

UNCONVENTIONAL SURNAMES AMONG JEWS IN THE AREAS OF THE OLD KINGDOM OF ROMANIA

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Abstract: The paper aims to analyze, from a historical and sociolinguistic perspective, the phenomenon of Jews adopting Romanian surnames or adapting foreign surnames to the Romanian cultural surroundings. Based on a database of name records of Jews in Greater Romania during the WWII period, the conclusion can be drawn that about 14% of the surnames used by Jews in the scope area were of Romanian origin or Romanianized. A few categories of such surnames are analyzed, among them surnames derived from old-style patronymics and matronymics, personal characteristics, toponyms as well as occupations, in order to understand the underlying motivation and significance.

Keywords: surname, onomastics, etymology, linguistics.

When speaking of Jews in the Old Kingdom of Romania, that is, the provinces of Walachia, Moldavia and Dobruja, one would think their names to be, rather obviously, of foreign – generally German or Slavic – extraction, such as *Rosenberg* and *Blumenfeld* or *Berkovitz* and *Naumovski*. According to documentation from the 1930s and 1940s, the most frequent surnames among Jews in Greater Romania were indeed, as expected, *Grinberg*, *Schwartz*, *Katz*, *Schechter* and *Segal*.

There were, of course a few exceptions, notably the “Spanish” surnames of the Sephardic Jews in Bucharest and some smaller towns in Walachia, such as *Alcalay*, *Bejarano*, *Eskenaszy*, *Nahmias* or *Profeta*, and examples of Romanian surnames adopted by Jews presumably in order to “hide their Jewish origin”, according to the narrative of the time. The names of writers and publicists such as Benjamin Fundoianu (formerly Wechsler), Mihail Sebastian (Iosef Hechter), Barbu Nemțeanu (Benjamin Deutsch) or Ilarie Voronca (Eduard Isidor Marcus) were rather well known at the time. At the same time, surnames formed with the Romanian patronymic suffix *-escu*, such as *Alterescu*, *Iosipescu*, *Naumescu*, *Segalescu*, were generally perceived as simple adaptations of the respective foreign surnames: *Alterovitz*, *Iosipovitz*, *Naumshon* or *Segalovitz*.

When analyzed on its own right however, the phenomenon of Jews adopting Romanian surnames or adapting their foreign surnames to the Romanian cultural surroundings appears to be much more extensive and complex than previously thought. On the basis of names documentation available to me, the conclusion can be drawn that up to 14% of the surnames used by Jews in the Old Kingdom of Romania were of

Romanian origin or Romanianized and therefore surprisingly “unconventional” by the standards of the time.

Jews are documented in the Romanian lands since the Roman period. Jews of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic origin settled beginning with the 16th century. Successive censuses register the evolution of the Jewish population since the beginning of the 19th Century: about 20,000 in 1820 (2.2% of the total population), 135,000 (3%) in 1859, 266,652 (4.5%) in 1899, 239,967 (3.3%) in 1912 in the Old Kingdom of Romania, and 728,115 (4%) in 1930 in Greater Romania. It is the names of this Jewish population, 99% of Ashkenazic origin, that constitute the subject of this study.

The linguistic analysis of Jewish Romanian and Romanianized surnames is based on an onomastic database that includes 276,095 names records documenting Romanian Jews present on the territory of Greater Romania. It was assembled in great part from data originating in the Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, documenting Jews listed by the Romanian authorities for persecution on racial grounds (forced labor, deportation, ghettos and camps inmates’ lists) during the Holocaust period (1940–1944), as well as from different additional, published and unpublished, sources relevant to the first half of the 20th century.

