THE ACADEMY OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

UNESCO HERITAGE PROJECT

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858–1922)

Reviver of Spoken Hebrew

Prepared at the Academy of the Hebrew Language

by

Dr. Mordechay Mishor

Dena Ordan

APPENDIX III

ANNIVERSARY OF A PERSONALITY

אֱלִיעֶזֶר בֶּן-יְהוּדָה

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda

A. Information concerning the personality to be commemorated

1. Family name: Ben-Yehuda (originally Perelman; he adopted this Hebrew name which means "Son of Judah")

   First name: Eliezer

2. Born: 7 January 1858   Died: 16 December 1922

3. Field of activity: Cultural-linguistic: pioneering architect of the nineteenth-to-twentieth-century revival of Hebrew as a spoken language

4. Brief description of the personality and of its most important works:

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda was a prime mover in the transformation of Hebrew from a dormant language of culture to a living, spoken language currently used in all spheres of modern life by millions of Israelis, and by Jews worldwide. Not only did he set a personal example by speaking Hebrew exclusively in his personal and family life, he was also instrumental in the public aspects of its revival: the establishment of the Hebrew Language Council (1889); the production of the seventeen-volume *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* (1908–59); and in the launching of several Hebrew newspapers that disseminated his linguistic innovations and modern Hebrew style.

5. Full list of his works and/or actions

Ben-Yehuda's language activism encompassed the personal, public, and academic spheres. In the personal sphere, (1) he drafted family members and friends to use Hebrew in daily life. In the public sphere, (2) he spread his ideas

through newspapers he founded, (3) actively taught Hebrew for a period and saw to its incorporation in schools, (4) founded the Language Council which undertook to adapt Hebrew to all spheres of modern life, (5) promoted the use of a popular style of Hebrew, and (6) systematically coined new words. In the academic sphere, (7) his broad-based lexicographical endeavor, grounded in the historical study of Hebrew, culminated in his monumental historical Hebrew dictionary. The Language Council was the forerunner of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, and Ben-Yehuda's dictionary the prototype for the Academy's Historical Dictionary Project (see Appendixes A.4.2, A.8.2, and A.8.3).

6. Please state whether this commemoration related to the work as a whole or to a particular work or action (if so, which?)

This commemoration relates to the entire linguistic-cultural spectrum of Ben-Yehuda's personal and public activity in the revitalization of Hebrew from a formal, literary language to a spoken language capable of meeting the variegated needs of everyday modern life.

7. Describe how this work/action has had a genuine impact at the regional and/or universal level

Ben-Yehuda's single-minded devotion to, and activity toward, revitalizing Hebrew as the language of the Jewish nation played a pioneering role in effecting the creation of a modern language that unifies the residents of Israel and Jews worldwide. Also crucial to this process was the 1914 decision to make Hebrew the language of instruction at all levels of education. Within forty years after Ben-Yehuda's arrival in Israel, in 1922, Hebrew had become so widely spoken that the British mandatory government recognized it as one of three official languages, alongside English and Arabic. Indeed, some consider the revival of a language whose development had been arrested nothing short of miraculous. Whether a miracle, or not, others view the modern revival of Hebrew as a spoken language as a model for other language-revival movements (see Appendix A.7).

8. Web site(s):

The Academy of the Hebrew Language:

http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il (Hebrew and English)

http://hebrew-terms.huji.ac.il (accesses all the specialized Hebrew-English dictionaries produced by the Hebrew Language Council and the Academy to date)

http://hebrew-treasures.huji.ac.il (accesses the database of the Ancient Literature Section of the Historical Dictionary Project

The Historical Dictionary

http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il/english1.html

Mishor, Mordechay. "The Philological Treatment of Ancient Texts: The Experience of the Historical Hebrew Dictionary Project." *International Journal of Lexicography* 15/2 (2002): 132–38.

http://ijl.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/15/2/132?eaf

Rubinstein, Doron. "The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language."

http://kdictionaries.com/kdn/kdn12-3-7.html

Selected articles online about Ben-Yehuda and his contribution to the revival of Hebrew:

1. Fellman, Jack. "Eliezer Ben-Yehdua and the Revival of Hebrew (1858–1922)."

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/ben_yehuda.html

2. ———. "Eliezer Ben-Yehuda: A Language Reborn." *The Israel Review of Arts and Letters* 1997/104.

http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2003/5/ARIEL%20-%20Israel%20Review%20of%20Arts%20and%20Letters%20Vol%20104-

3. Griver, Simon. "Bringing a Language Back from the Dead." *Israel Magazine on Web:* Nov. 1997

http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Israel%20beyond%20the%20conflict/Bringing%20a%20Language%20Back%20from%20the%20Dead

4. Tal, Rami. "The Israeli Press." The Israel Review of Arts and Letters - 1995/99-100 (contains a long section devoted to Ben-Yehuda's newspapers) http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1998/7/The%20Israeli %20Press

Popular Hebrew song

"Eliezer Ben-Yehuda" (Hebrew version):

http://mp3music.gpg.co.il/lyrics/save.aspx?id=5736

 "Eliezer Ben Yehuda" (English transliteration and translation)

http://www.hebrewsongs.com/song-eliezerbenyehuda.htm

B. Anniversary to be celebrated

150th anniversary of his birth (1858/2008)

Date(s) chosen for the celebration: 7 January (date of birth); 16 December (2nd night of Hanukkah) (date of death)

C. Information concerning the activities organized on this occasion by the country/countries concerned

Place	Type of activity (proposed)	Institution responsible	Funds requested (under the Participation Programme)
In your country	1. Spotlight on new words coined by Ben-Yehuda online: the Academy of the Hebrew Language site 2. Promotion of the work of the Modern Literature Section of the Historical Dictionary Project, esp. the documentation and processing of material by Ben-Yehuda and his contemporaries 3. Publications devoted to the topic of the revival of the Hebrew language 4. Public Lectures 5. Academic Conferences 6. Tours of Ben-Yehuda's room 7. Media coverage 8. Activities in schools	Academy of the Hebrew Language In cooperation with the Ministry of Education	$25,000 total for all activities
In other countries	UN session devoted to Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's linguistic-cultural contribution	Academy of the Hebrew Language and UNESCO	

D. *Links with UNESCO*

1. Please indicate the field of competence of UNESCO to which this celebration is related

Primarily culture and sociolinguistics, as well as education, and communication

2. How do you wish UNESCO to participate?

By devoting a UN session or meeting to Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and the revival of Hebrew

By assisting the funding of a short film on Ben-Yehuda and his impact on the revival of Hebrew, including watersheds in the revival process (which could be aired at the UN meeting)

By posting a piece on Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and the revival of Hebrew to the UNESCO website

By participating in the funding of the ongoing development of the Historical Dictionary Project of the Hebrew Language at the Academy of the Hebrew Language, especially of its section devoted to the modern period, namely, Ben-Yehuda and his contemporaries

3. Please state in what way this commemoration is linked to, and promotes, UNESCO's objectives and missions

The revitalization of Hebrew belongs to the broader context of preservation of national-ethnic cultures and their languages, and the successful revival of Hebrew has the potential to serve as a model for UNESCO activity on their behalf. Hebrew's success suggests that an ancient language can be adapted to a new reality and that means exist whereby new life can be given to endangered languages, including those of low distribution.

