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Estate¹ and other categories of Jews in Bessarabia, Russia in the 19th century

Introduction

The first laws concerning the Jews in Bessarabia were issued by the Russian government in 1818. “Regulations of establishing Bessarabia district” required Jews to join one of three estates, or classes: merchants, petty bourgeois (townsmen, middle class), or farmers. The “Regulations” stated that “...privilegias (privileges) given to Jews by Moldavian Princes (gospodars), will be kept in their entirety”, while the existent Russian legislation concerning the Jews did not apply, since Bessarabia had autonomous status. The regulations even authorized the Bessarabian Jews to reside in the villages and engage in leasing activities and inn keeping, in contradiction to the Russian "Jewish Statute" of 1804. The Jews could even buy a piece of empty land for farming.

The main source of information for the research presented in this paper was the primary source documents – Revizskie Skazki – Revision Lists, the census or family lists to identify families for taxation and men to draft into the army. Among many other sources used was Jewish Encyclopedia written by Brochhauz and Efron, Russia, 1908-13.

Estates in Russian Empire in the 19th century

Russian society had many different estates people belonged to. Following is the list of estates to which Jewish people may belong in the 19th century of Tsarist Russia.

Купцы (Kuptsy) – Merchants. They were owners of factories, plants, businesses, large stores, etc. From the time of Ekaterina the Great, families who had more than 500 rubles may be part of merchant estate. The merchants were divided into three guilds by the level of affluence.

Мешане (Meshchane) – Townsmen, Petty Bourgeois, Bourgeois, Tradesmen, Middle Class. They were owners of small shops, small sales people, peddlers, craftsmen, etc. In some places artisans were a separate estate, but in Bessarabia they were registered as petty-bourgeois.

Земледельцы (Zemledeltsy) – Farmers, peasants. These are people who worked on the land. In Bessarabia Jews were allowed to own land too. There were many Jewish agricultural

¹ A major political or social group or class. In Russian – Сословие (Soslovie).

colonies established in 19 century in Bessarabia and Novo Russia. Sometime these Jews were named colonists in the government documents, if they lived in one of the 17 colonies in Bessarabia. In other places there was also a term – Казённые поселяне - Kazyonye poselyane - State-Owned Settlers used for farmers.

Бурлаки (Burlaki) – Temporary workers, hard workers, employees, usually in the Revizskie Skazki burlaki were included at the end of Meshchane (Middle Class) lists, and most of the time they were single men, but sometimes they were married with children.

Почётные Граждане (Pochyotnye Grakhdane) - Honorary Citizens hereditary or private. That estate was a thin layer between the nobility and merchants, by which the government tried to solve the perennial problem - the Russian nobility guard against the penetration of foreign elements, and at the same time, support and encourage commercial and industrial fiber to meet their ambitions and promoting trade and business and charitable activities of its most prominent representatives.

Дворяне (Dvoryane) - Nobility (hereditary, private). A number of Jews in the middle and the end of the 19th century hold a government position, which automatically allowed them to get hereditary or private nobility. Though for Jews it was exceptionally hard to get into the public office and the nobility.

Иностранцы (Inostrantsy) – Foreigners. Foreigners who lived in Russia were under different set of laws, paying different taxes, and having different rights. Revision Lists had special sections for Foreigners.

Военные (Voennye) – Military. That estate included the families of active duty personnel, as well as retired soldiers, and also widows of died soldiers. The Revision Lists had usually Military records together with the Middle Class records, and it included rank and status of the person.

Estates of Jews in Bessarabia, statistics

In 'Revizskie Skazki' - Revision List records Jews from the different estate were not mixed. There were different set of records for merchants, middle class, and farmers. Below there are statistics from Jewish Encyclopedia of Broghauz and Efron, 1908-1913 as well as from Revision Lists of the middle of the 19th century. I have also used statistical data for the capital of Kishinev and a shtetl Kaushany, Bendery district from the birth records available for town.

