

# When the Record is Incomplete

## Windfalls and Pitfalls from Extrapolation Data

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The academic world by and large seems never to have regarded genealogy as a field worthy of scholarly pursuit.<sup>1</sup> One family's history is seldom of interest to other families, let alone to students of the past in general. Moreover, historians perceive our methods as so flawed by supposition that our constructs are doomed to collapse like houses of cards. Certainly we are all at risk of misidentifying someone else's ancestor as our own. The possibility that some of us are spending years building family trees that beyond certain generations belong only to other people, most of whom know little and care even less about their forebears, is very hard to face.

I doubt that there ever was a genealogist who got all the records he needed or felt that all the records he got held all the data he would like to find therein. To some extent, therefore, the record is always incomplete. We who search for documents from Central or East European archives sometimes encounter vast gaps in the record due to the destruction of war or other causes.<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on the benefits and risks in extrapolating data. I use the verb extrapolate as defined by Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary: "... (2a) to project, extend, or expand (known data or experience) into an area not known or experienced so as to arrive at a usually conjectural knowledge of the unknown area by inferences based on an assumed continuity, correspondence, or other parallelism between it and what is known."

In order to plumb this subject as comprehensively, thoroughly, and deeply as possible I have chosen the case study method. The reader is hereby warned that the case in hand is extraordinarily large and complex, that of one branch of the Jewish Clan of Gordon<sup>3</sup> with its earliest known roots in the 17th century Grand Duchy of Lithuania.<sup>4</sup> Let us first consider the issue of extrapolating data from the contexts in which sets of records are found.

### Demographic findings

Some time ago the Lithuanian State Historical Archives (L.V.I.A.) in Vilnius searched for Gordon (G.) family records from Vileika Uyezd, a former district of Minsk, later Vilna, Guberniya, provinces of Imperial Russia. An archivist searched through all the tax census records ("Revision Lists") for 18 different Jewish communities from 1816 to the mid-1850s. In 12 of those communities not even one G. was found. In three only one G. family each was listed, even in Vileika, the district administrative center, a large town (now a small city). In a fourth townlet three G. families were listed, two of them obviously closely interrelated. In the remaining two, Dunilovichi and Myadeli,

some 20 miles apart, so many G. families dwelled there that they took up 43 and 53 records, respectively!

### Extrapolating from the foregoing demographics

If the Gordons of Vileika Uyezd (comprising a territory which is now entirely within Byelarus) had descended from several different progenitors, unrelated to each other, who independently adopted the G. surname, they should have been found roughly more or less evenly distributed among the other Jews in that district. That the G.s were so drastically uneven in their distribution indicates that, at least in Dunilovichi and Myadeli, considered separately, the G.s descended from a common progenitor. (The single G. family in Vileika town was clearly near kin to one of the earliest G. families in Myadeli, and a blood tie between Myadeli and Dunilovichi G. has been determined.) Thus in examining the records from Dunilovichi and Myadeli the relevant question is not: are two given Gordon families interrelated, but how are they related? (I note here that the traditional Jews in that period were far more family oriented than we are in our modern western societies. So, e.g., if a brother took his family to reside in another town, sooner or later other brothers and their families would follow.) The potential for a windfall is apparent, but a caveat is in order.

### The pitfall in the foregoing extrapolation

It is certainly possible that a certain Gordon not knowingly related to any other Gs there moved to Dunilovichi because, say, his wife had a sister there. Thus one must admit that the interrelatedness of all the Gordons there is only a probability, though it might be over 95 percent. Moreover, the theory of probability is of limited value. It can describe more accurately a group as a whole than the individuals of which it is made up.<sup>5</sup>

However, the Gordon demographics are reinforced onomastically. Of the indeterminate total number of Hebrew and Yiddish given names used by Jews in this region of Europe only a tiny fraction is found among the G.s of Dunilovichi. Thus, e.g., the masculine names of Avrohom, Yitskhok, Yakov, Moshe, Dovid, Leib, and Hersh, and the feminine names of Sora, Rivka, Rokhel, Leah, Khana, Gesha, and Basha are repeated over and over again while only a small number of other names are found and with comparatively few repetitions. Moreover, there are many instances of two men having the same given name, patronymic, and surname; e.g., Khlavna Mortkheliovich Gordon — two different persons!

True, the patriarchal and matriarchal names of the Biblical (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel,

and Leah) are the most common among traditional Jews everywhere. Yet the onomastic distribution among the Gordons of Dunilovichi reflects the prevalence of inter-cousin marriages, which puts certain pairs of forebears on both sides of a family tree and accelerates the proliferation of the personal names. (Anyone engaged with canine pedigrees will encounter the same phenomenon because of the prevalence of line breeding with purebred dogs.)

### **The organization of records within a census list**

The Dunilovichi Jewish records in my possession consist of all 45 from the main list of 1816, 32 from the 1816 supplement, all 27 from the 1818 conclusion list, all 13 from the 1828 suppl., 32 of more than 43 in the main list of 1834, 38 of more than 70 in the main list of 1850, all 17 from the 1851 suppl., all 16 from the 1852 suppl., both two from the 1853 suppl., and the same for 1854—a total of 224 records, ostensibly the great majority.

A close examination of these lists reveals that the Russian tax census takers tended to group together records of closely interrelated households. Notwithstanding, there are very many instances where interrelationships between families with proximate records are not apparent because the surnames differ. Inconsistencies are also found; e.g., two brothers were householders but their records are not proximate. Instead, one or both are proximate with that of a man who was not closer than a first cousin.

