

Chabag (Shabo) a Swiss colony in Bessarabia

Shabo (also Chabo, Chabag, Shaba, Sabo, Шабo) is located on the western bank of the Dniester-Liman¹ and is a village south of Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyj in Odessa Oblast in southwestern Ukraine.

The first settlements existed at Schabo already in ancient times. The kurgans² on the northern edge of the village testify to this.

The remains of an ancient Greek settlement from the 4th to 3rd century BC were also found there.



In the 15th/16th century, a Tartar village was established in this place, at a time when the later Bessarabia belonged to the Ottoman Empire. The population was engaged in viticulture.



Akkerman fortress

The name of the settlement goes back to the Turkish name Ascha Abag (literally "lower gardens", that is, vineyard areas located below the Akkerman fortress³), although the contraction Schabag was later transformed into Schabo by the French-Swiss settlers to sound more French.

After the conquest of Bessarabia in 1812 by the Russian Empire, the region suffered from population migration to the Ottoman Empire. In Shabo, for example, out of 28 families, only three or four remained. Who was now to cultivate the abandoned vineyards? Tsar Alexander I decided to repopulate the region and replace the old vines with new ones. In 1817 dozens of families from the surrounding villages moved to Shabo. By 1820, 275 people lived there (172 Ukrainians and 103 Moldavians). However, due to the lack of experience in viticulture, the hoped-for success failed to materialize.

¹ Liman = indentation, typical for the Black Sea coast. The term comes from the Greek and means sea inlets formed from sunken river mouths.

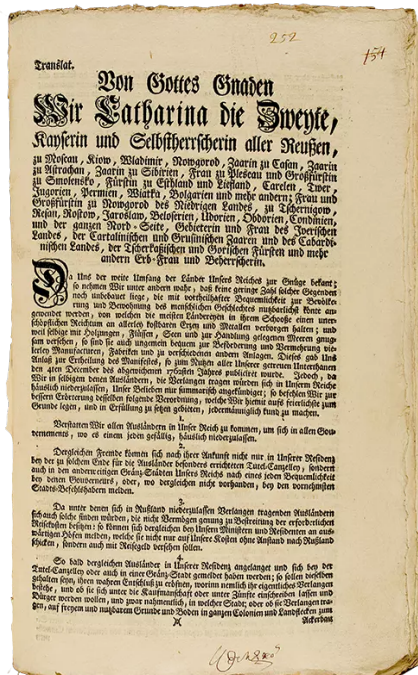
² A kurgan is a type of burial mound built over a grave, often containing a single human body along with burial vessels, weapons, and horses. Originally used in the Pontic-Caspian steppe, kurgans spread throughout much of Central Asia and eastern, southeastern, western, and northern Europe during the 3rd millennium BC. The earliest kurgans date to the 4th millennium BC in the Caucasus, and some researchers associate them with the Indo-Europeans. Kurgans were built in the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, ancient and medieval periods, with ancient traditions still alive in southern Siberia and Central Asia.

³ Today Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyj (Turkish Akkerman; German obsolete also Weißenburg) is a city in the Odessa oblast in southwestern Ukraine. It is the center of the rayon of the same name and a port city on the Dniester-Liman River 18 kilometers from the Black Sea. The city belonged to the historical region of Bessarabia.

Frédéric-César de la Harpe, a native of French-speaking Switzerland, Alexander's former teacher and educator, who knew the misery caused by Napoleon's wars in his homeland, proposed to call Swiss colonists from his homeland, French-speaking Vaud, to the country as model farmers, to found Helvetianopolis there, in Russia, and to work as winegrowers (i.e., they were not winegrowers, for in addition to being farmers and cattle breeders) in Shabo. i.e. they were not winegrowers, because apart from winegrowers they were also to work as arable farmers and cattle breeders) to cultivate the vineyards in Shabo, which had been abandoned by the Tatars.