E. *Please add any other information*

To reiterate, given the disturbing data on the broad and rapid scope of the disappearance of languages worldwide, the example of the revitalization of Hebrew implies the existence of approaches whereby endangered languages can not only be preserved but also rejuvenated. Appreciation of the importance of language as a cultural asset, and of the need for its preservation requires an intense public campaign, such as that already under way by UNESCO on behalf of endangered languages. The

Academy of the Hebrew Language has assumed a leading role not only in the adaptation of spoken Hebrew to the modern and postmodern worlds but also in the preservation of all Hebrew texts, from the earliest period of Hebrew to the present. We would welcome the opportunity to assist UNESCO's vital project of saving endangered languages through a more profound look at the factors promoting the successful revitalization of spoken Hebrew, in the hope that they can be applied to other languages.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in his study

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda: 1885, 1910, and 1922

The Ben-Yehuda Room at the
Academy of the Hebrew Language
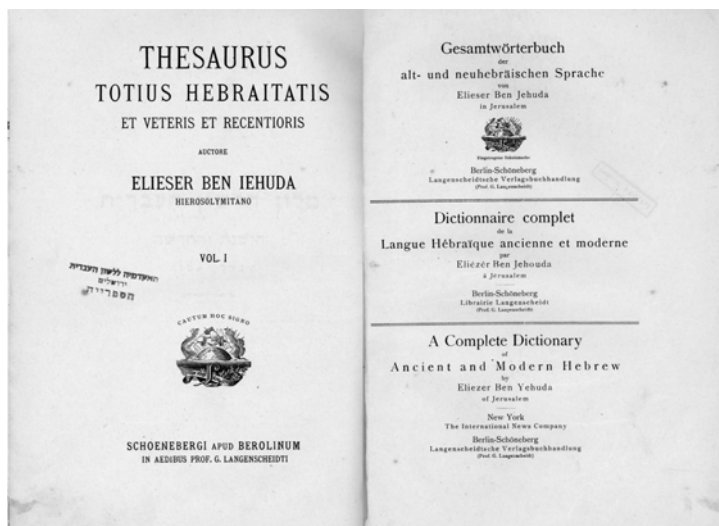
Title page of the Ben-Yehuda dictionary

Hazewi: Newspaper edited by Ben-Yehuda

(1884–1901; 1908–1914)

Hashkafa: Newspaper edited by Ben-Yehuda

(1896–1908)

Appendixes

A.3. *Field of activity (background)*

At the time when Ben-Yehuda began his activity, Hebrew was a language of culture for Jews scattered throughout the Diaspora, who spoke both the local languages and Judeo-vernaculars. Hebrew had gradually ceased to be a spoken language during the first centuries of the Common Era. It remained, however, the language of daily prayer and of study. Over the centuries, biblical commentaries, legal and philosophical works, poetry, grammars, and dictionaries, to name just some of its literary branches, were produced in Hebrew. The ongoing production of literary works in Hebrew was largely the possession of the educated elite; however, most Jewish males were conversant with the prayer book and the Bible as read in the synagogue service and illiteracy was rare among Jews in the medieval age, for example. For everyday matters Jews adopted the languages of the surrounding societies, with the incorporation of some Hebrew words, and Hebrew acquired the status of a "sacred" literary language. The literary Hebrew preserved by the different communities was divided into different pronunciation traditions, ostensibly similar to dialects of natural languages.

The generations immediately preceding Ben-Yehuda's day saw the emergence of the Enlightenment movement. Founded in the latter half of the eighteenth-century in Germany, and spreading to Eastern Europe, on the one hand, this movement, which espoused liberal, egalitarian ideals, brought a flowering of literary Hebrew. On the other, in its wake came assimilation, which threatened the "latent life" of Hebrew with destruction. Under such circumstances, the notion of reviving Hebrew as the spoken language of the Jewish people was seen as delusional. Linguists, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, absolutely negated the possibility that any dead language could be revived, let alone Hebrew, in its then current condition. Yehiel Mikhel Pines, later an enthusiastic supporter of Ben-Yehuda, defined the revival of Hebrew as "ein frommen Wunsch" (wishful thinking). On the other hand, ultra-traditional Jewish circles viewed such a revival as profanation.

The struggle of the Balkan peoples for freedom from Ottoman rule, which brought with it the enhanced status of their ethnic languages, impacted on Ben-Yehuda's aspiration to revive the Hebrew language in the Jewish homeland. His plan was to start a circle of Hebrew speakers in the Land of Israel, and to act for the acquisition of Hebrew by the next generation as a mother tongue in all respects. Upon

his arrival in Jerusalem in 1881, then under Ottoman rule, Ben-Yehuda enthusiastically set his ideas into motion.

Another development, although not directly related to the revival of Hebrew, was the movement to improve the low economic level of the Jewish masses, in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, in Eastern Europe in particular, by a return to productive occupations, including agriculture. One outcome of this movement was increased immigration to the Land of Israel and a return to agriculture, accompanied by the successful founding of an agricultural school and agricultural settlements in the late 1880s. The Jewish population of the Yishuv then numbered some twenty thousand. The attempt to create a new society *ex nihilo* through normalization of the socioeconomic and cultural situation of the Jewish people provided fertile ground for the revival of spoken Hebrew in the historical Jewish homeland.

A.4. Brief description of the personality and its most important works

A.4.1 Brief description of the personality

Ben-Yehuda received a traditional Jewish education. In his youth he was attracted to the Enlightenment movement and subsequently studied in a Russian gymnasium. The example of the Balkan nations sparked in him the notion of rehabilitating the Jewish nation and its ancient language in its historical homeland. Like many pioneering activists Ben-Yehuda worked tirelessly for realization of his goal through personal example.

For a fuller description, see the article by Jack Fellman, Appendix A.8.1.

A.4.2 The personality's most important works: The Historical Dictionary

It was Ben-Yehuda's conviction that the entire lexicon of Hebrew, inclusive of all of its historical strata, was at its revivers' disposal. As opposed to languages that developed naturally, Hebrew's anomalous situation blurred the distinction between its historical strata. This canceled the distinction between living and obsolete layers and placed the entire Hebrew lexicon on a single synchronic plane, making all of its items equally available for use. On the other hand, the metamorphoses of Hebrew throughout the ages presented a challenge to its historical study; these included: semantic processes, such as expansion or narrowing of meaning; metaphorical transitions; morphological changes in word-formation and -derivation; loanwords and

direct and indirect influence of other languages. Perceived as archetypical, these processes were applied to the creation of mechanisms for renewed linguistic creativity, in the spirit of the language of the past. Indeed, beyond its directly utilitarian aspect, the Ben-Yehuda dictionary was a true historical dictionary, which also met academic standards (taking into account the state of the research in his day), even though edited by a single individual and with very modest means.

1959 saw the publication of the final volume of the Ben-Yehuda dictionary and the Academy of the Hebrew Language's decision to initiate the Historical Hebrew Dictionary Project. This project by no means negates the importance of the Ben-Yehuda dictionary; indeed it may be viewed as a continuation of Ben-Yehuda's work in fitting with altered circumstances that dictated the founding of a new project. These included new data from more than two hundred thousand fragments of medieval manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza, discovered in the late nineteenth century, and texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls, dating from the second century B.C.E. to the second century C.E., discovered in the mid-twentieth century in the Judean Desert. The significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls lies in their provision of a missing link for the Hebrew between the biblical and talmudic periods. Also, the advent of the computer, then a novel tool, unlocked new capabilities for processing large quantities of data, and the HDP has utilized computers from the start. In its scientific principles, the HDP was inspired by, and modeled on, the outstanding historical dictionaries compiled for European languages (e.g., the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Grimm's Dictionary*). (See Mordechay Mishor, "The Philological Treatment of Ancient Texts: The Experience of the Historical Hebrew Dictionary Project." *International Journal of Lexicography* 15/2 [2002]: 132–38.)

