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# **Bessarabia/Moldova: Geography, History of Jews, Vital and other Records, Jewish Cemeteries, Yizkor Books and more**

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[www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia](http://www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia)

[www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia/files/conferences/May30-2016Montreal.pdf](http://www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia/files/conferences/May30-2016Montreal.pdf)

## **Bessarabia/Moldova: Geography, History of Jews, Vital and other Records, Jewish Cemeteries, Yizkor Books and more**

- **Geography, Governments for last 200+ years**
- **Jewish History of Bessarabia region**
- **Jewish Genealogy**
  
- **Questions?**

# Where is **Bessarabia** and Where is **Moldova**?

- Are these two geographical names the same?
- Moldova vs Moldavia?



From Historical Atlas  
of Central Europe,  
by Paul Magocsi,  
Seattle, 2002

### Central Europe, 1815



# Bessarabia on a map of Europe



Poland

Warsaw

Kyiv

Ukraine

Slovakia

Budapest

Hungary

Moldova

Chişinău

Romania

Bucureşti

Sea of Azov

Belgrade

Podgorica

Serbia

Montenegro

Podgorica

Prishtinë

Sofia

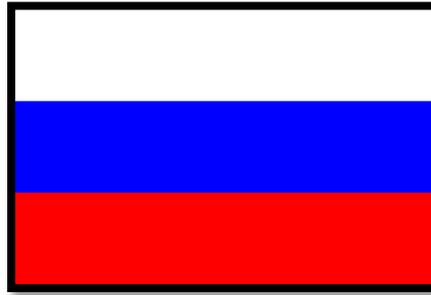
Bulgaria

Skopje

Black Sea

# Governments

- [Governments. Article from Bessarabia Special Interest Group website](#)



# Geography

- What is Moldova Principality?
- Moldova region in current Romania...
- What is Republic of Moldova?
- Pridnestrovskaya Moldova Republic? Or Transnistria Republic
- Moldova vs Moldavia ?

- My grandparents were born in Bessarabia Gubernia, part of the Russian Empire  
(Kaushany, Tarutino)
- My parents were born in shteitlakh in Romania  
(Kaushany, Tarutino)
- I was born in the Soviet Union, Moldavskaya Republic  
(Kishinev)



# Jewish History

- Before 1812, Moldavian Principality under Turkish control
- 1812-1917, Russian Empire, Bessarabia Gubernia
- 1918-1940, Romanian Kingdom

# Before 1812

- There are documents from **14-15 centuries**, that during reign of Moldavian Prince Roman (1391- 1394), and Alexander Bun (1401-1433) there were 1500 Jews living in Moldavian Principality. Jews at that time had privileges to live and to do business anywhere in the province
- Several Jews were close to the rulers of the land. Isaak ben Beniamin Shor of Yassy was a Chancellor, one of the highest position in medieval Moldavia during reign of Stephan Chel Marey (1457-1504). Also Isaak Berg, a Jewish physician in Stephan's court became the Moldavian emissary to the court of Persian Sultan
- In 16<sup>th</sup> century Moldavian Jews were mostly of Ashkenzic descent having emigrated from **Galicia, Poland and Germany**
- By the end of 16 century Prince Peter the Lame expelled Polish born Jewish merchants from Moldavia on the grounds that they had a total monopoly on Moldavian commerce
- In 1612 Jews were established once again. Jews were invited by boyars – Moldavian landowners, to settle in Moldavia, establish towns and markets. Stefan Tomsa (1611-1615, 1621-1623) wrote to the Magistrate of Lemberg requesting that regardless of religion, merchants be allowed to settle in Moldavia to promote trade and to do business without disturbance. To attract Jews to the area, he declared the expulsion order of Peter the Lame null and void.

# Before 1812

- In 1652, the Cossacks of Bogdan Khmelnitsky came to Yassy to claim Prince's daughter Ruksanda for Bogdan's son Timush. On his way Khmelnitskiy massacred Jews...
- At the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century, the first town found by the Jews was Onitcani in Orgeev district
- According to numerous sources at the beginning of 19c there are about 20,000 Jews living in Bessarabia or about 5,000 families. It is possible that the number was higher than that, even twice that much. Many Jews were not registered at that time, and some Jews moved to Moldova principality after 1812
- A number of towns in Bessarabia region had Jewish communities: Kishinev, Kiliya, Akkerman, **Kaushany**, Bendery, Orgeev, Khotin, and many others

# Before 1812

**Jews in Bessarabia in 18 century – from Demetrius Kantemir – writer, political leader, scientist, wrote *Descriptio Moldaviae*, first complete work on what was known as Moldova.**

Kantimir described Kilia as a cosmopolitan town with Turks, Jews, Christians and Armenian living together peacefully.

