-Avi's Hebrew romanization project as compared to other romanization projects in countries such as Turkey or the Soviet Union.

Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is twofold. It seeks to provide a comprehensive look into Hebrew romanization which, unlike previous scholarship, is not centered around its failure. Rather it will critically evaluate the relationship between Hebrew romanization and Jewish nationalism. Secondly, this thesis will use the Hebrew romanization movement in the context of Mandate Palestine and in comparison to other romanization movements as a means to investigate the way in which orthography can be used to assert power by regulating access to information. In this way, this thesis will expand the existing historiography of Hebrew development to incorporate a nuanced view of the way in which Hebrew romanization contributed to the political dynamics of the Yishuv.

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[16] Anderson, Benedict R. O'G, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) 67.

This thesis will be structured in three parts. The first part will describe in detail the scope and impetus of attempts to romanize Hebrew in Palestine. It will explore the main actors involved in Hebrew romanization, their motivation for romanizing Hebrew script, and the material products of their romanization efforts. Perhaps most importantly, this section will situate these romanization efforts within the ideological and political context of the interwar Yishuv.

The second section of this thesis will look at Hebrew romanization as it existed within the British Mandatory context. What was the British relationship to Hebrew romanization? How did Hebrew romanization influence the way in which the British exercised administrative power in Mandatory Palestine? What does British engagement with Hebrew romanization say about the way in which orthography can be used as a tool to regulate the flow of information?

Part three of this thesis will discuss Hebrew romanization in relation to romanization movements occurring in other countries during the interwar period. Most notably, Turkish romanization was undertaken in 1928 and proved successful. Similarly, around this same time Azerbaijan, Yugoslavia, and the Turkic republics of Central Asia also romanized their alphabets. What about the Hebrew context was different and how does this further illuminate the social, ideological, and political impacts of orthographic changes? What does contrasting the Hebrew romanization with other romanizations reveal about the way in which language is created and curated in different national settings?

## CHAPTER 1:

## THE ORIGINS AND AIMS OF HEBREW ROMANIZATION

In the preface to Itamar Ben-Avi's 1927 work *Avi*, he recounts a childhood interaction with his father Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. While sitting at home, Ben-Avi approached his father to complain about the difficulties with Hebrew orthography. The script, Ben-Avi lamented, was too difficult and confusing to read. He continued, asking his father "Tell me, please, how did it happen that you, a revolutionary man and a man of steel, did not also find the way to impose the Latin script on the Jews?" Searching for an answer to give Ben-Avi, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda replied "You are right, my son, but I did not want to damage two things - the word and the script." Unsatisfied, Ben-Avi retorted "And what do you say if I, myself, do what you have not?" Tussling a tuft of Ben-Avi's hair, Ben Yehuda uttered the words, "[b]e daring as much as you can, my son, because success lies only in daring."[17]

*Avi* (My Father) was the first full book to be published in romanized Hebrew and, as the title indicates, it was a biography of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda written and published by his son Itamar Ben-Avi. In producing *Avi*, Itamar Ben-Avi took a step toward fulfilling the promise— whether real or imagined— that his father made to him in childhood. By 1927, when *Avi* was first published, Hebrew was an official language in Mandate Palestine and its speaker base was constantly expanding. With the future of modern Hebrew secure, Itamar Ben-Avi saw a chance to build on his father's work and fundamentally change the character of written Hebrew by romanizing its alphabet.

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[17] Ben-Avi, Ithamar. *Avi*. 1st ed. ( Jerusalem: Hassolel, 1927) 1.

*Avi*'s release caused a large stir both in Hebrew literary circles across Palestine and throughout the Diaspora. While some writers welcomed the addition of this romanized work to the oeuvre of Hebrew literature, others strongly condemned *Avi*'s use of Latin script.[18] In an ironic twist to how Ben-Avi saw his own project, one criticism even called the biography "a betrayal on the part of the son of a modern Hebrew pioneer in respect of a sensitive matter touching the very sanctity and inner soul of our people."[19]

While the critical reception of *Avi* was overwhelmingly negative, this was merely one setback in what would be Itamar Ben-Avi's lifelong struggle to romanize the Hebrew alphabet. In interwar Palestine, Itamar Ben-Avi was the single most significant figure spearheading the Hebrew romanization effort. Through newspapers, editorials, and fervent advocacy, Ben-Avi promoted the Latin alphabet as both a viable system of Hebrew orthography and as the vehicle which would carry Hebrew into the future. In all of his efforts, Ben-Avi was backed by Revisionist Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who was the second most prominent advocate for Hebrew romanization in this period.

As Ben-Avi looked to advance his Hebrew romanization project, he explored a number of possibilities for Hebrew publications that could be produced and popularly distributed in Latin characters. Ben-Avi recounts that he took his inspiration for publishing a romanized Hebrew newspaper from his father, who initially sought to print his first Hebrew newspaper entitled *Mevaseret Zion* in Latin characters. Yet, before the paper went to press, Ben-Yehuda's first wife,

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[18] Nedava, Joseph, "Projects for the Latinization of the Hebrew Script," *Hebrew Studies* 26 (1985): 139.
[19] Kamhi, D, "Ivrit-Latinit," *Deror*, November 17, 1933, http://www.jpress.nli.org.il/Olive/APA/NLI/?action=search&text=deror#panel=document (accessed April 4, 2018)

Deborah, convinced him not to follow through with the romanized publication. She argued that publishing the Hebrew paper in Latin characters would result in outrage from the Orthodox community who would see romanized Hebrew as a defamation of the holy tongue.[20]

Building on this example, Ben-Avi sought support from his father's Hebrew daily newspaper *Ha'or* for the publication of a one page news column in romanized Hebrew. While Eliezer Ben-Yehuda rejected his son's request for similar reasons as those that prevented him from initially publishing his newspaper in romanized Hebrew, he encouraged Itamar Ben-Avi to independently pursue the production of a romanized Hebrew publication. In 1913, Ben-Avi came close to realizing his aspiration of publishing a Hebrew periodical in Latin letters as he planned for the production of a monthly journal titled *Kidron*.[21] However, shortly before the first issue was released, Itamar Ben-Avi was met with resistance from the religious establishment who thought that publishing Hebrew in Latin letters would debase the language which, in their belief, had been bestowed by God in the traditional script. Upon receiving a cease and desist letter from a rabbi in Jerusalem, Ben-Avi stopped any plans of production.[22]

Ben-Avi, however, did not give up hope for producing a publication in romanized Hebrew and began preparing a book of poems and novelettes. The work was written exclusively in Latin letters and entitled *Berakim.* While Ben-Avi hoped to publish this work in Jerusalem, he was prevented from doing so by the onset of WWI.[23]

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[20] Nedava, 138
[21] Ibid.
[22] Aytürk, İlker, "Attempts at Romanizing the Hebrew Script and Their Failure: Nationalism, Religion and Alphabet Reform in the Yishuv," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 4 (2007): 630.
[23] Ibid.

Following the war, Itamar Ben-Avi collaborated with Ze'ev Jabotinsky on a number of projects in an effort to get Hebrew romanization off of the ground. Jabotinsky and Ben-Avi first met in 1919 after Jabotinsky was demobilized from the Jewish legion and settled in Jerusalem. Bonding over their mutual distaste for traditional Hebrew script, the pair met again one year later with the purpose of creating a formal system with which to transliterate Hebrew text. At this meeting, Ben-Avi and Jabotinsky decided to take their partnership one step further by traveling to Europe to investigate the possibilities of ordering the necessary type to begin printing romanized Hebrew. Yet, like all of Ben-Avi's plans regarding Hebrew romanization to this point, his trip with Jabotinsky also fell apart. By 1925, Jabotinsky had become too immersed in his political career to pursue the romanization project with any earnestness. Yet, he would continue to serve as a vocal advocate for Ben-Avi's romanization efforts, writing articles in Hebrew, Russian, and English language newspapers in support of changing the Hebrew orthographic system.[24]

In the early years of Ben-Avi's romanization efforts, one of his primary goals was preventing semantic ambiguity in written Hebrew texts. As any modern Hebrew speaker is aware, there are a number of problems with traditional Hebrew orthography. Graphically, several Hebrew letters such as ד and ר, ב and כ, ו and ז, ס and ם bear remarkable similarity, which can prove difficult for non-Hebrew speakers learning the language as well as Hebrew speakers attempting to read a text that was printed in a low quality.[25]

Further difficulties with Hebrew orthography lie in the voweling system, which is used to vocalize Hebrew words. Generally, modern Hebrew texts are unvocalized and written without

[24] Nedava, 139.
[25] Aytürk, 628.

