

Some Gelles and Jaffe family migrations in recent centuries

Edward Gelles

Background Introduction

I have studied my ancestral background for the past 20 years. My work can be seen on the web site of Balliol College, Oxford (“Edward Gelles at Balliol College Archives & Manuscripts “). It includes references to numerous articles in specialist journals and six books published between 2006 and 2016, my more recent work also being recorded on this web site.

My ancestral connections include historically significant figures from a score of the leading rabbinic families. On my father’s Gelles side these include the most important rabbis of the Jaffe and Shapiro lines and on my mother’s Griffel side a scion of the Katzenellenbogen rabbis of Padua and Venice called Saul Wahl, who rose to importance in 16th century Poland. Among other forebears are distinguished rabbis and scholars of the ancient Chayes family which left Portugal in the 15th century. I also have connections, with the Horowitz, Isserles, Hillman, Halpern, HaKohen, Wertheimer, Oppenheim, Loewenstein, and Mendelssohn families. I have studied the history and genealogy of these families and the complex tapestry of their pan-European migrations. Some of these lineages hark back to Rabbi Salomon ben Isaac of Troyes known as *Rashi* (1040-1105), Rabbi Solomon Luria of Lublin (1510-1574), and Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague known as the *Maharal* (ca.1520 -1609), these three rabbis being of widely accepted descent from biblical times

Onomastics of the Gelles name

The European migrations of the Jaffe name (Jafe, Yoffe, etc) is well known. The name of Hebrew origin meaning “beautiful” is recorded over a period in medieval Spain. Forebears of my ancestor Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe were in Italy, notably Bologna, before moving to Prague in the late 15th century.

The Gelles name (and variants with somewhat different spelling) found among Jews in central and eastern Europe in the past few centuries is believed to derive from the German medieval girl’s name Geyle, meaning the fair or fair haired, extended in the Yiddish dialect to refer to a person descended from someone with fair or reddish hair. The more speculative onomastics of the name in earlier times is the subject of a separate essay.

My paternal Gelles – Jaffe line

I have traced my Gelles rabbinic line back to Brody in Galicia at the beginning of the 18th century. I am a 6th generation descendant of Moses Menachem Mendel Levush who married a daughter of a Rabbi S. Gelles and was thereafter referred to as Moses Gelles of the *Brody Klaus* (a member of that prestigious talmudical college). For the first three generations some of the issue of this marriage were known as Gelles and / or Levush. The line came down to my grandfather Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles (1852-1934). The latter's second son was my father, who forsook a rabbinic career for a secular education and became *Doctor Juris* of Vienna University, an advocate in that city, a leading Austrian Zionist and senior member of the Viennese Jewish community.

Before my forebears came to Brody they had followed in the footsteps of 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 *The Levushim*.

The following map and tables show my Gelles line and its family links over a period of 400 years of migration from Prague to Grodno in Lithuania, from Grodno in a southerly direction to Brody in Galicia, and then to Vienna.

Also shown is a separate branch of the Gelles family who migrated westwards from Grodno to the province of Posen and then on to Berlin. At the same time a Jaffe branch moved in a similar general direction from Grodno to Graetz and then to Berlin where they flourished under the name of Itzig. This Itzig family and my Gelles line, both being descendants of the *Levush*, were thus distant cousins. The Itzig made connections with Mendelssohn in Berlin and Arnstein and Eskeles in Vienna

According to the data base of the Museum of the Jewish People, Beit Hatfutsot, in Tel Aviv, the official museum entry for the name GELLES states that “*distinguished 20th century bearers of the Jewish family name Gelles include the Polish-born British Rabbi Benjamin J Gelles and the Austrian attorney and consultant David Gelles* “.

The latter is my father, Dr. David Itzig Gelles of Vienna whose descent in my Gelles - Jaffe ancestral line is detailed below, while the former, Rabbi Benjamin Gelles, is shown on appended chart and table as from a branch of my family that

came from Grodno to Lissa, then to Berlin and finally via Moench-Gladbach to England where he became Rabbi of Finchley.

