

Tracing my Gelles line back to Levush and Jaffe

Edward Gelles

I am a direct 6th generation descendant of Moses Gelles, a scholar of the distinguished Talmudical study group known as the *Brody Klaus*. He flourished in the first half of the 18th century. My studies of his lineage revealed complex family connections including descent 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, the *Levushim* (Rabbinical Robes of Learning). One of Mordecai Jaffe’s lines of descent goes via Zvi Levush and his son R. Nehemia Levush of Svierz and Vilna.

A Menachem Mendel Levush married a daughter of Rabbi S. Gelles, coming down from Lithuania to Brody in Galicia. He was then known by his father-in-law’s name, as Moses Gelles of Brody (such matronymic adoption being fairly common at that time). This scholar Moses Gelles had issue who were variously known by the names of Gelles (Gellis) and / or Levush for two or three generations.

These genealogical connections were resolved by a study of a fragment of the Records of the Brody Beth Din (the Rabbinical Court) which covered marriage contracts and property transactions of several generations of Gelles and Levush relatives. They indicated that Moses Gelles of Brody was one and the same person as Moses Menachem Mendel Levush. (The Beth Din Record is held at the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York).

A study of Brody birth, marriage, and death records kept in the Lviv archives, of tombstone inscriptions and property records followed. Particularly useful were the records of Brody house numbers with names and dates of the owners in showing lines of family ownership.

Note

A following essay outlines connections between descendants of Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe and Saul Wahl (Katzenellenbogen) and shows lines of descent from
“ Wahl and Jaffe to Gelles and Griffel “

Appended Tables

Edward Gelles, “ **An Ancient Lineage : European Roots of a Jewish Family**” published by Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2006

Chapter 29 : “ Finding Rabbi Moses Gelles “

Tombstones and house numbers reveal a distinguished ancestry

Chapter 30 : “Jewish Community Life in Brody”

From the Beth Din Records of 1808 -1817

- [1] p. 206 Records of the Brody Beth Din (1808-1817)
- [2] p. 207 Some Descendants of Rabbi Moses Gelles of Brody

Edward Gelles, “ **The Jewish Journey : A Passage through European History**” I.B.Tauris 2016 / Bloomsbury Publishing

Chapter 21 : “ A study in genetic genealogy “

- [3] p. 259 R. Moses Menachem Mendel Levush aka Moses Gelles of Brody, descent from R. Mordecai Jaffe of Prague

Edward Gelles, **website of Balliol College Archives and Manuscripts**
Edward Gelles Collection

- [4] Chart entitled “ Migration of rabbinic families in central and eastern Europe over the past few centuries “
- [5] Under section heading “ Some Family Charts “
“ Gelles of Brody “

RECORDS OF THE BRODY BETH DIN (1808–17)

- 1808. Rabbi Michel, son of Rabbi Menachem Levush (son-in-law of Rabbi S. Gellis) signed and sealed to his wife Feiga, daughter of Rabbi Yehoshua Heshel HaKohen.
- 1810. A contract between Leah, the daughter of Rabbi Gershon, and her husband Rabbi David Hertz, the son of Rabbi Ahron Benish, and the two brothers-in-law, Rabbi Meir Fraenkel, the son of Rabbi Dov Baer, and Rabbi Moshe Gershon Gellis, son of Rabbi Joseph.
- 1810. Sale between Chaya, daughter of Rabbi Henoah, and her husband Rabbi Abraham Yonah Reich, son of Rabbi Joseph, son of Rabbi M. Gellis. Half of this house belongs to the couple in partnership with his brother, Rabbi Hirsch Jacob Feigang, son of the above-mentioned Rabbi Joseph, and their brother-in-law, Rabbi Meir Shlomo Fraenkel, son-in-law of the said Rabbi Joseph, which they inherited from their father.
- 1810. Sale between Bonna, daughter of Rabbi Menachem Nachum, and her husband Rabbi Simcha, son of Rabbi Ahron Benyosh, the two other halves of the portion belonging to the two brothers-in-law, Rabbi Meir Fraenkel and Rabbi Moshe Gershon Gellis, the son of Rabbi Joseph Gellis. The said couple also sold their two halves of the portion to the above-mentioned brothers-in-law, Rabbi Meir Fraenkel and Rabbi Moshe Gershon Gellis.
- 1811. This place (or square) is bordered by the Vaskivonie of the heirs of the deceased Rabbi Moshe Gellis.
- 1812. After it, on the south side, is the house of Reb Mordechai Gellis.
- 1813. Sale between the wealthy Finkel, daughter of Rabbi Dov Baer, and her husband the learned Rabbi Benyamin Z. Wolf Bolchover, son of Rabbi Yaakov, who sold it for the purpose of honouring the deceased, in memory of the soul of the late Feiga, daughter of Reb Yehoshua Heshel HaKohen, the wife of Rabbi Michel, son of Reb Moshe Gellis.
- 1814. Deed of sale between Sarah Bathya, daughter of Rabbi Yehuda Zundel, and her husband, Rabbi Mordechai Levush, son of Rabbi Michel Gellis, to their son, Rabbi Moshe Levush.
- 1815. Contract by Chaya, daughter of Rabbi Aryeh Leib, widow of Rabbi Shmuel Gellis; half of this site had been left to her by her late husband, Rabbi Shmuel Gellis.
- 1817. Abraham (a bachelor), son of Rabbi Moshe Gellis, son of Rabbi Joseph Vaskivonie, married Taube, daughter of Rabbi Joseph Kalischer, son of Rabbi Berach Margoshes, the marriage contract mentioning the bridegroom's father, Rabbi Moshe (living) and the bridegroom's brother Rabbi Yankel Gellis. (This Rabbi Moshe is identifiable from an analysis of house numbers in the vital records as Rabbi Moshe Gershon Gellis, son of Rabbi Joseph Gelles).