Frédéric-César de la Harpe (1754 in Rolle - 1838 in Lausanne) knew the botanist Louis Vincent Tardent from Vevey and instructed him to recruit settlers. On August 13, 1820, the first meeting of emigrants took place. According to the minutes of this meeting, the following were present: Guerry Lucien, Jean-Georges Amel Testuz, Jacob-Samuel Chevalley, Francois-Louis Petit, Louis Vincent Tardent and Charles-August Grandjean (brother-in-law of Louis Vincent Tardent). At this first meeting, the future settlers agreed to set aside a sum of 800 francs to send a delegate to the site. Louis Vincent Tardent, 35 years old, left the same year. Enthusiastic about the place, Tardent wrote to the Vaudois in the spring of 1821. He asked them to join him as soon as possible in order to be able to plant vines and potatoes the next spring (1822) so that no year was lost.



Catherine's invitation manifesto

The winegrowers of Vaud received the same or even greater privileges than the German settlers in Bessarabia. Thus, in addition to the 60 desjatines (about 66 ha) of land per family, they were to receive the vines as property. All other granted privileges from the manifesto of Catherine II from 1763 and the one of Alexander I from 1804 were confirmed. In return, the settlers took the following oath: "We swear to be faithful to His Majesty, autocratic Emperor of all the Russias, and to the community of Achabag, of which we are members, to withstand all burdens when obliged to do so, to be faithful in all business conduct, to be allowed to remain in the community, and all this to obtain benefits and advantages".

The emigrants to Schabo



In 1822, a group of Swiss followed the call of the Russian Tsar Alexander, who promised them a better life on the Black Sea (Swiss Social Archives)

On July 21, 1822, the first convoy of Reformed French-speaking Swiss from Vaud set out on a 2,500-kilometer journey across Europe.

Among them were:

(1) the leader **Louis Vincent Tardent** (born 14.12.1787 in Ormont), botanist, with his wife Susanne Henriette Uranie née Grandjean (born 25.8.1789 in Buttes) and 13 children: Marc (1807), Louis (1809), Adrien, Charles (1812), Philippe, Samuel (1815), Jeanne-Marie, Louise (1816), Marie, Françoise, Emma (1818), Susanne, and Antoinette (1821).

(2) **Charles-Auguste Grandjean**, grandfather of Susanne Henriette Uranie) from Buttes (NE).

(3) **Françoise Albertine Légeret** (1806), maid of the Tardent family.

(4) **Jacob Samuel Chevalley** (born 2.3.1777 in Rivaz), winegrower, with his wife Susanne-Marie née Légeret (born 1.9.1785 in Rivaz) and their 6 children: Henri, Juste, Siméon, Louise, Susanne, Louis).

(5) the pharmacist **Henry Berguer** from Avenches.

(6) **François Noir** (1806), journeyman from Lausanne.

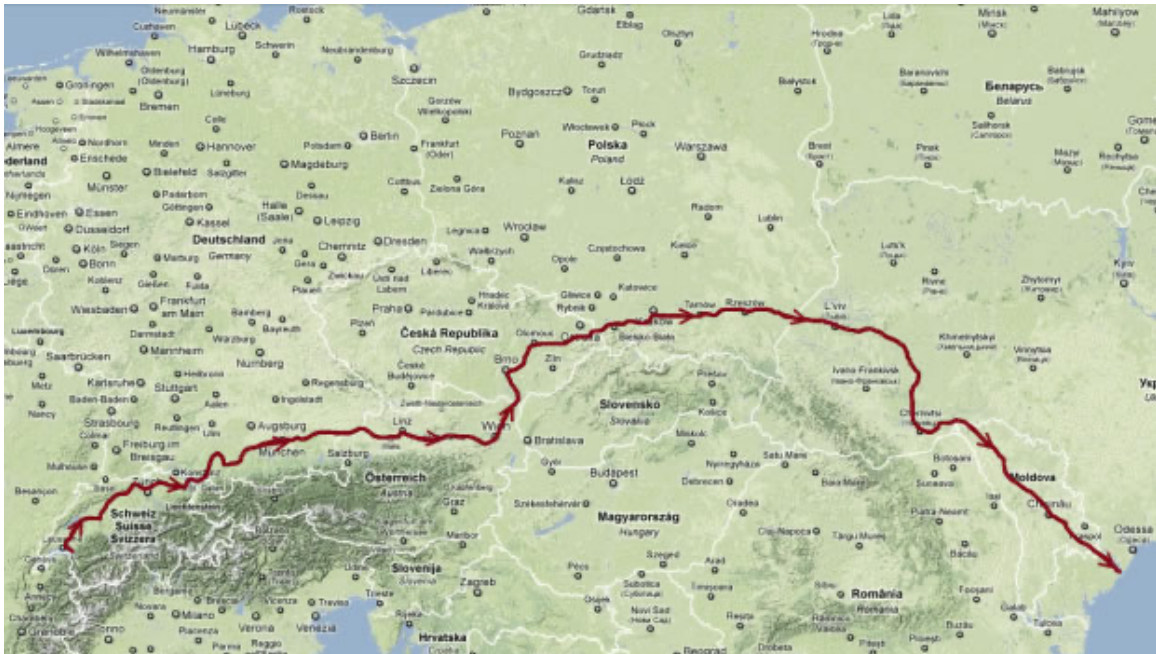
(7) **Georges Testuz** (born 29.3.1776 in Rivaz).