Much work remains to be done before the Historical Dictionary Project encompasses the entire range of the historical strata of Hebrew. Biblical Hebrew, with its attendant philological difficulties, still awaits processing; the analysis and processing of the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, whose publication was completed only a few years ago, proceeds slowly; the stratum spanning the eleventh to the mid-eighteenth centuries has not yet been treated; and for the modern age, which spans the mid-eighteenth to twentieth centuries, only selected sources have been processed. The dictionary's greatest accomplishment to date is the work of the Ancient Literature Section, which spans Hebrew from the beginning of the Common Era to the mid-eleventh century, now nearly complete. It represents a variety of genres: halakhic

works, commentaries, liturgical texts, and linguistic, medical, and astronomical texts, among others. (The database of Ancient Literature can be accessed at http://hebrew-treasures.huji.ac.il.)

That the Historical Dictionary Project has already made a significant contribution to scholarly research comes from the scores of studies that utilize its database. The HDP is also consulted by, and impacts on, Academy decisions regarding new words and the path of Hebrew. Further progress on this essential project, which represents the continuation by modern means of Ben-Yehuda's historical dictionary of Hebrew, is essential, especially with regard to the revival period.

A.5. Selected list of works by and about Ben-Yehuda

For a comprehensive bibliography of works in Hebrew, and in English and European
languages, see Jack Fellman, *The Revival of a Classical Tongue: Eliezer Ben
Yehuda and the Modern Hebrew Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 140–
51.

Bibliography of Ben-Yehuda′s works:

Canaani, Y. *Eliezer Ben-Yehuda: Ḥomer bibliographi meforat meḥulaq lefi seder
khronologi.* Jerusalem, 1929. A detailed bibliography (in Hebrew) of Ben-
Yehuda's publicistic genre and letters divided according to five chronological
periods: 1879–81, his stay in Paris and Algeria; 1882–83, his early period in
Jerusalem; 1884–1914, his Hebrew periodicals; 1914–18, his stay in the US
during the First World War; and 1919–22, his academic work on his
dictionary, in addition to articles for and against his activity.

Autobiography:

Ben-Yehuda, Eliezer. *A Dream Come True.* Translated by T. Muraoka. Edited by
George Mandel. Modern Hebrew Classics. Boulder: Westview, 1993.

———. *La renaissance de l'hébreu.* Translated by Gérard Haddad, Yvan Haddad,
Catherine Neuve-Église. Midrash. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998.

———. *Le rêve traverse: l'autobiographie du père de l'hébreu en Israel.* Precedée de
La psychose inversée de Gerard Haddad. Paris: Editions du Scribe, 1988.

Biographies:

Ben-Avi, Ithamar. *Avi.* Jerusalem: Hasollel, 1927. (Hebrew in Roman script)

Drucker, Malka. *Eliezer Ben Yehuda: The Father of Modern Hebrew.* Jewish Biography Series. New York: Lodestar, 1987.

Omer, Devorah. *Rebirth: The Story of Eliezer Ben-Yehudah and the Modern Hebrew Language.* Translated by Ruth Rasnic. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972.

Parada Cobo, Mario A. *La vida y la obra de Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, o, una lengua para el Israel de hoy.* Quintas jornadas culturales. Santiago, Chile: Keren Hayesod, 1984.

St. John, Robert. *Tongue of the Prophets: The Life Story of Eliezer Ben Yehuda.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1952. Reprint, No. Hollywood, Calif.: Wilshire Book Co., 1972.

———. *Die Sprache der Propheten: die Lebensgeschichte des Elieser Ben-Jehuda, des Schoepfers der Neuhebraeischen Sprache.* Translated by Gerta Brust. Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1985.

———. *Profeternes tungemål: ein biografi om Eliezer Ben Jehuda-pioneren, der genoplivede det hebraiske sprog til et moderne talesprog.* Translated by Inge Regitze and Christian Svendson. Copenhagen: Baruk, 1990.

Primary Sources in translation:

Ben-Yehuda, Eliezer. *A Weighty Question.* Translated by David Patterson. In *Eliezer Ben-Yehuda: A Symposium in Oxford,* ed. Eisig Silberschlag, 1–12. Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1981.

———. *Recueil de morceaux de lecture contenant: 1. Le texte français seul; 2. La traduction interlinéare hébraique-français; 3. La traduction libre en hébreu.* Jerusalem: A. M. Luncz, 1904.

———. *Le rêve et sa réalisation et autres texts: la renaissance de l'hébreu parlé.* Translated by Reuven Sivan and Maurice Adad. Paris: L'Harmatton, 2004.

———. "Eliezer Ben-Yehudah's hamavo hagadol: Introduction, translation, annotation by Scott Bradley Saulson." Ph.D. diss., University of South Africa, 1985.

Selected secondary works and articles on Ben-Yehuda

Barha, Yaakov. "Eliezer Ben-Yehudah." *Yayinlar.* N.p., 1971–78. (in Turkish)

Domb, Risa. "Hebrew, Speak Hebrew: The Place of Hebrew in Modern Hebrew Literature." In *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda,* ed. William Horbury, 307–18. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999.

Fellman, Jack. "Eliezer Ben-Yehuda: A Language Reborn." *Ariel* 104 (1997): 26–31.

———. "Eliezer Ben-Yehuda und die Wiederbelebung des hebräisch!" *Der Israel-Philatelist* 159 (2006): 5049–5054.

———. *The Revival of a Classical Tongue.* Contributions to the Society of Language 6. The Hague: Mouton, 1973.

Mandel, George. "Why Did Ben-Yehuda Suggest the Revival of Spoken Hebrew?" In *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile,* ed. Lewis Glinert, 193–207.

———. "Resistance to the Study of Hebrew: The Experiences of Peretz Smolenskin and Eliezer Ben-Yehudah." In *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda,* ed. William Horbury, 293–99. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999.

Silberschlag, Eisig. *Eliezer Ben-Yehuda: A Symposium in Oxford.* Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1981.

Ullendorff, Edward. "Hebrew in Mandatory Palestine." In *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda,* ed. William Horbury, 300–306. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999.

A.6. *Is commemoration related to work as a whole or to a particular work or action?*

All of Ben-Yehuda's public activity was related to the revival of Hebrew. Not only did he encounter resistance, he also paid a personal price for his single-mindedness. His raising of his children in a Hebrew-speaking environment, in isolation from other children, exposed them to potential psychological damage. In addition, because of his secularization of Hebrew, he faced fierce opposition from ultra-traditional circles who excommunicated him and reported his purported "sedition" to the Turkish authorities. As a result, he spent a year in jail. As a tuberculosis sufferer, the demands of Ben-Yehuda's intense activity also took their toll on his health.

For a description of the atmosphere in the Ben-Yehuda home, as related by Ben-Yehuda's firstborn child Ittamar Ben-Avi, see the Fellman article in Appendix A.8.1.