There was a practical reason for the Russians to follow the discerned pattern to the extent that they did. None of the thousands of Revision List records that I have read contain cross references.<sup>6</sup> So when the Russians returned to a town for a new general tax census (They were conducted every 15-20 years, with two exceptions, since Czar Peter the Great instituted the Revisions in 1719.), they tried to account for every family that had been listed in the previous Revision but was no longer there. In such cases they could consult the previous list, then knock on the door of one of the households with a record proximate to that of the missing family. Nearest kin were more likely than anyone else in the community to know what had happened to their close relatives.

A very large number of the households listed in 1834 got the same record numbers in 1850. Evidently, therefore, the grouping of closely interrelated households was deliberate, not coincidental. The illustrations in this article include selected sequences of records from the 7th, 8th, and 9th Revisions (specifically from the years 1816, 1834, and 1850, respectively) of the Dunilovichi Jewish Community. My English translations/transliterations of the Russian texts are also provided.

### **Evidence from the records themselves**

The first case I would analyze is that of rec. nos. 7 and 8 from 1834, the respective householders being Leib and Hersh (Russianized as Leiba and Girsha) Yankeliovich Gordon. Both the surnames and patronymics being the same is of course a hallmark of siblings. However, Yankel (a

Yiddish diminutive of the Hebrew Yakov (English—Jacob)), has long been one of the most common personal names among Ashkenazic Jews; i.e., those of Yiddish (Judaean-German) speaking ancestry. So let us analyze further.

Leib named a son “Itsko” (Yitskok/Isaac) in 1809 and a son Yankel in 1821. It has for many centuries been an entrenched custom among traditionally minded Ashkenazic Jews to name children only after deceased forebears. It is clear, therefore, that Leib’s father died between those births in 1809 and 1821.

From rec. # 69 in 1850, not reproduced, I learned that it was in 1815 that Hersh named a son Yankel Gershon. Thus Hersh’s father died before then. So far no conflict between the two records on this point.

I have a record of Leib from 1818, not reproduced.<sup>7</sup> Living with him was his wife and his “kid” brother, Nokhum, then 12. Now if their father was still alive in 1818, wouldn’t Nokhum have been living with him rather than with his “big” brother? It is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that their father had died before 1818, though there could have been another reason for Nokhum to have resided with his brother.

The 1834 records show that Leib named a daughter Rivka in 1822 and that Hersh did the same in 1823. Since Leib named a daughter in 1818, then again in 1820, then a son in 1821, the Rivka for whom he named a daughter in 1822 must have died c.1821. Similarly Hersh named a daughter in 1818, so the Rivka for whom he named a daughter in 1823 had died between those two births. Certainly c. 1821 qualifies. As both named a daughter Rivka one year apart, and it was the first daughter born to either of them after 1821, it looks very much as if they named those daughters for the same woman, most likely their mother.

Here one must resist the temptation to reason tautologically; i.e., to argue that Leib and Hersh were brothers because they had the same mother (and father) and if they had the same mother (and father), they were brothers. The two postulates (one conditional) cannot prove each other. In order to prove the unconditional one, one must adduce one or the other with evidence drawn from outside the tautology. (I use this term creatively as inspired by The American Heritage Dictionary: “...2. Logic. A statement composed of simpler statements in a fashion that makes it true whether the simpler statements are true or false ...”)

Now I refer to rec. #3 from 1816, a posthumous record of Yankel Abramov Gordon and two sons, all having died in 1812., which is smack in the middle between 1809 and 1815, satisfying the “requirements” of both Leib and Hersh. Moreover, Yankel was born in 1765, and given Leib’s birth year of 1788 and the early ages at which Jews then married—as early as puberty—Yankel Abramov could easily have sired sons in 1788, 1791, 1795, 1801, and 1806 (the birth years of Leib sr., Leib jr., Khaim, Hersh, and Nokhum, respectively), with enough time in between to have sired some daughters too.

The foregoing extrapolations have produced a windfall, have they not? Now for a pitfall, however. How can one person name two sons Leib with overlapping lifetimes? Well “Leib” is Yiddish and all traditional Jews receive one or more Hebrew names at their ritual circumcisions (on the eighth day of life).<sup>8</sup> One of those Leibs might have borne the Hebrew name Aryay, which means the same as does Leib—a lion. Indeed Aryay Leib was a very common combination. The other Leib might have gotten Yehuda, to form the second most common combination including “Leib,” Yehuda Leib, meaning Judah is a lion.<sup>9</sup>

But, one might argue, surely two brothers wouldn’t be called “Leib” by their family; it would be confusing. True, but the earliest record we have of the elder Leib was made six years after the younger Leib died. So when both were living in their parental home, one might have been called “Leib” and the other “Yud’l,” a Yiddish diminutive for Yehuda. In practice “Leib” might be preceded by any Hebrew name.

Indeed, among the Gordons of Dunilovichi there were two brothers, one of whom was listed as “Leib Hersh” and the other as “Aryay,” which has only Leib as a Yiddish equivalent. Hence two brothers shared one Yiddish name. For the census records a Hebrew name was usually given only if the person lacked a Yiddish or vernacular name. In such a case the Hebrew name might be Yiddishized (e.g., Yisroel as Isser) or Slavicized (e.g., Yisroel as Srola). In the case here cited Leib Hersh, once he became a householder, gave only Leib as his personal name and his brother gave only Aryay to avoid confusion.

