

GENEALOGY IN PORTUGAL

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THE COUNTRY

Portugal is the westernmost country in mainland Europe, including most of the Western part of the Iberian Peninsula. The Atlantic archipelagoes of Madeira and Azores are also an integral part of the country. It has an area of approximately 92,000 km² and a population of approximately 10 million (as of 2023). Lisbon is its capital and largest city. The official language is Portuguese, a member of Romance family of languages. Portugal has been a Republic since 1910, and a member of the EC/EU since 1986. It uses the euro as currency, and is a member of the Schengen area.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS

Portugal is divided in a number of different ways for different administrative purposes. The best-known division, however, is the one into districts (“distritos”). Mainland Portugal is divided into 18 districts, named after their capital cities. Madeira and Azores are autonomous regions and are not divided into districts. Both districts and autonomous regions are, in turn, divided into municipalities (“concelhos” or “municípios”), which are also named after their seats. There are 308 municipalities in total. Municipalities are in turn divided into civil parishes (“freguesias”), which are named after their seat (in rural areas) or after the name of some neighbourhood or patron saint (in towns/cities).

All these divisions have been remarkably stable. Today’s districts and municipalities are, with few exceptions, the ones that came out of the creation of districts and major redrawing of municipality divisions that both took place in the 1830s. Civil parishes were originally derived from Catholic parishes and in many cases can be traced back to the 1500s. A reform of civil parishes in 2013 reduced their total number from over 4000 to slightly over 3000 by aggregating some of those that had smaller populations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Following the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, the Iberian Peninsula was taken by Germanic invaders. The Visigoths eventually became the dominant force, before being defeated by a Muslim invasion from across the Strait of Gibraltar in 711-714 that took the entirety of the Peninsula except for a small area in the far north. The following centuries saw a gradual recovery of territory by Christians from North to South – what would be later called the Reconquista.

Portugal was one of several entities that emerged as subdivisions of Christian territory in Northern Iberia. It became an independent kingdom in the mid-12th century under Afonso I, better known as Afonso Henriques (self-titled king since 1139, recognized as such by its neighbour

León in 1143, and by the Pope in 1179). Portuguese territory by 1139-1143 corresponded roughly to the northern half of the present-day Portuguese mainland; the southern half was gained from Muslim territory during the following century. The borders of the Portuguese mainland, as defined by the Treaty of Alcañizes in 1297, were almost exactly the same as they are today.

Portugal kept its independence throughout most of its history. The exception was the period of the Iberian Union (1580-1640) when Spanish monarchs ruled over Portugal.

The Portuguese were pioneers in the Age of Discovery. The uninhabited Atlantic archipelagoes of Madeira and Azores were settled from the early 1400s. At the same time, territories were taken across the Strait of Gibraltar, starting with Ceuta in 1415, and the exploration of the African coast began. By the end of the 15th century, Portuguese explorers had reached the southern tip of Africa (Bartolomeu Dias, 1488), completed the maritime connection to India (Vasco da Gama, 1498) and located the Eastern tip of South America from which Brazil would be created (Pedro Álvares Cabral, 1500). By the mid-1500s there were Portuguese settlements from Brazil to Japan.

The Portuguese Empire was very long-lived. Initially based mostly on trading posts across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, its focus eventually moved to flourishing Brazil and, after Brazilian independence in 1822, to sub-Saharan Africa. Portuguese territories in Africa gained independence in 1974-1975. The remaining territory of Portuguese India was taken by force by India in 1961. The settlement of Macau was handed to China in 1999. East Timor was invaded by Indonesia in 1975, but eventually gained independence in 2002.

RELIGION

Medieval Portugal was a Christian country with significant Muslim and Jewish minorities. However, at the end of the 15th century, an event of mass expulsion/conversion occurred, leaving Portugal as virtually 100% Christian, at least nominally. In the 16th century, as the Reformation spread through Europe, Portugal was firmly on Rome's side, remaining a Catholic stronghold for the following centuries. Non-Catholics remained a vanishingly small fraction of the native Portuguese population until recently.

