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The Shtetl of Dolina and the Origins of the Weinbergs, by Rabbi Dr. Norbert Weinberg

By Carol Hoffman On September 7, 2013 · 2 Comments · In Article

The Jews of Dolina, Galicia (now Dolyna, Ivano-Frankivsk region,Ukraine) trace their origins back to the times of the Polish kings who had conquered the Ukrainian territories to their southeast.

Jews served the Polish nobility as their agents in administering the new lands they had conquered under a system known as “arenda”; the Jews obtained a lease on the lands, and in exchange for the payments were able to collect fees from the local Cossacks for use of the land for farming. In 1648, the Ukrainian Cossacks that had come under Polish domination revolted against their Polish overlords; in the process they carried out extensive massacres of Jews, whom they saw as agents of the hated Poles. (Centuries later, this long-simmering conflict between Poles and Ukrainians would create the perfect storm that made genocide that much easier

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**Events on
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Keeping the
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for the Nazis). The borders of the Ottoman Empire at this time ended at the Dniester River near the town of Dolina, and it is recorded that the Cossacks sacked this town as well.

At some point, Sephardic Jews came as administrators or merchants into those territories.

My uncle, Dr. Benjamin Weinberg (Munio),



an attorney who traveled extensively in the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire searched ancient land records in the town's archives. He reported having found documents dating to the 16th Century, when a progenitor of the Weinberg family, with name registered as Turteltaube, came from Turkish held regions to Dolina. Presumably, Turteltaube is a later Germanized rendition of what may have originally have been a Spanish name, perhaps akin to "Paloma" or "Tortola". This first ancestor of record established the Jewish cemetery and built a house there, which was still in use at least till 1917; the family members were always given the choicest burial plots. He opened and operated salt mines under contract from the local aristocrat. By the 17th century the first Weinberg was registered in the *Grundbuch* (land registry) of Dolina in Latin, German, and Polish. (Note: This Dolyna/Dolina is not to be confused with a current Dolina, which was formerly called Janow. Such confusion of place names is common in East Europe where cities have

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changed nations so often in the past century).

The first of the Weinbergs of whom we have greater detail, Mordecai Weinberg, was born at the time Napoleon delivered the Austrians a sound defeat in 1800. He was reported to be unusually strong, and could smash a table, but like so many of his contemporaries he made his success by his business acumen. He bought up rights to farms and owned a 100 acre farm himself. In time he established a lumber business. Typical of the Jews of his day he was devout, and was eager to support his community. He established one building in Dolina to house 3 synagogues under one roof, gave land for the Klos, a small chapel for the very pious mystics, a *Beis Midrash* (House of Study), a *Mikveh*, (ritual bathhouse), and house for bath supervisor. To each son he gave a house, and a set of Shas, Talmud, in shining leather. He then set off, at the age of 80, in 1880, with his wife, to Palestine just ahead of the Bilu (a pre-cursor to the later Zionism of Herzl). He came not as a colonialist nor as a usurper of someone else's land but as a pious Jew who wished to live his last days in the mountaintop village of Safed, home of the great Kabbalists. He brought with him his sterling silver cutlery and jewelry. Sadly he and my great-great grandmother were murdered by Arab marauders in 1896.

One of the sons to receive a Shas and a house was Hirsch Zvi Weinberg, born in 1835. He married Rachel Schumer, born in 1846, the sister of a wealthy man; and it is said that she was the businessman in the family. They operated a clothing business in Dolina. Rachel passed away in 1906, and Hirsch Zvi in 1918. They had several children. One daughter, Sarah, married the editor of the Hebrew language paper of Vienna, Jonah Gelernter. There was also Perl, whose daughters, Rachel and Ada, would make Aliyah to the Jewish settlement of Palestine, and Lippe. Another, Marcus, whom I met as a student, became a successful international import-exporter in Milan.

