

Paris People Came From Where—Huguenots?

Paris in Bessarabien:
Chronik der Gemeinden Paris und Neu-Paris in Bessarabien,
Arthur Suckut, self-published, 1986, 320 pages.

Arthur Suckut published his *Paris in Bessarabia: A History of Paris and Neu-Paris, Bessarabia* for the 170th Anniversary of the founding of the Village of Paris. Of particular interest to this translator was what he had to say about some of the people who came to Paris, Bessarabia and their possible connection with the Huguenots back in France. Pages 24-27 of his book are being translated below by:

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[Translation Begins]

Where Did The People Of Paris Come From?

Attempt at “Explaining the Footsteps”

According to our settlement history in Bessarabia, in the so-called “Budschak,” it is considered to be by the “Warsaw colonists,” because they moved from there by land to Bessarabia, like many other colonists who had heeded the tsar's call. But this area was only a stopover, maybe a few years or decades, exactly how long no one knows for sure. They were probably on a migration several times through different German countries until they finally landed in Bessarabia, the last stop in their search for a good and permanent place to stay, where they could live in peace. That is what was found in Paris.

Are We Huguenots from France?

As soon as we arrived at the transition camp *Semlin*, near Belgard (Yugoslavia), in the process of our 1940 Resettlement [from Bessarabia], every resettler was questioned. The medical personnel there and the camp authorities were not only astonished at the name Paris (Bessarabia), but even more astonished about our names. Two men from their group were hobby linguists and were familiar with the names. They told us right away ‘You must all head on to Paris (France), because you are French and descendants of the Huguenots.’ We knew nothing about Huguenots. These people named off similar names which they associated with names among the Huguenots: Allmer, Fano, Fercho, Jans, Kison, Konrad, Kroisandt, Reppnack, Salo, Suckut, Wornath—to mention a few. Of course, the spelling of the name has altered, *germanized*; but the lineage came from France—of that they were certain.

Who were the Huguenots?

The Reformation got started in Germany by Dr. Martin Luther in 1517 and spread rapidly. But a Reformation also took place in Western Europe which experienced its own character through *Zwingli* and *Calvin*, the “Reformed” kind as opposed to the “Lutheran” kind. Nevertheless, they were all “Protestants,” as they were called at that time, and demanded freedom of belief according to their conviction. After a brief tolerance, this led to wars that were bloody with many casualties. The Thirty Years’ War, from 1618-1648, was ultimately a “war of faith,” especially in what was then German lands. The “divisions” of that time extend to the present day. The “Reformed” in Switzerland were more or less tolerated. Not so in staunchly Catholic France. Through ever new edicts (= decrees) they were persecuted until *Henry of Navarre* ascended to the throne in 1589 as Henry IV. As a Huguenot, he was well disposed to his fellow believers and on 13 April, 1598, issued the famous “Edict of Nantes,” which was to give them freedom of belief from that point on, despite the fact that he himself had already converted to Catholicism for political reasons in 1593.¹

But the freedom promised “forever” did not last a 100 years. When Louis XIV was in power, he abolished the Edict of Nantes on 18 October, 1685, and banned the further practice of the religion of the Reformed under punishment to “body and property.” They had become “free game.” Attempts by some European princes, including the Great Cur-Prince of Brandenburg, Friedrich Wilhelm, to negotiate relief for the Huguenots failed. Their only recourse was to flee abroad. The numbers vary between 200,000 and 400,000. While the rich among them went to England and Holland, the middle class and farmers took flight and found refuge in Switzerland and in German countries, especially in Brandenburg.