Here is statistics of the estates of the Jewish population in all Russia according to All Russia Census of 1897:

95.0% belonged to the Middle Class;
1.7% were Merchants;

0.15% reached the status of Honorary Citizens (hereditary or private);
2.75% were Farmers.

According to the same census in 1897 in Kishinev lived 50,237 Jews, 46.3% of total population (108,483).. Estates population of Kishinev according to the census was divided into the following groups: hereditary and private honorary citizens – **173**; farmers – **190**; merchants – **1208**; middle class - **47,446**.

Following three tables provide a view on estates of the Jewish population in the middle of the 19th century.

Table 1 includes merchants, middle class and farmers. The Middle Class are those who paid tax (bira) and they were divided in two groups, who lived on private land or on town's land. Farmers were divided in those who got 10 year privilege or 25 years privilege².

	Uezd (counties, districts)								Total	
	Kishinev	Orgeev	Bendery	Akkerman	Kagul	Khotin	Beltsy	Soro-ki	Jews	Families
Merchants of 1 Gild	8/1								8	1
Merchants of 2nd Gild					8/2			2/1	10	3
Merchants of 3rd Gild in Kishinev and ports	425/111			92/14	88/18				605	143
Merchants of 3rd Gild in uezd towns		301/82	342/62	73/15	?	?	?	?	2150	485
Those who paid tax (bira) 2 rubles and 86 kopiks and tax of 60 kopiks from family (Bendery - 6 r. 72 k.) (Middle Class)	195/111	1155/434	264/134		117/52	3339/921	1655/808	2094/703	8819	3223
Same on the town land	4244/1957	734/324	853/299	902/268	1110/382	2797/792	763/352	698/208	12101	4582
Farmers on 10 years privilege	374/137	626/75	537/227	93/39		175/32	427/167	987/297	3119	974
Farmers on 25 years privilege							159/82	1168/131	1327	290

Table 1 Statistics of sstates of Jews in 1850 in districts of Bessarabia from Brogchauz and Efron, Jewish Encyclopedia, Russia, 1908-1913

² Privileges included lesser taxes, ability to buy or lease land, not be drafted into the army.

Table 2 represents data about the Merchants estate taken from the Revision List records of 1848, 1854 and 1859:

<i>town</i>	<i>uezd</i>	<i>year</i>		<i>microfilm</i>	<i>Jews</i>	<i>families</i>
Bendery	Bendery	1848	Merchants	2361557	390	27
Ismail	Ismail	1848	Merchants	2361557	124	9
Khotin	Khotin	1848	Merchants	2361562		
Kiliya	Ismail	1848	Merchants	2361559		
Orgeev	Orgeev	1848	Merchants	2361559		
Akkerman	Akkerman	1854	Merchants	2373291	188	13
Bendery	Bendery	1854	Merchants	2373291	736	56
Kagul	Kagul	1854	Merchants	2373292	75	12
Kiliya	Ismail	1854	Merchants	2373292	162	14
Kishinev	Kishinev	1854	Merchants	2373295	263	34
Orgeev	Orgeev	1854	Merchants	2373295	564	70
Soroki	Soroki	1854	Merchants	2373295	1000	60
Khotin	Khotin	1859	Merchants	2375782	1516	126

Table 2 Merchants from Revision Lists of 1848, 1854 and 1859, Bessarabia

The last table is devoted to one shtetl Kaushany, Bendery district, where 1675 Jews lived at the end of the 19 century, which was 45 % of total town population.

Data is from birth records from 1866, 1876, 1878 and 1887:

	Total	Male	Female	F a t h e r				
				Foreign Citizen	Listed in other Russian gub.	Listed in other town in Bessarabia	In military	Listed in Kaushany
1866	51	32	19	3: 2-Moldova ³ 1-Turkey	5: 2-Podolia 2-Kherson 1-Grodno	28: 10-Kishinev 11-Bendery 5-Akkerman 1-Ataki 1-Khotin		15-Kaushany

³ Moldova here is the Principality of Moldavia and from 1877 it was part of an independent Romania state.

