

My Family Background

by

Edward Gelles

born in Vienna, Austria on 24th November 1927

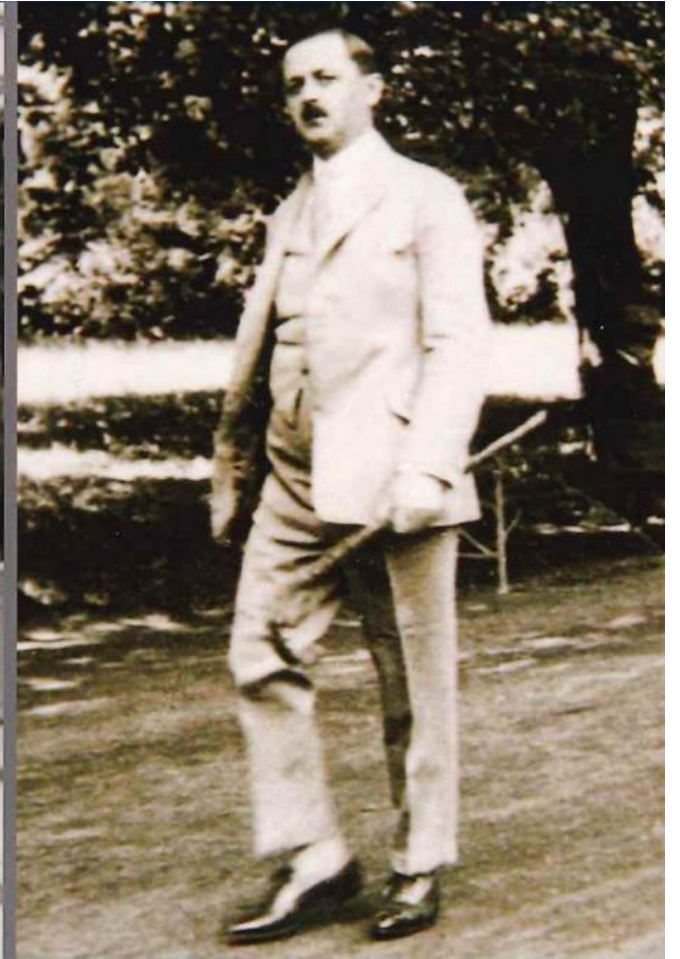
whose parents were Dr David Itzig Gelles (1883-1964)

and

Regina Griffel (1900-1954)



Edward Gelles

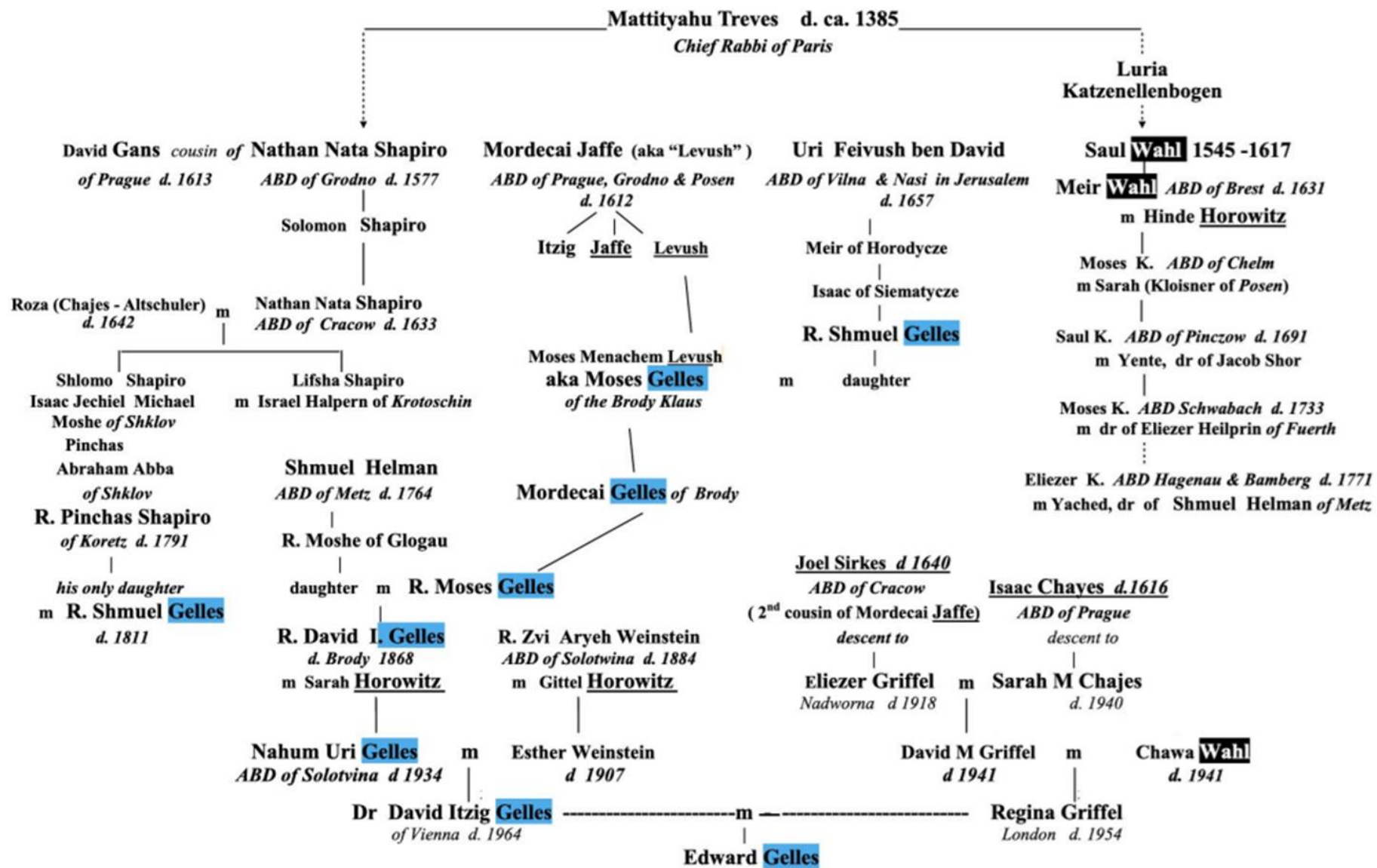


Edward Gelles with his father Dr. David Itzig Gelles and his mother Regina Gelles nee Griffel with her elder son Ludwig

Edward Gelles is the second son of Dr David Itzig Gelles and Regina Griffel. My paternal ancestry includes rabbis of Weinstein, Horowitz, Helman, Halpern and Shapiro families. My maternal line goes back from my grandparents David Mendel Griffel and Chawa Wahl to Chajes, Katzenellenboegn, Luria families amongst others.

