

Proposal for additional annotations for some modifier letters used for transliteration of Hebrew

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The German standard DIN 31636:2011-01 "Information und Dokumentation – Umschrift des hebräischen Alphabets" ("Information and documentation – Romanization of the Hebrew alphabet") lists the transliteration symbols to be used, as long as they are not simply basic Latin letters, by giving their Unicode value.

Especially the following modifier letters are used:

U+02B9 MODIFIER LETTER PRIME
to transliterate U+05F3 HEBREW PUNCTUATION GERESH

U+02BE MODIFIER LETTER RIGHT HALF RING
to transliterate U+05D0 HEBREW LETTER ALEF

U+02BF MODIFIER LETTER LEFT HALF RING
to transliterate U+05E2 HEBREW LETTER AYIN

The rationale behind these decisions was to ensure unambiguous representation independent of font selection.

Previous editions of DIN 31636 only showed the glyphs of a raised comma and a raised turned comma as transliteration characters for alef and ayin, without giving names for these transliteration characters.

As a research showed that U+02BC MODIFIER LETTER APOSTROPHE and U+02BB MODIFIER LETTER TURNED COMMA do not have adequate glyphs in several common fonts (where they resemble quotation marks instead, which often are straight especially in sans-serif fonts), the half rings were selected as they in fact are unambiguous and clearly distinguishable in common fonts.

This decision also has the advantage that the same transliteration characters are used for Hebrew alef/ayin and Arabic hamza/ain (the latter as specified in DIN 31635:2011-07).

Regarding the geresh, previous editions of DIN 31636 listed the "apostrophe" as transliteration character.

The decision now done ensures an appearance similar to the original character, clearly distinguishable from alef/ayin and (in most fonts) from a true apostrophe.

(The use of the the original U+05F3 in Latin text was not selected due to its bidi property "R".)

It is proposed that these decisions are reflected by adding the following annotations in the Unicode character tables:

U+02B9 MODIFIER LETTER PRIME
• transliteration of Hebrew geresh
→ 05F3 hebrew punctuation geresh

U+02BE MODIFIER LETTER RIGHT HALF RING
• transliteration of Hebrew alef
→ 05D0 hebrew letter alef

U+02BF MODIFIER LETTER LEFT HALF RING
• transliteration of Hebrew ayin
→ 05E2 hebrew letter ayin