SOME DESCENDANTS OF RABBI MOSES GELLES OF BRODY

Moshe Menachem Levush (Moses Gelles of the Brody Klaus) married a daughter of Rabbi S(amuel) Gelles of Brody. Their issue included:

1. R' Michel Levush or Gelles, married Feige (died ca. 1808–13), daughter of Rabbi Yehoshua Heshel HaKohen:
 - a. Mordechai Levush (Marcus Luwicz or Lewish), married Sarah Bathya (who died in 1826), daughter of Rabbi Yehuda Zundel
 - i. Their son, R' Moshe Levush or Gelles, (died 1851)
2. R' Joseph Gelles Vaskivonie:
 - a. R' Moshe Gershon Gelles (died 1824), married Rose (died 1820)
 - i. Rabbi Abraham Gelles, married (1817) Taube, daughter of Rabbi Joseph Kaliszer, son of R' Berach Margoshes. Their daughter Lea was a 'descendant of Moses Gelles of the Brody Klaus'
 - ii. R' Yankel Gelles (or Jacob Leway ?) married (1818) Hinde Gelles
 - iii. Possibly, R' Nathan Gelles who married Sarah Berman (died 1852); their son, Rabbi Chaim Naftali Gelles, was born in 1838
 - iv. Leah married R' David Hertz, son of Ahron Benish
 - b. Daughter married Rabbi Meir Fraenkel
 - c. Saul Woskoboynik (died 1831) married Beile (died 1831)
 - i. Their son, Osias Woskoboynik aka Osias Gelles (1804-1854) married Scheindel Schreiber
 - d. R' Abraham Yonah Reich married Chaya, daughter of R' Henoeh Reich
 - e. R' Hirsch Jacob Feigang
3. Rabbi Mordechai Gelles
 - a. Rabbi Shmuel Dov Gelles (died 1811), married Sarah Rachel Scheindel (born 1772), daughter of Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz (1726–91) for issue see notes 6 and 7
 - b. ? Rabbi Moses Gelles
 - i. Rabbi David Isaac Gelles (ca.1790–1870) married Sara, and their son, Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles (1852–1934) married Esther (1861–1907), daughter of Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Weinstein (died 1884).

R. Moses Menachem Mendel Levush aka Moses Gelles of Brody descent from R. Mordecai Jaffe of Prague

Genealogical evidence suggests that the Levush of my paternal Gelles–Levush line goes back to the distinguished sixteenth-century Rabbi Mordecai Jaffe of Prague, who was known as the *Levush*. Gelles and Levush connections in eighteenth-century Brody were echoed by Gelles–Jaffe marriages in earlier centuries in Lithuania, in Grodno where Mordecai Jaffe was Chief Rabbi for a time, and in other Lithuanian towns, such as Gorzd, where the *Pinkas HaKehilot Lita* mention Rabbi Moshe Jaffe, who occupied the rabbinical seat from 1840 to 1885.

His son Joseph Jaffe was a rabbi in Manchester, where he died in 1897. The tradition of this family was that they descended from the *Levush*.

A third-generation descendant of Rabbi Joseph Jaffe is one of the members of the Jaffe Y-DNA project at Family Tree DNA, who was found to be of haplogroup R2a (M124). Dr Jeffrey Mark Paull and I are of this haplogroup, which is relatively rare among Ashkenazi Jews and suggests that many thousands of years ago our distant ancestors might have come from regions of the Persian Empire to Mesopotamia and further afield before moving to Europe in larger numbers in the days of the Roman Empire.