(8) **Johann Heinrich Zwicky** (born 9.2.1794 in Obstalden), valet to Louis Tardent in Vevey.



The trek of the Swiss colonists in the museum of Schabo

Susanne Henriette Uranie Tardent, wife of the trek leader Louis Vincent Tardent, describes in her diary the journey from Vevey to Shabo in Bessarabia. This diary shows that the trek covered between 25 to 50 km a day and passed through towns such as Moudon, Avenches, Murten, Bern, Lenzburg, Baden, Zurich and St. Gallen in Switzerland, St. Johannes bei Höchst, Bregenz and Gmünd bei Bregenz in Austria, Kempten, Kaufbeuren and Munich in Germany, Braunau, Wels, Melk and Vienna in Austria, Brno in Moravia, Wieliczka, Lemberg and Czenowitz in Poland, Novoselyzja, Chisinau (the capital of Bessarabia), Akkerman and Shabo. After three months the trek finally reached its destination and 6 exhausted horses died shortly after arrival.



The emigration route of the Swiss settlers from the canton of Vaud to Schabo

The first years in the new homeland were not easy and soon the morale sank. The land had yet to be measured and the people who had lived there until then were to be expelled. The first winter the new settlers spent at the instruction of the governor of the tsar with citizens in the nearby town of Akkerman, who had to give refuge to the Swiss.



Schabo around 1850



In 1823, the first year in the new home, the harvest failed. The 60,000 vines planted had fallen victim to the drought. The Swiss settlers were forced to take out a loan of 1,400 rubles to plant as many vines the following year. By 1825, the number of their vines had doubled.

In 1823 another 2 families and 3 single people from Switzerland came to Schabo:

(9) **Louis Frédéric Huguenin** from the canton of Neuchâtel with his wife.

(10) **Jean-Antoine Maillard** from Oron-le-Châtel in the canton of Vaud.

(11) **Guerbold** (?) from the canton of Grisons.

(12) **Jean-Pierre Meillaud** (born 7/9/1782 in Blonay) with his wife Francoise-Pauline (born 1781 in Dupraz) and their children Jean-Francois and his wife Catherine Klutzpicher, Louis-Henri Francois Emmanuel, Marie-Louise, Amerlia and Harriet.

In 1824 only one new settler came to Schalbo:

(13) **Daniel Besson** from Treytorrens, who covered the 2,500 kilometer distance on foot.

In 1825, the Swiss winegrowers had 104,000 vines and about 2,000 fruit trees: plums, cherries, pears, mulberries and nuts. But of the now 14 families with 39 members, only three had harvested grapes.

The settlers also had to defend themselves against the Armenians in order not to have the vines that had been given to them by the government stolen, which resulted in the colonists Francois Noir, the apothecary Henry Berguer and Guerbold returning to Switzerland.

