IAJGS Conference

Philadelphia, PA

August 21, 2024

Translating Russian Documents for the non-Russian speaker

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Russian (Cyrillic) Alphabet

A a	Бб	Вв	Гг	Дд	E e	Ëë	жж	3 3
Ии	Йй	Кк	Лл	Мм	Нн	O o	Пп	Pр
C c	Тт	Уy	Фф	Xx	Цц	Чч	Шш	Щщ
ъ	ы	Ь	e E	Юю	я R			

There are 20 consonants, 11 vowels and 2 nonvocalized letters. There are two other vowels that are no longer used, but were prevalent prior to 1917. We'll see them later. The first three entries on the bottom line are never capitalized.

Other languages, such as Bulgarian and Ukrainian, use the Cyrillic alphabet, with a few differences from Russian.

These letters sound approximately as they would in English

	A a	E e	Кк	Мм	O o	Тт
Name of letter	ah	yeh	kah	em	oh	teh
Sounds like	f <u>a</u> ther	p <u>e</u> n or <u>ye</u> t	<u>k</u> ey	<u>m</u> an	m <u>o</u> re	<u>t</u> able

These letters look like English, but don't sound as they would in English

Вв Нн Рр Сс Уу Хх

Name of letter	veh	en	er	es	00	khah*
Sounds like	<u>v</u> ery	<u>n</u> ow	<u>r</u> at	<u>s</u> and	c <u>oo</u> l	Ba <u>ch</u>

^{*} Russian has two different letters that could be transliterated as *ch*. The one that sounds like German or Hebrew (as in Baru*ch*) is usually written as *kh*.

The rest of the alphabet

	Бб	Γг	Дд		Ëë	жЖ	3 3
Name	beh	geh	deh		yo	zheh	zeh
Sounds like	<u>b</u> oy	girl	<u>d</u> ay		<u>yo</u> gurt	t <i>mea<u>s</u>ur</i>	e <u>z</u> 00
Ии	Йй	J	Πл	Π	П	Фф	Цц
ee	ee kra	itkoye e	el .	peh	l	ef	tseh
m <u>ee</u> t	say	<u></u>	end	<u>p</u> ar	rt .	<i>f</i> an	ca <u>ts</u>
Чч	Шш	Щщ	Ы		ϵE	Юю	RR
cheh	shah	shchah	yeri*	ė	eh	yu	ya
<u>ch</u> ild	<u>sh</u> e	fre <u>sh</u> <u>ch</u> eese	<i>h<u>i</u>t</i>		<u>e</u> nter	<u>you</u>	<u>ya</u> rd

^{*} This is an older name for this letter. In modern Russian, it is named by how it sounds.

Non-vocalized letters and obsolete vowels

- ь (мягкий знак) soft sign follows some consonants and makes the preceding consonant softer. It is very common. For example, "дочь" (daughter) or the last name "Фельдман" (Feldman).
- ъ (твёрдый знак) hard sign prior to 1917, this sign appeared at the end of many words that ended in a consonant. It has mostly disappeared. However, it still appears in the middle of some words, such as съедать (to eat) ог объект (object).

For example, the word "брат" (brother) would have been written as "брать". This should not be confused with "брать" (to take).

- I i (десятеричное i) "tenth" i. (Depending on how we count, it was the tenth letter of the alphabet.) This has been replaced by И и.
- **b** ь (ят). This has been replaced by **E** e. It is rarely seen as a capital.

Strategies for learning to pronounce words

<u>Good news</u>: <u>Unlike English</u>, Russian is mostly phonetic. Consonants are pronounced the same way almost every time.* Vowels may change somewhat depending on whether the syllable is stressed or not.

There are many websites and YouTube videos that will help you learn the alphabet. Just Google "Russian alphabet" or "Russian cursive alphabet".

•• Go to Google Translate, which should be available on your computer or as an app for your phone. Type in any English word or short phrase. GT will give you a Russian equivalent. Try to pronounce it. Then have GT pronounce it for you. Don't worry too much about the vowels.

^{*} The main exception is the letter "r" (ge). When appearing between "eh" and "oh" or between two "oh's", it is sometimes pronounced like "veh". For example, "ero" (his) is "yevo", not "yego". This occurs mostly at the end of masculine and neuter adjectives in the genitive case. But in the word много (many), it is pronounced like "geh".

