

New Research Tool: DoJR Record-Type Taxonomy for Jewish Genealogy

by Marlis Humphrey and Helen Stein

Wikipedia: A taxonomy (or taxinomical classification) is a scheme of classification, especially, a hierarchical classification, in which things are organized into groups or types.

DoJR (the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide project) has created a new research tool, the “DoJR Record-Type Taxonomy for Jewish Genealogy,” a by-product of its construction of JCat, an online, first-ever master catalog of all record collections holding Jewish genealogically relevant data. This tool, available at <https://dojrww.org/taxonomy>, provides a comprehensive list of all record types relevant for Jewish genealogical research. Long overdue, the DoJR Record-Type Taxonomy for Jewish Genealogy helps beginners learn what sources exist, while experienced researchers can use it as a comprehensive checklist for their research plans.

A similar tool for general genealogy has existed for many years and may be found at www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Choose_a_Record_Type. Although researchers searching for Jewish ancestors certainly can use the general tool, Jewish genealogy has important, specific, different aspects. Until now, the lack of a similar tool specifically for Jewish genealogical research is part of what makes such research challenging. Beginning genealogists learn only haphazardly over time about such items as *landsmanschaftn*, *kahal* and *brit milah* records, or *yizkor* books and *prenumeranten* lists, their regional and historical variants and equivalents—plus a variety of other record types unique to Jewish genealogy.

What is a Record-Type Taxonomy for Jewish Genealogy?

A comprehensive list of all record types useful to Jewish genealogy certainly can be helpful, but even easier to use is a hierarchical list that is organized and groups similar elements together. Such an approach to Jewish genealogy is analogous to the way that scientists study and understand biology with its classification system (taxonomy) of the plant, animal and other kingdoms under the domain of all living things; kingdoms are further subdivided and grouped at lower levels, eventually dropping down to genus and species. Even Amazon’s Alexa, when asked to add an item to a shopping list, automatically records the item and classifies it under a section for produce, dairy or other categories to make it more useful for the task of shopping.

At the highest level, the FamilySearch example provides a domain of all elements that are useful sources for genealogists. These are divided into two main categories (like kingdoms in biology), Reference Tools and Genealogical Records. Genealogical Records are subdivided further into Compiled Sources and Original Records. Original records are

then subdivided into groups of Vital Events records or Residency records, Occupation records, and so on. Occupation records are divided into Military records, Business records, Pension records and more in a way that is similar to the genus and species level in biology.

Taxonomy, however, is more than a comprehensive list of all items in a specific domain, such as “genealogy information sources.” A taxonomy also groups those items into a classification hierarchy that includes their definitions. In the FamilySearch example, the classifications hierarchy appears in the way the boxes are labeled and arranged. Some items include definitions at the lowest level of box such as “Ownership” defined as disposition of real estate and personal property.

The DoJR Record-Type Taxonomy for Jewish Genealogy includes all record types relevant to Jewish genealogical research, finding aids, and reference tools, both those that are general as well as those that are specifically Jewish. The example on the next page shows the taxonomy for the sub-category of vital records.

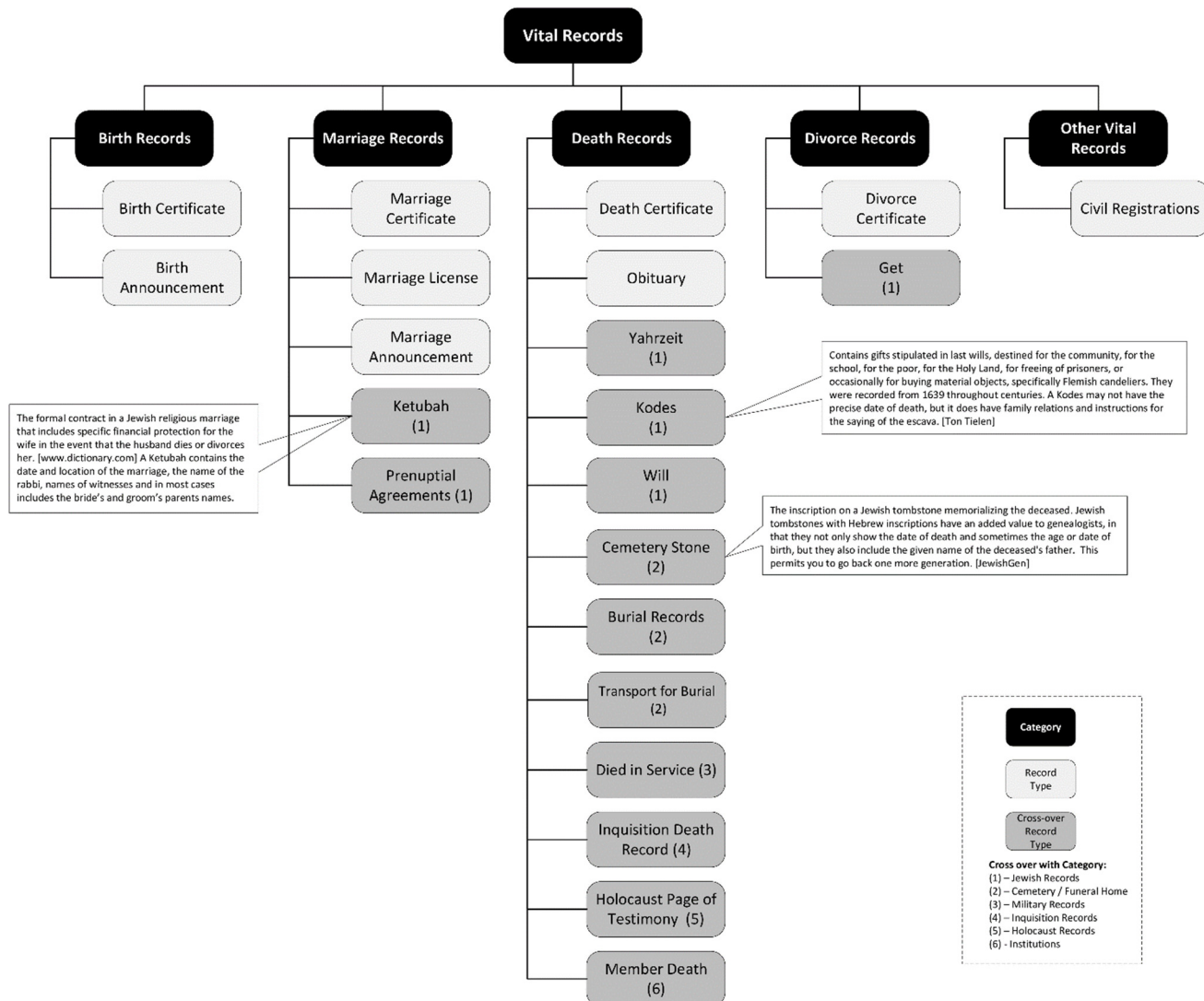
How Is This Taxonomy Useful?