A. 7. *Regional/universal impact*

The following two texts illustrate the challenge of revitalizing Hebrew as a spoken language.

The Hebrew writer S. Bernfeld made the following statement nearly 95 years ago:

> To transform Hebrew into a spoken language in the accepted sense of the word is, in my view, an impossible task. No language, or even dialect, has been revived after having ceased to be a spoken language. Broken glass cannot be mended, nor can a language whose natural development has been arrested and is no longer alive in the mouths of the people become, as history demonstrates, anything other than a literary or religious language, but not a vehicle of living popular speech. ("Bricklayers of Hebrew," *Hazefirah* 56, 1 Mar. 1912; translated from the Hebrew)

Joshua Whatmough represents an extreme example of the viewpoint of some linguists on this question:

> The experiment of teaching Hebrew in the schools in Israel … is contrary to the whole of linguistic history, and even to the present actual trend. It remains to be seen whether historic linguistic events are reversible, even on a small scale, any more than biological. (*Language: A Modern Synthesis* [New York: New American Library, 1957], 37)

Curiously, this statement was made in 1957.

But in the late nineteenth century only a minority of the Jewish population of the Yishuv heeded Ben-Yehuda's call to use Hebrew; more significant results were in evidence only in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1914, in response to the demands of teachers and students, Hebrew became the language of instruction in schools at all levels. In 1922, given the widespread use of Hebrew, it was granted recognition as one of the official languages by the mandatory government, alongside English (naturally) and Arabic, a decision made official a year later, on 29 September 1923. In the post-World War I period, and the inception of British rule, with its mandate based on the Balfour Declaration viewing with favor "the establishment in

Palestine of national home for the Jewish people," the Jewish population increased exponentially, reaching 650,000 with the establishment of the State of Israel. The waves of immigration did not hamper the inculcation of Hebrew in daily life; rather, Hebrew served as a unifying force for immigrants from different lands and speaking diverse languages. It is noteworthy that the process of the revival of Hebrew was accomplished several decades *before* the founding of the state in 1948 and was characterized, not by imposition from above, but largely by efforts at the grassroots level.

With the return of Hebrew to its native region, this enriched the linguistic map of the region with an additional Semitic language, alongside the various dialects of Arabic that penetrated the area beginning with the seventh century, and alongside the dialects of New Aramaic spoken in parts of Syria, Turkey, and Iraq, now endangered languages. Israel has made its contribution to their preservation by documenting the Jewish dialects of New Aramaic as spoken by immigrants to Israel.

In addition, as the following article from the New York Times illustrates, the revival of spoken Hebrew is seen as a potential model for other, particularly endangered, languages:

> Most of these language-revival movements model themselves on the national language of Israel. For more than two millenniums, Hebrew was found almost exclusively in Scripture and rabbinical writings. Its retreat was nearly complete -- out of the public square, into the house and finally into the scrolls of the Torah. But the early pioneers of what would become Israel faced a politically charged question: which of their languages should dominate? Ashkenazi Yiddish? Russian? German? Sephardic Ladino? The commonly agreed-upon answer was supplied by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the Jewish linguist who used the stiff, formal language of the Bible to conjure into existence a modern version -- now the main language of 3.6 million people. (**Jack Hitt, "Say No More,"** *The New York Times: Magazine Section,* **29 Feb. 2004, p. 52**)

A.8. Web source(s)

1. Jack Fellman, "Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and the Revival of Hebrew (1858–1922)"

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/ben_yehuda.html
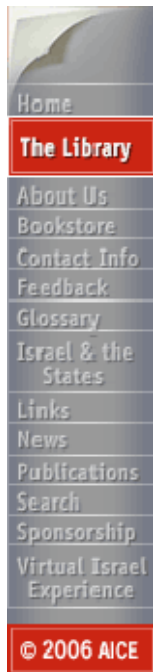
Eliezer Ben-Yehuda
and the Revival of Hebrew
(1858-1922)
by Jack Fellman*

In his pioneering work on language revivals and language revivers published in 1966, the American linguist Einar Haugen wrote: "It appears to be almost the rule that such movements can be traced back to a single devoted person, who gave focus to the prevailing dissatisfactions of his people. Having issued from the group whose language was neglected, such reformers often had more than a purely intellectual motivation for establishing the existence of their language. Theirs became one contribution to the general liberation of the group, a medium of revolt and a symbol of unity." For the Hebrew language revival, one of the truly outstanding socio-linguistic events of modern times, this characterization is eminently true of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, was born Eliezer Yitzhak Perelman, in the Lithuanian village of Luzhky on January 7, 1858. Like virtually all Jewish children of that time and place he began learning Hebrew from a very tender age as part of a thoroughly religious upbringing. He excelled in his studies and ultimately was sent to a talmudic academy (*yeshiva*) in the hope that he would become a rabbi. However, like many promising young Jews of the time in eastern Europe, he became interested in the secular world and ultimately exchanged the yeshiva for a Russian gymnasium, completing his studies as an external student in 1877. In the same year Russia proclaimed war on the Ottoman Empire to aid their fellow Slavs, the Bulgarians, to regain their independence from the Turks. Ben-Yehuda was captivated by the idea of restoring to the Bulgarians their rights and reviving the Bulgarian nation on its national soil. In the 19th century, several European nations had been so revived, perhaps the most celebrated being the Greeks, the heirs of Classical Athens, in 1829, and the Italians, the heirs of Classical Rome, in 1849. Ben-Yehuda was deeply influenced by such revivals and came to the conclusion that the

European concept of national fulfilment should also be applied to his people, the Jews. He felt deeply that if the Bulgarians, who were not an ancient, classical people, could demand and obtain a state of their own, then the Jews, the People of the Book and the heirs of historic Jerusalem, deserved the same. True, Eretz-Israel, the land of the Jews, contained few Jews in the 19th century, and the language of the Jews, Hebrew, was virtually only a written language and not a spoken tongue, but he felt these obstacles were not insurmountable. The Jews must return to their land and begin anew to speak their own language.

Acting on these ideas, Ben-Yehuda determined that he himself should go to Palestine. He left Russia in 1878, first going to Paris to study medicine, so as to be of future help to the Jewish community in Palestine. However, due to his own health problems (tuberculosis), Ben-Yehuda was unable to continue his studies, yet, to his eternal credit, he did not waver in his convictions, and in 1881 he arrived in Palestine with his revival plans for the Hebrew language intact. Indeed, while still abroad, he had pondered upon the revival question deeply, and had published several articles in various Hebrew periodicals on the triple question of the renaissance of the Jewish people, their land, and their language. Indeed, these early articles can be considered forerunners of modern political Zionism, for in them are included the basic elements pertinent to Jewish nationalism: settlement policy, the revival of the Hebrew language, literature, and culture in the national homeland. Ben-Yehuda settled in Jerusalem, where most Jews of Palestine lived in their various communities, planning to use the town as the base for spreading his revivalist ideas throughout Palestine and the Diaspora.

Ben-Yehuda adopted several plans of action. The main ones were three-fold, and they can be summarized as "Hebrew in the Home," "Hebrew in the School," and "Words, Words, Words."