Russian cursive alphabet

Aa Aa	MM Mu	чч Ч г_
Бб Б б	HH HH	шш М й
BB B b	00 0 0	щш Ш щ
$\Gamma \Gamma T 1 1$	Пп П л	ъ 7.
$д$ д \mathcal{D}_{g} ∂	Pp Dp	PI Pr
Ee E e	Cc Cc	ь (-
жж Ж ж	TT Mmy	Ээ Ээ
33 33x	уу У у	Юю 10 ю
ин U и	中中 的的	яя Я я
KK K K	$X \times X \times$	Ii J_i
Лл Л л	HH Uy	古地

Notes:

- Underbar on lower case III and overbar on lower case T are not always used.
- Lower case a and o can look alike.
- Lower case φ can look like
 ep or cp.
- Both versions are capital Γ are used frequently. Also true for lower case $\underline{\pi}$ and $\underline{\tau}$.
- "Hooks" on lower case π and M can be too big, which makes them look like other letters.

A very brief look at some Russian grammar

<u>Bad news</u>: Unlike English, Russian nouns and adjectives are *declined* into one of six cases – nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, instrumental and locative (prepositional) – depending on its use in the sentence. For example, the nominative case is used for the subject of the sentence, the accusative case is used for direct objects. Different prepositions require different cases. There are three genders – masculine, feminine and neuter – as well as singular and plural. Each combination of case, gender and number may have a different ending.

<u>Good news</u>: You don't need to know the specifics. Just realize that if you see a word that has a different ending from what a dictionary or app tells you, it may be that the word is being used in non-nominative case. For example:

<u>Книга</u> лежит на столе. The book (nom.) lies on the table (loc. of стол). Я читаю книгу. I read (or am reading) a book (acc.)

Odds and ends: There are no articles ("the", "a", "an") in Russian. There is no verb "to be" ("is", "are", "am") in the present tense, but there is in the past ("was", "were") and future (will be) tenses. So, я студент means "I am a student" and я был студент means "I was a student." There can be intermittent use of hyphens – words may continue onto the next line without any connector.

Family members

сын (сыновья)	son
дочь (дочери)	daughter
отец (отцы)	father
мать (матери)	mother
брат (братья)	brother
сестра (сёстры)	sister
внук (внуки)	grandson
внучка (внучки)	granddaughter
муж (мужья)	husband
жена (жены)	wife

дядя (дяди)	uncle
тётя (тётки)	aunt
племянник (племянники)	nephew
племянница (племянницы)	niece
дедушка (деды)	grandfather
бабушка (бабушки)	grandmother
родственник (родственники)	relative

I've included the plural of each word since some of them are irregular.

Other useful vocabulary

день / месяц / год (лет)	day / month / year (age)
его (pronounced "yevo")	his
ея (now spelled eë)	her
умер(ла) / смерть	died / death
родились / рождение	born (m.) / birth
брак / замужняя	marriage / married (f.)
развод / вдова по разводу	divorce / "widow by divorce"
вдова /вдовец	widow / widower
холост / девушка (девочка)	bachelor / maiden
в неизвестной отлучке	in an unknown place (MIA)
первый / второй / третий	first / second / third
еврейский	Jewish / Hebrew
ревизские сказки	revision list (literally "story")

These words may appear in abbreviated form, such as род. for родились.

Numbers and Months

один	1	шестнадцать	16	Январь	January
два	2	семнадцать	17	Февраль	February
три	3	восемнадцать	18	Март	March
четыре	4	девятнадцать	19	Апрель	April
АТВП	5	двадцать	20	Май	May
шесть	6	тридцать	30	Июнь	June
семь	7	сорок	40	Июль	July
восемь	8	пятьдесят	50	Август	August
девять	9	шестьдесят	60	Сентябрь	September
десять	10	семьдесят	70	Октябрь	October
одиннадцать	11	восемьдесят	80	Ноябрь	November
двенадцать	12	девяносто	90	Декабрь	December
тринадцать	13	сто	100		
четырнадцат	14	двести	200		
Ь					
пятнадцать	15	тысяча	1000		

Social classes

There were at least three different social classes prior to the Revolution. You may encounter these terms as you translate.

Мъщанин	
(second letter is "yat")	

Middle class, townsman, petty bourgeoisie, etc.

Купец

Merchant. (Upper class.)
Sometimes there is a guild
(гильдия) mentioned (1, 2 or 3).
You also might see a relative
(son, brother, grandson, etc.) of
a merchant.

Agricultural. Many farmers lived in colonies.

Surnames

The history of Russian surnames is complex and best left for another lecture. (Alexander Beider has several books on this.) However, you'll find that surnames in Russian often consist of a "root" and a "suffix".