References

- Jaffe article in Jewish Encyclopedia (1904)
Beit Hatfutsot, Museum of the Jewish People, Tel Aviv, database

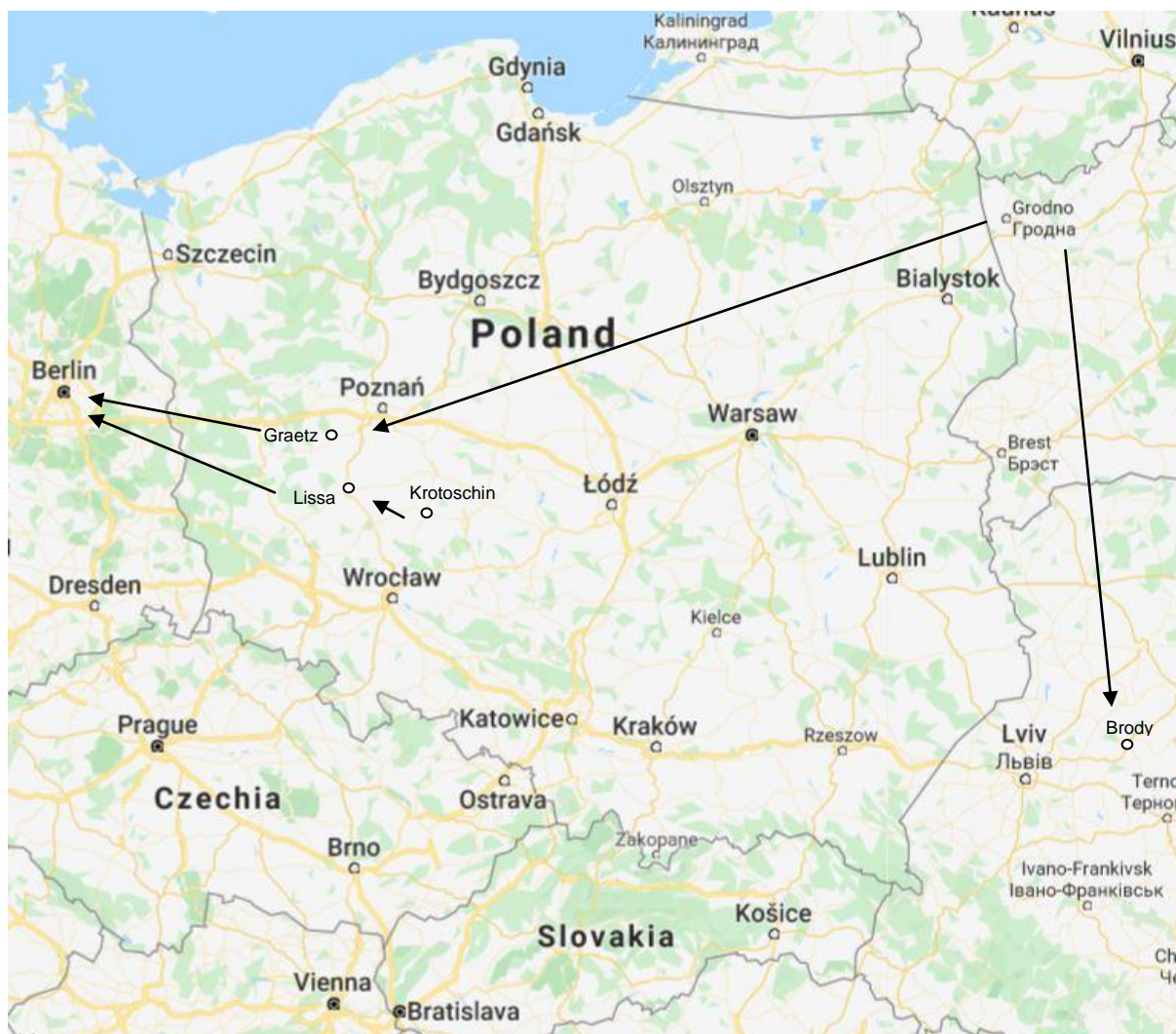
- **Dr. David Itzig Gelles** (my father) see especially my books,
“An Ancient Lineage” (publ. 2006), Chapters 26 and 27
“Family Connections: Gelles-Shapiro-Friedman” (publ. 2009), Chapter 6 (pp 85 – 112).
- **Rabbi Benjamin J Gelles** (Rabbi of Finchley) and others
“An Ancient Lineage”, Chapter 36, p. 277, note 14 and Chapter 38, pp 317- 318

