

Baal Shem Tov Y-DNA Research Study

Pre-Publication Draft

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to summarize the progress made on the Baal Shem Tov Y-DNA research study. It presents our current understanding of one of the lineages descending from the Baal Shem Tov, the Vulis family, based upon our review of traditional rabbinical sources, our research of census documents, and our efforts to validate that lineage via Y-DNA testing. We have utilized the same approach to validate the lines of descent and identify the unique Y-DNA genetic signature of many rabbinical lineages and dynasties.¹

Introduction

The first step in any Y-DNA research study is to assemble, document, and critically examine the paper trail for the pedigreed descendants of the founder of the lineage. In this case, the founder of the lineage is the Baal Shem Tov, from whom several lines descend. For the purpose of this article, we shall focus our attention on the Vulis line of descent.

Whenever possible, we try to corroborate the paper trail by researching rabbinical sources, as well as Russian archives for relevant census documents. These sources become particularly important for descendants with only partial pedigrees, whose paper trails do not extend all the way back to the founder of the lineage.

Once we have confidence in the paper trail, we are then able to test the Y-DNA of pedigreed descendants from different branches of the family as a final validation step. In this Y-DNA research study, we tested the Y-DNA from three pedigreed Vulis descendants.

Because the Baal Shem Tov was not the son of a famous rabbi, or the descendant of a notable rabbinical lineage, rabbinical sources provide very little information regarding his ancestry. Although more is known about his descendants, rabbinical sources present conflicting information regarding the Baal Shem Tov's lines of descent, and who some of his descendants were.

Part of the reason for this confusion may be due to repeating given names in different branches of the family. When combined with the lack of surnames, and the absence of dates of birth and death (an unfortunate but common practice in rabbinical sources), mistakes in the lineage can result. These mistakes are often cited, repeated, and perpetuated in subsequent rabbinical sources.

It also appears that the existing rabbinical sources were not contemporaneous, but rather, were published nearly a century or more after the Baal Shem Tov's grandson, Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev, had passed away. Hence, errors may have occurred during the conveyance of the oral history across the generations, and in the reconstruction of the lineage by later descendants and scholars.

This lack of documentation of the early generations may have occurred because the Baal Shem Tov fathered only one daughter and one known son, and unlike many of his followers and disciples, did not found a rabbinical dynasty. However, given his fame, and his profound influence on the Chassidic movement, this situation is somewhat perplexing.

As described in the following section, conflicting information in the rabbinical sources also created confusion, which further complicated our efforts to construct a genealogically accurate family tree for the Baal Shem Tov, and to clearly delineate his lines of descent.

Rabbinical Sources

One of the earliest of the rabbinical sources is *Sefer Knas Sofrim* (1898),² which states that Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev was the father of Rabbi Avraham, who was raised by Rabbi Boruch of Medzhibozh, the son of the Baal Shem Tov's daughter, Udel, and her husband, Yechiel Michel Ashkenazi. Rabbi Avraham's sons were Rabbi Aharon and Rabbi Boruch.

Another early source, *Khal Chasidim Hachodosh* (1902),³ presents two stories about Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev and his grandson, Rabbi Avraham of Skvira. This source contradicts the earlier rabbinical source, in that it states that Rabbi Avraham was the grandson of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev, and not his son. It should also be noted that Rabbi Avraham was not specifically identified as a son-after-son descendant, so conceivably, he could have been a maternal grandson, through Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev's daughter (see Figure 1).

Levi Ha-Levi Grossman, the editor of *Shem ve-Shearit* (1943),⁴ states that Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev had a daughter Sima Chisha, the wife of Rabbi Aharon of Chernobyl.⁵ Sima Chisha's second husband was Rabbi Boruch of Medzhibozh.

Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev also had two sons – Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, who was raised by Rabbi Boruch, and Rabbi Naftali Tzvi of Skvira (Grossman states that in his opinion, the information regarding Rabbi Naftali Tzvi being a son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev is incorrect). Grossman also states that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira was the father of Rabbi Aharon and Rabbi Boruch, descendants of the Baal Shem Tov.

A more recent rabbinical source, Alfassi's *Ha-Hasidut mi-Dor le-Dor* (1995),⁶ presents largely the same information, stating that Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev had sons Tzvi Hirsh of Skvira and Avraham of Skvira.⁷ Rabbi Avraham lost his father when he was young and was raised in the house of his sister [Sima Chisha], who was married to her second husband, Rabbi Boruch of Medzhibozh.

Alfassi states that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira married the daughter of his sister, from her first marriage to Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, and had two sons, Rabbi Aharon and Rabbi Boruch. Alfassi also mentions that after Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's death, his Chassidim became followers of his son-in-law, Rabbi Shlomo of Savran.

In his book *Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov of Medzhibozh* (2010),⁸ Naftali Aharon Vekshtein largely agrees with the lineage presented in *Sefer Knas Sofrim*, stating that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira was the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev. He also agrees with *Shem ve-Shearit* that Rabbi Naftali Tzvi of Skvira was mistakenly identified as the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev.

In keeping with Alfassi, Vekshtein states that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira was raised in the house of his sister, Sima Chisha, who was remarried to Rabbi Boruch of Medzhibozh, and that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira married his niece, from his sister's first marriage to Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev.

Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's sons were listed by Vekshtein as Aharon (Tzvi) of Pavoloch, Boruch, and David of Korostishev. One of his daughters, Feyga Ita, married Rabbi (Shimon) Shlomo of Savran-Chechelnik. His other daughter married Rabbi Moshe of Kamenka.