The database contains 156,401 personal records having reference to a specific place of birth, which is the main indicator as to the origin/use of a specific surname. The breakdown by regions is as follows:

– Bukovina	36.99%
– Bessarabia	28.36%
– Moldavia	19.46%
– Walachia	8.07%
– Transylvania	6.31%
– Romania, no specific location	0.81%

Of these records, 93.5% refer to Jews born in the “extended” Old Kingdom (including Bukovina and Bessarabia as former parts of historical Moldavia) and document 28,369 different surnames with their respective phonetic and graphic variants. An analysis of these surnames shows that close to 92% of them are foreign or “imported” Jewish surnames, about 0.7% (200 surnames) are Sephardic and around 7.8% (2,229 surnames) are either Romanian or Romanianized. It is important to note that when referring to the Old Kingdom strictly, to the exclusion of Bessarabia and Bukovina, the percentage of Romanian or Romanianized surnames proves to be significantly higher, reaching 13.6% (Avram 2012). Within this last group, I will briefly refer to a few categories of such “unusual” surnames.

Surnames derived from patronymics and matronymics

Towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, when it became necessary to create a whole new civil registration system in Romania, a general trend developed of adopting surnames based on the name of the father (rarely mother) with the addition of the suffixes *-escu* and *-an(u)*. Among Jews, this trend

resulted in surnames such as *Alterescu*, *Aronescu*, *Froimescu*, *Ițicescu*, *Lăzărescu*, *Segalescu* or *Aroneanu* and *Lăzăreanu*. A parallel pattern ending in *-ea* is also represented: *Berea*, *Conea*, *Haichea*, *Perlea*.

Surnames derived from old-style patronymics

The traditional patronymic pattern in the Romanian lands was *Ion {fiu} a lu' Petru*, which was paralleled by the equivalent Slavonic pattern *Ion sin Petru*, where *sin* means 'son' (Romanian *fiu*) (Jordan 1983: 21). Slavonic was the sacred language of the Orthodox Church and by extension used in state chancellery. In Romanian documents from the 16th through the 18th centuries the words *sin* (or *sân*) and *fiu* are coexistent as patterns for names registration. However, *sin* faded out and disappeared at the beginning of the 19th century. Jews adopted and used both patronymic patterns, which in fact matched exactly the traditional Hebrew one (*Isaac ben Abraham*): *Cerbul jidov sân Moscul* (Iași, 1755), *Leiba fiul lui Solomon* (Burdujeni, 1861). This resulted in a multitude of Jewish surnames such as *Sin Aizic*, *Sin Bercu*, *Sin Faibiș*, *Sin Herșcu*, *Sin Iancu* as well as *Sin Golda*, *Sin Haia*, *Sin Lea*.

Surnames derived from old-style matronymics

The common Romanian matronymic pattern was *Ion {fiu} a{l} Mariei* using the genitive case, later reduced to *a Mariei* where the suffix *-ei* is the specific mark as in *A Mariei* or *Amariei*. This is a rather antiquated vernacular pattern compared with other patronymics. Nevertheless, it too was adopted and used by Jews, resulting in surnames such as *Abasei*, *Aperlei*, *Ameiroaei* as well as *Adăscăliței* ('the teacher's son/daughter'), *Amoașei* ('the midwife's'), *Avădanei* and *A Văduvei* ('the widow's') and even *Arabinului* ('the rabbi's').

Surnames derived from male or female given names as such, with no patronymic or matronymic suffixes

These are surnames formed according to the pattern [XY], where Y is the name of the father and the genitival article was lost: *Ion Petru*. It is a very simple pattern consisting of the given name followed by the father's name as is, without any additions (suffixes or genitive mark), popular and well documented in the Romanian lands. This is a very common and especially productive surname creation pattern that was also adopted by Jews. Here are surnames having a specifically Romanian graphic or phonetic form: *Avram* (as opposed to *Abraham* or *Avrum*), *Bercu* (*Berko*), *Herșcu* (*Hershko*), *Iancu* (*Jankel*), *Leibu* (*Leib*), *Marcu* (*Marko* or *Marcus*), *Pincu* (*Pinkas*), *Zisu* (*Züs* or *Zis*). Most of these bear the distinctive mark of the suffix *-u(l)* common to Romanian names. Others are based on given names that underwent a more advanced adaptation process to Romanian resulting in forms, sometimes hypocoristic, such as in *Elișcu* from *Elia* or *Elias*, *Manașcu* from *Manase*, *Moscu* from *Moses*, *Nechemne* from *Nechemia*, *Simca* from *Simcha*, *Ștrul* from *Srul*.

