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The Jewish Surnames in Bessarabia/Moldova: What makes our surnames unique

Yefim A. Kogan
Masters of Jewish Liberal Studies

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yefimk@verizon.net

JewishGen Bessarabia SIG Leader and Coordinator

www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia

Bessarabia on a map of Europe



The Jewish Surnames in Bessarabia/Moldova:

What makes our surnames unique

- Importance of Names
- Why we are interested in surnames? Can the surname tell us about the family who acquired that surname?
- Sources of information
- Categories of Surnames
- Specific to Surnames in Bessarabia
 - Surnames of Romanian origin or with Romanian endings
 - Surnames of Turkish origin
 - More about Toponymic surnames
- Bessarabian names in other regions, countries
- Questions

Importance of Names...

- A good name is better than fine oil. (Kohelet-Ecclesiastes 7:1)
- A good name is preferable to wealth. (Ketuvim - Proverbs 22:1)
- Every person has three names: one parents give them, one others call them, and one they acquire themselves. (Kohelet Rabba)
- The name of a person can determine his destiny. (Berachot 7b)

Importance of Names...

- Jews in Bessarabia and most likely everywhere else in Russian Empire, did not like the idea of getting hereditary names... The surnames were imposed on them, sometimes the Jewish Kahal or the town/shtetl administration decided of what the surnames were going to be.
- Many Jews ignored their surnames until later in 19 century

Why we are interested in surnames? Can the surname tell us about the family who acquired that surname?

- Jews and other peoples did not have surnames in the Russian Empire until end of 18 century or even beginning of 19 century
- 1804 Russian ukaz (law) says “each Jew must have or assume a hereditary family name that must be used without any change in all transactions and registers”
- Jews in Bessarabia did not have the surnames until 1812
- First laws pertaining Jews in Bessarabia were published in 1818 and 1835
- Every Jew must keep forever his hereditary surname or assumed family name without any change..., from legislature of April, 1835, Russian Empire

Why we are interested in surnames? Can the surname tell us about the family who acquired that surname?

- Not all Jews in Bessarabia had surnames in 19c...
- those of Turkish origin, mostly Turkish citizens did not have surnames until beginning of 20c
- Also citizens of Moldova (Moldavia) Principality (later became Romania) did not have surnames in 19c (Do not confuse with Republic of Moldova)

Jews were known as Khaim ben Avraham, or Sara bat Leyb

- The exact year of assignment of Jewish Surnames is unknown

Why we are interested in surnames? Can the surname tell us about the family who acquired that surname?

- In some cases, the surname provides a bit of data about the family who acquired that surname for the beginning
- Mostly likely that information is for the time of acquiring the surname, and that is for Bessarabia from 1812-1835
- Here are few examples:
 - Family lives in Bessarabia at the end of 19c, and the surname is **GROBOKOPATEL**. The surname is an occupational, and the meaning of the word from Russian is “grave digger”. We can tell that the surname was acquired in Russian Empire, maybe in Bessarabia, the occupation of the bearer of the name was grave digger.

More examples

- Family lives in Kherson gubernia in the beginning of 20c, and the surname is **KAUSHANSKIY**. The surname is of geographical origin from a shteitle of Kaushany, Bendery district, Bessarabia., and the ending –skiy is typical ending of Russian names... Most likely the bearer of the name or his/her parents lived in Kaushany at some point, but at a time of acquiring the surname moved to some other town or shtetle.
- Family lives in Mogilev-Podolskiy in the beginning of 20c, and the surname is **DASKAL**. The surname is of occupational origin and translating from Romanian it is a teacher. Most likely that family name was acquired in Bessarabia or Romania, and that the original bearer was a teacher. Also most likely that the original bearer of the name lived in a small place in Bessarabia or Romania.

Sources of information

- Avrom Pribluda, “To the History of Jewish Surnames”, 1987, Supplement to “Sovietish Heimland”, Moscow, in Yiddish, 64 pages
- Benzion C. Kaganoff, “A dictionary of Jewish names and their history”, Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, New Jersey
- Alexander Beider, “A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire”, Avoteynu, NJ, 2008, 1008 pages

Sources of information

- I want to thank Alexander Beider for writing Dictionaries of Jewish Surnames and also for helping me with this presentation, and providing some information from his Dictionary

Categories of Surnames

There are different categorization of Jewish surnames. Here are most common categories:

