Introduction

This is a book about the history of Portuguese Jews in an overseas diaspora. In a sense it is a chapter of the historical narrative of Portuguese discoveries and expansion, and of the rivalry with other European countries. It certainly is part of the long history of Sephardic attempts to survive and adjust to adverse conditions, at a moment when they were compelled to seek a life of safety in lands distant from the Iberian Peninsula. But it is, as well, a chapter of the history of West Africa. Together with both Jewish and Christian Portuguese, African societies opened coastal and riverine paths to an Atlantic world in construction since the fifteenth century. In doing so they shared responsibility for the impact of their local and regional histories throughout a wider, even a global world. In many ways, African and Eurafrican agency made possible the complex intercultural relationships that constitute the subject of this book. As historians we seek answers to this apparently simple query: How was it possible for Portuguese to engage in trade and also to be Jews in an African setting?

A long process of Portuguese expansion led up to the seventeenth-century events that are at the core of this work. The Portuguese quest for gold, slaves, and imagined Christian allies started in the early fifteenth century under the political initiative of Prince Henry and the support of the recently established Avis dynasty. Anglo-Saxon historiography named Henry "The Navigator," although he was rather an organizer (or co-organizer) of a number of these travels and not an adventurer like the men whom he motivated, with noble titles and rewards, to bring him news and commodities from faraway lands. Indeed, by the 1420s Portuguese ships began to win the South, extending their usual raids from the waters off of North Africa and the Canary Islands, to the unknown coast of the Sahara.

A decade after passing the psychological barrier of Cape Bojador in 1434, they arrived at the "green land" of the blacks, as the land near the Senegal River was portrayed at the time. By 1448, the Portuguese were forced by African resistance and refusal to trade in a warlike context, to abandon their initial policy of capture and plunder in favor of a diplomatic and peaceful approach. From then on, trade became the common ground between Africans and Europeans and a shared history began.

The exploration of the West African coast and its major archipelago, the Cape Verde Islands, was completed in the 1460s.[1] During the reign of King John II, Portuguese ships explored the coast of West Central Africa, in search of an eastern passage to the Indian Ocean. In 1497–1499 Vasco da Gama's fleet established a maritime connection between Lisbon and India, giving birth to the "Carreira da Índia" (India Run), and the first official travel was established to what would be Brazil (1500). There, the process of colonization would wait a generation, but elsewhere in South America, the Indies of Castille would require slaves by the second decade of the sixteenth century, to support European settlements. Meanwhile, diplomatic relationships were developed with African polities along the Atlantic coast, and trading systems were organized to bring gold … and slaves … across the ocean.

Several systems of trade developed between Portuguese and Africans. On the one hand there was a system based on fortified trading stations such as Arguim in present-day Mauritania (mid fifteenth century) or São Jorge da Mina (Elmina) and Axim on the Gold Coast (late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries). Here, the Portuguese Crown attempted directly to control the Atlantic trade, in conjunction with African trading networks, against other European rivals and nonauthorized Portuguese private entrepreneurs. S. Tomé became a base for trading activities, a number of them private, in the Gulf of Guinea and in the polities of Kongo and Ndongo in West Central Africa. But there, from the late sixteenth century, in order to encourage the slave trade to the coast, the Portuguese Crown chose to settle and to attempt a conquest of what was called the "Kingdom of Angola."

The system of settlement and trade was quite different in the most important space of Eurafrican commerce in Western Africa: Greater Senegambia (henceforth Senegambia) or, in the words of contemporary Portuguese, "Guinea of Cape Verde."[2] This region also broadly coincides

[1] São Tomé e Principe Islands were first explored nearly a decade later.

