

Article

Researching Pre-1808 Polish-Jewish Ancestral Roots: The KUMEC and KRELL Case Studies

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Abstract: Tracing the ancestral roots of Polish Jews before the introduction of metrical data in 1808 represents a unique and complex challenge for genealogists and historians alike. Indeed, limited official records, shifting geopolitical boundaries, and the absence of standardized documentation practices characterize that early era. Sometimes, however, genealogical sources and records unique to Jews, based on religious daily life and traditions, have subsisted. When available, they open unforeseen avenues into identifiable family histories for which no other record, or personal memories, are available. In other cases, less well-known archival records unexpectedly emerge to elucidate a perplexing genealogical problem. The present article deals with two such instances with a similar starting point, namely, the apparent impossibility of merging two family clusters with the same surname in a given town. The first case deals with two separate KUMEC clusters in the small Polish town of Konskie. Research of this specific case, using limited official records, leads to the discovery of a single-family line dating back to the early 1600s, by means of complementary metrical and rabbinical data. The second case deals with two distinct KRELL clusters in the city of Warsaw, which, after 25 years of extensive but unsuccessful research, finally leads to merging into a cohesive KRELL ancestral line dating back to the early 1700s, by means of a less exploited source of archival records. The present study puts forward guiding principles for searches back to pre-1808 Jewish family history. As such, it should be useful to researchers encountering similar roadblocks in the quest for their Jewish ancestors.

Keywords: pre-metrical records; sources and records unique to Jews; nicknames and surnames; Polish-Jewish roots



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1. Introduction

The history of Polish Jews is woven with rich cultural, religious, and social aspects, spanning centuries of existence in the heart of Eastern Europe. Their genealogical heritage is a testament to their resilience, adaptability, and enduring presence in the region. However, tracing the ancestral roots of Polish Jews before the introduction of metrical data in 1808 presents a unique and complex challenge for genealogists and historians alike. This period, characterized by limited official records, shifting geopolitical boundaries, and the absence of standardized documentation practices can generally be considered to be a genealogical brick wall. Exceptions exist for Galicia and Bukovina (Kalik 2018; Czakai 2021), where precise lists appeared from the end of the 18th century when hundreds of thousands of Jews adopted newly created German surnames.

The absence of comprehensive and structured records prior to the implementation of metrical books—which recorded vital events such as births, marriages, and deaths—underscores the significance of alternative sources and methodologies in piecing together the ancestral narratives of Polish Jews. This era is marked by the unique challenges that the Jewish community faced in Poland including persecutions, expulsions, and waves of migration,

which further complicated the preservation of genealogical information. Consequently, tracing lineages back to this pre-metrical data period necessitates a deep understanding of the socio-political context, religious practices, and communal dynamics that shaped the lives of Polish Jews. Genealogists navigating this historical terrain must rely on alternative resources such as rabbinical records, communal registers, oral traditions, and rare archival documents.

Some genealogical sources and records are unique to Jews, based on religious daily life and traditions. These sometimes open unforeseen avenues into identifiable family details or histories for which no other records, or personal memories, are available. This will be illustrated here through two case studies, both involving the apparently irresolvable unification of two family clusters with identical surnames. To reconstruct the forgotten past, we delved into the methodologies and scarcer resources available, to bridge the gap between available historical records and the desire to unearth older ancestral stories. Those 'sources and records unique to Jews' mentioned earlier proved invaluable in the specific case studies examined here. The first case study in the current paper builds upon and expands a previous study (Wagner 2008) focused on the genealogical challenge of rare Jewish data predating the imposition of Napoleon's metrical records in Poland. Merging two family clusters, in this case, leads to the discovery of a single-family line dating back to the early 1600s, by means of complementary metrical and rabbinical data. A second case study again deals with two distinct clusters with the same surname in the city of Warsaw, which, after 25 years of extensive but unsuccessful research, finally leads to merging them into a unified ancestral line dating back to the early 1700s, by means of a less exploited source of archival records. These examples offer possible guiding principles for similar searches into pre-1808 Jewish family history sources, before the existence of metrical data in Poland. In the next section, we succinctly review the main sources of Polish-Jewish records available for ancestral research.

2. Polish-Jewish Records

Civil registers—A few words of historical context may be of assistance regarding some of the difficulties in Jewish-Polish family research that will appear hereafter. In 1807, Napoleon defeated Prussia and established the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, a French protectorate in which civil registration was introduced (on 1 May 1808) using the so-called Napoleonic format. In practice, this meant that the civil registration of deaths, marriages (and sometimes pre-marital agreements), and births, which did not exist before 1808, was instituted according to the Code of Napoleon. Thereafter, from 1826 on, all religious communities (Evangelical Lutherans, Russian and Greek Orthodox, Protestants, Jews, and so on) were authorized to keep distinct civil registers (evidently facilitating religion-specific genealogical research), still using the Napoleonic Code. From 1808, the civil registers were held in Polish, and from April 1868 until 1918, in Russian. Subsequently, they were again recorded in Polish. An additional difficulty with Jewish family research has to do with the fact that until about 1821, Jews usually had no last names, only patronymic ones (for example: Dwora, daughter of Abram), with a clear potential for confusion.

Specific Jewish sources—Genealogical research for Jewish-Polish ancestry involves exploring sources that are uniquely relevant to the Jewish community in Poland. These include—but are not limited to—the following:

- **Rabbinic sources:** Rabbinic sources include records and writings produced by Jewish religious leaders, such as rabbis. This category encompasses a wide range of materials, including *responsa* (answers to legal questions), sermons, and communal records maintained by rabbinic authorities. Rabbinic sources can offer insights into the religious and legal aspects of Jewish life. Family relationships, events, and community dynamics may be documented in *responsa* and communal records. Rabbinic genealogies, especially those found in works like *Otzar Harabanim* (Friedman 1975) and several others, can also be valuable for tracing lineages.

- Approbations (Haskamot): Approbations are endorsements or approvals often found at the beginning of a Jewish book, indicating that the work has been reviewed and approved by a reputable authority, such as a rabbi. In addition to providing information about the book's approval, Haskamot may contain details about the author, the community in which they lived, and sometimes even the names of the author's family members. Researchers can glean insights into the social and intellectual networks of the time.
- Pinkas HaKehillot: Pinkas HaKehillot is a series of books that document the daily history of Jewish communities in various towns and cities. They provide information about community life, synagogue records, and sometimes lists of residents.
- Jewish cemeteries: Headstones in Jewish cemeteries often contain vital information such as names, birth and death dates, and sometimes even relationships. Headstones may contain symbols, inscriptions, or epitaphs that provide additional information about the deceased, their character, or their relationships. This can provide insights into family connections, religious affiliations, and migration patterns.
- Mohel Books: Mohel books, or circumcision records, document the circumcisions performed by a mohel (ritual circumciser) in a Jewish community. These records often include details such as the names of the child, the parents, and sometimes the date and location of the circumcision. Mohel books can provide valuable information about family relationships, generations, and sometimes even the names of grandparents. These records may offer insights into the religious and communal life of the Jewish population in a specific area.
- Ketubot (Marriage Contracts): Ketubot are Jewish marriage contracts that outline the rights and responsibilities of the husband and wife. These documents often include details about the bride, groom, and their families. Ketubot can be essential for genealogical research as they provide information about the names of the bride and groom, their fathers' names, and occasionally additional family details. These records are especially helpful for tracing the maternal lines of a family.
- JewishGen: JewishGen is a platform that appeared in 1995 on the internet as a pioneering Jewish genealogy resource. It lists millions of Jewish records, hundreds of translated yizkor (memorial) books, research tools, a family finder, educational classes, historical components, and many other resources.
- Jewish Records Indexing—Poland (JRI-Poland): JRI-Poland is an online database that provides access to a vast collection of Jewish vital records from Poland, including information on births, marriages, and deaths. The database is continually updated and serves as a great resource for researchers looking to trace their Jewish roots in Poland.
- Polish State Archives (PSA): The Polish State Archives hold a variety of records, including vital records, census data, and other documents relevant to genealogical research. Researchers may find information about Jewish ancestors in these archives, particularly in vital records from specific towns and regions with significant Jewish populations.
- The Jewish Historical Institute (JHI) in Warsaw: The JHI in Warsaw is a key institution for researching Jewish history in Poland. It holds a variety of documents, including vital records, synagogue records, and other materials relevant to Jewish genealogy. The JHI is an important resource for researchers looking to explore their Jewish-Polish roots.
- Yizkor Books: Yizkor books are memorial books written by Jewish communities in memory of their towns and residents who perished during the Holocaust. These books often contain historical information, photographs, and personal accounts that can be valuable for genealogical research.
- Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP): Located in Jerusalem, CAHJP houses a significant collection of documents related to Jewish history, including materials from Poland. Researchers may find letters, diaries, and other personal documents that can aid in genealogical research.

