

# Brothers, Cousins—or Both: A Family Brainteaser

by H. Daniel Wagner

My grandmother, Dobcia-Dora Baum, was the great-granddaughter of Mosiek Baum and Ronia Kumec. Dora, who left this world in 1985, had a great sense of humor and would have enjoyed this genealogical tale about her ancestors. I never taped my conversations with her, but her joyful laughter has remained with me.

This article describes some tricky research that goes a bit beyond the typical complications of Jewish genealogical investigations in the Polish archives. Reminiscent of the theatrical world, this true story has both an amusing and a sad aspect (many premature deaths). The setting is Konskie, a shtetl in the Kielce area. In 1832, the local rabbi, Mendel Kumec, and his wife, Dwojra, wed their 16-year-old daughter, Ronia, to 18-year-old Mosiek Baum from Wyszogrod. The wedding is officially registered at the *Ursząd Stanu Cwilnego* (civil registration office) in the town hall. Metrical data and other sources reveal that seven children were born of this union: Nusin Leyb (1834), Aron Tobias (1837), Sura Chana (1840), Mendel Hersz (1843), Lejzer (circa 1858), Dwojra (circa 1859) and Abram (circa 1862).

At this point, a perceptive reader may have noticed the regular three-year span between each of the first four children and the more erratic distribution of dates between each of the last three (whose birth dates are not precisely known and were estimated from marriage documents). No doubt the reader will have wondered about the 15-year gap between the fourth and fifth child.

These puzzles are augmented when one discovers, in the Konskie data, that Ronia continued to give birth until 1862—even though she had died in 1854, as attested by her official death certificate! Despite the existence of the death certificate, Ronia's name appears as the mother in all of her children's documents (under various forms Ronia-Rojza-Rajca, etc.). Finding the solution to this obvious paradox proved to be a complex task that required careful re-reading of all of the microfilmed reels of Konskie records. As you will see, the sharp eye of Dolores Ring, a fellow Konskie researcher, provided the key clue.

I describe here, as clearly as possible, the sequence of events and mention those that are fully documented as well as those that currently are not supported by proof. To make things more understandable, see the accompanying figure and table.

When I examined the Konskie metrical data, I quickly noticed another family named Kumec in Konskie: Uszer and Frajdlia Kumec, who had a daughter, Ruchla Rajca, born in 1828. Thus, both Rabbi Mendel and Uszer had

daughters with approximately the same name, and since Mendel's mother also was Rojza, I suspect (but cannot prove) that Uszer and Rabbi Mendel were brothers.

In 1844, Uszer's daughter married Szlama Hersz Piotrkowski. The couple had a daughter, Rywka, in 1847. At this point, the reader may speculate that Szlama Hersz will die and his wife, Ruchla Rajca, will happily wed Mosiek Baum, end of story. Wrong!

In fact, it is Ruchla Rajca who dies in 1848 at age 20, and Szlama Hersz Piotrkowski becomes a widower with a year-old daughter at age 22. Then, quite mysteriously, we can find no trace of Szlama Hersz Piotrkowski any longer—or indeed of any Piotrkowski—in the Konskie microfilms! Well, perhaps Szlama Hersz left Konskie in search of brighter and happier skies.

Wrong again. Scanning through the Konskie films, Dolores Ring found a Szlama Hersz Manowicz with the same set of parents as Szlama Hersz Piotrkowski. This man must have been the same Szlama Hersz, who decided for some reason to change his name (and we will

probably never know why). Indeed, many Manowiczes live in Konskie. Maybe social pressure made him change his name; maybe the rest of his family already had chosen this surname, and possibly only Szlama

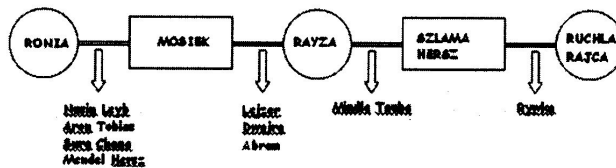
Hersz's father had not wanted to do so.

One year later, in 1849, Szlama Hersz Manowicz married another Kumec girl, Rayza (yes!) Kumec, daughter of Rabbi Mendel and Dwojra, thus presumably a cousin of Szlama Hersz's first wife. This Rayza, born in 1829, gives birth in 1851 to Mindla Tauba. Unfortunately her 26-year-old husband dies within a year, and young Rayza becomes a widow, with a year-old daughter as well as her husband's five-year-old daughter from his previous wife.

Here comes the turning point of the story for which, unfortunately, there is no formal proof. Young widow Rayza, with her two small children, and Mosiek Baum with his own four children, must have decided to combine their families around 1854 or 1855, a short time after the death of Mosiek's first wife, Ronia. It is presumably this Rayza, Ronia's younger sister, whose name appears as the mother of Mosiek's three youngest children. The similarity in names, as well as the inaccurate spellings, led to the confusion that forms the starting point of the present tale.

To summarize:

- Mosiek Baum successively married two Kumec sisters.
- Szlama Hersz Piotrkowski-Manowicz married two



The four couples and their children

Kumec cousins.

- Ronia, the mother of Mosiek's first four children, died.

- Rywka, Szlama Hersz's first child, lost her mother, Ruchla Rajca, when she was a year old. Then her father died when she was five years old.

- Szlama Hersz's second child, Mindla Tauba, lost her father when she was a year old.

