

International Conference on Jewish Genealogy , Jerusalem 2015.

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Rabbinical Genealogy – Doubts and Errors

Presentation of recent research which has revealed previously unknown or unavailable sources and led to a reassessment of rabbinic genealogies.

Such reassessment has been facilitated by access to archives in countries such as the former Soviet Union and its associated Eastern Block countries.

Rabbinical genealogical research should take into account critical research that has been conducted by scholars, both close to the time of writing of some of the early classical sources and often printed as appendices to those works, as well as modern critical analyses.

Of particular note is the work of Rabbi Shlomo Englard of Bnei Brak, Israel who has devoted his scholarly research to the task of verifying traditional lines of descent of the famous rabbinical families. To this purpose he has re-analyzed the sources quoted by the authors of rabbinical genealogies as the bases for the lines of descent presented by them sources.

Rabbi Meir Wunder composed an analysis of faults in the research of prominent nineteenth century rabbinic genealogists. See RAVSIG site <http://www.jewishgen.org/rabbinic/journal/wunder.htm> “In the second half of the 19th century, we do have famous experts in rabbinic genealogy, but even so, their writings include guesses, assumptions, and mistakes”.

Examples:

1)The **Maharal of Prague's** traditional descent from King David is based on an incorrect or forged reading of the date on a tombstone in Prague.

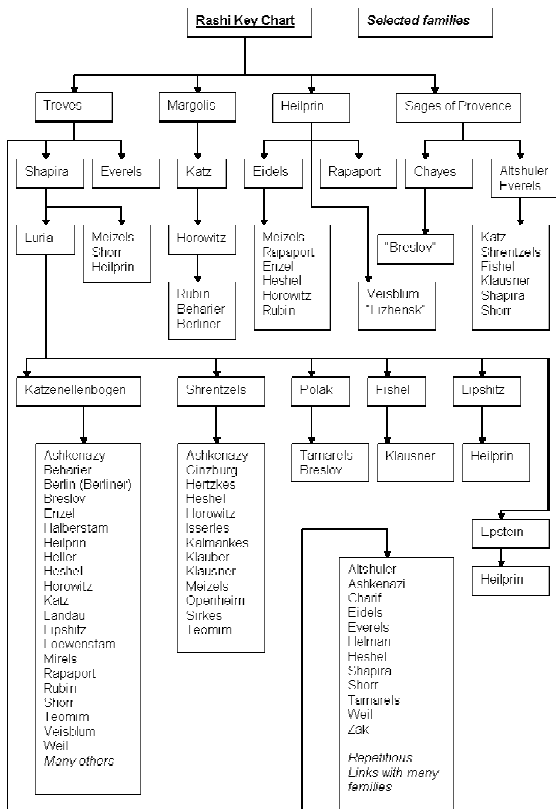
This has serious implications for many rabbinic families descended from the Maharal. (Published in "Avotaynu" Volume XXII Number 1, Spring 2006.)



Tombstone of Rabbi Liva “The Elder” excavated to show date of death .

Liva (Yehudah Leib) “the Elder” Died 1440 or 1540
Chaim
Betzalel
Yehuda Leib “Maharal of Prague” Born c. 1522 Died 1608

2) **Descent from Rashi** via the families Treves, Shapira, Luria, Katzenellenbogen.
<http://www.davidicdynasty.org/descendant-family-trees/>



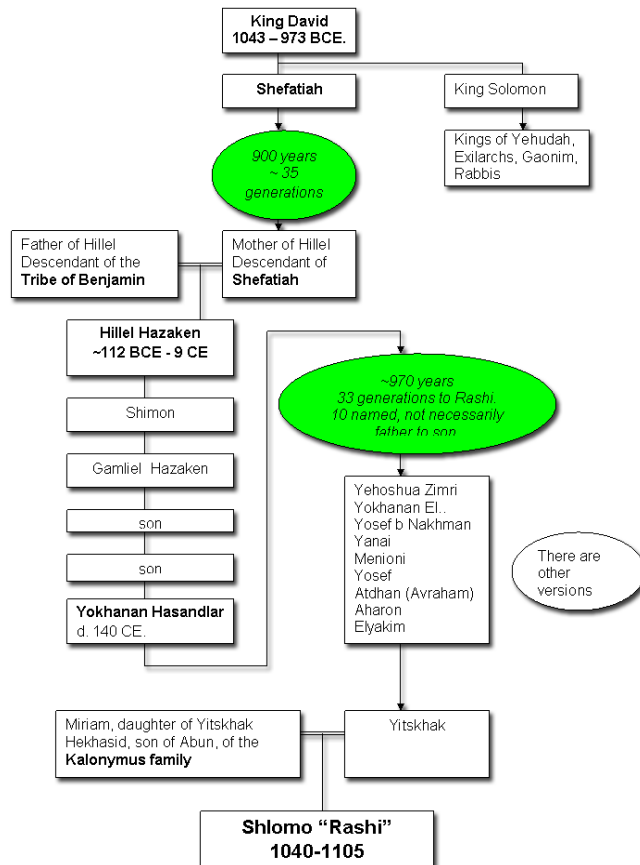
3) **Families claiming Davidic descent.**