- **Holocaust Records:** For those researching Jewish ancestry in Poland during the Holocaust, records from Yad Vashem in Israel and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum can provide information on Holocaust victims and survivors.

When delving into these specific Jewish sources, it is essential to approach the research with an understanding of Jewish naming conventions. Moreover, researchers may need to consult multiple sources to build a comprehensive family history. This will be demonstrated here, using two intricate case studies in ancestral branches of my family. In both of these cases, there were two clusters, each with the same last name, but based on metrical data only, it was not possible to figure out how they were related.

3. First Case Study: Two KUMEC Family Clusters in Konskie

My great-grandfather Icek-Meir BAUM (Figure 1) died in 1932 in Brussels and is buried in the Jewish cemetery of Putte, Holland. The epitaph testifies that Icek-Meir was the son of Aharon Tubi and grandson of Rabbi Moshe from Kinsk (Yiddish for Konskie).



Figure 1. The grave of my paternal great-grandfather, Icek-Meir BAUM, who died in 1932. The epitaph states that Icek-Meir was the son of Aharon Tubi and grandson of Rabbi Moshe from Kinsk (Konskie).

Using the available metrical records of Konskie, I had no trouble finding an 1832 marriage record documenting the union of Mosze BAUM with Ronia KUMEC, the daughter of Mendel KUMEC. It was the first time I heard about the KUMEC branch of my tree. This detailed document, adorned with elegant calligraphic handwriting (see Figure 2), revealed that Mosze BAUM hailed from Wyszogrod, a small town west of Warsaw, and that Ronia's father Mendel served as the rabbi of Konskie (though he did not officiate at his daughter's wedding).

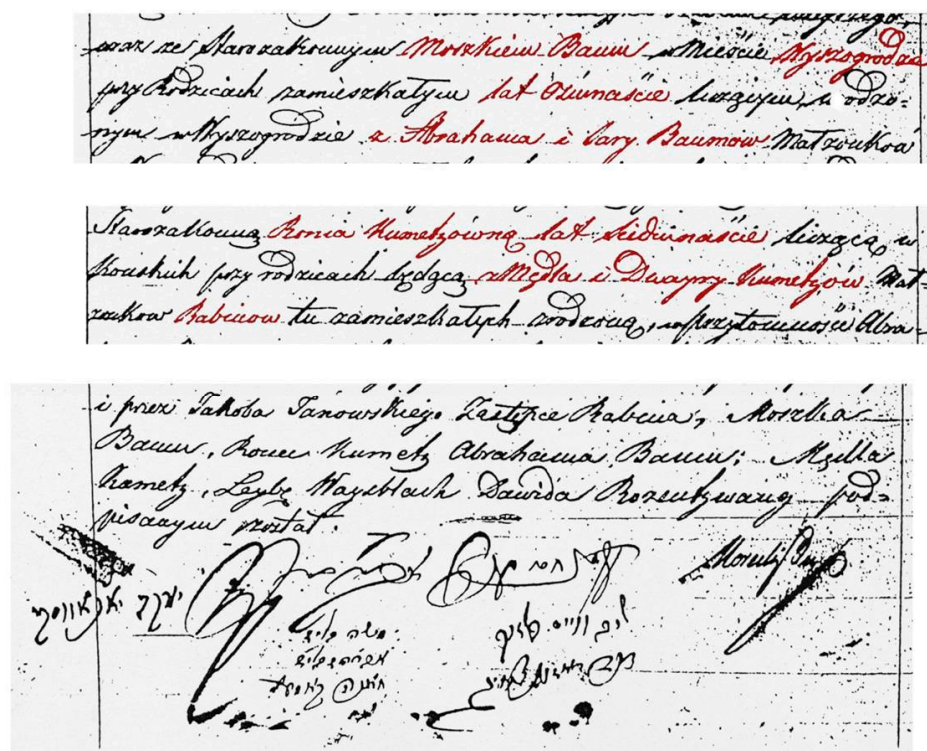


Figure 2. Selected portions of the 1832 marriage record of Mosze BAUM and Ronja KUMEC in Konskie, stating that Mosze and his parents are from Wyszogrod.

The Konskie records revealed that there were two separate KUMEC families: one led by Rabbi Mendel KUMEC and his wife Dwojra, the other by Uszer KUMEC and his wife Frajdla. Despite the rarity of the KUMEC surname, I could not figure out how these families were related. Rabbi Mendel's 1842 death record listed Mordka (Mortek/Markus) and Rajca/Rojza as his parents. In contrast, the parents of Uszer did not appear in his 1848 death record.

I considered three possibilities: (a) Mendel and Uszer were unrelated (unlikely but possible); (b) they were siblings (Mendel being the older one); or (c) they were first cousins. All of these assumptions proved to be incorrect.

An immediate question surfaced: why did Mosze BAUM (or his parents) from Wyszogrod, about 130 km away, choose a bride from distant Konskie? Another puzzle emerged about the *shidech* (Yiddish for 'bride selection procedure')—how intricate could it be, considering the challenges of distance and communication?

One possible scenario was to consider that both families originally lived in Wyszogrod. Perhaps the parents had known each other, arranging the marriage in advance. However, this was mere speculation since there was no concrete evidence of any KUMEC individual residing in Wyszogrod, the supposed meeting ground for the BAUM and KUMEC families.

3.1. Wyszogrod: Exploring the Earliest Metrical Records

In the mid-1990s, while on a trip to Salt Lake City, I explored the Wyszogrod 1808–1826 Mormons microfilms, in my quest for a birth record for Mosze BAUM. The fact that there were no surnames before 1820–1821, and that the records for all religions were amalgamated, did not facilitate the search for Mosze BAUM's birth document. Moreover, the handwritten documents were nearly illegible. In the end, the record was discovered in the 1816 listing. Remarkably, the scenario I had imagined proved to be correct: Wyszogrod served as the birthplace for Mendel KUMEC and his family, as documented in the records predating 1826. The findings included the following:

- A somewhat difficult-to-decipher birth record from 1815 was located for Ronia. The document specifies Ronia's parentage as Mendel Mordka (Mendel, son of Mordka) and Dwojra Josek (Dwojra, daughter of Josek).
- In 1818, another birth record was discovered, documenting the birth of Ronia, the daughter of Mendel Mordka, who held the title of 'podrabin' (Under-Rabbi), and Dwojra Josek (refer to Figure 3). In contrast to the 1815 record, this second document not only confirmed Ronia's birth but also revealed the presence of her twin sister, Sara. The absence of Sara's birth information in the 1815 record suggests that the 1818 entry might have served as a substitute or correction for the earlier omission. Interestingly, both Ronia and Sara went on to marry in 1832, in Konskie.

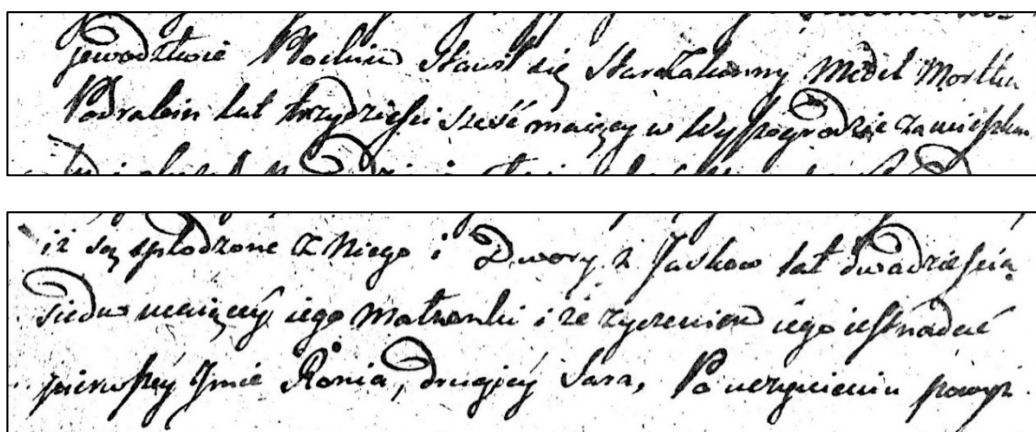


Figure 3. Selected portions of the birth record from Wyszogrod in 1818, which documents the arrival of twin sisters, Ronia and Sara, born to Mendel Mordka and Dwojra Josek.