1876	57	27	30	4: Moldova	5: 4-Podolia 1-Kherson	26: 8-Kishinev 15-Bendery 3-Akkerman	2: 1-in reserve	20-Kaushany society
1878	68	37	31	9: 5-Moldova 1-Holland 3-Turkey	6: 3-Kherson 1-Taurida 2-Kiev	32: 15-Kishinev 12-Bendery 4-Akkerman 1-Brichany	1	20-Kaushany society
1887	72	40	32	10: 6-Turkey 4-Moldova	13: 6-Kherson 1-Kiev 1-Taurida 2-Podolia	30: 2-Akkerman 15-Bendery 12-Kishinev 1-Orgeev	1	17 – Kaushany society
					1-Volyn 1-Minsk 1-Mogilev			1-Pharmacist
Total	248	136	112	26: 15Moldova 10-Turkey 1-Holland	29: 8-Podolia 12-Kherson 1-Grodno 2-Taurida 1-Volyn 1-Minsk 1-Mogilev 3-Kiev	116: 45-Kishinev 14-Akkerman 1-Ataki 1-Khotin 53-Bendery 1-Brichany 1-Orgeev	4: 1-in reserve 3-active	72-Kaushany <hr/> 1-Pharmacist

It is interesting to note that a large percentage of Jews in that town were registered in other towns of Bessarabia, or in towns in Russia outside of Bessarabia, or were foreigners. Only 25% of Jews in Kaushany were registered in Kaushany.

Almost all Jews were part of the Middle Class (Townsmen, Petty Bourgeois). Only 5 fathers of born children were merchants.

Estates of Jews in Bessarabia, what privileges did these estates grant?

Merchants. By the law of 1835, merchants could go for business outside of the Pale with wife and children from 6 weeks to 2 months. They could stay longer only by permission of the government. The Merchants of First Gild could go to any cities, including two capitals without getting permission. During their stay in these places merchants could have two home servants from the Jews. In the begging of the 20 century the rules changed and Merchants of the 1st gild could go outside Pale for 6 months in a year, and 3 months for the 2nd gild.

The rules for the permanent residence outside the Pale for the Merchants of 1st and 2nd gild were very different. Merchants of the 2nd gild could live in two towns, Nikolaev and Sevastopol,

which are in the Pale, but where regular Jews were not allowed to live. Merchants of the 1st gild could live in general anywhere outside the Pale.

Farmers. Jewish agricultural colonies appeared in Bessarabia after a new “Status of Jews” law was approved on April 13, 1835. The principal goal of the laws was to organize the Jews under the new regulations and allow them some activities but not others. According to the new status, Jews could freely cross over into the farmer estate without any restrictions. The new farmers could settle on crown, purchased, or leased land. Crown lands were set aside for Jews for an unlimited time for their sole use upon payment of taxes. In addition, in areas without much free crown land, Jews were permitted to lease or buy lands from private owners that they could select themselves. In this event, by investing their capital, they joined the rural community and became owners or renters of the land.

It is apparent from archival sources that the majority of settlers in Bessarabia came from Ukraine, primarily from neighboring Podol province. Most of the Jewish population in Bessarabia lived in colonies on the private land that was purchased or leased. Almost no crown land was available in Bessarabia. The total number of Jewish colonies in Bessarabia was 16 (17 in some sources); nine in the Soroki district, two each in the Bel'tsy and Orgeev districts, and one each in the Bendery, Khotin, and Kishinev districts. By the mid-19th century, Bessarabia had 1,082 homesteads with 10,589 inhabitants—who eventually returned to their traditional occupations: commerce, innkeeping, and private trading.

