

My Gelles and Griffel parents and their ancestors.

A brief introduction

by **Edward Gelles**

My ancestors include members of leading rabbinical families. Repeated inter-marriages occurred between some of these families over the generations on both my father's and mother's side, and there were also connections between the two sides. My Gelles and Griffel lines went back to a common ancestry in the Treves rabbis of medieval France.

My parents were Dr. David Itzig Gelles (1883 - 1964) and Regina Griffel (1900 - 1954). Their immediate families came from once Austrian Galicia. They married in Vienna shortly after the end of the first world war. I was born in 1927. We left Austria shortly after the Anschluss in August 1938, seeking refuge in England, and in due course we became naturalised British subjects.

My father was a son of Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles (1852 – 1934) and Esther Weinstein (1862 – 1907), a daughter of Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Weinstein of Solotwina. The rabbinical ancestry of my paternal grandfather goes back for hundreds of years and my father was the first of this line to seek a secular education. He became a doctor of law and an advocate in Vienna while maintaining a leading role in the Viennese Jewish community and in Zionist circles.

The branch of my paternal ancestry goes back to the marriage of a daughter of Rabbi Shmuel Gelles to a descendant of Chief Rabbi Mordecai **Jaffe** of Prague, Grodno, and Posen (1530 – 1612) who was known as the Levush after the title of his magnum opus called the “Levushim”.

The descendant, Moses Mendel Levush, became known by his father-in-law's family name as Moses Gelles and was a noted scholar of the Brody Klaus in the early 18th century.

Other notable ancestors of my paternal grandfather included the 18th century Chief Rabbis Isaac Horowitz of Hamburg, and Shmuel Helman of Metz, the 17th and 16th century Nathan Nata Shapiro of Krakow and his eponymous grandfather of Grodno - the long Shapiro rabbinical line going back to Matityahu Treves, the 14th century Chief Rabbi of Paris and then of France.

My mother Regina was the daughter of David Mendel Griffel and Chawa Wahl. The latter descended from Saul Wahl (1545 – 1617), scion of Chief Rabbis of Padua and Venice. Saul was the son of Samuel Judah Katzenellenbogen and Abigail **Jaffe**. He became a Jewish community leader in Poland where he attained a prominent role in state affairs.

My maternal great-grandmother Sarah Matel Chayes married my great-grandfather Eliezer Griffel (1850 – 1918)) who was the head of the Jewish community of Nadworna. Sarah Chayes came from the distinguished family of Rabbis and scholars who spread from 15th century Portugal over centuries, including Chief Rabbis of Prague and Vienna to a senior professor of law at Harvard University.

The Jaffe connection with Gelles is also shown with the ancestor of my Griffel great-grandfather. Chief Rabbi Joel Sirkes of Krakow was named after his mother Sirka Jaffe and was a 2nd cousin of Mordecai Jaffe.

From the above mentioned Wahl and Chayes connections the Griffel ancestral lineage leads back to the outstanding earlier Wahl – Katzenellenbogen, to the Luria connection, and then to the same Matityahu Treves, the Chief Rabbi of Paris and of France, who died around 1385.

The above ancestral outlines for my father and mother show that their Gelles and Griffel lineages come to a common Treves ancestry in the 14th century and thence go back together to the Kalonymos family of Narbonne and earlier times.

The wider Gelles and Griffel history is dealt with in my published books, including “An Ancient Lineage : European Roots of a Jewish Family” (2006), “Family Connections : Gelles- Shapiro – Friedman” (2009), and “The Jewish Journey – A Passage through European History” (2016), and much additional research material is presented in the “Papers of Edward Gelles” on the Balliol College “Archives and Manuscripts” web site. A relevant reference to the present Note is “Edward Gelles –Some Notes on my ancestral background”.