The two sides of my family were involved in a number of inter-marriages. Important ancestors included Mordecai Jaffe, the 16th century Chief Rabbi of Prague, Grodno, and Posen. He was known as the Levush after the title of his magnum opus, and a branch of this family carried down the name of Levush while another branch who adopted Itzig as their family name became Court Jews in Berlin.

The lines of ascendancy of Gelles and Griffel went back to common ancestors in the Treves rabbinic family of 14th century France. Matityahu Treves was Rabbi of Paris and subsequently became Chief Rabbi of France. The Treve rabbis were descended from the biblical scholar Rabbi Salomon ben Isaac, known as “Rashi”, who lived at Troyes in the 11th Century and his lineage went back to the Kalonymos of Narbonne.





Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles with (left to right) Lotte, Max, David, and Bertha

My grandfather Nahum Uri Gelles (1852-1934) was Chief Rabbi of Solotwina in Galicia, an outlying province of the Austrian Empire from 1772 to 1918. My grandfather married Esther, the daughter of Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Weinstein and Gittel Horowitz.

The photo shows four of my grandparent's six children, including my father David Itzig Gelles who was born in 1883 (standing to the right in the photo). He held the degree of Dr Juris of Vienna University and practised as an advocate in that city. He was a leading member of the Viennese Jewish community and of the Austrian Zionist movement.

My father's younger siblings Lotte and Max (born 1895 and 1897) followed him in obtaining their degrees of Dr. Juris in Vienna. Max was a practising advocate, wrote a standard commentary on Austrian Company Law, and was an outstanding amateur chess player. He left his daughter Elsa who lived in New York, and who is followed by her son, the medical specialist Dr. Peter Schmaus and his issue.

Lotte married twice, to the lawyer Dr. L. Ostrer of Vienna and secondly to the physician Dr Kurt Kalmann in Tel Aviv.

Bertha was born in 1881 and emigrated to America shortly before the First World War. She married Nathan Resnik in January 1914. Two children followed in 1915 and 1916 and a third in 1921. Her daughter Edythe had two sons, Dr Stuart Rothenberg, is an authority on Ayurvedic medicine and Dr Robert Rothenberg is a family physician. Stuart's daughter, the journalist Jennie Rothenberg Gritz, sent me this photo which appears to be a valedictory record taken prior to Bertha's departure for America.

