Understanding Russian-Jewish Given Names
by Boris Feldblyum

It is a well-known and worn saying that necessity is the mother of invention. This is true, it seems, even more when one deals with issues of culture, science or social life. Articles and books are written, societies are formed, conferences held. The field of Jewish genealogy that practically did not exist only one generation ago, experienced an explosive growth in the 1980s and has become much more than the pursuit of a lost grandmother's name. As recently as 25 years ago, we held the widespread opinion that "few Jews can trace their ancestry according to their surnames or nicknames; long family trees and heraldic snobbery are unknown."[1] We know now this was not quite an accurate observation then; it is far from the truth now.

The need to find like-minded researchers led to the formation of Jewish genealogy societies in the early 1980s. The discovery of one million records of the Russian embassy and consulates in the United States stored in the basement of the U.S. National Archives led to the publication (in 1987) of a 1,000-page-plus index to the collection. It was followed by *Where Once We Walked*, by Mokotoff and Sack (1991), *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, by N. and S. Schoenburg (1991), *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*, by A. Beider (1993), and a number of other reference and scholarly works—all related to the field of Jewish genealogy.

With the growth of interest in genealogy and in Jewish history in general, the area of Jewish given names is attracting the close attention of many researchers. While a large number of books are available in many languages, no practical guide emphasizes the vast universe of Jewish given names specific to Eastern Europe and Russia—the ancestral home of most of today's western Jews. This is a problem for genealogists who have obtained family documents from recently accessible Russian archives. Often, one cannot be certain if the people named in the documents really are the family members being sought; the given names look different than the ones known.

For this reason, I have just finished translating and will soon publish a book (Avotaynu, in press) that attracted my curiosity many years ago, because it was published in Zhitomir, Ukraine, my birthplace. It has a very long and hard to translate title: *Sbornik dlya soglasovaniya raznovidnostej imen—biblejskikh, natsional'nykh, talmudicheskikh, zaimstvovannykh i drugikh, upotreblyaemykh everyami v Rossii* (A Collection to reconcile variation of names—biblical, ethnic, Talmudic, adopted and others as used by the Jews of Russia)." Its author, Iser Kulisher, who held the official title of a Learned Jew in the Office of the Volhynia Governor did a marvelous job of compiling and sorting out several thousand given names from many primary and secondary sources.

Necessity also was the stimulus for Kulisher to write his book. The early 20th century was a particularly dark period in Russian-Jewish history. It started with the bloody Kishinev pogrom of 1903, followed by hundreds of other pogroms in big and small towns throughout the Empire. At the same time, despite all odds, Jews made advances in the trades, industry and culture of that

> *"Among other problems, the government was both ignorant of and oblivious to the fact that Moshe, Mojshe, Moisej, Moshka, Movsha, etc. was the same person."*

country. They also paid taxes and were drafted into the czar's army in disproportionately large numbers, a direct consequence of a problem with Jewish given names in official registers.

Jews were strangers in a strange land. They had become Russian subjects between 1772 and 1795, and the Russian government was never inclined to make their life easy. Among other problems, the government was both ignorant of and oblivious to the fact that Moshe, Mojshe, Moisej, Moshka, Movsha, etc. was the same person. It wanted to tax and draft poor Mojshe five times over. In the introduction to his book, Kulisher cites several examples of people who had died before reaching draft age, but whose families were fined because the same individual's name was spelled in slightly different ways in various government documents.

The following are some examples of distorted Jewish names and the dire consequences for draftees in one small shtetl during one year only. All draftees had died before reaching draft age:

Names from the draft list
  Trut, Shlioma Ojzer Itskov
  Baranchuk, Mojsej Lejbovich
  Burilo, Itskhok-Ajzik Khaimov
Names in the death records book
  Trut, Shlioma Ejzer Itskov
  Baranchuk, Mojshe Lejbovich
  Burilo, Ajzik Khaimov

In another case, a Jew identified as Mojshe was drafted into the army, but was also fined 300 rubles for a supposed brother Moisej who it was claimed dodged the draft—all because this very Mojshe had been listed as Moisej on one of the lists. Still better examples: a family of one Yankel Korotkin, executed in Vilna, fined because the deceased was accused of draft dodging; Letichev resident Ya. Rozenblat was murdered during a pogrom, yet his family was fined; another family was fined because a girl named Sima was entered by mistake as Simkha, etc. There were hundreds of cases like these

every year, making the lives of ordinary Jews unbearable due to the name mixups.[2]

Kulisher did not have to look far for his examples. The pages of many Russian-Jewish periodicals of that period are filled with horror stories rooted in the confusion about names. He attempted to give the government institutions, rabbis, and all official and private individuals a list of all names that the Jews in Russia used in his day and to reconcile all existing Jewish documents with such a list.

