

HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF SURNAMES

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Abstract: The article discusses the morphological structure and semantics of Russian surnames. Russian Russians also consider the specific features of the development of Russian society, the formation of Russian surnames and their spread. The article also talks about the distinctive features of onomastics in Western European countries, where stable local variants can be traced.

Keywords: Onomastics, Russian surnames, morphological structure, first name, patronymic.

Vladimir Andreevich Nikonov, one of the foremost experts in onomastics, stated that examining each surname is a complex, time-consuming scientific endeavor that is not always possible to resolve.

The examination of surnames holds significant scientific value. It enables a more comprehensive understanding of recent centuries' historical events, along with the development of science, literature, and art. Surnames serve as a form of living history. It is a misconception to believe that this only pertains to the surnames of notable individuals. The surnames of everyday people also provide insights, such as tracking migration patterns of both large and small groups. Here's an example to illustrate this.

The 1897 census records for the Yurginsky volost in Tobolsk province (present-day Tyumen region) include surnames such as Gorlatov, Devochkin, Eskov, Legostaev, Minakov, Molodykh, Teplyakov, Chernikov, Chuev, Shashkov, and Shumakov. Similar surnames from the same period are also found in the Bolsheglushnitskaya volost of Samara province [55, p. 12]. Given the rarity of these surnames, it is unlikely that their occurrence is due to chance alone. Therefore, it can be confidently concluded that these families migrated from the Lower Volga region beyond the Urals.

The data derived from surnames originating from toponyms (geographical names) holds significant value. For example, the surname Koksharov is spread across the Russian North, reflecting the historical aftermath of a small town on the Koksheng River in Vazhsky land, which was destroyed in 1452. If you plot the locations where surnames derived from a single city are found on a map and connect these points to that city, the resulting pattern resembles a rose of rays, illustrating the extent of its influence. Such visually striking cartograms of medieval cities in southwestern Germany were created by A. Bach.

An even more insightful approach is the reverse method of research: identifying which regions the surnames of local residents suggest they originate from. In Ivanishchevskaya volost of Shadrinsky district (located south of the Trans-Urals) in 1858, the following surnames were recorded: Vologzhanin—273 individuals, Mezentsev—75 individuals, Vazhenin—70 individuals, Kungurtsev—23 individuals, and Ustyuzhenin—16 individuals. Therefore, even without direct documentary evidence indicating the origins of these individuals, one can infer that the settlement of this parish was primarily from the northern part of European Russia.

Many surnames serve as reminders of once-thriving professions that have now vanished: Balakirshchikov, Berdnikov, Bortnikov, Bronnikov, Voskoboynikov, Batman, Znaharev, Kozhemyakin, Konovalov, Spearmen, Gyrfalcons, Archers, Swordsmen, Oleynikov, Reshetnikov, Okladnikov, Ponomarev, Usurers, Rushnikov, Svechnikov, Buffoons, Sokolnikov, Solodovnikov, Streltsov, Cheesemakers, Syromyatnikov, Tolmachev, Trapeznikov, Khamovnikov, Tselovalnikov, Shapovalov, Sherstobitov, Saddlers, and many more. It has been noted repeatedly that some professions have disappeared without leaving any trace, and their names have been lost to history. Yet, these names can still be found within the collection of surnames—if only one knows how to interpret them.

The history of labor and daily life has influenced surnames, with their lexical roots reflecting social relationships (such as Batrakov, Baskakov, Polovnikov), clothing items (Laptev, Nogovitsyn), food (Shangin, Sbitnev), and customs or rituals (Mummers, Panikhidin). Many surnames also originate from old superstitions: in families where children frequently died, newborns were given amulet names like Found, Nenash, and Nakhodka. These patronymics later evolved into surnames such as Naydenov, Nenashev, and Nakhodkin. Surnames like Nekrasov, Scoundrel, and Fool are connected to amulet names—these are patronymics derived from non-church terms Nekras, Scoundrel, and Fool, which were not intended as insults but served as protective symbols.

Surnames like Ozhgibesov and Obernibesov serve as valuable remnants of ancient folk beliefs and traditional art; similar to nicknames, they represent some of the most concise and expressive forms within folklore. The wide variety of surnames mirrors a historical characteristic of Russia from the 16th to 19th centuries: the tendency to assign ordinary people pejorative suffixes such as -ka. V. N. Belinsky remarked on this phenomenon, noting: "Russia is a terrible sight of a country where people call themselves not by names, but by nicknames: Vanka, Vaska, Steshki, Palashki" ("Letter to Gogol"). Surnames derived from such forms were especially common in regions where the majority of the population was serfs. In the peoples of the Volga region, pejorative name forms persisted until the early 20th century. For example, in the village of S. N. Baranovka in Khvalynsky Uyezd of Saratov Province,

approximately 23% of surnames—such as Vashurkin, Ivankin, Matveikin, Poteshkin, Samarkin, Semkin, Timoshkin, Yakimkin, and others—originated from these forms.