- “Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933”
(publ. K.G. Saur, 1980) has entries for Dr David Gelles and Rabbi Benjamin J Gelles

- “Hofjuden und Kulturbuerger. Die Geschichte der Familie Itzig in Berlin”
by Thekla Keuck (publ. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Goettingen, 2011)

Files on < Edward Gelles at Balliol College Archives & Manuscripts >

- Reflections on my ancestral background (A 1)
- Connections between Brody in Galicia and towns in Lithuania, Silesia, and Posen (A 3)
(includes pedigree of my grandfather Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles)
- Grodno in Lithuania and the migration of some Gelles and Jaffe families (A 6)
(includes reference to an old Gelles family branch who went from Grodno to Jerusalem)
- Tracing my Gelles line back to Levush and Jaffe (A 20)
(discusses descent of some Levush from Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe of Prague)
- Wahl and Jaffe to Gelles and Griffel (A 21)
- Wahl and Shapiro ancestral connections (A 22)
- Moses (Gelles) the Servant of God (A 23)
- Descent from Mordecai Jaffe (Levush) (B 12)
(descent of some Levush from Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe of Prague)
- Ancestry of Felix Mendelssohn (B 22)
- Mendelssohn and some Ashkenazi Court Jews (B 23)



From the time of Mordecai Jaffe (1530-1612), Chief Rabbi of Prague, Grodno, and Posen (Poznan), Jaffe and Gelles families migrated from **Prague to Grodno** and intermarried. At the end of the 17th century my Gelles – Jaffe family branch (who wrote their name as Gelles or sometimes Gellis) moved south from **Grodno to Brody** in Galicia (north-east of Lviv, formerly Lemberg). And later some of this branch came **to Vienna**. My grandfather Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles (1852-1934) was born in Galicia and died in Vienna. My father Dr David Itzig Gelles (1883-1964) was an advocate in that city, a Liberal Zionist, and a leading member of Vienna’s Jewish community.

Another Gelles branch went west from **Grodno to Posen** and to near-by towns of **Lissa (Leszno)** and **Krotoschin ((Krotoscyn)**, while some Jaffe who had come from the same direction settled in the little town of **Graetz (Grodzisk)**. In the early 18th century Daniel **Jaffe from Graetz went on to Berlin**, adopting “Itzig“ as his family name. In due course the Itzig became prominent Court Jews in Berlin, where they were connected by marriage with the Mendelssohn family.

Gelles from **Krotoschin and Lissa**, including Rabbis Siegfried Gelles (1884-1947) and Benjamin Gelles (1916 2000) also migrated westwards **to Berlin**, and deeper into Germany. Later they sought refuge in England, where Benjamin Gelles became Rabbi of Finchley.

A third Gelles branch from **Grodno moved to Jerusalem** at the beginning of the 18th century. Rabbi Abraham Israel Gellis (born 1951) is a 10th generation Haredi descendant of this family branch.

Migration of rabbinic families in central and eastern Europe over the past few centuries.