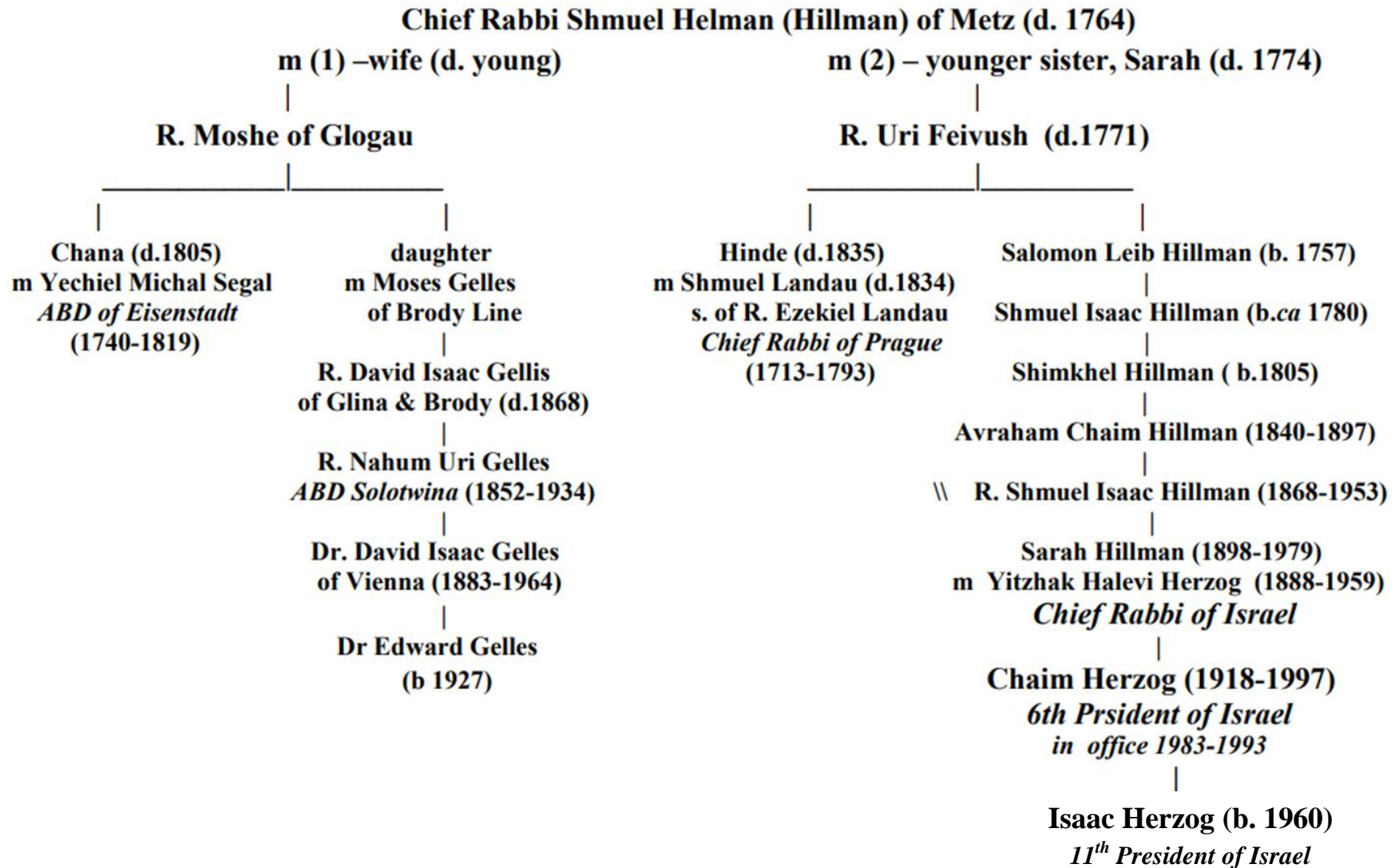


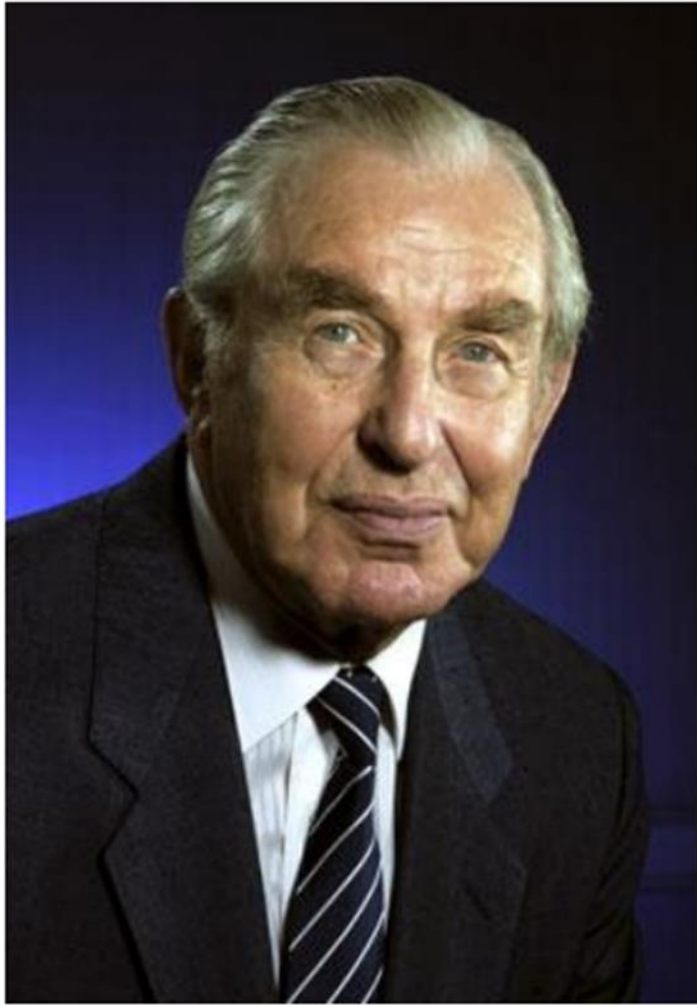
Dr Stuart Rothenberg is the Chief Medical Officer of David Lynch Foundation and National Director of TM Health Professionals Association

He is the grandson of Bertha Gelles Resnick



Stuart Rothenberg Bar Mitzvah Reception 1961 - Stuart seated third from right
Stuart's mother Edythe and father Murray (standing 2nd and 3rd from right), Edythe's mother, Bertha Gelles Resnick (standing 4th from right), Stuart's aunt Elsa (Gellis) Schmaus and her husband Walter (seated centre). Bertha is the aunt of Edward Gelles and Edythe and Elsa are his 1st cousins.



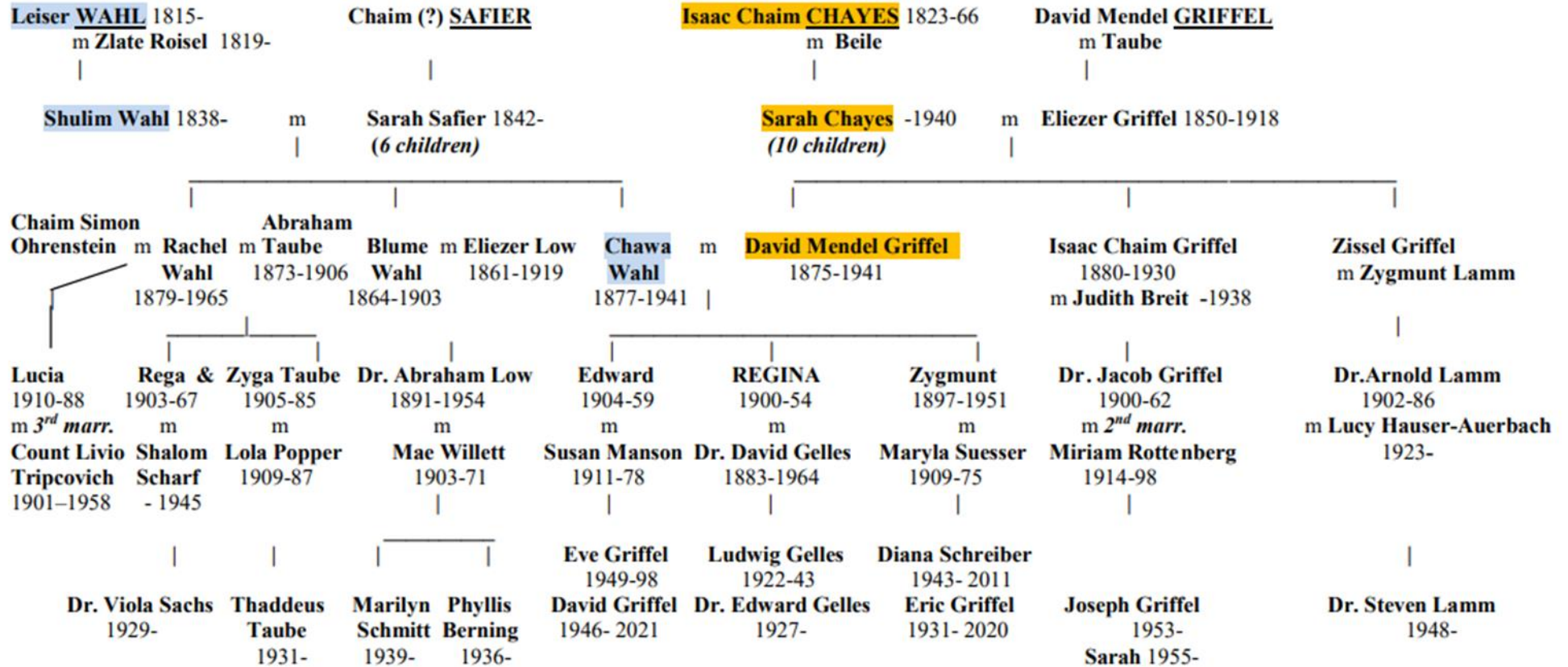


Chaim Herzog (1918 – 1997)
6th President of Israel 1983 – 1993)



Isaac Herzog (1960 -)
11th President of Israel 2021 -

Maternal Family Connections of Edward Gelles



The chart shows my mother Regina Gelles nee Griffel as first cousin of the distinguished Dr Jacob Griffel (see below)

Jacob Griffel's Rescue Missions

A life of heroic faith and service

Two of Eliezer Griffel's children were principally involved in his inheritance. They were my grandfather David Mendel and his brother Isaac Chaim. My mother Regina and her first cousin Jacob were born in the same year 1900. At the dawn of the twentieth century all seemed set fair for the large Griffel clan with their widespread business empire. With the First World War and Eliezer's death in 1918, the family drifted apart. Some remained in the new Polish republic and loyal to their orthodox persuasion, others stayed in Vienna or migrated further west, seeking their fortunes in more liberal climes. My mother and her two brothers were by that time quite assimilated, while Jacob and some of his siblings kept tenaciously to their *Chasidic* way of life.

Jacob Griffel's life started so auspiciously, was marred by great tragedy, and ended prematurely, but with a large measure of fulfilment. He found his mission and obeyed its call to the last. From the time his first wife and their children perished in Poland to the end of his days he devoted himself to saving and helping his fellow Jews. He was truly a servant of his God.

