

Illegitimacy in the Jewish Communities of Galicia

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Jewish vital records from Galicia province, Austrian Empire will often use terms like “illegitimate” and “ritual marriage”. The many punitive and restrictive laws in the Austrian Empire resulted in choices made by the Jewish community to circumvent these. Originally instituted to curtail the size of the Jewish community and create boundaries, the communities themselves changed and found ways to work around the laws. Sometimes our ancestors had multiple surnames, or even hyphenated surnames resulting from the legal issues the families found themselves embroiled in.

What is a ritual marriage? A ritual marriage in Jewish tradition is one at which a rabbi or community lay leader officiates. The contract entered into, called a *ketubah* is written in very specific language and binds the couple according to Jewish tradition. The *ketubah* often includes language regarding doweries and what will occur should the couple divorce.

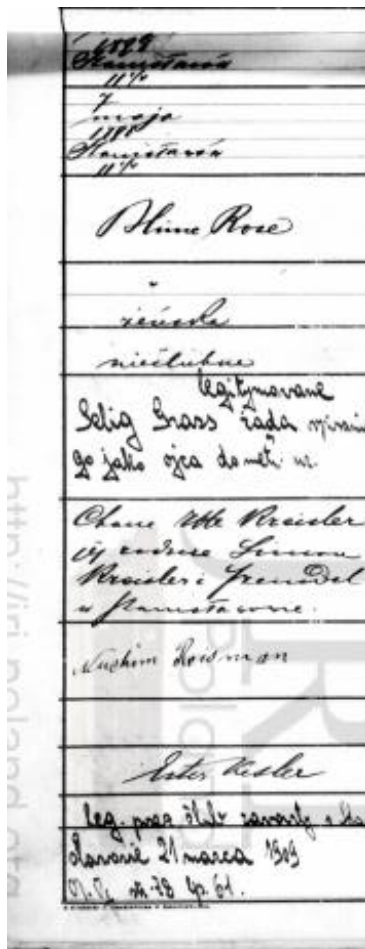
What is the problem with a ritual marriage? There is no problem with the ritual marriage itself. The problem exists when the couple, or the designated authority does not register the marriage with the civil authorities.

If a marriage was not registered, the children were legally not permitted to use their father’s name. Their birth was recorded with the mother’s name only. Children whose parents did not register their marriages could not inherit, were considered illegal aliens, not permitted to enter into certain occupations, and not allowed to travel. They had no official status.

Why wouldn’t a couple register their marriage? Austrian officials put a very high tax on official registration of Jewish marriages in the 19th century; in some towns the number of Jewish families were restricted; at times only one son in a family was permitted to marry.

How did people get around (or beyond) these restrictions? A father could appear in person with two witnesses who attested to him being the father of the child, or the parents could register their marriage. Often the latter occurred decades after the birth of their oldest child. When the parents marriage was registered or the father was acknowledged, the birth record was amended to add his surname, resulting in record changes and adding a name with f (false), r (corrected) or vel (also known as between the surnames).

Below is an example of one birth record and the results of a search in JewishGen databases to illustrate what the indexes of such “illegitimate” status might look like.



In this 1898 birth record, Blime Rose was initially recorded as the daughter of Chane Itte Kreisler, and then Selig Grass claimed paternity and 'requests to enter his name as father in the birth record.' In 1909 it was amended and a note was added to give the date and place of the marriage – Stanislawow, March 21, 1909, V1 N61.

False f. False

Recte r. Right

Vel v. Also known as

Primo Voto First Marriage

Secundo Voto Second Marriage

Examples:

Kreisler f. Rubin: **Kreisler is this person's legal surname not Rubin**

Achselrad r. Karpel: **The person uses Achselrad and the legal name is Karpel**

Gitl v. Gussie: **[She] is known as Gitl and Gussie**

Gitl Kreisler primo voto Rubin: **Kreisler is her current married name, and her first married name was Rubin (she could be widowed or divorced)**

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