Some common suffixes are:

-ман, -штейн, -берг or -барг, -бойм, -бройт, -скій, -ович, -ник, -ер

Some common roots are:

Брон-, Вайн-, Вайс-, Гольд-, Зильбер-, Клейн- or Клей-, Мил-, Ройзен- or Розен-, Ройт-, Трахтен-, Фельд-, Цукер-, Шварц-, etc.

Examples are: Бронштейн, Вайнберг, Вайсман, Милер, Шварцман, Гольдбарг, Ройзенштейн, Трахтенбройт, etc.

Some of the roots can be suffixes as in: Ройзенфельд or Вайнгольд

Of course there are many surnames that don't follow this pattern. But this can help decipher some names.

Common given masculine names

Here are some of the most common masculine given names. Each of them may have several variants.

- Абрам, Аврам, Алтер, Айзык, Арон
- Бер, Берко, Бенямин, Беюмен, Борух
- Вол, Волько, Вольф
- Герш, Гершко, Гершон, Гдал
- Дувид, Данил
- Зелман, Зейлик, Занвел, Зис, Зус
- Ицек, Ицко, Ихил
- Іос, Іосиф, Іойна, Іойл
- Келман, Копел, Кива
- Лейб, Лейба, Лейзор, Лейзер
- Меер, Мойше, Мошко, Мордко, Мортко, Михел, Мендел
- Нахман, Нухим, Нусин, Ноех

- Овшій
- Пейсах, Пинхас, Пинкус
- Срул, Симха, Сухер, Симха
- Ушер
- Фройм, Фишел, Файвел, Файбыш, Файвыш
- Хайм, Хаскел, Хуна
- Шмул, Шмил, Шулим, Шая, Шліома, Шапса, Шимон
- Эль, Элья, Эхил
- Юдко, Юкел
- Янкел

"Traditional" Russian names such as Иван, Николай, Владимир, Александр, Борис, Дмитри, etc. are rarely used by Jews.

Common given feminine names

- Алта, Анна
- Бейла, Брайна, Брана, Блюма, Бася
- Витя
- Гитля, Геня, Голда, Гудля
- Двойра, Добрыш, Двося, Дина
- Ента (or Энта)
- Зисля, Зися, Злата, Зельда
- Ита
- Лея, Либа, Ливша
- Марьям, Мария, Малка, Малья, Миндля, Минця

- Неха, Нехама, Неся
- Перля, Песя
- Рухля, Рывка, Рейзя, Роза
- Сура, Сима, Сойбля, Сося
- Товба
- Фрима, Фрейда, Фейга
- Хана, Хава, Хая, Хайка, Хинка
- Цырля, Цыпа, Цывья, Цызья
- Чарна
- Шейна, Шейндла, Шифра
- Эстер, Эстра, Эйдля, Этя, Этля

Revision list (ревизская сказка) for Bessarabia region (область), Teleneshti city (город) December (Декабря) 26, 1848

РЕВИЗСКА 1848 -го Года Декабра Яв дия Бес			remys
Семьи. МУЖЕСКІЙ НОЛЪ	По последней ревизіи состояло и после опой прибыло.	Изъ того числа выбыло.	Нынѣ на
M B HJ A H E	льта.	Когда именно.	Авта.
ТРАНСПОРТЪ			57.
19. Menjit mojomscoburb Benk regit - Menja mojomscobura Con-	33	135/125	46.
Mopmer Jour -	12.	borns	25.
Prounts	- 5. - podemen de mo wea bocemb	wenny wenny or Mens	18
	rains gelection	noruf nopene Nobiu	9

Columns:

- Household (семьи) number
- Name (мужескій поль)
 (male) middle class
- Age (льта) at last revision
- "When exactly"
- Age at this revision

If there is no age at last revision, it usually means that person wasn't born yet. If there is no age at the current revision, it might mean the person died. Or they could be "missing in action" or joined the military.

РЕВИЗСКАЯ СКАЗКА

1848 -го Года декабря Яв дия Бессарабской Области Торода М: тенсений в

Семьи.	женскій полъ	Во временной отлучкъ.	Нынѣ з на лицо.
N <u>€</u>	M & M A II K II	Съ котораго времени.	Авта.
	ТРАНСПОРТЪ		.41.
	Менра мортновича Второбрациях омена Гонда — Менра мортковича Дочь Лем менровича омена Грухеньмей — Мортка Гона менровича до гери Хама — Сура — Сура —		45. 6. 22. 3.

