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978-0-521-19286-6 - The Forgotten Diaspora: Jewish Communities in West Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World

Peter Mark and Jose da Silva Horta

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The Forgotten Diaspora

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, local Muslim rulers protected the Jews from agents of the Inquisition. 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 indirectly in the slave 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 moving to the United Provinces around 1620, the members of these communities 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.

Peter Mark is Professor of Art History at Wesleyan University. He is the author of several books, including *“Portuguese” Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (2002) and *The Wild Bull and the Sacred Forest: Form, Meaning and Change in Senegambian Initiation Masks of the Diola* (Cambridge, 1992), as well as multiple scholarly articles. Professor Mark has twice been an Alexander von Humboldt research Fellow at the Frobenius-Institut, Goethe Universität (Frankfurt). He has also held National Endowment for the Humanities and Fulbright Fellowships.

José da Silva Horta is Assistant Professor, with tenure, of African History and of Expansion History at the University of Lisbon, where he is also a researcher at the Centre of History. He serves as director of the Faculty of Letters Doctoral Program in African History and of the African Studies Undergraduate Program. He is author of *A ‘Guiné do Cabo Verde’: produção textual e representações (1578–1684)*, Ph.D. dissertation, 2002 (Gulbenkian/FCT, in press). His publications include *A representação do Africano na Literatura de Viagens, do Senegal à Serra Leoa (1453–1508)* (1991) and articles in international journals.

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*Jewish Communities in West Africa
and the Making of the Atlantic World*

PETER MARK

Wesleyan University, Connecticut

JOSÉ DA SILVA HORTA

University of Lisbon



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*Our dedication calls to mind a Portuguese drinking
toast: “aos presentes e aos ausentes”; “To those who are
present and to those who are absent.” In this case, those
who are absent will always be present for us:*

*To Odile Goerg
To Cristina Amaro
In Memoriam:
Herbert Mark
Maria Eugénia and Jorge Horta*

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Acknowledgments

This book represents seven years of joint labor. During that period, we developed a joint research project, following the rhythm imposed by our respective professional and personal lives in different countries separated by an ocean and five time zones. As a matter of fact, a coauthored book like this one would have been impossible before the era of the Internet. Nevertheless, nothing was more productive than the short periods, two or sometimes three times a year, when we met in Lisbon or Middletown or Amsterdam, to work together in the archives, to discuss (or argue) as we developed our analysis of the rich and often totally unexpected documents that our research in the Portuguese archives continually revealed. For seven years, as we gradually worked out the complex history of Jewish and other traders who moved between four continents, we ourselves moved across three continents, to present papers to colleagues in the United States, Portugal, France, Germany, the Netherlands, England, and the Republic of Guinea. In each of these places we received invaluable help and suggestions from the scientific community.

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