Now focus on rec. # 2 from 1816. The householder, Yosel Yankeliov Zeitel, appears next in rec. # 6 from 1834. There the first two letters of the surname are not clear, and in 1816 the first letter is formed ambiguously, but both records agree that he was 45 in that year and that his wife’s name was Rokha. So it’s the same household. Now note that the record of Yankel Abramov Gordon follows Yosel’s in 1816 and that in 1834 the deceased Yankel’s record position (not number) is filled by that of Leib. It seems to denote that he had succeeded his late father as the eldest son. As to the rec. no., 7, that was Leib’s in 1818 and his is the only number among the 27 records on that list that remained the same in 1834, perhaps indicating a special status in his community. Anyhow, his father was the first Gordon to be listed in 1816 and that was the same for Leib in 1818, 1834, and 1850. Moreover, several Gs were among the leadership.

Add to the foregoing the fact that Yankel Abramov is the only Yakov Gordon listed for that generation. Consider further that if Leib and Hersh were not brothers, they could not even have been as close as first cousins because their fathers had the same given Hebrew name. I trust that all readers will concur that the case has been made—that Leib and Hersh Yankeliovich Gordon were indeed brothers—and in fact sons of Yankel Abramov Gordon, even though all of the foregoing arguments are conjectural.

Now for a personal note. Hersh was my g-g-grandfather. How do I know? Well, my grandfather (Arthur Gordon) who was born in Dunilovichi in 1864, told me that

his father was called Meir and the latter’s father was Hershel.<sup>10</sup> Indeed Meir’s gravestone inscription (all in Hebrew) gives his name as Meir ben-R’ Tsvi Hersh (Tsvi being the Hebrew word and Hersh the Yiddish word for a deer). Furthermore, Meir’s death record (from Worcester, Massachusetts) states that he was 89 when he died on 11 February 1920 and that his father’s name was Harris (a common Jewish Anglicization of Hersh) Gordon. (The informant was his first offspring, Dov-Bear (Barnett), born in 1853.)

*Translation of 1816 Revision for Dunilovich*

Revision List				
Of the year 1816, July, Minsk Province, Viteika District, Dunilovich Jewish Community				
Families	Male Sex	How old according to the previous revision (1811) and whether they arrived since then	Which of these are now gone	New in person
No.	Burgers	Age	When exactly (they left or died)	Age
1	Silvina Benkhev Sagira Silvina's sons -----Abram Shmuel	56 15 Was missed	----- Died in 1815	61 --- 18
2	Yosel Yankeliev Zeitel	40	-----	45
3	Yankel Abramov Gordon Yankel's sons ---Leib Khaim	46 20 36	Died in 1812 " " " " " "	-- -- --
Families	Female sex	Whether gone in the meantime (since the previous revision, in 1811)	New in person	
No.	Burgers	Since when (have they been gone or died)	Age	
1	Silvina Benkhev's wife, Sofia Shmuel Silvina's wife, Recha	----- -----	55 18	
2	Yosel Yankeliev's wife, Rokha His daughter, Liba	----- -----	50 9	
3	(NOTE: only males were listed in 1811. The surviving females in family # 3 apparently lived in one or more other households by 1816.)			
No.	Burgers males	Age (in 1811)	When exactly (they left or died)	Age (in 1816)
12	Yankel Volfiv Kozmol	34	-----	39
15	Movsha Yankeliev Gombich Movsha's son, Gisha	36 14	----- -----	41 19
14	Yonkhan Arlev Gordon Yonkhan's son, Leib Gish	51 15	----- -----	56 20
15	Shapsha Yankeliev Chelkovich Shapsha's son, Volf	59 16	Died in 1815 -----	--- 41
	Volf's son, Movsha Yankel	8	-----	13
16	Baka Abramov-Zeitel Baka's son, Yankel	46 15	----- -----	51 20
17	Meyer Nakhimov Levit	40	Died in 1815	---
18	Yankel Shapshov Chelkovich Yankel's son, Movsha Volf A ward, Sotl Movshov Goldbard	39 9 24	They were lost in 1812 " " " " " "	--- --- ---
No.	Burgers females	Since when (have they been gone or died)	Age (in 1816)	
12	Yankel Volfiv's wife, Raysa His daughter, Liba	----- -----	28 2	
15	Movsha Yankeliev's wife, Recha His daughter, Raysa Gish Movshov's wife, Liba	----- ----- -----	40 3 17	
14	Yonkhan Arlev's wife, Khanna	-----	40	
15	Volf Shapshovich's wife, Liba	-----	38	
16	Baka Abramov's wife, Bayra	-----	46	
17	-----	-----	---	
18	-----	-----	---	

I refer you to rec. # 8 from 1850. There you will see that Hersh Yankeliovich Gordon had a son, Meir, who was 20 in Nov., 1850. Thus two records, one Russian, the other American, made 69 years apart, are in perfect agreement. I have already cited a record of Yankel Gershon Girshovich Gordon, Hersh's first-born. Indeed my grandfather said his father had a brother called "Yankiv" (a variant of Yankel) Gershon.