Surnames derived from uncommon given names

“Calque” translated names as early creations stemming from the need to make unknown foreign names more familiar through *ad-hoc* literal translation into Romanian, which later resulted in surnames such as *Cerbu* (*Hirsch* ‘deer’), *Leu* (*Leib* ‘lion’), *Ursu* (*Ber* ‘bear’) as well as *Lup*, *Lupu* (*Wolf*) that are equivalent to common Romanian nouns.

Another group consists of given names created by means of *sui generis* phonetic adaptation and transformation into new names unique to the Romanian lands: very common Jewish names that in earlier times were unknown or unfamiliar to the local population who struggled and mispronounced them until transforming them, by means of different phonetic processes, into new names altogether. Through a similar process by which the Late Latin name *Ludovicus* became *Louis* in French, *Joseph* evolved to a Romanian vernacular rendering as *Iosub* (or *Iosip*) that became common among Romanian Jews. Following the same principle, *Buium* is the rendering of *Benjamin*, *Hoișie* of *Hoshea* – *Joshua*, *Mates* of *Matatias*, *Nuță* probably of *Nathan* (see the Yiddish diminutive form *Nute*), *Șaim* probably of *Yeshayahu* (see the Yiddish form *Shaya*).

Surnames derived from uncommon given names with patronymic suffixes

Some of the “native” Jewish given names mentioned above also served as a basis for the formation of other surnames with the Romanian suffix *-escu* as in *Iosipescu* and *Lupescu*. But what is most interesting is the creation of Romanian Jewish surnames with the addition of non-Romanian suffixes such as the Slavic *-vici* as in *Buiumovici*, *Iosubovici*, *Iosupovici*, *Lupovici*, *Oișiovici*, *Șaimovici* and the German/Yiddish *-so(h)n* as in *Buiumzon*, *Iosubzon*, *Șaimzon*.

Surnames derived from personal characteristics

Surnames describing physical characteristics, by far the most numerous

Bălan(u) (‘blond, fair-haired’), *Barbălată* (‘wide-bearded’), *Barbăroșie* (‘red-bearded’), *Buzatu* and *Buzilă* (‘thick-lipped’), *Ciacăru* (‘cross-eyed’), *Ciuntu* (‘one-handed, maimed’), *Crețu* (‘curly-haired’), *Ghebosu* (‘the humpbacked’), *Lungu* (‘the tall one’), *Pătatu* (‘speckled’ or ‘freckled’), *Roșcovan(u)* (‘red-haired’), *Șchiopu* (‘the lame’), *Știrbu* (‘gap-toothed’), *Surdu* (‘the deaf one’).

Surnames describing character and moral aspects

Doibani (‘cheap, of inferior quality’), *Fudulu* (‘the arrogant’), *Pricep* (‘skilled, adroit’), *Șiretu* (‘the astute, sly’).

Surnames describing legal status

Raia, *Sudit* and *Supusu* (‘subject’), *Băjenaru* (‘refugee, exile’) also used to refer to the invited settlers (Jews and others), *Pribeagu* (‘vagrant, wanderer’), *Pripas* (‘stray, by extension vagrant, wanderer’), *Venetic* (‘foreigner, wanderer’).

It is worth noting that many of the physical characteristics emphasized by these surnames reflect the local popular image, even downright stereotype, of the Jew: red or fair-haired, bearded, freckled, astute. Surnames such as *Pribeagu*, *Pripas* and *Venetici* include a pejorative connotation, expressing the perceived status of the Jew as a rootless foreigner and alien.

