

On Dec 4th, Dr. Theodore Schurr, from the University of Pennsylvania's Department of Anthropology and Director of the National Geographic Genographic Project spoke on: What DNA Tells Us About The Jewish Diaspora.

Dr. Schurr began with maps tracing the Jewish Diaspora from the 1st century CE to the middle ages. These showed cities where Jews settled and the migrations and expulsions that ensued as many moved to what became the Pale of Settlement.

He explained DNA research and how a substantial portion of the Jewish population can actually trace back to the Middle East. Through several graphics, Dr. Schurr also showed migration patterns and genetic distributions.

Research on Spain was then explored. It showed that much of the current population has significant Sephardic Jewish DNA. And "the Sephardic Jewish component is the more ancient." This data changes the narrative about Jewish conversions and mixed marriages in Spanish history.

Dr. Schurr then shared research on the:

1. genetic structure of NYC Eastern European Americans and their linkage with Jewish DNA,
2. relative DNA isolation of the Ashkenazi,
3. impact of "founder effect" (bottlenecks where a reduction of Jews limited DNA sources to a very few people, known as Founders), and
4. dispersion of Jewish DNA into the areas related to Abraham's Children

Dr. Schurr answered questions throughout his presentation and as a disciplined researcher, provided a comprehensive list of references. This was an enlightening afternoon blending hard research with understandable examples. We thank Dr. Schurr for taking his time to help us.