*Translation of 1834 Revision for Dunilovich*

Revision List				
Of the year 1834, April, 30th day, Minsk Province, Vileika District, Dunilovich Townlet, the Jewish Community				
Families	Male sex	How old according to the previous revision (1816) and whether they arrived since then	Which of these are now gone	New in person
No.	Jews	Ages	When exactly (they left or died)	Ages
6	Yosel Yankelovich Zedel	45		63
(NOTE: the other males in his household are not relevant to this article; hence not included.)				
7	Leib Yankelovich Gordon His sons: Itka Yankel Nekhan Yankel Volfovich Kremel	30 on the 1818 suppl. Was (unclear) Newborn (7) 12 on the 1818 suppl. 39	Was (unclear) Died in 1828	48 25 13 28 --
8	Girsha Yankelovich Gordon Girsha Mevshovich Gendel (NOTE: on the 1836 list it is Genshtein) His sons: Yankel Ephraim Itka Abramovich Zedel Yankel Itkovich (Zedel)	27 on the 1818 suppl. 19 Newborn (sic) (unclear) 51 16 (NOTE: the 1816 list says he was then 20)	Died in 1826 Died in 1832	33 37 12 6 -- --
9	Volka Shaprydovich Tsydyevich (NOTE: On the 1816 list it is Cherkhovich) Leizer Mevshovich Polak (NOTE: On the 1828 suppl. it is Gordon, aged 18) His sons: Girsh Abram	41 8 (sic, preceded by "3," which appears to have been ineffectively crossed out.) Newborn (sic) (unclear)		59 24 9 3
Families	Female sex	Whether gone in the meantime (since the previous revision, 1816)	Since when (have they been gone or dead)	New in person
No.	Jewesses			Ages
6	Yosel Yankelovich's wife, Raikha			56
7	Leib Yankelovich's wife, Naime His daughters: Gorya Tolva Rivka Nekhan's wife, Raiza			44 16 14 12 26
8	Girsha Yankelovich's wife, Itka His daughters: Khaya Rivka Baya (Actually Devora, confused with her infant sister, as seen in the 1850 rec. # 8. Itka was their stepmother.) Girsha Mevshovich's wife, Talya His daughters: Esther Fokha			33 16 11 3 16 3 1
9	Volka Shaprydovich's wife, Tairya Leizer Mevshovich's wife, Malka His daughter, Revva (7)			58 19 4
(NOTE: The other females in his household are not relevant to this article; hence not included.)				

**Revelations from cross-analyses of a sequence of apparently unrelated records**

Consider rec. nos. 12 through 16 from 1816 with the householder surnames of Kremel, Genshtein, Gordon, Chekhovich, and Zedel, respectively. No two are the same, not even as variants of one another. Now see rec. nos 7, 8, and 9 from 1834.

Revision List				
Of the year 1850, November, Vilna Province, Vileika District, Dunilovich Jewish Community, Burgher Estate				
Families	Male Sex	How old according to the previous revision (1834) and whether they arrived since then	Which of these are now gone	New in person
No.	Burghers	Ages	When exactly (they left or died)	Ages
7.	Leib Yankelovich Gordon His sons: (1) Itka (2) Yankel Leib's brother, Nekhan	48 25 13 28	Died in 1830 Died in 1848 Died in 1847 Exiled to Siberia in 1846	
8.	Girsha Yankelovich Gordon His son, Meyer Girsha Mevshovich Gepshtein (Genshtein in 1816) His sons: (1) Yankel (2) Ephraim	33 was omitted 37 12 6	----- ----- Died in 1849 Not seen since 1849 Was recruited in 1846	49 20 --
9.	Vol'k Shaprydovich Tsydyevich Leizer Mevshovich Gordon His sons: (1) Girsha (2) Abram	59 24 9 3	Died in 1848 ----- Surrendered to recruitment in 1845 Died in 1847	40
Families	Female sex	Whether gone in the meantime (since the previous revision, 1834)	Since when (have they been gone or dead)	New in person
No.	Burghers			Ages
8.	Girsha's wife, Itka (Leib's daughter) His daughters: (1) Devira (2) Bayra		-- -- --	45 18 17
9.	Leizer's wife, Malka (Khaim's daughter)		--	38

*Translation of 1850 Revision for Dunilovich*

Note first #7, showing that Leib Gordon had succeeded Yankel Kremel as the householder after the latter died in 1828. Thus this record is based on #12 from 1816, from which Leib and his family were omitted, then listed in 1818. Now houses in that region were very small, so with few exceptions only very closely interrelated families would have shared a home. Between the Kremels and the Gordons there almost certainly was a marriage. Given that Leib was 11 years younger than Yankel and Leib's wife in 1818 was seven years younger than Yankel's wife, the relationship would have been that of siblings or siblings-in-law. (As to who married whose sister—if the two wives weren't sisters—the available data limit one to guess-work, which is for fools, not researchers.)

In #8 we see that Hersh "Gendel" (He's "Genshtein" in 1816, #13, and "Gepshtein" in 1850, #8.) was living in Hersh Gordon's household though the former's parents were still living in Dunilovich in 1834 as "Genshtein" (#23), not reproduced. As the two Hershes were only four years apart in age, with three years between their wives, this would also be a case of siblings or siblings-in-law. By comparison with #7, however, one can here eliminate more possibilities. (In both cases, of course, the two men could not have been brothers.)

