

Connections between Brody in Galicia and towns in Lithuania, Silesia, and Posen

Edward Gelles

Abstract

Some migration patterns of Jews in eastern Europe are exemplified by tracing the movements in my ancestral background from the beginning of the 17th century between Cracow, Vilna, and Grodno, Brody, Glogau and Posen with its small nearby towns of Graetz, Lissa, and Krotoschin.

Introduction

In the 16th and 17th centuries the city of Prague was at the crossroads between western and eastern Europe. Horowitz, Chayes, Jaffe, Gelles and others were noted members of its flourishing Jewish community. Increasingly, there was migration to Cracow, the old capital city of Poland, and then further afield. Some of my forebears came to Lithuania and, with changing political or economic circumstances, tended to move on at different times– to Posen and Silesia in the west and southward to Galicia and Bukowina. From the former, some continued westward into Germany, and from the latter their path led eastward to the Ukraine or south to Hungary and Austria.

Historical background

In the course of Poland's rise and decline over the centuries its frontiers underwent drastic changes. In the west, the borders with Brandenburg (and the later kingdom of Prussia) were subject to such changes from the time of the middle ages. There followed the three 18th century partitions of Poland between Prussia, Russia, and Austria, upheavals of the Napoleonic period, and most significantly the resurrection of the Polish Republic after the first world war and the

redrawing of borders after the second world war, involving losses of territory to Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine and gains of borderlands from Germany.

Grodno and Vilna were important cities of old in the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth and they were within the Polish republic of the inter-war years. Grodno was an important seat of power in 16th century Lithuania and is now in Belarus. Vilna is now the capital of Lithuania. Both cities once had large Jewish communities.

The Galician city of Brody lay in the south-eastern corner of Poland. It became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1772, was returned to Poland after 1918, and lost to the Ukraine in 1945. In the 18th century Brody underwent a rapid economic upswing as an entrepot between the Austrian and Russian Empires. At that time its vibrant Jewish community was briefly the second largest in Europe, after Amsterdam.

In the west, Posen (Poznan) and Glogau (Glogow) also had Jewish communities with considerable intercourse across the length and breadth of Poland and Lithuania.

My wider family background

On a number of occasions rabbis of one town moved to appointments in another. Mordecai Jaffe (1530-1612) was Chief Rabbi of Prague, Grodno and Posen. In his day the Rabbi of Posen was considered to have primacy in the Polish Rabbinate. Examples of such movements in the 18th century include those of my ancestors Jacob Jokel Horowitz and his son Isaac Horowitz, who were in turn Chief Rabbis of Glogau and Brody and of Brody, Glogau, and Hamburg.

The appended chart shows the ascendancy of my paternal Gelles line for six generations to Moses Menachem Mendel Levush, scholar of the talmudical study group called the Brody *Klaus*. He was known as Moses Gelles after his father-in-law Rabbi Shmuel Gelles. The

adoption of a matronymic was not uncommon in this period, while a laudable custom was the passing down of epithets recalling the magnum opus of a direct ancestor, in this case the afore-mentioned Mordecai Jaffe, who was known as the *Levush* after his major work, the *Levushim* or “Robes of Learning”.

Shmuel Gelles, the Rabbi of Siemiatycze, was a great-grandson of Uri Feivush ben David, the Chief Rabbi of Vilna, who travelled to Jerusalem in his old age where he became head of the Ashkenazi community with the title of *Nasi*.

The eponymous grandson of the scholar Moses Gelles of Brody married a daughter of Moshe of Glogau, the eldest son of Shmuel Helman, who was Chief Rabbi in turn of Kremsier, Mannheim in Germany, and finally of Metz in Lorraine where he died in 1764. Documents of his birth and his tombstone have not survived but it is recorded that he lived to a remarkable old age. There are records of his descendants, including that of my grandfather Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles, which state Helman’s father to be Isreal Halpern of Krotoszyn, son-in-law of the Chief Rabbi Nathan Nata Shapiro of Cracow. However, a conflicting early document gives Helman’s father as Uri Feivush. The suggestion that Uri Feivush of Glogau was actually Shmuel Helman’s father-in-law is discussed in my books, *An Ancient Lineage* (2006) and *The Jewish Journey* (2016).

To the south-west of the city of Posen lay the little town of Graetz (Grodzisk Wielkopolski) where there lived a Jaffe family descended from the Levush. Isaac ben Daniel Jaffe moved to Berlin. His son adopted Itzig as the family name. This Daniel Itzig (1723-1799) and his progeny became prominent Court Jews to the Prussian King and formed important connections with the Mendelssohn family and also with the Eskeles and Arnstein Court Jews of Vienna (see my chart “Mendelssohn and some Ashkenazi Court Jews”).

Further to the south -west of Posen was the town of Lissa (Leszno) and to the south -east lay Krotoschin (Krotoszyn),

David Tebele was Chief Rabbi of Lissa. His father was Nathan Nata, who came down from Grodno to Brody where he became its Chief Rabbi. David Tebele was a 4th generation descendant of Aryeh Leib Fischls, a notable Chief Rabbi of Cracow, and of Uri Feivush, Chief Rabbi of Vilna. He was thus related to the Gelles line of Brody (see my chart “Family Connections of Chief Rabbis of Prague, Cracow, and Brody”).

Rabbis who might be distantly related to my Brody line were Siegfried Gelles (1884-1947), and Benjamin Gelles (1916-2000). They were born respectively in Krotoszyn and Lissa. Siegfried’s father Benjamin Gelles had come to Posen from Lithuania. Siegfried Gelles was Chief Rabbi of Lissa and later Rabbi of Moenchengladbach, whence the family came to England in 1939. His son Benjamin was a rabbi in Manchester and later Rabbi of Finchley.