Surnames derived from Romanian words describing objects, animals (zoonyms) and plants (phytonyms)

Occupations-related surnames

Instead of the name of the actual occupation, here we have that of its end product or of an instrument or tool used for exercising the occupation: *Ciubotă* ('boot, shoe'), *Cureloi* ('leather belt'), *Talpă* ('shoe sole'), *Căldare* ('pail, cauldron'), *Rateș* ('inn'), *Spirit* ('spirits'), *Colțun* ('sock'), *Degetaru* ('thimble'), *Cântar* ('balance, scales'), *Cucuruz* ('corn, maize'), *Cumpănă* ('balance, scales'), *Brânză* ('cheese'), *Râșpel* ('rasper'), *Cauciuc* ('rubber').

Surnames describing products traded by or associated with Jews, or ad-hoc nicknames whose original reason for being chosen is totally lost to us

Cimpoi ('bag pipe'), *Cioară* ('crow; dark skinned'), *Clopot* ('bell'), *Cocoș* ('cock, rooster'), *Coșciug* ('coffin, casket'), *Frunză* ('leaf'), *Găină* ('hen'), *Gologan* ('copper, coin'), *Graur* ('starling; grey or dark'), *Șanț* ('ditch'), *Scânteie* ('spark'), *Țapul* ('he-goat'), *Urzica* ('nettle').

It is most probable that the surnames in the last two categories originated from popular, sometimes ironic and sometimes derogatory, nicknames by which the native Jews in these specific regions used to be called or known by their Romanian neighbors and which, in time, were registered in local records and became hereditary surnames.

Surnames derived from toponyms formed preferably with the suffix *-(e)anu* or *-an*, usually showing the person's place of origin

Surnames reminiscent of the names of small or remote villages (the district is given within parentheses)

Aroneanu from Aroneni (Iași), *Baranceanu* and *Baronceanu* from Baroncea (Soroca), *Bolbocean(u)* from Bolbocii Noi or Bolbocii Vechi (Soroca), *Brănișteanu* from Braniștea (Moldavia or Bessarabia), *Broscăuceanu* from Broscăuți (Dorohoi) or Broscăuții Noi or Broscăuții Vechi (Storojineț), *Cireșeanu* from Cireș (Storojineț), *Clejan* from Cleja (Bacău), *Corlăteanu* from Corlăteni (Dorohoi), *Cornișteanu* and *Corneșteanu* from Cornești (Moldavia or Bessarabia), *Coțușteanu* from Coțușca (Dorohoi), *Dagățanu* from Dagăț (Roman), *Dămideanu* from Dămideni (Botoșani) and others.

Surnames based on names of larger and better known locations

Bârlădeanu from Bârlad, *Botoșăneanu* from Botoșani, *Bucureștean(u)* from București, *Burdujeanu* from Burdujeni, *Cernăuțean(u)* from Cernăuți, *Craioveanu* from Craiova, *Darabăneanu* from Darabani, *Dorohonceanu* and *Doronceanu* from Dorohoi, *Fălticineanu* from Fălticeni, *Focșăneanu* and *Focșeneanu* from Focșani, *Focșeanu* from Focșani, *Gălățeanu* from Galați, *Herțan(u)* and *Herțeanu* from Herța, *Ieșan(u)*, *Ieșeanu* and *Eșean(u)* from Iași, *Mihăileanu* from Mihăileni, *Rașcovan* from Rașcov or Vadul Rașcov, *Săveanu* from Săveni, *Suceveanu* from Suceava, *Sulițeanu* from Sulița, *Tecuceanu* from Tecuci, *Văleanu* from Văleni, *Vișcăuțan* from Vășcăuți and others.

Surnames derived from occupations and professions

In Romanian, the articulation of the word is generally done by adding the suffix *-ul* to the word (masculine gender); in the spoken language the final *-l* is not always heard. Most occupational surnames are formed with the addition of the suffix *-u(l)* to the noun denoting the occupation.