1. Patronymic names derived from one's father or paternal ancestors (includes some acronyms): Abramovich, Davidesku; Barmak- son of Reb Moses Kalman; Khardak – khatan (son-in-law) of Reb David Kalman
2. Matronymic names dervied from the mother or other female ancestors: Rivkin (Rivka), Dobrin (Dobrish), Khaikin (Khaya)
3. Geographical, place names or toponyms - will discuss in more details
4. Occupational surnames: Chizmar (Romanian-shoemaker), Chokla (Romanian – grave digger), Kroitor (Romanin – taylor), Bakal – Turkish for grosser,
5. From personal characteristics: Barbarosh (Romanian-red beard), Mititel (Romanian – very small), Kopmar (Romanian – big head), Kuchuk (Turkish – small)
6. Artificial surnames: Lup, Lupu – Romanian- wolf
7. Rabbinical surnames
8. From Kohen or Levite origin (includes some acronyms): Kogan, Cohen, Kats

Categories of Surnames

Below is a list of surnames by categories or types from Beider's dictionary. Includes Orgeev, Bessarabia, neighboring Podolia and the whole dictionary, Bessarabia Revision lists of 19 century, and Cemetery records, mostly of 20c

From A. Beider's Encyclopedia															
Percentage of Jewish Surnames Found in Russian Parliament Voter Lists by Type															
			Type of Surnames								Total Names		Total Records		
District/Gubernia	Year	1	2	3-Toponyms	4	5	6	7	8						
Letichev (Podolia)	1912	9.7	8.1	6.3	25.3	15.6	28.7	4	2.3		1120				
Orgeev (Bessarabia)	1907	8.8	4.7	18.5	27.7	16	17.3	3.7	3.3		1267				
The whole dictionary		12.5	7	33.3	15.4	12.3	17.7	1.2	0.6		71,121				
Revision Lists of 19c				15.3							5,610		81,438		
Cemetery records of 20c				12.4							6,019		19,647		

Revision Lists of 19 century. Includes Revisions from
1824, 1835, 1848, 1851, 1854, 1859, 1875

- 81,438 record uploaded to JewishGen. There are another 16,000 sent to JewishGen, but not yet available and not included into this research
- The earliest records are from Khotin district from 1824 - 2778 records – this set include only Head of Household
- The latest records are from 1875, Orgeev and villages of Orgeev district

Cemetery Records mostly from 20 century

- The records are result of indexing occurring last 2-3 years.
- 19,647 uploaded to JOWBR. Half of the records are from one cemetery in Kishinev – Doyna. There are also records from Bendery, Dubossary, Cahul, Beltsy, Tiraspol, Kiliya, Chimishliya, Comrat, Chadyr-Lunga

20 most popular Surnames in Bessarabia

Revision Lists of 19 century				Cemetery records, mostly of 20 century			
Surnames	Occurrences	Type		Surnames	Occurrences	Type	
SHVARTSMAN	962	N		-	628		
KOGAN	819	K		KOGAN	200	K	
ROYTMAN	774	N		GRINBERG	159	A	
VAYSMAN	760	N		SHVARTSMAN	130	N	
KOYFMAN	593	O		VAYSMAN	118	N	
RABINOVICH	573	O		RABINOVICH	114	O	
SHNAYDER	573	O		ROYTMAN	106	N	
LERNER	501	O		FISHMAN	79	O	
AKKERMAN	479	T		GOLDENBERG	77	A	
FISHMAN	437	O		LEVIT	76	K	
-	435			REZNIK	75	O	
PORTNOY	378	O		FRIDMAN	73	A	
GOLDENBERG	368	A		FELDMAN	70	O, N, A	
FELDMAN	360	O, N, A		AVERBUKH	69	T	
FIKHMAN	351	O		GERSHKOVICH	68	M	
ZILBERMAN	350	O		KLEYMAN	66	N	
GROYSMAN	332	N		KATS	63	K	
AVERBAKH	328	T		MOLADVSKIY	62	T	
KOFMAN	319	M		ABRAMOVICH	61	M	
ROYZENBERG	316	A		KAUSHANSKIY	60	T	
Total 10008		12.29%		Total 2354		12.00%	

Categories of Surnames

Toponyms from Revision Lists of 19 c and from Cemetery records of 20 century

- There are total of about 800 different surnames with variations derived from Toponyms, for about 12400 people (15.2% of total population)
- There are total of 398 surnames from Toponyms for about 2429 people (12.4% of total population)
- Total of Jewish surnames from these two troupes are 914!