vowels.[26] This can cause a problem for non-native and even some native Hebrew speakers when trying to understanding the meaning of a text, as vowels serve an important semantic function. An indefinite article, for example, can be made definite by a vowel shift— which goes unnoted in a vast majority of modern Hebrew texts. This shift would have to be recognized by the reader purely from context. Phonologically, the accurate pronunciation of unknown words in unvocalized texts can be extremely difficult. In order to pronounce Hebrew vowels and words containing consonants *bet, kaf*, *pe*, and *shin*, readers must rely on a memory of the word in its entirety or venture an educated guess as to how the vocalization should sound.[27]

The traditional Hebrew script can also cause issues for native and non-native speakers in terms of spelling. For example, Hebrew speakers whose origins lie in the Arabic speaking world will generally pronounce an *ayn* and an *aleph* as two seperate letters, while a Hebrew speaker of European origins will pronounce both of those letters as the same sound. In modern pronunciation, the sound of multiple Hebrew vowels can also overlap, making them aurally indistinguishable. To this end, Joseph Shimron notes in his work *Reading Hebrew* that "only a small minority of Hebrew speakers are able to use vowel signs properly in their writing."[28]

Along with providing semantic clarity, Itamar Ben-Avi hoped to use Hebrew romanization as a way to transform and improve how Hebrew was taught to non-native speakers. Key to the revival of modern Hebrew was the development of a Hebrew speaking population. In pursuit of this end, Itamar Ben-Avi believed that teaching Hebrew with Latin characters would

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[26] A set of Hebrew letters called the *Imot HaKriah* are published in non-voweled texts to indicate the presence of vowels and assist with pronunciation.
[27] Shimron, Joseph, *Reading Hebrew : The Language and the Psychology of Reading It*, (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006) 136.
[28] Ibid., 137.

increase students' language acquisition rate. Ben-Avi's first experience with instructing romanized Hebrew came in 1895 when he began teaching his classmates at the Alliance school in Jerusalem Hebrew using Latin characters.[29] By his evaluation, the experiment was successful and he proceeded to implement this same method in 1899 while he was at the Teachers' Seminary of the Alliance Israelite Universelle in Paris as well as several years later when he was enrolled in the Oriental Studies Department at the University of Berlin.[30] During his time as a language instructor, Ben-Avi provided a foundation in Hebrew to such prominent Zionists as Dr. Judah L. Magnes— the first Chancellor of the Hebrew University— and Arthur Biram— an acclaimed director of the Reali School in Haifa.

With the onset of WWI, Ben-Avi and his family fled from Palestine. The war, however, did not prevent Itamar Ben-Avi from continuing his work teaching romanized Hebrew. In 1915 in the United States, Ben-Avi continued to instruct classes of American Jews in Hebrew using Latin script. As with his experiences in Europe over 15 years prior, Ben-Avi touted the ease of teaching Hebrew in Latin letters and the exceptional speed with which his students were able to progress in their studies.[31]

Also a believer in the educational potential of romanized Hebrew, Jabotinsky was a staunch supporter of Ben-Avi's efforts to conduct Hebrew education using the Latin alphabet. In his 1925 article "Stenographia" published in *Haaretz*, Jabotinsky remarks:

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[29] Nedava,138.
[30] Aytürk, 628.
[31] Aytürk, 630.

> If self-teaching is easy with respect to any other language, it is exceedingly difficult in Hebrew: not because of the intrinsic difficulties of the language but because of its orthography, which originated before the flood, which is where it belongs.[32]

Specifically, Jabotinsky advocated for the adoption of romanized script with the belief that its implementation would help newly arrived immigrants from Europe learn the language more quickly.[33] Himself a middle-class Russian Jew educated in secular Russian schools and an Odessa gymnasium, Jabotinsky's discontents with the traditional Hebrew script stem largely from his own difficulties learning the language.

Jabotinsky's attempts to learn Hebrew began in childhood and continued through adulthood. In his autobiography "Story of My Life," Jabotinsky remarks that he would take most of his notes in Hebrew in order to improve his faculty in the language. However, these notes and, in fact, all of his correspondence written in Hebrew would be produced in Latin letters. As he states, "I became accustomed to writing Hebrew in Latin letters, a style of writing that is easier for me than the Assyrian square script."[34] Thus, Jabotinsky's support of Hebrew romanization was largely rooted in his own experience with its pedagogical value and the benefits it held for promoting Hebrew literacy amongst non-native Hebrew speakers. With this basis, Jabotinsky would help bolster Ben-Avi's continued efforts to publish Hebrew texts in the Latin alphabet.

On December 14, 1928, Itamar Ben-Avi realized an ambition towards which he had been striving for over two decades. On this day he published the first newspaper to appear in

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[32] Jabotinsky, Ze'ev, "Senographia," *Haaretz,* June 28, 1925.
[33] Shivtiel, Shlomit Shraybom, "The Question of Romanisation of the Script and the Emergence of Nationalism in the Middle East," *Mediterranean Language Review* 10 (1998): 185.
[34] Jabotinsky, Vladimir, *Vladimir Jabotinsky's Story of My Life* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016) 94.

romanized Hebrew. More precisely, this paper was a weekly Hebrew supplement to the daily English language newspaper *The Palestine Weekly* of which he was the editor.[35] Entitled *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini*, the name of the Hebrew supplement was a direct translation of the paper's English title. The subtitle was in English and read "Hebrew Sheet in Latin Characters (For the Benefit of Gentiles and Jews Not Conversant with the Square Script)."[36]

As this subtitle indicates, the aim of Ben-Avi's paper largely reflected what he sought to accomplish through the Hebrew romanization movement in general. His paper would serve the pedagogical purpose of exposing non-native Hebrew speakers to the written Hebrew language in a manner free of the challenges and semantic ambiguities of the traditional Hebrew script. Fundamentally, the paper sought to make information in Hebrew more accessible to a wider base of people.

A majority of the information which exists on the distribution of Ben-Avi's Hebrew supplement to *The Palestine Weekly* comes from the newspaper itself and should be taken with a degree of skepticism. In the supplement, he claims that the first editions sold better than he expected and kiosks in Tel Aviv even ran out of copies.[37] As a testament to the wide reaching distribution of the newspaper, Ben-Avi also remarked that the supplement had subscribers from New York to Bombay. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of supplements sold in romanized Hebrew, the extent of the paper's distribution was most likely fairly limited. The first two issues of the romanized Hebrew supplement were given for free with purchase of *The Palestine Weekly,* while, as the scholar Ilker Ayturk estimates, the third issue sold approximately

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[35] Aytürk, 631.
[36] Ben-Avi, Itamar, "Ha-savuja Ha-palestini," *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini*, December 14, 1928.
[37] Ben-Avi, Itamar, "Li-qrat ha nittzahon (li shnatenu ha sheniya)," *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini,* 12 April 1929.

25 copies and the maximum sales were reached with the fifth and sixth issues which sold about 350 copies in total.[38] In his article "Projects for the Latinization of the Hebrew script," Joseph Nedava makes a much greater estimate regarding the circulation of *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini*, stating that the paper "sold some 800 copies weekly."[39]

While the actual distribution of *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini* may be disputed, it nonetheless elicited a strong response from a number prominent voices in the Yishuv. Following his characteristic role as Ben-Avi's longtime supporter, Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote an opinion piece in the Hebrew daily newspaper *Do'ar Hayom* in support of Ben-Avi's new project. The article reiterated many of the same points that Ben-Avi had been making in favor of romanization since his first days as a Hebrew instructor. Jabotinsky harped especially on the orthographical limitations that would make semantic interpretation of traditional Hebrew script exceedingly difficult for the non-native speaker.[40]

On the critical side of Ben-Avi's project was the religious establishment of the Yishuv, who again expressed the vehement opposition which they had held since the inception of the Hebrew romanization project. Specifically, the paper elicited a strong response from the Orthodox community due to its publication of a Torah verse in Latin characters. This was seen as especially heinous and a complete defamation of Hebrew's status as a holy script.[41]

Outside of Palestine, Ben-Avi's paper was also met with some criticism. Notably, the release of *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini* was announced in the London-based newspaper the *Jewish*

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[38] Aytürk, 633.
[39] Nedava, 139.
[40] Jabotinsky, Ze'ev, "Otiyot," *Do'ar Hayom*, April 5, 1929.
[41] Aytürk, 634.

*Chronicle.* In a following edition of the British paper, an anonymous author penned an op-ed criticizing Ben-Avi's project on a number of fronts:

> But nonetheless to those acquainted with Hebrew the transliteration must, in our opinion, prove awkward and unattractive. We doubt, moreover, whether the purity and the beauty of the Hebrew can be maintained in transliteration, and whether in the process the Hebrew will maintain its pristine power and significance… Nor are we enamoured very greatly of the Westernising impulse which is accountable for Mr. Ben-Avi's experiment[42]

While the author of this article begins by recognizing the potential benefits of Hebrew education that lie with using the Latin script, he ultimately comes to the conclusion that the costs of transliterating Hebrew far outweigh any benefits. Yet, significant to the criticisms that the author levels against Itamar Ben-Avi is his refutation of Ben-Avi's "Westernising impulse."