On August 17, 1826, another four Swiss families, 5 single and one widow arrived in Schabo:

(14) **Pierre-David Besson** (born 4.3.1777 in Treytorrens, died 1828 in Schabo) with his wife Frances and the children Françoise, Marie, Jean-Pierre and Samuel-Emmanuel.

(15) **Jean-François Testuz** (born 1.3.1802 in Rivaz).

(16) **Jeanne-Louise Forney**, widow (born 15.3.1798 in Rivaz) and her children Jean, François, Louis, Samuel, Henriette, Louise and Jean-Philippe.

(17) **James Gottraux** (born 16.3.1782 in Chavannes-le-Chêne) with his wife Jeanne Louise née Centlivres and daughter Louise.

(18) **David-Josias Dupertuis** (born 3.5.1787 in Ormont).

(19) **Victor Campiche** from Sainte-Croix (about 50 years old) with his wife a née Meylan and seven children.

(20) **Samuel Gander** (born 1807 in Penthérez) with his brother **Louis Gander** (born 1808 in Echallens).

(21) **Françoise Rey** (born 7.1.1807 in Puidoux).

(22) **Jean Rebaud**, who died a month after arriving in Schabo.

(23) **Pierre-François Michoud** (born 18.10.1783 in Chavannes-le-Chêne) with his wife Susanne née Perrin and their children Jean-Louis, Sylvie, Anne-Marie and Jeannette.

In 1827, only one new settler arrived in Schabo:

(24) **Théophile Grandjean** from Buttes.

In the meantime, the community counted 25 families with 73 people. Two fathers of families had indicated as profession watchmaker, two tanners, two farmers and 8 winegrowers.

On December 29, 1828 came the settler

(25) **David Dogny** (born 18.8.1808 in Bioley-Orjulaz) with wife Lisette née Brun.

On December 31, 1828 came

(26) **Paul-Samuel Lauren** (born 27/1/1774 in Fey) and his wife Jeanne-Elisabeth née Viret and their children Jean-Pierre and Harriet on the Danube Way in Schabo.

In 1830 another trek with Swiss colonists arrived in Schabo. Among them were:

(27) **Georges Thévenaz** (born 1769 in Bullet) with wife Jeanne née Lassieur from Bullet and their children Georges, François, Eugène and Charles-Auguste.

(28) **Lucien Robert** from Neuchâtel with wife Jeannette née Marion from Pailly and their children Louis and Esther.

(29) **Louis Philippe Hächler** (born 1801 in Kulm, Aargau) with his wife Susanne née Jatton.

(30) **Jean Hächler**, his brother.

(31) **Abraham-Daniel Tapis** (born 7/22/1786 in Combremont) with his wife Marie-Madelaine née Aigroz from Combremont and their children Jacques-Louis, Jean-Frédéric, Jeanne-Louise, Augustine and Susanne-Madeleine.

(32) **Jean-Louis Jatton** (born 29.9.1780 in Peney-le-Jorat) and his wife Jeanne-Marguerite née Charbon of Treytorrens and their children Jean-Daniel, Jean-Pierre, Marie-Louise and Jeanne-Francoise.

(33) **Joseph-Frédéric Kiener** (born 7.10. in Kildorf) with his wife Marie-Madeleine née Reller from Châtelard and their children Louis, Anne, Charlotte, Charles-Frédéric, Marianne-Catherine, Julie and Casimir-Henri.

(34) **Jean-Louis Miéville** (born 3.9.1789 in Essertines-sur-Yverdon) with his wife Marianne née Thévenaz from Bullet and their children Louis-Francois, Auguste, Jean and Jeannette.

(35) **Henri Broillot** (40 years old from Agiez).

In 1829 the colony was hit by a plague, probably cholera or typhoid, which was probably brought in by the Russian army returning from the Crimean War (1828-1829). In every house there were sick and dead people. Among the dead were Jacob-Samuel Chevalley (immigrated 1822), Jean Hächler (immigrated 1830), Jeanne-Marguerite Jatton (immigrated 1830), Paul-Samuel Laurent (immigrated 1828), Jean-Louis Guerry (immigrated 1822), Victor Campiche, his wife Meylan and 4 of their 7 children (immigrated 1826).

