

Bulgaria: Jewish Family History Research Guide

History

Archaeologists have uncovered Jewish religious relics in Bulgaria dating from the 2nd century C.E. By the 9th century Jewish communities are documented, and in 1335 the Bulgar King Johann Alexander married a Jewish woman, Sarah, who reigned as Queen Theodora. In 1492, when the Jews were expelled from Spain, some settled in Bulgaria. They brought their language—Ladino—and culture. In time, the Spanish Jews outnumbered the native population and the two groups intermarried. The Jews of Bulgaria became known as Sephardic and spoke Ladino.

Prior to WWII, about 48,000 Jews lived in thirty-two communities in Bulgaria. About eighty percent of Jewish children attended Jewish schools. (H. Vital, “The Jews of Bulgaria,” *Congress Weekly*, November 14, 1941) At the end of WWII about 50,000 Jews lived in Bulgaria. Of this number, approximately 48,000 immigrated to Israel when it became a state.

Current Community

The Jews who remain in Bulgaria are represented by the *Shalom Organization of Jews in Bulgaria*, successor to the Social and Cultural Organization of Jews in Bulgaria. You can write to the Shalom Organization at:

Al. Stamboliisky 50
Sofia
Phone 359-288-46-93
Fax 359-287-0163

Place Names

The following chart lists the current and previous names of some towns where Jews lived. The current place name is also provided in Cyrillic. To identify the map coordinates of these and other towns, see *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust—Revised Edition*, by Gary Mokotoff and Sallyann Amdur Sack with Alexander Sharon (Avotaynu, 2002).

Current Name	Current Name in Cyrillic	Previous Name(s)
Burgas	Бургас	Bergos, Bourghas
Dupnica	Дупница	Dupnitch, Dobnica, Dupnitsa, Stenke Dimitrov
Kustendil	Кюстендил	Kyustendil, Kjustendil
Nikopol	Никопол	Nicopolis, Nigbolo
Pazardzhik	Пазарджик	Pazardjik, Tatarpazari, Tatar Pazardki
Pleven	Плевен	Bleune, Plevne
Plovdiv	Пловдив	Filippoli
Ruse	Русе	Roustchouk, Rouse, Rusc
Sliven	Сливен	Islimiye
Stara Zagora	Стара Загора	Zagr-I-atik, Eskiagra, Yeski Sagta, Stara Sagora
Vidin	Видин	Widdim

Records

Civil registration of births, marriages and deaths began in 1893. The Family History Library (FHL) of the Church of Latter-day Saints has microfilmed records from some of the major cities, including Sofia, Plovdiv and Russe. FHL microfilms can be studied at the Center Genealogy Institute through our microfilm loan program, or at any LDS Family History Center.

To learn about other records, see the sources listed below or write to the Bulgarian Central Archives at Centralen Darzaven Arhiv., ul. Slavjanka, Sofia, Bulgaria.

For Further Information

Books

Arditti, Benyamin. *Yehude Bulgaryah: bi-shenot ha-mishtar ha-Natsi, 1940-1944* (B. J. Arditti [1961])
ASF D 810 .J4 A67 1961

Beni, Albert. *Yehude Bulgaryah be-maavak neged ha-Natsim* (Histadrut ha-Tsiyonit ha-Olamit, 1980)
ASF DS 135 .B8 B46 1980

The Fragility of Goodness: why Bulgaria's Jews survived the Holocaust. (a collection of texts with commentary by Tzvetan Todorov; translated by Arthur Denner. (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001)
ASF DS 135 .B8 .F7313 2001

Haskell, Guy. *From Sofia to Jaffa: The Jews of Bulgaria and Israel* (Wayne State Univ. Press, 1994)
YIVO /86768

Tamir, Vicki. *Bulgaria and Her Jews: The History of a Dubious Symbiosis* (John Wiley, 1979)
ASF DS 135 .B8 T35.

Web Sites

American Sephardi Federation: A research center with an on-line Library and Archives catalog
www.americansephardifederation.org

Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies
www.sephardicstudies.org/entrance.html

Searchable databases include:

- Bulgarian Jewish (Sephardic) Soldiers Killed 1912-1918
- Bulgarian Jewish Troops (Active and Reserve) 1911
- Bulgarian Jewish Troops Sent to the Front in 1917
- Bulgarian Jewish Officers, Active 1918
- Surnames of Ruse, (Rustshuk) Bulgaria
- Prominent Sephardic Jews of Bulgaria
- WWII Bulgarian Sephardim Deportees from France
- Bulgaria's Chief Rabbis
- Bulgarian Jewish Names
- Burials in the Jewish Cemetery of Shumen, Bulgaria