Both Ilker Ayturk in his article "Attempts at Romanizing the Hebrew Script and Their Failure" and Shlomit Shraybom Shivtiel in her article "The Question of Romanisation of the Script and the Emergence of Nationalism in the Middle East," point to westernizing the Hebrew language as part of the impetus behind Ben-Avi's romanization project. Such a westernizing impulse ran largely against the Zionist trend to construct a new Jewish identity in Palestine which sought to negate the identity of Diaspora Jewry. The Diaspora Jew was stereotypically characterized as weak, feeble, and averse to physical labor. By contrast, the "new Jew" in Palestine was seen as muscular and courageous, adept at agricultural work and cultivating the land. Crucially, the "new Jew," as a native of Palestine, was also a Hebrew speaker.

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[42] "Transliterating Hebrew," *Jewish Chronicle*, February 1, 1929.

The use of Hebrew was crucial to the formation of a new Jewish identity in Palestine because it provided a Biblical basis for the Zionist project. In settling Palestine, many Jews believed that they were immigrating to the land of their Biblical forefathers. The Bible, as Anita Shapira remarks, "was the bridge between past and present," and Hebrew, as the language of the Bible, provided a cultural link between ancient Israelites and the Jews of contemporary Palestine. [43] In using Hebrew as a modern language, Zionists took a key step in their attempts to legitimize a Jewish presence in Palestine based on historical grounds. Indeed, as Even-Zohar notes, "the distinction between Jewish and Hebrew cultures has become secondary and eventually obsolete." [44] For those Jews who sought to create a new Jewish culture in Palestine distinct from the Diasporic Jew of Western Europe and based on the Israelites of the Bible, writing in the same Hebrew script of the Bible was key.

Ben-Avi, however, did not see romanization as an obstacle to the Zionist creation of a Biblically rooted historical narrative to underpin the identity of the "new Jew." In fact, Ben-Avi viewed the Latin alphabet as having as much a connection to ancient Hebrew as did the traditional Hebrew script. Since the migration of ancient Hebrews to Canaan in the 12th century BCE, the Hebrew writing system has undergone a series of drastic changes. Initially written using a derivative of Cannanite-Phoenician orthography, Hebrew subsequently transitioned to a writing system that was indistinguishable from Phoenician.[45] From the Phoenician system, the Old Hebrew alphabet developed in the 8th century BCE. This alphabet was then replaced in the 3rd century BCE when Jews living in the Assyrian and Babylonian empires, of which Aramaic

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[43] Shapira, Anita, "The Bible and Israeli Identity," *AJS Review* 28, no. 1 (2004): 11.

[44] Even-Zohar, Itamar, "The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine, 1882-1948," Poetics Today, Spring 1990, 176.

[45] Shimron, 131-132.

was the official language, transitioned to writing in Aramaic characters.[46] Beginning in the 6th century CE, the Masoretes canonized the Tiberian Hebrew system, which based a Hebrew writing system on Aramaic characters and standardized a scheme of diacritical marks for vocalizing the 22 consonants of the Hebrew alphabet.[47] The modern Hebrew writing system closely resembles this Tiberian method.

As a derivative of the Phoenician system used for Hebrew previous to the 8th century BCE, the Roman alphabet was said by Ben-Avi to be a historically authentic way of writing modern Hebrew. Ben-Avi saw his project not just as a romanization of Hebrew, but as a Hebraization of the Roman script.[48]

Thus, in Ben-Avi's conception, romanizing the Hebrew script did not inhibit the establishment of a new Jewish identity in the Yishuv. Because the Latin alphabet maintained authentic ties to ancient Jewry, the "new Jew" could still eschew Diasporic stereotypes and maintain a Biblical basis for his or her presence in Palestine while writing in romanized Hebrew. Romanization, then, would paradoxically allowed Jews to create a vaguely non-Western and anciently founded national identity which consciously distinguished itself from the West while simultaneously making that identity accessible and oriented toward the West through Hebrew's use of the Latin alphabet.

For Ben-Avi's own political beliefs, orienting Jewish identity in the Yishuv toward the West made distinct sense. Ben-Avi was one of the earliest advocates of the cantonization plan for Mandate Palestine. Under this system, which was based on the Swiss model, Palestine would

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[46] Ibid., 133.
[47] Shimron, 124.
[48] Ayturk, 631.

consist of two cantons that were self-governing in internal affairs but shared a joint federal government that would conduct all foreign affairs. The Jewish canton would be comprised of land purchased by Jews to that point and the Arab canton would constitute the remainder of the territory. In Ben-Avi's conception the land would remain under governance of the Mandate with the British serving the function of a federal government. Having a script which was mutually intelligible for the British and the Jews would be part of ensuring the success of this political ideal. [49]

Ben-Avi's catonization plan rested optimistically, and perhaps naively, upon the premise of a harmonious Palestinian society in which all residents— regardless of religious or ethnic background— would work cooperatively toward the betterment of a Palestinian state protected by a wholly benevolent Great Britain. In his 1929 pamphlet "Palestinism: Moulding a Common Country for Two Brother Peoples," Ben-Avi elaborates on this idea:

> Such a 'common patriotism' of 'Judaeans' and 'Junubians' in the common country in which they dwell under the protection of an enlightened power is indeed unavoidable… This constitutes the beginning of 'Palestinism.' Such a thing must exist from now on. When I pass along the roads and see the peasants tilling the soil, I love them all, whether Arabic or Hebrew speaking. Just as the rest of the million residents of Palestine with its three creeds and two languages, they are helping to mould together a common country for two brother peoples.[50]

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[49] Aytürk, 640.
[50] Ben-Avi, Ithamar, *Palestinism : Moulding a Common Country for Two Brother Peoples* (Jerusalem: Hasolel, 1929) 18.

As a tool for fostering a shared popular sense of "Palestinism," Ben-Avi suggests a system of language education in which all residents of Palestine would be educated in Hebrew, Arabic, and English in the same way that residents of Switzerland are educated in German, French, and Italian.[51] Expectedly, Ben-Avi adds that in regard to language education "[i]t can be readily understood also, that the use of Latin characters in the writing of two languages would render them far easier to be grasped."[52] Thus, Hebrew romanization played a dual function in regard to the actualization of Ben-Avi's political thought: its educational benefits would make Hebrew learning easier and, consequently, expedite the language exchange requisite for bringing about "Palestinism" and the Latin alphabet would facilitate the transition to a shared system of Palestinian governance under the auspices of British Administrative oversight.

The function of Ben-Avi's periodical, then, was not in line with the other Hebrew publications of his time. By publishing in Hebrew, other newspapers were crafting, as Benedict Anderson puts it, a "national print-language" around which they could shape a national identity. The Latin script of Ben-Avi's paper and the political implications of using this script were an implicit rejection of Jewish nationalism in favor of a plan which replaced Jewish national aspirations with the hope for an autonomous Jewish region under the governance of the British Mandate.

Ben-Avi's final effort to produce a Hebrew periodical in Latin letters came on November 17, 1933 with the publication of his newspaper *Deror* (Liberty).[53] Unlike *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini*, which was a supplement to the English language newspaper *The Palestine Weekly,*

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[51] Ibid., 21.
[52] Ben-Avi, "Palestinism," 22.
[53] Nedava, 140.

*Deror* was produced as a standalone publication financed personally by Ben-Avi.[54] The newspaper's explicit goals were much the same as those of Ben-Avi's previous publications in romanized Hebrew. At the forefront of *Deror'*s aims was "to spread, at the hand of [Latin letters], the Hebrew tongue to broader groups of people than ever before."[55] An article published in the first edition of *Deror* entitled "Ma Anu Rotzim?" ("What Do We Want?") stated that through romanized Hebrew "the language of Canaan will be the property of all of Israel and all of world" whereby "tens of millions will read and learn Hebrew quickly."[56] In the vision that Ben-Avi put forth in this article, these millions of Hebrew readers would even reach beyond the Jewish community to include "Arabs, Englishmen, French, Russians, [and] Japanese."[57] The

MEHMIR HA MENIYA
be Eretz-Yisrael
le shana 75 gerush
le hhatsi shana 40 gerush
mi hhutz le artzénu
le shana 1.25 gerush
le hhatsi shana 65 gerush

# DEROR
(LIBERTY)
an illustrated hebrew weekly in latin characters

MEHMIR HA MODAÔT
be âmmud rishon
Kol inch qatann 5 gerush
bi shear âmmudim
Kol inch qatann 3 gerush

Kérekh 1 | TEL-AVIV, Yomwaw, êrev Kislew 5694 (17 Nov. 1933) | Mispar 1

## MA ÁNU ROTZIM?
### ki sefat kenâan tihyé le qinyan kol yisrael we kol ha tevel
ÂSAROT MILIONIM YIQRE'U GAM YILMEDU ÎVRIT BI MEHIRUT

## Lifné 10000 Shana
### Amerika—Emm ha Tarbut!
KO MAKHRIZ PROFESSOR HENSELING

## ÂL RÉGEL AHHAT
be îvrit latinit mevatteim kol ot we ot
A, E, I, O, U — niqraot kemo be latinit

## SAKH-KOL MEHUMOT YÁFO
### 29 Harugim, 190 Petzuîm

## SHAÂRURIYA BE DIROT TEL-AVIV
ALFÉ ÔLIM MITGALGELIM BI REHHOVOTÉHA

Qenu ÎVRIT!
Bimeqom "Whisky and Soda"
Shetu "Carmel we Soda"
lain yoter, gam zol yoter
WE ARTZÉNU NEHENET

PHOENIX
Ba shavûa Ha ba

[54] Ayturk, 636
[55] Itamar Ben-Avi, "Ma Anu Rotzim," *Deror,* November 17, 1933.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

purported ease of learning Hebrew in Latin letters would provide the basis for this vast expansion of Hebrew readership.