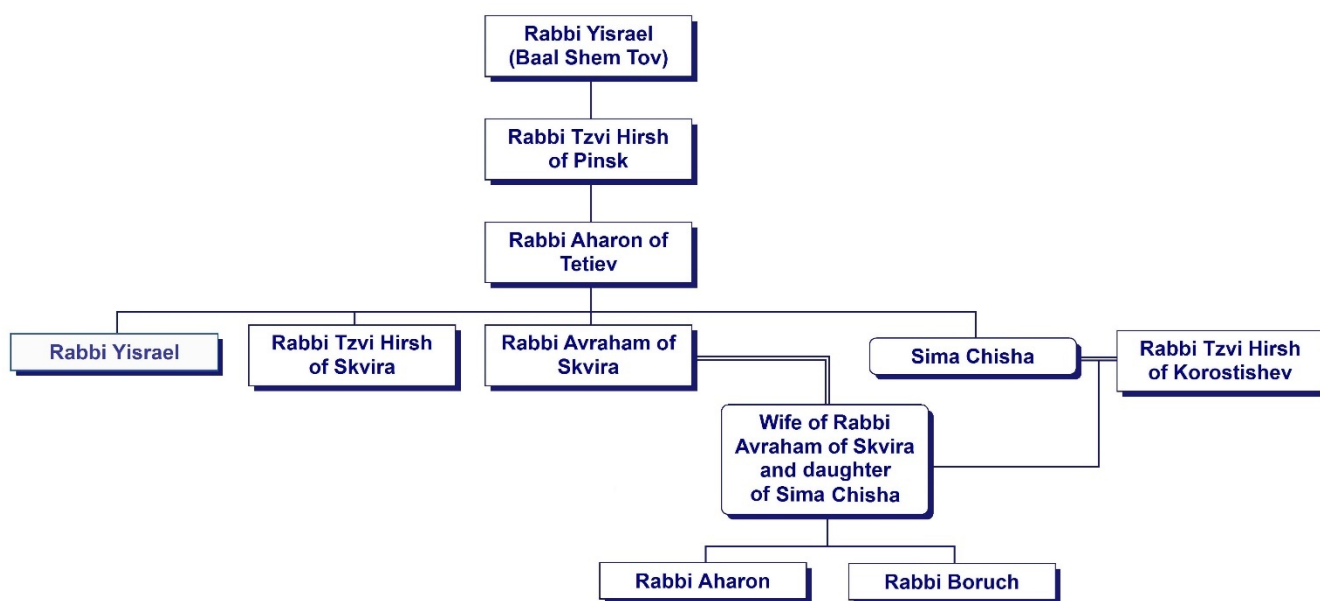
Vekshtein mentions that after Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's death, his Chassidim became followers of his son-in-law, Rabbi Shlomo [Giterman] of Savran-Chechelnik, son of Rabbi Moshe Tzvi of Savran.

Regarding Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, Vekshtein states that one of his daughters [Chana Malka] was the second wife of Rabbi Aharon Twersky of Chernobyl, the eldest son of Rabbi Mordechai of Chernobyl, who was the son of Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl.⁹

Our original understanding of the Baal Shem Tov's lineage was based primarily on these rabbinical sources. Relying on these sources, we conceptualized the Baal Shem Tov's lineage, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Baal Shem Tov Lineage Constructed from Rabbinical Sources



As shown in Figure 1, most rabbinical sources state that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira was the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev, son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Pinsk, son of the Baal Shem Tov. Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's wife, whose name is unknown, was the daughter of his sister, Sima Chisha, and her first husband, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev. Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's children were Rabbi Aharon and Rabbi Boruch.

Census Information

Through our research of records from the Kiev archive, we were fortunate in being able to locate the 1804 census for Tetiev, on which the household of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev was listed. This census was taken prior to the adoption of Jewish surnames.

Figure 2

1804 Tetiev Census

[illegible]

The household of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev with his two sons, and the household of his son-in-law, are the last two families listed on this page of the 1804 Tetiev census.

The 1804 Tetiev census¹⁰ for the household of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev confirms many of the names and relationships from the rabbinical sources; Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev's sons, as listed on the census, were Srul (Yisrael) and Gershko (Tzvi Hirsh), and his son-in-law was also Gershko (Tzvi Hirsh), who, according to rabbinical sources, was the son of Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev.

According to the data for the previous 1796 census, cited on the 1804 Tetiev census,¹¹ Aharon (Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev), son of Gershko (Tzvi Hirsh), was age 42 (born c. 1754). Aharon's sons were Srul (Yisrael), age 25 (born c. 1771), and Gershko (Tzvi Hirsh), with no age mentioned. Aharon's son-in-law, Gershko (Tzvi Hirsh), son of Avram (Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev), was age 20 (born c. 1776); he was listed together with his son Avrum, age 6 (born c. 1790).

However, there were also two significant discrepancies between the rabbinical sources and the information provided from the 1804 Tetiev census. The census provided information which suggested that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira may not have been the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev:

- According to rabbinical sources, Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's father was Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev (see Figure 1). However, according to the 1804 Tetiev census, Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev did not have a son Avraham, although it is possible that he had a son who was hidden from the census for tax avoidance, or other reasons.
- The only Avrum mentioned in the 1804 Tetiev census was Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev's grandson, the son of Gershko (Tzvi Hirsh), who was Rabbi Aharon's son-in-law. This Avrum was not mentioned in any of the rabbinical sources.

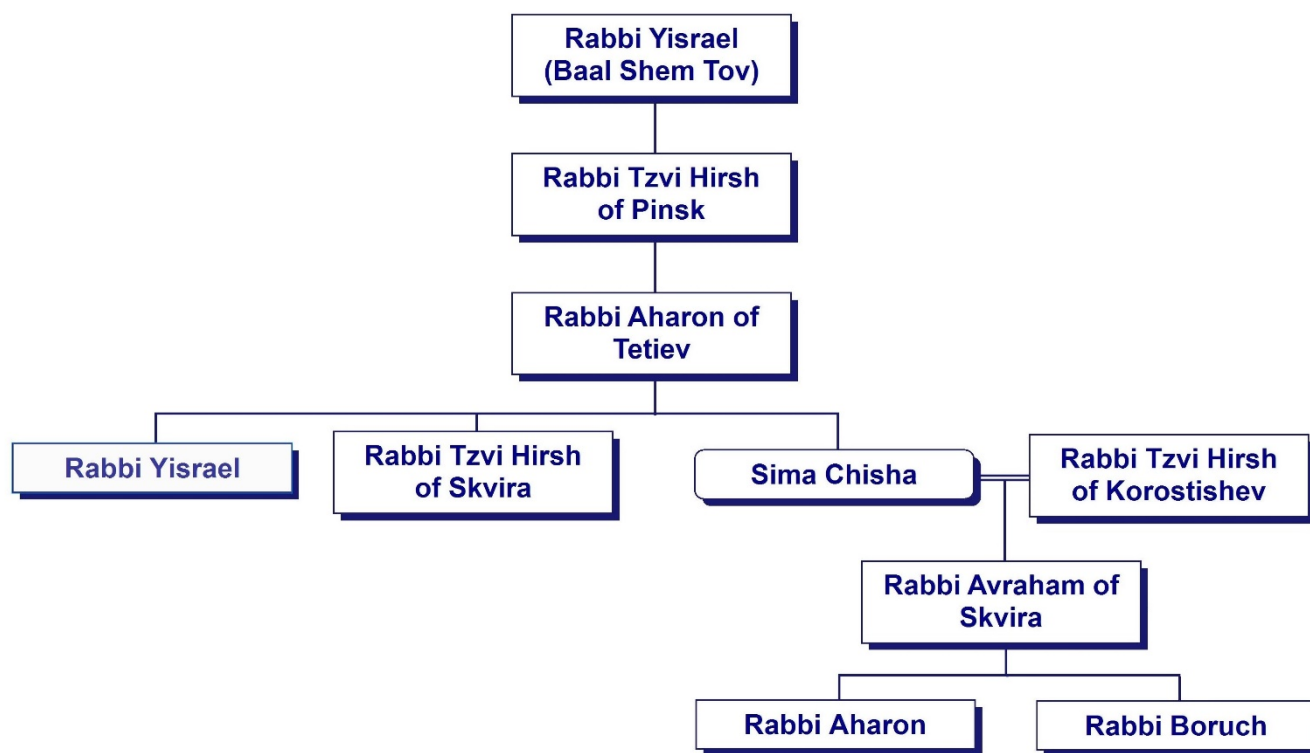
Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh (born c. 1776), son-in-law of Rabbi Aharon, was, according to rabbinical sources, the son of Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev, who was, in turn, the son-in-law of Rabbi Menachem Nachum Twersky of Chernobyl.