MAJOR ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

The largest and most famous archive in Portugal is the Torre do Tombo (formally Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo – ANTT) in Lisbon. Other archives with a national scope, also in Lisbon, are Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), which holds a large number of documents related to the former Portuguese empire, and the main military archives, Arquivo Histórico Militar (AHM) and Arquivo Geral do Exército (AGE).

A network of District/Regional archives covers the country. Each of the 18 main districts has its archive, with the exceptions of Lisbon (ANTT also covers the duties of district archive) and Coimbra (where the duties are taken by the Archive of the University of Coimbra, AUC). Madeira has its own regional archive (Arquivo Regional da Madeira, ARM) and the Azores have three regional archives (Angra do Heroísmo, Horta, Ponta Delgada) reflecting the former division of those islands into three districts.

Portugal's national library is the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (BNP) in Lisbon.

See the attached table for contacts and website links of all these institutions.

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

Genealogical research in Portugal is, in general, easier than in most other European countries. The country has not seen any major armed conflict in its territory for almost two centuries. The Republican revolution of 1910 led to the creation of a national civil registration and the confiscation of all vital records from the Catholic Church up to that date (which covered virtually the whole Portuguese population), to be used for civil purposes. These Church records are now mostly kept at easily accessible state-owned archives. The Genealogical Society of Utah / FamilySearch began photographing Portuguese parish records in 1978. Pre-1911 church records have been microfilmed, digitized and their images are being made available online, a process that is now almost complete and beginning to extend into post-1911 civil registration. Portugal's European borders have remained almost unchanged for over 700 years, and documentation produced by its national authorities during that period has been largely preserved, namely at its flagship, the Portuguese National Archive, usually called the Torre do Tombo.

Portuguese Church records are scattered across more than 20 archives throughout the country, sometimes in a non-obvious way due to historical reasons, and the websites of those archives are not always easy to navigate. The easiest way to access Portuguese vital records is through the third-party directory "tombo.pt", which has direct links to record books arranged by modern Portuguese administrative divisions (district/region, municipality, parish).

Like other Catholic strongholds, Portugal had a powerful Inquisition operating during the Early Modern period. The trigger for this was the mass expulsion and conversion of Jews in Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497). The Portuguese Inquisition was created in 1536 and most of its court cases were those of people of Sephardic Jewish descent (New Christians), accused of Judaism. The distinction between Old and New Christians was officially abolished in 1773, although a weakened Inquisition would remain in existence until 1821.

Tens of thousands of people were put to trial by the Portuguese Inquisition. During most of its existence, four courts were active: three in mainland Portugal (Lisbon, Coimbra, Évora) and one overseas (Goa). Almost all trial records from the mainland courts have survived to this day. They are housed at Torre do Tombo and provide an immense source of information on the life and families of the victims. A large fraction of those records, including the entirety of Lisbon cases, is already digitized and available online.

ASSOCIATIONS

Associação Portuguesa de Genealogia (APG), created in 1986 and headquartered in Lisbon, is the only Portuguese institution dedicated exclusively to Genealogy. It publishes a yearly journal, *Raízes & Memórias* (typically 400-500 pages in recent years), which is distributed free of charge to its regular members. Since its foundation, APG has kept the tradition of holding a monthly dinner gathering in Lisbon for its members and guests. The dinner is frequently followed by a presentation by a member or a guest on Genealogy or a related topic. This is currently scheduled for the third Friday of each month, except August.

Instituto Português de Heráldica (IPH), created in 1929 and also headquartered in Lisbon, has always had a significant connection to Genealogy. The founders of APG were themselves members of IPH. The journal of IPH, *Armas e Troféus*, also publishes Genealogy articles.

APG and IPH are the two Portuguese institutions that are members of the International Confederation for Genealogy and Heraldry.

PUBLICATIONS

The two main regular publications in the field of Portuguese Genealogy are the aforementioned *Raízes & Memórias*, from APG, and *Armas e Troféus*, from IPH.

The editorial market for Portuguese Genealogy books is small, but dozens of new books are published every year. Editions are usually of only a few hundred copies.

