

Some Scholars of the Brody Klaus

Gelles – Zundel Ramraz - Horowitz

by Edward Gelles

In the 18th century the city of Brody in eastern Galicia became an important entrepot for trade between central and eastern Europe, but declined economically with the coming of the railways, other innovations and accompanying socio-political changes. In its heyday Brody had the second largest Jewish community in Europe (after Amsterdam) and was known as “the Jerusalem of Austria”. The province of Galicia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1772 to 1918. Brody was once noted for its talmudical college, the so-called *Brody Klaus*. The college and its scholars were financially supported by the community and had a pan-European reputation in religious circles as well as considerable local influence (1).

One of its scholars was my direct paternal ancestor Moses Menachem Mendel Levush (ca.1700-1760) who was known as Moses Gelles, having adopted the matronymic Gelles from his father-in-law, Rabbi Shmuel Gelles. He was most probably descended from Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe (1530-1612) the Chief Rabbi of Prague, Grodno, and Posen who was known as the *Levush* after the title of his magnum opus, and on the Gelles side from Uri Feivush ben David, the Chief Rabbi of Vilna who became Head (*Nasi*) of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem in the mid 17th century (2).

A Brody contemporary of Moses Gelles was Rabbi Moshe Reb Zelig's (died 1759) who married a daughter of another scholar of the *Klaus* called Rabbi Ahron Zelig ben Yehuda Zundel Segal (died 1731). The acronym “Ramraz” referring to Rabbi Moshe's father-in-law became established as a family name with his descendants.

A son of this Rabbi Moshe (Ramraz) was Rabbi Yehuda Leib Zundel Ramraz who also became a scholar of the *Klaus* and died in 1804. His daughters Sarah Bathya and Rivka Henya married respectively a grandson of the scholar Moses Gelles and Eleazar Rokeach. From the latter marriage came Shalom Rokeach, the first Rebbe of the distinguished Chasidic dynasty of Belz (3).

As the appended chart shows, R. Yehuda Zundel Ramraz was followed in the *Klaus* by his nephew R. Todros Zundel Ramraz and the latter's grandson R. Todros Zundel Horowitz (4)

References

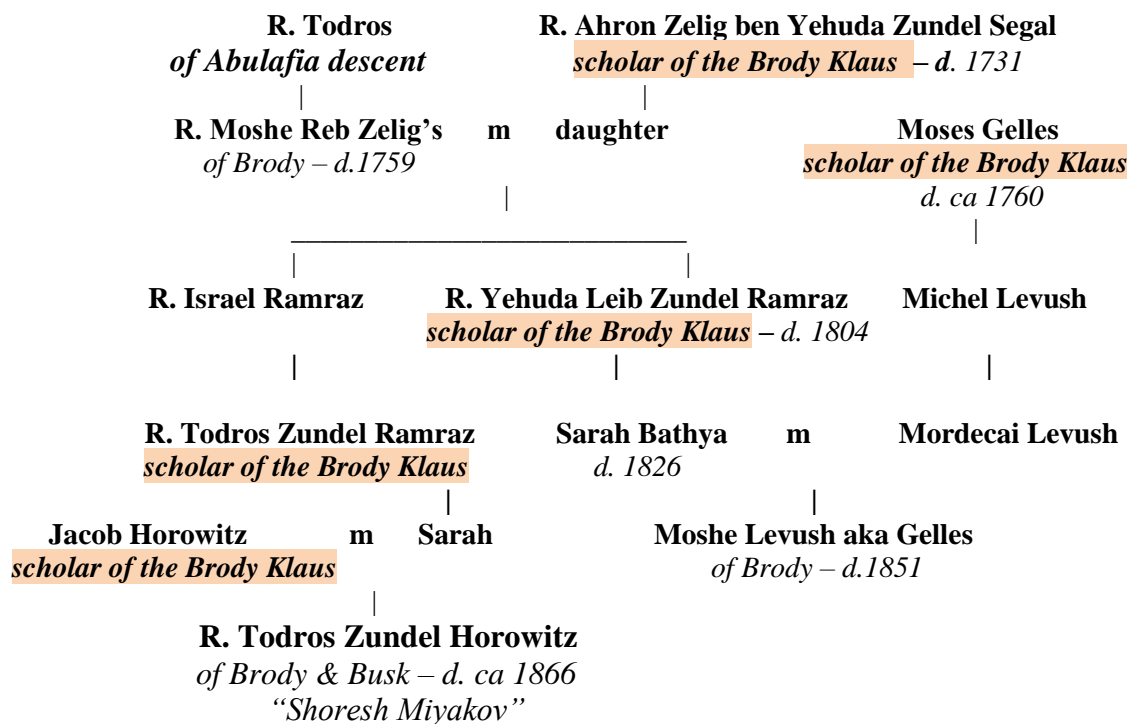
(1) A quotation from the Memorial Book of Brody about the Brody Klaus is appended here (from Edward Gelles, *An Ancient Lineage* (2006) p. 208.