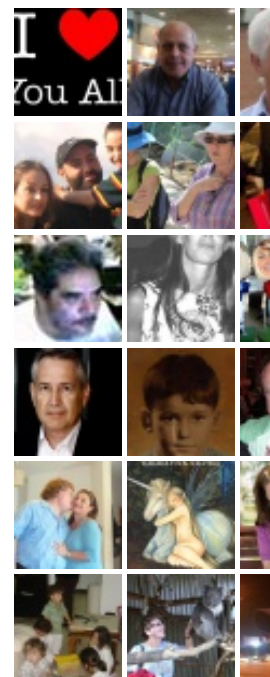
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I met my some of my father's cousins: Boaz Gelernter of New Jersey, Ada Ben Esther and Rachel Stricker of Israel. Another of my father's cousins, Wolf Weinberg, remained very pious, became a Chasid, and settled in Bnai Brak. Other relatives in the family included an attorney by the name of Geller, who wrote the Austrian law codes (perhaps this refers to Dr. Leo Geller, who authored the Oestereichische Justizgesetz and other law books towards the waning years of the Austrian Empire), a family by the name of Fox, an attorney named William Weinberg in the New York area, an Oscar Strumwasser in Los Angeles; another relative was both Rabbi of Stanislau, Poland, and a colonel in the Polish army. It is said that one relative emigrated to Argentina, became a Catholic, then a priest, and finally Archbishop of Buenos Aires!)

One of their children, Shmuel Weinberg, born in 1872 was energetic; and already as a young man had nudged his father out of the family clothing business and took over operations., One of his nieces, whom I met when I was in Israel as a college student, was impressed by something clever I had said, and commented, "I can see you are a Weinberg". That was the family reputation—sharp and clever, shrewd in business. He married Binah Zarwanitzer



a few years before the turn of the century. They had two children, first my uncle Dr. Benjamin (Munio) Weinberg, born in 1899, who became an attorney and businessman, and my father, Rabbi Dr. Wilhelm (Zeev William) Weinberg, a Zionist activist and Rabbi, born in 1901. In Dolina, he ran a General Store with ready to wear clothes, hats and food on

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ground floor; the family lived on second floor. The house had what was considered in those days, a luxury, a roof that could be opened up so that on Sukkoth a pious Jew could delight in sleeping in the Sukkah, while still being in the comfort of home. (Other Jews would have to suffice in living outside in impromptu structures with all the attendant chill of the Fall.)

He and three partners owned a bank in a second house, and a staff of one book keeper who was paid the equivalent of \$15 a month. He accrued assets of 1/2 million Austrian Krone (approximately \$US 100,000, equivalent to \$2,150,000 today. 5 Krone=2 1/2 ruble=\$1) up to outbreak of World War I. His income was derived from the purchase of bankruptcy liquidations. For example, he would purchase 1000 suits and sell them \$4,\$6,or \$8.



The entire fortune was wiped out by the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Galicia became the center of fierce fighting between the Kaiser's and the Tsar's armies. Samuel dodged being drafted into the desperate Austrian army, and fled battlefield with his family to Vienna. He came to Vienna a poor man with wife and sons to feed. He and the sons, my uncle, Benjamin, and my father, William, young teenagers, made insulation for the Austrian Army- the sons shredded paper to stuff in the coat lining.

Samuel



knew the expression of the Talmud-“*Hacham, Eynav berosho*”—The wise man keeps his eyes in front, wide open. He saw how the coat was being made, looked at the cloth, the stitching, the lining material. Within a short time he determined who were the suppliers, then went to the officials in charge of military acquisitions and sweet-talked them into a contract for manufacturing the coats. He then continued to buy up textiles and sell to other refugees. His business operation was to send silk to Poland, bring Polish merchandise to Trieste, bring rice and steel to Vienna, and around again. He eventually once again opened a small bank with easy lending policies and, among other projects, financed a flour mill. He was generally trusting, for all his acumen, and often lost much to bad borrowers. As my uncle Benjamin stated it, the word in Vienna was, “Munio cannot make money as fast as Shmuel can lose it.” Among his partners was the father of Professor Moshe Zucker, of the Jewish Theological Seminary, my teacher, and an elderly gentleman whom I met by chance one day during Sukkoth in a synagogue in the Bronx! With the Nazi Anschluss, the prelude to World War II, all was lost again. For example, he had 80,000 Marks in Fiat stock alone that would have been worth \$16,000,000 by stock market average growth.