Because we identified the correct household for Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev on the 1804 Tetiev census, and because there was only one Avrum found in the household, we hypothesized that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira was not the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev, but rather, his son-in-law's (Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh's) son Avrum, who was born circa 1790.

This hypothesis was also in agreement with the relationship that was presented in the rabbinical source *Khal Chasidim Hachodosh*, which stated that Rabbi Avraham was the grandson of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev, and not his son. This hypothesis led us to revise the Baal Shem Tov's family tree as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Baal Shem Tov Lineage Constructed from 1804 Tetiev Census



As shown in Figure 3, Rabbi Avraham of Skvira moved from his previous position as the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev in the descendant chart, to the position indicated by the 1804 Tetiev census, as the son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev and his wife, Sima Chisha, the daughter of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev.

In order to corroborate this finding, we continued our search in records from the Kiev archive for the family of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev in later censuses. The 1811 and 1816 Tetiev censuses could not be located – they were lost, destroyed, or never cataloged. We did succeed in locating the 1820 census for the Tarashcha district, which contains a list of male heads of household for the town of Tetiev (Figure 4). This was the first available census for Tetiev following the adoption of Jewish surnames during the period from 1804 to about 1811.

Figure 4

1820 Tetiev Census

203	12	мемелескому	изъ Гиршескому.	Исх 20 28
204		мемелескому	манде	18-4
205		магмачанскому	Егору	20-102
208	16	магмачанскому	Васили	25-134
209		магмачанскому	Васили	23-4
210		магмачанскому	Васили	27-133
211	19	Ставицкому	Васили	60-3
212		Ковалескому	Васили	57-15
213		магмачанскому	Васили	51-14
216	20	Ковалескому	Васили	49-33
217		Ковалескому	Васили	56-8
218		Ставицкому	Васили	58-2
219		Ставицкому	Васили	59-1
220		Ковалескому	Васили	57-2
221		Ковалескому	Васили	57-2
226	22	Ставицкому	Васили	21-51
227		магмачанскому	Васили	52-45
228		магмачанскому	Васили	70-57
229	23	Ковалескому	Васили	28
240	29	мемелескому	Васили	26

Avrum Volsh, son of Gershko, identified as head of the household #27 (record #240).

The 1820 Tetiev census¹² lists Avrum Volsh, son of Gershko (Tzvi Hirsh), from Tetiev. Because this was the only Avrum son of Gershko found on the 1820 Tetiev census, we believed him to be the same Avrum who was found on the 1804 Tetiev census. This was the first appearance of his Volsh surname, which later became the Vulish, and then the Vulis surname. This census entry raised the possibility that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, the son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, and Avrum Volsh might be the same person.

Continuing our records search of the Kiev archives, we next located the 1835 Tetiev census,¹³ which contains a list of males only (Figure 5). This census lists the family of Avrum Vulish. He and his four sons and their ages are listed as of the previous census of 1834: Avrum Vulish, son of Gershko (age 26 in the previous 1816 census; age 44 in the 1834 census), Aharon Gersh (age 17), Boruch (age 11), Shulim Shachna (age 6), and David (age 4).

Figure 5

1835 Tetiev Census

[illegible]

The family of Avrum Vulish, son of Gershko, household #27.

The fact that Avrum Vulish had two sons whose names matched the names of Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's sons (Aharon and Boruch) provided additional supporting evidence that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, the son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, and Avrum Vulish might be the same person.

We next located the 1850 Skvira census,¹⁴ which contains a list of households (Figure 6). This census contains the family of Avrum Vulis. He and his children and grandchildren and their ages are listed as of 1850: Avrum Vulis son of Gershko (age 61), his wife Chana (age 38), and his sons Aharon (age 32), Boruch (age 28), Shulim (Shachna) (age 23), and David (age 20).

The census lists Aharon's wife Chaya (age 32), their sons Nuchim (age 9) and Boruch (age 2), and their daughters Chana (age 14) and Malka (age 11). It also lists Boruch's wife Risya (age 26) and their sons Itsko (age 6) and Nuchim (age 6 months), and Shulim's wife Yuchved (age 23) and their son Srul (age 5).

Figure 6

1850 Skvira Census

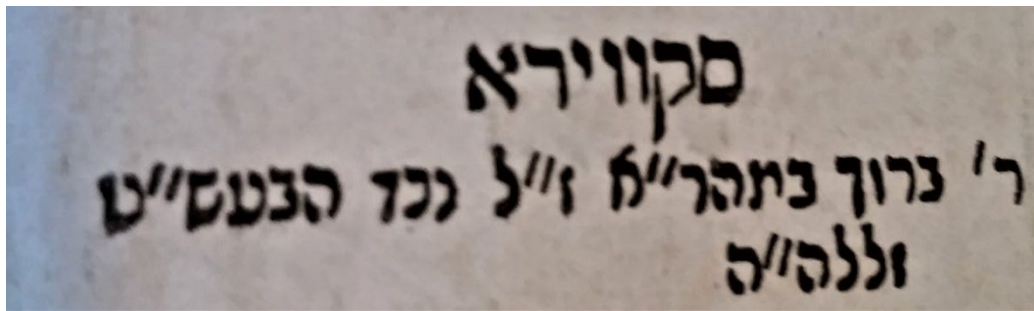
Family Name	Head of Household	Age
Avrum Vulis son of Gershko	Avrum Vulis	61
Chana (wife of Avrum)	Chana	38
Aharon (son of Avrum)	Aharon	32
Boruch (son of Avrum)	Boruch	28
Shulim (Shachna) (son of Avrum)	Shulim	23
David (son of Avrum)	David	20
Aharon's wife Chaya	Chaya	32
Nuchim (son of Aharon)	Nuchim	9
Boruch (son of Aharon)	Boruch	2
Chana (daughter of Aharon)	Chana	14
Malka (daughter of Aharon)	Malka	11
Boruch's wife Risya	Risya	26
Itsko (son of Boruch)	Itsko	6
Nuchim (son of Boruch)	Nuchim	6 months
Shulim's wife Yuchved	Yuchved	23
Srul (son of Shulim)	Srul	5

The family of Avrum Vulis, son of Gershko, is record #16.