As far as "Hebrew in the Home" was concerned, even before coming to Palestine, as a result of his first successful prolonged Hebrew conversation, Ben-Yehuda had decided to speak only Hebrew with every Jew he met. From what is known, this first conversation took place either with Getzel Zelikovitz or Mordechai Adelman, in a café on the Boulevard Montmartre in Paris. Since Ben-Yehuda had proved to himself that he could speak Hebrew successfully with friends and acquaintances, he wanted Hebrew to be his only language when he arrived in Palestine. It should be noted that this was not too difficult for him, except perhaps for a shortage of Hebrew words on certain topics. Indeed, Ben-Yehuda relates with great enthusiasm his first conversations in Hebrew when he and his wife disembarked from the boat in Jaffa, and he talked with a Jewish money-changer, a Jewish innkeeper, and a Jewish wagoneer, all in Hebrew. For here he had encountered simple people who could speak Hebrew, perhaps with mistakes, but still more or less naturally and freely. But Ben-Yehuda wanted the Jews in Palestine to speak Hebrew exclusively. Therefore, when his first son, Ben-Zion Ben-Yehuda (or, as he is more commonly known, Ittamar Ben-Avi), was born in 1882, Ben-Yehuda made his first wife Deborah promise to raise the boy as the first all-Hebrew speaking child in modern history.

According to Ben-Yehuda, this was a very important symbolic event for the future of the revival, because, with a child in the house, parents and visitors would have to speak naturally to him, and to converse on the most everyday

topics, all in Hebrew. And when the child would finally begin to speak on his own, Ben-Yehuda would have living proof that a complete revival of the language was, indeed, possible.

As Ben-Yehuda wrote in the introduction to his dictionary, "If a language which has stopped being spoken, with nothing remaining of it save what remains of our language – (if there is such a language) can return and be the spoken tongue of an individual for all necessities of his life, there is no room for doubt that it can become the spoken language of a community."

And this is indeed what happened. Ittamar Ben-Avi, in his autobiography, describes (albeit somewhat over-romanticized), some of the drastic precautions taken by Ben-Yehuda to ensure his son would hear—and thus ultimately speak—only Hebrew. Thus, for example, when visitors came to the house who did not know Hebrew, Ben-Yehuda would send him to bed so that he would not hear their foreign languages. Similarly, he would not let the child listen to "the chirping of the birds and the neighing of horses, the braying of donkeys and the fluttering of butterflies, because even they are, after all, foreign languages, at any rate not Hebrew." Indeed, the child only began to speak at the relatively late age of four. His mother could not keep to Ben-Yehuda's demand, and speak to the child only in Hebrew. One day, when Ben-Yehuda was out of the house, she began absent-mindedly singing lullabies to the child in her native Russian. Ben-Yehuda had returned early and when he heard Russian being used inside his house, he rushed in and began shouting. Ittamar wrote about the bitter scene that followed: "It caused a great shock to pass over me when I saw my father in his anger and my mother in her grief and tears, and the muteness was removed from my lips, and speech came to my mouth."

The fact that there was a child in the house accentuated the need to find appropriate Hebrew words for the mundane things of everyday life. Thus, new Hebrew words were coined by Ben-Yehuda for objects such as doll, ice-cream, jelly, omelette, handkerchief, towel, bicycle, and hundreds more. As the child grew, so did Hebrew, both in vocabulary and in naturalness of expression. Indeed, Ben-Yehuda and his Hebrew-speaking family became a living legend, an embodiment of the revival for others to emulate.

Of all the steps Ben-Yehuda took to revive Hebrew, the use of "Hebrew in the School" was clearly the most important, and Ben-Yehuda realized this. In his first articles, written while abroad, he had dwelt on the way the Russian language had become rooted among the youth in Russia, even among those for whom it was not their mother tongue, through being introduced as the language of instruction in schools. On the same principle, Ben-Yehuda preached that rabbis and teachers should use Hebrew as the language of instruction in the Jewish schools in Palestine, and for all subjects, both religious and secular. Ben-Yehuda understood that the revival could succeed especially, and perhaps only, if the younger generation would begin to speak Hebrew freely. Therefore, when Nissim Bechar, the principal of the Torah and Avodah School of the Alliance Israélite Universelle School in Jerusalem proposed to Ben-Yehuda in 1882 that he teach in his school, Ben-Yehuda seized the chance. Bechar understood the necessity of using Hebrew in the school, because, for the first time, children from several different Jewish communities would be studying in the same classroom, and they had no other common language which could be used. Bechar explained to Ben-Yehuda his

method of teaching Hebrew through Hebrew, a direct system, with no translation into other tongues—a system which had already been used in teaching French and other languages. Bechar had already tried the system in Hebrew in the Alliance School in Istanbul, which he had headed before coming to Jerusalem. Ben-Yehuda was able to teach for only a brief period, due to health reasons, but his Hebrew teaching was successful. After just a few months, the children were able to chatter fluently in Hebrew on daily topics connected with eating and drinking, clothing, daily life and events inside and outside the home.

It was clear to Ben-Yehuda that herein lay the very future of the revival. If children could learn Hebrew from a young enough age in school, they would become virtually unilingual in Hebrew when they grew up. In his words: "The Hebrew language will go from the synagogue to the house of study, and from the house of study to the school, and from the school it will come into the home and... become a living language" (*Hatzvi*, 1886).

And thus it came to pass. Ben-Yehuda's personal example and his teaching success made a great impression on other teachers. True, teaching in Hebrew involved many problems: lack of trained teachers, lack of textbooks, lack of materials such as games or songs, lack of terminologies and so on. David Yudeleviz, an early teacher, wrote in 1928: "In a heavy atmosphere, without books, expressions, words, verbs and hundreds of nouns, we had to begin... teaching. It is impossible to describe or imagine under what pressure the first seeds were planted... Hebrew teaching materials for elementary education were limited... We were half-mute, stuttering, we spoke with our hands and eyes." Another prominent teacher, David Yellin, wrote in the same vein: "Every teacher had a French or Russian teaching book of his own, and he organized his Hebrew work according to it... Terms for teaching did not exist. Every village teacher was an Academy (of the Hebrew Language) member with respect to creating words according to his taste, and everyone, of course, used his own creations." However, as time went on, all these linguistic problems were ultimately solved, and a young all-Hebrew speaking generation did emerge and develop, thus ensuring beyond anything else that the revival would be a success.

Besides teaching the youth, Ben-Yehuda also wanted to attract adults to his ideas. After writing for a few years in the local paper, *Hahavatzelet,* he began to publish his own newspaper Hatzvi, in 1884, to serve as an instrument for teaching adults, both via its content and its language. Newspapers in Hebrew were at that time still somewhat of a novelty, the first one having appeared in the mid-1850s (especially as the model Ben-Yehuda wanted to emulate was no less than *Le Figaro* of Paris). He foresaw a Hebrew paper that would treat all topics of interest to a people living on its own land, including international and local topics, weather bulletins, fashion, etc. And indeed virtually every (male) Jew in Palestine at the end of the 19th century could read and understand a Hebrew newspaper without too much difficulty. Ben-Yehuda believed that if he published a newspaper at a low price, people would become convinced of their ability to express everything they would want to in Hebrew, and that there would then be more readiness to use the language to convey their ideas. Ben-Yehuda also used his paper as a means to introduce new words which hitherto were missing, such as: newspaper, editor, telegramme, subscriber, soldier, fashion and many others. Jews being avid

readers, Ben-Yehuda's paper did much to spread his ideas and his linguistic coinages, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora.