At some point, after the Anschluss my grandmother was beaten. I have a photograph of my grandmother, her hair disheveled, a mark of some kind of trauma; it bears the stamp of the Polish consulate and I can only presume that after the Anschluss they were relegated to being citizens of their land of birth, Poland. They fled to Italy and then survived the war in Zurich, Switzerland (most of what he had saved

probably went to pay for a visa in to Switzerland) .

Binah died in Switzerland after the war. In 1950's Shmuel came to Canada to be with his son, Munio, and then commuted between son, Munio, in Canada, and son William, in the US. While always observant, he was a self-educated *Maskil* (enlightened modernist) who sent his sons to modern schooling, even while he did all his business dealings in Yiddish. He became deeply pious in his old age, studied Talmud with angels who sat at his bedside with him, left notebooks of Kabbalistic prayers, and went to Chasidic *shtiebelach* to worship. This strange confluence of ancient and modern in Shmuel Weinberg was typical of the currents that passed through European Jewry in the previous centuries.

He was the only one of my grandparents that I knew. When he stayed with us, he would sometimes walk me to school and try to help me with my Hebrew reading. We could not really communicate, since he spoke only Yiddish, and while I now can follow it, then, it was, as Shakespeare phrased it "Greek to me." Like all Jews until the rise of the State of Israel, he lived in only one city "Yerushalyaim shel Maalah", the mystic Jerusalem of eternity, and on his entry visa to the United States his nationality was "Stateless". He passed away a few days before my Bar Mitzvah in Washington, DC in October of 1961, still "Stateless".

The Zarwantizer line– How it came to be that my great-grandfather was also my great-great-grandfather and that I am my own third cousin

When the Rabbi of Dolina sent his *Gabbai* (assistant) to invite my father's grandmother to his daughter's wedding, she did not attend. When the Rabbi asked why, she replied, "You did not invite me in person; you only sent your *Gabbai*!"

Yichus—Ancestry- played a great part in Jewish circles. After all, the very Bible itself is a list of “begats” from Adam down to the lists of returnees from Babylonian captivity ; from the “ Hebrew “ Scriptures it goes on into the “ Christian” Scriptures as well. Thus it turns out that Jesus and I share the same *yichus* : King David and Aaron the first Cohen, High Priest.

While this may be wrapped in myth or faith, what is clear is that, in 11th century France, there lived the shining light of Biblical and Talmudic clarity, the Sage, Rashi, who, by tradition, was a descendant of King David. Centuries later , the descendants of Rashi became the leading Rabbinic scholars of European Jewry and prominent European intellectuals and political figures, such as Karl Marx or Lazar Kaganovich (Number Two Man in the Soviet Union under Stalin—not all is honorable). Somewhere in the mix of families there is one Rabbi Saul-Wahl Katzenellenbogen, who was reported to have been King –for- a- Day of Poland.

One of these descendants was Rabbi Yom Tov-Lippman Heller, Chief Rabbi of Prague and later Cracow in the end of the 17th century. Every popular printed edition of the Mishnah has his marginalia, the Tosafos Yom Tov , printed alongside the text; he himself was the object of false accusation by fellow Jews and persecution by Christian authorities. His daughter, Reziel, married Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Heller-Kahana, himself was a descendant of R. Nathan of Rome, a Cohen, who appended the Aramaic version, Kahana, to his name.

