

# Genetic genealogy and my ancestral background

Edward Gelles

In recent years DNA tests have become an important part of genealogical research. The commercial availability of these tests, the increase in the size of data bases, and refinements in the interpretation of test results are continuing apace.

After many years of using traditional methodology for the study of my wider ancestral background I was able to take advantage of these new research tools, which are at present particularly suitable for complementing established genealogical data and for supporting or disproving some mooted connections.

My own DNA tests and those of my close cousins, as well as comparisons with tests of many other probands, have yielded much genealogical information which is to be found in some of my published books and magazine articles and on my web page [1].

The present brief essay sets out the tests I have taken, with salient examples of the kind of information that can be derived from them.

I have used Family Tree DNA of Houston Texas for most of my tests. This company's large data base is particularly strong for Jewish connections. It currently offers a range of Y-DNA tests for studying paternal ancestry in the direct father to son line. It also offers a full "FMS" mitochondrial DNA test relating to the strict mother to daughter line, and its "Family Finder" provides the test for matches on the 22 chromosomes of autosomal DNA that relate to both paternal and maternal ancestry and to the 23<sup>rd</sup> chromosome's female X-DNA.

## **My Y-DNA haplogroup is R-M124 (previously referred to as R2a)**

My Y-DNA 67 marker test has so far shown up about sixty probands with the R-M124 haplogroup, matching me on 60 or more out of 67 markers.

Of particular interest are half a dozen probands with matches on 65 or 66 markers. These close matches relate to a line of cousins whose genealogy had been outlined in my earlier studies of family history and genealogy.

These cousins are descended from our common ancestor Moses Gelles, who was a scholar of the prestigious talmudic study group known as the *Brody Klaus* (ca. 1700-1760).

I am a direct 6<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of this scholar through his eponymous grandson Rabbi Moses Gelles of Glina and Brody who married a granddaughter of Chief Rabbi Shmuel Helman of Mannheim and Metz (d. 1764). I am also the latter's 6<sup>th</sup> generation descendant and an 8<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of Chief Rabbi Nathan Nata Shapiro of Cracow.

Another grandson of our common Gelles forebear was Rabbi Shmuel Gelles who married the only daughter of the eminent Rabbi Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz, and this couple became the progenitors of a Ukrainian rabbinic line who adopted the name of Polonsky after the name of the town of Polonnoye. Later descendants changed their name to Paull and other variants [2].

The Gelles family had multiple connections with leading rabbinical families in Ashkenaz including the ancient Shapiro line. From Nathan Nata Shapiro, the Chief Rabbi of Grodno (d.1577) there is a direct descent to his eponymous grandson Nathan Nata Shapiro, the Chief Rabbi of Cracow (d.1633), and then to his 6<sup>th</sup> generation descendant, the Chasidic leader Rabbi Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz (d.1791) [3].

So my Gelles line and that of the Polonsky cousins have a paternal common ancestor in Moses Gelles, the scholar of Brody, and a common Shapiro ancestor in Rabbi Nathan Nata Shapiro of Cracow. The common paternal Gelles ancestry is confirmed by the Y-DNA 67 marker test results, while the Shapiro connections through female lines can be studied in other ways including autosomal DNA tests.

### **My mitochondrial DNA haplogroup is K1a1b1a.**

Mitochondrial descent is exclusively in mother to daughter line.

I have taken the HVR1, HVR2, and full mitochondrial sequence (FMS) tests. An exact match in the FMS test between two people indicates that they most probably share a common ancestor at some time which may be up to several centuries in the past. Identification of these common ancestors will require

considerable knowledge of individual family trees from a variety of traditional sources or other types of DNA tests.