Surnames carry with them many forgotten words and forms that have been lost in everyday speech. Everyone is familiar with Tolstoy's surname, but the emphasis has shifted in the word "Tolstoy." Today, we say "fat," yet the surname reminds us of an older form of the word. We are also unfamiliar with the short possessive adjectives found in written inscriptions, such as "wolf's tail" or "snake's whistle."

About nine out of ten Russian surnames are formed using the suffixes -s or -in. For example, the surname Yakovlev originates from the patronymic of the name Yakov, reflecting an old linguistic rule: in Old Slavonic, possessive adjectives were formed with the suffix -j (meaning "son of," as in Volodimir, i.e., "Vladimir's son"). Phonetic rules prevented this suffix from attaching directly to labial consonants, so an [l'] sound was inserted between them—for instance, in the names Svyatoslav (meaning "Svyatoslav's son") and Yaroslavl (the city name derived from Yaroslav, meaning "Yaroslav's").

Proper names, such as technical terms, belong to a distinct subsystem within the vocabulary system, where the principles of language are reflected in a unique way—similar to how light bends when passing from one medium to another. This subsystem has its own patterns that do not exist in the language outside the realm of proper names. Once a word becomes a surname (or another type of proper name—such as a personal or geographical name), it begins to develop independently of its original form and may completely lose its connection to the original word. As a result, determining the etymology of a surname—identifying its origin, the root word from which it derived, and the processes of its formation—can be quite challenging. The characteristics that make surnames valuable for scientific study also pose significant difficulties in their analysis. Surnames do not originate spontaneously; for example, the surnames Bersenyev, Kamanin, or Ohryutin suggest the existence of earlier words like bersen, kaman, or ohryuta, which have long since disappeared, leaving only the surnames as traces of their former forms.

Few people who are well-versed in modern Russian can immediately identify the origins of surnames like Likharev, Maklakov, Otkupshchikov, Ryakhin, Suslov, Shvetsov, and Shlykov. The root words of these surnames are now obsolete. In some cases, the realities they once referenced have vanished—people no longer wear shish kebabs, and the roles of muckrakers and tax collectors have disappeared. In others, the original words have been replaced; for example, a seamstress is now called a tailor, and "ryakh" meaning neatness persists, although its antonym, "slob," also remains. Not every educated Russian can explain the origins of seemingly simple surnames like Bobylev, Goncharov, or Konovalov.

Deceptive simplicity can be particularly insidious. At first glance, explaining the surname Volokitin seems straightforward, but it's not connected to a red tape

boyfriend or bureaucratic red tape. Historically, "red tape" referred to a worker leading a harrow. The surname Dvornikov appears simple as well—indeed, it means "son of a janitor," but originally, it referred to someone who was a tenant of a farm or yard, not a modern yard cleaner. Similarly, the word "Customer" doesn't derive from the modern term. In earlier times, the verb "to order" meant "to forbid," so a "customer" was essentially a supervisor or overseer. The origin of the name Bortnikov, based on its sound, is also misleading—it relates not to shipping but to beekeeping: a hive is a hollow beehive. It's difficult to now guess what Babkin originally meant by "midwife." Likewise, the fish carp is often cited as the root of the surname Karpov. The given name Karp, which was fairly common in the early twentieth century, has fallen out of use and is largely forgotten today. Not everyone realizes that the surname Gurov is derived from the short form Gur, from the canonical name Guriy.

Even experts can sometimes make mistakes. For example, the renowned linguist M.A. Rybnikova interpreted the surname Rybnikov as meaning "son of a fish pie enthusiast," but in reality, the correct origin is from a fisherman, specifically a fishmonger. I.A. Elizarovsky, a specialist in northern dialects, incorrectly linked the surname Parshukov to scab disease; however, it is actually a patronymic derived from the folk names Parfen and Porfiry—namely, Parshuk. Similarly, Kharin was mistakenly associated with a vulgar term for face, when it actually originates from the shortened form Harya of the names Khariton or Haryon. As for Cherepanov, it is not connected to the word for skull; instead, it means "potter" or refers to someone from the city of Cherepovets.

