Sephardic Family History Research Guide

Sephardim
Spanish Jews, who had lived on the Iberian Peninsula since 6 B.C.E., began to call themselves Sephardim during the early Middle Ages. After the expulsions from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497), Jews fled to numerous places within Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and the New World. The word *Sephardim* came to refer to the Jews of these countries whose origins still remained in Spain or Portugal and who spoke Ladino and other Spanish regional dialects.

Sephardic Genealogy
Since the Sephardic world is so diverse and widespread, it is difficult to make generalizations about Sephardic genealogy. The sources, methods, and results of genealogical research on a family in Amsterdam, for example, differ greatly from research on a family in Aleppo or Salonika. However, there are several common characteristics:

- Sephardic family names are much older than most Ashkenazi names. With Hebraic, Aramaic, Spanish or Arabic roots, Sephardic surnames are often traceable to the 11th century and even earlier.
- In Sephardic naming customs, children can be named for both the living and the dead. Often, the firstborn son is named after the paternal grandfather, and the firstborn daughter is named after the paternal grandmother, so that given names may appear in every other generation.

Resources at the Center for Jewish History
General References
*Etsi* (www.geocities.com/EnchantedForest/1321): journal of Sephardic genealogy (French/English)  
Genealogy Institute


Resources by Country
Argentina – see our separate Research Guide

Barbados
*Barbados Jewish Community Collection.* Records from Congregation Nidhe Israel and an index of names and ages from a 1715 census of Barbados. AJHS I-139

Brazil

New Christians and Jews in Pernambuco, with historical narratives and biographical sketches. AJHS F 2601 .M4315

Samuel Oppenheim Collection. Samuel Oppenheim’s research notes about Colonial American and Brazilian Jewry, from court records, synagogue records, and the records of the Dutch West India Company. The collection is housed in 42 boxes; the finding aid contains sections on individuals (alphabetical by surname), groups, and localities. AJHS P-255


Ackman and Ziff Family Genealogy Institute • Center for Jewish History  
15 West 16th Street, New York, NY 10011 • (212) 294-8318  • http://www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/factsheets.php


Vol. 1 Judizantes e Judeus no Brazil, 1500-1808. Biographies of Jews and converts
Vol. 2 Judeus no Brazil, 19th century. Biographies
Vol. 3 Testamentos e Inventarios, 1684-1934. Wills and Inventories of estates
Vol. 4 Processos de Naturalizaacsos de Israelitas. 19th century naturalization records
Vol. 5 Judaismo e Judeus na Bibliografia em Lingua Portuguesa. Bibliography of Portuguese publications on Judaism
Vol. 6 Genealogias Judaicas. Genealogies of Brazilian Jewish families
Vol. 7 Processos de Inquisicao de Lisboa. Records of the Inquisition of Lisbon, including the date of the auto-de-fe, name of person, crime, and sentence. AJHS F 2659 .J5 W68


China


Curacao
Curacao Jewish Community Collection. In addition to congregational records, this collection includes births, 1723-1891; deaths 1883-1912; and lists of community members. AJHS I-112


England

Germany
Hamburg Jewish Community Collection: Includes copies of Sephardic gravestone inscriptions in Altona, Gluckstadt and Emden; a 1696 index of marriage contracts of the Sephardim in Hamburg; and a German translation of the minute book of the Sephardic Beth Israel congregation. LBI Archives MF77a, microfilm reels 1-2.

Jacob Jacobson Collection: 18th and 19th century records from the Jewish community of Altona, including the minute book of the burial society of Sephardic Congregation Neve Shalom. LBI Archives MF 447, microfilm reels 1-37.

Greece
Salonika Jewish Community Collection: Includes population registration books with records of vital statistics, 1920-1939 and lists of Salonika Jews, ca 1939. YIVO Archives RG 207

India
Italy


Jamaica:  

Mexico – see our separate Research Guide

Netherlands


Verdooner, D., and H.J.W. Snel *Handleiding bij de index op de Ketuboth van de Portugees-Israëlitische Gemeente te Amsterdam van 1650-1911.* REF DS 135 .N5 A7 1990

North Africa


Toledano, Joseph *Une histoire des familles, les noms de familles juifs d’Afrique de Nord* (Ramatol, 1998). YIVO /92990

Spain and Portugal


Turkey
*Archives of Morris Tarragano.* Compiled by Dr. Esther Fleischman and Randall C. Belinfante. ASF DS 135 .T79 A5 T38 2001
Web Sites and Online Databases

www.americansephardifederation.org/sub/library/genealogy.asp
American Sephardi Federation Genealogy Databases

http://dutchjewry.huji.ac.il
Center for Research on Dutch Jewry, Hebrew University

www.sefarad.org
European Sephardic Institute

http://www.sephardigene.com/
Jeffrey Malka’s site of Sephardic genealogy tips

www.nljewgen.org/eng/index.html
Netherlands Society for Jewish Genealogy: Sephardic burials at Jodengang cemetery in Middelburg 1656-1727

www.jewishgen.org/SefardSIG
Special Interest Group on Sephardic Jewry

www.sephardim.com/search.shtml
Sephardic names search engine

Other Records

Archivo Historico Nacional
Serrano 115, 28006 Madrid, Spain
phone (917) 688-500, fax (915) 631-199
www.cultura.mecd.es/archivos/index.html
Inquisition records

Ben Zvi Institute
P.O. Box 7660
Jerusalem 91076, Israel
http://ybz.org.il/
Oriens Judaicus Series—Sources for the History of Jews in Muslim Lands

Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People
Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Sprinzak Building, Givat Ram
P.O.Box 1149, Jerusalem 91010, Israel
Tel./Fax.: (972)-2-5635716
http://sites.huji.ac.il/archives
Partial community archives from Algeria, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, and other countries.

Yeshiva University Library
Special Collections
500 West 185th Street
Phone (212) 960-5451
www.yu.edu/libraries/page.asp?id=34
Jamie Lehmann Memorial Collection contains records of the Cairo Jewish community from 1886 to 1961. The Sephardic Reference Room houses an extensive collection of books, periodicals, and audio materials in Judeo-Arabic, Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), Hebrew and English.