[2] On the historiography of the concept of Guiné do Cabo Verde see Horta "Evidence for a Luso-African Identity in 'Portuguese' Accounts on 'Guinea of Cape Verde' (Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries)," *History in Africa*, 27 (2000), 99–130. The concept of Greater

with the current usage "Upper Guinea Coast." From the Senegal River basin southeast to present-day northwestern Sierra Leone on the coast, and from the Saharan fringe to the Atlantic forest, Greater Senegambia has been historically a transitional space. Within West Africa this was the region that engaged early and most deeply in the Atlantic trade and established intense interaction with the Atlantic world. Long-distance Mande traders connected the Sahel and savannah to Guinean routes and markets, where they met other African agents of local and riverine commerce. From the mid-fifteenth century onward, this trade network connected with Luso-African merchants and European traders.

The first Europeans who arrived in the region between the Senegal and Gambia Rivers found a federation of states: the Jolof empire (Le Grand Jolof), under Wolof authority. From the early sixteenth century, wealth brought by the new partners coming from the sea strengthened the smaller coastal states and contributed to the political fragmentation of this space. By the early seventeenth century several Wolof and Sereer kingdoms situated on the *Petite Côte*, the coast between the Cape Verde peninsula and the Gambia River, had become autonomous: Cayor, Baol, and Sine. From the Gambia south into present-day Guinea-Bissau, there were a number of Mande polities, the most powerful of which was Kaabu. Several polities and ethnic groups peopled the "Rivers of Guinea" from the Casamance region to Sierra Leone. Those located along the coast generally maintained trading relationships with each other by land and riverine trade routes linking them with the Mande network. Some of these groups became close partners of the Portuguese. That was the case of the Bainunk and Papel polities in the Cacheu region and the Biafada in the Rio Grande, both in Guinea-Bissau. Southward, the same happened with the coastal societies – the ancestors of today's Bagas and Temnes and probably several other groups – collectively called Sapes by the Portuguese. In the mid sixteenth century, the Sapes were reduced, by the newly arrived Manes, to inhabiting sections of present-day Guinea-Conakry and Sierra Leone.

The earliest commerce between Guinea of Cape Verde and the Atlantic world was centered in the Cape Verde Islands, located about 250 miles off the West African coast (see Map I.3). From the 1460s until the early seventeenth century, Santiago Island was the base for Portuguese activities

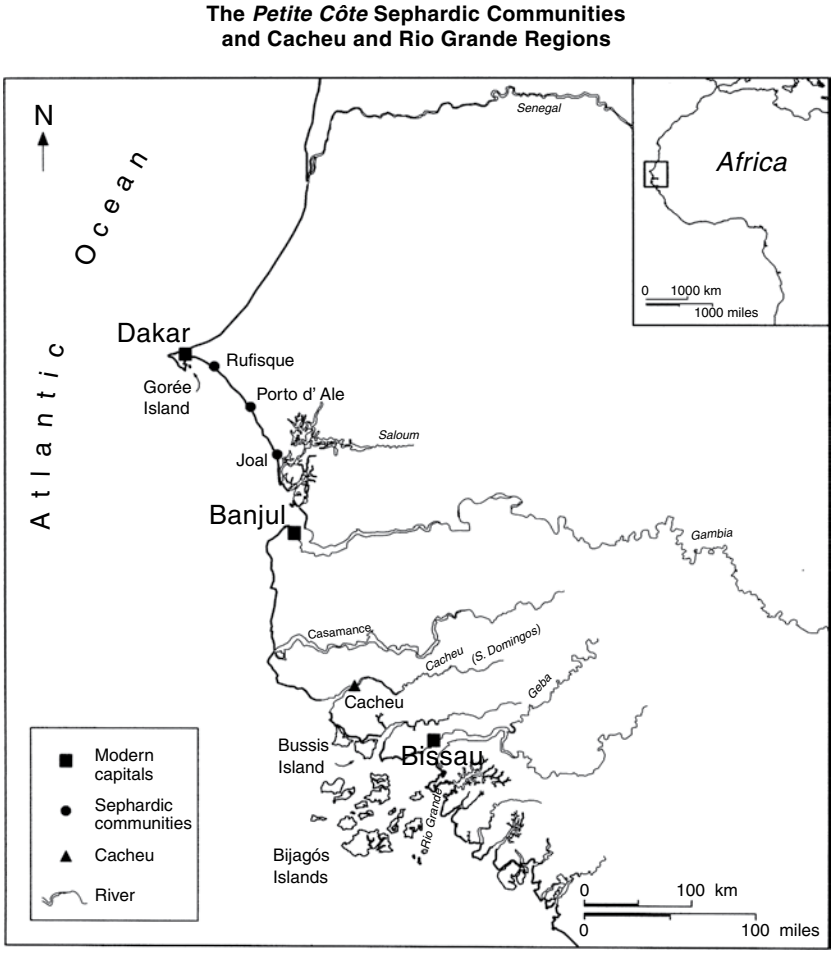
Senegambia was first developed by Boubacar Barry in *La Sénégambie du XVe au XIXe siècle: traite négrière, Islam et conquête coloniale*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1988. The recent work of Eduardo Costa Dias together with the authors has led to a reassessment of the concept. See the special issue of *Mande Studies*: "Trade, Traders and Cross-cultural Relationships in Greater Senegambia," Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, eds., vol. 9 (2007).