To help would-be speakers and readers of Hebrew, Ben-Yehuda began to compile a dictionary. Actually, he started the dictionary as an aid for himself when he was still in Paris, and at first it contained simply a short bilingual list in Hebrew and French written in the back of the notebook he used to write down his grocery lists. But, as Ben-Yehuda himself explains in the introduction to his dictionary, when he began speaking Hebrew daily, he became more aware of the lack of words in Hebrew, and his list grew longer, and he began publishing word lists in his newspaper, as aids for other would-be speakers with similar problems. But there were difficulties. As long as Ben-Yehuda spoke Hebrew at home or with his friends, he was able to use the language more or less as he wished. But if he wanted the entire society to use Hebrew, then the words would have to be precise and accurate, according to strict philological rules. Therefore, Ben-Yehuda became a scientific lexicographer. The results of his arduous labours, working sometimes 18 hours a day, are astounding, culminating in his 17-volume "A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew." It was completed by his second wife, Hemda, and his son after his death, and to this day is still unique in the annals of Hebrew lexicography.

To help him with his dictionary, and to solve various problems connected with the form and type of Hebrew – problems of terminology, pronunciation, spelling and punctuation, – in December, 1890, Ben-Yehuda founded the Hebrew Language Council. The Council was the forerunner of today's Hebrew Language Academy, the supreme arbiter and authority on all matters pertaining to the Hebrew language.

These were the main steps Ben-Yehuda took to implement his dream of the revival of Hebrew. Of course, he did not revive the language entirely on his own, as is often rather simplistically stated. Rather, he needed and relied on the support of the society around him. Besides the help of the local population (which was limited and at times even outright hostile), what helped Ben-Yehuda most of all in his linguistic crusade was that the year 1881, the same year he came to Palestine, also signalled the beginning of the early immigration waves of Jewish settlers to Palestine. The critical mass of these settlers were like Ben-Yehuda himself – young, educated, and idealistic. They came from similar east European Jewish socio-economic backgrounds, who, like him, had decided to begin their lives anew in the promised land of their forefathers. They were of great help to Ben-Yehuda because they were receptive to his novel ideas and were ready to speak Hebrew, as he insisted. Indeed, many could already speak Hebrew upon arrival in the country, while others were willing to improve their knowledge or begin learning the language. They passed on Hebrew to their children in the home, and in the kindergartens and schools they set up throughout the country. Thus, within a biblical generation, in the forty years between 1881-1921, a core of young, fervent Hebrew-language speakers was formed, with Hebrew as the unique symbol of their linguistic nationalism. This fact was acknowledged by the British mandate authorities, who on November 29, 1922, recognized Hebrew as the official language of the Jews in Palestine. The Hebrew revival was now complete, and Ben-Yehuda's lifelong dream had been fulfilled. Sadly, and perhaps significantly, only one month later, he succumbed to the tuberculosis

which had stalked him ever since his Paris days.

As we have pointed out, one should not say (as is often done) that before Ben–Yehuda, Hebrew was a "dead" language and that he single-handedly and miraculously revived it. Indeed, the term "dead" as applied to Hebrew is actually a much abused term. As the philologist Chaim Rabin noted in 1958, "...it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that at the time of Ben-Yehuda's first article in 1879, over 50 percent of all male Jews were able to understand the pentateuch, the daily prayers, etc. and some 20 percent could read a Hebrew book of average difficulty, allowing for a much higher proportion in eastern Europe, north Africa and Yemen, and a very much lower one in western countries." This being the case, we note Cecil Roth's penetrating axiom on Ben-Yehuda's role in the revival: "Before Ben-Yehuda... Jews could speak Hebrew; after him they did."

Ben-Yehuda, then, was the prophet and propagandist, the theoretician and tactician, the sign and symbol of the revival. He himself wrote in 1908 in his newspaper, Hatzvi, "For everything there is needed only one wise, clever and active man, with the initiative to devote all his energies to it, and the matter will progress, all obstacles in the way notwithstanding... In every new event, every step, even the smallest in the path of progress, it is necessary that there be one pioneer who will lead the way without leaving any possibility of turning back."

For the revival of the Hebrew language, that pioneer was Eliezer Ben-Yehuda himself.

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*Jack Fellman was born in the United States in 1945 and studied linguistics, semantics and Middle Eastern studies at Harvard, earning his doctorate in 1971. He came to Israel in 1968 and is a senior lecturer in the Department of Hebrew and Semitic Languages at Bar-Ilan University.

Source: [Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)

2. The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language

a. Excerpts from http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il/english1.html

The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language

The Historical Dictionary Project

The Historical Dictionary Project (HDP) is the research arm of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. It aims to encompass the entire Hebrew lexicon throughout its history; that is, to present every Hebrew word in its morphological, semantic, and contextual development from its first appearance in written texts to the present.

The Inauguration of the HDP:

Shortly after the founding of the Academy of the Hebrew Language in 1953, the president of the Academy renewed the previously suggested idea of creating a historical dictionary of Hebrew. In 1954, the Academy's plenum placed the dictionary on its agenda, and, in 1959, the HDP got underway following deliberations at the Academy and in scholarly forums. The HDP's initial step was to locate all the Hebrew texts from the post-biblical period on in order to create detailed catalogues known as <u>sourcebooks</u>. From the start, the HDP's founder Naftali Tur-Sinai/Torczyner decided to implement the use of a computer to process the material. Thus, concurrent with the founding of the HDP, what is now the **Computer Section** came into being.

The Workings of the HDP:

The HDP has two lexicographical sections: the **<u>Ancient Literature Section</u>** and the **<u>Modern Literature Section</u>** . The Computer Section is directly involved in the computerization of each section's data and the creation of a database for each. Initially, each literary work is typed into the computer. The text is then broken down into words and a dictionary entry is created for each. On the basis of the lexical entries a database was created in concordance form containing all the literary contexts in which the entry word occurs in chronological order. The composers of the lexical entries for the dictionary-in-the-making utilize the database in order to choose the most appropriate examples to illustrate each word's meaning….

The Ancient Literature Section

Since the biblical lexicon has been the subject of study throughout the ages and has been described in many dictionaries from the medieval age to the present, the Historical Dictionary begins with the post-biblical period. The Ancient Literature Section has compiled all Hebrew literary works from the closing of the biblical canon to the end of the Geonic period, and these works have been exhaustively recorded in the **Ancient Literature Database**. The section's aim is to identify every single written Hebrew word from antiquity and to create a national archive of the Hebrew lexicon available from the best manuscripts in libraries worldwide.

When we speak of ancient literature we must recognize that in the majority of cases the original copies are no longer extant. The sole material that accurately reflects ancient Hebrew is that found in epigraphic and archeological contexts: ancient funerary inscriptions, synagogue dedicatory inscriptions, coins, and seals. Only this material has reached us without the intervention of copyists.

The scrolls discovered in caves on the shores of the Dead Sea also provide an accurate witness of ancient Hebrew.

The majority of ancient Hebrew literature has, however, reached us in later copies. Some works were copied hundreds of times, one copy from another, leading to many scribal errors. The copyists also inserted "corrections" in places where they no longer understood the original text, thus obscuring the original language. Accordingly, the Ancient Literature Section attempts to locate the earliest witnesses of these works, the best manuscripts available from the pre-Gutenberg era, those least marred by deliberate or unintentional changes introduced by later copyists. The texts have been edited and processed in line with the best witness to their transmission - as established by scholarly research.