A simple categorization of the occupation-based Romanian Jewish surnames gives us the following broadly defined economic categories.

Manual crafts

– clothes, caps and accessories: *Pânzaru* ('fabric maker, weaver'), *Boiangiu* ('dyer'), *Croitoru* ('tailor'), *Blănaru* ('furrier'), *Cojocar* ('fur coat maker'), *Cușmaru* ('fur cap maker'), *Șepcaru* ('cap maker');

– leather and footwear: *Dubălaru* ('tanner'), *Ciubotaru* ('shoemaker'), *Tălpălaru* ('shoe sole maker'), *Curelaru* ('belt maker');

– food and beverages: *Grisaru* ('miller/grinder'), *Moraru* ('miller'), *Pitaru* ('baker'), *Covrigaru* ('pretzel maker'), *Beraru* ('beer brewer'), *Răchieru* ('liquor distiller'), *Casapu* ('butcher'), *Oțetaru* ('vinegar maker');

– woodwork and carpentry: *Stoleru* ('cabinet maker'), *Butnaru* ('barrel maker'), *Rotaru* ('wheelwright');

– metal work: *Argintaru* ('silversmith'), *Căldăraru* ('cauldron maker'), *Covaliu* ('blacksmith');

– other manual crafts: *Petraru* ('stone cutter'), *Cărbunaru* ('charcoal burner'), *Scorțaru* ('carpet maker'), *Frânghieru* ('rope maker').

Transportation

– freight transport: *Sacagiu* ('water carrier'), *Harabagiu*, *Căruceru* ('waggoner');

– passenger transport: *Birjaru*, *Surugiu* ('coach driver');

– horse dealership: *Geambașu* ('horse dealer').

Commerce and trade

– cereals and food: *Făinaru* ('wheat flour dealer'), *Bacalu* ('grocer');

- beverages: *Crășmaru* ('tavern keeper'), *Făgădau* ('inn keeper');
- general trade: *Crainic* ('announcer, crier'), *Telal* ('broker'), *Tutungiu* ('tobacconist').

Agriculture and farming

- fruit trees: *Meraru* ('apple orchard attendant'), *Livădaru* ('orchard attendant');
- sheep herding: *Ciobanu*, *Oieru* ('shepherd');
- miscellaneous: *Pescaru* ('fisherman or fishpond attendant'), *Țăranu* ('peasant, farmer').

Services

- related to food and beverages: *Ciuraru* ('flour sifter'), *Cantargi* ('merchandise weigher'), *Cotaru* ('barrel weigher');
- related to personal hygiene: *Bărbieru* ('barber'), *Ferederu* ('bath attendant');
- miscellaneous: *Fanargi* ('lamplighter'), *Cioclu* ('grave digger, undertaker').

Liberal professions

- related to Jewish tradition: *Dascălu* ('provincial school teacher'), *Hahamu* ('ritual slaughterer; rabbi'), *Ceașu* ('synagogue sexton');
- medicine and pharmacy: *Doctor* ('physician'), *Oculist* ('eye doctor'), *Spițeru* ('chemist');
- miscellaneous: *Muzicantu* ('musician'), *Țimbălaru* ('cembalo player'), *Tălmăciu* ('translator').

Administration

- estate administration: *Șafaru*, *Șufaru*, *Vătafu* ('administrator, supervisor');
- tax collection: *Tacsier*, *Mazilu* ('tax collector');
- military service or guard duty: *Călărașu* ('cavalry soldier'), *Pușcaru* ('rifle man'), *Străjeru*, *Pindaru* ('watchman');

Credit and finances

Creditor ('creditor'), *Zarafu* ('money changer').