in the Rivers of Guinea. The Cape Verdean colonists or *moradores* (those, mostly of Luso-African origin, who had the status of residents) were given the privilege of trading on the coast by the Crown. To limit private activity and stimulate internal growth, the Crown severely limited trade by the Cape Verdeans and all other Portuguese. One response was to become *lançados* (i.e., to launch themselves on the mainland, beginning a new life in close association with African societies). Trading in forbidden merchandise, lançados or *tangomaus*, as they were also known, did not hesitate to conduct business with European rivals of the Portuguese Crown. By the mid 1500s both the French and the English brought ships to the Guinea Coast, challenging the theoretical Portuguese monopoly. By the 1580s both were a regular presence, particularly in Northern Senegambia. At the end of the century they were joined by the Dutch, which is an important part of our story.

The Portuguese Crown was never able to impede their illegal activities. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Crown either traded directly through its own representatives or, much more frequently, rented out trade to private traders, the *contratadores* who held the so-called contract of Cape Verde. Unlike Arguim, Elmina, or Luanda, there were no fortified settlements in Guinea of Cape Verde until 1588, when Cacheu was founded. Only by about 1600 did Cacheu become a quasi official settlement with a vicar and Crown representatives. By that time the trading station was already crucial to the Atlantic trade, and it surpassed Ribeira Grande on Santiago Island from the middle of the 1610s onward.[3] The first *capitão-mor* was nominated in 1615. Nevertheless, given its mixed identity population, and the tension between Portuguese officials and private groups and individual traders, Cacheu did not achieve the same level of commercial security as did forts like James Island in the Gambia River. Furthermore, the Captain was himself dependent – as were other Crown delegates before him – on the contratadores who, in turn, nominated factors and other officers. African rulers, for their part, were interested in the diversification of trading partners. Any protection they could give to the lançados meant the latter could serve as intermediaries with European traders from other nations besides Portugal.

Under these conditions the lançados settled near the rivers and frequently married African women. During the sixteenth century, lançados

