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History in Africa, Volume 32, 2005, pp. 165-183 (Article)

Published by Cambridge University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2005.0010>



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FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SEPHARDIM OF THE PETITE CÔTE

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I

The publication in these pages of an article by Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta on the Sephardic communities of the Petite Côte in the early seventeenth century represents a significant step forward in our understanding of the Jewish presence in west Africa.² Using previously unreferenced material, Mark and Horta have filled out for the first time the nature of this community, and in particular provided valuable evidence as to the group's connections with Lisbon and Amsterdam.

This type of assiduous documentary research has long been needed for this topic. Although some Africanists have referred to the Jewish presence there, such references have tended to draw on the same few documentary sources. So though the work of Jean Boulègue, António Carreira, and Nize Isabel de Moraes has been important in drawing the attention of Africanists to the Jewish presence in Senegambia, one can say that, in general, historians of the upper Guinea coast have not systematized the place of the Sephardim in discourses related to their area of study.³

¹I would like to express thanks to P.F. de Moraes Farias, Yosef Kaplan, and T.C. McCaskie, all of whom have provided invaluable advice without which this paper could not have been written, as well as Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta for various interchanges.

²Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, "Two Early Seventeenth-Century Sephardic Communities on Senegal's Petite Cote," *HA* 31(2004), 231-56.

³Jean Boulègue, *Les Luso-Africains de Sénégal, XVIe - XIXe Siècle* (Dakar, 1972), 57-62; António Carreira, *Os Portugêses nos Rios de Guiné, 1500-1900* (Lisbon, 1984), 44-46; Nize Isabel de Moraes, *À la Découverte de la Petite Côte au XVIIe Siècle (Sénégal et Gambie)* (2 vols.: Dakar, 1995), 2:300; idem, "Sur les Prises de Gorée par les Portugais au XVIIe Siècle", *BIFAN* 31B(1969), 989-1013.

Meanwhile, there is almost a complete absence of reference to the Jewish presence in west Africa among historians of the Sephardim. There are perhaps two overriding explanations for this lacuna. For one thing, these communities were comparatively small and did not have an extended lifespan, and it is of course natural that historians of the Sephardim should concentrate on the most important communities of the diaspora. For another, we suspect that the absence of their commentary on this subject is not entirely unrelated to fears as to what might be uncovered, since it is notorious that one of the major activities of Europeans in Africa at this time was slaving. The implication of a significant number of Sephardim being involved in this activity would not sit comfortably with the traditional interpretation of many historians of the Sephardim that their subjects were, essentially, victims of persecution, and that, where they were slave owners, they treated their charges much better than did Christians.⁴

It should be stressed that this is not merely an arcane subject of interest only to specialists in Sephardic history. The lack of any full study of the role of Sephardim in west Africa is especially unfortunate, given the increasing amount of work available on the role of people of Jewish descent in virtually every area of the world where Iberian influence was significant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Looking at the Lusophone world, for instance, we cite the work of José Gonçalves Salvador, Anita Novinsky, Arnold Wiznitzer, and Egon and Frieda Wolff, who together have cast much light on the highly important role of Jews and *crístãos novos* in the formation of Brazil.⁵ In the for-

⁴See, e.g., Mordechai Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean: The Spanish-Portuguese Jewish Settlements in the Caribbean and the Guianas* (Jerusalem, 2002), 30-32, 107-08. Where historians of the Sephardim have entered into the arena of the Jewish presence in west Africa, they have again tended to do so from the perspective of the Jew as victim; see Moshé Liba (with the editorial cooperation of Norman Simms), *Jewish Child Slaves of São Tomé* (Wellington, 2003).

⁵José Gonçalves Salvador, *Cristãos-Novos, Jesuítas e Inquisição: Aspectos de sua atuação nas Capitânias do Sul, 1530-1680* (São Paulo, 1969); idem., *Os Cristãos Novos e o Comércio no Atlântico Meridional (com Enfoque nas Capitânias no Sul, 1530-1680)* (São Paulo, 1978); Anita Novinsky, *Cristãos Novos na Bahia* (São Paulo, 1972); Arnold Wiznitzer, *The Records of the Earliest Jewish Community in the New World* (New York, 1954); idem., *O Livro das Atas das Congregações Judaicas: Zur Israel em Recife e Magen Abraham em Maurícia, Brasil, 1648-1653* (Rio de Janeiro, 1955); Egon and Frieda Wolff, *Judaizantes e Judeus no Brasil, 1500-1808: Dicionário Biográfico* (Rio de Janeiro, 1986); idem., *Judeus em Amsterdã: Seu relacionamento com o Brasil, 1600-1620* (Rio de Janeiro, 1989). We would note, in addition, that it is important to make a distinction between Jews and *crístãos novos* (New Christians). *Cristãos Novos* were descended from converted Jews, but were as likely to be practicing Christians or agnostics as Jews.

mer Hispanic dominions there has, similarly, been much work done, particularly by Daniel MesaBernal and Anna-María Splendiani in Colombia, by Seymour Liebman (and earlier by Alfonso Toro) in Mexico, by Gunter Böhm in Chile, and by Pedro Guibovich Pérez and René Millar Carvacho in Peru.⁶

Taken in the round, the work done by these historians has made it impossible to doubt any further that the *cristãos novos*—whether as Judaizers, as sincere Christians, or as agnostics—played a crucial role in the Iberian conquest and ideological transformation of the lands that first appeared on European horizons at the end of the fifteenth century. In fact, in virtually every new colony of the Iberian nations where a serious study has been done, the concept of local identities—and the role that people of Jewish descent played in the formation of it—has had to be substantially revised.