Did the second KUMEC family cluster in Konskie, specifically Uszer and Frajdl, have its roots in Wyszogrod? Such a connection would corroborate the hypothesis of a close relationship between Mendel and Uszer KUMEC. The response was affirmative, as a birth record for Uszer, born in 1812, was discovered, with his parents listed as Mendel Mordka and Dwojra Josek (Figure 4). This established Mendel and Uszer as father and son. Everything was coming together: the age differences, the names spanning across generations, and notably, the occurrence of the double name “Mendel Uszer” in a descendant destined for KUMEC's future.

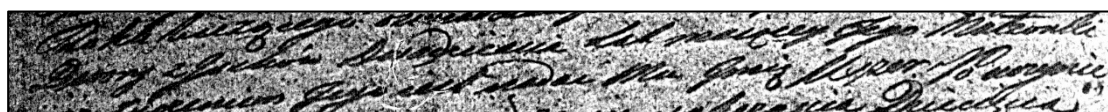


Figure 4. A segment in the 1812 Wyszogrod birth record of Uszer, the son of Mendel Markus/Mortka and Dwojry Joskow, proved difficult to interpret.

Despite the suboptimal quality of the microfilms containing the 1808–1825 metrical records, likely attributed to the deteriorated state of the original books, a thorough and systematic examination yielded several additional discoveries (not detailed here):

- The marriage record from 1815 documenting the union of Ester Effrem, a sibling of Mendel KUMEC, with a man named Uszer Markus (adding an additional layer of complexity).
- The death record from 1813 of Markus Effrem/Froim, possibly aged 60, husband of Rojza, the daughter of Wolek Effrem. Mendel Markus himself is listed as one of the witnesses, establishing that this Markus (also identified as Mordka/Mortek) was indeed Mendel's father. This fact was corroborated by Mendel's 1842 death record, which identified Dwojra as Mendel's mother. Moreover, there is a chance that Mendel

Markus had a sibling named Abram Mordka, who seems to be referenced as a witness in Markus Effrem's death record, although the text is difficult to decipher).

3.2. Wyszogrod: The Yizkor Book

The subsequent logical step was to examine the Yizkor Book of Wyszogrod, accessible online ([Rabin 1971](#)), anticipating that the surname KUMEC might have persisted in the communal recollection of the town. A significant breakthrough emerged on pages 19–20, albeit expressed in concise terms: Rabbi Asher KUMEC had served as an officiant first in Tykocin (referred to as Tiktin in Yiddish) and later in Wyszogrod.

3.3. Tykocin: The Yizkor Book

Upon further examination of the online Tykocin Yizkor Book ([Bar Yuda and Ben-Nachum 1959](#)), a thorough and detailed segment about Rabbi Asher/Uszer/Oszer KUMEC was discovered:

"Asher KUMEC was born in Tykocin in the early 1700s, and served there in 1767 as a Rabbinical Judge (Av Beit Din). Earlier, he had been a pupil of Rabbi Shalom Rokach of Tykocin, and then replaced him upon Rokach's passing. However, he only served for a year before moving in 1768 to the small community of Wyszogrod where he served as Rabbinical Judge. He gave his Approbation ('Haskama', an introduction to a manuscript by an eminent religious personality) to 'Hagorat Shmuel' (Shmuel's Belt), the book of Rabbi Shmuel Ben Azriel from Landsberg, a Rabbi in Plock. (...) Another book, 'Pnei Arie' ('Arie's Face') written by Rabbi Arie' Leyb KATZ (KAC, or K" C), who was Asher KUMEC' son-in-law, has an Approbation by Asher KUMEC' own son, Froim KUMEC".

This discovery extended the family tree, tracing its origins to the early 1700s. Genealogy research in rabbinical books was the expected next step.

3.4. Rabbinical Books

The subsequent information was uncovered in various books sourced from the Jewish National and University Library on the Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, as well as from the Library of the University of Bar-Ilan. The progress in this investigation was significantly facilitated by the invaluable assistance of Rabbi Dov Weber from Brooklyn, New York:

- a. The 1770 book authored by Rabbi Shmuel Ben Azriel from Landsberg, titled "Hagorat Shmuel" ("Shmuel's Belt") ([Ben Azriel 1770](#)), a Rabbi in Plock, notably includes an approbation ('Haskama') from Rabbi Asher KUMEC. From this, we glean the insight that "due to modesty, Rabbi Asher rarely provided his endorsement for books" (refer to Figure 5).
- b. The cover page of the book "Pnei Arie' ("Arie's Face") ([Katz 1787](#)) penned by Rabbi Arie' Leyb KATZ (KAC, or K" C) and published in 1787 in Nowy Dwor, makes reference to the author's father-in-law, Rabbi Asher KUMEC. Notably, the book contains an approbation provided by Rabbi Efroim KUMEC, Asher KUMEC's son (refer to Figure 6).
- c. The book "Divrei Gdolim" ([Michelson 1933](#)) ("Words From the Great Ones") (Figure 7) includes a biography (pages 6–10) of Rabbi Asher KUMEC encompassing the following key details:
 - Natan, the son of Asher KUMEC, passed away in 5581 (1820–1821).
 - Efroim, the son of Asher KUMEC, served as a Rabbinical Judge in Wrzesnia.
 - A daughter of Asher KUMEC was wedded to Arie' Leyb, the author of "Pnei Arie'".
 - Rabbanit KUMEC, Asher's wife, passed away on 11 Cheshvan 5531 (30 October 1770).



Figure 5. The front page of "Shmuel's Belt" (Ben Azriel 1770) and a snippet from Asher KUMEC's approbation.



Figure 6. The initial page of "Pnei Arie" (Katz 1787), featuring the concealed alphabetical date highlighted in the bottom line text, along with an excerpt from Efraim KUMEC's approbation.



Figure 7. The front page of the book "Divrei Gdolim" (Michelson 1933).

It is highly likely that Efroim KUMEC, referenced in both "Pnei Arie" and "Divrei Gdolim", corresponds to Mendel's grandfather Effrem/Froim, as documented in the 1813 death record of Mendel's father, Markus. Several indicators support this connection, notably the naming of one of Mendel's children born in 1827 as Efroim Leyb. Additionally, the "Pinkas Hakehilot of Poland (Vol. VI, Poznan)" (Wein and Grosbaum-Pasternak 1999) makes reference to "Rabbi Efroim, son of Rabbi Asher KUMEC, who, before arriving in Wrzesnia, served as a Rabbinical Judge in various small communities in Poland".

Regarding Natan, the son of Asher KUMEC, mentioned in "Divrei Gdolim", further exploration in the Wyszogrod metrical data led to the discovery of the 1820–1821 death record of Nusen Uszerowicz, aged 84, holding the title of 'podrabin' (Under-Rabbi). Additionally, the death record from 1811 for Laja, who was 68 years old, and the wife of Nusen Uszer, aged 70, was found, providing additional context.

- d. Considering the notable presence of Rabbis in the KUMEC lineage, turning to the authoritative work "Otzar HaRabanim" (Friedman 1975) ("A Treasury of Rabbis") appeared to be a logical decision. This reference indeed furnished the date of death for Rabbi Asher KUMEC, which occurred on 4 Kislev 5540 (13 November 1779).
- e. Additionally, insights from "Pinkas Kahal Tiktin" (Nadav 1996) ("The Minutes Book of the Jewish Community Council of Tykocin"), a remarkably well-preserved and

1. Page 20:

2. Page 28—Item 56, Rosh Hodesh Nisan 5502 (5 April 1742):

3. Page 37—Item 70, 27 Sivan 5516 (25 June 1756):

4. Page 145:

5. Page 148—Item 232, 26 Kislev 5466 (13 December 1705):

6. Page 151—Item 240, 20 Tamuz 5466 (2 July 1706):

7. Page 602—Item 909, Pesach 5498 (1738):

8. Page 606—Item 918, Pesach 5499 (1739):

9. Page 607—Item 919, 6 Iyar 5499 (14 May 1739) or 6 Iyar 5502 (10 May 1742) (?):

Before World War I, Weltsman extensively journeyed through areas of Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus, meticulously documenting the epitaphs of 921 notable Jewish individuals interred in 51 communities. To our astonishment, as we examined the pages, we encountered text directly copied from the tombstone of Rabbi Asher KUMEC (see Figure 8). This extraordinary discovery carries special importance, especially considering the absence of the two Jewish cemeteries in Wyszogrod today.