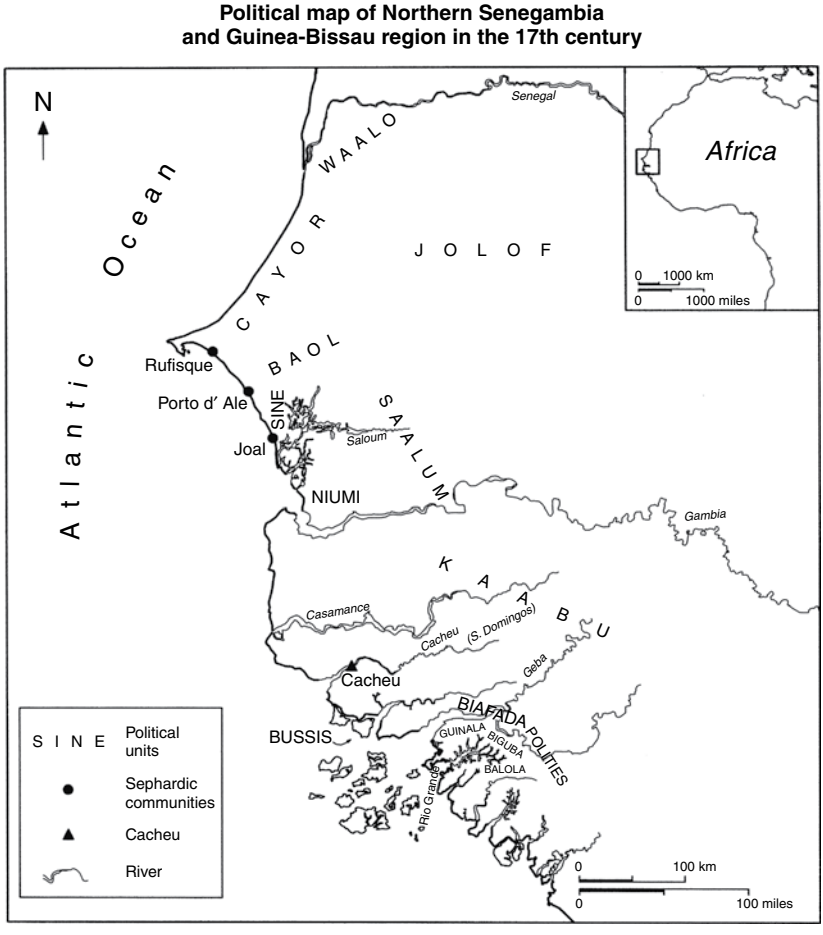
[3] See Maria Manuel Torrão, "Rotas comerciais, agentes económicos, meios de pagamento," in Maria Emília Madeira Santos, ed., *História Geral de Cabo Verde*, vol. 2, Lisbon/Praia, Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga, Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, Instituto Nacional da Cultura de Cabo Verde, 1995, pp. 17–123.



MAP I.1. Map of coastal Senegambia (locating the three Sephardic communities and main toponyms and rivers).

who did not return to Cape Verde or Portugal, and their Luso-Africans offspring, the *filhos da terra*, formed the core of Luso-African communities. Living in African villages or founding their own communities, these Luso-Africans also included the *grumetes*, literally "cabin boys." The grumetes were African mariners who were indispensable as navigation guides, as translators, and as trading agents.[4] The offspring of

[4] Frequently, grumetes belonged to African ruling lineages and were given by their own relatives to be raised by the Portuguese, whom they then escorted in their maritime activities. The grumetes served as crucial brokers. They generally accepted the Christian