The Ancient Literature Section has nearly concluded the processing of all the works appearing in its **sourcebook**. Moreover, the computerized concordance of these works is nearing completion: the massive corpus has been analyzed into lexical entries and roots have been determined for each entry, and a distinction has been made between homophonic roots. The already-processed texts have yielded some 5,500,000 citations.

Ancient Literature Database

The ancient literature database of the Academy of the Hebrew language is now available online (http://hebrew-treasures.huji.ac.il). Utilizing the best witnesses from the most reliable transmissions, the site's nine-million-word corpus draws upon some 4,300 Hebrew sources from the classic rabbinic period (2nd century B.C.E.) through the geonic period (11th century C.E.). The database is expanded and updated on a regular basis.

Modern Literature Section

The Modern Literature Section, which began to function in 1969, takes as its starting point Hebrew works from the early German Haskalah period (mid-eighteenth century). Its **sourcebook** saw publication in 1977. The Modern Literature Section processes the Hebrew lexicon wherever and in whatever literary genre Hebrew was written: belles-lettres, science, rabbinics, journalism, and periodical literature, among others.

Guiding principles:

With the inauguration of this section, the board of the HDP established two guiding principles:

1. Unlike the Ancient Literature Section this section would process *selected* works only, since it is impossible and unnecessary to process each and every work, or even one percent of the material printed in Hebrew in recent times for the purposes of the Historical Dictionary. In practical terms, this means that only one to three works by each modern Hebrew writer could be selected, with the exception of Mendele Mokher Sefarim (also: Moicher Sforim), Hayyim Nahman Bialik, and Shmuel Yosef Agnon - whose complete works have been processed.

2. It is the earliest printed version of each selected work that forms the basis for the concordance. In practical terms this means searching for the earliest published versions of hundreds of Agnon's stories, each of Ahad ha-Am's essays, and of Bialik's poems, for example.

Each text is edited prior to its computerization and is proofread two to three times after it is has been entered.

What has been done to date?

At present, more than 600 treatises of varying length have been entered into the computer. These represent the works of 79 authors and comprise some 10,240,000 words. Of these a computerized dictionary concordance of 207 treatises containing some 3,355,000 words has been compiled.

b. Doron Rubinstein, "The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language"

Excerpts from http://kdictionaries.com/kdn/kdn12-3-7.html

This article introduces readers to the major research project of the Academy of the Hebrew Language – the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language.

The Academy of the Hebrew Language (AHL) was established following a decree of the *Knesset* [*Israeli parliament*], "The Supreme Institute of the Hebrew Language Act, 5713-1953", passed on 27 August 1953. The Academy replaced an earlier institution, 'The Hebrew Language Council'. The first plenary session was held on 16 November 1953, about three months following the legislation. Its first President was Naphtali Herz Tur-Sinai (Torczyner, 1886-1973, President of the AHL from its foundation until his death). The next Presidents were Professor Ze'ev Ben-Ḥayyim (born 1907, President 1973-1981), and Professor Joshua Blau (born 1919, President 1981-1993). The current AHL President, since 1993, is Professor Moshe Bar-Asher (born 1939).

About a year after its foundation, on 20 December 1954, at its eighth session, the Academy's plenum approved an agreement between the AHL and Bialik Institute publishing house of the Jewish Agency, "to publish a historical dictionary of the Hebrew language, containing the lexicon of Hebrew words and their meanings throughout history, from ancient times to our age. This dictionary shall be called 'The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language of the Academy of the Hebrew Language'" (*Proceedings of the AHL* 1-2.45, 1954-1955). At its next plenary session, on 2 March 1955, the plenum appointed the editorial board of the Dictionary. However, four more years passed before its shape was determined.

The founder and first editor of the Dictionary was Ze'ev Ben-Ḥayyim. He served as editor until his retirement in 1992, when the current editor, Professor Abraham Tal (born 1931), was appointed.

Ben-Ḥayyim spent a few months in Europe on his scientific work (end 1957-beginning 1958), and took advantage of this stay to travel and study historical dictionary projects across the continent. In a series of sessions of the editorial board (May-June 1958), he reported his findings and proposed a plan to organize the preparatory work of the Historical Dictionary (*Proceedings of the AHL* 5.62, 1958). Ben-Ḥayyim suggested basing work on the Dictionary from its outset on the use of computers, a revolutionary idea in those days.

On 2 January 1959, the editorial board endorsed Ben-Ḥayyim's proposal to "decide on one comprehensive historical dictionary to embrace all periods" (*Leshonenu* 23.118, 1959, and *Proceedings of the AHL* 6.87, 1959). This dictionary "may also serve as an excellent basis for the preparation of special Period Dictionaries at some later date."

This decision determined the shape of the Project from that day onwards, and during the following months, in April-May 1959, the preparatory work for the Dictionary, headed by Ben-Ḥayyim, started according to that program (*Proceedings of the AHL* 6.87, 1959).

The first attempt to compile such a comprehensive dictionary was made by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922), known as the "reviver of the Hebrew language": *Millon ha-Lashon ha-'Ivrit ha-Yeshana ve-ha-Ḥadasha* (*A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, 1908-1959).

The Historical Dictionary Project: From the Source Book of Ancient Literature to the *Ma'agarim* CD-ROM

… It is important to emphasize one feature of the concordance. Its structure and its code system enable a uniform treatment of texts from all layers of the Hebrew language: Biblical Hebrew, Mishnaic and Talmudic Hebrew, medieval Hebrew and modern Hebrew. The mere existence of this possibility – the possibility to treat texts from all the language layers in one system – is a remarkable illustration of the historical uniformity of Hebrew morphology. Despite all the – very many! – differences between the historical layers of the language, all of them together and each and every one of them on its own represent aspects of **one** language – Hebrew….

In 1998 there appeared the *Ma'agarim* [*Databases*] CD-ROM, including the Historical Dictionary's database from the period of the second century BCE to the first quarter of the fifth century CE. A second edition of this CD was published in 2001, where the database was expanded and included texts up to the first half of the eleventh century.

The department of modern literature and the department of medieval literature

Until 1969 the activity of the HDP focused on ancient literature. That year the department of modern literature was established. This department was intended to process sources from the years 1750-1947. Two events demarcate this 200-year period: beginning in the sixth decade of the eighteenth century, with the publication of the journal *Qohelet Musar* (edited by Moses Mendelssohn; only two issues of which appeared), among the heralds of the *Haskalah* period in Europe, and ending in the year 1947, before the establishment of the State of Israel. This date, which is some decades ago now, offers a better perspective for examining the state of the language in that period.

Two historical facts are at the essence of the work of the department of modern literature: one – the multitude of Hebrew sources in the said period, and the other – the printed book (or journal) being the major means for disseminating the writings of that period.

Thus, the editorial board made two decisions that differentiated between the work of the department of modern literature and that of the department of ancient literature: first – to process only a selection of sources from the relevant period, not all of them, and second – to process each source according to its first (and sometimes only) publication in print. Excluded from the first decision were three great authors, all the work of whom it was decided to process: Mendele Mokher Sefarim, Ḥayyim Nahman Bialik and Shmuel Yosef Agnon. The practical meaning of the second decision made it necessary to find the place of first publication of, for example, each of Agnon's hundreds of stories – and to locate the journal or the book where it was printed.

