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**Historical Implications of Jewish Surnames in the Old Kingdom of Romania**

**ABSTRACT**

Linguistic and semantic features in names, and surnames in particular, constitute a rich corpus of evidence related to and influenced by historical phenomena such as migrations, occupational structure, acculturation, relations authorities vs. minorities. Few attempts have been made, however, to use the analysis of Jewish surnames to verify and/or clarify different aspects and trends of the Jews' history in specific region and period.

The present study is an attempt to explore a new approach in historical research by applying onomastic tools to analyze the surnames used by Jews as an additional and valid research method.

There are no systematic studies on the surnames used by Jews in the Old Kingdom of Romania (defined below): the application of this historical-onomastic research approach to Romanian Jewry should provide, in addition, a detailed description of the particular naming patterns and specific surnames.

This study's contribution is expected to be threefold:

- It proposes a new methodology based on a comprehensive onomastic (linguistic-semantic) and socio-historical analysis of a surnames corpus representative of the Jewish population in a specific region and time frame, in order to obtain a better understanding of the history of the Jews in that historical context.
- The study is intended to be a test-case for the application of this methodology to the analysis of the surnames used by Jews in the Old Kingdom of Romania.

- The study assembled a large surnames corpus documented for the Jewish population in the Romanian lands over more than four centuries, structured as a dictionary of most of the Romanian and Romanized<sup>1</sup> surnames adopted or used by Jews in these areas.

The study analyzes the surnames and naming patterns of Romanian Jews since early documentation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century until 1944 (end of WWII in Romania). It is applied to Romanian lands where the Romanian language was official (Moldavia and Walachia, later united in the [Old] Kingdom of Romania), focusing on Romanian and Romanized surnames (i.e. adapted to the Romanian language) as likely to provide evidence about the Jews' interaction with their surroundings.

The study is based on numerous sources containing Jewish given names and surnames in Romania, published and unpublished documents, especially Holocaust period material in Yad Vashem Archives and Pages of Testimony collection. The subsequent names database includes 276,095 name records on Romanian Jews, 156,401 having reference to a place of birth, main indicator as to the origin of a specific surname.

The names database covers 28,127 surnames, including phonetic and graphic variants; 91% are of German-Yiddish or Slavic origin. About 2,229 (7.74%) from 18,512 individual records, are either Romanian or Romanized, categorized as follows: 17.55% derived from toponyms (Fundoianu), 16.86% from occupational names (Cojocar), 14.29% from old-style patronymics (Sin Bercu, Aperlei), 7.72% from patronymics (Alterescu), 4.9% from personal characteristics (Șchiopu).

The onomastic analysis found a high concentration of Romanian or Romanized surnames in Northern Moldavia attesting to a Jewish settlement in the 17-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. **21%** of toponym-based surnames (**40%** of records) refer to villages in Northern Moldavia and Northern Bessarabia. Occupation-based surnames constitute 16.75% (**39.39%** of records): **65.12%** in the categories of manual crafts and transportation; commerce and services, credit and finance only 12.70%.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Romanized' will be used here with its linguistic meaning of graphic, phonetic and morphologic adaptation to the Roman/Latin language, referring in this particular case to the **Romanian** language.

The adoption of Romanian and Romanianized surnames by Jews developed as mostly unhindered a process, expression of their willingness to integrate. Lack of legal enforcement of surnames for Jews until late in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century implies a lack of Romanian official interest in Jewish integration.

I believe these findings of the analysis of the Romanian and Romanianized surnames adopted and used by Romanian Jews can help support and complement the historical documentation at the basis of Jewish historiography in Romania.

The resulting surnames dictionary, on the other hand, should bring to public light a lesser known chapter of Jewish onomastics, documenting and preserving particular local naming patterns and specific surnames, many of which disappeared together with their bearers in the Holocaust. I hope that Jewish genealogists will find in it a useful work tool.