In 1830, more Swiss came to Schabo to fill the gaps of the deceased from the previous year. Among them were:

(36) **Jean-Samuel-Jacob Gander** (born 17.12.1780) in Gessenay with his wife née Caille from Daillens and their children Nanette, Antoine, Francois, Georges and his wife Georgette née Thonney from Vuillens.

(37) Millioud, but died in the quarantine camp in Ismajil.

(38) **Marguerite d'Epautheyre** née Perret, (age 30), widow of Louis d'Epautheyres of Essertines and her 3 children. The father and some of her children died on the way between Ismajil and Schabo.

(39) **Francois Brochet** (22 years old) from Essertines.

(40) **Jean-Abel Logoz** (born 13.10.1793 in Goumoëns) and his wife Rosalie née Domée and daughter Marie.

(41) **Louis Borgeaud** (35 years old) from Pailly with his wife, brother, sister and two children.

(42) **Jeannot Kirchman** (22 years old) from Bern with his wife and 3 children.

(43) **Jacques-Francois Buxcel** (born 16/1/1793 in Romainmôtier) with wife Jeanne-Gabrielle née Achar from Geneva and children Jeanne, Julie, Jeanne-Aline, Susanne, Caroline, Francois-Auguste, Paul-Henri and Jean-Louis.

Shortly after their arrival, Jean-Louis Borgeaud, Marguerite Perret and their 3 children, Kirchman, Jacques-Francois Buxcel, Jacques Gottraux, Jean-Pierre Laurent and Anne-Susanne Michoud née Perrin died. As can be seen, the epidemic that had broken out in 1829 was not yet over.

In 1831 the last French-speaking Scheizer settlers arrived in Schabo:

(44) **Olivier Descombaz** (born 11.8.1785 in Lutry).

(45) **Huguenin Louis** and his partner Lucien Robert and his divorced wife.

The settlement came to a standstill. News of the epidemic of the previous years and the poor harvests had also reached Switzerland. Beginning in 1837, an internal colonization of Lutheran German-speaking settlers began, ending in 1847. Among these settlers were:

1837

(46) **Gottlieb Alwin** (30 years old) from Prussia with his wife Katharina née Meyer and their children Christian, Gottlieb, Katharina and Barbara Rosina.

(47) **Friedrich Heintzelmann** (born 9.3.1792 in Halbesbach, Baden-Württemberg) with his wife Elisabeth Barbara née Lang and their children Rosina, Johann Friedrich and Katharina.

(48) **Mathias Jundt** (born 4.8.1792 in Bottmingen, Baselland) with wife Margarethe née Lamlet and their children Ludwig, Matthias, Eva, Jakob, Johannes and Christine.

(49) **Katharina Mayer** née Lang, widow of Jakob Mayer, an Alsatian from Glückstal with her children Barbara, Katharina, Friedrich, Christian, Christina and Johann Jakob.

(50) **Johannes Singeisen** (born 18.9.1787 in Lausen, Baselland) via Grossliebenthal to Schabo with wife Rosina née Sigmund and their children Jakob and Peter Friedrich.

(51) **Martin Stohler** (born 11.5.1788 in Pratteln, Baselland) with wife Katharina née Kümerlet and their children Martin, Christina, Heinrich Konstantin, Katharina, Elisabeth and Johann.

1838

(52) **Johannes Heingstler** (born 30.12.1794 in Oberbaldingen, Baden-Württemberg) with his wife Marie née Unrath and their children Barbara, Maria, Katharina, Johann Conrad and Rosina.

1839

(53) **Philipp Wagner** (born Dec. 25, 1806 in Lustdorf near Odessa) with his wife Maria Stanger and their son Philip.

1843

(54) **Johann Reichkimmer** (born 1814) in Baden-Württemberg and his wife Anna née Singeisen, moved from Grossliebenthal.