In 1977 the first pamphlet of the *Source Book* appeared "for the period from 1750 onwards [...] a selection of writings from the Hebrew belles-lettres (1860-1920)". The department of medieval litertaure was established at the end of 1999, with the aim of treating literature of the 700-year period between 1050-1750 CE. At present this department deals with the Geonic literature.

Intermediate summary

As of April 2004, the HDP databases have been supplied with about 3,500 sources ranging from one or a few words (inscriptions and old coins) to tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of words (the *Mishnah* and the *Tosefta*, books from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, etc). The total number of word tokens in these sources is about 18,500,000; about 8,500,000 of them have received lexicographical entries.

At present, the computer department of the Academy is developing new software for the HDP, and the three project departments are gradually proceeding to use it. The transformation to the use of the new software is accompanied by a real revolution in the structure of the Dictionary's databases, and it necessitates their comprehensive updating. The task of updating the ancient literature database has now been completed, and serves as the base for updating the modern literature database, which is currently being done….

The form of the Historical Dictionary:
The Root 'RB – Specimen Pamphlet **and a thought about the future**

We have so far dealt with describing the work of the HDP, with its source books and its databases. But what will be the form of the Dictionary itself?

The editorial board tried to answer this question in 1982 and published – on the pages of the journal *Leshonenu* – a specimen pamphlet, containing the complete lexicographic processing of one root of the Hebrew language – the root *'RB* (*Leshonenu* 46.3-4.165-267). The root *'RB* was chosen as a sample because of the many difficulties it poses to the lexicographer in determining its branches of meanings, whether because of homonomy or because of polysemy. As Ben-Ḥayyim, who edited the pamphlet, wanted to present in it the continuity of use of the words derived from the root *'RB*, he included references not only from the Dictionary's databases – the ancient literature database and the modern literature database – but also from sources from historical layers of the language not yet processed in the HDP.

However, this pamphlet was written and printed when the personal computer and information networks such as the Internet were still in their infancy. The enormous development that has occurred in information technology in recent years requires the Project to adapt continuously, and it will naturally have an influence on the design of the Dictionary. Nevertheless, the infrastructure work that has been done, is being done and will be done on the Project, offers a solid base for the compilation of the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language, whatever end form it may have.

4. Ben-Yehuda's uncontested role as the icon of the revival of Hebrew even found popular expression in a hit song in Israel.

Hebrew words: http://mp3music.gpg.co.il/lyrics/save.aspx?id=5736

English translation: www.hebrewsongs.com/song-eliezerbenyehuda.htm

ELIEZER BEN YEHUDA   אליעזר בן יהודה
מילים: ירון לונדון   לחן: מתי כספי

English	Hebrew
Like the prophets, zealous about Hashem*	כמו הנביאים הקנאים לשם
He was zealous about the verb, the adjective, and the noun.	הוא קינא לפועל ולתואר ולשם.
And at midnight, oil-lamp in his window,	ובחצות, העששית בחלונו,
He would write in his dictionary stacks	היה רושם במילונו תְּלֵי תְלים
and stacks of pretty words, words	מילים יפות, מילים עפות,
which fly, which roll from the tongue.	מתגלגלות מן הלשון.
Eliezer, when will you lie down to sleep	אליעזר, מתי תשכב לישון
You're practically bent over.**	הן קומתך כמעט אפיים שחה
And Hebrew, which has waited 2,000 years	והעברית אשר חיכתה אלפיים
Will still be waiting for you at dawn.	היא תמתין לך עד בוא השחר.
Eliezer Ben Yehuda,	אליעזר בן יהודה
An amusing Jew.	יהודי מבדח
Words, words, words	מילים מילים, מילים מילים
He invented with his feverish brain.	הוא בדה ממוחו הקודח.
If Hebrew has slept for 2,000 years, nu, so what?	אם נמה העברית אלפיים, נו אז מה,
Come, let's wake it up, and invent	הבה נעירנה ונמציא את היזמה,
	את המגהץ, את הפצצה, את הריהוט

"initiative"

  (*yozma*), clothes-iron (*mag-hetz*),

bomb   (*p'tzatza*), furniture (*rihut*). With

feather tip, in fluid writing,

He wrote *k'ruvit* (cauliflower), he wrote

g'lida (ice cream); he wrote all of the Ben

Yehuda Dictionary.

And he went on creating words,

And his fast quill didn't rest,

And the language grew

And didn't recognize itself in the morning.

בקצה נוצה בכתב רהוט.

כתב כרובית, כתב גלידה,

כתב את כל, את כל מילון בן יהודה.

עוד הוסיף מילים לברוא

ונוצתו המהירה לא נחה

והשפה גדלה

ולא הכירה את מראה דמותה

את מראה דמותה בבוא השחר.

Eliezer Ben Yehuda,

An amusing Jew.

Words, words, words

He invented with his feverish brain.

אליעזר בן יהודה

יהודי מבדח

מילים מילים, מילים מילים

הוא בדה ממוחו הקודח.

And when a son was born to him, he said:

This firstborn I will call Ben Yehuda, Itamar

Who from infancy to withering

From the day of his entering the covenant

  (brit-milah) until his death

Will have a covenant, with Hebrew***

And will fight to wipe out foreign language.

ובן נולד לו, וכזאת האיש אמר:

זה הבכור אקרא לו בן יהודה איתמר

שמינקות ועד קמילה, מיום בואו

בברית מילה ועד מותו-

כרותה לו ברית עם העברית

ומלחמה לו את הלעז להכרית.

Itamar - truly became a man,

Tall, handsome and well-spoken,

And the language he spoke was Hebrew.

Itamar Ben-Avi****

Whose father was a prophet,

איתמר - אכן היה לגבר,

קומת תמר ויפי צורה וסבר,

והלשון בפיו הייתה שפת עבר.

איתמר בן אבי,

שאביו היה נביא

31

A man after my own heart.   גבר כלבבי.

Eliezer Ben Yehuda,   אליעזר בן יהודה

An amusing Jew.   יהודי מבדח

Words, words, words   מילים מילים, מילים מילים

He invented with his feverish brain.   הוא בדה ממוחו הקודח.

Translator's notes:

 * Hashem (literally, the Name) is a way of saying God, without actually saying it (in order not to take God's name in vain). Shem (name) also means noun, and ha-shem means "the noun".

** He had TB and worked standing up, to stay alert and not give in to tiredness.

*** Brit-milah (bris/circumcision) = covenant (between the Jewish boy and God); the next line is, a covenant with Hebrew (brit im ha'ivrit).

Itamar Ben Yehuda was raised from infancy to hear and speak only Hebrew. Ben Yehuda worked on reviving and expanding the language as he grew up.
Mi-yom bo'o b'brit-milah v'ad moto
K'ruta lo brit im ha'ivrit
Umilchama lo et hala'az lehachrit.

There's a nice wordplay here. Milah has two meanings: 1) word and 2) circumcision.
Brit-milah means covenant of circumcision, but maybe here it can also be taken as a covenant of words. Also, ka-rat (k'ruta is the adjective) means to make a covenant, but hichrit (from the same root) means to wipe out.
Lyrics: Yaron London
Music: Matti Caspi
Transliteration, translation, links and notes by Malka Tischler