Hersh's first wife, Gittel, was a Zedel (evidence for which is adduced further on) and his second wife, Itka, was the daughter of a Leib, as seen in #8 from 1850. Since the other Hersh was not a Zedel and his father was not a Leib, neither Gordon wife was his sister. Thus Hersh Genshtein married Hersh Gordon's sister unless the wives were each

13	מוֹבֶשׁ אַבְרָמֹבִיץ דּוּנִילוֹבִיטְשׁ	36	—	41	13	מוֹבֶשׁ אַבְרָמֹבִיץ דּוּנִילוֹבִיטְשׁ	—	—	40
	מוֹבֶשׁ לִיבָה גִטְלְיָה	14	—	19		עֲדוּף גּוֹרָה פּוֹלְיָה	—	—	3
						אִירֶשׁ מוֹבֶשׁ בֵּה עֲדוּף לִיבָה	—	—	17
14	יֶרוֹחֶמ אֲרִיעֶשׁ לֶקְרֹמֶשׁ	51	—	78	14	יֶרוֹחֶמ אֲרִיעֶשׁ עֲדוּף חַסְמֵה	—	—	40
	יֶרוֹחֶמ לִיבָה לִיבָה לֶקְרֹמֶשׁ	15	—	20					
15	מוֹבֶשׁ אַבְרָמֹבִיץ דּוּנִילוֹבִיטְשׁ	59	דְּמָה 86 1813	—	15	עֲדוּף אַבְרָמֹבִיץ דּוּנִילוֹבִיטְשׁ	—	—	38
	מוֹבֶשׁ לִיבָה אַרְיֵה לֶב	36	—	41					
	עֲדוּף לִיבָה מוֹבֶשׁ אַבְרָמֹבִיץ	8	—	13					

Original 1816 Revision for the Yankel Abranov Gordon family of Dunilovic

other's sisters. However, the former had a new wife by 1834, so it cannot be determined whether she, Gitlya, or her predecessor, Liba, was Gordon's sister if the relationship between the two families was marital.

Fortunately my research goals do not require determining the relationships in the foregoing households. Suffice it to note that two brothers, whose records became proximate in 1834, separately shared a household with two families whose records were proximate in 1816. Thus the probability is very high indeed that the Kremels and the Genshteins were closely interrelated.

Now for rec. #14, that of Yerokhom Arie Gordon, his much younger wife, and an adolescent son. There is conclusive evidence, not reproduced here, that Yerokhom was (1) the official rabbi in Dunilovichi, (2) wrote all the records for the main 1816 list, (3) certified their accuracy, (4) signed the 1818 list, (5) also provided religious leadership for the much smaller community of Myadeli, 20 miles to the south, where the Gordons were the majority of the Jews, and (6) that his father, R' Aryay Leib Gordon (c.1738-c.1798) had also been a rabbi.<sup>11</sup>

A very strong case can be made for the rabbi having had a sister in household #15, inherited by Vulf Chekhovich when his father, Shapsha Yankeliov, fled in 1813. In an 1816 supplement, not reproduced,<sup>12</sup> there is a record (#17) of Izrael Velkovich Gordon, aged 10. Velkovich is a patronymic based on the Lithuanian Jewish pronunciation of the Russian word for wolf: volk (transliterated phonetically). Izrael had been omitted from the main 1816 list, in which only Vulf Shapshyeliovich Chekhovich could qualify as his father—despite the difference in surname—for the following reasons:

- (1) In an 1839 Jewish birth record from Minsk (reproduced from an L.D.S. microfilm) the father is named as Shabsha Vulfovich Gordon from Dunilovichi. Although available records do not show when the elder Shabsha died, his birth in 1752 and the relatively short lives of that period make it most highly probable that the Shabsha in Minsk was named for the elder Shabsha, who had lived in Dunilovichi until 1813, and whose son, Vulf, was born in 1775, consistent with which is a granddaughter born in 1839.<sup>13</sup>
- (2) The aforementioned Izrael Gordon is listed posthumously in 1850 (in rec. #14, not reproduced) as Srol Vulfovich Gordon with, i.a., a son, Shepshel, born in 1821. (Shepshel is a Yiddish diminutive of Shapsha,

a Russianization of the Hebrew Shabsai, a quite uncommon name.)

Given that Izrael/Srol bore the Gordon surname by the age of 10, and his brother in Minsk bore the same surname, one can infer only that Gordon was their mother's maiden name. Add to the foregoing the proximate position of the Chekhovich record to that of the rabbi and the fact that Vulf's wife was only two year's younger than the rabbi's, she cannot have been the rabbi's daughter, unless by a previous wife, whose existence is not attested. The only reasonable inference is that Vulf had married a younger sister of the rabbi.

Another record (#30) from the 1816 supplement is that of the rabbi's only listed brother. In the 26 years between their respective births it would not be unreasonable to expect that one or more sisters had been born. Those still living in 1816 would have been listed under their husbands' surnames.

Now consider rec. #16 on the 1816 revision list: Itska Abramov Zendel with his wife and son. Cross-referencing with rec. #8 on the 1834 list, we find that Hershel Gordon (my g-g-gf) had inherited that household when Zendel's son, Yankel, died in 1832, the latter's father having fled in 1826. Ostensibly Hershel and family dwelled with the Zendels by 1816 but were not listed until 1828<sup>14</sup> (with others who had also been omitted from the 1816 list).

Again it is only reasonable to suppose that this is another case of in-laws. Given that Hershel was 36 years younger than Yitskhok Zendel, the obvious inference is that Hersh

Translation of 1839 Hebrew/Russian birth record from Minsk

No.	Who officiated at the circumcision?	Month & day of birth and of circumcision	W Status of the father	Who was born and what name was given to him [her]?
F	M		e	mother
e	a	Christian Jewish	r	
m	l	[Orthodox [Hebrew church calendar]	c	
a	c			
l	a		b	
e	a		a	
s	r		r	
	a		a	
147		B. 17th. B. 17th	C	Minsk burgher. A daughter is born. She is named
		Bove 17th Bove 17th	i	Shabsha Vulfovich. She is named
		Sept. Zibrel	i	Gordon from Dunilovichi. The mother is Gonda Girsheva.
		(Sept. 26th on the Gregorian Calendar)	a	
			f	The father is a Minskite, Shabsh ben-Ya'q
			m	Gordon from Dunilovits.
			i	The mother is Minsk
			n	Ben-Herish
			s	
			k	

was Isaac's son-in-law. Indeed a cross-analysis of recs. # 8 in 1834 and 1850 shows that Hershel named a daughter Basha c.1833, by when Zendel's wife, Basha, would very likely have died, given her birth in 1770 and the prevailing longevity.