Years later, the Kahanas settled in Sighet or Maramarossziget, Hungary (now Sighetu Marmatei, Romania) and became the prominent Jewish family of Hungary. (Perhaps the best known native of Sighet today is the Nobel-Prize winning voice of the Shoah, Elie Wiesel, also a descendant of the same Tosafos Yom Tov). One of the descendants was a Benjamin Kahana , born around 1810; he

married a woman by the family name of Kurtz, and their daughter, Devorah, was born around 1840. In her old age, she would come to live with her daughter, Binah. My uncle recalls her making claims of “yichus”, of sleeping on only silk sheets, and referring to relatives who were “*dayyanim*”, Rabbinic judges, of the cities of Sighet, Teczo, and Huszt. All of these cities straddled the border region between Hungary and Galicia at that time and just to the south of Dolina. She had an uncle who was Rabbi of Kalusz, a town to the east of Dolina; she claimed he was revered by the local Christian peasants for his wisdom and his blessings, as “maly bozek”-a little god.” (a term which have seen old Polish website used to refer to movie stars). As my uncle recalled, she was an elderly woman when she told him these accounts, and he did not think much of it till, later on, in his travels, after the Holocaust, he met a Dayan Friedman (himself a member of the Czortkower Chasidic dynasty) from Teczo who assured him she was indeed correct. She was referring to three brothers, Rabbis Hayyim Aryeh, Joseph Mordecai, and Jacob Gedaliah Kahana, contemporaries of my great-grandmother, and from that very same region; they may have been her cousins, once or twice removed. My father kept a copy of one book, a fragment from the work by R. Joseph Mordecai, “*Divrei Tzadikim*” (Sayings of the Righteous) and I can only guess that his father had kept it as a reminder of the family connection. (She also made mention of another book,” *Revid Hazahav*”(Golden Chain), attributed in other sources to one R. Israel Dov Ber Gelernter, a work on transmigration of the soul which I found quoted in hand-written notes of my grandfather.)

How does this “yichus” enter the Weinberg clan and how does it make me my own third cousin?

Success can trump “yichus”. Moses Zarwanitzer was born in 1835 the town of Kalusz, to the east Dolina, (and where one of the Kahana family served as Rabbi). The family may have gotten its name from a

town further east, Zarwanica . Moses was both my great-grandfather through my father and my great-great grandfather through my mother. He was said to have been a tall man, and my uncle remembers him with grey bearded and pipe smoking in his old age. (Note: Kalusz in Galicia is not to be confused with Kalisz in Poland). His parents died in a plague when he was only 4 or 5 and he never attended school; without formal schooling he started in life without being born into “*yichus*”, so he had to make it on his own. He became a builder and contractor for the government and proved that intelligence and diligence beat formal schooling. He built a railway station, a slaughter house, and schools, distributed wine and liquor, opened a salt mine operation, and operated a rail line for lumber transportation from the forests to the mills; he did this all the while by keeping his reputation unsullied, and he and never broke a contract. “We never had trouble with him,” was the word . Only once was he outbid on a government job, by a Polish engineer, who then went bankrupt; he took over the job and succeeded. (A brother of his owned a lumber mill near the railway, 40 miles away from Dolina, and also produced barrels. He passed away when he was in his high 90’s, in 1941. He had 5 sons and 1 daughter, all of whom died in the Holocaust).

He became President of the *Kultusgemeinde* (Jewish community) of Dolina and kept the Keter Torah (the silver crown placed on the scroll during the service) in his house for safe keeping. His first wife, a woman whose name I could not find in my records, would be my great-great grandmother, through the daughter born to them, Sossia, my great-grandmother, through her son, Nachman Gottdenker, my grandfather on my mother’s side (he would marry a great-granddaughter of Rabbi Akiba Eger). The first wife, however, died at a young age, and my grandfather by this time had become a prominent leader of his community. He had created his own “*yichus*”. Therefore, he came to ask for Devorah Kahana’s hand. They had a daughter, Binah, who

married Shmuel. Moses also had a son, Judah, whether from the first or the second wife, I cannot tell.

