

Call for Applications
Leo Baeck Spring School (LBSU) 2026
March 23–27, 2026 | University of Potsdam

Sephardic Studies: Past and Present

The LBSU in Sephardic Studies offers an intensive forum for graduate students and early-career researchers to explore the history, religion, literature, and cultural creativity of Sephardic Jews. In 2026, we focus on the *past and present* of Sephardic Studies, with particular attention to the evolving methodologies of the field. By combining keynote lectures from leading scholars with workshops dedicated to participants' research, the program provides both advanced training and an international platform for dialogue across academic generations.

The term *Sephardic* is both precise and elusive. Rooted in the Biblical name *Sepharad*, it has come to signify multiple layers of meaning: a geographical space (the Iberian Peninsula), diverse political contexts (the Christian kingdoms of Portugal, Castile, and Aragon; the Muslim territories of *Al-Andalus*; and later the modern states of Spain and Portugal), and, crucially, diasporic histories shaped by expulsion, migration, and encounters with non-Jewish communities and environments. Over the centuries, *Sephardic* has been used in both narrow and broad senses: sometimes referring specifically to the Jews expelled from Iberia in 1492 and their descendants, sometimes extending to encompass *Conversos*, Jews in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), *Edot Ha-Mizrah*, or all non-Ashkenazi Jews.

This semantic richness reflects the historical reality of Sephardic Jews as a dynamic and evolving constellation of identities. For the purposes of the **Leo Baeck Spring School 2026**, we focus on a) the descendants of Jews converted in and/or expelled from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century, and to the communities that emerged from their dispersal across the Mediterranean basin, Western Europe, the Americas, and beyond; b) diasporic Jews in the Islamic world, whose historical trajectories intersected and interacted with those communities of Iberian descent. These groups developed distinctive liturgical practices, intellectual traditions, communal institutions, and cultural expressions—from Judeo-Spanish linguistic heritages to the shaping of diasporic networks—that profoundly influenced Jewish history and continue to invite scholarly reflection.

The **Spring School 2026** is organized by the Chair of Religious Studies and Jewish Thought at the University of Potsdam in cooperation with the Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies Berlin-Brandenburg (ZJS). It invites graduate students at both early and advanced stages to participate in a week-long, intensive academic program.

Structure and Themes

The program is structured around five thematic days, each devoted to a major area of Sephardic Studies:

1. **The History of Sephardim** in Christian Lands – communities in the Netherlands, Italy, France, England, and the Americas: communal life, intellectual activity, cultural exchanges, and diasporic networks...
2. **The History of Sephardim** in the Islamicate World – communities of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, and North Africa: migration, inter-Jewish relations, local adaptation, and the long-term vitality of Judeo-Spanish...
3. **Religion and the History of Ideas** – liturgy, rabbinic authority, philosophical and theological traditions, mysticism, and the intellectual contributions of Sephardic thinkers...
4. **Music and Material Culture** – synagogue architecture, ritual objects, domestic artifacts, musical repertoires, and oral traditions as expressions of identity and cultural transmission...
5. **Poetry and Literature** – from early modern chronicles and responsa to modern poetry, prose, and contemporary writings, addressing exile, memory, and intercultural dialogue...

Each day will feature:

- **A keynote lecture by a distinguished scholar**, directly engaging with the day's theme in light of the overarching title *Sephardic Studies: Past and Present*. These keynote lectures will adopt a *methodological perspective*, tracing how the relevant field has evolved over time and reflecting on its place within the broader history of Sephardic Studies.
- **Workshops** dedicated to graduate students' presentations. Each project will be discussed collectively, fostering a dynamic environment of scholarly dialogue, feedback, and mentorship.

Aim and Contribution

The Spring School seeks to deepen scholarly engagement with Sephardic history, religion, and culture by combining innovative research with critical reflection on disciplinary development. By bringing together international experts and young researchers, it offers a unique platform for exploring the diversity of Sephardic experiences across time and space, and for reflecting on how Sephardic Studies itself has been—and continues to be—reshaped.

Application Requirements

We invite applications from starting and advanced graduate students working in Sephardic Studies. Submissions are welcome from all relevant disciplines, including (but not limited to) history, literature, philosophy, religious studies, anthropology, linguistics, and art history. Participants may apply for travel funding if needed. Based on their travel destination and related costs, financial support of up to €300 can be provided. This support does not apply to participants coming from the Berlin-Brandenburg region.

Please submit the following documents in a single PDF file by November 30, 2025, to Olmo Masa: olmo.masa@uni-potsdam.de

- A brief project description (max. 2 pages)
- A curriculum vitae (max. 2 pages)

Organizers:

Prof. Dr. Sina Rauschenbach (UP/ZJS)
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