The Jews were involved in agriculture even outside of the agricultural colonies. From the statistical information collected in 1853 in Kaushany and also in the shtetl Chimishliya, Bendery district 119 Jewish families worked in agriculture. Their estate/status was “gosudarstvennye krestiane” - state peasants or state farmers. Even after many families were reclassified as Middle Class a number of Jews in Kaushany continued their work in agriculture, among them were cattle and sheep farmers; for example in 1849 two Jewish farmers owned approximately one thousand head of cattle and three thousand sheep and goats.

In the middle of 19th century many Jews were registered as farmers in one or another colony, actually lived in a large town or city. That happened because of the privileges farmers received from the government. That included lower taxes and relieve from the conscription. In the face of these facts, the provincial government finally allowed the Jews to resettle officially in towns and enter the town communities. By the beginning of the 20th century, almost all of the former colonists lived in towns.

Burlaki – Temporary workers. Burlaki were hard working labor force, mostly as peasants on the land in Bessarabia. The Russian word ‘burlak’ means people who were walking on the beach pulled with twine riverboats upstream, see below the painting of I. Repin. The word also meant any hard working labor.

Ilya Efimovich Repin (1844-1930)

Burlaki na Volge –

Volga_Boatmen (1870-1873)



Honorary Citizens (hereditary, private)

Honorary Citizens estate was established for Jews in 1832, and already in 1839 it was added that promotion of Jews to Honorary Citizenship should be done in rare cases when they help the Russian Empire a lot. In 1844 in order to better develop agriculture, the Jews who bought a piece of land and settled on that land 50 Jewish families could get the private Honorary Citizens after 3 years of the colony, and who settled 100 Jews could get the hereditary Honorary Citizens. In late 1850s the Jews who were Merchants of 1st Guild for 10 years and of 2nd guild for 20 years could get for Honorary Citizenship, same as any other merchants in Russian Empire.

Jews could apply for the honorary citizenship by the decree of the Emperor. In 1850 "Jewish scholars in the governors" could apply for the estate, and from 1849 - physicians, pharmacists, scientists, agronomists, engineers, technologists, veterinarians also could become Honorary Citizens.

Leyb Moiseevich Tsirelson. Since 1908 Leyb Tsirelson was the spiritual and the official rabbi of Chisinau (Bessarabia). In 1910 he was elected chairman of the All-Russian rabbinical committee (Vaad harabonim) and held this position until 1917, when the commission was disbanded. As the authorized representative of the leadership of Jewish Religious Communities in Russia he appeal to the authorities on various matters relating to the Jewish population of the country. In 1911 he published a letter of protest signed by 300 rabbis of the Russian Empire in connection with the unfolding of Bayliss case⁴. He received the title of Private Honorary Citizen of the Russian Empire and the spiritual General.

Кишиневский городской раввинъ — личн. почетн. гражд. Лейбъ Моисеевичъ Цирельсонъ Екатеринбургская, 6. телеф. 4—88.

Leyb Moiseevich Tsirelson Kishinev Town Rabbi – private Honorary Citizen.
From Bessarabia 1914 Annual Book.

⁴ The Beilis case - the trial on charges of Menahem Mendel Beilis ritual murder of a 12-year-old student preparatory class of Kiev Theological School Andrew Yushchinsky March 12, 1911. The process took place in Kiev on September 25 - October 28, 1913, and was accompanied on the one hand, by active anti-Semitic campaign, on the other - public protests nationwide and worldwide. Beilis was acquitted.



Leyb Moiseevich Tsirelson



Monument to Tsirelson at the cemetery in Kishinev.

Abraham son of Naum Katlovker (1844-1907, Kishinev), a Jew from Soroca, a teacher, a secular member of the fifth session of the Rabbinical Commission under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire in 1893-1894 years, the official government rabbi and an hereditary honorary citizen.

Shteinberg Moyshe-Leyb, Hirsh, Ovshiy, Borukh and others in the family were listed in Vital Records as hereditary honorary citizens.