Opinion of David Einseidler:
“Careful examination of all available sources leads to the inescapable conclusion that there is no complete, reliable and positive proof of claims of descent from King David. Perhaps there is a middle road between Conservative genealogists and Traditional Genealogists who value religious tradition. ”

Avotaynu, Vol. IX, No. 2, page 34 (1993)

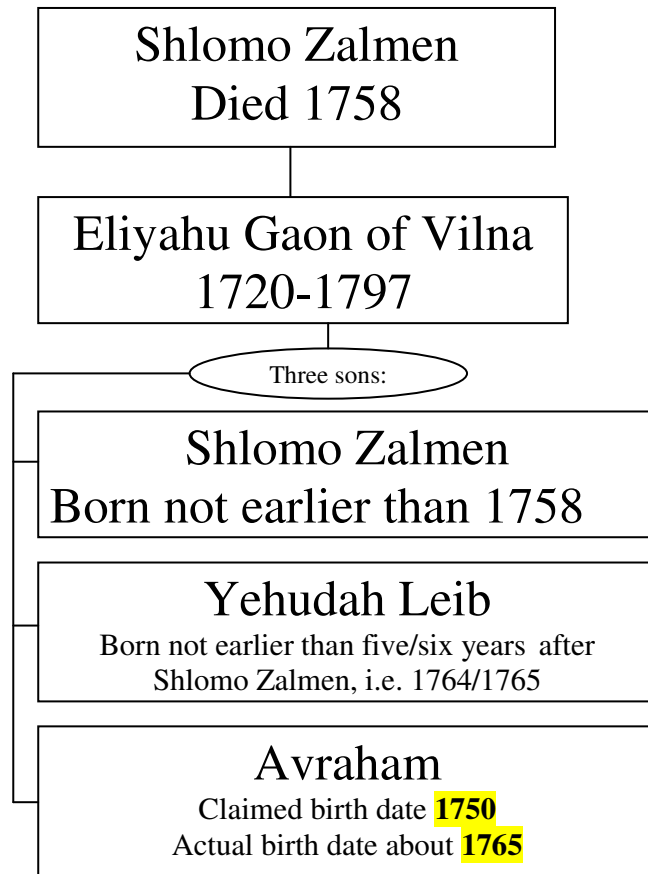
http://www.jewishgen.org/Rabbinic/journal/descent_part2.htm

The traditional descent of Rashi has many unknown generations



4) The family of the Vilna Gaon, erroneous family traditions and amendments necessitated by recently available documents such as Eighteenth Century Census lists.





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5) **Kremer - the Vilna Gaon had no surname** Despite a common misconception, the Gaon had no surname and "Kremer" or "Kramer" was a nickname applied to his ancestor Rabbi Moshe "Kremer" of Vilna because he had a stall in the market.

6) **Jaffe Family Descent from Rashi**. The misreading of a source led to the tradition held by the Jaffe family of their descent from Rashi.

7) **Multiple people with same name** a) It would appear that Yoel of Brisk, Yoel of Bykhov and Yoel of Szebrezin were three separate individuals, although related via the Bakh and the Taz. b) Various sources pertaining to the *Shaagas Arye*.

8) **The Chacham Tzvi – was he descended from King David ?**

9) **“Geni”** multiple contributors who perpetuate incorrect relationships, often without quoting sources. . Whilst GENI has been useful in finding some clues, it has much disinformation which people may not be aware of.

10) **Rabbi Moshe Isserles “Rema” non-descent from Shrentzels. Eliezer vs Elazar.** Englard has claimed that because the Rabbi Moshe Isserles, known as the “Remo” ‘s mother’s father in some sources appears as *Elazar and not Eliezer* as claimed by several genealogists,