However, as Mark and Horta point out, historians of Senegambia have tended to pass over Portuguese records, and the references to the Jewish presence which they contain. Yet as their article proves beyond doubt, the Portuguese Jews were important in the Petite Côte in the early seventeenth century. Surely, then, the role of Sephardim in the development of the emerging Creole societies of this period cannot be discounted, particularly when we consider the growing evidence from other parts of the world in which the Portuguese presence was significant.

In this paper it is my aim to elucidate some aspects of the research published by Mark and Horta last year. Research in the Gemeentearchief of Amsterdam has revealed a significant corpus of documentary material

⁶Daniel MesaBernal, *De los Judíos en la Historia de Colombia* (Bogotá, 1996); Splendiani's monumental work in transcribing and analyzing the books of the Inquisition on Cartagena will remain the standard work on the subject for years to come: Anna-María Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años de Inquisición en el Tribunal de Cartagena de las Indias, 1610-60* (4 vols.: Bogotá, 1997); Seymour B. Liebman, *The Jews in New Spain: Faith, Flame and Inquisition* (Coral Gables, 1970); Alfonso Toro, *Los Judíos en la Nueva España: Selección de Documentos del Siglo XVI, correspondientes al ramo de la Inquisición* (Mexico City, 1932); idem., *La Familia Carvajal: Estudio Histórico Sobre los Judíos y la Inquisición de la Nueva España en el Siglo XVI, basado en documentos originales y en su mayor parte inéditos, que se conservan en el Archivo General de la Nación de la Ciudad de México* (2 vols.: Mexico, 1944); Gunther Böhm, *Nuevos Antecedentes para una Historia de los Judíos en Chile Colonial* (Santiago de Chile, 1963); idem., "Los Judíos en Chile Durante la Colonia", *Boletín de la Academia Chilena de la Historia*, no.38(1948), 21-100; Pedro Guibovich Pérez, *En Defensa de Dios: Estudios y Documentos Sobre la Inquisición en el Perú* (Lima, 1998); René Millar Carvacho, *Inquisición y Sociedad en el Virreinato Peruano: Estudios Sobre el Tribunal de la Inquisición en Lima* (Santiago, 1997).

that substantially adds to these findings, and further develops our understanding both of the nature of the Sephardic community on the Petite Côte in this period, and of the nature of the relationship between the Sephardim and the Wolof people among whom they lived.

Such material is important not only as a supplement to our knowledge of the history of these communities and their role in the wider west African context, but also because it balances the Portuguese sources. Given the history of the Sephardim in Portugal, such sources—whether derived from the Inquisition, or from personal accounts—must be seen as tendentious and of questionable reliability where precise details are concerned, unless corroborated by outside evidence.

The Amsterdam material, by contrast, provides the perspective of the Sephardim themselves. It tells us who they were, where they had originally come from before reaching Amsterdam, and substantially fills out our picture of their international networks of commerce. Together with the material published by Mark and Horta, it renders the significance of the role of the Sephardim on the Petite Côte at this time impossible to gainsay. Furthermore, it shows that the fears of Sephardi historians as to what might be uncovered as to Sephardi history in the region are, at least in part, ill-founded.

My own interest in this topic derives from ongoing doctoral research on the history of the *cristãos novos* in Cabo Verde and the Guinea Coast, which I hope to complete by the beginning of 2006.⁷ Such a topic might seem to exclude the Petite Côte, but the very fact that Portuguese sources in Cabo Verde make reference to the Jewish presence in the Petite Côte, as well as in the region of what today is Guiné-Bissau, is evidence of the highly complicated web of links that encompassed this region in the seventeenth century, and shows that the Sephardic role in the historical discourse of this area must not be discounted—must in fact be given further thought.

II

Perhaps the most important figure to emerge in the findings of Mark and Horta is Jacob Peregrino. The documents they have uncovered describe

⁷In the age of postmodernism it is a requisite for some readers to know the perspective of the author, so it is important to point out that my interest in this subject-matter derives both from my status as a secular Sephardic Jew and from a longstanding interest in the region. See Toby Green, *Meeting the Invisible Man: Secrets and Magic in West Africa* (London, 2001).

Peregrino as the “rabbi” of the community of the Petite Côte. He was said to have brought twelve copies of the Torah with him to assist in the conversion of *cristãos novos*, and to have practiced the circumcision ritual there.⁸ Peregrino’s son, Manuel, was said to perform the ritual slaughtering of meat for the Jewish community, and might even have been a rabbi as well.⁹

Peregrino’s family origin is described by Mark and Horta thus: “Jacob Peregrino, whose Portuguese name was Jerónimo Rodrigues Freire, was born in the town of Tancos where he had been a farmer and later a salesman in Lisbon for Estevão del Cairo. He is described as having fled Portugal to Flanders. Afterwards, his wife also escaped together with “the people who came from Milan” (“a gente de Milão”); she died in Holland.”¹⁰

Documents from Amsterdam shed substantial light on the career of Peregrino, as this paper will attest. The earliest reference to him elucidates his origins still further. A notarial document of 1609 clarifies the petition of the Sephardi Joseph Pardo relating to certain particulars of a business transaction in Venice. The witnesses include Duarte Fernandes, Manoel Carvaillie [Carvalho], Jacomo Casseres, and one “Jacomo Pellingrino.” Both Casseres and Pellingrino claim to know the situation in Venice at close quarters, since both have lived in the city – Casseres for six years, and Pellingrino for thirteen.¹¹ Furthermore, the document tells us Peregrino’s age—approximately 47 years.¹² This would render his year of birth as *ca.* 1562.