The proximity between the Zendel and the Chekhovich records in 1816 was maintained in 1834, Nos. 8 and 9 respectively, though Vulf's surname is transformed into "Tsyeliovich" and the Zendels are gone. This suggests that there was a close relationship between the Gordon and Chekhovich/Tsyeliovich households. Was that relationship connected with Vulf Chekhovich's putative marriage with the rabbi's sister? I.e., was Basha Zendel another sister of R' Yerokhom Gordon? Or was she Vulf's sister?

By 1834 both Hershel and Vulf had new wives, so those women cannot figure in the proximate positions of the Chekhovich and Zendel records in 1816. Also the now posthumous record of the rabbi (and his brother) was no longer proximate with the Genshtein and Chekhovich records but became #27, not reproduced, of the householder Leib Hersh Gordon, the rabbi's elder son. If Basha Zendel was the rabbi's sister, the rabbi's father, R' Aryay Leib Gordon (c.1738-c.1798), would have been one of my g-g-g-g-gfs, as was Avrohom Gordon (c.1740-c.1810), whom I suspect was the former's brother.

On the basis of the records in hand it is not possible to determine this matter. However, it should be noted that Vulf Chekhovich had a younger brother, Yankel, whose record is #18, three positions below Vulf's. As the rabbi himself wrote all the records in the 1816 main list, he apparently considered someone in the Zendel household to be so closely related to him that it took precedence over the relationship between the two Chekhovich brothers. Still, to assume that the rabbi was always consistent is not warranted.

The case for Leib and Hershel Yankeliovich Gordon having been brothers and the sons of Yankel Abramovich Gordon is based on conjunctions of many conjectures that fit together somewhat like a jigsaw puzzle. However persuasive my argument may be, one can still ask whether only a record including all three men and specifying the relationships can truly prove the matter and obviate any need for extrapolating data. Granted, it would require one or more earlier records not only to corroborate my conclusions but to

enable me to build upon Avrohom Gordon as my g-g-g-g-grandfather.<sup>15</sup> Yet records themselves can be wrong.

**When records conflict with each other:**

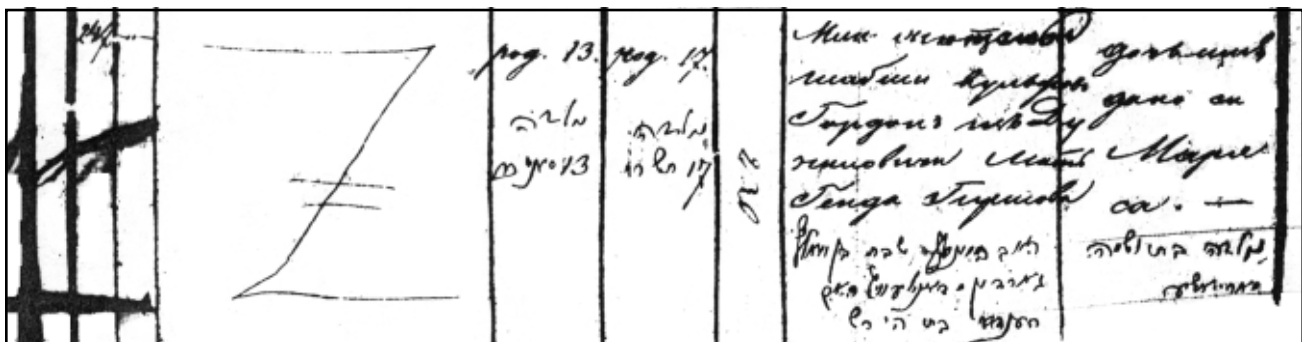
For several years my Gordonological research has been conducted in collaboration with my French-born putative 5th cousin in Paris, Michel Patrick Gordon. His paternal grandfather was born in Dunilovichi in 1867, the place and specific date being found on his French naturalization certificate of 1920. There was a problem, however, with his patronymic.

His Russian passport (from 1905) identified him as "Vulf Isakov Gordon," but his French death certificate (from 1951) gave his patronymic as "fils de Salomon et d'Eva" (son of Solomon and Eve). His naturalization certificate, relying on his Russian passport, named him as "Gordon (Wolf)." His signature on the passport is just "Gordon," though there was ample space to have added one or two given names plus a patronymic. There is a plaque on his gravestone inscribed thus: "a notre regrette president fondateur Wolf Gordon" (To our lamented founding president, Wolf Gordon). Evidently, therefore, his given name was David Wolf, only the latter (Yiddish) name being on the Russian passport. So what was his father's name?

David ("Wolf") Gordon was a very private person and spoke very little about his past. The Russian passport states that he was discharged from the army, having been inducted in 1887. (How he managed to raise a family while doing military service in Czarist Russian conditions for 18 years remains a mystery.)