Unusually for such a devout Jew, Jacob sought a secular education at the Universities of Cracow and Vienna. He became a doctor of law and involved himself in the family oil business. He married Feiga, the daughter of Chaim Freilich of Cracow. At the outbreak of war in 1939 he sent his wife with their two children, Zipora and Eliezer, to the presumed safety of central Poland, where they were engulfed by the German *Blitzkrieg*. He never saw or heard from them again, and they supposedly perished in 1942.

Jacob had stayed in the southeastern corner of the country near the oil fields, and managed to slip over the border into Roumania, ultimately making his way to Palestine. He immediately threw himself into the work of helping Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. In 1943 he was sent to join the Committee of Rescue in Istanbul, where he worked day and night with the Jewish leadership in Palestine, through all available diplomatic channels, and with the Jewish underground, rallying worldwide political opinion, arranging permits, supplying travel documents, raising funds for rescue work, and lending a hand to those who were bargaining with their

persecutors for Jewish lives. There is no doubt that he was instrumental in saving many thousands of souls. After 1945, his efforts did not cease. He threw himself into helping displaced persons and rescuing Jews caught up in the Soviet Union. He managed to extract one of his brothers from a Russian Gulag.

Later on, he made great efforts to bring orphaned and adopted Jewish children back into the fold. He went to live in the United States in 1950, where he married Miriam Devora (Dora) Rottenberg and raised a second family, his surviving children being Joseph Isaac Chaim and Sara Rivka Griffel. He died in 1962.

The full horror of Jewish oppression in Nazi occupied Europe did not become apparent until 1942. Even then, the priorities of the Allied war effort, of the Catholic Church, and even of some Jewish organizations delayed effective action for too long. The Zionist leadership in Palestine wished to concentrate their resources on securing and building up their base in the Holy Land and bringing in enthusiastic young people of working age, while the ultra-orthodox party were anxious to help any persecuted Jews. Finally, the Jewish Agency got together with various political groupings to set up the Committee in Istanbul, chaired by Chaim Barlas of the Agency, and including Venia Pomerantz of Mapai, Menachem Bader of Hashomer Hatz'ir, Jacob Klarman of the Zionist Revisionists, and Jacob Griffel associated with Agudath Israel.

Jacob Griffel was uniquely qualified for the work to which he devoted himself with his immense energy. He was reported to have installed a bed in his office so that he should never miss any message or allow even an hour's delay in any possible rescue attempt. He was a *Chasidic* Jew with the highest educational qualifications and wide secular culture. He had a commanding presence and charisma. He could talk with equal facility to orthodox rabbis, Marxist Zionists, American diplomats, and Papal nuncios, and gain the respect and trust of these as well as of the Jewish underground leaders in occupied Europe. His legal training and wide business experience also served him well. His passionate aim was to use any means to save any Jew of whatever religious or political hue. Griffel maintained contacts with the authorities in Palestine, with America, with diplomats in neutral countries, and with many committed rescue workers.

To quote Dr David Kranzler, they were such as Israel Chaim Eis in Switzerland and the Sternbuchs, who frequently relayed messages to New York, forwarded funds to him, and generally worked together on several major rescue efforts. He communicated with R' Eliezer Hager, the Rebbe of Vishnitz, and R' Sucha Portugal, the Admur of Skulen, who passed on vital information on the condition of Roumanian Jewry. Most importantly, he kept in touch with Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel in Slovakia, who knew he could trust Griffel more than anyone else on the Jewish Agency's Istanbul delegation. Weissmandel sent him the coded message calling for the bombing of the railway lines to Auschwitz from the post office in Bratislava.

Undoubtedly the best-known rescue efforts of this period were Weissmandel's negotiations with Dieter Wisliceny, the SS officer who was deputy to Eichmann, which achieved a substantial delay in the deportation of Slovakian Jewry, and the daring attempt of the Hungarian Joel Brand to barter with Eichmann himself for the lives of a million Jews in return for ten thousand trucks.

Griffel was also involved in much work that did not hit the headlines, but it may well be that the relative neglect of his great services is due to the undoubted strains between the ultra-orthodox and those who differed on aims and methods. A fresh assessment will surely be added in due course to the literature on the subject.

NOTES

1. John Mendelsohn, *The Holocaust: Relief and Rescue of Jews from Nazi Oppression 1943-45* (Garland, New York 1982), pp.47-51.
2. Abraham Fuchs, *The Unheeded Cry* (New York and Jerusalem: Mesorah Publications, 1983).
3. David Kranzler, *Thy Brother's Blood* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1987).
4. David Kranzler and Eliezer Gevirtz, *To Save a World* (New York, London, Jerusalem: CIS Publishers, 1991), Ch. 4.
5. Joseph Friedenson, *Dateline Istanbul* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1993).

Numerous references on the Internet include the evidence submitted by Dr Griffel at the Eichmann trial, as well as differing Orthodox and Zionist assessments of the period.



Edward Griffel (1904 – 1959)

father of David Griffel (1946–2021) and uncle of Edward Gelles (b.1927)

Edward Gelles and David Griffel are first cousins as shown on the following chart.

Edward Gelles and David Griffel

Chasidic dynasty founder
 Israel Friedman of Ruzhin, d. .1850
 m Sarah Efrari, d. 1847