It would seem reasonable to assume an identification between Jacomo Pellingrino and Jacob Peregrino. Firstly, as the evidence of Mark and Horta shows, Peregrino’s wife had familial connections to Milan. Secondly, as we will see in this paper, there were substantial commercial links between Peregrino and the Jewish communities of the principalities of Italy. Although this is the only piece of evidence that specifically refers to Peregrino’s previous residence in Venice, it would seem to require us to reconsider the notion that he had fled straight from Portugal to Flanders.

While it is possible that Peregrino had spent an early part of his life in Venice before returning to Lisbon and migrating thence to Amsterdam,

⁸Mark/Horta, “Sephardic Communities,” 241-42.

⁹*Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 241.

¹¹Gemeentearchief (hereafter GAA), Notarial Archive (hereafter NA) 196, f. 323v. “Verklaeren de voon Jacomo Pellingrino e Jacomo Casseres . . . dat zy . . . Venetie voor tijd gewoont.”

¹²*Ibid.*

several considerations require the rejection of this hypothesis. In the first place, his status as a witness in this case would be strange, to say the least, if his knowledge of Venice did not refer to recent experience. Secondly, the fact that as late as this document of 1609, he is referred to in documents with the Italianate name of “Jacomio”—soon to be given the Hebrew slant of Jacob—would suggest that Peregrino’s identification with Italy was a recent matter. Thirdly, his extensive business connections with Italy imply contemporary connections with the communities there.

A potential reworking of Peregrino’s life history in this case might suggest that he moved first from Lisbon to Venice, and came thence to Amsterdam. This would be in keeping with his status as a learned Jew made clear by Mark and Horta, since the thirteen years he spent in the Sephardi community of Venice would have given him an opportunity to become steeped in the Mosaic law that a more recent arrival in Amsterdam from Lisbon would not have afforded him. Although Lisbon was a hotbed of crypto-Jewry, the attentions of the Inquisition meant that a full grasp of Judaic practices was unlikely to be reached there. This finding stresses the need to treat details from Inquisition records with care. Perhaps it was assumed by informants that Peregrino must have fled from Lisbon to Flanders, as such an assumption suited contemporary prejudices about the nature of the Sephardic communities; at all events, it seems unlikely that these informants had as detailed a knowledge of Peregrino’s past as they pretended.

However, while this evidence challenges some aspects of Peregrino’s life history as described in the Portuguese documents, it supports others. In particular, Mark and Horta’s assertion that Peregrino was a Jew of considerable learning is reinforced by Peregrino’s connections in Amsterdam.

Two documents of 1619 refer to his trading connections to the Belmonte family and to Diogo Dias Querido.¹³ Diogo Dias Querido was a significant figure in Amsterdam’s Sephardic community. He was one of the founders of Beth Jahacob, the first Sephardic congregation in Amsterdam, and it appears that he had been tried by the Inquisition in Bahía in 1591 and had then left for Amsterdam.¹⁴ He was also known as one of the chief proselytizers of *cristãos novos* arriving in the city.¹⁵

¹³GAA, NA 645, ff. 621-22, 887. Both documents refer to Peregrino’s trading activities in Senegambia. I will return to this matter in connection with the international webs of commerce; the importance here is its connection of Peregrino to important Sephardic families in Amsterdam.

¹⁴Arnold Wiznitzer, *Jews in Colonial Brazil* (New York, 1960), 47.

¹⁵E.M. Koen, “Amsterdam Notarial Deeds Pertaining to the Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam up to 1639”, *Studia Rosenthaliana* 3(1969), 115n51. See also Elias

Furthermore, Querido's sister, Guiomar Vaz, was married to Jacob Israel Belmonte, who was another of the founders of Beth Jahacob.¹⁶ That Peregrino was also a member of the Beth Jahacob community is confirmed by his presence in the list of members of the congregation owing monies for 1614.¹⁷

The Amsterdam sources confirm that the principal thrust of the Portuguese sources as to Peregrino's religious orientation is correct. While he was certainly not a "rabbi" or leader of the Amsterdam community, his age and background could well have equipped him for this task in Senegambia. Moreover, while the connection between Peregrino and Italy might seem abstruse and of little relevance to west Africa, this is not the case. Taken together with the other evidence of Peregrino's connections with Italy, which I will now adduce, it fills out our understanding of the international Sephardic webs of commerce of which Senegambia formed a part, and of how Sephardic influence might have been brought to bear on the Petite Côte.

III

This question of the international webs of commerce is of crucial importance. As Mark and Horta write, these Sephardi "belonged to a generation that, in large measure because of the Expulsion and the Inquisition, had established an extensive international network of commercial connections based in part upon family ties".¹⁸ Their paper usefully adds to our understanding of these networks, but many unsupported generalizations have been written by others about such matters.¹⁹

Lipiner, *Os Judaizantes nas Capitánias de Cima (Estudos Sobre os Cristãos-Novos do Brasil nos Séculos XVI e XVII)*, (São Paulo, 1969), 102-03.

¹⁶Wiznitzer, *Colonial Brazil*, 47.

¹⁷GAA, Portuguese Jewish Archives, Livro 1, f. 244: "O senhor Jacob Peregrino deve quinze florins em q foi fintado por sua caza."

¹⁸Mark/Horta, "Sephardic Communities," 243.

¹⁹A particularly egregious example of this is José Gonçalves Salvador's *Os Magnatas do Tráfico Negro (Séculos XVI e XVII)* (São Paulo, 1981). Although much of Salvador's work is important, in this book in particular he uses terms such as "Jews" and "*crístãos novos*" interchangeably, appearing to assume that every *crístão novo* is a Jew. More recently, I would cite as an instance of this trend Maria da Graça Mateus Ventura's *Negreiros Portugueses na Rota das Índias de Castela (1541-1556)* (Lisbon, 1999). Ventura refers to "Jews, New Christians or Judaizers" ("*Judeus, crístãos-novos ou judaizantes*") with no attempt to differentiate among these categories or to see how they might overlap: *ibid.*, 36; cf. *ibid.*, 31, 37, 117, for unproven assertions of the Judaic origins of the Portuguese slavers.