Indeed David had named his first son Zalman, in 1897, and his second son, Yitskhok, in 1899. Family lore has it that David was orphaned at an early age, so his father died long before his marriage. Moreover, he was taken in by a man who eventually became his father-in-law. The given name was Moshe David. Thus David Wolf must have named his first son for his father as the boy's other grandfather was still living. He named his fifth son for that grandfather in 1910. Moreover, David was known as a piously religious man, so his sons would have known his Hebrew given name and patronymic as used in synagogue services. Thus Zalman was indeed his father's name though the Russian passport says Isak. Perhaps it was Shlomo Yitskhok or vice-versa. Shlomo

*Original 1839 birth record for Mariasa Gordon*



is the Hebrew basis for the Yiddish Zalman (and the English Solomon).

One problem remains, however. Patrick had it from his father that they were of Levitical patrilineage; i.e., descended from some man in the ancient Israelite tribe of Levi (to which Moses the Lawgiver belonged). Now my grandfather, Arthur (Osher) Gordon (1864-1955), was an Israelite, i.e., of a patrilineage that was neither Levitical nor priestly. Furthermore, the historic Gordons of 17th and 18th century Lithuania were also plain Israelites. That is proven by the published transcriptions of the inscriptions on their gravestones, the earliest one found having been set up in 1781. The challenge has been to find a Zalman Gordon among the records of the Dunilovichi Jews who could qualify as Patrick's g-gf.

Patrick's family had preserved the lore that David was the youngest of seven sons. Thus David's father would likely have been born more or less during the decade of the 1830s. There were only two Zalman Gordons in the Dunilovichi records that could have qualified chronologically by any stretch of the imagination: Zalman Srolovich, born in 1829, and Zalman Yankeliovich, born in 1839. The latter was listed at the age of 12 in a supplement of the 1851 revision, indicating that he belonged to a household that had been listed in the general revision of 1850. Thus his father could have been either Yankel Gershon Girshovich or Yankel Leibovich. The former was my g-granduncle and the latter was his first cousin. Thus both were Israelites. So that excludes Zalman Yankeliovich from having been the father of David Gordon.

As to Zalman Srolovich, it has already been stated that his paternal grandfather, Vulf Shyepshyeliov Chekhovich/Tsyeliovich, had undoubtedly bestowed his wife's maiden surname of Gordon upon at least two of his sons. Thus the Chekhovich men were not necessarily Israelites; but were they indeed Levites?

Now see rec. #17 from 1816. The householder's surname, Levid, is a variant of Levit (in Russian a final *deh* is pronounced as a *teh*), which is one of several names that denote Levitical patrilineage. Now Levid's record displaces that of Vulf Chekhovich's brother, rec. #18. Was Levid near-kin to both the Zendels and the Chekhoviches? Might his father have been a brother to Shapsha Yankeliov Chekhovich, making the latter also a Levite? Both would have adopted surnames between 1808 and 1811.<sup>16</sup> Many Jews with a tradition of Levitical patrilineage took surnames that did not denote that descent. (The same is true of Jews of priestly patrilineage.) Perhaps earlier records will arrive and determine the matter. Or perhaps the L.V.I.A. in Vilnius will find Dunilovichi records from a special census of Jewish males conducted in 1874-75 that will include a Zalman Gordon with a son, David Vulf, born in 1867.

For earlier records, back to 1765, we have high hopes. Meanwhile I conclude that the only justification for building upon extrapolated data is a circumstance in which you have enough to surround the problem completely; i.e., where everything fits together and none of the source data, from

which you have extrapolated, can undermine your genealogical structure.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A notable exception is Brigham Young University, which offers bachelor's and associate's degrees plus a certification program in genealogy. The allied fields of onomastics and etymology have long been welcome in university curricula, usually under the rubric of philology or linguistics.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., (a) the main archival building in Warsaw burned during the Polish uprising in 1944 against the German occupiers. Among the huge losses were most of the lists from the 1764-66 tax census of the Jews in the Polish crown territory, as distinct from the Lithuanian grand duchy; (b) Minsk was almost completely destroyed during World War II. Although the L.D.S. genealogical organization uncovered about one million double pages of records in the Byelorussian Central Historical Archives, barely 10 per cent of the vital records of the Minsk Jewish community, 1836-1916, were found there.

<sup>3</sup> The Jewish surname of Gordon is only homonymous with that of a Scottish highland clan (as both are with the Hungarian word for a bass fiddle—also *gordon*). The origin of the Jewish name is obscure, but it is apparently Slavo-Yiddish in derivation. *Gordo* means proudly in some east and south Slavic languages. (It takes the form *hardo* in west Slavic tongues.) In Middle Yiddish (Judaeo-German during 1350-1700) the suffix *-n* was sometimes used as a diminutive. In the Minsk region the surname *Gordin* was found. Whether it was a variant of *Gordon*—vowels in unstressed syllables are especially vulnerable to change—or whether the *Gordins* were an unrelated group of families is impossible to say. I note, however, that *Gordi*, an older form of *Gordei*, was a baptismal name for males in the eastern Orthodox Church. Jews often vernacularized their Yiddish or Hebrew personal names. Both *Gordo* and *Gordi* were found as surnames among Jews in the Grodno area of western White Russia.

<sup>4</sup> The Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth that emerged from the Union of Lublin in 1569 was for two centuries the second largest country in Europe. Only Russia was bigger.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., given enough statistical data about a given population, it could be said with a fair degree of certainty that certain numbers of people of certain ages would die in a given year; but it could not be predicted which individuals would die.

<sup>6</sup> Consider, however, the special census for males conducted during 1874-75 (in the wake of a new military conscription statute). The cross-references in those lists are between records in which it is apparent that the families

were closely interrelated. However, the references do not specify the relationships.