Kulisher's effort, however futile, offers Jewish genealogists and family historians of today an invaluable document written by a contemporary of so many of our ancestors.

The list of several thousand given names in Kulisher's book is a unique reference tool that allows us to trace nearly every Russian-Jewish name to its roots and in many cases to tie the name to a specific geographic area. Kulisher's efforts help us to know the equivalent variant forms of the same name that might appear in numerous government records. In addition, he makes an extremely important observation—many patronyms recorded in official records had simply been created by the recording clerks and were not at all the names of the father of the person being recorded!

As Kulisher demonstrates, however, in order to understand the evolution of Jewish names throughout history, one must know why a certain name was given to a person and why some forms of a given name did not resemble the sacred (Hebrew) name given to the same individual. Take the Yiddish name Zelik. If a Zelik lived within the borders of the Russian Empire during the 19th or early 20th centuries, his sacred name may have been one of no fewer than 19 root names: Aaron, Asor, Avraam, Azriil, Efrem, Eleazar, Eliakim, Girson, Iakov, Iekufiil, Isaak, Iuda, Meshuilam, Meshuilom, Nafan, Ruvim, Shimariya, Shneur and Solomon.

To understand why this occurred, one must leap back a few thousand years in time.

Historically, a given name was one of the most important aspects of Jewish life. First and foremost, it connected a Jew of any period with his forbearers, his religion, his whole heritage and the Bible. Many Jewish given names such as Samuel, Joshua, Eliyahu, Eliezer contain reference to God. The Bible is filled with the names that have formed the foundation of Jewish names throughout the history until today. Biblical names may be divided into several groups:

Names that reflected circumstances of birth. The most famous example of such a name is actually a non-Jewish name—Caesar—from the Latin *caedere* meaning "cut". It was given to the future Roman general Julius Gaius, who, according to a well-known legend was extracted from his mother's womb by a so-called Caesarean section. A biblical example of this group is: Isaac (יצחק)-Genesis 21:6. This is one of the most common names of all times, used by non-Jews as well as Jews.

Names that commemorated an event. A common "Russian" example is Elieser (אליעזר) which means "my God has helped" (to escape the sword of Pharaoh) Exodus 18:4. In Russia, this name also produced a plethora of names: Bukish, Buksh, Dliezer, Elazar, Elezer, Elezerek, Eliazar, Eliazer, Fabuli, Fajv, Fajvish, Fuks, Iozibl', Krup, Laza, Lazan, Lazar, Lazar', Lazarus, Lazer, Lazl, Lazor, Lejzl, Lejzor, Lejzor, Lezl, Liber, Liberman, Lipa, Lipko, Lipman, Litman, Lozer, Lozor, Luzer, Lyajzer, Lyazer, Lyuzer, Papu, Vajv, Vajvish, Zalman, Zisman, Zisman, Zusa and Zusman

Names that included family relationships. Ben (בן) meaning "son" and Bat (בת), "daughter". These name are used to this day and were common among the Jews of Russia: Ben-yamin (בן-ימין) and its Russian versions Bejna and Bishka; Bat Sheba (בת שבע) and its Russian versions Basheva and Betshil.

Additional groups of names describe other degrees of relationship; other names carried symbolic meanings.

Babylonian Exile

The 500-year long Babylonian exile (586–537 BCE) deeply affected Jewish culture and spiritual life and introduced new trends in name development. During both the Exile and the post-Exile periods, a trend toward name change and the use of foreign names generally became noticeable. Hadassa became Esther after the Babylonian goddess Ishtar (see Nehemia, Babylonian Talmud, Megilat Ester); Mordechai came from the Babylonian god Bel-Marduka who was especially revered by Nebuchadnezzar. According to the book of Daniel, we learn that Daniel was renamed Valtasar; Annaniah became Sedrach; Misail changed into Misach and Azariah transformed into Avdenich. All these names are of Chaldean (i.e. Babylonian) origin.

In general, the custom of changing the personal names of a defeated people was quite common in the ancient world; assimilation on the part of the Jews who had absorbed the Babylonian customs caused an even wider spread of local names among the Jews. The first known example of translating a foreign name into Hebrew also occurred during that period when the Arabic name Kharif meaning autumn rain became Yorai (יורי).

