

Bi- and Multi-Lingual Marine and Lacustrine Names – Consent and Dissent

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As a background to the discussions revolving around the names Tong Hae and Sea of Japan, and perhaps as a guide in future cases of a similar nature, this paper deals with a brief analysis of bi- or multi-lingual names applied to open seas or inland seas, i.e. large lakes – names which have been subject to international tension or given rise to international problems. Only in very few cases has there been international intervention towards a toponymic settlement of the problem, and then with little success. The cases, each represented by just a few examples, are sorted roughly according to the severity of the toponymic problem, as follows:

- Unification by official consent or by mute assent;
- Bi- or multi-lingual names by consent as endonyms;
- Uncontested “exonymic” names conferred e.g. by explorers or travelers;
- Politically-induced name changes;
- Toponymic-maritime conflict or political rivalry.

While the terminology employed here conforms to that prescribed in the United Nations “*Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names*” [1], it should be noted that while “maritime name” has been defined (as term No. 221), the term “lacustrine name” has not yet been included. It will be recommended for inclusion at the next meeting of UNGEGN’s working group on toponymic terminology, as “name of a lake or of an inland sea”.

In effect, we are dealing here with a matter of standardization, and mostly with cases involving two or more countries. The overriding (but hardly attainable) aim is the “one object – one name” principle. But while national standardization of geographical names can be imposed by a national authority, such as a government-installed board of geographical names, true international standardization can be attained only by cooperation and goodwill. If such goodwill cannot be achieved, there remains another means of obtaining *de facto*, if not *de jure*, recognition of allonyms by the international community. This, in certain instances, is mapping, and will be briefly dealt with in the final paragraph of this paper.

Unification by official consent or by mute assent

Perhaps the best example of cooperation between countries – although involving only the unification of the spelling of a name – is the name of the sea arm between southern Sweden and Norway and northern Denmark. This was spelt respectively Skagerak, Skagerack and Skagerrak by the three countries until, in 1970, they agreed on the uniform and standardized name Skagerrak, now used by all three.

A different case is that of the lowest water body on Earth, sharing its lacustrine surface – at the (rapidly falling) elevation of, today, some 425 metres below Mediterranean mean sea level

(m.s.l.) between Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The former calls it Yam haMelah, יַם הַמֶּלַח, (pronounced Yam Hamelach), The Salt Sea, while the latter's name for it is al-Bahr al-Mayyit, أَلْبَحْرُ الْمَيِّتِ, The Dead Sea, and also Bahr Lut, بحر لوط, Sea of Lot. But since this an internationally well-known geographical feature, both countries use the same English exonym for it, namely Dead Sea, used also in translation into nearly all other languages. Its specific component “dead” points to the fact that owing to the extremely high salt content of its water, some 33 percent by weight, it admits no living organism.

Bi- or multi-lingual names by consent or by mute assent

The English Channel can here serve as a first example. Its French name is la Manche, i.e. the sleeve (and this, as an exonym, is also its German name, Ärmelkanal). Both English Channel and la Manche are endonyms, and no country challenges the other concerning its use.

Another example, not very far from the first, is the sea which extends between Germany in the South, the eastern counties of England in the West and Danish Jylland (or Jutland) in the East. All three countries apply wind-rose names to it – but different ones. Germany, naturally, calls it Nordsee, while England uses the same name in English, North Sea, although it lies to the North only of the county of Norfolk. Denmark, to the East, names it Vesterhavet, the Western Sea. Here we find diversity by consent.

Between Sweden, Germany, Poland, the Baltic States and Russia lies the Baltic Sea. This English exonym represents, among others, the Swedish name Östsjön (East Bay), the German one Ostsee, the Russian Балтийское море and the Estonian one Läänemeri. Again, no problem is involved.

The sea which stretches between Greece in the West and Turkey in the East carries the name Aegean since Greek antiquity. But in the first Turkish atlas printed in Turkey in 1803 this sea was named “Anatolian”, after the name of the west Asian peninsula of Anatolia, known in history also as Asia Minor, which constituted the major part of Turkey. Kemal Atatürk used the name Akdeniz (Mediterranean Sea) for the Aegean. The present-day official Turkish name for it is Ege Denizi.

As a final example let us take the Red Sea. Its Arabic name is al-Bahr al-Ahmar, أَلْبَحْرُ الْأَحْمَرُ, (pronounced al-Bachr al-Achmar, with the *ch* roughly as in German “ach” or Scottish “loch”), meaning indeed the red sea, translated from ancient Greek texts and maps Ἐρυθρά Θάλασσα and from Latin ones Ruber Mare, or Mare Rubrum. However Israel, which “owns” just a small stretch of shore of the Red Sea in the Gulf of Aqaba or Gulf of Eilat, names it in Hebrew Yam Suf, יַם סוּף, meaning reed sea, after the reeds which grow along its shores – and this is its original biblical name.