The Jaffe were in medieval Spain, as noted in Pere Bonin's book *Sangre Judia* – names of Jafa, Jafe, Jaffa, Jaffe Jofa, Jofe, Jaffia, Jafia are recorded from 1175 to 1404 (the first letter of the name was traditionally written as Y as there is no J in the Hebrew alphabet). Jaffe flourished in northern Italy in the later Middle Ages, in Bologna and other towns. Some moved from Italy to Bohemia in the fifteenth century and later prospered in Poland and beyond. From these sprang Mordecai Jaffe who, before becoming Chief Rabbi of Grodno, Prague, and Posen, spent ten years of his life in Venice. He was a close relative of Abigail Jaffe, wife of the Rabbi of Venice. Abigail Jaffe was the mother of my ancestor Saul Wahl. There are about a dozen probands on the *Family Finder* database who are called Jaffe or lay claim to Jaffe descent. Some of these share autosomal DNA segments of significant size with me and my Gelles–Levush cousins, indicating a probable genealogical connection,

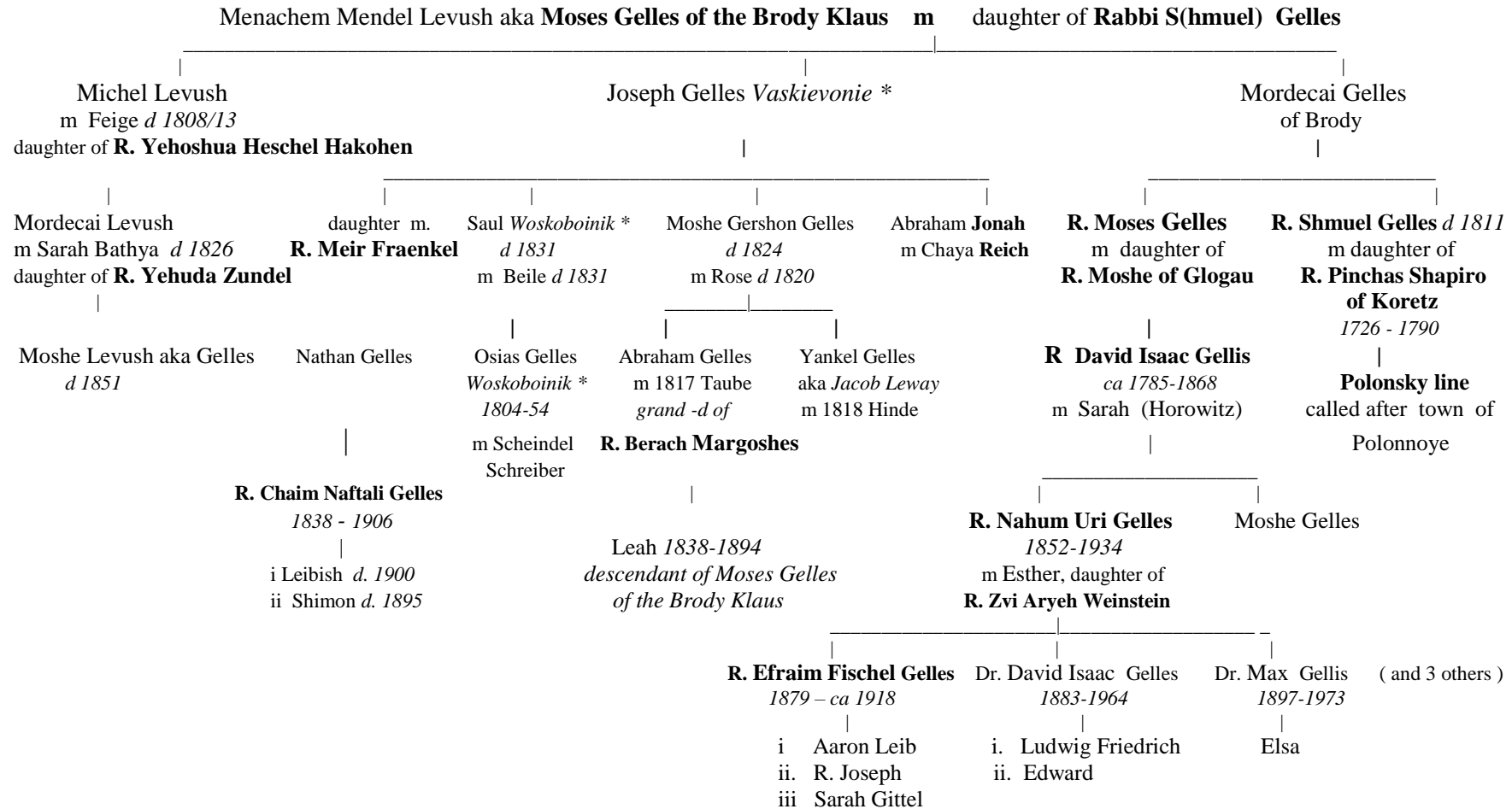
Migration of rabbinic families in central and eastern Europe over the past few centuries.

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		

Gelles of Brody

Partial family tree showing some rabbinical connections



* *Vaskievonie* & *Woskoboinik* - occupational epithets meaning "wax chandler" - the family owned wax works held monopoly for selling candles to the community