Connections between Galicia (Brody), Lithuania (Vilna, Grodno) , Posen (Graetz, Lissa, Krotoschin), Silesia (Glogau), Austria (Eisenstadt)

Isaac Horowitz Chief Rabbi of Brody, Glogau, and Hamburg, d. 1767	Nathan Nata Shapiro Chief Rabbi of Cracow 1585-1633	Mordecai Jaffe (aka Levush) Chief Rabbi of Prague, Grodno & Posen d. 1612	Samson Wertheimer Court Jew of Habsburg Vienna, Rabbi of Eisenstadt , Chief Rabbi of Hungary & Moravia died 1724	Uri Feivush Chief Rabbi of Vilna & Nasi in Jerusalem d. 1657	
<i>line connected with Rabbi D.I. Gelles of Brody and his descendants</i>		Jaffe of Graetz (near Posen)	<i>Wertheimer descendants connected with Oppenheim, Mendelssohn, Itzig, Eskeles, Gelles, Loewenstein</i>	Meir of Horodycze	
	Lifsha Shapiro m. Israel Halpern of Krotoschin		Isaac of Siemiatycze	Gershon Vilner of Shklov	Uri Feivush of Vilna
Uri Feivuch of Glogau	?	Daniel Jaffe Itzig in Berlin d. 1799	Shmuel Gelles Rabbi of Siemiatycze	daughter married Nathan Nata of Grodno Chief Rabbi of Brody d. 1764	
(1) daughter ? (2) Sarah d. 1774 married →	Shmuel Helman (Hillman) Chief Rabbi of Kremsier Mannheim & Metz d.1764	s Mendel Moshe Mendel Levush →	daughter married Moshe M. Levush aka Moses Gelles of Brody d. ca 1760		
Rabbi Uri Feivush of Lissa and other towns d. 1771	 Rabbi Moshe of Glogau 		Mordecai Gelles of Brody father or uncle of	David Tebele Rabbi of Lissa , d. 1792 (Gelles cousin)	
	daughter married Moses Gelles	----- →	Moses Gelles of Glina and Brody		
	another daughter, Chana, married son of Asher Lemel, Chief Rabbi of Glogau and Eisenstadt , d. 1789	Descendant of Rabbi Isaac Horowitz →	Rabbi David Isaac Gelles Brody, d. 1868 married Sarah Horowitz		<i>a distant Gelles line in Posen coming from Lithuania</i>
	Ahron Ber Gelles 19 th century community leader in Eisenstadt		Nahum Uri Gelles Chief Rabbi of Sopotwina 1852-1934		Rabbi Siegfried Gelles b. Krotoschin 1884
			David Itzig Gelles of Vienna 1883-1964		Rabbi Benjamin Gelles b. Lissa , 1916
			 Edward Gelles		

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 Kudrynce/Galizien, gest. 20. Aug. 1964 Wien; jüd.; *V*: Nahum G., jüd.; *M*: Esther, geb. Weinstein, jüd.; ∞ 1921 Renee Grif-fel; *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. – RFJI.

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. – RFJI.

GELLES – LEVUSH LINE

Edward Gelles
(b. 1927)

|

Dr. David Itzig Gelles (1883-1964)
advocate in Vienna
m Regina Griffel (a)

|

Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles (1852-1934)
Chief Rabbi of Solotwina nr Stanislau
m Esther Weinstein (b)

|

Rabbi David Isaac Gellis (ca 1790-1868)
of Glina and Brody
m Sarah (Horowitz) (c)

|

Rabbi Moses Gelles
m daughter of Rabbi Moshe of Glogau
the eldest son of Shmuel Helman
Chief Rabbi of Metz (d.1764) (d)

|

Mordecai Gelles of Brody
father or uncle of the above
and father of Rabbi Samuel Gelles (e)

|

Rabbi Moses Menachem Mendel Levush (f)
aka Moses Gelles, scholar of the Brody Klaus
(ca. 1700 -1760)
m daughter of Rabbi S(hmuel) Gelles

[Levush most probably descendant of Chief Rabbi Mordecai Yaffe of Prague (1530 -1612) known as the Levush after the title of his magnum opus].

- (a) Regina Griffel (1900-1954), daughter of David Mendel Griffel (1875-1941) and of Chawa Wahl (1877-1941), whose family were acknowledged descendants of Saul Wahl (1545-1617), scion of the Katzenellenbogen rabbis of Padua and Venice. Saul Wahl played a leading role in Polish affairs of state and according to legend became *Rex pro Tempore* during the interregnum that preceded the election of Sigismund III as Polish King in 1587 (but see re- interpretation in my published books).