Jews were allowed to build wooden synagogues but not stone structures. Jews were citizens of the nation but paid an annual tax that was higher than other citizens. Jews were engaged exclusively in commerce and tavern keeping. The author reported that “...foreign traders, Turks, Jews and Armenians keep all commerce in their hands because the Moldavians are not enterprising and show no initiative.”

In the final chapter of *Descriptio Moldavei*, The Customs of the Moldavians, the author recorded a stunning irony describing how native Moldavians on the one hand lived friendly with people of other ethnic and religious backgrounds in towns and villages and had the reputation of being hospitable to every traveler, yet “... they considered it hardly a mortal crime to kill a Turk, a Tatar, or a Jew.”

# 1812-1917 Russian period (1812-1825)



Emperor Alexander I  
1801-1825

1818 – first laws concerning Jews were issued by the Russian government “Regulations of establishing Bessarabia district:

Jews were required to join one of three estates, classes: merchants, petty bourgeois (townsmen), or farmers.

“...privilegias (privileges) given to Jews by Moldavian princes (gospodars), will be kept by entirety”

After 1818 Jews were required to have hereditary surnames. surnames.

1818. 86% of Jews worked in trade and 12% in handicraft. Several industries were almost entirely hold by Jews: Grain Trade – 85%; Markets in Major cities -90%; Post Office – 100% Jewish; Vodka production and trade – 100% Jewish.

1824. Russian government forbid the settlement of foreign Jews in Russia and even ordered the expulsion of those that had already become Russian subjects.

# 1812-1917 Russian period (1825-1855)



Emperor Nicolas I,  
1825-1855

## April of 1835 Laws

Bessarabia became part of the Pale of Settlement. From the Law: *A permanent residence is permitted to the Jews: (a) In the provinces: Grodno, Vilna, Volhynia, Podolia, Minsk, Ekaterinoslav. (b) In the districts: Bessarabia, Bialystok.*

Jews, as well as Gypsies were excluded from taking part in government (public) service.

Jews who were removed from closed cities of Sevastopol, Nikolaev and moved to Bessarabia were given privileges (1830) as an exception from common rulings. Jews-doctors from these places were able to hold a government position.

The liquidation of Bessarabian autonomy began;

the prohibition on Jewish residence in border regions was not enforced in Bessarabia until 1839;

compulsory military service started in Bessarabia in 1852-53.

# 1812-1917 Russian period (1825-1855)

Jewish farming much developed, 17 Jewish Agricultural colonies were established in Bessarabia and some of the flourished. There were 10,859 persons living on these settlements in 1858; 12.5% of Bessarabian Jewry were farmers

In 1835, Russia mandated keeping Jewish Metrical (metriki) records in two copies: one local and one for the government.

Beginning in 1857, a state employed Crown rabbi kept the registers with the purpose in mind of improving the completeness of the registration.

1836 – Jews 43,062 lived in Bessarabia

1830-40. Haskalah began to penetrate to Bessarabia and from end of 1840 – Jewish Government schools were opened.

1844 – 49,000 Jews lived in Bessarabia and 44,000 Jews lived in all other North Black Sea regions – NovoRossia - Kherson, Tavria, Ekaterinoslav, etc.

1856 abolished the cantonist system, when children from 10-12 years were taken to military schools, and after they turned 18, they served in the army for 25 years. Only from 1854-56 Jews of Bessarabia were subjected to the cantonists recruitment.

# 1812-1917 Russian period (1855-1881)



Emperor Alexander II,  
1855-1881

In 1855 there were six Jewish Government schools, in Beltsy, Khotin, Brichany, and Izmail, and two in Kishinev, with 188 pupils. Private secular Jewish schools also began to appear, and from the 1860s Jews in Bessarabia, especially wealthier ones, began to send their children to the general schools.

1856. 78,751 Jews lived in Bessarabia

1858 the Law of 50 verst from the border was softened, almost cancelled.

1864 – 97,700 Jews lived in Bessarabia

# 1812-1917 Russian period (1881-1894)



Emperor Alexander III,  
1881-1894

1881-82 – Pogroms in Bessarabia and NovoRossia

1882, May 3 – Temporary regulations concerning the Jews of Russia, proposed by Count Ignatiev, and sanctioned by the czar May 3 (15), 1882. MAY LAWS.

Jews were banned from living in rural areas and towns of fewer than ten thousand people.

Strict quotas were placed on the number of Jews admitted to universities, other institutions: 10% in pale, 5% outside and 3% in Moscow and Petersburg.

Decreed that the Jews be forbidden to settle anew outside, of towns and boroughs, exceptions being admitted only in the case of existing Jewish agricultural colonies

# 1812-1917 Russian period (1881-1894)

Temporarily forbidden are the issuing of mortgages and other deeds to Jews, as well as the registration of Jews as lessees of real property situated outside of towns and boroughs; and also the issuing to Jews of powers of attorney to manage and dispose of such real property.