Already on 29 October, 1685, only eleven days after the fateful decree in France of Louis XIV, Friedrich Wilhelm, the Great Cur-Prince, passed the “Edict of Potsdam”² and promised the persecuted acceptance into his country Brandenburg-Prussia. They came in large numbers and were to some extent received by him in a personal way. They settled all over his country, many in closed settlements, e.g. alone in the Uckermark (near Prenzlau) 18 villages. They were given their own municipal administrations, church administrations and school administrations, and even their own jurisdiction. His successors continued this work, so that over time Huguenots were settled in all Brandenburg-Prussian parts of the country. From the pen of Frederick II, the Great (1712 to 1786), the following lines come about the Huguenots in his country: “Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, whereupon at least 400,000 French people left their fatherland. The richest went to England and Holland; The poor, but working class, took flight into Brandenburg; their number came to 20,000. They helped populate our devastated cities and gave us the manufacture capabilities that we lacked...”³

As the empire of Frederick II grew ever larger, especially after the three divisions of Poland (1772, 1793 and 1795), he settled from among these Huguenots who came to his country, families in the newly won areas, together with other Germans, who listened to the call of Frederick to make the deserted and devastated, sometimes also destroyed land urbanized and economical. This is at least true of the Netze District, which, still during Friedrich’s time, had fallen to Prussia in 1772.

We can assume that Huguenot descendants migrated further into the territories that fell to Prussia in 1793 and 1795, and from there, about 20 years later, continued on to Bessarabia. It is a great likelihood that these people can be found among the later people of Paris, who were after all already called “colonists” at a time. As well as the Huguenots.

Results of Personal Research

The last information in our partially existing documents is “Poland and Prussia” as a country of origin, without place names! This is at least true of all those who were “real” Prussians. Among a few Swabians, who moved across Poland to Bessarabia with the “Warsaw colonists”, places of origin are sometimes noted. These Swabians, to name but a few, include the names Bader, Franz, Kelm, Klein, Knecht. Here, further investigations could be worthwhile.

If one can speak of “footprints,” it has come out in research that our Parisian names are met up with here and there in France—especially in greater Paris!, in Flanders and Holland, often with the same spelling. The name of my maternal grandfather Breitreutz is called Breetkruiz in Holland, pronounced as in our Parisian Platt, in which most of our names were spoken very differently than written, for example: Pfahl—Paua; Ölke—Ejak; Kraus—Krus; Breitreutz—Breetkris, etc. Our name can sometimes be found in large numbers throughout Friesland, from Holland to Schleswig-Holstein (the Husum poet Theodor Storm was actually called “Sturm”; we even now say “Storm” for Sturm).

Also in Rhineland, from Cologne to Holland, our name shows up here and there (Schmidke, Schmidtke, Klettke, etc.). One can find many in the greater Bremen-Hamburg area. The name Bork/Borch, for example, can be met up with in and around Frankfurt on the River Mainz. But there are significant traces, especially in the Brandenburg region, including Berlin. They moved further and further east: Neubrandenburg, Neumark, Posen-West Prussia, East Prussia. And everywhere they have adopted and taken “language footprints” with them, which have held up to our time. How often we Parisians are asked if we are from East Prussia. If we say words that have within it “ei”, e.g. *Heiliger Geist* [Holy Spirit], then it could have been spoken by an East Prussian, it is that similar. Or when the Dutch entertainer Rudi Carell says in the advertisement for milk: “A Dröpke Melk,” then it could just as well have been spoken by a Parisian.

The clearest practical trace, however, can be found in the entire Netze District. Here I spoke to many people during the war (there where we were resettled), where they spoke like our Parisian dialect. Many of our names have also been at home here. Some of them could still tell that relatives had moved on via Poznan, Kalisch, Lodz, Warsaw to Russia, probably to Bessarabia. There were Parisian names everywhere in the area of Filehne—Schönlanke—Schneidemühl and other places. From the area of Lodz—Petrikau—Pabianice—Lask, etc., I met people during the war with our names; they, too, had similar things to say as did those from the Netze District.

After the resettlement in Warthegau 1941/42, many of our Parisians came into the *Scharnikau* District and the neighboring *Eichenbrück* District. Here is told the following story, by a descendant of Emil Ziebart, who wanted to visit his brother Willi during a holiday, who was resettled in *Mühlingen*, *Scharnikau District*. Already at *Rogasen*, where he had to transfer, he

heard in the side compartment of the train our dialect being spoken and went over, assuming it to be his compatriots. How surprised he was that they were not Parisians but pure Poles or else Polish ethnic Germans. They told him that that is the way they always talk; that it was their dialect.