*Deror's* distribution was significantly wider than that of *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini*. In its first week, the newspaper sold 6,000 copies- a fairly high number by the standards of the Yishuv. Sales for the second issue of *Deror* declined to 2,000 copies. After the third issue, the newspaper's circulation leveled off at approximately 1,400 copies a week. Subscriptions for *Deror* were widespread throughout the Jewish world in locations such as New York, Lvov, Tehran, Salonica, and Cairo and during the newspaper's print run Ben-Avi received 1,200 applications from readers hoping to subscribe.

Responses to *Deror* were decidedly mixed. Notable authors and politicians such as Avigdor Ha-Meiri, Joel Blau, Arthur Koestler, Gershon Agronsky, and Meir Dizengoff voiced supported for the project.[58] The Hebrew poet Saul Tschernichowsky vehemently rejected the idea of Hebrew written in Latin letters just as he had done five years prior when Ben-Avi released his first periodical in romanized Hebrew. Haim Nachman Bialik— one of modern Hebrew's most famous writers—- remained silent on the issue. Playing his paradigmatic role as an unwavering supporter of Ben-Avi's romanization project, Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote a to Ben-Avi congratulating him on the new publication. In the tenth edition of *Deror*, Ben-Avi included excerpts of Jabotinsky's letters in which he stated "I read *Deror* with pleasure... there are those that are angry, but soon they will see their mistakes."[59]

The general population of the Yishuv had equally mixed responses to *Deror*. While the publication was immensely popular among newly arrived Jewish refugees from Germany who

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[58] Nedava, 140.
[59] Jaboinsky, Ze'ev, "et *Deror* ani Qore be Taanug," *Deror*, January 19, 1934.

were struggling to absorb the language and culture of Mandate Palestine, it elicited a violent opposition from staunch opponents of Hebrew romanization in the Yishuv. Several of Ben-Avi's detractors even went so far as to physically assault him outside of the Grand Synagogue on Allenby street in Tel Aviv as a response to his publication of *Deror*.[60]

Although refraining from this type of physical retribution, some members of the Orthodox religious establishment in Palestine had an equally severe response to Ben-Avi's new publication. They felt that Ben-Avi's publication of Torah verses in romanized Hebrew desanctified the holy text. On these grounds Rabbi Kook— the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine— protested the publication of *Deror*. Rabbi Kook, however, was not wholly opposed to Hebrew romanization. Rather, he supported writing secular Hebrew texts in Latin letters so as to preserve the holiness of the script used in sacred texts. Writing on Rabbi Kook's behalf, Rabbi Shulman argued that publishing Torah portions in Latin letters was reminiscent of forced burnings of the Talmud throughout Jewish history.[61] Responding to this privately exerted pressure from the religious establishment, Ben-Avi ceased publication of his weekly Torah portion and by the fourteenth issue of *Deror* there were no longer any religious verses published in the newspaper.[62]

More so than *Ha-shavua Ha-palestini*, *Deror* focused on reporting both domestic and international news stories. The newspaper published a weekly column entitled "This Week in Our Land and the World," which gave brief summaries of significant current events in Palestine and throughout the international community.[63] On a single front page, *Deror's* headlines could

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[60] Ayturk, 636.
[61] Nedava, 141.
[62] *Deror*, Feb. 16, 1934.
[63] "Shavua Artzenu we-ha Olam," Deror no. 14 Feb. 16, 1934, include figure

include a diverse assortment of world news from Mexico, Germany and Spain interspersed with domestic news from Haifa and Jerusalem.[64] This focus on world news coupled with domestic news belied Ben-Avi's internationally oriented political positions which underpinned the entirety of his romanization project.

Attempts to romanize Hebrew script in Mandate Palestine arose within a complicated milieu of ideological currents. Ben-Avi fervently pushed for Hebrew romanization with both a linguistic and political agenda. Ze'ev Jabotinsky— Revisionist Zionist and Ben-Avi's counterpart in advocating for Hebrew romanization— primarily derived his position on the Hebrew alphabet from personal difficulty learning the language rather than a distinct belief in the political implications of romanization. Yet, both leaders fundamentally thought that changing the Hebrew orthographic system would allow more people to read and access information in Hebrew. Thus, even with the Westernizing impulses and political undercurrents of his romanization plan, Ben-Avi advocated for Hebrew romanization with the belief— whether rightly or not— that it would increase the readability of the language and facilitate more expedient Hebrew learning. If they were to hold true, such benefits would drastically raise the number of Hebrew speakers and the number of people who would be able to absorb the information of a Hebrew text.

[64]Itamar Ben-Avi, "Milhhama Neged Elohim be Mexico," *Deror*, 12, 1934.

## CHAPTER 2:

ROMANIZED HEBREW AND THE BRITISH MANDATE ADMINISTRATION

In August 1929, tension mounting between Jewish and Arab communities over the ownership of holy sites in Jerusalem was its apex . Beginning with the first waves of Jewish settlement in Palestine, Jews began to buy property surrounding the Wailing Wall. As the Wailing Wall sits on the site of the Prophet Muhammad's ascension to heaven in the Islamic tradition, Muslim Arabs interpreted this increasing land ownership as an unwarranted encroachment on one of their holiest religious sites.[65] This sentiment was compounded during Yom Kippur religious services at the Western Wall in September 1928, when British policemen removed the ritual barrier separating men and women. This aroused fears that Jews were moving to take control of the site. The British action provoked "Arabs [to throw] garbage into the Western Wall alley and [direct] donkeys through it, disturbing Jews."[66] In response, Jews began yelling inflammatory nationalist rhetoric and later held Zionist demonstrations at the Western Wall.[67]

In his work *A History of Modern Palestine*, Ilan Pappe— a member of the school of New Historians— remarks that in 1928, British attitudes toward their responsibility in Palestine had markedly changed.[68] No longer were they focused on "constructing a modern state in Palestine."

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[65] Shapira, Anita. *Israel : A History* (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, c2012) 78.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Pappé, Ilan, *A History of Modern Palestine : One Land, Two Peoples* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 90. The New Historians are a group of historian who in the 1980s made use of newly opened Israeli archival material to redefine the historical narrative associated with the founding of the state. Also included in this group is Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, and Simha Flapan.

[69] Rather, they were now concentrating on "finding ways to rule indirectly while containing the developing conflict"[70] Containing this conflict in Palestine, however, would prove extremely difficult.

On September 2nd 1929, the front page of *The Palestine Bulletin* read "Seven Days of Bloodshed and Horror in Palestine."[71] The headline referred the first major wave of violence to sweep through Mandatory Palestine since the 1921 riots. Disturbances broke out in Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and in various towns and villages throughout the Palestinian countryside.[72] The violence lasted for a week and approximately 300 Jews and 300 Palestinians were killed.[73]

Looming over the British Mandate Administration during these riots would be a memorandum, submitted two weeks prior by Israel Amikam regarding the use of Hebrew characters in official telegrams.[74] The memorandum, dated August 12th, 1929 and sponsored by major organizations such as Vaad Hair (council of Jerusalem Jews) and Vaad Hallashon (the Hebrew Language Committee), presented a bold claim: the British Administration was in violation of Article 22 of the Mandate, which stated that "English, Arabic and Hebrew shall be the official languages of Palestine."[75] The basis for this claim rested on the fact that Hebrew telegrams could only be sent in Latin characters which, as the memorandum states, prevented the language from still being considered Hebrew.