Regina's grandfather Eliezer Griffel, head of the Nadworna community, married Sarah Matel Chayes, of the ancient Chayes family that included Isaac ben Abraham Chayes (1538-1617), Chief Rabbi of Prague, whose half sister was the first wife of the famous Rabbi Judah Loew (ca 1520-1609).

- (b) Esther Weinstein (1861-1907), daughter of Rabbi Hirsch Leib Weinstein of Solotwina and his wife Gittel. Circumstantial evidence suggests that Gittel was a daughter of Rabbi Yehuda Ahron Horowitz and his wife Miriam whose forebears were of an old Margolioth rabbinic line. Rabbi Hirsch Leib's father was Rabbi Israel Jacob Weinstein, who was a contemporary of Rabbi Yehuda Ahron Horowitz in Solotwina.
- (c) David Isaac Gellis appears to have married again later in life. He was in his sixties when my grandfather was born in 1852. It is plausible to connect Nahum Uri's mother Sarah to Rabbi Efraim Fischel Horowitz, a half-brother of Rabbi Yehuda Ahron Horowitz, whose father Rabbi Jacob Jokel Horowitz of Bolechow (1772 – 1832) was of the ancient line going back via Rabbi Isaac Horowitz of Hamburg (1715-1767) to the one time head of the Jewish communities in Poland, Pinchas Halevi Ish Horowitz (1535-1618).
The implications of these Horowitz connections would be that Nahum Uri Gelles and his wife Esther Weinstein were 2nd (half) cousins.
- (d) Rabbi Shmuel Helman (Hillman) of Metz, who was of pan-European significance, allied his daughters to a rabbi of the priestly Katz family, to Katzenellenbogen and Rapaport rabbis and to a son of Chief Rabbi David Mirels Fraenkel of Berlin (1707-1762). Helman was also related by blood and marriage to the eminent Chief Rabbi of Prague. Ezekiel Landau (1713-1793).
- (e) Mordecai Gelles of Brody, a son of Moses Gelles of the Brody Klaus, was the father of Rabbi Samuel Gelles (d.1811). The latter married Sarah Rachel Sheindel, the only daughter of the great Chasidic Rabbi Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz (1726-1791).
Issue of this Gelles – Shapiro marriage were known by the name of Polonsky from the area of Polonnoye (in present day Ukraine).
Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz was a direct descendant of the famous Rabbi of Cracow Nathan Nata Shapiro (1585-1633), whose line connects with the medieval Treves rabbis of France and goes back to the 11th century biblical scholar and commentator Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, known by the acronym of Rashi. The latter was widely believed to be of royal Davidic descent. My ancestral rabbinic families including the Treves, Luria, Shapiro, Loew, Katzenellenbogen, and Chajes claimed connections to Rashi.

- (f) The marriage of Menachem Mendel Levush aka Moses Gelles of Brody with a daughter of Rabbi S. Gelles produced issue that formed alliances with Ramraz, Margoshes, HaKohen, Fraenkel, and other rabbinic families as well as the afore-mentioned connections with the families of Rabbis Shmuel Helman of Metz and Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz. The use of both names Levush and Gelles continued for two or three generations after the above-mentioned Gelles– Levush marriage. Earlier Levush or Yaffe and Gelles had met and married in Grodno and other towns in Lithuania and their lines go back to 16th century Prague, where a scion of the ancient Katz (HaKohen) married a daughter of Judah Loew and Mirl Chayes-Altschuler, leading to marriages of their progeny with Horowitz, Chayes, Gelles, Helman and others.
- (g) The father-in-law of Menachem Mendel Levush recorded as Rabbi S. Gelles, was probably Rabbi Shmuel Gelles of Siemiatycze, who was a great-grandson of Chief Rabbi Uri Feivush of Vilna. In old age, Uri Feivush became head of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem with the title of *Nasi* (circa 1650), a title that had been borne in the preceding generation by Rabbi Isaiah Halevi Ish Horovitz of Prague, Frankfurt, and Safed (d.1627).