ONLINE DATABASES

Geneall (<https://geneall.net/en/home/>) houses a paid database which is the largest for Portuguese genealogy. Its data are of uneven quality, mixing data from primary records, ancient lineage books, more recent works and user contributions. Despite its shortcomings, it is an essential resource for those with an in-depth Portuguese genealogy.

The regional archive of the island of Madeira has an online database of all marriages recorded in the island, and another one covering all baptisms from 1860 to 1911 and earlier dates for some parishes.

The remarkable blog/website Genealogia FB (<https://genealogiafb.blogspot.com/>) includes indexes for many locations provided by individual users.

FamilySearch indexing of Portuguese records using automated systems is gradually progressing, although it is still in its early stages.

PORTUGUESE DIASPORA

The Portuguese Empire and the country's historical flow of emigrants have left large communities of Portuguese ancestry scattered across the globe, which have members interested in knowing more about their ancestry out of curiosity or, in some cases, to acquire Portuguese citizenship. These include:

- Brazil;
- The former colonies in Africa (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe);
- The former colonies in Asia (mainly Goa in India; Macau in China; East Timor);
- Major destinations of Portuguese emigration since the late 1800s (e.g. France, Switzerland, Germany, UK, Luxembourg, USA, Canada, Venezuela, South Africa).
- The Sephardic Jewish community.

USEFUL LINKS FOR GENEALOGY IN PORTUGAL

INTRODUCTION TO GENEALOGY

[Beginners' Guide \(in Portuguese\) \(Torre do Tombo\)](#)

CIVIL REGISTRATION

[Contacts of Conservatórias \(Civil Registration offices\)](#)

[Civil Online \(requests for certificates\)](#)

NATIONAL DIRECTORY OF PARISH AND CIVIL RECORDS

[Tombo.pt](#)

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND NATIONAL LIBRARY

Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal

[Main page](#)

[Digital Library](#)

[Catalogs](#)

Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Arquivo Histórico Militar

[Institutional page](#)

[Documents \(Archeevo\)](#)

[Documents \(GERMIL\)](#)

Arquivo Geral do Exército

[Institutional page](#)

DISTRICT AND REGIONAL ARCHIVES

Aveiro

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Beja

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Braga

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(Archeevo\)](#)

Bragança

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Castelo Branco

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Coimbra (AUC)

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(Archeevo\)](#)

Évora

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Faro

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Guarda

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Leiria

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Lisboa (ANTT)

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Portalegre

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(DigitArq\)](#)

Porto

[Main page](#)

[Documents \(CRAV\)](#)

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|-------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Santarém | Main page | Documents (DigitArq) |
| Setúbal | Main page | Documents (DigitArq) |
| Viana do Castelo | Main page | Documents (DigitArq) |
| Vila Real | Main page | Documents (DigitArq) |
| Viseu | Main page | Documents (DigitArq) |
| Madeira | Main page | Documents (Archeevo) Databases (Marriages, Baptisms, Passaports) |
| Angra do Heroísmo | Main page | Documents (Archeevo - Centro de Conhecimento dos Açores) |
| Horta | Main page | Documents (Archeevo - Centro de Conhecimento dos Açores) |
| Ponta Delgada | Main page | Documents (Archeevo - Centro de Conhecimento dos Açores) |

DIOCESE ARCHIVES WITH CHURCH RECORDS

| | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Bragança-Miranda | Main page | Documents (DigitArq - Arquivo Distrital de Bragança) |
| Lamego | Main page | Documents (Archeevo - Arquivos na Nuvem) |

ONLINE RECORDS AT FAMILYSEARCH

[FamilySearch](#)

PORTUGUESE INSTITUTIONS CONNECTED TO GENEALOGY

[Associação Portuguesa de Genealogia](#)

[Instituto Português de Heráldica \(Facebook page\)](#)

[Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa](#)

[Associação dos Amigos da Torre do Tombo](#)

DISCUSSION GROUPS

[Fórum Geneall](#)

[Genealogia FB \(Facebook\)](#)

[Origens, Genealogia e História da Família \(Facebook\)](#)

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

[International Confederation for Genealogy and Heraldry](#)

[International Academy of Genealogy](#)