My full mitochondrial sequence test shows several hundred matches including many exact matches (zero genetic distance). An instance of genealogical importance are such matches with Benveniste that throw light on my distant Sephardic background. My FMS test confirms the exact match with Marcelo Benveniste, whose ancestors came from Spain to the island of Rhodes about 400 years ago (when it was a part of the Ottoman Empire. I also have an exact FMS match with Raymond Rousso from Macedonia, a relative of whose family was an ancestor in the maternal line of Marcelo Benveniste [4]

At the same time Maria Kaufmann, the daughter of an eminent Bulgarian musicologist, the recently deceased academician Dr. Nikolay Kaufmann, allowed me access to her father's DNA test results. Kaufmann had forebears who came from Austria-Hungary and Romania within the last century or so. His haplogroups are quite different from mine and he does not show any relevant matches on his full FMS test. He does have mitochondrial HVR1 matches with Jack Benveniste and Jeanette Benveniste (who lists a Mordecai Rousso as a forebear).

And he has modest autosomal DNA matches with Marcelo Benveniste and related probands. Dr Kaufmann also has other autosomal DNA matches with many of my more distant family connections, including dozens of Friedmans. Rabbi Israel Friedman is of particular interest as he is clearly related to both of us and to other family members.

My essay entitled "Gelles, Friedman, Horowitz, and Benveniste" discusses my relatives and their ancestral connections with the Benveniste, who go back nearly a thousand years to Narbonne in south-western France and to Barcelona, Saragossa, and elsewhere in Spain [5].

Arthur Benveniste is related to Marcelo Benveniste - their forebears shared the same path of migration from Spain to the island of Rhodes at the time of the Spanish Inquisition and its aftermath. Arthur Benveniste's autosomal matches with my first and second cousins Dr Stuart Rothenberg and Susan Lee Weinstein are listed in this essay [6].

## **My closest ancestors from traditional genealogy**

My grandparents and great-grandparents included a Wahl descended from Saul Wahl, scion of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Katzenellenbogen Chief Rabbis of Padua and Venice, Chayes from a family that left Portugal in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and whose line of rabbis included a 16<sup>th</sup> century Chief Rabbi of Prague, who was a brother-in-law of the famous Rabbi Judah Loew, and Horowitz, connected to a millennial line of Levites in Spain, who took their later family name from the little place near Prague in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and who produced many distinguished rabbis including a great early 17<sup>th</sup> century Chief Rabbi of Prague, Frankfurt, and Safed. As for my immediate paternal Gelles line, we took our name from a Rabbi Gelles who was descended from a Chief Rabbi of Vilna who in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century became Head of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem. A daughter of this Rabbi Shmuel Gelles married Moses Levush of Brody who adopted his father-in-law's name and became known thereafter as Moses Gelles. He was most probably a direct descendant of Mordecai Jaffe (1530-1612) the Chief Rabbi of Prague, Grodno, and Posen, who was also known as the "Levush" after the title of his magnum opus. I am a direct descendant of the scholar Moses Gelles aka Levush, so my paternal Y-DNA haplogroup may go back to an ancient Jaffe line. The connections of these ancestors and many more were explored by me using traditional methodology [7].

## **My autosomal DNA and X-DNA matches on 23 chromosomes**

A compelling illustration of autosomal DNA tests coming into their own is provided by a table of my total matches and single longest match (in cM) with descendants of about twenty prominent Ashkenazi families who are listed with the names of some of their known ancestors. This table shows a nexus of interconnection going back 200–300 years between Guggenheim, Oppenheim, Wertheimer, Loewenstein, Stern, Rothscild, Salomon, Jaffe, and others [8].

## **GEDmatch and some of its utilities**

GEDmatch accepts uploaded DNA data from the "Family Finder" test of Family Tree DNA as well as from several other DNA test providers. It processes these data to provide utilities such as an individual's "one-to-many" autosomal and X-DNA matches with probands across its large data base, comparisons of autosomal and X-DNA matches on a "one-to-one" basis, and so on.

## **GEDmatch and genetic admixtures**

Gedmatch provides a useful starting point for the study of individual genetic admixtures and how these relate to the millennial migrations that have taken different ethnic groups across the continent of Europe.