The surnames Voronov and Voronin are quite common; at best, this can be explained by the fact that they originate from two different roots. However, the exact reason for the ancient distinction in their word formation—specifically the use of the suffixes -ov and -in—has not yet been fully clarified. These pairs are similar: Danilov and Danilin; Mikhailov and Mikhailin. In addition to historical lexicology and word formation, understanding historical phonetics is essential when analyzing surnames. Without this knowledge, it is impossible to determine the origins of surnames like Yezersky and Yesenin. In Old Russian, the initial e sound was often transformed into o: for example, one was *one*, elen meant *deer*, jezero was *lake*, and yesen referred to *autumn*. Consequently, the surname Yesenin, based on the word for autumn, is comparable in lexical meaning to surnames like Zimyanin and Vesenin, whose ancestors were Zimyanya (Winter) and Vesna (Spring). The surname Archers does not derive from the word *ray*; rather, it results from a historical phonetic softening where *raya* became *haya*. The patronymic indicates "son of an archer" and refers to someone who made small arms, such as bows.

However, having a thorough knowledge of the history of the Russian language alone is insufficient. Many surnames originate from dialect words, and while the

origin of the surname Kochetov is generally understood—if not by everyone, then by most—others like Bugrimov, Drogachev, Zagoskin, and Paderin are less widely recognized. For instance, "bugrim" in Vetluzhsky dialect means "gloomy," "drogach" in Ryazan refers to "twitching or grimacing," "Zagoska" in Olonets signifies "cuckoo," and "padera" in northern and Siberian dialects means "blizzard." The Shipulin family resides in the Darovsky district of the Kirov region, where only local dialect dictionaries reveal that "shipulya" means "quiet" or "slow." Similarly, the surname Shirmanov appears in Nizhny Novgorod and Ulyanovsk, and the word "shirman"—meaning "pocket"—is known specifically in the Middle Volga region.

Foreign-language surnames are quite common in predominantly Russian families. For instance, Turkic surnames include Aksakov, Bersenev, Bulatov, Karamzin, and Mamaev; Ukrainian surnames feature Kravtsov, Miroshnikov, and Tarasenkov; Polish surnames encompass Boratynsky, Malinovsky, Milyutin, Skuratov, and Tsiolkovsky; and German surnames include Fonvizin, Furmanov, and Shneiderov. Some surnames genuinely originate from distant non-Russian ancestors, but even without this, centuries of close interaction among peoples have led to the borrowing of words and names.

Vishnyakov and Veshnyakov have entirely different origins: Vishnyak means "cherry thickets," while Veshnyak in the White Sea region refers to "a fisherman who goes to sea in the spring to fish." You can still identify Astrakhantsev in the name Strakhantsev, and Leonidov in Levanidov, but it becomes more challenging to recognize that Clouds are Lawyers or that Vakhromeev and Okhromeev trace back to Bartholomew. Similarly, Stakheev is linked to Evstafy. This pattern holds true across languages: for example, the French surname Robespierre derives from the combination of Robert and Pierre. Many distortions and modifications occur even before family names are established.

Distortions are often caused by reinterpretations. For example, the surname Senofonovs in the village of Egryovo, Vladimir, traces back to the ancient Greek name Xenophon. Common surnames like Selivanov and Seliverstov derive from Latin names such as Silvan and Sylvester, meaning "forest," which have been reinterpreted based on similar-sounding words related to settlement or distance (versta). Additionally, the spelling of the surname Dorozhkin can be misleading, as it is linked to the patronymic form Doroshka (the canonical name being Dorofey), among others.

Surname distortions are common in a foreign language environment, especially when the original word is unfamiliar and lacks related terms. For example, the German surname Garrach, which was brought to Petersburg by Peter I, evolved into Gorok, and his descendants are known as the Gorokhovs. Similarly, the descendants of the Scotsman Hamilton are called Khomutov. Many Ukrainian surnames in Canada have been anglicized; Antonyshev was transformed into "Intonation" (the English

word for "intonation"), and Makogon (meaning "the man who drove poppy vodka") was adapted into McMahon, following Scottish naming conventions, implying "son of the Mighty."

Even minor distortions, when accumulated, can alter the surname beyond recognition. The bearers of the surname Lokhtivonov (from Kamensky District, Penza Region) are themselves surprised to discover that its root is the ancient Greek name Galaktion, meaning "milk." From this same name, the common surname Loktionov is derived and reinterpreted to resemble the word "elbow." The surname Lakshin, originating from the short form of the same name Loksha, is less common.