His son, like his father before him, was also President of the Dolina Jewish community after him. Judah remained close friends with his nephew, through his sister, Sossia, Nachman Norbert Gottdenker. (Norbert Gottdenker married Helena Iger (the descendant of Rabbi Akiba Eger) and had two children, Irene and Karol.



William and Irene married and I, Norbert Weinberg, am their son.)

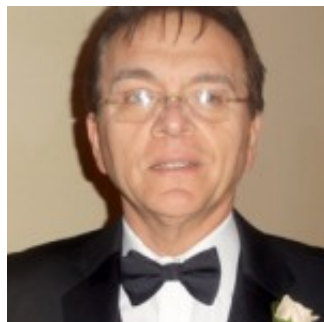
Moses and Devorah had a daughter, Binah, or Biniah as she was sometimes called, was born in 1876. She was the only other grandparent, besides her husband Shmuel, to have survived the Holocaust, but she, too, passed away before I could know her. I have only a few recollections about her from my father.

When he was a young man, in Austria, he was an eager Zionist pioneer. He volunteered for *Hachsharah* (Preparation Camp) and spent time on a farm, preparing to be a *chalutz*, pioneer, in Israel. He gave up on his dream when he realized that his mother wouldn't stop crying. When my father went to Berlin to Rabbinical School, Binah baked a special cake for him and packed it in his suitcase. When he arrived, he unpacked everything into the dresser in his room. At the end of the school year, he dutifully repacked his belongings, only to

find the cake, still uneaten, in the drawer. When she and Shmuel were living in Switzerland, my mother, Irene



young and beautiful, wrote her, “I don’t understand your son. Here I am, an attractive young woman, and he shows no interest in me. Tell him to look at me.” She told him and he proposed. She died a few years after the end of World War II. My father explained that she had suffered so much from worry for her children when they were in exile deep in the farthest regions of the Soviet Union, that when she knew they were well, the strain took its toll on her heart. When my uncle, Munio, was in his high 80’s, he took the long and uncomfortable flight to Zurich. He claimed it was to exchange dollars for Swiss francs. He really went to visit her graveside.



Rabbi Dr. Norbert Weinberg has had a distinguished career in the Rabbinate and in education and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinities, *honoris causa*, by his alma mater the Jewish Theological Seminary in recognition of his service.

He and his wife, Ofra, run the Huntington Learning Center School Services in Encino where they work with children in providing supplementary education for children under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. From 1996 till 2013 they ran the private students program at the center as well.

He is currently working on historical research on the Jews of 20th Century Europe, "The Courage of the Spirit: The story of Europe's Jewry in the 20th Century, from family accounts and documents". His work is posted on line at <http://www.courageofspirit.com>. He is President of A Place to Care, a new social media service for health and wellness, <http://www.aplacetocare.org> and has set up a resource group on the site for families of Holocaust survivors to share concerns and suggestions as they seek help for their aging relatives. He authors the blog, Courage of the Spirit, <http://www.courageofthespirit.com>

He served as Rabbi to Hollywood Temple Beth El in Los Angeles from 1990 to 1996 where his main focus was the integration of the new wave of Russian Jewish immigrants into American Jewish life. Prior to that, he directed the Central Institute for Jewish Studies at Bet Berl, Israel, under the auspices of Israel's Federation of Labor. His mandate was to help bridge the gap between the secular and religious Jews within the labor movement and to emphasize Jewish societal values. He has also served as Rabbi in Whittier, California, Newport-News, Virginia, and Houston, Texas.

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Norbert Weinberg says:

September 8, 2013 at 18:35

For more background on Dolina, you can see the following from my blog <http://www.courageofspirit.com>

:

Growing Up in the Shtetl

<http://www.courageofspirit.com/2010/12/2-growing-up-in-shtetl.html>

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Norbert Weinberg says:

September 8, 2013 at 18:55



PS. Personal update. Our social and wellness website "A Place to Care" is now being transformed into Live360, which is not yet live. We believe it will provide an information sharing platform that, among other services, will help children of Holocaust survivors who are looking after their elderly parents or grandparents, share valuable information.

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