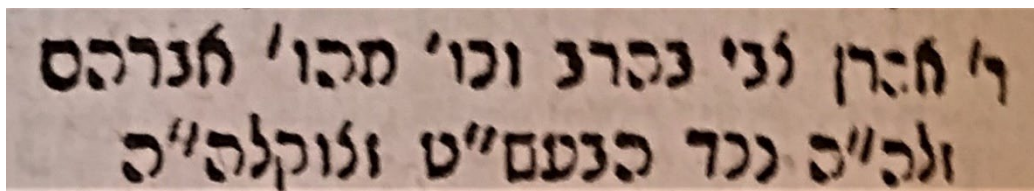
It is recorded in the 1850 Skvira census that the family officially transferred from Tetiev to Skvira in 1842. Because Rabbi Avraham of Skvira is also known to have moved from Tetiev to Medzhibozh, and later to Skvira, this again suggested that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira and Avrum Vulis might be the same person.

Although not a census document per se, the book, *Sefer Tehilim*, published in 1866,¹⁵ is a collection of prayers that also contains a list of donors who contributed to the book's publication. Listed among these donors were three of Rabbi Avraham's sons: R' Boruch, R' Aharon Tzvi, and R' David. Avraham was mentioned with the title of "rabbi," and was said to be a descendant of the Besht.

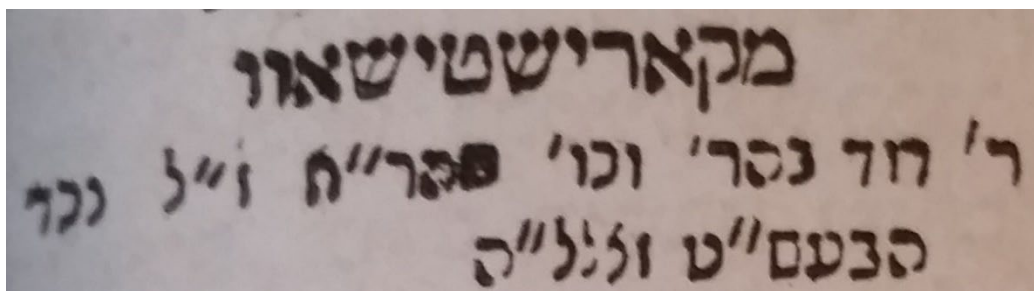
Although surnames were not mentioned in the donor listing, we believe that the Avraham referred to in *Sefer Tehilim* is Avrum Vulis. He had four sons, three of whom were named Boruch, Aharon Tzvi, and David. He lived in Skvira from 1842 until the time of his death before 1856, and it is known that his son David moved to Korostishev at some point between 1850 and 1866.¹⁶



Skvira – R' Boruch, son of Rabbi Avraham, descendant of the Baal Shem Tov



R' Aharon Tzvi, son of Rabbi Avraham, descendant of the Baal Shem Tov

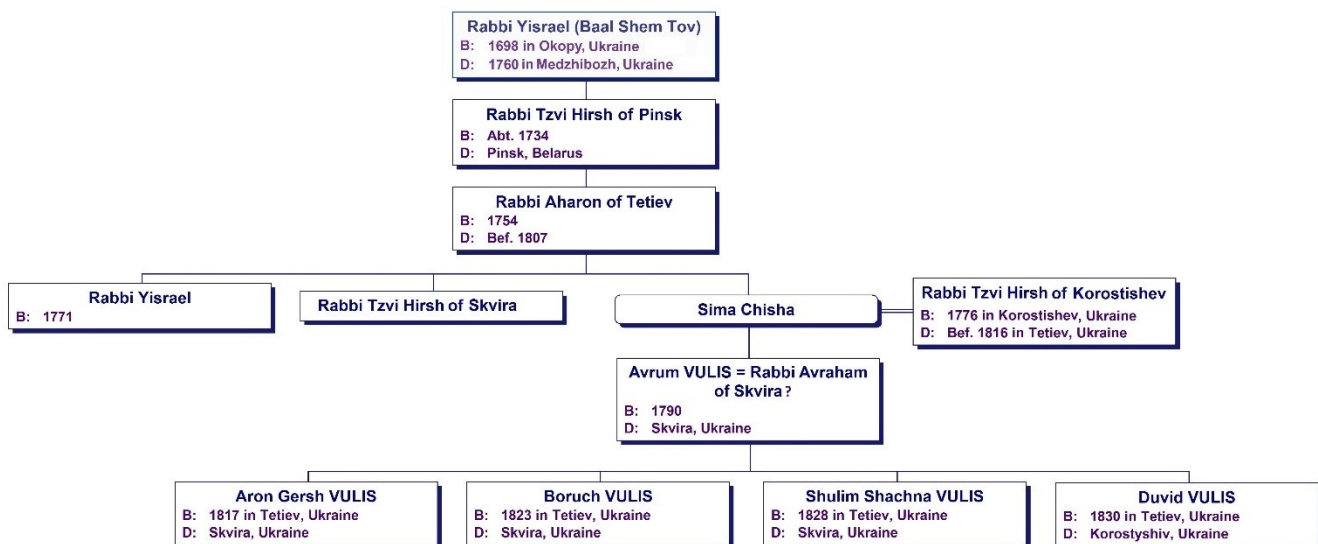


Korostishev – R' David, son of Rabbi Avraham, descendant of the Baal Shem Tov

Based upon the information provided in the rabbinical sources, in addition to the information provided by the 1804, 1820, and 1835 Tetiev censuses, the 1850 Skvira census, and the 1866 donor list, we revised the Baal Shem Tov's family tree as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Baal Shem Tov Lineage Constructed from Tetiev and Skvira Censuses



All four censuses were consistent in their identification of Avrum Vulis by his Russian patronymic “Gershovich” (*i.e.*, son of Gershko/Gersh/Hirsh), and never as “Aharonovich” (*i.e.*, son of Aharon). The use of this patronymic indicates that Avrum Vulis was the son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, the son-in-law of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev. However, the rabbinical sources were consistent in their identification of Rabbi Avraham of Skvira as the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev.

Due to this conflict between rabbinical sources and census data, we recognized that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira and Avrum Vulis were probably not the same person. The possibility remained that Avrum Vulis was a rabbi in Skvira, but that he was not the same rabbi who is referred to in the rabbinical sources as Rabbi Avraham of Skvira.

In an attempt to verify the information regarding Rabbi Avraham of Skvira in the rabbinical sources, we searched for any genealogical evidence, in the form of census records, or other evidence (*e.g.*, marriage records, tombstones, *yichus* letters, Jewish community/Av Beit Din records) that could shed light on this. Unfortunately, we could not find any documentary evidence pertaining to Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, nor could he be found on any census records for Tetiev, Medzhibozh, or Skvira.

According to rabbinical sources, Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev, and his elder sister, Sima Chisha, moved from Tetiev to Medzhibozh sometime between the year of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev's death after the 1804 census, and before the death of Rabbi Boruch of Medzhibozh in 1811. As previously discussed, Avraham son of Aharon was not found on the 1804 census for Tetiev, although he might have been hidden. Whether he was listed on the 1811 or 1816 Medzhibozh census is unknown, as these censuses did not survive.