Nobility (hereditary, private)

In granting the Jews the rights of the public service has not been set any restrictions on the erection of a hereditary noble estate. But there were many restrictions for the Jews to get into a public office. Some Jews from 1856 on the basis of the common rules acquired hereditary nobility with getting into a rank of “действительный статский советник” - Actual Civil Councilor / Actual State Councilor or by getting the first degree of every Russian Order or all degree of Order of Saint Vladimir. Some Jews in Russian Empire were entered into the nobility books. But in the late 19th century many questioned the right of Jews to the noble rank in general (1834 law prohibited baptized Jews to add into the nobility books). Only in 1900 it was prohibited to enter Jews into the Nobility Gubernia books, but the ministry started to work on a question about handling hereditary books for nobles which are not in the Gubernia Nobility books⁵.

⁵ Ср.: Мыш, «Руководство к русск. законам», изд. 3-е, 49—50, 393; «Будущность», 1900, № 4.

From 1860s Jews who have received medical or other higher university education could be taken to the civil service. By enrolling in the public service professionals Jews got promoted from the eighth to tenth grade. Ninth grade brought private nobility, and award the Order of St. Vladimir of 4th degree (before 1900) or the rank of councilor of state gave the right of hereditary nobility.

According to the All Russia Census of 1897 **108** Jews received hereditary nobility estate and **2905** received private nobility estate.

Converts to Christianity the Jews (the so-called "baptized") equated to non-Jews, while the nobles, the Jews, like their coreligionists in other estates, were struck in their rights as compared to non-Jewish gentry. Thus, the decision of the Senate in 1898 and 1901 confirmed that the Jewish nobles did not have, unlike all others, the unconditional right to public office - the path opened for the Jews only in the presence of higher education.

There are well-known Russian Jewish nobility families: Gunzburg, Efron, Polyakov, etc.

Baron **Horace Ginzburg** was a devout Jew who strictly observed the prescriptions of religion and actually ran the vast family affair. Horace Gunzburg helped many people - Jews and Gentiles. Using his help Jewish students attended the first Russian Conservatory, and famous sculptor Mark Antokolsky was able to complete the Academy of Fine Arts. He was a founding member of the Imperial Archaeological Institute, donated money to the establishment of the Institute of Experimental Medicine, and established the Society of cheap apartments in St. Petersburg. Horace Gunzburg was in the rank of State Councilor, he was awarded the highest medals of Russia, and when he died, the representatives of many cities and agencies paid him the last honors.

Other nobels were "Sugar Kings" **Lazarus** and **Lev Brodsky, Vysotsky**, the founder of the largest firms on the tea trade, Samuel **Polyakov** who built two thousand five hundred miles of railway tracks in Russian Empire. All three brothers Polyakov - Samuel, Lazar and Jacob - were elevated to the nobility, and received the rank of privy councilors.

Ignaz I. Manus, a Jew, was a well-known banker in the Russian Empire. He was born in 1860, in Bendery, Bessarabia, into a Jewish family. His parents were Middle Class Jews Yosef (Joseph) Manus - a doctor by profession, and Mani Manus. Ignaz Manus graduated from high school in Odessa, as Bender had only county real school. Then he was baptized and changed his name and patronymic in the Ignatius Porfirievich. He worked as a financial agent of the board of the Samara-Orenburg railway. At the beginning of 1900 he was engaged in speculation on the stock exchange, acquired a considerable fortune and received a rank of Actual Councilor of state and as a result was entered into a nobility estate.

Leo Fayvelevich Friedland (birth name was Moishe Arye-Leib Friedland, 1826, Dinaburg - 1899, St. Petersburg) - Russia's Jewish philanthropist, social activist and collector of Hebrew books, the actual state councilor, the first guild merchant.