<sup>7</sup> Revision List—June, 1818. Minsk Province, Vileika District, Dunilovich Townlet. Males and females of the Burgher class {Jews}. L.V.I.A., Vilnius. Fondas 515, Aprasas 15, Metai 1818, Byla 371, Lapas 211.

<sup>8</sup> Girls received their Hebrew and/or Yiddish names on the first Sabbath following their 30th day—in a synagogue ceremony. Hebrew names were used in religious rituals. In addition the new-born received a Yiddish or vernacular name for secular use.

<sup>9</sup> Inspired by a Biblical verse: Gur aryay Yehuda (Judah is a lion's cub.) Genesis XLIX: 9.

<sup>10</sup> Hershel Gordon (1801-c.1880) was an inventive mechanical engineer. C.1851 he moved from Dunilovichi to Postavy, some 18 miles to the west, to work for a "prince" (my grandfather's designation). His mandate was to raise the standard of the agricultural equipment on the prince's vast estate. Hershel also devised an odometer for his employer's carriage. His youngest son, Meir (my g-gf), became a watchmaker and jeweler. He also repaired stringed musical instruments (he played the violin) and made false teeth. He taught my grandfather the watchmaking and jewelry trade, in which he prospered in Boston, Massachusetts, U. S. A. for half a century (1884-1934).

<sup>11</sup> Intricate handwriting analysis was required. At the bottom of the last left-hand page (for males) of the main 1816 list are three Russian words represented approximately in Hebrew letters: Myeshchanin muzhcheski Dunilovits {sic} (burgher males of Dunilovichi). (Some Russian phonemes do not exist in Hebrew, so letter-for-letter transliteration is not always possible.) To the left—Hebrew is written from right to left—are two Hebrew words in a distinctly different hand: Yerokhom ha-Rabban (Jeroham the Grand Rabbi). At the bottom of the last left- and right-hand pages (for males and females) of the 1818 list is a Hebrew signature, meaning: Thus saith Yerokhom, son of the great rabbi, R' Ari, the remembrance of the righteous is a blessing. (The patronymic and honorific are abbreviated.) To the left of the signature—on both pages are in handwritten Cyrillic the words: Kagal'nin Yerukhim Arievich Gordin" (Jewish Community Councilman Jeroham, son of Aryay Gordon). The Cyrillic words are in the same hand as the records themselves and appear markedly different from the rabbi's hand, though a comparison between cursives in two fundamentally different alphabets is like comparing apples with oranges—except perhaps for an expert. Comparing the Rabbi's Hebrew penmanship with the Cyrillic lettering in the 1816 list, I noticed that the inked quill tip markings looked similar. Then I realized that the same effect could have been produced by two different persons using the same quill and

ink in turn and applying the same degree of pressure. So I asked myself: are there any written letters in one alphabet that resemble any in the other? Indeed yes! The upper case Cyrillic zeh and the non-final Hebrew tsadi resemble the Arabic numeral 3. (Hebrew letters do not vary in form with case, but five letters have a special form when used in the final position.) (The Cyrillic eh in both cases also resembles a 3 but is not found in this set of records.) Comparing the the rabbi's tsadis with the zehs in the records, I noticed that both letters, though they consistently differed slightly, towered over the other letters in the respective words, an eccentric style that I had never before seen in either alphabet. The extreme case was that of aZik {sic}, a Russianization of the Yiddishized Hebrew Aizik (Yitskhok/Isaac); i.e., the initial letter of a proper name is in lower case whereas the second letter is in upper case and greatly enlarged! Now why would the rabbi have done that? Well, the tsadi is the first letter of tsadik, Hebrew for righteous. Surely, however, he knew that the phonetic equivalent of the tsadi in Cyrillic is the tseh, with a radically different form. Similarly the phonetic equivalent of the zeh in Hebrew is the zayin, also with a radically different form. It seems, therefore, that the form of the upper case zeh turned him on because it reminded him of the tsadi. (In German, of course, the Zet is pronounced as ts.) The masoretic (traditional) text of the Hebrew Bible also enlarges certain letters for emphasis; e.g., the very first letter, the bes rabasi, in B'reshis (In the beginning), denoting the first beginning, perhaps reflecting the "Big Bang."

<sup>12</sup> L.V.I.A., Vilnius. Fondas 515, Aprasas 15, Metai 1816, Byla 376, Lapas 26.

<sup>13</sup> L.D.S. microfilm # 1920793. An apparently related birth record from Minsk in 1847 is of a girl whose father was Movsha Shepsyeliiov (Moshe ben-Shepsel) Gordin {sic} and whose mother was also a Genda Girshovna (Henda bas-Hersh). Movsha is listed as a Minsk burgher, but without any indication that he stemmed from Dunilovichi. Nevertheless, he might have been an uncle of Shabsa Vulfov Gordon in the 1839 record. If so, perhaps the latter had died young and his uncle, Moshe, married the widow.

<sup>14</sup> L.V.I.A., Vilnius. Fondas 515, Aprasas 15, Metai 1828, Byla 346, Lapas 183.

<sup>15</sup> Such records were expected to be in hand in fall, 2001. The L.V.I.A. has been informed by a private researcher in Vilnius that records of Jewish families in Dunilovichi are included with those of the other taxable classes of the population in the general revision books from 1795 and 1811. More recently a vast collection, some 2,500 pages, of the special tax census of the Jews in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, 1765-66, has been discovered in that archive.

<sup>16</sup> Prior to the Russian surname adoption law of 1808 Most Jews there lacked family names. Some used surnames personally, though not hereditarily.