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## **The Rusins of Bessarabia in the 19th – Beginning of the 20th Centuries: The Question of Numbers**

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***Русины Бессарабии в XIX – начале XX в.:  
к проблеме численности***

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Studying the ethnic groups of Bessarabia, including Rusins (Rusnaks), began since the inclusion of the territory between the Prut and the Dniester rivers into the Russian Empire. Researchers of the Russian imperial era and Romanian historians of Bessarabian descent studied this ethnic group, the history of its emergence and localization in this territory, and the population size. The comparison of their data is of great scientific interest. For the most part, the authors of the works written in the first years after the inclusion of the territory, into Russia do not mention Rusins separately, identifying them as either Russians or Ukrainians, due to insufficient knowledge of the issue.

In the “List of Population Aggregates in the Bessarabian Region” published by the Statistical Committee (The Bessarabian Region. The List of Communities/Populated Areas according to the 1859 Data. Published by the Central Statistical Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, St.Petersburg, 1861) “Galicians (Galichane) or proper Rusnaks either Rusins often called either Little Russians (though the name is incorrect) or Raylians, or even more specifically, Rayans” were mentioned among the ethnic groups that inhabited Bessarabia. They were called “the oldest, if not the original, settlers in these lands according to the time of of their settlement”. It was mentioned that

Rusnaks lived mainly in the Khotyn County, where they amounted to more than 3/5 of the population (and to 1/8 of the entire population of Bessarabia).

A. I. Zashuk (Zashuk A. I. Materials for Geography and Statistics of Russia Collected by the Officers of the General Headquarters. The Bessarabian Region. Compiled by General Headquarters Captain A. Zashuk, St. Petersburg, 1862) lists "the tribes inhabiting Bessarabia at present": "Moldavians (Romanians), Rusins or a Southern Russian tribe, Bulgarians, Armenians, Greeks, German settlers, the Swiss as well as Jews and Roma people dispersed everywhere; besides, immigrants from various regions, the Great Russians and Little Russians assigned at different periods to the cities and villages mostly in the central and southern parts of Bessarabia and the Poles in the Khotyn County were also part of the Bessarabian population as well as Serbs and Arnauts (hellenized Albanians) residing in the Bulgarian settlements". He pointed out that "the second largest tribe inhabiting Bessarabia are Rusins/Rusnaks speaking the Southern Russian dialect which is somewhat different from Little Russian"; "this tribe also inhabited Red Rus (Red Ruthenia) and the Principality of Halych". They inhabit "almost all the villages in the Khotyn County and some villages around the Prut in the Yași County, mostly in its northern part". The number of Rusins in the entire region was estimated by him at approximately 120,000 people. Zashuk divided Rusins into three groups: indigenous people, those displaced by Moldavian Gospodar Gheorghe Duca whom the Turks had appointed the hetman of Ukraine in 1681 – 1684, and those who moved to Moldavia during the period of the Union at the end of 16th – early 17th centuries.

A. S. Afanasyev-Chuzhbinsky (Afanasyev-Chuzhbinsky A. S. Travel to the Southern Russia. St. Petersburg, 1863, Part 2) wrote that "Little Russians, ("Rusnaks are a subethnic group of Little Russians") Moldavians, Jews, Armenians, Serbs, Romani, and Great Russian Old Believers (dissenters) referred to as Lipovans in Russia, lived on both banks of the Dniester from the Austrian border as far as the Black Sea. He also noted that the Bessarabian Rusnaks and the Galicians were two kindred ethnic groups indigenous to these lands.

In the monograph "Bessarabia. Historical Description. The Posthumous Release of P. N. Batyushkov's Historical Publications" (St. Petersburg, 1892) Rusins were called "Old Croatsians' descendants", "indigenous inhabitants of the Khotyn and the neighbouring counties", part of the Russian people who had lived there before the arrival of Vlachs, and were different from the Little Russians (Rusins, Little Russians, Great Russians – S.S.). In 1861 – 1862, the Bessarabian population totalled

to 1,003,035 people, among them 515,927 Moldavians and Vlachs, 283,793 Rusins, Little Russians and Great Russians.

In the review "Bessarabia. Geographical, Historical, Statistical, Economic, Ethnographic, and Literary Reference Book" (Moscow, 1903), edited by P. A. Krushevan it was emphasised that "Rusins, or Rusnaks, speaking the language which was a little different from the Little Russian language" were the indigenous population of the region, living in the upper lands of Bessarabia before the arrival of "Dragos, the first founder of Moldova". "Rusins inhabit almost all the villages in the Khotyn County and some villages around the Prut in the Beltsy County, mostly in its northern part. Their total number in the governorate is not less than 250,000, that is, 1/8 of the entire population".

The works carried out under the guidance of P. P. Semenov-Tyan-Shansky also provide information about the Rusin population of Bessarabia. The first volume of the "Geographical and Statistical Dictionary of Russian Empire" published in 1863 informs in the Bessarabian Region Section that "Rusnaks or Galicians and Rayans who form a raya (a province) of the Turkish possessions, amounting up to 130,000 people, both males and females, live mostly in Khotyn, Soroka, Iași and Orhei (Orgeev) counties. The Little Russians began to settle here in the 17th century, now their number amounts to 70,000 people both males and females".