Teytel Yakov Lvovich was born in 1850, in Podolia, neighboring to Bessarabia. He was a lawyer and public figure – The Actual State Councilor. He received a traditional Jewish religious education. He graduated from the law faculty of Moscow University in 1875. Thanks to the reforms of the 1860s and 70s Teytel was among the first Jews to get into a public service. In 1877 he was appointed Acting magistrate at the Samara Regional Court (confirmed as of 1880), where he worked until 1914.

Town, where people registered for an estate

The Russian phrases “Benderskiy Meshchanin” or “Izmailskiy Kupets” refer first to a person from Bendery at the Middle Class estate, and the other is a Merchant from Izmail. After working with the records in depth, it appears that such translation is not always accurate. What that means is that a person of a Middle Class estate was REGISTERED in Bendery, and a Merchant was REGISTERED in Izmail.

In order to register in a particular estate, there should be a formed society for the Jews in that estate, and not all towns had such societies. For example in Kaushany all Middle Class Jews were registered in Bendery until 1850s and that is why were listed in the documents as Bendery Middle Class. Later when the Middle Class society was organized in Kaushany Jews became Kaushany Middle Class.

As Jews moved in Bessarabia from town to town and in the whole Pale of Settlement, the town of designation in most cases did not change. You can find a person in Kaushany - Kishinev Meshchnin who got married, and lived at least for 5 years as Kishinev Meshchanin. People lived with the town designation for whole life. For example: Pinya Bruter in Kaushany in the beginning of 19 century still was Rashkov Meshchanin (Middle Class), even he moved to Kaushany from Rashkov in 1870s.

How could Jews change their estates, if at all?

Revision Lists note when Jews changed their estate. Basically in this case their names were removed from one Revision and added to another Revision.

From the statistical information of 1853 in Kaushany over 80 families of Middle Class in town were granted landholdings by the state, and they were reclassified as farmers. But due to the

difficult economic conditions, they were permitted to return back in 1864 to the category of townsmen (middle class). There is a Revision List of 1869 written for that event.

Here are several examples from the Revision List records when the estate was changed.

Revision List of 1869, farmers were reclassified as Middle Class

KOGAN	Anshel Moshko	Head of Household	M 50	Excluded from Farmers, relisted in Kaushany as Middle Class.
KOGAN	Moshko Anshel	Son	M 23	

Revision List, 1854, Romanenko colony, Bendery uezd

AKSMAN	Gershko Itsko	Head of Household	M 36	Farmers. Family was relisted to Middle Class in Kishinev.
AKSMAN	Khaim Gershko	Son	M 17	
KOVSTMAN	Duvid Mendel	Head of Household	M 59	Farmer. On a 10 year privilege from 1853. Relisted in Kishinev in 1858.

Revision List, 1854, Teleneshty, Orgeev uezd

BERNSHTEYN	Berko Srul	Head of Household	M 33	Farmers. By the decree of Chamber of Commerce relisted as Merchant of Orgeev
BERNSHTEYN	Ikhiel Berko	Son	M 19	

Revision List, 1848, Izmail

BLANK	Abram Motil	Head of Household	M 32	Middle Class. Old Jewish Society. By Chamber from January 31, 1859 relisted to Kishinev Merchants.
BLANK	Mordko Abram	Son	M 11	Born in 1837

Revision List, Leovo, 1854

KREYMER	Alter El	Head of Household	M 36	Middle Class. By Chamber of November 13, 1859 relisted into Kishinev Middle Class
KREYMER	Aron Alter	Son	M 2	

Revision List, Khotin, 1859

GROISMAN	Blyuma Moshko	Head of Household	F 34	Merchant. By the Chamber from March 16, 1860 family was relisted to Beltsy Merchants.
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Conclusion

The paper presents analysis of estates for Jewish people in the 19th century in Bessarabia, Russia.

The use of the primary sources of information, such as Revision Lists, Family Lists, and Vital Records is discussed and clarified. Analysis of such data is important to understand Jewish life of that time.

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