Archaic and obsolete occupations

- *Orendaru* from *orendar* ('lessee of an inn or tavern') – disappeared, a modern related term is *arendăș* ('lessee') used mainly in relation to farming land;
- *Velniceru* from *velnicer* ('liquor distiller') – disappeared, a modern related term is *răchier* ('liquor distiller');
- *Mahalu* from *mahal* ('porter of barrels') – disappeared, a modern related term is *hamal* ('porter'); from Turkish *hamal*;
- *Mindirigiu* from *mindirigiu* ('mattress maker') – disappeared, from Turkish *minderci*;

- *Țimbălaru* from *țimbălar* ('cembalo player') – disappeared, replaced by *țambalagiu*;
- *Mungiu* from *mungiu* ('candle maker') – archaic, replaced by *lumânărar*; from Turkish *munci*;
- *Sedecaru* from *saidecar* ('silversmith') – archaic, replaced by *argintar*; from Turkish *sadekar*.

In addition, a long list of occupational surnames include the suffix *-iu(l)*, a vestige of an archaic form that was later abandoned and contracted to *-u(l)*: *Berariu* (later *Beraru*), *Birjariu*, *Blănariu*, *Butnariu*, *Căruceri*, *Ceprazariu*, *Ciubotariu*, *Ciurariu*, *Cofariu*, *Cojocariu*, *Cotariu*, *Cotiugariu*, *Covrigariu*, *Croitariu*, *Cușmariu*, *Făinariu*, *Grisariu*, *Morariu*, *Pitariu*, *Rotariu*, *Stoleriu*, *Vădrariu* and others.

All the occupational surnames in the last category have in common a number of distinctive features: they are based on archaic and obsolete occupations (Burci 2009) and/or include the suffix *-iu(l)* whose presence speaks to their antiquity. Those features point, in my opinion, to an earlier period corresponding to the first part of the 19th century and perhaps even earlier.

Conclusions

The Romanian or Romanianized surnames used by Jews could be classified into a few main different categories according to their etymology and formation:

- 22% are derived from toponyms formed with the suffix *-(e)an(u)*: *Cornișteanu*, *Fundoianu*, *Herțanu*;
- 21% are derived from names of occupations, formed with the suffix *-u(l)*: *Cojocaru*, *Boiangiu*, *Harabagiu*, *Sacagiu*;
- 18% are derived from old-style patronymics and matronymics: *Sin Bercu*, *Sin Feibiș* or *Abasei*, *Aperlei*;
- 9.5% are derived from patronymics formed with the suffix *-(e)scu*: *Alterescu*, *Avramescu*, *Suhărescu*;
- 8% are derived from given names as such, with no suffixes: *Iancu*, *Lupu*, *Leibu*;
- 6% are derived from personal characteristics formed with the suffix *-u(l)*: *Șchiopu*, *Lungu*, *Ciacăru*.

The fact that about 35% of these surnames are derived from patronymics and matronymics with or without suffixes is fitting both the Jewish and non-Jewish tradition. But the fact that the percentage of surnames derived from old-style patronymics and matronymics is double than that of patronymics formed with the modern suffix *-(e)scu* points to an earlier, pre-modern and perhaps less urbanized phase of the Romanian society, when old fashion names formation patterns were still prevalent. The Jews shared in the patterns popular at that time.

A large percentage (22%) of surnames is derived from toponyms, which generally recall the place of birth or residence of a person as a point of reference or identification. These are surnames derived from names of places mainly from Moldavia,