Also, according to rabbinical sources, it was after Rabbi Boruch's death (c. 1811) that Rabbi Avraham moved to Skvira and became known as Rabbi Avraham of Skvira. Whether he was listed on the 1811, 1816, or 1834 Skvira censuses is unknown, as these censuses did not survive. He was not found on the 1850 Skvira census, which means that he most likely died before 1834, because the 1850 census referred to people who were listed on the previous census of 1834.

Furthermore, the sons ascribed by rabbinical sources to Rabbi Avraham of Skvira were not found in the 1850 Skvira census as "Aharon son of Avraham" and "Boruch son of Avraham." Since the 1850 census reflects the names of people registered in Skvira district in 1834, this indicates that these putative sons had either moved away or died before 1834. In contrast, the 1850 Skvira census records Avrum Vulis and his sons, who were officially transferred from Tetiev to Skvira in 1842.

The conflicting information between the rabbinical sources and the censuses could not be resolved by traditional genealogical research methods alone, as we had followed the paper trail as far as it could take us. For additional insights, we utilized Y-DNA research methods to validate the paper trail and to elucidate relationships between descendants.

Y-DNA Data

The main purpose of conducting a Y-DNA research study of a rabbinical lineage is to validate the lineage. Once the lineage has been validated, Y-DNA can also be used to identify the unique genetic signature of the lineage, as we have succeeded in doing for many rabbinical lines.^{17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24} Y-DNA is extremely valuable for both elucidating relationships in a lineage, and for validating the paper trail.

The Vulis family has a strong oral tradition of patrilineal descent from the Baal Shem Tov.^{25, 26} Avrum Vulis (born c. 1790), whom we found on the 1820 and 1835 Tetiev censuses, as well as on the 1850 Skvira census, was the most recent common patrilineal ancestor of three pedigreed Vulis descendants who participated in our Y-DNA study.

In order to confirm that Avrum Vulis was the son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, and not the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev, we sought out a pedigreed descendant of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh's father, Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev, for Y-DNA testing.

Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev was from a very important rabbinical family; he married Malka, the daughter of Rabbi Menachem Nachum Twersky of Chernobyl. Because he was from such a prestigious family, his line of descent is well known. Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gutman of Sudilkov was another son of Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev. We located a direct son-after-son descendant of Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gutman, by the name of Zvi Gutman, who agreed to take a Y-DNA test.

Zvi Gutman's Y-DNA test results were found to be a close genetic match to the Y-DNA test results of all three Vulis descendants.²⁷ These Y-DNA test results provide strong evidence verifying that Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev and Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Sudilkov were brothers, and that Avrum Vulis was the son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, and not the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev.

Discussion

There has been some question as to whether Rabbi Avraham of Skvira and Avrum Vulis were confused in the rabbinical sources, and whether they may have, in fact, been the same person.²⁸ When evaluating this question, there are several relevant facts to consider:

- 1) Avrum Vulis was listed in the 1850 Skvira census as a merchant.²⁹ He officially transferred from Tetiev to Skvira relatively late in life, in 1842, at age 52, and he died there before 1856. Rabbis generally acquire their titles from the place where they lived the main part of their lives and where they practiced as a rabbi. This raises the question as to whether Avrum Vulis would have become known by the title of Rabbi Avraham of Skvira.

- 2) Most rabbinical sources state that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira was a son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev. Based on the census information, Avrum Vulis was the son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, and this was verified by the Y-DNA data. Therefore, Avrum Vulis was not the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev but the son of Sima Chisha, and a maternal grandson of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev.
- 3) Rabbinical sources state that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's elder sister was Sima Chisha. Since Sima Chisha was the mother of Avrum Vulis, if the rabbinical sources regarding Rabbi Avraham of Skvira are correct, then he and Avrum Vulis could not physically be the same person.
- 4) The daughter of Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, Feyga Yenta, was found on the 1848 Kishinev census, as well as on her husband's Rabbi Shimon Shlomo (Giterman) of Savran-Chechelnik's will, which confirms rabbinical sources and provides compelling evidence of Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's existence.
- 5) Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, son of Aharon of Tetiev, was not recorded on the 1850 Skvira census.³⁰ Assuming that this means that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira passed away prior to 1850, he could not then be Avrum Vulis, who was alive at the time of the 1850 Skvira census.
- 6) According to rabbinical sources, after Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's death, his Chassidim became followers of his son-in-law, Rabbi Shimon Shlomo (Giterman) of Savran-Chechelnik, son of Rabbi Moshe Tzvi of Savran. Rabbi Shimon Shlomo died in 1848, which means that his father-in-law, Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, passed away prior to 1848. Hence, Rabbi Avraham of Skvira could not be Avrum Vulis, who was alive at the time of the 1850 Skvira census.

The latter three points are particularly noteworthy. Although Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, himself, was not found on the Medzhibozh, Skvira, or Tetiev censuses, his daughter, Feyga Yenta was found on the 1848 Kishinev census, which provides compelling evidence of his existence. Equally compelling is the fact that after Rabbi Avraham of Skvira's death, his Chassidim became followers of his son-in-law, Rabbi Shimon Shlomo (Giterman) of Savran-Chechelnik. This well-established historical fact is also cited in the rabbinical sources.

Rabbi Shlomo died in 1848, which means that his father-in-law, Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, passed away sometime prior to 1848, and most likely before 1834, as he was not found on the 1834 Skvira census. This provides convincing evidence that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira could not be Avrum Vulis, who was alive at the time of the 1850 Skvira census. Taken together, these facts effectively rule out the possibility that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira and Avrum Vulis were the same person.

There are many reasons why *yichus* and Y-DNA tell different stories.³¹ Through our experience conducting Y-DNA studies of rabbinical lineages and dynasties, we have encountered many lineages that were thought to be patrilineal but were not. Some were due to a son-in-law acquiring the surname.^{32, 33} Some were due to unreliable oral histories,³⁴ some were due to errors in the rabbinical sources,³⁵ and some were due to mistakes in the paper trail.³⁶

In nearly all these cases, research of the Russian archives enabled us to pinpoint the source of these lineage errors, once they were revealed by the Y-DNA tests.³⁷

