

## **Grodno in Lithuania and the migration of some Gelles and Jaffe families**

### **Edward Gelles**

My paternal Gelles line were rabbis in Galicia. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Moses Menachem Mendel Levush married a daughter of a Rabbi Shmuel Gelles and was subsequently known as Moses Gelles of the Brody Klaus, a noted scholar of that prestigious talmudical study group. His immediate progeny used both the Gelles and Levush names, The latter was believed to indicate direct descent from Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe of Prague (1530-1612) who became Chief Rabbi of Prague, Grodno, and Posen and was called *Levush* after the title of his major work. There were Gelles rabbis in Prague, contemporary with Mordecai Jaffe and some who migrated to Poland in the 17<sup>th</sup> century followed in his footsteps .

Gelles – Jaffe marriages are recorded in Grodno and other Lithuanian towns. Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there was an upswing in the economy of Galicia and Brody in particular, and rabbis from Grodno were among those who moved south. They flourished in Galicia under Austrian rule and later tended to move to Hungary and Austria and ultimately to Vienna.

At the same time Gelles and Jaffe from Grodno also migrated westward to Posen and neighbouring towns including Graetz, Krotoschin, and Lissa. The city of Glogau in nearby Silesia had a flourishing Jewish community. Some of these distant Gelles relatives later continued their westward journey to Berlin and elsewhere in Germany. Some Jaffe from Graetz adopted the family name of Itzig when they moved to Berlin where they became important “Court Jews”. Their marriages with Mendelssohns and others later linked them to “Court Jews” in Vienna.

My preceding chart “Migrations of rabbinic families in central and eastern Europe over the past few centuries” is on the Balliol College web site. It shows how my immediate Gelles line is enriched by marriages with other rabbinic families, and in particular with descendants of Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe.

The distant relatives who moved west from Grodno to Posen and Silesia include Rabbis Siegfried Gelles of Krotoschin and Benjamin Gelles of Lissa. The latter ultimately became Rabbi of Finchley. Biographical notes for these rabbis are attached to a preceding essay

At about the same time that some of my immediate ancestors left Grodno another branch went further afield. A Gellis family came to Jerusalem from Grodno in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Abraham Israel Gellis, a Haredi (ultra-orthodox) Rabbi, who was born in 1951, is a scion of this family and presumably a distant connection of my paternal forebears (Edward Gelles, *An Ancient Lineage*, 2006 edn., p. 317),

## NOTES

### **Rabbi Abraham Israel Gellis**

*Majesty and Glory; Synagogues in the Land of Israel*, by Rabbi Abraham Israel Gellis, Jerusalem: Carta 2011, and subsequent edition.

From the New York Times 14<sup>th</sup> January 2012 :

“Today there is not a city without a Haredi community,” said Rabbi Abraham Israel Gellis, a 10<sup>th</sup> generation Jerusalem Haredi rabbi, as he sat in his home, an enormous yeshiva on a hill outside his window. “I have 38 grandchildren and they live all over the country”.

Abraham Israel Gellis was “active in many organizations, editor of *Erev Shabbat* newspaper and *Mishpacha* weekly. He was an adviser to the Minister of Religious Affairs and editor of popular radio programs”. His recent book has fine illustrations and brief notes about many synagogues in all parts of Israel.

### **Some historical connections of synagogues in Israel**

It is noteworthy that a number of these synagogues have historical links with some of my Chasidic forebears and their marriage connections in eastern Europe, mainly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

My paternal Gelles rabbis were related to descendants of Israel Friedman of Ruzhin, the progenitor of the Ruzhin, Sadagora, Czortkow, Boyan, and other Chasidic lineages. In particular my grandfather and great-grandfather were close followers of the Friedmans of Czortkow. My Gelles also had a connection by marriage with the Chasidic Laufer dynasty of Nadworna that goes back to Rabbi Meir of Przemyslany and the founder of modern Chasidism - the Baal Shem Tov (the Master of the Good Name).

My maternal great-grandfather Eliezer Griffel was head of the Nadworna community. He and his immediate family were adherents of and linked by marriage with the Hager Rabbis of Ottoniya, whose family were leaders of the Vizhnitz Chasidic dynasty, in Galicia and Bukowina (latter-day Roumania).

The Hager and Friedman families were linked by marriage as were other Chasidic dynasties.

My Gelles ancestral line also had some links with the Rokeach, Grand Rabbis of Belz. Yossel Taube, ancestor of my cousin Thaddeus Taube, was head of the Belz community when Shalom Rokeach the first Rabbi of this dynasty, was appointed (see my chart on the Balliol College web page “Zundel Ramraz and Gelles-Rokeach cousins”).