In particular, it is often assumed without much documentary evidence that a sort of familial/kinship cabal was formed among Sephardi traders. Yet, as Newitt has written in another context, “to represent kinship networks simply as a basis for co-operation and not also as a source of rivalry would be to fly in the face of everyone’s experience of relations within an extended family.”²⁰ Though of course the shared Sephardi experience was the cornerstone of these commercial ties, tensions commonly arose, and affected both the Sephardim and the peoples with whom they traded.

The nature of the Sephardi commercial networks and of the tensions that arose in them is greatly illuminated by the Amsterdam evidence on the Petite Côte. In this regard, crucial evidence is provided by one of the aforementioned documents relating Peregrino to the Belmonte family in 1619. This is a statement made by Diogo Nunes Belmonte, a Portuguese merchant in Amsterdam.²¹ Belmonte is testifying at the request of David Abenacatar (alias Fernando Alvares Mello), the proxy of Eliau Benveniste, a merchant of Venice, and Francisco Gomes de Moraes, a merchant in Pisa.²² The petition states that in 1611 Jacob Peregrino sailed to the coast of Guinea with merchandise to trade. The merchandise was divided into 12 shares: Mello had 4, Benveniste 3, and the remaining 5 belonged to Diogo Dias Querido. Peregrino had had orders to send the proceeds of the traded goods to Livorno, where they would be dealt with Francisco by Lopezo Pinto.²³

However, a problem arose with the trading expedition. Pinto—and, after his death, his son-in-law Moraes—did not accept Peregrino’s accounts of the proceeds as being correct.²⁴ Indeed, a veritable showdown is in the process of being played out in Amsterdam in 1619: Alvares Mello wants Peregrino to be arrested in lieu of the debt, and Peregrino has confessed to Belmonte that he remains in hiding for fear of being arrested by Alvares Mello.²⁵

This priceless document elucidates an enormous amount as to the Sephardic community on the Petite Côte. With regard to the international trade networks, we learn that Dias Querido was as involved in the

²⁰Malyn Newitt, *A History of Mozambique* (London, 1995), 9.

²¹GAA, NA 645, f. 887: “koopman van te potugees natie en Amsterdam.”

²²Ibid.: “Davidt Abenacatar . . . [alias] . . . Fernando Alvares Mello portugees koopman . . . procuratie van Eliau Benveniste koopman te veneza na Italie . . . volmacht van Francisco Gommess de Morays koopman en de stalt von pisa.”

²³Ibid. Peregrino had “orders, deze partijen in Guinea te verhandelen en retour-ladingen naar Livorno te zenden.”

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., f. 888: “Peregrino nu weer in Amsterdam is en zich verborgen houdt uit vrees, dat Melo hem in gijzeling zal laten nemen . . .”

Senegambian coast as he had earlier been in Brazil, where he was a factor at the sugar mill of Manuel Rodrigues Veiga prior to arriving in Amsterdam.²⁶ In addition, Mark and Horta note that a certain Pedro Rodrigues Veiga had been present in Senegambia as a Jew.²⁷ Pedro was in fact the brother of Manuel Rodrigues Veiga.²⁸ Like his brother, he had business interests in Bahía.²⁹ The appearance of Pedro Rodrigues Veiga in Senegambia is thus further evidence as to the important network of links between Amsterdam, Senegambia, and Bahía at this period.³⁰

This document also tells us of the status of Senegambia in this network through the fact that Dias Querido saw Senegambia as of comparable importance to his other international trading interests—as evidenced by his almost half-share in the voyage. And crucially, we learn here of the role of the Jewish communities in Italy in financing and clearing the profits of these interests. The other backers are from Pisa and Venice, and the proceeds are to be cleared in Livorno. A significant part of the Sephardi diaspora, stretching from Bahía and Amsterdam to Livorno and Venice, is thus involved in the Senegambian trade.

With regard to the community on the Petite Côte, we learn that Peregrino's stay on the coast was temporary, and that he soon returned to Amsterdam.³¹ This suggests that we perhaps need to be cautious of several assertions that are implied by the Portuguese documents. It in particular does not support the view that “this rabbi [Peregrino] was sent by the Sephardic community in Amsterdam.”³² Peregrino appears to have been in Senegambia as part of a trading mission. Even though Dias Querido was a significant figure in Beth Jahacob, there is no evidence from this report that a principal reason for his presence on the Petite Côte was spiritual, nor is there any record to be found among the archives of the Portuguese Jewish community that the leaders of Beth Jahacob had anything to do with his decision to go there from a religious perspective. It follows then that we must also beware of the view that *cristãos novos* came to Senegambia “in part to be able to return to their religion.”³³

²⁶Koen, “Notarial Deeds,” 115n51. Mark/Horta (“Sephardic Communities,” 239) note that Pedro Rodrigues Veiga had come to Senegambia to convert.

²⁷Mark/Horta, “Sephardic Communities,” 239.

²⁸GAA, NA 62, f. 210v.

²⁹Ibid.: Pedro Rodrigues Veiga declares that “comprou na bahia hu engenho de açucar nomeado Santo Cosmas.”

³⁰It is also active confirmation of the presence of genuine crypto-Jews in Brazil at this time.

³¹Something that is also confirmed by his presence in the roll of debtors for Beth Jahacob of 1614: GAA, NA 62, f. 210v.

³²Mark/Horta, “Sephardic Communities,” 242.