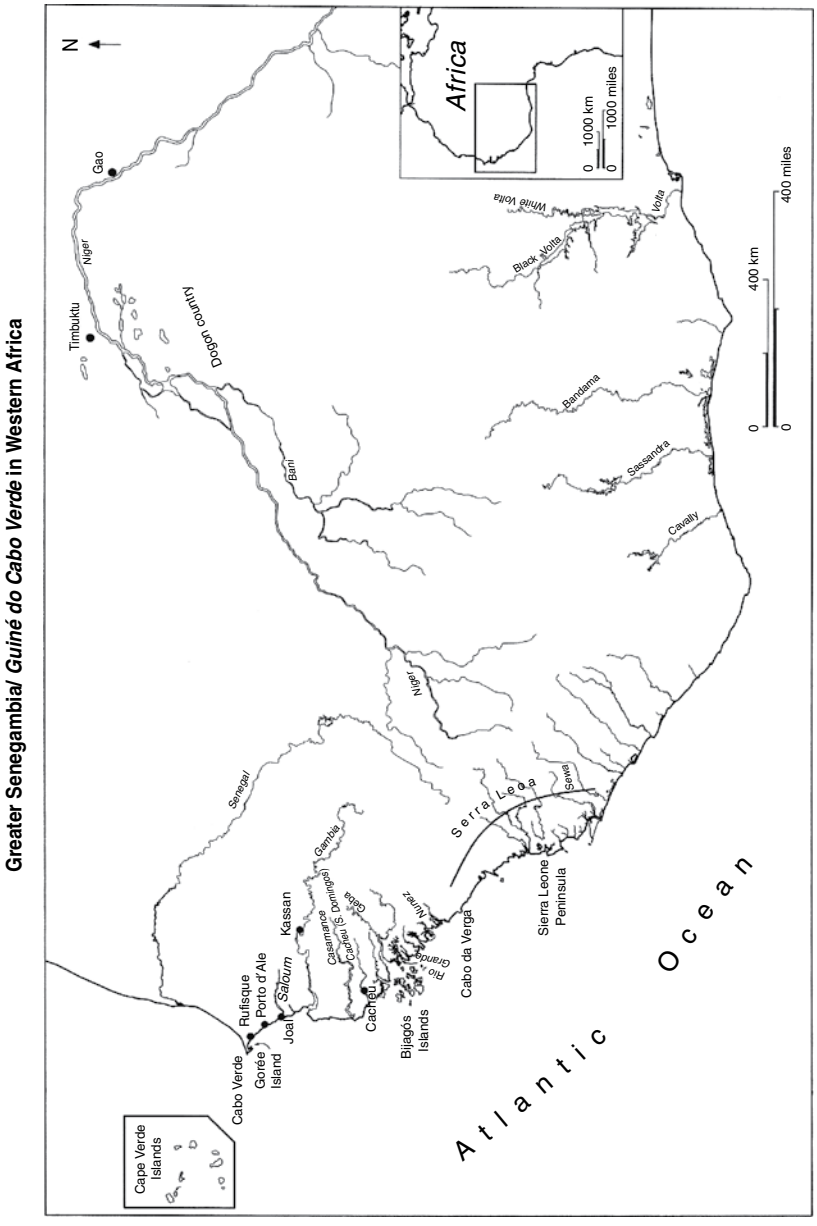


MAP 1.2. Map of early seventeenth-century polities, Petite Côte to Rio Grande.

the lançados identified as Portuguese and Christians and had a number of other ethnic markers: They were traders, they spoke Portuguese or Crioulo,[5] and they had a distinctive material culture.

religion and identified themselves with Luso-African society, while maintaining the ability to switch their identity in different circumstances.

[5] The formation of a Portuguese-based creole language in Guinea of Cape Verde may not predate the second half of the seventeenth century. Creole was connected with the process of urban encapsulation of Luso-Africans. A kind of Portuguese (neither a pidgin nor a creole) was spoken on the coast by Africans and Luso-Africans, as a language of trade and religion – a status it shared, for example, with Mandinka. See P.E.H. Hair, "The use



MAP 1.3. Map of Greater Senegambia, Guiné do Cabo Verde.

How did Portuguese Jews fit into this environment? The history of their presence is part of the forced diaspora from Iberia. After being banished from Spanish lands in 1492, Sephardic families in Portugal also became the target of expulsion in 1496–1497. The alternative was forced conversion to Christianity. This brought into existence a new social category: the so-called New Christians. Henceforth within the Iberian Catholic world a social barrier was interposed between the *Old Christians* and *New Christians* – all those of Sephardic descent. This social distinction was re-enforced by the Inquisition, or Holy Tribunal, authorized by the Pope in 1536 after an insistent request from the Portuguese Crown. A new step in the long history of persecution of the *gentes da nação*, people of the Hebrew Nation, began.