Most popular Toponymic surnames in Bessarabia from Revision Lists of 19 c

Surname	Occurences	From town, region	District	Gubernia, region
AKERMAN, AKKERMAN, AKKERMON	479	Akkerman	Akkerman	Bessarabia
AVERBUKH, AVERBOKH, AVERBAKH, AVERBAUKH	328	Auerbach	Bavaria	Germany
BARSKIY	208	Bar	Mogilev-Podolsk	Podolia
CHERTKOV	202	Chertki	Vitebsk / Orsha	Vitebsk / Mogilev
OCHAKOVSKIY	180	Ochakov	Odessa	Kherson
BENDERSKIY	134	Bendery	Bendery	Bessarabia
SHARGORODSKIY	123	Shargorod	Mogilev-Podolsk	Podolia
LANDA	115	Landau	Pfalz	Germany
DULITSKIY	104	Dulitskoe	Vasilkiv	Kiev
BERSHADSKIY	103	Bershad	Olgopol	Podolia
CHOBRUTSKIY	91	Chobruch	Tiraspol	Kherson
KAUSHANSKIY, KAVUSHANSKIY	87	Kaushany	Bendery	Bessarabia
SVERDLIK	84	Sverdlikovo	Uman	Kiev
VOLMAN	84	Volma	Minsk	Minsk
YAROSLAVSKIY	79	Yaroslavka	Berdichev	Kiev
RASHKOVSKIY	75	Rashkov	Soroki / Olgopol	Bessarabia / Podolia
KOLKER	75	Kolki	Lutsk	Volhynia
SADAGURSKIY, SADEGURSKIY, SADOGURSKIY	72	Sadagora	Chernovitz	Bukovina
TALMAZSKIY	72	Tolmazy	Akkerman	Bessarabia
DORIN	70	Dory	Minsk	Minsk

Most popular Toponymic surnames in Bessarabia

From Cemetery records of 20 century

Surname	Occurences	From town, region	District	Gubernia, region	
AVERBAKH, AVERBUKH	69	Auerbach	Bavaria	Germany	
MOLDAVSKIY	62	Moldova		Moldova	
KAUSHANSKIY, KAVUSHANSKIY	60	Kaushany	Bendery	Bessarabia	
KISHINEVSKIY	58	Kishinev	Kishinev	Bessarabia	
BRODSKIY	48	Brody	Pruzhan /	Grodno / Galicia	
SHAPIRO	44	Speyer	Rhineland	Germany	
LITVAK	43	Litva		Lithuania	
OCHAKOVSKIY	41	Ochakov	Odessa	Kherson	
GALPERIN	38	Heilbronn	Wurtenberg	Germany	
BENDERSKIY	34	Bendery	Bendery	Bessarabia	
NEMEROVSKIY, NIMIROVSKIY	30	Nemirov	Bratslav	Podolia	
BERSHADSKIY	29	Bershad	Olgopol	Podolia	
TARNOPOLSKIY	29	Tarnopol		Galicia	
LADYZHANSKIY	28	Ladyzhin	Gaysin	Podolia	
TULCHINSKIY	27	Tulchin	Bratslav	Podolia	
RAPOPORT	25	Porto		Italy	
POLYAK	22	Poland		Poland	
MERESHENSKY	22	Meresheny	Kishinev	Bessarabia	
YAMPOLSKIY	22	Yampol	Yampol	Podolia	
GUREVICH	22	Horowits	Bohemia	Austria	

Categories of Surnames

Toponyms from Revision Lists of 19 c

			Revision Lists			Cemetery Records		
	Gubernia, Region		Number of surnames from the region	Number of people with these names		Number of surnames from the region	Number of people with these names	
	Bessarabia		238	3699		97	539	
	Podolia		93	1566		56	409	
	Germany		51	1202		20	184	
	Vilna		57	552		20	65	
	Kiev		44	804		36	181	
	Volhynia		35	483		22	119	
	Kovno		40	323		12	21	
	Grodno		37	467		19	117	
	Galicia		32	331		15	111	
	Minsk		26	384		17	85	
	Romania		17	191		8	37	
	Austria		16	239		9	54	
	Vitebsk		14	152		-	-	
	Poland		13	214		9	72	
	Kherson		-	-		12	106	
			713	10607		352	2100	

Toponyms from Revision Lists of 19 c

- Show the table with all Toponyms from the Revision
- Show statistics for that set
- Why Toponyms are most important among all surnames?

Language of the surnames

	From A. Beider's Encyclopedia										
	Percentage of Jewish Surnames Found in Russian Parliament Voter Lists by Language						Total Names				
		Percentage by Language									
	District/Gubernia	Yiddish/Ge rman	Slavik	Hebrew	Romanian	Turkish					
	Letichev (Podolia)	73.1	19.3	7.6	-	-	1119				
	Orgeev (Bessarabia)	55.5	31.5	7.1	5.3	0.5	1273				
	The whole dictionary	43	51.6	5.5	0.3	-	61,370				
	Revision Lists of 19c				995 - 1.2%	290 - 0.36%	81,438	43 surnames from Romanian			
	Cemetery Records of 20c				275 - 1.40%	71 - 0.36%	19,647	57 surnames from Romanian			