When Alexander the Great subjugated Persia in 332 B.C., Judea fell under his power and remained so for ten years. One direct result of his conquest was that Jews began to give his name to newborn boys. According to the Talmud (Tamid 31b), when Alexander conquered Palestine, he demanded that a statue of himself be erected in the Temple. Simeon Ha-Tzadik, one of the leaders of the community, promised instead that all males born in Judea during that year would be named Alexander. Alexander the Great liked the idea, believing that it would immortalize him to a greater extent. Other Greek names also became common among the Jews, as did many Roman, Persian, Arabic and other names of peoples with whom the Jews later fought, traded or interacted in other

Jeremy and Joshua Feldblyum with pet, pictured in front of the 1837 Mogilev birth register, made an invaluable contribution to both this article and the forthcoming book on Russian-Jewish given names. They spent long hours typing the manuscript, checking Biblical references, transliterating some 6–8,000 names for the database from Russian while learning all 50 Russian variants of their names—none of which they liked.
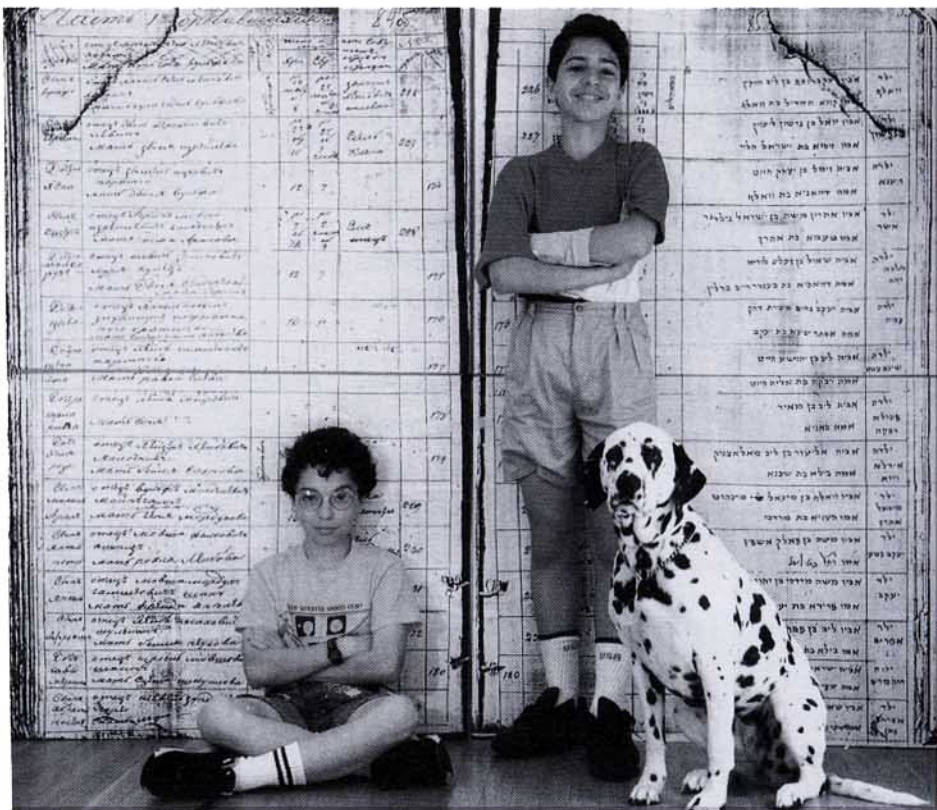
spheres of life.

Given names derived from common Jewish words, introduced (or reintroduced) in the early Middle Ages include Chaim (life); Yom-Tov (good day or holiday); Yatsliaskh (let it be happy); Abragam, Amnon, Baruch, David, Ierocham, Noah, Obadia, Salomo (Solomon), Shemaria, Eldod]; names ending in *el*, e.g., Daniel, Itiel, Iekutiel, Ioel, Machael, Uriel, Chananel, Shealtiel were used primarily in Italy.

At the same time, Jews living in Muslim countries began to adopt Arabic names such as Abdala, Abuali, Abudevud, Abulgedshadsh, Bassar, Dunash (appeared in the 10th century) Dzunavas, Jus and Justus (translations of Tzadik), Kalifa, Kelab, Meshachala, Salakh, Temim, Vivasi or Vivasius (translations of Chaim).