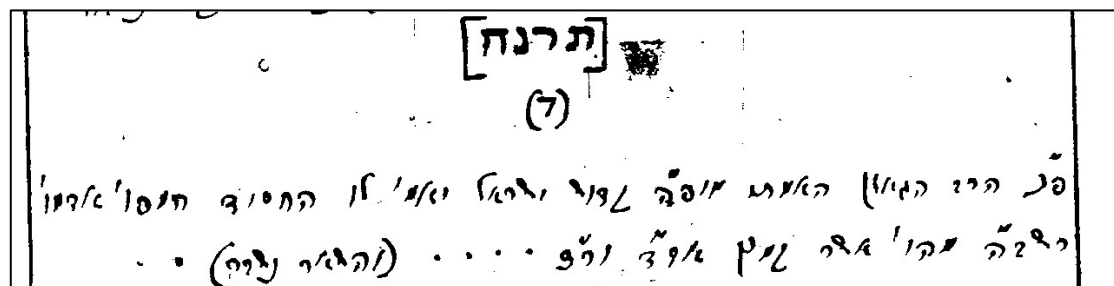


Figure 8. Weltsman transcribed the epitaph of Rabbi Asher KUMEC by hand, extracted from the “Avnei Zikaron” manuscript (Weber and Rosenstein 1999). Only the initial segment of the text survived from the fractured tombstone.

The thorough investigation detailed earlier is condensed and outlined in the KUMEC–BAUM family tree, as depicted in Figure 9. This family tree encompasses the lineage of direct descendants starting from my oldest ancestor Mordechai KUMEC (born on, or more likely, before 1685) and extending down to Ronia KUMEC and Moshe BAUM, along with one of their sons, Aron Tobias (my paternal grandmother’s grandfather). Twelve generations separate Mordechai KUMEC from my grandchildren Michael, born in 2019, and Yehuda, born in 2021.

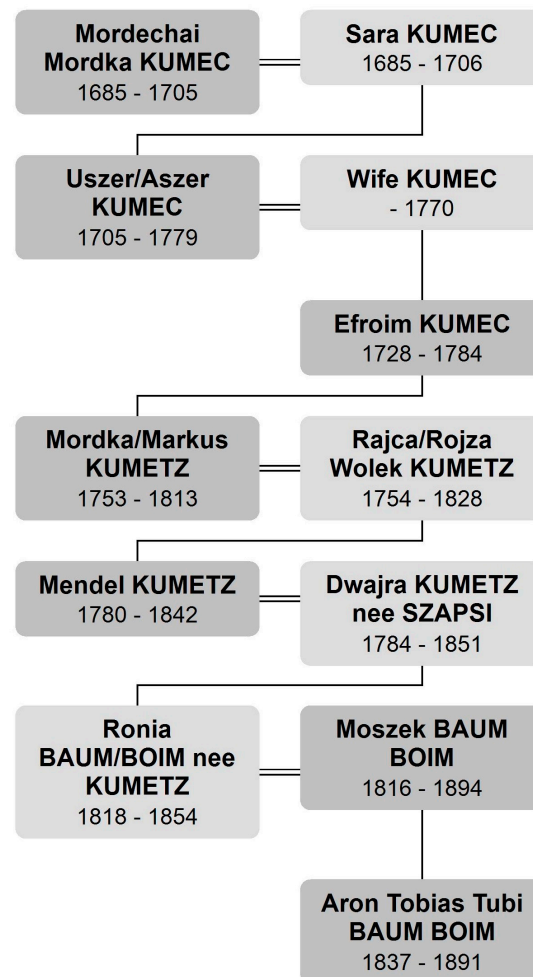


Figure 9. Seven generations of the KUMEC rabbinical lineage, spanning from around 1685 (or possibly earlier) to 1891. This genealogical chart traces the descendants from Mordechai and Sara through to Aron Tobias (Tubi) BAUM, the author’s paternal grandmother’s grandfather (see Figure 1).

Based on the case study research presented, specific conclusions can be drawn:

1. Unknown origin of the KUMEC surname: The exact origin of the surname KUMEC remains unidentified, but we strongly posit that KUMEC could have served as a moniker or nickname for the earliest ancestor, Mordechai.
2. Early appearance in records: The designation KUMEC, possibly functioning as a familial or personal identifier, is documented as early as the year 1705 in the Pinkas Kahal of Tykocin (Nadav 1996). This significantly predates the mandated use of surnames in metrical records, which became a legal requirement for Jews in the early 1820s.
3. Absence in early metrical records of Wyszogrod: Although the surname KUMEC is absent in the initial metrical records of Wyszogrod, it is evident that the name persisted as a traditional family surname. This continuity is demonstrated by its reappearance in the Konskie 1824 birth record of Morteck, Mendel KUMEC’s son. This suggests that

the surname KUMEC has deep historical roots within the family, possibly originating as a personal identifier and subsequently being maintained as a familial surname despite the legal changes governing surnames for Jews in the early 19th century. The investigation highlights the importance of considering alternative sources, such as community records, in genealogical research, especially when surnames predate legal requirements.

4. A rabbinical line: Mordechai, the earliest progenitor of the lineage, held a religious position (indicated by 'Moreinu HaRav' above). Consequently, he marks the initiation of what is likely a minor rabbinical line, extending through subsequent generations to the BAUM family (and very likely continuing through various other KUMEC lines of descendants). This lineage persisted until my great-grandfather, Icek-Meir BAUM, who served as a Rabbinical Judge in Brussels, Belgium, until his passing in 1932.
5. Mendel Mortkowicz is mentioned as a Podrabin (Under-Rabbi) in the 1815 birth record of his daughter Ronia, and also in the 1818 birth record of the twins Ronia and Sara. Subsequently, Mendel is referred to as the Rabbi of Konskie in the 1821 birth record of his son Josek (not displayed here). This appears to come close to the information presented in the Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Poland, Volume I (Poland), Pinkas HaKehillot Polin (published by Yad Vashem, Jerusalem). Indeed, the Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Poland provides specific information about the rabbis of Konskie, including R. Yekutiel (his name is recorded in 1827) who was a disciple of the Seer of Lublin (died 1815), then R. Mendel (about 1829, very likely Mendel KUMEC), and R. Joshua of Kinsk.
6. Subsequently, KUMEC lineages originating from Konskie spread to various towns and cities across Poland, including Piotrkow, Belchatow, Checiny, Bendin, and Lodz, among others. Over time, these familial lines extended their migration beyond Poland, reaching various locations worldwide such as Belgium, France, the USA, Uruguay, Australia, Israel, and more.

A more general conclusion regarding research into Polish-Jewish ancestral lines appears to limit the extent of success of such investigation to two sets of circumstances: (i) the case of a rabbinical lineage that is documented in religious books; (ii) the particular instances of relatively rare family names that happen to have persisted throughout the centuries (unlike nicknames which remained attached to specific individuals), including, for example, HOROWITZ, LANDAU, and more. As already conjectured in a precursor paper on this issue ([Wagner 2008](#)), the KUMEC surname discussed in the present paper could be a rare example of a nickname that turned into a persistent surname.

4. Second Case Study: Two KRELL Family Clusters in Warsaw

4.1. The First KRELL Cluster

My maternal grandfather David KRELL was born in Warsaw in 1901 in a Jewish Orthodox family. David's father was Hensch KRELL, married to Sura Ruchla, born RECHT-DINER. For a long time, I had been unaware that I carried my great-grandfather's first name. In the mid-1920s, David apparently decided to leave the orthodox world and move to Belgium, where he met his future wife, my grandmother Esther POTAZNIK, who had grown up in a small Polish town, Zdunska Wola. They were married in Liège in 1930. Later on, they managed to escape deportation to the death camps by continually fleeing from village to village in the Belgian countryside. After the war, the Holocaust was never brought up, and they never spoke about their past life in Poland or the fate of their Polish families in the war. They only said that no one had survived and that there was nothing to talk about. Of David's siblings and his parents, Hensch and Sura, I knew nothing. In 1998, after my mother passed away, I found a request for financial reparations from the post-war German authorities, written by David in the 1950s, in which he stated that he had had three brothers and sisters without mentioning their names. David passed away in 1983.

