

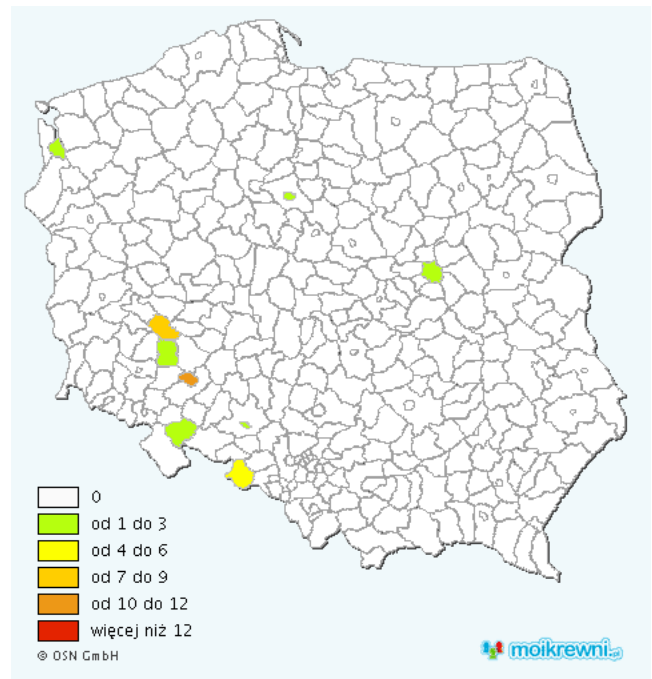
MAGDYCZ

Requested by Jeanette Orihuela: “I would like to know the origin and meaning of my maiden name, **Magdycz**. My grandfather came from the village of Nakwasza, SE of Brody near Podkamień in present-day Ukraine. At the Steven Morse gold-form site I came up with over 500 Eastern European last names beginning with *Magd-* so I figure it must mean something. Also, why was Helen such a popular name in Polish families? There are 8 Helens in my extended family.”

Analysis by: William F. “Fred” Hoffman <wfh@langline.com>, for UPGS 2008

In Polish **Magdycz** is spelled with no diacritical marks, and it is pronounced roughly “MOGG-ditch,” with the first syllable rhyming, more or less, with our word “log.” The data available at the Moikrewni Web site (<http://www.moikrewni.pl/mapa/kompletny/magdycz.html>) shows that as of 2002 there were 34 Polish citizens who went by name *Magdycz*. As the map at right shows, they were scattered in small numbers, mostly in southwestern Poland, except for two living in Warsaw county, in east central Poland.

Unfortunately, I have no access to data for Ukraine, so I can’t tell you how common the name is in that country, or where people by this name might live. I did, however, key in the Ukrainian Cyrillic spelling of the name, Магдич, and did a search with Google. This turned up plenty of Web sites, mostly Ukrainian but also Russian (Russians are a bit more likely to use the spelling Магдыч), that mentioned people by this name. So that is some evidence the name is not unheard of in those countries, and I suspect it’s more common there than in Poland.



Map showing the distribution of the surname **Magdycz** as of 2002.

This leads me to wonder if most Magdyczes in Poland today are living where they are because of Operation Wisła (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Wis%C5%82a), the 1947 forced deportation of Ukrainians, Lemkos, and Boykos from what is now southeastern Poland to the western and north central part of the country. After all, if a name is Ukrainian, you’d expect it to show up most often in southeastern Poland, near the border with Ukraine. When you find instead it shows up mostly in western or northeastern to north central Poland, it’s usually because of Operation Wisła. Odds are, before 1947, most if not all of those folks named Magdycz were living in southeastern Poland. This is important for researchers to know; otherwise it can throw quite a monkey wrench into your research to find your relatives living hundreds of kilometers west of where they used to live, for no apparent reason!

Professor Rymut mentions **Magdycz** in his book *Nazwiska Polaków* [The Surnames of Poles]. He lists it under surnames formed from the feminine first name *Magdalena*, famous among Christians by association with the Biblical figure Mary Magdalene. The same name is used by Ukrainians in the forms Магдалина [Magdalyna], Магдалена [Magdalena], and the short form Магда [Magda]. The ending *-ycz* or *-icz* is used in many Slavic languages to mean “son of,” so that *Magdycz* can probably be interpreted as meaning simply “son of Magda.”

I should add that it this surname is more likely to be associated with Ukrainians than Poles, because Poles tend not to create surnames from feminine first names, whereas Ukrainians do it quite often. I'm not saying Polish surname can never come from feminine first names; there are a number of examples. But in Polish they are rarer, comparatively speaking, than they are in Ukrainian. I think it's fair to say a surname meaning "son of Magda" is a little more likely to have developed among Ukrainians than among ethnic Poles.

As you can read at <http://www.behindthename.com/name/magda>, *Magda* is a short form for *Magdalena* used in many languages, including German, Dutch, Czech, Polish, and so on. They didn't mention Ukrainian, but they could have. Also Bulgarian—a Google search for the Cyrillic spelling of the name, Магда, turned up jillions of Bulgarian sites mentioning people by this name.

As for why Helen was a popular name among Poles, I don't know of any reason for that, except, of course, that it's associated with the woman who was supposedly the most beautiful female of all time, Helen of Troy. What parents don't think their daughter is the most beautiful girl ever? So it's not too surprising they might name a girl Helen.

Jan Grzenia's book on Polish first names, *Słownik imion*, says that *Helena*, the most common form of the name, appears in Poland as early as 1189. He adds that one factor in the name's popularity in Europe was probably its association with St. Helen (ca. 248 – ca. 328), the mother of Constantine the Great. Grzenia adds that as of 2004, there were 460,095 Polish females by this name, and it was most often given in the 1930s and 1940s. But it's been popular among Poles and Ukrainians for a long time. First names tend to enjoy cycles of popularity, becoming very fashionable for a while, then fading for a while, then returning, and so on. It's possible most of the people you're running into were given this name during one of its periods of great popularity.