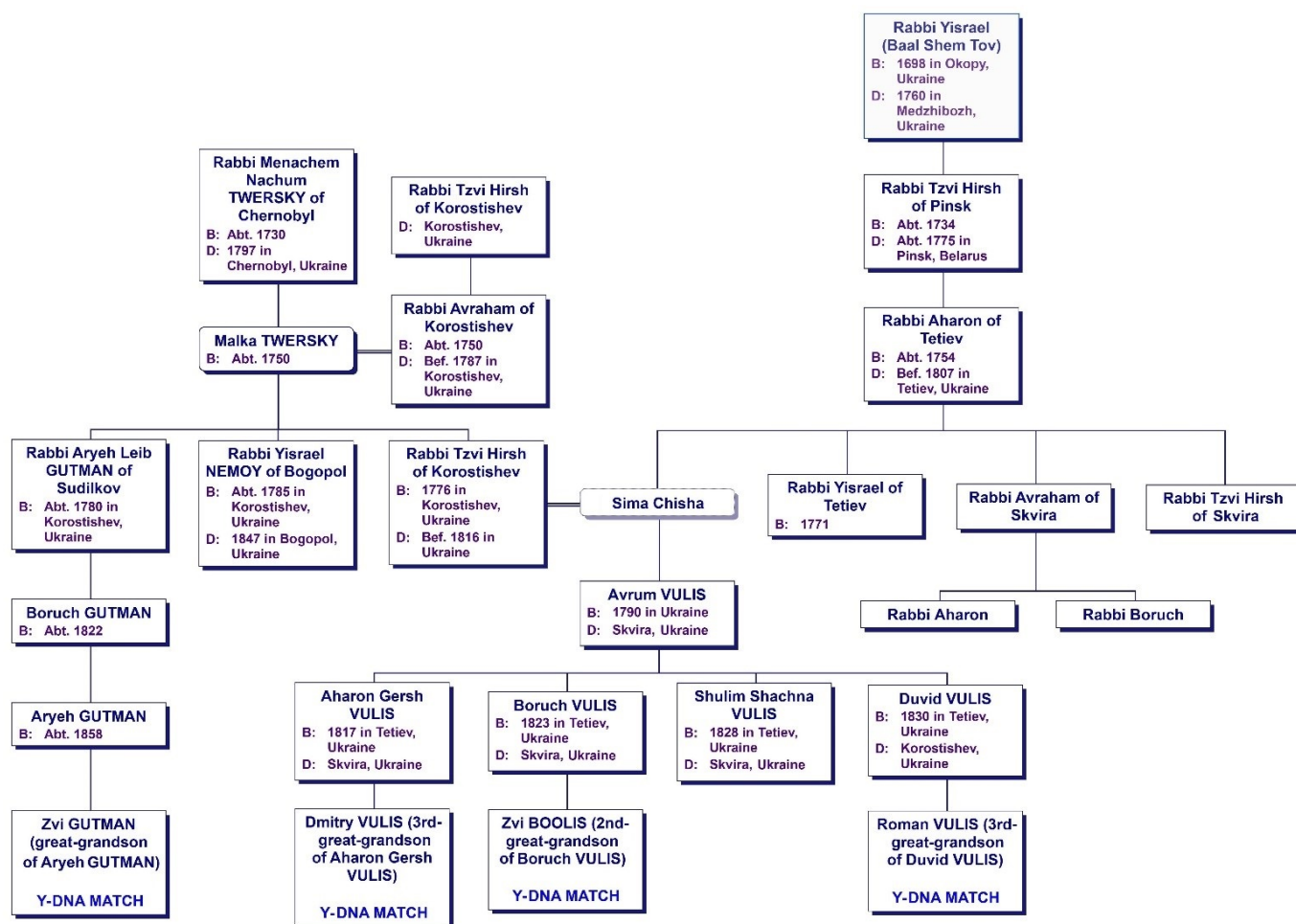
In this case, the source of the error in the lineage appears to arise from confusion between Rabbi Avraham of Skvira (who was the brother of Sima Chisha and the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev), and Avrum Vulis (who was the son of Sima Chisha and Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev). Both were descendants of the Baal Shem Tov, both had the same given name, both were born at approximately the same time, and both lived in the same places – in the town of Skvira, and even in the same household of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev.

It is, therefore, theoretically possible that Sima Chisha raised both her younger brother Avraham, and her son Avrum, in the same household (the home of her second husband, Rabbi Boruch of Medzhibozh). Having two boys of roughly the same age, in the same household, with the same given name, could certainly lead to confusion of their identities by the rabbinical sources.

Based upon the totality of the evidence provided by the rabbinical sources, censuses, and Y-DNA data, we revised the Baal Shem Tov's family tree as shown in Figure 8. Because we conclude that Rabbi Avraham of Skvira and Avrum Vulis were two separate and distinct people, both are shown in their respective branches of the Baal Shem Tov's family tree in the figure.

Figure 8

Vulis Line of Descent from Baal Shem Tov from Rabbinical Sources, Census Information, and Y-DNA Data



Future Research

We are in the process of corroborating our findings by testing a descendant from another branch of Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev's family. Along with Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev and Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gutman of Sudilkov, Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev had a third son, Rabbi Yisrael of Bogopol (now Pervomaysk).

We are currently trying to locate a living patrilineal descendant of Rabbi Yisrael of Bogopol, son of Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev, for Y-DNA testing. His descendants adopted the surname Nemoy. If the Y-DNA test results from a descendant of the Nemoy line genetically match those of the Gutman and Vulis lines, this will enable us to validate the Y-DNA genetic signature of Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev.

In addition to the Vulis line, research in the Chernobyl censuses has enabled us to identify several additional branches of the Baal Shem Tov's family tree from which there may be son-after-son descendants, including Birenbaum, Drukar, Prasol/Prosol/Parasol, and Rabin. We welcome information on any of these, or other lines of descent from the Baal Shem Tov, in which patrilineal descendants might be identified and tested.

We are currently in the process of identifying patrilineal descendants from some of these branches, for the purpose of Y-DNA testing. If the Y-DNA results from any two of these branches genetically match, we will have succeeded in identifying the Y-DNA genetic signature for the Baal Shem Tov's patrilineal lineage.

Conclusions

Based upon the totality of the evidence from rabbinical sources, Russian censuses, and Y-DNA testing, we draw the following main conclusions:

- Avrum Vulis and the Vulis family are descendants of the Baal Shem Tov through his mother, Sima Chisha, the daughter of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev.
- Avrum Vulis was the son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, and not the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev.
- Avrum Vulis, the son of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, and Rabbi Avraham of Skvira, the son of Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev, were two separate and distinct individuals.

The confusion between Rabbi Avraham of Skvira and Avrum Vulis is an unfortunate consequence of the ambiguous nature of rabbinical sources, which rarely contain surnames, wives' names, or dates and places of birth and death. Because they had the same given name, were approximately the same age, were closely related, lived next-door to one another, and had two sons with the same given name, it is easy to understand how the two rabbis may have been confused, particularly in light of the fact that the earliest rabbinical sources regarding Rabbi Avraham of Skvira were not contemporaneous, and appeared at least fifty years after his death.

In cases where rabbinical sources are relied upon as a source of lineage information, it is important to obtain information from other independent sources, such as censuses, to verify that information. Y-DNA testing is also a powerful tool that can be used to either verify or disprove the patrilineal line of descent. In this research study, these lines of evidence were invaluable in clarifying the Vulis line of descent from the Baal Shem Tov.