Some European names became common among Jews living in Christian countries e.g., Asterius, Basilius, Gind-iokus, Gosolas, Granelas (Geraban), Gerbanos, Jumnus, Julius, Justus, Kleonimus, Leon, Lupus, Megas, Priskus, Salpingus, Serenus, Sigerius, Teodorius, Vivatsius.

The evolution of names was not limited only to the Jews. Non-Jewish name patterns and preferences also have changed over time. Many Jewish names, especially those of Biblical origin, were used at times by the Christians, while unpopular among the Jews during the same period of time. Jewish names used by Christians during the Middle Ages include Avrum, Amshel, Bendit, Berman, Falk, Fischel, Ioslin, Iud, Koppl, Libkind, Man/Mann, Zalman and Zelig. One must remember this fact when speculating about the ethnicity and religion of an individual who lived during the Middle Ages.

After their expulsion from Spain in 1492, Jews became messengers of Arabic culture to Christian Europe. The pool of their personal names was constantly increased and changed. The custom of repeating the names in a family that had started in the 9th and 10th centuries became even more popular during that time. Usually, the eldest son was named after a paternal (or, very rarely, a maternal) grandfather. For example, Maimonides' grandfather signed his name as Josephke ben Isaac ben Joseph Ben Obadiah ben Shlomo ben Obadiah. One consequence of this tradition is that certain names became characteristic of certain geographic areas:

Arabic and pseudo-Arabic names like Mochir, Mobchar, Mokhtor, Machbab, Meborach and Seadel were common in the West. Greek Jews and Karaites utilized ancient biblical names like Aucitai, Yafet, Kaleb, Schefatja, Schelachia, Ehud and Schet. Names common in Italy included Immanuel (brought from Greece), Daniel, Jechiel, Binyamin, Gad, Yair, Schabtai, Sheshet, Zidkia, Yoav (used almost exclusively in Rome); Kalonymus and Theodorus became common in Southern Italy. Among the new names, Schemtob and Chefez were common in Arabic Spain: Jakar, Sinai and Nadi appeared in France, and Sinai and Pesach were popular in Germany.

The custom of giving boys two names at the time of circumcision was developed still further in the post-Talmudic period. One of the names was always a religious or

"sacred" name (*shem ha-kodesh*) used in the synagogue and in Hebrew documents. The other, which became known as *kinui,* was usually a vernacular name for secular use, often borrowed or adopted from non-Jews.

Name changing was another common practice. During the Middle Ages, a person who was dangerously sick would change his name in the hope that the Angel of Death, who summons persons by name, would be confused. This custom, known as *meshanneh shem* (to give a person additional names at any time during his life), became widespread among Ashkenazic Jews. Some names were temporary—until marriage, others stuck for life. Temporary names usually were given without any official ceremony and were mostly limited to Alter (old man) and Zeide (grandpa) for boys and Alte (old woman) and Boba (grandma) for girls. The children's real (e.g. official) names were quite often hidden from the community and from the children themselves. It is no surprise that in many cases these temporary names became the principal names for life.

Particular care was to be taken in the writing of names in legal documents, the slightest error in which would invalidate them. Hence, quite a number of monographs on names, both personal and geographical, date from this time. This custom of using multiple names for one person survived until the 20th century, adding to the problems between the Jews and the governments of the countries they lived in and often puzzling family history researchers.[3]

It was thought that Jews of the same name should not live in the same town or permit their children to marry into each others' families. It was even urged that one should not marry a woman of the same name as one's mother or that she should be required to change it. In Russia, as late as the early 20th century, it was considered unlucky for a father-in-law to have the same name as the bridegroom. For a somewhat similar reason, it was considered unlucky in Lithuania to call an only child by his correct name.

Although medieval Christian ignorance and barbarism led to widespread persecution of the Jews, no outside limitations were imposed on name giving. Generally, Jews of the Middle Ages were inclined to adopt given names common to the countries in which they lived. When the terrible persecutions of the 14th to the 16th centuries subsided and Jews settled in new areas and started new communities, new patterns used to form proper names became evident. German Jews preserved a mixture of English and French names; Polish Jews were still using Swiss names; Italian names were Germanized; Germanic names changed under Slavic influence and made a comeback in German-Jewish communities.

Three centuries of persecutions and wandering brought the Jews face to face with many peoples imposing the observance of new customs. Jewish names shared the same fate. Towards the late 18th century, the list of given names was augmented by many names taken from European peoples. Among the many male and female names adopted between 1492 and 1781 were: Adolph, Amadio, Amatus, Anastas, Angelo, Ansilio, Alsguta, Bienvenida, Blümchen, Blume, Camilla and Chryse.