Uncontested “exonymic” names conferred e.g. by explorers or travelers

Here we are dealing with toponyms whose language differs from the official language or languages of the surrounding country.

Beagle is the English name of a species of dog. Canal Beagle is the maritime name of the narrow waterway between Spanish-speaking southern Argentina's Tierra del Fuego and Chile's XIIth Region in the North, and Chilean Isla de Navarino and the Cape Horn (Cabo de Hornos) area in the South. The name commemorates Charles Darwin's ship of this name which traversed it in 1832. The English specific component Beagle has been accepted as part of the official name in a Spanish-speaking region.

Estrecho Wellington, Estrecho Nelson and Canal Baker are three waterways between the mainland of southern Chile's XIth Region and the archipelago of a multitude of islands sheltering

it in the West. These names, with purely English specific components were accepted by the purely Spanish-speaking government of Chile as valid endonyms and appear thus in Chilean maps and gazetteers .

Politically-induced name changes

This part of the paper deals primarily with changes of names of large lakes resulting from changes in the political environment. Toponymic history reveals several major periods of “revolutionary” name changing. One of these, and the one with which we’ll be dealing shortly, occurred after the end of, or even during the course of, the Second World War. Numerous countries threw off the yoke of their colonial masters, declared their independence and chose new names not only for their newly acquired territory but also for topographic features within it, including lakes, especially if their national language did not coincide with that of the former colonial power. In many such cases the new government simply reverted to former endemic endonyms. These had often been kept alive in the local language.

One such case was the Sea of Galilee, also known in English as Lake Genezareth, in British-administered Palestine which in 1948 became the State of Israel. It re-acquired its old Hebrew name, יַם כִּנְרֶת, Yam Kinneret, i.e. Sea of Kinneret, as the official toponym, documented already some 2,500 years ago in the Hebrew Bible (the “Old Testament”) in the fourth Book of Moses (Num. 34,11). In the King James (“Authorised”) English translation it is found as Chinnereth.

Some African examples are Lake Nyasa in British-held Nyasaland which became Lake Malawi, or Lake Rudolf in British Kenya which became Lake Turkana in the Republic of Kenya. But Lake Victoria, shared by Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, retained its Imperial name. Lake Edward in Uganda and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was, from 1976 to 1979, given the name Lake Idi Amin Dada. Guess by whom.....

An interesting case is found in the open sea constituting the eastern border of Kenya and Tanzania. This is part of the Indian Ocean. But in older maps, such as the pre-WWII Times atlases, one finds the name Azanian Sea, which surrounds the Zanzibar Islands. This maritime name rather disappeared later, but its origin is of interest. In the middle of the 12th century the Arab geographer and cartographer Idrisi of Ceuta entered the name Ard az-Zanj in his maps in parts of eastern Africa. The translation of this Arabic name is Land of the Blacks, or the “niggers”, and was apparently given by Arab traders from the Arabian Peninsula who frequently crossed the Red Sea pursuing the slave trade, “exporting” thousands of black Africans. Az-Zanj later turned into Azania, and is in effect a derogatory allonym of Africa.

Toponymic-maritime conflict or political rivalry

We now come to the more severe form of relations between maritime allonyms, or rather between their proponents. The fact – well-known to many toponymists – that a geographical name can lead to warfare, actual-physical and not only verbal, has been described in the book *Toponymy – the lore, laws and language of geographical names* [2] with the help of the example of Macedonia. This name nearly led to a real – and not just toponymic – war between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. So the United Nations assigned to the new republic the official name FYROM, an acronym of the final part of the previous sentence. But in the present paper we are dealing with maritime names.

In 1991 there began the first Gulf War. Which gulf? This war did not start because of a name, but two allonyms of the same maritime object featured prominently in it and in the original reports of the belligerents and of some other parties involved. The people in the country

to its East call it the Persian Gulf, and so do most western countries, following the ancient Greeks and Ptolemy. But not so the inhabitants of the countries bordering the Gulf on the western side; for them it is the Arabian Gulf, al-Halij al-'Arabi, الخليج العربي. These differences even spill over into the economic sphere. A well-known British cartographic firm produced, in 1977, two versions of a map of the same region, differing only in these and a few other names, thus ensuring sales to both sides, and making everybody happy – perhaps most of all the firm itself. Lately a demand has been raised for conferring the Arabic name Arabian Gulf as an official one in all maps and atlases.