Jewish Surnames in Bessarabia

- From researching the surnames in Bessarabia: the voter's list compiled in 1906-7, the surnames are in many ways similar to those in neighboring Podolia gubernia.
- During migration of Jews after 1812, Bessarabia received many families from all around Pale... you can find Jews with surnames typical in Belorussia, Lithuania, etc.
- Some of the surnames were acquired in Bessarabia:
 - 1) toponyms – from local towns, villages, some of these names have Romanian endings: Mashkautsan, Selishtyan
 - 2) a number of surnames, mostly occupational are based of Romanian words...
 - 3) some of the names are derived from Turkish

Surnames from Revision Lists of 19 c derived from Romanian and Turkish

- 61 different surnames are derived from Romanian: among them toponyms, occupation names, etc.

Botezat ... common name for Jews who were baptized...

- 48 surnames have Romanian ending: “-an”, “-tsan” or “-yan”, also “-esku”
- Show the list of all names

Surnames derived from Romanian language (partial list)

Surname	Number of Occurences in Revision Lists	Number of Occurrence in Cemetery Records	category	from romanian word	translation	comments
ARZHINTAR			O	argintar	silversmith	
BANAR, BANARER	28	5	O	bănărie	mintage place	
BARBA			N	barbă	beard	
BARBALAT, BARBILIT, BARBYLAT	87	6	N	barbă lata	broad beard	
BARBAROSH, BARBEROSH	29	6	N	barbă rosie	red beard	
BOTEZAT, BOTEX	1	1		botezat	baptized	usually given to Baptized people
BOTNAR	3	1	O	butnar	cooper	
BOYANZHIU, BOYANZHU, BAYANZHU		2	O	boiangiu	dyer	
BULGAR, BOLGAR			T	bulgar	one from Bulgaria	
CHAKIR	11	1	N	ceakir	squint eyed	
CHEPREZAR			O	ceaprazar	passementerie worker	
CHIZMAR, TSIZMER			O	cizmar	shoemaker	
CHOBAN, CHABAN			O	cioban	shepherd	
CHOKLA, CHOKLER, TSOKLA	94	9	O	ciokla	grave digger	
CHOLAK, CHULAK	91	19	N	ciolak	cripple	
CHURAR			O	ciurar	sieve maker	
DASKAL, DASKAL', DOSKALOVICH (DOSKOLOVICH), DASKAL'SKIJ	60	7	O	dascal	teacher	
FONARZHI, FANARZHI	1		O	fanaragiu	lamplighter	

Surnames derived from Turkish language

	Surname	Number of Occurences in Revision Lists	Occurrence in Cemetery Records	category	translation		
	BAKAL	53	2	O	Groccer		
	BAKALOV	5		O	Groccer		
	BARNASUS				small nose		
	BOKAL	3		O	Groccer		
	KANTARZHI	50	21	O	Balance maker		
	KARADZHI		1		?		
	KEMECHEZHI		1		?		
	KHANZHI	18		O	innkeeper (hanci)		
	KHANZHIN	5		O	innkeeper (hanci)		
	KOLPACHY	15	6	O	Hatter		
	KOLPAKCHIY	61		O	Hatter		
	KOLPOKCHY	19	6	O	Hatter		
	KUCHUK	61	32	N	Small		
	MADLYARZHI		1	?	?		
	MERIMSCI		1	?	?		
	Total	290	71				

Internet resources on Jewish Bessarabia

- Bessarabia SIG website: www.jewishgen.org/bessarabia
- Aaron Shneer Gallery: <http://picasaweb.google.com/106995678358404531836>
- Jewish News portal : www.dorledor.info (Russian)
- My town Kishinev: <http://oldchisinau.com/> (Russian)
- Centrul Istoric al Chisinaului: <http://www.monument.sit.md/> (Romanian)
- Jewish Memory: <http://www.jewishmemory.md/eng/> (English, Russian)
- All about Bessarabia: <http://www.bessarabia.ru/> (English, Russian)
- Jewish Encyclopedia: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3185-bessarabia>
- Historical Maps of Moldova:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maps_of_the_history_of_Moldova
- Jewish Cemeteries of Kishinev and Orgeev: <http://www.pavetex.md/>
- Bessarabian Jews: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Bessarabian_Jews
- Preserving Jewish memory Centropa: <http://www.centropa.org/>
- Bessarabian Maps: <http://www.wwii-photos-maps.com/bessarabianmaps/index.html>
- Memorial: <http://www.obd-memorial.ru/html/index.html> (Russian)
- Memory Book: <http://www.nekropol.com/Holokost.htm> (Russian)

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Questions?