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[69] Pappé, 90.
[70] Ibid.
[71] "Seven Days of Bloodshed and Horror in Palestine." *The Palestine Bulletin,* Sept 2, 1929.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Pappé, 91.
[74] "Petition on the Abrogation of the Hebrew Language in Telegrams by Israel Amikam," August 12, 1929, CO 733/190/6 British National Archives, London, England.
[75] "The Palestine Mandate," The Avalon Project, April 4, 2018, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp.

In Mandate Palestine, it had been British policy to send Hebrew telegrams exclusively in Latin characters since the onset of the British Administration in 1920.[76] The origins of this practice, as Amikam notes in his memorandum, stemmed from the fact that it was not possible in 1920 for the post office to transmit telegrams in Hebrew characters.[77] Due to restrictions of a technical capacity, telegrams could only be transmitted in Latin and Arabic scripts. Thus, the British Administration determined that in order for Hebrew telegrams to be sent, they would first need to be written into Latin letters.

Amikam's memorandum, however, rests on the fundamental claim that the technical barriers which restricted Hebrew telegrams from being transmitted when this policy was first instituted no longer existed. As telegrams are submitted via Morse Code and then written by the operator, there is no mechanical barrier to submitting Hebrew telegrams in Hebrew letters.[78] Transitioning to this system would only require training telegram operators to write Hebrew characters, which could be done with two weeks of instruction.[79] Why, then, did the British refrain from approving Amikam's appeal?

In challenging British policy on telegraph submission, Amikam's memorandum forced the British Mandate Administration to directly confront the ideological and practical implications of romanized Hebrew telegrams. On one hand, the British needed to justify maintaining their policy on romanized Hebrew telegrams nearly ten years after it was introduced and on the other hand they needed to respond to Amikam's claim that from an ideological perspective Hebrew

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[76] "Response to Petition on the Abrogation of the Hebrew Language in Telegrams," April 5, 1930 CO 733/190/6 British National Archives, London, England.
[77] Ibid.
[78] "Petition on the Abrogation of the Hebrew Language in Telegrams by Israel Amikam," August 12, 1929, CO 733/190/6 British National Archives, London, England
[79] Ibid.

written in Latin characters is not, in fact, Hebrew. At stake in this debate was the way in which information would be transmitted within the Yishuv.

The argument by members of the Yishuv against romanized telegrams is ideologically rooted in a historical claim to Hebrew script. As the previous chapter brought to light, part of constructing a new Jewish national identity and legitimizing the Jewish presence in Palestine was a link between the Zionist project and ancient Israelites. The revival of Hebrew— as the language spoken by the ancient Israelites— was key to establishing and strengthening this link. Delegitimizing the place of Hebrew in the Zionist project would also delegitimize part of the justification for a Zionist presence in Palestine.

For proponents of a traditional Hebrew script, the ability to write in Hebrew letters was seen as both integral to the character of the language itself and essential to the community's survival. To this end, Amikam writes in his petition to the British that "if a citizen of Palestine… sent an English letter, which the court asked to be sent in English, in Hebrew characters, such a man would be regarded as fit only for the mad-house."[80] Continuing, he states: "[a]s the Government could not refuse to protect the life of a Hebrew citizen in the National Home… so the Government cannot abrogate the right of the the Hebrew language"[81] Arieh Saposnik writes in his work *Becoming Hebrew* that "Zionism claimed to speak in the name of a nation that either did not yet exist or existed no longer, teetering as it was on the brink of national death."[82] The argument articulated by Amikam and supported by various organizations in the Yishuv was no

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[80]"Petition on the Abrogation of the Hebrew Language in Telegrams by Israel Amikam," August 12, 1929, CO 733/190/6 British National Archives, London, England.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Saposnik, Arieh B, *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)18.

exception to this rule. They saw the abrogation of Hebrew letters in telegrams as putting them on the brink of national death.

In replying to the ideological claims made by opponents of romanized Hebrew telegrams, the British Mandate Administration explicitly stated its position that Hebrew written in Latin letters is still Hebrew. The response of a senior British judge to Moshe Lehman— who petitioned on behalf of instituting Hebrew characters into the telegraph service before Amikam— reads:

> An argument has been addressed to us to the effect that the use of the Hebrew characters is an essential part of a message written in Hebrew. This is a view that we cannot accept. A message in Hebrew does not cease to be in Hebrew because it is rendered in Latin characters, any more than a message in English ceases to be English because it is rendered in Morse Code.[83]

This British response uses one of the same rhetorical tools that Amikam used in his petition. Amikam's comparison between Hebrew and the English language was set forward to indicate that if English was transliterated in any other alphabet it would be unrecognizable and therefore unacceptable to native English speakers. However, the Senior British Judge in this ruling takes that comparison and inverts it, arguing that English is indeed transliterated into Morse Code when telegrams are sent, and this is a completely accepted form in which to receive the language. So too, he argues, can messages in Hebrew be sent and received in Latin letters.

It is worth noting the differences between the Senior British Judge's comparison of English as being transliterated into Morse Code and Hebrew as being transliterated into Latin

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[83] "Response to Dr. Moshe Lehrer's petition of the telegram service by O.C.K. Corrie, Senior British Judge on May 2nd 1929," May 1930, CO 733/190/34, British National Archives, London, England.

characters. In the context of this comment, English is transliterated into Morse Code in order to make a message sendable within the technology of a telegraph service. The modulation of English into a series of long and short taps is a consciously temporary process. The operator knows that the English message will only exist in the form of Morse Code for its brief time between sender and receiver, eventually destined to be reproduced in Latin letters. Thus, a comparison between Hebrew being written in Latin characters and English being transcribed into Morse Code implies that the Hebrew will only exist in Latin characters temporarily, waiting to be transcribed back to the Hebrew alphabet following its submission through the telegraph service.

The judge's claim, then, in comparing English sent in Morse Code to Hebrew being written in Latin letters reflects a different intentionality than the comparison in Amikam's petition of Hebrew being written in English letters to English being written in Hebrew letters. On an ideological and symbolic level, Amikam's petition represents an attempt to permanently entwine Hebrew characters with the Hebrew language in official British government discourse. Yet, through his decision, the British judge rejects this assertion and instead reaffirms the existing utilitarian use of Latin letters in Hebrew telegram transmissions.

Outside of its ideological implications, romanizing Hebrew telegrams posed a substantial barrier to accurately sending and receiving information in Hebrew. After a decision by British Mandate authorities in 1941 to allow telegrams to be sent in Hebrew characters, *The Palestine Post* published an article recollecting the immense difficulty of sending telegrams in romanized Hebrew:

> " It may not be realized that [sending telegrams in Hebrew characters] is not merely a matter of principle, but has a practical significance... Experts have tried to break up

> sounds into graphic symbols and have not completely succeeded. But ordinary people are often bewildered… Unless the sender and recipient of a Hebrew wire in Latin characters have both been educated in the same tongue, they are likely to misread its contents."[84]

Thus, it appears that the British requirement to romanize Hebrew telegrams could prevent accurate communication between members of the Yishuv and, indeed, pose challenges for telegram recipients in accurately interpreting the meaning of a message in romanized Hebrew.

The British, however, make a distinct effort to downplay the challenges associated with romanizing Hebrew telegrams. In a reply to Amikam's petition, British Sergeant W. Hudson commented:

> The difficulties connected with the transliteration of the Hebrew Language into Latin Characters are, I think, largely exaggerated. In support of this opinion I would instance (a) the action of the *Palestine Weekly* which, for a considerable time, published a Hebrew supplement in Latin characters and (b) an announcement recently made of an intention to publish a Hebrew journal printed entirely in Latin characters[85]

In support of his argument, Hudson is referring, of course, to Itamar Ben-Avi's newspapers published completely in Latin characters. It is notable here that the British Mandate Administration cites *The Palestine Weekly* as support for their own position on romanized Hebrew telegrams. As was established in the previous chapter, the premise for Itamar Ben-Avi's romanization project rested upon two primary goals: rapidly expanding the number of Hebrew readers and pushing his political agenda, which included the cantonization of Palestine under the

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[84] "Reflections," *The Palestine Post*. March 7, 1941.
[85] "Comment on the Petition on the Abrogation of the Hebrew Language in Telegrams by Sgt. W. Hudson," CO 733/190/6, 1930, British National Archives, London, England

purview of the British Mandate Administration. Ben-Avi's newspaper *The Palestine Weekly* was published as a means to further these political and educational aims.