|
 Gittel Tova Toyba Friedman
 m R Ysef Manson

|
 R. Chaim David Manson , d. 1932
 m Udel Gottesman

|
 R. Israel Manson, d. 1961
 m Yente D Horodetzky, d 1955

|
 Susan Manson
 1911 -1978

m
 David Griffel
 1946 – 2021

David M Griffel
 m Taube Zeisler

|
 Eliezer Griffel d.1918
 m Sarah Chayes,d.1940

|
 David M Griffel, d. 1941
 m Chawa Wahl, d. 1941

|
 Edward Griffel
 1904 – 1959

|
 Regina Griffel
 1900 – 1954

Friedman - Gelles connections
 see charts in preceding essay

R Moses Gelles (Gelles of Brody)
 m descendant of Helman & Shapiro

|
 R. David Isaac Gelles, d.1868
 m Sarah Horowitz

|
 R. Nahum Uri Gelles ,d. 1934
 m Esther Weinstein, d. 1907

|
 Dr David Gelles
 1883 - 1964

m
 Edward Gelles
 1927 -



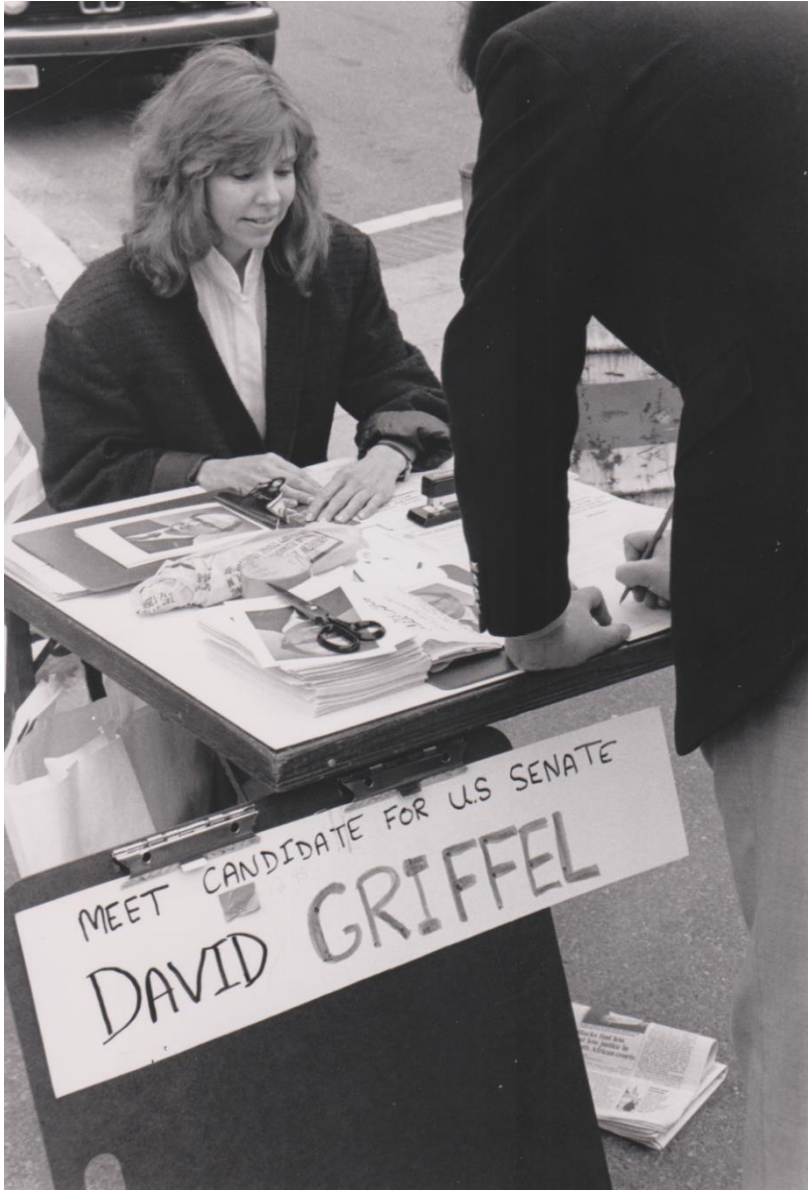
David M. Griffel and some family connections

Edward Gelles

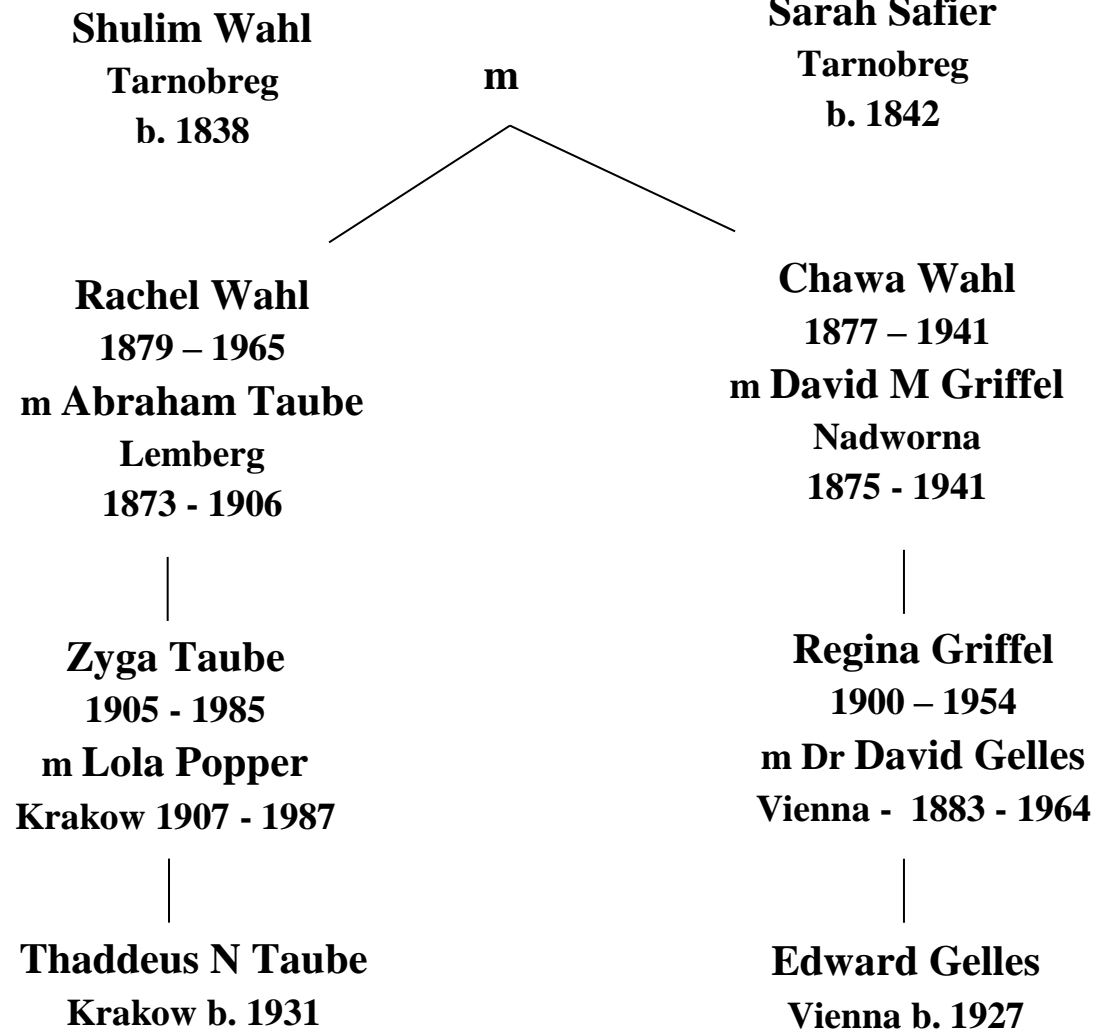
David Griffel who died a year ago, on 3rd December 2021, was the last remaining 1st cousin of our Griffel family. David's father Edward Griffel and my mother Regina Griffel were siblings whose father was David M. Griffel, after whom my cousin was called. The siblings' grandfather Eliezer Griffel, was head of the Jewish community of Nadworna in Galicia.

An outline of my cousin David's life can be gathered from appended photographs which were retrieved from his house in Weston, Massachusetts.

David Griffel was born in New York in 1946. His father Edward Griffel (1904 – 1959) married Susan Manson (1911 - 1978) . David's sister Eve (1949 - 1998) is shown beside her brother in the photograph which was taken in 1952 /1953.