For the DoJR project, a record-type taxonomy is a useful organizing principle in at least three ways. First, by grouping similar record collection types together we recognize that similar items:

- Have similar catalog descriptions about the type of genealogical information contained within, such as census records or books of residence, both of which tell where families resided, relationships of members to one another and their ages.
- Can be used as evidence for the same genealogical research fact such as residency.
- May be regional variants, such as marriage application files in the U.S. or marriage *alegata* (also called Marriage Supplements or Annexes, a group of documents that form a more detailed record of the betrothal than the marriage record) used in Poland before 1846.

Secondly, for ease of use when the DoJR JCat is online, the record type taxonomy will facilitate the presentation and filtering of search results in a grouped fashion. For example, for a specific town, the search results will show 10 collections of marriage records and 5 collections of cemetery records, instead of presenting all 15 collections in a long list. In addition, if a researcher is only interested in a specific record type, such as marriage records for a given town, the taxonomy will help filter a search by such a record type or multiple selected record types.

Thirdly, when the DoJR project is doing a regional survey to determine record collections available in the custody of



single individuals as well as in various civil, Jewish, and private institutions, the taxonomy becomes a survey checklist for completeness of that survey. That is, it can serve as a reminder to contact organizations that hold specific record types such as cemeteries, or ensure that a review of an archive catalogue is complete.

Outside of the DoJR project, the DoJR Record-Type Taxonomy for Jewish Genealogy can help Jewish genealogical researchers develop a research plan, check for completeness, and serve as a research guide, e.g.,

- When researching an ancestor and creating a research plan for that individual, the taxonomy can be reviewed and items selected for inclusion in the research plan.
- When hitting a research dead end, the taxonomy can be useful as a checklist for completeness to answer the questions, “where else can I find evidence of the genealogical fact I need? Have I searched for all the relevant record types?”
- The taxonomy can be used to suggest next steps for a specific research objective, e.g., “I want to find a maiden

name, where do I look? Once we have the DoJR Record-Type Taxonomy for Jewish Genealogy in place, we can create a comprehensive guide to Jewish genealogical research that starts with, “I am searching for...” and it suggests the best record collection type in which to search as well as alternate sources if those record collection types do not exist for the town of interest.

DoJR has released the DoJR Record-Type Taxonomy for Jewish Genealogy for public comment. Readers are invited to review the taxonomy, comment on its classifications, elements and definitions, and suggest additions at <https://dojrw.org/taxonomy>. The authors will incorporate comments and suggestions, and present the taxonomy at the 41st IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy August 2–5, 2021.

About DoJR

The Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide project, a strategic project of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, is building a first-ever master

catalog, JCat, of all record collections holding Jewish genealogically relevant data. For those seeking to discover their ancestors, JCat will answer the question “What records are available for my ancestral town?” For additional information about the DoJR project, email JCatCommunity@DoJRWW.org. Subscribe for project updates at <https://bit.ly/DoJRSubscribe>.

Marlis Humphrey is an expert on next generation family history publishing, a professional genealogist, and a frequent speaker at national and international conferences. Humphrey is President of Florida State Genealogical Society, Im-

mediate Past President of International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, Director-at-Large of National Genealogical Society and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide Project. Humphrey lives in Melbourne, Florida.

Helen Stein leads the development of the DoJR JCat data model and platform. Stein brings her expertise in Information Architectures, Information Systems strategic planning, Master Data Management, standards, terminology, enterprise modeling, and metadata management to the DoJR project. She holds an MS in Computer Science and a BA in Physics. Stein lives in Highland Park, New Jersey.

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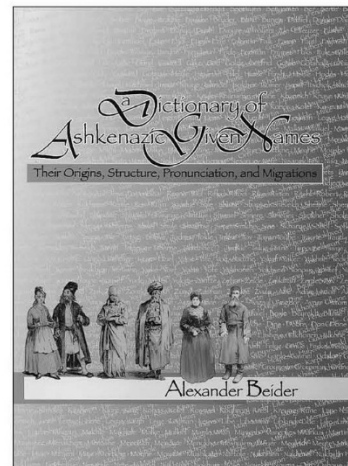
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