According to P. A. Nestorovsky, the author of the first monograph on Bessarabian Rusins (Nestorovsky P. A. Bessarabian Rusins: Historical and Ethnographic Essay. Warsaw, 1905), "isolated long ago from the congeneric Rusins living across the border, the Bessarabian Rusins, during their isolated existence, had become an independent ethnographic entity with quite clear-marked individuality". He stated that "now they are no longer the Rusins of Bukovina or Galicia nor the Little Russians of Russia's southwestern provinces but an almost independent ethnic group, realising, of course, that the independence is relative". The Rusins, as the author points out, are "generally regarded as the Little Russian population of Galicia and Bukovina or the descendants of those early Slavs who are known in history as Chervona Rus' (Red Ruthenia) or Chervonorussy. The descendants of these Chervonorussy survived in Bessarabia too, namely, in the Khotyn County. Their separate settlements are occasionally found in the other counties, mainly in the Soroka and Beltsy counties". He thought the latter ones to have been subjected to considerable "Romanization" ("Moldavanization"). Nestorovski believed that the Rusin population "in the Khotyn district, and in Bessarabia on the whole was about 250,000 people at the beginning of the 20th century

According to V. N. Butovich (Butovich V. N. Materials for Ethnographic Map of Bessarabian Province. Kiev, 1916), the total number of the Rusins, whom he called "the local Little Russians, usually calling themselves Rusnaks or the Russians", was not less than 270,000 people in the Khotyn, Soroka, Beltsy and Orhei counties in 1907.

L. S. Berg, whose works on the history of Bessarabia were published immediately after the revolution (Berg L. S. Bessarabia. Country – People – Economy. Petrograd, 1918; The Population of Bessarabia. Ethnographic Composition and Population Size. Petrograd, 1923), called Rusins "Little Russians-Ukrainians". This "Little Russian indigenous population is concentrated in the north of the province, mainly in the Khotyn County". "Our Little Russians call themselves "Rusnaks" or Russkie". It was noted that earlier they were often called Rayikas or Raylians because they inhabited the Khotyn raya under the Turkish rule. In the Akkerman County there is the village of Raylianka called so due to being inhabited by the Little Russians who moved there from the Khotyn County. Big masses of Little Russians inhabit predominantly the northern part of the Khotyn County.

Little Russians amount to 53% of the population in this county including the town. Their separate settlements are occasionally found in the other counties, mainly in the Soroka and Beltsy counties. The entire indigenous Little Russian population (the so-called Rusins) amounts up to 250,000 people in the Northern Bessarabia.

Researchers noted that the Rusins living side by side with the Moldavians, were subjected to "Romanization" ("Moldavanization").

Thus, the majority of the Russian ethnographers of the imperial period considered Bessarabian Rusins (Rusnaks) to be the indigenous population of the region related to the Rusins of the neighbouring Austrian Bukovina and Galicia. They identified the Rusyns as an ethnic group different from the Little Russians. Some researchers regarded them as an entirely separate ethnic group, they designated the northeast of Bessarabia (Khotyn, partly Beltsy, Soroka and Orhei counties) as the region of Rusins' compact settlement. Besides, some ethnographers pointed out their non-compact settlement in the other districts, including Moldavian villages. This fact, considering the bilingualism of Rusins, made it difficult to determine their actual number. The number of the Rusins of Bessarabia was determined in the range from 100,000 to 130,000 in the second half of the 19th century; at the beginning of the 20th century, it ranged from 250,000 up to more than 270,000 people.

We can agree with V. N. Butovich that Rusins lived not only in the North of Bessarabia, but also throughout its entire territory (concentrated in

the south of the province and in one district of Chişinău, and dispersed in many of Moldavian towns, villages and “shtetls” of the region). This is confirmed by the fact that many citizens in present-day Moldova have a large number of surnames of the Rusin origin (including ethnic surnames).

According to 2012 data, there were in Moldova:

4,681 people whose surname was Rusnak [ <i>Rusnac</i> – Rom.]	
6,017 .....	Railean
1,604 .....	Raileanu
265 .....	Reilyan [ <i>Răilean</i> – Rom.]
2,127 .....	Reilyanu [ <i>Răileanu</i> – Rom.]
11,489 .....	Gutsu [ <i>Guţu</i> – Rom.]
403 .....	Gutsul [ <i>Guţul</i> – Rom.]
7,259 .....	Russu
23,162 .....	Rusu

The surnames with such suffixes as *-uk/-yuk/-chuk*, *-ak/-yak*, *-ey*, *-sky/-tsky* are spread across the Prut-Dniester region. They belong to the southwestern group of East Slavic (mostly Rusin) names. According to the data as of the beginning of 2011, 7 surnames ending in *-uk/-yuk/-chuk* are among 300 most widespread surnames in Moldova (The total number of surnames in the republic is 141,570).

They are distributed as follows:

Vakarchuk [ <i>Vacarciuc</i> – Rom.] .....	2,392 people
Gavrilyuk [ <i>Gavriliuc</i> – Rom.] .....	1,983
Romanchuk [ <i>Romanciuc</i> – Rom.] .....	1,844
Kovalchuk [ <i>Covalciuc</i> – Rom.] .....	1,839
Savciuc (Savchuk) [ <i>Savciuc</i> – Rom.] .....	1,828
Shevchuk [ <i>Şevciuc</i> – Rom.] .....	1,787
Tkachuk [ <i>Tcaciuc</i> – Rom.] .....	1,762

Thus, the real number of the Rusins of Bessarabia in the 19th and early 20th centuries, in the author’s opinion, considerably exceeded the figures provided by the researchers of the imperial period.

### Keywords

Rusins, Bessarabia, Russian Empire, Russia, Moldavia, Bukovina, Russians.