Along with adopting new names, Jews changed a number of Jewish names, either adapting them to local tongues or accepting local variants of old Jewish names: Hosea (Joshua), Lasen, Isaak, Ismail, Israel to Isserlin to Isser, Izaak, Jacob (masculine); Priwa, Rachlin, Rachela, Reichel, Rachel, Sarlin/Zerline (feminine).

Historically, even during the darkest period of the Middle Ages, Christians objected when Jews adopted non-Jewish names. The situation worsened, however, toward the late 18th century when Jews also encountered strict limits imposed by law. An Austrian decree of 1787 (abolished on August 18, 1836) that stipulated the use of family names by the Jews, specifically limited the choice of given names to Biblical ones. Also in 1787, the Prussian government attempted to limit the choice of Jewish family names. It prompted notable Jewish scholar Leopold Zunz to publish a monograph that later became a classic work on Jewish onomastics, *Die Namen der Juden* (Jewish names).[4] Zunz cited numerous examples of Jews freely using Biblical as well as local non-Jewish names and exposed the absurdity of the Prussian law, which was subsequently revoked.

The cultural and spiritual renaissance of Western European Jewry bypassed the Jews of Russia. Before the late 18th century, Jews had never lived in Russia in large numbers. Since its creation eleven centuries earlier, the Russian Orthodox Church had been extremely hostile to the Jewish religion; Jews were declared "enemies of Christ" and, by a number of decrees, were explicitly forbidden to enter the Moscow principality. This situation changed sharply with the partitions of Poland in 1772, 1792 and 1795 when a great many Polish Jews became Russian subjects (about 200,000 individuals after the 1772 partition alone). The Jews brought into the new empire an abundance of Polish and other "Western" names.

The development of Jewish given names in Russia was greatly affected by a steady stream of anti-Jewish laws and regulations. In the first years after the acquisition of Poland, the Russian government made a number of half-hearted attempts to address (perceived) problems of the Jewish population within its imperial borders. At the same time, it passed numerous decrees that restricted Jewish movement, trade, land and property ownership. Use of the Russian language, which became mandatory in the newly acquired territories, had a limited effect on the formation of Jewish names until the late 1820s. Then, compulsory integration aimed at assimilation went hand-in-hand with increased oppression. The most infamous of Czar Nicholas I's decrees was the Ukaze of 1827 that imposed military service upon the Jews. Particularly cruel were the so-called cantonist schools into which Jewish boys between the ages of 8 and 10 were thrown; many

were forcefully baptized and, thus, lost to the Jewish people. A large number of Russian names became a part of Jewish life at precisely that time because of the many Jewish boys drafted into the army and given Russian names.

Further acquaintance of the Russian Jews with the Russian culture and their increasing acceptance by that society took place during the reign of Alexander II who liberated Russian serfs and passed a number of relatively liberal laws. The level of assimilation among the Jews grew steadily until Alexander II was assassinated by Russian revolutionaries in March 1881. What followed was a wave of bloody pogroms and the beginning of mass emigration, mainly to America. For those who remained in Russia, the 1880s were another dark period of reaction, rising anti-Semitism (the term itself was coined in that decade), expulsions from large cities and many other restrictions.

German anti-Semitism that penetrated Russia further aggravated the situation. The Russian government made a major effort to create new restrictions upon its Jewish population and passed a number of anti-Jewish laws. Several decrees regarding Jewish names were passed. According to the law, a Jew always had to bear the name given to him at birth. A Commission on Organizing Everyday Jewish Life stated in its preliminary ruling that it was mandatory for Jews "to keep the very names that had been entered in the vital records." To avoid use of distorted names in the future, the Commission assigned to St. Petersburg University Prof. Kossovich and the baptized Jew and anti-Semite Yakov Brafman the task of compiling a list of "correct" Jewish given names. Their work was found incomplete and imprecise, and the question of Jewish proper names remained unanswered.

The problem being unresolved, many Jews petitioned the government with requests to replace their often senseless and derogatory nicknames in the official documents with proper Russian names. Most petitions were initiated by Jewish merchants who resided outside the Pale of Settlement and maintained daily contact with Russian merchants. Another omission that worked in the years 1883–88, made one of the most serious attempts to study the "problem" of Jews using Christian names. It properly observed that:

> according to Jewish religious laws, Jews are to follow their own wishes and to give their children any names, including Christian names; the rabbis, therefore, do not consider it to be within their power to restrict either the choice of names nor their registration in the vital record books.

