

Sephardic Perspectives Research and Reading Group

University of Potsdam, Department of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies

Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies Berlin-Brandenburg (ZJS)

Among the many groups that have evolved within Judaism, Sephardim present a particularly fruitful object of scholarly study. They are not only one of the most inwardly diverse Jewish sub-groups, spread as they did across the Mediterranean and beyond, from the port cities of Northern Europe to the Antilles. Expelled from the realms governed by the monarchs of Spain and Portugal and forced to forge a new existence in exile, they also developed different retention and protection strategies that variously responded to the state traditions and sociological characteristics of the lands they reached.

Through events such as the international conferences “Colonial History – Sephardic Perspectives” (2015), “Sephardim and Ashkenazim: Jewish-Jewish Encounters in History and Literature” (2016), “The Many Faces of Early Modern Italian Jewry” (2021) and “Convivencia in the Mediterranean” (2021), two Leo Baeck Summer Universities “Sephardic History and Culture” (2020 and 2021), as well as the lecture series “Beyond Askhenaz: Sephardim and Other Jews” (2021), the Department of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies at the University of Potsdam and the Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies Berlin-Brandenburg (ZJS) have addressed many questions relating to Sephardic Jews in terms of migration, inter-imperial and transnational networks, and multiple belongings.

The research and reading group Sephardic Perspectives continues earlier work of the BMBF-funded project “Sephardic Perspectives” (2014-2023) at the ZJS. It aims at strengthening Sephardic Studies in German academia by bringing together early career scholars through discussion groups, workshops, and conferences. Topics to be discussed include Sephardic networks, cultures, and identities, in early modern, modern and contemporary European and non-European, colonial and post-colonial worlds. A focus will be on inter-religious and inner-Jewish entanglements and/or encounters, in particular entanglements, and/or encounters between Ashkenazim and Sephardim and/or Sephardim and Sephardim from early modern times to the present. This includes discussions about different concepts and uses of the term “Sephardi/Sephardic” in different contexts and (academic) cultures. Last but not least, the group will also pay attention to topics of Converso history, religion, and thought, both in the Iberian Peninsula and in the Western Sephardic Diaspora.

Regular meetings will be scheduled once a month via zoom. Scholars interested in participating are encouraged to contact Adem Muzaffer Erol (erol.muzaffer@gmail.com).