³³Ibid., 243.

In fact, as Cohen has pointed out with reference to the crypto-Jews of the Americas:

Not all the New Christians were Judaizers, and few if any of the Judaizers came over primarily to find a haven for the practice of their secret faith. If faith had been the primary concern, they would have sought to flee, as so many others did, to Moslem lands, Protestant lands, or at least to Catholic territories where Judaism was freely practiced, outside the orbit of Spain and Portugal, [sic] there can be little doubt that the primary motivations of most of the Judaizers who came to Latin America were economic and social.³⁴

In the early seventeenth century there was no need to come to Senegambia to return to Judaism. The Ottoman Empire, North Africa, Italian principalities, and Amsterdam were all welcoming Sephardim. Given the evidence this document adduces for the primarily commercial mission of Peregrino, it does seem plausible that the central motivation for the presence of Jews and *cristãos novos* in Senegambia was indeed trade. This was a place where important and well-established webs of commerce attracted men such as Dias Querido and the Belmontes. This in itself is testament to the evolution of trade between the peoples of the Wolof coast and outsiders, and the state of trading networks in Senegambia in the early seventeenth century. It was a place with which important men of business wanted involvement.

However, an interesting fact emerges when we examine the nature of the trade in which these Sephardim participated. The Sephardim of the Petite Côte do not appear to have traded predominantly in slaves. The expedition of 1612 in which Querido, Lopes Pinto, and Benveniste all had shares was not part of the triangular slave trade. Goods were to be sent from west Africa straight back to Livorno, and from a subsequent document we glean that the goods traded were most probably hides. Peregrino subsequently asked a sailor, Pieter Stoffelsz, to testify as to the slow nature of the trade in hides in Senegambia in 1613, apparently as an excuse for his failure to clear the debts he owed to the shareholders of the trading mission, and Stoffelsz testified that this was the worst year for trading he had ever known in Senegambia, and that he had only with great difficulty managed to buy some hides.³⁵

The point that these men were not slavers is supported by documents relating to other members of the Sephardic community of the Petite Côte

³⁴Martin A. Cohen, "Introduction" in *The Jewish Experience in Latin America* ed. Martin A. Cohen (Waltham, 1971), xxiii.

³⁵GAA, NA 645, ff. 1150-51.

at this time. On 19 January 1611 Simão Rodrigues and Estevão Rodrigues testified that they had received various goods from Diogo Dias Querido and Diogo da Silva to trade in Porto de Ale and Joal, and that they were to bring back hides and ivory in return.³⁶ Another of the Sephardim who traded in Senegambia at this time, Gaspar Nunes, is said in 1612 to have 2000 pounds of ivory and 140 pounds of wax as surety for Antonio Dias—both goods that were traded heavily in Senegambia, and would presumably have been acquired from here.³⁷ Finally, I would cite the documentary evidence that on 28 May 1612 Diogo da Silva found a witness to testify as to the nature of a voyage to the Guinea coast in 1611, where hides and ivory were purchased.³⁸

This is not to say that the Sephardim had nothing to do with slaves—far from it indeed. On 22 November 1610, Diogo Vaz de Sousa—heavily referenced by Mark and Horta—testified that representatives of the Sephardi traders Gaspar Nunes and Gaspar Sanches bought slaves in Joal and Portudal, securing a total of four slaves who were brought back to be in the personal service of Nunes and Sanches.³⁹ But there was nothing especially remarkable about this for the time, and we may not say that the principal activity of these Sephardim was slaving. They were on the Petite Côte, as they were in other parts of Africa, purely and simply to trade in whatever goods were to be found for exchange.⁴⁰

³⁶GAA, NA 62, f. 218v: “Simão Rodrigues e Estevão Rodrigues estantes nesta cidade de Amsterdam . . . confissão aver recebido de Dioguo da Silva e Diogo Dias Querido hû carregação de diversas mercadorias . . . a troque della ou de seus procedidos couros marfim e todas as mais cousas q acharem . . .”

³⁷GAA, NA 62, f. 345.

³⁸GAA, NA 375, f. 262. The ship was captured by pirates on the return voyage, which is why the deposition is made.

³⁹GAA, NA 52, f. 206r: “Os comisarios de Gaspar Nunes e Gaspar Sanches por nome de Luiz fernandes e Gaspar Fernandes comprarão em hum porto q se chama Joalla hu negro de hu portugues e em Portodalle comprarao outro de outro portugues e em ditto portodalle comprarão os dittos comisarios dous negros dos marinheiros da dita nao de Govert Jansen, os quais dittos quatro negros vierão em dita nao de Govert Jansen pera serviço dos ditos Gaspar Nunez e Gaspar Sanchez.”

⁴⁰In other aspects of my research, I have uncovered networks of Sephardic slavers, which were centered more on the Cape Verde islands and the Guinea coast. However, the point that Jews were primarily traders—whatever the “good” being trade—is particularly worth stressing, given the polemics that from time to time emerge regarding the Jewish role in the slave trade. On one side, demagogues such as Louis Farrakhan claim that Jews sold Africans into slavery; on the other, authors such as Eli Faber claim that the Jews were proportionately much less involved in the trade than their commercial activities should have suggested (see Eli Faber, *Jews, Slaves and the Slave Trade: Setting the Record Straight* [New York, 1998]). As so often is the case, both extremes would seem to be some way wide of the mark.

The Sephardim were, in other words, merely continuing their long commercial history that had begun in Spain and Portugal in the late Middle Ages. Conversion was a by-product of their activities on the west African coast, and of the unusual degree of freedom that they found there, as we have argued both here and elsewhere.⁴¹ But it was not the motivation that determined their presence. Nevertheless, their trading networks on the Petite Côte added an extra spoke into the web of international commerce; their presence was crucial in placing the Petite Côte in the growing Atlantic network, and thus in bringing change to the coast of west Africa.