Taken together, the census and Y-DNA evidence prove that Avrum Vulis could not have been a patrilineal descendant of the Baal Shem Tov, but he nevertheless has quite an impressive *yichus*. He was the great-great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov through his mother, Sima Chisha, the great-grandson of Rabbi Menachem Nachum Twersky of Chernobyl through his father, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Korostishev, and the paternal grandson of Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev.³⁸

Acknowledgments

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Jeffrey Mark Paull: "Y-DNA Research Studies of Rabbinical Lineages and Their Importance to Jewish Genealogy." https://www.academia.edu/38296562/Y-DNA_Research_Studies_of_Rabbinical_Lineages_and_Their_Importance_to_Jewish_Genealogy.
 - ² Eliezer ha-Cohen: *Sefer Knas Sofrim*, p. 74. Printed in Lemberg (Lviv), Ukraine, 1898.
 - ³ Yaakov Meshulam Nik (Jacob M. Nik): *Khal Chasidim Hachodosh*, pp. 84-85. Printed in Przemyśl, 1902.
 - ⁴ Levi Ha-Levi Grossman, Editor: *Shem ve-Shearit*, pp. 58-60. Betzalel Printers, Tel Aviv, Israel, 1943.
 - ⁵ This information is incorrect; based on the 1815, 1834, and 1850 Chernobyl censuses, Rabbi Aharon of Chernobyl's second wife was Chana Malka (b. 1796), the daughter of Sima Chisha. Chana Malka's father, as listed in the 1850 census was Gershko (Tzvi Hirsch).
 - ⁶ Yitzchak Alfassi: *Ha-Hasidut mi-Dor le-Dor*, pp. 47-52. Machon Da'at Yosef Printers, Jerusalem, Israel, 1995.
 - ⁷ Rabbi Shmiel Gruber: "Menachem Nuchim, Son of Tzvi Hirsh, Son of Yisrael – the Source." Email communication to Jeffrey Briskman, August 12, 2018. According to a *yichus* letter of Rabbi Mordechai Olin that was attached to the email, Rabbi Aharon of Tetiev also had a third son, Yisrael. This Yisrael was most likely named after the Baal Shem Tov.
 - ⁸ Naftali Aharon Vekshtein: *Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov of Medzhibozh*, pp. 19-20; 37-44, World Collection of Family Genealogies, Ashdod, Israel, 2010.
 - ⁹ Census information confirms this information from rabbinical sources. The 1850 Chernobyl census lists Aharon Twersky's wife, Chana Malka, daughter of Gershko (Tzvi Hirsh), age 61. The 1834 Chernobyl census lists Aharon Twersky's wife, Malka Chana, age 38. The 1815 Chernobyl census lists Aharon Twersky's second wife, Chana Malka, age 20. Hence, Chana Malka was born c. 1795.
 - ¹⁰ 1804 Census for Tarascha District (Tetiev): Kiev Archive, Fond 1248, Inventory 1, File 11.
 - ¹¹ Gershko's son Avrum was listed as being age 6 in the 1804 Tetiev census. He was listed as being age 44 in the 1834 Tetiev census, which also stated that he was age 26 in the 1816 census. He was listed as being age 61 in the 1850 Skvira census. The latter three censuses give an age-derived birth year for Avrum of c. 1790. This leads us to the conclusion that the ages listed in the 1804 Tetiev census were at the time of the previous 1796 census. The 1804 Tetiev census, which contained males only, appeared to be taken for the specific purpose of taxation, rather than for population enumeration purposes.

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- ¹² 1820 Census for Tetiev of Tarascha District: Kiev Archive, Fond 1248, Inventory 1, File 73.
- ¹³ 1835 Census for Tetiev of Tarascha District: Kiev Archive, Fond 1248, Inventory 1, File 152. The census, which listed males only, was probably conducted for military purposes. It referred to both the 1816 and 1834 main censuses.
- ¹⁴ 1850 Census for Skvira District (Skvira): Kiev Archive, Fond 280, Inventory 2, File 1012.
- ¹⁵ Rabbi Yehuda ben Chaim Landa: *Sefer Tehilim -- Diglei Hodaya v'haMitzvot, Pranomeranten* (List of Donors). Aryeh Leib Shapiro, Editor, Shapiro Printing House, Zhitomir, Ukraine, 1866.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Jeffrey Mark Paull: "Connecting to the Great Rabbinic Families through Y-DNA: A Case Study of the Polonsky Rabbinical Lineage." AVOTAYNU: The International Review of Jewish Genealogy, Vol. XXIX, No. 3, Fall 2013.
- ¹⁸ Jeffrey Mark Paull and Jeffrey Briskman: "Connecting to the Great Rabbinic Families through Y-DNA: The Savran-Bendery Chassidic Dynasty." Surname DNA Journal, May 31, 2015.
- ¹⁹ Jeffrey Mark Paull, Neil Rosenstein, and Jeffrey Briskman: "The Y-DNA Genetic Signature and Ethnic Origin of the Katzenellenbogen Rabbinical Lineage." Avotaynu Online, March 7, 2016.
- ²⁰ Jeffrey Mark Paull and Jeffrey Briskman: "Identifying the Genetic Fingerprint of a *Tzaddik* that Touched the World: The Shpoler Zeida." Avotaynu Online, July 1, 2016.
- ²¹ Jeffrey Mark Paull, Jeffrey Briskman, and Yitzchak Meyer Twersky: "The Y-DNA Genetic Signature and Ethnic Origin of the Twersky Chassidic Dynasty." Avotaynu Online, September 11, 2017.
- ²² Jeffrey Mark Paull, Jeffrey Briskman, and Susan K. Steeble: "The Y-DNA Genetic Signature and Ethnic Origin of the Shapiro Rabbinical Lineage (Pre-Publication Draft)." https://www.academia.edu/38073682/The_Y-DNA_Genetic_Signature_and_Ethnic_Origin_of_the_Shapiro_Rabbinical_Lineage.
- ²³ Jeffrey Mark Paull, Jeffrey Briskman, and Susan K. Steeble: "The Y-DNA Genetic Signature and Ethnic Origin of Rabbi Raphael of Bershad." https://www.academia.edu/35130835/The_Y-DNA_Genetic_Signature_and_Ethnic_Origin_of_Rabbi_Raphael_of_Bershad.
- ²⁴ Jeffrey Mark Paull: "Y-DNA Research Studies of Rabbinical Lineages and Their Importance to Jewish Genealogy." https://www.academia.edu/38296562/Y-DNA_Research_Studies_of_Rabbinical_Lineages_and_Their_Importance_to_Jewish_Genealogy.