These regulations – May Laws - were intended only as temporary measures; and the government itself when it issued them was aware of the fact that such legislation would not be good for the permanent law of the legal status of the Russian Jews. The regulations were to remain in force until the final revision of the laws concerning the Jews.

This revision was assigned to a special commission, under the chairmanship of Count Pahlen. In 1888, the special commission came to conclusion that from the government's point of view Jews should be equal with others! In this memorandum, it was said that the Jews are not foreigners, but part of Russia for 100 years! They recommended reforming the laws and giving Jews equal rights, but Alexander III and his surroundings did not want to do anything, they had different agenda for Jews.

1889. According to Jewish Encyclopedia, total population in Bessarabia was 1,628,876 and the population of the Jews was 180,918

# 1812-1917 Russian period (1894-1917)



Emperor Nicholas II,  
1894-1917

1897 – All Russia Universal Census. 5 million Jews lived in Russia and 1.5 million outside Pale. In Bessarabia from total population of 1,936,392, Jewish population was from 225-228 thousand, depending on the sources. Jews constituted about 11% of total population. In towns there were 109655 Jews, which is 37.4% from total population. Kishinev - 50237 Jews, which is about 46.5%, Beltsy – 10348, 55.9%, Bendery 10644, 38%, Orgeev - 7144, 59.5% and Soroki 8783, 57.4%.

Jews by Professions: Taylors and shoemakers - 13%, Grain trade – 9%, Forest – 8%, Trade of other – 11%, Sales – 43%, Transport – 3.65%, Agriculture – 7%.

Total of 377 plants, factories in Bessarabia and 106 were owned by Jews, and they were getting 30% of all products made.

In 1897, 7.1% of Jews lived from agriculture, when in all Russia only 3.55%

1903, Kishinev Pogrom, 49 Jews were killed, and many wounded

# 1917-1940 Romanian period



King of Romania,  
Ferdinand I, 1914-  
1927



King of Romania,  
Michael, 1927-1930



King of Romania,  
Carol II, 1930-1940

Governments - bound by International treaties on minorities – were obligated to grant Jews some civil rights.

An atmosphere of state antisemitism was pervasive.

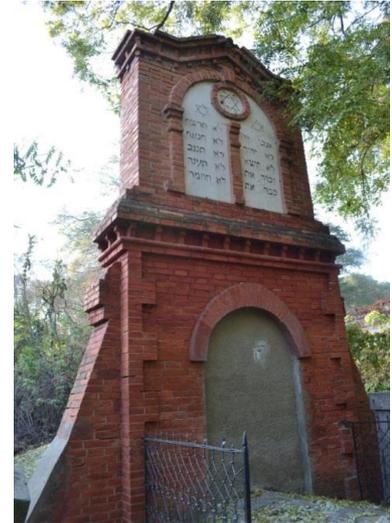
Jewish political party organizations were active. A network of Yiddish and Hebrew schools and two teachers' seminaries were established. In 1922, there were 140 Jewish schools with 19,746 pupils (105 of these were Hebrew schools, with 16,456 pupils).

By 1920, there were 267,000 Jews living in Bessarabia. Some Jews ran from pogroms of White Army in Russia, and settled in Bessarabia.

Jews were granted Romanian citizenship in 1918, but legislation redefined many of them as aliens in 1924 and in 1938.

# 1917-1940 Romanian period

Between 1922 and 1937, four Jewish representatives were elected to the Romanian parliament, including Rabbi [Yehudah Leib Zirelson](#); first as a deputy, then a senator)



In 1919 In Kishinev lived 62,000 Jews from total of 133,000.

At the end of 1920s in Bessarabia were 366 active synagogues, and prayer houses. In Kishinev were 77 synagogues, in Soroki – 60, Beltsi – 49, etc.

From middle of 1930s Fascist groups made life of Jews miserable. Antisemitism was on a rise.

Many Jews welcomed the Soviet Army in June of 1940...

# Jewish Genealogy in Bessarabia

- Available records
- KehilaLinks websites
- Jewish cemeteries
- Yizkor Books
- Main Source: [www.jewishgen.org/bessarabia](http://www.jewishgen.org/bessarabia)

# Jewish Genealogy in Bessarabia

Records available online:

Bessarabia Vital Records – 160,000 records

<http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Romania/KishinevVRs.htm>

Bessarabia Revision Lists – 108,000 records

<http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Romania/BessarabiaRevisionLists.htm>

Duma Voters Lists – 128,000 records

Business Directory, 1924 – 13,000 records

Kishinev Commercial Directory, 1940 – 1,300

Russian-Jewish Fallen Soldiers of WWI 0 1,559

Jews in Public Life of Bessarabia, 1862-1914

Vsia Rossia 1895 Business directory – 1,500

more...