For half a century, historians have debated the religious identity of the New Christians. Among the New Christians, some were faithful Christians and others were public Christians but secret Jews. During the sixteenth century, the latter group grew distant from normative Judaism. They are often referred to as crypto-Jews or *Marranos*. As recent historiography shows, however, the religious orientations of these groups were flexible.

As many as 50,000 Sephardim chose to leave the Iberian Peninsula to find a new life far from the tentacles of the Inquisition, in Muslim lands of the Maghreb or in the Ottoman Empire,[6] as well as in the new overseas "promised lands" in Sub-Saharan Africa, America, or Asia. After the first diasporic movements at the end of the fifteenth century, new waves of migration occurred, particularly when the Inquisition intensified its persecutions, or when New Christians profited from a general authorization to leave Portugal freely. One of the latter moments occurred in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as hundreds of New Christians left Iberia for the United Provinces, which subsequently became a refuge.[7] There they joined members of crypto-Jewish communities fleeing the

of African Languages in Afro-European Contacts in Guinea: 1440–1560," *Sierra Leone Language Review* 5 (1966), 5–26 and Jean-Louis Rougé, "A propósito da formação dos crioulos de Cabo Verde e da Guiné," *Soronda* 20 (July 1995), 81–97.

[6] Jonathan Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550–1750*, London, Littman Library, 1998, p. 19.

[7] In 1601, in exchange for payment, a special authorization was given by Philip III to New Christians to leave Portugal and settle overseas. In 1609 the Twelve Years Truce began; it allowed the New Christians to circulate and engage in maritime business with Northern Europe. See José Alberto Tavim, "Senegal" in Lúcia Liba Mucznick et al. (eds.), *Dicionário do Judaísmo Português*, Lisbon, Editorial Presença, 2009, p. 498. The general pardon of 1605 granted for the "crime" of Judaism may also have offered an opportunity to leave the country without the risk of arrest.

Catholic Spanish occupation of Antwerp and other places. This emigration led to the growth of important Sephardic communities in Rotterdam and, especially, Amsterdam. The connection between Jewish and crypto-Jewish trading networks was steadily strengthened.[8]

However, on the geographical margins of empire, where there was no Holy Tribunal, Sephardim were rarely forced to hide their Jewish identity. In fact, the more peripheral a place, the safer New Christians and Jews tended to feel. West Africa was one such place.

Written Sources

Portuguese archives contain a wealth of documents that are insufficiently utilized by, and often unknown to, historians of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century West Africa. Until recently, relatively few Africanists have recognized the potential significance of the Portuguese archives for Senegambia, a region generally considered within the orbit of francophone or anglophone West Africa.[9] Yet, Lusophone sources are crucial for the period of earliest contact between Europeans and West Africans.

The late Avelino Teixeira da Mota and Paul Hair[10] were pioneers in publishing, translating, and annotating several important Portuguese primary sources at an international level; also important are the documents collected and transcribed by António Brásio in the volumes of the *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*. Nize Isabel de Moraes provides documents and commentary for francophone scholars.[11] The late Walter Rodney was

[8] For an overview of the evolution of converso, Crypto-Jewish and Sephardic networks see inter alia the recent synopsis of Jonathan Israel, "Jews and Crypto-Jews in the Atlantic World Systems, 1500–1800," in Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic Diasporas, Jews, Conversos and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism 1500–1800*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, pp. 3–17.

[9] A noteworthy exception is the late Paul Hair, who made available annotated translations of several important primary sources, including Almada and Donelha, and whose numerous articles in *Africana Research Bulletin* provide access to works by Barreira and other authors. See also Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800*, Oxford, 1970. In addition, see, for example, Jean Boulègue, *Les Luso-Africains de Sénégambie: XVIe–XIXe siècles* (avec la collaboration de Xavier Guillard), Lisbon, Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical (hereafter IICT)/Université de Paris I-Centre de Recherches Africaines, 1989. Boulègue makes use of Portuguese sources. In addition, N. I. de Moraes, *À la découverte de la Petite Côte au XVIIe siècle (Sénégal et Gambie)*, 4 tomes [3 vols.], Dakar, IFAN, Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, 1995–1998, provides documents and commentary in French translation. George Brooks has worked continuously on Luso-Africans, also making use of Portuguese sources; see note 13.