The Yurchenkov family's history was marked by challenges. Their Greek name, Georgies ("farmer"), originated from Byzantium and entered Russia. Its meaning is obscure, and its pronunciation is unusual—since the Russian letter *r* is five times less likely to come before a consonant than after one. The name was primarily used in church contexts, while its informal forms—such as Egor and Yuri—became common in everyday life, possibly influenced by the Varangian name Yurga. Although there is no Russian surname Georgiev (which is relatively common among Bulgarians), the surname Egorov is widespread. Other related surnames include Yegorkin, Egorshin, Egorushkin, Egoryshev, Egoshin, Egoshkin, and others. The Ukrainian suffix "-one," meaning descendant (similar to "child" in Russian), led to the formation of the surname Yurchenko, which was then combined with the typical Russian surname suffix.

Addressing all these challenges simply involves examining the origins of surnames. Even once their roots are identified—which is not always feasible—we still lack an understanding of their actual meanings. For example, the surname Kuznetsov does not directly mean "blacksmith"; rather, it indicates a connection to a blacksmith—perhaps "son of a blacksmith" or "worker for a blacksmith." This distinction is important, as the semantics (meaning) of the surname differ from its etymological roots.

In Russia, the development of surnames started at the end of the 14th century. Prior to that, princely titles and the family names of boyars were not considered surnames. For instance, boyar Andrey Kobyl, who lived in the first half of the 14th century, had three sons: Semyon Zhrebets, the ancestor of the Stallions; Alexander Yelka Kobylin, the ancestor of the Kobylins; and Fedor, known as The Cat, the ancestor of the Koshkins, from whom the Romanov imperial dynasty traces its lineage.

Boyars and nobles primarily started to adopt surnames in relation to the introduction of mandatory public service and the creation of registers of those who served. Most noble surnames were derived from patronymics and grandfathers' names, and less frequently from the names of their estates, as was common among

boyars and the Polish gentry. The development of noble surnames concluded in the 17th century.

Surnames began to appear among merchants in the 16th century, initially among the more prominent, such as the "eminent merchants," which included families like the Stroganovs. However, a large portion of the merchant class remained unnamed until the 19th century. According to the 1816 census of the entire taxable population, nearly 25% of merchant families were recorded without surnames. Census records often contain entries such as: "the surname Serebryakov is permitted to be used from January 17, 1814," or "adopted the surname Shaposhnikov on July 10, 1816," and similar notes.

In the 18th century, surnames began to be assigned to members of the clergy. Prior to their graduation, the diocesan bishop would visit the seminary to bestow surnames, typically derived from the name of the church where the seminarian's father served. Examples of surnames with ecclesiastical origins include Arkhangelsk, Troitskiy, Voznesensky, Rozhdestvensky, and Blagoveshchensky, among others.

Starting from the mid-16th century, surnames of artisans and urban residents started to emerge. However, even into the mid-19th century, many townspeople remained without surnames. During the 16th and 17th centuries, common names among peasants began to be inherited from father to son, evolving into family nicknames or street surnames. For example, in 1643, there was a peasant named Ivan Demidov, son of Opar, whose son was Sergei Oparin. Although many peasants bore street surnames, these were not officially recorded and often changed over time. Consequently, it was not unusual for a family to have several different street names.

According to I.M. Ganzhina in the "Russian Surnames Dictionary," a substantial portion of modern Russian surnames originate from the names listed in the church calendar. Russian names, along with foreign and non-Russian names, only became a significant foundation for Russian surnames in the 19th and 20th centuries. In contrast, during the 16th to 18th centuries, such surnames were relatively rare and typically derived from secular, everyday variants of canonical names, often in their full forms (e.g., Borisov, Yuriev, Andreev, Nefedov, Isaev). Most surnames based on Christian names, including diminutive and pejorative forms like Vanyushechkin, Ivanchikov, and Vaskov, did not emerge until the latter half of the 19th century, coinciding with a period of widespread denigration of Russian peasants.

Other sources contributed to the formation of generic names. For instance, during the 16th and 17th centuries, the Urals experienced rapid settlement by people from different regions of Russia. During this period, geographical surnames emerged, reflecting the places where ancestors once resided. Examples of such surnames include Vychezhzanin, Dvinyaninov, Kivokurtsev, Belozarov, Kolmogorov, Mezentsev, and Pinegin.

Therefore, many researchers have attempted to classify surnames by categorizing them into groups such as "from animals" (Baranov), "from birds" (Utkin), "from plants" (Dubov), and so on. However, there are no possessive adjectives derived from common nouns like cart, raven, or crow. So, what is the origin of surnames like Telegin and Voronin? Ultimately, these names do not stem from the nouns cart or crow themselves; instead, they originate from patronymics—Telegin and Voronin—formed from personal male names, specifically Telegin and Voronin, which answer the question "whose son?" (similar to Ilyin or Fomin).

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