For example, my autosomal DNA matches from “Family Finder” are processed by GEDmatch utilities such as Eurogenes K36, K13, and EUtest V2 K15 and hint at a millennial ancestral journey not too different from that suggested by traditional history and genealogy [9].

From the Levant and the Caucasus to Anatolia, Greece, Sicily and the Iberian Peninsula, and Italy to the Rhineland, and then prolonged migrations to eastern Europe that began to reverse in the Age of Enlightenment. Interestingly the divergent paths of Sephardic Jews at the time of the Inquisitions are indicated for my ancestral connections – from Spain and Portugal to Gascony and the Low Countries and then west to Britain and the New World or east to Germany, central and eastern Europe - rather than the migrations from Spain to the Ottoman Empire, Greece and the islands of the east Mediterranean, and sometimes to the north African littoral or back to Italy.

## **References**

- [1] My web page “Edward Gelles on Balliol College Archives & Manuscripts” lists my six published books and numerous magazine articles as well as a large amount of more recent material.  
The present essay will be found under the section heading ;  
“Reflections on my ancestral background”
- [2] Gelles and Polonsky lines from grandsons of Moses Gelles  
see my book “ Meeting my Ancestors “ , p 29.
- [3] The Shapiro Connection  
see my book “Family Connections : Gelles-Shapiro-Friedman”, pp 18-19  
also on my web page, chart 8 under section heading “Some Family Charts”
- [4] Full mitochondrial DNA match with Marcelo Benveniste  
see appended note
- [5] my earlier essay “ Gelles, Friedman, Horowitz, and Benveniste”  
see my web page
- [6] Autosomal DNA matches with Arthur Benveniste  
see appended note

- [7] Ancient Rabbinical Ancestry of Edward Gelles  
see my web page, chart 5 under section heading “ Some Family Charts”
- [8] Autosomal DNA matches of Edward Gelles with descendants of Ashkenazi  
family nexus  
see my book “The Jewish Journey” , p 177 ( chart 15. 4)
- [9] GEDmatch Eurogenes admixture tests K36, K13, and EU V2 K15  
see details on my web page

Further to the above references 4 and 6:



*Liliana y Marcelo Benveniste, directores de eSefarad  
reciben la Medalla de las 4 Sinagogas Sefardíes de Jerusalem*

Marcelo Benveniste of Buenos Aires whose family lived on the island of Rhodes for several hundred years following their departure from Spain at the time of the Inquisition.

He shows an exact match with Edward Gelles on the Full Mitochondrial Sequence Test (FMS)  
of Family Tree DNA

(see “Gelles, Friedman, Horowitz, and Benveniste”  
on “Edward Gelles at Balliol College Archives and Manuscripts

## Gelles – Jaffe, Horowitz, Benveniste

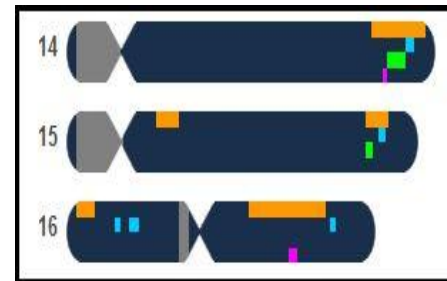
Close cousins of Edward Gelles include Dr Stuart Rothenberg and Susan L Lipsitt nee Weinstein  
They are respectively his 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cousins once removed

### Dr Stuart Rothenberg autosomal DNA matches (on Family Finder)

on chromosome 9  
with Arthur Benveniste  
Susan Lee Lipsitt, Alice Jaffe,  
Larry Epstein, and Steven M Horwitz



on chromosomes 14 - 16  
with Edward Gelles  
Alice Jaffe, Ronald Allen Jaffe,  
Judith Salomon



with Arthur Benveniste  
Susan L Lipsitt , Alice Jaffe,  
Miles Saltiel, Steven M Horwitz