*The Palestine Weekly*, however, maintained a fairly fraught relationship with the British Mandate Administration. On March 31, 1930 Itamar Ben-Avi was put on trial by the Mandate Government for illegally publishing his supplement to *The Palestine Weekly* in romanized Hebrew. The charges were officially justified on the grounds that this supplement was published without an appropriate permit. However, this action by the British Mandate Administration only came after Ben-Avi had published an article in romanized Hebrew condemning the newspaper censorship regulations in place during the 1929 riots. Until this point, the romanized Hebrew supplement to the *Palestine Weekly* had been published for weeks without any backlash from the Mandate Administration.[86] As a result of the trial, Ben-Avi was fined $25.[87]

Despite mounting a case against Ben-Avi for publishing an illegal romanized Hebrew supplement in *The Palestine Weekly*, the British cite this same newspaper as evidence for the ability of Hebrew to be written effectively in Latin characters. This ambiguous and seemingly contradictory British discourse surrounding *The Palestine Weekly* is indicative of the British position in Palestine following the 1929 riots. Per Ilan Pappe's claim, the British Mandate Administration's policy from 1928 onward was characterized by attempts to maintain peace and mitigate further conflict in Palestine. Evaluating the motivation of British policy on these terms brings into focus an image whereby the British Mandate Administration's actions are not

[86] "Ben Avi Trial March 31," *The Palestine Bulletin*, March 18, 1930.
[87] "Ben-Avi Fined For Publishing Supplement to the Palestine Weekly," *The Sentinel*, Friday, April 11, 1930.

necessarily characterized by a rigid adherence ideological consistency, but rather the achievement of practical aims.

Telegrams played a sizable role in the construction of the British Empire and by 1908 British investors controlled over fifty percent of the world's 470,000 Km of underwater telegraph cables. [88] As the British Empire continued to grow, telegrams became a vital connection between London and colonial administrative centers as well as between administrative centers within the colonies.[89] Yet, Britain's expansive telegraph network was more than an attempt to efficiently administrate in its colonies. Rather, as Michael Mann argues in his work *Wiring the Nation*, "the expansion of a worldwide telegraph network was propelled by concerns over nationalistic/imperialistic security and corporate and commercial interests." [90] That is, through the British telegraph network, the complex dynamics of "national, imperial, commercial, and capital interests" manifested themselves in vast information networks which were integral to the function of the British Empire.[91] Yet, Amikam's memorandum demonstrated that telegrams did not always knit the empire together.

In the case of Mandatory Palestine, the requirement to send Hebrew telegrams in Latin letters served as a barrier to the expedient flow of information that telegrams were supposed to facilitate. Britain, in attempting to create an efficient imperial infrastructure through which to administer its empire, was placed in the uncomfortable position of arbitrating a dispute whereby the very tool which facilitated communication throughout the empire was questioned in a formal

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[88] Mann, Michael, *Wiring the Nation: Telecommunication, Newspaper-Reportage, and Nation Building in British India, 1850-1930* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2017) 4.
[89] Ibid., 5.
[90] Ibid., 3.
[91] Ibid., 5.

petition. This petition meant that the telegraph network, which was supposed to promote efficiency, was actually in itself generating problems which hindered the efficiency of the Mandate Administration in Palestine.

In explaining the potential motivations of the Mandate Administration for making their decision on the petition regarding Roman characters in telegrams, it is useful to look to Benedict Anderson as a theoretical model. In relation to the development of print-languages, Anderson states:

> In their origins, the fixing of print-languages and the differentiation of status between them were largely unselfconscious processes resulting from the explosive interaction between capitalism, technology and human linguistic diversity. But as with so much else in the history of nationalism, once 'there' they could become formal models to be imitated, and, where expedient, consciously exploited in a Machiavellian spirit[92]

The manipulation of print-languages largely occurs through the ability of a centralized power, such as a government or a printing press, to control the conventions used in disseminating a language. Anderson points out, in centralizing language production, "print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars."[93] With the development of print-capitalism, languages have a larger reach and influence than previously possible. Yet, due to this reach, the power of a centralized authority to manipulate language also becomes greater.

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[92] Anderson, Benedict R. O'G, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) 45.
[93] Ibid.

While in Anderson's work this model is applied to the development of print-languages generally, within the scope of this paper Anderson's model can be applied to Hebrew as a print-language specifically. As operators of the postal service that controlled telegraph lines and the means of communication between Jewish settlements throughout Mandatory Palestine, the British Mandate Administration maintained a centralized control of print-language produced through the telegraph service. In mandating that Hebrew telegrams could only be sent in romanized form, the British Administration used this centralized control to regulate the production of Hebrew as a print-language in its dissemination through telegrams.

In the model presented by Michael Mann's *Wiring the Nation*, "the success of the telegraphically transmitted message not only depended on its contents and the speed of transmission but also, to a very large extent, on the expected mean and variation of transmission time, that is, the reliability of information *and* the calculability of time."[94] For Hebrew telegrams transmitted in Latin letters "the reliability of information" and the "calculability of time" are limited. Due to the nature of Hebrew orthography, words can be transliterated in a variety of ways with a variety of meanings. Thus, meanings for telegrams can be skewed, the time taken to read the telegrams increased, and the effectiveness of communication between Jews in the Yishuv diminished.

If— as Anderson suggests— a shared print-language is a means of fostering national sentiment, British control over Hebrew print-language production in the telegram service can be seen as the British Mandate Administration regulating the output of Hebrew text in order to assert control over the Yishuv. Prohibiting the use of Hebrew script in telegrams forces those

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[94] Mann, 6.

telegrams to conform to the standards of the Latin alphabet. As the previous chapter discussed, the only prior effort to convert Hebrew to Latin letters for formal publication was in Ben Avi's works, which themselves had an extremely limited print run. Being that the British were still publishing official notices in Hebrew letters, it is clear that they were not trying to advocate for Hebrew to be officially romanized. Nonetheless, British responses to Jewish petitions indicate an insistence to maintain the procedure of sending Hebrew telegrams in Latin characters. While this policy can certainly be tied to budget restrictions and wanting to preserve the status quo in a time of violence and volatility, the maintenance of romanization requirements for Hebrew telegrams quite possibly had an additional effect. Namely, the use of orthography as a tool to fulfill new aims of the British Mandate Administration at this time of maintaining order in Palestine.

# CHAPTER 3

## A GLOBAL TREND IN ROMANIZATION

In his memoir, Itamar Ben-Avi recounts a meeting with Mustafa Kemal— the founder of the modern Turkish state— at The German *Fast* Hotel in Jerusalem. The two encountered each other in 1908, immediately after the outbreak of the Young Turk Revolution when Kemal was stationed in Jerusalem as a new officer in the Turkish army. Ben-Avi found himself immediately drawn to Kemal, who he saw as attractive, energetic, and intelligent. Kemal and Ben-Avi soon struck up a conversation in which they spoke about subjects of mutual interest. Their discussion quickly drifted into the realm of politics and Ben-Avi expressed his future vision for an autonomous Jewish region in Palestine which, at this point, he saw as existing under the Ottoman Empire. Ben-Avi's vision, of course, did not just include territorial sovereignty in his plan for the future of Jews in Palestine, and, over the course of the conversation, he anxiously informed Kemal about his burgeoning Hebrew romanization project. Latin letters, Ben-Avi informed Kemal, would serve as "a wonderful common bridge on which both our peoples would be treading."[95]

While Ben-Avi's vision for romanized Hebrew was never realized, he would nonetheless paint his conversation with Mustafa Kemal as immensely important. From this chance encounter, Ben-Avi credited himself with planting the idea for a cornerstone of Ataturk's modernization project in establishing the Turkish state: the romanization of the Turkish language.

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[95] Ben-Avi, Ithamar, *'Im Shaḥar 'atsma'utenu : Zikhronot-Ḥayay Shel Ha-Yeled Ha-'Ivri Ha-Rishon* (Israel: 1961) 215-21.

The interwar period saw the rise of romanization movements in a variety of national contexts with two of the most successful romanization programs being conducted in the Soviet Union from 1929 onward and in Turkey beginning in 1928. In both of these cases, languages were converted from their previous script to a writing system based on the Latin alphabet. The new Latin script was completely adopted for all official communication, government documents, and educational purposes. While the Soviet Union underwent a subsequent orthographical shift in 1939 and again changed its writing system to the cyrillic alphabet, Turkey has continued their use of a Latin script to the present day.

Both Turkish and Soviet romanization were conducted with the fundamental aim of increasing literacy. One of the first initiatives of the Soviet Union after the formation of the state was *Likvidatsiia bezgramatnosti* or 'liquidation of illiteracy.' Yet, a substantial obstacle to achieving the universal literacy desired by Soviet policymakers was the fact that a majority of languages within the Soviet Union did not have writing systems. In an effort to construct literary traditions for these purely oral languages, the Party created a system in the 1920s of categorizing linguistic groups based on four classes: A) Mostly bilingual small nationalities that lived in scattered groups surrounded by larger nationalities and did not have a formal script; B) Monolingual small and medium sized nationalities without scripts that lived in compacted areas; C) Monolingual medium and large sized groups that lived in compacted areas with scripts and contained an intelligentsia, proletariat, and bourgeoisie; D) Territorially united nationalities with a traditional script, literary tradition and high levels of economic and cultural development.[96] In

[96] Grenoble, Lenore A, *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003) 46.

developing linguistic and educational policy, the Soviet Union would look to this classification system as a guideline. Creating the ABCD Hierarchy was an important step toward the work of developing a language policy which would formally and efficiently regulate the scripts of linguistic groups within the USSR.