Griffel – Wahl - Taube





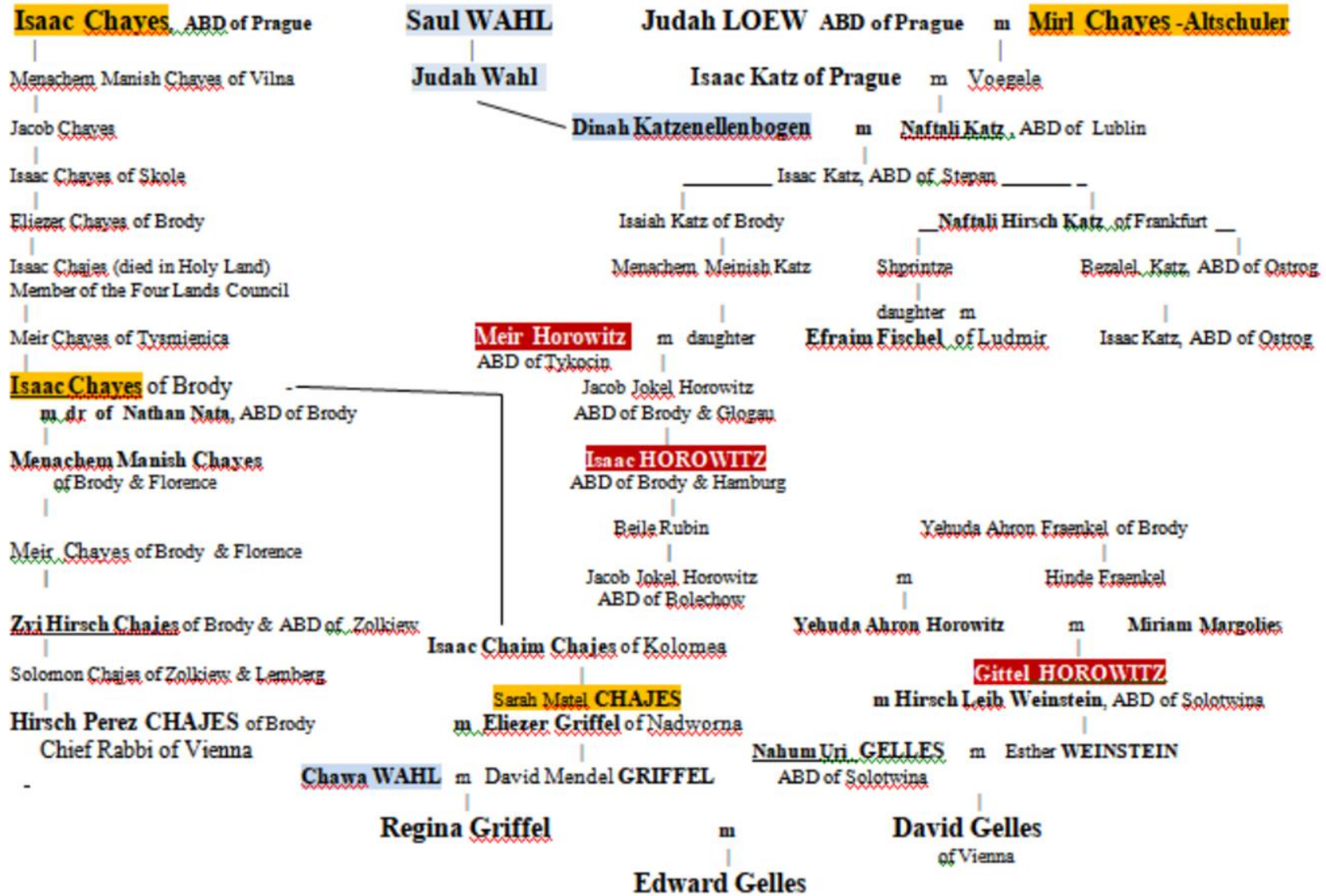
Thaddeus N Taube with his wife Dianne and Edward Gelles at dinner in London (2002)

Tad Taube and Edward Gelles are second cousins whose grandmothers are Rachel Wahl and Chawa Wahl.