As a result of these activities, the law of April 23, 1893, to revise and augment existing laws, stated:

• Jews are to be called only by the names as written in the vital records; with the exception of correcting a clerk's error as stated in article 1082, no corrections of the vital record books are allowed.

• Every Jewish head of household is to be informed of the name and family name by which he is entered in the vital record books, family lists, indexes, passports and other documents.

• Jews found guilty of appropriating names that are not theirs will be punished according to article 1416 of the Criminal Code (up to 200 rubles for the first offense).

The last provision was a clear threat to prosecute those Jews "who in their private life call themselves by names differing in form from those recorded in the official registers. The practice of many educated Jews to Russianize their names, e.g., Gregory, instead of Hirsch; Vladimir, instead of Volf, etc., could now land the culprits in prison... In several cities the police brought actions against such Jews 'for having adopted Christian names' in newspaper advertisements, on visiting cards, or on door signs."

Despite the appearance of lawfulness, problems with Jewish names continued. Jews were still assailed for using not just single names, but whole categories of names, and their right to use these names was contested. The biggest fight, carried out by the Russian nationalists and anti-Semites, was against the use of "purely Christian" names by Jews. The argument was quite ridiculous because practically all New Testament "purely Christian" names had been originally either Jewish (Biblical) or passed on by pagan forefathers of the Christians. One look at the beginning of the list of saints of the Russian Orthodox Church reveals their Jewish origins: Avdiyah (עבדיה), Avdon (עבדון), Aviv (אביב), Avraham (אברהם), Hagav (הגב), Hagey (הגי), Adam (אדם), Azariya (עזריה), and so on.

For ease of pronunciation of phonetically foreign sounds, Christians often distorted Jewish names. This approach, largely influenced by Judophobia, created a plethora of diminutive, supposedly Jewish, names. On the other hand, when Jews adapted non-Jewish names, they, too, did their best to transliterate the names phonetically. Considering that many of these adopted names were Christian versions of Jewish Biblical names, while others were diminutive, hypocoristic or conversational versions of "proper" Christian names, it is easy to understand the maze of Jewish names created in Russia by the mid-19th century.

All those variations and distortions were duly recorded in the vital records books, with more errors created in the process of recording. The confusion was multiplied because many rabbis did not know the Russian language and, most importantly, there were no standard phonetics among Polish, Lithuanian and Russian Jews. In reality, many of these distortions and versions replaced the original, proper names.

Such a confused web of Jewish names could only arise in the absence of a guide similar to the List of Saints in the Russian Orthodox church. Attempts to create a "guiding document" were made long before Kulisher published his compilation in 1911. *A Complete Collection of Jewish Names*, by Zhurakovskij and Rabinovich, appeared in 1874; Kherson Rabbi Meshel Pogorel'skij published his

monograph entitled *Jewish Given Names* in 1893.

The traditional Russian naming convention that later affected Russian-Jewish name formation was in large part influenced by the custom among the lower classes of using extremely diminutive name forms when relating to the government and its officials. The most common form of lowering one's image was to add a suffix, *ka* or *ko*, as in Van'*ka* Vas'*ka* Mash'*ka*, etc. This suffix, which is derogatory in Russian when applied to an adult, (in a way similar to calling an adult American black male "boy"), migrated into Jewish name formation and created names like Mosh*ko*, Abram*ka*, Ber*ko*, Ios'*ka* and many others.

As Jews came to understand the Russian culture better, many became dissatisfied with the belittling names bestowed on them. As early as 1858, a well-known Jewish writer Osip Rabinovich published an article in an Odessa newspaper titled *On Moshkas and Ioskas* in which he ridiculed the use of the many diminutive name forms.

Construction of Patronymics

When studying Russian-Jewish name formation, one important factor to consider is the construction of patronymics. The general evolution of patronymics is a reflection of the evolution of a society and its people. In the beginning, patronymics indicated membership in a tribe; later, in a family. Gradually, they became individualized. This evolution did not occur for all the peoples on the same level and at the same time. While the Jews still maintain the ancient, 3,000 years old tradition of stating the father's name next to name of a child (Yehuda ben Yitzhak, Miriam bat Zeev, etc.), others no longer use this form. Patronymics among the Russian people, on the other hand, evolved into an attribute of respect for an adult, a necessary attribute in all spheres of life. The custom of including a patronymic with all names is a valuable asset for all those engaged in Russian or Russian-Jewish genealogy and family history.