Columns:

- Household (семьи) number
- Name (женскій поль) (female) middle class
- Age at this revision (but usually not the age at previous revision or reasons for absence)

19	Меир Мортковичь ЗЕЙКАНЕР	33	46 Meir Mortkovich ZEYKANER		* родился в тысяча восемьсот тридцать девятой году	
	Меира Мортковича сыновья от 1 ^{ой} жены	от 1 ^{ой} жены from first wife		from first wife		
	Мортко Іос			Mortko Yos	harn in 1920 (after	
	Шлоймы	7	20	Shloimi	born in 1839 (after previous revision)	
	Фройм 5		18	Froim		
	Аврум	*	9	Avrum		
Меир Мортковичь вторабрачная жена Голда			45	Meir Mortkovich's second wife Golda		
Меир Мортковичь дочь Лея			6	Meir Mortkovich's daughter Leya		
Мортко Іос Меировичь жена Рухел Лея			22	Mortko Yos Meirovich's wife Rukhel Leya		
Мортко Іос Меировичь дочери Хася			3	Mortko Yos Meirovich's daughters Khasya		
Cypa			1	Sura		

Note: Surnames are always transliterated in all capital letters.

Marriage record from Kishinev 1903

	Літа.		Вто совершилъ	Число и ифенцъ.		Глиние акти или запи-	Кто именно съ къпъ пступаетъ	
Æ	Byzcz.	Женск.	челинія (хипл) пів и фрикосо- сораду обруче-	Христіан- скій.	Kapen- exin.	си и областольства между пступлющики пъ брокъ и свидътели опыхъ.	въ бракъ, такжо имена и состо- япіе родителей	
						Деорой на	LONDCITUS MURACMAND- CKIÑ LUNGUJAHULHO LUNCULA DLEBO MINO- GABCKIÑ/ NO OMNO-	
297	23.	19	Pablitub	n	, to	ebugnemeu:	Weriso Mupaesallo CKALO PABBUHA OMI MATTALA 1903 a. LA	
			PEC. Pon- REHOUSS.		2 12 6	unapre u	H5861. GRBUYA CYPA-DOSPOULLE, GOSS PEULL. MBUS. MOURA PPURUMYKA.	

Columns in marriage document

Льта: Мужск. / Женск.

Кто совершиль обрядь обрученія и бракосочетанія

Число и мьсяць Христіанскій / Еврейскій

Главные акты или записи и обязательства между вступающими въ брак и свидътели опыхъ

Кто именно съ къмъ вступаетъ въ бракъ также имена и состояніе родителей

Age: Man / Woman

Who performed the rite of betrothal and marriage

Date and month
Christian / Hebrew

Major certificates or records and obligations between those being joined in marriage and witnesses

Who exactly marries whom, also the names and status of the parents

Раввин Ръс Чопленах

Rabbi Res.(?) Choplenakh

Тюль 25 / **Аба** 19

July 25 / Av 19

Актъ ксуба деоройсо (?) на 48 руб. сереб. Свидьтели Мойше Гиншпаргъ и

Б. Енгольцъ

Marriage contract (ksube). Dowry of 48 rubles of silver *

Witnesses are Moyshe Grinshparg and B. Yengolts

Холостъ Тираспольскій мьщанинъ Шлема Элевъ Молдавскій/ по отношенію Тираспольскаго Раввина отъ 27 Іюля 1903 г. за № 586 / девица Сура-Добрышъ, дочь Киш. мъщ townsman Moshko Krinshpun Мошка Криншпуна

Bachelor Tiraspol townsman Shlema Elyev Moldavskiy / by order of Tiraspol Rabbi on 27 July 1903, #586 / maiden Sura-Dobrish, daughter of Kishinev

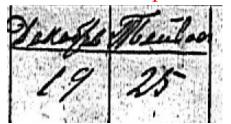
^{*} Dowry for a woman who had not been previously married was 48 rubles. It was only 24 rubles for a widow or divorcee. (Sort of like buying a used car.)

Typical birth record from Bendery in 1877 (in bad handwriting)

число и изони розденія и образонія Христіви- Еврей- свій, свій,	Состояніе отца, ние отца, ние отца да матери.	2018年10月1日代406月16日第七日2世出版出版的共產黨等所向
Texassa Theulas	luga elkolus	En elanens.
	ra Razusana ra a escaplus Gaen	

Column headings on birth record

- Число и месчц рождения и образения
- Христианский / Еврейский



- Где родились
 В Бендерах
- Состояние отца, имена отца и матери
- Кто родился и какое ему или ей дано имя

