

**AJL REFERENCE AWARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH**  
***Sephardic Genealogy: Discovering Your Sephardic Ancestors and Their World***

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A retired orthopedic surgeon, **Dr. Jeffrey S. Malka**, associate professor of orthopaedic surgery at Georgetown University, was chairman of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at Inova Fairfax Hospital in Virginia until his retirement. Descended from a long line of Sephardic rabbis, Dr. Malka has accumulated unique expertise in the resources available to Sephardic genealogists. In 1995, wishing to stimulate interest in the field, he created the large award-winning website "Resources for Sephardic Genealogy." In 2001, at JewishGen's request, he also created the SefardSIG website for JewishGen which he continues to develop and enhance. Dr. Malka is author of several articles on Sephardic genealogy in *Etsi*, the journal of the Sephardic Genealogical and Historical Society, and is author of several chapters in the forthcoming *Avotaynu Guide to Jewish Genealogy*.

Thank you very much for selecting my book on Sephardic genealogy for this year's Reference book award. As I've told Peggy, I feel both honored and humbled by your choice. Honored because the award is given by knowledgeable professionals in the field. Humbled because I could not have written this book without the expertise of all the preceding genealogists and historians who taught me so much and it is thus on their behalf too that I wish to accept the award. Indeed it is particularly appropriate that the award comes from an association of libraries since it is within libraries that I was able to glean the basic information that forms the underpinnings of this book.

My motivation in writing this book was a selfish one. I am of both Sephardic and Ashkenazic ancestry. Sephardic on my father's side and Ashkenazic on my mother's. As I became interested in Jewish history and in learning more about my ancestry I was delighted by the large amount of books and experts willing to help me uncover the traces of my maternal Ashkenazi family tree. However, little advice was available to help me with my Sephardic side. I was frequently told that the records did not exist and that it was just not possible to do much research there.

I gradually discovered that was not quite true. Archives and other resources for Sephardic genealogy did exist. Because so many hereditary Sephardic surnames go back a millennia or more, it is indeed often possible to go much further back in time on the Sephardic side than on the Ashkenazic side. As I accumulated knowledge in the area, I tried to spark interest in the field in the hope that this would attract more researchers and that their labor would uncover additional resources.

This being the Internet age, I therefore created a large website about Sephardic genealogy resources and was later invited to create a Sephardic presence for JewishGen, the premier resource for Jewish genealogy on the Internet, in the form of a Sephardic SIG website. By then I had long discovered the main attraction of genealogical research, at least for me. It lay in the Jewish history learned and the acquisition of knowledge about a variety of arcane subjects that would not otherwise have interested me in the least but which now enthralled me. I tried to communicate this enthusiasm to the website visitors and now to the readers of my book.

The success of the website and the numerous queries I received suggested there was a need for a reference book on the subject. I realized that such a book - the first of its kind for Sephardic genealogy - would also promote my goal of stimulating additional interest in the topic. Your award, which came as a total surprise, will give the book greater visibility and draw attention to a neglected side of Jewish genealogy and for this I thank you.

This book is not just for Sephardim. As late as the 12th century, 90% of all Jewry lived in areas we now consider Sephardic. Twelfth-century Granada and Cordoba had Jewish populations of 12,000 each. This was at a time when the largest Jewish populations in the Ashkenazic world, Frankfurt am Main and Vienna, had a mere 700 and 1,200 Jews respectively. With the known history of extensive Jewish travel, trade, migrations, and the relative sizes of the populations involved, it should not therefore be surprising to discover Sephardic ancestry in totally unsuspecting Ashkenazic families - and vice versa.

There are numerous books written about Sephardic history, but this is the first one that focuses on the tools necessary for researching Sephardic history and genealogy. In this book I tried to combine the general rules for valid and documented genealogical research with the specialized tools and methods needed for Sephardic genealogy such as Muslim and Ottoman calendar conversions, Sephardic languages, holdings of little known archives, bibliographic resources, and onomastics. The book is thus designed to be useful to both the beginning researcher and the more advanced and experienced one. I also attempted to dispel some of the longstanding mythology overlaying the popular history of Sephardim.

Finally, I wish to express my great debt of gratitude to my publisher, Gary Mokotoff, who gave me full latitude in what I wrote and to my editor Irene Goldstein Saunders whose wonderful editing and advice helped make the text so much more intelligible. I particularly wish to thank Dr Silver for funding the AJL Reference award year after year and of course this year of which I am the beneficiary. My hope is that this book stimulates enough interest in Sephardic genealogy resources to encourage many other authors to further help us travel through the mists of our Jewish history.