IV

One of the most intriguing elements of the paper by Mark and Horta is the final section on the position of the offspring of Jewish men and African women, and the question of whether or not these descendants would have been seen to be Jews. As they note, by 1612, “some at least of the Jews on the Petite Côte had offspring.”⁴² Yet as these children were not born to Jewish women, they should not, by Jewish law, have been considered to be Jews. This issue was first raised by Jean Boulègue, who saw it as a significant reason for the gradual decline of the Jewish community on this part of the west African coast in the seventeenth century.⁴³ Certainly, such a decline would appear to be a corollary of this factor, and yet the Amsterdam sources place the situation in a somewhat different light.

One of the Jews who had sexual relations with Wolof women on the west African coast was Jacob Peregrino’s son, Manuel. We know this because of a remarkable dispute that developed in Amsterdam in 1619 between the Peregrino family and their former trading partner Manuel Ayres. A brief outline of the case is as follows. Riffika Mesurado, the daughter of Manuel Ayres, claimed that Manuel Peregrino had promised to marry her, having seduced her, whereas Manuel Peregrino and his father, Jacob, claimed that Riffika had been constantly soliciting Manuel, and that Manuel had constantly refused her. Jacob and Manuel claimed that Riffika had asked Manuel to climb up to her room when her mother

⁴¹Tobias Green, “The Role of the Portuguese Trading Posts in Guinea and Angola in the “Apostasy” of Crypto-Jews in the 17th Century” in *Proceedings of the C.R. Boxer Centenary Conference* (forthcoming).

⁴²Mark/Horta, “Sephardic Communities,” 253.

⁴³Boulègue, “Luso-Africans,” 62.

and aunt had been out of the house, but that Manuel had refused.⁴⁴ Included in the list of questions that Jacob asked witnesses on his side was that of whether the witnesses knew that “the said Rebecca had called to the said Pellegrino, and that when he did not want to go, she said that he lacked courage, because he was brave enough to kill a Goy [non-Jew] but not to come up the stairs.”⁴⁵

This piece of evidence gives us an extraordinary insight into both the Sephardic community of Amsterdam and to the nature of the Sephardim on the Petite Côte. Although we recognize that other glosses could be put on it, a plausible interpretation of this question is that it was alleged in Sephardic circles that Manuel Peregrino had indeed killed a non-Jew. That the question was asked without any apparent embarrassment by Jacob Peregrino might imply that this was at least not an impossible accusation in Jewish circles. Furthermore, the use of a word commonly associated with Ashkenazim—“Goy”—implies that the communities of Ashkenazim and Sephardim mixed more in Amsterdam than has been supposed.

What Jacob Peregrino’s question renders implausible is the idea that Manuel Peregrino was a particularly holy man—certainly not a rabbi, which is the suggestion of the Portuguese sources cited by Mark and Horta.⁴⁶ Although Jacob Peregrino asked his witnesses to confirm that his son was a quiet and studious young man, the evidence suggests that others in the community thought otherwise, as Manuel Peregrino was imprisoned on suspicion of his guilt.⁴⁷

Further evidence that Manuel Peregrino was imprisoned comes from another, even more astonishing source. These are the depositions of Daniel Belmonte and Jorge Fernandes Carnero that, several years before, Manuel Peregrino had been robbed of his goods by the Wolof king for sleeping with one of the king’s daughters. It was mentioned that Peregrino was in the jail of Amsterdam, and that the depositions are made at the request of Manuel Ayres, clearly with a view to showing that the claims of his daughter were to be believed.⁴⁸

⁴⁴Documents relating to the case are as follows: GAA, NA 461, ff. 297-98; GAA, NA 382, ff. 196-200, 202-03.

⁴⁵“Se algum dia ouviu que o ditto Rebecca chamara a ho ditto Pellegrino, e não querendo elle yr, lhe disse que era de pouco animo, pois ho tinha para matar hum Goy e não para subir polla escala arriba.” GAA, NA 382, f. 203.

⁴⁶Mark/Horta, “Sephardic Communities,” 247.

⁴⁷GAA, NA 382, f. 196; *ibid.*, f. 200.

⁴⁸GAA, NA 645, ff. 595-96: Daniel Belmonte was following the petition of “Manuel Ayres portugees koopman wonende in Amsterdam.” Manuel Peregrino “tegenverding in de Boien de Amsterda e zoon van Jacob Pelegrino berooft en gespoileert was . . . daar hij geslepen . . . bij de dochter von de Koning van Jalloffo.”

What the evidence shows, then, is that Manuel Peregrino probably belonged to one of the groups referred to by Mark and Horta, following “the general practice of other Europeans, which was to form liaisons with local African women, by preference choosing either the daughters of local rulers, or wealthy trading women.”⁴⁹ This liaison would also tend to militate against the idea that Manuel Peregrino was a rabbi—he certainly was not determined to seek out endogamous relationships—as would his incarceration without any interposition from Sephardic authorities in Amsterdam.

Once again then, the Amsterdam sources show that the evidence from the Inquisition and Portuguese accounts must be treated with caution. While Jacob Peregrino was probably well-acquainted with the finer points of Jewish law, his son appears to have been something of a Lothario. The idea that he was a “great rabbi” probably reflects the fantasies of the informant, rather than the actual situation.⁵⁰

A further implication of this evidence is that the Sephardim were by no means a secure community on the Petite Côte, and that instead they traded according to the whim of the Wolof kings, who could strip them of their goods whenever they wished to. Thus the view of Thornton that relations were not “imposed” on local African kings, and that African communities played a pre-eminent role in shaping the nature of international exchanges, is supported by this evidence on the Sephardim of west Africa.⁵¹ They were traders with an international network, but they depended on the goodwill of those with whom they traded. This in itself might explain the relative transience of the community on the Petite Côte, which has been attested throughout this paper by the numbers of Jewish witnesses called throughout this period to give notarial evidence, who were present in Amsterdam and who had experience of the area.