[10] A number of their extensive historiographical contributions are cited in this work.

[11] See Moraes, *À la découverte*.

also one of the first historians to renew our knowledge of the region using Portuguese manuscripts.[12] Jean Boulègue and George Brooks have worked continuously on the history of the region and on Luso-Africans, also making use of Portuguese sources.[13] Contemporary Portuguese scholars such as Maria Emília Madeira Santos,[14] Maria Manuel Torrão[15] and Maria João Soares[16] have made major contributions, connecting the history of Guinea to the Cape Verde Islands and the Atlantic routes, followed recently by Tobias Green.[17] Philip Havik[18] works on gender and, together with Torrão, Walter Hawthorne's[19] and António de Almeida Mendes's[20] contributions

[12] See Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800*.

[13] From Boulègue see inter alia *Les Luso-Africains; from Brooks, see his recent Eurafricans in Western Africa. Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, Ohio University Press and James Currey, Athens-Oxford, 2003.

[14] Santos, ed., *História Geral de Cabo Verde*, vols. 2–3.

[15] Maria Manuel Ferraz Torrão, "Actividade comercial externa de Cabo Verde: organização, funcionamento, evolução," in Luís de Albuquerque and M.E. Madeira Santos, eds., *História Geral de Cabo Verde*, vol. 1, Lisbon/Praia, Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga, Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, Direcção Geral do Património Cultural de Cabo Verde, 1991, pp. 337–345; Torrão, "Rotas comerciais, agentes económicos, meios de pagamento"; *Tráfico de escravos entre a Costa da Guiné e a América Espanhola. Articulação dos impérios ultramarinos ibéricos num espaço atlântico (1466–1595)*, PhD dissertation IICT/University of the Açores, 2 vols., Lisbon, in press.

[16] Maria João Soares, "Para uma compreensão dos Lançados nos Rios de Guiné. Século XVI – meados do século XVII," *Studia* 56/57 (2000), 147–222; Soares with M. E. Madeira Santos, "Igreja, missionação e sociedade," in Santos, ed., *História Geral de Cabo Verde*, vol. 2.

[17] Tobias Green, "Building Creole Identity in the African Atlantic, Boundaries of Race and Religion in 17th-Century Cabo Verde," *History in Africa* 36 (2009), 103–125; see also Green, "Equal partners? Proselytising by Africans and Jews in the 17th century Atlantic Diaspora," *Melilah* 1 (2008), 1–12; see also Green, "Amsterdam and the African Atlantic: The role of Amsterdam Sephardim in Senegal in the Early Seventeenth Century," in Hilary Pomeroy, Christopher J. Pountain and Elena Romero, eds., *Proceedings of the Fourteenth British Conference on Judeo-Spanish Studies*, London, Department of Hispanic Studies, Queen Mary, University of London, 2008, 85–94.

[18] Philip Havik, *Silences and Soundbytes; The Gendered Dynamics of Trade and Brokerage in the Pre-colonial Guinea Bissau Region*, Münster, Lit Verlag, 2004.

[19] Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves. Transformations along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400–1900*, Portsmouth, Heinemann, 2003.

[20] António de Almeida Mendes, "Traites ibériques entre Méditerranée et Atlantique (1450–1550)," *Anais de História de Além-Mar* VI (2005), 351–387; Mendes, "The Foundations of the System: A Reassessment of the Slave Trade to the Spanish Americas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in David Eltis and David Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 63–94; Mendes, "Child Slaves in the Early North Atlantic, Northern Senegambia to Portugal, 15th–16th Century," paper presented to the conference "Brokers of Change, Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in the 'Guinea of Cabo Verde'," University of Birmingham, June 12, 2009.