1846 or 1847

(55) **Ursus Georg Röthlisberger** (born 1808 and died 30.9.1866 in Schabo) from Langnau im Emmenthal with his wife Catharina née Öhmle (born around 1825 and died 12.11.1883 in Alexanderhelf) and his two daughters Elisabetha Margaretha (born 3.11.1844 in Lustdorf) and Anna Margaretha (born 16.12.1845 in Lustdorf). The couple married in Lustdorf on 26.2.1846. Six more children were born in Schabo.

Schabo as a leading wine village in the Russian Empire

Under the leadership of botanist Louis Vincent Tardents, Schabo developed into one of the leading wine villages of the Russian Empire.

By the middle of the 19th century, the population of the Swiss colony had risen to 252.

In 1829 the Swiss produced 3,480 , in 1848 11,640, in 1871 65,000 and in 1872 92,000 buckets (1 bucket equals 12 liters) of wine. At the end of the 1840s, the Schabo winegrowers employed 3,200 seasonal workers.



Grape harvest in Schabo around 1950



On September 18, 1843, the first Swiss teacher Francois Louis Bugnion arrived in Schabo with his wife. Now the community had received a bilingual teacher. After Bugnion had been ordained in Switzerland, the congregation also hired him as a Reformed preacher in 1846. When Bugnion then got married before his marriage was divorced, he was removed from office in 1854. The colonists also brought the other teachers and pastors from Switzerland.

Due to the German colonists, there were now not only two languages, but also two denominations represented in the colony.



School in Schabo (Swiss Social Archives)

The dispute whether the church tower should be crowned by a cross or a rooster is decided by the colonists by the compromise to put a rooster on the cross.

In 1923, 491 Germans and 394 Swiss lived in Schabo, mostly conversing in Russian.



The church in Schabo around 1922

The daughter colonies of Schabo

From 1889 Swiss colonists from Shabo bought 1,000 desjatines of land on the left bank of the lower Dnieper, where they founded the daughter colony Osnova. In the following years other daughter colonies were established nearby, such as Novije Sudaki in 1901/02, Nev Chabag and Vesjoloje in 1906/08.

Groups of German colonists also bought sandy land on the Dnieper, where they founded Lugovaia (in German Wiesengrund) in 1899 and Kljutschevoje (in German Quelldorf) in 1901/02.

The 1st and 2nd World War and the time afterwards

After World War I, Bessarabia was part of Romania from 1918 to 1940. In 1940, after Bessarabia had to be ceded to Russia again, most of the inhabitants of Shabo resettled together with the Bessarabian Germans. A small part returned to Shabo after the reconquest

of Bessarabia in 1941 by Romanian and German troops, but in 1944 they had to leave the village again before the advancing Red Army.

Those who were able to regain Swiss citizenship mostly returned to Switzerland. Only more or less Russianized members of five families remained. The descendants of these families still grow quality wine in and around Schabo.

Over the decades, a Schabner dialect developed in the Swiss colony - a mixture of Swiss German and Swabian, interspersed with French, Russian, Romanian, Ukrainian and Yiddish words.

Traces of the Swiss colonists are few and far between today. Streets still bear names such as "de la Harpe-Strasse" or "Helvetia-Strasse", and a memorial stone commemorates the Swiss cemetery. Many buildings, such as the Reformed church or the schoolhouse, were converted during the invasion of the Red Army in 1940 and partially destroyed by the German troops.

The invasion put an abrupt end to Shabo's golden age. Most of the Swiss fled head over heels at that time - some to the old homeland via detours, others overseas. Those who decided to stay were dispossessed and a few were even deported to the Urals. There are only a few surviving contemporary witnesses left in Switzerland.

The imported wine culture of the Swiss winemakers on the Black Sea has remained. In 2003, a Georgian businessman took over the agricultural production cooperative of the former Soviet Union and invested in a modern winery. In 2009, the first wine culture center in Ukraine was opened in Shabo. By the outbreak of war in 2022, the former Swiss colony exported wine to over 18 countries around the world.

It has been 200 years since Shabo was founded. On this anniversary, the settlers' church, which was destroyed by the Soviets, should have been renovated. This will probably not happen in these difficult times of the Ukraine war.