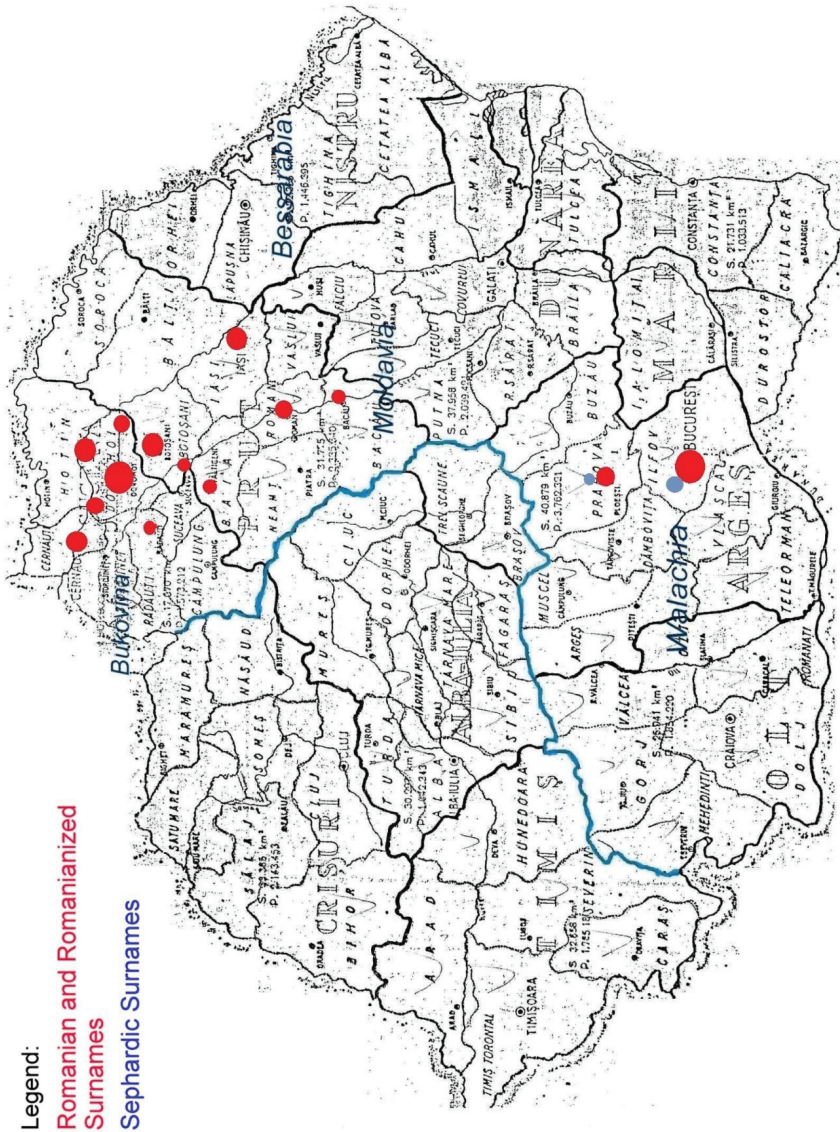
more rarely from Walachia, pointing to a specific demographic concentration. The fact that a large number of these toponyms refer to simple, sometimes obscure, villages as opposed to provincial towns (*târg*) and cities is proof of an extended Jewish presence in the rural areas of the country.

Lastly, 21% of the surnames are derived from names of occupations and mostly within what was considered “productive” branches of the economy such as manual crafts and transportation (as opposed to trade and finances). Occupational surnames are good proof of integration of the Jewish population into and their contribution to the national economic effort.

Most of the Romanian or Romanianized surnames documented as being used by Jews were concentrated in the former Romanian districts of Dorohoi, Botoșani, Baia and Iassy. It could therefore be said that they are specific of the early Jewish settlement in the northern half of Moldavia, at a time when the Jews and their Romanian neighbors did not yet have hereditary, formal surnames and identified themselves using the same simple and common popular patterns. This assumption is further strengthened by the fact that Jews coming to the Romanian principalities in later times, especially after 1830, already had formal surnames imposed on them through legislation in Habsburg Galicia or the Russian Empire. There was not much of a social status mark to gain in a Romanian surrounding by the middle of the 19th century by changing one’s foreign sounding surname to a local one such as *Sin Bercu*, *Buium*, *Ciacâru*, *Gologan* or *Mindirigiu* for example. These unconventional surnames must have been in use long before among the native Jews.

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Map: Geographic location of the main concentrations of Roman and Romanized Jewish Surnames