For those languages which did not utilize written scripts, the Soviet Union was forced to invent a writing system which would depict the phonology of an exclusively oral language. In the initial years of creating these new writing systems, the USSR primarily relied on the Latin alphabet, so as to avoid associations with tsarist Russia that would be brought about through use of the Cyrillic alphabet.[97] The development of new alphabets occurred rapidly and by 1936, the Central Committee of the New Alphabet reported that of 102 Soviet nationalities only twelve lacked writing systems.[98] By comparison, at the inception of the Soviet Union only nineteen languages had writing systems.[99]

Outside of creating a new writing system for oral languages, which is an obvious prerequisite for developing literacy, the Soviet Union conducted a 'Latinization' project to romanize languages which used neither the cyrillic nor Latin alphabets in an effort to make the writing systems of those languages more easily learnable. To this end, the All-Union Turcologcal Congress was held in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1926 to determine the most effective way to carry out script reform in Central Asia, where Turkic languages such as Uzbek and Kazakh were still being written in Perso-Arabic script. A number of participants in the conference strongly advocated for the use of  Latin script as a means of writing reform, rather than traditional Arabic script,

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[97] Grenoble, 50.
[98] Ibid., 48.
[99] Ibid., 45.

reformed Arabic script, or Cyrillic script.[100] Following this conference, the Soviet Union assiduously carried out their Latinization project for the Turkic linguistic groups of Central Asia.

Party discourse surrounding motivations for the Soviet Latinization project largely mirrored that of Ben-Avi's Hebrew romanization project. The peoples using alphabets other than the Latin script, were said by the Party to have outgrown those writing systems. They characterized non-Latin writing systems as antiquated and unable to accurately portray the languages in question. The conversion of Kalmyk from the Mongolian script to Latin letters in 1924, for example, was explained as being a result of "'inaccessible' and inflexible [Mongolian script, which] could not be adapted to the phonological changes in Kalmyk."[101]
In his attempts to romanize Hebrew, Ben-Avi made similar arguments about the inflexibility of Hebrew script. As was discussed in chapter two, Ben-Avi specifically sought to eliminate semantic ambiguity from Hebrew using the Latin script, which would incorporate the vowel sounds left out of unvocalized texts and, in doing so, ease the pronunciation and understanding of texts that would otherwise be challenging for non-native speakers. Similarly, Soviet discourse surrounding Latinization sought to make non-Latin alphabets more accessible to those speakers who were developing a literacy in their native tongue by eliminating discrepancies between orthography and phonology.

The Soviet project of 'liquidation of illiteracy' was in many ways a success. Literacy rates jumped in the early years of the Soviet Union from 24% in 1897 in Tsarist Russia to 81.2% in 1939 in the USSR. Rural literacy rates went from 19.6% in 1897 to 76.7% in 1939.[102] While

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[100] Ertürk, Nergis. "Toward a Literary Communism: The 1926 Baku Turcological Congress." *Boundary 2* 40, no. 2 (May 1, 2013): 185.
[101] Grenoble, 50.
[102] Grenoble, 47.

the extent to which Latinization contributed to this rapid development of literacy is a matter of debate, it is clear that orthographic shifts from traditional script to Latin letters during this period were a cornerstone of the Soviet policy for expanding literacy.

Thus, while the scale and scope of the Soviet Latinization project was drastically different from that of Hebrew romanization, both cases stemmed in part from an impulse to make language education more accessible. In the same way that Hebrew romanization sought to increase the rate at which non-native Hebrew speakers could acquire the language, the Latinization of national languages in the Soviet Union sought to rapidly propagate literacy amongst the general population that was either largely illiterate in a language which had a distinct literary tradition or illiterate because their language lacked a writing system.

Similar to Hebrew and Soviet romanization projects, Turkish romanization was based in part on the goals of eliminating semantic ambiguity in written text and eradicating illiteracy. As in Hebrew, the Arabic alphabet consists of a system of vowels which are not written in most texts. This can result in issues when attempting to identify the syntactic or semantic function of a word in unvocalized texts. Moreover, because the Arabic alphabet only consists of three vowels (a, u, i), it is unable to represent all of the vowel sounds present in Turkish.[103] The lack of punctuation, standardized spelling or proper representation of Turkish phonology caused the Arabic alphabet to be seen by Ataturk as a significant barrier to the development of Turkey in the post-Ottoman era for similar reasons that Ben-Avi saw the Hebrew alphabet as limiting in attempts to revive the Hebrew language.

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[103] Yılmaz, Hale, "Learning to Read (Again): The Social Experiences of Turkey's 1928 Alphabet Reform," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 4 (2011): 678.

By improving the way in which Turkish was represented by its orthographic system, Ataturk hoped to increase the rate at which Turkey could improve the literacy of its citizens. As Hale Yilmaz indicates in her article "Learning to Read (Again): The Social Experiences of Turkey's 1928 Alphabet Reform," there were indeed other difficulties with Turkish society that caused illiteracy such as "[t]he scarcity of schools, cultural attitudes toward literacy and reading, methods of teaching literacy (memorization, particularly of the Qur'an), [and] the content of reading materials (including the late introduction of Turkish language texts in the school system)"[104] So while the Turkish alphabet was certainly not the only barrier to developing greater literacy in Modern Turkey, changing it was seen as part of the solution to this issue. Significantly, transitioning from the Turkish alphabet was also a means to increase the efficiency with which Turkish texts could be distributed.[105] Being that the Ottoman Turkish alphabet required over 400 pieces of type to produce a printed text, transitioning to a Latin based alphabet would reduce the financial cost of printing Turkish language materials while also reducing the extensive time required to typeset Turkish.

Like Ben-Avi's Hebrew romanization project, The Turkish and Soviet romanization campaigns were premised on distinct political motives in addition to their overt goals of increasing general literacy and access to written information. In the Soviet case, Latinization was a way to bolster a sense of national culture within the constituent republics of the state. National culture, as conceived of by the Soviet Union, was the promotion of a distinctive national identity and the simultaneous destruction of national beliefs and social practices.[106] This idea was key to

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[104] Yilmaz, 679.
[105] Ibid., 479.
[106] Martin, Terry (Terry Dean), *The Affirmative Action Empire : Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001) 183.

the function of the Soviet Union as a multi-ethnic socialist empire spanning wide swaths of territory. Through national culture, the Soviet Union sought to demonstrate respect for non-Russian peoples by preserving their collective national identities while also inhibiting the growth of national independence movements.[107]

As a distillation of Soviet ideas on national culture, the Soviet nationalities policy mandated that national languages be used for all education and government work.[108] Notably, Lenore Grenoble remarks in her work *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* that "[t]he Soviets viewed language to be the main criterion for 'nationality.'"[109] Yet, delineating nationality along linguistic lines often proved difficult in regions where languages were not clearly distinguished from one another. Throughout Siberia, for example, many native populations did not identify within ethno-linguistic groups.[110] This posed challenges for governmental officials who sought to administratively regulate the empire based on linguistically rooted nationalities.

Latinization served an important function for curating national identity within the USSR. In constructing and enforcing specifically Soviet conceptions of nationality across the state, the Latinization program provided a neutral alphabet which united the Soviet Republics under a writing system free of the imperial legacies of tsarist Russia and historical connotations of traditional scripts that could spark ideas of national exceptionalism. Terry Martin's work *Affirmative Action Empire* frames Soviet Latinization as part of a process of symbolic politics called *signaling.* In this process the Soviet Union used symbolic signals to reconcile discrepancies between administrative expectations and the rigid ideological framework of the

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[107] Martin, 183.
[108] Ibid., 185.
[109] Grenoble, 45.
[110] Ibid.

state.[111] Latinization provided this symbolic signal in reconciling the expectation of national language administration with the difficulty of molding that national identity in a way which was subservient to the larger state.

The program of Soviet Latinization, then, was used as an officially mandated means of unifying constituent republics within a statewide administrative network. After complying with the Latinization policy, Soviet republics could continue using their national languages for government administration in their respective constituencies while simultaneously embedding themselves in the Soviet Union as a whole. Latinization in the Soviet context was a state instituted policy for connecting and integrating the various nationalities of the USSR while preserving their independence.

In comparison to the Soviet case, the British Mandate Administration's policy on romanized Hebrew telegrams served the opposite purpose: rather than increasing the efficiency of governmental administration, these telegrams diminished it. Whereas Latinization in the Soviet Union united numerous Soviet nationalities and languages under the banner of a single alphabet, the British Mandate Administration's policy on Hebrew telegram romanization divided a single language between two alphabets. By requiring Hebrew telegrams to be sent in Latin letters, the British did not seek to unify their population under a singular state banner like the USSR. The British use of romanization was much more limited and, as the previous chapter demonstrated, maintained in the wake of the 1929 riots as a means of preserving order in a volatile mandatory possession.