Pictured above: Hamburg-American Steamship Line advertisement from an 1891 Russian-Jewish newspaper.
Pictured on facing page: An English-language translation of the advertisement. (Courtesy Boris Feldblyum)

ГАМБУРГО-АМЕРИКАНСКОЕ
ПАРОХОДНОЕ АКЦІОНЕРНОЕ ОБЩЕСТВО.
Прямое пароходное почтовое сообщеніе

изъ
Гамбурга
въ
Балтиморy
Бразилію
Ла-Плату
Канаду
и изъ
Штеттина
въ
Нью-Іоркъ.

изъ
Гамбурга
въ
Остъ-Индію
Вестъ-Индію
Мексику
Гаванну
и изъ
Штеттина
въ
Нью-Іоркъ.

изъ ГАМБУРГА въ НЬЮ-ІОРКЪ
черезъ Соутгамптонъ.
Путешествіе по океану 6—7 дней.

Подробности сообщаютъ: I. Бувенъ (I. Bouvain) въ ЭЙДКУНЕНѢ, I. Абельманнъ (I. Abelmann) въ МЕМЕЛѢ, и Георгъ Штѐккель въ ОДЕССѢ (Мало-Арнаутская, д. Небе).   22—1

Unlike given names, patronymics in Russia were not regulated by a guide or a government decree, but rather evolved according to local customs and traditions. As a result, many different forms derived from the same name. For example, the name Pavel led to Pavlov, Pavlovich, and Pavlych. People of different social ranks *(soslovie)* preferred some forms of patronymics to others. Thus, peasants and merchants almost exclusively used forms ending in *ov*, e.g., Andrei Ivanov (Ivan's son), Peter Yakovlev Shishkin (i.e., Peter, Yakov's son, Shishkin).

This relatively homogenous situation changed dramatically toward the end of the 18th century. Ethnic Poles, Germans and Jews who became Russian subjects brought with them totally new and different customs, national characters and names. All these people were obliged to accept and use totally strange and unnatural forms of patronymics whenever they entered into official relations with the Russian government; this often began with a birth record. In the absence of any guides and regulations, government clerks created patronymics literally on the fly. Thus Karl, son of Berngardt Schoenberg, became Karl Berngardov/Berngartovich Shenberg; Sigizmund, son of Boleslaw Grabowski, became Sigizmund Boleslavov/Boleslavlevich Grabovskij; Moisha ben Itzhak Finkelson became Moisha Itskov/Itskovich/Itskevich Finkelzon, etc.[5]

Kulisher's book cites a number of very interesting examples, apparently the result of comparing the Hebrew half of the birth records against the Russian half. In some cases, the Russian patronymics do not even resemble the names from which they presumably were derived e.g., ben Aryash became Iokhelev and ben Amshel became Nokhimov. A Jewish genealogist who obtains such a birth record would naturally assume that the father of Berel Iokhelev was called Iokhel or that Lejzer Nokhimov's father was called Nokhim—and would be led seriously astray!

Unfortunately, proper analysis of a patronymic is possible only when two parallel texts exist, one Hebrew and one Russian. These are present in metrical (birth, marriage, divorce and death) books. In the case of census records, family, conscription and tax lists, compiled in Russian only, one should accept the information only

provisionally until additional evidence is found.

The ignorance or whim of government clerks often led to the creation of patronymics analogous to those common in their own region. Thus, Itzchok ben Moshe became Isak Mosh*kovich* in Podolia, Isaak Mosh*kov* in central Russia and Isaak Moishe*v* in Lithuania. Even within the same region, however, government clerks were not inclined to be consistent or to pay attention to documents previously created for a person. As a result, one might find in a case of a hypothetical Avram ben Khatzkel Rabinovich that a

•family list reads: Khatskel Rabinovich, his son Avram
•the government school (Gymnasia) diploma reads: Avram Khatskelev Rabinovich

  •draft papers read: Abram Khatskelevich Rabinovich
  •military identification reads: Abram Khatskilovich Rabinovich

Such examples were countless and created many hardships for the Jews, leading at times to accusations of criminal forgeries.