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- ²⁵ Dmitry Vulis: "Vulis Family Tree." Email communication with Merrill Weber, October 27, 2011. "According to him [Dmitry's uncle, Mikhail Vulis] my great-grandfather Israel was absolutely certain that he was Baal Shem Tov's descendant in the 7th generation via the direct male line and he could even name all persons in between his famous ancestor and himself. Unfortunately, this knowledge wasn't transferred further."
- ²⁶ Olga Nikiforova: "Vulis Family History." Email communication with Jeffrey Briskman, May 3, 2016. "My grandfather [Israel Vulis] was a very pious man and, according to what my aunts said, took a great pride in the fact that he had the same name as Israel Baal Sham Tov and was his 7th-generation direct descendant in the male line."
- ²⁷ According to the FTDNA time predictor model, the probability that the most recent common ancestor between Zvi Gutman and the three pedigreed Vulis descendants lived between 7 and 8 generations ago was estimated to be between 80.9 and 97.3 percent. Based on our experience conducting Y-DNA studies of rabbinical lines, these results conform to the expected probability estimates for descendants of cousinly lines, based upon how many generations ago their common patrilineal ancestor, Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev, lived.
- ²⁸ Merrill Weber: "Your DNA Analysis of the Vulis Family." Email communication with Jeffrey Mark Paull and Jeffrey Briskman, September 21, 2019. In the email message, Merrill states: "I have re-created the family tree focusing on Avraham Vulis, with the assumption that he is the same person as Avraham of Skvira."
- ²⁹ 1850 Census for Skvira District (Skvira): Kiev Archive, Fond 280, Inventory 2, File 1012. Avrum Vulis was listed as a member of the merchant class on the 1850 Skvira census. According to the "Regulation on the Arrangement of Jews of 1804," all Jews were obliged to be inscribed in the census as belonging to one of four categories: farmers, artisans, merchants, and burgers (town inhabitants). Most rabbis in the Russian Empire were therefore recorded as merchants.
- ³⁰ There are other explanations for why an individual might not be recorded on a census, other than death. Jews living in the Russian Empire were assigned the community to which they belonged, based upon the community to which their father belonged. In general, this assignment to a community could not be changed, except for certain merchant classes, or upon completion of military service. Hence, if an individual later moved to a different community, they would not be included in that community's census, but rather, in the census for the community to which they originally belonged.
- ³¹ Jeffrey Mark Paull, Jeffrey Briskman, Susan K. Steeble, and Yitzchak Meyer Twersky: "When Y-DNA and Yichus Tell Different Stories." https://www.academia.edu/33977075/When_Y-DNA_and_Yichus_Tell_Different_Stories.

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- ³² Jeffrey Mark Paull and Jeffrey Briskman: "Identifying the Genetic Fingerprint of a *Tzaddik* that Touched the World: The Shpoler Zeida." Avotaynu Online, July 1, 2016.
- ³³ Jeffrey Mark Paull, Jeffrey Briskman, and Yitzchak Meyer Twersky: "The Y-DNA Genetic Signature and Ethnic Origin of the Twersky Chassidic Dynasty." Avotaynu Online, September 11, 2017.
- ³⁴ Jeffrey Mark Paull, Neil Rosenstein, and Jeffrey Briskman: "The Y-DNA Genetic Signature and Ethnic Origin of the Katzenellenbogen Rabbinical Lineage." Avotaynu Online, March 7, 2016.
- ³⁵ Jeffrey Mark Paull *et al.*, "When Y-DNA and Yichus Tell Different Stories." *Op cit.*
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ A perfect example of this involved the Savran-Hager dynasty, who claim that their paternal ancestor, Baruch (born c. 1820), was a son of Shimon Shlomo Giterman II (c. 1811–1848), son of Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Giterman of Savran, and also a descendant of the Baal Shem Tov, through Shimon Shlomo's wife, Feyga Yenta (née Vulis).

Two descendants from different branches of the Savran-Hager family were tested, and their Y-DNA matched. They belong to the J-M172 haplogroup. However, their Y-DNA did not match the Y-DNA genetic signature or haplogroup (E-L117) of the Savran-Bendery Chassidic dynasty, from which they claim to be paternally descended.

These Y-DNA results led us to take a closer look at the Hager family tree, and to research the genealogical records and documentation of their descent from the Giterman lineage. Our findings indicate that Baruch cannot be a son of Shimon Shlomo II and a paternal grandson of Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Giterman. He cannot, therefore, be a descendant of the Baal Shem Tov through Shimon Shlomo's wife, Feyga Yenta Vulis.

- ³⁸ The lead author, Jeffrey Mark Paull, also descends from Rabbi Avraham of Korostishev through his daughter, Leah, who married Rabbi Aryeh Leib Wertheim, ABD of Bender, Moldova. Their daughter, Sima, married Rabbi Eliyahu Pinchas Polonsky, ABD of Ekaterinopol, Ukraine, who was the 4th-great-grandfather of the author.

Dr. Jeffrey Mark Paull was born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA. He earned his BS in Chemistry and Master of Science in Industrial Hygiene from the University of Pittsburgh, and his MPH and Doctorate of Public Health (DRPH) from the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. Dr. Paull's career as an environmental toxicologist and scientific expert in the field of occupational and environmental health spans over thirty years (1976–2008).

Since that time, Dr. Paull has devoted himself to his passion for genealogical research and writing. His first book, entitled: *A Noble Heritage: The History and Legacy of the Polonsky and Paull Family in America*, traces his family's ancestry over a millennium of history, and discovers their lost rabbinical heritage from the Shapiro-Treves rabbinical lineage that descends from Rashi (1040–1105). His book was featured on the PBS website, "Finding your Roots, with Henry Louis Gates, Jr."

Dr. Paull is very active in the field of genetic genealogy and has published numerous pioneering autosomal and Y-DNA research studies in which he has identified the unique genetic signature of some of Eastern Europe's most renowned rabbinical lineages. In addition to his genealogical research studies of historic rabbinical lines, Dr. Paull conducted a pioneering Y-DNA research study of the patrilineal lineage of John Hart, one of America's Founding Fathers, and the thirteenth signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Jeff's many genealogy-related book chapters, research articles, and publications are available online at Academia.edu (<https://independent.academia.edu/JeffreyMarkPaull>), where they have surpassed 36,000 views. Jeff is a highly sought-after speaker, and he has presented talks on his pioneering genealogical research studies to many genealogical societies, and international genealogy conferences around the world.

Dr. Jeffrey Briskman was born and raised in Kursk, Russia. He attended Kursk State Technical University, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheba, Israel, and Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, NJ, from which he holds a Doctorate in Pharmacy. Dr. Briskman is fluent in Russian and Hebrew, has obtained and translated hundreds of Russian census documents and vital records, and has contributed to numerous independent and JewishGen genealogical research projects. In addition to his collaboration with Dr. Paull on many pioneering genetic genealogy research studies, he is co-authoring their forthcoming book: *God on Trial: The Life, Legends, and Descendants of the Shpoler Zeida*.