Mosiek Baum and his second wife, Rayza, may have had nine children at home: Mosiek's four children from his first wife, Ronia, then three from his second wife, Rayza. Mosiek's second wife, Rayza, had one child from her first husband, Szlama Hersz. Rayza's first husband had one child from his first wife, Ruchla Rajca. All of this is shown in Table 1.

From a genealogical viewpoint, we may consider some stimulating issues in this complicated situation. Most interesting is the question of the family relationships among all the children of the four couples involved. This complexity is a function of the nature of the link between Rabbi Mendel Kumec and Uszer Kumec. I have considered three options:

- Mendel and Uszer were not related, which is the least likely option.

- Mendel and Uszer were first cousins.

- Mendel (born about 20 years earlier) was Uszer's elder brother. This seems the most likely option.

The resulting relationships among the children are presented in Table 1. If Mendel and Uszer were indeed brothers, some of the children in the home of Mosiek and Rayza were brothers, some half-brothers, some first cousins and some second cousins!

The complexity of this research arises from the following accumulation of problems:

- Confusion due to inaccuracy in the spelling of the two Racia-Rojza-Ronias

- The fact that Szlama Hersz changed his surname with no formal record of that change

- Absence of some key documents. We have neither marriage record for Rayza and Mosiek nor proof that Uszer and Mendel Kumec were brothers.

#### Postscript

Mosiek became a rabbi in Konskie like his father-in-law, Mendel Kumec, and died in 1894. No death certificate has been found for his (presumed) second wife, Rayza. Mosiek's second son (from Ronia), Aron Tobias

**Table 1**

Family relationships between the successive children of the various marriages, assuming that Rabbi Mendel Kumec and Uszer Kumec were either brothers, first cousins or unrelated altogether. The different assumptions only affect the relationship between Rywka and Mosiek's seven children.

	Nusin Leyb Aron Tobias Sura Chana Mendel Hersz	Lejzer Dworja Abram	Mindla Tauba	Rywka
Nusin Leyb Aron Tobias Sura Chana Mendel Hersz	Brothers	X	X	X
Lejzer Dwojra Abram	Half-brothers	Brothers	X	X
Mindla Tauba	First cousins			
Rywka	Second cousins <sup>1</sup> or Third cousins <sup>2</sup> or Unrelated <sup>3</sup>	Second cousins <sup>1</sup> or Third cousins <sup>2</sup> or Unrelated <sup>3</sup>	Half-sisters	Self

<sup>1</sup> If Rabbi Mendel and Uszer were brothers

<sup>2</sup> If Rabbi Mendel and Uszer were first cousins

<sup>3</sup> If Rabbi Mendel and Uszer were unrelated

(born in 1837), was the father of Icek-Meir (born in 1867 in Bendin), who was the father of my grandmother, Dora (born in 1908 in Lodz).

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References Available

## As I See It

Back in 1988, when Gary Mokotoff served as president of the new Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (AJGS, later IAJGS), he said he hoped never to see the day when genealogical research became “too easy.” Never fear, Gary; a review of this year’s human interest stories shows little chance of that.

For years we fretted over lack of access to resources. Now that archives are open virtually worldwide, we face a different set of challenges. Missing documents still plague us, but almost as often we are stymied as we try to make sense of the records we have found. Danny Wagner’s complicated, convoluted tale has it all, including a superb picture of Jewish life in 19th-century Poland. Early deaths, multiple marriages, inconsistent spelling of names—even an inexplicable surname change. Most of all, Wagner’s story illustrates the value of extracting vital information about *all* the Jews in a single small town.

Linda Levine learned that the proverbial grain of truth in every *bubbe meiseh* (old wives’ tale) can be more like the needle in a haystack when the documents she found really didn’t jibe with what she’d always been told.

Another twist on the unexpected find is the “mystery” person. In Sam Schleman’s case, it was a gravestone in a family plot; for Roy Hiller, it was someone in a family photograph. Richard Spector “rediscovered” a lost cousin to learn about Richard’s father’s life. The stories of how they traced the stranger in their midst offers valuable tips to sharpen our detecting skills.

Undoubtedly, the single task that preoccupies the greatest number of us these days is that of finding a specific “mystery person,” the submitter of a Page of Testimony at Yad Vashem for our relative, many of them submitted nearly 50 years ago. In the lead article, Randy Daitch and I offer some suggestions. As most readers will recognize, the tips for massaging the Yad Vashem online database are vintage Daitch.

Travel to ancestral homes and the effects of the Holocaust—and sometimes a combination of both—are two themes that continue to occupy us. Olga Zabludoff’s beautifully written story of restoring the Jewish cemetery in Butrimonys, Lithuania, can serve as a template and inspiration for all such future efforts. A not-uncommon bonus is the Jewish census given to her along the way. Valery Bazarov opens a window onto little-known HIAS rescue activities through Portugal. Sara Wenger discovers her Holocaust-survivor father’s hidden identity and helps us understand some of the post-war anxieties of the survivors. Letters from Viviana Grosz’s grandparents remind us that most Jews caught up in the Holocaust didn’t survive. The descendants of those who did often have an almost irresistible urge to revisit the lost ancestral homes. AVOTAYNU Contributing Editor Claire Bruell highlights conditions in her section of Moravia, as she describes a technique for covering the most territory in a

*(continued on page 42)*