Comparing the same name, e.g. the masculine Ari (Russian Jews used this name most often paired with its Yiddish translation Leib and often Lejb by itself) and the feminine Nechama, one can see how clerks' imaginations and differences in local dialects and phonetics—both Jewish and Gentile—contributed to a huge pool of names:

Arye-Leib (אריה=ליב)

• Variants from the Vistula region: Leib, Leibel, Leibus, Leibusz, Lejb, Lejbe, Lejbel', Lejbka, Lejby

• Variants from the Volhyn and Podolia region: Lejbel', Lejbish, Lejbko, Lejbysh, Lejvij, Lejvy.

• Variants from Lithuania: Leib, Leo

Nechama (נחמה)

• Variants from the Vistula region: Nakha, Nakhema, Nekhma, Nekhana

• Variants from the Volhyn and Podolia region: Nakha, Nakhama, Nekhama, Nekhuma, Nokhama

• Variants from the Lithuania region: Nakhema, Nakhama, Nekhama, Nekhe.

All attempts to reconcile different versions of the same name proved to be too laborious for both the petitioners and government officials involved. What was worse, the root of the problem had not been addressed. In the absence of unified standards and regulations on the formation of given names and patronymics the question remained: How should one write a patronymic for such names as Man, Egoshia, Koftsia? The answers are plentiful: Manev, Manov, Manevich, Manyev, Man'yovich, etc. Russian grammar rules are simple and logical when it comes to Russian name patronymic creation; the non-Russian population suffered because of the wild imaginations of half-literate clerks. Writing Girshko instead of Girsh forced the creation of patronymics like Gershkov and Gershkovich instead of the correct Gershov and Gershovich.

Problems with patronymics were aggravated by two additional factors: proper patronymic spelling and the various versions of a father's name that appear in different documents. Both are the results of the abnormal life inside the Pale of Settlement and the local administration's oblivion to problems in the lives of ordinary Jews. An example of misspelling of two common names, Abram and Moishe, shows that combinations of the two grow exponentially:

Moisha+Abramov/Avramov/Abramovich/Avramovich...
Movsha+Abramov/Avramov/Abramovich/Avramovich...
Moisei+Abramov/Avramov/Abramovich/Avramovich...
Moshko+Abramov/Avramov/Abramovich/Avramovich...
Moshka+Abramov/Avramov/Abramovich/Avramovich...

.
.
.

While all of these combinations are similar, they do differ in spelling, and thus permit the government to treat poor Moshe ben Abram as a different person in different circumstances. Here lay the beginning of numerous horror stories related to supposed draft evasion, refusal of residential permits, expulsion from universities, etc. And, if that was not enough, Jews customarily used double names, like Avrum-Zelman. Russian documents are filled with entries like Avrum Zelman Movshov with no hint whether the person is Avrum Zelman ben Moshe or Avrum ben Zelman Moshe.

The absence of standards for Jewish name records was a direct consequence of the generally ignorant and hostile attitude of the Russian government toward its Jews. The results, as newly

available archival records illustrate, are innumerable ambiguities to puzzle many a contemporary Jewish genealogist.

Notes

1. B. Munitz, "Identifying Jewish Names in Russia," in Soviet Jewish Affairs, No. 3, 1972, p. 71.

2. Kulisher I. I., p. 4.

3. One curious aspect of name forming, although not directly related to the issue of the name development, was the practice of creating a name-abbreviation out of the real name initials—an acronym—very often with the title. Two examples immediately coming to mind are RASHI—Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzhak and RAMBAM—Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon. It probably grew out of a need to use economically the expensive printing blocks in the early years of book making. The list of such abbreviated names is rather long, it includes many noted rabbis of the past, e.g. MaHaRaL—Morenu Ha-rab Rabbi Liwa (ben Bezalel), MaHaRSHaK—Morenu Ha-rab Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, RIBaK—Rabbi Yehudah ben Kalonymus, SHeReZ—Shmuel Raphael Zvi (-Hirsch), YaSHaR (of Garitz)—Yitzhak Shmuel Reggio.

4. Leopold Zunz, *Die Namen der Juden*, Leipzig, 1837.

5. The situation repeated itself 150 years later when the Soviet Union appropriated Bessarabia, Western Ukraine and the Baltic states after World War II. There Jonas, son of Kazys Malevichius, was entered in all official papers as Yonas Kazisovich/Kazevich Maliavichius.

Boris Feldblyum was born in Zhitomir, Ukraine, and immigrated to the United States 17 years ago. He is the cofounder and president of FAST Genealogy Service. This fall, Avotaynu will publish a book on Russian-Jewish given names writen by Feldblyum. It is based on a turn-of-the-century work by I. I. Kulisher.