A handful of pictures of our KRELL relatives were discovered in my mother's old family album, some with inscriptions on the backside; see Figure 10.



Figure 10. (Top, left to right): Henoch and Sura Ruchla (both on 20 March 1931); David as a youngster (about 1915); Ester and David as a young couple (early 1930s); (Bottom, left to right): Chaim Leyb/Lejb, and Mendel (only the back side text has survived), most likely brothers of David.

4.2. Warsaw: The Metrical Records

This first KRELL cluster, my mother's paternal family, was rather small. It grew a little larger when, in the late 1990s, I began to investigate the Warsaw metrical records, first via the Mormons microfilms in Salt Lake City, then online via JRI-Poland. Most of the Jewish metrical records of Warsaw, eighty to eighty-five percent or so, did not survive WWII destruction.¹ The 1901 birth index for Grandfather David had survived, but not his birth record, unfortunately. Yet, an 1891 birth record did exist for a Blima, born in Warszawa on 22 November/4 December 1890, the daughter of Henoch KRELL, aged 20, and Sura Ruchla RECHTDINER, aged 21 (Figure 11). Blima was likely the eldest of David's siblings. This provided an approximate birth range for Henoch and Sura Ruchla, namely 1868–1870, but neither their birth records nor their marriage record could be found. Their parents remained unidentified.

Other sources of information were needed: address and telephone books; notary and other records from the Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie (the State Archive in Warsaw), including branches of the Archive located in Milanówek and Grodzisk Mazowiecki; business records; army draft books; Books of Residents if available; and more.

Specifically, Jewish resources in Warsaw were necessary as well, including the Jewish cemetery at Okopowa Street (which fortunately survived World War II largely unharmed), the Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (ŻIH, The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute), and possibly the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

4.3. Warsaw: The Okopowa Jewish Cemetery

Established in 1806, the Warsaw Jewish cemetery at Okopowa Street is one of the largest in Europe. It is a beautiful and quiet place for reflection and remembrance, and it is full of history. In it, a few years ago, I discovered the graves of two previously unidentified siblings of David, Fale (or Pale) TROCHE and Mendel KRELL. This unexpected finding provided written evidence that their father, Henoch, was still alive when they passed away

in the 1930s; see Figure 12. However, no grave could be found for Henoch himself among the extant twenty-one KRELL tombs² in the cemetery.

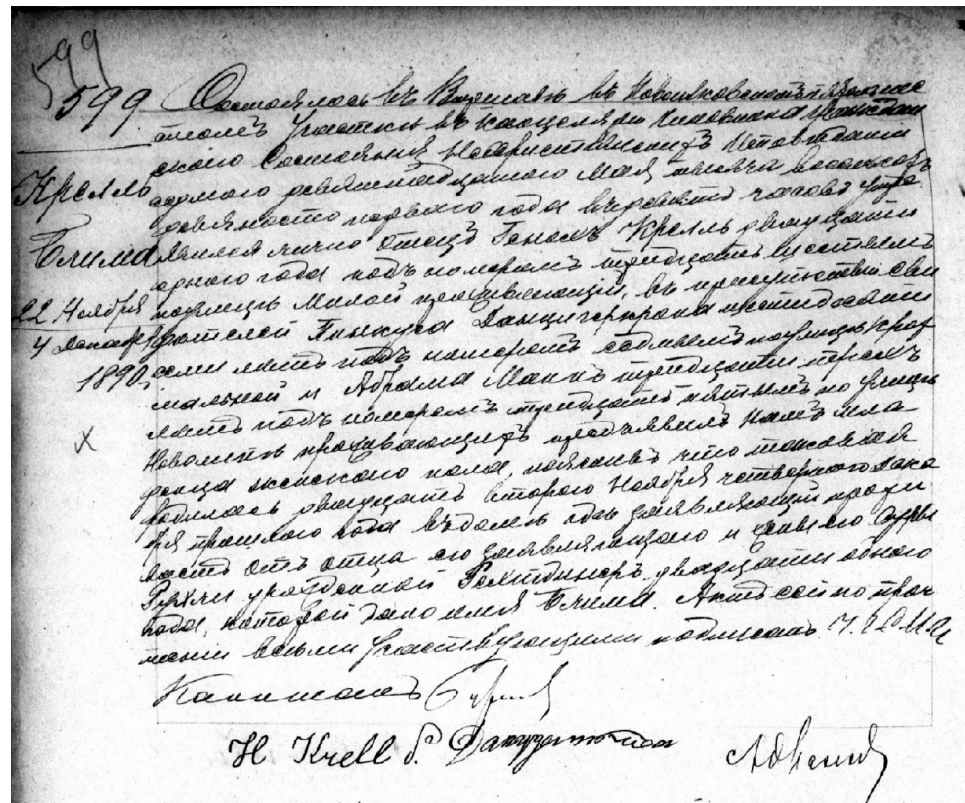


Figure 11. Birth record of Blima KRELL, daughter of Henoch and Sura Ruchla RECHTDINER, born 22 November/4 December 1890, in Warsaw, District V/VI, Mila St 36, which remained Henoch's address at least until 1930.



Figure 12. (Left) Grave of Fale TROCHE, daughter of Henoch Henich HaKohen ('still alive') KRELL, died on 13 November 1932, aged 36, and was 5 years older than David. Her husband Naftule was also 'still alive'. (Right) Grave of Menahem Mendil, son of Henoch Henich HaKohen ('still alive') KREL, died on 14 December 1937.

Additional information about Blima, the eldest daughter of Henoch and Sura Ruchla, was discovered in the Opoczno Book of Residents.³ She is quoted as being the daughter of Henoch KREL and Sura Ruchla RECHDYNER, being the widow of a man whose surname was ZAMLUNG, and having links with a GROSBART family from the town of Mszczonów and with a GELBLUM family. These surnames and the town of Mszczonów were familiar: indeed, they belonged to the second KRELL cluster.

The Warsaw address books and phone books were an additional source of information. Henoch's address in Warsaw, stated as Mila 36 in 1890 on his daughter Blima's birth record (Figure 11), remained the same in 1908, 1909, 1910, and 1930. The address of Chaim Leyb (likely David's brother; see Figure 10) in 1930, 1935, and 1938/1939 was Nalewki St. 18. (however, much earlier, in 1869, another Chaim Leyb resided at Krochmalna (house 1016)). The first reconstituted KRELL cluster, including the newly found siblings of David, is shown in Figure 13.

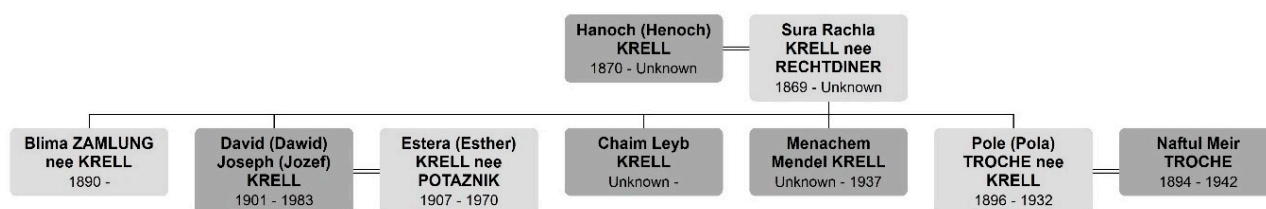


Figure 13. First KRELL cluster in Warsaw. Henoch and Sura Rachla were the author's great-grandparents; David and Estera were his maternal grandparents. The identities of Henoch's parents and Sura Rachla's parents were not known.

