

**Edward Gelles at the Launch of his latest book
(Athenaeum Club, 28th January 2016)**

Sir Drummond and Lady Bone have taken an interest in my work for some time and I wish to thank them for giving my new book this splendid send-off which has special symbolic significance for me.

But first, a few words about the book.

Jews have been in Europe for a very long time, during which the continent has seen major migrations involving various ethnic groups.

Much has been written about the part the Jews have played in the history of Europe and in shaping western civilisation.

I have attempted to provide a fresh slant to the story of *The Jewish Journey* by bringing together findings from genetics and from traditional genealogical study to set against the historical background.

I think my book might appeal to the general reader for its brief outline of Jewish history and genealogy, while the rapidly increasing number of people who are taking commercial DNA tests in the hope of discovering their ancestors may find some guidance in the later chapters.

My study may have begun as just another search for family roots, but as I continued to find links between many notable families there gradually built up a picture in microcosm of Ashkenazi Jewry

Salient points in our history that I wrote about in my book included the interactions between Jews and Christians from before the time of

the crusades, through periods of persecution and expulsion, and effects on conversion, intermarriage, and social change

The Inquisitions in Spain and Portugal were among the major turning points in our history.

I have chapters on rationalist and mystical strands in Judaism, from early times to the period of the 18th C Enlightenment and the Chasidic movement.

Another chapter presents new material on the Frankists, a heretical Jewish sect who were welcomed by the Catholic church and later often intermarried with the Polish nobility.

The study of Jewish names and naming customs is one of the many subjects that can be brought to bear on these researches, but the game changing promise for the future lies with genetic genealogy and anthropology.

I think that my modest pilot studies using commercial DNA tests on numerous probands, including those of my wider family, have illustrated the potential of this inter-disciplinary approach.

Ashkenazi Jews have a well defined DNA profile attributed to genetic bottlenecks in the middle ages. They appear to have a mixed Eastern and European genetic make-up with an emphasis on affinities with the people of southern Europe and reflecting the nature of their encounters with many peoples on their journey. Millennial Italian connections have left a particularly strong imprint.

I have studied a variety of DNA tests for about a hundred probands which have shed new light on genealogical links and on genetic admixtures.

My own DNA test results tie in well with my known family history and traditions but also show traces of ancestral origins in the Low Countries, British Isles, and Scandinavia.

We are what the interactions of genetic inheritance with our environment and nurture have made us.

My childhood environment was typical of assimilated middle class Viennese Jews of the interwar period, namely a mixture of mid European culture and of Jewish tradition.

I was ten years old when I came to England in 1938. My parents sent me to a boarding school where no one spoke a word of German, and my rapid absorption of contemporary English culture proceeded apace when we moved to Oxford in 1940. My two years at the City of Oxford High School laid the foundation for my general education. We went back to London in 1942, but two years later I won an open scholarship to Balliol and so returned to Oxford for another six years.

The Athenaeum with its cultural traditions is such a felicitous choice for our present gathering.

I am glad that my publisher's Dr Lester Crook and several of his colleagues are here today. I.B.Tauris was founded by its distinguished Iranian chairman and has publishing interests including the history of the middle east in ancient and modern times. Incidentally, the results of my Y-DNA tests are compatible with the possibility that a very long time ago some of my forebears might have had connections with ancient Persia.

I am happy to see old friends here, who share with me some genetic background and also a Viennese childhood, as well as memories of our Oxford school and university days.

Balliol and Oxford, whose influence has undoubtedly played the major role in my nurture, and of so many generations before me, remain torchbearers of European culture, and so in more ways than one this day has strengthened the bond with my Alma Mater.

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