Pedigree of Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles (1852-1934)

Chief Rabbi of Solotwina near Stanislau (1884 -1934)



Ohalei Shem by Shmuel Noach Gottlieb, published in Pinsk, 1912 (pp 261-2)
“...a descendant of Chief Rabbi Shmuel Helman of Metz, son of Israel Halpern of Krotoschin, who was a son-in-law of Chief Rabbi Nathan Nata Shapiro of Cracow.....”

see also, Eliezer Lipman Zak, *MS R.761* at the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, and later sources.

Edward Gelles, *An Ancient Lineage : European Roots of a Jewish Family* (Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), chapter 33 “Rabbi Shmuel Hillman of Metz”
The Jewish Journey : A Passage through European History (I.B. Tauris, 2016), chapter 12 “Rabbi Shmuel Helman of Metz”

Entries from the "Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933" Volume 1, page 217, published by K.G. Saur, 1980

Gelles, David, Dr. jur., Rechtsanwalt; geb. 24. Dez. 1883 Kudrynca/Galizien, gest. 20. Aug. 1964 Wien; jüd.; *V*: Nahum G., jüd.; *M*: Esther, geb. Weinstein, jüd.; ∞ 1921 Renee Grifsel; *K*: Edward. *Weg*: 1938 GB, 1949 Österr.

Prom. Wien; 1919–38 RA in Wien; Präs. *Herzl-Klub* Wien, Vizepräs. isr. Kultusgde. Wien, Gr. u. Ehrenpräs. *Allg. Zionisten Österreichs*, Mitgl. ZA der Weltkonf. *Allg. Zionisten*. 1938 Emigr. GB, 1938–49 Rechtsberater für kontinentaleurop. Recht in London. 1949 Österr., 1949–64 RA in Wien; VorstMitgl. österr. Zionistenorganisationen.

Qu: Hand. Pers. – RFJL.

Gelles, Siegfried, Dr. phil., Rabbiner; geb. 30. Dez. 1884 Krotoschin/Posen, gest. 3. Sept. 1947 London; *V*: Benjamin G. (geb. Litauen), Dayan (ehrenamtl. relig. Richter), Schächter; *M*: Marie Peshe, geb. Tobianski (geb. Litauen); *G*: 2 S, um 1900 Auswand. GB; 1 S (gest. vor 1914 in Deutschland); 1 S u. 1 B (umgek. im Holocaust); 1 B Emigr. USA; ∞ 1915 Lydia Guttmann (geb. 1890 Namslau/Schlesien, gest. 1969), 1939 Emigr. GB mit Familie; *K*: → Benjamin Gelles; *StA*: deutsch. *Weg*: 1939 GB.

1905–13 Stud. Jüd.-Theol. Seminar Breslau, Rabbiner, 1908 Prom. Erlangen. 1913–21 Hauptrabbiner in Lissa/Posen, 1921–38 Rabbiner jüd. Gde. Mönchengladbach u. bis 1933 ReligLehrer an höheren Schulen. Mitgl. *B'nai B'rith*; Nov. 1938 zeitw. Haft. Febr. 1939 Emigr. GB, Unterstützung durch Verwandte u. *Chief Rabbi's Emergency Fund*, Geschäftsf. *Brit. Rabbis Assn.*; im 2. WK einige Mon. Internierung Isle of Man.

W: Die pantheistischen Gedanken in Leibniz' „Theodizee“ und Schleiermachers „Reden über die Religion“ (Diss.). 1908. *L*: Kisch, Breslauer Seminar. *Qu*: Arch. Pers. Publ. Z. – RFJL.

Gelles, Benjamin, Ph. D., Rabbiner; geb. 2. Nov. 1916 Lissa/Posen; *V*: → **Siegfried Gelles**; ∞ 1946 Annette Esther Broza (geb. 1926 London); *K*: Naomi Zmiri (geb. 1949 London), 1967 IL; Rena Hadary (geb. 1951 London), 1970 IL; Jonathan (geb. 1952 London), Wissenschaftler; David (geb. 1955), **in** höherer Talmud-Akad. tätig; *StA*: deutsch, 1948 brit. *Weg*: 1939 GB.

1926-35 Gymn. Mönchengladbach, 1935-38 Rabbinerseminar Berlin, Predigerdipl.; Febr. 1939 Emigr. GB mit Familie, zunächst beschränkte, später ständige Aufenthaltserlaubnis; Unterstützung durch Chief Rabbi's Religious Fund u. durch Verwandte; 1939-40 Liverpool Talmudical Coll.; Juni 1940 bis Jan. 1941 Internierung Isle of Man u. Huyton. 1941-42 Manchester Talmudical Coll., ab 1941 Univ. of Manchester, 1945 M.A.; 1944-46 Rabbiner Manchester Great Syn., ab 1947 Finchley Syn. London. 1949 Vertr. des Oberrabbiners im *Nat. Marriage Guidance Council*; Mitgl. Hauptgeschäftsvorst. *Mizrahi Org.* für GB u. Irland, 1952 Präs. *Finchley Mizrahi Org.*, 1958-71 stellv. Vors., 1971-77 Vors. *Jew. Marriage Educ. Council* London. 1974 Ph.D. Univ. London. Lebte 1977 in GB.

W: Peshat and Derash **in** the Exegesis of Rashi. Diss. phil. 1975; *Qu*: Fb. Hand. - RFJL.