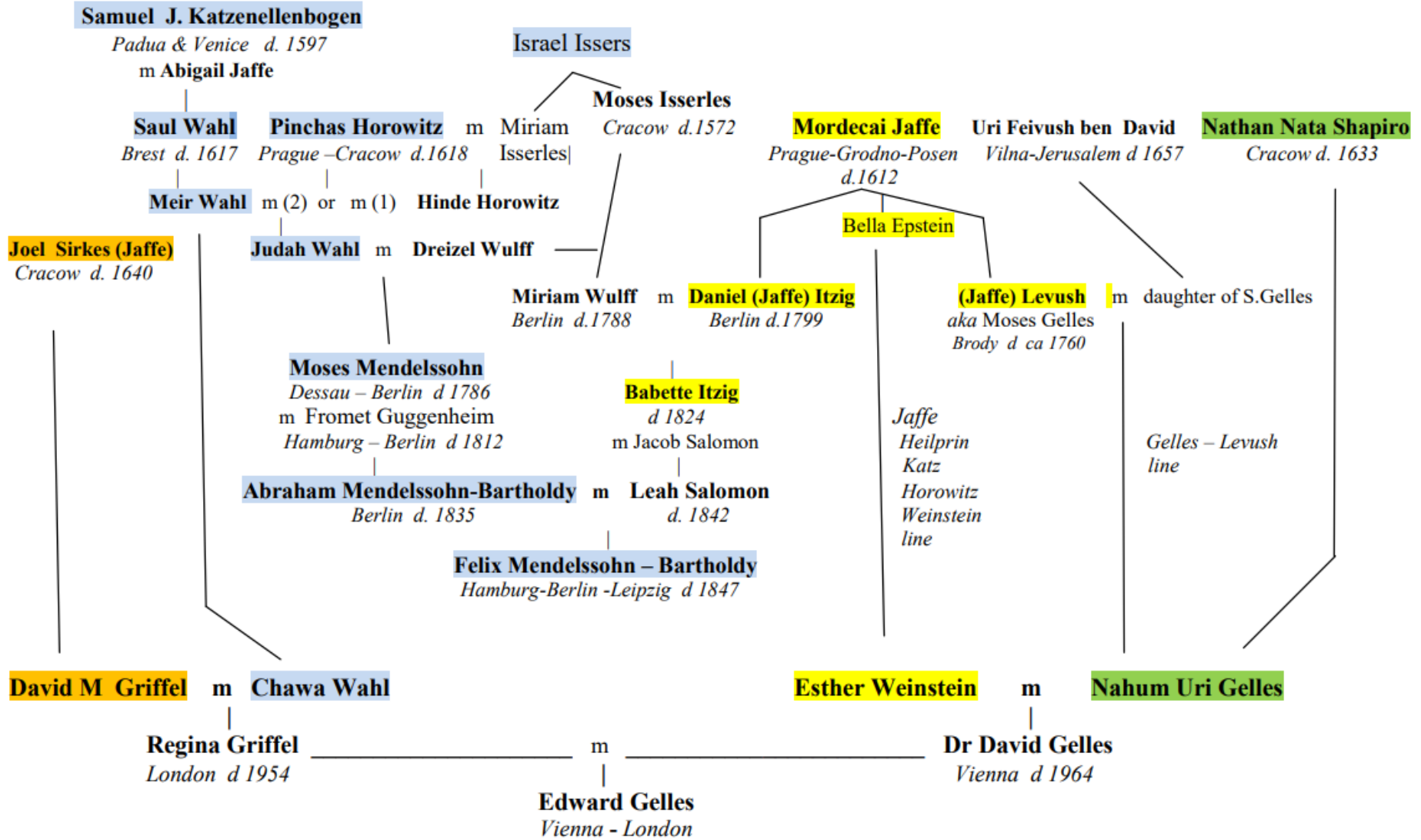


Zvi Hirsch Perez Chajes (1876-1927)
Chief Rabbi of Vienna
(see following family chart)

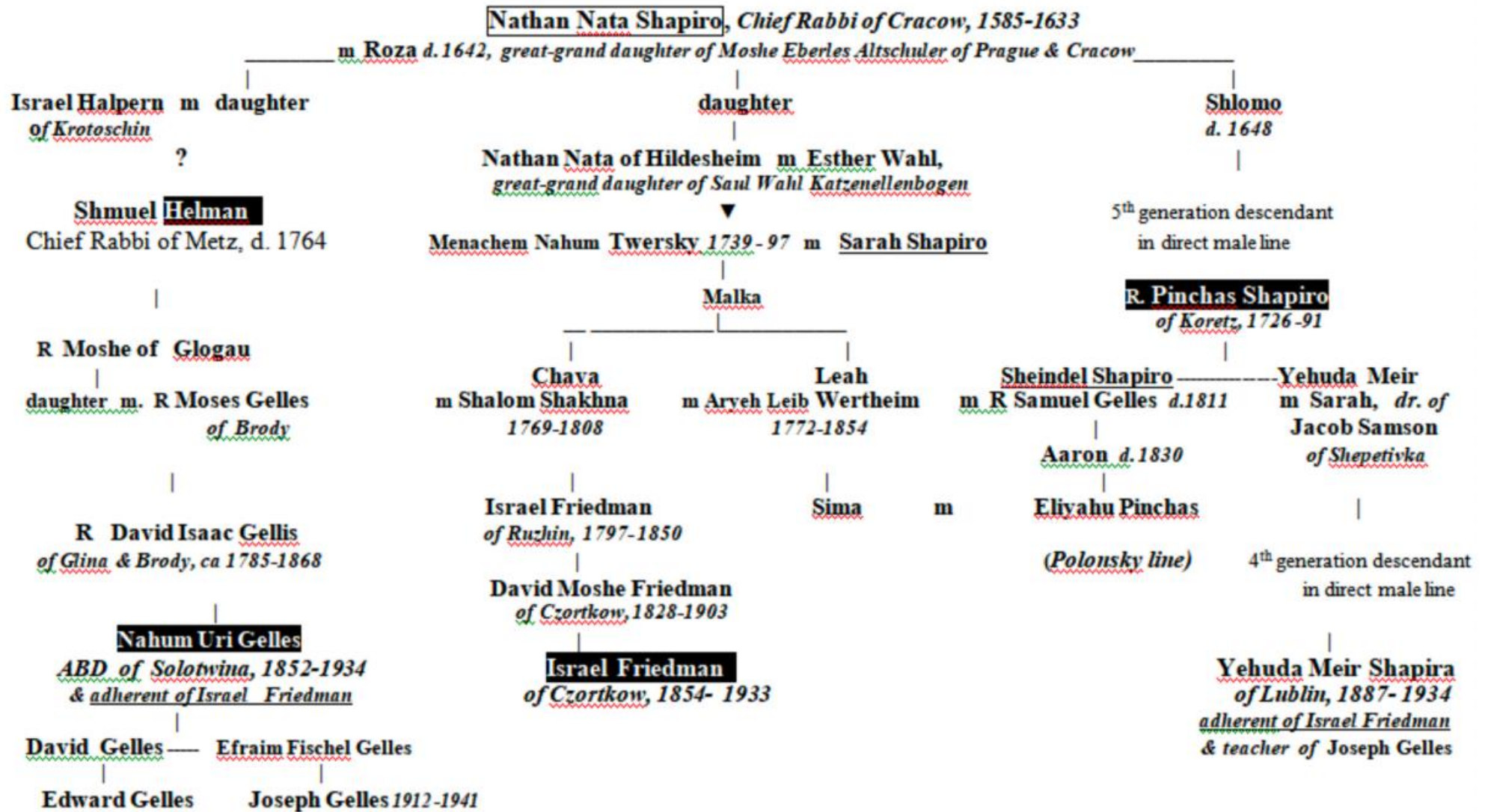
Descent of Edward Gelles from Rabbis Judah Loew and Isaac Chayes of Prague



Ancestral Links of Edward Gelles and the Mendelssohns



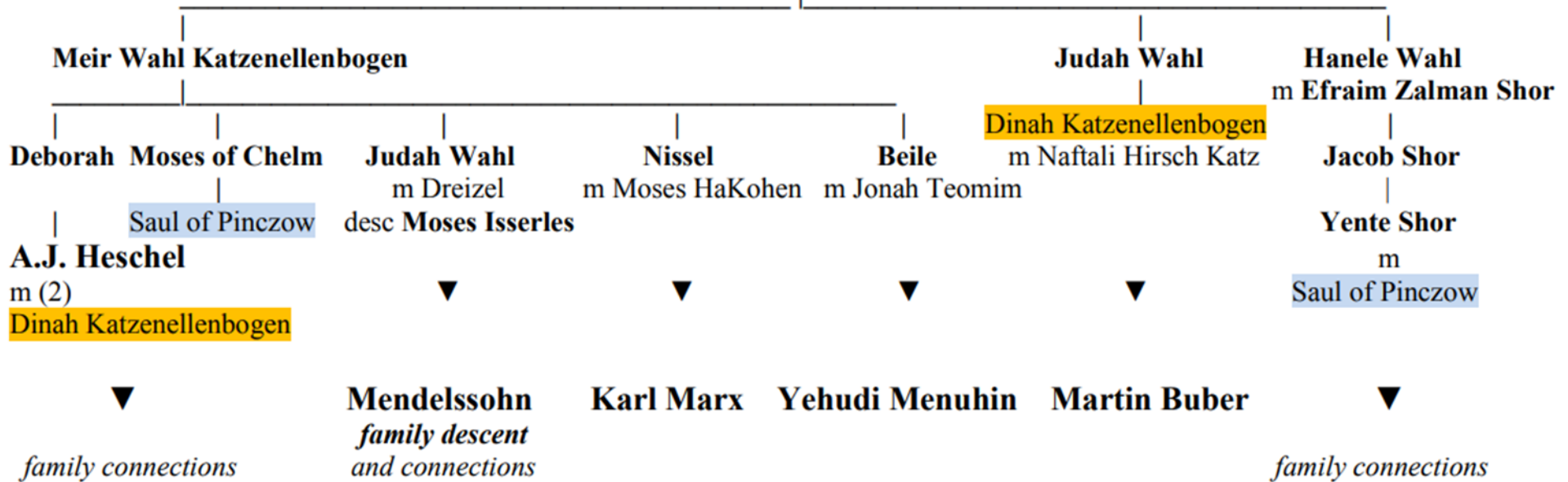
The Shapiro Connection of Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles and the Chasidic Grand Rabbi Israel Friedman of Czortkow