Once in Mühlingen, he searched for his brother. He knew the same sounds again coming from a courtyard and thought that these were real Parisians. But far from it: Again it was locals, whether Poland or ethnic Germans—in his bewilderment, he did not ask about it any further. In any case, we have here the clear confirmation that for a long time the residence of the later Parisian colonists must have been the residence of the later Parisian colonists. This “language footprint” was also confirmed to me by the head of the “Research Centre for Folklore in Bremen and Lower Saxony,” Alfred Cammann, OStR i.R., residing in Bremen. He has conducted extensive studies, including among fellow Parisians, and from a letter from a working-class teacher reported that he spoke almost the same dialect as Parisians. Mr. Cammann is a recognized and esteemed researcher in our student organization with local affiliations (*Landsmannschaft*). We have also worked together for years and even today exchange letters at times.

In our dialect, however, there is another change that is to be addressed here. We have as a vocabulary, many ending in “o” or also “ei.” Also here it was possible to find a footprint. When our people in earlier times pronounced *sagen* (to say)—*seggen*, so it was later pronounced *seggo*. So many more examples could be cited. Where, then, is this change in the dialect from? The explanation is—so I found after much searching—with the language influence of the Jews, the “Yiddish,” mainly from the time (maybe 1800-1814), when our ancestors lived in the area of Kalisch-Lodz. Many Jews were native here; Lodz had among its inhabitants (1800 to 1850) up to 50% as Jews. They were the business people and manufacturers, they dominated in all areas, including culture and language. The Jews—especially in Yiddish—have many of these very endings with “o” and “ei.” In general, our ancestors from there took quite a few words and terms to Bessarabia. I myself have talked to Jews, even in Yiddish dialect; this was moreover also found in Bessarabia. When we Parisians said “Tato” (*Vater*=father) or “Mamo” (*Mutter*=mother), it is the same in Yiddish; but if they said “Voto” or “Moto,” then it referred to the old, the grandparents. We said it the same way in Paris. There I also heard the word “Groman = *Gemeinde*/congregation, *Gemeindeversammlung*/community assembly—just as we used it! Of course, the latter is also spoken in the Romanian language. Whether the “Yiddish” language influence had not also come into its own here? is going to go too far—it would require a scientific work—if one wanted to pursue everything here and bring more examples. But one thing seems almost certain after all this: all these show “migration paths and language footprints” apply at least to us people from Paris!

These “assumptions” may be accurate: We are Huguenots (partly), the people who passed through Holland, Prussia, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Neumark, East Prussia, Netze District, etc., then through Kalisch—Lotz—Warsaw as ethnic and linguistic “mixtures” on the way into the Steppe of South Bessarabia. A pastor from East Prussia, with whom I was on a study course during the war, told me, because of his knowledge of church records, that our name was also numerous there. He mentioned names like Broneske, Bork, Borch, Reppnach, Suckut

and other names; we practically went through the list of our Parisian names, and he recognized almost everyone from his East Prussian homeland.

I would really like to pursue “information of names” here, but this book would have to be a few hundred pages in scope, and that is not possible. Perhaps it will stimulate the younger generation, by way of scientific studies, to pursue this theme in a thesis (dissertation).

When the Bessarabian-German literature refers to the origin of the Parisians, or so with Dr. Albert Eckert,⁴ both are not wrong, their information is correct; only the origin, which is even further back, is open there, is not “questioned.” We Parisians are just like a “people scattered by the wind.” Our documents (church books, family trees, entry certificates, kinship sheets, etc.) do not provide more, so we cannot say any more. With a few exceptions, the final station is always “Poland,” “Prussia,” which at the time of their emigration to Bessarabia was the same in terms of geographical history.

[Translation Ends]

¹ Hans-Georg Tautorat, *Um des Glaubens willen*. NWZ-Verlag, Düsseldorf 1985, S. 16.

² a.a.O., S. 28

³ a.a.O., S. 132

⁴ Dr. Albert Eckert/dir. Albert Mauch, both gentlemen are mentioned only in the text, without providing sources and quotes from their publications.