Nevertheless, although the power base of the Sephardim on the Petite Côte was tenuous, Mark and Horta are right to stress that they clearly developed significant interpersonal bonds with the peoples of the coast, as evidenced through the sexual relationships which developed. Moreover,

⁴⁹Mark/Horta, “Sephardic Communities,” 252.

⁵⁰This is not to say that Manuel Peregrino might not have been involved with ritual slaughtering of meat, another suggestion of this source (Mark /Horta, “Sephardic Communities,” 247). But this is far from being the same thing as suggesting that he was a rabbi—the implication at this point of the article—since all synagogues had designated butchers who were rarely, if ever, rabbis themselves, its being a completely different skill.

⁵¹John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (2d ed.: Cambridge, 1998).

their stimulating exposition of the possible Jewish origins of some of the mulatto presence on the coast is placed in an interesting light by the evidence of the numerous African and mulatto members of the Sephardi community of Amsterdam in its formative years.

From the records of Talmud Torah, we know that there were African Jews in Amsterdam.⁵² The rulings for 1644 state that “circumcised black Jews shall not be called to read the Torah.”⁵³ In 1647 it was ruled that a separate space must be found in the cemetery of Beth Haim to bury blacks and mulattos.⁵⁴ In 1650 the authorities ruled that the same punishment should be applied to those who circumcised blacks and mulattos as to those who circumcised Christians.⁵⁵ What we have here then is evidence as to both the inclusiveness of Judaism and the developing exclusivity. There were African members of the community, but they were increasingly unwelcome.

The presence of African members of the Sephardic communities should not in itself be a surprise. Netanyahu, the famous scholar of late medieval Sephardic history, has shown how traditional Judaic doctrines had no prejudice against outsiders. He cites the Roman Cassius Dio as stating that he could not define what the Jews were “except to say that they are a people of different races who follow the laws of the Jews.”⁵⁶ And Netanyahu also cites Maimonides, who hailed from Sefarad itself, who stated that if someone “becomes a proselyte anywhere, whether he is an Edomite, an Ammonite, a Moabite, an Ethiopian [African] or of any other nation, and whether male or female, he is permitted to enter the congregation at once.”⁵⁷

⁵²The congregation of Talmud Torah was founded in Amsterdam in 1639, amalgamating the previous congregations of Beth Jahacob and Beth Israel. These references to the presence of African Jews in Amsterdam are cited by Yosef Kaplan, *Judíos Nuevos en Amsterdam: Estudio Sobre la Historia Social y Intelectual del Judaísmo Sefardi en el Siglo XVII* (Barcelona, 1996), 73.

⁵³Portuguese Jewish Archives, book 19, f. 173: “Os Señores do Mahamad, Por Justas Consideraçois Hordenam que Avendo Algun Judeo Negro çircucidado não seja chamada asefer torah . . .”

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, f. 224: “Temo sobre que aya lugar separado en Bet Aghaim para enterarem os negros e mulattos judeos.”

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, f. 281: “Reformaçao da escama de 39 que trata de ciruncidar goim declararão os senhores do mahamad que as mesmas penas de hirem em quem circuncida negros.”

⁵⁶B. Netanyahu, *Towards the Inquisition: Essays in Jewish and Converso History in Late Medieval Spain* (Ithaca, 1997), 6.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 6n30.

However, what is clear from the sources in Amsterdam is that these ancient, inclusive attitudes were changing in the early modern period. It appears that this Sephardic community had become “infected” with the doctrines of *limpeça de sangue*, or cleanliness of blood, which had become so widespread in the Iberia from which its members in Amsterdam came.⁵⁸ We know, for instance, that Menasseh ben Israel, who persuaded Cromwell to accept the entry of Jews in 1655, stressed the “nobility and purity of their [the Sephardim’s] blood.”⁵⁹

Such sentiments would not have been out of place in a discussion among churchmen in Iberia. In other words, the community in Amsterdam had adopted the very categories of prejudice which had been devised to discriminate against them; and, as the evidence of the rulings of their synagogues show, had begun to exercise these categories against the Africans and mulattos among them.

Yet perhaps the matter should not be allowed to rest there. The fact that as late as 1650 members of the Sephardic community in Amsterdam were being threatened with punishment for circumcising Africans implies that not everyone thought in this new and discriminatory manner.⁶⁰ Given the evidence that has been adduced—both by myself and by Mark and Horta—as to the nature of the sexual relationships between Jewish men and African women in the Petite Côte, it is at least plausible to suggest that support for the inclusive view may have come in part from the experiences of those members of the community who had lived in west Africa, traded with Africans, and developed a mutual discourse. The implication is that complex and balanced relationships between the Sephardim and the peoples of the Petite Côte were developing in the early seventeenth century, something that is of equal significance for our understanding both of the histories of the peoples of the coast and of the Sephardim themselves.

V

In November 1635 the Capuchin missionary Alexis de Saint Lô reached the coastline of west Africa near Porto de Ale. He spent some time there, as well as in Rufisque and Joal. In Porto de Ale he visited “a Jew called

⁵⁸The classic account of the statutes of purity of blood is Albert A. Sicoff, trans. Mauro Armijo, *Los Estatutos de Limpieza de Sangre: Controversias entre los Siglos XV y XVII* (Madrid, 1985).