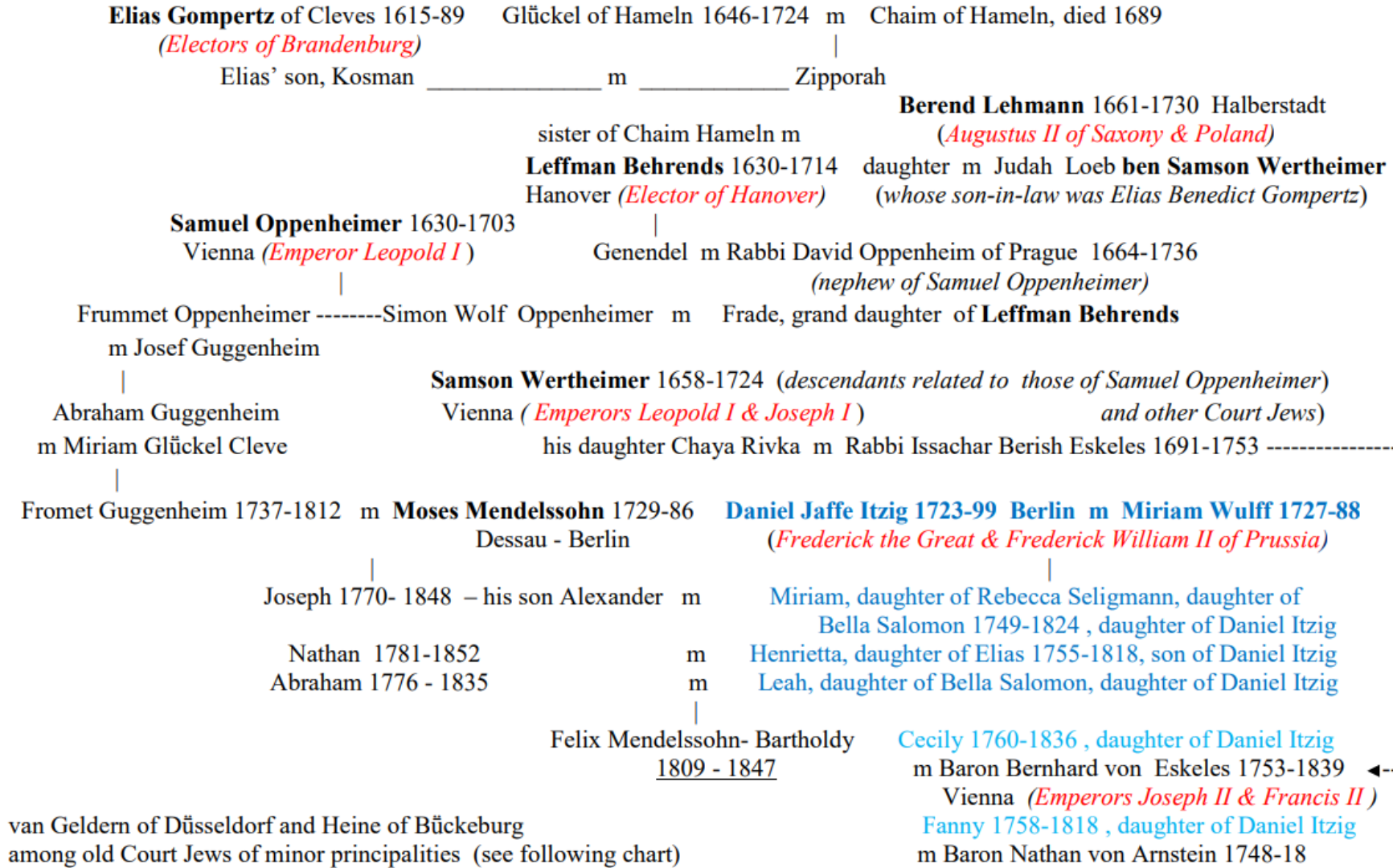
Some lines of descent from Saul Wahl

**Rabbi Samuel Judah Katzenellenbogen of Padua and Venice
m. Abigail Jaffe**

Saul Wahl (Katzenellenbogen)



Mendelssohn and some Ashkenazi Court Jews



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	Moshe Mendel Levush →	daughter married Moshe M. Levush aka Moses Gelles of Brody d. ca 1760	daughter m Isaac Chayes of Brody d 1807	
Rabbi Uri Feivush of Lissa and other towns d. 1771	Rabbi Moshe of Glogau		Mordecai Gelles of Brody father or uncle of	her brother David Tebele Rabbi of Lissa d. 1792	
	daughter married Moses Gelles	----- →	Rabbi 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 Solotwina 1852-1934		Rabbi Siegfried Gelles b. Krotoschin 1884
			Dr David I Gelles of Vienna 1883-1964		Rabbi Benjamin Gelles b. Lissa , 1916 1 st cousin of
			 Edward Gelles		Judge Bernard Gillis. 1905 - 96

Published books by Edward Gelles

‘An Ancient Lineage: European Roots of a Jewish Family: Gelles-Griffel-Wahl-Chajes-Safier-Loew-Taube. London: Valentine Mitchell, 2006.’

‘Family Connections. Gelles – Horowitz - Chayes. Maastricht: Shaker, 2008.’

‘Family Connections. Gelles - Shapiro - Friedman. Maastricht: Shaker, 2009.’

‘Ephemeral and Eternal: Josef Gelles A Brief Life. Maastricht: Shaker, 2010.’

‘Meeting My Ancestors: Genealogy, Genes, and Heritage. Maastricht: Shaker, 2011.’

‘The Jewish Journey: A Passage through European History. London: IB Tauris, 2016.’

‘Edward Gelles: Photographs relating to my family and ancestral background. London – (Cewe), 2020’