“ In Brody proper and in its 14 dependent settlements there were, in 1765, 15 leasing agents, 3 distillery owners, 4 taverners; of 737 providers ...147 were in trade, with a hand in practically every branch of business in Brody at that time (such as marketing wines and liquors, grain and flour, iron, furs, horses and cattle, fabrics, spices, books, and more); 5 in industry (of whom 4 manufactured soap and 1 made candles).

One of the more interesting chapters, both in the history of the community of Brody, and of the scholars and scholarship in all Poland at the time is that of the “ Wise Men of the Kloiz of the Holy Community of Brody”. Over a period of almost 80 years (from the 1730's to the end of the 18th century) the learned of Brody, or rabbis and scholars from the towns of the area, sat learning steadily from Sabbath to Sabbath in the large “bait midrash” called a Kloiz (from Klaus, cf. Latin *claustrum*, old French *cloistre*), a smaller, more informal house of worship and study near the old synagogue. These scholars enhanced the honour of the Torah through their writings and by dint of study, debate, and exchange of opinions with the greatest Torah scholars in the world of their time. Among the scholars were those who knew the Kabbalah, and they had their own “Shtibl” (small house of prayer) near the Kloiz. The community of Brody took care of the material needs of the scholars of the Kloiz, establishing a fund from the contributions by the rich men of Brody.

- 2) The story of my ancestor Moses Gelles and the Brody Klaus comes into a number of my writings, including. Edward Gelles, *An Ancient Lineage*, Chapter 29 – “*Finding Rabbi Moses Gelles*” and my essay “*Moses (Gelles) the servant of God*” (web page of Edward Gelles on Balliol College Archives & Manuscripts)
- (3) *An Ancient Lineage*, Chapter 30, “*Jewish Community Life in Brody*”, Tables 26 and 27
- (4) Edward Gelles, *The Jewish Journey* (2016) , p. 119 and on my web page *Millennial descent from Shem Tov Halevi of Gerona Gelles - Horowitz Connections*

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Footnotes to the Chart

R. Todros was a descendant of the Abulafia scholars and courtiers of medieval Spain

R. Yehuda Leib Zundel Ramraz was grandfather of the first Grand Rabbi of the Belz Chasidic dynasty (Shalom Rokeach (1779-1855)

Jacob Halevi Horowitz was a son of Yehuda Aryeh Leibush Halevi Horowitz of Apt. They claimed descent from Rabbi Isaiah Halevi Ish Horowitz (ca 1568-1627), who was known as the holy *Shelah*.

see Arim Veimahot Beyisrael, Vol 6 (Brody), pp 54,56, 69-70,

Meir Wunder, Meorei Galicia, Vol.2: 217, Vol.4 : 844-907 and 967-9,

Vol.6: 475

Yitzchak Shlomo Yudlof, Sefer Yichus Belza, pp 25-35, 311-315

A recent enquiry received from Jeffrey A. Ramras drew my attention to him and his cousin Donald Ramras and their DNA test results. Both cousins listed Todros and Ramraz of Brody among their ancestral surnames. I show autosomal DNA matches with both, indicating some common ancestry in the 18th century that is compatible with my Gelles - Zundel Ramraz links.