# KehilaLinks websites

Bessarabia SIG KehilaLinks Websites: Three towns are in Transnistria (Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic (PMR)). One town – Bender (Bendery) was part of Bessarabia (on the right bank of river Dniester), but formally is part of PMR.

## Republic of Moldova

- Baimaclia (In Progress. Contact [J. Michael Burke](#))
- [Bălți \(Belz\)](#)
- [Bender \(Bendery, Tighina\)](#)
- [Briceva \(Bricheva\)](#)
- [Briceni \(Brichany, Britshan\)](#)
- [Călărași \(Kalarash\)](#)
- [Camenca \(Kamenka\)](#) (Transnistria) (UPDATED)
- Capresti (Kapresht) (In Progress. Contact [Patricia Klindienst](#))
- [Căușeni \(Kaushany\)](#) (UPDATED)
- [Chișinău \(Kishinev\)](#) (UPGRADED!!)
- [Dubăsari \(Dubossary, Dubasar\)](#) (Transnistria)
- [Dumbrăveni \(Dombroveny, Dombroven\)](#)
- Grigoriopol (Transnistria) (In Progress. Contact [Todd Cohn](#))
- [Leova](#)
- [Olișcani \(Olishkan\)](#)
- [Orhei \(Orgeyev\)](#)
- Tiraspol (Transnistria) (In Progress. Contact [Inna Vayner](#))

## Ukraine

- [Akkerman \(Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy, Cetatea Alba\)](#) (NEW!!)
- [Hotin \(Khotin, Khotyn\)](#)
- [Kiliya \(Chilia Noua, Kilia\)](#) (NEW!!)
- [Klishkivtsi \(Clîșcăuți, Klushkevitz\)](#)
- [Sokiryany \(Sekurian\)](#)
- Serpneve (Leipzig), (In Progress. Contact [Yefim Kogan](#))
- Tarutino (Anchokrak), (In Progress. Contact [Yefim Kogan](#))

# Jewish Cemeteries in Bessarabia / Moldova

There are 73 existing Jewish cemeteries in the region. Some cemeteries have few remaining standing gravestones, other cemeteries have 5,000-10,000 burial sites.

Go to <http://www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia/Cemetery.html>

For all the details. Bessarabia SIG members are working hard to photograph and index all remaining tombstones. From August of 2015 we completed 19 cemeteries! There are 36 cemeteries completed or partially completed with 42,000 burials in the index.

# Yizkor Books

Large collections of Memorial books. Mostly these books were written in Israel in 1950s, 1960s by people who came for these towns or villages.

Books include stories, historical essays, personalities, lists of Jews murdered by the Nazis.

Samples: Dubossary, about 400 pages

<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Dubossary/dub298.html>



Shabsa

Yerikhem

Some books are part of collection of chapters,  
Encyclopedia of Jewish

Communities in Romania, example: Kaushany, 3 pages

[http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/pinkas\\_romania/rom200394.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/pinkas_romania/rom200394.html)

[www.jewishgen.org/bessarabia](http://www.jewishgen.org/bessarabia)

--->If you are interested in doing Bessarabian/Moldavian research, please explore our Bessarabia SIG website, every section of it.

--->Subscribe to Bessarabia SIG Discussion group, where you can post your questions, and try to reply to others questions.

--->If you have memoirs, family trees for people who used to live in the region, please donate them to Bessarabia SIG website.

## Bessarabia SIG is looking for volunteers

We need people who can translate from Russian, Hebrew, occasionally from Yiddish, Romanian. Revision List project is underway, as well as Cemetery projects.

We also need your monetary donations to pay for new records acquired from Archives, for photos taken at the cemeteries, for newspapers, other material from libraries and archives, and more.

# Internet resources on Jewish Bessarabia

- Bessarabia SIG website: [www.jewishgen.org/bessarabia](http://www.jewishgen.org/bessarabia)
- Aaron Shneer Gallery: <http://picasaweb.google.com/106995678358404531836>
- Jewish News portal : [www.dorledor.info](http://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](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](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)

# Articles at Bessarabia SIG website

- Governments and Flags:  
<http://www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia/files/GeneralFlag.pdf>
- Jews in Bessarabia in 18 century – from Demetrius Kantemir:  
<http://www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia/files/Bessarabia-DKantemir.pdf>
- History of Jews in Bessarabia in the 15th to 19th Centuries  
Geography, History, Social Status, 2008:  
<http://www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia/files/HistoryOfJewsInBessarabia15-19c.pdf>
- [Jewish Life in Bessarabia Through the Lens of the Shtetl](#)  
Kaushany, 2012, Yefim Kogan

**Bessarabia/Moldova: Geography, History of Jews, Vital and other  
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Questions

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