4.4. The Second KRELL Cluster

It rapidly became clear, from the metrical records, the address books, as well as from the graves in the Okopowa cemetery, that a second, much larger KRELL cluster had existed in Warsaw, which had several common characteristics with the first cluster, as follows:

- (i) Grandfather David was a Kohen (an heir member of the priestly status descended from Aaron, the elder brother of Moses). Indeed, the male KRELL tombstones in the Okopowa cemetery all have the Kohen 'open hands' symbol;
- (ii) Several first names (Chaim Leyb, Blima, Malka, Josek, Mordka-Mendel, and more) repeatedly appear in both clusters;
- (iii) Physical appearance: a few years ago, I had been startled by a photograph on a webpage of an unknown KRELL man, originally from Uruguay, who had a shocking resemblance to Grandfather David. His ancestry originated from the larger KRELL cluster in Warsaw, and I was told that a few years earlier he had contacted the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, searching for KRELL relatives.⁴

However, it was not possible to formally merge this second cluster with the smaller cluster described in Figure 13. This impasse resulted from a lack of documentation, specifically, from the apparent impossibility of formally identifying Henoch's parents and thereby combining both clusters. A similar barrier existed for Sura Ruchla RECHTDINER: the names of her parents could not be found either. This deadlock, namely, the impossibility of merging the KRELL clusters, lasted for more than 20 years.

There were two specific research objectives: (i) to trace the ancestral roots of the second KRELL cluster as far back in time as possible, through careful study of archival and specifically Jewish records; (ii) to find the missing link between the two KRELL clusters.

First objective: tracing the KRELL ancestral line

The earliest KREL/KRELL metrical document (1836, #70) in Warsaw found on the JRI-Poland website is the death record of Hersz Lewkowicz KREL, the son of Lewek (or Leyb/Layb), a butcher, and of Malka), Figure 14. Hersz was a stall keeper and died on 26 June 1835 (thus, registered a year late) at the age of 37 in the Jewish hospital on Pokorna Street #2098. Hersz's wife was Laie/Laia.

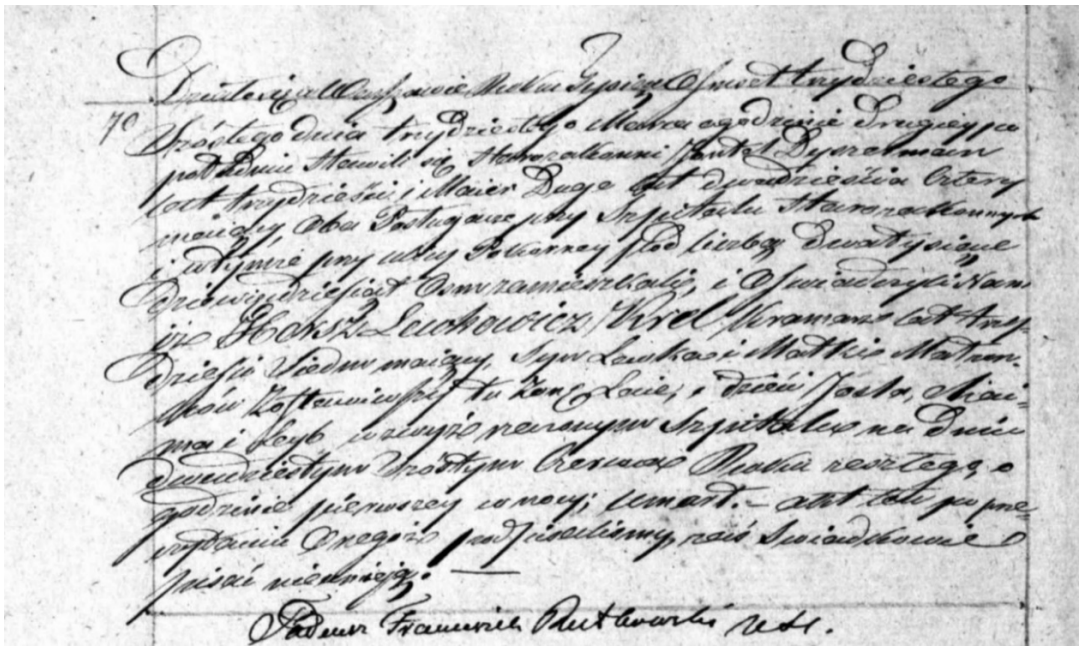


Figure 14. Death record (Warsaw, 1836/D70) of Hersz Lewkowicz KREL.

Evidence gradually emerged of related KRELL records found outside Warsaw, in Mszczonów and Grodzisk Mazowiecki.⁵ The Mszczonów records, currently not available in the JRI-Poland database, were accessed through alternative Polish websites,⁶ as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-1826 KREL/KRELL records from Mszczonów.

YEAR	TYPE/ REC#	SURNAME	FIRST NAME, AGE	YEAR OF BIRTH	DATE OF EVENT	PLACE OF BIRTH	RESIDENCY	FATHER, AGE, OCCUPATION	MOTHER, AGE	SPOUSE	COMMENTS, ADDRESS
1819	B/4	KREL	Josek		6 Jan 1819	Mszczonów	Mszczonów	KREL Hersz, 20	Łaie, 19		House 100
1821	B/25	KRELL	Ester		20 Mar 1821	Mszczonów	Mszczonów	KRELL Hersz, 22, stall keeper	Łaja z MICHŁOW, 21		House 27
1821	D/19	KRELL	Ester, 3 months	1821	18 Apr 1821	--	Mszczonów	KRELL Herszek, stall keeper	Łaja z MOŚKÓW		died in House 27
1822	B/26	KREL	Jankel		7 Apr 1822	Mszczonów	Mszczonów	KREL Hersz, 26, stall keeper	Łaja z MECHŁÓW, 24		House 27
1823	D/55	KRELL	Layb, 76	1747	30 Jul 1823	--	Mszczonów	butcher	--	Malka z HER- SZKÓW	died in House 99; witness: Hersz KRELL, butcher, son
1824	B/4	KREL	Leyb Chaim		9 Jan 1824	Mszczonów	Mszczonów	KREL Hersz, 31, trader	Łaja z MECHŁÓW, 24		House 99

The 1823 death record in Mszczonów of Layb, Hersz’s father, is shown in Figure 15. These records form the basis of the oldest reconstituted KRELL ancestor line. Since Hersz was born between 1793 and 1799 (his age fluctuates on several of his children’s records), likely in Mszczonów, his parents Leyb and Malka—who both died in Mszczonów—must have been born around 1768. Both Hersz and his father Leyb were butchers. Malka’s parents were Hersz Moszek and Pesa, both born around 1743 in Mszczonów. Malka’s paternal grandfather Moszek, born around 1718, is, thus, the oldest ancestor on the KRELL line; see Figure 16.

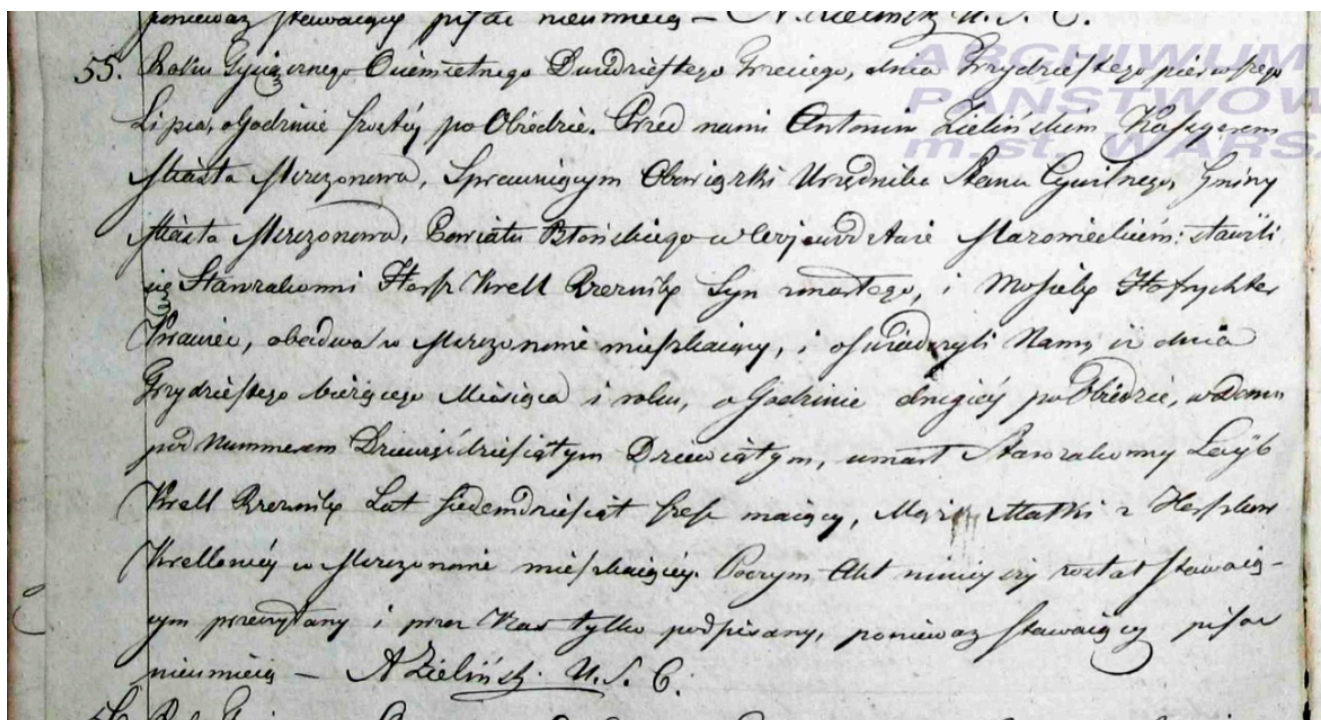


Figure 15. Death record (Mszczonów, 1823/D55) of Layb/Leyb/Lewek, 76 years old, father of Hersz KREL.