And this brings to mind the case of Tong Hae, the East Sea or Sea of Korea, and the refusal of Japan to recognize this allonym of the Sea of Japan. However, today many cartographic institutions around the world (including the present writer's country, Israel) do already insert both names in their maps.

I shall close with a last case, involving the Mediterranean Sea, which occurred in the last century. Italy, under the dictator Benito Mussolini, insisted on the name Mare Nostrum ("our sea") because the Mediterranean ("between the lands") lay between the Italian mainland and its colonies in North Africa. But WWII quickly relegated this name *ad acta historicae*, since it was, indeed, a latter-day revival of an old Roman name, now to be used no more.

The formal status of maritime names

Let us briefly investigate the formal status of the names we have been dealing with above. This depends on two factors, namely (a) what use is made of a name, (b) to which part of the sea or of a lake the name is applied.

As to (a), a remark must be made regarding the context in which the name is used. There is a difference between two uses of a toponym. On the one hand it may be used in an international application such as a map or any other document designed for international use or circulation. On the other hand it may appear in a text in a particular language which is not that of the country of the specific name in question. For the former applications the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names recommend (they cannot prescribe or force) to use official endonyms when referring to places "abroad", i.e. where the language differs from that of the map or atlas. Therefore in an English atlas the capital of Poland should appear as Warszawa (and not as Warsaw), København (and not Copenhagen), or Athina (and not Athens). But in the second case, for "home" or "domestic" use, and in particular in general literature and running texts, exonyms can still be used, e.g. in the forms in parentheses in the previous sentence. But the United Nations warn against the excessive use of exonyms because they might give rise to international friction and even conflict.

Now to point (b). There is clearly no difference of opinion on the status of a name of a lake or of an inland sea entirely enclosed within a single state. Only this country can decide on the name, which then becomes the official endonym. The same can be said of the territorial waters of a particular state. Thus, Gulf of Aqaba (Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt) and Gulf of Eilat (Israel) are both valid endonyms. The same is true of a lake or inland sea which shares its shoreline among two or more states, such as the Dead Sea (Israel and Jordan).

But what about the sea areas outside the territorial waters of large water bodies such as oceans and their parts? Here, no official exclusive endonym can be applied to the entire sea. Therefore any country, whether bordering on the sea in question or not, can apply its own names. Examples are the Baltic Sea mentioned above, or the Pacific Ocean/Stiller Ozean, or Ishavet/Nördliches Eismeer/СЕВЕРНЫЙ ЛЕДОВИЙ ОКЕАН. Formally, of course, one should not infringe on the official names of territorial waters, though practically this is sometimes

unavoidable, especially in small-scale maps. Often such “nationally based” names extend over the entire water body.

This also seems to cover the case of the sea between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, where both the Japanese name Nihon Hai (Japanese Sea) and the Korean one Tong Hae (East Sea) can both be equally applied.

So, finally, what can be done in a case of conflict?

The first thing to do in a case of different names being applied to a single water body and leading to friction would be to follow the recommendations of the United Nations, namely for the two (or more) countries to try to reach agreement on a single unified name – as in the case of the Skagerrak cited above. If different allonyms still prevail without giving rise to toponymic or political problems, as in the case of bi- and multi-lingual names described above, perhaps no action needs to be taken.

However, if one side in a names conflict feels it needs redress from the other, it can turn to a third party in order to try and solve the problem. The United Nations would be a natural third party in such a case. But as has already been noted, the world organization, through the U.N. Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, has no powers to force a solution on the sides. This can be done only by the Security Council or the General Assembly and has been attempted only once to the present writer’s knowledge, in the case of Greece vs. Macedonia/FYROM.

But if this does not help, a practical step can still be tried. Since maps and atlases are perhaps the major and most important repository of geographical names, even in this age of digital geographic information systems (GIS), the party which feels slighted or underprivileged can approach map and atlas publishers around the world with the request to print its preferred maritime name in addition to any other. If this request is reasonable, and is accompanied by documentary evidence supporting the claim, it might be followed up by cartographers (and perhaps by other publishers). In a map there is, however, one limitation: the scale of the map may be too small for including more than one name. In this case, it is up to the cartographer to decide which name to insert.

Thus, the present paper still ends on a note of “active indecision” or “indecisive action”, but with the hope that in future, cases of this nature will be resolved by agreement and consent.

Notes

[1] United Nations (2002), *Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names*, in six languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Arabic), edited by N. Kadmon. United Nations Publications, sales No. M.01.XVII.7.

[2] Kadmon, N., (2001), *Toponymy – the lore, laws and language of geographical names*. 333 pp. incl. the U.N. *Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names* (in English only). 35 illustrations, index. Vantage Press Inc., New York. ISBN 0-535-13531-1, US\$ 14.95.

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