

Bacharach/Bachrach/Bacherach Surname DNA Project

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Bacharach Origins

The name, which is spelled a variety of ways (Bacharach, Bachrach, Bacherach, Backerack, Backrach, Bakhrakh, etc.) is presumed to come from the town of Bacharach, on the Rhine in Germany. For the purposes of this article, I will standardize on the Bacharach spelling, but I mean to include all spelling variations.

Since more than one Jewish family could have originated in a given town prior to the time surnames were widely adopted in the early 1800s in Germany, it's possible that multiple unrelated families who were originally from there could have taken the surname in other parts of Europe. This is likely to be the case for lots of toponyms (names taken from geographic locations). For example, every family who became Bamberger might have once lived in Bamberg, but not every Jewish family from Bamberg was necessarily descended from the same male ancestor. For more on how surnames were adopted in Eastern Europe, see Jeffrey Paull and Jeffrey Briskman's article "[The Jewish Surname Process in the Russian Empire and its Effect on Jewish Genealogy](#)" on the topic. Surname adoption in Germany took place earlier, as a rule, than in Eastern Europe, usually with Napoleon's advance eastward, but the general idea is that there is a moment in each region when the local authorities created lists of Jewish residents and fixed the surnames that were to be passed down from father to son from that time onward. Prior to that date, the vast majority of European Jews used patronyms (e.g. Joseph ben Samuel, Joseph Samuel in Germany, Yosef Shmoelevich in Russia) or toponyms (e.g. Joseph Bamberger, Yosef Slutzky). These surnames changed with each generation as the patronym changed or a toponym could change with a move to a new shtetl, causing a discontinuity in documenting the paternal line.

Lars Menk's book [A Dictionary of German-Jewish Surnames](#), which is invaluable for doing serious research, lists dozens of locations where he found the name Bacharach, at least half of which are prior to the mass adoption of surnames across western Europe. Because the Bacharach name was in use as early as the 1400s and widely dispersed by the 1600s, when this study began in 2009 we worked on the assumption that there would be connections among at least some of the different families who carry the name. It was exceedingly unusual at that time for Jews to pass a surname down from generation to generation, unless it showed a connection to a famous rabbi or religious scholar. The exception to this is the Jewish community of Frankfurt and a few others in Germany and Central Europe where hereditary surnames were adopted

There were a few renowned rabbis who had the Bacharach surname and probably originated in the Rhine area around the town of Bacharach. One was Rabbi Abraham Samuel Bacharach (ca 1575-1615) ([see his Wikipedia entry](#)) who married the granddaughter of the famous chief rabbi of Prague, Judah Loew ben Bezalel and was the rabbi of Worms. His grandson, Rabbi Yair Chayim Bacharach (1639-1702) ([see his Wikipedia entry](#)) is even more well-known. In Ruzhany, Belarus, Rabbi Tuviah Bachrach was martyred in 1659. His family was thought to have originated in the Frankfurt-Worms area. There have been numerous illustrious rabbis in the Bacharach family for hundreds of years.

From [Lars Menk's book](#), in the section entitled "Historical Development of the Concentration of Surnames in Some Areas":

Thus, the surname BACHARACH (Bacherach; Bachrach) that indicates an origin in the town of the same name situated on the Rhine River was originally adopted in the cities of Worms (1449), Mainz (1455) and Frankfurt am Main (1516). Then, carried by a rabbinical dynasty, it spread to numerous locations in central and eastern Europe. Later, in the early 17th century, it appeared in and around Göttingen (then a southern part of the Duchy of Braunschweig). In the middle of the 17th century, this surname could be found in and around Kassel in the county of Hesse-Kassel (today in Northern Hesse).

—A Dictionary of German-Jewish Surnames (page 5), Copyright 2005 by Lars Menk, excerpted by permission of Lars Menk

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