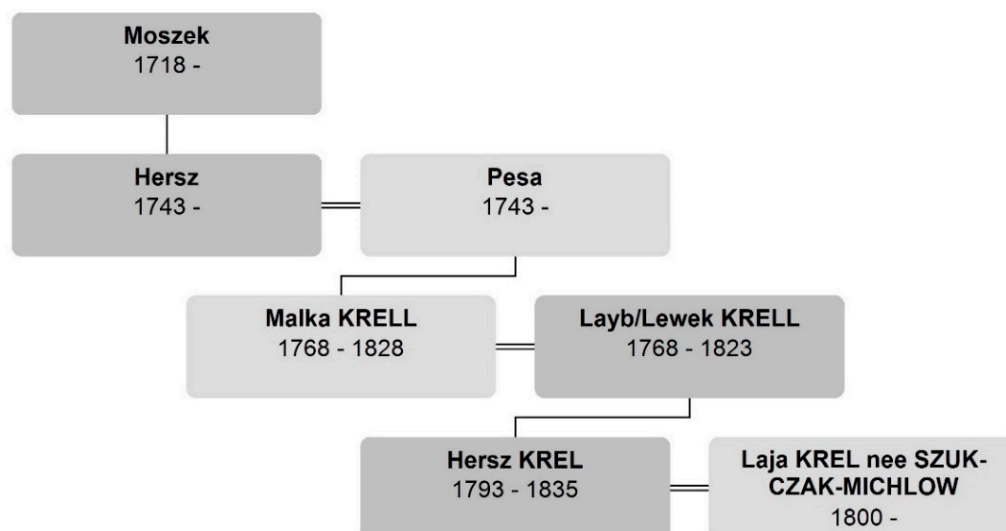


Figure 16. The most ancient KREL line, from Mszczonów.

Second objective: identifying Henoch's parents, thereby merging the KREL clusters

Our starting point in Figure 16 is Layb KRELL: apparently, the first to bear this surname, who can be viewed as the most recent common ancestor (MRCA) of all the individuals discussed here.⁷ Based on documented records, Layb's son Hersz KRELL and his wife Laja CZAK/SZUK begot three male and four female children, all born in Mszczonów. Carrying the KRELL surname, these three male descendants⁸ were Josef/Josek (married to Chawa CEJLON), Jankel (unmarried and fate unknown), and Chaim Leyb—sometimes called Chaim Yehuda Leyb, for example, on his tombstone in Warsaw—married to Blima GUTKIND). The birth records of Josek and Chaim Leyb are shown in Figures 17 and 18.

Thus, Henech's parent candidates include the following couples and two of their male children:

- Josek KRELL (1819–1875) and Chawa CEJLON (1819–1879), who had four male children: Abram (1842–1921), Mordka (1852–1909), Azryel (1854–1855), and Moszek (1857, fate unknown), and five female children: Gitel (b. 1839), Maryem (b. 1848), Ryfka (b. 1848), Bina/Blima Chaja (b. 1855), Chawa (b. unknown, died bef. 1898), and a baby who died at birth (1846), thus, ten children, all born between 1839 and 1857 in Warsaw;
- Chaim Leyb KRELL (1824–1884) and Blima GUTKIND (1824–bef. 1879), who had four male children: Hersz (1852–1854), Mendel (1861, fate unknown), Moszek (1863, fate unknown), and Mechel (1864, fate unknown), and seven female descendants: Malka (b. 1846), Sura (b. 1849), Chawa (b. 1851), Rywka (b. 1853), Fajga (b. 1859), Rojza (b. 1863), Dwojra (b. 1865), and likely another girl,⁹ Gitel (no birth record), thus, twelve children, all born between 1849 and 1865 in Grodzisk and/or Warsaw.
- Two of Josek's male children, Abram (b. 1842) and Mordka (b. 1852), also fall within the right age range to potentially have fathered Henech (born around 1865–1870). Mordka indeed had a son named Henech, who died young in 1879; see footnote 2. The epitaph on the tombstone of that young Henech indeed states '*My son, a child*', which eliminates the possibility of that Henech being my great-grandfather and, most certainly, the likelihood of his father Mordechai being the searched-for father of my Henech. As to Abram and his wife Sura Fajga MALINIAK, they begot 10 children between 1862 and 1882, but there is no indication that they had a son named Henech. That option will be shown to be wrong

The presence of numerous KRELL tombstones in the Okopowa cemetery in Warsaw demonstrates that during the first half of the 19th century, many members of the KRELL family migrated from Mszczonów to Warsaw. However, prior to his own move to Warsaw, Chaim Leyb first relocated for a few years to Grodzisk Mazowiecki, seemingly motivated by the fact that his future wife, Bluma/Blima GUTKIND, lived in that town,¹⁰ in which several GUTKIND families resided. Their marriage record, presumably from the early-to-mid 1840s in Grodzisk, could not be found. However, between 1846 and 1855, five children (Malka; Hersz, a baby who died at one year old; Sura; Chawa; and Rywka) were born there to Chaim Leyb and Blima; see Table 2. In 1859, a sixth child, Fajga, was born in Czyste, a village located right outside Warsaw which ceased to exist in 1916 as a separate administrative entity and was integrated into Warsaw. Subsequently, around 1860, Chaim Leyb and his family moved to Warsaw, in District IV, where five more children were born: Mendel (1861), the twins Mosze and Rojza (1863), Michal (1864), and Dvora (1865).

As an interesting aside, in 1863, the Jewish newspaper Hamagid indeed referred to Josek and Chaim Leyb as brothers (also including Yitzchak Goldman, a family member); see Figure 19.

ה ו ר ע ו ת.

מהרמב"ם הנרפסים אצלי ביופי ובהדור עם כל הנושאי כלים
ננטר עד היום ארבע' כרכים, והסוכנים הכללים בכל מדינת פולין
הן המה ב ו ו א ר ש א ה"ה המשכילים המופלגים ומפורסמים מו"ה
י צ ח ק ג א ל ד מ א נ ומחור"ר ח י ו מ ל י ב ק ר ע ל ל אחיו של
דוד הגביר מו"ה יוסף קרעלל, ואין רשות לאחר בלי כחם למכור
בכל מדינת פולין כפי המודעה שלהם הנרפסה ווארשא י"ג תשרי
העבר.

Figure 19. Excerpt from the Yiddish newspaper Hamagid, published on 1 July 1863 in Poland, mentioning the brothers Josek and Chaim Leyb KRELL as well as Yitzchak GOLDMAN (Chaim Leyb's son-in-law).¹¹ The passage mentions that selling of four volumes of a book (about the Rambam?) in Poland is restricted to their authors (Yitzchak Goldman and Chaim Leyb Krell).

Table 2. KRELL–GUTKIND records from Grodzisk Mazowiecki.