⁵⁹Kaplan, *Judios Nuevos*, 62-63.

⁶⁰Note 55 above

Peregrin, who is like the Doctor of the Jews of the coast.”⁶¹ It seems likely that this is the same Jacob Peregrino that I have been following in this paper, now an old man, in his early seventies. In an earlier passage, Saint-Lô referred again to the Jews of Porto de Ale. “We found three or four Jews in this port, of which only one had been born into the race, the others being Jews only because they had been perverted by this one. He was extremely knowledgeable about his law: I have argued with him in the presence of all the Portuguese of this port.”⁶²

Putting the two passages together, it is clear that this Jew must have been Peregrino. And yet it is also clear that the vibrant Sephardic community of the Petite Côte which appears to have existed here in the early seventeenth century had dissipated. In part, it is true, this might have been the result of the punitive Portuguese expedition to the coast of 1629.⁶³ But we must also look to other reasons for the demise of the community.

As we have seen in this paper, Peregrino did not have anything like a continuous residence on the Petite Côte. In 1619 he had been in Amsterdam, fighting two legal cases simultaneously against other members of the Sephardic community: one, claiming that he had defrauded his business partners in an earlier visit to the Petite Côte; and another, claiming that his son had violated the daughter of another member of the community. My researches in Amsterdam failed to turn up the conclusive results of these cases, but Peregrino’s presence in Senegambia in the 1630s is suggestive. As we have seen, one of the principal reasons for Sephardim to visit Senegambia in the early seventeenth century was to benefit from trade. But as we have also seen, Peregrino lamented that the trade in the region had been parlous in 1613, citing this as the cause of his failure to meet his commercial dues. It would therefore seem unlikely that he would have returned to the coast unless under force of circumstance. As we know, Fernando Alvares Mello wished to see him imprisoned for the debts he owed—this could certainly constitute force of circumstance.

Furthermore, the fact that no other members of the Amsterdam community followed him also suggests a certain isolation, since his fellow Jews in Porto de Ale are converts. Surely, given the evidence I have

⁶¹Alexis de Saint Lô, *Relation du Voyage du Cap Vert* (Paris, 1637), 167: “nous allames chez un Iuif appellé Peregrin, & qui est comme le Docteur des autres Iuifs de la Coste”

⁶²*Ibid.*, 103-4: “Nous avons trouvé trois ou quatre Iuifs en ce Port, don’t il n’y en avoit qu’un de race & de naissance, les autres ne l’estoyent que pour avoir esté pervertis de celuy-cy, aussi estoit-il en sa Loy extrêmement habile: j’ay en la presence de tous les Portugais de ce Port disputé contre luy.”

⁶³Moraes, “Prises de Gorée.”

adduced as to the commercial motivation that lay behind the Sephardic presence here in the early seventeenth century, the failure of Peregrino's commercial mission and the legal cases that resulted are strong evidence as to the reason for the falling away of the Jewish community on the coast: it was simply no longer worth the while of the Sephardic commercial families to attend to this part of the Atlantic network.

Furthermore, it is clear that, far from constituting one endlessly receptive and mutually supportive kinship cabal, with mysterious tentacles reaching out to all corners of the globe, the international Sephardic network was quite prepared to ostracize one of its own if, like Peregrino, they had failed them in a mission, as Peregrino had failed in Senegambia. Tensions in the extended family of the Sephardim were always present, and could always create tragedies like that of Jacob Peregrino. Like all families, everything was not as outsiders liked—and in some cases, still like—to imagine.

And so Peregrino ended his life on the coast in isolation from the “pure blood” of his fellow Sephardim of Amsterdam. He was not here the seditious rabbi portrayed in the sources of the Inquisition, but a lonely old man whose solitude had arisen from the spirit of both his time and of the people into whom he was born—a spirit where profit drove movement, and could both raise up and bring down whole communities, on the Petite Côte as much as anywhere.

Codicil

Research in Lisbon's Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo shortly before this paper went to press allows further elucidation of its subject matter. In two separate denunciations to the Prosecutor of the Inquisition of Lisbon, Manuel Ayres—whose daughter, Riffika Mesurado, claimed to have been promised in wedlock by Jacob Peregrino's son, Manuel—was said to be the brother-in-law of Fernão Alvares Melo (see ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Livro 203, folio 182r and *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Livro 206, folio 245r). This is surely the same Fernão Alvares Melo who was a creditor of Jacob Peregrino, and of whom Jacob Peregrino was said to be hiding from for fear of being arrested. Although this evidence, as derived from the inquisitorial archives, might strike some as unreliable, the double reference certainly casts doubt on some of the accusations laid at the door of Manuel Peregrino.

A plausible refined interpretation of the facts as they are now known might be the following: that, aware of the story of Peregrino's having been robbed by the Wolof ruler for sleeping with his daughter, Fernão

Alvares Melo and Manuel Ayres developed the story of Peregrino's having seduced Ayres' daughter, knowing that witnesses could be found to attest to the events on the Petite Côte. As far as I know, there is no evidence of additional ties such as that between Ayres and Alvares Melo which would have warranted false evidence being given by the witnesses of the events in Senegambia, Daniel Belmonte and Jorge Fernandes Carnero.

Thus, in Manuel Peregrino's eyes Riffika Mesurado's mockery and accusation might well have revealed a complex and painful double meaning: that he was both a sexual coward—a man who could kill a Goy (not a *goio*, as the Portuguese Sephardim referred to non-Jews), but not meet her challenge—and also a sexual dilettante whose affair on the Petite Côte led him into dangerous territory which in Amsterdam, owing to his father's financial failures, he would be forced to revisit.