



The Forgotten Diaspora: Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World

Peter Mark, Professor José da Silva Horta

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This book traces the history of early seventeenth-century Portuguese Sephardic traders who settled in two communities on Senegal's Petite Côte. There, they lived as public Jews, under the spiritual guidance of a rabbi sent to them by the newly established Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam. In Senegal, the Jews were protected from agents of the Inquisition by local Muslim rulers. The Petite Côte communities included several Jews of mixed Portuguese-African heritage as well as African wives, offspring, and servants. The blade weapons trade was an important part of their commercial activities. These merchants participated marginally in the slave trade but fully in the arms trade, illegally supplying West African markets with swords. This blade weapons trade depended on artisans and merchants based in Morocco, Lisbon, and northern Europe and affected warfare in the Sahel and along the Upper Guinea Coast. After members of these communities moved to the United Provinces around 1620, they had a profound influence on relations between black and white Jews in Amsterdam. The study not only discovers previously unknown Jewish communities but by doing so offers a reinterpretation of the dynamics and processes of identity construction throughout the Atlantic world.

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