YEAR (REG.)	TYPE/REC#	SURNAME	FIRST NAME	DATE OF EVENT	PLACE OF BIRTH	RESIDENCY	FATHER, AGE, OCCUPATION	MOTHER, AGE	COMMENTS
1846	B/25	KREL	Malka	16 Jun 1846	Grodzisk	Grodzisk	Chaim Lajb KRELL, 23, dealer	Blima GUTKIND, 21	
1854	D/15	KRELL	Hersz	24 Aug/5 Sep 1854	--	Grodzisk	Chaim Lejb KRELL	Blima (GUTKIND),	One-year-old baby; witness: Mordka Szlama GUTKIND, szkolnik, age-35
1855	B/35	KRELL	Sura	13 Jul 1849	Grodzisk	Grodzisk	Chaim Lajb KRELL, 32, trader	Blima GUTKIND, 27	witness: Mordka Szlama GUTKIND, szkolnik, age-36
1855	B/36	KRELL	Chawa	18 Mar 1851	Grodzisk	Grodzisk	Chaim Lajb KRELL, 32, trader	Blima GUTKIND, 27	witness: Mordka Szlama GUTKIND, szkolnik, age-36
1855	B/37	KRELL	Ryfka	20 Jul 1853	Grodzisk	Grodzisk	Chaim Lajb KRELL, 32, trader	Blima GUTKIND, 27	Late registration due to father's illness; in the two previous records, late registration because father was unaware of the law
1859	B/100	KREL	Fajga	28 Nov 1859	Czyste	Czyste village	Chaim Lajb KRELL, 37, trader	Blima GUTKIND, 37	

In 1903, the newspaper Ha-Tsefira, published in Warsaw, listed apparently related KRELL, MINC, GESUNDHEIT, and possibly other family members, all Gur Hasidim, see Figure 20.

ע"ו ר' העניך קרעלל מביית חסיד גור רוקא 27 :
ל. טינץ 20 רי"ב ; זה מינץ 2 ר. ; ה. מוינץ, ג. מעלדבוים.
ברוך עששטין בי"א 1 רי"ב ; ב. קאמינער 75 ק. ; נ. ד. ויס-
קינד, ב. געוונדהייט, ה. קרעלל, י. געוונדהייט בי"א 50
ק. ; א. ב. קליינמאן 1.50 ר. ; י. קאליסקי 35 ק. ; ב. גאלד-
בערג, מ. ווייס, ב. גופראד בי"א 25 ק. ; י. ליכט 30 ק. ;
אליקום, י. תאומים כ"א 20 ק. ; ט"ה 31.5 ר.

Figure 20. Excerpt from the Yiddish newspaper Ha-Tsefira, published on 26 May 1903 in Warsaw, which lists contributors and their contributions (in kopek and ruble), to the families of the victims of the 19–21 April anti-Semitic pogrom in Kishinev.¹² Note the presence of several KRELL (including Henoch/Henich), MINC, and GESUNDHEIT family members, and others, all Gur Hasidim.

4.5. Furthering the Search

Research into the Business and Army Draft Warsaw archives (in Milanówek) did not yield any result about Henoch, although other KRELL family members appear in these archives. Notary records were explored as well for 1890 and nearby years, keeping in mind that an *alegata* (a supplementary document attached to a marriage record) could possibly be found for Henoch and Sura Ruchla, which would surely include birth dates and parents' names. The only reference to Henoch appeared in an 1890 index of notary Krzysztof Kierskowsky, but unfortunately, the document itself did not exist anymore. Searching other notaries (M. Markiewicz, L. Wichrowski) yielded information about related KRELL individuals but not about Henoch.

The odds of finding Henoch's parents' names, and, thus, of merging the two KRELL clusters, remained rather bleak for more than twenty years. Progress slowly occurred through

exchanges with newly found researchers of the second KRELL cluster.¹³ Significantly, DNA testing demonstrated that indeed there was a genetic connection between members of both KRELL clusters. However, concrete authenticating evidence was still lacking.

4.6. The Solution

The missing link unexpectedly materialized through the Duma Voters list for Warsaw, a perhaps less explored database. These are lists of eligible voters for the Russian parliament (Duma) in the early 1900s, which contain patronymics of the (all-male) voters. There were four czarist-era election periods: the 1st Duma from January 1906 to April 1906, the 2nd Duma from December 1906 to February 1907, the 3rd Duma from September 1907 to October 1907, and the 4th Duma from September 1912 to October 1912. The Warsaw Gubernia Voters list is only partially available on JewishGen for 1907, but no KRELLs appear. The Genealogy Department¹⁴ of POLIN, the Jewish Museum in Warsaw, was able to assist with the 1906 list from District V of Warsaw, in which Henoх KRELL finally materialized (number 4295 on the list): the son of Chaim (patronymic: ‘Chaimov’, or Хаїмовъ), residing at Mila 36. This is the first, and so far, the only, concrete evidence of a son–father connection between Henoх and Chaim Leyb KRELL, Figure 21.

№ по порядку	Фамилія, имя и отчество	Цензъ	Адресъ	Примѣчанія
4295	Креллъ Енохъ Хаїмовъ	н.с.	Мила 36	
4296	Крениць Шаянъ Масковъ	н.с.	Бураковста 2	
4297	Крениць Лейзоръ Кронъ	н.с.	Ново-Марш. 15	
4298	Крениць Марцінъ Вавровъ	н.с.	Блонска 9	
4299	Кривошопи Мисла Мисловъ	н.с.	— " — 7	

Figure 21. Excerpt of the 1906 Duma Voters list for Warsaw, District V, in which one finds “4295 KRELL Henoх Chaimov (written as Cyrillic Хаїмовъ), Mila 36”.

Henoх was thus the 13th and youngest child of Chaim Leyb and Bluma/Blima, born when his mother was about 46 years old.

4.7. Closure—Conclusions

1. During the 20th century, the numerous KRELL descendants from Mszczonów, Grodzisk Mazowiecki, and Warsaw have spread to various countries, including Belgium, France, Israel, the USA, Uruguay, Australia, and more.
2. From the present genealogical data, not all of them being presented here, it is clearly apparent that different Kohanim families were more likely to be wedded with each other: the records show that multiple intermarriages occurred between and within Kohanim branches including KRELL, GROSBARD, RECHTDINER, and more. Kohanim may be recognized by the characteristic open hands symbol on their (male) tombstones, such as on the grave of Chaim Leyb KRELL; see Figure 22 (note the inclusion of the middle name Yehuda).



Figure 22. Grave of Chaim (Yehuda) Leyb KRELL, son of Tzvi (Hersz) HaKohen. Note the characteristic Kohen open hands symbol.

3. The parents of Sura Ruchla RECHTDINER are still unidentified. This obstacle represents a challenging merging issue similar to that described here for Henoah, namely, linking two RECHTDINER clusters.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ Personal communications from Hadassah Lipsius (JRI-Poland) and Ania Przybyszewska-Drozd and Yale Reisner (the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw).

² An 1879 grave exists in Sector 71 for a Henoah KRELL, whose father was Mordechai/Mordka HaKohen, 'still alive'. The epitaph states 'My son, a child', which eliminates the possibility of this Henoah being my great-grandfather and most certainly, the likelihood of Mordechai being the searched-for father of my Henoah. There is also a Henoah KRELL, born in 1877 in Lodz, son of

Szmul Moszek and Rywka Leah SALOMON, died in Konskie in 1940 together with his wife Bina Przedborska, in unknown (but likely violent) circumstances. So far, a connection with the Warsaw KRELL lines has not been found.

Stanley Diamond, personal communication.

Anna Przybyszewska, personal communication.

Petje Schroder and Anna Przybyszewska, personal communications.

<https://metryki.genbaza.pl/>, <https://geneteka.genealodzy.pl/>, both sites accessed on 21 March 2024, courtesy of P. Schroder.

Interestingly, surnames are inherited in a similar way as specific regions of the Y (male) chromosome. For this and other scientific aspects of such correlative issues, see (Rhode et al. 2004; King and Jobling 2009; Manrubia et al. 2003; Wagner 2013).

The focus here is on tracking the patrilineal surname KRELL since the objective is to search for Henoch's parents.

Eve Locker (USA) and Inbal Kandel (Israel), personal communications.

Blima might have been born in the same year as Chaim Leyb. Indeed, an 1824 birth record in Grodzisk was uncovered for a Bluma GUTKIND: 1824/B109, father Moszek (22), mother Reyzly Michlow (18).

Source: The National Library of Israel (NLI).

See above Note 11.

Personal communications from A. Krell (USA), S. Krell and L. Krell (Uruguay), M. Taub (Israel), I. Kandel (Israel), E. Locker (USA), M. Herman (USA), D. Msellati (France), and Ch. Nissimov (Israel).

M. Shefi and M. Wzorek, personal communication.

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