

From: Fred Hoffman (wfhoffman@prodigy.net)
To: Nik Majdan
Date: Friday, July 20, 2007 9:46:44 AM
Subject: Re: Name request

To: Nik Majdan <nmajdan@yahoo.com>

Hi,

> I stumbled upon your website and found it very
> intriguing.
> I've done light research into my genealogical
> background,
> which is to say I've exhausted free resources
> available online.
> I figured it couldn't hurt to contact you as you
> already had
> one surname of my ancestors on your site
> (Rzeszutko).

It certainly doesn't hurt to ask. Analysis of surnames doesn't usually tell you a whole lot about your specific family. I often find myself explaining that to people who seem to think I have the entire history of their family back to Adam sitting on my desk. Usually the most I can do is satisfy a little curiosity about what a name means. Which is a worthwhile thing to do -- I just hate disappointing people, even when they have unreasonable expectations. It sounds to me as if your expectations are reasonable.

> If you have time, I would love any analysis into
> my surname
> and another surname of my ancestors'. My surname
> is Majdan
> and my paternal grandmother's maiden name was
> Sukach. I
> believe my grandmother's father was born around
> Bialystok.
> Also, I know there is a town called Majdanek in
> Poland but
> I do not know if this relates to my surname at
> all. Any help
> would be appreciated. Thank you for your time.

MAJDAN is an interesting name. It is pronounced roughly like a combination of our words "my" and "dawn," with the accent on the first syllable: "MY-dawn" -- or, if you find it less misleading,

"MY-don."

As of 1990, according to the database at <http://www.herby.com.pl/herby/indexslo.html>, there were some 711 Polish citizens named MAJDAN; the database was missing data for about 7% of the population, so the number might have been a little higher. People by this name lived all over the country, with the largest numbers in the provinces of Zamosc (227), Lublin (71), and Szczecin (74). Lublin and Zamosc, where the name is most common, are in southeastern Poland, on the border with Ukraine. I suspect the name is also reasonably common in Ukraine, but I have no data for that country. The database showed no one named Majdan living in Bialystok province, but there may be an explanation -- forced post-war relocations. I'll discuss that more in the discussion on SUKACH.

According to Polish name expert Kazimierz Rymut, names beginning Majd- can come from the verbal root *_majd-* meaning "to wag (a tail), to move back and forth," and another expert mentions that *_majda_* can mean "left-handed." But this specific name MAJDAN almost certainly derives, in most cases, from the noun *_majdan_*, the short meaning of which is "yard, clearing," or indicates origin in a place with a name such as Majdan, Majdany, etc. -- such place names are particularly common in southeastern Poland and Ukraine. Some years back I wrote an article for the Journal of the Polish Genealogical Society of America that discusses various terms, translating from a Polish-language gazetteer, and it gives much more info on the origin of that word, which I think will interest you. I've quoted the relative passage at the end of this note. If you'd like to read the whole article, here is the address:

http://www.pgsa.org/powiats_and_wolas.htm

SUKACH would be pronounced roughly "SOO-kock," except the final sound is not really a K, but a guttural like the "ch" in German "Bach." However, there is a very real possibility SUKACH is an Anglicized spelling, and the original form was SUKACZ. Poles pronounce CZ the same way we pronounce CH, and immigrants' names were often modified. In this case the name's not all that long and foreign-sounding, so it could be the name

was SUKACZ and they just changed the spelling to fit the orthographic norms of English.

The reason I think this is likely is that the 1990 database shows no Polish citizens named SUKACH, but 39 named SUKACZ. That's not conclusive, by any means; but it is suggestive. I would definitely keep in mind the possibility that the name was SUKACZ originally. Frankly, I think that is likely.

The 39 Poles by that name lived in the following provinces: Warsaw 3, Bydgoszcz 15, Jelenia Gora 3, Katowice 7, Lodz 2, Sieradz 2, and Wroclaw 7. So these days the name shows up most often in central to western Poland, some distance from the eastern border. But that may be misleading. After World War II large numbers of people living in eastern Poland were forcibly relocated to the western part of the country. This was especially common with people of Ukrainian ethnic descent, but we also find Lithuanians and Belarusians among those forced to move. So it may not mean much that SUKACZ does not show up anywhere near Bialystok today. If we had comparable data from before 1945, that might have painted a very different picture.

Prof. Rymut lists SUKACZ in his book, saying it appears in Polish records as early as 1662. He gives two derivations for surnames beginning SUKA-. The more obvious is from the noun *_suka_*, "female dog"; Rymut adds that it might also come from a dialect verb *_sukac'_*, "to twist, roll." Those same roots show up in other Slavic languages; *_suka_* means "female dog, bitch" in Russian and Ukrainian as well, and in Ukrainian *_sukaty_* is a verb meaning "to twist, spin (thread)."

At first glance one would suppose an ancestor was called SUKACZ (or SUKACH, if that was the correct original form) as a kind of nickname meaning "the bitch guy." It wouldn't necessarily be an insult; it might have referred to an ancestor who bred dogs or had a particular fondness for female dogs. Of course, it could also have been meant as an insult, since Slavs generally use *_suka_* much the same way we use "bitch." But I don't think it has to be construed as an insult.

Besides, it is quite possible the name began as a nickname for one who twisted or spun something, especially thread. I notice there's a Website with information on Russian names that specifically interprets this name as referring to an occupation, meaning "one who spins thread":

http://mirimen.com/co_fam/Sukach-3084.html

I know that's not much help if you don't read Russian, but I wanted to show that this interpretation is entirely plausible, especially if your ancestors came from territory now in eastern Poland or the lands east of the current border. The superficial reaction would be to interpret it as "the bitch guy," but "the spinner of thread" strikes me as more plausible. The only way to settle the matter would be to trace the family history back far enough to establish exactly where your ancestors came from and what the word would mean in the local dialect. But I suspect "spinner" is more likely to apply.

I hope this information, and the translation given below, is some help to you, and wish you the best of luck with your research.

William F. Hoffman
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PGSA Publications Editor <www.pgsa.org>

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Majdan: a Turkish expression designating an enclosed four-sided space used as a fairground, a site for military exercises, or a gathering place. In Polish camps the _majdan_ was what they called the open central space where knights gathered to share the booty equally. From this the name came to be used for the campsites of forest workers, who set up their budy in a closed quadrilateral. These campsites often became the beginnings of villages founded in cleared forest areas; the name Majdan could then pass to the village as well. _Majdany_ differ from _budy_ in that they served as gathering point for a larger number of workers, which made it necessary to set up some sort of administrative and judicial authority, whereas budy were usually individual forest settlements. _Majdany_ were founded in order to exploit the

wealth contained in the forests by melting down tar, burning coal, etc. They usually took their names from the estates to which the forests belonged. The *_majdan_* plays the same role in wooded areas on the right bank of the Wisla up to the Bug and Narew as the *_huta_* plays in areas on the left bank. [Written by Bronisław Chlebowski, from the entry *Majdan* in the 15-volume *_Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich_*, published around the turn of the century].