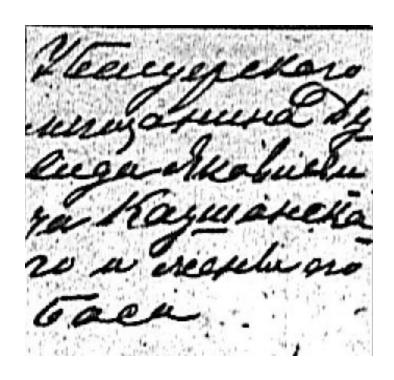


- Day and month of birth and circumcision
- Christian / Hebrew

Декабрь (December) 19, Тейвас (Tevet) 25

- Where born (written vertically in the column)
 In Bendery
- Status of father, name of father and mother
 *shown on next slide
- Who was born and what name was given to him or her

сын(ъ) Хаим(ъ) Ицко son Khaim Itsko



У Бендерскаго мъщанина Дувида Яковіевича (?) Каушанскаго и жены Баси

To Bendery townsman (middle class) Duvid Yakov Kaushanskiy and his wife Basya

Notes:

- All nouns and adjectives, including names, are in the genitive case since they follow the preposition "У", which requires that case. The ending "aro" is now spelled "ого". The nominative cases of these words are Бендерскій, мьщанин, Дувид, Яковіевич, Каушанскій, жена and Бася.
- The "middle name" of the father is a patronymic, thus ending in "–вич". When translating, leave this part out.

Family list Kishinev 1910

3	4	5	6 50	7	8	9	,
Прозваніе (или фамилія), имя и отчество лицъ мужескаго пола		Лѣта къ 1 января того года, въ ко-	Р А С Т Ъ Годъ, мѣсяцъ и денц рожденія по метрик	гмѣтка о прибыли и убыли «цъ мужескаго пола послѣ д составленія списка	Лица женскаго пола къ семействамъ надлежащія	Возрастъ къ 1 января того года, въ которомъ составленъ посемейный списокъ	Отм и у скаго ст
JEOGDMANY Dybudr Dybudoba	60	110			Dybuda fena 2. 5 jun. Nes		
ero ewnobus: F. Finkr TI: Uxem TI: Deyro TY: Oasepr	,, 5 3	55. 49		uuz oma ed 1854.	2. Eper. Mes	90	N 3
T. Users Dybidobo cuno bus : Yulepr		31.	\$\$10xf.9621841.		Uxeris neena: Pubxa Vow: Mobba	54. 36.	
īv. Ousepa Дувидова сыповаў: 1. Давидч vuyneys ? Суци - Йосидог ? Хашив-Вольсры ч. Шиши - меерг 5. Дания	"	21.	1880 г. 7 Япр. N 203. 1882 г. 29 улоп. 1854-360. 10 нар. вид. К/ОКт 90 fr 20 л.	ym. 12 frong 1885 n. N 240.	Muroka - Janka	47. 24. 22. 19.	- X-2

	Men			
Кофманъ Дувидъ Дувидовъ	60	110		Kofman Duvid Duvidov
сыновья Эликъ Ихель Берко Ойзеръ	5 3	55 53 49	в неиз. отл. 1854	sons Elik Ikhel Berko Oyzer
Ихель Дувидова сыновья Ушеръ		31	къ 1 окт 96г. – 18г.	Ikhel's son Usher
Ойзера Дувидова сыновья Давидъ Срулъ-Іосифъ Хаим-Водьфъ Шмиль-Мееръ Даниль		22	1880г. 7 Апр. №203 ум. 12 Іюня 1885г. №240 1882г. 29 Іюня №359-360 ум. 1890г. 16 Іюня №316	David Srul-Yosif Khaim-Volf Shmil-Meer Danil

Elik in unknown place since 1854. Usher was 18 on October 1, 1896. David was born on April 7, 1880. Srul-Yosif and Khaim-Volf are twins (близнецы), born June 29, 1882. Srul-Yosif died June 12, 1885. Danil died June 16, 1890.

Women

Дувида жена 2 брач. Лея	90	Duvid's second wife Leya
Ихеля жена Ривка дочь: Товба	54 36	Ikhel's wife Rivka Daughter: Tovba
Ойзера жена: Этля дочери: Сура-Ривка	47 24	Oyzer's wife: Etlya Daughters: Sura-Rivka
Милька Маня	22 19	Milka Manya

This family list seems to be based on one taken 50 years earlier (1859 - 60). People who were in the 1859 revision are presumed to still be *alive* in 1910, unless a death has been recorded in a document. Hence, Duvid is listed as 110 years old. Similarly, some of the women, such as Tovba, are likely married. But without official documentation, they are still listed here. If they are married, they would be listed with their husband's family.

See my article about this data set on the BessarabiaSIG website.



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