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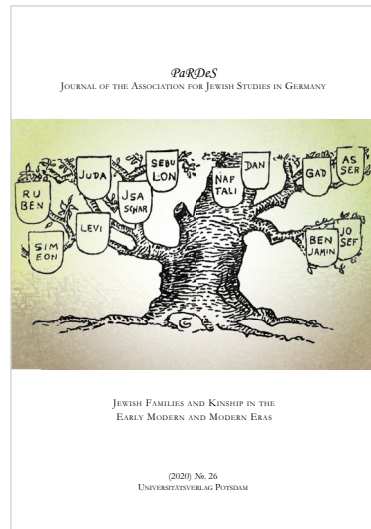
Jewish Families and Kinship in the Early Modern and Modern Eras

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Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey Through the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 336 p., \$ 28.

The first half of the 20th century brought profound changes to the Jewish world. Nationalist movements – Jewish and otherwise – rose, World War I brought mass mobilization and privation, empires fell, replaced by nationalizing states in which Jews often found themselves on the uncomfortable edges of national imaginings. Jewish individuals and families relocated, often multiple times

over a lifetime, motivated by factors that bridged economic, social, political, cultural, and personal. Simmering interwar tensions boiled over during World War II, and the Holocaust left no European Jewish life unscathed. Those few survivors who returned found their houses occupied, their property looted, their lives on a path now permanently altered. For scholars of Jewish history, this narrative is familiar, but generally through the lens of Ashkenazi Jews and the geographies associated with them. *Family Papers* traces an “intimate arc of the twentieth century” (4) through the lens of four generations of one prominent Sephardi family – the Levys – with roots in Ottoman Salonica as they traversed the upheaval of the 20th century. Much like Tevye’s daughters enabled Sholem Aleichem to posit the trajectories of Eastern European Jewish futures, the paths of the Levy family’s descendants explore the cartographies of Sephardi pasts. They reveal a history whose familiarity in the broad strokes and peculiarity in the details bares the complexity of 20th-century Jewish life.

Few historians are as equipped to delve into a history that is at once Jewish, Ottoman, European, Mediterranean, and diasporic as Sarah Abrevaya Stein. *Family Papers* combines Stein’s prior work on Ottoman and post-Ottoman citizenship, Jewish commercial diasporas, and the Ladino press to tell a history that is both intimate and expansive. Although she draws on documents, photographs, and objects from thirty archives in Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Portugal, Italy, and the United States, central to this book are the personal archives of the extended Levy family. These family papers are spread across nine countries on three continents, reflecting one Salonican family’s dispersal over one or two generations. The largest collection, of more than five thousand letters, is housed in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where a single branch of the Levy family emigrated on Portuguese papers in 1925 after short stays in France, Switzerland, and Germany.

The book begins with the patriarch Sa’adi Besalel Ashkenazi a-Levi, who wrote the first known Ladino memoir, the translation of which Stein published with Aron Rodrigue in 2012. A-Levi, whose very name hints at the blurring of Ashkenazi and Sephardi, was a key figure in the development of Ottoman Salonica’s Ladino press and an agitator against rabbinic authority. *Family Papers* traces the lives of Sa’adi, his children, grand-children, and great-grand-children through the letters that they left behind. Their correspondence documents a family with relationships both close and fractured, who squabbled over remittances and inheritances even as they supported each other, and who

struggled to navigate the profound political, social, and economic upheaval of the first half of the 20th century, even as their lives also shaped the changes around them. Women of the extended Levy family are central to this history. Even when they went unnamed in correspondence or when their letters do not remain, Stein weaves them in through analyzing photographs and other sources. The seven sections of *Family Papers* emphasize distinct relationships to imperial and state powers: Ottomans, Nationals, Émigrés, Captives, Survivors, Familiars, and Descendants. Within each section, Stein focuses short chapters on different family members, at times returning to the same individual across sections. This approach emphasizes the profound change that a single person traversed over the course of her life, and the ways that generation affected language, geography, and strategies of adaptation.

The family's extensive correspondence enables Stein to paint an intimately honest portrait of the Levys. The fluidity and approachability of Stein's writing and the short chapters make this an ideal text for students, lay readers, and scholars of modern Jewish history who want to deepen their knowledge of where and how Sephardi experiences are parallel to, or diverge from, Ashkenazi-centric narratives. Scholars of Sephardi history will benefit from the intimate view of this family, including Stein's exploration of one descendant, Vital Hasson, who was the only Jewish collaborator in Europe tried as a war criminal and killed by a state – Greece – at the behest of the local Jewish community. Hasson, never mentioned directly by name in the family papers, nonetheless remained a spectral figure in their correspondence. *Family Papers* provokes deeper questions what is absent and present in archival records, the complexity of family relationships, the durability and fragility of Jewish diasporas, and the value of tangible correspondence and ephemera to the transmission of history, and what is lost when the record turns digital.

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