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[111] Martin, 184.

It is important to note that Latinization in the Soviet Union was not just seen as a national project. At the inception of the USSR, there remained significant hopes for a worldwide socialist revolution in which the dictatorship of the proletariat would extend its reach beyond the borders of the Soviet Union.[112] In Vladimir Mikhajjlovich Alpatov's article "Scripts and Politics in the USSR," he states that "[t]he creation of the new alphabets was considered not only as a Soviet, but as a universal, worldwide policy."[113] The universal use of a Latin script would unite the languages of socialism under a single linguistic banner, allowing for the maintenance of distinct ethno-linguistic national identities without the communicative challenges of disparate orthographical systems.

While significantly more limited in its aspirations, Turkish alphabet reform maintained similar hopes for orthography as a means through which to simultaneously define national identity and foster a new international alignment. Shifting the traditionally used Perso-Arabic script to a system based in Latin letters was a distinctively nationalist move by Ataturk in which he sought to isolate Turkey from its historical linguistic roots and build a new national tradition.[114] Yet, this shift in writing system, like that of the Soviet Union, also sought to recast Turkey's role in the international community. In this manner, romanizing the Turkish language was a means for Turkey to break with its Middle Eastern Islamic traditions and reorient itself toward the West.[115]

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[112] Alpatov, Vladimir Mikhajlovich, "Scripts and Politics in the USSR," *Studi Slavistici; Florence* 14 (2017): 12.
[113] Ibid., 13.
[114] Johnson, Aaron, "The Road to Turkish Language Reform and the Rise of Turkish Nationalism," M.A., McGill University (Canada), 2005, 83.
[115] Ibid.

Hebrew romanization was pursued in the Yishuv with similar political aspirations to both the Turkish romanization movement and the Soviet Latinization program. As chapter two discussed, part of Ben-Avi's impetus for romanizing Hebrew was to provide linguist preparation for his cantonization plan, by which Palestine would consist of autonomous Jewish and Arab cantons under supervision of the British. Basing Hebrew in the Latin alphabet would ease the role of the British administration in overseeing this political system. In the Hebrew case, then, romanization served to provide an alphabet that was intelligible within the broader international community while preserving within that alphabet a language around which Zionist national sentiments were based.

The internationalist impulse of Hebrew romanization— which echoed that of Turkish and Soviet romanization— was on prominent display in Itamar Ben-Avi's Hebrew weekly newspaper *Deror*, published in Latin characters. Here, Ben-Avi included articles on romanization efforts— however minor— from countries throughout the world. Even countries such as Greece, which only underwent government mandated romanization in a single city.[116] For Ben-Avi, romanization was a global project to which his efforts for Hebrew orthographic change were directly connected.

In its implementation, it is clear that Hebrew romanization drastically contrasts with Soviet and Turkish romanization. While in the Soviet Union and Turkey the Latin script was widely instituted at the behest of a centralized government, the Hebrew case indicates a tension between the British Mandate Administration and Hebrew romanizers who were members the Yishuv. Unlike the Soviet and Turkish governments which implemented full romanization

[116] Ben-Avi, Itamar, "Otiyot Latiniyot be Yawan," *Deror,* January 19, 1934.

reforms from the top down, the British only mandated that Hebrew romanization be implemented in the form of official Hebrew telegrams. Calls to use Latin letters as the primary writing system for Hebrew instead came from Itamar Ben-Avi, a member of the Yishuv. Ben-Avi, and not the British Mandate Administration, advocated for Hebrew romanization on a similar basis to the Soviet Union and Turkey, believing that romanizing the Hebrew alphabet would increase Hebrew readership and lay the administrative foundation for the achievement of his political ends. Thus, unlike in Turkey and the USSR, the Hebrew romanization was pushed for from the bottom up. Rather than being characterized by collaboration between the government and the governed, Hebrew romanization was characterized by conflict.

While the Hebrew case differs from the USSR and Turkey in that Latin letters never became the dominant Hebrew writing system, the comparison of these three initiatives reveals a remarkable trend with respect to the impetus of shifting a system of orthography. In each of these national contexts the impulse for romanization speaks to its power as a reform in which tangible effects are sought and political symbolism propagated.

## CONCLUSION

While the shifts and ruptures of the interwar period wrought fertile ground for projects of script change in Palestine and elsewhere, similar enterprises have continued in the years hence. Albeit in a marginal and inconsistent way, efforts for Hebrew romanization specifically have been sustained well after Ben-Avi's death in 1943. Following the establishment of the State of Israel, Hebrew romanization was proposed sporadically by a number of different figures. In the 1960s, Uzzi Ornan and Yonatan Ratosh— two members of the contemporary Canaanite movement of which Ben-Avi was a predecessor— proposed again to completely romanize the Hebrew script. Both Ornan and Ratosh were Western educated secular Ashkenazi Jews who hoped to further secularize the character of the state with their proposal. Like Ben-Avi, they saw the Latin alphabet as a more historically authentic form of Hebrew writing which had derived from Canaanite script through Latin by way of Greek.[117] Their proposal was brought to the press and included systematic details for implementing Latin letters in place of traditional characters in all facets of Israeli society.[118] However, by this point the use of Hebrew with traditional script had been established beyond question in Israel and the proposal was largely met with no serious reaction.

Further calls for Hebrew romanization have been brought about by Michael Landman in his 1973 book *Reform of the Hebrew Alphabet*, which relies on a pedagogical argument in pushing for romanization.[119] As recently as 1990, Oun Ben Pele published an article entitled

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[117] Weinberg, Werner. *Tiḳun Ha-Ketiv Ha-ʻivri : Ha-Beʻayah Ṿeha-Nisyonot Le-Fotrah* (Jerusalem: Hotsaʾat sefarim ʻA.Sh Y.L. Magnes, ha-Universiṭah ha-ʻIvrit, 1972)

[118] Shivtiel, Shlomit Shraybom, "The Question of Romanisation of the Script and the Emergence of Nationalism in the Middle East," *Mediterranean Language Review* 10 (1998): 187.

[119] Landmann, Michael. *Reform of the Hebrew Alphabet*. (Ann Arbor, Mich: 1976).

*Ketav Oz, ha-Ketav ha-Latino-Turki* in the periodical *Lashon ve-Ivrit*, which advocated for the romanization of Hebrew based on the orthographic limitations of traditional Hebrew script. Unlike the newspaper articles published by Ben-Avi in interwar Palestine, these contemporary pieces did not create a significant stir within Israeli society, where Hebrew script is the norm and does not face any real challenge of being upended. Yet, contemporary romanization proposals point to a continued consciousness of issues with the Hebrew script and a desire to push for reform in what is now a vibrant living language with several million speakers. More than that, the resurfacing of Hebrew romanization proposals until the modern day demonstrates the continued symbolic importance of Hebrew as a signifier for values in the modern state of Israel, whose identity still confronts paradoxes first brought out in the Zionist movement regarding the religious nature of the state and its identification with the West.

Outside of the Hebrew linguistic sphere, romanization has been a contentious issue in recent years in countries such as Bulgaria and Kazakhstan. In Bulgaria, the "streamlined system" was created in 1995 as a requirement under the international mandate to transliterate Antarctic Place-Names. The system subsequently expanded and began to make inroads in Bulgaria. In 1999 it became required to romanize personal names on domestic identity cards and place names on street signs using the streamlined system. A 2006 law saw the adoption of romanization for official use on road signs, street names, official information systems, databases, and local authorities websites. The Transliteration Act in 2009 required Bulgarian geographical names, names of historical persons and "cultural realities" to be transliterated with this system for

official and some private publication.[120] Thus, a romanization system initially required for international administrative use progressively diffused into society, eventually becoming a standard for even cultural printed discourse.

The international roots of the Bulgarian romanization system strike at the core of one of romanization's most perplexing paradoxes: an impulse to redefine and distinguish national identity while also ensuring the accessibility of that identity to outside groups. In other words, instilling nationalism with a sense of internationalism. Such was the nature of Hebrew romanization as it was propagated in interwar Palestine and such is the nature of the alphabet reform movements which accompany the forward march of history.

As one of the most fundamental forms of communication, language creates the basis for human interaction. Yet, language— and especially written language— is dynamic, subject to influence and regulation. Writing systems are a key element of how language is curated, with implications that reach far beyond language itself and into the construction of nations and society.

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[120] Dobrev, Dimiter and Ivanov, Lyubomir and Skordev, Dimiter , "The New National Standard for the Romanization of Bulgaria," *Mathematica Balkanica* 24 (2010) 5.

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